

If God Permits

(Heb. 6:1-6) Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, ² of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. ³ And this we will do, if God permits. ⁴ For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.

Verse 6 says, if after they have tasted the good word of God, they “have fallen away it is impossible to renew them again to repentance.”

- Who are those “fallen away” ... is this former church members? ... religious people? ... does this mean that if you’ve been religious but are no longer religious then you can never be saved?
- Are the “fallen away” saved people ... does this mean that saved people can lose their salvation and once they have lost it, they can never be “re-saved?”
- Is our hope in Jesus Christ only as secure as our own personal diligence and tenacity?

PRAY

Dr. David Allen, professor of preaching at Southwestern Theological Seminary said that he received a copy of Criswell’s sermon ledger from 1944 till mid 1990’s.

In that ledger Criswell wrote the date, time (am or pm) and the scripture text for every sermon he preached.

In a 17-year period WA Criswell preached through all 66 books of the bible.

However, what is interesting is that when you get to Hebrews there is a gap in chapter 6. There is no indication that Criswell ever preached on this particular passage of scripture.

Before we get into our text, I want to give you the overall context because sometimes the chapter and verse numbers (which were added later) can be distracting.

The immediate context for these 6 verses goes from Hebrews 5:11 to Hebrews 6:12 and it is the third of five warning passages.

The flow of discussion in Hebrews tends to that the author gives the doctrine, unpacks the doctrine for the reader, and then gives a warning.

- 2:1-4
- 3:7-4:13
- 5:11-6:12
- 10:19-39
- 12:14-29

Here is what is often not understood ...

... these 5 warning passages in Hebrews are all talking about the same thing ... they are all referring back to the same event.

... that why you see a similar theme in each of these passages.

- 2:1-4—we must pay close attention so that we do not drift away
- 3:7-4:13—take care that there not be in you an unbelieving heart that falls away
- 5:11-6:12—have tasted and then fallen away
- 10:19-39—if we go sinning willfully there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins
- 12:14-29—see to it that no one comes short of the grace of God

The author of Hebrews is looking back at the time when the Israelites were at Kadesh Barnea, where the 12 men spied out the land of Canaan.

... He is comparing the danger and attitude of the Israelites in the wilderness with the danger and attitude facing the Hebrew Christians.

Numbers 14 is in the mind of the writer of Hebrews ... so in order to better understand what the author of Hebrews is saying we need to go back to Numbers 14.

In Numbers 13 Moses sends 12 men to go into Canaan and spy out the land and return with a report.

... If you know the story you will remember that after that expedition 10 of the 12 spies (with the exception of Joshua and Caleb) gave a bad report and said that it would be impossible for Israel to defeat the Canaanites.

The Israelites had finally made from Egypt to the border of the promised land of Canaan.

Now was the time to enter, conquer, and claim what God had given them.

But when Moses sends in the 12 spies 10 say that going into Canaan is impossible and only two say that God will give them the victory...

... and the people agree with the 10 faithless spies.

... This is where Numbers 14 picks up the story.

(Numbers 14:1-6) ¹Then all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. ²All the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and the whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! ³"Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" ⁴So they said to one another, "Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt." ⁵Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces in the presence of all the assembly of the congregation of the sons of Israel. ⁶Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, of those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes; ⁷and they spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, "The land which we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. ⁸"If the LORD is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us-- a land which flows with milk and honey. ⁹"Only do not rebel against the LORD; and do not fear the people of the land, for they will be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them."

The people are rebelling against God and wanting to return to Egypt.

...Do you see the seriousness of this sin?

(Num. 14:10-16) ¹⁰But all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Then the glory of the LORD appeared in the tent of meeting to all the sons of Israel. ¹¹The LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst? ¹²"I will smite them with pestilence and dispossess them, and I will make you into a nation greater and mightier than they." ¹³But Moses said to the LORD, "Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for by Your strength You brought up this people from their midst, ¹⁴and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, O LORD, are in the midst of this people, for You, O LORD, are seen eye to eye, while Your cloud stands over them; and You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. ¹⁵"Now if You slay this people as one man, then the nations who have heard of Your fame will say, ¹⁶'Because the LORD could not bring this people into the land which He promised them by oath, therefore He slaughtered them in the wilderness.'

I hope you can see here that Moses is a type of the Lord Jesus Christ as he intercedes for the people as he is concerned for the glory of God.

Notice Moses intercessory prayer.

(Num. 14:17-20) ¹⁷ "But now, I pray, let the power of the Lord be great, just as You have declared,¹⁸ 'The LORD is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations.' ¹⁹ "Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness, just as You also have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now." So the LORD said, "I have pardoned them according to your word;

I want you to look closely at this last verse...

... Did God or did not God forgive them?

- Were they not faithless?
- Was not their sin awful?
- Were they not guilty of unbelief?

(Num. 14:21-23, 26-27) ²¹ but indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the LORD. ²² "Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, ²³ shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it... ²⁶ The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, ²⁷ "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who are grumbling against Me? I have heard the complaints of the sons of Israel, which they are making against Me.

Even though they had seen God's glory and God's power ...

... God says they tempted him 10 times and did not listen to His voice

... He even calls them an "evil congregation" ... but don't forget what verse 19 tells us ... God says that he has pardoned or forgiven them.

They are evil and rebellious, and they will die in the wilderness ...

—but they are FORGIVEN.

The story actually goes one step further.

(Num. 14:40-45) ⁴⁰ In the morning, however, they rose up early and went up to the ridge of the hill country, saying, "Here we are; we have indeed sinned, but we will go up to the place which the LORD has promised." ⁴¹ But Moses said, "Why then are you transgressing the commandment of the LORD, when it will not succeed? ⁴² "Do not go up, or you will be struck down before your enemies, for the LORD is not among you. ⁴³ "For the Amalekites and the Canaanites will be there in front of you, and you will fall by the sword, inasmuch as you have turned back from following the LORD. And the LORD will not be with you." ⁴⁴ But they went up heedlessly to the ridge of the hill country; neither the ark of the covenant of the LORD nor Moses left the camp. ⁴⁵ Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down, and struck them and beat them down as far as Hormah.

There are a lot of words here, and in Psalm 95 that tells us of Israel's sin and rebellion ... but they never ceased to be God's covenant people...

Even though Israel failed and sinned miserably ... they never ceased to be God's people.

I know what you are thinking.... *Nathan, but doesn't their death in the wilderness mean they didn't go to heaven?*

I would remind you that Moses also failed God in disobedience and unbelief by striking the rock and he also was unable to go into Canaan and died in the wilderness ...

... and in Matthew 17 we see Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus

All 5 warning passages in the book of Hebrews are rooted in the reality that Israel, although more blessed and privileged than any other nation—neglected God's Word ...

- ... did not fully trust in God's Word
- ... they did not spiritually mature
- ... they disobeyed God's
- ... took God's blessings for granted and missed realizing the spiritual fullness that God wanted for them.

Now, let's turn back to our text in Hebrews and I want us to look at the entire warning passage: **5:11-6:8**

Now again. Staring in chapter 3 the author of Hebrews is using the event that occurred in Numbers to exhort the reader to not be unbelieving, not to have a hard heart—he is saying over and over again, “don't miss out on God's rest.

(Heb. 5:11-14)¹¹ Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.¹³ For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

The author of Hebrews is telling these Jewish believers that they have failed to mature and therefore they do not have the spiritual capacity to understand and embrace the truth they need.

However, rather than continue to verbally beat up these people for not maturing the writer approaches it from a different angle ...

... He begins encouraging them to “grow up” spiritually and he lists three couplets of truth which are necessary for spiritual maturity.

(Heb. 6:1,2) Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,² of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

The author is pointing us Godward l... letting us know the necessity of repentance from dead works and faith toward God.

He talks about baptism and ordaining people into Christian service.

This is about the local assembly of believers—the author wants the reader to know, that spiritual maturity involves being in corporate worship ... in the church ... being with the community of faith.

Paul simply says, “*You’ve laid the foundation, you know your ABC’s now move forward!*”

Here is the key verse to understanding what this warning passage is all about.

(Heb. 6:3)³ And this we will do, if God permits.

Wait, why wouldn’t God want them to press on maturity.

The truth is that God wants everyone to spiritually mature but at a certain point if you keep saying “no” to God’s promises and God’s invitations ...

... at a certain point God says, “I’ve called and called, I’ve offered and offered ... now it’s too late.

That is exactly what happened in Numbers 14 ...

...they wept and repented and said “we are going to go into Canaan ...

... but God says you didn’t trust me when I offered you the land of promise ... you complained and wallowed in unbelief ...

... It’s too late, you can’t be renewed again to repentance ... you cannot enter the land of promise.

In other words, you cannot enter into spiritual maturity and you will be spiritually immature all your life.

- This is why Lot lost his whole family
- This is why Moses couldn’t enter the land of Canaan
- This is why David couldn’t build the temple
- This is why Elijah had to give his mantle to Elisha
- This is why there isn’t a chapter 5 in the book of Jonah

Israel wept and prayed but God said, “No, you can’t go in, you will be spiritually immature all your life.”

The awful truth is that some people will press into the nailed scarred hands of Jesus Christ nothing more than the charred embers of a wasted life.

(Heb. 6:4-6) ⁴ For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.

Look at those two words in verse 6 “fallen away.”

This is not the word ‘apostasia’ which refers to someone who has been turned over to a reprobate mind as in Romans 1 ... this is the word ‘parapto’ which literally translated means to fall alongside.

Thinking of all those Israelites who fell in the wilderness the writer of Hebrews is saying ...

There are people who have had every spiritual privilege and opportunity—

... they have been enlightened,

... they have the Holy Spirit, and

... they have the good Word of God

...but they have fallen down, they have come short, they have not taken advantage of their opportunities...

- As a Christian they bring reproach to Holy God!
- They bring disgrace on the very work that Jesus did on the cross
- They are bringing open shame (Just like the Israelites in the wilderness did) on the very God who saved them.

Look at how the writer of Hebrews ends this paragraph with an illustration.

(Heb. 6:7-8)⁷ For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; ⁸ but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.

This illustration is about ground that gets planted and watered—

- The ground that drinks up the rain and bears fruit receive a blessing from God.
- The ground that drinks up the rain and only bears thorns will be worthless and cursed

The point: The value and worth of the ground is determined by the kind of fruit it brings forth.

Yes, in Christ you are safe and secure ... nothing can separate you from God's precious love

... Yes, your anchor holds in every storm ... but is there any good fruit in your life?

Child of God can I ask you a question? What kind of fruit are you bringing forth?

Can you not sense that these are urgent days? The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

We cannot afford to live powerless lives any longer.

We cannot afford to have powerless homes and marriages—because our children’s destiny hangs in the balance—I don’t want my children to choose my religion, I want them to know my God.

Robert Robinson’s father died when he was 10 years old.

As he grew he became more and more wicked.

One day he heard George Whitfield preaching on the text from John the Baptist, “O Ye generation of Vipers.”

In the message Robert Robinson cried out, “O my God, The Wrath to come! The Wrath to come!”

That sermon stuck with him for three years until he surrendered and gave his life to God and soon felt the call of God to enter the ministry and pastored a number of churches.

1758 at the age of 23 he wrote "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing" as a hymn-poem for the conclusion of one of his sermons.

Come, Thou Fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace;
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
Call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet,
Sung by flaming tongues above.
Praise the mount! I’m fixed upon it,
Mount of God’s redeeming love.

O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I’m constrained to be!
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter,
Bind my wandering heart to Thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here’s my heart, O take and seal it,
Seal it for Thy courts above.

Robert was used by God for a number of years but he allowed his intellectualism to draw him from his strong belief in the grace and mercy of God—even doubting the deity of Jesus Christ.

Years later Robert Robinson was riding a stagecoach with a lady who was deeply engrossed in a hymnbook.

She could see that he was sad, down cast, miserable. She was humming the tune to “Come thou fount” so seeking to encourage him, she asked him what he thought of the hymn she was humming.

Robinson burst into tears and said, “Madam, I am the poor unhappy man who wrote that hymn many years ago, and I would give a thousand worlds, if I had them, to enjoy the relationship I had then.”

- How many victories could have been gained?
- How many souls could have been won?
- How many marriages could have stayed strong?
- How many prayers would have been answered?

I leave you with this quote from Martyn Lloyd-Jones

“I am not asking whether you know things about Him, but do you know God, are you enjoying God, is God the center of your life, the soul of your being, the source of your greatest joy? The most vital question I can ask you is this: Do you have a soul thirsty for God? Is your life centered on Him? Don’t just taste, feast ... feast on the riches of Christ Jesus and revel in His glory!” –Martyn Lloyd-Jones