

What does Hebrews 6:4 mean?

WES: Welcome to the Radically Christian Bible study podcast. I'm your host, Wes McAdams, and here we have one goal: Learn to love like Jesus. We've been in the middle of a series -- or we are in the middle of a series that we are working through different passages of the Bible and just simply asking, "What does this passage mean?" And so if you have a passage that you would like for us to discuss, you can use the "Contact Us" page at RadicallyChristian.com or you can leave a voicemail. We would love for you to leave a voicemail so that we can play that on the podcast. The phone number that you can reach us at is (707) 238-2216, and let us know what passage you would like for us to study.

Today we're going to be looking at Hebrews 6, and I would like to introduce our guest for today, my friend, Jacob Rutledge.

Jacob, thank you so much for being with us again, Brother.

JACOB: Hey, great to be here, Brother.

WES: It's been a while since I've had you on the podcast. I'm excited to hear your thoughts on today's passage.

JACOB: I'm excited to get into it. It's a great passage.

WES: Absolutely. Okay. So, specifically, the passage that we're going to talk about is Hebrews 6. I think we said verses 4 through 6, but as with any passage of scripture, it doesn't mean anything except in context, and so let's just read the passage, I guess, first. I'll read the passage for us, and then I'll toss it over to you, Jacob, and we can talk about what does this mean.

So Hebrews 6:4, this is from the English Standard Version, says, "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."

Okay. So, obviously, a difficult passage in the sense of this is a stern type of a warning, and as we read this and try to figure out what does this mean, where should we start, Jacob, do you think?

JACOB: Well, you know, one of the things that I was thinking about when I was reading through this passage -- and it kind of hits at something that you said before the podcast began -- is how quickly and easily we jump to certain things, certain assumptions and applications, before we get the wider context. I can't think of a passage that it's more important for us to understand the greater context than this one, because there have been great misapplications through the centuries when it comes to this passage and other passages. You can just see that historically with some things that have happened within Christianity.

One of the things I think that we need to remember about Hebrews is not just the wider context of this passage, but the entire book, and that is that Hebrews is pretty unique in that it's almost written in crisis mode, right? I mean, it's because he has a very intentional purpose as to why he is writing, and he is deeply concerned about the status of some of these Christians and whether that is due to them falling back into Judaism or falling back into paganism or simply falling away from Christ. That is one of his primary

concerns within this letter, and he's trying to convince them of the importance of perseverance, of endurance, and it seems as if -- to me at least, the way I read Hebrews, is this is his last-ditch effort to preserve some of the saints there that he is writing to.

I think you have to remember that when you come to Hebrews because how we operate in crisis mode is going to be different from how we operate on a normal level. You're going to say things extremely that are true, but you have an intention and purpose behind kind of these audacious statements that you're making. One of the things that I told our church recently when we went through this is that within the book of Hebrews you have, on one hand, some of the most comforting words of grace you will ever find in all of scripture in Hebrews. Okay? And you go to these passages and, man, if you want to feel secure in your salvation, if you want to feel just that blessed assurance that we sometimes sing about, then you go to these passages. On the other hand, and at the same time, you also have some of the most shocking words of judgment in all of scripture found within Hebrews, and they're in the same book. And that contrast, to me, sets the entire framework for this book, for this letter -- or some believe it actually could have been a sermon that was even recorded, which I don't think is beyond possible. It's considered a word of exhortation there at the end of Hebrews 13.

So that, I think, sets the context for it, and the Hebrews major concern within chapter 5 and chapter 6 is that instead of progressing, instead of maturing, instead of growing -- as apparently he's known this church for quite some time and has had a relationship, at least it seems to me, because

he mentions some personal names within this; he seems to know the background of whoever he's talking to -- these Christians he's talking to, and he knows that -- where they were and where they should be at this point within their walk with the Lord, and he is deeply alarmed with their present spiritual status, and you see that at the end of chapter 5, starting in verse 12. He says, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil." Then he jumps in verse 1, "Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works" -- that's key to understanding this passage -- "and of faith towards God."

So he's deeply concerned with the fact that they are way behind on their spiritual growth, and there's going to be some consequences to that if they don't wake up to that reality. In fact, later on, a little bit past verse 6 in Hebrews 6, he uses this analogy, this metaphor, where he says, "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." So notice there he's using this language of maturity, of growth that should be expected, and it's very, very similar to the same language that Jesus used, that the prophets used of Israel when it would talk about Israel being God's vine and coming to it and expecting production and

expecting fruit, but not finding it, right? Not finding these things that he would expect, the type of character that they are to be, the type of works that they are to be producing by his grace. And so it's -- in fact, he even says in verse 12 of chapter 6, "so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

So he's concerned about a sluggish faith that is not maturing the way that it should. Now, he's hopeful. Here again is the contrast here. Words of dire warning -- okay? But he says in verse 9, "Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things, things that belong to salvation." Okay. So notice there's that contrast again. These words of dire warning, crisis, right? You're talking to maybe a child that you're worried if they make this decision, they're not going to come back from this, so you say -- but then you want to give them hope, right? "But I know you and I know you're going to do the right thing." And so I think that's kind of the greater context for this passage that we need to understand. And maybe you have some thoughts on that. I feel like I've been talking for a while, so...

WES: No, no, that's really good. I think you've set this up really well, Brother. I love the way that you've painted the picture for us, that this is crisis mode. And I love the metaphor or the idea that when you speak to somebody in the middle of a crisis, somebody that you're trying to save their life -- you mentioned a small child. Or another image that came to my mind is somebody that is on a ledge and about to take their own life. You have somebody that is in a situation where they are about to do something that is going to have such horrible consequences, that if they take this next step and they do this next thing that they are right on the precipice of doing, then the

consequences are going to be dire. And recognizing that, you want to speak to them urgently, you want to speak to them dramatically; but at the same time, like you said, you also want to speak words of comfort and hope. You don't want to just yell and scream at them and help them realize the danger of what they're doing; you also want to coax them back towards the love and the embrace and the relationship.

And so I think that you're exactly right that you have a group of people that, at least some of them, are right on the edge of doing something, going back to a lifestyle that is away from Jesus, and so this writer is in crisis mode. And I think that's a really good way to put it, to frame it, so that we understand why things are painted in such stark contrast and why the words of warning are so dire, but also the words of hope are so rich, and I think that that's really important to point out.

And we've sort of broken these conversations down into observation, interpretation, and application, and as someone does -- you mentioned the whole book of Hebrews, and I always encourage -- that's sort of my soapbox is encouraging people to read whole books. And as you sit down and you read the whole book of Hebrews, pay attention to those things that Jacob painted and drew out for us, these words of warning, like "Don't do this. This is going to result in you losing your life," but also the words of hope and encouragement that he lays out there for us. And I think that that is something you notice as you go throughout the whole book.

JACOB: Yeah, and even from the very beginning you see his concern about that, right? In Hebrews 2, "Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message

declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?" So that's also, you know, the contrast, as well, is not just judgment and mercy, but also the response of the person who's hearing it and receiving it. You're either neglecting it or you're receiving it, and that type of kind of contrast and conflict, kind of these either/or situations -- very similar to Jesus, right? "You're either with me or you're against me." There's no middle ground here. And I think that he's also trying to warn them against taking kind of a middle-ground position, right? Jesus isn't someone that you can take a middle-ground position on. You're either for him or you're against him. You're either accepting him or you're neglecting him.

And I think that he speaks in these -- and 1 John is very similar, actually, to Hebrews in that. I'm preaching through 1 John right now, and John talks in these very stark, distinctive categories. And in a very similar fashion, he's concerned about a particular situation with false teachers in that area. And the reason he does that, though, is because he wants you to see those statements and for you to then self-reflect and say, "Okay. What side am I really on?" You know, really do some self-evaluation. "Where am I actually?" And "Where am I really?" And looking at the fruit of your life and saying, "What am I producing?" You know, "What's going on in my life?"

And those type of statements really cause you to reflect on that. I mean, you get to some of these statements of judgment in Hebrews, and if they don't scare you, they don't make you tremble, I don't know what will,

you know, because the Hebrews writer obviously believed -- and we'll get into this, I think, in a little bit. He believed that Christians could fall away from the Lord. I mean, there's just -- that's the whole reason that it's written. He's not talking to unbelievers. In fact, those who hold to that position have a very difficult time with some of these scriptures in Hebrews, and -- but at the same time, he also wants them to feel absolutely secure in their salvation. I mean, you get to Hebrews 10 and, I mean, that's all about security, that's all about assurance. And that's -- but his point is that type of assurance and that type of security is only found in Jesus, and if you decide to go away from him, you're not going to find that security. You're not going to find that assurance, and I don't want you thinking that that type of assurance is somewhere else, because it isn't.

WES: Well, and to that point, as we kind of get -- as we observe not just the whole book, or even the immediate context, but even as we look at the passage itself, that contrast even within these three verses, 4, 5, and 6, you see that contrast there between you're either -- and I love some of the ways that he describes salvation: "being enlightened," "having tasted the heavenly gift," "shared in the Holy Spirit," "tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come." Like, I love -- and knowing that you and I share a love for eschatology and a love for the idea of the age to come, that, in Christ, as Christians, we have already begun to taste the powers of the age to come -- again, that sentence right there, I don't know that there's a more beautiful description of what it means to be a Christian.

JACOB: Yes.

WES: This is what it is to be a Christian, is to be enlightened, is to taste the

heavenly gift, share in the Holy Spirit, taste the goodness of the word of God and taste the powers of the age to come. That's what it is to be a Christian. But then that's offset and contrasted with crucifying again the son of God. I mean, it's one or the other. And to your point that this whole book is a book of stark contrast, there it is. You're either tasting the heavenly gift or you're crucifying again. As someone who has come to see Jesus for who he is and come to be a Christian and a follower of Jesus, now these are your two options. Your two options are to go on enjoying these blessings or to crucify again the son of God to your own harm and hold him up to contempt. Those are your options.

What else would you say to notice in these verses here?

JACOB: Well, I think, first off, we don't need to -- and this is one thing that I think we have to be very careful of. Listen, I'm the kind of guy -- you know, I don't like to intentionally unsettle people with scripture. You know, I like to kind of jump to the comfort part and to the reward part, right? But, again, there's a reason these things are written, and if we jump over the shock value of some of these statements, we're not going to get the message. And one of the major messages here is, "Listen, Christian, if you're not careful, if you don't continue to progress in your faith and grow closer to Christ, if you kind of -- just kind of allow this sluggishness to take over, here's the scary thought. You can get to the point where you will not repent, where you will not return to God," and that is a terrifying thought. That is a scary thought.

Now, I don't think -- well, first off, he obviously is talking to Christians. Those things that you were mentioning just a moment ago --

enlightened, sharing in the Holy Spirit -- these are individuals who have come to know the goodness of God and they have believed and confessed who Jesus is, what his atoning work has done, the cross and his resurrection. So that's his crowd that he's talking to, but we have to understand -- and I guess we can kind of transition maybe a little bit into some of the more details of this.

WES: Yeah.

JACOB: He's not saying that God doesn't want us to repent, or even if we wanted to repent, that we can't repent. And that's why I say we have to be careful about how we interpret this because third and fourth, fifth century church and Christianity had a very dangerous view about sin after baptism. So, for example, the Emperor Constantine, a very, you know, interesting historical figure, and people believed that Constantine wasn't genuinely converted to Christianity or didn't genuinely believe Christianity because he wasn't baptized until on his deathbed. He was baptized a week before he died. And so people look to that and say, "Well, listen, look, he obviously didn't really believe; otherwise, he would have been baptized." Well, the only problem with that is that's what most people did during that day and time, and the reason that they did that is because they believed that if they sinned after they were baptized that they could not be forgiven, and so they would wait till the very last moment, you know, and be baptized so that they didn't have any -- you know, the chance and the time period for them to sin was shortened.

And, now, whenever we look at that -- and we contrast that, for example, with the book of Acts where we see people come to faith and

immediately being baptized, we say, okay, well, obviously, this -- at least this is the way I think about it. Obviously, the way they interpreted this passage is wrong because it's in complete contrast to what we see here in the book of Acts where they're immediately being baptized, and many of them are young. You know, some of them are younger, or at least it would appear to be, so that interpretation is not correct, you know. But when you first come to this -- and, again, "you cannot restore them again to repentance," that seems like he's saying, "Listen, if you do this, okay then, you can't repent."

But we see other passages, for example, Galatians 6:1-2, where Paul talks about if a brother is overtaken in a fault, "you who are spiritual, restore such a one." It's the same word, same language, and that word for "overtaken" there is someone who has been ambushed, someone who has been taken over completely. So it's not just talking about someone who's occasionally sinning and messed up. It's someone who has been overcome with sin once again. And he says, "Well, that person is still able to be restored." So when I come to this passage, I know he's not talking about even someone who's been overcome with sin or even fallen away from the church, you know, maybe has stopped coming to worship and isn't as engaged as they used to be. So we know that it doesn't mean that we cannot be restored if we sin. And we also know that it's not meaning that if I sin after I'm baptized, well, then I can't repent. He's not talking about that, either, and we just talked about that in 1 John 1. Go ahead.

WES: Yeah, I think that's a good place to sort of just kind of recap where we are because I think that there are sort of maybe two extreme

interpretations, as you're kind of putting it for us. Like on the one hand, there are those who almost interpret this passage as -- maybe they interpret it as rhetoric, and they just interpret it as being exaggeration or hyperbole and that the Hebrews writer doesn't really mean what he's saying because they take the rest of scripture to mean that if you're really saved in the first place -- if you're really saved, then you can't fall away.

JACOB: Right.

WES: That's the doctrine in Calvinism known as perseverance of the saints. We often call it "once saved, always saved." And so there are those who take this to mean -- or take the totality of scripture to mean that really saved people, people that are actually saved, cannot fall away. But, again, as you pointed out, it's hard for -- there's no way for us to fit what he says in verse 4 about having tasted and been enlightened and shared in the Holy Spirit, having experienced salvation -- that's the whole context. And as you said, throughout the whole book of Hebrews, he's talking to saved people. He's talking to people that have and are experiencing the benefits and blessings of salvation. So the idea that lost people, or people that become apostate, were never really Christians to begin with, it flies in the face of what he says here. So that is extreme interpretation. I agree it has to be rejected.

And then the other side, it might be more like, as you were pointing out, the people in the third and fourth century that waited until the end of their life to be baptized almost interpret this in a way that if one side is once saved, always saved, the other side is once saved, barely saved, and the idea that "I don't want to mess up because if I do anything wrong, I won't be able to be forgiven or I might not be able to be -- to come back," and that, I think,

also flies in the face not only of some of the other passages you pointed out, but also the whole book of Hebrews because the comforting parts of Hebrews are the fact that Jesus is our high priest and is presently interceding on our behalf. That would be unnecessary. All we would need Jesus to be would be to be the sacrificial lamb. We wouldn't need him to be an ongoing high priest unless it's possible for Jesus to continue to intercede on our behalf and continue to wash our sins away and purify us and cleanse us.

And so I totally agree; I think that both of those extremes have to be rejected. But we also have to recognize, as you said, the shock value of exactly what he is saying, that it is possible to go down this path and for people to be unable to come back. So what do you think he has in mind there as far as -- what does that mean, that it's impossible to restore this kind of person to repentance?

JACOB: Well, you know, first off, I've thought about this passage before, and I've thought this: You know, if you're the kind of person that has never considered the fact that you might could fall away and not come back to God, if you've never been once worried about your salvation, then this scripture should probably concern you. On the other hand, if you are worried about this passage, and it concerns you and it bothers you and it's kept you up at night, then you probably don't need to be concerned about this passage. And so he does talk about falling away, right? He says they then fall away, which again gives credence to the fact that these are Christians. What are they falling away from at all? They're falling away from something, and they're falling away from all of the things that he previously mentioned. So they are fallen away, but fallen away to what?

Well, if you connect what he says there at the end of verse 6, "...they have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance," well, he mentioned repentance once again -- or, previously, rather, in verse 1, "not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God." So he mentions it in verse 1; he mentions it again in verse 6, this idea of repentance and being restored to repentance.

Now, it depends on what you mean by repentance. Repentance, sometimes the way we think of it, you know, and the way that I was almost kind of taught to think about it, is like a one-time decision, right? You know, hear, believe, repent, confess, be baptized. But the issue is that is not how the scripture talks about repentance. Now, repentance does come at a moment where you see the grace of God and decide to turn to him, but it is a lifestyle, right? It's a lifestyle of transformation, of sanctification, of change, of returning again and again to God, turning again to God throughout the rest of your life and coming to his mercy and to his grace and to his throne.

So you have someone who he says they know the doctrine, they know what the Bible teaches, or -- well, they know what the Lord taught at this point, right? They know what the teaching is on repentance and on turning back to God. If they have then -- so here's the condition. If they have fallen away -- and what does "fallen away" mean? "...since they are" -- that's the present tense -- "they are crucifying once again the son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt." So you have two things that are going on there. They're recrucifying Christ and they're holding him up to contempt. Now, that's very interesting language because, essentially, what he is saying there is -- that idea of "contempt" is that instead of looking to

Christ for salvation, instead of looking to Christ in glory and in honor and in awe, they're now looking upon him with contempt, and that is language that is very closely associated with crucifixion: "contempt" and "shame."

And so what I tend to think he's saying is that they no longer believe that Christ is the saving sacrifice for sin. They are essentially saying that Christ, in his crucifixion, deserved it. He deserved what he got. They don't view him with awe anymore. They view him with the contempt of crucifixion. Whenever you look at that type of language, 1 Corinthians 1, for example, where he talks about the cross being a stumbling block for the Jews and for the Greeks, he talks about individuals who cannot get over the audaciousness and the offense -- what he refers to there as the offense of the cross. Okay. Well, why was it offensive? Well, because you're saying that this criminal is the savior of the world. That's contemptible to say such a thing.

So the Hebrews writer is talking about a crowd of individuals who are crucifying the son of God again, not as a means of atonement -- so initially when they trusted in Christ, they trusted in his death as an atoning work and they viewed it as the glory of God. But now they have turned back to their old faith, whether it was Judaism or paganism, and now they're viewing the crucifixion of Christ completely different than they did before. Now they say, "You know what? He deserved what he got, and it's not really what you said it was," and that's why -- that's why I believe this scripture has to be tied into the previous discussion about maturity and about basic principles.

Why does he tie that? Because you notice the beginning of verse 4 starts with the word "For." Okay? That is key to interpreting this, in my

opinion. Because what he's about to say is, "What I'm saying is connected to what I've previously said." Well, what did he previously say? He said, "Listen, we need to leave these basic elementary doctrines and go on to maturity. For" -- then he starts talking about this crowd that you can't restore to repentance. Well, what's the connection there? I think what he's saying is there might have been some Christians who were going to this other group of Christians who had forsaken the church, forsaken Christ, had turned back to the world, no longer viewed his sacrifice as atoning, no longer viewed him as the son of God. They were holding him in contempt.

And they're going to them with these kind of basic elementary teachings trying to convince them to return to Christ and return to the church, and the Hebrews writer is like, "That's not going to do any good. They already know that stuff. You're not telling them anything they don't know. They've already tasted that. They've already shared in the goodness of it. You can't restore them back to this place of where they're going to start walking because they've forsaken that and they know all of it. So don't come to them and present these things that are just basic elementary things when that's not going to prick their conscience. That's not going to prick their heart. That's not going to restore them back to where they need to be. They've already tasted it. They already know everything you're talking about. They've already experienced it, and they have intentionally and willfully said, 'I don't want it. I don't want it.'"

And his point is this: How do you think they got there in the first place? They did not take their salvation seriously enough, they grew sluggish, and they turned again to the world. And his point is, if you are not

careful, you will arrive at the same exact place, this place where you no longer want to repent. You no longer -- and we see that within characters within scripture, right? We see it within Pharaoh. We see it within even the people during Jeremiah's day, where they claim they want to repent but they don't genuinely want to repent. They don't genuinely want to change.

And what's crazy is that even in those instances when God is pronouncing -- read through the book of Jeremiah. God is pronouncing these incredible statements of judgment. Absolute certainty. There's no way they're not going to come into judgment. And then what do you have almost immediately after that? God pleading with them to change. God pleading with them to turn, right? This is not the Hebrews writer saying, "Listen, if you mess up one time as a Christian, that's it. God doesn't want you back. He doesn't want you to change. He doesn't want you to return." That is completely antithetical to everything else we read about God in scripture. God is constantly, even at the very end, calling for people to repent, calling for people to change. He's the Saviour that forgives the thief that was mocking him just an hour before and allowing him to come into the kingdom. That is who God is.

And so what that tells me about what I know of God when I come to the scripture is that this isn't God that's not wanting them to come back; this is these individuals who don't want anything to do with Jesus anymore. And you have Christians that are coming to them, trying to convince them to -- "Hey, guys, remember this? Remember this?" And the Hebrews writer is like, "Don't waste your time. That's not going to do them any good because they hate Christ and they're not going to come back anymore."

And anybody that's listening to this podcast can get to that point in their life if they aren't careful, and that is the Hebrews writer's warning, which is still shocking. It might not be maybe the initial interpretation that you think it is, but that's still a warning that we need to take seriously. And I'm sure that you -- I know that I have -- ministered to people that you're talking to them, they've fallen away, and you know as you're talking to them that nothing that you say is going to break in. Nothing is going to convince them to turn back because they already -- they've already tasted it, and they're saying, "I don't want any of it anymore," and it's sad.

WES: It is. It's incredibly heartbreaking, and I think there's a couple things to point out about what you're saying here. One is that I think that we tend to read verse 6 and we tend to insert the wrong word. And I think you pointed out really well about that it says "repentance"; it doesn't say "salvation." It says that when they've "fallen away, to restore them again to repentance," and what we tend to insert there, for some reason, is "salvation." What he doesn't say is --

JACOB: Good point.

WES: -- if they've fallen away, they can't be restored to salvation. He says they can't be restored to repentance. And just like you said, it isn't that God doesn't want them back; it's that they don't want to come back. Sometimes people can go so far away from Jesus that they actually have contempt for him. They hate him. They despise the cross, and they are essentially part of the crowd that's yelling, "Crucify him," and yet they're doing it all over again. And instead of adoring what Jesus did for them at the cross, they are, as you said, saying, "You deserve this." They hate Jesus, and if they are the

kind of people that have already tasted salvation and then have gotten to this point where they hate and have contempt for Jesus, then you can't make them want Jesus again. What are you going to say to them?

It's like -- I've often compared it -- and I think the writer himself does this, comparing it with food. When you've already tasted how good something is and then you've rejected that for something that's less than that, what am I going to say to you? If you've already had this amazing food, then how am I going to say, "Oh, Jacob, you would love this. You've got to try it," because you've already tried it. You already know what it tastes like, and yet you've rejected it. But for somebody who -- they've eaten nothing but trash their entire life, if I offer to them this delicious food, this is something new and it very well might attract them, and they say, "Wow, I've never tried this before," and they come to eat that. But if you've rejected the good food for the trash, well, then what am I going to say to you that's going to bring you to the point where you want the good food again? Probably there's nothing I can say to you because you've already tried it.

And another thing that I think you pointed out really well is that he's talking about people that have come to reject and despise Jesus. I think so often -- there's even a song that we sing that bothers me. I don't know how you feel about it, but we sing a song that says, "Does he still feel the nails every time I fail?" And we put this thought in people's head that every time they sin, even the smallest mistakes that we make, we are recrucifying Jesus. I think there's several problems with that.

JACOB: That's not what he's saying.

WES: That's exactly right; it's not what he's saying. And I think,

theologically, even within the book of Hebrews, one of the major points is Jesus has been crucified once. His sacrifice is so much better than any other sacrifice that he only has to do it once. He's not being sacrificed over and over and over again. So we do not -- if we're Christians faithful to Jesus, we're not re-crucifying Jesus every time we make a mistake. That's not what he's saying. He's saying that if you reject Jesus, it is as if you are part of the crowd that crucified him. You are putting him to shame again. And if you get to that point, there is no restoration to repentance if you become so hardhearted.

And I think, as you said, that warning to these Christians to make sure you don't get to that point has to be taken seriously by everybody who wants to follow Jesus. And I think that's why, as preachers -- we could just talk about that for a second. As preachers who believe that good theology -- he laments the fact that even with this group of people to whom he's writing, he can't even really get to the deep stuff that he needs to get to with them, and wants to get to with them, because they're not ready for that. But they need that deep stuff in order to prevent them from becoming apostate themselves, and how good theology is the best inoculation against apostasy. But so often we don't want that and we want to stay just at the shallow end of the pool. But it's when we stay at the shallow end of the pool and we don't understand the gravity, the beauty of the cross of Jesus Christ, that we leave ourselves open to apostasy and false teachers who will lead us astray.

JACOB: I know both of our sons are in baseball, right? And kind of using that metaphor, if you're constantly staying with the basics, number one, you're never going to enjoy baseball. You know, I mean, baseball, at its

most basic level, fundamentals, it's important, but it can get old quick if you're constantly going over the fundamentals, so you're probably going to stop playing the sport, right, because you don't enjoy it. Number two, you never grow and mature to actually enjoy the freedom of being disciplined within the sport.

And so that's the state that they are in danger of, and the Hebrews writer will later say in Hebrews 10:26, "If we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins." Well, why does he bring that up? Well, because they have forsaken their sacrifice, right? They're holding the true sacrifice up to contempt, is what he's already said, and if you're holding up that sacrifice to contempt, there's -- God's not sending another. I mean, if you're thinking that -- and I do think that's why there is some background here and some returning to Judaism and kind of awaiting another messiah. I think that is some of the background here, to where it's like, "Listen, if you're going to go back into Judaism and live that way, and you're waiting for the fulfillment of the messiah and his -- the taking away of sin, that's not going to happen. It's already come. It's already here. It's already been done."

And you still have, sadly, you know, individuals who are waiting for the messiah and kind of, you know, in a variety of different ways, just kind of living the way that they want to live. And, you know, there's some scriptures here that should make Christians tremble and at least step back and say, "You know what? I do need to make sure that I'm taking my salvation seriously. I really need to consider this because life is more than just being comfortable and life is more than just pursuing the next pleasure.

There are bigger things going on here."

And I think that, you know, we do need to -- and so -- okay. For example -- I mentioned this earlier -- we have Christians who fall away and then they come back. I mean, some of the most faithful Christians I know are Christians who fell away and then came back to the Lord. I'm sure that's the same with you. But I think the difference is, in those situations, their contempt -- if you want to call it that -- was not for Christ, but for themselves. And so they never once, you know, denied or rejected the sufficiency of Christ. In fact, you talk to some of them when they're in their fallen state and they will confess to you they know what's right and they know that Jesus is Lord, and they just can't bring themselves, at that point, to return to him. And maybe it's a self-loathing; maybe it's a sin they're caught up in, but it's not a contempt for Christ, right? And when they do return to Christ, they're even more thankful. So they can be restored.

I mean, you have to put Galatians 6:1-2 in contrast to Hebrews 6 because that helps us to see that, you know what -- because the last thing we want to do as a church is look at Christians who have fallen away and say, "Well, Hebrews 6 says there's no point in even talking to them," right? There are some that you're going to go to them, and they don't care and they hate Christ. I mean, you've talked to some of them; I've talked to some of them, and, sadly, you're not going to say anything. But there are others that you're going to go to and they just need someone to help them to see how much God still loves them and how his arms are still open. I mean, what's the whole point of the story of the prodigal son, right? That God is there with open arms. He's waiting to receive. And that's something that we have

to keep in mind as the church. We can't forsake these people that have fallen away, just assuming, "Well, they're never going to come back." That's not the point of the Hebrews writer here. He wants people to come to faith.

WES: That's exactly right, and I think his point is, "Don't go down that path." He's using this reality and this possibility that this could be your future. If you don't shore up your knowledge and shore up your faith and keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith -- if you don't fix your eyes on him, you're going to end up like this, and there won't be any coming back for you once you become so hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Like just because that's a reality for some, doesn't mean -- it doesn't mean that it's a waste of time to try to reach people or that there is no coming back for anyone. If somebody comes back after having fallen away, then all that proves is that thankfully wasn't the case for that person, but it doesn't negate the reality that that is the case for some people.

So I think that, you know, as far as application goes, I think sometimes we fall into this trap, you know, as teenagers, maybe, when our parents warn us not to do stupid things, like, "Hey, don't do this." "Don't drive this way," "Don't do these things," and they paint a picture for us that's very stark. And they say, "Listen, if you do this, this could be the results and the consequences." Well, in our immaturity, sometimes all we want to do is give an example of, "Well, it didn't happen to Billy and it didn't happen to Bobby, and Joe drives like this all the time and it doesn't happen to him." Well, just because these people thankfully escaped the very worst consequences that could have been their reality doesn't negate the very real truth that this can happen, and the warning is there for a reason, because if

you don't heed the warning, you very well might end up like that.

So I think that, to your original point, that if you're worried, "I wonder if this is true of me," "I hope this isn't true of me" -- if you hope this isn't true of you, then chances are it's not true of you. You know, if you are repentant, then it is not true of you. This is only true of people who lack the desire to repent. But we all need to heed the warning that it's possible to get to the point where, "I don't even want to repent because I don't believe or want what Jesus has to give me."

JACOB: I remember a story I heard once of a guy who was in ministry -- and I think he was in a college ministry -- and he had a young man come to him just in tears because he was really struggling with his battle with porn. And he was like, "Man, I don't think I can be saved. I don't think God can forgive me." And he was a Christian, and so the guy took him out -- there's a public basketball court outside of the office, and he took him over there, put his arm around him, and he said, "You see all those guys out there?" And he said, "Yeah." He said, "Why do you think it is that not a single one of them is concerned about the fact that they struggle with lust and porn, and yet you are here in my office in tears because of your state and because you've hurt the Lord? What do you think the difference is? The difference is you're saved and they're not, and God's working in you and he's convicting your heart and he's going to root this out of your life. Don't fall back into sin just because you think you're a lost cause."

And I think that that is the danger that some people -- because, listen, if that interpretation is true, that once you sin as a Christian you can't come back from that, or even if you have struggled with sin as a Christian, you

can't come back from that, God's not going to forgive you, then what's the point of coming back? Like there's no point in coming back. Why even try? Just live how you want to live because you're lost anyways. There's no hope. God's not giving you a second chance. And so how we interpret this passage is very important.

And this passage -- I think 1 John 1:7-9 is another greatly misunderstood passage about walking in the light. And you have Christians out there that never feel secure, never feel right in their relationship with God. They come to passages like this and it kind of secures it in their mind, like, "See, I should be afraid." And it's like, "Well, listen, you know, maybe there should be some trembling in your life if you're not living the way that you should, but at the same time, realize he's talking about these extreme categories over here, that you can be if you're not careful. But the fact that you're even reading this scripture and worried about it shows me that you don't have that type of heart because you're wanting that, and know that God loves you and that Christ is working on your behalf."

You know, I heard one preacher say -- he said, "You know, I think some people are convinced that God could save them from being a sinner to being a saint, but now that they're a saint, he's not nearly as concerned with saving them. He was powerful enough to save them from being a sinner to a saint, but now that they're actually a saint, well, you know, now he can't really save them." But Paul says in Romans 5, around verses 10 and 11, that if he justified us -- if he was able to justify us by his death, how much more so now that he is justifying us by his life, right? And so that is the comfort and the security. You know, we tremble, absolutely. The Hebrews writer

does not want you taking your salvation casually. This is how I put it when I taught Hebrews: God wants you to be confident in your salvation. He wants that for you. God wants you to be confident in your salvation, but he does not want you to treat your salvation casually, and I think that that is the message the Hebrews writer is getting across. Be confident in what Christ has given you, but don't act and don't assume that you cannot fall away, and that once you've fallen away, that you can come back, because you might not want to come back, and that's a scary thought.

WES: Yeah. I think that's a perfect place to end, Jacob. Thank you for helping us to see the warnings of Hebrews, but also the confidence that the gospel that we see in Hebrews gives us. So thank you, Brother. I appreciate it so much.

JACOB: Thanks for having me, Wes.

Thank you so much for being part of the Radically Christian Bible Study Podcast today. We hope that you've enjoyed this episode. I want to give a special thanks to Travis Pauley and to our McDermott Road church family for making this podcast possible. As always, we love you, God loves you, and we hope that you have a wonderful day.