

Don't Fall Away  
Hebrews 5:11 – 6:20

Turn to Hebrews 5. Hebrews has a lot of good news in it about Jesus our high priest, and about coming to God. But there are blunt warnings mixed with this encouragement, and today we're reading one of those warning sections.

Hebrews 2 began like this, "we must pay the most careful attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away." And without giving details, the writer tells us that it will go very badly for people who hear the gospel and receive it, and then decide to ignore what God said.

And in Hebrews 3 we read, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." And he preaches from Ps 95, about how God responded to the Israelites who hardened their hearts, who disobeyed him and sinned.

Our Scripture today is another one of those. This Scripture has encouragements in it, but also a stern warning about falling away. The writer says openly, "I am warning you about falling away. I am persuaded that you are *not* doing that, you are *not* falling away, but I am concerned about you and I at least must warn you."

I don't think we here are on the brink of falling away, not at all; but still, it is good for us to get the lay of the land, to get the big picture of how these things work in the Kingdom of God.

You are Not Ready for Solid Food – Heb 5:11-14

*We have much to say about this [about Jesus the high priest], but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the basic truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, does not know the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to separate good from evil.*

Let's talk about mature believers. Being a teacher has little to do with education, or information, or how long we've been believers. Instead, the mature have *by constant use trained themselves to distinguish good from evil*. We're talking about people who make the hard choice again and again. They ask themselves, "how would the Lord want me to handle this difficult situation? What do his words tell me to do?" And then they do that, and that's normal for them.

The mature are people who make the hard choice to do the right thing again and again. I read this week that the glorious Christian life "it is made up of constant hard choices, and unattractive tasks, accepted under the pressure of the Will of God." [repeat] That's lovely (Evelyn Underhill).

That's maturity, and the writer to the Hebrews tells his people that they should be mature by now, they should be able to teach this, but they've not been interested in this call, so they are infants. And that is why they are in more danger of falling away, they are more vulnerable.

Let's Leave the Basics Behind – Heb 6:1-3

*Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ, and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptism, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And God permitting, we will do so.*

This paragraph summarizes the things we learn about when we first come to the Lord, the things we have to know to come into God's family, so we understand our basic choice to believe in Christ. Those are the basics, the foundation, and now we'll move on.

Those who Fall Away Cannot Return to God – Heb 6:4-6

*It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they crucify the Son of God all over again and subject him to public disgrace.*

It is impossible for those who have received Christ and enjoyed the goodness of God and the Holy Spirit, and then fall away, to be brought back to repentance. I know ways to make this not say what it sounds like it says, but we will not do that. We will let it say what it wants to say.

There are two things here that can trouble us. One, that genuine believers can fall away at all. The writer means genuine believers, as the Hebrews certainly were, and they can fall away.

The second thing that can trouble us, and for me this is an even bigger, is that once they have fallen away, they cannot be brought back to repentance. There is no coming back. This could mean that they never want to come back, or it may mean that they want to but God won't have them. I will leave that open. Either way, they are not coming back, period.

We are talking about people who want nothing to do with Christ any more, a clear choice to leave Christ behind. It does happen, it happened to someone who was an elder in this church.

Hebrews 12 talks about Esau, who rejected his inheritance, and later changed his mind, and tried with tears to get his blessing back, but he could not undo what he had done.

This is the core of today's warning. This is why we must pay attention so we don't drift away. This is why, if we hear God's voice today, we must not harden our hearts. This falling away was a real danger for the people getting this letter.

The church has quite a few people who had some kind of faith when they were children, and in their young adult years they left this behind, and then later they come back to the Lord. And there are also many who do not come back to the Lord. We will not try to dissect stories like that. This is not written so we can point a finger, this is written so we will stay faithful to the Lord.

In Numbers 14, God did not think Israelites younger than twenty were accountable for their decisions; I have been pondering that. The warning is real, and we will let it stand.

#### A Farming Picture – Heb 6:7-8

This is how their falling away looks to God: *Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to the farmers receives the blessing of God. But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is about to be cursed. In the end it will be burned.*

This is how it looks to God: If God pours out the benefits of Christ on people, and they respond by thanking him and serving him, then he blesses them. But if he pours out the benefits of Christ on people and they drift away, if they hear his voice but they harden their hearts, if they no longer thank him and serve him, then they are worthless, they are about to be cursed, and in the end they will be burned. This is how it looks to God when we leave him behind.

#### We are Convinced of Better Things for You – Heb 6:9-12

*Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are convinced of better things in your case—the things that have to do with salvation. God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realized. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.*

The lives of these Hebrews tells the writer that these believers do need to hear these warnings. On the other hand, he does *not* think they have fallen away, he does *not* think they are just producing thorns and thistles.

*God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.* The writer reminds them of the good crop they have produced, and he says that God would be unjust to forget what they have done.

And I say this to all of you who have worked for God. God would be unjust to forget that, and God is never unjust. God remembers the work you have done, and God thinks he would be unjust to forget about that.

*He will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.* Let's pay attention to the three things this line brings together.

1, work. 2, showing love for God. 3, serving one another. We work and by this work we show our love for God. What are we actually doing? We help his people. We've been doing it for some time, and we continue to help them.

Helping God's people is work. Helping God's people is how to God that we love him. Whatever was going wrong with the Hebrew believers, they had a strong record for this, for working to take care of each other. That was the crop that God's rains had produced, and it was a good crop.

So, says the writer, keep showing this same diligence, right to the end, so that you arrive at your hope.

God Keeps his Promises – Heb 6:18-20

*God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to grab the hope set before us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf.*

What the writer wants to make clear is that if God promised to bless you, he will certainly keep his promise. The two unchangeable things are one, that God promised, and two, that God took an oath. First he promised, and God always does what he promised. Then, God raised his right and said, "I solemnly swear that I will bless those people." A promise, and an oath, that what we look forward to will happen. Our hope is sure.

These verses have a favorite picture of mine. "We who have fled to grab the hope set before us." This is how we became believers, this is what was really happening. We are in the middle of a terrible disaster, a bus going over a cliff, a burning house, a sinking ship.

And suddenly, there is a rope right in front of us. Grab that rope! That's what we did when we came to Christ. We fled disaster to grab the rope, which is our hope, the sure promise that God placed right in front of us.

*We fled to grab the hope set before us. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf.*

At the other end of the rope is an anchor, an anchor for our souls, and that anchor is absolutely solid. The rope we hang onto, if we follow the rope, will lead us into the tabernacle, and the rope leads under the curtain into the very Holy of Holies. Our anchor, at the other end of the rope that was set before us, is in the Holy of Holies, and it is actually a person, it's Jesus, our high priest. Jesus himself is the anchor in the sanctuary of God.

## Summary

So, let's move toward maturity, and let's decide on the right way to act, the Lord's way, and make that a daily process. Because it is impossible for those who have enjoyed the benefits of belonging to Christ, and then fall away, to come back, to repent again.

Well-watered land that produces a crop receives God's blessing, but if it produces thorns and thistles, it is useless and ends up being burned.

The writer is convinced that better things are waiting for the church getting Hebrews, as I am about our church. Take note of what God will not forget: our work and the love we have shown for him by always serving and helping one another.

God keeps his promises. We have come to Christ. That means we fled disaster to grab the promise he put in front of us. That's what it means to become a Christian. We have this promise as an anchor for our souls, Jesus himself, behind the curtain in the Holy of Holies. God has promised us great blessing, and he keeps his promises. So we will hang on to our hope. Amen.

**PRAYER:** O God, keep us awake. We don't want to be afraid, but we want to be awake. We are not strong, and we are not wise, so keep us awake and watching, keep our eyes open. We are not spiritual giants, we are sheep, so keep us awake. Amen.

**BENEDICTION:** May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace as we trust in him, so that we may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.