

## Discerning True Believers from False Part 2

By David Harrell

**Bible Text:** Hebrews 6:1-8  
**Preached on:** Sunday, January 22, 2017

This morning I would invite you to take your Bibles and turn to Hebrews 6 as we continue to make our way verse by verse through this wonderful epistle that speaks of directly to our hearts even though it was written to Jewish people primarily some 2,000 years ago. Let me read the text that we will be examining this morning. Hebrews 6:1-8.

1 Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. 3 And this we will do, if God permits. 4 For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. 7 For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; 8 but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.

One of the great examples of God's mercy can be seen in the clear and the repeated warnings that he gives us in his word and the epistle to the Hebrews is filled with warnings, warnings especially to unbelieving Jews. As you will recall, there are essentially two types of unbelieving Jews that are being addressed here. One group would be what I would call borderline believers, those that were on the very edge of placing their faith in Christ. They had an intellectual understanding of who Christ was, an intellectual understanding of the new covenant, of the Gospel, they knew the basics but they had no heartfelt commitment to Christ. Then there were what I would call the Christian unbeliever, they were Christian in name only, those who had made a shallow profession of faith. They had considered the truths of the new covenant, embraced some of them, but they hadn't fully abandoned Judaism and made a wholehearted commitment to Christ. And in many ways, the same kind of people can be seen in evangelical churches today. In fact, Jesus tells us in Matthew 7 that this will actually be the rule, not the exception.

And because of this, the writer has given them warnings repeatedly. The first warning was in chapter 2, verses 1 through 4. He warns them that, "Look, you are refusing to pay close attention to what you are being taught concerning the Gospel and therefore you are

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drifting away from what you've heard and you're neglecting so great a salvation." He warned them again in chapter 3, verses 7 through 19. He told them that, "Like your ancestors in the wilderness, your hearts are becoming hardened against the truth. Your ancestors were guilty of that deadly sin of unbelief and you are following after them." They had never come to Christ, these people that he is referring to here, in genuine brokenness over sin and as a result their heart was becoming increasingly hardened against the truth and they were tempted to fall back, fall away once again into Judaism. Then there was a third warning that we have examined in chapter 5, verses 11 through 14, that they had to become dull of hearing. They had actually regressed into a state of apathy. They had become indifferent to the transforming power of the new covenant of the Gospel. They had been informed to a point where he says that, "You ought to be teachers," but they had need again for someone to teach them the elementary principles of the oracles of God of the Old Testament. They possessed an academic, intellectual understanding of Christ but they did not possess Christ himself. They had become willfully ignorant. They needed someone to teach them once again the ABCs of the old covenant so that they could grasp the infinite superiority of the new which the old covenant pointed to.

But now in the first 8 verses of chapter 6, there is a great crescendo of caution. Here the inspired author gives yet a fourth warning, a very solemn, a very disturbing, you might say even a frightening word of warning. And as we will examine in detail, he is going to warn them that, "You need to forsake some of these foundational doctrines of Judaism." And he's going to remind them of the amazing opportunities that they have been given, opportunities to help them see Christ and embrace him fully. And then finally he's going to tell them that, "Unless you do this, you will forever lose the opportunity to receive Christ and you will perish in your sins."

Now, let me digress for a moment. This is very important. As some of you are aware, this is a very controversial passage of Scripture, and in my humble opinion, this section is not being addressed to believers as many would argue but to unbelieving Jews who were in danger of falling away from, that is rejecting, the Gospel invitation, not rejecting or losing their salvation. Losing one's salvation, frankly, is a position that is utterly foreign to Scripture, utterly foreign to the biblical doctrines of God's grace in salvation. Nowhere in Scripture is there an example or a warning about a genuine believer losing his salvation. There is no example or warning of someone overpowering the Spirit's work of regeneration resulting in being unborn again. You just don't see that. There is no example of a new creation being uncreated; of someone receiving eternal life and then having that gift rescinded. There is no example of anyone ever thwarting the purposes and power of God the Father, rendering his decrees of election and predestination null and void and subject to the will of man. There is no example of anyone erasing their name from the

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Lamb's book of life in which it was written before the foundation of the world. Frankly, losing your salvation implies that Christ's great work as the Mediator for believers and his intercession for believers as our great high priest is somehow deficient, that somehow it's ineffective. And Scripture is so clear when the Holy Spirit comes along and he causes a man or a woman to be born again and gives them eternal life, he instantly indwells them and seals the believer for the day of redemption, and that sealing is a down payment guaranteeing a believer's future inheritance and he baptizes the believer into union with Christ and into the body of believers.

If a genuine believer could be lost, all of these divine works would be invalid and would need to be reversed but Scripture knows nothing of any of that. In Romans 5:3, Paul says, "We have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand." The term "stand" means "to be established or fixed in place so as never to be moved." And what is this place in which we stand firm forever established, never to be moved? It is the position of grace. Was not this the very heart of Jude's doxology in Jude 24 where he spoke of the Lord Jesus as the one "who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy"? Are we to say that somehow he is unable to do what he has promised to do? In Romans 8, Paul says, "I am convinced that nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord."

"Ah," but some will say, "what about Galatians 5:4 where Paul says that a man can be severed from Christ and fall from grace? The text says you have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law. You have fallen from grace. Surely that tells you that a believer could lose his salvation." No, dear friends, understand the context doesn't say that at all. Paul is not speaking of the security of the believer but of the legalistic Jew who seeks to be justified through obedience to the law rather than through grace by faith. He's arguing that law and grace cannot be mixed together. They are mutually exclusive. That man that he is describing there is one who comes to Christ for salvation by grace but then tries to supplement grace with acts of legalism under the law thus he has fallen from grace, which means you fall away from or you lose one's grip on something; you are driven off course. That's the idea. You have been severed from Christ in the sense that you are now relying upon your works, upon your legalism, not Christ's saving grace as being sufficient to save you and keep you saved.

"Well, what about believers who apostatize? Who walk for years with Christ and then renounce their faith?" Well, the answer to that is quite simple: they fooled themselves and they fooled you. They were never saved. 1 John 2:19, "they went out from us but they were not really of us, for if they had been of us they would have remained with us, but they went out in order that it might be shown that they are all not of us." Didn't Jesus say

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in John 10:28, "I give eternal life to My sheep and they shall never perish and no one shall snatch them out of My hand"? And Paul encourages us in Philippians 1:6, "I am confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ."

Now, with that background, let's examine this text and I want to do so under three basic categories. First, what we see is six foundational doctrines of Judaism that they are asked to forsake. Secondly, he's going to describe five opportunities to embrace Christ that they were neglecting. And then finally, he's going to give a solemn warning to those who reject Christ.

So let's look closely at the text. He says in verse 1, "Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity." The term "leaving" means "to forsake;" it means "to disregard; to put off; to separate yourself from," the elementary teaching, that is, the most rudimentary aspects of the Old Testament about the Christ, about the Messiah so that we can press on to maturity. Now, please understand he is not telling Christians to leave or to forsake or to disregard the elementary teachings, the most basic rudimentary teachings of Christ in the Gospel, that would be absurd. We are never to do that, which underscores, I believe, the assertion that this is written to unbelievers, not to believers. Leave the elementary teachings about the Messiah that were revealed in the old covenant, that's the idea, and frankly, that's the theme of this entire epistle. Put that stuff off and come over here to true Christianity. Embrace Christ. Leave all of the ceremonies and the sacrifices and the holy days, the rituals, the cleansings, the ordinances, all of the symbols, all of the types, all of the shadows that pointed to the Messiah that has now come. Let us press on to maturity. Leave the ABCs of the old covenant and seize the glorious riches of the new covenant. In the first stage of spiritual maturity, of course, a man must be born again to receive spiritual life through repentant faith in the living Christ.

So he says, "let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of," and now he's going to give six foundational doctrines of Judaism. The first one, "repentance from dead works and of," number 2, "faith toward God," number 3, "of instruction about washings," number 4, "laying on of hands," number 5, "the resurrection of the dead," and number 6, "external judgment," and he says, "And this we will do, if God permits." In other words if it is God's sovereign will to save and to sanctify you, he will use his word, he will use his servant to teach you these truths and you will embrace them with your whole heart and press on to spiritual maturity.

So let's examine these six foundational doctrines of Judaism that they must forsake. These are six prominent features, as you will see, of the old covenant that needs to be

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abandoned. He's not referring to elementary teachings of the new covenant, of the Gospel. Again, he's speaking to unbelieving Jews, not immature Christians. We are never commanded to disregard the basic teachings of the Gospel.

"Don't keep laying again a foundation of," number 1, "repentance from dead works." "Repentance," of course, means "a turning away from evil," evil actions which lead to death. You see, all they understood in the old covenant is that they should obey the law, and when you disobey the law, you have to repent, you offer a sacrifice, you return to God and you bear fruit in keeping with your repentance. That's all they knew. That's what the Old Testament taught. They knew nothing of placing their faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross and not only being forgiven but also being declared righteous and being transformed in the inner man. You may recall in his defense before King Agrippa in Acts 26, Paul explained this very thing. He described how he kept declaring to both Jews and Gentiles, "that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance." He's basically describing that as placing your faith in Christ who suffered and rose again, giving "light both to our people and to the Gentiles." You see, under the old covenant, repentance from dead works and turning away from evil was crucial and certainly God honored that, but under the new covenant, repentance from dead works is only half of the equation. True repentance includes turning away from sin and turning unto God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. A putting off and a putting on.

In Hebrews 9, the writer goes on in verse 13 to describe some of this. He says, "For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" And this is precisely what the Apostle Paul preached to the Ephesians. Remember in Acts 20, beginning in verse 20, he says, "I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks," here it is, "of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." And this is what the writer of Hebrews is saying to these unbelieving Jews that refuse to make a clean break with Judaism and wholeheartedly commit themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ. He's saying, "Let's press on to maturity. Don't keep laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works. Let's grow on beyond that. Come to full faith in Christ and enjoy regeneration and sanctification and ultimately glorification."

Secondly, "Don't keep laying again a foundation of faith toward God." To be sure, the Old Testament taught repentance from dead works and faith toward God. Even before the law was given to Moses, Abraham believed God, remember, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Old Testament saints were saved just like we are, by grace through

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faith, not of works but now under the new covenant, man is saved by faith in the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. That is acceptable faith. That is saving faith. That's why we read in Acts 4:12, "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

Now, many people will tell you today that, "Oh, you need to have faith in God." But then they resent the idea of saying, "Yes, but we need to have faith in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ." I'm sure some of you saw the inauguration this week and whenever you see these types of spectacles and the government is involved in religion, of course, you bring in all of the different faiths and they all have faith in God, right? This ecumenical parade. And it was very interesting that I noticed that they had Franklin Graham come in there and, of course, CAIR, the Council on American Islamic Relations, were horrified that they would have Franklin Graham and they protested greatly. And when I saw him at the benediction of the inauguration and I heard that he was going to read from 1 Timothy 2, I thought, "Oh my, they have thrown the cat in amongst the pigeons now!" And here's part of what that text says that he read, God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth," and here's what the truth is, "For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time." You see, dear friends, saving faith is faith in the Son of God, the Lord Jesus, who paid the ransom for our sin. "Let's press on to maturity. Don't keep laying again a foundation of faith toward God but faith toward his Son, your Messiah."

Thirdly, "Don't keep laying a foundation of instruction about washings." The term is interesting. If I can be technical for a moment, in the original language it comes from the Greek word "baptizmos" and throughout Scripture we see that that term is used to describe ritual cleansing of vessels and of the hands and even of full body immersion in what the Jews call a mikvah, which is basically a basin that is often carved out of rock, the old ones were. Every Jewish home had one so that their family and their friends could use it for various ceremonial washings. The term is not "baptizo," the term always used in Scripture to describe the ordinance of baptism. And unfortunately, if you have a King James Bible, I believe it mistranslates this phrase and it translates it as "doctrine of baptisms," and the translators probably assumed, as many people do, that this whole section is directed to believers.

But the term is "baptizmos, washings," and it referred to those Levitical ritual cleansings associated with the Old Testament, the old covenant, and this was very important under the law. In fact, that were some impurities that required what was called living water which referred to water that would flow from a spring or a fountain as opposed to that which was collected in a cistern. And a person, for example, had to be ritually pure in

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order to enter the temple. If you go to Jerusalem today and to the Temple Mount and you go up the stairs that lead to the temple, you will see mikvaot, which is the plural of mikvah, you will see one for the women, one for the men. That was probably the very one that Mary and Joseph went into when they brought Jesus to the temple.

But none of those external washings can cleanse the inner man from his sin. Again, the writer of Hebrews is going to later on say in chapter 9 in verse 9 that "both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation." So ultimately it's Christ that can do the cleansing. So the point here is, "Don't keep laying again a foundation of instructions about these washings. All of those rituals pointed to the need for a permanent cleansing that can only come through faith in the Messiah."

Jesus told Nicodemus, "Truly, truly, I say to you unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." Jesus there wasn't referring to literal water as if somehow baptism could save anyone, he's speaking of a figurative water that was used in the Old Testament that referred to the need for renewal, for spiritual cleaning, especially when used in conjunction with the Holy Spirit. Nicodemus and the Jews would have understood that very clearly. In fact, what Jesus said harkened back to Ezekiel 36. If you go back there, you will see that Ezekiel is prophesying concerning the nation in the land of Israel that has "suffered the reproach of the nations," in verse 6. And there he prophesied that a day would come when they would be regeneration, a spiritual cleansing, that Israel would have to experience before they could nationally enter into the promised blessings of the messianic kingdom. And here's what Ezekiel said in Ezekiel 36, beginning in verse 24. God speaking through the prophet says this, "For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances."

So back to Hebrews. The point is this, "Don't keep laying again a foundation of instructions about washings. Put your faith in Christ and the Holy Spirit will instantly cleanse you at the moment of salvation." This is what Paul described as the "washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit," in Titus 3:5.

Fourthly, "Don't keep laying a foundation about the laying on of hands," in verse 2. Now, this was another old covenant practice required by the Levitical law. Whenever a person

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would bring a sacrifice to the priest, they had to lay their hands on that sacrifice which symbolized their identification with the sacrifice. For example, Leviticus 1:4, "He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf." So the point here in Hebrews is, "Guys, gals, leave that stuff behind. Put your faith in the perfect and final sacrifice. Lay your hand on the Lamb of God, if you will, and when you do, you will be identified with him; you will be united to him because at the moment of the new birth, all believers are immersed into the body of Christ by means of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit dwells, in fact, the Triune Godhead dwells within us and us in him. So please, don't keep laying again that foundation."

Fifthly, "Don't keep laying a foundation about the resurrection of the dead." They understood that there would be a bodily resurrection from the dead, there were a few passages that spoke about that, Job 19:26, "from my flesh I shall see God." Psalm 16 speaks about it. They also understood that there would be rewards for the righteous, there would be some kind of punishment for the wicked, but they had no idea how salvation would unite them to Christ who said, "I am the resurrection and the life." They didn't understand that. The Old Testament didn't explain the glorious details of a bodily resurrection. Isn't that a magnificent thought? They knew nothing of a glorified body that would be like Christ's; that we will someday be like him because we shall see him as he is. So again, the point here is, "Move beyond that limited understanding. Know that eternal life in the resurrection are available for all who place their trust in Christ and are united to him, identified with him."

Sixth, "Don't keep laying a foundation about eternal judgment." You see, all they really knew about judgment was from what the rabbis told them and a lot of that was conjecture because there is little Old Testament information on the subject. Psalm 62:12 says that God will render to a man according to his work. Ecclesiastes 11:9 says God will bring into judgment all that we do. Ecclesiastes 12:14, God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden whether it is good or evil.

So he's telling them, "Folks, let's mature beyond these basic things. Jettison that limited understanding. Learn about eternal judgment as it is described and understood in the new covenant. Understand the apostolic teachings in the New Testament that is filled with information about eternal judgment; that Christ himself is going to be the judge; that he is going to be the one that will judge the living and the dead. Your Messiah is going to do that. Learn about Christ who will separate the goats from the sheep. He will be the one who will preside over the great white throne judgment. Learn that every believer will some day stand before the judgment seat of Christ to have his works examined. And the greatest news of all, learn this, that there is now therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. That Christ, again, is able to keep you from stumbling and to make

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you stand in the presence of his glory, blameless with great joy." So, folks, in these first two verses, the writer is adjuring them, he is solemnly pleading with these unbelieving Jews to forsake the elementary teachings of the old covenant that pointed to Christ and instead he wants you to embrace Christ himself. The old covenant was the shadow, the new covenant is the reality.

Then he goes on in verses 4 through 6 to point out five opportunities to embrace Christ that they were neglecting. Now, let me preface this by saying that none of the terms that he uses in verses 4 and 5 are used anywhere in Scripture to refer to salvation. Moreover, the terms that would normally be used are missing. You don't see anything about election, predestination, chosen of God, saints by calling, new birth, adoption, regeneration, justification, sanctification. None of those things. And why, why is that? Because he's speaking to unbelievers who are unsaved. He's describing five opportunities that should lead them to salvation that they are neglecting.

Let me read the passage, "For in the case of those who have," number 1, "once been enlightened and," number 2, "have tasted of the heavenly gift and," thirdly, "have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and," fourthly, "have tasted the good word of God and," fifthly, "the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame."

Look at these opportunities. The first one is they had been enlightened. It comes from the Greek word "photizo." It means "to give light." And on several occasions in the Septuagint, the term is used, it is translated as "that which gives light by knowledge or by teaching." It speaks of mental illumination, not of salvation. It speaks of being informed, of being instructed, but it has no reference to whether or not a person agrees with or disagrees with or believes in or doesn't believe in what is being said. And as Matthew records, the people had been enlightened as the prophet Isaiah had promised, Matthew 4:16, "the people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light." You see, many people had seen Christ with their eyes. They had heard his message of repentance and need for faith in him, and it was common knowledge that no one had ever heard anyone teach like Jesus with such clarity and authority and power. They had never seen that before. They witnessed him give sight to the blind. He gave hearing to the deaf. He gave food to the hungry. He healed completely the disabled from the disease. He even gave life to the dead. So enlightened, oh yeah, they were enlightened but saved? No. Big difference. Very few believed and were saved. John 12:37 says, "though He had done so many signs before them, they still do not believe in Him."

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Now, some of you have been enlightened but you have never committed yourself to Christ and like these Jews, you are in danger of neglecting the light that you have been given which will become a judgment against you unless you repent and believe. In 2 Peter 2, beginning in verse 20, Peter says the same thing. He says, "For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them."

The second opportunity they had, he says, "You have tasted of the heavenly gift." This, of course, refers to the gift of Christ and the salvation that he offers. In 2 Corinthians 9:15, Paul describes it as that inexpressible gift, "Thanks be to God for that inexpressible gift." So they had tasted it, they had enjoyed some of it through common grace. You might say their tongues and their lips of their soul had a little flavor of the new life of the kingdom, of the blessings. They had tasted it, they had sampled it, but they never drank it in. They never fully ingested him to be saved. We all know that the Holy Spirit gives believers a taste of the heavenly gift to draw men to Christ as we are salt and we are light. And when this happens, people's minds are illumined to the truth of the Gospel, the very Gospel that they are often suppressing in unrighteousness. They witness the transforming power of the Gospel in the lives of believers and testimonies of believers kind of whet their appetite for salvation, but many of them never believe.

But some do. I remember various stories in this church, one man in particular, who was very hostile to the Gospel. But his wife had come to the church, this was many years ago, the early days of the church, his wife had come to a saving knowledge of Christ and was just radically transformed. I mean, just to look at her, you wouldn't know it was the same lady, and it blew this guy away. He didn't know what had happened to his wife. He wasn't sure he liked it or not, he told me later, at first.

We invited this man to a hamburger cookout with several other couples. We invited this man to a fishing trip and it was kind of a father/son type of thing, some of you were there. And I remember that man standing by the trees, he didn't want to join in and he would just watch the whole time. I thought, "Boy, that is odd." I would ask him, "Do you want...?" "No, I just want to be left alone. I'm good." But later on that man was sitting in this congregation and during communion I began to hear some sobs and it was during that time that that man gave his life to Christ. God just radically saved him right there.

And later on I was talking to him and I said, "Tell me, what has happened?" He said, "Well, first of all, let me tell you what happened to my wife. And I saw that and I thought,

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my goodness, something is going on here." He had a little taste of the heavenly gift there with his wife. Then he said, "I went to that cookout. Do you remember that cookout?" And he tears up and he said, "You know, what blew me away is nobody got drunk and crazy and nobody hit on my wife." Then, thirdly he said, "I went to that fishing thing and I saw fathers with their sons. When I was 16 I had to beat up my dad to keep him from killing my mom. I saw something I had never seen before and as I began to hear the Gospel, God used all of those things to bring me to an understanding of my condition." Now, what if he had ignored the taste of that heavenly gift? Thankfully he's still walking with Christ with his wife. Isn't that great? You see, Jesus said a man must do more than taste of the bread of life, he has to eat it. You've got to do more than taste of the living water, you've got to drink it.

Thirdly, they had an opportunity, it says, "You have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit." The term "partakers" is interesting. The term in the original language, "metochos," it denotes "sharing in common association, not possession." It's not speaking of indwelling here. In fact, it's translated "partners" in Luke 5:7, "and they signaled to their partners in the other boat"; in other words, those who shared in or were in a common association with others in a particular event.

Now, to be sure, these unbelieving Jews that are being addressed had shared in some common association with the Holy Spirit. They didn't possess him but they shared in this; they were partakers in him in the sense that they were constantly exposed to his works, to his word. Some of them, no doubt, had even been healed by his power. Do you realize by this time in Palestine there is like nobody was sick. It was amazing what had happened. Who knows, they may even have been part of the crowd that ate some of the loaves and fishes.

Oh yes, they were in association with the Holy Spirit but they didn't possess him. You recall the warning in chapter 2, beginning in verse 3, "how shall we escape," this is Hebrews 2, "how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them, but by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will. How can we possibly neglect that?" Obviously some were. They had been made partakers of the Holy Spirit.

Fourthly, they had tasted the good word of God. In other words, "you've sampled a little flavor of what God has revealed to you concerning Christ and the Gospel." It's interesting, the good word of God, the term "word" is "rhema" here, a very unusual term to refer to God's revelation. Normally the term that is used is "logos." Rhema emphasizes parts and portions, not the whole. And of course, this is consistent with the context of the

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## Discerning True Believers from False Part 2

By David Harrell

**Bible Text:** Hebrews 6:1-8  
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passage, I believe. They were aware of the Old Testament but not of the full words of Jesus and the apostles in the New Testament, certainly the full canon of Scripture. Furthermore, they would come together and meet with other believers in their churches and they would listen to portions of the word, not the whole, and some would probably only hear what they want to hear. Aren't we all like that a bit? Others hadn't been able to hear very much, they hadn't been taught much, but even for some of them, the little amount that they had tasted was enough to point them to Christ but their ears had grown dull, their hearts hardened and they hadn't ingested the full truth of the Gospel. Now, bear in mind, no one is saved because they taste the good word of God. Man is saved when he devours it, shall we say. That's the point like Jeremiah who said, "Your words were found and I ate them, and Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart."

Not only that, fifthly, "you have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come." This, of course, speaking of the supernatural miraculous powers of the future messianic kingdom on earth. You see, they had witnessed the miraculous works of Christ and the apostles including the raising of Lazarus from the dead and, of course, that went out all over everywhere. Everybody was aware of that. There was hardly any disease in the entire region. And as we look at the great miracles recorded in the Gospels and in the book of Acts, we see that these are ultimately powers which belong to the millennial kingdom. They were intended to authenticate the offer of the kingdom to Israel, a genuine offer conditioned upon repentance of the nation. And of course, they refused.

So in summary, what he's saying here is, "You've been given all of these opportunities to come to faith in Christ. God has enlightened your minds to the truth. He has allowed you to be in association with the Holy Spirit. He's allowed you to taste of the heavenly gifts of the word, of his power that will one day dominate the earth in his kingdom. And yet you are still undecided? You are uncommitted? You are yielding to the pressure and the persecution of your family and your friends? So you just won't wholeheartedly trust in Christ, your only hope of salvation?"

Of course, this sets up the fourth morning that we see in the epistle, the third point in my little outline and that is: a solemn warning to those who reject Christ. Notice again in verse 4, "For in the case of those who have experienced all these amazing opportunities and advantages," verse 6, "and then have fallen away." Again, not from salvation but from the opportunity to be saved. Once again, let me reiterate this to say it refers to salvation would contradict all of the New Testament passages that clearly affirm the perseverance of the saints that comes from divine protection, not from human effort. All of that frustrates and violates grace. 1 Peter 1:5, he speaks of our eternal inheritance in salvation and how that it is "protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation

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ready to be revealed in the last time, in this you greatly rejoice." Boy, I love that passage. I'm glad that he's the one protecting it and not me, right?

For those who have fallen away from the full light of divine revelation and the offer of salvation, he says, "it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame." Wow, what a warning. He's saying, "Look, if with full knowledge in these amazing opportunities you choose to follow away from Christianity and fall from the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and fall back into Judaism, there is no hope for you. It's impossible to renew you again to repentance, not only in the sense that there is no greater evidence that can be offered but that the persistent rejection of the truth leads to a hardness of heart and a stricter judgment." You see, chronic rejection of the truth which includes persistent indecisiveness and a lack of commitment to Christ, gradually produces hardness of heart. Remember, he warned about this earlier in chapter 3 in verse 12. He says, "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today,' so that none of you will be," catch it now, "hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

My friend, please understand the danger here. There is a progression. The heart is deceitful, it is desperately wicked. The deceitfulness of sin blinds you to the truth of the Gospel so that you're basically characterized by unbelief. And then unbelief, especially in light of full knowledge of the truth, will turn your heart into stone. We've all seen people like this, people that could be described as those who had a granite indifference towards the Gospel. Nothing can penetrate the fortress of a hard heart. The preaching of the word of God is boring, it's of no effect, it's irrelevant, and they become immune to the truth. They hear it, they hear it, they reject it, they reject it, and they just keep falling back into whatever religious or philosophical deception that is appealing to their heart. And when that happens, he says, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance. In other words, to restore them once again to the original level of conviction and excitement about the saving truths of the Gospel.

You see, this was a solemn warning to these unbelieving Jews that were either straddling the fence or they had made some halfhearted commitment to Christ, some phony profession of faith, but in both cases they were refusing to fully commit themselves to Christ. He's saying, "If you fall away from the truth in light of all of these opportunities that God has given you, it's impossible to renew you again to repentance since you again crucify to yourself the Son of God and put him to open shame." In other words, you're just taking a stand with all the others that said, "Crucify him! We will not have this man reign over us. He is a fraud. He is an imposter. He is a charlatan, a blasphemer. Put him to open shame. He's guilty as charged." Like Judas, you reject him with full understanding.

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Remember what Jesus said of Judas? "It would have been better if that man had never been born." Later in Hebrews 10, the writer says something very similar, he says, "How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified and has insulted the Spirit of grace?"

Well, our time is gone. The inspired writer closes this summarization or he closes with an illustration, I should say, that I would say kind of summarizes everything that's been stated here. Notice in verses 7 and 8, "For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned." The point is this: the nourishing rains of opportunities and the Gospel message falls upon the people of the earth. In some cases they respond in repentant faith and bear much spiritual fruit and receive great blessings from God. And in other cases, people respond with granite indifference, with unbelief, and they bring forth thorns and thistles and they are utterly useless and end up being burned. Folks, which person are you? I would challenge you to examine your heart this morning. Are you fully committed or are you in danger of falling away, falling back into whatever deception, whatever sinful lifestyle that appeals to your flesh?

And I'll close with a word of encouragement: if you are fully committed, your life is going to manifest what the writer is going to go on to describe in verse 9, "things that accompany salvation," which as we will see, is a stark contrast to the characteristics of an unbeliever that has been described thus far, and that's what we will look at next week. Don't we serve a glorious God? Aren't you thankful for his grace? Oh, I hope that's what you come away with here. Be thankful for his grace.

Let's pray.

*Father, we are so thankful for your grace, your goodness in our lives. Thank you for the truth of your word and I pray that we will hear it, that we will obey it, that we will apply it to our lives for our good and for your glory. For it is in Christ's name that I pray.  
Amen.*

We pray you've been edified by this presentation. You've been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at [otcr.org](http://otcr.org).

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