

Sermon Series: *Hebrews: The Supremacy of Christ*



Toward the Full Assurance of Hope

Hebrews 6:1-12 (ESV)

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, ² and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³ And this we will do if God permits. ⁴ For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. ⁷ For land that has

drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. ⁸ But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

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

Introduction

If you have read the book or seen the moving, *The Lord of Rings: The Return of the King*, then you'll remember this scene.

Aragorn stood staring into the darkness at the head of the Road Under the Mountain that led into the haunted valley of Harrowdale. The wicked armies of Sauron were about to destroy the glorious city of Gondor, Aragorn's home. Aragorn's last hope to save the city was to call upon the Army of the Dead who had been cursed to a living death because of their failure to keep an oath to his ancestor who had been their king? This undead army lived in Harrowdale.



Many men had entered the shadowy valley but none had survived the Army of the Dead. Aragorn's only hope was that the ancient prophecy was correct which said that the Army of the Dead would be released from their curse only by fulfilling their oath to fight to an heir of Isildur. Aragorn was the last heir of Isildur. But was the prophecy true? Would the Army of the Dead keep their oath? Would they fight to save Gondor? Was it worth the risk of entering the shadowy valley and commanding an ancient army of dishonored soldiers? It was Aragorn's only option. Without the help of this ancient army, there was no hope for the salvation of Gondor. Aragorn had decided. He slowly walked down the shadowy road and into the city of the dead. The only hope lay through the valley of Harrowdale.

Preaching this passage in Hebrews makes me feel like what I imagine Aragon must have felt like just before heading down that road. He entered that road with fear and trembling, yet full of hope. I preach this passage with fear and trembling, yet filled with hope. Hope is the goal of this passage but it can only be had by first walking on a road that takes us through some of the most fearful words in all of Scripture.

Many biblical scholars agree this may be the most difficult passage in the whole of the New Testament.¹ There are words here that should make any thinking Christian tremble. The problem the author is dealing with is a kind of spiritual immaturity from which it is impossible to recover. In the heart of this paragraph he describes a situation in which salvation is impossible. However, hope is the aim of the author. This is clearly stated in verse 11.

Hebrews 6:11 (ESV)

¹¹ And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end,

The terrible words of this passage are aimed at providing you **the full assurance of hope until the end**. He wants to provide you with a sure and certain hope of your salvation. But, he must first warn against any *false* assurance of hope. He aims at true hope, not false hope. False hope rests upon a faulty foundation. True hope rests upon an examined and firm foundation. Almost everyone who thinks there is such a place called heaven has high hopes they are going to get in. However, Jesus has this to say.

Matthew 7:13-14 (ESV)

¹³ "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. ¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."

I have presided over about a dozen funerals and I have attended twice as many more. At only one was it obvious to all that the deceased would not be entering heaven. ***The goal of today's sermon is not to cast doubt where assurance ought to exist, but rather to remove assurance where doubt ought to exist.*** I don't intend to upset confidence where it rightly should exist, but rather to upset confidence where it should *not* exist.

If you think you're going to heaven and you're actually not, then it would be unloving for me to affirm you in your false sense of security. However, if you are well on your way to heaven—through genuine faith in Jesus—, then it would be equally unloving for me to leave you doubting the safe path you're presently on. I must walk this delicate balance this morning. I must speak the truth and trust in the Holy Spirit to rightly apply this truth to your and my life today.

Main Idea

The main idea of this portion of Scripture is this: ***"Let us go on to maturity, so that we will have the full assurance of the hope of salvation until the end of life."***

¹ R. Albert Mohler. *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary: Exalting Jesus in Hebrews* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2017), iBooks (iBooks. <https://itunes.apple.com/us/book/exalting-jesus-in-hebrews/id1205051230?mt=11>), in chapter "Warning Against Apostasy."

The press of this passage is to keep you moving on your spiritual journey. It is to motivate you to drawing nearer and nearer to Christ. It is also intended to cause you great discomfort if you have presently grown content in a state of spiritual immaturity.

Spiritual maturity leads to unshakable hope. If you're not interested in pursuing spiritual maturity, then you have a serious problem. Every kid wants to be more mature than they are. Every 10 year old wants to be 13, and every 13 year old yearns to be 16, while 16 year olds can't wait to be 18 or 21 or 25. It's natural to desire maturity. There's a massive problem if there is *no* desire for spiritual maturity.

There is a serious developmental problem when a person is content to remain a spiritual infant. And there were some among the original readers of this letter to the Hebrews who were in this condition. And there are some listening to my voice today who are in this position. ***You're eternal destiny depends upon whether you go on in your faith in Christ or if you become spiritually lazy and lapse into a deadly spiritual doldrum out of which you never recover.*** Immaturity will not bring you "the full assurance of faith." Only the mature will taste the full goodness of that blessing. You must not stop growing in your faith and drawing ever nearer to Christ. Those who continue to draw nearer to Jesus will know the unshakable blessing of the full assurance of faith.

Three Steps Toward Assurance of Hope: Leaving, Learning, & Loving

Therefore, the author describes three steps toward spiritual maturity that will bring about the full assurance of hope. It involves leaving, learning, & loving. First, one must *leave* the elementary doctrines (vs. 1-3). Second, one must *learn* the danger of apostasy (vs. 4-8). Third, one must *love* Jesus above all other persons or things (vs. 9-12).

On to Maturity by Leaving Elementary Doctrines (v.1-3)

The first step toward spiritual maturity and full assurance of faith is ***leaving elementary doctrines.***

Hebrews 6:1-3 (ESV)

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, 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.

Christians are called by God to go on toward spiritual maturity. Once the foundation of the basics is laid, you are to employ that truth you know, to act on it, and grow in it. The author here briefly explains six elementary doctrines in the form of three couplets. All of these

doctrines are found in the Old Testament and may have constituted an early catechism, or a set of instructions, given to new Christian converts from Judaism.²

Couplet 1: “repentance from dead works and of faith toward God” (v.1)

Couplet 2: “instruction about washings and the laying on of hands” (v. 1)

Couplet 3: “the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment” (v. 2)

Repentance from dead works is the basic notion that you can’t turn to Christ without first turning away *from* sin. It is impossible to hold with one hand to your favorite sin and with the other to Jesus. You can’t do this. You’ll be torn apart. This is what John the Baptist’s primary theme in his preaching: repentance. Turn away from your sin and turn to Christ.

Faith toward God is the basic notion that faith is the foundation of justification, not “good works.” It is impossible to do enough good works to earn your way into heaven. What gets you justified before God is not your good deeds, but your dependence on him. It’s not your actions, but your attitude. It’s not your deeds, but your trust in him.

Instruction about washings is the basic notion of ritual cleansing. Note that “washings” is plural. Literally the word is “*baptismos*” or “baptisms.” It refers to the many rituals in Judaism that are required for ceremonial cleansing. The point is these things are symbols and signs that point to something beyond themselves but they do not have the power to effect genuine spiritual change. In other words, you ought not to think that the physical act of baptism, or any religious ritual, has the power to wash away the sins of your soul. Your sins aren’t washed away because you’ve been baptized in water, but rather because by faith in Jesus you have been spiritually united with Christ. It is his blood applied to you by God that actually washes away your sins. Baptism is a visible, physical sign of this unseen, spiritual reality.

Laying on of hands refers could refer to any number of instances, such as receiving the Holy Spirit, being healed, being set apart for vocational Christian service, being commissioned for a task or a mission or simply receiving a blessing from God.

The resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment are both linked and refers to the basic notion that all persons, both good and evil, will be resurrected from the dead and then judged. The righteous will inherit eternal life in heaven with God while the wicked will inherit eternal punishment in hell away from the presence of God.³

These doctrines serve as a foundation of faith, but the mature Christian must go on in his or her walk of faith. This does not mean these things are insignificant, but rather that once you know these facts, then you must act on them and live them out. The mature Christian will live these

² Paul Ellingworth, [The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1993), 310.

³ See Matthew 25:46; cf. Daniel 12:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:9.

truths out in daily life. He doesn't merely assent to these truths on Sunday, but he also remembers them on Monday at work and Tuesday night when he comes home. These principles are applied every day in the life of the mature Christian, but he's not content with these things alone. He's hungry for more of God. There's more truth to know. If he truly is a child of God, then he will grow. He will press on to maturity, **if God permits**.

Hebrews 6:3 (ESV)

³ *And this we will do if God permits.*

And This We Will Do If God Permits

This is a staggering sentence. Why are we told this? Why does he tell us to move on in faith, but then tell us that we will only make progress if progress is granted by God? Spiritual growth is a necessity, but it will only happen **if God permits**. Every Christian is called to grow and move forward in their walk with Jesus, but spiritual growth requires the permission of God. Why do we need to hear this?

We need to hear this truth for at least two reasons. First, to keep us **humble**. God hates pride and actively opposes the proud.⁴ We need to be reminded that our spiritual growth ultimately comes from God. We are called to act and do, but ultimately the growth is granted by God.⁵ If you advance in spiritual growth and maturity, you cannot take credit for that advance. If you are spiritually mature, then it is not because you are so smart and wise, but rather because God is gracious and generous.

The second reason we need to hear this is because it keeps us in a place of persistent **prayer**. If our spiritual maturity is decisively dependent upon God, then the wise Christian will habitually be in prayer. The humble Christian who wants to grow will daily plead with the Lord to grant such growth. No one becomes spiritually mature without the decisive granting of our great sovereign and gracious God. We are called to **go on to maturity** and **this we will do if God permits**.

This is the first step toward spiritual maturity and full assurance of faith; **leaving the elementary doctrines** and going on to maturity through humility and habitual prayer.

On to Maturity by Learning the Danger of Apostasy (v.4-8)

The second step toward spiritual maturity and full assurance of faith is **learning the danger of apostasy**. Apostasy is defined as "abandonment and repudiation of former beliefs."⁶

⁴ Isaiah 20:11; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5.

⁵ 1 Corinthians 3:7.

⁶ Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, [Tyndale Bible Dictionary](#), Tyndale Reference Library (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 95.

Hebrews 6:4-8 (ESV)

⁴ For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. ⁷ For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. ⁸ But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

The most stunning truth revealed in these words is that **there is a time when salvation is impossible**. There are some people who will reach a point at which they will be unable to repent and thus will be permanently cut off from God's grace. We need to understand this.

Who Are These People?

The main question is who are these people? Are these words describing true, born again, regenerate Christians? If so, then it is possible for one to possess salvation and then to lose it. Or are these words describing people who only *appear* to be true, born again, regenerate Christians, but in fact are not?

Whichever the case may be, these are people who have personally witnessed and participated in the very real work of God through the power of his Spirit and his people and then have chosen to reject it all and walk away from Christ. In such cases, *it is impossible for them to be restored to a place of saving repentance*. This is serious. Understanding this is a matter of spiritual life and death.

They Sound Like True Christians

It must be admitted, this description certainly sounds like someone who is a true Christian. They have been "*enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, shared in the Holy Spirit, and tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come.*"

They have "**once been enlightened.**" The light of the gospel of Christ has come into their lives and they have understood it. These people have been taught the gospel to the point of clearly understanding it. "**Tasted the heavenly gift,**" may refer to the Lord's Supper or it may mean that they have been so closely associated with the spiritual gifts given by the Holy Spirit that they have personally experienced and benefited from them in their own lives.

Furthermore, they have "**shared in the Holy Spirit.**" In some degree they have been enfolded into the work of the Holy Spirit as he has been active among God's people. Lastly, they have "**tasted the goodness of the word of God and the power of the age to come.**" They have personally witnessed and experienced the good results that come from God's word in action

and they have personally witnessed and experienced the reality of the power of the “age to come,” a phrase that usually refers to the messianic age.

The folks know that God’s word is good and that his kingdom is powerful. They have tasted the reality of these things and yet they have chosen to walk away from Jesus. These people who have experienced such things and then rejected them will never be restored again to repentance. They’ve already repented once. They’ve made a public profession of faith. They’ve made changes in their lives and for season they looked like every other Christian, but then they fell away. They walked away from Jesus. The question is are these genuine, born again, regenerate believers who had salvation and then lost it? Or were they never truly regenerate in the first place?

If They Are True Christians, Then There’s a Massive Contradiction

If these are true Christians who fully possessed salvation and then lost it, then the author of Hebrews is contradicting himself along with dozens of other Scripture and even Jesus himself. Let’s go back to Hebrews 3:14.

Hebrews 3:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

The verb tense is crucial here. Only those who *hold the faith firm to the end* are those who *have come to share in Christ*. This verse clearly states that only those who keep the faith to the end of life are the ones who truly became genuine believers. If they do not hold their faith to the end, then they never had saving faith in the first place. The apostle John agrees with this understanding. He explains that people who appear to lose their faith, actually never had it from the beginning (see 1 John 2:19). Paul teaches the same principle (Phil. 1:6). But the words of Jesus are most compelling.

John 6:39 (ESV)

³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.

God the Father has chosen to elect some people to salvation. These are those whom the Father has given to the Son. All whom the Father chose to give to the Son are those who will be raised up to eternal life on the last day. These are the elect. If some of the elect (those whom the Father intends to save) will not be among those who will be raised up to life on the last day—because they had salvation and then lost it—then Jesus is not able to do the will of God the Father. If the truly saved can become unsaved, then Jesus is unable to do the will of the Father.

But of course Jesus can do the will of God the Father. He has completely done the will of the Father. So it is impossible for those who truly possess salvation to lose that salvation, not because of what they are able to do, but because of what Jesus is able to do. Therefore, the author of Hebrews is not contradicting himself, nor is he contradicting dozens of other Scripture, nor is he here contradicting Jesus.

Those Described Only Appear to Be True Christians

The people being described in verses 4-6 are not true, born again, regenerate Christians. Rather they are people who *appear* to be true Christians, but who in fact are not. We know this because Scripture repeatedly affirms that it is quite possible to look exactly like a true Christian and not be one. No one is a true Christian simply because he says he is. Jesus teaches us this in breathtaking clarity.

Matthew 7:21-23 (ESV)

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.'"

No one gets into heaven just because they say "Jesus is my Lord." There are many people who appear to be doing the will of God. They are prophesying in Jesus' name, preaching and teaching in his name, they are doing mighty works in Jesus' name, probably donating lots of money to Christian schools, hospitals, and orphanages, and even going around casting out demons, and yet on that day Jesus will say to them, "I never knew you!" He does not say, "I knew you for a little while and then you fell away." Instead, he says, "I never knew you."

The persons being described in Hebrews 6:4-6 never had salvation. They did not have salvation and then lose it. They never had it in the first place. If you think such a description could not possibly apply to a non-regenerate, unsaved person, then you need to ponder Judas.

No One Suspected Judas

Judas was numbered as one of the Twelve disciples. No one knew he was the betrayer. Even when Jesus said during the Last Supper, "*The betrayer is the one whom I give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it.*"⁷ Then he dipped it in the dish and gave it to Judas and yet we are told that no one understood the betrayer to be Judas, even with such a massive hint.⁸ When Jesus said "one of you will betray me," no one said, "Ah ha! It's Judas. I knew it." No one suspected anything about him.

⁷ John 13:26.

⁸ John 13:27-28.

Judas Fits the Description of Verses 4-6

Judas had been *enlightened*. He had heard the best gospel preacher in whole history of humanity. He heard the gospel preached and illustrated 10,000 times. He listened to such inspired preaching for three years. He had *tasted the heavenly gift*. He ate the bread and the fish that Jesus miraculously multiplied on the mountain, he ate it until he was full. Many times he personally benefited because of the miracles of Jesus. No doubt he drank the good wine of Jesus' first miracle. He *shared in the Holy Spirit*. He *participated in the power* of the Holy Spirit. When Jesus sent out the twelve to heal the sick and cast out demons, no one came back saying, "Hey, how come Judas can't heal anyone? How come he can't cast out demons?" Evidently Judas did cast out demons and heal the sick and yet he was not a true, genuine, born again, regenerate believer.

Judas *tasted the goodness of the word* of God. He saw the life-changing power of God's word. He *tasted the power of the age to come*. He saw whole towns converted. He was there when the Samaritan's rejoiced that Jesus was the messiah and begged him to stay with them and teach them. Judas saw lepers healed, the lame walk, the blind receive sight, the weak receive strength, the lost get found, the hungry filled, the outcast brought in, and the dead raised to life. Judas saw and tasted it all and yet in the end he preferred money over the messiah! Judas did not lose his salvation. He never had salvation even though it appeared to everyone around him that he did. Listen to the words of Jesus.

John 6:70 (ESV)

⁷⁰ Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil."

This was early in his ministry. Judas was a devil from the beginning. He changed his life for a while. He cleaned up his act. He put away all the nonsense and looked just like all the other disciples on the outside. He repented with all the other disciples. He joined the team. He took the baptism class and passed the catechism course. He jumped in with both feet. He was even baptized with all the other disciples. Yet his heart remained unchanged.

And so when he sought to return the money after betraying Jesus, it was impossible for him to be restored to repentance. He discovered that it was impossible for him to repent. He confessed that he had betrayed innocent blood. That was true, but there was no place for repentance. Judas was devil from the beginning. Judas did not lose salvation. He never had it.

Fruitful Crop or Thorns & Thistles

To confirm that the author is not talking about those who once had salvation and then lost it, he offers us an illustration in vs. 7-8.

Hebrews 6:7-8 (ESV)

7 For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. 8 But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

Jesus said that will know people by their fruit (Mt. 7:15-20). False preacher and false prophets and false Christians abound. They all look great, but the fruit is in their deeds. Their fruit is in what they do at night, when they come home from work and they think no one is watching. Those who live closest to them know the true story of who they are.

There are two kinds of land here. The people are the land. The rain is the word of God. If they receive it, then they bear good fruit and it is useful, and these are blessed by God. But those who do not receive God's word, their lives produce nothing but pain—thorns and thistles. The people around them are constantly getting cut, poked, and bruised. The people who persistently ignore the word of God and refuse to be changed by it, are worthless and near to being cursed and in the end they will be burned in the fires of hell.

These are sobering words that all the people of God need to hear. Which are you? Is the fruit of the Spirit evident in your life? Are you producing a crop that is useful to God and the people around you? Or are you producing thorns and thistles, and dead deeds of darkness?

This is the second step in moving toward spiritual maturity. You need to learn the dangers of apostasy. If you pretend to be a Christian and yet refuse to allow the word and Spirit of God to change you, then you are near to being cursed and if you persist in this hardhearted, stubborn rejection of Christ, then you run the risk of being refused the opportunity to repent.

So what's the remedy?

On to Maturity by Loving the Name of Jesus (v.9-12)

The remedy is *loving Jesus* more than any other thing. The third step toward spiritual maturity and full assurance of hope is loving Jesus more than any sin, any person, and any thing.

Hebrews 6:9-12 (ESV)

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

He calls them **beloved**. He knows he has just spoken terribly frightening words, and yet he reminds them that they are loved by God. He is confident that his words will have their effect. May these words move you away from unholiness and towards maturity and toward Jesus.

God loves his people. *Beloved*, there are better things, things that belong to salvation. Here's one more clue that the author does not think that the people he described had salvation and lost it. What he is about to say pertains to those who truly do have salvation. And the primary distinctive of these people is that they love the name of Jesus (v. 10). It is the love of God that motivates them. They love the name of Jesus and so they serve the saints. They love the name of Jesus which proves that their hearts have been transformed.

How do you know if you're truly a Christian? It's if you love Jesus more than anything else in this world.

Do you love him more than your wealth?

Do you love him more than your health?

Do you love Jesus more than your job?

Do you love Jesus more than your family?

Do you love him more than your own life?

If you lost everything you own, and all who belong to you, then could you, like Job, still fall on your face and worship him? Or would you curse him?

What does it mean to truly be a Christian? It means loving Jesus more than any thing.

Matthew 10:37-39 (ESV)

³⁷ Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Conclusion

Full assurance of faith comes only from fully hoping in Jesus. Is your faith fully in Jesus this morning? Are you trusting in him alone today?

If you're trusting in anything else, then you need to repent. Are you willing to stand at the head of the road under the mountain and look down the pathway of your life and die to everything so that you may live to Christ? Are you prepared to walk through the Valley of Harrowdale and lose everything this world has to offer so that you may have full assurance of hope in the eternal life Jesus has to offer?