

Hebrews 06 - Warning #3: Stagnation (Cont'd); The Certainty of Salvation; God's Promises are Reliable

I. Doctrinal Section of the Letter to the Hebrews (Heb 1:1–10:18)

- (4) Christ is superior to Aaron (Heb 4:14–10:18)**
 - (C) Believers are warned of the consequences of immaturity (Heb 5:11–6:20)**
 - (b) What the audience should leave behind (6:1-3)
 - (c) The warning (6:4-6)
 - (d) The illustration (6:7-8)
 - (e) The confidence (6:9-12)
 - (f) The reason for the confidence (6:13-20)

Review: Warning #3: Stagnation (No Progress Toward Maturity) (Review of Heb 5:11-14)

This section contains one of the most debated passages in biblical studies. Therefore, it is wise to keep certain principles in mind when interpreting this passage:

1. These eight verses need to be interpreted in light of Hebrews as a whole. That is why it is always better to handle this passage *after* dealing with the first five chapters. This book, as a whole, was written specifically to a body of Jewish believers who seriously contemplated going back into Judaism and the Levitical system in order to escape the persecution they were suffering at the time. These Jewish believers felt they could go back into Judaism and be saved again later when the persecution subsided. The new salvation would erase the sin of their apostasy.
2. This section must be interpreted in light of the immediate context, which began in 5:11: the author is trying to get them to press on to spiritual maturity. That is his goal. They must leave babyhood and milk, and press on to meat and maturity. The danger is that if they do not, they will make an irreversible decision that will permanently keep them in a state of spiritual immaturity.
3. The fact that Scripture does not contradict itself and, consequently, this passage must be interpreted in harmony with biblical truths taught elsewhere in Scripture. If the thrust of Scripture is eternal security, one verse cannot negate the many verses that confirm this doctrine. The difficult passages must be interpreted by using the clear ones.

Hebrews 6

(b) What the audience should leave behind (6:1-3)

Warning #3 (Cont'd): Stagnation (No Progress Toward Maturity) (Heb 5:11—6:20)

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,**

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,**

1 Therefore, leaving behind the elementary teachings about the Messiah, let us continue to be carried along to maturity, not laying again a foundation of **repentance from dead actions, faith toward God,**

1 Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of **repentance from dead works**, and of **faith toward God,**
- "Therefore" - connects this section with what just preceded it (5:11-14); seeing that you ought not to still be "babes"...

- "...leaving" - to abandon, to forsake, to put away; to pass from one phase of contemplation to another. They needed to move on from the basics of Scripture to the more important, meatier things of Scripture.

— As he pointed out in 5:11-14, at this point they do not need more knowledge. What they need to do is to use the knowledge they already have and then press on for more.

— These are immature, baby believers, not because they have been recently saved, but because they failed to mature after being saved for some time

— "...elementary teaching about the Christ" - the first principles of Christianity. The readers are saved, genuine believers, so they did not need to learn that again.

— They must leave babyhood and milk, and press on to meat and maturity; they had a foundation, but no structure was built on it.

— The danger is that if they do not, they will make an irreversible decision that will permanently keep them in a state of spiritual immaturity.

— These foundational truths are fundamental to the Jewish faith as well...

- "...us" - the writer includes himself

- "...press on" - implies active exertion; they should not be content with their present condition

— In this context, spiritual maturity involves receiving and responding to revealed truth

— Spiritual maturity does not come by striving with self-effort, but by cooperating with God as we do His will, while depending upon His help.

- "...maturity" - spiritual maturity; matured knowledge of those who are "of full age" (5:14)

- "...repentance from dead works" - a reference to the Levitical system, which was temporary, and came to an end with the death of the Messiah
- "...faith toward God" - refers to their once-and-for-all commitment to the Messiah, which brought them salvation

2 of **instruction about washings** and **laying on of hands**, and about the **resurrection of the dead** and **eternal judgment**.

2 of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

2 instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

2 Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

- They didn't need further instructions in four other subjects

— Many regard these topics as a Biblical list of important "foundations" for Christian life, but that isn't the writer's point here

— The list is not distinctive to Christianity, as each topic could be placed in an orthodox Jewish community. However, each acquires a new significance in a Christian context, but the impression is that existing Jewish beliefs and practices were used as a foundation on which to build Christian truth.

- So the "elementary principles" the readers were to move beyond are all items in the "common ground" between Judaism and Christianity. This was a "safe place" for Jewish Christians to retreat to in the face of persecution.

— Because Christianity grew out of Judaism, it was a more subtle temptation for a Jewish Christian to slip back into Judaism than it was a formerly pagan Christian to go back to his pagan ways. These Jewish Christians did not want to abandon religion, but they did want to make it less distinctively "Christian." Therefore, they went back to this "common ground" to avoid persecution.

— Living in this comfortable common ground, they wouldn't stick out too much. A Jew and a Christian together could say, "Let's repent, let's have faith, let's perform ceremonial washings"; but this was a subtle denial of Jesus.

— This is characteristic of many today...there is a temptation to remain religious, because that's what "we've always done," but a reluctance to be so "fanatical" about Jesus

- "...instruction about washings" - *baptismos*, the doctrine of spiritual cleansings; refers to Jewish ceremonial washings whenever it occurs in the NT (Mark 7:4,8; Heb 9:10). A different Greek word (*baptisma*) describes Christian baptism.

— Among Jewish believers, baptism marked the final point of separation from Judaism

- "...laying on of hands" - in Judaism, part of the sacrificial ritual (Lev 1:4; 3:2; 4:4; 8:14; 16:21); transferring a blessing (Gen 48:14-15); and commissioning for public office (Num 27:18,23; Deut 34:9)
- "...resurrection of the dead" - the OT taught this (Job 19:25; Is 26:19; Dan 12:2)
- "...eternal judgment" - the Great White Throne judgment and Lake of Fire; the OT taught this as well (Gen 18:25; Is 33:22)

Foundational Beliefs

Verses 1-2 list some of the first principles or ABCs of the faith. There are six things, outlined in three sets of two. The first pair deals with conversion; the second pair with ceremonial elements; and the third pair with eschatology. Keep in mind these are what the author is referencing as the "milk" of the Word, basic theology for any believer.

- Conversion
 - Repentance from dead works: refers to a turning away (repentance) from the Levitical system
 - Faith toward God: refers to their once-and-for-all commitment to the Messiah, which brought them salvation
- Ceremonial Elements
 - Baptisms: the ceremonial cleansings of the Levitical systems (Cf. 9:10). Among Jewish believers baptism marked the final point of separation from Judaism.
 - Laying on of hands: OT: for imparting blessings; appointment to office or work; NT: Matt 19:13; Acts 6:6; 8:17; 1 Tim 4:14; 5:25
- Eschatology
 - Resurrection of the Dead: OT doctrine (Job 19:25; Is 26:19; Dan 12:2)
 - Eternal judgment: the Great White Throne Judgment and the Lake of Fire

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

3 And this we will do, if God permits.

3 And this we will do, if God permits.

3 And this will we do, if God permit.

- "...this" - "going on to perfection (completion)" as referenced in v1; moving beyond the basics is the primary imperative of Warning #3

- "...if God permits" - first class condition in Greek, which assumes the statement is true. The verse should read: "if God permits this, and He does."

— It was God's will for these believers to leave behind the ABCs of the faith and move on toward maturity, but God will not force this. However, they cannot move on without leaving behind the indifference of 5:11-14.

— Since it is God's will for them to press on to maturity, their failure to do so is not God's fault, but their fault. This shows their dullness is not yet irrevocable or irreversible: they can still choose to go on to maturity. They have not yet made the decision to go back to Judaism.

How does a stagnant, sour believer grow in spiritual maturity? It happens when the believer responds positively to further revelation beyond the basics. We see examples of the danger the writer warned his readers about all around us. Many churches repeat only the basics over and over. Their ears become dull, they stop growing, and many of them turn away from the faith. Some go off to follow cultic leaders who claim to offer deeper spiritual truth. Those who put themselves under the challenge of more advanced sound teaching, and respond properly to it, grow more mature.

The Primary Riddle of Hebrews

So now comes one of the primary challenges in the entire NT. The danger of a relapse and forfeiting their inheritance. The writer points out in these verses the consequences of not pressing on to maturity in order to motivate his readers to diligently pursue spiritual growth (Cf. 2 Peter 1:5; 3:8).

(c) The warning (6:4-6)

- 4 For it is **impossible**, 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**,
- 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,
- 4 For it is impossible to keep on restoring to repentance time and again people who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have become partners with the Holy Spirit,
- 4 For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost,
- This is the beginning of one long sentence (Heb 6:4-6)
- "For" - connects the previous section on moving toward maturity with the following warning about the alternative to spiritual progress
- "...it is impossible" - *adunaton*, disabled, without strength, impotent
- These readers have certain spiritual privileges that the author will list, however a lapse is in danger of taking place. This lapse will not accomplish what they think: the readers think they can, by lapsing, be renewed later, but the author is stating in this passage that it will be "impossible" to renew.

- "...those who" - each of the five qualifiers is governed by this article. The use of a single article indicates that only one group of individuals is in view.
- The author then points out that his readers have experienced 5 spiritual privileges (v4-5):
 1. "once enlightened" (v4)
 2. "tasted of the heavenly gift" (v4)
 3. "made partakers of the Holy Spirit" (v4)
 4. "tasted the good word of God" (v5)
 5. "tasted the powers of the world to come" (v5)
- "...once enlightened" - refers to the decisive moment when they were witnessed to and the light was grasped; the moment they understood and believed in the Messiah (Cf. 10:32).
 - Taking knowledge of the truth; to understand to the point of applying it; "enlightened" by the knowledge of the gospel.
 - "once" emphasizes something that is not repeated
 - "...tasted of the heavenly gift" - literally, "experienced the Messiah" or "experienced salvation"
 - Some interpret "tasted" to mean the readers were not saved; they "tasted" salvation instead of "swallowed" salvation; they did not fully appropriate salvation, which is ridiculous.
 - "tasted" - means they had a real experience (Acts 10:10; 1 Peter 2:3; Heb 2:9); to hold something in common with something or someone else
 - "gift" - refers to either the Messiah (John 4:10; 2 Cor 9:15) or salvation itself (Eph 2:8-9), likely the latter
 - The readers had a real, conscious enjoyment of the blessings, of grasping this gift and its true nature. They had possession of real spiritual life.
 - "...made partakers of the Holy Spirit" - indwelled by the Holy Spirit
 - "partaker" - means to have real participation (2:14; 3:1,14; 12:8)

5 and have **tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come**,

5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come,

5 who have tasted the goodness of God's word and the powers of the coming age,

5 And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come,

- "...tasted the good word of God" - these readers experienced a personal revelation from God (Cf. 1 Peter 1:23; 2:3)
- "word" - *rēma*, the spoken Word. This is not simple participation, but brings out the personal character and experience in it.
- "...[tasted the] powers of the age to come" - the readers tasted the power that will be manifested in the messianic kingdom; they were able to experience this power in their lives

- These are in the aorist tense, meaning a “completed action” (except for the participle that describes the coming (*mellontos*) age, as that is future). There is no more forceful way to indicate that these believers were truly saved.
- The author’s point in this passage is that it is “impossible” for those who have had these five spiritual experiences, to “fall away” (v6)

6 and *then* have **fallenaway, to restore them again to repentance**, since they again **crucify to themselves** the Son of God and **put Him to open shame**.

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.

6 and who have fallen away, as long as they continue to crucify the Son of God to their own detriment by exposing him to public ridicule.

6 If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.

— “...they” - refers to the group of people addressed here; the “those who” of v4

— Apparently, certain individuals had actually fallen away (Cf. 10:25), so the warning is not hypothetical. The sober teaching is about a regenerated individual’s apostasy.

— “...fallen away” - *parapiptō*, expresses a decisive refusal to trust God, which results in a general state of spiritual retrogression; this parallels the experience of the Israelites at Kadesh-Barnea.

— The Greek word is used only here in the NT; means to “fall aside” or “fall away from”; to deviate from the right path; to error

— To what the readers had fallen away from is not specified, so context becomes the determining factor. Considering 3:6,14; 10:23-25,35-39, the “falling away” relates to the withdrawal from their Christian confidence and worshiping function in God’s house.

— The assumption that “fallen away” from salvation is the focus here is the single greatest mistake made in attempting to resolve the difficulties of the warning passages. Just because the first four participles refer to salvation doesn’t mean the fifth one also must have this reference.

— The point of the participle string is that people who are genuinely saved (participles 1-4) and who then fall away (participle 5) will face serious consequences. This shows that Christians are accountable for their actions—which produce either blessing or cursing (v7-8), depending upon whether those actions are obedient or disobedient.

— The internal dullness and immaturity of the readers may have its outward manifestation in their “falling away”

— Their willful choice to abandon their Christian confidence and worship function may place them in a position of judgment described in v7-8

- "...to restore them again unto repentance" - this is the thorn of the entire passage; let's understand what this means:
 - There are three dependencies which, if completed, will initiate the "impossibility" of "renewing them unto repentance":
 1. Fallen away (aorist — completed action)
 2. Crucifying (present active — continuing action)
 3. Publicly ridiculing (present active — continuing action)
 - From the Greek grammar, it appears the impossibility is in place while the "crucifying" and the "publicly ridiculing" are continuing action (the "falling away" has already occurred). Once the "crucifying" and "publicly ridiculing" cease (become completed actions), the "impossibility" is removed.
 - That is, the actions described by the aorist participles *occur during the time* of the crucifying to themselves and the public ridiculing. After the person stops these two actions, at which time these behaviors become past tense activities, the impossibility of renewal or restoration no longer applies, since they no longer are present tense activities relating to the word "impossible."
 - Once these two present actions cease, the impossibility is removed. ***If the impossibility were described by the author as being permanent, the two present tense participles ("crucifying" and "publicly ridiculing") would have been described with aorist participles.***
 - However, the author uses the present tense, thus giving hope to those who might otherwise be hopeless. ***If the author had used aorist participles for the verbs "crucify" and "ridicule," anybody who fell away for a season could never be renewed to repentance.***
 - "renew" - the subject of this infinitive is not given, so it is best to supply "us" or "anyone" as the intended subject. The verse would then read: "...it is impossible for us, or anyone, to renew them again to repentance."
 - These individuals would be beyond encouragement by others in the community to repent and press on to Christian maturity. They would be "dull of hearing" and beyond human persuasion.
 - "repentance" - *metanoia*, change of mind
 - "...crucify to themselves" - to "re-crucify" Christ; this is the first of two reasons given as to why repentance is impossible
 - Those who deny Christ in this way are really taking their stand among those who crucified Jesus. In heart and mind they make themselves one with those who crucified Him (Cf. 10:29).
 - This could also refer to these Jewish Christians going back to the sacrificial system, succumbing to persecution, and failing to grasp the truth that after Christ had come and

finished the work of redemption, every sacrifice was a crucifying afresh. This is reinforced by the fact that the writer states "once for all...for by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb 10)

- "...put Him to open shame" - the second reason given why repentance is impossible; literally to "make a public example of" Him. What carnal Israel did outwardly, those who fall away do inwardly, ripping Him out of their heart, where He had taken residence, and put Him to open public shame as something powerless and common.
- They have known in themselves the power of Christ's sacrifice, but now reject it. The means of return provided by God's love they now reject; their conscience being severed, twice dead, are now past hope.
- These actions are the result of a spiritually dull heart. These individuals become impervious to all efforts by others in calling them to repentance.

A decision to return to Judaism will be an irrevocable decision, and this decision will render them permanently spiritually immature. It will be impossible to renew them again unto repentance; they will not be able to change their mind later and press on to spiritual maturity. In the wider context, they would then be subject to physical death as a divine discipline: they would fall under divine discipline to the point of physical death in the judgment of 70 AD.

Repentance

The author bases this warning on the Israelites' experience at Kadesh-Barnea (Num 14). When the Israelites arrived at Kadesh-Barnea, they had already seen the pillar of fire and cloud over the tabernacle ("been enlightened"), eaten of the manna ("tasted of the heavenly gift"), experienced the Spirit on the 70 elders ("made partakers of the Holy Spirit"), and witnessed the giving of the Law at Sinai and the miracles of Moses ("tasted the good word of the Lord and the powers of the age to come"). Like the readers of the epistle, the Jews of the Exodus were a redeemed people (Ex 6:6-7; 14:31). And most significantly, the wilderness generation was guilty of refusing to press on (Num 14:1-10) in a way similar to those described in Heb 6:6. When the Israelites arrived at Kadesh, they paused and sent spies into the land because they did not trust God's promise that the Land was theirs to possess. When the scouts returned, the majority report was that Canaan was populated by giants who lived in cities with impregnable walls. In spite of the efforts of Joshua and Caleb, the people believed the worst. At that moment the people came to a critical point of decision in which they rejected Moses' leadership and refused to enter and possess the land. As a result God condemned that generation of adults to die in the wilderness. Though they attempted to enter the Land, they were not permitted to do so. Their decision was irreversible.

Similarities between the Israelites and the readers of the epistle are numerous. As the Israelites refused to obey the voice of the Lord (Num 14:22) and act according to His promises (Ex 23:27-31; 33:1-2), so too these people were in danger of refusing to "press on to maturity" (v1). Though the Israelites changed their minds and tried to enter the Land the next day (Num 14:39-45), they were not permitted to repent of their decision to return to Egypt. Similarly with the readers of Hebrews there was the question of whether God would permit them to go on to maturity ("This we shall do, if God permits," v3), for once they decided to "fall away" it would be "impossible to renew them to repentance" (v6). As the wilderness generation was denied the right to the blessings of "rest" in Canaan and died in the wilderness (3:17-19), these Jewish Christians, if they chose to turn away and return to Judaism, would forfeit the blessing of God's rest and would experience His temporal discipline.

In summary, like the Exodus generation, the initial readers of Hebrews were at their "Kadesh." They were faced with a decision. If they chose not to go on in maturity, severe judgment would fall on them (v7-8). However, the author also knew that the readers had not yet made that final decision (v9-10).

Following are five varieties of paraphrases of the passage [as presented by Dr. Charles Ryrie]:

1. If they could fall away and then at a later time be saved again, this new salvation would erase the sin of their previous apostasy. However, since they cannot fall away and be saved again, they must press on to maturity and begin bearing spiritual fruit.
2. If it were possible to fall away and be saved again, which it is not, then it would be possible to start all over again and remove their past mistakes. Yet, since it is not possible, they must be warned about how they are now living and must press on to maturity. They will give an account of their lack of spiritual maturity at the Judgment Seat of Christ. It is impossible to fall away and to renew again because of their spiritual position and privileges which the author just listed. Because of these five spiritual privileges (once enlightened, and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come), because they have had these things, they cannot go back to their original state in the unsaved womb. Because they cannot fall away, they also cannot retreat. Therefore, their option is to remain where they are or to press on to maturity. The reason they cannot do what they think they can is because they cannot re-crucify Jesus.
3. If it were possible to fall away (and it is not), they could begin the spiritual life all over again. Since they cannot begin the spiritual life over again, he warns them about the way they are now living.

4. It is impossible for those who are saved to fall away and so remove all the wasted years of failure and babyhood. This would require Jesus to die again and to put Him to open shame because His first death was not sufficient. Since all of this is impossible and they cannot remove the record of wasted years as a believer, there is only one thing for them to do: to go on to maturity.
5. Leaving babyhood behind, let them go on to maturity. It is impossible for them to fall away and then be saved again and start with a new record by means of initial repentance through salvation. This would necessitate Jesus' dying again and making His first death of no avail and, therefore, a mockery to those looking on.

To summarize: these Jewish believers did not have the option they thought they had. They did not have the option of giving up their salvation, going back into Judaism, and being saved again later because that requires Jesus' re-crucifixion. Moreover, Jesus will not be coming back to be re-crucified because He has already saved to the uttermost; He has already saved completely.

They had two options: The first option was to go back into Judaism. That will not mean the loss of salvation, but it will mean the loss of their physical lives in the judgment of 70 AD. The second option was to make their break from Judaism once and for all complete. For Jewish believers, then and today, that comes by means of immersion of water baptism. After that, they need to press on to maturity. The rest of Heb 6 is trying to encourage them to do just that—to press on to maturity.

The point the author makes in v1-6 is illustrated in v7-8:

(d) The illustration (6:7-8)

7 **Foreground** that drinks the **rain** which often falls on it and produces vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God;

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;

7 For when the ground soaks up rain that often falls on it and continues producing vegetation useful to those for whom it is cultivated, it receives a blessing from God.

7 For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God:

- The author points out that the law of human life teaches condemnation follows the neglect of blessings

— This fact is also observable in nature: we look for certain results from certain conditions. When rain falls, we expect the earth to bring forth herbs for those who have planted and tilled it. In the same way, God's blessings fall upon all believers.

- The rain is like God's blessings; the earth is like all believers. Just as rain falls on all kinds of land, God's blessings fall on all kinds of believers. Like the land, some produce fruit and some do not. Eventually, all must be judged.
- "For" - links the illustration of v7-8 with the previous section, showing that the readers of 5:11-6:6 are still in view. It illustrates the warning and exhortation of the previous section
- "...ground" - in this illustration, represents all believers; this is the subject of v7-8; the same "ground" is in view in both verses.
- The difference in the "ground" in these two verses is in the produce that results from rain
- The "ground" in v7 produces vegetation, green plants, and herbs, and this produce justifies the blessing of rain sent upon it. This produce is useful and receives a "blessing from God." God is looking for what grows in us after He blesses us, especially what grows in terms of maturity.
- The rain-soaked ground fulfilled its God-designed function by providing the produce for the farmer, which resulted in a blessing being received from God
- "...rain" - in this illustration, represents God's blessings, which fall on all believers
- Contextually, this verse illustrates a believer who obediently chooses to press on to spiritual maturity. The concept of usefulness is seen in natural produce; this "produce" is described as ministries of work and love among the readers. These activities, like proper produce, result in a believer receiving God's blessing.

8 but if it yields **thorns and thistles**, it is **worthless** and **close to being cursed**, and it **ends up being burned**.

8 but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.

8 However, if it continues to produce thorns and thistles, it is worthless and in danger of being cursed, and in the end will be burned.

8 But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.

- v8 shows the negative side of v7...

- The same "ground" is in view, but this time the rain yields "thorns and briers," not useful produce

— This condition describes the readers' dullness of hearing and immaturity (5:11-14).

Spiritually immature and dull believers will not produce fruit.

- "...thorns and thistles" - illustrates fruitlessness; in the case of a believer, these are works of the flesh listed in Gal 5:19-21

— This corresponds with those believers who have become dull of hearing (5:11-14); they live a useless life for the Lord

- "...worthless" - better translated "disapproval"; worthless, good for nothing, disqualified (Cf. same Greek word translated as "castaway" in 1 Cor 9:27); used in connection with works, not salvation
- "...close to being cursed" - those who are disapproved ("rejected") are near to being cursed. This does not mean "a narrow escape"; it means that judgment was near, but had not yet fallen. This divine discipline could culminate in physical death.
- To those who wished to go back to the Law and sacrificial system, it meant that they placed themselves back under the curse of the Law once again (Gal 3:10-13)
- Some relate this to the fall in Gen 3. However, the curse in Gen 3 resulted in thorns and briars, whereas here thorns and briars resulted in the curse.
- The "curse" in this verse is the consequence of the rain-soaked earth failing to fulfill its natural function, which is the production of useful vegetation
- "...ends up" - points to an eschatological perspective; the consequence of disapproval at the Judgment Seat of Christ, where these works will be burned
- "...being burned" - to equate this with eternal damnation is to ignore the immediate context. Salvation is not in view; the context is a call for believers to press on to maturity. The danger is a dullness of hearing which may result in a disqualification and temporal discipline.
- If these Jewish believers remain in an immature state and fail to press on to maturity, they will be fruitless, their works will be burned, and they will be disapproved. However, this does not mean they will lose their salvation, only their reward.
- The burning relates only to the worthless thorns and briars, not the ground itself. The purpose of the burning is to remove the "thorns and briars" (the results of disobedience) by means of temporal judgment (Cf. 12:5-11).
- The specifics of this temporal discipline are not given, but biblically God's discipline of His children is for the purpose of bringing them back to usefulness and productivity (1 Cor 5:5; 1 Tim 1:20; Heb 12:5-11).
- People expect rain to produce and bring forth herbs, but the end result for fruitlessness are thorns and briars, which will be burned
- For believers, there will be a "burning" of useless motives, thoughts and actions at the Judgment Seat of Christ (Rom 14:10-12; 1 Cor 3:10-15; 2 Cor 5:10). Paul used identical imagery in 1 Cor 3:10-15.

To summarize this section, the irreversible decision of going back to Judaism will result in two things: discipline in this life and loss of rewards in the next life. The Exodus Generation made an irrevocable decision and could not progress on to the Promised Land. The generation to whom the Book of Hebrews was addressed could also make an irrevocable decision and fail to progress to maturity. They will reach a point of no return and remain in

spiritual immaturity just as the Exodus Generation stayed in the wilderness. Israel did not go back to Egypt and to slavery to become an unredeemed people again. By the same token, these believers will not go back to an unsaved state but will remain in a state of spiritual immaturity. The result was discipline. Israel was disciplined by physical death outside the Land. These believers will be disciplined by physical death in this life and loss of rewards in the kingdom.

(e) The confidence (6:9-12)

9 But, **beloved**, we are **convinced of better things regarding you**, and things that **accompanysalvation**, even though we are speaking in this way.

9 But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way.

9 Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are convinced of better things in your case, things that point to salvation.

9 But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.

- Danger does not exclude the consolation of hope

- "...beloved" - another proof that the writer is addressing believers

- "...convinced of better things regarding you" - the author did not want his readers to think he had given up on them, so he provides some words of encouragement

— The author is confirming to the readers that they were not beyond renewal and retaining their eschatological inheritance and blessings

— The previous, severe description of what they are in danger of has not yet happened to them; they have not yet reached that condition, and the author is confident that they won't.

- "...accompany" - these are things that "accompany" salvation; our justification is not in view here

- "...salvation" - should be understood in the same way as elsewhere in Heb (1:14; 2:3,10; 5:9; 9:28) as referring to eschatological victory, glory, and ruling with the Messiah (third tense salvation: glorification)

10 For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, by having served and by *still* serving the saints.

10 For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.

10 For God is not so unjust as to forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have ministered to the saints and continue to minister to them.

10 For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

- The readers have produced, and to some extent are still producing, good works
- The warning is not given because these good works are not appreciated, because God is not unjust to forget them
- He lists 5 things God will not forget:
 1. He will not forget their work, their good works after salvation (Eph 2:10).
 2. He will not forget their labor of love. This word emphasizes both effort and the motivation behind the good works.
 3. He will not forget those things which they have shown toward His name. This points out that the works they did in the past were for the glory of God.
 4. He will not forget their past ministry to the saints.
 5. He will not forget their present ministry to the saints.

11 And we desire that each one of you demonstrate the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end,

11 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end,

11 But we want each of you to continue to be diligent to the very end, in order to give full assurance to your hope.

11 And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end:

- Nevertheless, the author reaffirms his desire for the readers to press on to maturity, as originally stated in 5:11-14

- He emphasizes that there must be continuance and perseverance; their life needs to reflect what they believe

12 so that you will not be **sluggish**, but **imitators** of those who through faith and endurance **inherit the promises**.

12 so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

12 Then, instead of being lazy, you will imitate those who are inheriting the promises through faith and patience.

12 That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

- "...sluggish" - the purpose of this exhortation is that the readers not be sluggish; their "sluggishness" or "dullness" as a manifestation of their immaturity should be replaced by diligence.

- The Greek word is the same word used in 5:11, translated there as "dull of hearing"

- "...imitators" - *mimic*, imitators; they are to "mimic" others who have obtained promises by patient endurance; the people to imitate are listed in Heb 11
- "...inherit the promises" - there is more to have than simply justification; justification simply stamps our passport for entry into heaven
- The promises, in this context, is to attain spiritual maturity in this life and rewards for the kingdom in the next life. Perseverance is essential for inheriting the promises. In Hebrews the word "promise" is used 18x; 16x it is used of the kingdom.
- Since the readers had not yet entered into a permanent state of dullness, it was possible through God's working in them and their perseverance for them to inherit the promises related to the coming age (rewards and positions in the kingdom).
- Which promises were optional? — see the seven different promises to the overcomer given in the seven letters to churches in Rev 2-3.

(f) The reason for the confidence (6:13-20)

- 13** For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear an oath by no one greater, He swore by Himself,
- 13** For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself,
- 13** For when God made his promise to Abraham, he swore an oath by himself, since he had no one greater to swear by.
- 13** For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself,
- The point of v13-20 is to show that God's promises can never fail
- God's promises to Abraham implied a future fulfillment, which demanded the exercise of patient endurance
- The reason Abraham had the assurance, and therefore could exercise patient endurance, was because of God's promises to him

14 saying, "INDEED I WILL GREATLY BLESS YOU AND I WILL GREATLY MULTIPLY YOU."

14 saying, "I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply you."

14 He said, "I will certainly bless you and give you many descendants."

14 Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee.

- Quoting Gen 22:16-17 to show God's promises can be trusted because of who He is

- God reconfirmed the promises to Abraham after a long delay to reconfirm his patient endurance. God's promises can be trusted because of His purposes.

15 And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise.

15 And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise.

15 And so he obtained what he had been promised, because he patiently waited for it.

15 And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.

- Abraham exercised 25 years of patient endurance to obtain the promise of Isaac

— While God's promises are not always immediate, they are always certain

16 For people swear an oath by one greater *than themselves*, and with them an oath serving as confirmation is an end of every dispute.

16 For men swear by one greater *than themselves*, and with them an oath *given* as confirmation is an end of every dispute.

16 For people swear by someone greater than themselves, and an oath given as confirmation puts an end to all argument.

16 For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife.

- In v16-18 the author points to the unfulfilled promises given to them that need to be patiently waited for in confidence

- When God makes a promise, it does two things: first, it stops all contradiction and controversy and, second, it establishes that which is a trust.

— Men swear by something that is greater (the altar, temple, etc.), which settles the issue. When a man swears by something greater, he pledges himself to fulfill the promise.

— It is the nature of swearing to appeal to a higher authority. God is the highest authority, so His Word settles and confirms.

— God made the same affirmation men make, yet God could not appeal to a higher authority; there is nothing higher or greater than God Himself.

17 In the same way God, desiring even more to demonstrate to the heirs of the promise the fact that His purpose is unchangeable, **confirmed it with an oath**,

17 In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath,

17 In the same way, when God wanted to make the unchangeable character of his purpose perfectly clear to the heirs of his promise, he guaranteed it with an oath,

17 Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath:

- "...confirmed it with an oath" - the oath renders it immutable—unchangeable: not open to "repentance" (Cf. Num 14:23)

— God made an oath in His own Name in conformity with the human method in order to guarantee to Abraham and his seed that the promises would be fulfilled.

— Because His counsel is immutable, meaning unchangeable, His promises are unconditional and eternal

— God made an oath when He gave His promise. It means God put an oath between Abraham and Himself; He bound Abraham to Himself with an oath. The mere promise of God is sufficient; He did not need to give any more, but He chose to give more. As if His Word were not enough, He gave an oath. Thus, God's promise can be trusted because of His oath.

18 so that by **two unchangeable things** in which **it is impossible for God to lie**, we who have taken **refuge** would have strong encouragement to hold firmly to **the hope set before us**.

18 so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.

18 so that by these two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to prove false, we who have taken refuge in him might be encouraged to seize the hope set before us.

18 That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:

- "...two unchangeable things" - there was not just one immutable thing, but two:

1. When Abraham was 75 years old, God promised him a son. The promise contained the content of the covenant (Gen 12).
2. The promise with *an oath* was given when Abraham was 99 years old (Gen 17). The promise and the oath were the unconditional guarantees of the covenant.

— God did not need to give the oath (His Word alone was enough, v17), but He did so for two reasons: "First, to show that His promise is immutable because it is impossible for God to lie. Second, to give a strong consolation or strong encouragement to those who have fled to Him for refuge.

- "...it is impossible for God to lie" - Cf. Num 23:19; Titus 1:2

- "...refuge" - the OT concept of the Cities of Refuge is the background for this verse

— Just as a man flees to a city of refuge, believers have fled to Jesus for refuge because that is where "the hope set before us" resides

— Abraham patiently endured and the promise was fulfilled. Believers also have a promise from God that they can obtain spiritual maturity, but they must gain it like Abraham did: by faith and patient endurance.

- "...the hope set before us" - the coming expectation of seeing God's promise (of spiritual maturity) fulfilled in their lives

19 This hope we have as an **anchor** of the soul, a *hope* both sure and reliable and one which enters within the veil,

19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a *hope* both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil,

19 That hope, firm and secure like an anchor for our souls, reaches behind the curtain

19 Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil;

- How can a believer be certain that God's promise of obtaining spiritual maturity will come to pass? — because the Messiah, our city of refuge, has already entered heaven.

— The Messiah in heaven is the basis of the certainty of the promise. He currently resides behind the inner veil of the Holy of Holies in the Heavenly Tabernacle.

- "...anchor" - our hope is anchored to God's Throne; the anchor prevents drifting (avoiding the problem of 2:1)

20 where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become **a high priest forever** according to the **order of Melchizedek**.

20 where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

20 where Jesus, our forerunner, has gone on our behalf, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

20 Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.

- The presence of the Messiah in heaven is the guarantee that believers will ultimately be there bodily

— Not only do believers have a guarantee of spiritual maturity in this life, but they also have the guarantee of Heaven in the next life because Jesus is the "forerunner."

- "...high priest forever" - Jesus is our High Priest today (since the Ascension), and will be forever

— This is one of the works of Christ during His Present Session. See Present Ministry of Christ for details on what Jesus is doing from heaven today.

- "...order of Melchizedek" - by mentioning this, the author picks up where he left off in 5:10

— Earlier he told his readers why they might not be able to understand these difficult truths (5:11-14)

— Having again encouraged them to press on to maturity, he is now ready to expound on the Melchizedekian Order...