

# “Impossible to Restore Them and the Perseverance of the Saints”– Hebrews 6:4-8

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*[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, [www.welovethegospel.com](http://www.welovethegospel.com)]*

Take a Bible and meet me in Hebrews, chapter 6...

Today, like last Sunday, we will be considering what many scholars have called the most difficult passage in the Bible to understand and to accept. Because it's such a challenging passage, we are spending three weeks on it and this is week 2. We are essentially working through and evaluating some of the major interpretations of this warning passage. We can't, even in three sermons, look at every interpretation that has been proposed and we really can't even do justice to the major ones we will consider. Even these have multiple variations within their general approach. So I'm under no illusions, knowing that these kinds of sermons always leave some people frustrated because I didn't say enough about their position. But, hey, if you want everyone to like you all the time, don't go into pastoral ministry...

But in all seriousness, these verses have been debated for good reason. There are several viable interpretations (and some that, frankly, should be dismissed out of hand). My own conclusions I hold loosely, but they have been formed after much consideration, far more than these three sermons could represent. In any case, today will be far more thoughtful than applicational. We have to determine what the author is truly saying before we can understand how to apply his words. So we're working toward the application, but we have a sermon and a half to go before we can get there. With that in mind, let's jump in. I'll begin reading in Hebrews 6:4. Follow along as I read. This is God's Word...

*“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.”* (Hebrews 6:4-8)

So last week we determined that one of the major questions we have to sort out is whether or not the author is describing true Christians or fake Christians in verses 4 and 5. Who exactly is falling away? The answer to that question is very debated and drastically changes how we handle this warning. We admitted that verses 4 and 5 definitely sound like language that could be used of Christians, but that itself doesn't solve the matter. So we began asking, last week,

## WHAT IF THESE ARE BELIEVERS?

If the author is describing believers, then there are two major options for how we interpret this warning.

### *Option 1: The Loss of Salvation View*

This is the view that we spent our time on last week. We asked is it possible that the author is describing true believers who somehow lost their salvation? My conclusion was no and I based that on the consistent

teaching of the New Testament in favor of the eternal security of the believer. If you missed it, then you can find that sermon on our website and see what you think of the argument I made.

Today I would like for us to consider a second option among those who conclude that verses 4 and 5 are a description of real Christians. This one is definitely viable and, as we will see, does not deny the eternal security of the believer.

### *Option 2: The Hypothetical View*

This view(s) does *not* involve believers losing their salvation. There is general agreement among these interpreters that those who have been born again will in fact be saved forever. They acknowledge the strength of the case made last week for the eternal security of the believer and cannot escape the conclusion that those with saving faith will never lose their salvation. That said, they still believe that the language in verses 4 and 5 is being used for true believers. Therefore, they conclude that this warning passage amounts to a hypothetical scenario that either cannot actually happen for the believer or will not happen for the believer. They escape the difficulty of this passage by arguing that the apostasy described is merely hypothetical situation, not a true reality for any child of God. It's just an imaginary situation.

There are certain English translations that seem to lend themselves to a hypothetical view. The King James Version, for instance, begins verse 6 with the word "if"—"if they shall fall away..." Similarly, the New International Version that I was brought up on (not the one that is currently in use, which came out in 2011) reads "if they fall away..." Such a reading would seem to open the door to a hypothetical reading. If a person did fall away, it's argued, then it would be the case that they could not be brought to repentance, but since it cannot happen (because such a falling away is not in reality possible) or will not happen (because God won't let it happen), then the author is just engaging in hypotheticals.

This is at least possible. I could probably make a case that Paul engages in hypotheticals a time or two in some of his New Testament writings. But it should be noted that there is actually no "if" in the original language. That's a word that was added by translators who are making an interpretation of the grammar. It's a possible interpretation, but it's not the most natural reading, which explains why most English translations don't include an "if" in verse 6. It's not "if they fall away," but "those who have fallen away." The English Standard Version that's in the pew reflects a solid translation of the original—"*It is impossible, in the case of those who have [experienced the things in verses 4 and 5] and then have fallen away [not if], to restore them again to repentance...*" So while the grammar doesn't rule out the hypothetical view, it can hardly be said to support it.

Still it is at least possible. A variation of the hypothetical view has been called the "means of salvation" view.<sup>1</sup> Those who hold it argue that, yes, the author has described true believers and, yes, it's theoretically possible for them to fall away from their salvation, but, no, that will never happen because God uses warning passages like this (and His promises elsewhere) to keep all true believers from falling away. So the writer is employing a sanctifying "what if," where the power of the threat is what God uses to persevere His people in the faith.<sup>2</sup> There are some fine scholars who have held this view. This was Charles Spurgeon's view and his been followed more recently by people like Tom Schreiner, both of whom I admire greatly.<sup>3</sup>

However, we might wonder how likely it really is that the author would warn believers against a sin that is, for whatever reason, impossible to commit? Once you conclude it's only hypothetical, does the warning not, at least to some degree, get emptied of its power? D. A. Carson once likened this interpretation to a parent who issues threat after threat after threat to a child who knows perfectly well that his parent will never make good on the threats. If the child knows the parent is just a pushover with no follow through, then how seriously will the child take the threats? Not very. There's no reason to change course because the warnings

have nothing behind them. Thus, while this interpretation is at least possible, it does have the ring of, in Carson's words, "a very clever pastoral copout."<sup>4</sup> A better interpretation would conclude that:

"This situation of apostasy is very real, a very terrible possibility that must be earnestly avoided. It is something that does happen and will happen to real people. Indeed, it may be that there are particular people in view here who have fallen away and can no longer be restored."<sup>5</sup>

But wouldn't that mean that we are back to the view we considered and dismissed last week—that a true believer can lose their salvation? Only if we grant the premise that verses 4 and 5 are describing true believers. As it turns out, I don't think that premise is required. I think it is possible that verses 4 and 5 are *not* describing true believers but rather those who are false converts, almost believers, fake Christians. But is there reason to conclude this from the larger context or from the language used in verses 4 and 5 themselves? I think so. With the remainder of our time I want to make the case from the larger context of Hebrews and then next time I'll make the case from the description of these individuals in verses 4 and 5.

You'll notice that we are working from outside in. Last week we consider the teaching of the larger New Testament, which I argued supports the eternal security of the believers and thus rules out the possibility that Hebrews 6 is speaking of losing a person's salvation. Today we will consider the larger context of Hebrews. Next week we will look at the center of the passage itself. So we are dealing with concentric circles, inching closer and closer to the center.

## CONTEXT, CONTEXT, CONTEXT

I've heard people say that while the rest of the New Testament may speak of the eternal security of true believers, if all we had was the book of Hebrews then an honest reading of Hebrews 6 would leave us with the impression that believers could lose their salvation. That strikes me as a strange thing to say. For starters, we do have the rest of Scripture and we should take it into account. And, second, I'm not so sure that even the book of Hebrews in isolation supports that position. This passage is too often studied in isolation, without adequate attention to what the context before and after contributes to its meaning. Let me briefly outline a handful of ways I think the context should influence our understanding of this warning passage and who it is addressed to.<sup>6</sup> First of all, we must notice...

### *The Shift in Person*

One of the things people have observed is that the writer of Hebrews has a tendency to speak in the first and second person before and after the passage in question.<sup>7</sup> He uses a lot of "us" and "we" and "I" and "me" and "you" and "y'all" and "your" and "our" pronouns in the verses that come before and after our passage. There's a very personal sound to it all. In fact, these people whom he consistently address in the second person he also addresses as "*brothers*" (e.g., 3:1, 12; 10:19; 13:22). That's a distinctly Christian way of referring to them. In fact, in Hebrews 3:1, he calls them "*holy brothers...who share in a heavenly calling*". That must mean he views those he addresses his letter to as Christians (at least as far as he can tell).

But notice the shift in language in chapter 6. For some reason, when he starts speaking of apostasy in verses 4 and following, he drops all the "we" and "us" and "you" language. He shifts to the third person. All of the sudden, it's "*those who have been enlightened, [those] who have tasted the heavenly gift*" and so on. Do you see the shift to the third person? It takes a discerning eye, but this may suggest that while he's still speaking *to* his readers, he is not speaking *about* them (or at least he's giving them the benefit of the doubt that they are not included in the group he describes). This is confirmed in verse 9, where he pivots out of the third person and goes back into his usual way of speaking of his audience, saying, "*Though we speak in this way,*

*yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things...*” So it would seem, from the variance in the language in verses 4 through 8, that the author is describing a group that is not necessarily the same as his readers. They aren’t necessarily believers. Does that make sense?

Now, while we are at verse 9, let’s make a second observation...

#### *Hebrews 6:9*

Not only does his language get personal again in verse 9 by shifting away from the third person, but look at the rest of that verse.

*“Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation.”* (Hebrews 6:9)

Notice the phrase, *“things that belong to salvation.”* The *“better things”* that the writer is confident are true of his readers is not what he has just described in the previous verses, but things that accompany salvation. He believes his readers are really saved and will therefore not commit the apostasy he has described. He believes they possess true saving faith and will not prove to be the barren field of verse 8. He fully expects *“better things—things that belong to salvation.”* He is confident that the things connected to salvation—things like perseverance in faith and production of fruit—will be evident among them. “He does not believe that fruitlessness and apostasy accompany salvation.”<sup>8</sup> Better things accompany salvation. So it’s hard for me to believe that the people described in verses 4 and 5 were truly saved since they don’t prove to possess these better things.

#### *Hebrews 10:14*

In a few chapters the writer will say the following about the sacrifice that Christ offered up on the cross:

*“For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.”* (Hebrews 10:14)

If we take the warning passage in chapter 6 to mean that believers could at one point be justified through faith in Jesus Christ and then at a future point lose their right standing with God, then Hebrews 10:14 would be meaningless. “It says that, for those who are now being sanctified (that is, who are now indwelt by the Spirit and born of God and are growing in holiness by faith), the offering of Christ on the cross has perfected that person for all time.”<sup>9</sup> Did you hear that? For all time! Not until the day they walk away from Christ and become apostates. For all time! “In other words,” as one preacher put it,

“to become a beneficiary of the perfecting, justifying work of Christ on the cross is to be perfected in the sight of God forever. This reality suggests that Hebrews 6:6 does not mean that those who re-crucify Christ [as the apostates are described in chapter 6] were once really justified by the blood of Jesus and were really being sanctified in an inward spiritual sense.”<sup>10</sup>

I think this is correct. If the Spirit of God has begun to sanctify you (and He has, if you are a Christian), then we are being assured that Christ’s death has perfected us *“for all time...”*

## Hebrews 13:20-21

The benediction at the end of Hebrews reads,

*“Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant,<sup>21</sup> equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”* (Hebrews 13:20-21)

What is *“the eternal covenant,”* mentioned in these verses, that is connected with Christ’s blood? It is the New Covenant. Do you remember when Jesus shared His last supper with the disciples? At some point in the meal he took up the cup of wine and said, *“This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood”* (Luke 22:20). If you know your Old Testament, there is no question about what He was referring to. By the time we get to the end of the book of Hebrews, there will be no question what he is referring to because this is a major topic in the pages ahead.

Prophets in the Old Testament explained that a day would come when God would establish a “New Covenant” with His people. The coming of that New Covenant would make the Old Covenant (the Law of Moses) obsolete (Hebrews 8:13). And Jesus said that when He shed His blood the day of that New Covenant had dawned. It was inaugurated by the blood He shed on the cross.

The second verse of that benediction reminds us that the New Covenant included, according to these Old Testament prophets, the promise of a new heart that would be given to God’s people so that they would be able, finally, to walk in God’s ways (e.g., Ezekiel 36:27; Jeremiah 24:7). A couple examples will suffice. In Ezekiel 11, the Lord says,

*“And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh,<sup>20</sup> that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.”* (Ezekiel 11:19-20)

The Lord said, in the book of Jeremiah:

*“I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them.<sup>40</sup> I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.”* (Jeremiah 32:39-40)

Now notice the way the language of Jeremiah is being echoed in Hebrews 13. The writer of Hebrews mentions the same *“eternal covenant”* and Jeremiah says that those with whom He makes this covenant will have the fear of the Lord put in their hearts, [why?] *“that they may not turn from me.”* So when the writer of Hebrews speaks of the blood of this covenant equipping Christians (i.e., the New Covenant people) with *“everything good”* to *“do his will”* and *“that which is pleasing in his sight,”* at the very least this must include what Jeremiah refers to—working in their new hearts the fear of the Lord so that they would not turn away from the Lord. Those who enter this New Covenant will not turn from the Lord and have been assured that God *“will not turn away from doing good to them”* (Jeremiah 32:40). In other words, part of the promise of the New Covenant is that New Covenant people will not commit apostasy. The logic has been expressed like this:

“Hebrews 6:6 would contradict the new covenant if it meant that people could be truly justified members of the new covenant and then commit apostasy and be rejected. That would mean that God

did not fulfill his promise to ‘work in them what is pleasing in his sight.’ He would have broken his new covenant promise.”<sup>11</sup>

A couple of weeks ago, I was reading an excellent book called, *The Forgotten Fear: Where Have All the God-Fearers Gone?*, by Albert Martin. At one point, in the opening chapter, he reflects on the New Covenant promises in Jeremiah 32, writing,

“God says, in effect, ‘The whole end for which I will work in such power in this new covenant is to put My fear within the hearts of My people so that they will not turn away from Me.’ According to this passage, it is the fear of God placed in the hearts of the beneficiaries of the new covenant that becomes the principal reason for their perseverance in the faith, and in a loving and obedient attachment to the God of their salvation.”<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, I would argue, that Hebrews 6:6 cannot be referring to real Christians. What are real Christians, if not beneficiaries of the New Covenant? And beneficiaries of the New Covenant are those whom God Himself ensures will not fall away from Him. They persevere in faith. And this leads me to the final contextual evidence I have time to offer today...

#### *Hebrews 3:6 and 3:14*

Do you remember when we considered these two conditional statements in chapter 3? I believe these are the key verses to understanding all the warning passages that follow them.<sup>13</sup> We don’t have time to rehash the significance of these conditional statements today, but if you missed it you can find our detailed discussion on our church website. I just have time for some general observations this morning.

In Hebrews 3:6 we read,

*“Christ is faithful over God’s house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.”* (Hebrews 3:6)

So how do we know that we are a part of God’s house (i.e., His people)? We know we are, “if indeed we hold fast...” Perseverance in Christian confidence and hope is what proves that we are a part of God’s people. Our perseverance doesn’t cause us to be a part of God’s people. We have become a part of God’s people in the past, if we persevere. God’s household perseveres.

Similarly, listen to Hebrews 3:14,

*“For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.”* (Hebrews 3:14)

How do we know we have in the past come to share in Christ? We know we have, “*if indeed* [in the future] *we hold our confidence firm to the end.*” Again, perseverance in faith (in the future) does not cause our coming to share in Christ (in the past). It proves that we had come to share in Christ. No perseverance, no having come to share in Christ. The former is proved by the latter. So if there is no perseverance, it shows that a person, despite all previous appearances to the contrary, never truly came to share in Christ. Falling away doesn’t show that someone no longer is a partaker in Christ. It shows that they never were. True believers persevere to the end. That’s the doctrine of perseverance of the saints. And it’s not just taught here (as we saw when we considered these verses earlier in the sermon series). As D. A. Carson has said, “one of the essential definitions of a genuine believer is perseverance...genuine saving grace, by definition,

perseveres.”<sup>14</sup> Perseverance is the hallmark of genuine conversion.<sup>15</sup> And I appreciate that the hypothetical view at least takes that seriously.

So what does that have to do with Hebrews 6:6? The author expects us in chapter 6 to remember what he has already said in chapter 3. So if he has already taught, in chapter 3, that true believers persevere, then he cannot mean, in chapter 6, that those he describes as “fallen away” were true Christians. Whatever he means, he cannot mean that. His writing and argument is far too cogent and his logic far too tight to allow for such a glaring contradiction from one page to the next. That’s a conceivable. And that’s a conclusion that no one who believes in the inerrancy of the Bible (i.e., that the Bible is free from any error) could accept.

Based on the context of Hebrews 6:6, the rest of the book itself, I don’t think we have to conclude that the people the author describes as falling away are necessarily Christians. So the question now becomes is it possible to take the description itself, found in verses 4 and 5, as referring to anyone other than Christians? I believe the answer is yes. I believe you can make a case that he is in fact describing people who look like Christians on the outside and hang out with Christians in church and have a close proximity to the things of God and even self-identify as Christian for a time, yet are not truly saved. Do you have a category for that kind of person in your mind? You need one. Next time we will allow God’s Word to create one for us, as we wrap up our consideration of this very difficult warning passage.

Let me close by circling back to that New Covenant hope we saw in Jeremiah 32. The Lord has promised:

*“I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. <sup>40</sup> I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.”* (Jeremiah 32:39-40)

Brothers and sisters, if our faith rests in Christ alone for deliverance from sin and right standing with God, then God has committed Himself to our perseverance. He has put the fear of the Lord in your heart to keep you from turning away from Him fully and finally one day. He has purchased your perseverance by the blood of Jesus Christ. So worship. In a book called, *Doctrine Matters*, which will soon be re-released under the title, *Astonished by God*, John Piper offers us a helpful reminder that I’ll leave you with today...

“If you are persevering in faith today, you owe it to the blood of Jesus. The Holy Spirit, who is working in you to preserve your faith, honors the purchase of Jesus. God the Spirit works in us what God the Son obtained for us. The Father planned it. Jesus bought it. The Spirit applies it— all of them—infallibly. God is totally committed to the eternal security of his blood-bought children...

But it would be a terrible misunderstanding if we thought that these Scriptures were written to threaten our security in God. Exactly the opposite is the case. *They are written to threaten our security in everything but God.* If you find your security in health, the Bible is a threat to you. If you find your security in your family or job or money or education, the Bible is a threat to you. And in threatening all these utterly inadequate foundations of security, the Bible drives us relentlessly and lovingly back to the one and only eternal and unshakable foundation for security—God. All the threats and warnings of the Bible declare with one voice: sin is an effort to feel secure in anything other than God.

Therefore, when God demands on the one hand, ‘Turn from sinning or you will die,’ and on the other hand, ‘Feel eternally secure in my love and you will live,’ he is not demanding two different things. Sin is what you do when you replace security in God with other things. So when God threatens our feelings of security in the world, it’s because he wants us to feel secure in his love and power. The threats and promises of Scripture have one message: *seek your security in God alone.*”<sup>16</sup>

Let’s pray...

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<sup>1</sup> See David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), 373ff.

<sup>2</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul* (PW; Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993), 156. Note this is not Hughes' own view: "The obvious problem with this view is that if the sin cannot be committed, it is absurd to offer it as an argument against falling to it!" (Ibid., 156)

<sup>3</sup> This is also the position held by W. G. T. Shedd and G. C. Berkouwer. See Allen, 373n.405.

<sup>4</sup> D. A. Carson, "Jesus Is Better: Don't Apostatize," in *D. A. Carson Sermon Library* (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2016), Heb 5:11-6:20.

<sup>5</sup> Richard D. Phillips, *Hebrews* (REC; Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2006), 187. According to Philip Hughes, the danger of apostasy here "is real, not imaginary; otherwise this epistle with its high-sounding admonitions must be dismissed as trifling, worthless and ridiculous. Certainly, in our author's judgment, the situation is one of extreme gravity. He is addressing readers whose loss of confidence and whose flagging will to persevere in the Christian race (10:35f; 12:3, 12) point alarmingly to the possibility of their placing themselves beyond all hope of restoration." (Cited in Raymond Brown, *The Message of Hebrews* [BST; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1982], 113).

<sup>6</sup> I considered also looking at Hebrews 6:17-19, but decided against it for the sake of time and in the knowledge that we will be studying that passage in a few weeks. Concerning those verses, Richard Phillips writes, "the writer concludes this chapter with a bold statement of assurance for those who have truly received the gospel. Perhaps mindful of the false conclusion some may draw, in verse 17 he writes of 'the unchangeable character of [God's] purpose' with regard to 'the heirs of the promise.' The point is that what stands behind all human activity is God's sovereign ordination and promise. The author concludes by writing of God's covenant promise to Abraham: 'God desired to show [that]...we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul' (Heb. 6:17-19). These are hardly the words of someone who wants to convey a fundamental insecurity to those who have trusted in Christ! The original readers of Hebrews, on the basis of this conclusion of chapter 6, could well recite Paul's great statement of his own assurance: 'For I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me' (2 Tim. 1:12)." Phillips, 188-189.

<sup>7</sup> Dennis E. Johnson, "Hebrews" in *Hebrews-Revelation* (ESVEC; Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 86.

<sup>8</sup> John Piper, "When Is Saving Repentance Impossible?", a sermon preached on October 13, 1996, to Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, MN, and accessed online at: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/when-is-saving-repentance-impossible>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Albert N. Martin, *The Forgotten Fear: Where Have All the God-Fearers Gone?* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), 10.

<sup>13</sup> Similarly, scholars like F. F. Bruce, D. A. Carson, and Wayne Grudem have also seen these conditional statements as a significant interpretive key for the famous "warning passages" of Hebrews. Buist Fanning writes, "The pattern for making sense of these warnings is to be found in two conditional sentences in the first lengthy warning passages (3:6-4:13). These significant statements are in Hebrews 3:6 and 3:14....Careful attention to the wording shows that these lines do not cite what *will* be true if they hold on, but what *is already* true of them, if in fact they endure. Their endurance through temptation will be the evidence of their vital connection to Christ. The writer asserts that their continuance in faith will demonstrate that the *are* members of God's household, not that it will make it so in the future. Holding on to their confidence will reveal the reality they already *have* come to share in Christ, not that they will share. By continuing in faith, they demonstrate the work Christ has already begun and will certainly accomplish in them... On this reading, these sentences in chapter 3 provide the framework for interpreting the warnings throughout Hebrews by showing us the author's underlying structure of thought. He reflects here an implicit distinction between true and false faith, between genuine and superficial membership in the Christian community. He understands that the readers are troubled and discouraged. They are tempted to pull back from their commitment to Christ, and this puts them in great danger. These verses then picture the crisis point reached by the readers and how the author chooses to exhort them in their situation. In their time of severe temptation, would they hold fast to the hope they had professed and this show that they genuinely were God's people and partakers in Christ (3:6, 14)? The writer was confident they would endure and would remain faithful (cf. 6:9-12; 10:39). But he was careful to warn them against the alternative. They had been exposed firsthand to the truth of the gospel and the supremacy of Christ's saving work. Up to that point they had given every evidence of true Christian experience. But they must continue in faith and obedience. To shrink back from Christ now would be a willful repudiation of the only way of salvation, and severe judgment would be



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certain for those who did so.” Buist M. Fanning, “A Classical Reformed View,” in *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2007), 206, 215-216.

<sup>14</sup> D. A. Carson, “Jesus Is Better: Don’t Apostatize,” in *D. A. Carson Sermon Library* (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2016), Heb 5:11–6:20. Similarly, F. F. Bruce writes, “In these verses he is not questioning the perseverance of the saints; we might say that rather he is insisting that those who persevere are the true saints.” F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. Ed. (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 144.

<sup>15</sup> Arturo Azurdia III, “The Fatality of Apostasy, Part 1,” a sermon accessed online at: [http://media.thirdmill.org/mp3-16/art\\_azurdia.Heb13.mp3](http://media.thirdmill.org/mp3-16/art_azurdia.Heb13.mp3).

<sup>16</sup> John Piper, *Doctrine Matters: Ten Theological Trademarks from a Lifetime of Preaching* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2013), 144, 149-150.