

2. How might this passage serve as a warning for those who have a genuine faith, but have become lazy in our pursuit of Christ?
3. How might walking away from the faith amount to “crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace?”

A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT

⁹ Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are convinced of better things in your case—the things that have to do with salvation. ¹⁰ God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. ¹¹ We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realized. ¹² We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

The writer of Hebrews virtually defines an authentic believer as someone who has embraced the truth of the gospel, bears the fruit of the gospel, and maintains their confidence in the gospel to the very end.

1. What is the one particular fruit of the gospel that gives the writer of Hebrews confidence his readers possess a genuine faith?
2. Why is this a particular important evidence that the gospel has taken root in our lives?
3. What are some practical ways you can take the warnings and encouragement of this passage to heart?



Several years ago, one of our baseball coaches handed me a well-worn copy of “The Power of Positive Thinking.” I think it may have been popular in business circles at the time. It’s a breezy little book with a simple premise. If you think positive thoughts, then good things will happen to you.”

That was also about the time I started taking Scripture seriously. While the Bible is full of noble thoughts you’ll want to cross-stitch and hang on your wall, there are some hard truths that are far from breezy and inspirational. Biblical scholars refer to these hard sayings as “warning passages.” These are not passages you cross-stitch and hang on your wall, but they are a meaningful part of the Biblical record. God in his wisdom encourages us with the truth of the gospel, and warns us of the dire consequences of ignoring the gospel. I considered compiling some of the hard sayings in a volume entitled, “The Power of Sober Thinking.”

When we come to Hebrews 6 we are confronted with one of the strongest warning passages in the New Testament. One writer maps out the flow of Hebrews 5:11 through 6:12 under the broad headings; the author shames his readers, warns his readers, and finally encourages his readers. While the passage ends on a positive note, the writer of Hebrews is not afraid of warning us of the consequences of a lazy faith.

A WORD OF SHAME (5:11-6:3)

¹¹ We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. ¹² In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!

¹³ Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

^{6:1} Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, ² instruction about cleansing rites, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³ And God permitting, we will do so.

1. How does the author shame his readers?
2. The phrase “you no longer try to understand” might literally be translated “you have lazy ears.” The author uses the same word in verse 11 and verse 12, “We do not want you to become lazy.”

What are some of the ways we can become lazy in our approach to the Christian life?

What are the consequences of spiritual laziness?

3. While it is important to put the past behind us, it is sometimes helpful to think about what might have been. Where might you be if you made yourself more available to the grace of God over the course of your walk with Christ?

How does this motivate you for the future?

4. Notice that the writer of Hebrews does not describe maturity as those who have their theological act together, he defines maturity as those who are actually practicing righteousness.

What does the Bible teach us about righteousness (or about how we are made right and live rightly before God)?

How would you describe the difference between a deep theological understanding of righteousness and living in light of the righteousness we have received from God?

A WORD OF WARNING (6:4-8)

⁴ It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age ⁶ and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

⁷ Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. ⁸ But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.

This is one of the most difficult passages in the history of biblical interpretation. For some it describes believers who actually lose their salvation. Others see it as purely speculative, since they believe it is impossible for an authentic believer to fall away. While all these phenomena seem to describe genuine believers, I believe the writer is describing those who have been part of a community where all of these phenomena are taking place, and might mistakenly assume they belong to Christ.

The author’s model for falling away is the Exodus generation who experienced God’s miraculous deliverance from Egypt, witnessed God’s awesome presence on Mount Sinai, and were miraculously sustained in the wilderness. In spite of their spiritual experiences, their faith fell short. Rather than realizing God’s promises they perished in the wilderness (see Hebrews 3:7-19).

The illustration he uses in verses 7 and 8 describes a people who receive God’s blessing (drink in the rain often falling on them) but produce two different crops. He tells us those who produce thorns and thistles are in danger of being cursed, and that in the end they will be burned. Like the Exodus generation they have experienced the blessing of God, but they are in danger of falling short of the ultimate goal.

Jesus also talks about those who seem to respond to the gospel and demonstrate amazing spiritual phenomena, but their faith falls short.

The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away (Matthew 13:20). Author’s Note: This passage is a pretty apt description of what seems to be taking place in the churches that the author of Hebrews is addressing.

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’ (Matthew 7:21-23).

1. How might these passages serve as a warning for someone who has been immersed in a vibrant Christian community but only exhibits a superficial faith?