



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Hebrews 5:11–6:3

“The Disaster of Dullness”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for this great Epistle to the Hebrews, written by an unknown author. We recognize the greatness of the early church, composed of the apostles and, no doubt, others, who had unusual gifts and made their mark and made it possible for the early church to grow and develop into that which the church of Jesus Christ has become, down through the years. We thank Thee for him. We thank Thee for this letter. We recognize that, ultimately, it has not come from a man but rather from the Holy Spirit and we honor our great triune God, not only for all that has been accomplished for us, climaxing in the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, but for the preservation of the Scriptures. Here, centuries later, we are able to enter into the spirit and the reality of the divine revelation through Christ. We ask, Lord, that Thou will be with us as we study the Scriptures. Give us understanding, each one of us, enable us to grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and enable us to be faithful in proclaiming him, to our family and to our friends and those with whom we come in contact. We, again, praise Thee for the greatness of the Son of God and for the greatness of the high priesthood, which he exercises at this very moment for us. We thank Thee, Lord.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] We’re returning tonight to Hebrews chapter 5 in verse 11, and we’re going to read through verse 3 of chapter 6. This is really the beginning of a section that begins at verse 11 and takes us through the 6th chapter and in a moment, we will look at the progression of thought through that section. But for tonight, we’re reading these verses beginning at Hebrews 5:11 through chapter 6 in verse 3. The author writes, “Of whom.” Now, he has just said that the Lord Jesus is called of God as High Priest, according to the order of Melchizedek and now he says, “of whom.” In the original text that could just as easily be translated, “Of which,” that is, a reference to the high priesthood. By translating it this way, of course, the translation makes the reference of the relative pronoun to the person. And we’ll take it that way, but it’s important to know it could be taken the other way.

“Of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.”

Now, this is a very interesting verse, this 3rd verse, and we need to look at it very directly and notice precisely what it says.

“And this we will do if God permits.”

That, of course, raises the question, under what circumstances could it be that God would not permit us, or the readers, to go on? So “this we will do if God permits.”

The subject for tonight is, “The Disaster of Dullness.” Our passage is one of the great passages, perhaps the most famous, the bellwether of the Arminians, the cardinal reference of all who believe that salvation may be ammissible. Now, that’s a theological term that means, simply, “may be lost,” after one has obtained it.

There are, as you know, in the Christian family of denominations and bodies of people making confession of faith in Christ. Methodists who believe, if Evangelical, many Methodists today are not evangelical, as you know, if you’ve followed the history of the Christian Church at all, but those who are evangelical believe, historically, that one could become a believer in Christ and the possession of true Christian life, and then lose it by virtue of unusual sin later on. Anglicans and Episcopalians also generally embrace that doctrine. There are some, however, who do not; but generally they do. Lutherans also believe that it is possible to have eternal life and to lose it.

Now, that’s a great body of professing Christians; Methodists, Episcopalians, Lutherans, in fact, if you didn’t know anything much more than that, you might say, “Well, it certainly must be the majority viewpoint.” But, on the other hand, we have well-known bodies that believe that salvation is not ammissible, cannot be lost. Baptists for example, all the Baptists that I know, there probably could be some group some where of whom I am ignorant, might believe that one could lose the salvation. But all the Baptists that I know, all over the face of this globe, both European and American, believe that once a person possesses eternal life, genuinely, he will always possess it. He may suffer discipline, and he may suffer loss of communion with the Lord, but once saved, always saved. And the Presbyterians, as is stated in the Westminster Confession of Faith, embrace, also the doctrine of the certainty of the ultimate possession of salvation, once it has been genuinely obtained.

The man with whom admissibility is generally associated, although, as a matter of fact, historically he was somewhat in doubt about it, is Jacob Arminius. Arminius, was Arminius’ Latin name, and his theological name, and he was a well known, very skilled theologian; born in a little

town, Oudewater, in the Netherlands and had the name, Jacob Harmenzoon which means, all of you people know Dutch, I know, but anyway, it means, Harmen’s son. Just like my name is Johnson, son of John. I’m descended from the Apostle Peter because his name was Simon bar Jonah, Simon son of John, Simon Johnson. And so I stand in apostolic succession. [Laughter] And you didn’t realize that and I’m not bragging. [More Laughter] But, nevertheless, Jacob Harmenzoon is Harmen’s son. And his name was Harmenzoon. So his Latin name is the name that has stuck with him, Jacob Arminius, and from Arminius, Arminianism, and the Arminians had, later as Arminianism developed, after Jacob Arminius, their doctrine probably represented fully in the Remonstrants, who followed Arminius, the five points of Arminianism, to which the Calvinists respond and from which we get the expression, the five points of Calvinism.

Actually, the Arminians expressed the view first. The Calvinists responded to them. For example, the Arminians believed that a person could, of himself, turn to the Lord by an act of faith, an act of faith that began in his own free will. So men have free will and can, of themselves, can turn to the Lord. So men are not totally unable as the Calvinists sought to show. They also believed in conditional election that is election conditioned upon our response from our free wills. They believed that Jesus Christ’s atoning work was intended to be for all. And then, being intended for all, obviously, since not all have embraced it then, of course, they also generally believed that God could be frustrated by man’s disobedience. They also did not believe in the irresistibility of grace or the effectuality of grace.

And, Arminius, himself, was doubtful of the perseverance of the saints, but Arminians came to believe that the perseverance of the saints was not taught in Scripture and so they believed, according to this 5th point, that men did not necessarily persevere in the faith but could by an act of sin, serious sin, usually, fall from the possession of the grace of God; that is, fall from salvation. They, of course, would not sing as you and I sing, “The soul that on Jesus hath for repose, I will not, I will not desert to His foes. That soul, tho all Hell should endeavor to shake I’ll never, no never, no never forsake.” That’s a Calvinistic stanza, of course.

Some years ago, I remember reading one of H. A. Ironside’s books and, in his book, he was talking about eternal security, which is the popular term for the perseverance of the saints. Actually, eternal security and the perseverance of the saints are not really the same, not the exactly same doctrine. But, at any rate, he was writing about eternal security and he said his old instructor used to say, because he was an Arminian, “Getting to heaven is like riding a bicycle, if I stop pumping, I will fall off.” So, I think, you can see, that the point of that was that one must keep active in his good works in his Christian life; if we turn away, he will lose his salvation.

Now, above most of the passages of the New Testament, here is a passage that demands a sound hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation. It may apply to any kind of discipline, for that matter. It could apply to law, medicine or theology, and we’re using it in the sense of application to theology. Hermeneutics, the principles of interpretation, there are certain principles of interpretation that most of us use naturally; if our minds are at all sound. We’ve reasoned enough and argued enough with some people to know that there are certain principles necessary if we are to arrive at accurate interpretations of material.

Well, this is a passage that demands sound hermeneutics. We must pay attention to the immediate context, we must pay attention to the book as a whole, and how this particular passage fits within it, and we also must pay attention to the whole of the New Testament. In fact, one could say, the whole of the Bible, but specifically the whole of the New Testament, because fundamental to almost all genuine Christian study of the Scriptures, is the conviction that the Bible is a unity, in itself. In other words, almost all who study the Bible believe in the unity of the word of God. Those sixty-six books, they are unified in the message that they present. And so the unity of the Scriptures is something that we all have, if we’ve studied the Bible much, as a fundamental doctrine. We must pay attention to all of these things and, in this passage, a very difficult passage, we are going to try to interpret this very difficult passage, which says in verses 4 and 5.

“It’s impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and the taste of the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.”

Does that passage say that a person could have salvation and then lose it? It does say, if they fall away. So we’re going to spend three times on this section, beginning at chapter 5, verse 11 through chapter 6, and about verse 12. We’re going to spend one more time, I think, on the remainder of chapter 6. But, anyway, we’re going to try to do this in a little bit of detail, since it is so often discussed by believers.

And, what I’d like to do is, first of all, I’d like to look at the progression of thought in the section itself, which begins at chapter 5, verse 11 and takes us through the last verse of chapter 6. So 5:11 through 6:20.

It’s one of these passages in which the author is warning his readers of the necessity of paying attention to the things that he is talking about and of embracing them, truly. So we’re going to look first at the progression of thought in the passage, then I want to look more specifically at the problem of immaturity in the section that we are look at, specifically, tonight, 5:11 through 14. And then, finally, at the plea for perfection, which the author makes, in verse 1 through verse 3. And then, for the next two times after that, we’ll look at this very difficult section and seek to answer the question, Does it say that a person may lose salvation after he has once possessed it? Now, “once possessed it,” not once professed it, but “once possessed it.” So that’s important.

All right, let’s look now at verse 5:11 through chapter 6, verse 20, broadly. And I want to go through it and look at it, and I underline this, as I see it. Now, when I say that, “As I see it,” I want to acknowledge the fact that there are other fine expositors of the word of God who differ with me on certain points here. And even some, whom I respect as students of the Bible, who differ with the point, the main point, that I’m trying to make. They are Arminians. That is, they believe you can

lose your salvation. So I don't want to denigrate all of the students of the Bible and let you think for one moment that I'm the only interpreter of Holy Scripture who has things right.

But now, the progression of thought and, first of all, chapter 5, verse 11 through verse 14, the first section.

What our author has said is in verse 10 that the Lord Jesus has been perfected, he's become the author of eternal salvation to all who obey him and he has been called of God, as High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. I know what a person would like to say is, “What in the world does he mean when he says, ‘according to the order of Melchizedek?’” Well, that will come before us in chapter 7, of course, and we'll put that aside and look, rather, now, at just the fact of the Melchizedekian High Priesthood of Christ.

What he says in verse 11, “of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.” In other words, the author is saying to his readers, “I have a whole lot to say to you about the Melchizedekian High Priesthood of Christ, but you have become stagnant in your Christian life.”

Now, when we have people who are stagnant in their Christian life, I'm speaking as if he were speaking to you, if we have people who are stagnant in their Christian life, they have made profession of faith, but now they are stagnant, and one can see it. Two possibilities exist. Number one, though they are professors of the faith some of them may never have really believed. Now, what do we say about people who have made a profession of faith but it becomes evident that they have not believed, perhaps even, they have turned away from the faith, what do we say that they are?

Well, we say that they have apostatized; they are apostates. They've made a profession but they've turned away from it. That's precisely what apostasy means, to stand off from. In fact, we, when we were dealing with chapter 3 in verse 12, where the author said, “Beware brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing,” I pointed out that the word that is used here is the word, *aphistēmai*, which in Greek means, essentially, literally, to “stand off from.” And this might well be translated, “in apostatizing from the living God.” So that's one possibility. If we have

individuals who’ve made a profession of faith in Christ, who’ve said they believed in Christ and then, after a period of time their lives become, well, they become with the disaster of dullness, and do not make advance in the Christian life, it’s legitimate for us to ask the question, have they really believed? That is, in explaining the situation. So the first possibility then; some, although professors, may never have believed. The danger is the danger of apostasy.

The other possibility is that they have truly believed but they are in, what we might call a carnal state, that is, they have truly believed, they genuinely have Christian life, but they are not walking according to the principles of the new life, which they truly have. Paul, in 1 Corinthians chapter 3, speaks of such. In verse 1 of chapter 3 of 1 Corinthians, he writes, “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.” You’ll notice, he calls them “brethren,” so he takes them to be genuine Christians. But he says, “I couldn’t speak to you as to spiritual people, but as to carnal people, as to babes,” notice they are “in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For whereas there is among you,” or, “whereas,” I was going on memory, but of the Authorized Version. “For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like,” my text has, “mere men?” For like men. In other words, it’s possible for a person who has truly believed, a babe in Christ, who is maybe legitimately called by an apostle, a brother or a sister. It’s possible for them to walk just as if they were mere men, mere men and women, who are not believers at all. Looking at them from the outward, you might not see any difference. So these two possibilities exist.

Now, I’d like to say at this point, that it is the author’s persuasion, as I understand these as a warning. It’s his persuasion that the Hebrews, who have made profession of faith, the Hebrew believers, are not apostates, but they are in the carnal state. In other words, it’s his opinion that they are genuine believers, but the other remains as an individual responsibility. So generally, he’ll refer to them as believers, but there may be some who could be called apostates. I’d like for you to notice verse 11 and 12 of chapter 6.

“And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

So as a general conviction, they are believers but individuals, there may be some individuals who could be called, legitimately, apostates.

Now, having said that, verses 5, 11 through 14 and chapter 6, verse 1 through verse 3, he says, “Therefore, let us go on.” The author will remedy the thing that is lacking if God permits. That’s very important to notice that. So he says, “Let’s leave the discussion of the elementary principles of Jesus Christ,” and he lists them. And he says, “We will do this,” we’ll go on to perfection, “if God permits.”

Now, in verse 4 through verse 8, you’ll notice the 4th verse begins.

“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.”

What he is essentially saying when he says, “For,” he’s just said, “This we will do if God permits.” But now, you may wonder, is there a condition under which God may not permit? Yes, there is. “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened,” and so forth, if they fall away to renew them again to repentance. So for apostates, their apostasy may be irremediable. That’s very serious. As a matter of fact, our Lord accused the generation that crucified Him of just that sin in John, chapter 12. He said, not only that they did not believe, he said that they “could not” believe, because in the eye of our Lord they had passed the point of turning back. So our author says that.

Now, in verse 9 through 12, the 4th of these sections, “But,” he says, “But, beloved.” Notice, it’s very fitting that he should say, “Beloved.” The word that marks them out, in his mind, as believing people.

“But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner.”

In other words, your past Christian experience indicates that your condition is not hopeless. “May each,” he says, “press on.” Now, he knows that their last is not hopeless because, notice what he says in verse 10.

“For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and are ministering.”

So in the midst of their dullness, there are those who are ministering in the present. So he has a confidence that the Hebrews as a whole are Christians, who are dull but genuinely Christians. However, some may not be, and he’s very concerned, of course, about them.

And, finally, the last part of the chapter, verse 13 through verse 20, he points out that as in the case of Abram or Abraham, the promise that is embraced in our faith in Christ, comes into our possession, often, after endurance. Endurance is the proof of the reality of our faith. And that’s the principle that he’s referred to, already, a couple of times in the letter.

Now, that’s a broad treatment of the way in which the author develops this; and we’re going to go into great detail. And, when we finish, one hundred percent of you in this audience will say, “You’re right.” [Laughter] Well, we will see.

Anyway, let’s turn back to chapter 5, verse 11 through verse 14, which is the subject for tonight specifically, the first of these sections.

“Of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.”

Now, Paul, in that passage that we referred to in 1 Corinthians, chapter 3, if we had time to study it in detail, I think I could justify this, but I will just state it and hope that you will say, essentially, it sounds as if Johnson is right. There, he says, there are four kinds of people.

First of all is the natural man; that’s a very common verse, which Evangelicals cite, often cite “The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God. They are foolishness to him, neither can he know them for they are spiritually discerned.” It tells us that no man, of himself, may turn to the Lord. “No man can come to Me except the Father, which hath sent Me, draw him.” The Lord Jesus said. In other words, we are totally unable, spiritually, because we are fallen individuals. That’s the first kind of man. Jude, in the 19th verse of his epistle, defines those who are natural, using the very word that Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 2:14, as those who do not have the spirit. So the natural man is the person who does not have the Spirit of God; he is the unsaved man.

Then secondly, there is a man who can be called carnal; Paul does call him carnal, but he is not willful, it’s the carnality of weakness. He’s a babe; a babe in Christ. Now, every single believer in Christ, the moment that he is converted, becomes a babe. No matter how old he is, no matter how long he’s been around a church, no matter how many believers he knows, he begins as a babe. Just as everyone physically begins as a babe, so in the spiritual life we begin as a babe. That’s why it’s so foolish to take a person who has just become a Christian and put them in a place of responsibility in the Christian church. Babe. So that’s the second kind of person. Paul says, in 1 Corinthians 2 and 3, there, that they may partake of milk, but they cannot take meat. How many of you fed your new child, your little child, with steak? If you did, you really fed that poor child for yourself because the poor child doesn’t even have the teeth in which to handle the steak at all. So we know those principles; those also are principles that are true in the spiritual life. We must remember that.

In fact, do you think for one moment that the Lord looked down, on his great creation, and he looked down and he said, “Well, those new babies there, they cannot eat. I think that they would perform the work of a good illustration of a new Christian. And so I’ll have the apostles write this.” Well, that’s the way a lot of people think about the Bible. The word of God is that which is determined in the infinitely wise mind of God from ages past, and what we are was designed by God to illustrate spiritual truth. He didn’t just discover that and cause the apostles to write about it. This is his purpose. So we have infants; they are great pedagogical devices. You don’t realize how good God has been to you, if you have children, because you learn an awful lot about life through your child, don’t you?

Now, thirdly, Paul says that there are people, he calls carnal, the same term, actually, well, there’s a slight difference. I don’t have to go into the details of this, but they are characterized by carnality, but their carnality is not the carnality of babyhood, it’s the carnality of persisting in failure to respond to the word of God. I like to call them carnal-willful, as over against those who are carnal-weak. There are those who are, have the experience of arrested spiritual growth. You’ve seen them. You’ve been them, perhaps, at one point in your life. They characterize our Christian church. They characterize individual churches. It’s one of the saddest things in the Christian church, in the Evangelical Church, there are so many who are still carnal, as Paul says. Still carnal, after having believed years ago, some sitting in the congregation where the word of God has been preached have no spiritual depth at all. They are still carnal.

And what Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 3, characterizes many of us. He says, you’re still carnal, “For where there are envy, strife, divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I am of Apollos,” are you not carnal?” What I, the person I like, is Chuck Swindoll. And that for me is everything. No, no, not Chuck Swindoll, John MacArthur. John MacArthur has good sound theology. Swindoll just gives you the light kind of stuff to make you feel good. And so the argument begins among Christians, among carnal Christians, you know, “I’m a follower of Swindoll.” Or, “I’m a follower of

MacArthur.” And, I heard, there was a follower of Johnson. [Laughter] And that’s all bad. It’s really all bad.

We, as Christians, have been given the gifts, a vast number of teachers of the word of God; we should appreciate them all. We should know their shortcomings. All of us have those shortcomings. And, at the same time, we should, nevertheless, appreciate them. So there are these individuals. Now, the author says that these are “dull of hearing.” That is, they are individuals who have heard, but they have not responded to the things that they have heard. “Dull of hearing.” That’s an interesting word, incidentally, this word, “dull.” It’s a word that meant, in the original language, slow moving in mind. Someone has said it meant, torpidity in understanding. Dull of hearing means witlessly and senselessly forgetful of spiritual things. It can be used of numbed limbs of an animal which is ill. And it can be used of a person who has the imperceptive and lethargic nature of a stone. Evangelical Churches are full of these Christian stones, sitting in the congregation. They sit there, Sunday after Sunday, they haven’t grasped anything. They may be thinking about their business or thinking about the family problems, and when the service is over they haven’t really heard the word of God, but they’ve been there.

“Yes, I was there this morning.” But, they had the spiritual perception of a stone. Come on! Let’s look like you know that’s true. You know that’s true, don’t you? Have you never sat there like a stone? I have. I’ve sat there in a service and when I finished, I might have been able to tell you the text that was used, but my mind was on something else. And so I was acting just like a stone in that service, that’s dullness of hearing.

When we come to hear the word of God, we are, of course, to be responsive to that word. And so these individuals, he said, are dull of hearing.

I was preaching in Nacogdoches, many years ago, and what came to my mind especially, because I saw this individual. But, over twenty years ago, I was preaching there on 1 Corinthians 2 through chapter 3, verse 3. And there was a young girl about thirteen years of age sitting in the front row and at the end of the service, she left with her family. But her mother told me, the next day, she

said, “When we went home, Brenda said in her prayers that night, ‘Lord, help me to be un-carnal?’” That was the way she put it. Un-carnal. Well, Martha and I were down in Nacogdoches in January, and we had the privilege of eating dinner with Brenda, who is now a woman with children, and I reminded her of that prayer. She had forgotten that prayer. But I reminded her of it because I put it in my notes as such a marvelous response of a young person. “Lord, help me to be un-carnal?”

So dullness blocks the reception of the high priesthood truth of Christ. That’s what Paul is saying. Do you have trouble with the High Priesthood of Christ? It may be because you, too, are dull of hearing. That’s what he has said. He’s said we have Christ, “called of God,” “High Priest, according to the order of Melchizedek.” We have a whole lots to say to you about this, but you are “dull of hearing.” And so he wants now to try to bring them out of their dullness into the sense of looking forward to the hearing of the word of God. And so having told them that they are dull, tracing it, no doubt, to the fact of our human sin.

I have in my notes an interesting thing. I wrote this up. It was after Robert Kennedy was assassinated. I’d forgotten all about this until I read this. It was June the fifth nineteen sixty-eight that he was assassinated. And I listened all week to the reporters as they discussed the national climate of violence. All types of suggestions were put forward to explain it; racism, hate, injustice, *et cetera*, while some suggested that there seems to be something wrong with a lot of men. What interested me was the fact that not one person said that it was a sinful act, an act of sin, in fact, the word sin, I wrote in my notes, has not yet been used in my hearing, and I have listened to the TV [I have to apologize for this] I listened to the TV a total of at least thirty hours, and not once did I hear the word “sin” mentioned. That is really our fundamental problem. We’re not really ready to acknowledge what we are, before the Lord. How easy it is to become dull of hearing. And the Hebrews, professors of faith in the Lord Jesus, were dull of hearing.

Now, he goes on to say, “Of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers you need someone to

teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.”

Now, what does he mean by “the first principles?” Well, I suggest to you that what he means by “the first principles of the oracles of God” because the term “oracles of God” is a reference to the Old Testament. What he is talking about is the elementary teaching of the Old Testament economy that was fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. That which they had heard from those who were their teachers, and which they had professed to believe, the things concerning the Messiah, “the first principles of the oracles of God.” You need someone now to teach you again what you first received when you made your profession of faith. You have need of milk, now, and not solid food.

Then he explains, his way; his explanation may be compared with the Apostle Paul’s, “For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.”

And I found it very interesting in the Christian Churches of today, for a man to teach only milk is regarded as a great ability. If he can teach milk and not get into the stuff that’s deep, then that’s the kind of person we really like. We want that which is easy to understand, the milk. This writer was not very much impressed by that. In fact, he said, when a congregation is only able to handle milk, there is something wrong with the congregation. Isn’t that interesting? Today, we glorify simplicity and we say bad things about depth because depth challenges us. And, perhaps, we in our spiritual life are not in the spiritual condition to receive it.

At any rate, this particular group of people are afflicted with the lethargy of a lazy mind and the embattled prejudice of a closed mind, as someone has put it. And they had settled upon them. They do not want the deep things of the word of God. They need someone, now, by virtue of the fact they haven’t advanced at all, to teach them the first principles. That is, the ABCs. That was the Greek term, incidentally. The Stoic *Kha*, which is used here, was a term that was used of the ABCs. It was used of the four basic elements in physics. It’s sad, when Christians refuse to grow up. We often think that it’s very good to be child-like. And, yes, I agree with that. It’s good to be child-like

in our faith. But to be childish in our faith is something else. There’s a great difference between the two.

So he says, finally, “But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised.” That’s interesting because that “exercised” is the word *gymnazo* from which we get gymnasium. It’s something that all of those who go down here to the corner of Preston and Churchill Way and spend time down there in the aerobics center. Get exercised! You get on the machines, you do all the things you do, and I see them out running on the track, all of the time. That’s what it is. It’s exercise. You’re trying to physically keep yourself in good shape. Well, the author is talking about the same thing spiritually. He says, “Who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” Spiritual aerobic center! We can go to a place like that and spend two or three hours. We feel good. That’s great. But studying the Scriptures and then exercising ourselves in obeying what we’ve come to understand? That’s something else.

Now, he makes the plea for perfect in verses 1 through 3. “Therefore,” since your weakness is only cured by High Priesthood truth, let’s go on and let’s start from a *terminus a quo*, he’ll describe it in verse 1.

“Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, [Now,] not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead work.”

The dead works, incidentally, are those works that he describes in chapter 9 in verse 14, where he talks along this line. “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God cleanse your conscious from dead works, to serve the living God.” He means the Levitical ceremonies that they are acquainted with. They are professing Hebrew Christians and so they were familiar with the Levitical ceremonies, and those are the “dead works.” They are no longer valid, to produce vitality and life. Before the Cross, they were vital

because they were still required of people. He mentions “faith toward God.” That, of course, is true whether in the Old Testament or the New Testament. “Faith toward God” is one of the things characterizing true spiritual life.

The doctrine of baptisms, we’re inclined to think about Christian baptism, and there are some who think that is the meaning of this. But I’d like to point you to verse 10 of chapter 9, again, “Concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings,” baptisms, the same word. “Various washings and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.” The doctrine of baptisms is the doctrine of the washings of the Old Testament that belonged to the Levitical ritual; men who went into the priesthood had to be washed all over. The various things in the Levitical ceremony are required the washing of hands. There was even a laver in the carrying out of the priestly work in the tabernacle, as you know. So the doctrine of baptisms is the doctrine of washings.

“Laying on of hands.” When a man brought an offering to the Lord, he brought the offering, he put his hand on the top of the animal in token of the fact that he was identifying himself with the animal as his substitute. And when the priest slew the animal, the figure was of he, of him dying, for sin, and being freed. Of course, the figure was a reference to our Lord Jesus Christ. His sin is laid on the substitute, the animal, and he goes free.

“Resurrection.” Well, the Jews believed in resurrection, too, as we know. The Pharisees for example did. And, finally, he says, in verse 2, “And of eternal judgment.” Six of these great doctrines are mentioned.

Now, all of these doctrines are consistent with Judaism. Judaism embraced all of these. And so when he says here, “leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, doctrine of washings, laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment,” he’s talking about things that are consistent with Judaism. Remember, these are Hebrew professing believers.

Donald Grey Barnhouse used to say, “The Epistle to the Hebrews is written to the Hebrews to teach the Hebrews that they should no longer be Hebrews.” He loved to do that and he came to Birmingham, Alabama, to teach The Epistle to the Hebrews. And every morning before he gave his message, he’d start out by saying, “The Epistle to the Hebrews is written to the Hebrews to teach the Hebrews that they should no longer be Hebrews.” Actually, that’s false. I didn’t know enough to know that. But I know now, and this is the way I would put it. Dr. Barnhouse, I hope you don’t turn over in heaven “The Epistle to the Hebrews is written to the Hebrews to teach the Hebrews that they should not only be Hebrews, but Hebrew Christians.” So at any rate, these are Hebrew professing believers, but they have become believers, the author feels. However, he’s worried about some of them.

Now, what is the *terminus a quo*? They come from these truths. Well, he said, in verse 1, “Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles, let’s go on to perfection.” What’s perfection? Well, the time is drawing near the end so I’m just going to state what it is, and you’ll just have to take my word for it. Later on, this is a common word in Hebrews, and we’ll make the point from time to time, anyway. This is the full possession of the Messianic salvation. “Let’s go on to perfection.” That is, to truly possess the salvation in Christ, in which the Old Testament ceremonies are fulfilled in Him. The full profession and possession of the faith.

And then in verse 3, the terribly grim condition. The author says, “And this we will do.” Why didn’t he just leave it at that? “This we will do.” We’ll we go on to perfection. Why did he not say, “And this we will do if you follow along?” But he says, “And this we will do if God should permit.” Why would there ever be any doubt about God permitting a person to go on to possess, in reality, the salvation that is given in Scripture?

Well under one condition maturity is impossible, and that condition is apostasy. It’s irremediable, as he will say. For it is impossible for certain people who have had certain particular blessings to, it’s impossible “to renew them again to repentance.”

Next week, we'll talk about that in a bit more detail. You know, when you think of something like this, and you realize how serious it is, my thoughts go to one man. My thoughts go to Judas Iscariot. Judas Iscariot was a man who had some of the greatest opportunities that a man could ever have. He was an apostle of Jesus Christ. If people put headstones in cemeteries in the day in which Judas died, they could have put a headstone over Judas' grave, “Judas Iscariot, apostle of Jesus Christ.” That's what he was. What a tremendous blessing. Apostle of Jesus Christ! Greatest opportunities, but also in his case, the greatest failure. And in his case, isn't it striking that the Scripture speaks about him regretting what had taken place, later on? In fact, the Authorized Version renders that word as repenting. But, it was too late. So Judas, is the individual who had the highest trial in history, in a sense, called to be an apostle, called to be one of the founders of the Church of Jesus Christ, presented with the highest opportunities, put to trial, in that august responsibility, and he failed. Much has been written about the difference between the repentance of Judas and the repentance of Peter. Peter repented. He went out. He wept bitterly. Judas died as he died, regretting what he had done, “I have been guilty of sinning against innocent blood,” he said. The repentance of Judas whatever it was, came too late. He had sinned away the opportunities that were his.

Often, Judas is a sermon that people preach in an evangelistic way. I guess that's valid. I've done it, I know. I hope it's valid.

But, I'd like to suggest to you something else; that Judas is the sermon to preach to those who've made profession of faith. Judas is the sermon that those who are in the inside circle should hear. That it's possible for a person to be so close, for so long, to spiritual things and yet, to not have the reality of it. And in Judas' case, that was true. This is a sermon for the disciples. This is a sermon for the friends of Jesus Christ. It's a sermon for you. And, it's a sermon for me. Judas the story of his life.

Every member of the Christian Church who has ever sat down at the Lord's Table, who has ever undergone the waters of baptism, sat down at the Lord's Table. Everyone who has confessed

himself as a follower of Jesus Christ is on trial, with reference to that relationship. That’s your trial too. You have said you believed in Jesus Christ. You have been baptized. You have made your profession of faith. And you have sat at the Lord’s Table. Maybe you have sat at the Lord’s Table many times. But the reality of the Christian life is not in your heart. Judas’ experience is an experience for you to think about. I might ask you the question, “How is your trial? How is it proceeding?”

I think of the last Passover and the Lord’s Supper, when the twelve were around the eleven, actually well, twelve, were around the table and our Lord announced that one of them would betray him. And they went around the table. “Is it I, Lord?” “Is it I, Lord?” “Is it I, Lord?” “Is it I, Master?” That would have been a clue, wouldn’t it? No man can call Jesus “Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit. The reality of the confession is the confession that is produced by God the Holy Spirit, who works in the heart, and draws a man to Christ.

Is that your experience? Are you sure that you belong to him? Has God the Holy Spirit so moved your heart that you know that the reality of the life is yours? Or are you just a person who sat in an Evangelical church and listened to sermons through the years, but it’s never really, the word of God has never really come to you in the power of the Holy Spirit, and has given you a new life, and a new nature? Is the story of Judas for me? That’s a question we all have to ask? But, our time is up.

Let’s close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for these words from this author of Holy Scripture. They are surely solemn. And, Lord, we pray that each one of us, including me, may ask that question. “Is it I who belong to Thee, Lord?” We thank Thee, Lord, for the conviction that comes from the Holy Spirit that Christ has died for sinners and such we are. And we thank Thee for the grace of God that moved us to flee to Him and say to Him, “Lord, save me, I’m lost?” And, we thank Thee for the promises of the word of God that the answer is always affirmative to those who ask out of the

sincerity of their hearts. Lord, if there should be someone here, who has not yet believe, O God,
work in their hearts to that end.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.