

## *“The Danger of Apostasy”*

### **Fixing Our Eyes On Jesus, Our High Priest**

Hebrews 6:4-12

Rev. Jeff Stivason

June 8, 2018

**Jeff:** All right. Let’s hum together. (*Laughter*) Why don’t we pray?

Our heavenly Father, we are thankful for the time that You’ve given. And Father, we’re thankful for the relationship that we have one to another. We know that You are building us into a temple, and You have made us to be living stones situated together. Lord, we’re thankful for that. And we’re thankful that we have our Head, the Lord Jesus Christ to grow up into. And Father, as we do, we pray that You will indeed conform us to His image. Complete what You started in us.

Father, as we gather together, we are mindful that Your word is the only safe place wherein we may stand. And Father, we thank You for its nature and its attributes. We thank You that it comes from You, and so it is truth that doesn’t wander from it. It is inerrant. And it is authoritative because it is Your word. We’re thankful, Lord, for all of these things about Your word, and for the comfort that Your Spirit brings to us when we open it up and read it, how it bears witness, how Your word by Your Spirit bears witness to our spirit that indeed it is Your word.

Father, as we come before You, we also think about concerns that are upon our hearts. And we think about Reed, and we ask that Your hand would be upon him. We pray that You’ll bring physical healing to his body. Father, we pray the same for Rita who struggles with pancreatic cancer.

Father, we pray for Brett, and we ask that Your hand would be upon him as well, for our brother Don as he begins chemotherapy next week, for Frank, Father, and for the others who are in need of prayer, for those who are upon our hearts and our minds that we need to lift up to you this morning and every day.

And Father, we pray for ourselves as we gather unto Your word. We ask that Your hand would be upon us for good. We also look forward to tonight with the Army gathering. And Father, we pray that You would make this a significant event for them, that they’ll garner support and that the organization would go on in strong ways, that they might share the gospel to the benefit of their hearers. And Father, we pray for the event tomorrow. We ask that Your hand would be upon that. We pray, Father, that You’ll use the men speaking. And we pray that You’ll bring the gospel to bear upon their lives in a most significant way.

And Father, we’re thankful for Bruce. We’ve been praying for him for so long. And for almost a year this group has been without him. And so now, Lord, it looks as if that time has come to an end. And we pray, Father, that You will continue to strengthen his body and make him well. We’re thankful that the other Bible study was able to move and that he’s able to gather strength throughout the week to come here and to lead this one. Father, we pray that Your hand would be upon him in a powerful way as he returns to these men and leads them. And Father, we’re thankful for his life and for his ministry. And we pray Your continued blessing upon him. And we ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

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**Men:** Amen.

**Jeff:** Okay. Well, let’s turn to Hebrews chapter 6, verses 4-12. And I’m going to read verses 1-12 today. So let me turn your attention to that, at least half of the chapter.

*“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, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. And this we will do, if God permits.*

*“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, and have tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the age to come, 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.*

*“For the 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. But if it bears thorns and thistles it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.*

*“Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work, and the love that you have shown for His name in serving the saints, as you still do. And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness, to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”* The word of the Lord.

**Men:** Thanks be to God.

**Jeff:** At my last time I remembered.

**Participant:** You got it! *(Laughter)*

**Second Participant:** Let me be clear about this. This is not Jeff’s last time. He has obligations.

**Jeff:** My last time for June. *(Laughter)*

**Participant:** We need him back in July, so please be nice to him. *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** I’m going to take him around with me wherever I go. *(Laughter)* In fact, I want to tell you. Wait a minute! I only want to say this. He called me last night. I was in the car with my wife and my daughter, okay? My wife and my daughter! He calls me. You can hear him over the entire car, right? *(Laughter)* So I tell him. “Hey, my wife and my daughter are in the car.” And I introduce him. And then he says to my daughter, “I feel bad for you.” *(Laughter)*

And do you know what my daughter says? “Thank you.” *(Laughter)* That’s what he said, all right. *(Laughter)*

So today we’re going to look at an introduction. And today we’re going to look at what is probably the hardest text in the book of Hebrews, and maybe some would say one of the hardest texts in the Scriptures. And so it’s going to be a bit challenging, I think, and I want us to acknowledge that before we head into this text. We’re going to look at a warning and the context of the warning. We’re going to look at the warning itself. We’re going to look at an illustration of the warning. Then we’re going to look at some encouragements that the Preacher gives.

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Again I want you to understand that we need to look at this warning as a difficult text heading into it. And you may have some questions about it, and I want you to feel free to ask at any point along the way. I know you will, but I wanted to reiterate that.

Well, let’s look at some introductory things about this. I want you to know, as I’ve said to you, that this text is something of a hot bed of controversy. You know, when you look at the books that are written, oftentimes you find books that are called “Three Views of This” and “Four Views of That.” You know, there’s a book out called *The Four Views of Hebrews Chapter Six*. I’m not kidding. And we’re not going to go into all four views. But along the way I am going to talk to you about some of those views. And I want you to be aware of them because as I interpret the text from my particular vantage point, I’m going to pull in some of those other ways to help you offset or see them as something of a foil.

Here we have a question. And the question is this. Can a believer fully and finally apostatize from the faith? In other words, can he fully and finally walk away from the faith, having been saved?

Now that’s the question that’s often posed when we think about Hebrews chapter 6, because some will say that it looks possible. It looks possible for a believer—a genuine, true, regenerate, however you want to describe it believer—to walk away from the faith.

Now I think we need to take care of that particular issue right from the get-go. So let’s think about one problem in relation to that particular view, that a regenerate person can walk away from the faith.

I think that the one problem with that view is the Bible. (*Laughter*) The Bible doesn’t seem to teach that view. Why?

Well, let’s just look at a couple of texts. We could look at so many. We’re only going to look at two or three.

John 10:28. *“I give eternal life to them and they will never perish, and no one can snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”*

I don’t know about you, but when I look at a text like that, that looks to me like God is saying that one who is redeemed is redeemed because the Father redeemed him, and the Father cannot lose any that He redeems.

John 17:1-2. This is the high priestly prayer of Jesus. *“Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him He may give eternal life.”*

So there is this idea that Jesus is saying that. This is your wrist band. This is the bracelet that you wear around. If the Father has allocated them, if He has given them, then the Son provides for them the needed work for eternal life, and the Holy Spirit applies the work of Christ to them, and they will be saved.

And then one more. Philippians 1:6. *“He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”* I think that’s pretty decisive.

But I want you to think about Hebrews as well, because those passages were outside of the book of Hebrews. This is the book we’re looking at. Oftentimes when you think about how to interpret a book, you think about how I interpret it within its context. Go a little larger than that. How do I interpret this passage within the book itself? And go a

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little larger than that. How do I interpret it within the Pauline corpus, or what other corpus you’re looking at—Johannine or whatever,—and then the New Testament, and so on? Well, let’s think about this in light of the book of Hebrews. How do we interpret it in light of the book of Hebrews?

Well, take a look at 2:16 for a minute. And perhaps you’ll remember this. But in 2:16 one of the things that you’ll hopefully remember is this expression. *“For truly it is not angels that He helps, but He helps the offspring of Abraham.”*

Now I said to you that the idea of *help* is *to take hold of*. He takes hold of the seed of Abraham.

Now that’s quite a powerful expression, much stronger than the rendering *help*. He takes hold of the seed of Abraham.

How about Hebrews 5:9? Hebrews 5:9 says that Jesus has become what? The Source. *“Being made perfect He became the Source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.”*

But not only that. We need to go to Hebrews 12:2 in order to see this. So let’s just flip a little further because someone may say, “Well, He may be the Source. But that doesn’t say that we’re fully and finally saved by Him.” But it says in verse 2, *“looking to Jesus, the Founder and Perfecter of our faith.”* So what you have there is that not only is He the Source of our salvation, but the Perfecter of our salvation.

And so when you look at the book of Hebrews, I think one of the things that you recognize is that the author, the Preacher, is saying that when God saves a man, He is the Source of that salvation in Jesus Christ, and He is the Finisher or the Perfecter of that salvation that’s found in a man. Why? Because in Jesus Christ He has taken hold of man.

So I think the argument is a pretty clear argument from the book of Hebrews. If God saves, then how can the saved fall away? And this is something that I’m convinced of not just from the few passages that I’ve shown to you that are here in Hebrews or in the rest of the Bible and the three that we looked at, but I think this is a pretty clear teaching from the Scriptures. But I am willing to pause here and to think about this a little bit if you want to wrestle through this for a minute. Yes?

**Participant:** In Revelation 21:27 it talks about *“nothing unclean will ever enter it, or anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.”* So it talks about the Lamb’s Book of Life. And isn’t that Lamb’s Book of Life already written? So if your name is in there, it can never be taken out. Is that correct?

**Jeff:** Yes, I think that is a great symbolic kind of language. But I think that kind of language indicates the certainty of those who are written for eternal life. Yes, that’s right.

**Participant:** Also it says in the very end of Revelation that if anybody takes away from the book, he will be taken out of the Book of Life. That’s almost the opposite.

**Jeff:** Yes, but you want to be careful about how far you press that image in terms of its literalness, because I had a minister once who told me that he argued that. And I said, “Well then, we should never do evangelism.” He argued that everybody was written in the Lamb’s Book of Life, and when they rejected, they were erased. And I said, “Well, we should never do evangelism so that no one will reject. That way no one will be erased.” Yes, Ted?

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**Ted:** I think this question all depends on where you start from. You start from man’s ability. Does man have the ability in his natural self, even with the aid of God, to come to salvation? Does he have the ability to do that, even with the grace of God? Charles Stanley, for instance, would say that’s true. But he also would say that we can never lose that salvation. So those who hold that man has the ability, even with the help of God and the grace of God to do that, he also has the ability to take himself out of the grace of God.

Stanley, I believe—and this is very typical of evangelical belief—says that you have the ability to get into the grace of God, but you don’t have the ability to take yourself out of it. To me that seems to be a contradiction.

**Jeff:** Are you saying that we have the ability to take ourselves out? That’s what they’re saying?

**Ted:** If you start out with the premise that man has the ability, even with the help and grace of God, to get himself saved, then he also has the ability, at least it seems reasonable that he has the ability to do it. It just depends on where you start. If you start with man’s ability, or total inability.

**Jeff:** Right. Well even if you start from—well, if you go to Romans 8, where he says, *“What shall we say then to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?”* And then he talks about how can we be separated from Christ. And you read down through all of these things. And the Arminian says, “Yes, but I can still take myself out of God’s hand.”

But I like the answer that comes back to that—*“nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* And I’m in creation. And so the *nothing else* that’s in all creation includes me. I kind of like that in the response to Charles. Yes?

**Participant:** It just seems to me that eternal life is one of the major gifts that we receive from Christ. It just seems to me a bit odd to have eternal life for a short period of time. *(Laughter)*

**Second Participant:** Well said.

**Jeff:** Let the record show that there is a thumbs up given here. *(Laughter)*

**Participant:** Just one other thing. In Hebrews 6:6 the word in the NIV is *repentance*, not *salvation*.

**Jeff:** Okay. Wait till we get there, okay, Jim? *(Laughter)*

**Participant:** Picky, picky, picky!

**Jeff:** I know; that’s right. All right, anybody else?

All right, so let’s press on. How then do we understand the text before us? Well, I think that we need to understand it in light of its context. And what do I mean by that? Well, when you look at the book of Hebrews, one of the things that you realize is that this is one of those books that has exhortations sprinkled throughout. And I think that when we look at this book, we need to remember that it’s not simple sections that we look at. But it’s sections that are tied together with a line of reasoning and argumentation peppered with exhortations. And you remember, if you go back to the book of Hebrews chapter 2, that among some of the exhortations that we encountered were in chapter 2

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—“Do not drift away.” We saw that in 1-4 of chapter 2. Listen, that you don’t drift. That’s the idea.

And if you remember right after that, right after chapter 2 and that exhortation to listen, that you might not drift, he talks about the generation that came before. And he talks about that generation and how they did drift away. And then he brings it right up to the present moment. And remember how he does that. It’s Psalm 95 that he uses. And he says,

*“Today, if you hear His voice,*

*Do not harden your hearts as you did in the wilderness.”*

And remember what I said at the time we were looking at that. We’re looking at that today from three separate contexts—from the context of the Exodus generation itself. They had a *today*. From the writing of Psalm 95—they had a *today*. And now, here in the book of Hebrews, they have a *today*. But it’s more than that. We have a *today*.

And so there’s a sense in which the admonition not to drift reaches back to the Exodus generation and reaches up to this very moment when we read God’s word as it comes forth into our lives. And we’re admonished not to drift.

And so the church under age drifted. We are admonished not to drift. And I think that’s the crucial thing that we need to remember. We need to remember that within the church, whether it’s the church under age of the past or the church present, it is a mixed multitude. In other words, think about the Exodus generation. And Moses even tells us that those who came out of Egypt were a mixed multitude. And we see that. We see that in that some believed. Some heard the word and responded in faith. And some heard the word and responded in unbelief.

But that’s no different than what we find today. I mean, today we sit in church and we may hear of someone who has departed the faith, someone who has rejected the gospel. We may even hear about an excommunication notice read. Somebody has rejected the faith and has departed. And so the church has excommunicated him to fulfill Matthew chapter 18. There’s a mixed multitude.

And so when you look at this particular chapter in its context, starting back in chapter 2, one of the things that you remember is that he has been admonishing us not to drift, because there is the possibility of those who are in the context of the community drifting. So you need to understand that as its context as we move forward.

Now I want you to think about this. We’ve got our friend John back here, who has done us a good deed by putting *Pilgrim’s Progress* up on the website. Hopefully you men have taken the opportunity to listen to that. If you haven’t, you need to. It’s a requirement for heaven. *(Laughter)* You’re in danger of drifting if you haven’t. I’m kidding. Let the record show that. I’d better say that. *(Laughter)*

This is a great story. I mean, this is one of those wonderful stories that will put your mind to active duty as you read through it, because it tells the story of a man who begins in a very solemn way. He’s been reading a book. He’s agitated with himself because he can’t find rest. And he meets a man by the name of Evangelist who tells him. “Do you see over there?”

And he says, “No, I can’t see it.” There are so many nuances to this book.

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“Do you see the light?”

“No, I can’t see it.”

“Well, do you see the light?”

“Yes, I see the light.”

“Then go for the light.” And yet it’s really interesting because of what Mr. Worldly Wise says to him. “Do you see that mountain over there?”

“Yes, I see it very clearly.” You know, the idea of being in Adam and being able to see that which we ought not to see so well, and yet not being able to see what we ought to be able to see clearly. Anyway, he says, “Run for that light.”

And so Pilgrim begins to run for that light. And his wife says, “Oh no, what’s going on with him?” And so she sends after him Obstinate and Pliable.

Now you can understand those characters, right? (*Laughter*) The character is built right into the name.

Now Obstinate and Pliable go after him, and they meet up with him. And they begin to try to persuade him to come back to the City of Destruction.

And the reason I bring this up is because Bunyan has captured what it is that we’re talking about early on in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Obstinate says, “You need to come back.”

He says, “I’m not coming back.”

Pliable says, “Well, does he really need to come back? I think I want to go with him.”

Now we know he’s Pliable. We know that Silly Putty is pliable. And Pliable is Silly Putty at this point. But listen to what Pliable says. “My heart inclines to go with my neighbor.”

Now forget that his name is Pliable for a minute. “My heart inclines to go with my neighbor.”

Well, Obstinate says, “You’re both idiots. I’m leaving.” So he leaves.

And look at all the things that Pliable does along the way. He encourages Christian. “Let’s be on our way.” To Christian he says, “Tell me where we’re going.” He encourages Christian to read the book that is in his hand, to read the Bible. And then he says, “Explain it to me.” And then Christian explains it to him.

And he says, “Oh, those are wonderful explanations! I just absolutely love them so much!” And then Pliable says, “The hearing of this is enough to ravish one’s heart.” Isn’t it great?

And when you read these things, if you can just divorce yourself from remembering that this is Pliable, if you go back to these things, have you met somebody like this? Have you met somebody who encouraged you along your way and told you, “Tell me where we’re going” again and again? “Encourage me. Read from the book.” He praises your explanation of it or the explanations of a minister, and then departs from the faith.

You’ve met this person. What do you think of him? Well, if you have no other evidence than these things, what do you say? You say that if it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it’s a duck, right? You don’t have any way of piercing the heart and reading the heart and doing the heart surgery and saying, “Ah, you know?” No. You take it for face value. You see that this person must be a believer.

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But we know his name is Pliable. And we know this, that he has no burden. Remember that Christian has a burden on his back. He’s got this burden on his back, and he’s going to the cross where the burden can be relieved.

But Pliable doesn’t have a burden. Pliable, he’s walking along. “Why are you taking so long here?” He just kind of likes everything. And then they come to the Slough of Despond. I don’t know how you pronounce it.

**Participant:** I say *slew*.

**Jeff:** Yes, *slew*.

**Participant:** In England it’s called *slou*.

**Jeff:** Now what the Slough of Despond is, it’s all of the sins of the person, and those sins had to catch up to him, those memories of things gone by, and they catch up to him and they weigh him down. And he can’t seem to get through the Slough.

And so what happens? What happens is that Pliable says, “What in the world are you leading me into?” And he swims to the shore where the City of Destruction is, and he leaves Christian in the muck and the mire and doesn’t help him out.

Now we see those kinds of characters in Scripture, don’t we? There’s Pliable who is in *Pilgrim’s Progress*. But there is Demas, and there’s Simon Magus, and there are others like him in the Bible.

There are those who are described by John as those “*who had gone out from among us, but were never of us.*” And so what we need to understand is that when we look at this context, we need to understand that the church is a mixed multitude. And the person who looks like a believer may not be a believer. And they go out from us. That’s the context. I think we have to keep that in mind.

There’s a warning here. And the warning is what we have a tendency to get caught up on and struggle with. So what is it?

Well, I said to you that when it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck it must be a duck. And when you look at what we find here, what do you find? Not only do you find the things that we look at in verses 1-4, but we find enlightenment and tasting of the heavenly gifts, being partakers of the Holy Spirit, hearing the Word, experiencing the powers of the age to come. This is a description of those we find in Hebrews chapter 6.

Now what are these things? This is the difficulty. What are these things? To what do they point? Let me ask you. When you read this particular passage, what do you make of it? Who do you see here?

**Participant:** A believer.

**Jeff:** Yes, you see a believer. Go ahead, Brian.

**Brian:** But here it’s somebody who goes to church, takes Communion, sits under the preaching of the Word and then walks away.

**Jeff:** Okay. Stop the last part, though. Somebody that goes to church, sits under the preaching of the Word, takes Communion. What do you call that person?

**Participant:** A duck.

**Jeff:** You call that person a duck. (*Laughter*) Yes, you call that person a Christian because he hasn’t walked away. Once they walk away, then they don’t go to church. They don’t hear the Word, they don’t take Communion, right? That sort of thing. Go ahead.



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**Participant:** But is that the person that can't come back?

**Jeff:** Ah, no, no, no. We're not there yet, Brian. *(Laughter)* We're not there yet. All right.

**Participant:** You say, “walk away, but that's not *reject*. Many of us who aren't full time preachers kind of get distracted by things that are part of our responsibility in life, and we don't focus like we should on our faith. But we're not rejecting it. And I don't think we're walking away. We're just not as committed full time as you are.

**Jeff:** Right. But here's the thing, though. Remember what he says. He says that we can drift. And members can look at the warnings about drifting.

Remember what I said to you last time? What does it look like to have these things on your mind when you're not in full time ministry? I said that it's sort of like anticipating vacation, right? Even when you're at work doing your job, you're anticipating vacation. It's never far from your mind. You know what I mean? Even though you're doing your accounting or you're doing your architectural work, there's sort of that levity that's there in your mind, because I'm going on vacation! You know, that sort of thing, right?

I think that's a nice illustration of how we ought to think about the Christian life. The Lord is always sort of there in a way that He might not be in the front of our minds because we've got to do this particular problem, or figure out a solution to this particular issue. But He's there.

And I think that what the author of Hebrews is saying is that there's a drift that takes place that is a drift that takes you outside of the realm of sort of always knowing it in the back of your mind. He even describes it as “a forsaking of the assembly,” and those kinds of things. So there are some definitive things that will come into play when we think about somebody who has drifted to that extent. Hold on just a second. We've got Ted.

**Ted:** There are a lot of us. Being a pastor, you could walk away, too.

**Jeff:** Oh, sure.

**Ted:** You can very definitely drift. You can get very occupied with the things of the church.

**Jeff:** That's right.

**Ted:** So I don't think being a lay person or a pastor really makes any difference.

**Jeff:** Yes. And I think I've met lay people that have been more faithful.

**Ted:** Absolutely, all the time. I'm embarrassed at my own faith many times by lay people, because they're that much more integrated into the faith. And looking at the progression there, the qualifications, you can look at that and say, “Well, you know, this person is just not coming along.” But everybody comes along at a different speed. So somebody may be hot on Jesus and do all those things. Another person may not be hot, but hot later. So it's very hard to tell. It's very much a mixed bag, which kind of agitates against churches that long to define closely who's in and who's out.

**Jeff:** Yes. Mm-hmm.

**Participant:** We're always tempted to make a judgment based on what you have up there on the board. A better standard—and even that is incomplete—is Biblical. Show me the works. He refers to that in verse 11; this is what he points to. So if you make it a

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matter right there, you’re always going to fall short. And that is probably why we’re told not to judge.

**Jeff:** Yes. What does it produce? Yes?

**Participant:** I just wanted to comment. I completely agree with Jim’s comment. We talk about drifting. We drift all the time. We sin, every day we sin. And where do we end up? Are we making progress? And where do we end up at the end, because we’re all drifting. There are times when we read something in the Bible. We start to doubt something, maybe in Hebrews. And a little bit of a question comes into our minds. So I think we all drift, all the time. But what’s important is what is the real foundation, and where do we end up?

**Jeff:** Right. But remember what he says. Listen and don’t drift. And so the idea is that we’re not perfect, and that we’re prone to drifting, just like you say. We drift. There is that. It’s part of the Christian life. But we always need to fight against the drift.

**Participant:** But my point is, who doesn’t stop drifting? Do you stop drifting? Do I stop drifting? We all drift. We continue to drift—maybe not as much as we used to, but that drifting takes place every day.

**Jeff:** Right. It does take place every day. But we can’t negate the warnings not to drift simply by saying that we always drift. I mean, we will drift. That’s the difficulty, right? That’s why we either go in one of two directions. Think about it. This is a great point. The person who says that everybody drifts, and you’re going to drift and I’m going to drift and everybody drifts is the person who is in danger of forsaking the Law and saying that it’s antinomian. It’s against the Law; it’s all of grace. We’re all going to drift. We might as well just resign ourselves to the fact that we’re saved by grace and nothing else.

The person who listens to “don’t drift,” and says, “Oh, no, no, no! It says, ‘don’t drift,’ and there’s the danger of losing my salvation. And so I’m going to go to the other end, and I’m going to talk about all the legal requirements that are incumbent upon me to obey, that I stay in Christ.”

You know, the one guy says, “I’ll never get out of Christ because that’s just the way of it.” The other guy says, “No, no, no; I need to work to stay in Christ.” And both of those are wrong.

But what’s right is *union with Christ*. It’s the person who says, “My foundation is in Jesus Christ. And I will not lose my salvation because I stand in Jesus Christ. And yet I need to not drift away from Jesus Christ.”

And that’s the tension, right? The tension is that I’ll not finally drift away from Christ. But I need not to drift away from Christ. And well, you know, if you’re not going to drift away from Christ finally because you’re in Christ, why do you have to worry about drifting? And you say, “I’ve got to worry about it because the Bible says that I’ve got to worry about it.” And it’s that sort of tension that I think we’re all experiencing right now. Yes?

**Participant:** I’ll pick on Ted because he’s so open about his life, and I can say the same for mine as well. You know, we struggle with sin each and every day. But I don’t think that’s drifting. We’re aware of it and we’re struggling with it. We’re trying to deal

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with it rightly before God. The drifting comes when we suddenly become apathetic and indifferent toward Christ and toward God, and we’re drifting in that sense.

**Jeff:** And I think that you bring us back around to the idea of what drifting is in chapter 2. It’s pulling a ship into harbor, fixing your eye on that point on the shore and then aiming for it, right?—knowing that the tide is always going to be trying to pull you this way and that way, or being out watching your parents on the shore while you’re out at the beach and sort of losing sight of that. Oh, we’ve drifted, you know. We’ve got to get back up. But you’re always looking out of the corner of your eye and playing. You’re always fixed on the point of your parents, you know, until you lose it, and then you’re drifting. And you’ve got to come back. Yes?

**Participant:** You know I don’t always agree with you. *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** I did know that. Somebody told me that one time. *(Laughter)* Somebody said, “You know, Bill doesn’t always agree with you.”

**Bill:** I believe we’re hard-wired to do things as men. We want to do things. We want to do something. I think you can approach the Scripture two different ways. You can approach the Scripture with the mindset where I have to do something, and look for the dos and the don’ts. Or you can approach Scripture from a relationship. It’s all about relationship. When you do that, you get the assurance of that relationship, and it’s not based on performance.

**Jeff:** So you believe in synergism after all! *(Laughter)* Because a relationship is synergistic. *(Laughter)* Bill! Wait! This is a momentous occasion! *(Laughter and applause)* Thank you, Ted. I appreciate the help. *(Laughter)*

**Bill:** You said it; I didn’t. *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** All right.

**Bill:** One more thing. *(Laughter)* Don’t you think that Augustine addressed this issue very well with the visible and the invisible church?

**Jeff:** I think that Augustine put too much emphasis on the visible. And B. B. Warfield said that had he had another ten years, he’d have been able to work the problem out. *(Laughter)*

**Bill:** I hope you get another ten years. *(Laughter)*

**Participant:** Just please expand on the rabbit trail that Bill led us down on. *(Laughter)* It’s only invisible according to Augustine.

**Jeff:** Yes. So Augustine talked about, and we have in theology today, the right understanding that there is one church, and there are two aspects to that church. When you think about theology, you oftentimes think about the creation of categories in order to think about things, because without those categories you can’t think about those things. So we talk about the obedience of Christ. But we divide our understanding of that obedience into categories—the *active obedience* and the *passive obedience*.

Well the church is the same way. We think about the one church, the one universal church. And yet we think about it from different aspects. Or we create categories in which to think about that one church. And the categories, for instance, that we use, at least one subset of categories, is the *visible* and the *invisible* church.

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The invisible church transcends age and stretches back to the earliest point of the first believer and goes up to the climactic point of the last believer. And so it encompasses every age, with all believers in every age. And so when we talk about the church invisible, we think about the church collectively.

When we talk about being part of the visible church, we mean that we’re a part of the concrete community in which we live. So there’s a local congregation. And that’s a visible aspect of the church.

Now there are other visible churches. It’s not just our community. So there are visible churches here in North America and over in Russia, and so on. So there’s a sense in which there’s a visible dimension of the one church and an invisible dimension of the one church.

And it’s like anything in theology. You can put your emphases too much on one side or the other. And some think that Augustine put his emphasis too much on the side of the visible church rather than the invisible church. And that can lead to problems, just like putting your emphasis on the invisible church. That can lead to problems too.

**Participant:** What would that mean, though? What was the down side of that emphasis?

**Jeff:** The down side of the emphasis can mean that you place your—fopr instance, let me give you one example each.

So Augustine would have understood that he was in tension with himself. He would have understood that salvation is by grace through faith. And yet he would have also understood that the sacraments of the church are not just instrumental, but become agents conveying grace. In other words, they have the power in and of themselves to convey the grace that God points to those agents. So that can be an over-emphasis on the visible church.

An over-emphasis on the invisible church can be something like I encountered in my very first pastorate, where a guy came to me and said, “I’m part of the invisible church. I think the visible church is a cultural phenomenon of the first century. And I don’t think it’s appropriate nor absolute for every generation after the first century. So you’re not going to see me anymore. I’m going to worship with my family in my living room, and I’m a part of the invisible church.” And so that’s the idea.

**Participant:** Did he ever come back?

**Jeff:** No.

**Participant:** When you mentioned that drifting, I was thinking about Mark chapter 4 verse 19, and He gives us what causes drifting—*“the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches and the lust of other things,”* which choke the word and make it unfruitful. And I think that maybe some of that might be what the old divines used to call *our affections*—Edwards, and I can’t think of the other man who was very well known for teaching on godly affections. But I think that’s where the tension comes in, because we live in a world and we live in a culture where our affections are tuned in not always to godly things. There’s a lot of competition for our affections. And I think that’s where the real pull comes in to drift.

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**Jeff:** Yes, and I think that what you’re saying is right on target. There’s a sense in which they receive it with joy, right? But the persecutions of this life and the cares of this life choke out the word. And I think what you’re saying is dead on. And that is that they had passions, right? External things stirred them up, whether it was the Preacher, and him stirring them up to excitement about what they heard. They had that, but they didn’t have the internal stirring of the Holy Spirit, and the affections that were real and lasting to lay hold of the gospel that they heard. Yes.

Well, let me just take us through how we understand this. I think we understand this in terms of Judas. I’ve mentioned Judas before. I want to use him for a minute.

What about him? Well this was a guy who was trusted. You don’t give the purse to the guy you don’t trust. He was a trusted figure.

**Participant:** But Jesus did, because He knew what kind of guy he was.

**Jeff:** Jesus did, but we didn’t. (*Laughter*) And they didn’t, right? You always have to operate from the perspective of how can I see Judas in the best possible light at this moment, right? Well we don’t, because we understand all of Scripture. But when we look at him in the midst of the disciples, we understand that he was a trusted figure, right? And they would have trusted him.

**Participant:** They did trust him.

**Jeff:** Yes, they did trust him.

**Participant:** But it says something about the character of Christ when he knows what kind of guy Judas is. And He says, “Okay, I’ll trust you with this money, and I know you’re not going to take care of it. You’re going to cheat.”

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Participant:** He knows that.

**Jeff:** Right.

**Participant:** And He goes ahead. What a neat guy He is—Jesus!

**Jeff:** Yes. You also understand, though the key. That’s part of the unfolding plan of redemption, to send Him to the cross, right? He understands that Psalm 69 is about Judas and about His betrayal, and about Him going to the cross. Yes.

But looking at it from the disciples’ perspective, they trust him. They give him the purse. He takes the Lord’s Supper. I realize that we may disagree on whether he does or he doesn’t on the basis of the two gospels and how they portray the Supper. But he seems to eat the Supper.

And so when you look at Luke 9:1—and we’ll not take the time to look at this,—but one of the things that you discover in 9:1 is that the disciples were sent out. They were given power and authority over demons. They were able to heal people. And he was among them.

Now when you think about the description that we just thought about, here’s a man who’s a part of that. And Luke 10:23-24 says, as He says to the disciples, “*Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see. For I say to you that many prophets and kings wished to see the things which you see and did not see them, and to hear the things which you hear and did not hear them.*” This is what He says to the disciples after they come back from driving out demons and healing the sick.

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Judas hears these things. Now I want you to think about this. I think this is important. If you were walking along and had passed Judas the night on which Jesus was betrayed, you would have watched him go in to the Scribes and Pharisees, and had you been listening outside the door, you would have heard him negotiating to betray his Master.

On that same night, if you were to walk up to a burning barrel that had a fire in it, and heard a man protesting that he was not with Him, you would not have known which man was the apostate, which man stood apart from Christ.

**Participant:** Right.

**Jeff:** I mean, they both would have looked apostate, right? Now the reason I say this is because we go with perceptions, right? When somebody comes to us and professes faith, comes to church and hears the Scriptures read and says he believes the preaching of the gospel, we say what? We say, “He’s a duck.” We say he’s a Christian. When we see someone like Peter or Judas on the night that Jesus was betrayed, what do we say about them? We say that they look like they’ve apostatized. I don’t know if it was a final apostasy, but they look like they’ve forsaken Jesus.

And what’s the difference? Well the difference, first of all, is in the word itself. And this goes back to what Tom said. We know the difference because it’s like reading *Pilgrim’s Progress*, knowing Pliable for whom Pliable is.

But look at John 17:12. This is what Jesus says about His disciples. *“I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture may be fulfilled.”* So we know that’s about Judas.

But we also know about Peter. *“Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?”* And that’s the restoration of Peter in the final chapter of John’s Gospel.

So how do we know who is who? Well, we know on the basis of the Word. Jesus tells us that Judas was finally destroyed and that Peter was not. He was restored.

But the difference from our perspective, when we don’t have that kind of thing written out for us, is that the backsliding believer can only be distinguished from the final apostate by the fact of his recovery. That’s in *Thoughts On Religious Experience* from Archibald Alexander, who was the first theology professor from Princeton Seminary way back in the 1700s. So he says, look. The only way you’re going to know the difference between a Judas and a Peter is by their repentance. That’s the only way we would know it if we didn’t have the Word to tell us.

So the warning is real. Go ahead.

**Participant:** You know, this is always a hot button for me—Judas and Peter. Anyway,

**Jeff:** What, what?

**Participant:** Hold on!

**Jeff:** This whole class is a hot button!

**Participant:** That’s why we love you so much! (*Laughter*) In my reading this week I came upon the parable—or the story, not the parable—of the man who was paralyzed. And his friends go up on the roof and open up the roof and take all these risks and drop him down in front of Jesus. And what does Jesus do first? He forgives him. The guy didn’t even ask to be forgiven. So Judas didn’t ask to be forgiven. He was tormented. He realized that he had betrayed the Savior of the world. He realized, after the Resurrection,

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“What have I done?” So he hangs himself. Jesus forgives this paralyzed guy without even being asked.

**Jeff:** You’ve got to explain John 17:12 to me before I’m going to be persuaded that Jesus forgave Judas.

**Participant:** He was just a pawn to fulfill the Scripture.

**Jeff:** No, I think that if you were to sit down and ask Judas, “Did you do what you wanted to do?”, that he would say, “Yes, I did what I wanted to do.”

**Participant:** Yes, but isn’t God full of mercy and grace?

**Jeff:** But He’s also filled with justice.

**Participant:** Judas did not receive it.

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Participant:** Even if He offered it.

**Jeff:** Here’s the thing. I want to say this. I’m glad this has been such a calm experience. (*Laughter*) I just want to say this. *The warning is real.* Look, Peter drifted and had to be restored, right? Peter was a genuine believer whose faith was locked in, if we can put it that way, because Jesus saved him. And yet he was a man, and he drifted, just like we all drift. But the only reason he is saved is because his life is anchored in Christ. But it is incumbent on him to do what?

**Participant:** To repent.

**Jeff:** To repent, right. And in the same way, when we talk about the response to our own drifting, what is that response? It’s repentance. That’s why the Christian life is a life of faith and repentance. Why? Because we drift all the time.

And so the warning is real. And the extent of the danger is in verse 6. And look, I know this is going to—I don’t even want to read this. But if you look at verse 6, it says, “*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.*”

Remember the four views of Hebrews chapter 6. There are some who say that this is a mere hypothetical, and that really the Preacher doesn’t mean this. This is hypothetical. In other words, no one who is fully and finally in Christ can fall away. And he’s writing to a church, and so he’s writing this hypothetically.

Now I don’t find that to be the case at all, especially when you look at the exhortations that we looked at in the beginning, and how it’s a mixed multitude, just like it was in the Old Testament. In other words, this is a real warning, because the church is made up of a mixed multitude. But not just because it’s made up of a mixed multitude. It’s because it’s made up of people who are rooted in Christ but have a tendency to drift. And look, we need to repent.

And so the warning is real. The extent of the danger, I think, is blistering. I think it’s real and I think we have to take that into consideration. If we dismiss it, we’ll not take this warning seriously.

And yet I think we have to take this warning for what it is. If you’re outside of Christ, it’s a terrible warning. If you’re in Christ, it’s a warning not to drift and always to come back so that you show yourself to what? Go ahead.

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**Participant:** So if we don't repent before we die, we are unforgiven. We become Roman Catholics, right?

**Jeff:** So how many times do we have to repent in a day? That's really what you're asking. You're saying, "How many times do I have to repent in a day? Do I have to repent morning, noon and night? But what happens if I die between the morning and the noon repentance?"

That's not what we're saying. If you're forgiven in Christ, all your sins are forgiven in Christ. But I'm not the one who tells you that you have to pray for the forgiveness of your sins. Jesus is. And remember why I said that. I said that because there's a relational component to this, right? There's a relational component to our relationship with Jesus. He says, "I've forgiven you all your sins." Colossians 3. But you have to repent of your sins. Why? Because there's a relationship.

It's sort of like saying the little duty thing. In the past I've said why do we pray? Because it's our duty to pray, right? And what if you gave your wife a card for your anniversary, and she said, "Thank you so much, honey; I love this card!"

And you said, "It was my duty to do it," you wouldn't win any points with your wife, right? (*Laughter*) Because it is our duty to do it, and yet it's relational, just like bill has been saying. *Relational* means, "Lord, I love you. Forgive me of my sins, despite the fact that I already know that I'm forgiven of all my sins." Yes?

**Participant:** In verse 6 is the word *crucifying* in the present tense?

**Jeff:** I don't know if it's in the present tense.

**Participant:** It's translated as if it's an ongoing attitude.

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Participant:** Well, if you're—

**Jeff:** If you're remaining in that,--

**Participant:** If it's an ongoing thing, if you're rejecting Christ, you're not going to be repenting.

**Jeff:** That's right. If you're in that state, and that's the state you're in,--

**Participant:** That's it.

**Jeff:** That's it. Yes?

**Participant:** In Acts there was a group of people who wanted to be baptized, and some were forbidding them. And the author says that these were given the gift of repentance. Do you think that gift of repentance is only a one-time thing?

**Jeff:** Oh no, Yes, right.

**Participant:** So any repentance is a gift from God.

**Jeff:** Absolutely, yes.

**Participant:** Monergism.

**Jeff:** All right, really quickly. There's the illustration of the field. And he says, "Now think about a field that has received sun and rain and all of these things. And yet the field is unfruitful." He says that it's possible to be a field like this, and to be a person who goes to church, receives the Word, takes the sacrament, and to be unfruitful.

What's he saying? He's simply saying that the church is a mixed multitude, like we've been saying. So don't drift.



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The encouragement is threefold. *The Preacher’s posture*. Don’t you love it? This is what I said to you in the very beginning of chapter 1. He says, “I’m convinced of better things concerning you.” He has a posture toward his people. It would be a mistake for a preacher to stand up there and say this. “Now I know there are some of you,” right? “And I see you and you,” and that sort of thing, right? But there are preachers who do that all the time, right?

That’s not what the Preacher in the Scriptures does. The Preacher in the Scriptures has a better view concerning his congregation, despite the fact that he knows there’s a mixed multitude. So he’s convinced of better things.

*His confidence is in God*, not in the people. God will not lose His fields. That’s the idea. In verse 10 He basically says, “My confidence is not in the fact that you’ll persevere. My confidence is in the fact that God will keep you.”

And then he says what? Press on. Show the same diligence. Work these things out. We don’t have time to work those things out right now.

But I’m just glad that we could finish this particular month on such a high note. *(Laughter)* Well I’m going to pray, and then I’ll see you in a few weeks or so.

Father in heaven, thank You for this time that You’ve given to us. And Lord, we pray, despite the difficulty of a passage like this, that You will bless to our understanding the importance of a passage like this. And yet we pray all the more that You’ll protect our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus as we seek to be rooted and established in Him, knowing that He is the One who rooted us in Him. We pray these things in His name. Amen.

**Men:** Amen. *(Applause)*