



Don't become dull to the word! **Hebrews 5:11 – 6:20 (Part II)**

Third Warning In Hebrews (Part II) — Dr. Deane J. Woods

Most reading this article would know Fanny Crosby's hymn 'Blessed Assurance':

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of His Spirit,
washed in His blood.

Refrain:

*This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Savior all the day long;
this is my story, this is my song,
praising my Savior all the day long.*

At first glance, it may appear that her familiar words are irrelevant to the passage of Scripture presently being reviewed. However, some scholars (and many general readers) who have studied Hebrews 6 – one of the most hotly debated chapters in the Bible – have concluded that 'eternal salvation' can never be totally secure! Their view is that "salvation can only be secure as long as a believer continues to believe". Thus Christians can lose salvation if they are no longer believing at the point of death.

Is this alleged doctrine of losing one's salvation really what the 'Third Warning' passage is teaching? A closer study of the text leads diligent enquirers to an entirely different conclusion. In short, *believers are eternally saved on believing in Christ*

In short, *believers are eternally saved on believing in Christ. They are justified by faith alone and secure for all eternity. However,*

there are inevitable temporal and eternal spiritual consequences if they become 'dull' of hearing (5:11, 6:12) as to whom Jesus is and what He has done on the Cross (1:1-4). Moreover, as our author has shown (and will go on to emphasize), Jesus has a present High Priestly ministry in heaven (3:1; cf. chapters 7-9) and a future regal role in the coming Messianic Kingdom and the Eternal State (1:5-13; 2:5-9; 12:28).



The passage emphasized the dire consequences of believers defecting, spiritually. Moreover, the seriousness of such defection is highlighted by *three fundamental, irrefutable, indissoluble reasons why believers can experience a 'blessed, (settled) assurance' of eternal salvation, right now – and in the future!*

Our previous article⁽¹⁾, stated that this 'Third Warning' passage encompassed '**The REBUKE for Spiritual Immaturity**' – (Heb. 5:11-14) and '**The REMEDY for Spiritual Immaturity**' – (Hebrews 6:1-3).

Further, this remedy is as essentially 'necessary' (verses 4-8) as it is equally 'noble' (verses 9-12).

B. The Necessary Remedy (6:4-8)

These verses not only stress the extreme importance of Christian growth to maturity in Christ, but the absolute necessity of it. They were a prelude to three subsequent, foundational truths upon which believers can be totally assured of their personal eternal security (See verses 13-20). The text stated:

^{v4}For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the good word of God and of the powers of the age to come, ⁶ if they fall away, to renew them again unto repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God and put Him to an open shame. ⁷For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; ⁸but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.

At least six questions inevitably arise as readers ponder these verses:

- Is the contention that the passage relates to believers' 'blessed assurance' valid?



- Who are addressed here – Christians or unbelievers? If believers, have they somehow ‘lost’ their salvation?
- Could it be that they were ‘professors’ of Jesus but not actual ‘possessors’?
- What will be the eternal destiny of genuine believers who defect, spiritually?
- Is the question of the loss of believers’ rewards (because of such spiritual defection) implied?
- Finally, are these verses to be understood as relating to Christian reality, or do they refer to hypothetical issues, couched in literary terms?

To answer the last question first: All of us can think of those who once radiantly witnessed for Christ but who were somehow sidetracked into “by path meadow” – to quote Bunyan. The ‘hypothetical’ view just doesn’t square with empirical reality and should therefore be dismissed on this, as well as contextual grounds.

The remaining questions as to who exactly were in danger of ‘falling away’ and the resulting consequences for them are clearly answered when five key words and phrases in the text are carefully considered and interpreted correctly. On etymological, literal, grammatical, and contextual grounds, those who had been ‘enlightened’,⁽²⁾ ‘tasted the heavenly gift’,⁽³⁾ and become ‘partakers of the Holy Spirit’,⁽⁴⁾ and ‘tasted the good word of God’⁽⁵⁾ and ‘the powers of the age to come’⁽⁶⁾ are clearly born again believers, as

against variant interpretations to the contrary.⁽⁷⁾

The latter ‘believers’ view is supported by several significant facts stated in the next verse regarding the **remedy for Spiritual Immaturity**. Thus, in verse 6, God’s Word revealed: “... it is impossible... if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance ...”. First, there is no word “if” in the original text.⁽⁸⁾ The strong point made here was that, given what has just been described, it is *absolutely impossible* to renew such a one who has fallen (to the wayside) to repentance.⁽⁹⁾

Secondly, The word that was employed at this point carried the idea of ‘falling beside’.⁽¹⁰⁾ There is a different word (in Greek) meaning simply ‘to fall’⁽¹¹⁾ but that was not used here. The issue therefore was not a matter of being renewed to salvation or forgiveness. There was no way to go back and start all over again. There is salvation in none other than Jesus; nor is there salvation by any other means. His ‘salvation work’ on the Cross, and the believer’s response in faith to His ‘finished work’ was unique! (See Acts 4:12; Jn. 14:6; 2 Cor. 5:19, 21).

Thirdly, there can be no doubt that in Hebrews 6 believers were urged to go on to maturity lest their rewards be lost in the Kingdom. They were to share their inheritance at that time as ‘companions of the King’ (Cf. 1:9; 3:1, 13f etc). They must therefore realize that there was an eschatological motivation to ‘go on to maturity’ in the author’s words. For this to happen, the Hebrew believers were in need of the ‘Noble Remedy’, described in verses 9-12.

By way of application, how do we measure up in our progress as a ‘spiritual pilgrim’?

C. The Noble Remedy (6:9-12)

In verse 9, the Hebrew believers were told of the writer’s confidence regarding their response to his

exhortatory warnings. This was especially so relative to his present warning about “**dullness**” or “**sluggishness**” to God’s Word. He certainly expected spiritual progress!

Furthermore, the readership should remember that their God is “righteous” and “does not forget”. He remembers what they have done (and are still doing) in “still ministering to the saints” (vs. 10). Now, just as He is exemplary in His present (and future) righteous roles, so they were urged “to show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that (they) do not become **sluggish**, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the **promises**” (vss. 11-12, emphasis added).



What a timely warning this is to all believers today! Apathetic Christians who begin by drifting, then defer to doubting and then deteriorate further by becoming dull and sluggish to God’s Word, should heed the Warning and respond by God’s grace by not going back to Judaism. Its ‘foreshadowing’ practices were all fulfilled in Jesus, the Messiah.

But the author had not finished his exhortatory warning.⁽¹²⁾ There are distinctly observable reasons why he desired his readership to “imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (6:12). He had just said that he desired each one to show the “same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end” (6:11, emphases added). Next

he cited three specific, **indissoluble bases** because they guaranteed the eternal security of believers. These are:

- God's promise to Abraham;
- God's eternal oath to Abraham and the "heirs of the promise"; and,
- Jesus our High Priest who has "entered behind the veil" (6:13-20).



Rather than 'lose' their salvation, the writer showed that the opposite was true. Believers are eternally secure and will inherit the promises by appropriating one simple principle: "go on to maturity" in their daily pilgrimage with Jesus. Fanny Crosby put it this way:

Perfect submission, perfect delight!

Visions of rapture now burst
on my sight;
Angels descending bring
from above

Echoes of mercy, whispers of love.
Jewish or Gentile friend, do these
words describe your present
experience and testimony?

III. The **REASONS** For Believers' Assurance of Eternal Security (Heb. 6:13-20)

The prior references of being "dull" of hearing the Word and therefore becoming "sluggish" to it caused the author to give his unique antidote for spiritual immaturity:

"... imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises"

(verse 12). He then specified the example, *par excellence* – their Hebrew patriarch, Abraham.

A. God's Promise to Abraham (vss. 13-15)

^{v13} For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, ¹⁴ saying, "Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you."¹⁵ And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.

Observe the significance of what he said in these verses:

Firstly, the "Source" of the promise was God Himself! He was (and is) the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – the God of the everlasting, unconditional covenant!

Secondly, attention was drawn as to the "Surety" of that promise – God's sovereign oath, next to be elaborated upon in the following three verses! What 'strong consolation' this should bring to spiritual pilgrims!

Thirdly, our author pointed to the fact of the "Satisfaction" of the promise. Abraham was said to have actually "obtained" it at the end of his journey of faith. This journey involved "(patience) and endurance", that is, an attitude and action the patriarch (and they) should emulate as well!

B. God's Eternal Oath to Abraham & "The Heirs of Promise" (vss. 16-18)

^{v16} For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is an end for all dispute.¹⁷ Thus God determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath.¹⁸ that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have

strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.

How simple, yet sublime, the truths of these verses conveyed to those first century believers – and to us today! There was no need for elaboration, just appropriation!

C. God's Promised Hope in Jesus, the Messiah and High Priest forever (vss. 19-20)

^{v19} This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, 20 where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek..

What mind boggling, eternal truths were communicated in these two memorable verses. First, the author drew attention to the future hope believers have. That hope was likened to an anchor – an anchor "founded firm and deep in the Saviour's love", to quote part of Priscilla Jane Owens' old song. Moreover, it is an anchor "of the soul".

Secondly, the writer continued his stress on the believers' eternal security in two further aspects: this "anchor of the soul" is "both sure and steadfast". In other words, the anchor is 'stable, fast, firm and secure' in the sense that God's provision of salvation in Christ, and His gracious assurance of that eternal security for believers,



is *absolutely trustworthy*. Well may we then sing with unswerving, unabashed conviction:

Perfect submission, all is at rest!
I in my Savior am happy and blest,
Watching and waiting,
looking above,
Filled with his goodness,
lost in His love.

Conclusion: The Hebrew believers in Jesus were therefore challenged in this 'Third Warning' passage not to become "**dull**" of hearing God's Word, but to "go on to maturity" faithfully "to the end". Not to do so would result in dire spiritual consequences notwithstanding their salvation being eternally secure. They would lose their rewards in the coming Kingdom.

This same challenge confronts us today. Whether we are Jewish or Gentile believers – one in the Body of Christ. The question is this: Are you going on to spiritual maturity in your walk with your Messiah, King, Saviour and Lord? Hebrews 5:11 through 6:20 demands our humble, obedient response. Are you listening to God's Word so as to appropriate the 'Third Warning' of Hebrews 6 personally – right now? Enter into the joy of those who know without doubt, the reality of "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine"!



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ENDNOTES

(1) See *The Australian Shofar*, Vol. 4, Issue 4, September, 2011.

(2) That is, they had experienced the light of God shining upon them – a necessary experience for salvation. (2 Corinthians 4:1-6, esp. verse 4; Ephesians 1:17.)

(3) This word used here (Greek, *γευω*) means "to taste, eat, try the flavour of, partake of, enjoy, to take food or nourishment". It connotes a full, real experience. (N.B. Heb. 2:9 and see note 7 (b), below) The "heavenly gift" most probably referred to salvation (Cf. Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:8).

(4) This is a unique term and phrase. It refers to one receiving the Holy Spirit and fellowshiping with Him (Cf. Heb. 2:14; 3:1, 14: 12:8 and 1 Cor. 10:17-21).

(5) This phrase means exactly what it says: They had heard God's Word, experienced the goodness of its message and been personally familiar with its work in their lives.

(6) Clearly this phrase indicated they had experienced God's supernatural power – a power characteristic of the coming eternal age – the coming Messianic Kingdom. It should be remembered that divine powers and sovereign miracles were associated with Jesus when He was present on earth (Cf. vs. 8), and the same will be true in His coming Kingdom (Cf. vs. 9).

(7) Five main views have been suggested:
(a) Saved, but possibility of 'losing' salvation. If this view is correct, the statement that follows must also be accepted as a logical corollary: *it is impossible* to be saved subsequently! (Cf. vs. 4-6, esp. 6a). **(b) Not saved, but speaking of those who have had certain experiences (vs. 4-6) short of salvation** (cf. vs. 9). The "falling away" is from the knowledge of the truth, not personal possession of it. But if "tasted" (vs. 5) is interpreted to mean something akin to "not entering into the experience or reality of", then how can such interpreters adequately explain the exact, same term as used in relation to Jesus "*tasting* death for every man" in Hebrews 2:9? (Emphasis added).

(c) The Hypothetical View: Proponents of this view argue that the whole passage is purely hypothetical, particularly in light of verse 9: *But, beloved, we are confident of*

better things concerning you...". This view lacks contextual substance when the whole passage is analyzed. Real people with real problems are in view. **(d) The warning is given to genuine believers to urge them on to Christian growth and maturity.** As Ryrrie stated it: "To 'fall away' is impossible (since, according to this view, true believers are eternally secure), but the phrase is placed in the sentence to strengthen the warning ... In this view the phrases of vv. 4-5 are understood to refer to the conversion experience" (RSB, 1843). Associated with this view, yet considered an extension of it, is ... **(e) The passage referred to believers, who, if they don't progress on to maturity, will lose their rewards, not salvation.** This aspect has been consistently applied by our author thus far in Hebrews. In 1:5-14, he spoke of the fact that to God's Kingly-Son, not to the Angels, belongs a triumphant, eternal reign. Moreover, His "companions" (1:9; [2:14]; 3:1, 14; 6:4 and 12:8) will share in "that ultimate deliverance from conflict which involves a joint-participation in Messiah's glorious Kingdom reign" (Cf. 1:14; 2:3, 9; 5:9; 6:9; 9:28, noting 12:25-28f). No wonder his key verse for the whole book (10:23) will state it so clearly: "*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful!*". Thus, when views **(d)** and **(e)** are combined into what this writer herein categorizes *The Composite View*, viz., 'The Urging to Christian Maturity/Rewards-Loss of Rewards view', the picture becomes clear: **Pilgrims must make progress!**

(8) The word in the original text is a connective adjectival participle that could be translated simply as '(and) falling beside'...

(9) The emphatic position of this word in the sentence in verse 6 in the Greek text connotes the following emphasis: it is *truly an impossibility!* (Cf. also 6:18; 10:4; 11:6)

(10) The word employed here, *parapesontas*, meaning 'having fallen beside/away'.

(11) The regular Greek word meaning 'to fall' is *pipto*. Observe the additional compound (para) as cited in note 10, above.

(12) There is no justification in making an artificial division between what has been said in Hebrews 5:11 – 6:12 and what will next be addressed in verses 13-20. The word at the beginning of verse 13, "for", grammatically speaking, it is an adjectival connective.

A happy and holy
Christmas to all.

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