



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Hebrews 6:1-12

“The Thing God Cannot Permit”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the promises of the word of God, and we thank Thee for this great one contained in this book, among them the promise of a great High Priest, who lives continually to make intercession for us, who has offered the sacrifice and now engages in the continual prayer that everything that He has accomplished in his death for us may be secured for us, not only by what he did on Calvary's Cross but by what he is doing at this very moment. We thank Thee and praise Thee for the great arrangements that have been made between the persons of the Trinity; the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and we thank Thee for the confidence that we have that all of those arrangements shall be perfectly carried out to the glory of the Triune God and to the blessing of the saints of God, both from the Old Testament times and from New Testament times. We thank Thee for this book that the unknown author has written to encourage the saints and, also, to admonish them. And we pray, Lord, that the admonishments as well as the encouragements may truly be received by us in the way in which Thou wouldst have us to receive them. And, Father, we pray particularly now, as we turn to the word of God, that Thou wilt be with us in our studies, and may our Lord be glorified in them.

And we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] We’re returning, again, to the difficult passage in Hebrews chapter 6, and for the Scripture reading this evening, I’d like to read verse 1 through verse 12. The writer writes in verse 1.

“Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits. For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away.”

Now, we’re going to tonight show, I hope, for those of you who have the technical skills to understand what I’m going to talk about, you will, I think, see that this is an incorrect translation. The others of you, you’ll have to, of course, rely upon my explanation in this case because the issue touches the original text. But, at least, I hope to give you enough so you will see that this is, even from your standpoint, an unlikely translation. My text does have “if they fall away.” The New International Version in the translation of which I participated, not in this book but in other books, has “if they shall fall away.” But, on the other hand, the New American Standard Bible has “and then have fallen away.” The New Revised Standard Version, as well as the Revised Standard Version, has a similar translation. And J. B. Phillips, also, has a translation contrary to this one. I may refer to it in a moment; it’s located in my notes. But I’ll give you the reasons why that is a false translation, to translate it, “if they fall away.”

This translation is found in the Authorized Version. It’s found in this, the New Authorized Version, the New King James Version, as well as in the NIV. And I’m really

puzzled over why the NIV translators, who were largely capable men, missed this particular point. But anyway, what I'm saying to you does not hinge upon this, but, nevertheless, it does eliminate one possible interpretation that some people have offered. So anyway, we have, verse 6.

“If they fall away to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame. For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned. But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love, which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

We said, last week, in the introduction that this famous passage because it is a famous passage is the bellwether of the Arminians; particularly, because it does seem to say it's possible for a person to have eternal life and then to lose it. It's the trump card of all who believe that salvation may be won and lost. The Wesleyans, the Lutherans, and other particular teachers and students of the word of God fall into that category. The American Evangelist, who wrote the book that a Scottish theologian read, once put it this way. He said, “A Methodist knows he's got religion, but he's afraid he may lose it. A Presbyterian knows he can't lose it, but he's afraid he hasn't got it.”

Well, that saying is a witty saying and there's a whole lot of truth to it, because the Arminians believe that a person may lose the salvation that he feels that he may or has

obtained. And, on the other hand, Presbyterians believe that they cannot lose the salvation that they have, but they're not always sure, at least, many of them, that he really has got it. And so those two characteristics do pertain to those two types of people. The person with whom this is associated is Jacob Arminius, who was the one whose name Arminianism is derived from. Jacob Arminius was a Dutch theologian. He was a reformed theologian. In other words, he was Calvinistic in his training. He actually trained under Calvin's successor, Beza, in the land of Switzerland in Geneva, specifically, but later on he began to waver. He was a very well-known Dutch theologian. Later was professor at the University of Leiden. He was, also, not only that, but he was one of the pastors of the Ouderkirk, one of the cities of Amsterdam, one of the most famous of the reformed churches in the land of the Netherlands; in fact, when you go to Amsterdam, that's the old church that you may want to see, as something of great historic interest.

Among the things that the Arminians have believed is that God's decrees are based on foreknowledge and not on the foreordination of the Lord God in heaven. That man's depravity is not total because man can, of his own free will, turn to the Lord. That the atonement is intended equally for all men, and that the human will is one of the causes of regeneration because it is the decision of the human free will by which a person turns to the Lord. And since it's his free will, it's of himself that he turns to salvation. He, actually, as you can see, could not really say salvation is of the Lord. He would have to say, if he were truly honest, true to his theology, salvation is of the Lord and of my free will decision.

Now, Arminius himself was uncertain about the question of man's perseverance. Arminians, however, have not accepted the perseverance of the saints. Arminius did leave and the Arminians, the first ones, the Remonstrants, had some questions about perseverance. Arminius, himself, expressed the fact that he wasn't sure whether a person who truly believed in the Lord would have finally salvation. So there was some question about that, as far as he was concerned, and those that followed him.

But I'm sure that you can see, if you really believed that God's decrees were based on foreknowledge that man's depravity is not total, that the atonement is intended equally for all, that the human will is one of the causes of regeneration, and that men may actually fall away from grace or fall away from salvation; then when we have the hymn, "I've got a friend," or "I've found a friend," called out in our meetings, we cannot sing, "I've found a friend, O such a friend, He loved me ere I knew Him, He drew me with the cords of love and thus He bound me to Him. And, round my heart still closely twined those ties which naught can sever, for I am His and He is mine forever and forever." Only a person who believes in the perseverance of the saints, the eternal security of the believer, looking at it from a slightly different perspective, could sing a hymn like that.

Now, I mentioned also last time something I need to mention again. This passage, above many other passages, must be approached with sound principles of interpretation. Now, everybody says that. Don't think that I'm saying something unique. Arminians say that too. They will say, when they come to a passage and intend to interpret according to Arminian theology, they will warn us that we must use sound principles of interpretation. And then, of course, they reach their conclusions according to their idea of sound principles of interpretation.

And Calvinists or those who believe in sovereign grace do the same way. So to say this doesn't prove my point or their point. The question is, do we really carry out sound principles of interpretation in our practice of discovery of the meaning of the words of God? So we need to keep in mind, at least, this. And they would agree with us that we have to pay attention to the immediate context of the passage in which the difficulty lies. That we should pay sufficient and necessary attention to the whole book or piece of literature in which the disputed point is found. And, we should, of course, look at anything in the New Testament from the standpoint of other teaching of the New Testament, because if they are biblical people and many of them are, and if we are biblical people and some of us are, not all of us, but some of us are, then we together

believe in the unity of the word of God. That is, we do not believe that Matthew writes something that is contrary to that which Mark writes or that Matthew writes something that is contrary to that which the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews writes. They may look that way but we believe that careful study of the word of God will enable us to reach the conclusion that the Scriptures are harmonious. That is, there is a unity of the word of God. Now, almost all Evangelicals, that is, those who accept the Bible as the word of God, almost all of them accept those general descriptions of hermeneutical principles. So we're going to try to do that in such a way that we can say that we have followed sound hermeneutics or sound interpretation.

Now, tonight, what I'd like to do is to move on just a little bit more in the study of this passage. We will not conclude it until next week in our message next Wednesday night, the Lord willing. So in doing it and in making every effort for all of us to have a good comprehension of it, I want to go back and review a little bit, and then we'll move on to the problem of apostasy in verses 4 through 8. But let me review a bit so that we'll keep these things in mind. It will help us when we come to the final determination of the meaning of the passage; so the progression of thought in the passage.

In chapter 5, verse 11, after the author has mentioned the fact that we now have a priest who is called of God, as a High Priest, according to the order of Melchizedek, he launches into a lengthy admonition. But first of all, at the end of chapter 5, verse 11 through verse 14, he says, “We have a great deal to say to you, but you have become stagnant, you have become dull in your spiritual life.” And in the light of fact that you have become dull in your spiritual life, we commonly say something like, “They are backslidden.” That's the way in which a person today speaks of individuals who have made a profession of faith, but now they're not living according to their profession. It's a very common word Evangelicals use, backslidden. The individual is backslidden, well, it's something like that. For he says in verse 11 through verse 14, you've been professing

believers for a long time, you ought to be teachers of the word of God, but you have need that someone teach you again what are the first principles of the oracles of God.

Now, I believe, that is very true to human experiences and Christian experience because it's not uncommon at all for teachers of the word of God to observe individuals, over a number of years and to discover later on, to their disappointment, that individuals who have sat under the hearing of the word of God are not as sharp ten years later in the understanding of Scripture as they were in the first year or two. What has happened? Well, a similar thing has happened. And if you have been around Christians for a long time, I'm sure that you recognize that that is a danger, a peril, into which all of us may fall. So he says, “You ought to be teachers, you have need that someone teach you the first principles of the oracles of God. Everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness. He is a babe. Solid food belongs to those who are of full age.” And, evidently, he regards the high priesthood, according to the order of Melchizedek, to be solid food. And so he's not sure that they are going to be able to comprehend what is involved in having a great High Priest, according to the order of Melchizedek. Cause, after he finishes this warning, which concludes with the end of chapter 6, he will launch into that lengthy discussion of our Lord as the High Priest, according to the order of Melchizedek. And if they are not prepared spiritually for it, they will not understand much of it.

Now, we're going to have a little exam when we finish chapter 10 in verse 18, and we expect you here that night and we're going to ask questions about the High Priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek to see if you have really comprehended what the author is talking about or whether you really belong back there among those stagnant Hebrew professing believers. No, we're not going to do that, but you knew that too. [Laughter] But it might be a good exercise, although, I don't think putting things down on the paper, necessarily, indicates how advanced you are in true Christian living.

Well anyway, he says, “You have become stagnant.” And since you have become stagnant, there are two possibilities with reference to your spiritual life. First of all, some of you who have professed faith in Christ, you actually may be individuals who have never believed at all. Now, such individuals are in danger of apostasy. Apostasy is the profession of faith and then the turning away from it.

We noticed last time, chapter 3 in verse 12, where the author says, “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing.” Now, notice, he calls them brethren, takes them at their profession, “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing.” And we made the point three or four times now that word “departing” is the word, actually, from which we get the English word, “apostasy,” in the sense that it means “to stand off from.” *Apostanai*, to depart from the living God; *aphistami* means that. So that’s one possibility. A person may have heard a lot of the word of God, have made profession of faith, but then, still among the company of believers, he may, actually, never have truly believed and now be in process in turning away from it, apostatizing from the faith, departing from the faith. So that’s one possibility.

Now, the second possibility is that the individuals are genuine Christians; but they are stagnant in the faith. They are dull of hearing; they have not advanced in the Christian faith, as Paul would put it, in 1 Corinthians chapter 3, they are brethren, but they are still “babes in Christ,” and they walk as men. In other words, they look just like anyone else, and yet they really, truly, believed. They are Christians. He calls them carnal, that is, those whose lives are according to the flesh. That means they live according to the world, the pleasures of this life rather than respond to the responsibilities that they have as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, to live for Him and for the glory of the Triune God.

Now, this, I believe, is the author’s persuasion concerning the Hebrews; that is, the ones who professed faith that he’s addressing this letter to. Now, the reason I said that is

because in chapter 6, verse 9 and verse 10, he says, “But, beloved,” after this warning, “But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner.” And he goes on to say that he wants each of them to live up to their profession.

So to sum it up then, he says, there are two possibilities; one, you’re apostates, you made a profession but you’re not really a true believer; the other is that you are believers, true believers, who are in a carnal state. But the other remains as an individual responsibility. He’s persuaded that the Hebrews generally fall within the company of those who’ve made a true profession and possession of faith; and, thus, they are stagnant believers. But the other remains a possibility. The reason I say it remains a possibility is because in verse 11, he says, “We desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end,” the same diligence as those who are mentioned in verse 10. “That you do not become sluggish,” as you have been, “but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” So now, do you get the point? He’s talking to people that he believes are Christians. They’ve made a profession of faith. He believes the majority of them are that. But the possibility of apostates lies in that group to whom he’s writing by virtue of what he knows about their Christian life.

So in chapter 6 in verse 1 through verse 3, he says, “Let us go on.” What I hope to be able to do through the letter that I’m writing to you is remedy the lack that you have. You have been a Christian for a long time, but you have forgotten the things of the Christian faith that are important. So “Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of the laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits.” So he encourages them to go on.

Now, in verse 4 through 8, I’m going to just do this generally. In verse 4 through 8 he says, “For,” as he says in verse 3, “This we will do if God permits.” For if apostasy is

one's condition then it is irremediable. Even as nature itself shows in verses 7 and 8, because bad ground will not produce good fruit.

Now, in verse 9 through verse 12, he says, but your condition is not hopeless in the light of the past. I'm persuaded of you better things and things that accompany salvation and may each one of you press on by faith, to grow in the knowledge of the Lord, and possess, truly, what you have professed.

And, finally, at the end of the chapter verse 13 through verse 20, he points out, as in the case of Abraham, the promise that God gave him, early, when he called him out of Ur of the Chaldees, brought him into the land, the promise that he would have a son, in whom the whole of the world would be blessed, was a long time coming.

Now, you know, of course, if you read the Book of Genesis, that those promises that were given to him as early as chapter 12, for example, of the fact that all the families of the earth would be blessed in him; those promises were believed by Abraham, and he had great concern over them. In fact, he looked at his situation and brought it before the Lord in Genesis chapter 15, and, in fact, tried to accomplish it himself by having Sarah's handmaid as his consort, in order to produce a seed, producing Ishmael, of course. But that was not God's way. “In Isaac shall thy seed be called,” we later read. And God intended for Abram to be the father of the seed, in whom all the families of the earth would be blessed. And he also intended that Sarah would be the mother. And even she was so surprised by it all that she laughed, when the promise was given to her.

So Abram illustrates the fact that the promises of God do not necessarily come immediately. In his case, the promises came after much long suffering, although the issue was settled by the fact that the promise of a redeemer had been made.

So in the case of Abraham, continuance in the faith was proof of the reality of the original faith that Abram exercised. And so in the believers' life today, continuance in the faith is the ultimate proof of the reality of the faith that we profess. That's one of our author's great teachings. And it's certainly true. The man who truly believes and who has

truly been regenerated, by God the Holy Spirit, will inevitably manifest God’s eternal life. You cannot have a nature, a divine nature, and not produce fruit. I don’t mean that every one of us should necessarily see the fruit in every one of our friends, but there is fruit. And the Lord God sees it. And I’m not trying to excuse any who may be living as professing Christians for twenty years and one cannot with the finest spiritual microscope find any evidence of the new life in them. I’m not trying to excuse that, except simply to say, that when a person truly believes in Christ, fruit of the new life, the new life, must manifest itself. Everything in physical life illustrates that point.

When the doctor brings the new infant out into our world, we know immediately that there is new life, don’t we? The noise is there. And the noise persists and for a long time it’s there to remind us there is a new life in this family. In the Christian family it’s the same way.

Now, the plea for perfection. Next. Looking at verse 1, “Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ.” Therefore. Since you are, let me expound that “therefore” in a sentence or so. Since your faith of immaturity may be cured only by the High Priesthood ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, let us go on. It isn’t enough to simply know the Old Testament principles. One must build upon them and go on to perfection. So there is a *terminus a quo* that he mentions in verse 1 through verse 3; specifically, in verse 1. “Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of the Messiah.”

What are the elementary principles of the Messiah? Well, it’s the truth that pointed to the Messiah, the elementary principles. Remember, the Bible doesn’t begin with the New Testament. The Bible begins with the Book of Genesis and so the elementary principles of the Messiah are the things that the Old Testament authors, Moses and the Prophets, have set forth for us. Those are the elementary principles. And so when we look at these terms, we must have those things in mind. What are they? Well, he

mentions six of them. He says, “Not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works.”

What are dead works? Well now, I could expound dead works without looking at the Bible at all, if I am permitted to expound them in the light of what I see in the Christian church. Dead works, what are they? Attending church on Sunday morning and not knowing our Lord as personal savior. Sitting at the Lord’s Table and not having a personal faith in our Lord. Opening up the Bible and sitting in a Bible class, but not really interacting at all with what is said in the word of God. And going out and saying, “I was at Church this morning, in the Sunday school class, and actually sat at the Lord’s Table.” A dead work. It would be a dead work. It just wouldn’t be the dead work about which our author is speaking. Remember, sound hermeneutical principles.

Now, one of the soundest principles, of course, is to interpret the words of Scripture by Scripture. Isn’t that right? We must do that. Now, in chapter 9, in verse 14, our author says, “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

Well, the “dead works” are the levitical systems, about which he is talking; that is, all of the things which Moses wrote, which were valid and important, and had the authority of God behind them, from the time that Moses was given the Law, till the time when Jesus Christ died on Calvary’s cross, when the veil of the temple was “rent in twain” from Heaven to earth, God doing it, telling us that. And, those Old Testament things that were valid activities are now dead works, there’s no life in them. If we went out and observed the Day of Atonement today, just as Israel observed the Day of Atonement, it would be a dead work, now. That has been put away. So “dead works” interpreted by the precise term in chapter 9, verse 14. “Faith toward God,” now, let me ask you a question. Did Adam have faith toward God? Did Moses have faith toward God? Did David have faith toward God? Dr. Johnson, don’t teach us like we’re in primary Sunday

school. Of course they did. So faith toward God is something that pervades both of the Testaments.

“Doctrine of baptisms,” ah, doctrine of baptisms. That’s one of the elementary principles of Christ. We believe in Christ and we’re baptized for our faith, aren’t we? Doctrine of baptisms. Why plural? Doctrine of “baptisms.” Well, maybe because some people baptize by sprinkling, and some by immersion? No! Doctrine of baptisms? Well, what does the Book of Hebrews say? Fortunately, we have some help here in verse 10 of chapter 9, we read after verse 9.

“It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered, which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience concerned [Now, talking about the Old Testament] concerned with foods and drinks, various washings.”

Now, that’s the exact same word. Various baptisms! Baptisms! What were they? Well, for example, the priest, when he was inducted into office, he had to be washed. That was one of the baptisms. Various other things; when the priests went back and forth in the tabernacle, there was a laver there. They had to wash their hands and feet regularly; so, various washings, baptisms. That’s what they were called. That’s what baptism is; a washing. So, the doctrine of baptisms is the teaching concerning the washing of hands and feet, found in the Old Testament in levitical Law.

“The laying on of hands.” Well, you know if you’ve read the Old Testament at all, you know that when an individual brought his animal to the priest, to have it sacrificed, the sin offering or what ever offering it might be, he laid his hand upon the animal in order to symbolically indicate that the animal was his substitute. In other words, the laying on of hands was an identification of the person who brought the animal with the animal. And when the animal was slain, he was confessing that his sin should bring his

death; but by virtue of God’s marvelous provision, the sinner did not die. The animal died as a substitute. So “laying on of hands.” We even have the “laying on of hands” in New Testament times, in which the saints lay hands on Paul and others, as they go out on their missionary journey. It’s an identification symbol.

And then, in verse 2, we read, “Of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead.” Now, we don’t have to talk about this, in the Old Testament, there was a doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. Read Job 19 in verse 25, for example. The Old Testament saints believed in the resurrection of the dead. Not all of them! Because, not all of them were as well instructed in the word and enlightened as some; but that’s an Old Testament doctrine and not simply a New Testament doctrine.

And then, “of eternal judgment.” And, of course, eternal judgment is taught in the Old Testament, as well. In Psalm 1, verse 5 and 6, for example, the Psalmist wrote.

“Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish.”

That is, in the judgment “shall perish.” Now, all of these six things are then Old Testament teaching. Now, they could be called New Testament teaching if the context, not all of them, but some of them could be called New Testament teaching, as well, resurrection, eternal judgment, faith toward God. But, the context, since we are talking about the Messiah, and first principles, it is evident the author is thinking about the Old Testament. In other words, every one of these six things is consistent with Judaism, biblical Judaism. So he says, in order to go on to perfection, we’re not going to go back over the things that you know, those great truths of the Old Testament that are doctrine concerning the Messiah. What he wants to go to is “perfection,” as he puts it in verse 1.

What is perfection? Well, in the light of the context, this term is used in the Epistle to the Hebrews a number of times. We can't stop and talk about every word in individual place, because it will come up later, but in the light of the teaching of the word of God, perfection is the full possession of the Messianic salvation; that is, the possession of the truth concerning Christ, as set forth by the New Testament apostles and writers of the New Testament.

Now, so we have a terminus a quo, from the Old Testament teaching concerning the Messiah. We're not going back over that, he says. But, we want to go on to perfection, the full possession of messianic salvation, because it's clear that some of them don't have it. They're stagnant. They have not made the necessary progress in the faith. “And this,” he says, “we will do,” and then, there is that terribly grim condition, “if,” if, he says. “If God permits.” “If God permits!” How could there be any question about that? Surely, God would permit us to go on, everyone to go on? Isn't that true? Be careful what you say. “This we will do if God permits.” Well, under one condition, our author feels, it might be necessary for God to close the door on an individual, and that is apostasy.

Now, there are a number of places in the Bible where this is taught, but I'm going to turn to one, in which the Apostle John is responsible for it in our Lord's ministry, and its John chapter 12. And if you have your New Testament's, let's turn to John chapter 12, because I want you to see, there can come addition, I don't know what I was thinking when I said that I was thinking about something else, there can come a situation, a situation in which God cannot permit an advance in the faith.

John chapter 12, verse 37, listen to the Apostle John as he's talking about our Lord's ministry.

“But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: ‘The Lord,

who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they were unbelievers, because Isaiah said again [Now, you're saying, "My, what translation are you reading from now?" Look at what it says.] Therefore they could not believe." [They could not believe because the prophesy of Isaiah was fulfilled in them!] because Isaiah said again, 'He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, Lest they should see with their eyes, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.'"

In other words, there is a form of unbelief, when a person has had the gospel presented to them, the Good News presented to them, and God has exercised his marvelous loving kindness and tenderness with us, over a lengthy period of time, it is possible for a person to so continually refuse, that finally, he cannot believe. That's a horrible thing! That's a very horrible thing! The Bible's full of this. We have the prophesies of the Old Testament; the one that John refers to; Isaiah, chapter 6. And there are others. In fact, a reference is made in one of the prophets, we'll refer to it in our next study, in which that precisely is said; that Israel so refused the Lord till finally there was no remedy.

That's in the Bible! If you have been reading through the Bible, and you're at Galatians [Laughter] you would have read that. Now, I knew it before I read through the Bible, it so happened. But, you would have read that. You would see that this is not an incidental teaching of the word of God. It is possible for us to so refuse truth that we finally have made ourselves blind to the truth. That's why it's a terrible grim condition. It's apostasy.

Now, that brings us to the lengthy statement, beginning at verse 4.

“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good

word of God and the powers of the age to come, [and then have fallen away, that’s how it should be rendered.] and then have fallen away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.”

This lengthy statement, as you can see, falls into three parts; a description of the class of persons. Six facts again are stated of them: once enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, partakers of the Holy Spirit, tasted the good word of God, powers of the age to come, have fallen away. Six things said with reference to them. Then, the fact about them, it’s impossible to renew them; these people, who have these six things that are true of them. And, finally, a cause of that impossibility is given, in verses 7 and 8, where he says, to explain, “The earth which drinks in the rain,” and so on. He points out that it may, “if it bears thorns and briers, it’s rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.”

There are plots of ground in this earth, which our Lord in one of his parables speaks of as bad ground, on which one cannot grow anything. And anyone who tries to grow knows to avoid just such plots of ground. And our author uses that common illustration.

Now, I want to, I’m behind, I get so interested in this that I get behind my schedule. I wanted to do this in three times. I hope I can catch up. But anyway, that brings us to the major interpretations of this passage. The Arminian view is simply this; that it’s possible for a person to have salvation and to possess all of these things is to have salvation and to fall away is to lose one’s salvation. And so this is a very simple passage to them. It teaches us, since these six benefits that they possess, the things, they’ve been enlightened, they’ve tasted the heavenly gift, they’ve become partakers of the Holy Spirit, have tasted the good word of God, and so on that evidently means that they are believers. Doesn’t it? If they have those things? And then, if he says, “They have fallen away,” why,

obviously that means that they've lost them. So they have salvation and they've lost salvation.

When I read this passage, I think of an experience I had, and I told my students this experience after I had it, a number of years. And, not too many years ago, in fact, last year to be exact, I read a statement written by one of my former students who is president of a theological institution at the present time, in which he referred to this as “something one of his professors told him.”

Well, it was the experience that I'd had. I was giving a series of sermons in Nacogdoches, Texas, many years ago back in, I think, the latter part of the nineteen fifties or the early part of the nineteen sixties, at a church there called Grace Bible Church, which is still there. And the series of messages was on the difficult texts and problems of the Christian faith. And so I had a series of seven sermons; two on Sunday and five during the week, through Friday, all with catchy titles, designed to underline the problems of the Bible that everybody knew about.

And one of my sermon titles was “Once Saved, Always Saved?” question mark. And, I gave the message and at the conclusion of the message, a man came up to me, a relatively young man, as I remember, probably in his thirties and I was about in my thirties at that time, too, and he said, “Dr. Johnson, I'd like to come by and talk to you tomorrow, or some time, if I could, about the message that you gave this evening.” And I said, “Well, fine.” I was preaching at night and didn't have anything to do in the daytime except great ready for the next night, so “Fine,” I said, “I'll meet you here in the church in the morning, if you want to?” And I met him in the kitchen. In fact, I went back and preached in the church in December and again in January, four or five times and, every time I walked through that kitchen, I remember that conversation I had with him.

And so he came that morning and he had a book under his arm. And it was Matthew Henry's commentary. And so he started out by saying, he was very nice young man, he wasn't trying to nastily argue, but he wanted to discuss the passage and he said,

“Matthew Henry says that this text means that you can lose your salvation.” And I said, “Well, that’s very interesting. That’s not surprising, that’s not a surprise to me, but let me ask you this? If you do not believe in “once saved, always saved,” then you must believe in another very difficult doctrine.” And he was willing for me to talk, so I went on and talked and said, “You see, it says, that it’s impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, the powers of the age to come, if they fall away to renew them again, unto repentance.” And if it’s true that these things do mean that you have eternal life, and then that it’s impossible to renew them again under repentance, if they fall away, then my doctrine which is ‘Once saved, always saved,’ is, according to your teaching, once lost, always lost.”

Well, that was so shocking to him that he said, as I remember, he, and I wrote this out when I said it, he was completely stumped. And then, he said, “But what about 2 Peter chapter 2, verse 20 through 22?” And, it was such a shock to him he had absolutely no defense for the statement, ‘Then your doctrine is, ‘once lost, always lost.’ It’s impossible to renew them again unto repentance, because he didn’t believe that at all. So he said, “Let’s look at another passage?” So after another thirty minutes of conversation, he left still an Arminian but a little chastened Arminian, perhaps. Because you see, if it really does, in these texts, indicate a true Christian faith, once enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, partakers of the Holy Spirit, tasted the good word of God, the powers of the age to come. If they fall away, it’s impossible to renew them again unto repentance. So it just may be that those statements don’t indicate a certain experience of salvation.

Now, others have different views. Professor Weist, who taught for many years at Moody Bible Institute, did not handle this too well and finally came up with this solution to him that this passage didn’t really speak about anything that pertained to us, today, for the simple reason that today we don’t have a temple and we don’t have sacrifices. And so, consequently, the situation is not our situation at all, and therefore, what the author

was talking about is something that we may safely skip by, since it doesn't really apply to us who live in this age. Very few people have accepted that view.

A third view has been called the hypothetical view; and that is, that what he is saying is, we must go on because we cannot retreat. In other words, falling away is an impossibility, really. Now, I'd like to suggest that that view is wrong in three ways; it's wrong grammatically, it's wrong exegetically, and it's wrong doctrinally. It's wrong, first of all, grammatically because the participle in verse 6, that is rendered, “If they shall fall away,” cannot be rendered, “If they shall fall away.” It is not an adverbial participle! Adverbial! Now, those of you who don't know anything about Greek, you'll just have to accept this. And, those of you who do, there are a few of you here, they'll nod and that means you follow them. An adverbial participle may be rendered by if, although, while, when, and so on, as the context might suggest. But an adjectival participle cannot be rendered conditionally. This is an adjectival participle, as you can see, there is an article, there is a series of participles that are related to that article. So it's impossible, grammatically, for this to be rendered, “If they fall away.”

Now, if the construction is such that there is a bit of space between the article and the final participle, and it's possible for a person not to notice that the first time that he does it, just as when you and I read an English sentence, we sometimes don't notice precisely what it's saying, because we read it too quickly, or we've read it carelessly. In this case, you cannot render the participle, *parapesontay*, “if they shall fall away.” Our author is not talking about people “if they fall away,” he's talking about people who “have” fallen away. That's the point. They've been enlightened. They have tasted the heavenly gift. They've become partakers of the Holy Spirit. They've tasted the good word of God, the powers of the age to come “and they have fallen away.” It's these about which he is talking. It is impossible to take this in that sense, hypothetical sense, exegetically. He doesn't say, as it has been said, it's impossible to go back. He says, it's impossible to “bring back” after one has gone back. Please notice that! It's impossible to

bring back after someone has gone back! That’s the point. If you’ll look at it, you’ll see that that’s precisely what he has in mind.

Furthermore, it’s “bring back to repentance.” Repentance. He’s already used that word in verse 1. Repentance from dead works.

And, finally, doctrinally, this is impossible. Falling away from privilege and profession is possible. It’s possible for a person to fall away from a profession. That’s apostasy. It’s impossible for someone to fall away from salvation. It’s true: Once saved, always saved! But, our author is not talking about people who are saved; he’s talking about people who have come very, very close, have had all the opportunities that Israel had in the teaching of our Lord and the apostles. But, nevertheless, “have fallen away.”

There is a man, in the word of God, who, to my mind, I think about when I think of this. I don’t have time to talk about it cause I want to stop on time. I’ll just mention his name, maybe, because next week we’ll probably talk about it. But the man who was upon this man’s, the man who wrote this book was upon his mind was probably Esau. Esau. In fact, he writes about it in the 12th chapter. This is a man, who had great privileges. First born! With the blessing!

And what do we read about Esau? Verse 16 of chapter 12.

“Lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.”

You know, if you read Genesis chapter 25 and Genesis chapter 27 and a tear does not flow down your face, as you think about Esau, I don’t think you’ve fully entered into what transpired there. Here was a man, first born of Isaac, a man who had the blessing, the man who had the birthright, but coming in and seeing some of that food that Jacob

was preparing and overcome with the physical desire to have food, sold his birthright. And, Moses writes, and so Esau despised his birthright. And later on, he sought to get his blessing back after crooked Jacob crooked him out of it. You look at those two men and you want to know which one you despise the most. Well, the Bible tells us, despise Esau more. Don't approve everything that Jacob did. Despise Esau more, because with all of the blessings of the birthright and the blessing, he sold it all for a mess of pottage. That red stuff there, as he put it. That red stuff! That red! That's what I want. What a picture of 20th Century believers! They love that red, that red stuff, rather than the things of the Lord.

Time is up; I must stop.

Let's close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are so grateful to Thee for the Scriptures because we so need the instruction that comes from heaven. And we have so many characteristics that are like Jacob and like the others of the Old Testament, who have shown that they, too, were men such as we are. But, Lord, deliver us from the traits of Esau. Deliver us from the traits of some of the others of the Old Testament, who had great privileges but turned away from you. Lord, give us a deep and earnest desire to seek Thy face, to truly be pleasing to Thee in our day, not to waste our time but to use it for the glorification of the one who has our heart, has our love, who means so much to us, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Lord, if there is anyone here who has not yet come to Christ, may they come to him now.

For His name's sake. Amen.