

The Most Frightening Passage in the New Testament

The Book of Hebrews

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Bible Text: Hebrews 6:1-8
Preached on: Sunday, February 9, 2020

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With our Bibles open, it's Hebrews 6:1-8. There is a question that actually forms the basis of the title this evening, "The Most Frightening Passage in the New Testament?" Is this it? Is this the passage which puts the most fear in Christians? Well, I suspect the answer may well be yes, and probably the second behind it would be in Hebrews 10 which, God willing, we'll come to in future months. So that's the passage that we have. What does it say? What does it mean? What is it speaking?

Well, we just remind ourselves where we have just traveled from and we have had to suffer under a rebuke that the writer to these believers has issued to this company of people, that they are accused of being dull of hearing. The writer was going to speak about Melchizedek. Well, could you explain Melchizedek if I was to come up to you and say, "Well, tell me about him then"? Well, the writer obviously expected his readers would understand who he is and why he's important and what he stands for, and why it is that he's going to talk about him, but he has to break off from it and talk about high priests, contrasting high priests. Our Lord Jesus Christ stands out as a high priest beyond anything that Aaron was or ever could be, that that priesthood had its limits and Aaron himself had his limits that he was a man himself who had to offer for his own sin. But then there's a different priesthood, a higher one, and that's the Lord Jesus Christ and actually as well is prefigured by the person of Melchizedek.

Well, as we say, we're going to have to postpone our deliberation to follow the train of thought of our writer here as he was going to speak about him but then had to pause and said, "I don't think I'm going to get very far teaching about him because I don't think you're actually hearing about him. You're not that far yet. You should be," he said, and if you recall there he really chided them that they themselves should be able to do this kind of teaching and yet they need others to teach them, and he accused them of being dull of hearing. Somehow it's not getting through. Somehow we're just not equipped to hear these things and apply these things and he's exercised about that, and we ought to be exercised too if that is where we are, that we're still needing milk, not solid food.

And we remarked that how what has happened here is that in this process of declining from Christ, for that's what's happening, and now drifting towards believing in the Aaronic priesthood, that Aaron is the man and that they need to follow Jewish customs

and Jewish ritual and follow the feasts and be there on the Day of Atonement or whatever else it might be, that they're actually doing a switch and forsaking the cisterns which could supply them, the broken cisterns which could not, and that this was a huge huge mistake. Somehow their discernment has been dulled. Somehow they haven't been trained. Somehow they've not been looking and assessing and understanding doctrines and comparing Scripture with Scripture, unable to recognize and see the wood for the trees, if you like, getting bogged down in things and missing yet what are the key points.

So the writer has had to come back to the basics and in a way what we have here at the beginning of chapter 6 are the basics. This is the milk. He's saying, "Well, really we should be leaving the discussion of these things but here for the sake of just getting it clear in our thinking, here are the elementary principles of Christ." For what he means by that, Christian doctrine. And he lists various things that fit within that category which they should actually be teaching others. They should be equipped by now to be teaching those things to others, should have graduated beyond that and be able, for instance, to look at Melchizedek or as we did this morning, how about this, looking at Elisha, another Old Testament figure and saying, "Well, how do they point us forward to the Lord Jesus Christ? What is it about them that strikes us as perhaps very familiar because of the way in which they embody something of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ?" Solid food. Things that are part of what is becoming skilled in the word of righteousness, God's word, the word that speaks to us about how we can be made right with God, what leads up to that, what's part of that.

So, of course, it all hinges on the Lord Jesus Christ and so the writer, in a way, has his cake and eats it. He's wanting to move beyond the elementary principles, calling them there to move to perfection, that's not perfection in respect of some moral perfection but towards maturity. That's what he's speaking about, moving on to maturity, to be able to say, "These things, we get them. We've got it now. We understand that. We don't now need to have this gone through again for us." God is having his cake and eating it, saying we want to move on to perfection but here just in case we still need to hear it, which he rather fears they do, here are these elementary principles of Christ, what are these basics that he hopes to be able to move beyond.

That's what he says in verse 3, isn't it? "And this we will," we will leave this discussion behind, "if God permits," if we're able to, if we feel satisfied that you've got it now, that you see this and that you're now you've got a foundation because if you haven't got a foundation, if we haven't got basic Christian doctrine, basic categories, then other things won't make sense. We won't be adding anything to it because we're just not hearing it, we're just not able to respond to these things and we are then forever fumbling around, we latch onto other things as these people latch onto Aaron and will be mistaken by things and stressed over other things that aren't really there to be stressed over.

So the basics and he begins with repentance. Repentance. There it is. Well, we know that word, I hope. I hope we do and I hope that if I was to ask you the question what is it, that you'd be able to give me an answer to that, you'd be able to explain something of what this wonderful and rich doctrine means, a very elementary doctrine because without it

that's repentance unto life. If we've never repented of our sin, we've never seen the need of that, well, then we're not Christians. That's as simple as that. But it means, does it not, a change of mind which is actually an indication of a deeper change, a change of heart, change of direction, a whole different worldview that we've now come into and which involves a root and branch review of who we are and a breaking down of allusions and delusions about who we think we are. And it's of course, when we think we're right with God by virtue of who we are, well, these are dead works. As we say there's a repentance from dead works and in a way he's looking here to some of the things that the people are going back to, religious works, dead works. They don't bring you nearer to God. Not now that you have in the Jewish economy the fulfillment of it in the coming of Christ. That's where you look to now. These are dead works, works that we thought were earning us merit and accumulating for us righteousness that God's favor was upon us. Repentance means we see it is rubbish. Well, Paul saw, didn't he, he counts it all as rubbish, all of his upbringing, all of his pedigree, all of the things he wants counted as important and now he counts them all as loss. They were debit. These things were blocking his way to heaven. These were entertaining thoughts that were false thoughts of security. Then he realized he was adrift from God.

So repentance, a deep-seated change of mind, a recognition that we've fallen short of the glory of God and we must sorrow for it. We look on ourselves with amazement that we could have thought we were right with God. There may be tears. There may be that breaking in of that reality and we want to change, we want to change direction. We want to be different people. We want to be away from what we were and we now want to be towards what is pleasing to God, even though we might realize there's no way that we could ever offer to God the works that would be sufficient. Sorrow, sense of guilt, a sense of our own moral responsibility before God that we're culpable, we're blame-worthy, and the day of judgment looms large before our thoughts and we see that on that day we have no standing, no place, that God will find us guilty and condemn us.

So this is it, a recognition that we're sinners, a recognition that sin is just ingrained in who we are, that it cannot be kind of dealt with in some easy fashion, that this is a significant and deep problem. Repentance, then, dear friends, have you repented? Have you tasted of something of that? Have you been humbled? That's what it's about, isn't it? How good it is for people to be humble but they're proud. That's what we are by nature. We reckon we're righteous as we stand. We need some breaking into that and a breaking up of that, and we realize that we're adrift.

Then there's faith, faith in God, faith toward God, a faith that we express then in God to save us from our sin. We deny ourselves the power to save ourselves. We've seen through that. That's repentance. We now are adrift. There's only one help that we can have, it's God, and beyond, of course, simply saying that, it's the cross. We see no other place. We see no other hope for ourselves but the cross. We come there, "Simply to thy cross we cling," and Jesus Christ and him crucified stands out to us as the most necessary gift. Ever wonder why we sing, "Jesus, thou joy of loving hearts," or "Jesus, the very thought of thee with gladness fills the soul." Do you wonder why because it is all about him and our faith has to be in him.

Faith toward God takes us to him and if he means nothing to you or only occasional thought to you, well, then you have to ask yourself are you a Christian, am I a Christian? And the writer has already prepared us for this, hasn't he, by establishing the supremacy of Jesus Christ. So Hebrews 1:1 which we spent some time on, well, here it is again, isn't it, "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they." Or as we have it then in Hebrews 5, nearer to home as to where we are at the moment, verse 5, "So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.'" That's his identity, Son from eternity, the eternal Son of God, the begotten of the Father, and he it is we express our faith in. Nobody else. Not dead works. Not any works. Not any observances. Not any other principles that we might or might not follow. All about him.

So there he is, now what do we make of baptisms, the doctrine of baptisms, plural, plural? Well, we believe here, don't we, in baptism by full immersion and we would say that's Scripture for you. We can't find any other kind of baptism. That's what he means. That's what the word means and that is what the New Testament church we would affirm actually practiced, that believers will be fully immersed in water. They are buried with Christ, united with him in his death, buried with him, and then rising up to newness of life. But how come the plural? People have thought this is talking about baptism in the Holy Spirit, that which happens when we're converted and sealed in the Holy Spirit and all made to drink of one Spirit. Well, it could be referring to that. Well, maybe that seems a little remote, the concerns and considerations here, or maybe this, that actually it's referring to some of the confusion that surrounded baptisms.

Do we find evidence of that in the New Testament? We do. Think of Acts 19, for instance, in that way and how the Apostle Paul finding a group of believers and his rival in Ephesus and they were devotees, they were followers of John the Baptist, and when he asked them about their spiritual experience, it becomes clear they not only had a baptism but it wasn't the baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ, it was the baptism of John. And so he has to explain to them that they need to go beyond that. That was a baptism, surely, a valid one but that really was a preparatory one and there was another baptism that they needed just as John had said, that he pointed out the Lord Jesus Christ, "The one coming after me is before me because He was before me." And he points people to him, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. "I come baptizing with water but there's One who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." And so he doesn't fail, does he, to testify, testifies freely to all who ask him saying, "I am not the Christ. It's Him."

And here Paul has to bring something of that teaching to these people, almost believers but they become fully believers. They have been prepared well by John. They had

baptism, the remission of sin, but they haven't yet had that baptism that brings us into the assurance of what Christ has done, the expression of what he has done, baptism conducted by the local church in that way. And here is their confusion, Acts 19, reading from verse 1, "it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples he said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' So they said to him, 'We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.'" You see, they were quite at sea here. "And he said to them, 'Into what then were you baptized?' So they said, 'Into John's baptism.'" And John says, "Then Paul said, 'John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.' When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. Now the men were about twelve in all."

So they had been baptized, yes, but they needed another baptism, the one that was to follow, the one that was properly expressive of full-orbed Christian truth. John prophesied, didn't he, under the old kind of testament way. There was no greater man born of woman than he but he was least in the kingdom of God, it is greater than he, that there is this understanding that in a way he stumbled over, not knowing if the Lord was the one to come or should we seek another, expecting him to judge all the enemies of God to bring together what is part of the second coming with the first coming. He worked still with some degree of misunderstanding and fullness of revelation that was not his at that point.

That's where these people were and they needed more. They needed to know about the Holy Spirit, that they were a little bit unclear. More than a little bit, they were unclear about him and not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit, and so something Trinitarian was missing. We see Paul was puzzled of them, that they were somehow not integrated, adrift. That's why they asked about the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit would have brought them into communion with other believers, would have knit them together and given them interests and appetites beyond where they seemingly had got. And so he quickly realizes, no, there's more that they need and speaks to them about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then when they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Baptisms, plural, and if one added to that, some of the Jewish baptisms and the ways in which they had baptized people, proselytes, perhaps Gentiles who had come and they would have their practice but here the writer to the Hebrews, we're turning to Hebrews 6, would say that you need understanding of this, you need to see that there is this baptism, true Christian baptism and that's enough. You don't now need a Jewish baptism or John the Baptist's baptism. One will suffice. One full immersion baptism will suffice, and so he teaches that as elementary because that, in a way, is introductory to other things, isn't it? It's introductory into the life of the church, part of what it means to be a member of the local church and serving and identifying with it and feeling its burdens and having its concerns close to our hearts.

Well, what else do we have? The laying on of hands. That's also mentioned as part of this elementary teaching. It's happening here. Well, we would understand from it part of what it means to be baptized, coming into the local church, there's laying on of hands, there's recognizing that you're part of this company, that you belong here, that you sit under the discipline of that local church now, that you under the pastoral oversight and respect now that role and that ministry, that these things and, of course, the apostles laid hands on people just as with those believers in Ephesus when there were some very clear things happening. They spoke in tongues and they prophesied and we have evidence, don't we, when we go to Samaria, Acts 8, that that's what they did there so it may well also refer to when the apostles would lay hands on people and the things that would follow, all the things that now would not follow because there weren't apostles to lay hands on people now moving on, and the church would have a commission perhaps, something to identify a person as belonging in that local church but not the tongues and the prophesying following.

Then taking them together, resurrection and eternal judgment. What happens at the end? And really repentance and faith toward God is already embodying that. We already have got a taste of this. We know there's a world beyond, we know there's a judgment. We're beginning to fear God. Repentance is wrapped up in that, and so that is very much in our thinking. Christ raised from the dead, ourselves to be raised from the dead and judged according to the things we have done. In the end on that, did we believe? Were we fervent in that? Did we contribute in the life of the local church or whatever else there?

And John 5, in that way we just turn there to verses 28 and 29 and it reads as such there, "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth--those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation." And the doing good there is to believe. If you look back at verse 24, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed." Well, that's this. That's the good that we need to do is believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. What work must we do to do the works of God? "Believe in Me," was the answer the Lord Jesus gave his skeptical audience that time.

Heaven and hell. We believe in those places, don't we, both them. We believe in both of them. We believe they're both realities. We believe that both of them are locations and one or the other of them will be our home for eternity. The better that it should be heaven, how much the better that we should have been believing now in the Lord Jesus to pardon our sins and to bring us into relationship with him and to pardon us, that on the day of judgment we have one who answers for us, answers for all our transgressions, hides them from view, blots them out by his precious blood.

Well, we believe in the future. We believe in eternity. We believe in it through our difficult and sad days in which we live, in our times of distress and pressure. We believe in eternity and that's elementary. Do you believe in eternity? Do you live as though these things are such? Do you think this world is all there is and we kind of live it as though this world is all there is? Even as Christians we can sometimes be guilty of that.

Well, we have to keep our minds on these things. These are basic things, elementary things about the life of the church, about the future, about Christ, about repentance and how we enter in by the narrow gate. These are elementary things. Could you teach them to others? Would you be able to run with those things? Could you explain that to your family member or next door neighbor should, well, the chance ever arise for you to say it? Because that's what the writer is saying, we should be able to. That's his challenge to us, isn't it, that these are elementary things, and if we haven't got these, if we haven't got these and have some mastery of them and some competence in teaching them and rehearsing them in our thinking, then we won't be getting very far with Melchizedek and other things beyond that.

So we should be giving thought and attention to doctrine, to teaching, to the Bible, what it teaches, thinking about it, reflecting on it, explaining it to ourselves so we can explain it perhaps to others. Well, we had the heading and our second heading takes us to that: a frightening passage. A frightening passage. This is where we go from verse 4 to verse 8. Well, we could spend all night on this alone, couldn't we just, but we have here something that is a very severe judgment. That is clear, isn't it? This, remember these people are, have come into a very very dangerous situation spiritually speaking. They really are in difficulty.

First of all, it's impossible for them to be renewed to repentance. That's what verse 4 is teaching us. It has various things that have happened to these people and all of these things are adding up in the end to a condemnation. Oh, they've been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, they had had various advantages but somehow they haven't done anything with it and there's a state that is reached, and we'll come to that in a minute, where they can't be renewed to repentance. That won't happen now. They've forsaken the way and the way has forsaken them.

So we find them again at verse 8 at the end contrasting with those which drinks in the rain and is for using something useful to the one who cultivates it, that's the believer. That's the believer who has got the elementary things and is now moving on to perfection but what about the other? Well, verse 8 says it there, "but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned." That's judgment, isn't it? That's being burned. That's a judgment. That's a curse of God. That is to being rejected, no way back. It's finished. Complete. Nothing further that can be done.

What a place that that is. That's frightening. Who is there? Apparently us, could we end up there? Could that be possible of a true child of God? Falling away, it talks about there, doesn't it, if they fall away, verse 6. Enlightened, tasted of the good things of the word of God, then falling away. What does that mean, then? Can we fall away? Can a true child of God fall away? It's not a question, is it, of just momentary interest, that's a big question. That's an important question but our own peace of mind will come one way or the other depending on how we answer that question. We see Scripture doesn't hide things from us, it presents us with things that we need to think about.

So what have we here because many believers have tormented themselves with this passage and have thought to themselves, "That's me. I've backslidden once and that's it, I can't be renewed again to repentance. I'm lost. I'm finished. Or that that will be me and I can just feel the rebellion in my heart. There are sins that are there and that therefore I'm falling away and I won't be renewed to repentance and I'll be cursed, I'll be burned." Well, is that a productive even biblical way of reasoning?

Well, here we come to a big moment, a big moment. This is where we with our confession and our standard that we follow, the 1689 Baptist Confession in that way, say we differ from what others teach. Quite fundamentally actually, we differ from what others preach and this, we might say, is what is called Arminius was a bit more than what is called Arminianism, but this idea that we can lose our salvation, that the child of God can have all of the adoption, sonship, receive the Holy Spirit, be baptized in the Spirit, and then lose their salvation, and that scheme would assert you can. It would say that you choose when you come in, and in a way you choose when you go out. You opt-in by your choice, you can opt-out by your choice. So you can come into the benefits but then you can also lose all the benefits and it's over to you, it's your choice on that. We would say, no. The true child of God has eternal security, that they can't in that way lose their salvation. They may get into griefs and they may get into difficulties and they may need rescuing from some pretty odd places, but the elect, the true child of God does not fall away. They cannot be finally lost.

So whatever we may think about ourselves at times and we're wise to do an audit and to wonder at the kind of people we are, the kinds of decisions we make, the sins we humor, and are reluctant to part with, the besetting sins, the things that bog us down, pride and unbelief, well, we're right to be very concerned about those things, and yet while still there is trust in Christ, where still we can feel antipathy to sin and a loathing of it, a repentance that is an ongoing experience from it. We cheer ourselves in these things and humor them, well, that's not a good sign. But if we are feeling the weight of those things, that is a very good sign and we can teach, I believe emphatically, conclusively from the word of God that we cannot lose our salvation.

So where can we turn? Well, we can turn to John's gospel where we were a moment ago and just here I'm turning to John 6:37. These are verses well worth remembering and noting where they are. What does it say to us there? "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out." I won't throw them out. I won't cast them out. They come to me, they stay with me. They are mine and I look after them and they won't perish.

Well, I'm anticipating my next verses I want to look at, John 10:27-30, which should be an immense comfort to us. I hope they are. I hope these verses are an immense comfort to us. So what does it read there? "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand." They stay there. They are his sheep and we notice that his sheep hear his voice. They've repented, they are trusting him,

they are following him, they're not going off to Aaron or anything else. They're following him and though there may be some twists and turns, they're not snatched out of my Father's hand. They are kept by him. They are in his care and keeping and so they don't lose their salvation.

Ephesians 1:3-6, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will." There it is, the adoption, the election that precedes that and that leads us then into this place of blessedness, blessedness that remains, blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, chosen before the foundation of the world. Well, we should then be lost but that we should be kept and remain and be able to be still standing when we draw our last breath on earth and go into eternity.

That's what it teaches. It doesn't teach that we can be lost, but even if we were to turn in Hebrews, yes, in this same book, we find the same thing taught. So chapter 7, verse 25, "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." He saves to the uttermost. You notice that he does the saving. He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through him. To God, repented, we put our faith in him, and so we have come to him and he saves us to the uttermost. We don't get plucked from our Father's hands. He doesn't cast us out, and this we find taught here in Hebrews. Whatever Hebrews 6 is saying, Hebrews 7:25 is telling us there is eternal security, there is safety, we are looked after and we will persevere. What a hope, what a joy it is to know that.

So we notice that the "those" of verse 4 of chapter 6 are not the same people as the "beloved" of verse 9 of chapter 6. He's talking about another category of people, people that are not actually his readers. He is warning his readers that they don't become that category of person but he's saying actually he's confident of better things concerning his readers, then applies to those in verse 4 and verse 8. So what do we have here? Well, these are the people that fall away and this falling away is not a temporary mishap or a period of backsliding or Christians still battling with sin and very disappointed in themselves that they yet have not defeated it, that yet they still fall into temptation like we're hearing in our Spurgeon reading after lunch today.

Well, these are people who have fallen away and are quite emphatic about it. They have done this with style. They have left the Christian faith and slammed the door behind them. There is something about them, something final about the way in which they now dismiss what are spiritual truths and spiritual realities, and that is frightening because people can do that and I venture to suggest we can even name some names of people who have done that, and that is frightening. It's shocking. And the writer is actually warning them there is a way, there is a way into apostasy. We've talking about it in previous sermons, apostasy, that falling away, that turning against the Christian faith, and he's saying don't go down that path. You're beginning to, some of you, that lapsing from

Christ and going towards Aaron and believing in these other things and adding dead works to it, and making them the basis of your assurance. Fatal, he'd say, don't do it. You're neglecting so great a salvation.

But there were those who have done more than that, they really have gone the whole-hog. They really have departed from the Christian faith, outright denial. Well, some people are atheists, people who once had some kind of Christian faith, or liberals, people who call themselves Christians but really their behavior is totally totally against Christian doctrine and Christian truth and who glory in it and insist that they're right in it. Well, we look at these people and we see them bearing thorns and briers, likely to be rejected, near to being cursed whose end is to be burned.

So it's a warning not to become these people. These people he's writing to are not those people and the writer is putting these boundary lines there to say don't become those people. There are worrying signs. You're beginning to drift. Don't be this because if you go in that direction, nowhere back. You don't repent. You, in fact, can't repent. You harden yourself in your apostasy, in your rejection of Christ and that is it and you're not renewed again to repentance. That falling away is not something that's light and a bit of carelessness, it's something that ends up becoming a real hardened position and that is frightening.

And what we can see here is these people once had some contact with the Christian faith, have even asserted their belief in it at one point but it didn't last. It was something superficial, some contact with it that left no deep impression upon them and that's what all these expressions here mean. And we notice them, they were enlightened. There was some knowledge. You can have knowledge of the Christian truth and it can do you some good. Wherever the Christian truth is, it will do you some good, but it may not convert you if you've not repented and put your faith toward God.

2 Peter 2, look what it says there that these false teachers, "For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them." They had knowledge. They'd been enlightened. Knowledge there about the way of righteousness. They escaped even from some of the pollutions of the world, some of the obvious and big sins, but there was no fundamental change. There was no response system in them and gradually that became clearer until finally they had gone totally. And the writer says, Peter here says that they are overcome and their sin now brings them down, their latter end is worse for them than the beginning. Better not to have known the way of righteousness than to have known it, to turn from the holy commandment. That turning is something emphatic here. It's something willful in all of this.

So a bit of knowledge but that's not enough, who have tasted the heavenly gift. Now what might that be there? Well, it's thought to have been knowledge, again the gospel of salvation, the heavenly gift that is given of Christ Jesus, what he means. And they've

tasted something of it but their taste is a bit superficial, they haven't digested it, they haven't really grappled with it, there's been no real heart engagement. It's a superficial thing and so it wasn't enough. It wasn't enough and partakers of the Spirit might have been in the environment in which miraculous gifts were operating, or simply this, the benefits of being amongst Christians, the life that's there. They are filled with the Spirit. They are showing attitudes of forgiveness and of generosity and of their emphasis on eternity. You've got all of this and yet you were partaking of it in a way, you were present but it did nothing, didn't change you. Again, you've tasted of the good word of God, truth and all of its fullness but again it's just tasting it. It hasn't been digested. It hasn't left a big impact upon the person and so it's not enough. Then the powers of the age to come. Eternity. Well, they saw something of it, heard something about it and it moved them to a sort of temporary momentary repentance. It sobered them up for a bit but it didn't last and now they speak against these things.

So people can get into religion and it can be evangelical religion, it can be religion but it hasn't changed them, it hasn't been the truth, it hasn't been spiritual, it hasn't been the power and the reality of these things, and then eventually they drift away from it, and in the end these people flatly deny it or they're so steeped in sin that that's what their behavior is saying and that is something to behold. So as we finish, God's method is to offer us warnings. What a damaging thing it is when people don't actually look at commandments and warnings in Scripture, when they think as though we're now above and beyond all of that. I mean, you look at their behavior and you begin to sniff around it and find apostasy. You begin to think this carelessness, oh, we just need the Holy Spirit or we're under grace, not under law and we can follow, we've got all that it takes here, and begin to not realize there are passages like this. And when you see how they behave, they just think that their account is being given them from God and you're shocked. I was shocked in my own Christian, shocked to what things people would say were of the Holy Spirit. That can't be. That really, that cannot be. How can people believe in the Bible and the God of the Bible and then say it only does this. It's foolish things and idiotic things and mindless things and it doesn't work, does it?

So God puts warnings there and we realize there are false prophets, we realize that people can fall away into apostasy, we realize that you can taste of these various things to do with the Christian faith and not actually be the real article. Well, it's a warning, isn't it, to us there to watch ourselves, be watchful, be vigilant, don't assume that everything is fine with us, that we attend church, we go to meetings. Well, yeah, but do we listen? Do we learn from it? Are they actually having an influence, an impact upon us? Are they making us wise unto salvation? Bible reading, good, we use Bible notes, fine if they're good notes, but are they doing anything in us? Are they changing us? Are they maturing us? Are we moving on to perfection or are we standing still, worse than that, going backwards?

So these are warnings that are given to us. We are to work out our salvation, friends, with fear and trembling but we're glad that it is God who is at work in us as to will and to do according to his good pleasure. So we respond to passages like this, frightening passages, by pledging, "That's not going to be me, Lord. Not me. I'm going to take this to heart. I'm

going to realize this. I want to go deeper in my Christian faith. I want to get these elementary principles and I want to become more of a student of Scripture. I want to go further and I want to make sure about myself, that I'm not going to become one of these." That's what it does, it provokes us to actually go deeper or go higher, whichever way you want to think of it, to have more of Christ not less, to be a better student, to be listening better to these things and make sure that we're not unproductive in our knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So here we have it. Can we lose our salvation? Clear answer: no. These aren't true children of God. They don't lose salvation. A true child of God and given the fruits of that and the evidences of it, well, then don't let this passage leave you sleepless nights. Let it be a warning. It needs to be there and we need to heed it because we can be careless and we can fool ourselves and we can become very slovenly, but there are the warnings. Take them to heart but be of good heart. A true believer can't lose their salvation so don't let this be to you a frightening passage. Amen.