

# Jesus is the Better Path

We must be cautious of the consequences of moving away from Christ, while at the same time remain mindful of the security of moving forward in our faith.

*Hebrews 6:1-9, Luke 8:12-15*

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## BECKY

This morning we have a special recognition and I'd like to ask Becky Shilito to come up. If you don't know Becky, it's because you haven't been at Grace very long. For the past 37 years, this woman's has dedicated herself faithfully to the health, integrity, and stability of this church. You know God gives the pastors vision, but Beck has been the one to keep things from spiraling out of control.

When I came my head was spinning, and over the past year I have watched and been so grateful for Becky's expertise, knowledge and dedication to the people of Grace, and to the Lord.

today marks a new season as she moved into a much deserved retirement. Her ministry is not over, but is changing forms.

paul to Philemon hearts have been refreshed by you.

presentation of the Bible

reception in foyer after service

## ILLUSTRATION

Have you ever been asked a difficult or challenging question that you weren't all that excited to answer? Here are wiki-how's top things to do in order to answer a difficult and disturbing

question:

1. **Don't answer.**
2. **Flip the question back to the questioner.**
3. **Delay.**
4. **Answer gradually.**
5. **Use humor.**
6. **Answer it intelligently.**

So, I guess we will see how many of those tactics I employ this morning while tackling arguably one of the most disputed and difficult passages in the New Testament.

## CONTEXT

These next couple verses have been the source of numerous theological divisions within the church. If you have ever even heard the question posed, ***Can someone lose their salvation?*** ~~that~~ that question most likely came from this chapter and specifically these verses. Now, I can't claim that I have the understanding and revelation to interpret this passage perfectly. I have come to some conclusions that I will share with you, but even in my conclusions, there are some questions that remained unanswered.

- If you read two commentaries by respected bible scholars, it's very possible that they will interpret this passage as polar opposites.
- **TWO CAMPS:**
  - I'll dive into the multiple interpretations of these verses a little later.
  - To put your minds at ease, even a little bit, regardless of the perfect interpretation of this text, the good news is that the implication and applications are the same: ***There is no salvation outside of complete faith in Jesus alone.***

**PRINCIPLES:** the most important principle to interpreting scripture, especially one like this is to not isolate it unto itself.

- **ONE:** We derive theology not only from single verses but from the entirety of scripture and how the Scripture interprets itself. In other words, like a puzzle, the Bible creates a complete picture when it's balanced in context.

- When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, his weapon of choice was the Word of God. Satan quoted scripture word for word. But he quoted scripture out of the context of the entire thought and context of greater truths. What did Jesus do? He responded with scripture in order to bring about the fuller context of the Word of God.
- When someone tries to create an entire doctrine soteriology based on Hebrews 6:4-6, they are skating on thin ice, for they neglect so many other passages of scripture that are designed to bring balance and clarification. They even ignore the surrounding verses and context of the book of Hebrews itself.

# 1

## They Never Move from Religion to Christ

### BIBLE VERSE

**Heb 6:1-3 NKJV – 1 Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. 3 And this we will do if God permits.**

### CONTEXT

This verse is a bridge between the end of chapter 5, discussing the importance of maturing in Christ, to the middle of chapter 6 which discusses the eternal dangers of leaving Christ.

- He warned them that some might not receive these next truths because they had become dull of hearing.

**Let us go on to perfection** – maturity, having a more complete understanding of our faith.

**Not laying again the foundation:** These are the elemental building blocks of God's truth. they are in three categories:

1. ***Repentance and faith – Our response to God***
2. ***Baptisms (washings) and laying on of hands – Our connection the the Church***
3. ***Resurrection and judgment – Our eternal outcome***

I believe that we have to remember the context. He's writing to those who came out of Judaism!

- Nothing on that list is specifically or uniquely Christian. Every Jewish boy and girl, from childhood, would have learned all of these principles from the Old Testament and Jewish tradition.
- **Don't forget, our Christian faith was built on the foundation of the Old Covenant and the Jewish religion.**
- The problem is that some believers wanted to stay there. **They didn't want to view the fullness of their doctrinal knowledge through the lens of Jesus Christ.**
- ***I believe the author is calling some in his audience to view repentance, faith, baptism, laying on of hands, resurrection, and judgment, no longer through the lens of Judaism and the Old Covenant system, but through the lens of Jesus and fully embrace His new and better covenant.***

## APPLICATION

The problem with those to whom Paul was referring, was not that they lacked a theological basis for Jesus, but that they never moved beyond their religious affiliation to fully embrace the truth of Christ.

Let us GO ON – the term does not mean to abandon to former, but to springboard off of the former into fully embracing Christ.

**[Gal 3:23-25 NKJV] 23 But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. 24 Therefore the law was our tutor [to bring us] to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. 25 But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.**

You see, it's not that the Law of Moses under the Old Covenant wasn't valuable, it just wasn't complete. It was designed to lead us to that which is complete, Jesus. But to one who embraces the rules, regulations, and practices of a religious system, but never fully embrace salvation by grace alone, through faith alone in Jesus Christ, they are walking in very dangerous territory.

## 2

## They Neglect the Truth in Front of Them

## BIBLE VERSE

**Heb 6:4-6 NKJV – 4 For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.**

## DIFFICULTY

Now, there are several things about this passage that make it difficult to interpret. But the one thing in the passage that makes it the most difficult to swallow is the word: **IMPOSSIBLE. (It is IMPOSSIBLE to renew them again to repentance).**

- Whatever class of people the author is talking about, the one thing remains, there is a point that one can go that is too far... a point of no return when it comes to their repentance before God.
- The word impossible in Greek and the context is undeniable. Consider the other times this same word is used in the book of Hebrews:
  - **Hebrews 6:18 – ...it is impossible for God to lie.**
  - **Hebrews 11:6 – without faith, it is impossible to please God.**

So, in the context of Hebrews, impossible doesn't mean "highly unlikely." It means, "It ain't happening!"

But to balance this out, when I hear the word impossible, I remember what Jesus said after he implied that it was impossible for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. His disciples questioned saying, "Than who can be saved?" Jesus answered, **"The things which are impossible for men are possible for God."**

- Here's the point... minus a miraculous act of God, someone who has fallen from their faith has entered into a landslide that no one can pull them out of. So we must ask, ***"What does it mean to fall away, and who is at the greatest risk of such a thing?"***

## DEFINITION

Before the “who,” let’s work backward and discuss the “what.”

The word here in verse 6 for **“if they fall away”** is the word that means to fall or slip aside. It’s the only time this word is used in the New Testament. Slip back into what? Back into religion without Jesus. Back into a sacrificial system that would mock the sacrifice of Christ.

- One thing we need to make clear is that the author is talking to Christians who have slipped into some moral failure or sin. Today we might call it today, “Backslidden.”
- It’s inconsistent with the rest of scripture, and the gospel itself, to say that someone who is battling against sin in their life will never be able to find repentance or forgiveness again.
- I don’t believe this is talking about the person who is like the prodigal son.
  - The one who had a season of disobedience. Obviously, the Father was willing to welcome the wayward son back, and the son had a moment of eye-opening reality that led him to repentance.
  - The man in the church at Corinth who was living in sin, sleeping with his step-mom was unrepentant and kicked out of the church. Later, according to 2 Corinthians, that man became sorrowful and experienced godly repentance and was received back into the church.
  - Apparently, a Christian can fall into a specific sin, or even sin for a season and still find true repentance and forgiveness. So he is clearly not talking about people who sin after they are saved. To some degree, we all sin after we get saved.

I mention this because there are some who read this one verse and think, **“I’ve committed the unpardonable sin and now I’m doomed forever!”** I don’t believe this is an accurate interpretation of the passage. 1 John tells us:

**1Jo 1:8-10 NKJV – 8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.**

**It is not your works that can earn you salvation, nor can they lose it for you.**

- **Wait, Josh, didn’t you say last week that Jesus is the author of eternal salvation to those who obey Him? Yes, obey the gospel! What is obedience to the gospel? FAITH, not work.**

- **Jhn 6:28-29 NKJV – 28 Then they said to Him, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” (They were looking for something they could do to earn God’s favor) 29 Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.”**

*I believe the only legitimate interpretation of this passage is that we are referring to a person who has walked away from Jesus as the only hope for their salvation altogether; who has abandoned their confession of faith in Christ. Who refuses to trust in the blood of his covenant. They have walked away from the only sacrifice that has the power to deal with their sin.*

**SIDENOTE:** *“Phew, thanks, Josh! Now I don’t have to worry about what I do or don’t do! I’ll just continue to sin and do what I want and be ok because I believe in Jesus!”* Whoa, partner! How could you say that you have come to the realization of how sinful you are and how Holy God is and how loving He was to send His son for you and maintain a cavalier attitude toward sin. If you care not about your sin and see Jesus as nothing more than a “get out of hell free card,” then this morning you will be jolted by the reality that perhaps you have not fully embraced the true gospel. Your religion won’t save you. Your church attendance won’t save you. Your membership in a church won’t save you. Your mere confession of Jesus won’t save you. You must come to full faith in Christ within your heart.

I like how Greek scholar and commentator William Lane puts it in reference to the Greek structure and wording of this statement:

#### QUOTE

*What is visualized by the expressions in verse 6 is every form of departure from faith in the crucified Son of God. This could entail a return to Jewish convictions and practices as well as the public denial of faith in Christ under pressure from a magistrate or a hostile crowd, simply for personal advantage.*

William Lane, Commentary on Hebrews

**BIBLE VERSE**

[Luk 4:24-28 NKJV] 24 Then He said, “Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country. 25 “But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; 26 “but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, [in the region] of Sidon, to a woman [who was] a widow. 27 “And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.” 28 So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath,

**APPLICATION**

Widow of Zarephath

Naaman the Syrian

- Neither were Jews
- Neither had access to the temple worship or sacrifices
- Neither had any credentials
- Neither had a basis of theology or belief in God
- Neither had access to the prophets or the law.

What did they have? Unswerving loyalty to the true God. Only faith.

Sets a precedent. The one question that determines salvation: Not are you religious? Are you a good person? Do you adhere to the Westminster catechism? Are you a member of the church? But rather, “Do you trust Jesus fully and solely for your salvation?”

**QUOTE**

*Regarding one’s salvation, the question isn’t, “What are you doing?” It’s, “Who are you trusting?”*

**BIG QUESTION**



That makes the next question in people's minds, "Well are these people who were really saved and lost their salvation, or are these people who only appeared to be saved but never really were?"

And the answer is, "I don't know."

- I listened to one sermon where the pastor insisted that these were tears among the wheat, and wolves among the sheep, fake believers who blend in but have never truly been converted. But then I ask, ***"How can you fall away from something you were never really a part of?"***
- I listened to another sermon where the pastor insisted these were true believers who gave up their faith, to which I wonder, ***"Well what about the power of the Holy Spirit to keep them?"***
- ***I heard another say it's probably both, another says it only applies to the first-century Jewish believers, another says that the author is putting forth a hypothetical situation to assure his audience of their salvation!***

There are many people who are convinced that they know, and each of them has some difficult unanswered questions and encounters biblical conflicts in defending their views. **So now that you know you aren't leaving today with any definitive answers, let's continue looking at the passage.**

- Let's look at the author's description of these people a little more closely:

## BIBLE VERSE

**those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come**

## POINTS

Here we have 5 characteristics of the people he is talking about:

1. **Once enlightened** – to bring illumination, namely to instruct one's mind – in other words, there was a point where the knowledge of the gospel entered into their minds. They

considered and processed the good news of Jesus. It doesn't necessarily mean they fully believed it, but they did mentally receive it.

2. **Tasted the heavenly gift** – I believe the heavenly gift here refers to the gift of Jesus (as the Holy Spirit is mentioned next). There are some who make the argument that tasted here means to sample, but not ingest. Jesus tasted (same word) the wine that the guards offered him of the cross but he didn't drink it. However, the same word is used in Hebrews 2 when it says that Jesus tasted death for everyone. Certainly, Jesus didn't just take a little taste of death, but fully drank that cup.

1. So again, it's unclear. It could be someone who is getting little samples of Jesus by osmosis. They remain close to the community of faith enough to take some samples, but they never fully consume Christ.

2. Some would say, "They just flirted with Christ, but never really married. They tasted the heavenly gift – rolled it around in their mouth – but never swallowed." ***Sounds like Bill Clinton, "I smoked, but didn't inhale."***

3. **Partakers of the Holy Spirit** – again, does "partake" mean that some of the benefits rub off on you, or that you yourself were filled and sealed with the Spirit? Did your car get splashed by parking next to the carwash, or did you actually go through the car wash?

1. I should not that the Bible is pretty clear, that once you fully receive Christ and are filled with the Spirit, He also seals you to the day of redemption.

4. **Tasted the good word of God** – again, we have the word taste. To some degree, they've heard and even benefited from God's Word. A sermon really gave them some food for thought. They even went away impressed that the Bible has some relevance.

5. **Tasted the power of the age to come** – They were privy to and partakers of the work of the kingdom of Christ. They witnessed the Holy Spirit's power through the church to see the sick healed, dead raised, demons cast out. Remember, at the final judgment Jesus will look at some people who will say, ***"Did we not cast out demons in your name and perform miracles in your name?"*** And He will say to them, ***"Depart from me you workers of iniquity, I never knew you."***

## ILLUSTRATION

Imagine the college football recruiting process.

- Nick Saban from Alabama and his team scout out the high school talent.

- They invite them to junior week. They court them and give them personalized tours.
- The players walk the locker room, participate in some practice on the field, go through the dorms and eat in town.
- Then the coach visits their home, talks through the offers with the parents, makes a case to the family why Alabama is the best option.
- They've tasted of the school, they've partaken of some of the benefits, they've been enlightened to the offers, they have a sweatshirt and a hat.
- But buddy, you aren't an Alabama football player until you sign the commitment!

## THE OUTCOME

**MY PERSONAL BELIEF:** There were Jews within Paul's audience who were associating with genuine believers, but had not become fully convinced in their own hearts. It was not possible for Paul to discern between the two on the outside, so he warns them all to not neglect the power and truth of Jesus that they were witnessing right before their eyes. he was n to trying to make a case for losing salvation, or judging someone's saved status... He simply points out the truth and lets the chips fall where they may: if you have been introduced to the way of Christ, and you decide to reject that way or trade it for another way, you are in an eternally dangerous situation.

Whether or not these are saved people who lost it or unsaved people who faked it is not the point. The point is that these people really exist. God knows the state of their eternal salvation. Try to figure it out, and you might end up in a tailspin of circular reasoning.

- **No one can snatch them out of my hands! Yeah, but can you walk out?**
- **Paul says that you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit until the day of redemption. Yeah, but he also says you can only inherit the promise if you remain steadfast in the faith?**
- **Christ is faithful to sanctify you, body, soul and spirit, until the day of salvation! Yeah, but I have to keep myself in the love of God?**

**Here is the point: Whoever you are, place your faith fully and solely in Jesus Christ!**

3

## They Reject the Only Sufficient Sacrifice for Sin

## BIBLE VERSE

*6 it's impossible... if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.*

## INSIGHTS

If they fall away – Maybe they will, maybe they won't! If they don't fall away, then the consequences attached certainly don't apply. If they do fall away from Christ and his sacrifice, then repentance in that state of mind is an impossibility.

- Again, is it impossible for God to receive them back? I don't think so, but as long as they are rejecting Christ, their hardened hearts makes it humanly impossible to argue them back into the faith. If you know someone who has heard the gospel, partaken of the word, witnessed the power of the Spirit, yet they deny Christ, you won't argue them into the faith. The best thing you can do is pray for them, that God, by some miracle, would allow them to move into a place of faith.

Notice the implications of their unbelief:

- They mock the cross, declaring the sacrifice of Christ to no effect. They bring shame on the cross of Jesus by denying the One who spilled His blood to purchase them. The modern-day terms might be, ***"Spit in the eye, or slap on the face."***
- ***After all, to reject the sacrifice of Jesus is to identify with those who crucified him. Furthermore, to go back to the sacrificial system of Judaism after the blood of Jesus had been offered was a shameful devaluing of Christ's sacrifice.***

## ILLUSTRATION

There's a familiar story that comes to mind when we are talking about this. It's the parable Jesus told of the ***sewer, the seed, and the soil.***

- You probably remember: Jesus told the story of a sewer going along a path sowing seed. Some seed fell by the wayside and was snatched by the birds before it was implanted into the soil. Some seed fell on rocky ground, sprang up, but eventually died from starvation.

Some seed fell on the thorny ground, sprang up, but was choked out by the weeds. Finally, some seed fell on good soil and produced fruit.

- In Luke 8, Jesus explains the parable:

## BIBLE VERSE

**Luk 8:12-15 NIV – 12 Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. 13 Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. 14 The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. 15 But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.**

## APPLICATION

**The one example that sticks out to me the most in relation to the kind of people that Hebrews is talking about is the rocky soil:**

- **The rocky soil** – these people did receive the gospel and showed initial enthusiasm and excitement, but the pressure and persecution attached with following Jesus weren't worth the price. They failed to count the cost of discipleship and quickly faded from Christ because they were never truly and fully rooted in Him.
- Perhaps these were the people who were quickly turning from Christ to run back to the law and Judaism or were abandoning Christ due to persecution.
- This can happen! Remember the time that Jesus lost an entire crowd of disciples? After Jesus told this large crowd of followers, "you must eat my flesh and drink my blood" everyone got offended. We read:

**John 6:66 NKJV – 66 From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.**

These were disciples! People who initially liked the idea of following Jesus but ultimately refused to fully embrace Christ. You might say they "tasted" Christ, but never consumed his body and

blood, the sacrifice for their sin.

## 4

# The Never Bear the Fruit of True Faith

### BIBLE VERSE

**Heb 6:7-8 NKJV – 7 For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; 8 but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.**

### APPLICATION

Again, the focus is on the what happens to the seed once it enters into the spoil. Sometimes the only way a farmer would know which land would produce the best fruit was to simply watch and wait after the seed was planted.

- Both soils receive the same water. They both drink from the same source. The both absorb the same nutrients, but one produces good fruit and the other has thorns and weeds coming out of their life. Only God knows what's going on beneath the surface. But it's clear.. one path leads to eternal life, the other path leads to apostasy, and the end is destruction.

### BIBLE VERSE

**Jhn 15:2 NKJV – 2 “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”**

### QUOTE

*“It’s what we do with the rain that matters. If we bear fruit we’ll be blessed. If we bear thorns we’ll be cursed. Our eternal destiny is shaped by our response to God.”*

## APPLICATION

**I'll be honest with you. The first person that comes to mind when I read this passage is Judas Iscariot.**

- Judas walked with Jesus and TASTED of the heavenly gift.
- He was ENLIGHTENED as Jesus taught of the Kingdom.
- Judas cast out demons and partook of the Holy Spirit and the power of the kingdom to come.
- Judas was part of the 12 disciples
- Judas betrayed Jesus
- Judas found no true repentance

Compared to Peter:

- Peter denied and cursed Jesus three times.
- He abandoned Christ at Jesus' time of greatest need.
- He wept bitterly but eventually found true repentance and forgiveness, and God knew the entire time this would happen.

What we see here is pretty clear: Judas was a fake follower. According to John 6, Judas never really believed, but he had everyone fooled. Jesus washed his feet too. His LACK OF TRUE FRUIT fruit ultimately became clear.

## BIBLE VERSE

**Heb 6:9 NKJV – 9 But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner.**

## APPLICATION

The author recognizes that he is speaking in a manner of stern warning. It might be frightening for the readers to read about the drastic and fearful consequences of turning one's back on Christ. But despite the stern and blunt tone, there is an expectation that better things are in store for those reading the book.

## QUOTE

*We must be fully aware of the dire consequences of walking away from Christ, while at the same time, holding unwavering confidence in our security as we hold fast to Christ.*

Pastor Josh,

## APPLICATION

- That as they remain committed to the gospel and to continue in their faith, fruit that accompanies true salvation will abound in their lives.
- This passage isn't merely intended to frighten but to encourage. It's not designed to have one question their salvation, but to find security in it. To know that as long as they are continuing with Christ, they will be fine.
- ***Chances are if you are concerned about losing your salvation, it's proof that you never will.*** The very fact that you care is evidence of the fruit of God's Spirit working in your life.
- ***Certainly, if the apostate is never saved, it's because he continued in his apostasy; not because he sought salvation and forgiveness in Christ but couldn't find it.*** In other words, if you want salvation today, you fall into the camp of the latter; those who bear the fruit that accompanies salvation.
- The next part of our chapter teaches us HOW we are to endure... that is through faith and patience. But for today, it's a good reminder to continue on in our faith. Keep responding to God's voice through His word. Don't harden your heart lest you become choked out by the cares of this life, or fold under the pressure of persecution, or become ashamed of the offense of the gospel.
  - Keep always in mind the tragic course of all those who abandon Christ so that you can be committed to clinging tightly to Him, trusting Him and following Him.