

IF YOU HEAR, TURN TO HIM, WHILE YOU CAN  
HEBREWS 6:1-8  
HEBREWS 11.3

INTRODUCTION

Everyone, this is a time to open your Bibles and get ready to pay close attention. This message is not only important, but it can be very challenging. I will need your full attention.

TEXT: HEBREWS 6:1-8

*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.  
3 And this we will do if God permits.*

The writer wants to move on from elementary teachings. No one wants to get stuck in 1<sup>st</sup> grade. The content of the elementary doctrines of Christ is presented in three couplets. Let's look at them briefly.

He mentions that the foundation of salvation is repentance from dead works, of having faith towards God. This truth should be the first we learn as believers. We do not only repent of sins, we also repent of our attempts to be righteous.

In the movie, *Schindler's List*, Oscar Schindler has a moment where he illustrates repenting from good works. He is helping to save Jews to get them to work in his factory. But his motive is not to save them. He sees them as slave labor. He can make money because the Jewish people are not valued by society. He can therefore operate a business where he makes things to sell to the army, using almost free labor. This has a benefit to the Jews in the factory, of course, as it keeps them from death. Then, one day, he is riding his horse with one of his mistresses and from a hill, sees dead Jews being carted away. And if that isn't bad enough, one of them is a little girl in a red coat whom he had seen in the town before. His heart breaks as he sees that his efforts to do good for the Jews were really filthy rags. He is wicked and selfish. He changes his mind and attitude and, from that point on, he puts all his effort into saving the lives of as many Jews as possible, knowing that it will cost him all the profits he was making and maybe even his own life.

Repentance from dead works is to be the first lesson we learn. We change our outlook on our sins, as well as our good deeds.

Also listed are instructions about the washing and laying on of hands. This is likely a reference to baptism by water and by the Holy Spirit, for service. Each one who believes is baptized into the church, the family of God. Each one is also filled with the Holy Spirit so that they can live righteously and do good before God.

The third step in Christian basics is the combination of resurrection and eternal judgment. These are the two halves of eternity. Some are raised to eternal life. Some await eternal judgment --Heaven and hell, as we often summarize them.

These are the basics of faith: Repentance and faith, Church and the Holy Spirit, understanding of eternal destiny.

The writer wants to move on, past these things. It is a sad thing to think that some Christians never move on past these things. The writer thinks it to be a great loss to not be able to move on to next level truths.

*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.*

These three verses have caused a great deal of anxiety and conflict among Christians throughout the centuries. Why? Because they present the case of the possibility of someone reaching a point where salvation is no longer possible. It is a horrible thought to all Christians to think that there is someone out there who is beyond hope of being saved. To say it is “impossible to restore them again to repentance” is to imply that someone can get to a point in their spiritual journey where they will remain alive in this mortal world without any hope. Is that what this text is saying?

The second issue that causes difficulty is determining if the author is saying that the portion of the population that reaches this point of no return are people who were once Christians and are not any more, or if they never were.

Now, if you read 5 different commentators to discover the answers to these questions, you will find 5 different varieties of answers. I’m going to tell you what I believe the author is saying, but I need to say that this passage is one that there are greater scholars than I that cannot figure out.

I will tell you what I think this passage is saying, but I want to focus more on what I am sure of than what I am uncertain of.

In short, I think the author is speaking of people who are among the saved, but do not know Christ personally. In other words, they have not been born again. Remember, being saved is not about intellectual agreement with a set of beliefs, but rather about something happening in our spirits –God works to regenerate, or give life to, that which is dead. We are born again, adopted. But there are examples in the Scripture of people who hang out with believers, but are exposed as unbelievers as time goes on.

Secondly, as to whether they can never be saved, I will say this: either the author is speaking hypothetically to make a logical point, or he is saying that some people can reach a point of no return. I believe it is the second, but I can see what is being said by those who believe the first.

Let me try to state their case: If a Jewish person who is in the church says, “Well, I don’t really believe that Jesus is the way, I will stick with my pre-Christian Judaism,” then we must say to them, then, that there is no way for you to repent! Either what Jesus did was enough or you will die in your sins –otherwise you would have to crucify Jesus again in order to be saved, and that is impossible.

However, I think it is more likely that the author is saying that there are those who have been exposed to the truth of Jesus and have not been born again, and now reject Him, and have reached a point where they will never accept Him.

Now as soon as I say that, I want to say that I struggle with this idea because I don't want to say anything is impossible for God. God raises the dead. God turns sinners to Himself. He can move the hearts of kings. So, I don't want to imply that God is powerless over the will of a stubborn man. But perhaps God is the one who has, in His wisdom, declared the person lost, and has Himself chosen to leave him in that state.

Notice also, that the writer doesn't include these people in the audience of the letter. He moves from first and second person, We and you, to third person, they, when speaking of these lost people. He says, "Let us" leave the elementary teachings –and "We will do this." Then he switches to the third person to talk about a group of people who have fallen away, who are not among the readers of the letter. Then, in verse 9, which is not part of our text, he says,

"in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things (Heb 6:9 ESV)."

This text is a warning text. **He is saying, the saved among you are going to hear God when He speaks. But there are some who might be in your midst who are in danger. They are hearing the Word, but not listening. They are in danger of becoming forever lost.**

#### COMFORT TO THE ANXIOUS

Now, having said what I think the text is saying, I would like to support my position by showing truths from the text that we can be certain about. But before I do, I need to stop and talk to the anxious hearts among us. Satan commonly lies to many saying, "That's you. You are not really saved. Your faith isn't strong enough. That's you, and you are lost forever!"

To you I want to say this: no one who is anxious about his or her salvation fits this text. These lost people are described as those who have fallen away, and are not renewed unto repentance. By definition they are not turning back. They are not crying, "God please save me! Don't let me be lost!" The repentant say that, not the reprobate. The text doesn't say that it is impossible for them to be saved. It says it is impossible for them to turn to God, to repent. You are turned to God and begging Him to save you. So, be at peace. That evil pest, the devil, is seeking to work on your insecurities. That's all. You are safe in the arms of God who never turns away any who want Him.

#### THIS WE KNOW

For the rest of the time, I want to discuss things we know from the Scripture:

1. **We know that some who are among God's people are unbelievers.**

Our prime example is Judas. Some say that the Hebrews writer is talking about saved people who get lost, but that is not consistent with the rest of Scripture

on God's saving power for the lost. They say that the Hebrews text points out that people *tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come*, --how could this not be a description of salvation?

Easy: Judas. The Bible says that.

*It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe." (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father." After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the Twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil." He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the Twelve, was going to betray him. (Joh 6:63-71 ESV)*

Judas did not believe. He wasn't a believer who later turned away. He never believed. He heard the words of Jesus, all of them. He shared in the ministry, even having the power to cast out demons in the name of Jesus and to heal. He preached Jesus to the lost. And yet, he himself was lost. In the end, he left Jesus behind, betrayed Him to death, because he never believed. He fits the description of our text perfectly. Perhaps the Hebrews writer had him in mind when issuing this warning.

Even when his plan to betray Jesus for money went horribly wrong, and he regretted doing it, he still did not repent and come to God for salvation. Contrast Judas with Peter, who also failed Jesus, but always believed in Him. He was restored to Jesus, though he too appeared to have fallen from the faith. He had not. He believed.

Judas is not alone in the scriptures. There is King Saul of the Old Testament, who had participated in God's spiritual work, but never believed. And of course, the Hebrews writer's favorite example of lost people so far: the Jews who died in the desert, having seen God deliver them from Egypt with His powerful miracles, still did not repent of sin and still did not believe.

Look how the apostle John spoke of some who fell away in his time:

*Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. (1Jo 2:18-20 ESV)*

The earthly church had members in it who were not really saved. Over time, this showed itself as they left the faith. John says that they were never of the family of God, but it was made plain who they were over time. He contrasts this with the believers when he says, "You have been anointed by the Holy One."

Paul says the same when he warns the pastors of Ephesus:

*I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. (Act 20:29-30 ESV)*

The Church of God is a place that draws faithless people for their own motives. They come and seek to divide and exploit for their own reasons. Again, look at Paul:

*Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, (Phi 3:17-20 ESV)*

We see that false people sneak in, unnoticed for a while. But if we follow the Gospel examples of Paul and the apostles, then we will not be deceived. There are those whose god is their bellies, and those who have citizenship in heaven.

I could go on, speaking of Simon Magus, some of the Pharisees, and others. But the point is strong in scripture: there are those who are among us who are not with us. That is true in every church that loves God.

## **2. God never turns away a repentant heart.**

Another theme of the Scripture is that God never says to someone who cries out for salvation in Jesus: "No! Not you!" I'll let the Bible prove this point itself:

*[of Jezebel, Jesus says....] 21 I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, (Rev 2:21-22 ESV)*

and

*21 "But if a wicked person turns away from all his sins that he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is just and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions that he has committed shall be remembered against him; for the righteousness that he has done he shall live. Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live? (Eze 18:21-23 ESV)*

and

*5 But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned-- every one--*

*to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isa 53:5-6 ESV)*

and

*37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. (Joh 6:37 ESV)*

and,

*"And you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, Thus have you said: 'Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we rot away because of them. How then can we live?' Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel? (Eze 33:10-11 ESV)*

Why would you die? How about you? Are you here as one who hears the word over and over again, but you have never repented and surrendered your life to God? He is merciful. If you are damned it is because you had so many opportunities yet refused to soften your hard heart.

Listen to the last words of our text for today:

*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. (Heb 6:1-8 ESV)*

The rain is the Word of God. The ground is the hearts of men. For some, the rain falls and produces life. They hear the word of God and believe and are saved. For others, they hear the word, over and over and over again, but do not believe. Their destiny is to be cursed.

Are you in danger of being cursed? Are you in danger of eternity of judgment for your sins? Turn while you still have time. If you hear the message of Jesus, and you desire to change, then there is still time. But do not put it off! The time may come when God takes away your ability to repent, and then there will be no salvation for you. But if you want Him today, that is His mercy. Anyone who turns to Him will find forgiveness of sins and eternal life!

Jesus ends the Bible with this invitation:

*And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price. (Rev 22:17 ESV)*