

## **"A DIRE WARNING" (HEBREWS 5:11 THRU 6:8) part 1**

This morning we'll be looking at one of if not THE most challenging passages to interpret in the entire Bible – Hebrews 5:11 thru 6:8. Frankly, it's a passage that confuses and bothers a lot of Christians. As we get into it, you'll understand why it is so difficult to understand. I remember writing a paper about this passage while I was at Dallas Theological Seminary. It's troublesome because it deals with a tough subject, apostasy. [Q1] What is apostasy? The dictionary definition says, "Apostasy is the formal disaffiliation from, abandonment of, or renunciation of a religion by a person." To state it more simply: Apostasy is totally abandoning or rejecting one's faith.

[Q2] Can this really happen to a true, born-again Christian? It's a good question, a fair question. The answer may surprise you. It is NO. Let me tell you why from the Bible. First the writer of Hebrews thinks NOT. In Hebrews 3:6 he says, "But Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are His house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope." Then in Hebrews 3:14 he says, "For we have come to share in Christ if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end." Hebrews 10:24 says, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful." First John 5:4 says, "For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – OUR FAITH." Revelation repeatedly talks about true believers as being overcomers. So as I read Hebrews and the N.T. the answer is NO. The evidence that we are truly saved is our perseverance. *[Dr. Baylis quote: "You don't have to agree with me. All I'm asking is that you consider what I'm telling you is true."]*

Another question that arises from this passage is our security as believers. Those who do not believe in the doctrine of eternal security, who believe you can lose your salvation will use this passage as one of their proof texts. [Q3] One of two things is true. Either you can lose your salvation or you can't. I believe very strongly, based on how I read the

Bible, that once an individual is truly saved (has placed their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior), they CANNOT lose their salvation. Are you saved? I am saved. We, then, are sealed by the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption (Eph 4:30). No one is able to snatch us out of the Father's hand (John 10:29). Nothing shall separate us from the love of Christ (Rom 8:35). We have an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, reserved in heaven for us (1 Peter 1:4) So then, I firmly hold to the doctrine of eternal security that says "once saved, always saved."

When we first began this study of Hebrews I pointed out something to keep in mind while studying Hebrews. The Book of Hebrews is a letter and it was written to a Jewish community. That's where the book gets its name from. It is written to "Hebrews," also called Jews. As with the other letters in the N.T, we are reading someone else's mail. In the case of Hebrews we just don't know exactly who the recipients are. But we do know from reading this letter that they're Jewish. From the text we discern that there are 3 groups of Jews who are the intended audience of this letter: (1) Jewish Christians. They came out of a Jewish background and had been converted to Christ probably thru the preaching of the apostles or second generation disciples. Faced with growing persecution for their faith in Christ, many of these Jewish believers got discouraged. They may have even begun to have some doubts about what they believed. (2) Jews who believed intellectually that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah. However, though they were convinced of that truth, never committed themselves to following Jesus. Instead, they held on to their Jewish practices. I've been referring to this group as "fence-straddlers." (3) Jewish unbelievers who rejected Jesus as their Messiah altogether. The writer of Hebrews, whoever he is, apparently has all 3 groups in mind as he makes his argument that the NEW covenant in Christ is BETTER than the OLD covenant. That's the central argument of Hebrews. And the writer makes his argument strictly from the O.T. Scriptures. When this letter was written (65-69 A.D.), the N.T. canon had not yet been formed.

So the question is as we go thru Hebrews, the various messages being conveyed, is how do we know which group of Jews the writer is talking to? The answer is, we know from the context of the passage.

Within any group, even in churches, you will have both believers and unbelievers. And it's often difficult to tell them apart (parable of the wheat and the tares in Matt 13). The writer of Hebrews is apparently familiar enough with this Jewish community to realize there are many in this fellowship who have yet to profess their faith in Jesus. They've heard the truth of the Gospel of Christ which has been proclaimed to them repeatedly, but they have not responded in faith. They've "tasted" the heavenly gift of salvation, but never feasted upon it. They've felt the Holy Spirit's calling, but resisted Him. [Q4] I'm convinced as I read this passage that it is this group of fence-straddling Jews who are so close to accepting Christ that the writer of Hebrews is addressing.

Throughout the Book of Hebrews you have this great theological treatise about who Jesus is. The writer lays out how the new covenant in Jesus' blood, based on the sacrifice He made for us on the cross is better than the old covenant found in the Law. Interspersed in all of this wonderful Christo-centric theology are warnings for unbelievers. The writer's message is clear. You must respond to Jesus by faith. Hebrews is all about faith, faith in Jesus Christ. You need to commit your life to Him.

It is very important whenever you read and study the Bible that you know something about the target audience. They are real people with real life issues. So when you study a passage you need to know the entire context. Otherwise you stand the real danger of misinterpreting a passage and developing a faulty theology.

So far in our study we've come across 2 previous warnings. This passage here will be the third warning. The first warning came in Ch 2. There the writer of Hebrews, having just said that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, the One who made purification for sins (that Jesus already dealt with the sin issue) – given everything that he's just laid out about

Jesus, the writer asks his unbelieving audience how are they going to respond to Jesus? In Hebrews 2:3 the all-important question is: "How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?" He's referring to the salvation that comes in Jesus. If Jesus IS indeed the promised Messiah, if He IS the means to salvation (the writer obviously believes that He is), then how will anyone escape the flames of hell if they reject Him? The implied answer is THEY WON'T! So the first warning that is given demands a response on the part of the unbelieving Jews, which is (citing from Isa Ch 8) to place your hope trust in the Messiah, in Jesus! That's warning #1.

The second warning came in Ch 3-4. The writer quotes from Psalm 95. Three times he says, "Do not harden your hearts." He compares these unbelieving Jews he's talking to in Hebrews with those faithless people of the wilderness generation of O.T. Israel. The warning given is that if they fail to act in faith and believe the truth of God concerning Jesus, just like their forefathers, they "will not enter God's rest." They won't be a part of the Kingdom of God. Warning #2.

So two warnings have been issued so far, both directed at Jewish unbelievers – that is made clear in both passages. So what makes us think that this third warning here in our passage is any different? My position is that it is not any different. Like the two warnings previously, this warning is for unbelievers, more specifically for the "fence-straddlers" who are so close to embracing Jesus Christ as Savior. He's really targeting them.

To understand this difficult passage about apostasy you need to file away these two things: (1) once a person is saved they cannot lose their salvation and (2) the target audience is fence-straddling unbelievers. Given these two things will help us to understand this passage – what it IS saying and what it is NOT saying.

Let me read the entire passage first. READ Hebrews 5:11 thru 6:8.

So let's go back and begin to unpack what we just read. This is a two-part lesson. What I don't cover this morning we will pick back up and cover two weeks from today.

READ Hebrews 5:11

In other words, "There's more I'd like to say about the whole idea of Melchizedek being a type of the Messiah, a foreshadowing of Jesus (what he was talking about before). There are deeper truths I want to share with you, but they're difficult. If I told you them, you wouldn't understand because you've become dull of hearing. So then [Q5] the main problem with the audience is that they have become intellectually lazy.

You can sense the frustration by the writer here as he talks to this group of Jews. What a contrast between them and the Jews in Berea of Acts Ch 17 who "examined the scriptures daily to see if these things were so" (Acts 17:11). The Jews in Berea had the gospel preached to them by Paul and Silas. They checked out what they said against their O.T. scriptures. As a result, "many of them believed." So you remember the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar that Jesus talked to in John Ch 4? Based on what Jesus told her about Himself and what she knew from the O.T. Scriptures, she suddenly realized who Jesus was. She ran into town and told everyone, "Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could He possibly be the Messiah?" As a result of that woman's testimony many Samaritans from that town came to know Jesus. And then there is the time after His resurrection that Jesus is talking to two men on the road to Emmaus. It says in Luke 24 that Jesus "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets (the O.T. scriptures), interpreted to them the things concerning Himself." Later on after Jesus had left they said, "Didn't our hearts burn within while He opened to us the Scriptures?"

By contrast you have this group of Jews here in the Book of Hebrews. They've heard the Gospel message preached. They're familiar with the O.T. scriptures that offer a picture of the Messiah. They know that Jesus fulfilled the various messianic prophecies. But unlike those examples I gave you,

these Jews here don't seem to be moved by any of it. They've heard the truth. They even believed it a little. But they have not respond in faith. Thus the writer of Hebrews calls them, "dull of hearing."

READ Hebrews 5:12-13

"You've heard the Gospel message so much you could probably teach it. That's how familiar you are with it. But the problem is that you don't even understand the basic principles from the O.T. scriptures, what v 12 calls 'the oracles of God.' You're spiritually immature." If a child doesn't know their A,B,C's how are they ever going to read? Likewise, if these Jews don't even understand the very basics from their own Scriptures; if they cannot see how it all pictures and symbols points toward their Messiah, then how in the world are they going to take that next step, see how Jesus fulfilled them and commit their lives to Jesus?

Notice the analogy the writer of Hebrews uses here to describe the spiritual immaturity of these unbelieving Jews. This relates to **Q6**. In 1 Cor 3 Paul uses the same analogy contrasting those who live on milk (spiritual infants) with those who eat solid food (spiritually mature). Paul's target audience was the church at Corinth comprised of carnal, backslidden Christians who were not growing in their faith as they should. Peter uses the same analogy the same way that Paul does in 1 Peter 2. Again Peter is addressing a mostly Christian audience. In our passage the writer of Hebrews picks up on this same baby-milk-solid food analogy that Paul and Peter used. But the writer of Hebrews has a different audience in mind, specifically, unbelieving Jews in a particular community. So, the same analogy related to spiritual immaturity is used, but with a different application. Just because you have an analogy made for one thing doesn't mean that the same analogy means the same thing later. Example: a lion. Prov 28 applies to the righteous; Jer 2 applies to the people who killed their own prophets; 1 Peter applies it to the devil; Rev 5 applies it to Jesus. This is just one example to make a point. Don't assume then that because Paul and Peter used this same analogy to apply to believers that the writer

of Hebrews is applying it here the same way. Don't make that wrong assumption. Look at the context.

READ Hebrews 5:14

Go back to my previous examples. Here the writer of Hebrews equates spiritual maturity with being like the Jews of Berea, like the woman at the well and the Samaritans of Sychar, like the two men on the road to Emmaus. [Q6] So, here a mature Jew is one who **acts in faith (believes)** based on what they've been taught. Spiritual maturity for those examples I gave involved hearing God's word, studying it, discerning its truth, understanding it the best that they could, and then finally, acting on it by faith. Here spiritual maturity refers to being given the full knowledge of Christ from the O.T. scriptures and believing it. The writer of Hebrews point is simply this: a spiritually mature person, knowing the truth, should be capable of making wise choices and distinguishing good from evil. At this point, these Jews here in Hebrews should have been able to clearly see the truth of the Gospel (they knew it well enough that they could teach it) – that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, the Savior. He is clearly the One the O.T. Scriptures spoke of. So why won't they then respond to it in faith? Because they have the same mindset as those O.T. Jews that says, "Hey, we keep the Law, we're OK, We're Jews, God's people. We're automatically in!" A cultural mindset, a false sense of security.

Back in Hebrews 3:12 the writer is addressing this same group of Jewish unbelievers. In that second warning he gave them he says, "Take care, brothers (Jewish brothers), lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God." We often think of good and evil as being strictly how we behave. But that's not the case. Every action begins in the heart. Good is doing things God's way, believing God's revealed truth and then acting obediently to it. Evil is the total opposite – NOT doing things God's way, NOT believing what God said is true and failing to act in faith on His word. What was Adam and Eve's sin? Not believing God. Instead, they bought into the serpent's (Satan's)

lie. Their sin (and the sin of these unbelieving Jews in Hebrews) is the sin of unbelief. They know the truth but won't commit to it by faith. That's the problem.

Now for the solution...Chapter 6 and we will look at this next time...

"Therefore," Ch 6 opens, "let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity..." The "elementary doctrine of Christ" refers to the basic O.T. teachings about the Christ, the Messiah. That is the first part of Q7.

"Let's move on past the A,B,C's – the basics that the O.T. shows us about the Messiah (all of those forms, pictures and symbols) and move on toward spiritual maturity. Embrace the reality that the Messiah has come. Live the life of faith in Christ rather than a life of works, trying to keep the Law."

The writer warns these Jewish fence-straddlers what will happen to them if they don't. And it is a dire warning – it's very, very serious.