

Hebrews 6:1-12: God Will Curse You, But He'd Rather Show You Mercy

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I. Introduction

God is capable of wrath but He would rather show mercy. We sin all the time and yet we're still breathing. At His core, God is not a God of wrath; He's a God of love. Even His discipline comes from His incredible love for us. But when we choose to walk away from Him permanently, we leave Him no choice. However, long before we reach this point, He gives us chance after chance after chance to repent.

II. Hebrews 6:1-12: God Will Curse You but That's the Last Thing He Wants to Do

6:1-3, the author wants to explain to this audience the earth-shattering significance of Jesus' priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek, the only one that can do what the Levitical priesthood never could, save them. But his audience won't understand because they've become sluggish and lazy about applying what the Lord's already taught them. Though they should be teachers by now, they've reverted to the state of spiritual babies who need to relearn the ABCs.

However, the author is going to encourage them to forge ahead, to go from babyhood to maturity. He's not going to cover the elementary principles of Christ again, the things every Christian should know and learn at the beginning of their Christian faith: *Repentance from dead works and faith toward God*—the beginning of their conversion when they repented of the dead works of Judaism which could never save them and placed their faith in the only One who could, Jesus Christ. *Doctrine of baptisms*—including their initial baptism into the faith where they identified thoroughly and publically with Christ. *Laying on of hands*—which confirms God's call on an individual for ministry/service. *Resurrection of the dead and Eternal judgment*—events that foreshadow the end of this age and the beginning of the new creation (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 20). The author then adds, "And this we will do if God permits." It is God's desire for them to mature, to trust and follow Him despite the pressure they're under. Will they?

6:4-8, this is part of a third warning the author gives this audience (cf. 2:1-4; 3:7-4:13). This is a much debated passage: is the author warning his audience that they're in danger of hellfire? Is this audience made up of true Christians, "almost Christians," i.e., they profess faith but are not yet true Christians, or are they Christians who are in danger of losing or have lost their salvation? To answer these questions, one has to look at the context behind the author's warning, which takes us back to what he said about the Exodus Generation in Hebrews 3-4. Before addressing what the passage means, are these true Christians? Yes: they, the author, and Jesus have the same Father (2:11). But also in this very passage they are individuals who have been *enlightened* (the light of the Gospel shone on them), *tasted the heavenly gift* (experienced the Lord's heavenly salvation), *have partaken of the Holy Spirit* (the Spirit worked in their lives evidenced by their labor of love in ministering to the saints), *tasted the good Word of God* (though they've reverted, they were taught and did live God's Word) *and the powers of the age to come* (they experienced and/or performed the Lord's power including miracles), and have performed and continue to perform a labor of love in God's name for His saints (6:10)! Can a Christian lose their salvation? NO! Jesus promised that He would lose NO ONE who simply believes in Him (John 6:39-40). But also in this very passage, the land "whose end is to be burned" and which stands for the audience, is not consumed by the flames; what's consumed is the land's bad crop of thorns and thistles (6:8).

So what is the author saying? His warning is not about hell; hell is no threat to this audience. When he says that it's impossible for these Christians—who've been born again and experienced God thoroughly and completely—to be renewed again to repentance if they fall away, he's saying that they're in danger of reaching a point of no return and suffering the death penalty as the Exodus Generation did (Hebrews 3-4). If you recall, when the Exodus Generation—who was just like this audience: they were enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, became partakers of the Holy Spirit, and tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come—reached a point of no return, God cursed them to die in the wilderness. They had tested God ten times and when they not only refused to enter the Promise Land but accused God of trying to kill them and then tried to depose Moses in order to return to Egypt, God had enough (Numbers 14:3-4, 22). After they reached this point it was impossible to renew them again to repentance: they tried, but it was too late (Numbers 14:39-45). Now, did the Exodus Generation lose their salvation? No, but they did lose their lives (14:26-35). Were they merely professing or were they truly God's people? They were His people through and through which is why He forgave this egregious sin but their lives were not spared (Numbers 14:20-23).

So when the author of Hebrews says that it's impossible to renew them again to repentance if they fall away, he's not saying that his audience is in danger of going to hell. He's stating the reality of what their actions will do if they return to the Levitical sacrificial system. If they do this, they will go back in time and join hands with the mob who cried out, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" (Luke 23:21). They will agree with that mob that Jesus died for no one's sins but His own, that in order to atone for your sins, you have to keep offering the Levitical sacrifices, all of which nullifies Jesus' sacrificial death on the Cross, which puts Him to open shame. If they commit this egregious sin, they will leave God no choice but to execute them, as a land is cursed and burned when it refuses to bear useful herbs and instead bears thorns and thistles (cf. Genesis 3:17-19).

6:9-12, but this is the last thing the author wants and he's confident that it won't happen. He's confident that his audience will leave spiritual babyhood and press on to spiritual maturity and continue to do all the things that should accompany their salvation, like ministering to the Lord's saints as they have been and continue to. He wants them to behave as those who are fully assured of their hope in the Lord, who cling to the Lord until the end no matter the circumstances. Instead of reverting to their lazy and sluggish state (5:11), they imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises (as Caleb and Joshua did in the face of those tremendous odds, Numbers 14:6-9). He wants this audience not to fear their circumstances but to have faith and enter the Lord's promised rest.

God isn't the one who walks away, we do, we have a rebellious nature. From the time we're born til the day we die, we will rebel against God. God knew this and yet He still decided to create us and sacrifice His life in order to rescue us from this madness. But if we decide to reject His mercy permanently, we'll suffer the consequence that God never desires for us.

III. Conclusion

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