

HEBREWS VERSE BY VERSE - The New and Living Way - Part twenty-three

Sunday, July 16th, 2017 - 10 a.m. - Teaching #1982

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WHAT KIND OF WARNING DO WE HAVE IN HEBREWS 6:4-8?

Hebrews 6:4-8 - "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."

I think everyone should understand what we are trying to do in this Sunday morning teaching. We are now considering the five most studied and contested verses in the New Testament. The church has been divided over these frightening words for centuries. Which means we will have to *pray* and we will have to *think* as we approach the Word right now.

The *last* thing we're going to do in this teaching is re-apply the practical encouragement in the *context* of these verses. They are, like *all* verses in your Bible, meant to deepen your walk with Christ. Yes, there are things "*...hard to explain*" (5:11). But that doesn't make them less *important* or less *helpful*. And we certainly are smack in the middle of "*things hard to explain*" in this morning's text.

The *big division* over these verses is simple to state. It's the *details* that get mirky. The big division, oversimplified for sure, is whether a genuine believer can ever become an *unbeliever*. Can a truly regenerate person *lose* his or her standing in Christ? Can salvation be lost?

Virtually all - though not quite all - *Calvinists* say it is *impossible* for a truly redeemed saint to lose eternal life. *Wesleyans* say that while it is not *easy* or *common*, it is *possible* to forfeit a genuine saving faith in Christ. This is not to be confused with *backsliding*, from which repentance can arise and renewing grace can be applied to even the most rebellious heart.

Obviously these two theologies shape the way this text is approached. For the *Calvinist* there are only two options available for **verses 4-6** - "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."

For the *Calvinist*, if these cautioned people fall away from grace, they *aren't* truly regenerate *or* what they *lose isn't* salvation. So some will say these people were never truly saved in the first place. *John McArthur* will see those cautioned in our text as unregenerate *Jews still clinging to the Old Covenant*. They are devoutly religious but reject Jesus as the Messiah. They see no value in Christ's atoning work as the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrificial system. And so, McArthur says these Jews crucify the Son as surely as those who mocked Jesus as He hung on the cross (6).

Others - like *John Piper* - see these cautioned people as unregenerate people who may have had some special religious *experiences* of grace and *claimed* a relationship with Jesus but never separated themselves from the world. They treasured self-will more than Christ. And this is how they "*crucify once again the Son of God*," and "*hold him up to contempt*" (6).

To complicate things even more there are *Calvinists* who are also *covenant theologians*. I believe people like *Timothy Keller* would make a distinction between being a participant in the *covenant* through infant baptism (or possibly later), communion, and confirmation in the faith - covenant theology makes a distinction between that entrance into the covenant community and being one of the *elect*. Not all members of the covenant are elect to salvation.

So, just as all of the descendants of Abraham, at least according to the Apostle Paul, weren't really God's faithful elect, there are people who participate in the new covenant who aren't regenerate - aren't part of God's elect, chosen for salvation. So the warnings about apostasy are real. But what is lost is place in the covenant, not salvation because these were never a part of God's elect in the first place.

The only other option taken by some **Calvinists** is to say these cautioned people **are** Christians, but what they lose is **not** salvation. They lose something **else** - usually **rewards** of one form or another at the final judgment.

The problem I have with that is our writer says the problem with these people is they can't be **"restored to repentance"**(6). And rewards at the judgment or in heaven are never said to be given out on the basis of **repentance** anywhere in the New Testament. There are rewards for **service**. There are rewards for **faithfulness**. There even seem to be rewards given based on the **persecution received** in this earthly life. But never are rewards said to be given on the basis of **repentance**.

So whether these cautioned people are **Christians** on the verge of **losing rewards** or **un-repentant people who were never Christians in the first place**, there are no **Christians losing salvation** anywhere in this text for the **Calvinist**.

And there's something very comforting in that - for **some** people. But there's something extremely **frightening** in it as well. And I'm terribly concerned it's so rarely discussed in a more **Wesleyan** oriented church like ours. I need to openly talk about this for just a minute.

I don't say these words lightly. God knows my heart. I have no ill-will toward any church lifting up Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of all. But there's a reason many Calvinistic churches post on their web site **only** the Calvinistic doctrine of **the perseverance of the saints** - or what used to be called **eternal security**.

Churches post their statements of faith on their web sites. Our church posts our core convictions on our site as well. Like all churches, we do that because we **want** everyone to be aware of them. We don't want these truths hidden. If some other church mentions our statement of faith in their church I'm very pleased with that. They're not **gossiping** about us because we **advertize** these truths.

I've been looking at church web sites this week along the lines of the topic of our text. If you go to the web sites of the **Harvest Churches** or the **Campus Congregations**, or **Victory Baptist Church**, here in York Region you will find they all stress the fact that salvation can never be lost under their **"Doctrinal Statement"** sections. And there's good marketing in telling everyone salvation can never be lost. This is something all Christians love to hear.

But thoughtful Christians need to ask the important question. **"Why can salvation never be lost? How can we be so certain it can never be lost?"** And there are not two answers or three answers to that question. There is only **one** answer in Calvinistic theology. Remember it every time you hear about eternal security. **Salvation is un-loseable because divine grace is irresistible.**

Irresistible grace is not a complicated doctrine. God's saving grace is **sovereign** grace in the sense that where He bestows it nothing can prevent it and no one can refuse it. God's grace **overrides** all opposition - inward and outward. Always. One hundred percent of the time. It can **never, never, never be refused or discarded**. Not by **anyone**. Not **ever**.

Here's the simplified take home point. **Irresistible grace is the engine of Calvinism**. It is the root of **eternal security**. And here's what that means. If **salvation is un-loseable it is because divine grace is irresistible**. And if God's saving grace is **always** irresistible it can't possibly be offered to everyone because if absolutely irresistible grace was extended to everyone **no one could possibly be lost**. And we know from the lips of Jesus Himself some people **will** be eternally lost:

Matthew 18:8-9 - "And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet **to be thrown into the eternal fire**. [9] And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes **to be thrown into the hell of fire**."

Calvinism recognizes this. Some people will be eternally lost. And because of its doctrine of **irresistible grace** the only answer it offers is **Jesus Christ never died on the cross to reach everyone with salvation**. He **could** have. His work on the cross was great enough and effective enough to save everyone. But God never **intended** - never had it in His **plan** to offer saving grace for all sinners. **Jesus died on the cross offering saving hope only to some - only to the elect. God never, ever intended an offer of saving grace for all.**

Get that point deeply in your mind. In all of these churches promising Christians can never lose their salvation there is only one way that doctrine works. Whether they post it on their web site or not, they absolutely believe Jesus never died on the cross for everyone.

Don't glibly rush past this. **Jesus never died for everyone. Say it over and over to yourself and ask yourself if that sounds right. Ask**

yourself it that's a deal breaker. Saving grace isn't offered to everyone.

Maybe not your sons or daughters. Maybe ***some*** of them but not ***all***. Jesus died for ***one*** but not the other ***two***. Perhaps for you but not your spouse. Perhaps not for your parents. Perhaps not for your grandchildren. Or perhaps only for some of them and not the others. ***This*** you won't find posted on any church web site.

Now how comforting is it when you read on church web sites Christians can never lose their salvation? There's a huge price to pay for that kind of teaching. And that's why most churches ***only*** post eternal security on their home page. Not ***limited atonement*** (or ***particular redemption*** as its now more commonly called).

I took a big bite of time with this because it doesn't get probed into all that often by either ***Calvinists*** or ***Wesleyans***. And I think it cuts out the heart of the gospel of grace. Here's where we're going now. I want to examine this text to see ***who these cautioned people are***. To my mind it is powerfully portraying ***redeemed people***.

Then I want to look at what these Christians lose. And I'm convinced what they lose is their salvation. I do ***not*** believe divine grace is irresistible, though God could have ***made it so*** had He intended. These regenerate people ***thoroughly reject grace to their eternal peril***.

What I'd like to do is study just ***one*** reason I believe that is what this text teaches today and then three or four more reasons next Sunday:

1) **I BELIEVE THESE CAUTIONED PEOPLE ARE CHRISTIANS BECAUSE OF THE LOGICAL FLOW OF THE CONTEXTUAL ARGUMENT OF THE WRITER**

It is extremely difficult to find a reason for **6:4-8** unless these verses are describing the ***same people*** as those in **5:11-6:3**. Unfortunately the only way to study this carefully is to cite these verses once again ***back to back***. We just have to do the mental work:

Hebrews 5:11-6:2 - "About this 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 need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, [13] for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. [14] But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. [1] Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, [2] and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment."

Hebrews 6:3-8 - "And this we will do if God permits. [4] 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."

So here's what seems obvious: **5:11** is addressed to Christians - "***...you have become dull of hearing.***" **5:12** is addressed to Christians - "***...by this time you ought to be teachers.***" **5:14** is addressed to Christians - "***...for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.***" **6:1** is addressed to Christians - "***...let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity....***" Even **6:3** is addressing future teaching ministry to Christians - "***And this we will do if God permits.***"

Then the argument builds ***to the same people*** - **Hebrews 6:4-6** - "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....**"

Our writer has just addressed these readers about their need to move on from their ***elementary repentance*** and cautioned

them about their need to apply it properly and maturely - **Hebrews 6:1** - **“Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God....”**

But what if they **don't** move on to maturity. Our writer seems convinced they will (**6:9**), and they most likely will. We're all **“sluggish”**(**6:12**) and **“dull of hearing”**(**5:11**) at times. But our merciful High Priest can restore the weak and the fallen. All we need to do is come to the throne of grace (**4:16**). And this we Christians do - **almost always**. And to be sure we are **never turned away** by our sympathetic High Priest. **No one** who comes is turned away - not ever. There is no shortage of grace for every repentant heart.

But still there's no denying our writer is **concerned**. You don't warn unless you're also **fearful of a possible set of bad circumstances**. That's where warnings come from. Our writer doesn't want these people continuing their present course of **dull hearing**. And the important question to face is **why** is he concerned? Is there anything eternal at stake here? And I believe the text clearly says there's more at stake than we'd like to admit.

Finally, I believe our writer's concern in this text is a precise echo of Jesus' theology of **compounding effect** of carelessly hearing and sluggishly obeying the truth we have heard:

Matthew 25:29-30 - **“For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. [30] And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”**

Here's the easily overlooked truth in this parable of the talents. That servant who didn't **use** - didn't **multiply** - the one talent man is obviously the key player in Jesus' story. Never forget he **lost** the one talent he **kept**. He lost it even though technically he didn't **lose** it. He didn't lose it but he still ended up with nothing.

The reason is in Jesus' words in **verse 29** - **“...even what he has will be taken away.”** This is a parable about the **loss** of what a man thought he **still had**. You never **keep** what doesn't **multiply**. And however you interpret the judgment in **verse 30** it isn't where this man wanted to be.

There is another text where Jesus restates this same principle even more directly related to how we **hear** His words - **Luke 8:16-18** - **“No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. [17] For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light. [18] Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.”**

What you're looking at here is the deceptively silent, incremental cost of not building on the foundations of the first beginnings of faith. Repentance isn't something you and I can control indefinitely.

We've just scratched the surface of this text. We'll continue with it next Sunday. But the closing point here is there is no **reason** for this to happen. Spiritual listening is always the key. That's why there is one sentence that gets repeated for emphasis in the New Testament. And the significant thing about it is it only comes from the lips of Jesus. No one else ever says it:

“He who has ears, let him (or her) hear what the Spirit says....”