

# Irreversible Apostasy

Hebrews 6:4-8

*Halifax: 11 December 2022*

## **Introduction:**

Today, we will continue our sermon series through the book of Hebrews.

Last week, we looked at the first three verses of chapter 6.

- We saw that we have a wonderful foundation of faith on which to build.
  - We were admonished to go on to perfection (becoming all that God has called us to be) upon this foundation.
  - We saw that it is the same foundation that the Jews like Abraham had...
    - Repentance from dead works coupled with faith in God who promises to save us from our sins.
    - With this are the ordinances of the church that God appointed to point us to His promised salvation—baptisms (many in the Old Testament and but one in the New) and the laying on of hands, which represents the giving of the Holy Spirit for the edification of the church.
    - And the hope of the resurrection of the dead and the certainty that God will judge us and either reward or punish us forever.
  - That summarises the basics of the faith in both the Old and New Testaments.
- We considered that, now that Christ has come, this foundation has been beautifully and powerfully enhanced for us.
  - Because God has sent the Son that He promised, all of these elements are brought to a fullness and a certainty and a beauty that was not possible before!
    - Now we see not only that we need to repent, but that our sins calls for the punishment of God the Son in our place.
    - We see that God has done the unthinkable and given His Son to be offering for our sin—and the Son has come to do that. Faith is now trusting in Him for salvation.
    - And we see that not only does He give us baptism, but that this baptism is accomplished by the Holy Spirit who unites us to Christ for cleansing and who also renews our hearts so that we will come to Him.
    - We see that God has poured out His Spirit on Him as the anointed one and that He now gives Him to us that we may serve, the Spirit's giving being represented by the laying on of hands.
    - As far as the resurrection, we see that Christ has now made it certain by being the first rise from the dead as our head and representative.
    - And regarding judgment, the of Son of God made flesh, this holy lamb of God, is to be our judge to reward us with eternal life or condemn us to eternal death—the nature of it being all the more certain seeing what He did to save us.

In Hebrews 5, we were admonished about being dull of hearing, which will keep us from growing and going on to perfection in our faith,

- And here in chapter 6, we are urged to go on to perfection because of this glorious foundation we have in Christ's salvation.
- We saw last time that we will do this—we will go on to perfection—if God permits.
  - Without Him, we can do nothing.
  - Prayer is needed, dependence upon Him is needed.

In today's text, we are confronted with the strongest possible warning.

- A warning about rejecting the gospel even after we have fully heard the call.
- The text is verses 4-8.
  - I will read it to you, beginning in verse 1 to give us the context.
  - This is the precious Word of God.

**Hebrews 6:1-8: 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, <sup>2</sup> of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. <sup>3</sup> And this we will do if God permits. <sup>4</sup> For *it is impossible* for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup> and have**

**tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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; <sup>8</sup> but if it bears thorns and briars, *it is rejected* and near to being cursed, whose end *is* to be burned.**

Praise God for His Word. May we all take it to heart and respond appropriately to it.

This is a text that has troubled many Christians.

- In a way, it should trouble us!
  - It presents a dreadful prospect.
  - Here we have a person who fully understands the gospel, knows that it is true, and yet rejects it, making themselves incapable of ever being restored.
    - This is not the case with all who profess and then turn away—
      - Many of them come to their senses like the prodigal son, and return.
      - Some of them never even really understood the gospel and then come to understand and believe.
      - Others, like Peter and David, are true believers who fall in a time of persecution or temptation, but then repent and are restored.
    - This speaks of a different case, like Judas or Esau.
      - They know the truth, but deliberately renounce the LORD, all the while believing that He is the Messiah that God sent to save His people.
      - It is an enlightened, decided renunciation of Him and it renders them incapable of ever finding repentance.

Let's dig into the text.

**I. Let's begin by looking at the wonderful privileges that they share with those of us who believe.**

A. There are five of them.

1. First, like us, they have been “once enlightened.” (v. 4)
  - This is more than merely hearing the truth about God, that He is the Creator of the world, that He is sovereign, that He is holy and that we sinned against Him, that He sent us Son to redeem us, that Jesus came, lived a sinless life, and then gave Himself on the cross for the remission of our sins, that He rose again and was received up into heaven where He reigns until He returns to judge the world, that He has sent His Spirit to work in His church and that people are being brought from death to eternal life through faith in Him.
  - To be enlightened here means that, yes, they have heard all of this; but also that God’s Spirit has shown them that this is all true.
  - The blinders have been taken off and they can see plainly that all of these things are true.
2. Second, like us, they have tasted the heavenly gift.
  - This could refer to several things...
    - Jesus—God gave His Son to us...
    - the Holy Spirit, except that would be redundant since the Spirit is next on the list...
    - but I am inclined to think that it refers to our salvation in Jesus.
  - To taste of these is to experience something of the blessings of salvation.
    - the comfort and relief of sins forgiven,
    - the joy of being reconciled to God,
    - the hope of eternal life,
    - the confidence of being under God’s care and protection,
    - the blessing of justification (being righteous in God’s sight);
    - adoption—being God’s child;
    - and sanctification—being transformed from sin to new life in Christ.
  - Those who are saved truly have all of these blessings.
    - They taste of them because they possess them.
    - But even before we believe—when we are being drawn to salvation...
      - We are able to taste them because of what we know about them—especially when they Spirit enables us to taste them.
      - It is the way you can taste a car when you test drive it, even though you don’t own it yet and have not committed to buy it...
        - or the way you can taste a watermelon at a road-side stand where they cut out a sample.
    - This is even more the case when become a member of the church—which is the case with these who are said to have turned away.
      - They professed and were communing members—they had the promises and the comfort of them even though they had not yet truly received them.
    - The situation here is that God so works in them that they have come to understand and in that sense, to taste, the gift of salvation with its benefits.

3. Third, like us, they have become partakers of the Holy Spirit.
    - All who are members of the church are, in one sense, partakers of the holy Spirit—even those who only attend often are to some extent.
      - When the word is preached, the Holy Spirit works in the hearers as well as in the one who is preaching.
      - So also when the word is read, when praises are sung, when the sacraments are administered—all who are present experience something of the Holy Spirit at work—
        - there is some conviction of sin, some belief of the truth...
    - And not only that, there is some experience of the Spirit's transforming power...
      - to reform one's life—as Peter says, to escape the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of Christ—lives are changed.
    - Besides all that, the Spirit's gifts of service are given to all who are in the church, even those who profess but are unbelievers.
      - God is pleased to use them, even to preach the gospel, to lead others to salvation, to comfort the downcast with the truth, to convict and restore one who is going astray.
        - Yes indeed—sinners are often converted by unbelieving ministers or friends.
        - There is no reason to doubt that when Jesus bestowed His Spirit on His disciples, giving them authority to cast out demons and to preach, Judas received the Holy Spirit the way the other eleven did.
      - What the unbeliever does not receive is the new birth by the Spirit—and the indwelling of the Spirit.
        - But the unbeliever who is in the church can receive everything short of conversion—all the preliminary graces that the Spirit uses in those He brings to salvation...
  - The fourth and fifth privileges are the fruits of partaking of the Holy Spirit.
4. The fourth privilege is to have tasted of the good word of God.
    - This is to see that the Bible is the word of God.
      - To know that it is more than a book of human reflections about God, but be able to see what is plain to a believer—that these are divine oracles.
      - To see and understand the remarkable prophecies and how they are fulfilled.
    - But even more, to see how the word works in the lives of God's people...
      - how it changes them and renews their minds...
      - and to experience something of its powerful effect in your own life.
    - Yes. Unbelievers, when God's Spirit is at work,
      - experience the conviction of sin when they hear the law of God and when they see how God has not been honoured or loved as taught in the word.

- They experience the drawing power of the appeals of the word—to believe, to repent, to serve, to draw near, to be renewed, to love...
    - and they experience the word as that which they know to be true when it speaks of God and His glory, and of Christ and His salvation.
5. And fifthly, there is a tasting of the powers of the age to come.
- We might first think that “the age to come” refers to heaven, but more than likely it refers to the time of the New Covenant.
    - Why would I say that? Because the Jews (this letter is written to the Hebrews) spoke of two periods of history in the old covenant—
      - “The time that now is,” and “the age to come,” which was understood be the day of the Messiah.
  - Whatever the case, these persons had come to believe and see that God was at work...
    - They believed that Christ had been conceived.
    - They believed that He had wrought miracles among the people.
    - They believed that God had raised Him from the dead.
    - They believed experienced the apostolic miracles that were common at that time.
      - These were the powers the age to come.
  - They had also seen His power transforming lives...
    - The drunkard who is set free from the bottle and full of the joy of the Lord.
    - The angry man who is now amiable.
    - The blasphemer who praises God.
    - The selfish, rebellious woman who is now gracious and submissive.
    - The pugnacious person who is now a peacemaker.
- B. These are great privileges!
- They are the blessings of the New Covenant.
1. Most people never experience them.
- a. Those who have never been exposed to the gospel know nothing about them.
    - Many live and die without ever hearing the gospel.
    - They grind away without hope, without God in the world.
  - b. There are many in the church who have little to no experience of these.
    - For some it is because they go to an apostate church that confirms them in their unbelief.
    - For others, it is because they are dull of hearing and never pay attention to these glorious blessings.
  - c. The elect people of God are the ones who enjoy these things.
    - God has graciously designed them for the blessing of His children—to comfort them and encourage them and to keep them in His way.
    - They cause us to grow in the Lord and in our service to Him.
    - We encourage one another in these blessings.

- d. But those who end up beyond repentance were also given these for a time.
  - Unbelievers in the church may have them to varying degrees.
  - These apostates have them in great abundance.
- 2. See that you are of those who receive and rejoice in these privileges.
  - See that they bring forth in you more and more love and devotion to our Lord.
  - The purpose of this passage is not for those who rebel like this.
    - It is not given merely to pass along information about this for our curiosity.
  - The purpose is to stir us up and make us zealous to not rest in our privileges, but to delight in them and make use of them to bring us near to the Lord.
    - To draw us to Christ and to faith in Him, and then to strengthen that faith—to go on, as we have seen in this chapter, to perfection, reaching the goal that the Lord has for us.
    - And this passage is given to help us minister to others and urge them to do the same, teaching them and warning them of dangers of having these privileges and not going on.

## **II. See the dreadful demise of those who partake of these privileges and then turn away.**

- A. Verse six tells us that if they fall away, it will be impossible to renew them to repentance.
  - 1. Their apostasy will be irreversible. They will never be able to come back.
    - That's what it says.
      - The sentence begins in verse 4 with the words "It is impossible for those..." then it describes all the privileges of those being drawn... then verse 6 continues: "if they fall away, to renew them against to repentance."
  - 2. Understand, this is not the fate of all who apostatise.
    - It is the fate of those who were truly enlightened and knew by the working of God's Spirit within them that Jesus was the true Messiah and yet, when it came down to it, rejected Him.
      - It is not that they don't think it is true—it is that they don't want it.
  - 3. This is in fact that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit that Jesus spoke about when men saw His miracles and said it was the work of Satan.
    - The danger for these men was not that they thought Jesus was doing miracles by the power of Satan.
      - The danger was that some of them did this even though they knew that Jesus was actually the Messiah—even though God's Spirit had worked in them to show them that He was...
        - And then after being convinced of this, they continued to oppose Jesus and to say that He was doing His work by the devil's power.
    - Jesus actually excluded such men from His prayer on the cross.

- He knew that some of them knew He was the Messiah and contrary to what the Spirit had shown them, said He was an imposter and called for Him to be crucified.
- He excluded such corrupt men from His prayer when He prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”
  - Most of the Jews did not know—many, like Paul, thought they were serving God when they opposed Jesus—
    - His prayer was for such men who knew not what they did; He did not pray for those who knew exactly that they were crucifying the Saviour that God sent from heaven to redeem the world.
  - Paul actually refers to this in Timothy when he speaks of his conversion and says,
    - 1 Tim 1:13: **although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man... I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.**
    - The implication is, if the Spirit had shown him that Jesus was the Messiah and he had gone out to destroy His people, he would not have received mercy—he would have been beyond the scope of God’s mercy.

B. We may say that those who are given the privilege of having the truth of the gospel revealed to them by God’s Spirit and who then knowingly reject it and oppose it are beyond the pale of God’s mercy.

1. But is it indeed possible for anyone to be beyond the scope of God’s mercy?
  - Indeed it is.
    - Is not Satan beyond the scope of God’s mercy?
    - Are not all the devils consigned to the Lake of Fire to be tormented forever?
    - Is this not the condition of all those who have died in their sin without the Lord?
    - Should it then surprise us if there may be some in this life who are in such a condition that their doom is already sealed because they have not only rejected the gospel, but have rejected it even though they know it is true?
  - God is a holy God.
    - The thing that ought to surprise us is not that there are those who are beyond the hope of God’s mercy, but that there are any that should receive mercy!
2. It may even be that it would be contrary to God’s very nature to show mercy to such persons as it would be to show mercy to Satan.
  - That may or may not be so.
  - But what is certain is that God has decreed that those who blaspheme the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

- And that it will be impossible for anyone to renew them again to repentance.
  - If some of these Hebrews came to believe the gospel was true and then deliberately reject Jesus to go back to their Judaism,
    - The author of Hebrews has no interest in going over the rudiments of the faith with them again.
    - There is no point in doing so because they already believe it all—they just don't want the LORD.
      - They are persons whom the LORD has consigned to perdition.
3. But I say again, all this is being said, not for the sake of those who have committed this sin, but for the sake of those who might be considering it.
- It is said to deter you if you are thinking of rejecting Christ even though you know He is true and that He is the Saviour of the world.

### **III. What makes this sin so heinous that they should be beyond repentance?**

- We are told in our text.
- A. It is because they (v. 6) **“crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.”**
1. It was done the first time by the high priests and the Sanhedrin.
    - They examined Him and declared that He was an imposter—the justice could only be served by crucifying Him.
    - He was publicly humbled and brought to shame before all the people.
    - Though He was the Son of God who came to redeem His people in an act of unfathomable grace,
      - He was declared by those representing God to be cursed—and indeed He subjected Himself to God's curse because He was bearing our sins, and on account of them, was worthy of God's wrath and curse.
      - It was a gracious act of bearing the guilt of another.
  2. But now these Hebrews who had come into the church, who had come to understand all of that...
    - They have come to Him and examined Him and knowing that He was crucified to bear the sins of others now reject Him all over again.
    - By going back to their Judaism, they attest that He is an imposter even though they know not only that He is the Messiah, but also why He went to the cross.
      - They reject Him, even so! On their part—to themselves—they crucify Him again and by their public testimony, put Him to an open shame.
      - This is the sin that puts them beyond the reach of mercy.
  3. Of course, this sin can be committed by those who are not Hebrews as well.
    - Anyone to whom God, by His Spirit, graciously reveals the truth who then, fully knowing the truth, turn against Christ, not in weakness, but with deliberate, cold resolution, put themselves beyond the pale of mercy because they crucify Him again to themselves and put Him to an open shame.



B. In verses 7-8 we are given an illustration of how God rejects those who are blessed with privileges and bring forth no fruit.

1. The picture is of a well-cared for field that is rejected because it never produces fruit.
  - It says: **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 briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.**
  - The meaning is clear.
    - If you cultivate the ground and plant good seed and the ground brings forth nothing but thorns and briars, it is good for nothing but to be burned.
    - This rejection may be of those who, on the one hand, are exposed to the means of grace but who are never enlightened by them—never have the five privileges in any meaningful way to them...
      - But it can also be of those like the apostates described in our text as beyond repentance, who have all these privileges, but with no true fruit for the LORD.
2. We see in this that the LORD actually rejected these for barrenness before their rejected Him.
  - He turned them over to their own hardness so that they departed.
  - They were worse than others who were likewise barren because their privileges were greater.
  - That is why their rejection is final.
3. Let us all take this parable to heart.
  - This applies not only to the ones who fully blaspheme the Spirit—who go out and actively oppose Christ when they know better,
    - but it also applies to those who do nothing—who sit under the means of grace—who have the working of the Spirit around them in the church, who have the word preached and read, who have the sacraments and Christian encouragement and accountability,
      - but who continue to have no fruit—month after month, year after year.
      - Yes, they don't actively oppose Christ, but neither do they produce fruit despite all their privileges.
        - What is to become of them?
        - They may remain in the church for the rest of their life, but when their day of judgment comes, they will be rejected.
          - They had all these blessings and helps, but they never actually bothered to cast themselves on the LORD to be saved.
            - They saw their need of Him and admitted it, but they never looked to Him for mercy and forgiveness.
            - They saw that He was the only Saviour and admitted it, but they never trusted Him to save them.

- They saw and admitted that He is LORD, and they called Him LORD, but they never submitted themselves to Him.
- That is the purpose of this text.
  - It is to urge you go on to perfection in Christ.
- See that you are like the ground in verse 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.**
  - How?
    - Well by casting yourself on the Lord Jesus who is the Saviour of the world of course!
    - You can do nothing without Him.
    - He is presented as the only one who can save you.
      - The only comfort that is well founded is the comfort that comes from trusting in Him.
      - Enjoy the blessing dear children of God! Enjoy the blessings!