

“Impossible to Restore Them and the (In)Visible Church” (Part 2)– Hebrews 6:4-8

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com]

Take a Bible and meet me in Hebrews 6...

Today we are going to examine the famous and troubling warning passage in Hebrews 6 for a fourth and final week. We have come to realize why this passage is considered the most difficult passage in Hebrews and one of the hardest in the entire Bible. Even beyond its interpretive challenges, it makes us uncomfortable on a number of levels because of its implications no matter where we land in our interpretation. But we need this text. God has given it to us for a reason. And we don't skip the hard stuff. So let's have a look once again. Follow along as I read, beginning in verse 4. This is God's Word...

“For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. ⁷ For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. ⁸ But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.” (Hebrews 6:4-8)

The first week we studied these verses we considered the way some take them as describing true believers who lose their salvation. I showed you the Bible's teachings on the eternal security of the believer, which would rule out that interpretation. The next week, we considered the possibility of this being just a hypothetical situation for believers that would never actually happen. I made a case for why I don't think this is a mere hypothetical and for the Bible's teaching that all true believers persevere in faith.

Last week I introduced what I think is the best understanding of these verses, namely, that they are not talking about true believers, but merely those who looked to us like believers for a season but were never genuinely converted. They may understand the Gospel—that God sent His Son Jesus to die in the place of sinners on the cross and rise victoriously from the dead so that anyone who turns from their sin and self-sufficiency and trusts alone in Him would not perish but have everlasting life with God—but merely understanding the Gospel does not prove that one has accepted it by faith. As I argued last week, it is possible for the description in verses 4 and 5 to be true of both believers and non-believers. Today, I'd like to pick up that discussion with the analogy the author gives a couple verses later...

In verses 7 and 8 he gives an agricultural analogy to show that it is possible for the same exposure to produce two different outcomes.¹

“For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. ⁸ But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.” (Hebrews 6:7-8)

As you might recall from last week, the rain is a picture of the blessings described in verses 4 and 5. The writer of Hebrews is taking a page out of the prophetic material of the Old Testament with this metaphor.

“OT prophets compared God’s word and God’s Spirit to precipitation falling on parched earth, making it fruitful (Isa. 44:3-4; 55:10-11). They indicted Israel as a vineyard that bore worthless fruit in response to God’s cultivation (Isa. 5:1-10; Jer. 2:21; Ezek. 19:10-14). Israel’s treason was ‘thorns and thistles,’ like those that sprang from the cursed ground after Adam’s original sin (Hos. 10:1-8; cf. Gen. 3:17-18)... Yet, just as the Lord set before Israel alternatives of blessings or curses, depending in their response to him (Deut. 11:13-17, 26-29; 28:4, 11-12, 16-18, 23-24), so God promises blessing to those who resemble ground that ‘produces crop useful’ to its cultivators (Heb. 6:7).”²

Presumably, the original audience of Hebrews, quite acquainted with Old Testament Scripture, would have picked up on the author’s point. And that point, simply stated, is this: It’s possible for a person to have proximity to the things of God—hear and understand the light of the Gospel, experience the activity of the Holy Spirit in their midst, and be blessed by the Word of God—yet still fail to produce the crop of saving faith, which in this context always endures (i.e., the absence of falling away). When the crop of enduring faith is absent in a person’s life the outcome is always the same. They’re deemed “worthless” (Heb. 6:8).³ There remains for that person only the curse of God and a fiery end.⁴ It’s not because that person was truly saved and lost their salvation. It’s because said person looked saved but truly was not and falling away proved that reality. Apostasy reveals a misdiagnosis of salvation on our end, not a loss of salvation on theirs.

But don’t miss the reality that both types of land—that is, both types of people, genuine and apostate—have received the same rain, the same exposure to the things of God. “The farmland analogy... illustrates the distinction between externally experiencing blessings and internal heart responses.”⁵ So I think Richard Phillips draws the right conclusion.

“There is one way to positively identify those who belong to Christ, but it requires time... What matters is not whether or not rain falls upon the ground, for God sends rain on the good and the evil (Matt. 5:45), just as he does his saving Word. It is the presence of fruit that ultimately tells the tale.

The fruit of perseverance in faith. As the author of Hebrews has said, “*we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end*” (Hebrews 3:14). It doesn’t ultimately matter how one appears to start the Christian race. The real issue is not even the quality of teaching they receive or the outward profession that they make or the baptism that they undergo. That can all be fool’s gold. It matters if they finish the race. That’s what proves the pudding. “Millions make professions of faith in Christ, but how many of those are still identifying with Him when the journey is over?”⁶ The depressing and tragic answer to that is exactly why we need warning passages like Hebrews 6. Churches have ignored them to the peril of countless souls.

All this agricultural talk is quite reminiscent to the picture Jesus painted when he told the “Parable of the Sower.” You might recall that Jesus’ parable likewise “categorized hearers in terms of their response to the word he was broadcasting, whether unresponsive, showing initial interest but fading because of persecution or distraction, or enduring and fruitful (Matt. 13:3-8, 18-23).”⁷ Each is response is described as a kind of soil that does something different with the same seed sown on each. Here is the explanation of the parable, as told by Jesus:

“Hear then the parable of the sower: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. ²⁰ As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. ²² As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and

the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. ²³ *As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.*” (Matthew 13:18-23)

Now what do we know about the audience that the writer of Hebrews is addressing. We know that they were brought up in Jewish circles prior to coming to Christ. We know that after a good start in the faith, they were now being tempted to go back to their old Judaism and walk away from the church. This temptation is probably driven by persecution they are experiencing in the world and rejection they are experiencing from their Jewish families and neighbors. Whether they will fall away and turn back remains to be seen, but given that scenario there is a danger that they may prove to be like the second seed that Jesus describes. They may be “*rocky ground*,” people who heard the word of the Gospel and initially received “*with joy*.” If any person falls away, he would prove “*he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately falls away.*” The warning in Hebrews 6 is addressed to that kind of person. But please notice, as F. F. Bruce has pointed out,

“In our Lord’s parable of the sower, no difference might have been seen for a time between what had sprouted on the rocky ground and what was growing on good ground. It was only when a time of testing came that the difference became evident. It was a time of testing now for the recipients of the epistle, and our author is anxious that they should respond triumphantly to the test and prove that in their case the seed had fallen on good ground.”⁸

Again, it’s not the start, but the finish that’s telling. The start of an apostate and a genuine believer can look **identical** to our eyes, but in time they prove to be as different as a useful crop is to thorns and thistles after a rainy season. The start looks the same though.⁹ There’s joy. There’s “I believe! I want Jesus! I’ll come forward! I’ll get baptized! I’ll join the church! I’m in!” The initial response is positive and enthusiastic and receptive in each case. But then comes the inconvenience. Then come the sacrifice and the cross to bear. Then come the trials. Then comes persecution. And they fall away. I once heard a preacher say that the best way to sniff out an apostate is to turn up the heat. Turn up the heat and they will walk out the door. They’ll fall away.¹⁰ Persecution doesn’t shrink the church. It reveals it.

Jesus didn’t want us to be surprised by this and neither did the writer of Hebrews. In fact, the New Testament goes out of its way to illustrate this pattern for us a number of times. The writer of Hebrews has already given us an example of this from the Old Testament’s wilderness generation.¹¹ In chapter 12 he will give us another illustration through the life of Esau, which we will cover later in our series.¹² Let me give a few others instead.

In Matthew 7, Jesus uttered these startling words:

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² *On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’* ²³ *And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”* (Matthew 7:21-23)

On the Day of Judgment do you really think that people will stand before Jesus claiming to have prophesied and cast out demons and done miracles, if they really had not? Of course not! They are citing these examples because they actually happened and they think they will gain them entrance into God’s heavenly kingdom. But Jesus stops them in their tracks, saying, “*I never knew you; depart from me*,” which shows that it is indeed possible, in the words of Hebrews 6, to be an unbeliever who has “*tasted...the powers of the age to come*” (Heb. 6:5).

Arguably no defection was more startling than Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve. Was he not “*enlightened*” by the truth of the Gospel? Had he not “*tasted the goodness of the word of God*” (and from the lips of Jesus no less)? Was he not in some sense companion to the Holy Spirit and His ministry on earth, experiencing “*the powers of the age to come*”? Yes, yes, yes, and yes. All the yeses. Friends, Judas preached the Gospel. Judas performed miracles. Judas cast out demons. Judas healed the sick. Judas walked with Jesus for years and had more access than most. Judas raised not the slightest doubt about his dedication to Jesus among the other disciples. Without a doubt, Judas referred to himself as a disciple of Jesus. But Jesus called Judas “*the son of destruction*” (John 17:12), which proved to be true when Judas betrayed Jesus and fell away. Ladies and gentlemen, if nearly 10 percent of Jesus’ closest followers during His earthly ministry fell away (to say nothing of the masses who turned from him) do you really think it doesn’t happen in our day and in a congregation like ours? Are the odds better with us than they were with Jesus? They’re not. I recently read some research that suggested that...

“...of the 85 percent of American adults who were raised Christian, nearly a quarter of them no longer identify with Christianity. Former Christians now represent 19.2 percent of the US adult population overall. To put that into perspective, says Allen Cooperman, Pew’s director of religious research, ‘there are more than four former Christians for every convert to Christianity.’”¹³

It would appear that apostasy is every bit a reality today as it was in the earliest days.

Acts 8 provides another vivid picture of a person described in Hebrews 6. He’s called Simon Magus because he was a magician. Philip, a man described as “*full of the Spirit*” (Acts 6:3), rolled into town and preached the Gospel. The text describes several miracles that Philip did and says that “*there was much joy in that city*” and “*when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women*” (Acts 8:8,12). Among these was a great magician named Simon, who actually followed after Philip for a time. Eventually, Simon offers the disciples money, saying, “*Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 8:19). Peter loses it and declares that he is captive to sin and has a heart not right with God.

Then there is the infamous disciple of Paul by the name of Demas. At one time Paul counted Demas among his “*fellow workers*” in the Gospel (Col. 4:14; Philemon 24). He labored with Paul. He was a man of reputation in Paul’s circles. But toward the end of Paul’s life, Paul tells Timothy, “*Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica*” (2 Timothy 4:10). We don’t know exactly the circumstances, but it had something to do with Demas’ love for the world. It sounds a bit like the third soil Jesus described, where “*the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and [the seed] proves unfruitful*” (Matt. 13:22).

In John’s first epistle, he describes this thing in a more general way. He writes of those who fall away,

“*They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.*” (1 John 2:19)

Now that verse has been misused and applied to anyone who leaves a church or changes churches. That’s not what John was talking about. There weren’t multiple churches to choose from in the early days. There was often just one gathering of believers in a city at the onset. But people fell away from the body of believers and went the way of unbelief even in those days. They fell away from the local church and eventually from the faith all together. That’s what the Apostle is talking about.¹⁴ But notice what he says. In leaving the church these people show that they were not really part of the faith in the first place. “*They departed because they had never been united to Christ through a Spirit-wrought living and enduring faith.*”¹⁵ Simon

Kistemaker used to say, “Believers belong; deniers depart.”¹⁶ It’s sad, but true. One commentator offers the following:

“We should be discouraged if people leave our fellowship after being with us for years because the church is not meeting their needs, because their favorite hymns are not sung often enough, because the sermons are too long, or because of some other superficial reason. And we should weep over gullible but genuine Christians who temporarily leave the apostolic fellowship because they are deceived. But we should not grieve for the church when wolves come in and steal sheep. True sheep abide in the Good Shepherd; true sheep stay safely within the gates of the apostolic testimony. Put differently, the anointed abide in *the* Anointed.”¹⁷

These examples should be sufficient to confirm that the apostasy described in Hebrews 6 is a real possibility. It’s described and illustrated multiple times in the Bible. But what is most troubling, and now we must turn our gaze back to Hebrews 6, is that this phenomenon is, at least in some instances, irrevocable. Look with me once more at the sobering statement we find in Hebrews 6. “*It is impossible [in the case of the people described in verses 4, 5, and 6] to restore them again to repentance...*” What exactly is repentance?

“Simply put, repentance is a godly sorrow. It is godly sorrow over sin, coming from the conviction of the Holy Spirit, making us aware that we have offended God. Having this conviction we desire to turn *from* sin and in obedience turn *to* God in thoughts and actions.”¹⁸

Since repentance is the fruit of saving faith, there is no salvation apart from repentance. This is why this statement in Hebrews 6 is so startling. “*It is impossible...to restore them again to repentance.*” That’s a jaw-dropping statement, if ever there were one in the Bible. There is a kind of person, in other words, for whom salvation is impossible. And make no mistake about it, when the author says “*impossible*” he means impossible, not improbable. This is confirmed by his other uses of the word in Hebrews.

Hebrews 6:18—“*it is impossible for God to lie...*”

Hebrews 10:4—“*For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.*”

Hebrews 11:6—“*And without faith it is impossible to please [God]...*”

It’s clear that impossible means impossible in each of these instances, so in chapter 6 we must conclude that there is a person for whom saving repentance cannot happen. It’s not because God would turn away a truly repentant person. It’s because the person described will never turn back to God in repentance. Their hearts are so hardened that they will never be receptive again to the Gospel. How could you ever convince a person? They had a front row seat to the faithful preaching of God’s Word and the wonders of the Spirit. They heard and understood the Gospel. They know what they are turning from. They are making their choice. And there is only one Word and Spirit for them to receive. There is nothing more to give. This is not an ignorance issue. This is an insider issue who has seen what there is to see and heard what there is to hear. “The apostate in effect has turned his or her back on the only means available for forgiveness before God.”¹⁹

The author says that in falling away “*they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt*” (6:6). What does that mean? It means they are adopting a stance that puts them in the company of the people who executed Jesus. They are identifying with Jesus’ executioners. In walking away they are saying, “I agree with the crucifiers of Jesus. He is not the Son of God. Jesus is a liar or a lunatic, who deserved to be treated like a common criminal. He can’t save. He couldn’t even save Himself. I’ll take the world instead.”²⁰ As Tom Schreiner explains, “apostasy concedes that Jesus should have been crucified, that the penalty was warranted...[because what] Jesus received was deserved.”²¹ The result is absolutely tragic. “God, who sovereignly grants repentance to rebels (Acts 3:26; 11:18), will not intervene (as he could) to turn around those who have willfully walked away.”²²

Sometimes people push back and say that the text indicates that these people have repented and cannot be renewed “again” to repentance, which could suggest that they were at one time saved. But the context argues against this as we have seen in previous weeks. He seems to be describing these people in terms of what is observable to us. There is a kind of repentance that is caught up in salvation and a kind of repentance that is not truly saving, involving some behavior modification and worldly sorrow perhaps but not a saving experience. But those two things can look the same to us.

Now having said all that, another clarification is in order. Just as it is possible for someone to look like a true believer but not actually be one, it is likewise possible for someone to look like a person has committed the sin of apostasy when in fact they have not fully and finally fallen away from the Lord. Appearances in both cases can be deceiving. There is a difference between a Peter and a Judas. Both had the same exposure. Both seem to commit apostasy. Only one truly did. Similarly, there is a difference between Paul’s companion Demas and his companion John Mark. Both seem to abandon him, but only John Mark (so far as we know) turns back and is reconciled. At any given moment Peter and Judas look the same. At any given moment the acts of Demas and John Mark look interchangeable. But what was going on under the surface and in the heart was quite different. Looks can be deceiving. Therefore, we ought to be very slow to give up on people. And this leads us to the first of three points of applications I want to leave you with today.

Don’t Give Up On Others

Dennis Johnson writes,

“This terrifying portrait of irreversible apostasy is given not to tempt us to try to discover whether *someone else* has crossed a spiritual point of no return, nor to discourage our efforts to recover those who have wandered from Christ (Matt. 18:10-14). Rather, it’s purpose is to caution us to beware, for ourselves and each other, of any movement whatsoever toward that lethal precipice.”²³

The last thing we should do with a warning passage such as this is give up on people. To give up on people is to do the opposite of what the writer of Hebrews is doing in these verses—he’s pursuing his audience though they appear to be drifting away from the faith. The biblical witness shows that some appear to fall away fully and finally, but are brought back. If appearances are deceiving, then don’t be too quick to label a person apostate. If people are drifting, go after them! If you haven’t seen them in church for a while, check on them. They could be drifting toward destruction, but we shouldn’t let them get there without a fight. As Charles Spurgeon once said:

“If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to Hell over our dead bodies. And if they perish, let them perish with our arms wrapped about their knees, imploring them to stay. If Hell must be filled, let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go unwarned and unprayed for.”

What a godly attitude! May that be said of each of us. Do you have friends or family who seem to be drifting from the faith? Pray for them! Pursue them! Warn them! Don’t stop pleading with God for mercy! “While our passage tells us that there are those who have apostatized and cannot be renewed to repentance, we never know for sure who they are until they take their last breath.”²⁴

And this leads us to the second exhortation...

Don't Ignore the Right Fruit

A mere understanding of the Gospel message does not prove salvation. You can understand the message without embracing it as your only hope in life and death. You can believe something can work without trusting in it to work for you. Saving faith is not merely about knowledge. It's about trust. Knowledge of the Gospel is not enough. Do you believe it and trust in Christ alone? Richard Phillips warns,

“...the church is no place for playing games, much less for indecision and loitering. When you hear the gospel and understand what is taught, you incur an obligation to God to press on to saving faith. Hebrews shows that it is very dangerous to toy with such knowledge; by delaying you run the risk of a terrible fate. Furthermore, if you are not willing to turn to Christ for salvation today, what makes you think it will be any different tomorrow? It will be harder to embrace Christ later if you delay now. Therefore, as Paul wrote, ‘Now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation’ (2 Cor. 6:2).”²⁵

Just like present knowledge and understanding of the Gospel (without trust) is not evidence of salvation. Past experience doesn't really prove much either. Remember, it's not how one starts, but how they finish. It doesn't really matter if a person has made a profession of faith in the past or been baptized in a church. It doesn't matter if they have a clear recollection of the moment of conversion. It doesn't matter if they won Bible drill as a kid. It doesn't matter if they miss fewer Sundays than the pastor. It doesn't matter if they once taught your Sunday school class or preached really insightful sermons. Participation in the Christian community and the things of God may be necessary evidences of true conversion, but they are not sufficient.

What matters is whether or not a person is resting in the finished work of Christ now. Do they *presently* believe themselves to be sinners in need of God's grace? Do they *presently* believe that there is no salvation to be found in any other name than Jesus Christ? Do they *presently* believe that Christ died for their sins and rose for their justification? Do they *presently* trust in Christ and Christ alone for their full salvation? Are they *presently* holding firm the confidence they had at first (Hebrews 3:6, 14)? We don't look back to what used to be. We look forward for present and enduring faith. If that's not evidenced, then there is great cause for concern. The person may be drifting toward the sin of apostasy, if they have not transgressed the line already. Do not be deceived about this sin.

“It happens to people who have professed faith in Christ and have been baptized, like Simon. It happens to people who were involved in Christian ministry, like Demas. It happened to those endowed with great charismatic powers to heal and cast out demons, like Judas.”²⁶

Make sure you are looking for the right fruit in your life and the lives of others. “Without indulging in morbid introspection, it is appropriate for all believers to examine themselves to see whether they are ‘in the faith’ (2 Cor. 13:5 NIV) and whether they are ‘living the life of faith’ (NEB).”²⁷ Look for perseverance in faith because “perseverance is the hallmark of authentic conversion.”²⁸

Finally, let me add...

Don't Live Without Assurance

Raymond Brown writes,

“It is probably true to say that these warnings here and elsewhere in Hebrews have caused more unnecessary anxiety to believers than almost any other verses in the New Testament. Aware of moral

failure or spiritual apathy, thoughtful people the world over have been haunted by these passages, some driven to despair at the thought that, having neglected or forsaken Christ, they have forfeited forever the blessings of the gospel. . . . We are not here dealing with the sincere believer who is depressed about his spiritual failure, or the backslider who has temporarily lost interest in the things of God. We are here confronted with fierce opposition to Christ and his gospel, public rebellion against Christian things and a determination to bring Christ's work to an end."²⁹

It is important for us to recognize that distinction, so that we can experience true assurance of our salvation. Christians can sin with the best of them (just ask Paul, or Peter, or Moses, or David). The sin Hebrews 6 is warning against is not a sin of passion, or wrestling with an addiction we've yet to conquer, seasons of apathy or coldness toward God, or some momentary moral lapse.³⁰ We all have been guilty of this. Such things can lead to apostasy, but they are not themselves the sin of apostasy. All those sins can be forgiven and covered by the blood of Jesus Christ. But true believers always persevere in their faith in Christ. They don't turn from and renounce Christ and sufficiency. Backsliders can come home. Apostates will not.

So we derive our assurance not simply from our performance on any given day or the strength of our commitment during any given season. Our assurance derives from our trust in the God who saves. Our assurance derives from the character of the Savior we are resting in by faith. We have assurance because we believe the blood of Jesus is sufficient to take away the sins of the world. That's where we rest our hope. His work, not ours. As F. F. Bruce put it, "We depend for our salvation not on our love for God but his love for us, not on our commitment to him but his pledge to us, not on our hold of him but his grasp of us."³¹

And all God's people said? Amen! And let me add, Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Next week we will consider the rest of chapter 6. It is very encouraging. Pastor Derek will unpack it for us. . .

Let's pray. . .

¹ "The concluding agricultural illustration helps explain the passage. The word *for* marks that an explanation is coming." R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Exalting Jesus in Hebrews* (CCE; Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2017), 90.

² Dennis E. Johnson, "Hebrews" in *Hebrews-Revelation* (ESVEC; Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 87-88. Similarly, Mohler writes, "This illustration about agricultural land receiving rainfall was common in the Old Testament. For instance, Isaiah 5 uses the metaphor of rainfall causing crops in a field to grow. Isaiah makes clear that the field is Israel and the rain is the word of God. Isaiah 5 also warns that an unproductive field where rain has fallen is worthless. In Hebrews 6, the illustration begins positively. 'For the ground that drinks the rain. . . produces vegetation.' That is its purpose. It produces 'vegetation useful to those for whom it is cultivated.' This results in 'a blessing from God.' However, the illustration continues. 'If it produces thorns and thistles' brings to mind the curse on Adam in Genesis 3. Because of man's sin, the land no longer yields produce without cultivation and rigorous husbandry. Rather, the land naturally brings forth thorns and thistles. In Hebrews 6 a land that received rain but yielded weeds rather than a beneficial crop was burned." Mohler, 90-91.

³ "The word 'worthless' (ἄδókimos) is regularly used in the NT for those who are disqualified on the last day, for those who will not be saved, but judged, by God (cf. Rom 1:28; 1 Cor 9:27; 2 Cor 13:5-7; 2 Tim 3:8; Titus 1:16)." Schreiner, 190.

⁴ "The author says the land will be burned, which applies to people who will be consumed on the final day. Those who think the text speaks of losing rewards instead of final damnation appeal to the illustration to support their view. But such a reading fails, for it is not the fruit that is burned but the land itself! It would make sense to see a reference to rewards if it were the crops that were destroyed at the end. The author, however, describes the destruction of the *land*, not its fruit. The land refers to the persons in the illustration, and hence there is no doubt that the threat is eternal punishment, not loss of rewards." Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews* (BTCPC; Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 191.

⁵ Johnson, 87.

⁶ Mike Andrus, “Bad News, Good News,” a sermon preached on January 3, 2010, to First Evangelical Free Church in Wichita, KS, and accessed online at: <http://firstfreewichita.org/sermons/sermon/2010-01-03/bad-news--good-news>.

⁷ Johnson, 88.

⁸ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. Ed. (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 145.

⁹ “Hebrews draws a distinction between the constituency of the church as we view it from our finite perspective and those whom God knows to be joined to Christ by living and lasting faith (cf. 2 Tim. 2:19). Likewise, Hebrews implies a distinction between the *temporal and external* benefits of participation in God’s covenant community—whether it be ancient Israel or the new covenant church—and the *eternal and internal* salvation received by living, lasting faith in Christ.” Johnson, 85.

¹⁰ Arturo Azurdia III, “The Fatality of Apostasy, Part 1,” a sermon accessed online at: http://media.thirdmill.org/mp3-16/art_azurdia.Heb13.mp3.

¹¹ “Just as the Hebrew spies who returned from their expedition carrying visible tokens of the good land of Canaan nevertheless failed to enter the land because of their unbelief, so those who had come to know the blessings of the new covenant might nevertheless in a spiritual sense turn back in heart to Egypt and so forfeit the saints’ everlasting rest.” Bruce, 145.

¹² “It is a failure that puts someone in an irretrievable position of loss. The example of Esau in Hebrews 12:16-17 does seem intended as a parallel to 6:4-6. He forfeited his rights of inheritance because he placed no value on them and later was unable to inherit blessing, though he sought it, because no opportunity for repentance was available to him.” Buist M. Fanning, “A Classical Reformed View,” in *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2007), 185-186.

¹³ James Emery White, *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post-Christian World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 23.

¹⁴ “We must bear in mind that John is not talking about a mere exchange of one denomination for another—the one who does that is not by that act revealed to be an unbeliever—but rather of a departure that is at the same time a rejection of the fundamental truths of Christianity.” James Montgomery Boice, *The Epistles of John: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 70.

¹⁵ Douglas Sean O’Donnell, *1-3 John*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, 1st ed., Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 82.

¹⁶ Simon J. Kistemaker, “Exposition of the Epistles of John,” in *James, Epistles of John, Peter, and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 277.

¹⁷ O’Donnell, 82. “The perseverance of the saints is a biblical doctrine, but it is not a doctrine designed to lull the indifferent into a sense of false security; it means that perseverance is an essential token of sanctity.” Bruce, *The Epistles of John*, 69.

¹⁸ Anthony Carter, *Running from Mercy: Jonah and the Surprising Story of God’s Unstoppable Grace* (Nashville: B&H Books, 2018), 79-80. He continues, “Wayne Grudem, in his *Systematic Theology*, defines *repentance* as ‘a sincere desire to forsake sin and walk in obedience to Christ.’ The Westminster Shorter Catechism defines *repentance* as ‘a sinner, out of true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of Christ, does with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, endeavor after, new obedience.’ The common thread running through all those definitions is a forsaking of your sin. It is grieving over the sin that has offended God, but also turning from that sin into full embrace of a new life of obedience unto God.”

¹⁹ Andrus, “Bad News, Good News.”

²⁰ “The main purpose of this letter was to urge these Jewish Christians not to allow themselves, under pressure of persecution, to abandon the distinctively Christian aspects of their faith and slip back into its purely Jewish elements. To do this would mean that they had taken their stand with the Jewish attitude to Jesus, that he was a blasphemer, not Messiah, worthy of execution of the worst possible kind. The form of apostasy envisaged here is surely on par with the serious ‘blasphemy against the Holy Spirit’ warning in the ministry of Jesus, the sin of ascribing the good, God-inspired, healing ministry of Christ to the work of demonic forces. It is to describe what is Christ’s work as the devil’s work. These believers were in danger of identifying themselves with Christ’s persecutors that first Good Friday, who deliberately rejected him and cried, ‘Crucify him.’ . . . The force of their Christ-rejection is vividly expressed in the tenses which are used here to describe their activity. Such people ‘keep on crucifying’ (present tense) for themselves the Son of God, and ‘keep on putting him to open shame’ (present tense again). If such people are resolutely determined to respond in this way to the message of Christ’s love and forgiveness, then certainly it is ‘impossible to keep on repeatedly leading them (present tense) afresh into repentance’.” Raymond Brown, *The Message of Hebrews* (BST; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 113-114.

²¹ Schreiner, 189.

²² Johnson, 87.

²³ *Ibid.*, 89.

²⁴ Andrus, “Bad News, Good News.”

²⁵ Richard D. Phillips, *Hebrews* (REC; Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2006), 194.

²⁶ Azurdia, “The Fatality of Apostasy, Part 1.”

²⁷ Brown, 115.

²⁸ Azurdia, “The Fatality of Apostasy, Part 1.”

²⁹ Brown, 111, 114. Similarly, Johnson (85) writes: This warning is intended to challenge the presumptuous, but it may

also alarm and unsettle the sensitive consciences of sincere believers. Aware of this danger, the author immediately reassures his hearers with reminders of the evidence of good fruit that God's word and Spirit have previously borne in their lives (Heb. 9-12).” And I personally love the way F. F. Bruce words the following remarks: “The Scriptures contain encouragement enough and to spare for the feeblest of believer, but are full of solemn warnings to those who think they stand to beware lest they fall. A credible profession of faith must be accepted as genuine, but ultimately it is only the Lord who knows those are his.” Bruce, 147.

³⁰ Andrus, “Bad News, Good News.”

³¹ Bruce, 115.