

Light for Dark Times

You Must be Born Again!

Sermonaudio.com/lfdts

www.unholycharade.com

www.lightfordarktimes.com

Light for Dark Times – YouTube Channel

Light for Dark Times - Facebook

TULIP – The Fundamentals of the Faith by which we are Saved

Sermon #10 – Apostasy and the Perseverance of the Saints (con)

February 20, 2022

Sermon Text: Hebrews 6:4-6

Scripture Reading: Heb 12:1-17

Are there not scriptures that would seem to teach that in fact a Christian can become an “apostate.” An apostate is a person who once professed Christ but at some point fully and finally rejects that profession and is lost? For example:

2Pe 2:19-22 They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved. (20) For if, after they

have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. (21) For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. (22) What the true proverb says has happened to them: “The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire.”

We know however from our previous study of Scripture that the Bible teaches that salvation is of the Lord and that once, out of His own good pleasure, He elects His people to salvation, that salvation will be carried through to the end. Nothing can ever separate the Christian from Christ. What then

do passages like these teach? How are we to understand the apostate?

Our question this morning is not whether a person who *claims to be a Christian* can renounce that claim and end in hell. We know that many such people have and do exist. But what we want to find an answer to is the question – *is it possible for a person to be actually born again, to be in Christ, and then due to some sin be cut off, rejected, and end in hell?* Arminian Christianity would answer – “yes.” We reply, no – such a thing is impossible.

And the passage of Scripture that we are examining in particular is this:

Heb 6:4-8 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.

Recall that to help us understand what the Apostle to the Hebrews means here in chapter 6, we are calling on John Owen (1616-1683) who wrote extensively on these verses.

As you can see, it is easy for people to assume that a person who is described in these terms:

- Has been enlightened
- Tasted the heavenly gift
- Shared in the Holy Spirit

- Tasted the goodness of the Word of God
-(tasted) the powers of the age to come

...to assume that surely such a person described is a Christian. Genuinely. In Christ. Regenerate. And that thus this Scripture is teaching that the Christian “may totally and finally fall from grace and perish eternally.”

Let me continue to review from where we left off two weeks ago so that we have it fresh in our minds:

Heb 6:4 **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,

And we said:

Little words are often BIG in importance and so it is here. What does “for” tell us? *It tells us that what the Apostle is about to say here is a result of what he has said before.* Therefore, it is a great error to simply press on ahead without

looking back. And so –

Heb 5:11-14 About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. (12) For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, (13) for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. (14) But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

We see then that there was a very serious problem among these Hebrews. They had become “dull of hearing” so much so that they were difficult to teach. They had professed Christ some time before – long enough before that they should actually have matured sufficiently in Christ to be teaching others themselves.

The Apostle's purpose then is to demonstrate to the Hebrews and to us...well, listen to Owen once more as we heard last time:

“Whereas he had shown that they were slow as to the making of progress...he lets them know the danger that there was in continuing in that slothful condition; for not to proceed in the ways of the gospel and obedience to Christ is an entrance into a total relinquishment of both. So that they might be acquainted with the danger of it and be stirred up to avoid that danger, he gives them an account of the miserable condition of those who end in apostasy.”

Consider the text again:

Heb 6:4-6 For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, (5) and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, (6) and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are

crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

Now, notice the subjects – *the people* – described here by the Apostle. They have been made *partakers* of, as Owen calls them – 5 instances of *evangelical privileges*. Five gospel privileges, which (and do not miss this) –

“...are all privileges which consist in certain special operations of the Holy Spirit.” (Owen)

And these operations of the Spirit are *evangelical* – that is, *they are peculiar to the New Covenant era*. These privileges were not available to the members of the Old Covenant. This working of the Spirit is a participation in the Spirit of some kind which did not come to those under the Law, but only to those who heard the good news of Christ.

However, notice that in these verses, there is *no mention of their faith or obedience to Christ, nor of justification, sanctification, or*

adoption as sons – things which are freely spoken of in regard to the true people of God in Christ.

And after issuing this sober warning about apostasy, the Apostle will turn again to the case of these Hebrews to whom he is writing and he will say things to and about *them* like this:

Heb 6:9-10 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.

See it? He speaks differently of them than he does the apostates. These Hebrews evidenced things that belong to salvation – work and love for his name, serving the saints, and so on. *Still, we see that it is proper and right for genuine Christians to have not only assurance of salvation, but a reverential fear of God and to know that there are people who have experienced wonderful privileges in the workings of the*

Holy Spirit upon them, but who through carelessness, unbelief, hardness of heart – fall away and perish eternally.

Similar warnings are given in the rest of this epistle:

Heb 10:24-31 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, (25) not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

(26) For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, (27) but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. (28) Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. (29) How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was

sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?

(30) For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” (31) It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

And again:

Heb 3:7-19 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear his voice, (8) do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, (9) where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years.

(10) Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.’ (11) As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest.’”

(12) Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.

(13) But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (14) For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

(15) As it is said, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.” (16) For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? (17) And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? (18) And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? (19) So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

Here is this dual, parallel truth in Scripture. 1) None of Christ’s true people, no one who has been born again and therefore is in Christ, will ever perish. It is impossible. That is the “P” in TULIP. BUT, right alongside this doctrine are these sober warnings to us *not to be careless and presume*. We must

examine ourselves by comparing ourselves to what Scripture says are the fruits of every real Christian because of our union with Christ. *You cannot claim to be a Christian, you cannot even have received tremendous and powerful gifts of the Spirit, and at the same time walk in unbelief to Christ and in disobedience to His commands, and still expect Him to receive you into His kingdom.* And anyone walking that dangerous path *is on a dangerous path which will end in this no-going-back apostasy if it is persisted in.*

Think about just how many people today claim to be Christians but are evidencing a faithless, unbelieving, disobedient, careless and flippant attitude toward Christ. They do not evidence a fear of God. They love the world.

Let's proceed now with a closer look at the nature of each one of these great privileges – works of the Spirit – which these apostates had enjoyed:

They were once enlightened

...in the case of those who have once been enlightened.

What is this “enlightening.” Well, in the early church, water baptism was called “illumination.” It represented a translation from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light and grace. However, as John Owen observed, this word did not come to have this meaning of baptism until quite some time after the New Testament was written. In the Bible itself, “illumination” (the Greek word for it, “photismos”) never means “baptism.” Rather, it always means “an inward operation of the Spirit.”

What then does this word mean in Scripture? It means, “*to give light or knowledge by teaching.*” You see it for example here:

2Ti 1:10-11 and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality **to light through the gospel**, (11) for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher,

And again:

2Co 4:3-4 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. (4) In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, **to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel** of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

That is to say, the people the Apostle is speaking of here in Hebrews 6 (who are apostates) are people in whom the Holy Spirit had so shone that this blindness to the light of the glory of Christ was removed. They were people who heard and were enabled to see Christ's glory, the satanic blinding being removed from the eyes of their heart. It was perhaps similar to Saul of Tarsus seeing the glory of Christ on the road to Damascus.

The gospel was preached to them and the Spirit so worked in that preaching that this happened to them:

2Co 4:6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has

shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

And so Owen concludes:

"to be enlightened is to be instructed in the doctrine of the gospel, so as to have a spiritual apprehension of it."

I have seen over these years of ministry many people just like this. They hear the gospel. They are excited. They know it to be true and they even feel it to be true.

Mat 13:20-21 As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, (21) yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.

I can still see their faces. Big smiles. Fervent zeal – they dive into Bible study. They have "seen" the glory of Christ and you are just certain they have been born again. And yet, after a time, you see it.

Carelessness. They begin to be unfaithful in obeying Christ. They grow cool in their relationship to Christ's people. And then, one day, they are gone. And if, years later, you happen upon them, you will find yourself talking to a person you don't even recognize anymore. These are the kind of people the Apostle is speaking of here and their apostasy is what he is warning us against.

The Spirit, by the Word, illumines such people:

“The knowledge of the doctrines of the gospel concerning the person of Christ, of God's being in Him reconciling the world to Himself, of the offices of Christ, of His work and mediation, and other such wonderful truths of the gospel, sets up a spiritual light in their minds so that they are enabled to discern what was utterly hidden from them before.” [Owen]

And yet this in itself is still not the new birth. I have seen people virtually drop everything and run off to Bible college or seminary, so excited are they about these new things they can now see. And yet,

sooner or later the fervor cools, unbelief and unfaithfulness creeps in and they fall away.

An excited zeal for Christ, for the truths of the gospel, for fervent and energetic service in religion as a result of this sight of the glory and truth of Christ...by itself is not the new birth. To have this impression of the glory of Christ made on one's mind is a very good thing, but many to whom it has come eventually fell away, never to repent again.

Here are three very important application points which John Owen gives us in respect to this enlightenment:

1. It is a great mercy, a great privilege, to be enlightened with the doctrine of the gospel through the effectual working of the Holy Spirit. BUT...
2. It is such a privilege that may be lost and end in the aggravation of sin, and condemnation of those who were made partakers of it...
3. Where there is a total neglect of the necessary improvement

of this privilege and mercy, the condition of such persons is hazardous, and inclines them toward apostasy.

Now, think carefully on these things. *How many people have been assured that they are born again because at some altar call in a church or evangelistic service they excitedly and with great emotion responded? They even evidence a delight and a joy in the truths of Christ and they even demonstrate a remarkable change in their life, and yet...it does not last.*

This is why people like Jonathan Edwards back in the days of the great revivals in this country, who saw wonderful workings of God's Spirit so that, as he said, you couldn't walk through the town and not hear people engaged in conversing about the things of Christ...and yet, Edwards was not quick to assume that a person truly was regenerated simply because they had shown this "enlightenment" upon hearing the gospel. Only time would tell, you see.

When such persons fall away, when they become apostate, this is not a case of a genuine Christian being lost. It is, rather, an instance of someone who received a great mercy and privilege growing neglectful of that privilege and, in the end, perishing.

We will plan to continue with this passage next time. Remarkably, this enlightenment is not the only spiritual privilege worked in these apostates, all of which, being neglected through unbelief and disobedience, were of no avail.

Examine yourself to be sure that you are not one of these. Where in your life might you be walking carelessly? Take care. Take care.

Here is this great benediction with which Hebrews closes and it is fitting for us:

Heb 13:20-21 Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, (21) equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that

which is pleasing in his sight,
through Jesus Christ, to whom be
glory forever and ever. Amen.