



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

You've Been Warned

Hebrews 6:1–12

Tim Badal | November 29, 2020



We're in a series we've entitled "Jesus: Greatest of All Time" and are working verse by verse through the book of Hebrews. Today we find ourselves in Hebrews 6, but before we go there, I want to bring

you in on a little bit of what I knew growing up as a kid. I knew when my parents were mad at me. It wasn't that they had to yell and scream. They did, but that's not how I knew. They didn't need to storm up and down the hallway, even though they did. The way I knew the level of trouble I was in came from the way they spoke my name. It was a one-alarm trouble for Tim when they would say, "Timothy!" I knew then I was in a little trouble—misdemeanor level trouble. It moved into greater trouble when I would hear them say, "Timothy Daniel!" A three-alarm fire in my life was when I heard "Timothy Daniel Badal!" Then I knew it was time to head out and join the circus when neither of my parents were able to remember my name. How many of you have been there?

What I learned about these warnings was that they always came from love. My parents were mad, but they loved me. Second, the warnings came out of their desire to protect me from things I should not be getting into. Third, these warnings were given for my good, even if it didn't feel like that at the time.

That's what warnings are for. They help us. Sometimes we are given warnings even before we've done something wrong. "Hey, beware of this. Be careful about that." Then there are warnings that happen in the middle of us doing something we shouldn't do. "Listen, in the heat of the moment, don't you dare..." —fill in the blank. Finally, there are warnings that come after the problem takes place. "If you think you can do that and not get in trouble, you've got another think coming." I never knew what the other "think coming" was, but I didn't like it.

All of us live in a world of warnings which leads us to today's text in Hebrews, where we'll see the author issuing a warning. In fact, we'll see five warnings in this book. A lot of people don't like the book of Hebrews because of these warnings. The author has been writing a long sermon to these first-century Hebrew Christians who had been walking with the Lord for some time. Then at some point in their walk with God, they had begun to be tempted to walk away from their faith and return to Judaism. The author employs a two-sided response to this problem, what we might call the "carrot and stick" approach. The carrot would be giving them something they like; the stick would be something they did not like.

Let's look at the carrot first. Through the proclamation of God's Word, the author is encouraging them to recall the excellencies of Christ. As we've been learning over the past few weeks, Jesus is the greatest of all time. He's essentially telling them, "Don't give up on your faith. You need to persevere in times of difficulty because Jesus is greater than the angels. He's greater than the prophets. He's greater than the patriarchs. He's greater than the Mosaic law you so admire. He's greater than the Sabbath you long to enter into."

He's essentially telling them that Jesus Christ is greater than everything taught in the Old Testament, so without Him they would be lost. If they gave up on Him, it would be the most foolish thing they could do. That was the carrot he was giving them. Jesus is so great, why would you ever want to give up on Him?

Then there's the stick—the warnings. The author is using these five warnings to call them to consider what it would mean if they walked away from Jesus Christ. These warnings become increasingly severe. If they still chose to wander from the truth, there would be no opportunity to repent and be restored.

The text we're looking at today has been dubbed by many theologians as the most difficult in all of Scripture to understand. There's a lot of disagreement about exactly what it means, so we need discernment. I need to add that the various positions taken on this passage are held by godly men and women who have good reasons for their views. But with every position there are issues along the way. So we need to be careful not to become too dogmatic in the way we understand these verses. Maybe you've already studied this text and have come to certain conclusions. I may not agree with you, but I will respect your views. We all share a desire to honor God and give Him glory for what He does.

Let's read the text, then I'll give you a thesis statement regarding where we're going, after which we'll walk through it step by step. Let's read Hebrews 6:1-12:

Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,² and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.³ And this we will do if God permits.⁴ For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit,⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come,⁶ and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.⁷ For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God.⁸ But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

⁹ Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation.¹⁰ For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do.¹¹ And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end,¹² so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

This passage can cause lots of problems.

So where are we going? Here's my thesis: This passage can cause lots of problems, but it should motivate us to pause, ponder and push us to maturity. It will get really easy to focus on the differences of opinions on this text, but I want you to know that the main thrust of this passage is to warn us to move on to godliness. No matter whether you're a follower of Jesus Christ or not today, this passage should serve to compel you to a deeper and more robust relationship with Him.

If you were to take 12 different commentaries on the book of Hebrews, there would be much agreement about what is being said in the first five chapters. But that would end in Hebrews 6:1-12, especially verses four through six. What makes this passage so difficult is the writing is hard to follow. We're not sure exactly who the author is talking about here. In verses one through three, we see the pronouns "us" and "we." He's talking to a group that he's a part of. He begins with "Let us..." Then in verses four through eight, the pronouns change from "us" and "we" to "those" and "them." He moves from talking about "us" to talking about "those people" and "them." Then in verses 9-12, the pronouns change to "you" and "your." Who's he talking about and who's supposed to be listening to these words? That's a problem.

Another problem is that if we take these words at face value, it seems the Bible is contradicting itself. It's saying that someone can be a follower of Jesus Christ and has experienced the goodness and grace of God in multiple ways. Yet if they turn away from this, they could lose their salvation. But there are plenty of other Scriptures that tell us when a believer is truly a follower of Jesus Christ, he is secure to the end and there's nothing that can separate him from the love of Christ that has been given to him. There's no amount of sin after redemption that can remove our salvation from us. Yet at face value, it sure sounds like this author is saying something else, contradicting Paul and Peter and other biblical writers.

While there are good reasons for each view, every view has holes in it. That's what makes this so difficult. Right when we go down a particular interpretive path, it may solve problems one and two, but then it doesn't resolve problems three and four. Or it may address problems three and four, but doesn't help with one and two. Each view has value and each view has weaknesses. So we

must be careful not to be too dogmatic. It's okay for us to disagree about how to interpret this. In any view, we can agree that this should serve as a warning to us that will lead us to a more robust relationship with Christ.

Let's look now at the two main positions. I won't spend a lot of time on this, because there are books written regarding the four views—yes, there are actually four major ways to interpret these verses. Go read about it, then you'll be the smartest person in your small group this week. They may not want you there, but you'll know the most.

View 1 – Rebellion that leads to a loss of salvation

So, could Hebrews 6 be speaking about a rebellion that leads to a loss of salvation? For those who hold to what theologians call a more Arminian perspective—which emphasizes man's ability to choose God in salvation—the response would be this. If I choose using my free will to follow God, then surely I can also choose to disown God by that same free will. This person believes the passage is talking about someone who decided to live for Christ for a season, but then at some point changes his mind.

In this understanding, the writer of Hebrews is indicating that a second repentance is not possible. This person would have lost their salvation. One of the challenges to this viewpoint is that the Arminian would say God would give the person another chance to change their mind and change their ways back to righteousness and holiness. So the question we must ask is this: is the person in this passage actually saved but then actually loses that salvation? I don't think that's the case.

View 2 – Rewards in the future of the believer

A more minority view might interpret the passage as referring only to the question of rewards for the believer. The writer is talking to a group of Christians and is saying there are two types of Christians. There are those who endure and are faithful to the end, then there are those Christians who do not persevere to the end. This view does not think salvation can be lost in either case. Rather, the reference is to the rewards that can be gained or lost depending on the Christian's faithfulness and obedience.

This view is supported by the example of the Israelites' experience in the wilderness. These people were still given support and provision from God, but they never were allowed to enter the Promised Land. Only Joshua and Caleb received this reward because of their faithfulness and perseverance.

They would view verse seven to also support the idea that this passage is referring to rewards. *"For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God."* This is a description of the group who are faithful to God, so when they die or when Christ returns, they are rewarded with the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Then for those who have not been faithful, verse eight gives this description: *"But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned."* They would point to the phrase, "near to being cursed" And say it does not actually mean cursed. On the day of judgment, there is an intermediary state where some receive blessings for their holiness, there are some who are sent to hell because of their sin, then there's this group who, because they never lived out their faith as they should, they will experience a loss of rewards at the judgment.

Some popular evangelical preachers suggest this could be a loss of participation in the Millennial Kingdom, which is the earthly reign of Christ. Or it could be the loss of authority and dominion in the new creation where we'll spend eternity. The problem here though is it seems to go against the larger picture of Scripture. Nowhere in Hebrews does it clearly say there are two classes of Christians—obedient ones and disobedient ones.

View 3 – Renouncing of cultural Christianity

The third interpretation, which is probably the most popular view, believes this is speaking about the renouncing of cultural Christianity. The thinking is that Hebrews was written to a body of believers, a church very much like ours. They're gathered together and the elder gets up to read this long letter from the author. It seems the writer is realizing that in a group this size, there will be some people who are walking with the Lord and others who are just going through the motions. He's pointing out that those latter individuals who are mingled with the believers are like the tares mixed in with the wheat, or the goats together with the sheep. Only God can sort the two groups accurately, although the individuals themselves may know if they're just going through the motions.

Cultural Christians are those who have been enlightened and have tasted God's goodness, but they are not authentically saved. This then is a warning to them that if they don't choose salvation, the very things that could save them will be kept from them. They will think, "I've been there and done that; there's nothing more to know about the gospel." If they are familiar with the gospel but don't embrace it, the writer is saying it's impossible for them to change.

This then is a warning specifically addressed to those in the assembly who act like they're Christians, who talk like they're Christians, but they know—and God knows—they're not true believers. Their hearts are not in it.

View 4 – Reinforcing a believer's security

The final view is that this passage is actually reinforcing the security of believers. This view, called the "hypothetical view," sees these verses as a warning of something that will never really happen. You might wonder what good that kind of warning would be. Parents, we use those warnings all the time: "If you don't do this..." "If I have to come in there, I'm going to wring your neck." Are you really going to wring your kids' necks? Some of you are thinking, "Yes." Let's be honest. To wring one's neck is to literally take their life from them. You're not going to do that. But you're giving them a stern warning to elicit obedience.

Even though what the writer says isn't going to happen, the very fear of this happening should be enough to scare someone straight. It's like this. "Brothers and sisters, you who are beloved, you have been walking with the Lord, but now are being tempted to walk away from the truth. Beware, because to go away from God—to apostatize, to give up on the faith—means there will be nothing left to bring you back." This should bring you to a place of great fear if you continue to walk away. That's not going to happen to true believers, because you're secure in the hands of almighty God. Rest secure as a follower of Jesus Christ, knowing that this could never come upon you. Can you see the value in this perspective?

With each interpretation, there are also problems. As a church, we will probably most resonate with the third and fourth views. I know some of you may be from other traditions and you might be at a different place—I respect that. But for the sake of moving forward, I want to navigate through views three and four. In a church this size, I believe there's value in realizing what is at stake.

What I mean is that some of you are here, but you're not here. Some of you are fellowshiping, but you're not fellowshiping. Some of you are participating, but you're not participating. There are some who appear to be enjoying this, but you're really not enjoying this. I want to challenge you that if you're not careful, you may find out in the worst possible time that you're on the wrong side of salvation.

Likewise, I want to affirm those of you who are walking with the Lord that, as you feast on the goodness of God, you can rest assured that these warnings are not going to apply to you. Once we are saved, we will endure to the end. I'm going to explain how. With all that said, what do I want you to walk away with? I'm going to go back to my thesis statement. This causes lots of problems as we've talked about. What this text really does is cause us to pause and ponder, then it pushes us on to maturity. That's what God wants us to learn through His Word.

This passage can motivate us to pause

Let's begin by taking a moment to pause and ask ourselves, "What is my status?" In verses one through three, the writer tells us to leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity. We need to be moving. This question is for everyone. Whether you're playing games or truly participating, are you in a relationship with Jesus Christ that's moving you from spiritual infancy to maturity? No one can answer that question except you.

Notice what the author lists in these verses. There are some who thought themselves to be believers because they had added a little Jesus to a bunch of other things. He mentions repentance from dead works, faith towards God and instructions on washings. He adds the laying on of hands, the resurrection from the dead and eternal judgment. These are all part of the Christian faith, but he reminds his audience that these are also part of the Jewish faith as well. These elementary things are the beliefs that are shared by both Judaism and Christianity. Judaism talks about repentance from dead works. Judaism talks about faith in God. Judaism talks about the laying on of hands and the washings, whether baptism or other ritual washings. Judaism talks about eternal life and the judgment that's going to come.

In other words, these individuals hadn't grown all that much from their former beliefs. They had just added a little Jesus to the mix. Be careful, church, that you don't just become inoculated with religion, but rather that you are involved in a relationship with Jesus

Christ. That's why the author is emphasizing that it's not about rituals or religion—it's about Jesus Who is the greatest of all time. Live for Him, love Him and make Him the most important thing in your life.

This passage can motivate us to ponder.

He then moves to some things we need to ponder. We need to ask ourselves, "What things prove my salvation?" We need to be careful about two things.

Don't be fooled – participation does not prove possession.

First, we need to not be fooled into thinking participation proves possession. It doesn't. In verses four through six, the author lists a number of experiences and then asks if they're true of his readers. All of them could have responded, "Yes. We're experiencing enlightenment. We're experiencing the sharing of the Holy Spirit." But that doesn't mean they actually possess a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Growing up in this church, I was part of the youth group. I will tell you one of the great heritages of Village Bible Church is that God has blessed this church with outstanding student ministries. For years, we have had a lot of pastors who have come and gone, but over our history we've had two great youth pastors and we should be very thankful for them. The tenure of a typical youth pastor is somewhere around 12-14 months. It's really quite amazing that our two youth pastors have spanned more than 15 years in each of their pastorates.

Being part of a great youth group with a great youth pastor, I have seen the reality that participation does not always mean possession. I am now 25 years beyond my high school days. As I look back, I see some of my peers have a healthy and vibrant relationship with Jesus Christ. Some of you are in this room right now. Some of them have gone on to other ministry and missionary endeavors. God has used our youth group days in awesome ways. As I look out, I see at least half, if not the majority, of people who were part of the same mission trips and Bible studies then are now not even in Jesus' area code. Yet we participated in the same things. We saw the same moving of the Spirit. We saw kids get saved. How could they not be possessing God? Some of them are actually opposed to the things of God.

Listen, participating in things isn't the same as possessing those things. Sadly, some of you who are here today will one day stand before God and you might say to Him, "I was part of Tim Badal's church and we did a lot of great things." Let me tell you, don't do that. Jesus will say to you, "Yeah, you participated, but you never possessed Me. You never made Me your all in all."

Brothers and sisters, I don't want to scare you into thinking you don't have salvation, but I want to challenge and warn you about this. You might be able to fake out everybody here, but you won't fake out the Spirit of almighty God. So be careful. Just because you're here doesn't mean you're here. Just because you're a part doesn't mean you're a part. Participation doesn't guarantee possession.

Being filled with these things provides us the power to endure.

Look again at the list in verses four through six. When we are filled with these things, they will provide us the power to endure. They can be used to make people think they're in when they're not in, but they also are what needs to be going on in our lives. Verses four through six make it clear that as our lives are enlightened and tasting and sharing in the Spirit in a sense that we actually own them, they give us the faith and endurance to persevere. Let's talk about these things.

To be enlightened by God's Word means to see its value and the value of God. Can you say this morning that this week you were enlightened by God's Word? Has it brought wisdom to every facet of your life? Can you say you've tasted the heavenly gift of God? People who hold position three would say that some individuals have nibbled a little bit, as if it was an appetizer, but then they gave it up. It's kind of what some of us do with sushi. Here's the problem with position three. If that's the way the text should be read, it goes against that word "tasted." The only other place this Greek word is used it speaks of Jesus when He "tasted" death for everyone. Did Jesus just nibble on death? Was it just sort of an appetizer for Him? No, He tasted all of death when He died on the cross. So the idea here is that we are able to consume all of the goodness of God.

The text goes on to say we've experienced the goodness of God's Word. This means we've seen God move through the stories we read about the men and women of faith. I have never stood before a giant and had to strike him down with a couple smooth stones and a slingshot, but I have seen God move when the different giants in my life have been brought low. I've seen Him provide for me, even though I've not seen manna come down from heaven. I've seen God show Himself faithful in similar ways to those in Scripture. So as you read the Bible, are you seeing God not just moving in the lives of others, but moving in your life as well?

Finally, are you sharing in the Spirit? Are you being filled with the Holy Spirit in such a way that He is leading and guiding you? This is what the author means when he says in verse seven that we are fertile land that produces much fruit because God has given us all we need for growth. It's not that we're doing anything for which we deserve praise; it's that we're receptive to the rain God gives which produces the fruit from the ground as God has cultivated it in our lives.

Christianity is a life filled with ups and downs. We sin and stumble and mess-up, but it's also a life that will produce good fruit. If you're not seeing fruit in your life, then the question is: are you a follower of Jesus Christ or are you simply participating? Have you possessed it?

This passage can motivate us to be pushed toward maturity.

Those to whom the author was writing who were true believers, who drank deeply of the things of God, were still struggling. But notice what he tells them in verses 9-12:

Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. For God is not so unjust as to overlook your work and the love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do. And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

The author is pushing those who are true believers toward maturity. We have identified that Jesus is the greatest of all time, that He has done all He has done for us and given all He's given us and that He has bought eternal life for us. So, the challenger here is that the only response for a true follower of His involves two things: to get going and to keep growing.

We need to get going.

In order to get going, we can't be sluggish. That word "sluggish" is the same word we discussed last week when it was translated "dull of hearing." We can't allow the distractions of life or other pursuits to keep us from moving ahead on the race marked before us.

We need to keep growing.

We also need to keep growing, leaving the elementary truths and going on to maturity. We see this in his illustration in verse seven: *"For the land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated..."* Why do we get going and keep growing? We're cultivating the ground so that when it rains, we are able to receive God's grace not only for today, but also for tomorrow. How many of us need grace for today and hope for tomorrow? We all do as followers of Christ. We need to cultivate the ground and allow the rain of the grace and mercy of God to rain down on us on a daily basis. As we do, we will have the assurance that we are secure in the hand of almighty God.

So let's take this warning seriously. Maybe you find yourself rebelling against God. Take warning to get right with Him before it's too late. Maybe you find yourself playing games with God. You're acting the part, but really you're not a follower of Jesus Christ. Take warning before it's too late. Maybe you're a follower of Jesus Christ but you're tempted to give up and give in. Take warning because the way of obedience is better than the way of disobedience. Do this before it's too late.

Whatever it is, God wants to warn us in this text that living for Him is better than living without Him. Amen? So take warning, get going and keep growing—for your good and for the glory of God.