

(Hebrews - Part 16): All Kinds of Twisting and Turning

by A.W. Tozer

The sermon discusses the possibility of falling away from Christianity and the impossibility of renewing someone to repentance if they have gone too far in apostasy.

Duration: 37:13

Scripture: Hebrews 6:1, Hebrews 6:4

Topics: "Expositional"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher uses a story about a man hiring a coach driver to illustrate the importance of being close to God without falling into sin. He emphasizes that simply hearing the word of God or belonging to a church is not enough, but rather, one must have a personal relationship with God. The preacher references John Bunyan, a Calvinist, to highlight the idea that there is a way to hell even from the gate of heaven. He concludes by urging the listeners to seek wisdom and admonishment in order to avoid perishing.

Transcript

We're in the sixth chapter of the book of Hebrews. Hebrews, the sixth chapter. We read verse one and on.

Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptism, laying on of hands and resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. And this will we do if God permits. Now, we dealt with that last week.

Now, for it is impossible for those who have been, or who were, once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again on repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God. But that which beareth thorns and briars is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned.

But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak." The writer hadn't put verse 9 in there, that was too much for a lot of us, because we could have driven home our position with a lot more finality. But he put that one in, and we got to deal with it. But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.

Now, we run head on here into a controverted and controversial passage. This passage seems to teach the possibility that it's possible, that possibility that some can believe and fall away and finally be lost, inasmuch as they can never be restored unto repentance. And, of course, it's powerful ammunition for all those who like to teach this.

If somebody would ask me, Mr. Tozer, what are you, a Calvinist or an Arminian? I would have to say about myself what I heard said about a famous English preacher, now still active. I said, he's a Calvinist, isn't he? And a brother smiled good humoredly and said, well, he's an equivocating Calvinist. And I think probably that that would describe me and describe most of the land people, we're equivocating Calvinists.

We won't go as far as the Calvinists do by any means, but we don't like this kind of Christianity. It gets converted today, backslides tomorrow and gets re-converted the next day. The young woman said, saved, oh, I've been saved three times.

Well, we don't quite like that, and yet we don't want to come out and say, as some people do, I'm converted and I couldn't go to hell if I wanted to. I'd be a little afraid of that myself. In fact, I don't think anybody that said that ever was converted.

Now, those who believe that you can be born again and then finally sin and be lost take certain passages, but this passage here in Hebrews 6, the other side, they deny this and explain it and interpret it. Somebody said that he had one time gone by a little factory, a woodworking factory, where they make clothespins and chair legs and all sorts of things with wood. And on the sign out in front said, All kinds of twisting and turning done here.

And when I read books by some of the brethren who are trying to dodge out of this 6th chapter of Hebrews, it's impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and were made partakers and have tasted of the heavenly gift and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again in repentance. And I have read a lot on this, and the only sign that I could put over the book would be, All kinds of twisting and turning done here. But now, I don't want to come out on either side, because I told you I was an equivocating Arminian, but here are the actual words that are spoken by the man who wrote this book, the actual words, and you see what you think about it.

Now, he said, It is impossible for those who were once enlightened and later fall away to be renewed unto repentance. Now, there are those who say, Once enlightened means merely had light. That's all, merely had light.

They weren't born again, they merely had light. Now, that's what you will find, but I'm not a Greek shark, but I like occasionally to turn to the Greek, not to burden my audiences, but to learn myself a little. And I find the same word is found in Ephesians 1, where Paul prays that the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling and the riches of his glory, and of his inheritance in the saints and the exceeding greatness of his power.

Now, Paul was praying for an advanced spiritual state for these Ephesians Christians. They were already Christians and already saints, and he prays for them that they might go on to a place where their understanding being enlightened, and that's exactly the same word as the Holy Spirit uses when he says it was impossible for those who were once enlightened. If that means merely had information about the gospel but never were converted, then what did Paul mean when he used the same word to pray an advanced prayer for people whom he called saints and said they were already chosen of God and so on? Then, the next thing it says, tasted of the heavenly gift and of the good word of God and the power of the world to come.

Now, that word tasted there has given some of our twisters and turners a lot of ammunition. Why? It says they are merely tasters. They never actually had the heavenly gift, they never had the good word of God, they never had the powers of the world to come, they merely licked at it to see if they liked it and decide they didn't.

They merely tasted. But the same exact word is used in Hebrew 2.9 where it says, Christ tasted death for every man. Now, you just think about it, I'm not trying to influence you, I hope, I'm just trying to explain that tasted the heavenly gift and tasted the good word of God and the power of the world to come, if that means merely nibbled at it but never actually swallowed it, then the same thing is said about Jesus when he died on the cross.

He tasted death for every man. Does that mean that he merely tasted it and nibbled at it? No, the word taste means experienced here. He experienced death for every man.

And that's what the same word means in this chapter where it says the man who has experienced the heavenly gift and experienced the good word of God and experienced the power of the world to come. And then it says, made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and they tell us that partaker means merely to go along with. Kind of a foul traveler, but not really actually anything real.

The heavenly gift and the Holy Ghost here merely went along with him, but they never really had him. But I notice the same word elsewhere used means to be a participant in, to take part in, and to accept and to eat and receive. So I think this word here means experienced too, that they received and had and experienced the Holy Ghost.

Now it says in our text here that it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, that is, who had what Paul prayed that the Ephesians might have, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, that is, experienced the heavenly gift, and were made partakers, that is, to take part in the Holy Ghost, and have experienced the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away to renew them again under repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God fresh and put him to an open shame. Evidently there is somebody here that you can't renew and I can't renew. It's impossible for us to renew him to repentance when this has happened.

Now, the difficulty in this passage lies in two phrases. One phrase is, fall away, and the other is, renew to repentance. Just what do we mean by fall away? Just how far does it indicate that a man goes? How far does he go in his iniquity when it's called fall away? It doesn't mean backslide, because look at Peter.

He backslid, and Peter after his backsliding was forgiven and became the great apostle to the circumcised. It can't mean just backslide, because Mark backslid and went back, and later we find Mark was restored and served the Lord until the time of his death. It can't mean just backslide, because the man

in the 5th chapter of Corinth, who had married his stepmother and was living in incest with his stepmother and was condemned by Paul, repented with great sorrow and tears, and the result was Paul forgave him, the Corinthian church forgave him, and they restored him again to fellowship in the church after he had quit his incestuous relationship.

It can't mean merely backsliding, because 1 John 2 says, My little children, I write these things unto you, that ye sin not. But if any man sin, he has an advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world. And in the 1st chapter, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

So it means something other than backsliding. Now, I want to give you a little rule here, and I'm sure that this rule will hold throughout the whole Church of God around the world for all time. If you worry about having committed the unpardonable sin, you haven't.

If you have, you don't worry. The person who has gone so far in apostasy that there is no help for him never worries about it. Remember in Matthew 12 and Mark 3, the Pharisees gave vent to certain words which Christ branded as evidence of the unpardonable sin.

And yet these Pharisees weren't the slightest bit worried about it. They believed themselves to be righteous, there was no penitence in them, no compunction, no sorrow, no repentance, no humility, no meekness. They were bold believers in their own righteousness.

And Jesus said that they had committed the unpardonable sin in that they had attributed the work of the Spirit to the devil. So if they had feared that they had committed it, they would have been humble and lowly and meek and frightened, and they would have come like the jailer, shaking and trembling and saying, Lord, what shall I do to be saved? But they had no thought of it at all. The people walking around the city of Toronto who committed the unpardonable sin would be the last ones who think they have committed it, because they don't think they have.

They live in a way that you wouldn't think they had, and I, we wouldn't have dreamed that they had, because they are righteous, self-righteous, self-assured people who are religious and sure of themselves and cocky and absolutely a million miles from ever believing that they might be guilty of the unpardonable sin. So if you are worrying about having committed it, you haven't. The very fact that you are worrying indicates that the Spirit of God is moving in your heart, and the Spirit of God does not move in the heart of the man who has committed the sin unto death.

I don't even know that this is the sin unto death. I am merely using this, but I don't even know that he is talking about the unpardonable sin here. But I say that if we knew what fall away meant, fall away must mean something that goes so far that the man doesn't care about it and isn't worried about it and has no further feeling concerning it and shrugs it off as a foolish thing, this believing in Christ that he once did, a foolish thing, and that's all.

I knew a Jewish girl one time, rode in a car with her, a whole car full of people, on to a young people's rally, and she happened to be alone. I don't know what she'd be doing going to the rally, but she was. She was a Jewish young woman, and as we rode along, they told about how she had given her heart to the Lord Jesus and accepted him as her Messiah, and then later she had been persecuted so by the Jews, her relatives, that she had repudiated Christ.

And we asked her about it, and she angrily said to us there, I felt chilled to hear it, she angrily said, it wasn't worth it, it wasn't worth it, taking Christ as my Messiah, it wasn't worth what I had to put up with. She said, they literally tore the dress off of me in their anger, tearing at me, and she said, of course I repudiated Christ. I haven't followed that girl up, I don't know, but in my deep heart of heart I believe that if she truly and really ever knew Christ at all, that angry outburst wasn't the end.

I think God had something further for her. Peter, you remember, also one time said, I know not the man, and cursed and swore, but later on he did repent, and I hope that she has. So that's fall away that I've talked about.

Now, renew them to repentance. What does that mean? It's impossible to renew them to repentance, but it doesn't say that it's impossible that they should ever be renewed unto repentance. And I have a passage over here that I like to go to.

You may consider this a little bit of twisting and turning, and possibly it is. But it's a passage that I want to turn to here and read. For I verily am as absent in body, but present in spirit, says Paul, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath done this deed.

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we are gathered together, and my spirit with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ to deliver such a one unto Satan, for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, this man who was living in incestuous marriage with his deceased father's wife, not his own mother, but his deceased father's wife, this man couldn't be brought by the Church to repentance. He denied there was anything wrong with it.

Paul said, I will turn him over to Satan, for the destruction of his flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. And in the 11th chapter of Hebrews, talking about the Lord's Supper, Paul says, that if a man, if we judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.

Now I do not know but what if this man cannot be, by any effort of the Church, renewed to repentance, this man who has fallen away. I do not know that God can't do it, even by bringing him down to the point of death, and in the last hour of death sending his judgment upon him and turning him around to himself. Now I say, these passages seem to indicate it.

So you see, I'm back where I started, an equivocating Calvinist and an apologetic Arminian. Because here we are in the middle, and this is where we stand, and I will not be pushed by either side to come out and deny truth here in order to establish truth here. The Christian and Missionary alliance has always stood in the middle.

I know that I sat on the New York board, I have sat on there now for so long that I can't remember, and I sat on the New York board with two great men. One of them was Dr. L. H. Zimmer of Toledo, the other Dr. R. R. Brown of Omaha. These two men sat, they loved each other, they preached for each other, and they sat and discussed the things of God and voted and debated the things of God together there on the board for years and years, literally until Dr. Zimmer went to be with the Lord.

Dr. Zimmer was a Calvinist, Dr. Brown is an Arminian. Those two men got along beautifully together. Down in the alliance tabernacle in New York City, there was around the corner from Dr. Simpson's main church, a little church called the Chapel.

In that church, the Anglicans, called Episcopalians down there, had set up their little altar, and being good Arminians that they were, they had their good church altar service or whatever they called the thing there every Sunday morning. So here was a fellow with a neck here, and he was having his service there, his communion service there, believing in the real presence. And he was an Arminian.

Just through the wall, within hearing distance, was Dr. Simpson, the Presbyterian Calvinist, preaching the house down. Now, they got along together perfectly. There were Baptists and Anglicans and Presbyterians and Methodists and what have you all mixed together in the early alliance.

For that reason, I refuse ever to run for cover when in the Calvinist with his eyes, blazing starts in my direction. Just blaze on, brother, I'm made of asbestos when it comes to that. And I refuse to run and hide when an Arminian comes after me.

I have learned a new trick lately, Brother Gray. I didn't know about this before, but I've learned it. I told him down in New York this week, last week, about it.

I find that when somebody reads something I write and get blazing mad, he says, I'm grieved. I got a letter from somebody the other day that said, signed a missionary, and it said, I was greatly grieved to read this. And I said, now at last I've caught on, when they get real mad, but they're sanctified and don't want to admit it, they say they're grieved.

I was grieved when I read that. They were just plain mad. If a fellow was honest, he'd say, my hackles rose when I read what you wrote.

My hackles rose. But they're good spiritual people and they couldn't admit they had hackles. So they say, I was grieved.

Well, that's just another name for I was sore. It made me mad and I'm writing a nasty letter here, not signing it. But he was good and spiritual, or she, whichever it was.

I thought it might have been a she, but of course you can't tell by the handwriting. Now it said here that if these people, whoever they are, do this thing, they have tasted and experienced Christianity, they've been renewed in God, and yet they fall away. And it's impossible for the Church to get them to come back, because they crucify the Son of God afresh.

Now whoever they are, this is what they do. Of course Christ can't be put on Calvary again, but the apostate puts him through the experience again. He judges him and pronounces against him, I've tried him, and this little Jewish girl says it wasn't worth it.

And I have found the old way better, says the apostate. It amounts to crucify him, crucify him. You've all heard of Julian the Apostate, the man who was a Christian, later turned against the Lord and fought against the Lord and died on the field of battle.

And as he was dying, he lifted his hand up and said, Thou hast conquered, O Galilean. He was known as Julian the Apostate, because once he said he was a Christian, then turned and said he was not a Christian. Now it tells us something here that anybody who has been a farmer, even anybody who has kept a backyard garden will understand.

He says that in order to get an illustration before us, the earth which drinketh in the rain, that cometh off upon it, and bringeth forth herbs fit for them by whom it is dressed, receives blessing from God. But that which bear thorns and briars is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned. And he uses this illustration right close up to and next verse after crucifying the Son of God afresh and putting him to an open shame.

Now in nature, two fields can lie side by side. One of them is a cultivated field. It has been plowed and then it has been harrowed.

We talk about having harrowing experiences, and we forget what the word harrowing means. It means having a machine with steel spikes running back and forth over it. We've had harrowing experiences, and we've had our field harrowed, and then we've had it planted.

And the rain comes today and it clears up in the night, and the next day it's warm and sunshiny, and the next day it rains again. Between alternating rain and sunshine, this field brings forth grain or corn or whatever it is, it brings it forth in abundance, lying right across from that field. And a field as good as this one, no difference in the quality of the soil because there's just a line between.

Here lies a field, the same sun shines on it on Wednesday, the same rain falls on it on Thursday, and on Saturday again the same warm sun, and on Sunday the rain. It is alternating. God is alternating his sunshine and his rain on that field, too.

But what do you find there? Nobody can live there but rabbits, green briars, and skunk cabbage, and thorns and thistles. Nobody would want it, nobody. It's good for nothing but to be burned.

And if the farmer ever decides to clean up the place, that's what he'll do. He'll cut it down, pile it and burn it, for it's no good for anything. So says the Holy Spirit, the word of God falls on people and they're like two fields.

They may be for a lifetime in a church, I'm sure it happens. They come to church, they're on time, sing the hymns, quote the scripture along with the rest in the responsive reading, and say amen at the end of the prayer and go again and do that week after week when they're in health for a lifetime. But in the one life there is the fruit of the Spirit, love and peace and humility and joy and the knowledge of God.

In the other, unclouded, unheralded field, who has had the same opportunity, has heard the same truth, received the same seed, there is nothing but briars and thorns which are ready to be burned. That happens in homes. There are homes where young people have been brought up, one of them will turn out to be a fire evangelist and give himself to God and go throughout the world preaching the gospel, or he will give himself as a missionary and go to the field as a missionary and teach the heathen there and go old in the service of God.

His brother back in Canada or back in the States will be serving the devil and living anyway, but what he should. The same mother prayed for both, and the same father took both to Sunday school, and the same parents sat between these parents, the same two. But that's the way it happens.

Esau have I hated, but Jacob have I loved. And they were twin brothers. Cain and Abel were brothers of the same parents, and one of them received a word from God that he had been accepted and his sacrifice accepted, and the other one was boldly and forthrightly rejected.

So it is. Just hearing the word isn't enough. Just giving a cent that you belong to a certain church that believes the gospel, that isn't enough, because as John Bunyan said in his wonderful and terrible book, I saw that there was a way to hell from the very gate of heaven, as well as from the city of destruction.

John Bunyan was a Calvinist, incidentally. So we see, my friends, that the wise soul is going to be admonished here. The wise soul is not the one who will try to get at the root of this and say, Now what am I to believe about this? Can a man finally perish, or can he not finally perish? That's not the necessary that you should settle that ancient controversy that has divided men through the centuries.

It's not necessary that you should settle it. But the man who is more concerned with controversy than with his own soul is a rash, foolish man. The humble soul will profit by remembering.

He will remember the context, and he will remember that this was the blessed Holy Ghost. This terrible picture that can't be toned down is here for him, and he will hear the exhortation to go on to perfection. Lecture 11 Justification and Sanctification 2 You know the story of the man who, in the days when they drove horses and buggies, this has been told so often you've no doubt heard it.

They drove horses and buggies, and a man was rich and he had a coach and he wanted a driver. He advertised for a driver, and he had many people come. He said to one man, Now I will entrust the driver, whoever it is that I hire, my family, my wife, my children, and get into that coach and they go back and forth and they have the life of my children and my wife in their hands, the driver has, because we drive along over a way where a road is chiseled out of the rock and a chasm below and the mountain above.

And now what I want to ask you is, how close can you come to the edge without going over? Well, I think I could drive within a foot without any danger at all. He dismissed him and sent for the next man waiting. He told him the same story.

He said, How close could you come? He said, I could get within two inches and not go over and not worry a bit. The next man said, I could go so close that I could drive so that half of the tire would be over the cliff, half hanging on and I could still make it. He dismissed him and sent for the fourth man.

He told him the same story. He said, How close could you come? Well, he said, I do not know how close I could come, and I promise you I'd never experiment if I get the job. He said, I might come close, but I'll never find out because I'll hug the side of the cliff every time I have your wife and children with me.

He said, All right, you're hired. Come on, you're hired. There's your man.

And always it's so. When I find Christians that beat their chest and say, I believe in the security of the believer, well, all right, believe in the security of the believer, but you start thumping your chest about it, I'm worried about you. Because you're seeing how close you can come without going over the edge.

The city of Chicago, a great church there, the pastor turned to this chest beating, said he couldn't go to hell if he wanted to, and two of these young fellows in his church stole an automobile and got put in jail. So they sent one of the workers down from the church to see the two young fellows, go down and talk with them. They were young fellows in the church and in their young people's group.

And when the worker came in, these two fellows said, Good morning, Bill, nice to see you. He said, I hear about your trouble and I'm down to talk with you. He said, We know why you've come.

I said, Let's get one thing straight. We have broken our fellowship with the Lord in stealing this automobile and getting in jail, but it hasn't affected our relation in the slightest. We don't feel so good now.

We don't feel so good, but we have this. Everything is the same. Now, if you'll start from there, go ahead and talk to us.

We know you want to talk to us. Go ahead. I had to turn my back on those two delinquents and walked out and prayed that God Almighty might send the arrows of conviction that they might fall down on their face on the stone floor and pray that God would convert their souls.

For the man who takes advantage of the safety that he believes is his in Christ to become reckless and sinful is no Christian at all. And the man who believes truly and scripturally that he is safe in Christ will live as close to the heart of Christ as possible for the rest of his life. I don't want to experience what the word fall away means.

I don't want to know. Just as I don't want to know any more about hell, I know enough about hell. I don't want to know any more about hell, but I want to know a lot more about heaven.

And I don't want to know how far I can go to the edge without finally perishing, but I want to know by the grace of God how far I can keep from the edge. But now the man of God eases up here and tosses in a little change of pace, and he says, But I am persuaded better things of you. He said, I'm worried about you because you have become such as have need of milk and not of meat, and you're not going on as you ought to go on, and I'm worried about you, because it's possible.

But he says, I don't think it means you, because I think better things of you. I feel that way, too. But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, so I don't press this too hard.

I only say, let's not defend a cold heart, nor a worldly life, nor a careless mind. Let's not defend it, but let us rather follow Christ fully. And by following him fully, we know we'll never deny him completely.

If we should fall or stumble or through some weakness of the flesh fail him, thank God for the first aid kit. Over here in 1 John, I read it to you a while ago, it was God's first aid kit for his family. You know how it is in your family? We always had what this pink stuff you put on, mercuricum, and the bandages and band-aids and all sorts of things.

Because of those six boys, there was always one of them that had something, almost always, somebody was falling off of something, breaking something, and a fellow fell and hurt his shoulder, and they took him to the doctor, got him fixed up, and he climbed the fence and fell over and broke his collarbone. And then they took him back and put a board on his back, and he climbed a tree with a board on it. Well, you know, you're going to have to have some sort of first aid around for a fellow like that.

And they were all about life. And they're all healthy and alive now, by the grace of God and band-aids, and mercuricum and the careful mother that watched over them, the father that was home sometimes. But here we have God's first aid kit.

He says, Now if you say you haven't sinned, you're lying. He said, Don't do that, but my little children. If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous.

Go to him and confess your sin, and he'll cleanse you from all unrighteousness. I believe that. And so now I pass over this terrible passage.

I've tried to deal with it as fairly as I could and as boldly as I could. And I don't want anybody coming to me and trying to convert me to your viewpoint. I've studied all viewpoints for 30 years.

I only want to tell you, we've gone past this passage now, and we're going to determine, aren't we, that we'll never have any reason to worry about ourselves personally on this. We're not going to go back, but we're going to set our face like a flint, as Jesus did toward Jerusalem, and follow the Lamb wherever he goes. And this can be academic.

It doesn't have to be personal. It can be academic, this matter of falling away. It doesn't have to be real.

And once more I repeat, if you're worrying about having fallen away and not getting back, you haven't fallen away. If you were worrying or concerned about the unpardonable sin, you hadn't committed it. There is cleansing at the fountain, precious fountain, filled with blood.

And that cleansing you can have this morning. Amen.

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