

## Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 184

Hebrews 5:11-6:20

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**Teacher: Dr. Michael S. Heiser (MH)**

**Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)**

Our series on the book of Hebrews continues the writer's emphasis on the faithful priesthood of Christ – this time as the basis for turning away from a theology of dead works and clinging to faith. The centrality of not turning from the true gospel of faith in the work of Christ and God's acceptance of the ministry of his Son – of continuing in "believing loyalty" to the gospel – is the central focus of the controversial statements in Heb 6:4-6. Does this passage teach that believers can lose salvation or reject salvation? Is there a difference? What about eternal security? This episode focuses on these questions.

### Transcript

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 184: Hebrews 5:11-6:20. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike. I sincerely apologize for the beat-down that I put on you this weekend in Fantasy Football. [laughter]

**MH:** I told you, you caught me at the perfect week.

**TS:** Almost a hundred-point beat-down. Almost...

**MH:** Yeah. Well, I didn't have anybody to play. That's how bye weeks work. But you know, I'm looking forward to the end of the season because one of your main guys will be on suspension.

**TS:** We shall see. He's back on, so...

**MH:** Well, he won't be back on at the end of the year. He will serve time. And it's going to be over the playoffs. [laughing]

**TS:** Well, if he serves time now, he'll come back week 16, which will be the Superbowl, which I will clearly be in...

**MH:** He's going to play this weekend, so the fact that he's battling is going to shift it just enough.

**TS:** It shifts it so he returns week 16, which is the Superbowl, which I will be in.

**MH:** You're going to be out of the picture.

**TS:** That'll be my secret weapon.

**MH:** You're not going to make it that far without him.

**TS:** Probably not. We shall see.

**MH:** It doesn't matter. I'll be at full-strength then, anyway. The Pugs will be looking for vengeance.

**TS:** Sorry to ruin your seven-game winning streak, your undefeated...

**MH:** You don't want to run into an angry pug, let me just tell you. [laughter]

**TS:** Do they get angry, or do they just get cuter and cuter?

**MH:** I'm sure Mori gets angry, but I can't tell. [laughs] I was going to say something about *Stranger Things*... We have a new name for Mori, but we probably don't have all that many...

**TS:** I'm only on episode 4, so don't ruin it for me.

**MH:** Okay, I'm not going to say anything to you. It generated a new name for Mori. I'll just leave it at that.

**TS:** Awesome. Well, I'll try to guess what it is as I'm watching it. That gives me something else to do while I watch *Stranger Things*. Mike, I also want to mention that the conferences are coming up. We'll be covering those with several interviews we have lined up. We're also going to try to do a live Q&A like we did in San Antonio. We're going to shoot for Friday, November 17, in Boston. We're going to be looking for another coffee shop. We don't know where, so if anybody lives in the Boston area and has any good ideas... Where is our hotel again exactly, Mike?

**MH:** For SBL, it's in Woburn, Massachusetts. It's outside central Boston.

**TS:** If there are any listeners out there in that area that know of a good coffee shop, send me an email: [treysticklin@gmail.com](mailto:treysticklin@gmail.com) and let me know and we'll try to set up Friday evening. We're going to try to do a live recorded Q&A again. That'll be fun!

**MH:** Maybe we'll get Burnett again, who knows? I just saw on Facebook that he's already feeling a little harried now that he has to do some teaching and grade papers and stuff like that. It just kind of made me laugh [laughter]... It's like, "Oh well, hey, there you go!"

**TS:** Welcome to the club!

**MH:** He's going to have to bring it with him, like I bring my stuff with me to these conferences. He's going to be a busy boy, but we'll see.

**TS:** Good deal. All right, Mike. Back into Hebrews, I guess!

**MH:** Yep. Hebrews 5:11 through the end of chapter 6. So it's technically Hebrews 5:11 through 6:20. We decided to group things this way because there's a thematic relationship here. We're actually going to talk a little bit about priesthood again, but I sort of cautioned people when we got into the priesthood of Jesus in Hebrews that it's going to really extend on into chapter 10. We just keep running into that. But then there is also the issue of apostasy—losing faith and that sort of thing, or drifting away from faith, rejecting the gospel for some reason. But it's typically cast as the problem of unbelief—losing faith. Hebrews 6 is sort of known for that. So that's what we're going to hit on today. Let's just jump into Hebrews 5:11. I'm going to read 11-14. We'll start out that way. Reading from the ESV again, the writer says:

5:00

**<sup>11</sup>About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. <sup>12</sup>For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, <sup>13</sup>for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. <sup>14</sup>But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.**

This line here that Hebrews 5:11 opens with:

**<sup>11</sup>About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain...**

What's hard to explain? What is the "this" that he's talking about? Well, I'm with most commentators here who would say that verses 7-10 (the preceding four verses to verse 11) are the immediate reference point. So let's just read those again. Hebrews 5:7-10 says this:

**<sup>7</sup>In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard**

**because of his reverence. <sup>8</sup> Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. <sup>9</sup> And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, <sup>10</sup> being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.**

That's the stuff that the writer says, "Boy, about this we have much to say, and it's kind of hard to explain." Well, there's a lot in there! We talked about this last time, where you have a reference in verse 7 where Jesus is offering up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears. Apparently, this is a reference to the Garden of Gethsemane scene. Interestingly enough, the writer here in Hebrews says that Jesus was heard. His prayers were heard. But how were they heard? Well, he had to do the will of God. Remember the prayer: "Let this cup pass from me, but nevertheless, not my will but your will." Because that was the answer and because Jesus was faithful, we have verse 8:

**<sup>8</sup> Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.**

In other words (we talked about this last time), Jesus learned what it was to overcome weakness. Remember last time we talked about the passage where Jesus had to go through all the weaknesses and the temptations that are common to human beings, and he emerged on the other side sinless. So in verse 9 here, after he learns obedience and what that's all about (overcoming the weakness of the flesh, because he's human, and the incarnation idea)... He learns obedience.

**<sup>9</sup> And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him...**

Because he endured and conquered weakness and temptation, he was made perfect. He was validated. He was shown to be true in every way with nothing diminished—no blemish at all. He becomes the perfect sacrifice, he fulfills the role of high priest. Verse 10:

**<sup>10</sup> being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.**

He performs his priestly duty—in this case, offering up himself as a propitiation, as an atonement. Because he is eternal, then that sacrifice is eternal. He becomes the source (Hebrews 7:9) of eternal salvation because of his faithfulness in this. These things are difficult. It's hard to explain how the son of God could learn obedience. It's because he became a man and lived through the weaknesses and temptations common to human experience. He learned to persevere and remain sinless, despite experiencing what it was to be human. Weakness, temptation to sin... he felt all those things.

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How is Jesus the source of eternal salvation, a high priest after the order of Melchizedek? Well, he's appointed that, but his obedience—his faithfulness—validates the appointment. He does what he was supposed to do. There's a lot of layers to this. We've seen some already in chapter 5. We've seen that the priesthood idea is going to continue through, so we're going to be running into more of this. The writer keeps returning to this because this is what he really wants to talk about. This is the meaty stuff. We'll see in a moment what he sort of wants to get away from and what he wishes he didn't have to talk about. But, of course, he's in a situation with his readership that he has to go back and sort of rehearse the things that they should have known. They should already be mature and he shouldn't have to repeat these things. So he's struggling with this a little bit. He says, "This is the stuff that you should be ready for, but you're not. This is the good stuff that's hard to explain, since you'd become dull of hearing."

10:00

**<sup>11</sup> About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.**

So the problem isn't an intellectual one, like "this stuff is just too deep and you're not smart enough to get it." No, it's because they've become dull of hearing. What aren't they hearing? What aren't they getting? Let's keep reading, back into verse 12:

**<sup>12</sup> For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you *again* the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food...**

"You can't handle the solid food." And, of course, the solid food is the stuff in verses 7-10: the work of Christ, the order of Melchizedek, the incarnation... These are big topics. They're theologically significant topics. They have lots of layers to them. And they're deep. I think we've already sort of seen that. And the writer is saying, "This is where I really want to park, but I can't. Verse 13:

**<sup>13</sup> for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. <sup>14</sup> But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.**

Why is the writer's audience not ready for this? In this description that we just read again for the second time (verses 11-14), what are their problems? What's going on here? The writer says they're dull of hearing, they're low on discernment, they're apparently untrained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. In that little encapsulation (dull of hearing and low on

discernment, which he defined as them being not practiced enough to distinguish good from evil), we see a relationship there between spiritual maturity and understanding. It's about comprehending the nature and point of Jesus' role as the mediator of eternal life—that His obedience is what satisfies God. This is not just about intellectual understanding. When he goes into them being dull of hearing and lacking discernment, he's referring to the stuff that he wishes he could teach them. And the stuff he wishes he could teach them is in these preceding verses (7-10). It's the Melchizedek order, it's the incarnation, it's how eternal salvation is brought to humans and made possible not by our works (not by anything we do, by our obedience), but by Jesus' obedience. That's the stuff that they're dull of hearing about. That's the stuff that's just not getting through.

We tend to read this whole idea of discerning good and evil and think that's about specific sins, it's about moral behaviors. There might be some of that in there, but at the very least, they are unable to discern good and evil (defined against verses 7-10). What would be evil about failing to understand the incarnation, the priesthood of Melchizedek, the obedience of Christ, or how Jesus learned obedience? What would be evil about that? The answer should be kind of evident. Either you don't comprehend what all this stuff accomplished for you and you're substituting your own obedience in there, or you're just sort of rejecting it. You don't want to believe it. Either you're unable to grasp it and you're still going back, as he's going to say in the next verse (6:1), to dead works. That's bad, that's evil. That is something that the immature do—the people who are dull of hearing. Because that results in death. That is not the basis of eternal life. It's not the basis of eternal sonship, eternal membership in the family of God. That is what he's been talking about from the very first verse of the letter, when we got into this language about Jesus being the radiance and his pre-existence and all this stuff. That's important because you mix that with incarnation and you have an eternal sacrifice. It's through the obedience of that one, that person—Christ—that we have an entryway into the family of God. This should be our hope, the writer of Hebrews keeps saying. *This* is the reason why you should be confident. You can be confident in Jesus. He didn't fail. Don't be confident in yourself because your dead works (even your best works, frankly) have nothing to do with this. Well, if you can't get away from that, then you're dull of hearing and you lack discernment. You're not discerning the true gospel from a false gospel, which is not a good thing.

15:00 I'm willing to admit... There are going to be places in the passage where there are issues of moral obedience and disobedience and that sort of thing. We tend to focus on that, at least a lot of preachers do that I've heard. We tend to focus on that and we don't connect lack of discernment or embracing good versus embracing evil with the knowledge of who it is that actually achieved our salvation for us. Having a false gospel—a gospel that doesn't work, a different gospel, another gospel—that's not good. By theological definition, that would be an evil, in that sense. It's going to result in destruction—in hell. So that's definitely part of what he's talking about. He hasn't even gotten to specific behaviors yet.

He will, but at this point in Hebrews 5, what he's talking about is the stuff that we just discussed on the last episode. This is how he's connecting back into that. He's saying, "I want to go on and talk about this stuff more because this is really the heart of the matter. This is really the guts of the gospel, but you're dull of hearing. It's just not getting through. And you just lack discernment. I can't move on to the good stuff because you haven't grasped or fully embraced the fundamental things." Again, that's just not a good thing. So there's a direct relationship between understanding those things intellectually—comprehending the nature and the point of Jesus role as the mediator of eternal life and that it's his obedience that satisfies God and not your own—and being spiritually mature.

Just as a sidebar here, I wish I had a dollar for every sermon I heard growing up that wanted to dichotomize depth of knowledge with spirituality. Here the writer of Hebrews actually fuses them. He brings them together. What should be happening is that the more you understand about these doctrines and about scripture—the more you understand biblical theology—it should produce maturity. But if you lack spiritual maturity and you really fail to grasp these things in your heart (not just your head), that's a problem. Lack of discernment, lack of spiritual maturity *is*, in fact, related to what you understand—your knowledge of doctrine, your knowledge of biblical theology. The two are not mutually exclusive.

This is what the writer is concerned about. We have a problem here. If I could say it this way, when we really grasp what grace means and what the offer of eternal life really requires (that is, belief—not our own performance, but belief)... When we really grasp that this is what grace is, then we can think of ourselves as spiritually mature. But that means grasping some really significant core theological ideas. Those who are spiritually mature understand grace. They really do. *Those who are spiritually mature understand grace.* What do I mean by that? They understand that eternal life is not about any merit of our own. The spiritually mature do not redefine the gospel in the wake of their own failures and sin. Think about how many times we do this as believers. I know we can all think of somebody else that does this. Think about yourself, as well. In my own life, I had a time where I really struggled with this. But if you're spiritually mature and you really understand what the basis of salvation is and who accomplished it, you're not going to redefine the gospel in light of your own failure and sin. Sin is awful. It's disgraceful at times. But since the offer of eternal life never hinged on your moral perfection (or near-perfection), your failures do not change your relationship to God through Christ. The spiritually mature person (the person who understands grace) will resist redefining the gospel in light of their own failure. That's part of maturity. It's part of grasping theology, becoming mature. The writer of Hebrews is basically going to point out that "I still have a whole lot of you that this is where you're at. You are redefining the gospel in light of your own failures. That shows me that you really don't understand it."

20:00

Another thought about forsaking faith and moving from belief to unbelief... That's really the only thing that can actually affect your standing before God. If you reject grace—if you reject the gospel—this is different. Let's just say that you have a propensity to redefine the gospel in light of your own failures. That doesn't mean you're rejecting it. But if you mentally and in your heart say, "I believe this is the gospel, that I have to have works and do X, Y, or Z, and people who don't are going to hell, I'm trying to achieve perfection here and I need to if I'm going to have eternal life..." If you're there—if that's where you're at—then if that's your deliberate choice to redefine the gospel and then pursue it intentionally, you've rejected the real gospel. That's really the only thing—moving from belief in what God has done through Christ, trading the true gospel to a false gospel—that can affect your standing before God. It's a rejection of the truth. You can only reject the gospel and eternal life if you don't believe it. It has nothing to do with a specific sin that you commit. That's not what it's about. If you believe the gospel, you are eternally secure. If you don't, you're not. I've said this many times in this series here on Hebrews already.

The point is that you must believe, and it's very clear what you must believe. You must believe in the gospel, as presented in not only the book of Hebrews but the New Testament—biblical theology. You have to believe in who it is that accomplished your salvation. This has been the constant drumbeat of the book of Hebrews. It's about the faithfulness of this one person—not yours. You can stumble; he couldn't. If he stumbled, then we're all in a whole lot of trouble. But he didn't stumble. He was validated. He learned obedience through suffering. He did perform the duty of the high priest. He did everything that needed to be done so that you don't have to perform—you don't have to have a certain track record of behavior—to have eternal life. It's just not the point. But again, our propensity is to add behavior to it. In so doing, we redefine the gospel, which demonstrates that we are spiritually immature. We are not ready for real meat. We're not ready for the details. We're not ready to drill down because we're still struggling with what should be apparent on the surface.

I'm belaboring this because we're going to get into chapter 6: "You must believe to have eternal life." That is the requirement. You must believe. Believe what? Believe in the fact that God has accepted the work of Christ on your behalf. Believe in what he did, not in what you're doing or in what you think you need to do. It has nothing to do with your own merit. You must believe. And if you do believe the gospel you're eternally secure; if you don't you're not. Hebrews and other passages inform us (we're going to get into this as we drift into chapter 6 here) that this belief must endure. You can't just be like, "I believed ten minutes on a Sunday morning twenty years ago and I prayed this pray, and since I prayed that prayer I'm in, and now I can more or less believe whatever I want." I'm sorry, but that's not the truth. You must believe. A biblical theology of belief involves believing loyalty. Not "I believe and now I've got to do all these works. That's how loyalty is defined—doing works." No, you believe and you keep believing. You are loyal to that belief. Salvation is by grace through faith—through belief. It has

nothing to do with your own merit. You don't earn it. A biblical theology of belief is believing loyalty—remaining loyal to that belief. And, of course, Christ is the object of that belief—what he did, not what you do. That theology of belief does not mean we can pray a prayer of confession and then choose to follow another god or choose to follow another gospel or choose to follow no gospel at all. Belief is not uttering a prayer like it's an incantation.

25:00 Think about Abraham, because Abraham is going to be the example in the book of Hebrews. He's the example in Romans and other passages, too. Just a little hypothetical pondering here... Let's consider Abraham in a hypothetical way. Let's say that Abraham heard from Yahweh. Yahweh shows up, speaks to Abraham, and Abraham confesses his belief in Yahweh. He gets circumcised and then he later drifted into the worship of another god. Would Abraham have eternal life? For me, that's not difficult. There are no Baal-worshippers or worshippers of other gods... There are no people who are trusting in other gods in Yahweh's house. You have to believe in what he tells you to believe and stick with it. You have to be loyal to that belief. If Abraham just decides, "Well, I'm going to follow Molech now. I kind of like Yahweh and I got circumcised. I can remember back in that day when I put my faith in him and did what he asked me to do, but I'm doing the Molech thing now." He's not going to be there. He's not going to have eternal life. You have to believe.

Israelites—the elect. What about them? They're "elect," but masses of them apostasized and went after Baal and Molech and Asherah. What about them? You could have a bunch of Israelites who say they believe in the God of Israel. They do the circumcision thing, they do the festival thing, they observe Torah, they don't eat pork—all this kind of stuff—but if at some point they drift off and they worship Baal, Molech, Asherah, or any other deity, they're not believers in Yahweh. They're believing somebody else. They're believing some other deity can save them. You're not going to have Baal worshippers in heaven. You just aren't. This is why it's the greatest commandment in both Old and New Testaments! It's about believing loyalty—remaining in that belief. It's not adding works. The word "loyalty" doesn't have to do with, "Okay, I believe and now I've gotta do so many of this and so much of that. I've gotta spend an hour here and..." No, no, no, no, no, no, and NO. It isn't about what you do. It's about what you believe. Do you believe in the gospel of grace—that it's all about what Christ did and his obedience, not yours? That's the simple truth, and that's what the writer of Hebrews wants his readers to see.

All that kind of makes the comment about discerning good and evil interesting. "Good" at least *includes* (although it may not be the whole thing about good) grasping the true nature of the gospel. Evil would, therefore, be following another gospel or altering it or changing it—forsaking faith in what really gives salvation. Turning toward unbelief is different than doubt. Turning toward unbelief intentionally is different than feeling an uncertainty or hearing something and then having your belief shaken: "Boy, I'm not sure now. I've got to think about

this. I've got to try to answer this question." That isn't what we're talking about. We're talking about a deliberate turning away. Forsaking faith is different than having a doubt. Forsaking faith is a decision. It's yielding to deception, perhaps, to follow another god or another gospel. Apostasy isn't passive. You have to decide to do it. It's something that requires volition and decision. All of that is important as we turn into chapter 6. Look at the first verse. He writes:

**Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God...**

Repenting from dead works and having faith in what God wants you to believe... We should already be past that point, but we're not. That's the problem. So the nature of the gospel (faith in Christ instead of works) should be elementary doctrine that we should all be able to move on from. But you know what? Many believers—I know them, you know them, and one of them might be you—still struggle with this. By definition, then, they are not mature believers. It doesn't matter what kind of factual knowledge they have in some other area of biblical study, if they can't get over this by what the writer of Hebrews is saying here, they still need the milk. They still need the basic message. They need to just fully understand it and embrace it.

30:00 What about this language: "foundation of repentance?" The writer says, "I don't want to lay this foundation again." Well, what's the foundation? The foundation is repenting from dead works and having faith toward God. What is that? Notice he doesn't contrast repentance from *sin* with faith toward God. That's not what he says. The contrast here is repenting from dead works and faith toward God. Those are the two things that are juxtaposed there. I think what he's talking about should be clear at this point. You repent from dead works. Think about what the gospel really is. It's about Jesus' obedience, not yours. Repenting from dead works is turning away from the things that don't save. Your works are not going to save you; they are dead works. This isn't what's going to give you eternal life. You need to turn away, i.e., repent. Turn away from that stuff. Turn away from thinking that's what saves you and realize what actually does save you: faith toward God and what he has promised.

God has given promises. Earlier in the book of Hebrews (a few episodes back) there was this language about "the promises of God." They're still on the table to be claimed. God has promised certain things. That's what we need to have faith toward. Faith toward God is faith in what God has said—what God has promised. If you go back to the earlier chapters, how does God say you get eternal life in his home, as part of his family and household? The basis of that promise (as we've seen in chapters 3, 4, and 5) is believing what God's son has done, not what you've done or what you're doing. That isn't the issue.

A little bit of a rabbit trail here that I think is kind of necessary. In Romans 6, Paul takes this rabbit trail. If you think about Paul in Romans 4, it's kind of similar to what we have here in Hebrews, where he's using Abraham as an illustration of what faith really is, what the gospel really is, justification by faith and not works, and all that stuff. He hits Romans 6 and says:

**What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?**

Well, if salvation is not about anything I do, I guess I can do anything I want! I guess I can just go sin, sin, sin! As long as I believe that Christ is the only means of salvation, I can do whatever I want! There might be some here at this point in our study of Hebrews that might be thinking that. Paul actually addresses this in Romans very bluntly. We'll just take a little segue because Paul raises the question; he ran into that. His answer is pretty obvious.

**Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? <sup>2</sup>By no means! [MH: some translations have "God forbid!"] How can we who died to sin still live in it? <sup>3</sup>Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup>We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.**

What's Paul's point? We died to sin. His point is that we're united to Christ (that's the best way to encapsulate verses 3-5). What does it mean that we "died to sin" (verse 2)? Well, he tells you in verse 3: we were baptized into Christ. We were put into the body of Christ. He uses this language elsewhere (in 1 Corinthians 12:13). It's being placed in the body of Christ, it's being united to Christ, it's being in Christ. We are grafted together with him. There's all sorts of language and metaphors that Paul (and it's not just Paul, but primarily) uses to get us to understand or try to understand that we are sort of fused with Christ. We have become part of his body. We are united to him. Hebrews hints at this in Hebrews 2, where it's Jesus talking about how we're siblings, we're brothers, we're part of the same family because of the incarnation and all that sort of stuff. It's really talking about this idea that when you embrace what Jesus did on your behalf, you are joined to him. God looks at you and he sees him, because you are embracing what God asked you to embrace. You are embracing what God wanted you to do. That's it. Nothing else added to it. You are fixated, you are attached to, you are glomming on (however you want to say it). You have become united to what Jesus did for you. You're not depending on what you're doing for you. It's what he did, not what you do or what you did. We're joined to Christ.

What Paul is getting at here in Romans 6 with this "if it's just about Jesus I can do what I want" is "Look, you don't sin so that you get more grace. This isn't

incremental." So the idea that "oh, let's sin so that grace may abound" shows point-blank that you don't understand it. It's not something that you go get infusions of it every day and if you miss a few appointments with the Grace Infuser, then you're in trouble. No, the grace of God is shown to you through the work of Christ. That doesn't keep repeating. You don't need infusions of it. You don't need injections or pills or something like that. The idea that you're going to just keep "getting it" as you sin shows a fundamental misunderstanding of what you're being asked to believe.

So that's one point. I'm going to kind of go through Romans 6, but Paul gets into Romans 6 and makes the larger point that, "Look, if you're a believer and you're really clinging to this belief and really understand it, by definition you'll be grateful. Gratitude is what should motivate you to do what's right and to refrain from doing what's wrong. So if you're living a life of sin, you're either ungrateful (which, of course, would kind of make you wonder if you really understand the gospel or not) or you, in fact, just don't get it. You think you do, but you don't. Does "we have died to sin" here mean we stop sinning? Think about that. Paul says:

**Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? <sup>2</sup>By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?**

Well, he obviously doesn't mean, "how can we who've stop sinning still live in sin" because he knows believers are going to sin. He knows *he* sins. So that's not what he's meaning here. He's not saying "how can who've stopped sinning" as if now we have to throw our works into the pot here—we have to add a little merit here. That's not what he's saying, but people will read it this way quite mistakenly. It doesn't mean "those of us who have stopped sinning" or "those of us who have now found a way to make God happy with us." It doesn't mean that at all. Dying to sin means being united to Christ and then imitating Christ—trying to live in such a way that would honor him or that would show our gratitude toward him. It does not refer to this idea that now that we've believed the gospel we have to add moral perfection to it. That's not what the text says. Our dying to Christ is linked to being united to Christ in *his* death, which was in our place. Christ died for our sin and we're joined to him in that payment for sin and his resurrection to eternal life. Think about *that!* The reason we have eternal life is not because we've stopped sinning. It's actually because Christ was raised. We have this joining metaphor. We are part of that. How do we become part of that? How do we become joined to the body of Christ? Well, it's simple: *believe*. That's what Paul's message is in Romans 6 and it's what the message of the book of Hebrews is here.

Hebrews 10:10 is kind of interesting in this regard. We're getting a little ahead of ourselves, but that verse says:

**<sup>10</sup> And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.**

Did you catch that? What sanctifies us? Does Hebrews 10 say "we have been sanctified through stopping sin" or "we've been sanctified because we figured out how to stop sinning?" No, it doesn't say that. It says we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. This is the consistent message of scripture. Salvation is about believing in what Jesus did, not trusting or believing in what you do or what you abstain from. If you're really joined to Christ and you really get it—you really understand the gospel—you're not going to use the gospel as a means by which to gratify your flesh, to do what you want.

40:00 People who really understand the gospel are going to try to imitate Christ because they want to honor him. We don't do works so that we can add our own merits to the gospel. What you do isn't going to change God's disposition toward you in any way, because your salvation from the get-go was not based on you earning God's favor in any way. It's never based on how well you perform. So if salvation is divorced from that from the beginning, why would we assume later on that somehow God changes the definition of salvation? Or that "while we were yet sinners" God loved us and Christ died for us, but now after we've embraced the gospel, now God's watching us. And if we sin, he's angry with us. He looks at us differently. We'd better do something to make God happy again. That is a way of processing things that shows that you don't understand grace. By definition, in this passage in Hebrews, you're not ready to move on. The writer of Hebrews does have to lay again the foundation of turning away—repenting—from dead works. Because you need that. That's what you need. He wishes you didn't need it, but that's what you need. Turn away from dead works and look toward (have faith in) what God has said. On one level, it's a simple message. But on another level it really sort of defies human propensity. We want to think that we're contributing something or we feel badly enough because we want to imitate Christ, we want to be useful to God, we want to please him, but we take this desire to please God and we actually take that idea and then we redefine the gospel. We put words in God's mouth. We turn the gospel into something that it isn't and it never was. Again, in the head and the heart, you've got to know what the gospel is and then believe it. You can tell the writer of Hebrews is frustrated. "I wish I could just not have to talk about this again, but I do."

Just one little summary here before we run into the real apostasy passage here in Hebrews 6. Just for the sake of emphasis... We spend a lot of time on grace and then people want to talk about "what about repentance and good works?" It's good to not do things that are sin. It's good to do things that please God. But if you take your behavior and you insert it into what God says is the basis for him accepting you and making you part of the household of God (to use the terminology in Hebrews)... In other words, if you add "Here, God I'm going to help you out a little bit and supplement what the gospel is," God says, "I'm accepting

you because of the obedience of my son. I'm not looking at your obedience because, frankly, you're going to be a disappointment. Frankly, that's unrealistic. Frankly, why would I make the gospel about your behavior when I know you're going to fail? So stop adding it." We take this good compulsion to please God and then we end up redefining what God says. Frankly, God just doesn't like that. [laughs] That's a dangerous thing because you can deceive yourself into following a gospel that isn't a gospel. He's concerned about that; he doesn't like it.

So why should we seek to refrain from sin? Why should we try to live a holy life? It's really about gratitude. It's not about merit. That's the struggle for a lot of people. They want to add works to the gospel. They think they've got to do something to keep God happy with them. Works are important because they show to whom our believing loyalty is given. Do you have believing loyalty in the gospel? If you do—if you really understand it—that's not going to make you say, "Great, this is awesome. I can go sin all I want now!" If you really have believing loyalty, you're going to want to do good works, but you're also going to realize that, you know what? These works aren't adding to my salvation. God doesn't require them for salvation. God loves to see them because it shows our gratitude to him. God loves it when we're grateful. And it helps us to be useful. It helps us to be people that are open to service, where God doesn't have to spend his time correcting us all the time or chastising us. We can actually be an effective servant. It has nothing to do with merit. It's about appreciation, it's about being useful. We practice holiness not to merit God's favor, but to show love and appreciation to Christ—to show the world and its powers where our spiritual loyalty is. God loved us while we were yet sinners—when we were lost, when we gave no thought at all to pleasing God. It was the last thing in our minds. Even in that state of "the last thing on our minds would be making God happy," God *loved us*. You don't need to add works to that. It was already there. You don't need to add what's already there. You don't need to manufacture what is already there. You don't have to make God love you. He already does. He did and does.

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So we've got to get away from this mentality, and we have to stop trying to make God love us. Or to keep God liking us. [laughs] He already did that! He already loves us and he already likes us. He had that disposition before we ever cared. We do good works to imitate Jesus, the loyal son of Hebrews 5. We try to be loyal sons, too. It's a gratitude motivation. We're not working for any other reason. We do work to imitate Jesus. That's why we should do it—to be grateful to God. We don't work to replace Jesus as the means of our salvation, or to plop some works on his lap: "Here, Jesus, we're helping you out!" You've got to get past this point and understand the role of works—what works are really about. They validate something that's already there. They validate your faith. This is James. James never says that works earn you merit—a merit-based salvation. His whole thing is that if you don't have works, is your faith real? He doesn't say, "If you don't have works, you obviously haven't done enough to earn salvation." No, he says, "If you don't have works, is your faith real? Because it's faith that

saves you. Is your *faith* real?" They're just a means to look at somebody—look at ourselves—and examine ourselves. Not in a merit-based system. We don't replace Jesus. We don't need to convince God to love us. He did that while we were yet sinners, before we had a single glimmer of a thought that we should care about what God thinks. It was already there.

With all that as a backdrop, look at the rest of Hebrews 6. Let's just read these 12 verses here in Hebrews 6.

**Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God...**

Let's be mature. Let's escape from spiritual infancy. Let's go beyond this. We also want to leave:

**<sup>2</sup>and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.**

The point here is that these are basic doctrines. Let's move past the basic doctrines to get back to the amazing stuff back in Hebrews 5. Now, a few words here... "washings." Luke Timothy Johnson has a little summary about what's referred to here that I think is worth reading, so I'm going to read it. This is a teaching about ablutions and imposition of hands. This phrase "washings and laying on of hands"... "ablutions" is sort of a ritual term for ritual washing, and then this practice, which he terms the "imposition of hands." Kind of an interesting phrase. He writes:

The term *baptisma* was used for John's baptism for repentance (Mark 1:4; Matt 3:7; Luke 3:3; Acts 19:3) and also for the ritual of initiation practiced by Jesus' followers (Rom 6:4; Eph 4:5; Col 2:12; 1 Pet 3:21). But Hebrews here uses the noun *baptismos*, which is used for ritual Jewish washings (Mark 7:4) and for John's baptism. In Heb 9:10 Hebrews speaks of "diverse washings" (*diaphoroi baptismois*) together with Jewish practices of eating and drinking. The usage in the present passage suggests the ritual initiation of baptism, but the plural is puzzling. We must remember, however, that a single person could conceivably have undergone, in sequence, a proselyte baptism, circumcision, John's baptism, and baptism into the Jesus movement.

What Luke Timothy Johnson is saying here is that the plural is a bit unusual but it shouldn't throw us off because people might have done this more than once. The same basic point sort of stands: this is a basic practice, this is something connected with the beginning point of a person's spiritual journey. The writer of

Hebrews is saying, "Look, must we go back over this stuff again? Turning away from dead works, turning toward faith in God, more talk about baptisms, more talk about the laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead... that's important, but it's a basic doctrine. Eternal judgment—important, but a basic doctrine. In other words, we cover this stuff all the time. Can we just talk about something else? *We cover this stuff all the time.* It's not that these are unimportant items, but they're sort of basic ideas that become the focus at the beginning point of someone's salvation experience or journey (however we want to put that). This is the beginning point of being a believer, being born again and however we want to put that. This is the kind of stuff you talk about at the very beginning. But we're still talking about it. Can we just move on to some other, deeper things?" In verse 3, the writer says:

**<sup>3</sup>And this we will do if God permits.**

So he's hopeful that maybe at some point we'll be able to do that. And then he expresses this lament that "Do we have to go over the basic stuff again, including the elementary doctrine of Christ? How many times do we have to go over the gospel? Boy, I'd like to move on. Maybe we'll get a chance to if God permits." And then he hits verse 4 and he writes this. Here's the most controversial part of the passage. I'm going to read verses 4-12.

**<sup>4</sup>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, <sup>5</sup>and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.**

**<sup>9</sup>Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, <sup>12</sup>so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.**

Many think that this section of Hebrews 6 teaches that believers who lapse into unbelief cannot return, that they are just cut off. It's over for them. Many also

contend that this section teaches that believers who sin too much or too badly (whatever that means—how much is too much and what's too bad?) lose their salvation. Now, I think personally that it's easier to see the flaws in the second idea than the first. Since salvation cannot be merited (there's a whole host of passages that make that point, including material we've seen in Hebrews up to this point), lack of merit cannot result in the loss of the thing that can't be merited. So if salvation cannot be earned by good works, it can't be lost by not having good works. Since it's not earned by abstaining from sin, it's not going to be lost when we sin. This is just axiomatic. This is simple stuff—straightforward stuff. Verse 12 sort of actually deserves some focus here about what's really going on here. If sinning too much or too badly is supposed to be what loses salvation, one would expect moral performance to be what brings salvation. But that isn't what verse 12 says:

**<sup>12</sup>so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.**

You have belief and then you have belief that endures. That's what saves. We can't say that he's arguing earlier in Hebrews 6 that, "Oh, well, if you sin too much or don't have enough good works, then you're going to lose salvation." No, because you would expect the contrast, then, to be in verse 12, "Well, you've got to work harder. You've got to work more. You've got to sin less." That's not what he says! Those who inherit the promises of eternal life do so through faith and faith that endures. It's always about faith. So Hebrews 6 actually contradicts this "losing salvation" by committing too many sins or some specific sin or something like that. It actually contradicts that. And, frankly, it denies works salvation. That's where your attention needs to be in Hebrews 6, to help you think through that second flaw. He actually illustrates the point that salvation... those who inherit the promise do so through faith that endures. Then he goes into verse 13 (I'm just going to read the rest of the chapter):

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**<sup>13</sup>For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, <sup>14</sup>saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you." <sup>15</sup>And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. <sup>16</sup>For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. <sup>17</sup>So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, <sup>18</sup>so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. <sup>19</sup>We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, <sup>20</sup>where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.**

He uses Abraham as an illustration. Abraham is the one whose belief—his faith—was counted to him as righteousness. Jews are going to know the story really well. Abraham was not saved by works. This is Paul's point over in Romans 4. He was saved by faith. The line about God counting his faith to him (Abraham) as righteousness was before he was circumcised. It has nothing to do with the works, with the Torah, with rules, or whatever. It didn't have anything to do with that. Ultimately, what it depends on is God's own character—God's own loyalty to his own promises on your behalf. Frankly, it depends on God's loyalty to his promises on behalf of Jesus, because Jesus was the lynch-pin to his means of salvation—the salvation he provides for us. And Jesus did the job, and he did it perfectly. He was unblemished. He was validated. He was made perfect, as we read a few minutes earlier in this chapter.

So for God to change the terms after the fact, well he's not going to do that because of his own character. God swore upon his own self that he would do this, and since Jesus did this all, he performs the office and is the high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, God is going to be loyal to him. And in being loyal to him, he'll be loyal to you. He'll be loyal to us. This is the basis of salvation: patient enduring faith. It's not about works. This whole passage in Hebrews 6 about falling away and being renewed to repentance and so on and so forth... It's not about works. It's not about committing a specific set of sins or a sin a specific number of sins. It has nothing to do with that.

Let's go back to those two things that many people think. Many people think this section of Hebrews teaches that if believers lapse into unbelief they can never return. That was the first idea. And the second idea (the one that we just covered) was that people believe that believers who sin too much or too badly are going to lose their salvation. That idea is demonstrably false because of what the rest of the passage says. What about the first suggestion, though? I think this one is harder to see or to embrace. What about the first suggestion—that many people think this section of Hebrews 6 teaches that if believers lapse into unbelief they cannot return? In other words, God is going to cut them off? It may sound from the ESV like that's what's going on, but I think it's a misreading of some of the wording. So let's read Hebrews 6:4-6 again in the ESV:

**<sup>4</sup>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, <sup>5</sup>and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, <sup>6</sup>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.**

First, it seems pretty clear that the writer is talking about people whose profession of faith at some point was genuine. He's talking about people who believed. At one point they said, "Yeah, I believe that." To make this point, Hagner writes:

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The Christianity of the readers is not in doubt. They are described as "enlightened" (v. 4), meaning that they have been brought from darkness to light (cf. 10:32, "after you had received the light"). They also have "tasted" of "the heavenly gift" and "the goodness of the word of God" ("word" here is not *logos*, referring to Christ as the Word of God, but *rhēma*, referring to what God has spoken). The word "taste" does not mean that they only partook of Christianity partially and did not participate fully in Christian salvation. In a similar way, the word "taste" in Heb 2:9 does not mean that Christ did not fully die.

**<sup>9</sup> But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.**

In other words, it's not just a nibble. He really did it; he really died. It's not just this partial idea. So Hagner is saying that those who have tasted the heavenly gift (the gospel) are people who heard the gospel, understood it, and believed it. He writes:

The readers had become "partakers of the Holy Spirit," the certain mark of genuine Christians.

Given this assumption, which is with the majority of scholarship, the key line here to me is this one: it says "to restore them again to repentance." What repentance are we talking about? Most scholars (and I would agree) argue that this statement in verse 6... Let me just read the verse again so we don't lose the context.

**<sup>4</sup> 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, <sup>5</sup> and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, <sup>6</sup> 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.**

This line, "to restore them again to repentance," is crucial. Most scholars would feel that we need to connect that statement about repentance (this one in verse 6) with the statement made in verse 1 about repentance. Let me read you verse 1 again:

**Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God...**

Now, if the statement about it being impossible to renew them again to repentance has a relationship to this idea of repentance from dead works... If they're connected—if that's the case—then the writer has someone or something specifically in view: someone who embraced the idea that salvation was by faith in Christ's work on the cross who then turned away from the true gospel and re-embraced (went back to) dead works. Here in the context of Hebrews, that would be essentially law-keeping (Torah keeping).

So this person in view is going back to works salvation, so they would need to once more turn away from trusting in dead works. They would need to again repent from trusting in dead works. Now, this person who no longer thinks correctly about the works problem is in danger of committing an apostasy so serious that the writer of Hebrews (under inspiration) can't guarantee that they'll ever return.

That's how I take this "impossibility" language. That language, I think, has to be balanced with God's desire in many passages that those who are trusting in their works turn to salvation—that they actually turn to the gospel. Trusting in works doesn't make salvation by faith impossible. Nearly every human being who is saved turns to Christ from some form of works-salvation mentality—some other religion. They all teach works. So the point can't be that trusting in works makes salvation impossible. Rather, the difficulty here is that the person we're talking about rejected salvation by faith. In other words, they understood what the truth was and then they went back to works. That makes the possibility of them sort of coming to their senses, so to speak, much more difficult. Salvation by faith is no longer a revelation to them. It's no longer news to them. They've been there. They used to believe that. But now they've turned back to dead works. If they again become disillusioned by their dead works system, where are they going to go? They've already abandoned salvation by faith. *This* is why the writer adds the note that those who have returned to works... It's like crucifying once again the son of God to their own harm and holding him up in contempt! At one point they saw, "Okay, I can't be saved by works so I'm going to embrace the gospel." And then for some reason they go back to a works mentality. If they see the futility in that again, where are they going to go? There is no other sacrifice. There is no other way to resolve the human sin problem. So if they've already rejected the cure in favor of a return to works, it really does look like they're just not going to make it back. It really does look like they can't be saved because they've already rejected the solution. Hagner puts things this way. He says:

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These Jewish Christian readers, who had so clearly participated in the fruit of Christian salvation, now contemplated turning away from it all. Nothing could be more serious in our author's view. He insists that their apostasy would be a form of betrayal and the shocking equivalent of crucifying Jesus and subjecting him to public shame yet once again. In effect, their apostasy would be a mockery of the cross itself.

All of that lurks behind this impossibility language. On one level it's still hypothetical, though, because trusting in works in and of itself is no obstacle to having eternal life. Most people are saved out of that. The person who trusts in works must (to use the language of Hebrews 6:1) "repent from dead works"—turn away from that idea. They have to turn toward believing in God's promises. But on another level, the fact that someone had understood all that and embraced it and *then* turned from that back to a works system makes any future repentance seem very unlikely—seemingly impossible. I say "seemingly" because—and I think this is really important in the passage—the adjective used here that gets translated "impossible" is *adunatos* (ἀδύνατος). It doesn't have just one meaning. It doesn't always mean "impossible." For example, it can generically mean "powerless or weak." Let me read you Romans 15:1.

**We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.**

The word "weak" there is *adunatos*, the same word here as in Hebrews 6. There's no sense of fatalism there in Romans 15:1. In other passages, though, it does refer to kind of an absolute impossibility. For instance, later in this chapter (Hebrews 6:18), we read:

<sup>18</sup> **...it is impossible for God to lie...**

Okay, well that's absolute. Romans 8:3 would be another one of these. Let me read that one to you:

<sup>3</sup> **For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do.**

There you have this "could not do" statement. The law is never going to bring salvation, so that would be sort of a categorical impossibility. So we have a generic kind of reference of weakness, and in some contexts we've got a certain impossibility. I would say, though, that there's even another alternative. I'm suggesting that we read Hebrews 6:4 in this light. At other times, the term *adunatos* refers to more severe weakness or inability and, therefore, great unlikelihood, but not absolute impossibility. I think that's what Hebrews 6:4 is talking about—something that's really unlikely. It doesn't look like it's going to

happen, but it's not actually impossible. Here's the passage that makes me think this. The "eye of the needle" passage in the gospels actually illustrates this perspective. This is Matthew 19:23-26 (also Mark 10:27, Luke 18:27). Let me just read you the larger passage in Matthew.

**<sup>23</sup> And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>24</sup> Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."**

Let's balance those two sayings. Jesus says, "Only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of God." He doesn't say, "Well, there are no rich people in the kingdom of God because they just can't... that's impossible." He doesn't say that. He says it's really difficult. And then he gives this illustration:

**<sup>24</sup> Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. <sup>25</sup> When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" <sup>26</sup> But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible [*adunatos*], but with God all things are possible.**

Of course, in the gospels we have the illustration of Zacchaeus. He was a rich man—very rich—and he came to faith. So Jesus' point here is that this might look impossible to people, but with God all things are possible. Yep, it's really hard... it's really difficult for a rich person to enter heaven. It's so hard it's like a camel going through the eye of a needle. It's really hard. But what man looks at as impossible isn't impossible with God. This is the same term used in that gospel passage as our verse in Hebrews 6. So I think that is really how we need to read Hebrews 6:4.

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The bottom line is that when you have this situation where you have a person who understood the gospel, they had turned from dead works at one point, they really understood the gospel and they believed it, but then they forsake it—they reject the gospel and go back to a works system or (in theory) nothing at all... I think even a works system would be harder than nothing at all, but they go back to the works system. Hebrews 6:4-6 is saying that it's really difficult—it's really unlikely—that that person is going to come back to faith. But what we can't say is that it's impossible. It looks impossible to us, but with God all things are possible. Why is it so hard? Because the unbeliever has to re-believe in the thing that they rejected—that they understood at one point and then they rejected. God has nothing else to offer. There is no other sacrifice for sin. There is no Plan B. This is the thing that gives us eternal life. This is the only thing that can do that. And

so if they've already rejected it, even after understanding it, that's really hard. It's really hard, but it is not technically impossible.

Before we wrap up... That was the major point of this half of the episode (these verses 4-6). It reinforces the message that this sounds oh-so-complicated, but I think that there's a way to uncomplicate it. Just believe. Some would question what I'm arguing for here and this idea of "you're eternally secure if you believe, and if you don't believe you're not." Some would argue that's inconsistent with concepts like election or passages like 2 Corinthians 1:22 and Ephesians 1:13. When it comes to election, hey—Israelites were elect, but that didn't guarantee salvation. They had to believe. They couldn't profess a belief in Yahweh and then do the circumcision thing and do the Torah thing and the Sabbath thing and then go worship Baal. The evidence that the view I'm articulating here is correct—that election did not guarantee salvation—do you want evidence for that? It's called *the exile*. [laughs] Okay? You had a bunch of circumcised Israelites who at one point... Israelites weren't always doing all this stuff, but they drifted off into worship of other gods and then they paid the price. Israel was elect—yep—but their election didn't guarantee salvation. Election means something different. I've blogged about that a lot. The exile is also the context for the Spirit language in the New Testament—these two verses that I referenced (2 Corinthians 1:22 and Ephesians 1:13). God will not share his living space or his family membership role with other gods. Let me read 2 Corinthians 1:22—a verse about how God has put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee, and then Ephesians 1:13.

**<sup>13</sup>In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit...**

What does it mean to be sealed with the Spirit? We act as though it means, "I have my salvation ticket and can now believe whatever I want or nothing at all." That is to treat the promise of salvation—the gospel message—like an incantation to be uttered or whispered or for a genie's bottle to be rubbed. Sealing is actually about identification. When we are sealed with the Spirit, we are marked as God's in a way that is similar to the role of works. Works identify those who believe. But works don't merit salvation. These are identifying characteristics, not that which takes away guilt and sin. Works testify to faith. They do not replace faith or supplement faith so that salvation is merited.

Now, the Spirit of God... I would say it works the same way. God's presence residing within us identifies us as members of his family, but we must believe to receive the Spirit and to remain in God's family. We must keep believing. We cannot turn to another god or another gospel. Israelites were sealed by circumcision (the Bible actually does use that language). Israelites were sealed by circumcision as part of their election, and election didn't guarantee salvation. Therefore, circumcision didn't guarantee salvation, either. Romans 4:11, in fact,

separates the sign and the seal of circumcision from salvation. What saved Abraham was his faith, not his circumcision. God's choice—his elective choice—to speak to Abraham also isn't what saved him. Abraham had to believe. This is a consistent, simple, straightforward, biblical, theological idea. But we mar it with the way things are preached. We mar it with theological traditions.

This gets us into the Calvinist idea of perseverance, for instance. But Calvinism isn't a synonym for biblical theology. I'm sorry, but it's not. On one hand, yes—we must persevere in belief. Sure, we have to do that. If we believe, we are eternally secure. God guarantees our eternal destiny. If we don't believe, we aren't. There's nothing in Hebrews that guarantees professing believers will continue to believe. That's what the writer fears. That's what he's afraid of—that believers will reject their belief. A Calvinist might say, "Such a statement is a contradiction of Romans 8." Let's just read Romans 8:29-30.

**<sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup> And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.**

I don't see a contradiction. The passage is actually talking about sanctification.

**<sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be *conformed* to the image of his Son...**

Sanctification isn't salvation, but of course it's connected to salvation. Think about the passage this way: it is absolutely true that anyone glorified was justified. And anyone justified was called. And anyone called was predestined. And things that are predestined are foreknown, because God foreknows everything—even the stuff that doesn't happen, in which case his foreknowledge doesn't necessitate predestination. But what's the predestinating about? It's about being conformed to the image of God's son. Here's how I read Romans 8 in the context of other passages: anyone who keeps believing and who, therefore, inherits eternal life will be glorified, because that's part and parcel of eternal life. It's Hebrews 2. We're made members of God's council-family. That person—the glorified person who makes it all the way to the end—is glorified because they were justified, and they were justified because they believed and didn't turn from belief. The person who makes it all the way to glorification was, indeed, justified, called, and predestined. The latter part really is about remnant theology. But all of that—all of it—depends on believing the gospel.

Calvinists want to predestinate belief, but the passage never actually says that. Calvinists want to link predestination with faith and then argue that faith cannot be surrendered because the person's belief was foreknown and, therefore, must

have been predestinated. Again, news flash to the hardline Calvinists: God also foreknows people who will forsake faith. The people that the writer of Hebrews is worried about were (and are) real. In Calvinist logic, their forsaking of faith must also, therefore, have been predestinated. So not only does God predestinate the lost in that system... in other words, the non-elect. And one wonders about the elect because the non-elect in the Old Testament might have become elect, but let's just set that aside. In Calvinist logic, the forsaking of faith must also have been predestinated. But God also predestinates the loss of what he predestinated earlier. So in the Calvinist system (I'm talking about the hard-liners here) you've got those predestinated to hell and those predestinated to heaven. Well, if God foreknew that some people would have faith and then lose it (they would believe and then abandon it), now you have God predestinating both the loss of what he had predestinated earlier and... If both belief and unbelief of the same person are predestinated, because both decisions of that same person are foreknown, that's what you get. This is why Calvinists *must* say that the people in Hebrews 6:2-4 (the ones who were enlightened, who tasted the heavenly gift, who shared the Holy Spirit) weren't really enlightened. They didn't really taste the heavenly gift. And they didn't really share in the Spirit. If those people are believers, then God both foreknew and predestinated their embracing of the gospel and their apostasy, because they were both foreknown. One act of predestination unpredestines the other. Look at the quandary: you either have to deny in Hebrews 6:2-4 the plain language used elsewhere that describes believers (taste the heavenly gift, share in the Holy Spirit, were enlightened, went from darkness to light)... You have to deny that this refers to believers here when it refers to believers in lots of other places. You either have to deny that to avoid this "predestinating and then unpredestinating what was earlier predestinated"... [laughs].

1:20:00

Look, this is why systems just complicate things. The person who believes—whose faith remains—was certainly glorified. They're going to reach the end. They're going to be glorified. And if they're glorified, they were called, they were justified, they were foreknown, they were predestinated. God knows all that. It's when we start to get into this causative element that we run into problems—when we link without any qualification foreknowledge and predestination. It forces us to deny clear biblical language for salvation in Hebrews 6, else our system sounds ridiculous. That's just what you get. It's so much simpler to just affirm what the text says. That's what we try to do here on the podcast.

Here are the simple facts, as we wrap up:

1. Salvation is only by faith—or belief—in the one who secured atonement. That's Christ. That's Hebrews 1-5, and we've been there for weeks now.
2. We must all repent. We must all change our thinking about dead works. We have to stop behaving/living/thinking as though our works can save us. They cannot save us because there's no merit.

3. We cannot sin away salvation because salvation was never about doing enough good works or abstaining from enough bad works to merit salvation. But salvation can be rejected, even by those who once claimed to believe it. People who professed to believe it can reject it.
4. It is very unlikely that anyone who believes the gospel and then rejects that same gospel to return to dead works will come back to faith. It's very unlikely, but it's not truly impossible. It's just very unlikely.
5. We are, therefore, eternally secure if we believe. That cuts through the whole thing. It cuts through all the mess. We are eternally secure if we believe. If we don't believe, we aren't.

I'm tempted to say, "Don't go away from this episode scared." You might say, "Oh, this is so hard! What do I do? How can I be saved?" Well, it's actually easy. But the writer of Hebrews actually wanted his readers to feel a little trepidation here because belief is eternally serious. I would say that the takeaway from Hebrews 6 and this episode is the same that we've already seen. You can actually reduce the takeaway to one word: *believe*.

**TS:** What's that Journey song? "Don't stop believing." [laughter] That comes to mind on that.

**MH:** I was going to say, "Leave it to you to think of that, Trey," but you actually have a point. [laughter] Let's edit that out before I admit that.

**TS:** I think this repentance and works versus grace and faith is very important. I've never really been able to articulate grace versus repentance or works versus faith and all that, but I think what you're doing here now is giving us a tool so we can say, "Here you go, listen to episode #184."

**MH:** Merit is the key. Christian, why are you doing the works that you're doing? If you're doing them thinking that you need to do them to keep God happy—that you want God to still look at you the way he did a year ago, a week ago, whatever, then you don't understand grace. The correct answer is "I'm doing this because I'm grateful. I'm doing this to be like the obedient son. I'm doing this to be like Christ. I know it doesn't earn me anything, I just want to do it."

**TS:** And you have a lot of Christians that really pound home the repentance. They can't get over that. They're stuck on it and the works.

**MH:** Right. And if we're living in sin, we ought to repent. But again, why are you repenting? Are you repenting because you're convinced that you've made your profession of faith... And you really do believe in the gospel, but are you repenting now because you want God to love you? Are you repenting now

thinking that you need to get saved again? Merit is the issue. Are you repenting so that now you can feel like you've earned salvation? A lot of Christians would say, "No, I would never think that!" Well, that's good! So hold that thought in your head. Yes, you need to stop cheating on your wife. You need to repent of X, Y, Z. You need to repent. But when you do, I'm glad to hear that you know that you're not doing it to earn salvation. You're doing it because it makes you less useful to God, it's a terrible testimony, it's self-destructive, it's going to destroy people around you—lots of good reasons to repent. But we don't repent so that we can redefine the gospel. That's not why we do it. But a lot of people are just stuck in that loop. And that's why guilt is such a factor. I'm not saying that if we're deep in sin we shouldn't feel guilty. I'm not saying that. But once you do repent, the cycle of guilt shows that you're really stuck in this loop where you wonder if you're good enough now for God to like you again. That in itself is really self-destructive. That shows that you haven't quite escaped from this mentality that says, "What I do is really important to whether God loves me or not." Those are two things you have to clearly distinguish in your head to be able to move on. So yes, live a holy life. Yes, repent from sin. But understand the relationship of your repentance, your behavior, and your works to how God looks at you. While you were yet a sinner—before this ever would have been a conversation—Christ died for you. He had the disposition way back there. You're not going to give him the disposition toward you that he already has.

**TS:** All right, Mike, another good episode. Next week is chapter 7, Melchizedek? Back into Melchizedek?

**MH:** [laughs} Who???

**TS:** We've got more to say about it?

**MH:** Can't get rid of that guy. [laughter] Yeah, yeah. There are specifically two places we're going to drill down on that, but yep—he's back.

**TS:** I figured it's going to be a five-minute show. You're just going to reference the past...

**MH:** Go listen to that other stuff, yeah!

**TS:** I figured that's what it would consist of. All right, Mike, we're looking forward to that. And again, if you haven't done so, go rate us/review us wherever you consume us. Let us know how we're doing. And we want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.