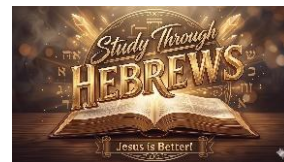




Better Things: The Warning of Falling Away and the Assurance of Grace (Hebrews 6:4-9) (Lesson #11)



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Before we step into the text of Hebrews 6 today, I want us to pause for a moment and look closely at one of the most infamous characters in all of Scripture.

Quick overhead, rhetorical question to start: ***How would you describe Judas spiritually?***

I believe the life of Judas gives us a sobering, necessary lens through which to understand the passage before us in Hebrews. Let's do a quick, laser-focused review of what the Bible tells us about Judas.

1. Judas was chosen among the Twelve

First, **Judas** was not an **outsider** or a casual onlooker; he was **explicitly called** by Jesus Himself:

12 In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. 13 And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles: 14 Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, 15 and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, 16 and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. (Luke 6:12–16, ESV)

2. Judas was given supernatural empowerment

Second, and perhaps even **more startling**, Judas was included among the disciples who received **direct, miraculous empowerment** for ministry:

1 And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction. 5 These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, 6 but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7 And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' 8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay. (Mat 10:1, 5-8, ESV)

Notice the sweeping scope of this commission: Jesus gave the Twelve authority over **unclean spirits**, authority to heal **every disease** and **every affliction**. They were commanded to **preach the gospel, heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and cast out demons**. **Judas was not an exception.**

Mark corroborates and further details this collective empowerment:

7 And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. 12 So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent. 13 And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them. (Mark 6:7, 12-13, ESV)

Judas was called just like Peter or Matthew. He was there for Jesus' entire three-and-a-half-year ministry. He witnessed the Sermon on the Mount, saw Jesus calm the storm on the Sea of Galilee, watched Him walk on water, and was present when He fed the 5,000 and the 4,000. He heard Jesus speak in parables to the crowds and listened to the private explanations given exclusively to the Twelve. He spent time with Jesus, dined with Jesus, belonged to the inner circle of disciples, and had his feet washed by Jesus. He was even at the table with the other eleven during the Last Supper.

When Jesus sent the apostles out to minister on their own, Judas was right there alongside them—and we have every reason to believe he was an active, functioning member of the group.

Do you see the depth of his involvement?

3. Jesus Was Never Fooled

Let's pause here so we remain **thoroughly anchored in Scripture**. While Judas is a **profound mystery** to you and me, he was **no mystery to our Savior**. Jesus knew **exactly who Judas was, what he was capable of, and what he would ultimately do**.

For the **sake of time**, consider just one of many examples recorded this one by John:

66 After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. 67 So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" 68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, 69 and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." 70 Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil." 71 He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray him. (John 6:66–71, ESV)

Judas **preached**. Judas **cast out demons**. Judas **called people to repentance**. God **used him to heal the sick**.

All of this brings us to an **inescapable—and perhaps unsettling—conclusion: A person can be deeply involved in kingdom work, active in ministry, viewed as a trusted partner, and even used by God in powerful, supernatural ways, and still not be saved!**

Some of you might be thinking: Rich, I am not sure I agree that God would use someone in a powerful way if they aren't actually saved.

Let me show you what Jesus Himself said on this matter during the **Sermon on the Mount**:

21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' 23 And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.' (Mat 7:21–23, ESV)

Look closely at how these people are described:

- **Prophesying in His name**
- **Casting out demons in His name**
- **Doing many mighty works in His name**

Jesus isn't just talking about Judas here. He is talking about **many** people—people who will stand on the Day of Judgment utterly shocked, protesting that there must be some terrible mistake. Jesus did not rebuke them and call them liars. Rather, Jesus said I never knew you.

I never knew you, the word translated knew is **γινώσκω (ginōskō)**. This Greek word speaks of an **intimate, relational, covenantal bond**. Jesus didn't lack information about them; He lacked a **saving, relational connection** with them, or better yet, they lacked a saving relationship with Him.

This means, that across the timeline of history, there are likely always individuals who are close, involved, engaged, busy, and even performing mighty works, yet **they never truly knew Jesus**.

WE SHOULD BE SHOCKED! These are not my words, they are our Lord's.

Spiritual heritage, religious association, and giftedness do not equal regeneration.

Important Conclusions to Carry into Hebrews 6:

1. **Proximity to Jesus is not salvation.** One can live near Christ, hear His sermons, and participate in His ministry without ever surrendering one's heart.
2. **Spiritual gifts and ministry results do not validate spiritual life.** Judas cast out demons, healed the sick, and preached the Gospel, yet was described by Christ as “*a devil*” (John 6:70) and “*the son of destruction*” (John 17:12).
3. **The “many” in Matthew 7** performed extraordinary religious feats in Jesus' name, yet hear the terrifying words from Jesus: “*I never knew you.*”
4. **God's redemptive plan cannot be thwarted.** The darkest betrayal in human history was sovereignly woven by God to accomplish the salvation of the world through the cross.
5. **Tares among the wheat, goats among the sheep, and the lost among the saved** (even within active ministry) do not overthrow God's ultimate kingdom purposes.

With that background let's head to Hebrews 6:

6:1-3 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.

Then the author writes this:

Vs 4-6 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.

As we **arrive at these verses**, let's be entirely honest: these are among the **most contested, least agreed upon, and consequently most misunderstood** verses in the entire New Testament.

The late Chuck Missler suggested that there are as many as **sixteen different interpretations of this passage**. Whether that exact number is right or not, the sheer variety of views proves just how **heavily debated these few verses are**.

I approach this text with a **deep sense of humility**. Recognizing that many godly, brilliant teachers land on different interpretations, this means I should hold my **view with conviction**, yet with the **humble awareness that I could potentially be wrong**.

One absolute rule must guide us here: **Wherever we land on the meaning of these verses, it cannot contradict the clear, overarching teachings contained in the rest of Scriptures.**

The text in Context: Last week at the start of our lesson, we saw the author's use of pronouns:

5:11-12 About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food,

Then as we finished last week we saw how they had shifted:

6:1 Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ... 3 And this we will do if God permits.

Then beginning in verse 4, he shifts again from us and we, to:

Vs 4-6 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.

We live in a day and age where **pronouns don't seem to mean much** to the culture at large—people feel free to pick and choose whatever pronouns they prefer.

But for us as serious students of Scriptures, **pronouns matter immensely.**

Why does the author open his warning with “**you, you, you,**” shift to “**us and we,**” and then suddenly transition to “**those, them, and they**” when he reaches these controversial verses?

At the very least, we must admit that the writer distances his immediate audience from this description—*unless* his audience chooses to place themselves into that category of “**them and they.**”

Do you see how important this grammatical pivot likely is? Armed with this critical contextual marker, let's begin walking step-by-step through the text itself.

Vs 4a For it is impossible...

Before we ask the **critical question**—*What specifically is the author saying is impossible?*—we have to answer a more immediate linguistic question: *What does the author actually mean by “impossible”?*

In everyday conversation, we throw that word around rather loosely. We say things like:

- “Losing twenty pounds is impossible.”
- “Staying up all night is impossible.”
- “Fasting for two days is impossible.”

But we don't actually mean impossible. **We mean improbable, doubtful, unlikely, really hard, or very difficult. So how does the writer of Hebrews use this word?**

First, the Greek word translated as “**impossible**” is (**adynatos**). It literally means something that is incapable of occurring, something that cannot be done, something that is strictly, truly impossible. It means “without power,” “impotent,” or “incapable of happening.”

The author of Hebrews uses this exact word several times throughout the letter. Let's look at how he applies it elsewhere:

18 so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. (Heb 6:18, ESV). (Is he saying improbable or impossible)?

4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. (Heb 10:4, ESV) (Is he saying improbable or impossible)?

6 And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. (Heb 11:6, ESV). (Is he saying improbable or impossible)?

So, when Hebrews 6:4 says, “**For it is impossible...**” we must take the author at his word. He is warning his readers of something that is truly, strictly impossible.

At this point, a natural objection arises: **Wait a minute—I thought with God all things are possible!**

Indeed, they are, unless they violate God’s holy character or unless God Himself declares something to be contrary to His moral order. So, what specifically is the author talking about that is impossible?

He outlines a specific group of people—characterized by five distinct descriptions which we will examine in a moment—who reach a terrifying spiritual threshold.

The author says essentially: It is impossible for people (like this) (who have experienced this)(who have been a part of this) (who fit into his description) a description which we will look at in a second. **It is impossible** for people who fall into those descriptions that he outlines, and then according to verse six:

Vs 6, if they fall away, to restore them again to repentance!

The text says that if people *like this* should fall away, **to restore them again to repentance is impossible!**

That should cause every single one of us to pause and reflect. It seems the author is saying that there are people who can place themselves into such a hardened, rebellious posture toward God that if they fully fall away, renewal becomes impossible!

Let's look closely at the mechanics of what the author describes: If they “fall away” the Greek word is **παράπιπτο (parapiptō)**. It is a **hapax legomenon**—a linguistic term meaning it is used only here in the entire New Testament.

This doesn't mean a simple stumble, slip, or temporary backsliding. It carries the idea of an **intentional, deliberate turning away or casting aside** the truth once embraced. It is the idea of willful apostasy.

If they should fall away, it is impossible to “restore” them again unto repentance. The word translated “**restore**” is also a **hapax legomenon**, but it seems to mean **restore**, or **renew**.

Then finally, If they should fall away, it is impossible to restore them again unto **repentance**.

Here we come to a very common word. The word translated repentance, is the Greek word: **metanoia**. This is a word we are very familiar with, this was one of the foundation words from last week:

1 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, (Heb 6:1, ESV)

At face value, this text presents a **sobering reality**: it seems to be saying there are individuals who experience deep spiritual privileges (which we will look at next) who, if they ultimately turn their backs on Christ, cross a line where bringing them back to a place of **metanoia**—true repentance—at least on the face, appears utterly impossible.

As a reminder, **repentance and faith** were the **first two pillars** of the Christian life we discussed last week.

Now, let's look at the actual **five attributes or characteristics** used to describe the people who stand in this **shocking place of danger** in verses 4 through 5.

4-5 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,

Let's first look at these **five characteristics** in **overview**, and then we will walk through each one of them individually:

- **First (vs 4):** They had once been enlightened.
- **Second (vs 4):** They had tasted of the heavenly gift.
- **Third (vs 4):** They had shared in the Holy Spirit.
- **Fourth (vs 5):** They had tasted the goodness of the word of God.
- **Fifth (vs 5):** They had tasted the powers of the age to come.

Now, before we go any further, before we pull this apart, let me ask you: **Would you describe Judas this way? What about those Jesus was referring to in Matthew 7:21–23?**

Walking Through the Five Descriptions

First, Verse 4: “They had once been enlightened”

In modern vernacular, we might say they had once “**seen the light**.” The concept of **Jesus as the light**, and of **humanity needing to see that light**, runs all through the Bible.

When Mary and Joseph brought infant Jesus to the temple, Simeon took the baby up in his arms and declared:

29 “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; 30 for my eyes have seen your salvation 31 that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.” (Luke 2:29–32, ESV)

Matthew described the ancient lands of Zebulun and Naphtali similarly:

15 “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— 16 the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.” (Mat 4:15–16, ESV)

The writer of Hebrews uses this exact same Greek word in Chapter 10:

32 But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, (Heb 10:32, ESV)

Paul also employs this language when writing to the Ephesians:

8 To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, (Eph 3:8–9, ESV)

To be “**enlightened**” (**phōtizō**) means to be illuminated through teaching—having your mind opened to intellectual or spiritual understanding.

It signifies a **profound brush** with the **light-giving claims** of the gospel, but it **does not automatically equate** to saving faith.

We see this word used in the Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament) in Judges 13:8:

8 And Manoah prayed to the Lord and said, “I pray, O Lord Adonai, the man of God whom you sent, may he come to me yet again to us, and instruct us what to do about the young child that is to be born.” (Jud 13:8, LES)

Here Manoah is asking the angel to *instruct* or teach them what to do with the child to be born.

Could “enlightened” be used to describe Judas. Could it be used to describe the people in Matthew 7?

Second, Verse 4: “They had tasted of the heavenly gift”

There are two critical parts here: “**tasted**” and “**heavenly gift**.”

Scholars debate the exact identity of the “**heavenly gift**”—some view it as the **Holy Spirit**, others as **salvation**, others as **Jesus Himself**, and some as a **spiritual experience**. At a minimum, it points to a profound spiritual encounter.

The verb for taste (**geuomai**) can mean to sample lightly, or it can mean to fully experience, eat, or consume. Context must decide the meaning.

34 they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. (Mat 27:34, ESV)

9 But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. (Heb 2:9, ESV)

Matthew 27:34 uses the word for Jesus **tasting** (then refusing to drink) the wine mixed with gall, while Hebrews 2:9 says Jesus **tasted** death for everyone (experiencing death's full reality).

Think of Jesus' parable of the sower:

18 “Hear then the parable of the sower: 19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. 20 As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, 21 yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. (Mat 13:18–21, ESV)

Here as you consider the stony or rocky ground hearer. They heard the word, they received it with joy, yet when tribulation or persecution came on account of the word, they fell away!

As you think about Judas, would it be fair to say he “tasted” the heavenly gift? What about the people listed in Matthew 7?

Third, Verse 4: “They had shared in the Holy Spirit”

Next, we are told that these individuals “**shared**” in the Holy Spirit.

The Greek word translated as share is **metochos**, which means to be a **partner**, a **participant**, or a **companion in something**. The writer of Hebrews uses this exact same word in chapter 1 when quoting Psalm 45:6-7:

8 But of the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. 9 You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions (*metochos*).” (Heb 1:8–9, ESV)

It speaks of **close association** and **involvement**.

But it is noteworthy that this phrase is used nowhere else in reference to the Spirit. Of all the ways the Holy Spirit’s relationship to believers is described, (I will provide a few), **indwelt, filled, sealed, led by, walking in, born of, baptized into, Spirit intercedes for, gifted by, or gives assurance**.

This is the only place “**shared**” in the Holy Spirit is used. **Why might that be?**

Could it be said of Judas that he was a companion/participant connected to the outward movement of the Holy Spirit? What about those in Matthew 7?

Fourth, Verse 5: “They had tasted the goodness of the word of God”

Once again, the author uses *geuomai* (“**tasted**” or “**experienced**”). It is striking how the **author carefully selects** terms that stop **just short of describing a deep, life-transforming, saving faith**.

Why not use language like Jeremiah:

16 Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O Lord, God of hosts. (Jer 15:16, ESV)

Instead, we see a **more detached participation**.

Could this superficial engagement with the goodness of the word of God be said of Judas or the crowd in Matthew 7?

Fifth, Verse 5: “They had tasted the powers of the age to come”

Though not explicitly repeated with a verb, it implies they also “**tasted**” the **miraculous, dynamic powers** of the **coming age**.

The author is a master of the Greek language. Why does the author keep using this careful terminology?

Why does he uses the phrases that are not used anywhere else to describe a saving relationship?

SO YOU KNOW: In the original text, the phrase translated as the “**powers of the age to come**” carries a sense of the present reality breaking in—the powers belonging to the new age of the Messiah that has already dawned. Think of all the miraculous signs that ushered in the ministry of Jesus and the apostles, marking these very “**last days**” mentioned in Hebrews 1:2.

Could it be said of Judas or the Matthew 7 crowd that they “tasted” the powers of the world to come?

Vs 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.

Some English translations insert the word “if” here (“*if they shall fall away*”). However, that word is **not** in the original Greek text.

The text reads *kai parapiptō*—literally, “**and having fallen away**.” It is stated **not** as a **hypothetical condition**, but as a **definite description** of what happens if someone from this highly privileged group turns their back.

As we noted earlier, *parapiptō* (“**fallen away**”) is a **hapax legomenon** (a word appearing only once in the entire New Testament). It is a totally different word from the one Jesus used when He told the disciples:

31 Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ (Mat 26:31, ESV)

The word Jesus used in Matthew, (*skandalizō*)—means to **stumble** a temporary tripping or stumbling.

Solomon expressed that idea like this:

16 for the righteous falls seven times and rises again, but the wicked stumble in times of calamity. (Pr 24:16, ESV)

But *parapiptō* is of an entirely different magnitude. We are not talking about a believer falling into a momentary sin, struggling with doubt, or stumbling into an incorrect belief.

The author is warning about a **willful abandonment**—a **calculated, deliberate turning away and walking out on Christ** entirely. This brings us face-to-face with the biblical concept of **apostasy**.

Now at this point you should be thinking, Rich how can you be so certain that the **word brings with it this idea of willful calculated turning**. Didn’t you just tell us it is a **hapax legomenon**?

Although this word is only used once in the Greek New Testament, it is used a **number of times** in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament):

*8 And I will grant the land to be a ruin because they committed apostasy, (*parapiptō*) says the Lord.” (Eze 15:8, LES).*

The writer is talking about a **willful, purposeful deliberate turning from Jesus**, and in the case of the Hebrews **back to the shadows of the Old Covenant**.

If those who have enjoyed all the incredible privileges and spiritual proximity described in verses 4 and 5 choose to completely walk away, the author states it is **impossible to renew them again to repentance**.

Why? Because repentance—the foundational first pillar of the Christian life—requires a posture of humility before the cross and after all they have learned and experienced about Jesus, they have rejected Him as the answer.

Consider two great examples (Judas and Peter). They both denied Jesus, yet Peter was restored, and Judas went off into perdition. **WHY?**

Peter repented and returned to the Lord. Judas regretted what he did, he grieved over what he did, he gave the money back, but he did not repent towards Jesus.

To turn your back on Jesus after experiencing so much of His light is, in effect, to do **two terrible things**:

1. **Crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm**: In their own minds and actions, they are siding with the crucifiers. By rejecting Christ after having tasted the truth, they are virtually declaring that **Jesus *deserved*** His shameful death on the cross, treating His sacrifice as a **fraud**.
2. **Holding him up to contempt**: This phrase translates another rare Greek term, which means to make a **public spectacle** or **public disgrace** of someone.

By publicly renouncing Christ and returning to Judaism or the world, they are treating **Jesus as a public criminal** who **deserved public humiliation**, holding Him up to **open ridicule** before a watching world.

This is not a light offense. It is a **heinous spiritual crime**: taking the immense light of the gospel, sampling its incredible benefits, and then **deliberately dragging Christ's name through the mud**.

APPLICATION: In our culture, people often drift away from the church quietly or casually. But the Bible warns us against a hardening of the heart that leads to a conscious, defiant rejection of Christ after having known the truth. Christianity is not a social club or an intellectual philosophy that we can try out and discard when it becomes difficult, costly or we lose interest.

When someone who has sat under deep biblical teaching, enjoyed Christian fellowship, and witnessed the power of God deliberately turns around and makes a mockery of Jesus, they anchor themselves in a place where their heart potentially, possibly, becomes impervious to repentance.

Vs 7-8 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.

Here, the author provides an **agricultural metaphor** to explain the behavior and ultimate destiny of the people described in the preceding verses.

God sends the rain (representing spiritual blessings, truth, and exposure to the Gospel), the land drinks it in, and a responsive heart should yield a harvest useful to the One who cultivates it. Rain that produces a proper crop results in a blessing from God.

However, if the exact same rain falls on the land, but the soil only brings forth thorns and thistles, that produce is worthless.

It is in danger of being cursed, and its end is to be burned—completely destroyed by the landowner. The unstated, yet obvious goal of cultivation is fruitfulness.

This land represents those mentioned in verses 4–6 who were given **immense spiritual advantages and privileges**. They should have produced a crop of **genuine faithfulness** and **good fruit**; instead, they produced **thorns and thistles, rendering themselves fit for judgment**.

This language clearly and purposely echoes Genesis 3:

17 And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in

pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; 18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. (Ge 3:17–18, ESV)

Vs 9 Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation.

After **delivering a stern and searching warning** about the **impossibility of restoration** for those **who fall away after experiencing profound spiritual privileges**, the author shifts tone dramatically.

“Though we speak in this way”—referring to the sobering picture of uncultivated land, thorns, and fiery destruction—***“yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things.”***

Whose case? The author looks directly at his audience and expresses confidence that to them belong **“better things.”** Better than the things he just expressed. Further, he calls them **“beloved”** an enduring familial term.

Now, he could have stopped there, but he adds weight to the statement: ***“things that belong to salvation.”***

Whatever we make of the **sobering description** in verses 4–8, we must hear the author’s own boundary marker: those negative traits do not belong to, nor are they a part of, **true salvation**.

While the **warning is real and urgent**, the author remains hopeful that the shoe does not fit his audience, though he is deeply concerned that some are dangerously close to drifting back to Judaism, dangerously close to turning their backs on Jesus.

The specific historical pressure on these Hebrew Christians was intense persecution from their fellow Jews. Going back to the Temple rituals, the Levitical priesthood, and the safety of traditional Judaism felt like an **escape hatch**, but the author treats it as a **catastrophic rejection of the finality of Christ**.

Miscellaneous Observations from the Text

First, as we look at verses 4-6 why does the author choose descriptions of participation in the gospel movement that are different from the standard language of conversion?

It appears he is describing a group of people who stood on the very fringes of the community of faith—who experienced phenomenal spiritual proximity, saw the light, tasted the atmosphere of the Spirit, and witnessed miracles—yet ultimately proved they had no deep roots. They were like Judas, or the people in Matthew 7, they were like the seeds that fell on the stony ground. **Close, but never been transformed by the gospel.**

Second, as we look at verses (4-6). I want to draw your attention to words the author does not use to describe the people or their relationship with God (words like): **Saints - Brothers and Sisters - Children of God - God’s Elect - Servants - Reborn or Born Again - Born of the Spirit – Beloved – Justified – Forgiven – Repentance – Faith – Love - Obedience - Belief or Believe - Elect or Chosen – Saved – or Salvation.**

But then after the metaphor of the land and rain we read:

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.

The author is clearly familiar with these words that the New Testament uses over and over that point to saving faith. Why does he not use any of these in verses 4-6 and then in verses 9-10 he uses four?

Third, I will not review it again here, but remember the pronouns and how they were used.

Fourth, the New Testament is replete with various statements that all allude to the fact that a believer cannot lose their salvation. I am going to provide you with a few (no particular order): John 5:24; John 6:39-40; John 10:27-29; Rom 8:1; Rom 8:28-30; Rom 8:38-39; 2 Cor 1:21-22; Eph 2:8-10; Phil 1:6; 2Tim 1:12; Heb 7:25; Heb 10:13; 1 John 5:13. We cannot forget about this foundational point.

We must conclude that the author is not teaching that people can lose their salvation, that a person who has been born again, can fully and with finality, reject Jesus.

We must remember that people can be close, near, associated with, and even participating in, but never bend the knee, never yield their heart to Jesus. But this is not just my belief, it is the consistent testimony of sacred scripture.

What is the Author Saying?

Having warned his readers that they are immature in their knowledge and thus their faith, having outlined the dangers of stalling in their faith and drifting away from Christ, the author issues a real, legitimate, and deeply concerning warning about how dangerous is it to live on the fringes.

He remains hopeful that this shoe does not fit any of his audience, though he is deeply concerned that it very well may.

He is concerned that some in his congregation may be like Judas, like the Matthew 7 people, or even like the stony ground hearers that Jesus spoke about.

For these Hebrew believers who have experienced Jesus like we see in verses 4-6, and then choose to turn from Him and back to Judaism—slinking back to the familiar, walking away from all they have seen and even been involved with—the author warns of two devastating outcomes:

- They are crucifying Jesus afresh.
- They are putting Jesus to public and open shame.

Having initially turned toward the only way of salvation, to now turn away leaves them nowhere else to turn.

I do wonder if John was writing about a similar group:

18 Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. 19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. (1 Jn 2:18–19, ESV)

They have seen the full scope of the truth and have rejected it; therefore, in that state, it is impossible for them to be restored to repentance. Because in the present tense, by their ongoing rejection of Jesus, they continue to crucify Him afresh and hold Him up to open public shame.

I know the pressing question: Rich, can these people be redeemed or are they eternally lost? Have they crossed a point of no return?

First, if someone completely rejects the finality of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice and returns to alternative systems (like returning to old covenant legalism), there is no other sacrifice left to appeal to—humanly speaking, there is no plan B.

Second, if someone is worried that they have committed this sin and deeply desires to return to Jesus, that very grief and desire for repentance is strong evidence that they have not fallen away in the sense described here. A truly hardened apostate is indifferent to God.