



Hebrew's Warnings

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Hebrews Warnings

Lesson One

Introduction

As Christians we have one of two options. We can go forward or backward in our salvation.

Many Christians are deceived believing that they can get into some stationary state called “saved” and stay there until they die or Jesus comes.

That language creates a completely wrong idea suggesting salvation is a static condition. Salvation is a process, it implies growth, development and movement. Paul puts it like this, ***“For in him we live and move and have our being”***. Acts 17:28.

The author of Proverbs writes, ***“The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn shining ever brighter till the full light of day.”*** Proverbs 4:18.

Righteousness is not a place it’s a path suggesting progress and movement. The light on your path gets brighter and brighter every day until you reach your goal.

Every day we crave more light more revelation of God.

The faith that we have not only keeps us, but causes us to move forward in God. Constantly we must be on our guard against the devil (the deceiver) who wants to lead us astray.

“I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.” 2 Corinthians 11: 2-3.

“But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.” But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.” Hebrews 10: 38-39.

We can be his righteous ones who live by faith and then draw back. We are warned, God is not pleased with us.

Through the Book of Hebrews there are five warnings. They reveal Satan’s schemes to outwit us and hold us back from forward movement.

Can we lose our salvation?

Are we saved no matter what we do? In our Christian lives we must be careful not to live in the extremes. Some Christians live their lives believing God’s grace is such that they can live just how they please and there are no consequences. At the other extreme some are so frightened they believe every slip will be judged harshly by God and so live legalistic lives in fear of God.

Five questions to assure us of our salvation

- 1) Can I honestly confess that Jesus Christ is my Lord?
- 2) Do I always want to obey Christ even though sometimes I fail?
- 3) Am I disappointed in myself when I sin?
- 4) Do I keep myself from the devil i.e. avoid certain places and people?
- 5) Do I love other Christians even though I find them difficult at times?

Three verses that assure us of our salvation

1. We are chosen by God.
“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.” Ephesians 1:4.
2. Our salvation is not based on works but grace.
“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no-one can boast.” Ephesians 2:8-9.
3. Christ has the power to keep us saved.
“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.” John 6:39.

Overview of the five warnings

1. ***Hebrews 2: 1-4.*** Drifting from the word. ***“We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we don’t drift away.”***
2. ***Hebrews 3:7 - 4:13.*** Doubting the word. ***“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”***
3. ***Hebrews 5:11 - 6:20.*** Dullness towards the word ***.....you are slow to learnwho by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.***
4. ***Hebrews 10:26-29.*** Despising the word. ***“If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth”***
5. ***Hebrews 12: 14-29.*** Defying the word. ***“See to it you do not refuse him who spoke.”***

What do the five warnings teach us?

1. There will be dire results if we ignore them

The warnings are against believers who might drift away from Christ and not enjoy the full working out of their salvation. They are justified (in Christ), and will be glorified (live with Christ in eternity) but they are not being sanctified (focusing on Christ so they are made holy).

2. God is a caring Father who wants the best for his children

The Bible is a pastoral book. The Bible is a parental book. Parents love and encourage their children. But there are times when they must warn them of impending dangers. Both are needed for different times in their development. In this way, Scripture is both affirming and warning.

Warning. ***“If you do not persevere, you will lose out.”***

Promising ***“Christ gives you the power to persevere.”***

3. The Father constantly encourages us in our relationship with his Son

The warning is to those who make little of Christ, and the promise to those who make much of Christ. In both cases, the exaltation of Christ is the principle concern. The practical lesson of these warnings is to make much of Christ always. Ignoring Christ is the singular work of a Christian’s “falling away.” Falling away from Christ in this world will affect our relationship with him in the next.

4. God will discipline those he loves

God knows our eternal destiny depends upon our obedience to his word. His love is so great towards us he will not cease in discipling us.

Hebrews 12: 4-6 “In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.”

5. It might cost us our life but we will not lose our salvation

Just as a coach might remove a penalised player from the game to safeguard his team from permanently losing a player. God is at liberty to remove any of his children if their continued activity is detrimental to the church.

Acts 5: 3-5. “Then Peter said, Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to man but to God.” When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died.”

6. God the Father is patient and long-suffering

The admonitions of God become stronger as we progress through the book of Hebrews indicating the Father’s tolerance and patience with his children. It is always far better to respond to God’s warnings at the early stages.

Lesson Two

Warning to pay attention

“We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.” Hebrews 2: 1-4.

1) We must pay attention, this includes all of us teachers and pupils alike. God speaks to us by none less than his own Son therefore we should pay careful attention. ***“In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.” Hebrews 1:2.***

2) We must pay more careful attention, the longer we have been a Christian the more complacent we can be. We have settled for the basics and do not want to go further. If we don't go forward we will go back, there is no standing still. We will lose the ground once won.

3) The danger in all these warnings is not in 'rejecting' our salvation but in 'neglecting' our salvation.

When we neglect the exhortations of what God's word tells us to do we start to drift.

The nature of drifting is you do not realise you have moved.

4) In the Old Testament the people of God were chastened i.e. subdued, restrained, disciplined, or punished when they violated the message spoken by angels - how will we escape if we violate the message given by Jesus.

But Moses said, “Why are you disobeying the Lord's command? This will not succeed. Do not go up, because the Lord is not with you. You will be defeated by your enemies, for the Amalekites and Canaanites will face you there. Because you have turned away from the Lord, he will not be with you and you will fall by the sword.

God instructed his people to go into the promised land. They grumbled and refused to obey. The result was they journeyed in a wilderness for 38 years and died there.

Neglecting God's word will expose us to Satan's attack on our lives. Neglecting God's word will result in a wilderness experience.

5) Verse two speaks of “violation” and “disobedience”.

To knowingly break God's word is a violation
To unknowingly ignore God's word is disobedience

We have little or no excuse for not knowing God's word.

6) God confirms or testifies to his word with signs and wonders.

When God speaks either through his written word or directly into your spirit and you believe him and act upon it you will see the miracles of God.

What is it we have a danger of drifting away from?

- The message that was preached to the first generation of Christians was "such a great salvation." The recipients of this letter were probably second generation Christians and already it was losing some of its greatness.
- My fear is that a great part of the church in the west today has not heard all about our 'great salvation'. Much of it has been so diluted it lacks its initial power.
- We have heard about how to get saved and little more. We have little appetite for the 'great salvation' we settle for salvation and not the life of Christ.

This great salvation claims our entire devotion

Only an insight into its abundant glory and surpassing greatness will compel men and women to willingly and joyfully give up all and buy "the pearl of great price."

It comes through a triune God - a Holy Trinity.

"Which was first announced by the Lord."

"God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles."

"The gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will."

God came to us. To neglect God's word is nothing less than despising God himself.

We neglect the gospel at our peril as believers.

What should we do?

- We should be hungry to discover more truth that liberates us and gives us a better understanding of the God we love.
- We must study to become experts in correctly handling the word of truth and we must always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks us to give the reason for the hope that we have. (2 Timothy 2:15 and 1 Peter 3: 15).
- Each one of us ought to be teachers able to explain to another the elementary truths of God's word. (Hebrews 5:12).

The church in the west has more teaching material and time to study than any previous generations. Sadly we have more materialism and pressure in our lives than any previous generations. We must redeem the time and organise the priorities in our life if we are to heed these warnings.

Lesson Three

Warning against unbelief

The author of Hebrews and its intended audience is unknown. Nevertheless, the book does give some information about its first readers. They had heard the gospel through contemporaries of Jesus. ***“This salvation which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.” Hebrews 2:3,*** and their conversion had brought on physical persecution. ***“Remember those early days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated.” Hebrews 10: 32-33.*** One fact leaps out: their spiritual state greatly distressed the author.

The background to warning against unbelief

Reminding the audience of what happened 2000 years previous when their ancestors refused to believe what God had said it was not a question of not hearing but not believing.

Moses led God’s people from captivity in Egypt across the Red Sea to the border of the Promised Land.

God clearly spoke to Moses. ***“Go up and take possession of it as the Lord; the God of your fathers, told you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”***

Take note: Fear and discouragement can derail your Christian life, don’t let it.

Prior to entering the Promised Land Moses sent in 12 spies as directed by the Lord. Two, Caleb and Joshua brought back a positive report and encouraged the people to go forward. Ten were fearful and they persuaded the people not to trust God.

- In not going in - they knew nothing of the joy of victory over their enemies.
- In not going in - they knew nothing of living a life of faith.
- In not going in - they knew nothing of God’s deliverance.
- In not going in - they knew nothing of the love of God.
- In not going in - they knew nothing of the peace of God.
- In not going in - they knew nothing of the dwelling place of God.

Their lives amounted to NOTHING

Even as Christians our lives can amount to NOTHING

Wandering for 40 years without purpose or direction.

With this background understanding let's read God's warnings to pay attention.

Hebrews 3:7 - 4:13.

So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did. That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, 'Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.' So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'"

See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end of the confidence we had at first. As has just been said:

**"Today if you hear his voice
do not harden your hearts
as you did in the rebellion."**

Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said.

**"So I declared on oath in my anger,
'They shall never enter my rest.'"**

And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world. For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: "And on the seventh day God rested from all his work." And again in the passage above he says, "They shall never enter my rest." It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before:

**"Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts."**

For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no-one will fall by following their example of disobedience.

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Note how many times the word 'today' and 'rest' are repeated.

When God speaks by his Holy Spirit listen

Hebrews 3:7 "So, as the Holy Spirit says:"

It is the Holy Spirit who has always conveyed the word of God into the hearts of his people.

We need tender and submitted hearts to hear the Holy Spirit.

As we read the Scriptures, or the Holy Spirit speaks directly to us or we hear through a third person as is says in ***Hebrews 3:7: "if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts"*** and again in ***Hebrews 3:12: "See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God."***

The result will always be a wilderness experience.

When God speaks do not delay

The word 'today' is used 5 times in this warning.

When God speaks act on it 'today'.

Hebrews 3:15: "As it has just been said: "Today, if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion."

Satan's favourite word is 'tomorrow'. The word 'today' puts you under obligation.

There is nothing that will harden your heart more than 'delay'.

Today God is calling you to complete submission, complete trust, today he is calling you into the land of promise where we cease from our effort and trust God.

Entering into God's rest

In this warning 'the promise land' is called 'my rest', 'his rest', and 'a Sabbath rest'.

The 'rest' that God is calling us to is not a life of inactivity, on the contrary it is a life of battling and activity.

By disobeying God's word God's people found themselves in the wilderness a place of inactivity but not at rest with God. Later when they went into the Promised Land entering into God's rest there were armies to defeat and cities to conquer.

The Israelites did not choose the wilderness they rejected the Promised Land, it was the result of their unbelief.

When we reject what God says it will always result in an empty, meaningless life.

God will always care for his children

Despite Israel's disobedience God made every provision for his people in the wilderness.

A loving father will never reject his children how much more will God never reject his children.

But, and there is a big but:

- they never lived by faith God provided all that they needed.
- they never knew a father's true affection because he was angry with them for 40 years.
- their lives lacked vision, there was no heavenly city for them to journey to.
- there was no opportunity to grow because there was no enemy to defeat, no giants to slaughter and no cities to take.

There was one thing they did excel in, that was grumbling and complaining.

A New Testament example of the very same thing

Jesus like Moses is a deliverer who takes Gods people into the Promised Land i.e. into God's rest.

Jesus never calls anybody into a life of tranquility but of adventure and risk.

Somebody once said faith is spelt R I S K.

Mark 4: 35-41 gives us the account of Jesus inviting the apostles to accompany him to the other side of the lake.

On the crossing a furious squall came up. Literally a tempest, an earthquake.

To follow Jesus - to enter the Promised Land - to enter God's rest will probably mean battling with impossible situations.

When God calls go, to defy God, is to anger God.

What terrifying, impossible thing is God asking you to do?

"Call me Lord into the earthquake so I don't have to experience a faithless, purposeless wilderness experience, Amen."

Lesson Four

Warning against falling away

It might better be described as the warning against falling back like an athlete in a race.

The warning is for you to keep on making spiritual progress.

Jesus said: *He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.*” **Matthew 12:30.**

There is no neutral in God, salvation moves forward or back.

Hebrews 5:11 - 6:20.

We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And God permitting, we will do so.

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.

Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case - things that accompany salvation. God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no-one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, saying, “I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.” And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.

Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest for ever, in the order of Melchizedek.

Four marks of spiritual immaturity

- 1) “You are slow to learn.” You find spiritual things boring, you are not interested in knowing or understanding things that will help you make progress.
- 2) “You ought to be teachers.” You fail to learn a subject sufficiently that you are able to sit with another and teach it clearly.
- 3) “You need milk, not solid food.” You can only consume the milk of the gospel, teaching that has been broken down by others and then presented to you in a form that is easily digestible, easy to swallow and requiring little effort.
- 4) “You can’t take solid food.” You don’t want teaching that trains you to distinguish the sacred from the secular you want to be told what you can and cannot do.

Leaving the elementary teachings and going on to maturity

Elementary teachings are the foundational teachings the ABC of Christianity.

They are: Repentance from acts that lead to death i.e. useless rituals; faith in God; instructions in baptisms; the laying on of hands; the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgement.

Every Christian desiring to build a strong mature Christian life needs to lay a solid foundation.

Can a Christian lose his salvation?

There are many interpretations of Hebrews 6: 4-6. My research led me to 16 different viewpoints.

We will consider 3.

- 1) The writer warns of apostasy i.e. wilfully turning ones back on Jesus and returning to the old life - forfeiting salvation.
- 2) A person can think they are saved but they have only given mental ascent to the truth. From God’s perspective they were never saved so they will either fall away or discover their fate at the judgement.
- 3) It is impossible to loose your salvation. Neglecting it means you will not progress beyond the baby stage.

How can we be sure of our salvation.

1) We are chosen of God:

Ephesians 1:4. "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be old and blameless in his sight."

2) Our salvation is not based on works but grace:

Ephesians 2: 8-9. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is a gift of God - not by works, so that no-one can boast."

3) Christ has the power to keep us saved:

John 6:39. "And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day."

4) We keep pressing on making progress.

Hebrews 6:11. "We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure."

What does going onto maturity look like?

When God spoke to Abraham he swore he would give him many descendants.

Hebrews 6:14. "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants."

God wants to bless each one of us with many descendants.

God is saying "I want to reproduce myself in you. Then as I live through your yielded, obedient faith filled life you will be the dispenser of my life blessings to others. I will cause you to minister life to many."

Mature Christians produce descendants who look like Jesus.

God has sworn this on oath that he would do this.

Hebrews 6:17. "Because wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very dear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath."

Don't remain a baby Christian. Study, grow, progress. Let Christ form himself in you. Then you will have descendants, others who look to you, who see Christ in you and in turn Christ is formed in them because of you.

Lesson Five

Warning against deliberately keeping on sinning

The warnings get more severe

As we progress through these warnings we see them getting more severe. In the same way a parent might warn their child as he continues to resist verbal discipline.

“Pay attention, do not drift in your Christianity neglecting the things of God.”

“Do what I say or drifting will lead to unbelief.”

“Unless you do what I say I will have to take action, I will have to discipline your unbelief.”

“Now I must discipline you because falling away will lead to a life of deliberate sin.”

This fourth warning is a trumpet blast warning more terrible than anything we have yet heard. In the first three we hear warnings from God in the fourth God is taking action.

God’s fourth warning Hebrews 10: 26-39

“If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgement and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses, How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” and again, “The Lord will judge his people.” It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

“Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathised with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, “He who is coming will come and will now delay.

But my righteous one will live by faith.

And if he shrinks back,

I will not be pleased with him.”

But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.”

How does God interpret a life of continual deliberate sin

As in all the warnings God is not dealing with one particular act of sin but an attitude that leads to repeated disobedience. What does God think when he sees a child of his continually disobeying, going his own way? How does God interpret a life of continual deliberate sin? In this warning we see the three persons of the Godhead, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are all affected.

From the Father's perspective he sees the blood of his Son being trampled under foot. The Father sent his Son Jesus to stand in the pathway of sinners. He is pushed to one side and falls to the ground. He is then trampled by those rushing headlong into sin.

The Son who has given his blood to ratify the New Covenant sees it being poured away as an unholy thing. Just as water is poured into a basin for men to wash and then thrown away. The blood of Jesus has been poured out for the cleansing of sin but is being rejected by those who should know better,

The Holy Spirit is insulted as the door is slammed in his face as he comes in the Spirit of Grace to convince those of sin and lead them back to Jesus.

What can this person expect from God?

It would be wrong to water down the severe discipline that God expresses in this warning.

Hebrews 10:27. "But only a fearful expectation of judgement and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God."

These scriptures are written to Christians yet he calls us his enemy, how is this possible, how could a born again believer find himself in such a position?

Examples of sins power

In an earlier warning we have seen how the children of Israel angered God through unbelief in the wilderness and although they were saved by the blood of the lamb into the promised inheritance nearly all of them died in the wilderness. They never entered into their rest because of their disobedience.

Scripture points out that there are sins that lead to death. Although redeemed by Christ's blood there are sins that will open the door to Satan and his influence on the believers life that death takes him prematurely.

1 John 5:16. "If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life."

There are sins then that lead to death.

1 Corinthians 11: 28-30. *“A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognising the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgement on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick and a number of you have fallen asleep.*

Not recognising the body of believers is a sin that can lead to death.

Acts 5: 1-11 Ananias and Sapphira, his wife, agreed to lie and deceive. Satan filled their hearts and they gave way to lying, covetousness and deceitful spirits which were able to control them.

Acts 5: 5,10. *When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. At that moment she fell down at his feet and died.*

Maybe it was because of the damage they might do to Christ’s fledgling church. Maybe it was because of the influence they had over new converts to the church.

God does not always take the life of rebellious believers but he will always deal with them.

Hebrews 10: 30-31. *“For we know him who said, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” and again, “The Lord will judge his people.” “It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”*

Warnings from Israel’s history

1 Corinthians 10: 1-11:

“For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.

Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: “The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry.” We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did - and were killed by snakes. And do not grumble, as some of them did - and were killed by the destroying angel. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come.”

Paul doesn’t want us to be ignorant.

In God’s anger their bodies were scattered in the desert.

These things are an example to us not to set our hearts on evil.

I do not believe that the Lord’s discipline leads to a loss of salvation but it might lead to a loss of life.

It is important to remember that every Christian should obey God and please him at all times.

Dealing with sin is a requirement of the church but it must be done with tolerance and patience. Leading the offender through kindness towards God.

When David sinned committing adultery and murder. Nathan the prophet said to David: **2 Samuel 12:9.** *“Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.”*

God forgave David’s sin but he suffered the sad consequences for years after.

2 Samuel 12: 10-14. *“Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.” “This is what the Lord says: ‘Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.’” Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.” Nathan replied, “The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the Lord show utter contempt, the son born to you will die.”*

You say, “This is the Old Testament today we live under God’s grace.”

God has always been gracious - the law demanded David be put to death for murder - God let him live.

Living under the New Covenant we are still subject to blessings and curses. Christ became a curse for us and by appropriating his death as redemptive for the curses on our lives we can be delivered from their effect.

This warning is given to mature Christians who had in the past sacrificed so much for God but now found themselves rebelling against God. In the same way, David who had loved God and given up so much for him was now rebelling against God.

Hebrews 10: 32-34

- 1) You stood your ground in the face of suffering.
- 2) You were publicly exposed to insult and persecution.
- 3) You stood side by side with those ill treated.
- 4) You supported those in prison.
- 5) You joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property.

So: Do not throw away your confidence, it will be richly rewarded.
You need to persevere to receive what you have been promised.
It is not about how you started this life it is about how you finish it.

Never become complacent believing the years extend a liberty to sin. Keep your eyes on Christ the author and finisher of your faith.

Those who shrink back will not be lost but they will lose out on the sum total of all that God wanted them to receive.

Lesson Six

Warning against refusing God

In our study of God's warnings through the book of Hebrews we have had pointed out to us the danger of 'drifting' - not paying attention to our relationship with God. Then 'doubting' - slipping into unbelief. Thirdly being dull refusing to study and build a strong spiritual foundation into our lives. Fourthly 'despising God' - deliberately sinning. Which brings us to the fifth and final warning 'defying God' - refusing to obey God.

Hebrews 12: 14-29

“Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no-one will see the Lord. See to it that no-one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. See that no-one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Afterwards, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears.

You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, because they could not bear what was commanded: “If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned.” The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, “I am trembling with fear.”

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised. “Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.”

The words ‘once more’ indicate the removing of what can be shaken - that is, created things - so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our “God is a consuming fire.”

The goal of our Christian life

In the opening verse, 14, the goal of our Christian life is clearly stated. (1) to live at peace with all men. (2) to be holy. The promise is in pursuing these goals we will “see the Lord.”

The warning in this passage

There are two warnings in this passage of Scripture the first is found in verse 15 ***“See to it that no-one misses the grace of God.”*** And verse 25 ***“See to it you do not refuse him who speaks.”***

See to it no-one misses the grace of God

In our own strength we cannot live at peace with all men and we cannot be holy. It is only by availing ourselves of God's grace can we achieve these two goals.

If God were to ask you today, "Are you living at peace with all men and are you living a holy life?" What would your answer be? If your response is 'I'm doing my best.' Would that be a good enough answer?

God expects more from us than "our best", he expects us to avail ourselves of his grace and live like Jesus.

Missing God's grace

In this world we will have troubles. Because we love and follow Jesus the world will hate us. Without God's grace in our lives roots of bitterness will grow in us and we will become bitter people.

Esau rejected God's grace

Esau, Isaac's eldest son cared little for the things of God unlike his younger brother Jacob who esteemed God's blessings. As the older brother, his birthright entitled him to the leadership of the family and the judicial authority of his father.

Listen to Esau's blessing ***"Your dwelling will be away from the earth's riches, away from the dew of heaven above. You will live by the sword and you will serve your brother. But when you grow restless, you will throw his yoke from off your neck."***

Now compare this with Jacob's blessing. ***"May God give you of heaven's dew and of earth's richness - an abundance of grain and new wine. May nations serve you and people bow down to you. Be lord over your brother, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you, May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed."***

Esau despised what God was offering him. He rejected God's grace. A decent, likeable man but a worldly man.

Jacob on the other hand was a schemer and deceitful but Scripture tells us that God loved him.

Romans 9:13. Just as it is written: ***"Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."***

God loved Esau but he hated his attitude.

Warning. If we spurn God's grace in our lives to cause us to live at peace with all men and be holy - he hates that attitude, that sin, in us.

Mount Sinai

In this second example we read of how God's nation under Moses refused God's grace and defied his instruction.

God said to his people at Mount Sinai, clean and prepare yourselves outwardly. Then I will extend my grace to you so you can enter into my presence. My plan for you is that you will fully obey and keep my covenant, then out of all the nations in the world you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine you Israel will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

As they approach the mountain to enter into God's presence they were terrified and refused to go any further - they refused God's grace and defied him. God's desire for a kingdom of priests would be delayed until Jesus came and established a New Covenant with his Church.

Mount Zion

Just as Esau, the first son, was rejected because he refused God's grace so Israel God's first son was rejected. Jacob the second son who desired and accepted God's grace is a shadow of the Church, a people under God, who have accepted and not refused God's grace.

We have to be cleansed this time not outwardly but more importantly inwardly by Christ's blood.

He extends his grace to us and says:
Come and live with me in my presence.

Come and live with the joyful assembly of God's angels.

Come and live in the church with your brothers and sisters.

Come and be joined to the saints who have gone ahead of you.

Come to Christ the judge of all men.

Come to Jesus who sealed the New Covenant in his blood.

Come to Jesus whose blood cries out for mercy on your behalf.

A mercy that God will not deny you.

See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks

God's grace is freely available to us to enable us to live at peace with all men and be holy.

At Sinai their turning away from God's grace led them to a powerless life in the wilderness. A life characterised by grumbling and complaining.

Now God's Holy Spirit lives in us we have far less excuse.

The shaking of God

At Mount Sinai God shook the earth with terrifying consequences.

In coming to God he calls us up the mountain into his presence. As we ascend there will be a shaking in our lives. God will shake everything. He will shake all created things - things pertaining to this world and they will all fall away only what is of God will remain.

All that God will allow to remain in our lives are the things of his kingdom. He will come as a consuming fire burning out of our lives all that is not of him. And why will he do this? Because he wants the very best for us for all eternity.

Lesson Seven

Warning against missing the kingdom

Can my salvation be lost

As a true born again Christian will I enter heaven whatever I do in the future or is there some act or acts that I might do that will deny me my place there?

The problem with this subject is that there are many verses in the Bible which say once saved, salvation cannot be lost, whereas there are a similar number of verses which seem to say the opposite. Is it therefore possible to come to a definite conclusion on what the Bible is actually saying on this subject? I believe that it is possible and that the Bible actually teaches that once saved there is nothing a person can do to lose that salvation. Before looking into the various verses in the Bible on this subject it is necessary to consider two points.

1) The fact of salvation

Firstly salvation must be a fact. There must be some evidence of the Holy Spirit at work supernaturally following the initial prayer for salvation.

Receiving Jesus as Saviour requires a change of the will; no longer must things of this world, however innocent, dominate. From now on Jesus must be the Lord of your life. A typical prayer of commitment is as follows:

“Lord Jesus, I acknowledge that I am a sinner and have fallen short of your standard. I also realise that you died in my place at Calvary and I now willingly accept you as my Saviour and Lord and I am going to serve you as best I can from now on. Thank you for saving me and making me your child.”

A prayer like this, sincerely prayed, will make you a child of God and ensure your eventual place in heaven. However, such a prayer is just the start as God will want to change many things in your life as you live with him.

To enable you to change the Holy Spirit will come and live on the inside of you. As he starts his work in you, he will comfort, challenge and direct you. He will also give you an assurance of salvation.

If there is no evidence of change in your life or assurance of salvation something is wrong. A spiritual transaction has not taken place. Just believing in God or going to church is not in itself evidence because non-Christians claim to believe in God and go to church, the evidence has to be supernatural, personal and to be demonstrated.

2) There are two kinds of righteousness

The first kind of righteousness a new convert encounters is the righteousness that is gifted to him by God when he places his faith in Jesus Christ as personal Saviour. A holy God cannot fellowship with unrighteous man so he clothes him in garments of righteousness to enable an intimate, personal relationship. This is illustrated for us in

the parable of the prodigal where on his return to the father he is immediately received and given new garments, garments of righteousness.

1 Corinthians 1:30 “who has become for us wisdom from God - that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.”

Christ's righteousness, then, is given to all when they truly repent and turn to God. A Christian can then say “My life is hidden in Christ's life. Christ's living, doing, speaking, suffering and dying are mine as much as if I had lived, done, spoken, suffered and died as he did.

Just as a bridegroom possesses all that is his bride's and she all that is his - for the two have all things in common because they are one flesh - so Christ and the church are one spirit.

God the Father has granted to every believer everything that is necessary to partake in Christ's divine nature.

2 Peter 1: 3-4 “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

The second kind of righteousness the Christian begins to appreciate is different in that it is an outworked righteousness. He is not gifted this, it is the good that he does - the crucifying of the self life, the love of his neighbour and the fear of the Lord. It is the work of sanctification the evidence of salvation.

Philippians 2:12 “Therefore my dear friendscontinue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.”

Salvation past, present and future

We can consider salvation as an event in our past. There was a day, a specific time when we prayed the sinners prayer and received Christ into our lives via the Holy Spirit. A day is coming when we will step into the next world to spend eternity physically with Jesus, on that day we will be able to say “I'm saved” from a lost eternity.

Meanwhile day after day we are being saved. Not from death unto life for that is a past event but saved from ourselves, our old fallen nature that was at enmity with God. When the New Testament speaks of losing our salvation it is referring to losing our battle against sin and allowing it to have dominion over us.

This salvation can be lost, but, losing it, has no effect on our eternal destiny: it means that contact with God in this life is lost with all the disadvantages that this brings. It can be regained but only through repentance, turning back to God, and if appropriate, by putting matters right with other Christians.

Many verses in the Bible which seem to indicate that the new birth experience of salvation can be lost do in fact apply to the ongoing work of salvation (sanctification) and therefore have no effect at all on our final destiny.

Once saved, always saved

Before looking at verses which appear to indicate that salvation can be lost let us look at some of the verses which clearly state that this is not the case.

We have eternal life that cannot be taken away

1 John 10: 27-30. “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”

Jesus states in these verses that his sheep hear his voice, they have eternal life and that no one can snatch them out of his or the Father’s hand. It is difficult to see how these verses can mean anything other than once saved, always saved. There are no caveats stating that this only applies in certain circumstances, such as, if a holy life is lived. No a person needs simply to be one of his sheep, hearing his voice and salvation is a certainty and cannot be lost.

1 John 5: 11-15. “God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. This is the assurance we have in approaching God; that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us - whatever we ask - we know that we have what we asked for.”

The confidence in these verses arises from being certain of eternal life, which we have been given as a result of believing in the name of the Son of God, i.e. being born again. The teaching in these verses is very clear and, again it is difficult to see how a person can know that he has eternal life if this life can subsequently be lost through some future sin! At best he can only hope that he will eventually have eternal life.

Romans 6:23. “For the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Romans 11:29. “For God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable.”

Once a gift is given, God never withdraws it and this applies to the gift of eternal life.

These three examples have been quoted out of many verses in the Bible that could have been chosen all with the same theme that once salvation is embraced it cannot be lost.

Licence to do what you like

A difficulty with the once saved, always saved view is that some people may feel that this gives licence for doing what they like after being born again, including indulging in all sorts of sinful activities. This difficulty is countered when it is realised that such activity disqualifies that person from the blessings in this current life, including God’s provision and guidance. And if persisted with, it will bring God’s discipline and judgement in this life.

1 Peter 4:17. “For it is time for judgement to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God.”

But what about the many verses in the Bible that are often quoted and that seems to indicate that eternal life can be lost through some sinful act, many, many years after first becoming a Christian? We will look at a number of these in the following lesson.

Lesson Eight

Warning against abusing God's grace

In this lesson we shall look at a number of verses that are often quoted that seem to indicate that eternal life can be lost.

Those who renounce their unbelief

The first group of verses to be considered are those regarding apostasy (renunciation of a belief). In Hebrews 6:6 we read about believers who have mastered the elementary teachings about Christ but who have now fallen away.

Hebrews 6: 1-6. "Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity..... It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the power of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace."

Verse 4 states that in this case these people had not only been enlightened but had shared in the Holy Spirit (evidence of salvation) and verse 5 sets out the fact that they had actually tasted of the good things of God and had therefore started to walk in salvation. Clearly they were born again.

By verse 6 however things had changed. Despite God's blessings to them they had fallen away and we are told that they cannot be brought back to repentance. Note that verse 6 does not say that they will be eternally lost but that they cannot be brought back to repentance. Repentance is "a change of mind": these people are lost as far as God is concerned for this life but there is no mention that they are eternally lost - if they had been it is inconceivable that this would not have been mentioned.

Who are these people?

Let's note who these people are. They are not the normal backsliders who start turning from God in a small way and who, in the course of time, lose all connection with God and yet who probably still consider themselves Christians. These are people who say that they are no longer Christians, they disown Christ, they renounce their connection and allegiance to him: they crucify afresh the Son of God and subject him to public disgrace by denouncing the fact that they no longer consider themselves Christians.

And yet Hebrews 6:6 does not say that these people will be eternally lost, only that it is impossible to bring them back within the orbit of God's blessings for this life. Is God telling us not to waste our time with them trying to bring them back into a relationship with him?

Can God really be that merciful?

The carnal nature of man violently rebels, for it greatly delights in punishment in boasting of its own righteousness, and its neighbour's shame and embarrassment at his unrighteousness. Therefore it pleads its own case and it rejoices that this is better than its neighbours. But it opposes the case of its neighbour and wants it to appear nasty.

This perversity is wholly evil, contrary to love, which does not seek its own good, but that of others. It ought to be distressed that the condition of its neighbour is not better than its own. It ought to wish that its neighbour's condition were better than its own, and if its neighbour's condition is the better, it ought to rejoice no less than it rejoices when its own is better.

Is then it not permissible to punish evil men? Is it not proper to punish sin? Who is not obliged to defend the righteous? To do otherwise would give occasion for lawlessness.

An eye for an eye

Matthew 5: 38-41. *“You have heard that it was said, ‘eye for eye’ and ‘tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.*

The person who can do this is living like Christ. He is not looking for revenge or punishment. He is grieving more over the sin of his offender than over the loss or offence to himself. And he does this that he may recall those offenders from their sin rather than avenge the wrongs they themselves have suffered. Therefore they put off the form of their own righteousness and put on the form of those others, praying for their persecutors, blessing those who curse, doing good to evil-doers, prepared to pay the penalty and make satisfaction for their very enemies that they may be saved. This is the gospel and the example of Christ.

Matthew 5:44. *“But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.”*

If we are expected to treat those who despitefully use us in this way how much more our Saviour.

Those who abandon the faith

1 Timothy 4:1. *“The Spirit clearly says that in latter times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.*

1 Timothy 5:15. *“Some have already turned away to follow Satan.”*

2 Timothy 4: 3-4. *“For time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.”*

James 4:4. *“You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred towards God?”*

Is not one of these verses does the Bible mention that such backsliders lose salvation.

Those who corrupt others

Matthew 18:6. “If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

Even if a true Christian is involved, this verse does not actually state that such a person will be eternally lost, just that it would be better if that person was drowned, i.e. leave this world as there is no prospect of God’s blessing while still here and still acting in this way.

Those who continually deliberately sin

Hebrews 10: 26-29. “If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sin is left, but only the fearful expectation of judgement and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.”

We considered this group of believers in lesson five. We said that it would be wrong to water down the severe discipline that God expresses in this warning. God will discipline his children the way he sees fit. However, being in receipt of God’s vengeance does not mean a loss of salvation.

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