

October 20/21, 2018

**Let's Press On**  
*Christ is Enough Series*  
**Hebrews 6:1-8**  
Pastor Bryan Clark

So let's imagine you're taking a class. It's a class for work...for your degree...for a hobby. You decide what class it is, but it's a class that's very important, has a lot of information you need to know; it's also very expensive. So you and the other students are excited for this class but it seems like there's a handful of students, that for some reason are in the class, but they just don't really care. They don't pay attention; they don't really listen; they don't do their homework, and some of them sleep through the class. So what happens is week after week after week the professor keeps going back over the same material because this small group of students still don't get it. And at some point you realize, "I paid a lot of money for this; there's a lot of information I really need to know, and it looks like we're only going to get through a small percentage of what we were supposed to learn. At some point you would become frustrated and in your mind you would think, "Let's move on!" Well that's exactly the frustration of the writer of Hebrews. This is a confusing and dangerous world. There's a long list of ways we can make a mess out of our lives. We have so much more we need to learn and understand in order to live skillfully. The writer of Hebrews is saying, "Alright, let's press on." So that's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to Hebrews, Chapter 6. You'll be delighted to know that Hebrews chapter 6, verses 1 through 8—our text this morning—is one of the, if not the most, debated, argued, and discussed text in the entire New Testament.

This week I was in the hall and bumped into a friend of mine who's from out of town. He just happened to be here for the day. He has a doctorate in theology and he said, "Hey, whatcha workin' on?" I said, "Hebrews 6," and he went, "Ohhhh." You know, that's kind of the way it is. So after two thousand years of debate and confusion, I'm going to clear it all up this morning. (*laughter*) So the real conflict is in verses 4 through 8 so we have a couple of verses to warm up with, and then we'll see what we can do. So it's really important that we remember the flow of thought.

Last week at the end of chapter 5 is what's referred to as the third warning passage in the book of Hebrews. These people had been Christians for some time. They should have grown up. They haven't grown up; they still seem to be infants. So he ends that discussion with a reminder that it is really important that they learn, understand, practice, and that they train in the truth in order to get more skillful at the ability to discern between good and evil. These people are headed into severe persecution. There's a lot they need to know, so there's a sense of urgency. So based on what he just said, you might think chapter 6, verse 1 when he says, "**Therefore**," he might be going to say, "Therefore let's go over it one more time." But that's not what he says.

**Therefore leaving the elementary teaching (the ABC's) about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation...** (\*NASB, Hebrews 6:1a)

So basically what he's saying is, "I've gone over it enough times; it's time to **press on**; we need to keep moving; we need to grow in these things." He goes on then and does a quick overview of these elementary things, the ABC's of what he's already covered. Most of these we've seen already

in the book of Hebrews. Most people see them as six phrases and they're in couplets—so three sets of two that kind of play off each other. So the first one is:

**...a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, (Vs. 1b)**

Now there's some discussion as to what is meant by **dead works**. Some people see it as maybe sinful behaviors. While that's possible, that would seem odd right here in the book of Hebrews as it hasn't come up as a concern one time yet. What has come up consistently as the concern is that they are drifting back into Judaism—drifting back into these old covenant ways instead of moving forward in their new relationship with Christ. So he told us that Sabbath rest is basically resting from religious works or attempts at self-righteousness, and instead resting in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. So what would make the most sense here is he's saying that we need to move on from our **repentance**. We changed our mind about these religious works. Let's not go back to them but rather move forward, and that would be defined as faith in God, believing God tells the truth, so **faith toward God**. The second couplet; verse 2:

**...of instruction about washings and laying on of hands...**

Again, some people think **washings** is a reference to baptism. That seems like an odd interpretation. Baptisms aren't really referred to this way. It's also plural. None of that really makes sense. What makes sense is again they're returning back to the ceremonial washings of the old covenant, for some reason to try to cleanse themselves. So he's saying, "You know we've already talked about this. That was just a shadow of the ultimate cleansing to come. Now Christ has come, so we move away from the **washings** to the **laying on of hands**." Most scholars think the **laying on of hands** was just that moment when they trusted Christ as Savior and that was kind of affirmed with them. We might think of it today like an altar call. So somebody walks to the altar and they remember that was the moment they trusted Christ as Savior. It's like a lot of us that grew up in the church and there was a lot of hell, fire and brimstone. We went to camp and VBS and youth gatherings, and many of us were saved again and again and again. You hear the altar call and it gets everything revved up and you think, "I'm just not sure if it stuck," so you do it again and again and again and lots of us did that. But at some point you have to be mature enough to understand, "Okay, that is a decision I've made, so let's move on. I don't stay there. I shouldn't spend the rest of my life doubting whether or not I'm a Christian. I get it; I believed; they laid hands on me; let's press on. That's the idea there. And the last couplet:

**...and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.**

So this is just *life after death*. Remember the illustration of Psalm 8—that Jesus has already completed the assignment. He's pioneered a way of salvation; He's seated at the right hand of the Father. Therefore, Jesus has already accomplished that, but we live in the *not yet*. So there's this weird tension between the *already* and the *not yet*, but we have the promise that one day that will be our future because Jesus is already there. So that's the hope of the gospel—that ultimately the best is yet to come! So while those six things would have been kind of the ABC's, the elementary things that he's covered were specific or unique to them, they're not so different to us. There's a need to repent—change our mind about whatever religious works we were doing to save us—and to put our faith in Christ. We understand that we move beyond that religious activity to our belief that we've been saved through the death, burial and resurrection of Christ and understand that no matter what happens in this life, the best is yet to come! So those are kind of the fundamentals and he wraps it up in verse 3:

**And this we will do** (we will press on beyond these things), **if God permits.**

So all of that's relatively clear. Starting in verse 4, "Let the fun begin!" Before we get into the specifics, I want to talk about several things. One—kind of the heart and soul of the debate—is around whether or not you can lose your salvation. So it's helpful to understand that for two thousand years godly scholars who love the word of God and love Jesus have disagreed. The language is vague; it's abstract—it's hard to figure out for sure. So at the end of the day, nobody should be too dogmatic about their conclusion on this particular passage. Now I'm not going to go through all the different views, and there are a number of them. That's just going to confuse everything. I'm going to just share with you what makes the most sense to me, but just understand there's quite a range of interpretations and views.

With that in mind, one biblical principle of interpretation is you take what is clear in order to shed light on what is unclear. So the issue of whether or not you can lose your salvation, no one, no matter where you land on the issue, should take their position from this passage. It's just too vague; it's just too unclear; it's just too disputed. It would be foolish for anyone to land on that issue based on a text that is so disputed and so unclear. So what we do is we go to other places in the New Testament. We try to understand what's clear and allow that to shed light on what is so unclear. So for me personally, I do not believe you can lose your salvation. Your salvation is not based on your ability to perform for God; it's based on the finished work of Jesus on the cross and that doesn't change. Even on your worst days, that's equally true. Your salvation has never been based on your ability to be good, but on what Christ has done for you. Some people would make the argument that at some point you can choose to reject it. Again, that makes no sense to me. The idea that you can, at some point go back, —there is no back; there's no back to go back to. You have been radically changed. You have been transformed. Romans said you've been metamorphosed. You were a caterpillar; now you're a butterfly. You can't go back to being a caterpillar. Romans says that you died. The old self is dead; it's buried with Christ. It doesn't exist anymore. You can't go back. There is no back. Paul says in Corinthians, "Old things have passed away." He's promised, "I've given the Holy Spirit as a pledge. I'm going to finish what I've started." Not only do you have the indwelling Holy Spirit, you actually have the very nature of Christ. So for you to at some point reject Christ is Christ rejecting Himself. It makes no sense. So I do believe you are eternally secure. So I take what I think is clear and I'm going to bring it to a passage that is unclear in order to help us process what's being said here. Verse 4:

**For in the case of those** (so apparently this has already happened to some) **who have once been enlightened and have tasted** (that word means experienced) **of the heavenly gift** (or heavenly blessing) **and have been made partakers** (associates, partners) **of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted** (or experienced) **the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away...** (Vs. 4-6a)

So a lot of the discussion revolves around whether or not that describes a true believer or not. Now some commentators are very adamant that the book of Hebrews is written only to believers; therefore it's a description of a true believer. Again, that makes no sense to me. I don't think there's a single book of the New Testament where the writer could know for sure that the recipients are believers. How could anyone know that? As a matter of fact, there's always an assumption that there may be unbelievers mixed in with the believers. That comes up again and again and again. As we've studied through the book of Hebrews, we've seen a consistent concern by the writer that some of these people are kind of confusing to the writer. They seem like maybe they're drifting back. He says they're *infants*. By now you should be an adult. You should be teaching others, yet

you're still a baby, and there's clearly a concern. He's talked to them about the concern that maybe you don't really believe, and here's the cost of disbelief. So there seems to be this theme that there are some among them that he is concerned about, and he's just not quite sure where they stand.

One commentator, looking at what we just read, said, "A more wondrous description of the Christian in the New Testament he cannot find," to which I would say, "I have no idea what you're talking about." There isn't a single descriptive there that is the common term used to describe a true believer. Every single word used is vague. It's unclear. Every single phrase is like, "What does that mean?" There isn't a single one of those phrases that uses a typical New Testament term to describe someone who's genuinely born again. So it seems, rather than describing someone who was truly saved and then fell away, it's describing someone who *seemed* like they believed. They seemed like they understood it. They seemed like they were part of the family. They experienced community; they experienced the things that the Holy Spirit was doing. They seemed like they were in. But at some point apparently they weren't, because they fell away. So the question would be, "Now wait a minute, do we see anywhere else in the New Testament where that's a concern?" Answer would be, "All over the New Testament! It's a consistent concern!"

For example, in Acts chapter 8, there's a guy by the name of Simon. He seems like he's in, seems like he's full of power, then as things happen and the discussion goes forward, they're starting to wonder if Simon's in at all. First John chapter 2, John talks about those that were with us and then they went out from among us, and he's very clear they ended up going out among us because they were never really part of us. He's very clear that they were never really believers. James has the concern in his discussion of faith and works. There are some people that say they have faith but there's no evidence. The argument is a faith that saves is a faith that manifests itself in behavior. A faith that saves is a faith that works. In the end of the book of Acts, the writer of Acts has this great concern as Paul is leaving, emphasizing that there are wolves in sheep's clothing that are going to come out from among them. We're told again and again that there's the concern of false teachers that come from within. They seem like they're one of us, but they end up being false teachers. Jesus talked about this in the Parable of the Sower and the soils. He talks about those that seem like they're in—seems like the seed has taken root—but it ends up they're not. He talks about the parable of the wheat and the tares. The tares were like a weed that looked like the wheat and they get sown together. He even goes so far as to say, "Don't try to pull out the tares; you'll pull out the wheat by mistake." Essentially what he is saying is, "Yes, they may look alike; just let Me do it. You can't judge; let Me do it."

Even with the ministry of Jesus himself, Jesus did miracles and all kinds of great things and the crowds grew larger and larger and larger. A lot of those people experienced some of those miraculous moments firsthand. But about halfway through, Jesus starts doing fewer and fewer miracles and starts teaching them, "This is what it will cost you to follow Me. You need to count the cost. You need to decide if you're in or not." The crowds did not continue to grow; they began to shrink smaller and smaller and smaller until the time that Jesus was arrested the crowds had become very small. People that seemed like they were on board turned out not to be on board.

So this is a consistent conversation throughout the New Testament. It's entirely possible for people to seem for a time—sometimes a long time—like they're in, but at some point the truth comes out and they fall away. The word used for **fallen away** there is a Greek word from which we get our word *apostasy*, and it does show up in Hebrews, but not here. It shows up in Hebrews chapter 3. If that's what this was, why not use the term? This is an unusual term. It's the only place in the New Testament it's used. It means to fall by the roadside; just to fall away. So the idea is if you're

pressing on, you're going down the road and there are those who have just fallen by the roadside, they've fallen into the ditch; they've been left behind. That's essentially what he's saying. He goes on and says:

**...it is impossible** (not difficult, not challenging...impossible) **to renew them again to repentance** (Vs. 6b)

That's the line that terrifies some people. Most of the people that believe you can lose your salvation also believe at any point you can regain your salvation. So often for those people it's kind of an up and down—lose it...gain it; lose it...gain it; lose it...gain it thing. But what the text just said is, "It's not three strikes and you're out; it's one strike and you're out—and it is impossible to **renew you to repentance**. That's what terrifies people. But again, what is it actually saying? So **repentance** means *a change of mind*. So what he's saying is, "There's nothing new to tell you to change your mind." So the idea is this: you have been exposed to the gospel; you can quote it as well as I can; you've experienced the life of the body; you've been in the community of faith and the work of the Spirit—you've been part of all of that. But at some point you've decided, "I don't believe it. I'm out." At that point, once you've rejected Christ, there is no plan "B". There's nothing else to tell you. There's nothing new I can tell you to get you to change your mind, so it's impossible to renew you to repentance because you've rejected the one and only way of salvation. That's essentially what he's saying. That is confirmed by the last part of verse 6. Why is it impossible to renew them again to repentance?

**...since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.**

In other words, at some point they decide, "I'm out, I'm out. I don't believe it." Therefore, what they're saying is, "I'm going back to Judaism and I'm going to stand with the religious leaders and agree with the crucifixion of Christ. In other words, I don't believe He's the Messiah; I don't believe He died for my sins; I stand with those religious leaders who **put Him to open shame** and reject this idea that Jesus is the Savior of the world. It's interesting that in the last half of verse 6, all of the verbs are present tense. So essentially what it's saying is, "Right now my position is that I do not believe Jesus is the Christ; I don't believe He's the Messiah; I don't believe He died for our sins. Therefore, I stand with the religious leaders when they crucified Jesus; I **put Him to open shame** and I reject that message." Essentially, I'm going back to Judaism. As long as that's where I'm at, it is impossible to renew me again to repentance because there's nothing that you can offer me to get me to change my mind. As long as I've rejected the Messiah, there is no plan "B". There is no other message. There is nothing more I can tell you. You know what the truth is. You've just decided you don't believe it. So that's the idea there. Verses 7 and 8 then create kind of an illustration of this.

**For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.**

So what is he saying there? It sounds a lot like the parable of Jesus and the sower and the soils. Here's the idea. The farmer goes out and plants his seeds. The rain comes down and now we wait. Every farmer knows this. You don't get a crop the next day; you wait. In the ancient world they wait and see if they're going to get a crop or if they're going to get weeds, but you don't know for a while. So it has this same flavor as Jesus' parable—that the message goes out; the rain comes down

but only time will determine if this is going to be a crop or if it's going to be weeds—very similar again to Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares. It's not up to me to judge people. It's not up to you to judge people. I don't know. There are a lot of people who seem like they're in, but maybe they're not. I don't know. Time and truth go together. Eventually it will work itself out. But part of the concern of the warning, is sometimes it's hard to tell and the writer has some real concerns. Why are you still infants? Why are you not growing? Why aren't you moving forward? And he's wondering, "Do you really believe this or are you just taking it for a test drive?" You're kicking the tires and you're eventually going to say, "You know I get it, but I don't believe it. I'm out."

Now this is a really good message for us as American Christians to think about. So for two thousand years, for most Christians there really was not an opportunity for cultural Christianity. Historically for most Christians, to be a Christian meant persecution, so there wasn't this mushy middle ground. Either you're in or you're out. It's that way in many places in the world today. For at least the last two years it's been determined that the demographic around the world that is most persecuted are Christians. There are places in the world today where if you declare yourself to be a Christian, you are setting yourself up for persecution, possibly imprisonment, possibly torture, and possibly death. So there is not really a middle ground. It's "in or out," "in or out". That's what Jesus said. "Count the costs. Are you in or are you out?" And there was this great divide between people as to those who were followers and those who weren't. We in America have this mushy middle that is very confusing. The last poll I saw, somewhere between seventy-five and eighty percent of Americans identify themselves as Christian yet, according to Barna in 2017, only seventeen percent who identify themselves as Christians have a Christian worldview. He identifies a *Christian worldview* by the most basic beliefs—clearly the ABC's, the elementary things of our faith. So there's quite a gap—seventeen percent to eighty percent—as the mushy middle. What's going on there? I don't know. I'm not God. It's not my job to judge them. But wouldn't we all agree there's reason for concern? Something's funny there. So what's going on in that mushy middle? That's the concern; are they in or are they not in? Do they believe or do they not believe?

Now I've done this long enough to know there are some people where a text like this is just terrifying! It completely undoes them. You know, they'll toss and turn all night wondering, "Is it me...is it me...am I in or I'm out?" We all have insecurities and they tend to come flooding out. "What if it's me? What if I'm not really in?" So again, let's think about this. There's nowhere in this passage where it's saying that if you don't perform at a certain level, you're out. Your salvation has never been based on your ability to be good before God. It's always been based on the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Even in this text, the discussion is not on performance. The discussion is on belief. So if you're going to toss and turn tonight in bed, here's the question to wrestle with, "Am I rejecting the Christ? Am I saying I do not believe Jesus was the Messiah; I reject the idea that Jesus died for my sins?" If that's not what you're doing, then there's no need to panic. You know, "Are you or aren't you? Are you rejecting the Messiah or aren't you? You know." There are some people who are rejecting the Messiah. They say, "I get it. I get the gospel. I get what you're saying. I'm out. I don't believe it." Those people *should* be terrified. I would hope those people would not sleep tonight. Not to be mean, but that is a very serious decision—to reject the one and only way of salvation.

There are others who will wrestle with, "But what if someday I do that, what if someday I do that—like it's a lottery ticket and I don't know if I have a winner or not?" It's not like that. It's not a mystery; it's not a lottery ticket. It's a choice. You choose! You choose: Do you believe it or not? Are you in or not? There is this danger in our country of cultural Christianity and people just floating along. Every single one of us has to decide for himself or herself: Do you believe Jesus is

the Christ? Do you believe Jesus was God in the flesh and He died for my sins? Do you believe He rose again? Do you believe He offers salvation freely as a gift? It's not a mystery. "Yes," or, "No," because that's where the writer of Hebrews is at. We need to *press on*. He's saying to these first century believers, "This is going to get really complicated. This is going to get really hard. The intensity of the persecution is going to increase. We can't keep going over these basics again and again and again. We need to move on. We need to learn more and grow more and practice more and train more and get more skillful at discerning between good and evil. You need to learn a whole lot more, so we can't keep staying as infants. We have to decide, "In or Out," and if you're In, then let's grow. Let's listen; let's learn; let's practice; let's train and let's get better. Let's understand better what it means to be a child of God and live out this faith in a complicated world.

So that's my challenge to all of us this morning. You have to decide for yourself. "Am I In" or, "Am I out? Is it true, is it not true? Do I believe or do I not believe?" because we need to *press on*. There is so much more we need to learn in order that, at the most difficult moments of your life, you will believe with all your heart in that moment that *Christ is enough!*

*Our Father, we are thankful that You haven't left us in the dark to struggle our way through, but You've given us the truth. We also understand it's up to us to believe or not to believe. Lord, it's not enough just to call ourselves Christians. Do we believe or do we not believe? Lord, my prayer would be there wouldn't be one single person that would leave today without clearly affirming in his or her heart, "I believe; I'm in," that we might press on, that we might grow, that we might learn, that we might live more skillfully as Your children, and in our worse moments we would be adequately prepared to know that in that moment, Christ is enough! Lord, may that be so. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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## **Let's Press On**

### *Christ is Enough*

Hebrews 6:1-8

Pastor Bryan Clark

### **Opening Discussion**

1. What is the difference between a cultural Christian and a true born-again follower of Christ? How might we tell the difference?
2. Why do some people grow rapidly to maturity in Christ and others seem to remain spiritually immature for years?

### **Bible Study**

1. Review Hebrews 5:11-14. What is the warning?
2. Read Hebrews 6:1-8. What is the writer's solution to the problem described in 5:11-14? (See specifically 6:1)
3. The writer of Hebrews identifies 6 things that define the ABC's or the foundation for their faith (vs 1,2). Those 6 statements would be relative to the basic issues they were facing as first century Jews. What would you consider to be the basics or the ABC's for someone today to lay a foundation upon which to build?
4. Review the 3 warning passages of Hebrews so far. Clearly the writer has some concerns about some of the recipients and what they actually believe. He identifies some ("those") who seemed to be part of the family but then have fallen away. Compare this concern with the following texts: Acts 8:9-24; I John 2:18-19; James 2:14-26; Matt. 13:3-9, 18-23; 24-30. Is it possible, according to these texts, to appear to be a Christian not truly be born again? How does this line up with our Hebrews text?
5. Why is it impossible to renew these people again to repentance? How does knowing the verbs are present tense verbs in the second half ("since" and following) of verse 6 help shed light on what is meant by impossible? If they subsequently changed their minds concerning Christ would it still be impossible? Why or why not?

