



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

Marks of True Christianity

April 3, 2022

Hebrews 6:1-8

Clint Pressley

6 Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, ² and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³ And this we will do if God permits. ⁷ For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. ⁸ But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

(Pastor prays)

It feels like it's a time of testing who is in and who is out. And you wonder, can the center hold? Is the faith once and for all delivered to the saints enough? Is it enough to walk you through this death? Through this hurt? Through this crisis? Through this hour? Is it true that Jesus is enough? Are you willing to trust in the God of the Bible and to stay true to Him no matter what the consequences? The bridge of casual Christianity has burnt. The "prosperity gospel" is bankrupt and the social gospel is rotten. And all the political gospels can do is fight.

We don't want to fight. We want to flourish. We want to be joyful in the midst of confusion and hopeful in the midst of hurt. We are facing what they in the text were facing. It was a time of testing for the recipients of this letter. The political pressure and the social cauldron they lived in was causing many of the church members to take a step back from their otherwise vibrant Christianity. And their pastor who wrote this felt it! You can hear it in the tone, you can see it in the text as he pens what many have considered one of the most difficult passages in the whole Bible as he presses his people toward maturity and warns them of the inherent dangers of not

taking their faith seriously. Jesus didn't die on the cross for you to step back and fall away. He is calling his people to renew their vigor, to run the race with endurance and to get spiritually tough and persevere. This passage is not questioning the perseverance of the Saints, once saved always saved. He's not questioning the perseverance of the Saints; he's insisting that those who *persevere* are the *true* Saints. And here before us is a practical truth that has verified itself repeatedly in the experience of the church! So brothers and sisters, let us gird up our loins and take up the mantle of Christians.

True Christianity Will Always Show Itself

Let's join the preacher as he presses his people toward true Christianity.

True Christianity has a desire to grow

Join me in verse one. *6 Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, ² and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.* Therefore, you see his argument in chapter 5 carries over into chapter 6. The true Christians put down their milk and want the meat of the word. It's leaving behind and moving ahead. Let us leave to make progress, to grow and to develop. We must leave some things behind: old ways, old habits, old sins, old beliefs, and maybe even old friends. It's a decisive action of walking away and putting it in your rearview mirror. All growth has a backward glance and a forward gaze. You can't drive a car by looking through the rearview mirror. You look forward into the windshield. In chapter 5 the preacher used the analogy of milk and meat. Here he's saying that you don't build a house by stopping at the foundation. And in verses 1-2, he lists six items in three pairs that were basic to being a child of God. Let's read that again. *6 Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, ² and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.* Repentance. Faith. Baptism. Laying on of hands is probably when the Holy Spirit comes to a person. Resurrection. Judgment. It's like an early catechism on the bare minimum belief about being a Christian and a symptom of their immaturity is a preoccupation with the once saved always saved thinking. And what the writer is saying is that if that is where you are stuck, if that is the sum total of your Christianity, then we are running into some danger.

You see, true Christianity starts with the Gospel. What is the Gospel then? It is that God is the holy creator who created all of us in His image. The image of God in us is what makes us have any dignity. But that image in us has been disfigured because of our own sin. That sin has not just taken us far from God; the Bible says that we are dead in sin. The fellowship is broken. And God who is just must punish the sin. But He is also loving. God in His love gave us Jesus who was fully God and fully man. He lived a perfect life. Now that's important because He earned righteousness that He is going to give us. At the end of His earthly life He goes to the cross, and there at the cross as a sign of judgment: every sin of every sinner who will ever be saved has been poured out on Jesus at the cross. And, those who believe, get the righteousness He earned. So when God looks at you, if you are a son or daughter of God, what He sees is the perfect righteousness of Jesus. If you turn from your sin and believe that, you are saved. That's the Gospel.

That's true and the way we know it's true in your life is that you desire to grow. Is that what you desire to do? Do you desire to love God, hate sin, engage in worship, search scripture, repent of known sins, change behavior and bear fruit? True Christianity desires to grow.

True Christianity depends on grace

Let's go to verse 3. *And this we will do if God permits.* When I say, "depends on grace." I mean that you need to trust God's grace in all things, especially in salvation. We believe in grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. I love verse 3. Listen to the confidence and determination mixed with reticence and dependence. ³*And this we will do if God permits.* What a great balance of my action and God's providence, my determination and God's sovereignty, my responsibility and His lordship! You have two things packed into this one verse. *This we will do*, that is decisive action, clear determination, genuine conviction and real commitment. That's my heart's desire and life purpose, to live for Christ and honor Him in all things in no matter what I might have to face. *This we will do.* You might even want to determine right now in your heart, I'm tired of being spiritually lazy. I'm going to change. But don't forget the last phrase: *if God permits. Deo valente*'. If the Lord allows. That right there is a genuine and joyful statement of faith. That's believing in the full and close-up involvement of God in our daily lives. This is an awareness of God and dependence on Him. Here is The Lord's Prayer in action. "Our father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done." Here is

determination and dependence all in one verse. It's the mark of a true Christian, fully determined to honor God and fully dependent on God's grace. True Christianity will always show itself. True Christianity has a desire to grow. True Christianity depends on grace.

True Christianity perseveres

Let's jump into some of the most problematic verses in the Bible. This is what makes me want to change, once saved always saved, to IF saved always saved. Jump into that first phrase. It is impossible. In Greek it is a long sentence that begins with the word "impossible." He uses the word "impossible" three other times. In verse 6:11, *without faith it is impossible to please God*. In verse 6:18, it is *impossible for God to lie*. and in verse 10:4, it is *impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins*. Now he's giving a graphic warning to all of those who would play fast and loose with their salvation or abandon it altogether.

To get this right let's go through the verses together and get a sense of what he is saying and then come back and make some basic application and observation. Join me there in verse 4. ⁴ *For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit,* It is impossible in the case of those who have once been enlightened. That means they have had a decisive moment, prayed the prayer and have been baptized. It means that they hear and understand and know many things and maybe believe many things and show the appropriate signs of being a Christian. And then the preacher says they tasted the heavenly gift. That means they have received some of the blessings of being a part of the body of Christ. That may mean that they have a godly home, enjoy Sunday school, went on mission trips, raised hands in worship and tasted or partook. That means they liked being with God's people in the church. He goes on to say that they shared in the Holy Spirit. That means they are convicted and feel bad about sin and the people they hurt. They desire to be better, they're nice to people, they quit drinking for a bit and didn't cuss as much.

Verse 5 says ⁵ *and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come,* They have affirmed the story of the Bible, saying it's true and even had a devotional life. They could articulate the Gospel and had some knowledge and a real experience. Let's go back to verse 4 and read through verse 6. ⁴ *For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy*

Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

So we pick it up in verse 6 and see that it says *and then have fallen away*. That means they've left a faith or ignored the faith or lived in some unrepented sin. It is impossible to restore them again to repentance. This is Esau and Judas. It's not because God doesn't forgive or work but because they now have double-crucified the son of God. They have held Him up in contempt. This is graphic of Jesus being nailed to the cross and the contempt that the soldiers had with mocking and spitting. What is the preacher saying? In the context he's warning the church members, *if you go back to Judaism then you're gone*. Here it says if you go back to the old ways, here is the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. This is experiencing as an insider all God has to offer in Christ and that not being enough.

For example, people are frequently immunized against a disease by being inoculated with a watered down and mild form of it. And I think that's what happens to so many who profess to be a Christian but don't persevere. They get immunized against true Christianity by being occupied with something that looks so much like the real thing that is generally mistaken for it. It's a watered down version of the Gospel. And the point here is that true Christianity perseveres. Of course only God knows! Are you in the faith? Have you trusted in Christ's work on the cross? Are you growing in grace? Do you hate sin and love God? Do you have fellowship with the body? Are you engaged in worship and serving? Are you more sensitive to your own sin than you are of others' ? Do you long to know Christ more and the Bible deeply? True Christianity will always show itself. There will be a desire to grow and a dependence on grace. True Christianity perseveres.

True Christianity bears fruit

Here the preacher does what Jesus often did. He gives an illustration to make the whole point of the last few verses. Verse 7 is a positive and verse 8 is a negative. It's the same point in Matthew 13 with the parable of the soils. ⁷ *For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. ⁸ But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.* Here you see in verse 7 the blessings from God. And then in verse 8 you see the

worthless, cursed and burned alternative. You are either one or the other. Let's dip down into verse 9. *⁹ Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things— things that belong to salvation.* There are better things, things that belong to salvation. Better things are when we know the Gospel and are strengthened by grace. We love God and are growing Christians. During the next song, come pray for yourself or someone you know who needs to grow in grace. Because true Christians persevere.

(Pastor prays)