

Basic Training Bible Ministries presents



An Appeal for Faithfulness in an Age of Apostasy

The Five Warning Passages of Hebrews

October 25–27, 2019

Uniontown, Pennsylvania

An Appeal for Faithfulness in an Age of Apostasy

The Five Warning Passages of Hebrews

Introduction

The Book of Hebrews is, in the author's own words, a "*word [or message] of exhortation*" (Heb. 13:22). The contents reveal the author's deep concern that the recipients are in danger of falling away from the faith, and thus incurring the combined damages of shipwrecked spiritual lives, loss of effective witness, extreme divine discipline, and loss of eternal reward.

Correct interpretation of the book requires taking its historical and cultural context into consideration. The book was written around 66–68 A.D. This was in the early stages of the growing Jewish/Roman war that would end in the destruction of the Temple, the city of Jerusalem, and the Nation of Israel itself.

The recipients were Hebrew believers, who under fierce persecution were considering returning to Judaism as a shield against both their Jewish persecutors and also the growing Roman threat. At this time, Judaism was still protected by Rome.

According to the Jewish historian, Josephus, the whole nation had given in to a collective madness, which called for divine judgment. In the forty years since the crucifixion, the self-inflicted judgment of the collective cry, "*His blood be on us and on our children*" (Matt. 27:25), had, in effect, driven the nation into a spiritual vacuum.

The parallels between first century Israel and 21st Century America are frightening. No one of sound mind can look at our nation today and not see the insanity that has resulted from our own spiritual void. And far too many believers today, wearied from the constant state of the spiritual conflict, have begun to drift away from their former devotion to Jesus Christ and His Word.

The Book of Hebrews is not an epistle written to professing but unsaved people (the Calvinist/Lordship view). Nor is it a warning to genuine believers who are in danger of apostasy resulting in the loss of their salvation (the Arminian view). Rather, it is a stark warning to true children of God of the danger of loving this world to the point of hiding their faith and denying the Savior—just as Peter had done.

The one great difference between Peter's denials, and that possible to these recipients, was time. Peter had time to recover, but these believers—living in the shadow of one of the most cataclysmic and violent upheavals in ancient history—did not have time. For their generation, as well, I believe, for our own, time was nearly up!

The Beginning and the End: Hebrews in a Nutshell

God Has Spoken

“God ... has ... spoken to us by His Son ... See that you do not refuse Him who speaks ... from heaven.” Hebrews 1:1–2; 12:25

“How Shall We Escape?”

“How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation ... spoken by the Lord ... much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven.” Hebrews 2:3; 12:25

Consider Jesus

“Consider the Apostle and High priest of our confession, Christ Jesus ... For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.” Hebrews 3:1; 12:3

The Scriptures warn us that “... to whom much is given, from him much will be required” (Luke 12:48). The author’s point is that, since all that we have been given in the Church Age is greater than what Israel was given in the Old Covenant, we stand under even greater accountability. If Israel was not spared severe, divine discipline for their apostasy, how then shall we escape our own accountability?

Hebrews Topical Outline

1. Jesus Christ is greater than angels, Hebrews 1–2.
Therefore, let us give greater heed (focus on the Word) (Heb. 2:1).
2. Jesus Christ is greater than Moses, Hebrews 3, also Joshua and David (Heb. 4:7–8).
Therefore, let us fear ... *“be diligent to enter ... rest”* (faith-rest life) (Heb. 4:1, 11).
3. Jesus Christ is greater than the Levitical priesthood, Hebrews 5–7.
Therefore, let us press on to maturity and fruitfulness (Heb. 6:1–3).
4. Jesus’ work is greater than that of the Old Covenant, Hebrews 8–10.
Therefore, *“let us draw near ... hold fast ... consider one another”* (Heb. 10:19–25).
5. Jesus Christ is greater than all Old Testament saints, Hebrews 11–12.
Therefore, *“let us run with endurance ... looking unto Jesus”* (Heb. 12:1–3).

Five Warnings/Exhortations

“And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words.” Hebrews 13:22

In each of the warning sections, three things are observed:

1. The superiority of Jesus Christ to all previous persons and events
“Therefore” explains the **reason/basis** for the exhortation.
2. The proper spiritual response to these greater provisions
“Let us” calls us to join the author in a **spiritual response**.
3. A warning of the potential dangers of neglecting/rejecting His grace
“For” (because) is a reminder that our decisions have **consequences**.

All of these must be viewed in light of the epistle being written to First Century Jewish believers in danger of turning back to Judaism, under the shadow of the approaching calamity of 70 A.D. Because of this historical context, **no believer today can fail in exactly the same way that these believers were warned against**. However, this book will be crucial to Jewish believers living during the Tribulation Period, as the same fundamental issues will exist then.

First Exhortation: A Call to Listen in an Age of Distraction, Hebrews 2:1–4

“Therefore, we must [let us] give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away [from them] ... for if the word spoken through angels ... how shall we escape ”? Hebrews 2:1, 5 (emphasis added)

Reason/Basis

“Therefore”: Because of the infinite greatness of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1)

The Glory of His Person, Hebrews 1:1–4

1. Heir
2. Creator
3. Revealer
4. Explainer
5. Sustainer
6. Redeemer
7. Victor

The Greatness of His Work, Hebrews 1:5–14 (Seven Old Testament quotes)

1. His incarnation, v. 5; Psalm 2:7
2. His unconditional obedience, v. 5b; 2 Sam. 7:14
3. His coming kingdom (Second Advent), v. 6; Psalm 89:27
4. His authority, v. 7; Psalm 104:4
5. His anointing, vv. 8–9; Psalm 45:6–7; Isa. 61:1, 3
6. His immutability, vv. 10–12; Psalm 102, 25–27
7. His exaltation, v. 13; Psalm 110:1

Spiritual Response

“Let us”: Here, *“we must give ... more earnest heed.”* The Greek word translated *“must”* means a logical necessity due to the nature of the situation. We who are “heirs of salvation” (Heb. 1:14; 2:5; 12:28; Gal. 3:29; 4:6–7) are under the obligation of gratitude to utilize the grace gifts we have received. *“Give ... earnest heed”* means diligent attention, by always holding up before our face the Word of God. It is a call to serious study, reflection, and application of the Word of God.

The Warning

“For ... how shall we escape if we neglect ...?” Two conditions are given: First, in Old Testament history, every word communicated through angels (inferior to the Son) proved steadfast and had consequences. Second is the phrase, *“if we neglect so great a salvation”* (Heb. 2:3). This *“salvation,”* from Hebrews 1:14, is not eternal life alone, but what we are to *“inherit”* through our actions and conduct in this life.

Three Phases of Salvation

1. Phase One: Justification—declared righteous through faith (2 Cor. 5:21)
2. Phase two: Sanctification—practical righteousness through faith (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38)
“The just shall live by faith” (Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17; Heb. 10:38).
3. Phase Three: Glorification with Christ, including just reward (1 Cor. 3:11–15)

Principle: *“To whom much is given ... much will be required,”* Luke 12:48.

“How shall we escape?” Escape from what? We who have trusted Christ cannot escape the duties and obligations of the spiritual life. Every decision we make has consequences, either for blessing or for cursing (see Heb. 6:7–8; Deu. 11:26; Deuteronomy 28).

“... much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven [Jesus Christ] ...” Hebrews 12:25

Five Things to Escape from in Hebrews	The Process of “Falling Away,” Ephesians 4:17–19
1. The danger of apathy to God’s Word, Heb. 2:1–4	1. <i>“futility of ... mind”</i> —the vacuum created by apathy to God’s Word
2. The danger of bypassing the faith-rest life, Heb. 4:1–11	2. <i>“alienated from the life of God”</i> —carnality vs. spirituality
3. The danger of never attaining spiritual maturity, Heb. 6:1–3	3. <i>“blindness of ... heart”</i> —hardening of heart begins
4. The danger of a life of willful sin, Heb. 10:25–35	4. <i>“given ... to lewdness”</i> —speaks of a frantic search for happiness and fulfillment, because of an unfulfilled spiritual life
5. The danger of final apostasy and loss, Heb. 12:12–17	5. <i>“to work all ... greediness”</i> —a determined commitment to unrestrained lifestyle

Note: This same process can be seen in the life of the heathen (Rom. 1:18–32), which is why Paul says believers should, *“no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk”* (Eph. 4:17).

Main Point: If God honored the Law of Moses, which was given by angels, how can we escape divine discipline if we ignore the word of Jesus Christ? Bear in mind that these warnings are given in light of the impending judgment of 70 A.D. Where do you think America is today on God’s cycle of judgments (Lev. 26:14–35, five cycles)?

A Gracious Way of Escape

1. There are three things we as believers need to escape from in life:
 - We need to escape from trials and temptations.
 - We need to escape from discipline for disobedience.

- We need to escape from sharing in the judgment of unbelievers.

At the moment we believed in Jesus Christ, we became, “*partakers of the divine nature, **having escaped** the corruption that is in the world through lust*” 2 Peter 1:4 (emphasis added).

2. God will always provide His children with a way of escape, if they will take it.

“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation [trial] will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.” 1 Corinthians 10:13

3. God provided, even for worldly Lot, a way of escape, both from captivity (Genesis 14), and from destruction in Sodom. He took it; his wife did not.

“The LORD being merciful to him ... said, ‘Escape for your life!’” Genesis 19:16–17

4. In order to escape the spiritual dangers that face us, we need to be worthy of escape. How do we do that? We choose to take the way of escape!

“Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand [victoriously] before the Son of Man.” Luke 21:36 (see 1 John 2:28)

5. No one who seeks the Lord in humility and faith will fail to escape.

“And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.” Jeremiah 29:13; Deuteronomy 4:29

Second Exhortation: An Invitation to Enter the Faith-Rest Life, Hebrews 3:7–4:14

“Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, Let us fear lest any of you seem to come short of it. For ... the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.” Hebrews 4:1–2 (emphasis added)

Reason/Basis

“Therefore”: Because of the superiority of Jesus to Moses (Heb. 3:1–6)

1. The Lord Jesus is both the **Apostle** (represents God to us), and **High Priest** (representing us to God), of our confession of faith.
2. Jesus is worthy of greater glory than Moses, because He is the builder of the house of Israel, while Moses was a servant within the house.
3. Now, with the New Covenant, Jesus Christ is the Son over His own house.
4. We who believe in Him are also active members of this household, **if we hold fast** our confidence and joy, firm to the end. The warning implied here is not loss of salvation, but of active fellowship in His service (see Heb. 3:14, “*partakers*”).

Spiritual Response

“Let us”: Our exhortation is in two parts:

1. **“Let us fear”** (Heb. 4:1). It is both right and proper that we should fear failing to enter into “*His rest.*” The phrase “*to have come short,*” literally means “to fall behind, to fall short” of the life of faith-rest. “*The perfect tense marks not only a present or past defeat, but an abiding failure*” (*Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, pp. 674-75).
2. **“Let us ... be diligent to enter that rest”** (Heb. 4:11). The Greek word translated “*diligent*” means “to be eager, to hurry, to be determined.” If you read 2 Peter 1:5–7, we find that “*diligence*” is the key to moving on in spiritual growth after we come to faith in Jesus Christ.

The author’s point is that a healthy fear of spiritual failure provides motivation for the spiritual diligence necessary to enter into the fulfillment and fruitfulness of the faith-rest life.

The Two “Rests” of the Spiritual Life

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me ... and you will find rest for your souls.” Matthew 11:28–29 (emphasis added)

1. The rest of **salvation**.
This is the once-for-all rest that comes from laying down the burden of sin and guilt, and the peace that results from trusting Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1).

2. The rest of **spirituality**/sanctification.
This is the day-by-day rest and peace that comes from a life of growth, obedience, and the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22; Phil. 4:7).

The Warning

“For ... the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith ...” (Heb. 4:2). Who is the author referring to? The Exodus generation of chapter 3. There are two things the author wants his readers, and us, to understand about the Exodus generation:

1. They were believers, who had been delivered by the blood of the lamb, faith in the Lord, and by His mighty power (Exod. 4:31; 12:7, 22; 14:31).
2. After they believed and were delivered, they ceased believing in God’s Word. The incident referred to in Hebrews 3:1–19 takes us back to Kadesh-Barnea.

Failure at Kadesh-Barnea

The word *“Kadesh”* means “consecrated, sanctified” (*Unger’s Bible Dictionary*). *“Barnea”* means “son of wandering” (*Fausset’s Bible Dictionary*). The original name of the place was *“En Mishpat,”* which means “Fountain of Judgment.” The combination of these names shows us that we all come in our spiritual lives to a place intended for “sanctification” and blessing but, by our own rebellion, may become the place of “judgment and wandering.”

1. It was at Kadesh-Barnea that the children of Israel chose not to enter into the Promised Land—the place of “rest” promised by God (Numbers 14).
2. It was at this same place that Miriam died (Num. 20:1).
3. It was also here that Moses *“struck the rock twice”* (Num. 20:11), when he was told to *“Speak to the rock”* (Num. 20:8). Paul tells us *“that Rock was Christ”* (1 Cor. 10:4). This is what the author of Hebrews has in mind when he later speaks of *“crucify[ing] again the Son of God”* (Heb. 6:6). Remember that, for this sin, even Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land (Num. 20:12), because he did not believe the Lord. What an example of the fact that “God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11)!

When Believers Cease to Believe, Hebrews 3:12–19

“Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.” Hebrews 3:12

The word *“departing”* here is the word we get “apostasy” (*apostenai*) from! Take note of the process involved:

1. It begins with evil motives of the heart.
2. This leads to a refusal to believe God’s Word.
3. This results in a departure from fellowship/partnership with God.
4. The heart then begins to be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.

5. If persisted in, this hardening will close the door to recovery. (We will see more on this in Heb. 6:4, under the concept “it is impossible to restore.”)

“So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.” Hebrews 3:19

Main Point: If Jewish believers under Moses missed out on entering the Promised Land, does it not make sense that we can miss out on faith-rest/abundant life (Matt. 11:29–30; John 10:10)?

The Solution?

I realize that passages like this can be troubling to many believers. The good news is that if you are troubled, you are not hardened beyond the point of no return. You can begin today to recover lost spiritual ground and enter into the “second rest,” which we call the faith-rest life—what Jesus referred to in John 10:10 as “abundant life.” The abundant life is a life of faith, power, purpose, productivity, and blessing to self and to others. Here are the author’s steps to spiritual recovery:

1. We need to recognize that failure is a very real possibility (Heb. 3:12–14).
2. We need to fear that we should fail our Savior in this way (Heb. 4:1).
3. We need to understand that the way into blessing is continued faith (Heb. 4:3).
4. If we have failed, we must understand that the life of “rest” is still available (Heb. 4:9).
5. We must cease from our own efforts (“dead works”), in the energy of the flesh, to find blessing and fulfillment (Heb. 4:10).
6. We must be diligent in our pursuit of God’s plan and purpose (Heb. 4:11).
7. We must make the focus—the “North Star” of our lives—the Word of God (Heb. 4:12–13).

These simple steps will lead us to a life of increasing assurance, stability, and usefulness in the service of our Lord. The author concludes this section with these words:

*“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, **let us hold fast our confession.**” Hebrews 4:14 (emphasis added)*

Third Exhortation: Press on to Maturity, Hebrews 5:12–6:12

“Therefore ... let us go on to perfection [maturity] ... for it is impossible” Hebrews 6:1, 4 (emphasis added)

Reason/Basis

“Therefore”: Because we have a compassionate and mighty High priest (Heb. 4:14–5:9)
The unique priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ is a central theme of this book.

1. He is uniquely qualified to sympathize with our weaknesses (Heb. 4:15).
2. Therefore, we need have no fear to come to Him boldly, in claiming His grace in our times of need (Heb. 4:16).
3. An essential trait of a priest is compassion for the ignorant and erring, based on experience (Heb. 5:2, again Heb. 4:15).
4. The Father bestowed on Christ the High Priesthood of the order of Melchizedek, following the resurrection (Heb. 5:4–6).
5. Jesus earned this right due to His incarnation, perfect life, crucifixion, and resurrection (Heb. 5:7–9; Psalm 110:1; Acts 13:33).

Spiritual Response

“Let us go on to perfection” (Heb. 6:1). The word *“perfection”* (*teleios*) means “maturity, completeness” in our spiritual growth. The problem was the willful, spiritual immaturity of his listeners, as seen in Hebrews 5:11–14:

1. They had become *“dull of hearing,”* Hebrews 5:11. They were already in the early stages of hardening their hearts, and were not stimulated by God’s Word.
2. They had believed for a long enough time that they should have been teaching others, v. 12.
3. They had reverted to the point that they needed to re-learn the basics, v. 12b.
4. They were unskilled in the use of God’s Word—both in their daily lives and in helping others, v. 13.
5. They lacked the practical experience to even discern good from evil, v. 14. They had failed to redeem the time they had been given, and now time was almost up for them. We may very well be in the same condition in America!

In order to “go on to maturity,” we must move beyond the teachings that were relevant to our salvation. Of these, the author names six:

1. Repentance from “dead works” (Heb. 6:1)
This is repentance from all efforts at salvation by our own works.
“Dead works” = energy of the flesh/sin nature
2. Faith toward God
We can never turn to God by faith in Christ until we “[cease] from [our own] works” (Heb. 4:10).
3. The doctrine of baptisms

Note that this is in the plural. There are seven baptisms mentioned in the New Testament. Each one involves some type of identification:

- a. The baptism of Moses (1 Cor. 10:2). The children of Israel were identified with Moses as their deliverer. They did not get wet, they went through on dry land (Exod. 14:16, 29; Heb. 11:29).
 - b. The baptism of the cross (Luke 12:50). Here, Jesus was identified with sinners, and paid the penalty of our sins (Matt. 27:46; 2 Cor. 5:21).
 - c. The baptism of fire (Matt. 3:11–12). John speaks of the coming judgment of all unbelievers. They will be identified with the wrath of God (John 3:36).
 - d. The baptism of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11; 1 Cor. 12:13). At the moment of salvation, the believer is baptized into the Body of Christ forever (Eph. 1:13–14; Col. 1:13).
 - e. The baptism of John (Matt. 3:11; Acts 19:3). This is not the same as Christian baptism. John called on Israel to be baptized as a confession of their sinfulness, and in anticipation of the coming Messiah/Christ.
 - f. The baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:13–17). This was to identify Jesus as the promised King (John 1:29–34), as well as for Him to identify with us as sinners.
 - g. The baptism of believers (Matt. 28:18–20; Acts 16:33). In this ritual, the new believer is identified with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6:4–8). Water baptism is an outward confession of what has already happened inwardly by the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
4. The laying-on of hands. This was the practice of identification for sending out ministers and missionaries (Acts 6:6; 13:3).
 5. The resurrection of the dead. This includes both of the saved for eternal life and of the lost for eternal judgment (John 5:24–29).
 6. Eternal judgment—the state of the lost (Heb. 9:27–28)

“This we will do if God permits.” (Heb. 6:3)

Why would God not permit it? There are two reasons given in the context: The first is the condition of the souls of his listeners. He cannot know if some are already hardened beyond the point of no return. Second, there is the time factor. Israel, at the time of this writing, was running out of time. Let us consider the prophetic factor behind Hebrews.

The Prophetic Perspective of Hebrews

These First Century Jewish believers had ample evidence of what was coming upon Jerusalem—the destruction of 70 A.D., being instructed in the following seven prophetic warnings:

1. Daniel’s 70 weeks: Messiah “*cut off*,” Jerusalem destroyed (Dan. 9:26)
2. The warning of John, Israel’s last prophet (Matt. 3:7, 11–12; Luke 3:7)
3. Jesus’ warning: “*by your words ...*” (Matt. 12:37)

4. The Pharisees' response to the parable of the vineyard (Matt. 21:40–41)
5. The seven woes, ending in the prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction (Matt. 23:36–39)
6. The self-incrimination of the nation before Pilate (Matt. 27:25)
7. The cry of Jesus on the cross and the rent veil (Matt. 27:50–51; John 19:30)

The Book of Hebrews was written around 66 A.D., just at the beginning of the Jewish/Roman war, that would end in the awful judgment predicted by Jesus (Matt. 23:34–36, 38; Luke 21). The author knew that time was running out. The recipients should have known as well!

The Seven Terminal Generations

1. Noah's generation: Genesis 6:3. It was 120 years until the flood. This cannot be a lifespan, due to Genesis 7:6, 11 and 9:28.
2. The Exodus generation: Genesis 15:12–18. Those in Egypt who were well-instructed, like Joseph, were prepared (Gen. 50:22–26), 400 years.
3. The Exile generation: Daniel 9:1–2; Jeremiah 25:11; 29:10, 70 years.
4. The Messiah generation: Daniel 9:25–26. Seventy “weeks” of years (490 years), from 445 B.C. Messiah would be “cut off” after 62 “weeks” (483 years). These are lunar years, so they don't line up with our calendars. The last “week” is the seven-year Tribulation Period. Both the wise men of Babylon (Matt. 2:1) as well as others like Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:25–37) were waiting!
Note: This is why Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for not knowing the time of their visitation (Luke 19:44).
5. The 70 A.D. generation: Jesus declared that the city and the Temple would be destroyed in “*this generation*,” 40 years (Matt. 23:36; 24:2).
6. The Rapture generation: Matt. 24:32–35. The fig tree represents Israel. The nation came back onto the world scene in 1948. “*This generation*” will see His return.
7. The Second Advent generation: This is closely tied to the Rapture generation, when the 144,000 Jewish evangelists are sealed. They will know they are in Daniel's 70th week. They will not know “*that day and hour*” (Matt. 24:36), but they will know down to the month or week. “*Unless those days were shortened*” (Matt. 24:22) keeps the element of uncertainty!

The Warning

“For it is impossible ... if they fall away, to renew them to repentance” (Heb. 6:4, 6). This passage is not teaching that believers can lose their salvation. In many ways, it is just as fearful, for it is possible for genuine believers to go beyond the point of no return in their spiritual lives.

The Historical Example

Remember that the author has laid down historical precedent for what he is speaking about. Look again at Numbers 14 regarding Kadesh-Barnea.

1. Moses sent out the twelve spies: While Joshua and Caleb brought back a good report, the other ten said that the land was impregnable (Num. 13:26–14:10).

2. The Lord declared that this was the tenth time since the Exodus that the people had rebelled against Him (Num. 14:22–23). Therefore, they would not enter into the land. God had been gracious, but they had passed the point of no return.
3. When the people heard this, they “repented” (Num. 14:39–42), but Moses told them it was too late. God had already passed judgment on them. In other words, it was “*impossible ... to renew them [again] to repentance.*” They would instead suffer the consequences of their rebellion.

The Point of No Return

“If they fall away [apostasy] ... since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.” Hebrews 6:6

Again, we need to consider the historical context. These were Jewish believers who came out of Judaism. In the face of persecution, they at first stood firm (Heb. 10:32–34), but in the face of continued pressure, they were considering returning to the Temple and its services, so as to escape their sufferings.

But when Jesus died, the veil in the Temple was rent from top to bottom (Matt. 27:51; Heb. 10:20), thus declaring God’s rejection of all Temple service from that day forward. To return to the Temple, to sacrifice lambs again, would be the greatest insult to God and shame to Jesus Christ.

The author is saying that if they take that step, they will have gone beyond the point of no return!

Encouragement to Press On, Hebrews 6:9–12

Here, the author, much like Paul often does, softens his harsh warnings with words of comfort and encouragement. He expresses three grounds for hope:

1. God is faithful, and He will not forget their past acts of faithfulness, v. 9.
2. The author and his fellow-believers were encouraging, and no doubt praying, for them to come to the full assurance of our hope, which is the anchor of the soul, v. 19.
3. It was still within their grasp to lay hold, by faith and patience, of the promised inheritance, v.12.

It is interesting that woven into the author’s encouragement are the words “*love ... hope ... faith.*” These three spiritual virtues are the foundation of all spiritual growth and service (1 Cor. 13:13; Gal. 5:5–6; Eph. 4:2–5; Col. 1:4–5; 1 Thess. 1:3; 5:8; 1 Pet. 1:3, 5).

Just as the Promised Land was the “inheritance” of Israel (Exod. 23:30; 32:13; Lev. 20:24; Deu. 1:38), we who have trusted Christ have an inheritance we will share with Him (Matt. 5:5; Rom. 8:17; Gal. 3:29; 4:6–7; 1 Pet. 1:4–5; Rev. 21:7). The question is: How much will we inherit? That is determined by our individual faithfulness, or lack thereof (1 Cor. 3:11–15).

Main Point: Salvation cannot be lost, but eternal reward for growth and service can. Note “*inherit the promises*” (v. 12), and “*heirs of promise*” (v. 17). Inheritance is not equivalent to salvation/justification.

Inheritance in Hebrews (with supporting passages)

1. Jesus Christ is the heir of all things (Heb. 1:2, 4). It is obvious that inheritance here has nothing to do with salvation. Rather, inheritance is the birthright of the sons of God (Heb. 3:26, 29; 4:6–7). All who believe in Jesus Christ have an eternal inheritance (1 Pet. 1:4–5). This base inheritance can be enhanced and increased by obedience.
2. Those believers who grow, endure, and serve, can greatly multiply their eternal inheritance (Heb. 6:11–12; see Matt. 5:5; 6:20–21; 2 Pet. 1:5–11).
3. Believers who choose to live by faith in the power of the Spirit (not in the effort of the flesh, which equals dead works) will receive maximized eternal inheritance, as the Scripture has promised (see Col. 3:23–25).
4. God is faithful to give reward that is equivalent to our faith, growth, and service to Him (Heb. 11:6, 8, 10). Consider Jesus’ promise in Revelation 22:12:

*“And behold, I am coming quickly and My reward is with Me,
to give to every one according to his work.”*

Fourth Exhortation: Draw Near to God, Hebrews 10:19–25

*“Therefore ... let us draw near ... hold fast ... consider ...
for if we sin willfully ...”* Hebrews 10:19–26 (emphasis added)

Reason/Basis

“Therefore”: In this passage, this word looks at the superiority of Jesus to the Mosaic Covenant (Hebrews 8–9), and our security due to the finished work of Christ on the cross.

The superiority of Jesus to the Old Covenant (Heb. 10:4–18):

1. All of the sacrifices of animals throughout the entire Old Testament period could not satisfy God’s justice or take away our sins (Heb. 10:4–6).
2. However, throughout the “*volume of the book*,” the coming and sacrifice of Jesus Christ was foretold (Heb. 10:7).
3. When Jesus accomplished the work of propitiation (Rom. 3:25), He offered the only sacrifice God would accept—His own righteousness in our place (2 Cor. 5:21).
4. By this work, He set aside the Old Covenant (the Law) and instituted the New Covenant (Heb. 10:8–9; Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:22–27; Matt. 26:26–28).
5. His work on the cross has “*sanctified*” all who believe in Him “*once for all*” (Heb. 10:10), “*forever*” (v. 12), and “*perfected forever those who are being sanctified*” (justification, sanctification, glorification) (v. 14). The reason for this is that, with the penalty for sin paid in full, “*their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more*” (v. 17).

Note: Because of the finished work of Christ on the cross, “*there is no longer an offering for sin*” (Heb. 10:18). This is good news if you are resting in His work, but bad news if you are going back into the Temple.

Spiritual Response

“Let us draw near ... hold fast ... consider ...” (Heb. 10:19–25)

We should note that these exhortations are grounded in the high priestly work of Christ on our behalf (vv. 19–21). Because He has opened the way into God’s presence, we should “*come boldly to the throne of grace*” (Heb. 4:16).

There are three exhortations here that are all part of the proper response. In fact, they cannot be carried out apart from our “assembling together” in Hebrews 10:25:

1. The first is a call to exercise our priesthood, v. 22.
We are to come to God for cleansing and for prayer. Since every believer is a priest before God (1 Pet. 2:4–10), we are to cleanse ourselves for service (2 Tim. 2:24; 1 John 1:9). Once we are purified, we are to exercise our priesthood in prayer for our fellow-believers (James 5:13–20). This is our first spiritual service.

2. The second is a call to exercise our ministry in the Body, v. 23.
As a member of Christ's Body, we are obligated to all other members (1 Cor. 12:12–27). The body only stays healthy when all members play their part (Eph. 4:11–16).
3. The third is a call to be faithful in our ambassadorship, v. 24.
We are also called to be witnesses to the world (Matt. 28:18–20; Acts 1:8; 1 Pet. 3:15). We have been called as "*ambassadors for Christ*," with a message of reconciliation to give to the world (2 Cor. 5:17–21).

The purpose of our assembly together is to encourage us all to engage in each of these practical areas of ministry. As we do this, we grow and also encourage the growth of others. The tragedy today is that there are more believers outside the local churches than inside. Many have simply given up on the local church.

The Warning

"For if we sin willfully ... there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins" (Heb. 10:26–39).

This passage has often been used to support the idea that salvation can be lost for sin committed after salvation. If this were true, none of us would have any hope! We must keep the author's word in the context of his time and the contents of this epistle:

1. First of all, note that the point of v.18 is repeated here.
Question: In v.18, is this good news or bad news? Answer: It's great news!
So what is different here? If someone who is a believer in the First Century were to go back into the Temple and offer sacrifices, what would that imply? That they were denying the finished work of Christ. In that case, their sacrifices would not be cause for blessing, but rather, for cursing. They would have gone beyond the point of no return (review Hebrews 6).
2. It is an historical fact that, while most Christians fled Jerusalem before its destruction, some chose to remain within the walls. What then was their outlook? "*A certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries*" (Heb. 10:27). Had they heeded the warning of this book, they would have "escaped," but they did not.
3. Anyone—believer or unbeliever—who rejected Moses' law suffered the just punishment (Heb. 10:28). Since Christ is so much greater than Moses, how much more severe the punishment (Heb. 10:29–30)? For a believing Jew to go back into the Temple was to "[trample] *the Son of God underfoot*, [count] *the blood of the [new] covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing*, and [insult] *the Spirit of grace*." But, in spite of what a horrible "willful sin" this would be, note that he was still "sanctified by the blood of the (new) covenant"! He is still saved! He just dies a horrible and unnecessary death.
4. God has promised, "*the LORD will judge His people*" (Heb. 10:30). In fact, Peter tells us that judgment begins "*at the house of God*" (1 Pet. 4:17). However, this is not judgment

for eternity, it is judgment in time, so that we will not be judged with the world (1 Cor. 11:32). This is what we call “divine discipline,” and the author will go into detail about this in chapter 12.

The bad news is that, if a believer continues on a path of disobedience, God will discipline, and ever more severely the longer one goes without repentance. The good news is, God always disciplines in love, and for our benefit:

“Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward ... Now the just shall live by faith.” Hebrews 10:35, 38

Fifth Exhortation, Hebrews 12:25–29

“Therefore ... let us lay aside ... run with endurance ... for consider Him ...” Hebrews 12:1, 3

“Therefore strengthen ... pursue peace ... and holiness ... for you know ...” Hebrews 12:12, 17

Reason/Basis

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded ...” (Heb. 12:1a)

The basis for the author’s appeal is the company of the great men and women recorded in Hebrews 11. They all, like us, had weaknesses and failings. Yet, they persevered and become witnesses to us—that we can persevere, too. The key phrases of chapter 11 are: *“By faith ... out of weakness were made strong ... of whom the world was not worthy”* (vv. 8, 34, 38). God values faith above all things and will always reward those who seek Him by faith (Heb. 11:6).

Spiritual Response

“Let us lay aside ... let us run with endurance ...” (Heb. 12:1b–3)

No one can run carrying weights. Our various areas of sin weigh us down so that we cannot run the race God has set before us. Every one of us has been put into a lane. We cannot run someone else’s race, nor can they run ours. How we need to learn to stay in our lane, and run!

But before we run, we have to *“lay aside ... the sin which so easily ensnares [entangles] us.”* This will be different for each of us. We have to honestly identify what it is, and then we have to lay it aside.

The Christian life is not a sprint—it is a distance run. It takes training, and persistence, and tenacity, and keeping the eyes on the goal. Paul recognized the necessity of keeping the prize in view (Phil. 3:12–14). Because of his fierce tenacity, he was able to say at the end of his life, *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith”* (2 Tim. 4:7). This should be the goal for each and every one of us!

The Warning

“For consider Him ... lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls” (Heb. 12:3–11).

The word *“consider”* was used in Hebrews 3:1, where the word means “to bear down with the mind, focus.” Here, the word is a bookkeeping term and means “to constantly take into account.” In every new situation of life, we need to “consider Jesus.” He overcame for us; should we not overcome through Him?

Divine Discipline, Hebrews 12:5–11

In this section, the author deals with a doctrine that is rarely taught, to our detriment. There are those who say that too much teaching on grace produces carelessness and “gives license to sin.” It’s funny, I never knew anyone who needed a license! But part of teaching about God’s grace is the teaching of His faithfulness to discipline His children. Consider the following points:

1. The motive behind God’s discipline is always His infinite love (v. 6).
2. The discipline of God should never be despised, nor should we become discouraged (v. 5).
3. In fact, discipline is a proof, especially when we are disobedient, that we are a child of God (vv. 6b, 8).
4. God’s discipline adjusts to our level of resistance (vv. 5–6). Note three levels:
 - Rebuke—this is verbal, through His Word, or by the convicting work of the Spirit.
 - Chastening—this is the belt, when Dad takes it off and says, “bend over.”
 - Scourging—this is the woodshed, when He takes us aside, and brings welts and blood. It is severe and painful to the extreme, but it is far better than what He is saving us from. If even this does not work, He may call us home early (1 John 5:16) in the “sin unto death.”
5. The object of all discipline is to restore us to righteousness (a right relationship with the Father), with the resulting fruit of peace (v. 11).

What is He Saving Us From? (Hebrews 12:15–17)

The author uses the example of Esau, the firstborn, who traded away His birthright. When the time came to inherit it, it was too late:

“... for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.” Hebrews 12:17 (Gen. 25:29–34; 27:34–38)

There will no doubt be many believers who stand before the Lord at the Bema Seat of Christ, who watch all their lives of wood, hay, and stubble burn up, who will cry with Esau, “*Have you only one blessing, my father? Bless me—me also, O my father!*” (Gen. 27:38). But for many, it will be too late.

You may ask, what difference will it make, if I am still saved? This question only reveals the hardness of a selfish heart. For on that day, each of us will desire more than anything to give something to Him who gave all for us. And what will we have to present to Him? Only what we have gained by faithfulness in this life. Why does eternal reward matter? Because it is all we will ever be able to give to Him of ourselves, to say “Thank You for all You have given me.”

The Conclusion

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.” Hebrews 12:28–29 (emphasis added)

Evidences of Spiritual Growth, Hebrews 13

The author gives a number of evidences of what the spiritual life should look like in this chapter:

1. There should be a trend of love for fellow-believers (v. 1).
2. There will be an openness and hospitality even for those we do not know (v. 2).
3. There will be a special care for believers who are suffering (v. 3).
4. Marriage will be held in honor and purity (v. 4).
5. There will be a confidence and boldness in facing life (vv. 5–6), not based on position or possessions.
6. There will be a respect and honor given to those who labor in leading and teaching God’s Word (vv. 7–10).
7. There will be a willingness to suffer for Christ, and to share the sufferings of others (vv. 11–14).
8. There will be a life of joyful worship and praise to God (vv. 15–17).

Do these qualities characterize your life? If not, the Book of Hebrews is written for you. Every exhortation, every warning, is directed by the Spirit of God, to you. Don’t ignore His grace, nor despise His warnings.

Be restored to a right relationship with Him, and find peace, purpose, and power!

*“So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth;
It shall not return to Me void,
But it shall accomplish what I please.
And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”*
Isaiah 55:11