

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Hebrews 6: 4-8

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. Today, we will continue reading Hebrews chapter 6, verses 4 to 8.

The author of Hebrews encourages the saints, who have already received grace and salvation, to leave the elementary principles of Christ and press on to perfection. He even lists six fundamental truths: repentance from dead works, faith toward God, baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. These foundational teachings are essential for the salvation of the saints, but after experiencing them, one must continue moving forward and not remain at the elementary principles. In fact, this is the burden of the entire book of Hebrews—that the saints must grow, continue advancing, and reach perfection.

The following passage is one of the most controversial in the Bible. Teachers from different theological frameworks have entirely different interpretations, and most hold firmly to their theological stance, even to the point of twisting the Scripture to defend their views. I will first highlight the key points of contention so that the saints can reflect on them before presenting my perspective as we delve into the text.

First and foremost, we must recognize that the Bible is God's gift to man, intended to reveal the mystery of salvation clearly. Generally speaking, the first impression you get when reading Scripture is God's original intent. If an interpreter tells you that this is not what God means, it is most likely because he cannot fit the passage into his theological framework and is attempting to distort its meaning to preserve his system.

The Calvinist school emphasizes God's sovereignty and has developed the doctrine of "once saved, always saved." They claim that the people mentioned in this passage—who were enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, partook of the Holy

Spirit, tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come—were never truly saved. According to this view, these individuals later fell away from the truth and are destined for the lake of fire. But if this interpretation is correct, then salvation must be extremely difficult—how many people in today's churches are truly saved?

On the opposite side, the Arminian school emphasizes human free will and has developed the belief that salvation can be lost. They use this passage to support their view, arguing that a saint with such profound experiences may still lose his salvation if he does not remain vigilant. But is this really the case?

This passage presents a complete concept, followed by an example that serves as an illustration, much like a picture that further clarifies the author's original intent. Therefore, we should first read through the author's argument in its entirety, with some explanations, before examining the example he provides.

Verses 4-6: "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted 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."

In this passage, the author speaks of a group of people who have been enlightened by God. When one is enlightened, they see their own wretchedness while also perceiving the brightness of Christ. The most direct response is to repent of their dead works, to desire to trust in God, and, according to the promise of the gospel, God allows them to taste the heavenly gift.

The Greek word for "heavenly gift" is "dorea," which refers to the gift of the Holy Spirit or the gift of life. In Acts 2, Peter delivered a powerful sermon at Pentecost that pierced the hearts of the listeners. They asked Peter, "What shall we do to be saved?" Peter responded in Acts 2:38, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive

the gift of the Holy Spirit." The phrase "receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" uses the Greek word "dorea."

Receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit unquestionably signifies that these individuals had repented, were baptized, and had the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This explains why the next phrase in Hebrews states that they were "partakers of the Holy Spirit." These individuals were not only saved and had the help of the Holy Spirit, but they also earnestly pursued spiritual growth, having "tasted the good word of God." The Greek word for "word" here is "rhema," referring to the timely, spoken word of God. This suggests that they applied God's word in their lives, producing good results. They experienced the work of the Holy Spirit and recognized God's omnipotence, which not only transcends this present age but also determines the destiny and rewards of the age to come. They were aware of the powers of the age to come.

Here, we see that the author, fearing any misunderstanding, provides extensive descriptions to ensure that these individuals had indeed been genuinely saved and had all the spiritual experiences expected of true believers. They could not possibly be unsaved individuals. The question then arises: What happens if these individuals turn away from the truth?

Verse 6 states that if they "fall away," they cannot be renewed to repentance. The Greek word for "fall away" is "parapipto," a compound word from "para" (close beside) and "pipto" (fall away). It describes someone who initially followed Christ closely but later deviated, betrayed, and fell away, ultimately leaving Christ.

The author refers to these Hebrew believers, who had subjectively experienced the truth of the gospel and were truly saved. Their deviation from the truth likely stemmed from succumbing to temptation, trials, or pressure, leading them back to Judaism. Given the historical context, this was understandable, as Christians were severely persecuted, whereas Judaism maintained a friendly relationship with the Roman authorities. These Hebrew believers might have been unable to withstand the pressure and thus returned to Judaism. However, the Jewish system was the very entity responsible for crucifying Jesus. These believers, who had tasted

salvation, returning to the system that had killed Jesus, were essentially crucifying the Son of God again and putting Him to an open shame. Hence, the author makes a definitive statement: They cannot be renewed to repentance, meaning that in their lifetime, they can no longer return to fellowship with the saints.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is a very solemn warning. Before we were saved, we may have belonged to a particular religious group. Later, we heard the gospel, believed in Jesus, and accepted Christ as our lifelong Savior. We genuinely experienced the grace of Christ, partook in the Holy Spirit, tasted the good word of God, and understood the powers of the age to come. Having had such precious experiences, we must hold fast to our faith. When facing persecution or hardship, we may become weak, retreat, or even fall, but there is a red line we must never cross: We must not deny our faith. If we return to a state of unbelief, rejoin our previous religious group, and worship idols, it is equivalent to crucifying the Son of God again and putting Him to an open shame. If we fall into such a state, we cannot be saved again, nor can we return to the church within our lifetime.

At this point, I would like to briefly mention an alternative interpretation. Because the syntax of this passage is not entirely clear, it could also mean that those who fall away cannot repent unto salvation again, not because they have lost salvation, but because their foundation of salvation has already been established and does not need to be laid again. To attempt to do so would be akin to crucifying Christ again and putting Him to open shame. Therefore, those who have strayed from the truth only need to confess their errors and repent in order to return to church life and continue moving forward. The respected Brother Stephen Kaung holds this view, which truly highlights the vastness of Christ's grace. After much consideration, I still believe that certain red lines cannot be crossed. However, I am not entirely certain and thus present Brother Kaung's perspective for reference.

After reading this passage, some may still have doubts. The author, with great wisdom, follows up with an illustration to clarify the situation. It is often said that a picture is worth a thousand words. Through this illustration, we can more clearly understand the ultimate outcome of these believers.

Verses 7-8: "For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned."

It begins by saying, "For the earth," which serves as a parable for the saints. In 1 Corinthians 3:9, Paul also says that we are God's field. Furthermore, in Matthew 13:1-8, Jesus speaks of the parable of the sower, comparing the human heart to four different types of soil. Thus, this field refers to the saints, particularly the hearts of the saints, which should be quite clear.

This field drinks in the rain that often comes upon it. This rain represents God's grace, which is also mentioned in verses 4 and 5 through five aspects: being enlightened, tasting the heavenly gift, partaking of the Holy Spirit, tasting the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come. Having experienced so much grace as rain, if this field produces useful herbs for the cultivator, they will receive a blessing from God. In other words, every saint who receives the nourishment of God's grace must bear the fruit of life to bring joy to the Lord, which is the purpose of the saint's calling. However, if it produces thorns and briers, it will be rejected by God.

Let us first consider the origin of thorns and briers. In Genesis 3:17-18, after man's sin, the ground was cursed and began to produce thorns and briers. This reveals that the human heart has two sources: one from the Holy Spirit, which supplies life and enables the growth of the fruit of life; the other from the flesh, which leads to sin and produces thorns and briers. Thus, Paul says in Galatians 5:17, "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another."

The term translated as "lust" in the Chinese Union Version originates from the Greek word "flesh" (sarx), and can thus also be translated as "flesh." This means that the flesh and the Spirit are in opposition, waging war against each other. The human heart is the battleground between the Holy Spirit and the flesh. Therefore, we must guard our hearts above all else. We must frequently apply the precious

blood of Christ to maintain a pure conscience, lest this rain of grace nourish our flesh and cause thorns and briers to grow. If our hearts produce thorns and briers, we will be rejected by God and be near to a curse.

We must read the Scripture carefully. It does not say "it is cursed," but rather "near to being cursed." Since it is "near to being cursed," it is not yet cursed. This is a word of reminder in God's grace, allowing us the opportunity to repent. However, if one continues to refuse repentance, the end will be burning. This refers to God's judgment by fire.

In verses 1 and 2, the six foundational principles of the doctrine of Christ are mentioned, the sixth being "eternal judgment." We have previously discussed that this includes two types of judgment: one for believers and another for unbelievers. Let us first examine the judgment of believers. At Christ's return, they will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Since God's judgment begins with His own house, every saint must give an account before Christ's judgment seat and be recompensed according to their deeds after salvation, whether good or bad.

If our field is full of thorns and briers, the end is burning. Saints, take heed! When the field is burned, it is the thorns and briers that are consumed, but the field itself is not destroyed—it remains. This is what 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 describes: after receiving grace and salvation, every person is building upon a foundation, and the materials used are determined by the individual. Some build with gold, silver, and precious stones, which result in a construction that is slow and small. Others build with wood, hay, and straw, quickly erecting a grand house.

However, at the end of the age, in the judgment before Christ, the Lord will test each person's work with fire. If the work endures, the person will receive a reward—this is the reward of the overcomers. If the work does not endure? 1 Corinthians 3:15 states, "If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." God's word is very clear here: because he built with wood, hay, and straw, his work is burned, and he suffers loss, but he himself will still be saved. In other words, though he has no part in the millennial kingdom's reward for the overcomers, he does not lose eternal salvation. What he

loses is the labor of his entire life—he has wasted his time on earth, which is a most severe loss.

As for unbelievers, they will be judged after the millennial kingdom at the great white throne. At that time, all whose names are not found in the Book of Life will be cast into the lake of fire.

At the beginning of today's message, we mentioned the two theological frameworks of Calvinism and Arminianism. Both fail to distinguish between salvation and overcoming, leading them to categorize all non-overcoming believers as unsaved—whether they never believed at all or lost their faith later. In both systems, the final outcome is the same: the lake of fire.

Personally, I find this to be inaccurate. The true state of the church today resembles the parable Jesus spoke of in Matthew 22:1-14, where He concludes in verse 14, "For many are called, but few are chosen." All who receive grace and salvation are called, yet among them, few are chosen. The chosen ones are the overcomers within the church, and overcomers are the minority.

Thus, in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, Christ calls for overcomers in every church. Since the seven churches represent different conditions, the proportion of overcomers varies. In the church of Philadelphia, the entire congregation is already in the position of overcomers, and they only need to hold fast to remain so. However, in large churches like Thyatira or Sardis, the proportion of overcomers is very low. The seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 symbolize all churches throughout history, including today's church. God is calling for overcomers among us.

Even so, God's calling is irrevocable. This means that although non-overcoming Christians will lose their reward in the millennial kingdom at Christ's return, they will still partake in the new heaven and new earth after the millennium. Therefore, in terms of eternal salvation, it is indeed "once saved, always saved." However, regarding the reward of the age, "many are called, but few are chosen." Thus, the author of Hebrews repeatedly warns and exhorts every saved saint to move beyond

the elementary principles of Christ and strive toward maturity to obtain the reward of the age.

Let us pray together: Lord, grant us ears to hear, a teachable spirit, and a clear mind so that we may truly understand the mystery of salvation. Every one of us who has received grace and salvation has been called by You. Thank You for placing us in the church life so that our lives may grow. You have poured out the rain of abundant grace upon the church. Help our hearts to bear the fruit of life. Help us overcome the temptations of the flesh so that thorns and briers do not grow in our hearts. Bless my church with many saints who can support and encourage one another in running the heavenly race together. Let the church be a glorious testimony on earth, bearing the fruit of the Holy Spirit, so that Your glory may be praised. We pray this in the holy name of Jesus Christ. Amen.