

Where we left off last week, we were reminded that while Jesus was on the earth He did it all perfectly. As such, He was appointed by God to be our great High Priest in the order of Melchizedek and “the” source of eternal salvation—a salvation that is to be experienced by every believer in our here and now. Let’s continue.

### ***Hebrews 5:11-14***

About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 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, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

I have to warn you this whole next part of the passage is as intense as what we studied in Chapter **3** and **4** in terms of the contrast that was made between those who lived in unbelief and refused to enter the Promised Land (which resulted in God promising in His wrath that they never will enter) and those who ultimately experienced the rest God had promised. In fact we will be pulling from these chapters throughout to make sure that we hold true to the context of the text.

The Spirit says: “About “this” we have much to say”—“this” being the reality that Jesus is our great High Priest in the order of Melchizedek and the source of eternal salvation. But these believers have already started to drift away from the

Word that was spoken over their lives and they have become dull of hearing. If you remember from **2:1-3** they were warned to pay much more closer attention to the Word that they have heard and not neglect the great salvation they have been given or else they will drift away as a natural consequence of their not betting their lives on that Word. And this makes total sense when you understand that faith is always active and never passive and that whatever is not of faith is sin (**Romans 14:23; James 4:1**).

The phrase they “have become dull in hearing” is in the perfect active indicative tense. This means that they made a decision in the past that impacts their now and there is no question about the certainty of the impact. In other words, they chose to neglect the Word of truth and their reality of their great salvation, and as an ongoing daily result they are unable to clearly hear the truth.

You see, at some point, because of the intensity of their suffering and persecution, they decided to let their own wisdom have a higher authority over their lives than the Word of God. As we studied in **Ephesians 4:17-19**, when we let anything else, especially the futility or worthlessness of our own wisdom, have a higher place in our lives than the Word of God we become darkened in our understanding of God, excluded (literally alienated) from the life of God, because of the hardness of our hearts. It is what happens.

Our hearts become hard, our ears clogged with wax, our heads all cloudy and we have such a hard time understanding God and how to be in relationship with Him. In fact, in those times a real relationship with God seems so impossible and faith unattainable. Again, it is what happens to us when we neglect the great salvation that has been given to us and give greater worth to other things. I know

that this is a hard truth, but nevertheless, it is the truth and we must not shy away from it; we must not neglect it; for the impact on our lives is undeniable.

By now these believers should be mature and leading others in the truth. They should be teaching others how to walk by faith in the Spirit of God but they can't. They cannot even handle the deeper things of God; rather, they are like babies who cannot seem to grow or mature; it's kind of freakish.

Many of you have experienced this. Even now you may have been coming to Pathway Fellowship or listening to the teachings for quite some time but you have drifted. The issue is not your knowledge of the Word but your willingness to make application of the Word to your life. You have presented yourself to your own wisdom, your own wants, your own desires, and have been unable to mature. Your head is in a cloud. Others talk to you about believing and you say, "I am not sure I know what you mean. Explain to me again how to do that?" Or "I don't know what to do, just tell me what to do."

The reality is that because of your unbelief you have quenched the work of the Spirit in your life and your *Old Sinful Nature* dominates you. It dominates your mind and infects all your thoughts; as a result, your attitudes and behavior just hurts people and you have no peace. Even if you want to love others and be an example for them you simply do not have access to the spiritual resources that you need because you have chosen to ignore the truth spoken over your life.

**5:12** says they need someone to teach them the basic principles of the oracles of God. That is because, when you neglect your great salvation and live not like a son of God but a son of man, the ugliness of your *Old Sinful Nature* wraps itself around your soul with terrifying results. You know what I mean.

To get out of it you have to go back to the very beginning and once again walk through all that hard, terrible, and horrific work of trying to rip your fleshy desires from your heart and mind. For those of you who have listened to the “How God Speaks Series” I used the metaphor of having to cut off the head of the snake (the head is where all the venom is) and work your way back through your thoughts, emotions, and fears and you have to keep working backwards until you can once again get some clarity about who Jesus really is and who you are to Jesus.

Sadly, in this place you need milk and you are not able to digest into your soul the depth and the layers of the Word of God. You are a child in the faith and despite your years and all your’ learning, you are still unskilled (or literally ignorant) in the word of righteousness.

Now I want to make one important clarification. Being “unskilled in the word of righteousness” does not mean that you don’t “know” the Word and cannot quote it to other people at the drop of a dime as if you are dispensing out aspirin to help cure their woes. What it means is that that you simply do not live the truth because you have departed and been unwilling to bet your life on the truth.

But solid food, the stuff we have been learning here week after week, is for the mature; it is for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. The stuff that God has given us to understand over the past 2.5 years has been amazing; but if you are not choosing to bet your life on this Word, if faith is not produced in the form of active belief, it’s as if you are a starving person who just lets the most amazing and delicious fruit fall from a tree and rot right in front of you. You have a banquet laid out for and you refuse to eat.

If this passage describes you, as it said in **2:1**, you are neglecting the Word; you are not **considering** Jesus (**3:1**); the good Word has not been united in you with faith (**4:1-2**); you have not held fast your assurance (**3:14**); you have not held fast to your confession (**4:14**); and you are a child (**5:14**).

But if you **consider** Jesus and choose to live in this great salvation you will grow in your maturity by training your senses to distinguish good from evil. This means that you daily connect with Jesus in such a way that you are able to discern when you are living in the Spirit from the ***New Creation*** (which is good) and when you are living from your *Old Sinful Nature* (which is evil). You are able to discern between that which draws you to Jesus and everything else which draws you away from total dependence upon Jesus.

Now learning those differences takes a lot of practice, especially when you consider how religious, deceitful, and self-righteous the *Old Sinful Nature* really is and how powerful both our emotions and the desires of our flesh can be. But a mature Christian constantly trains the body and the emotions to serve the Spirit and does not let them have a place of authority in their lives. Similar to Paul, the mature Christian trains like an athlete and disciplines the body and makes it their slave (**1 Corinthians 9:26**). The mature Christian lets the Word of God do its powerful work of dissection in their soul (**4:12-13**) so they can learn in the deepest recesses of their hearts why they can trust themselves to God and how to trust themselves to God.

Therefore, going back what we studied in Chapters **3** and **4**, today if you hear His voice, **do not** harden your hearts as in the day of the rebellion. Don't do it. Instead, be sure and practice, practice, practice so your powers of discernment

between good and evil will rise to the level of expert and you will know how to sustain a walk in the Spirit. In fact, it's time to leave behind all your childish ways (no matter how small or large they might be) and trust yourself completely to Jesus and His will for your life. Besides, when you should be mature and should be teaching others, acting like a child is a bit unbecoming.

***Hebrews 6:1-8***

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, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits. For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then fall away, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. 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. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

Now there are those who think that in this passage the Spirit suddenly changes direction and speaks to unbelieving Jews. Often they conclude this because of the severity of the language for on the surface it seems to speak of eternal judgment.

And while that conclusion may be possible, I personally do not believe that it fits the flow of the text and the overall context of what the Spirit has been saying from Chapters **1-5**. Rather, I think this very difficult passage is just a continuation of the message to believers to stop acting like a bunch of children and grow up.

Now, even though the Spirit can, if He wants, choose to change directions and address an entirely new topic and audience, such a thing would be a rare occurrence. And, just for the record, I am not opposed to someone making application of this passage to unbelievers; but I think that the best understanding of this passage flows from context and everything that the Spirit has been communicating in Chapters **1-5**. In fact, the “***therefore***” in **6:1** demands that we connect the line of thinking in this passage with what was being said to believers at the end of Chapter **5**.

Honestly, the language in this passage is not so scary following on the heels of what was said in Chapters **3** and **4**. In fact, I believe the Spirit just reiterates the same message using different metaphors to make the same point.

Well let’s dig into this text. You are going to need to be fully engaged with me to follow the message as this is not an easy passage. It has caused many people lots of problems throughout the years. I believe, however, that once we get through it the difficulty will melt away like wax to a flame.

Now, when we see a “therefore” we always need to ask what it is therefore. In this case, the Spirit wants us to follow with the line of thinking that says it is time for you to stop acting like children, it is time we grow up and move on to be mature men and women; the kind who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice of distinguishing good from evil.

It is time to leave behind the basic instruction about religious rituals and requirements. Sure, on the surface they may seem to make so much sense and be so holy and righteous, but they are worthless. It's time to move beyond the discussion about our need to repent from dead works and of faith toward God. Which by the way, if they were still unbelievers we would not move on from our discussion about repentance form dead works and faith toward God, or the resurrection from the dead, and eternal judgment for all of that is part and parcel of the gospel that they would need to ***first*** believe.

Then the author, by the Spirit says, "and this we will do if God permits." What is "this" that He will do? "This" is leaving the elementary doctrine of Christ and moving on to maturity. He wants to move on to the deeper truths associated with maturity for it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then fall away, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

Now, we will carefully unpack this. First of all, I believe we can conclude that the Spirit is still addressing believers because of the use of the words "enlightened," "tasted," "shared," and then again "tasted." "Enlightened" is in the aorist passive tense which means the sometime in the past the Spirit brought them illumination. "Tasted" is in the aorist tense and middle voice which means that in the past they chose to eat of the heavenly gift. This brings to mind the manna that the Jews ate in the wilderness, which as we know from ***John 6:32-40*** was a symbol of Jesus. So they have tasted of Christ.



They have also shared in the Holy Spirit. In the Greek, the word we have translated “*shared*” is a noun and not a verb. It is the same word “*metochous*” which is translated “partakers” in **3:1** and which was also used as a noun. So they are those who share and ***are*** partakers in the Spirit; which can only be by reason of their having the Spirit of God live in them in the ***New Creation***. I can’t see any other reason why it would be a noun and not a verb.

In the Greek it literally says they were made “partakers.” We have it translated “have shared.” However, “were made” is in the aorist passive tense which means that sometime in the past the Spirit caused them to become sharers or partakers. Clearly, the Spirit is not saying that they have just brushed up against the Spirit and seen Him in action like bystanders who have accidentally benefited from the works of God, as in the case of an unbeliever. But they are those who were made to be sharers; it is what they ***are*** and ***not*** what they have done!

They also have “tasted” the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the age to come. “Tasted” is in the aorist tense and middle voice; they ate. The word translated “tasted” is the same word used in **2:9** when it says that Jesus tasted death for everyone—which obviously is to be understood literally. Jesus really died and we are not to think that He just dipped His finger in and “tasted” death. In **1 Peter 2:3** this same word is used for those who are brand new babies in the Lord—born-again believers—who have tasted of the goodness of God and now need to drink the milk of the word of God.

So clearly, the normal way we use the word “*taste*” in our culture is not what is being communicated. We are to understand it more in the sense of having

acquired. So they have taken and eaten of the goodness of the Word of God. Like Jesus, they did not just dip their finger in for a “*taste*.”

Now this next one is cool. When it says they have tasted the powers of the age to come, “*to come*” is **not** in the future tense. The Spirit is not talking about their getting a peek of the future and the possibility of going to heaven, as in the case of an unbeliever who longs to know what will happen to them after they die. In addition, it’s not talking about the future when Jesus returns; which will be a time of great power. But “*to come*” is in the present active tense. So they are those who experience the powers of the age to come in their here and now. They experience eternity now which is exactly what Jesus addressed when He said: “He who believes in the Son has eternal life” (**John 3:36**).

So I believe that consistent with what we have studied from Chapters **1-5**, the Spirit is still addressing those who are saved and as a result experience some aspect of eternity in their here and now. Sure, they are clearly children who are suckling milk and are not yet eating meat and therefore are not able to enjoy all that comes along with this great salvation; but I believe they are saved.

This is why it is hard for me to conclude that is some clear jump where the Spirit suddenly addresses unbelievers as all those descriptions cannot really be applied to unbelievers. In addition, as I said before, the Spirit opened up this line of thought with the statement that He wanted to move on and no longer talk about the foundational truths like repentance from dead works, resurrection from the dead and eternal judgment which a religious Jew who was not born-again would obviously need to hear. Therefore, we cannot read into this passage the idea that unbelievers who hear the gospel and yet walk away have no chance of

being saved. In practice, it seems that most unbelievers need to hear the gospel and witness the works of God many times before they are willing to relent and surrender to Jesus.

So that leaves us with the unnerving truth that this passage is dealing with born-again believers. So here is the **big** question. What does it mean that it is impossible to restore again to repentance these individuals given the understanding that, if they then fall away, they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt?

In the context of our text, I think the Spirit is communicating that if they continue to drift away from the Word that has been spoken over their lives and neglect their great salvation, if they continue to harden their hearts and persist on returning to religion, if they continue to refuse to enter into the Promised Land and choose to wander in the wilderness of unbelief, if they continue to be mere babies and refuse to mature (which is all the things He has addressed in Chapters **2-5**), that they will inevitably reach a point where their falling away is so serious that they will not escape their just retribution—which is what the Spirit said in **2:3** and what I believe was practically explained in Chapters **3** and **4**.

In other word, they will reach a point where God will honor and respect their decision to not believe and He will swear in His wrath that they will not get to experience His promise of peace and rest; instead, they will wander in the wilderness of religion until they die.

In addition, as a not so little side note, if you are thinking about this passage in terms of “salvation,” and the possibility that a believer might not go to heaven,

you will find that this passage does not support this conclusion. In fact, it does not even address the issue of “salvation” in terms of going or not going to heaven.

If you are a believer who has fallen away, it is impossible, in the context of “salvation,” to “restore” or “renew” your repentance. You see, once you are saved and forgiven of your sins, you never have to be forgiven again. **1 John 1:9** makes that very clear. If we confess our sins and receive Christ, He will forgive us of all our sins. Now, the “forgive” is in the aorist active tense. This simply means that it is done—we are forgiven—and the impact to our lives of our forgiveness actively and continually applies in our now throughout the rest of our lives. So it is impossible to restore one who already shares in Christ to a place of repentance in terms of “salvation.” You can’t give someone what they already own.

This reminds me of another part of the exodus story which has been the theme of the last few chapters. In **Exodus 17**, shortly after leaving Egypt the Israelites were in the desert and had no water. Moses asked God what he should do and God told him to take His staff and strike the rock and that when He did water would flow and the people would be satisfied; which he did and they were.

Now, there are many types used in this passage. The rock, as we know from **1 Corinthians 10:4**, was a spiritual rock and we are told that the rock was Christ. The staff is symbolic of the cross. Jesus would be struck by the cross one time and as a result the Spirit (symbolized by the gushing water—see **John 7:38**) would be made available to all believers (who are symbolized by the Israelites—see **Galatians 6:16; Romans 9:6-9; and Philipians 3:3**).

Then in **Numbers 20**, we come across a similar situation. Still wandering in the desert they found themselves once again without water. Moses asked God what

He should do and God told Moses to speak to the rock that was following them (which is kind of creepy) and water would come forth. But Moses was so frustrated with the people's constant complaining that instead of speaking to the rock in anger he took his staff raised his hand and twice struck the rock; in so doing he violated the type or picture of Christ and the consequences were severe.

You see, Christ would only be crucified once and after that He would only need to be spoken to and a person would receive a present outpouring of the Holy Spirit. You cannot put Christ back on the cross and try and get a believer to once again get saved. It's like striking the rock again and again. In so doing you hold Christ up to contempt or public shame because you are saying that His perfect work on the cross was not all sufficient for all time.

When you do this you actually risk great personal harm. Now the Greek does not literally say "to their own harm" but it says "crucify to themselves," which implies this harm. For example, in Moses case He was not allowed to enter the Promised Land. He went through all those difficulties for all those years and yet He only got to look out on the land that flowed with milk and honey. He did not get to step one foot into God's promise of peace and rest. He did not get to taste one grape (***Deuteronomy 32:48-52***).

Moses even begged God and begged God to change His mind but God said, in no uncertain terms that He would not relent of His decision to permanently exclude Moses from the Promised Land (***Deuteronomy 3:21-27***). You see, it was impossible to restore Moses to that place of repentance or favor with God. He struck the rock instead of speaking to it and the personal consequences were

severe; Moses had failed to demonstrate the Lord's holiness to the people and so He was excluded from the Promised Land and did not inherit the promises.

So again, this passage is not about "salvation" in terms of getting it or losing it; rather, it is dealing with living out your salvation and experiencing the promises that Jesus said should be experienced by every believer; the promises which are only found in the Promised Land. Besides, this is exactly what it says in **6:12** which we will get to next week; the Spirit wants us to inherit the promises.

However, there seems to be some turning place where it is practically impossible to restore those who have made a firm decision to depart to a place of repentance because as He previously said, God swore in His wrath that they will not enter into His rest. That is why the Spirit said that today, while there still remains a chance to enter into the rest, before you get to the point of no return, do not harden your hearts. Don't go past that place where God will let you just remain in your departure, remain in your unbelief, and let your life just play out in the flesh (just the way you seem to want it) wandering in the wilderness of the religion. In other words, the Spirit is exhorting you to not put God in the position where He decides to completely honor your choice to not believe.

So what does it look like to "fall away?" First of all, I have to point out a couple of things. This word "fall away," "*parapipto*," is used only this one time in the New Testament. It is a serious word for sure, but the way it is translated is not right. In the Greek there is no "if" and this passage should actually be rendered in the past tense because like "enlightened," "tasted," and "shared," it is in the ***aorist*** active tense. In other words, they had fallen away sometime in the past and the effects were still haunting their daily lives.

From what I have been able to research, this idea of “if they fall” was added when the Greek was translated into Latin because the translators did not want it to seem as if this passage contradicts with the clear doctrine that teaches a believer cannot lose their salvation and the translator must have applied this passage to unbelievers. So for our purposes we will stick with the rendering, “have fallen away” especially since I think we have already shown that this passage is not talking about “salvation” in the sense of going to heaven but rather it deals with the issue of living out your “salvation.

I also want to note that “fall away” is different from the word “*apostasia*” (where we get our word apostasy) which literally means a renunciation of one’s faith, and from “*apostasion*” which literally means divorce. Both of these words have the idea in mind of a complete and permanent severing of a relationship. So I am reluctant to equate “fall away” with “apostasy” as some may do since we know that those who do not enter the Promised Land are still children of God.

I actually think “fall away” is more in line with the word departure used in **3:12** where the Spirit exhorted us “brethren” to not be like the Israelites having a worthless unbelieving heart departing from God. The word “*aphistemi*” translated “departing” literally means to remove, revolt or desert. It’s the same word Jesus uses in the parable of the sower and the seed when He says that the Word sometimes falls on rocky soil and never takes root and in the time of temptation those who heard the Word fall away or depart (**Luke 8:13**).

So although “fall away” is an intense word, in the context of our passage the Israelites who refused to enter into the Promised Land also had fallen away or departed since they lived in unbelief.

So let's summarize the two ideas that we have addressed. 1) It is impossible to renew to repentance (in the sense of salvation) someone who has been enlightened, tasted, and shared and has fallen away since they would be striking the rock once again and that is something that cannot be done. Believers need only speak to the rock. The same idea can be found when Jesus said that those who have been cleansed by the Word do not need to bathe their whole bodies for they are completely clean, but need only to rinse off their feet (*John 13:10*). In other words, no one has to worry about losing their salvation and having to get all clean once again.

2) It is impossible to renew to repentance someone who has been enlightened, tasted, and shared and has fallen away or departed since, like the Israelites whom He swore would not enter His rest, they have reached that point where God confirms and supports the decision they already made in the past to fall away or depart and not enter into the Promised Land. And their choice as a believer not only harms them, but it also shames the work of the cross holding it up to public contempt. Again, they are by implication saying that the cross is not enough for them to move forward onto maturity and they are too afraid to do the work that is required to possess the Promised Land. Thus, to others who are watching, such a decision makes it seem as if their great God is just too small to really save them.

Now, you may be thinking that although I have exhausted you with detail, you are not entirely convinced that this is not dealing with heaven and hell especially considering verses 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. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being



cursed, and its end is to be burned.” That sounds so ominous and seems to have overtones to eternal damnation. Well, it doesn’t.

This statement is not unlike what we studied in **John 15** about abiding in Christ. If you remember the context of that passage was that the only way you are able to bear the fruit that comes from God is if you continually and abide in the vine—or trust yourself wholeheartedly to Jesus by clinging to Him with everything and for everything. For if you don’t continually abide, you will have unproductive branches that bear no fruit and are good only to be cut off and burned in the fire. Even though fire is used as a metaphor, in context, **John 15** is talking about the quality of fruit that is produced from a believer’s life and not eternal condemnation.

Another example of this kind of burning language can be found in **1 Corinthians 3:12-15** where it says that all our works will be subject to the fires of judgment. Every man builds on the foundation of Christ with their choice of materials: wood, hay, or precious jewels; but only the precious jewels will survive the fires of judgment and follow you into eternity. Everything else will be burned away. This is another way of saying that all the fruit which derives from God (which is good) will follow you throughout eternity and all the fruit which derives from you and your *Old Sinful Nature* (which is evil) will just burn.

Thankfully, we are specifically told in **1 Corinthians 3:15** that the builder will suffer great loss even though the builders themselves will be saved. You see fire is necessary and it is a metaphor that describes the method through which the bride of Christ is cleansed and prepared for her great wedding day (**Revelation 11:18; 19:7, 21:2**). Therefore, just because the language in **6:7-8** uses fire it does not

mean the passage is about hell because we know the builders will be saved. Therefore, with regard to believers, the metaphor of fire speaks to cleansing and purification.

I believe **6:7-8** is another way of making the same contrast we find in **5:11-13** at the beginning of this passage. If you are a mature Christian the Word will work in and through your life and you will be a blessing to others. You will be one who actually teaches others and the fruit from your life will be useful to others. But if you remain a child who only drinks milk, then you will not be able to help anyone. You will not discern the differences between good and evil and your life will produce all sorts of ugly and rotten fruit that is worthless and good only for the fires of judgment.

So again, this passage is not talking about hell. It is addressing the fruit that is produced from a believer's life and: why it is so necessary that we choose to live by faith and trust ourselves to Jesus; why we must pay close attention to the Word that was spoken over us and not prioritize the lies which the enemy has spoken over our lives ever since we were babes; why we must consider Jesus and not neglect the great salvation that He has given us; and why we must choose to believe and enter the Promised Land no matter how many enemies we must destroy in the process.

Now I don't want you to be afraid, that maybe you have gone too far in your unbelief. You are here tonight because the Spirit is still calling to you. Once again He says, "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." So you still have an opportunity to live out the great salvation you have been given. Besides, the Spirit was hopeful in regard to these believers, just as He is for all of you.

***Hebrews 6:9***

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

So even though the story line is scary and there are those who so reject Jesus that they never come back to repentance and experience in their daily lives the benefits of salvation, that is not you. I know for a fact that you believe and will continue to believe; in fact, most of you have chosen to enter into the Promised Land and your life is about eliminating the enemies of wrong belief and unbelief. But for those of you who are still toying with the decision to enter into the Land, it is time to leave behind all the childish. It is time to live like a faithful and mature man or woman of God whose life is a blessing to all those who get to share it.

We will pick up here next week.

Let's Pray.