

The Book of Hebrews

Lesson 6: The Danger of Falling Away; God's Sure Promise -- Hebrews 6:1-20

Imagine a farmer standing at the edge of two fields after a long season of rain. Both fields drank in the same showers. Both received the same sun, the same care, the same patient hope of the one who worked them. But one field is green and heavy with grain, and the other is a tangle of thorns and thistles, good for nothing but burning. Same rain, two harvests. The writer of Hebrews uses exactly this picture, and it is meant to make us examine our own soil. Land that drinks the rain and produces a useful crop receives God's blessing. Land that drinks the same rain and produces only thorns is near to being cursed.

This chapter contains one of the most sobering warnings in all of Scripture, and we must not rush past it or explain it away. The writer speaks of people who were once enlightened, who tasted the heavenly gift, who shared in the Holy Spirit, who tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and who then fell away. These are not descriptions of outsiders who never knew God. They are descriptions of people who were truly inside, who tasted real grace, and who turned their backs on it. The writer says it is impossible to restore them again to repentance, because they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and holding Him up to contempt.

It would be easy to read those words and sink into fear, and the writer knows it. So notice how tenderly he turns. Though we speak in this way, he says, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things, things that belong to salvation. He has seen their love and their service. He is not trying to crush them; he is trying to wake them, the way you would shout to someone walking toward a cliff in the fog. The warning is real precisely because he loves them and wants them safe. A warning is only cruel if there is no danger. This danger is real, and so this warning is mercy.

And then the chapter rises into one of the most comforting passages in the letter. God made a promise to Abraham, and because there was no one greater to swear by, He swore by Himself. God gave His word and His oath, two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, so that we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. This hope, he says, is a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, one that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf. So the chapter holds both truths in its two hands: take the danger seriously, and hold the anchor tightly. Keep going, because the One who promised cannot lie.

Group Discussion: The writer gives a severe warning about falling away and then immediately expresses confidence that his readers will press on to salvation. Why do you think Scripture pairs strong warnings with strong encouragement, and how are both meant to help us keep going?

Personal Reflection: The image of two fields drinking the same rain invites honest self-examination. When you consider the grace God has poured into your life, what kind of harvest is your soil producing right now?

Study Questions

1. In verses 1 through 3 the writer urges his readers to leave the elementary teachings and press on to maturity. What are the basics he lists, and what does it mean to move beyond them toward maturity without abandoning them?
2. The writer calls his readers to grow up and press on rather than stay forever on the foundations. What is one foundational truth you have known for years that you sense God wants to deepen into maturity in your actual life, not just your knowledge?
3. In verses 7 and 8 the writer pictures two fields that drink the same rain, one producing a useful crop and one producing thorns. What does this image teach about how people can receive the same grace from God and yet end very differently?
4. The two fields received identical rain but produced opposite harvests. What is the rain God has poured into your life, and what would it look like this week to turn that grace into a useful crop rather than letting it go to thorns?
5. Verses 9 and 10 show the writer's confidence that his readers belong to salvation, because God is not unjust to forget their work and the love they have shown. How does this passage hold together a severe warning and genuine assurance, and what does that teach us about both?
6. The writer commends his readers for serving the saints and encourages them not to grow sluggish but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. Where are you tempted to grow sluggish or weary in doing good, and what would help you keep going?
7. In verses 13 through 18 the writer points to God's promise and oath to Abraham, two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie. What does this teach about the certainty of God's promises and the foundation of our hope?
8. Verse 19 calls this hope a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul. When the storms of life are tossing you, what does it mean practically to drop the anchor of hope into the promises of God rather than into your circumstances?
9. In verses 4 through 6 the writer warns that those who were once enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, shared in the Holy Spirit, and then fell away cannot easily be restored. Some teach that a truly saved person can never be lost. Using this passage, how would you explain the seriousness of falling away, who is being described, and how this warning fits with the assurance and hope the rest of the chapter offers?
10. Look back across the whole chapter. The writer wants you both to take the danger of falling away seriously and to hold fast to the unshakable hope anchored in Christ. Name one specific way you will guard against drifting and one specific way you will lay hold of the hope set before you this week.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Genesis 22:15–18, God’s promise to Abraham confirmed by an oath; Matthew 13:18–23, the parable of the soils and the different responses to the same word; 2 Peter 2:20–22, those who escape corruption and become entangled again; Hebrews 10:23, holding fast the confession of our hope without wavering; Colossians 1:21–23, reconciled to God if indeed you continue in the faith.