

# Impossible to Renew

*Study in Hebrews*

By Dr. James White

sermonaudio.com

**Bible Text:** Hebrews 6:1-4

**Preached on:** Sunday, March 28, 2010

## **Phoenix Reformed Baptist Church**

3805 N. 12th Street

Phoenix, AZ 85014

**Website:** [www.prbc.org](http://www.prbc.org)

**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/phxrefbap](http://www.sermonaudio.com/phxrefbap)

Turn with me, please, once again, to the epistle to the Hebrews, Hebrews chapter six. Yes, that chapter, Hebrews chapter six.

We continue in our studies of this tremendous text and I will just have to tell you that in preparation for today this chapter has leapt up my list of favorite chapters from one of the on, no chapters to wow, how did I miss that chapters. And so I am extremely excited about this text and, hopefully, Lord helping us, we all will be once we finish. I can guarantee you. We won't get it done today, but we will try to get a good running start at it.

Hebrews chapter six. Let's ask the Lord's blessing upon our time.

*Lord, once again, we do recognize that apart from your Spirit we can do nothing, that all the preparation, all the anticipation can accomplish nothing unless your Spirit comes and opens hearts and minds. So be with us now. May you be honored as your Word is proclaimed. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.*

I was raised in a very conservative context and I was raised to be respectful of my elders. In fact, even as my beard has begun to turn white, it is hard for me not to refer to people as sir. It is very, very strange. And ma'am, even though there are some in Congress who wouldn't like that. But ... and it is very strange for me to begin to realize, for example, that many of the doctors that I see are younger than I am. I haven't gotten that down yet at all. It is a strange, strange thing.

In light of that, what I did one Sunday morning in Sunday school at a large church here in the valley was very unusual. I had been and I was a senior in high school and I had been in this particular Sunday school class for quite some time and I got up during the small group session and told the Sunday school teacher that he was wrong and that he knew what he was doing was wrong and I walked out.

Now I had never done that before. I don't even send bad steaks back at a restaurant, ok? So I just don't make a scene of things. But I got up and walked out. Why? Well, because my Sunday school teacher had decided—and we found out later he and his wife together

decided and they did this concurrently with different small groups in their class—to introduce all of us to the fact that salvation was not eternal and that we could lose our salvation even though they knew the position of the church. Now I knew the position of the church as well. And that is why I left that class and immediately contacted the leadership of the church in regards to what had taken place.

Now the specific text that he focused upon that morning was in Galatians chapter five, but he also made reference to what is probably the most famous text in all of the New Testament used by those who would say that you can be a true believer, truly in Christ and yet fail to receive eternal life, receive eternal punishment and that is Hebrews chapter six verses four through six.

Now that led to a couple of sermons on the subject at the church and, of course, those folks left the church and went to find themselves a fellowship more in line with their current theology. But the fact of the matter is it is very difficult for many of us to approach this text and to do so in a fair way. It has been such a football for so long that it is very difficult to try to disentangle it from the context that we have normally had to deal with it in.

I know that years ago when I preached through Hebrews six, seven, eight, nine and 10, very quickly here at the church, I had done so because I had just read through Hebrews and tried to follow the argument of Hebrews. And that helped a lot to disentangle it, to get it out of the tendrils of controversy that seemed to encase this particular text. But now we have come to this text in a, shall we say, a natural way. We have been preaching through the book of Hebrews. And the last time I had opportunity to speak to you we covered all of chapter five in a single Sunday, Sunday morning and Sunday evening. We have now seen numerous exhortations and warnings in this tremendous book.

And so now we come to chapter six and I will simply tell you that as I mentioned in my preparation, I felt like I had seen this text for the first time, not that there were lights and voices from heaven or anything else, but having the first five verses, having had to translate them and work through them and read commentaries and struggle with difficulties and things like that, having that as the background, now we get to chapter six and what I am seeing more and more is that the real benefit of consistent Bible study and Bible study where you are doing all the Word of God, Old Testament and New Testament, is you see the beautiful cords of truth that are woven throughout the fabric of Scripture. You can't see those if you don't look at all of Scripture. You cannot see consistent themes if all you see is the Bible as individual texts strung together without a relationship to one another.

And, fortunately, that is how most evangelicals I know view the Bible. Partly because of the way we have the Bible divided up into chapters and verses and things like that and the way we memorize the Bible. I know that those are wonderful things, but they tend to sort of blow the text up into individual pieces and we don't see the overarching themes. But as we see when you look at a piece of beautiful cloth... I was in London, as you know, recently and we went to a Covent Gardens which used to be a main place you would go

to buy food stuffs, so fruits and vegetables and things like that for hundreds of years Covent Gardens would... in London is where you would go. Well, they don't sell fruits and vegetables there now because you have such a thing as a grocery store. But it is still a place to buy all sorts of things. And I decided it is always wise while traveling to get something for the wife and the daughter or they are going to give you really bad looks when you get home if you arrive without anything in your luggage. And so one of the things I got at Covent Gardens, I found these beautiful Indian scarves and just beautifully... I mean just beautiful cloth with threads interwoven in it of various colors and gold and silver and just beautiful and I bought them in Covent Gardens.

Now you can fold these things. You can lay these things out and you can see the pattern, but if you were to just zoom in using a microscope on one little portion of that cloth, you really wouldn't be able to see that this is beautiful cloth. It just looked like any other cloth and you wouldn't see the patterns of the threads. You have to stand back to see the whole thing.

And that is what I am saying about this text as well is seeing it in the whole of Hebrews, which, let's admit it, 99 percent of the time when you are talking with someone about whether you could lose your salvation or not or if there is such a thing as apostasy which there clearly is, but does that mean apostasy of a true believer or someone who is a false believer, et cetera, et cetera. How often do you actually approach any text with any context to it at all?

Well, don't you believe what it says in Hebrews 6:4? It says this and that means this.

Well, how do you know it means that? The only way to know that is to look at the context, to see it in the overall scheme. Very rarely do people approach the text of the Bible in that way.

And so as we come now to Hebrews chapter six, as I began working through this text once again, the consistency of it simply was awesome and I hope to be able to communicate to you that same thing. And obviously I realize not everyone can be here every single Sunday and not everyone remembers everything that anyone has ever said in the past in previous sermons. But hopefully if you have been here fairly consistently you have already heard the sermons on Hebrews one, two, three, four and five. You have got a flow here that will help us. Remember, at the end of the last time we were together we had seen the writer say, beginning in verse 11 of chapter five:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

He is concerned about the people to whom he is addressing his letter that they had become dull of hearing, that they need milk and not meat. And so it is in that context, then, that we come to chapter six and I will try to work through just the first nine verses. We will get a start this morning and certainly, Lord willing, by this evening finish this particular text.

Therefore leaving or moving away from the basic teachings or doctrine of Christ let us move on toward completion or perfection, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and faith toward God, teachings concerning baptisms, that is plural, maybe oblations, something like that, baptisms and laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. And this will we will do if the Lord wills.

For in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit and have tasted the good Word of God and the power of the age to come and then have fallen away, have apostatized, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance as they are crucifying to themselves again the Son of God and putting him to an open shame. For the earth, the land, the ground that drinks the rain that often falls upon it and brings forth crops. It is literally a Greek word for botany from which we get our term. It brings forth vegetation, crops, pleasing to those for whom it has been tilled or farmed receives a blessing from God. But if it brings forth thorns and thistles it is useless. It is close to being cursed and its end is to be burned.

But we are convinced concerning you, brethren, of things better, things which accompany salvation even though we are speaking in this way.

Now you would think that I would be jumping directly into verses four through six, but that, I think is the greatest danger that we face here. It was in finally stopping long enough to consider the first three verses that I found the context to verses four through six that is so very, very helpful. Sometimes we get so focused upon the controversy that the details of what is said around that text become lost. That is what we need to focus upon this morning, so we have a foundation to really be able to understand what the writer is saying here.

He says, "Therefore, leaving the elementary teaching..." It is literally the fundamental, the beginning of Christ word is literally what the text says. Leaving that, let us press on to completion, to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and faith toward God, teachings about ablutions, baptisms, laying on of hand, resurrection from the dead and eternal judgment.

Now, just a couple of things just so we have our bearings on the text. Most commentators see this text and say, "Well, there are six things here that are talked about in regards to what the elementary teaching about the Christ is."

And, again, back up and put yourself in the context of Hebrews. To a Hebrew congregation who is the Christ? Well, to the Hebrew mind we are talking about the

Messiah. The Christ is just the Greek word for the Messiah. And so he is talking about the elementary teachings of the Messiah and then most people see a list of about six things here. You have repentance from dead works, faith toward God, instructions about washings, laying on of hands, resurrection from the dead and eternal judgment. It is possible, however, given a very, very minor textual variant that you actually have repentance from dead works, faith toward God and then the teaching of ablutions, washings, baptisms, et cetera, et cetera is then restating what this foundation is. So it would be a two and a four type situation at that point that would divide the two up. There is some discussion of that, but we will stick with most of the translations that render it the way that I have already translated it for you.

Did you notice something about these things? Look at these things. Repentance from dead works and faith toward God, teachings about washings. Now how many washings are there in Christianity? There were many in Judaism. But there is really only one baptism, one faith, one baptism in Christianity. Teachings about washings, laying on of hands. Well, we see that a little bit. It is not overly common, but we do see that in Paul, for example. We see it in Acts. Resurrection of the dead. Eternal judgment, ok. Is there anything in this list that is absolutely, uniquely Christian?

You see, when I first started reading on this I kept seeing all this discussion about, wow, this is what the Jews believed. The good Pharisee would talk about repentance from dead works and faith toward God. The good Pharisee understood the teachings concerning such things as the washings that you had to go through and laying on of hands. That was a part of Judaism and certainly the Pharisee believed in resurrection of the dead, unlike the Sadducee. Eternal judgment, yeah, that is all there. So what is uniquely Christian? Well, the only thing that is uniquely Christian is the use of Christ right at the beginning of verse one. But it is interesting enough the Christ, the Messiah. And so what is going on here?

I had just sort of looked at that list and really hadn't spend much time on it. It is like, yeah, ok, repentance from dead works. Yeah, ok. And then I realized what is going on here. Remember what our context of Hebrews is. We have got to go back to Hebrews chapter one when we did the introduction. What is going on here? What is the pressure being placed upon these people? Come back to the old ways. Offer sacrifice. That is why we have seen to believe that this was written before the destruction of the temple, probably, because there is no discussion of how you couldn't do that anymore. Offer the sacrifice. Give up this Jesus stuff. Come back to the old ways.

And what is the writer saying? There is nothing to go back to. And you look at this foundation that is discussed here, not laying this foundation again. And all of the sudden it struck me. How different it is to be a Jewish convert and to be a convert from Paganism? You see, to go back to your Paganism complete split. I mean, Pagans, many gods, all the debauchery involved with that, et cetera, et cetera. You enter into the Christian congregation. You seem to be talking about people who have been baptized, people who have partaken in the Lord's supper, people who are a part of the regular worship of the church here and that is who is being preached to. That is a big change

from Paganism, but if you are a Jewish convert to Christianity there are a lot of things that are very similar. You have already been taught about repentance from dead works, works that are not pleasing to God. You have been taught about faith toward God. We know that there were godly Jews. We meet them in the pages both of the Old and New Testament. And you have already heard about instructions about washings and laying on of hands and you have believed the resurrection of the dead and you believe in the coming judgment and you see when someone starts putting pressure upon someone like that to go back to the old ways it is a lot easier. It is a lot easier to just, well, you know, what you are saying we both believe the resurrection of the dead. We both believe in eternal judgment. We have so much in common with one another that maybe I can just let go some of these unique things like the idea that Jesus is that fulfillment of all the law, the fulfillment of all of the sacrifices, that he is the only high priest, that his death is what all of the Old Testament law pointed to. Maybe I can just sort of let go some of these things.

You see what the writer is saying is: We must press on to maturity, because the danger is to say, "Well, what I believe is good enough. And I can have so much more. I can have my family back if I just would be willing to compromise on this little thing or that little thing. And does it really matter?" And the writer is saying, "Yes, it matters."

You have become dull of hearing and once you become dull of hearing then you may not hear how much it matters that Jesus is the fulfillment of all of these things. And if he is, then you are, in essence, calling God a liar if you go back to the old ways. Yes, God established those things, but he did so for a purpose. They point to a greater fulfillment.

And so what he is saying is, "I can't leave you here. You may have become dull of hearing, but I need to instruct you about who this Jesus is. I need to talk to you about how he is the great Melchizedek priest." And that is what he is going to get back to at the end of this chapter.

Notice verse 20 where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. He has gone back to where he was before after a lengthy exhortation saying, "You must press on. You have to have a real foundation that is a distinctly Christian foundation."

And so he is not saying that we just need to forget about the foundational things that are common between ourselves and Judaism. I mean, we certainly see the apostles are Jews. We see the fulfillment of Old Testament Scripture, all these things are true. But what he is saying is that is not enough to talk about our similarities and how often do we hear that today? How often in the context of our culture today are we beaten about the head and shoulders by people saying, "You just want to talk about what divides us. Shouldn't we just talk about what can unite us?" As long as what unites us isn't specifically the lordship of Christ, as long as it is a moral system, something like that. We get hit with that same kind of pressure in our experience today.

So what the writer is saying is there is that foundation, but it is not enough. We need to

go on beyond that and recognize why it is that God has revealed truths about these things. That foundation is on us. God has given us more. You need to know who this Jesus is, that he is this great Melchizedek priest, that he has entered into the heavenly place, that he is the final high priest and the center core of the entire epistle, the death of Christ, that once for all sacrifice.

You can talk all you want about washings and laying on of hands and everything else. All of that fades into insignificance in comparison to that finished work. And so then verse four begins by saying to us: Impossible.

So what he is doing is he is going to give us an impossibility. The impossibility is the renewing unto repentance of those who fall away, *παραπιπτω* (par-ap-ip'-to) become apostates.

So we have that tough section coming up, not tough to understand, but it is never ever comfortable for us to talk about apostasy. And we already have, then, a previous section. You recall where we... about two months ago when I last had the opportunity of preaching, you see there was that section about pressing on, exhorting. And we are just continuing that exhortation here in chapter six. That tough section coming up, but before he gets to it he says, "And this we will do if God permits."

Normally we just read that and skip right by it because of what is in the next verse. It is impossible. And here is, you know, let's talk about whether these are true believers or not. And we skip past the statement of the writer. We are going to press on. We must press on if God permits. We must press on to perfection, to maturity, to completeness.

Why do I want to stop and emphasize that statement? Because one of the greatest dangers that I can see for Christians in our context, in the context of a church where we have remained focused upon the necessity of the preaching of the Word of God. We have not given in to the temptation to follow after all of the fads that come flowing through the valley. And, oh, they come every single Easter season and Christmas season and this new way of doing things and that new way of doing church and, you know, we celebrated a while back the pastor's 35<sup>th</sup> year with us. And you go back 35 years, Evangelicalism looked a whole lot different than it does. Think of all the stuff that has come and gone in 35 years. We recognize not going there and it is very easy for us to become proud of saying we are not going there. We are not going there and that makes us better than somebody else. We have got to be careful of that. But it seems to me that one of the greatest dangers is spiritual apathy.

There is an interesting term in verse 12 that I think might describe it. Don't become sluggish, spiritual apathy. I have got the foundations down. I have got the five points. In fact, I have got verses for every one of the five points. In fact, I have got more than five points. I have got 10 points. I am the super Calvinist. And I have memorized all the verses I can use for my 10 points. And you have only got five.

And it is very easy for us to go, "Well, you know, most of the folks I meet out there in

evangelical land they think Bible study is sitting around and opening up a text and going, 'So, brother Wood, how do you feel about this text? How about you, sister Pam?' And you sit around and you go, 'Well, this text makes me feel this way.'"

Now there is everything wrong with that. That is not proclaiming or studying the Word of God. The Word of God doesn't really care what you feel like and it is not determined by your feelings. But, you see, the danger is we see that. We go, "We don't do that. We work through the text. We read a parallel gospel in Sunday school. I mean, we are up there at the front. We are on the cutting edge."

It is very easy since it doesn't look like anybody else is, you know, pushing us on that level to just go, "Well, I am happy where I am. Everything is fine."

We need to push on to maturity. And anybody who feels that they have arrived is deceiving themselves. If you sit here this morning and maybe because of some of the people you work with, some of the people in your family you have succumbed to the temptation to go, "Ha. Boy, in comparison to that... Oh. Yeah, in comparison to them," but that is not the standard is it?

The danger for all of us who have regular, proper, necessary exposure to the Word of God is that we fall into apathy, sluggishness. And maybe you had to go through a lot to get here. I know a number of your stories. And you maybe had to give up a lot. You had to give up some friends. You may have family members that don't even talk to you anymore. They think you have just completely lost it. You are just ... you are too interested in that religion stuff or that reformed theology. You have gone too far. And it is real easy to look back on that and go, "You know, I went through a lot then, so I am good." As if somehow that past experience is grounds for your current sluggishness and your current apathy.

Maturity. What does that mean? As you look at your own life this past week consider how you responded to the difficulties that you encountered, not just outwardly, but inwardly as well. Hopefully you see signs of Christian maturity at points, but is there not may an instance where your response was anything but mature from a Christian perspective? It is far too easy for us to become comfortable in a reformed cocoon. But the Scripture is always saying, "Press on to maturity." And that is not going to happen in this life, but it is our calling. And we are either moving forward or we are moving backwards. I don't think there is such a thing as standing still.

The writer is concerned that his hearers have become dull because they don't see the necessity of constantly moving forward in the battle, constantly conquering more territory in the Lord. The danger of spiritual stagnation comes when you set up the borders and you have built the wall. The result is Christian Legalism and Moralism.

Oh, I would never do those things. But there is this whole area over here that you know is not under the lordship of Christ. But I have got all that area over there. So it is ok. I will get back in the battle in that area some other time. I am tired. I need to take a rest.



Sluggishness, apathy, dull of hearing. The writer says, “No. We must press on to maturity.”

Now part of that is going to involve his explaining some difficult theological concepts, some meat. And, of course, that fits with the analogy, does it not? Oh, well, you know, we are just drinking the milk. You need the meat if you are going to become mature. You have to be able to take in real sustenance.

Those of us who are parents who have grown children, especially of the male variety, remember those years between about 13 and 19 where the majority of our sustenance went to provide them with sustenance. They can eat anything. But they needed to. That is the connection that is being made. Press on to maturity. I need to give you strong meat so that you can have the foundation to withstand the onslaught that is coming against you. And anybody who stops in the battle...

I mean, think about it. Almost every time Pilgrim stopped on his way, what happened? He got in trouble. Any time we stop in the battle we are asking for spiritual problems.

And so as we look at the congregation and what they experienced in verses four and following, my challenge to you, my fellow believers, is to hear what I am saying and ask yourself an honest question. Have you stagnated? Have you become apathetic? Do you think you are doing good enough, or do you still feel that strong Spirit born recognition of your own sin and your need to be in the Word of God and to be growing in grace? The world will do everything to convince you you are religious enough. Religion isn't enough.

Press on to maturity. But listen to the warning. The case of those who once been enlightened, you sit in this congregation. Some of you young folks, older teenagers, young adults, you have been raised hearing the Word of God preached from this pulpit. You have more light available to you than entire generations of mankind that has passed. And to whom much is given, much is required.

And some might say, “Oh, no, to be enlightened means to be a true Christian.”

No. I suggest to you that to sit in the congregation as one that seems that these are individuals who made profession of faith. Oh, yes, we believe, been enlightened, heard the Word of God. All this light provided them morally and in all of their life the proverbs being read, all the wisdom one can gain. If you just obeyed the proverbs, how many people would avoid so many heartaches in life? Once enlightened, sat in the congregation, tasted of the heavenly gift.

Some people think that has to do with the Lord's supper. I don't know. Maybe. The term tasted there is also used down below, tasting the good Word of God. So I don't know that it necessarily has anything to do with taking something in. But it might. But whatever it refers to, again, it is only within the Christian congregation. And when you are in the

Christian congregation you are around people who don't want to talk about evil things. They don't want to talk about what they did Saturday night out carousing in the world. They want to talk about what is good. They want to talk about what is righteous. And that provides a curb to you. They talk about heavenly things. We pray for what? The Spirit to be amongst us, to hear his Word. We have heard about the gift that God has given in his Son, the gift that God has given in the Holy Spirit. They have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit. Oh, well, that surely means that they are believers.

And yet, once again, if we asked the Spirit to come into this place and to quiet our hearts and to open our hearts and minds to his truth, these are individuals who have been blessed to be a part of the Christian congregation. They may well have experienced religious feelings. How can you not? How can you sit in the congregation during the Lord's supper and not have religious feelings? How can you observe the baptism of individuals and hear about their testimonies and their lives and not have deep feelings about this? Maybe you have experienced conviction. You might have even experienced moral reformation. I can't come to church and having done the things I normally have done during the course of the week and so there is a moral reformation and they have tasted of the good Word of God.

You know, that man up there, he says a lot of things and they help me. They are meaningful to me.

There are a lot of benefits that come from being under the preaching of the Word of God. There is even the power of the age to come.

You have heard people talk about how God has sustained them through incredible tragedy and incredible ordeals. And you have thought, oh, my, listen to that. There was something that attracted these people to the Christian congregation. And they were not saying that these things didn't exist. They believe in the Spirit of God and that God has spoken and all of these things. They believe that men can be enlightened. All the Jews believed those things, at least those who accepted the Scripture. But they had come into the Christian congregation. What does it mean that they fell away?

Well, I believe that this is the specific act of apostasy, the specific act that is in view, not only here, but it is the same thing that John talks about. And I know we are getting close to noon, but just hold on to your seats a second.

1 John chapter five John talks about this sin. He has talked about it a number of times throughout the text of Scripture, but he has talked about those who deny that Jesus is the son of God. They do not have eternal life. They make him a liar verse 10 says. If you don't have the Son you do not have life, verse 12 tells us. And in verse 16 we read, "If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death he shall ask and God will give him life, for those who commit sin that leads to death. There is a sin leading to death. I do not say he should make request for this."

It is pretty hard to make heads or tails of that unless what he is talking about is the specific sin of apostasy, the denial of Jesus Christ, having confessed him and then denying him.

That is exactly what is going on here and we can tell that because it says we cannot bring them to repentance against seeing they ἀναστρωσω (an-as-tow-ro'-o) they crucify Jesus a second time. They had made profession of faith. As far as anybody could tell from the outside, they were part of the congregation. But what were they really?

We will see—this is not meant to be an advertising thing to get you to come back tonight, though if you are a member of this church I just remind you that outside of providential hindrance this is where you should be this evening. I want to look at the rest of the text this evening and make application.

Paul... Paul, a little Freudian slip there, but I don't think that necessarily it was Paul, but whoever wrote this is going to say, "We are convinced of better things, brethren, things which accompany salvation."

How do you understand that? If these are the marks of salvation then verse nine makes no sense. But once we see, once again, that this is an exhortation to a gathered body and I can't see your heart. I wish I could. It would make things a lot easier. But I can't see your heart. And so in addressing that body of believers, enlightened, tasted of the heavenly gift, tasted the good Word of God and partakes of the Holy Spirit, powers of the age to come, you sit in the Christian congregation and you are blessed to be here. But the worst place to go to hell from is the pews of a good solid church, because at least the Pagan is going to go, "I didn't know." The person who has sat under the ministry of the Word of God, seen the Spirit move changing hearts and lives and then turns around and says, "Nah, not for me." What a tremendous burden to bear.

Remember this when we get to Hebrews chapter 10, because we are going to hear it again. The warning is: Great blessings in the congregation, but that is not enough, because, you see, the rain it falls on the ground. Some ground brings forth fruit and some ground brings forth thistles. Wasn't that Jesus' parable as well? It is not enough to just hear these things. It is not enough to just hang around Christians? The person who apostatizes in the midst of this cannot be renewed to repentance.

What does that mean? Heavy words, which we will delve into next time we look at this text this evening, Lord willing.

Let me make this application to us this morning. We have seen people who once sat in these pews that are not here. They have gone back to the world. And I could not sit here and look over the group and say, "Well, I think it is going to be you, you, you and you." I can't do that. I don't have that capacity. But I can tell you one thing. At some point in their life, they became dull of hearing, sluggish, apathetic. And what is the natural end result? You see, the natural man can act religious for quite some time as long as it is to

his benefit. But the natural man will not persevere in the things of God. Eventually their true nature will manifest themselves. It will happen.

When we gather here, my friends, we say this all the time, but I want to emphasize it again this morning. We claim to be about God's business. We claim to be handling the Word of God. We claim to be asking the very Holy Spirit of God who created all things to be in our midst. These are serious things. We as elders exhort you. Prepare yourselves to be here. Don't just stumble into the service. And if we really believe we are meeting with God, wouldn't we prepare ourselves? We would.

And so these are the exhortations of this write to people knowing that their very spiritual life is the focus of his exhortation. I don't want to be amongst these who crucify themselves the Son of God afresh. I don't want to be there. And so as you sit in the congregation as God's Word is proclaimed, as a believer, guard yourself against apathy. Guard yourself against sluggishness. But if you are here this morning and you have heard the Word of God preached to you over and over and over again, I ask you a simple question. If you have not bowed the knee to Jesus Christ as your Lord and your Master in repentance for your sin and faith toward him, why are you tempting God? You don't know what tomorrow is going to bring. You don't know that you are going to get your house this afternoon.

And I am not trying to scare you. That is a reality. Why are you tempting God?

Well, I am not ready.

God might be.

Today is the day of salvation. Don't keep putting it off. You are literally stealing from your Creator. You are assuming he is going to give you life till you can get to the point where you are comfortable and bowing the knee to Christ. If you have heard the truth, if you have been enlightened, do not sin against that light, for you have no promise that he will continue giving you that light. And if he takes it away, great will be the darkness that is yours.

If you have that light and you rejoice in that light, then great should be your rejoicing because you didn't deserve it and neither did I. He continues to give it to us out of love and mercy and grace to his own honor and glory.

Let's pray together.

*Our heavenly Father, we hear the weight of your words and, once again, we recognize that we deal with a holy God. You are a consuming fire. While we live in a world that doesn't care about these things, that takes spiritual truth so lightly, we look back and we know that that is not your way. Lord, I know that there are some within the sound of my voice right now who have been tempting you, borrowing life from your hand, acting as if eternity is not right around the corner. I pray, Father, by your Spirit that you will reign*

*in their insanity, that you will reveal to them their need, your holiness, their sin, your provision in Christ that you will break that pride of the heart and cause them to flee to the only one who can give eternal life. And, Father, for your children who sit in this congregation this day, who right now are confessing that sin of apathy, that sluggishness, of feeding richly at your table and yet not pressing on to maturity. Father, we pray that you will light that fire within us, that it will burn brightly as it once did and that in its light we will press on to maturity, to your honor and your glory. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.*