

When Churches Are Publicly Ashamed of the Son of God, Hebrews 6
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Introduction: This Hebrews 6 passage is breath-taking, however not breath-taking as in a serene beach sunset or an awe-inspiring mountain vista. This passage reaches down and grips the soul, wrenching breath away by its spiritual weightiness—soul shocking!

The disturbing portion of the passage is found in verses 4-6 which are often taken out of context in an attempt to prove a doctrinal system which teaches believers can lose salvation. But if this were the teaching of this passage it would prove a two-edged sword, because according to verse 6 there could be no repentance or re-salvation....

e.g. as I heard a faithful preacher recently declare, “If we could lose our salvation, we all would!”

Examining the context of this passage makes it clear that “losing salvation” is not the doctrinal lesson intended by this Scripture:

- 1) because verse 9ff. turns the argument by contrast in terms of God’s gracious salvation...
- 2) because there are no corroborating Scripture passages that teach believers can “lose” their salvation.

(cf. Westminster Confession of Faith w/ Scripture references chapters 17 & 18)

So what is this weighty passage of Scripture about?

Another view widely accepted is that this passage is a sober warning concerning apostasy, i.e. the Biblical teaching that someone can make a profession of salvation and can outwardly enjoy the fellowship of the Visible Church for a time and then turn away or renounce the Gospel. This is a foundational teaching from Jesus Himself in the Parable of the Sower (or Soils), cf. Matthew 13:3ff. et al.

I believe this Hebrews 6 passage incorporates the Biblical doctrine of apostasy, but applies it within the context of the Visible Church as particular churches and denominations are charged with keeping the truth and purity of the Gospel.

“This catholic (universal) church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less visible. And particular churches, which are members thereof, are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them.

The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error; and some have so degenerated, as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan. Nevertheless, there shall be always a church on earth, to worship God according to his will.”

(Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 25, sections 4 & 5)

One astounding warning from Hebrews 6 may be formed as a question, “Can the Visible Church lose the Gospel?” This warning is identified in the context by verse 6 with the disturbing evidence when churches are publicly ashamed of the Son of God.

Ill. Have you ever been shamed by a parent, teacher, coach... or publically ridiculed, insulted, embarrassed...

By this question believing Christians are faced with the disturbing and uncomfortable consideration of when does heresy (miss-teaching) become apostasy (false teaching denying the Gospel).

Losing the Gospel is losing the good news of God's way of salvation!

"All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them."

(Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 1, section 7)

*The context of this passage is primarily about the visible church and secondarily by application about the matter of individual apostasy.

We live in a culture that promotes the cult of self, so very often Scriptures that collectively or corporately address the visible and sacramental church are only considered as matters of individual piety.

Yet the Scriptures repeatedly exhort believers about the mystery of communion in the Body of Christ and connectedness to one another.

The context of Hebrews 6 is about the visible, sacramental church and God's covenantal faithfulness fulfilled in the New Covenant by the person and work of Christ, the Son of God, applied by the Holy Spirit, through the Gospel means of grace.

Vss. 1-3, The gospel is incomplete without the God appointed doctrines and means of grace, e.g. using the name of Christ or Christianity can be vain and hollow even resulting in Divine abandonment!

Vss. 4-6, Forsaking the gospel results in openly shaming Jesus Christ as insufficient along with the risks of becoming like the religious people who originally crucified the Son of God, the idea is betrayal [ἀνασταυρώω/*an-as-tow-ro'-o*, to *recrucify* (figuratively): - crucify afresh, giving up to crucifying, ἀνασταυρουντας present tense, active voice, participle] expressing the idea of continual, intentional condition willfully giving up in the same way as the ones actively crucifying Jesus, but not an actually recrucifying, rather the disposition of rejection by betrayal, the leading example is Judas Iscariot. So what should we say of churches or denominations which forsake and deny that Jesus Christ is the Son of God shaming the witness to His substitutionary death, literal burial, plus historical/factual resurrection and glorification? Such a group that is ashamed of the Son of God should be called a Judas Iscariot church!

Vss. 7-8, Like the natural world is dependent on God's power and order, so the gospel is only fruitful by God's blessing...

Vss. 9-12, Visible churches may be evaluated by the Biblically identified things that accompany salvation, so visible churches are considered better or worse, more or less pure, by God's covenantal standards, e.g. more than morality, based on God's faithfulness...

Vss. 13-15, Abraham belongs to the Christian Faith as an example of justification by faith and covenantal grace...

Vss. 16-20, God's eternal counsel confirmed by His covenantal oath is timeless and insures the success of the Gospel of Christ, God has given His promise by His Word—in Scripture and Incarnate...

