

A person in a dark suit is walking on a paved surface, carrying a briefcase. A long, dark shadow is cast behind them, stretching across the pavement. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

Session 2

Can I Walk Away from My Salvation?

THE POINT

A true relationship with Christ is seen in our perseverance.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

You may not be a quitter, but we do quit things from time to time. For some, it's a hobby they haven't touched in years. Or it might be a movie that's not holding their interest. Others quit their jobs. Unfortunately, some people quit their families. But can a person quit being a Christian? If you have genuinely committed yourself to Jesus and have been born again by His grace, can you stop being a Christian? And if you sin, does this mean you lose your salvation? It might be better to ask why would any real disciple ever turn away from following Jesus?

These are tough questions, and they are made more difficult by a challenging passage in the Bible, which some interpret to mean Christians can fall away from their faith. But we must remember two important principles of biblical interpretation. First, we must interpret verses in their context, studying the verses both preceding and following them. Second, we need to interpret these verses in light of what the rest of the Bible says.

Let's use these two principles to discover the answers to the questions above.

QUESTION 1:

What's something you're glad you never quit?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

HEBREWS 6:1-3

¹ Therefore, let us leave the elementary teaching about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works, faith in God, ² teaching about ritual washings, laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³ And we will do this if God permits.

The word “therefore” in the Bible means you should look back to see what’s it “there for.” This is a signal to interpret each passage in its context. In this case, the preceding verses are a warning against spiritual laziness (Heb. 5:11) and a strong admonition to intake the Bible for spiritual nourishment. These instructions were written to believers openly identified as Christians pursuing their faith. The counsel that follows must be considered in this context: a call for believers to stop being lazy about learning the Word of God and start putting it into practice. The goal is spiritual maturity fueled by “milk” and “solid food” (5:13,14) and demonstrated by changed behavior.

These instructions were addressed to Christians. As we will see in the next section, this context undergirds how to sort out the interpretative choices necessary to understand a potentially confusing passage of Scripture.

This theme continues with the challenge to move beyond elementary teachings about Jesus. The word “principles” is not pejorative, indicating something basic. It means foundational, underscoring that initial instruction about Jesus is vital but not enough to assure

spiritual maturity. Believers must build on this foundation and “go on to maturity” (6:1). The list of subjects to move on from included things like repentance from dead works and ending ritual washings. These might seem strange to modern believers who may not struggle with these particular issues.

These subjects were a series of illustrations, not a fixed set of things to avoid or a checklist proving spiritual maturity. The point is that believers should be growing beyond foundational information about Jesus toward character transformation. You may not need to stop ritual washings, but you do need to change other behaviors which reflect on your growth in Jesus.

The process of spiritual growth described here still works today. You grow in your faith by internalizing the Bible and living out what it teaches. There are many ways to do this, including hearing biblical preaching, participating in a small group study, reading the Bible privately, listening to an audio Bible as you commute, and listening to music with Scripture-based lyrics. For believers, there’s no excuse for failing to intake the Word of God.

While spiritual growth is grounded in learning the Bible, amassing information isn't the goal. The Bible changes you when you put it into practice and live it out. For example, you may know the Bible says to love your spouse sacrificially, but your marriage won't improve until you do it. You may understand the Bible calls for generosity from believers, but evidence needs to show up in your bank statement.

While the list of issues in this passage may sound archaic, the principle remains valid. Move on from the basics and live transformed! Move on from "Jesus loves me" to "I will love others the way Jesus loves me." Grow past "God gave me the gift of salvation" to "I will now give away

what I have to serve others." It's time for you to move beyond the basics, demonstrating your faith by fulfilling meatier discipleship demands. It's time to grow up, and by doing so, demonstrate the validity of your salvation.

QUESTION 2:

What has been most helpful to your growth as a believer?

HEBREWS 6:4-8

⁴ For it is impossible to renew to repentance those who were once enlightened, who tasted the heavenly gift, who shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ who tasted God's good word and the powers of the coming age, ⁶ and who have fallen away. This is because, to their own harm, they are recrucifying the Son of God and holding him up to contempt. ⁷ For the ground that drinks the rain that often falls on it and that produces vegetation useful to those for whom it is cultivated receives a blessing from God. ⁸ But if it produces thorns and thistles, it is worthless and about to be cursed, and at the end will be burned.

Written to believers in the context of striving for spiritual maturity, we now come to one of the most intriguing passages in the Bible. We've established the context, but now we must bring the second interpretive principle mentioned above to bear on these verses. We must allow the weight of what the Bible teaches on the security of believers to dictate how we view this passage. The interpretative information on this subject in the rest of the Bible is clear: God sustains His people by His grace and perseverance by believers is evidence of true conversion.

In this passage, the phrases used to describe the recipients of Hebrews are similar to other uses of these terms which describe believers. The word "enlightened" (v. 4) is used to describe believers and their perseverance. Those who "tasted the heavenly gift" of "God's good word" (vv. 4,5) did more than take a sip. The word "taste" also describes how Jesus experienced death (2:9), which implies that tasted means full conversion. Finally, the people in question had "shared in the Holy Spirit" (v. 4), which means they had received the Spirit—an experience only available to believers.

This passage describes Christians and is addressed to Christians. That makes the warnings particularly serious. Believers are warned it is “impossible to renew to repentance those . . . who have fallen away” (vv. 4,6).

Are these warnings written to caution believers that, if they reject their faith, they can’t ever return to Jesus? Does this mean a Christian who sins can’t be forgiven and restored? Or do these warnings serve a different purpose, as a caution to press toward maturity perpetually as a validation of your salvation?

The context of the teachings favor the latter perspective. These are dire warnings, not threats designed to exclude true believers who sin from repenting and being restored. These are cautions against those who prove the illegitimacy of their faith by falling away.

Christians want to grow in their faith. Perseverance through difficult trials, besetting sins, and painful life circumstances is evidence of God’s

sustaining grace, rather than a sign of the path to apostasy.

You might be thinking, “But what if . . . ?” The Bible doesn’t address hypothetical situations. It deals with real life. Here’s what we know: God sustains true Christians in their faith. Striving against sin and growing spiritually isn’t evidence of apostasy, but of authenticity. No true believer rejects their faith. They grow in it, no matter how difficult that may be. And we heed the warnings of the dangers of neglecting our growth and determine to never allow those consequences to happen to us. We want to be fruitful people who enjoy God’s blessings.

QUESTION 3:

How do security and perseverance go hand in hand?

HEBREWS 6:9-12

⁹ Even though we are speaking this way, dearly loved friends, in your case we are confident of things that are better and that pertain to salvation. ¹⁰ For God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you demonstrated for his name by serving the saints—and by continuing to serve them. ¹¹ Now we desire each of you to demonstrate the same diligence for the full assurance of your hope until the end, ¹² so that you won’t become lazy but will be imitators of those who inherit the promises through faith and perseverance.

The seriousness of the previous subject contrasts with a more uplifting perspective in this section. This passage was also addressed to

believers, described this time as “dearly loved friends” (v. 9). The writer expressed confidence these Christians would press forward in their

Engage

CHOOSING TO GROW

Take a moment to write out three achievable goals for growing in your faith for the remainder of this year. Keep these goals until the end of the year and, if you feel comfortable, share them with another group member to hold you accountable.

Examples: Handing out one gospel tract each week; reading one chapter from the Bible each day; finding one person you can spiritually mentor (meeting monthly), and so forth.

1.

2.

3.

faith, avoiding the judgments just discussed, and pursue “things that are better” (v. 9). He underscored, in contrast to the falling away warned about in the previous verses, that what he wrote pertains to their salvation.

The writer then described what validated their salvation; it was validated in the way they were treating other Christians. Their love was demonstrated by service to other believers, mentioned twice in the same verse to emphasize both the intensity and continuity of their service. This contrasts with earlier warnings and demonstrates they weren’t at risk of losing their salvation. Their behavior illustrated the opposite reality: Their faith, though perhaps immature, was vital and growing.

This section ends with encouragement to press on in spiritual growth and service. The believers were challenged to “demonstrate the same diligence . . . until the end” (v. 11). They were reminded they had good examples of those who persevered through trials as they “inherit the promises through faith and perseverance” (v. 12). Some promises from God become more significant when we’re challenged by difficulty.

QUESTION 4:

What does diligence in our faith look like?

Believers are warned against laziness as they pursue growth in their Christian life. This completes the thought introduced at the beginning of this section, which started with a similar warning. Christian growth requires focused effort. That’s the overall theme of this section.

Several examples used in the Bible to describe the Christian life underscore the importance of striving to thrive as a believer: soldier, farmer, athlete, ambassador, and builder all speak of the hard work it takes to live as a Christian. Changing our thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors is difficult. Loving other people and forgiving those who hurt us is hard. Mastering disciplines like consistently giving money, praying regularly, worshiping frequently, and sharing the gospel takes work.

This might seem overwhelming! A wise mentor told me many years ago, “A brick house is built one brick at a time.” That gave me hope. Rather than lament the sorry condition of my spiritual house, I decided to go to work on it one brick at a time. Instead of trying to master every aspect of spiritual development immediately, I worked on a few things. Soon, I was making steady progress without the false guilt and devilish shame from focusing only on my shortcomings. God helped me change—one brick at a time.

You can grow as a Christian. Your salvation is validated by your desire to grow. Your participation in a Bible study like this indicates you want to grow. As you do this, you’ll make steady progress toward being the more mature believer you long to be. And it doesn’t matter how old you are or how long you’ve been a Christian, you can still grow and change.

QUESTION 5:

What are some ways our group helps one another persevere?

LIVE IT OUT

A true relationship with Christ is seen in our perseverance. Determine to pay the price to become a more mature Christian. Choose one of the following applications.

- **Study.** Study the Bible and do what it says. Remember, just learning more facts won't change your behavior. Get busy putting the Bible into practice. This journey is not for the faint of heart but take courage! God will sustain you as you strive to grow in your relationship with Him.
- **Serve.** Become more than a passive church member; join a community and begin serving others. This will include a formal leadership or service role, but that's not required. Just find some needs among fellow Christians and meet them.
- **Encourage.** You may know another believer who is struggling with his or her own faith. Walk alongside this person and call him or her to persevere and walk with you as you both seek to walk with Christ.


