

“Salvation & Sluggishness”

Hebrews 6:4-12

November 5, 2023

Hebrews 5:11 - 6:12 *About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull [nōthros; sluggish, i.e. lazy, dull, slothful] of hearing. ¹² 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, ¹³ for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.*

¹ 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, ² and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³ And this we will do if God permits. ⁴ 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, ⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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. ⁸ But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

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

INTRO ... The Hebrews Moment ...&... the Historic Moment

- The Hebrews Moment ...Note the “Bookends” of the word [nōthros; sluggish, i.e. lazy, — dull, slothful]
 - The Writer is Seeking to Address a condition of Sluggishness and Dullness
 - Again, He WARNS Them—v. 4 ...
 - He Describes another “people” besides them—v. 4 “...in the case of those who have...”

⁹ Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to **salvation**.

- The Historic Moment ...This verse has become a Weighty Verse in the Debate about the Doctrine and Nature of “SALVATION”

SALVATION

...v. 4-6 ...contributes some thought that gets understood differently by different people!

“John Wesley, the great Methodist leader, made much of these verses, writing, “Must not every unprejudiced person see, the expressions here used are so strong and clear, that they cannot, without gross and palpable wrestling, be understood of any but true believers?” People who hold this interpretation cite these verses as a key proof against the assurance of salvation or eternal security. Wesley was typical of many others when he wrote: “On this authority, I believe a saint may fall away; that one who is holy or righteous in the judgment of God himself may nevertheless so fall from God as to perish everlastingly.” **Richard Phillips**, Hebrews, Reformed Expository Commentary

“They, whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.” **Westminster Confession of Faith**

Phrases/doctrines of: “Losing your salvation” ... “Eternal Security” ... “The Perseverance of the Saints” are significantly Informed by This Passage.

? – Where does your “Doctrine of Salvation” BEGIN?

Eph 1:3-14 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, **according to the purpose of his will,** ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ **making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose,** which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ **as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.***

¹¹ *In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, ¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. ¹³ 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, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.*

...This is an elaborate description of God Unfolding His Purpose—His Decided Upon Plan—that interacts with the destiny of this world and with our individual stories! ...There are 3 Significant Things

- 1) **God is Deciding!** ...to Save, to Redeem
- 2) **God has a Purpose!** ...that supplies His reasons; it Reigns over the “Human Drama” and My Personal Storyline!!
- 3) **We are Deciding!** ...Salvation does not exist for anyone who doesn’t WANT & CHOOSE it!

...What is the Nature of God’s Decision with Regards to “SALVATION”?

Rom 9:3-13 *For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. ⁴ They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. ⁵ To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.*

⁶ *But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, ⁷ and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” ⁸ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. ⁹ For this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.” ¹⁰ And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, ¹¹ though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— ¹² she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” ¹³ As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”*

...The Israelites have been Greatly Blessed!—v. 4 ...Yet, they have Rejected Christ and are Not Saved!! HOW CAN THIS BE?—v. 6ff explains

—You Can Be Blessed with Stuff from Heaven, but Not Actually Be Saved!

—The “Ruling Decision” in the land of “Decisions” is GOD’S DECISION—v. 8ff

Jn 1:9-13 *The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

...The Reason we have the thoughts in Rom 9 is because of the “Guaranteed Purpose Statement” in Romans 8...

Rom 8:28-30 *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.* ²⁹ *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.* ³⁰ *And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*

“...remember that our salvation goes back even before the beginning of our faith, into eternity past. Salvation begins in election. ...Paul sees a golden chain: from God’s foreknowledge and predestination in eternity past, to calling and justification, to glorification. Those who are predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ cannot fail to be glorified.” **John Frame**, “Systematic Theology”, p. 1000

Guidelines for Interpreting a Passage: (1) Bring Your Bible—your Whole Bible ...(2) Carefully Consider the Passage in Light of All of Scripture

“SALVATION” That is Informed by SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

(1) The Whole Bible (On the Nature of Salvation) (External Help)

John 6:37-40 *All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.* ³⁸ *For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.* ³⁹ *And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.* ⁴⁰ *For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”*

Philippians 1:6 *And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*

Jude 1:24-25 *Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy,* ²⁵ *to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (ESV)*

1 Corinthians 1:7-9 *...as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ,* ⁸ *who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.* ⁹ *God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (ESV)*

Ephesians 4:30 *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. (ESV)*

John 6:40 *For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”*

1 John 2:19-20 *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.* ²⁰ *But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. (ESV)*

(2) Careful Consideration of This Passage

- The previous presentation of Israel (Heb 3-4) ...a report of those who “failed to enter because of unbelief”. ...Even though they were greatly blessed! They had their own experience of v. 4-6

” [Heb 6:1] the participation in spiritual realities of those who “fall away,” though they have been “enlightened” and “shared” and “tasted” the things of God, parallels the privileged experience of the children of Israel in the wilderness who fell away and died in unbelief. As part of the covenant community, the fallen Israelites had placed blood on the doorposts, eaten the Passover lamb, miraculously crossed the Red Sea, observed the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night, tasted the miraculous waters at Marah, daily ate manna, and heard the voice of God at Sinai. But their hearts were hardened in unbelief, and they fell away from the living God. **Kent Hughes**, Hebrews, vol 1 (Preaching the Word Commentary)

- v. 7-8 ...This is the Commentary Provided in Hebrews to Explain this Phenomena in v. 4-6
⁷ 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. ⁸ But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.
 - v. 4-6 ...describe experiences that a person could have. These experiences sound like the ones that genuine believers have! But that's how the passage is designed for the sake of its intended purpose. It is trying to tell you that something can be "drastically similar" and yet lack the real substance!
 - v. 7-8 ...these verses are the commentary designed to explain v. 4-6 ...This is the story of 2 different lands. BOTH receive and experience rain (the blessings, revelation, and interaction of God through his word and His Spirit). ...It is the FRUIT that comes forth from the life that REVEALS the True Condition of the land!

"So the picture is not of a field that had life and vegetation and then lost it. The picture is of two different kinds of fields—one is fruitful and blessed; the other is barren and cursed." **John Piper**, "When is Saving Repentance Impossible?"

- "THEY" are Different! ...⁹ Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. ...later—
 - Heb 10:38-39** *but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him."*³⁹ *But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.*
 - Heb 3:1** *Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus*
 - Heb 3:14** *For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.*

I sometimes ask people: Why do you believe you will wake up a Christian tomorrow morning? Why do you think you will have saving faith tomorrow when you wake up? I ask this to test what sort of view of perseverance someone has. The biblical answer is not, "I know I will choose to believe tomorrow morning. I am committed to Jesus." That is very fragile confidence.

The answer is found in all these texts. God is faithful. God will work in me. God will keep me. God will finish his work to the end. The answer is God's ongoing work, not my ongoing commitment. When I ask this question I am fishing to see if anyone has the view that eternal security is like a vaccination. We got our vaccination when we were converted and can't catch the disease of unbelief. That is a misleading analogy because it implies that the process of preservation is automatic without the ongoing work of the great physician. Perseverance is not like a vaccination, but like a life-long therapy program in which the great physician stays with you all the way. He will never leave us ([Hebrews 13:5](#)). That is the way we persevere. That is the way we have assurance." **John Piper**, *What We Believe about the Five Points of Calvinism*

...The REASON this passage appears—is NOT the insertion of an Eternal Security Excuses ...it is to MOTIVATE the SLUGGISH!!

Heb 6:9-12 *Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, ¹² so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*

“It seems to me that the book of Hebrews has a special way of making us serious. It is a very sobering book. It is not a sad book. But it is a serious book. If you hear what it says, it blows away glib, trite, trivial attitudes about life. It does this not to make us sad, but to make us unshakably happy in God (see 10:34; 12:2; 13:17). One of the ways that Hebrews does this is with warnings about false security. There is a kind of happiness that will kill you. And the book of Hebrews is relentlessly loving in exposing this dangerous happiness and warning us to flee from its deceptions and pursue the solid happiness that will never let us down. In other words, Hebrews is written to deepen and strengthen the joy of our assurance in God, and one of the strategies of the book is to expose false assurances and fleeting pleasures. That's what we are reading in Hebrews 6:4-8.” **John Piper**, “When is Saving Repentance Impossible?”