

# Light for Dark Times

## *You Must be Born Again!*

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

#### *Sermon #11 – Apostasy and the Perseverance of the Saints (con)*

*March 13, 2022*

**Sermon Text:** Hebrews 6:4-6

**Scripture Reading:** 1 Cor 10

We continue this morning looking at the biblical doctrine we call the “perseverance of the saints.” That is, the Bible’s teaching that every single one of God’s elect people will, without fail, be brought safely home in Christ. In other words, no one who is born again through faith in Christ can ever be lost.

And we have seen that there are numbers of scriptures that by themselves appear to teach just the opposite – that a regenerate person

can indeed “lose their salvation” and end in hell. Even a brief reflection on this issue will demonstrate its importance. Can YOU, being assured that you are in Christ, end up being cast away from Him and be lost forever because you somehow sinned? You see this issue touches on that common question – “what is the unpardonable sin?”

Arminian theology which you find in groups such as Methodism, Nazarene, Quaker, Pentecostal, charismatics and others (it really is much more widespread in typical evangelical churches today as well) insists that a Christian can indeed be lost and that to maintain otherwise is to promote lawlessness and a disregard for holiness. Roman Catholicism as you probably are aware, even pronounces “anathema” anyone who teaches the Perseverance of the saints. There is no assurance to

be found in Rome. Throw in the horrid doctrine of Purgatory and you keep people enslaved to the devil who through the fear of death holds them in slavery.

You will recall that this subject cropped up in the Reformed churches of the Netherlands in the 1600's through the teaching of a pastor there named Arminius. A minority of pastors also adhered to his position and ultimately filed a petition or "Remonstrance" with the civil authorities, asking that the government protect them from church discipline. As the controversy grew, a church assembly called the Synod of Dort met in order to deal with it.

The Remonstrance party formulated 5 doctrinal points which opposed the Reformed doctrine of the churches. Arminian in doctrine, their theology essentially put election and salvation – and this subject of the perseverance of the saints – in the hands of man rather than God. The Synod of Dort rejected Arminian doctrine and answered with what we commonly call the Five Points

of Calvinism.

The Apostle Paul anticipated these Arminian objections to the security of the believer:

Rom 6:15-18 What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! (16) Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? (17) But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, (18) and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

One of the scriptures which Arminian theology points to as support of their position is the one we are examining – Hebrews 6:4-8,

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.

We looked, last time, at that word “enlightened,” and saw that words like this – enlightened, tasted, shared in – are not the typical terms used in Scripture for Christ’s people. Justification, sanctification, adoption, faith – do not appear here, but do come up again later when the Apostle specifically addresses these Hebrew Christians.

Heb 6:9-12 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.**

His purpose in verses 4-7 is to show careless, dull of hearing spiritual infants *how incredibly dangerous it is to drift along presumptuously instead of pressing on to maturity in Christ. And that danger is apostasy.* The apostate is the person the Apostle is describing here. In spite of amazing spiritual and gracious benefits from the Lord, the apostate ends in a terrifying expectation of hell:

Heb 2:1-4 Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we

have heard, lest we drift away from it. (2) For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, (3) how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, (4) while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

And again:

Heb 10:28-31 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.

So when we maintain that a Christian – a truly regenerate person who is therefore in Christ – can never be lost, *we do not teach and promote spiritual carelessness or lawlessness*. We do exactly what the Bible does – assure Christ’s people that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ, while at the same time warning those who claim to be Christians and yet who are neglectful and careless in striving to follow Him. We encourage one another to examine ourselves by the light of Scripture to see if we truly are in Christ.

Well then, let’s move ahead and take a closer look at that next descriptive phrase of still another of the privileges the apostate has received –

*“who have **tasted** the heavenly gift”*

The emphasis the Apostle is making here is exactly what we see him doing in that passage we read earlier:

1Co 10:1-5 For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, (2) and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, (3) and all ate the same spiritual food, (4) and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. (5) **Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.**

*The hearing of the gospel, the blessing and gifting of the Holy Spirit as He enlightens the mind to the truth of Christ, even the witnessing of mighty acts of God's power, growing up in a Christian home and seeing the example of godly parents, being in a faithful church year after year and hearing the Word of God truthfully preached, does not ensure that a person will ever see the Promised Land. Why?*

Heb 3:15-19 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.**

*"Tasted the heavenly gift."* What does this mean? What is this experience or privilege these apostates received? Once more, we call on John Owen to help us understand. (I summarize here)-

"The second thing asserted in the description of them is that they have tasted of the heavenly gift. What is meant by 'heavenly gift,' and what by 'tasting' of it?

As far as I can observe, *dorea* (gift)...is nowhere used [in Scripture] except to mean the Holy Spirit. See Acts 2:38, "you shall

receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Also see Acts 8:20. The Holy Spirit is the gift of God under the New Testament.

And He is said to be from heaven. After Christ’s ascension, He sent the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the great gift of the gospel (New Testament) era. He was the great gift which God would give and by whom God would institute a new way and a new rite of worship (in “Spirit and truth,” see John 4) in place of the earthly ordinances of Moses.”

What then is this “tasting” of the Holy Spirit which benefit these apostates received? Owen continues:

“This tasting signifies no more than making a trial or experiment of something. We taste such things by the sense given us to discern our food, and then either receive or refuse them, as we find occasion. It does not therefore include eating, much less digesting and turning into real nourishment of what is tasted.

Tasting is therefore to make an experiment or trial of something. And to these apostates then, the tasting ascribed to them is that *they had an experience of the power of the Holy Spirit, that gift of God in the New Testament era. They had made a trial of the excellency of the New covenant in Christ, a privilege which not all men were made partakers of. And by this taste they were convinced that it was far more excellent than what they had been beforehand accustomed to. And yet still, they rejected this fine wheat to return to their old acorns.”*

In making application of this, Owen says:

“There is a goodness and excellency in this heavenly gift which may be tasted or experienced in some measure by people who never received it in their life, power, and effectual working. They may taste the Word in its truth, but not in its power. They may taste of the worship of Christ in the church in its outward order, but not in its inward beauty.”

*A rejection of the gospel, its truth and worship after some experience being had of its worth and excellency, is a high aggravation of sin and a certain precursor to destruction.”*

This is very sobering and I hope that the gravity of it strikes you. It is supposed to strike us – for our good so that we do not grow careless and dull in our walk with Christ. That is the path the apostate treads and ultimately he falls away – he regards Christ with contempt and disregard. A person who makes a profession of faith in Christ but then, after years go by is still in spiritual diapers, such a person is en route to going back to the world and thereby demonstrating he was never in Christ at all. *Do not be one of those people! Taste the milk, but press on to the meat!*

In practical terms, what does this look like?

- Feeding daily on Christ by carefully and prayerfully

reading His Word.

- Praying at all times that the Lord would grant us greater love for Him, greater understanding of His Word, and a greater love for holiness and hatred of sin.
- Regularly remembering the Lord’s day and gathering together with His people.

You can see in this book of Hebrews that these are things these people were neglecting and the Apostle Paul admonishes them for it and encourages them to renew their obedience to Christ. [See 3:13; 4:1, 11; 10:24-27; 12:25]

Before we conclude, let’s at least begin to look at the third characteristic of these apostates. It is this:

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,**

Do you begin to understand now why *it is dangerous and careless to*

*pronounce and assure someone that they are most certainly in Christ simply because they evidence certain positive traits upon hearing the gospel?* This Apostle is telling us that many people receive real operations of the Holy Spirit within them, all of which fall short of salvation. Hearing the gospel is good. Hearing the gospel and being excited about it is good. Understanding the goodness of Christ and seeing His glory is a very, very excellent gift of grace. John Bunyan was one of the most foul-mouthed people in his town and he came under heavy conviction of his sin – so much so that he reformed himself and people even commented on the remarkable changes in his life. But Bunyan tells us – he was not born again at that time.

So here the Apostle tells us that a person can actually have *shared in the Holy Spirit*, and yet not be regenerate. A share in the Holy Spirit, and yet ultimately fall away and end in hell. To *share* in the Holy Spirit is (Owen) *to have a share in the gifts He distributes. It*

*is to have a share in the benefits of His operations.* [See Acts 8:21, Simon the magician, who, negatively, had no share]

“We may observe that the Holy Spirit is present with many people who are made partakers of him in His spiritual gifts *who are never made partakers of Him in His saving graces.*” (Owen)

Mat 7:22-23 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.’

I want to conclude this morning by calling upon you all once again to give careful and serious consideration to this last point. *There are people – many people – in churches and various ministries performed in the name of Christ who are nothing more than Almost Christians.* The Almost Christian, having been enlightened by the

Spirit, having tasted of the Spirit and even partaken of His gifts, is still nothing more than a mimic. He or she can do rather amazing things. And yet....

1Co 13:1-3 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. (2) And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. (3) If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Take care. Be wise. Examine yourself, but also test the spirits as Christ commands us. The Almost Christian can:

- Found a Bible College
- Be an expert in theology
- Preach to thousands each week
- Write a library of books
- Be in demand regularly at the biggest Christian conferences
- Pray the most divine prayers

Yet never be born again.

Be wise. The apostate can fall away, deny the faith, and *yet I suggest to you that he can continue, for purely self-glorifying reasons, to play the role.* These kinds of people can be very energetic in “serving” Christ. And yet, perhaps many years before, after sharing in the Spirit, they fell away – but kept the disguise, never having been born again at all.

Christ is coming. Perhaps today. Perhaps TODAY is the last Lord’s Day we will gather together on this earth. Be sure of this – one day IS going to be our last day in this world. There is no time to be careless in following Christ. No time to cling to this world.

Our One Life  
Horatius Bonar

‘Tis not for man to trifle! Life is  
brief, and sin is here.  
Our age is but the falling of a leaf,  
A dropping tear.  
We have no time to sport away the  
hours,  
All must be earnest in a world like

ours.

Not many lives, but only one have

we,

One, only one;

How sacred should that one life

ever be,

That narrow span!