

Hebrews 5:11-14, 6:1-12 “Heart Check”

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama.! Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

We're returning this morning to our study through the book of Hebrews,! where the writer has been telling us over and over about the greatness of Jesus, right?

So that we will not drift away from Him, but we'll hold fast to Him. In fact, he's just started talking about Jesus as our great high priest, the one who brings us to God.

And he has mentioned that Jesus is a priest in the order of Melchizedek. And he wants to explain that big unfamiliar name to us and all that that means about who Jesus is.

It's rich teaching in the rest of this written sermon. But first, before he dives into that more, he stops and he wants to speak as a pastor to these early Christians.

[1 : 10] He loves them enough to say some really hard things. Some of them are famously hard to understand. Others are hard to hear, hard to embrace.

There's a challenge with immediate urgency. There's a warning this morning with eternal ramifications. And thankfully, there's also a comfort full of hope for us.

And it is important to the writer that everyone in the church hears all three of them. All for everyone. So we're going to read them and we're going to talk about them one at a time after we pray.

Let's ask for God's help to hear from Him. Father, we need that to hear from you as we open your word.

We're so grateful for it. And I'm just so aware this morning that I don't have the skill to explain it adequately. They don't have the attention span to hear it as they need.

[2 : 24] We together don't have the wisdom on our own to know everything it means for us in our lives. And so we need you. You know this, Father.

We need your spirit. We need you to speak through your word that we might hear your voice and know your love. And we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. First, a challenge. Hebrews 5 and verse 11. About this, this Melchizedek and Jesus being a high priest.

About this we have much to say. And it is hard to explain since you have become dull of hearing. 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.

[3 : 39] Therefore, let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity. Not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

And this we will do if God permits. Imagine being in a graduate level seminar to discuss Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

Or the U.S. Constitution. Or Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. And you get together with everybody in the class and all the students can do when they get together is sing the ABC song.

It's a good song. I mean, you need to know the ABCs. But you need to be able to put them together. You need to be able to read in order to discuss your thoughts.

Or imagine the Von Trapp children who learn Do, Re, Mi, and so on. And then they say, well, that's a very good place to start.

[4 : 52] But what else do you sing? Imagine if they had stopped there and never built on that foundation of those notes. We'd never hear the inspiration to climb every mountain.

Imagine if after pouring the foundation of the Eiffel Tower, they never built anything that went above ground level.

Or if in your home, all you had was a rock foundation that was just poured over and over. Imagine all that you'd be missing out on if you just had a concrete slab.

The foundation is important. Very important. But how much beauty and goodness would we miss out on if we didn't build on it, right?

You see that? That's the challenge spiritually in these verses. Don't stop growing. Or if you prefer, grow up.

[5 : 53] No one wants to be called a baby, right? Right? The immaturity. The immaturity. The lack of growth is coming here from a spiritual dullness.

A laziness. A laziness in this case of the ears, he says. You're not listening to God's word. To the truth about Jesus.

That verse 13 says is a word of righteousness. To help you know how to live all of life with Jesus. Many in this church, it seems, they're settling for just a little bit of Jesus.

Not making a priority of their faith every moment of every day. But, you know, stopping in for Jesus on an occasional Sunday. More than a couple of times, I've had a version of this conversation.

Pastor, I gotta be honest with you, man. I really like you. But I really struggle with coming to church. I've been around a while.

[7 : 04] I basically know what I need to know, man. I'm going to heaven. And I know enough to know that there's nothing else I can do to earn anything else. So, it's just not all that exciting.

Right? I mean, I see a few people there, but I could see them somewhere else. They're good friends. I just have a hard time wanting to be there. Have you thought that before?

Maybe around minute 34, 35 of the sermon. Have you felt bored reading the Bible? Has your heart quit responding for a season to the worship of God's people when you gather?

And you're there, but there's just nothing? That's a dullness of hearing. That you hear blessed assurance and you think, blessed assurance, I guess.

A dullness of hearing that has settled for spiritual immaturity. I've got more for you, God says.

[8 : 23] Moving beyond the ABCs to building something beautiful in your spiritual growth, your maturity. Now, don't read this wrong. He's not against foundational things.

The things listed here in verses 1 and 2 of chapter 6. He just wants them built on beautifully. Now, there's debate here about whether this list of things, this repentance, faith, washings, laying on of hands, resurrection, and judgment.

Whether those are Jewish teachings that are in that sense the beginning of the word of Christ.

That's literally what it means there in verse 1. The beginning of the word of Christ.

In the sense of there being the shadow. The background that Jesus fulfills the reality of. That's one possibility. Or whether these are six foundational aspects of early Christian training.

Perhaps for those about to be baptized. I think that there is a really good case in this context for the former. For these being aspects of the old covenant that Jesus is fulfilling now in a fresh way.

[9 : 39] But regardless of which one of those is correct. These are good things. Good things that must not be stopped at some just basic intellectual understanding of them.

But applied to life in light of the greatness of Jesus. Right? It touches everything. So when you read this, don't hear him saying you have to be a graduate level Christian in order for God to love you.

That's not what it means. He's not saying, well, Jesus is nice. I mean, faith alone in Christ alone.

Yeah, yeah. But then you need to get to the real meat of Christianity.

No. No way is that what he's saying. It's more like what Scotty reminded us last week when he was here with us. There's nothing more than Jesus.

But there's always more of Jesus. That's what he's saying. Pastor Andrew Murray says it this way. That's what 514 means.

[10 : 54] This is not demanding that we know more truth to impress Jesus. But rather that we apply more truth to enjoy Jesus.

To share Jesus. Take the ABCs and the do-re-mis of Jesus. His incarnation. His life. His death. His resurrection.

His ascension. His return. Cling to those things. Cling to a relationship with him by faith that forgives your sins and grants you eternal salvation.

And clinging to those things, use them to build something in every area of life. In every moment of your day. That's maturity, he says. Always more of Jesus.

Like receiving his peace in your anxiety. Stewarding his gifts for his kingdom. Finding his comforting presence in the valley of the shadow of death.

[12:00] Reflecting his image in your workplace. Sharing his hope with your neighbor. Following his will for all of your life decisions. I mean, has anyone in here exhausted the areas and places and relationships where God has called you to a Christ-centered walk with him?

Anybody just taking care of all of those? No way. Endless opportunities. But just think of how much we would be missing.

If Christians didn't learn to apply, for example, the image of God in every man and woman to abolish the African slave trade.

To apply the priesthood of Jesus to prayer in the very presence of God in the midst of my pain.

To apply love for neighbor to hospitals or aid for refugees or orphanages. It would be like missing out on the Eiffel Tower or Edelweiss.

[13:07] Right? Don't stop growing in Jesus. That is the challenge for every one of us here. So how do I respond to that challenge?

How do I not just brush this off like, hey, I'm already a teacher, so he's not talking to me. Yes, he is. How do I receive this word that is for all God's people?

Let me urge you, no matter how long you've been learning or how much you've grown, there's always more of Jesus, amen? Always.

Trust me. Don't move past him, but go deeper into Jesus. That's maturity that begins to grasp the ocean-sized greatness of Jesus.

You're never going to plum it all, are you? Ask him to show you a part of your life that you've kept him out of. Your work, your marriage, your money.

[14:12] You're not praying. You're not evangelizing. You're not discipling someone else. What is it for you? I don't know, but no matter how many times you've read through the Bible, read it again.

You'll learn something new. I always do. Every time I open God's word, it's one of the reasons it's such a gift to me to get to preach it. What a privilege. Maybe one last thought on how to listen and receive this challenge.

If you're concerned that your ears are growing dull, sluggish, if you sense that, you're just not motivated or excited about the things of God, don't keep that to yourself in shame.

We can do that in the church. Feel like, well, I just must be the only one. Now listen to what God wants for you. God wants to grow you to maturity. Ask someone to join you in praying for that renewal.

You're asking for something he delights to give. Maybe ask that person to open God's word together so you can borrow one another's zeal. He does that to encourage our hearts.

[15:23] Southwood, we long and we pray to be a church that loves the word of Jesus and lives life with Jesus.

We long for that. Don't stop growing ever. See, there's a specific danger in becoming spiritually stagnant.

Why is it so important to keep growing in grace? More of Jesus. Living with him in every area of life. Here, the writer says it's because if you don't stand firm, you might stand away.

That's literally what the word in verse 6 we think of as apostasy. That's what it means. You might actually stop believing.

This is one of the most severe and most debated warnings in the whole Bible. Let's listen to it and then we'll look at it carefully.

[16:34] It's verse 4. 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.

I'm going to read it off of this. To restore them again to repentance. Since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

For 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.

If you were reading out of the Pew Bible and it seemed a little bit different, which is why I got lost, the translation has been slightly updated. This is an updated version.

It says the same thing. It just moves some of the words around, okay? Don't get lost. Because those are hard words, aren't they? What do they mean?

[17 : 55] There's a lot of stuff in their language. We don't talk like this very often. What he's clearly talking about is people who appear to be saved. People who live among God's people, who sit in churches like this, hearing sermons like this one to the Hebrews, and yet fall away from Jesus.

If you want more details on some of those phrases and descriptions, email me. I'll send you something I got. But just briefly, it says they've been enlightened.

They've been taught the truth about God and not just heard it, but liked it. They've tasted the heavenly gift, actually experienced the blessings of God.

They've shared in the Holy Spirit personally or by participation in the covenant community. They see the Spirit at work. They tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the age to come.

In other words, they've learned from the Bible extensively. They've even witnessed, perhaps in some cases, performed miracles. From everything that anyone can tell, these people look like Christians.

[19 : 15] Any one of us would be very grateful to be described in such a way. But then, in the same description, it says these same people have also fallen away.

Deliberately, completely, and finally rejected God. in fact, to the point of crucifying Jesus again, as it were, being like the Jewish or pagan unbelief that sent Jesus to his actual death by the public rejection and contempt that they place on this so-called crucified Messiah that they no longer believe in.

This is not a one-time struggle with sin, a wrestling with doubt, but a determined rejection of salvation.

Such a person, it says, it is impossible, jump down, to restore to repentance. So firm is their rejection of Jesus, it's impossible to restore to repentance.

In fact, as the image he then gives points out, they may have received a lot of good rain. It looked like good stuff was coming in, but they produced thorns and thistles, perhaps hear Jesus' parable of the sower.

[20 : 46] And they end with being cursed or burned. Wow. Are there any people like that in the Bible?

Anything we could think of that would help us understand what could be going on here? Well, the author of Hebrews has already pointed us to the cautionary example of Old Testament Israel who learned about God from a great teacher, Moses, right?

Who experienced his powerful spirit, his miraculous work all the way up to and through the Red Sea itself. Amazing. Who tasted his daily blessing and manna and water.

They were a part of his special people. And yet, how many did not reach the promised land?

Paul tells us the example of these idolaters is for us. So that anyone who thinks he stands should take care lest he fall.

[21 : 52] Don't think you're above this. Paul warns. These were wonderful people. Special people. Watch out. You might think of others like Judas.

His teacher pretty decent. Pretty good miracles he saw. I'd say so. Simon Magus who did powerful things in the name of Jesus but perhaps for the sake of his own name.

I think of the scribe talking to Jesus. He heard from him the sobering words that I pray bore fruit in his heart later. You are not far from the kingdom of God.

He knew so much. He got so much right. Seemed like everything. But did he actually place his faith in the Jesus that he learned so much about and valued so highly?

See being baptized is not magical. Giving 10% is not enough. Neither is 100% for that matter.

[23 : 04] You can't buy it. Assuming you're a Christian because you're southern or white or American is deceptive heresy that can't bring you to God but it can keep you from God.

Warning in my words. Knowing a lot about Jesus is not the same as knowing Jesus.

Teachers, Presbyterians, beware. Knowing a lot about Jesus is not the same as knowing Jesus.

Kids, you know we love you. But being born in Southwood Church is not the same as being reborn into life with Jesus.

In fact, rejecting the blessings of the covenant family of God is dangerous. In other words, understanding the truth of your need, seeing the solution, the provision of grace at the cross of Jesus only to turn away in pride from such a salvation is a sobering choice.

[24 : 32] Dear ones, young and old, don't make that choice. Please don't live not far from this pulpit and not far from the kingdom of God.

No, no one. So how do you hear this warning and not say what many of our hearts naturally do, which is, oh, that's not for me.

It's not talking to me. Well, if you're hearing it, don't fall away means that you haven't yet.

Right? It's a good place to start. A great place for us to start would then be taking all of the warnings of Hebrews seriously with the directives.

What does he tell us to do? What he keeps warning us? Hold fast to Jesus. Fix your eyes on Jesus. Pay much closer attention to the Bible's message about Jesus.

[25 : 31] Draw near to God afresh through Jesus. Find rest for your soul in Jesus. Grow up bearing fruit in Jesus. That's what we mean by talking about faith priority around here so much.

You probably heard those words this year. what we're talking about is to take ownership of your relationship with God. The relationship you have through faith in Jesus.

Making a priority of learning what that means for every moment of your life. Not just for one day, someday in heaven, but a priority now. At the same time, don't assume that you're above falling away because you've been around long enough or you've done enough.

Don't assume that about someone who used to sit next to you regularly and now you don't see them and they can never make grace group. Love them enough to reach out and check in.

Would you pray? Pray for God's preserving grace for yourself and for your whole church family.

Reminding one another of the greatness of your need for Jesus and the greatness of Jesus.

[26 : 45] Those are ways to heed this warning. Before we move on, I want to assure you that it is God's grace that you can trust to secure for all time your relationship with Him.

This passage was written pastorally to direct our hearts, I believe, to challenge us to a heart check. Okay?

That's the motivation behind these words. But many of you know the big theological debate centers around whether or not it teaches that someone truly saved can actually lose his salvation.

salvation. I'm convinced that it does not teach that. Happy to send you more on that. I'm convinced of that both from this passage itself and from many others in the Bible.

Once saved, always saved or the perseverance or the preservation of the saints is true. It's biblical. You can count on it.

[27 : 56] But I didn't want to let our hearts off the hook so simply with a theological reassurance from our systematic theologies. Hebrews wants us to go somewhere else for that assurance.

Have you figured out where? Hebrews wants us to run to Jesus for that assurance. not some system of theology that you've heard taught. The people described here are best understood as those who very much appear saved but when they go out from us they reveal that they were not actually of us.

Those are the words of 1 John. But y'all that's not a reason just to take a deep breath and disregard. That's sobering. All of us should be sobered.

But neither the author of Hebrews nor God himself wants you to be sobered into fearful despair. So I want to make sure to talk about this for just a second.

I had this experience as a young boy. I remember reading passages like this one and another one I believe is connected to it about the unforgivable sin. I don't remember exactly how old I was.

[29 : 12] I remember exactly how scared I was by that. To the point that one night I couldn't go to sleep. I remember going and calling my dad to come back and saying dad I'm just so afraid that I've committed that unforgivable sin.

I loved Jesus but what if I had done that and didn't know? He very helpfully told me that the fact that I was concerned about that that I didn't want to do it that I loved Jesus and his grace and his forgiveness that those were really good indications that I had not fallen away to where it would be impossible to be forgiven to be restored to repentance.

Don't let this drive your heart to that kind of despair. Don't ignore the concern in your heart that you might feel this morning but let any concern that you feel about apostasy drive you not to despair away from Jesus but drive you where?

Drive you to Jesus. That's the one that you're worried even this morning you might be falling away from. Don't let that fear drive you to Jesus himself.

He promises to save you and keep you so that no one can snatch you out of his hand not even you. So that nothing can separate you from his love not even your sin.

[30 : 41] That's the Savior you have. Run to him. That's where Hebrews ends this section with comfort. There's a little bit now and there's a whole boatload of it next week before he turns back to Melchizedek and Jesus.

Listen to what he's going to say especially if you're discouraged right now. Don't stop listening to God's word. He's not finished yet with this communication that he's giving them.

He's going to say don't stop hoping. Don't stop growing. Don't stop believing. Don't stop hoping. Verse nine. Though we speak in this way difficult hard things yet in your case beloved we feel sure of better things.

Things that belong to salvation. For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name and serving the saints as you still do.

[31 : 47] And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end so that you may not be sluggish but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

The warning is really clear but to everyone who hears this warning he also writes that his confidence with them is of things that belong to salvation.

In fact believer in Jesus he wants you to have the full assurance of hope. Don't stop hoping.

Remember last week Scotty said hope is not here a wishful feeling pie in the sky but a certain reality grace on the ground.

Hope is something firm that you can hold on to and that you can count on to hold on to you. Notice the source of our hope. In your case these salvation things for God.

God's character promises God's promises and look verse 10 again God is the one producing fruit in your lives together as his people.

[33 : 12] You're loving one another. You're trusting God in hard seasons. You're enduring with patience when the world says you're missing out and God can't be counted on. You're doing those things.

He's encouraging you keep it up. Grow in grace. To maturity. Not sluggishly avoiding God's word but eagerly earnestly shaping your life around it.

So that when you see a self driven person submit to God's word when you see a selfish person love his neighbor and sacrifice when you see a self centered person show up at a church to listen to a pastor who's preaching he really doesn't love to grow in love for a savior he wants to love and to show his love to people he doesn't even know if he likes.

When you see that you can be certain God's at work that's what he's producing among you. So God wants you to have the full assurance of hope that blessed assurance Jesus is mine Christ is my hope in life and death I don't have any other and so that as that becomes your hope even the weakest of us indwelt and empowered by his spirit become heroes of the faith just by clinging to Jesus when we become Eiffel Towers displaying the wonders of his love the glories of his grace in every moment of your life if that's going to happen with us we'll need

Jesus for that won't we and that's why he's come that's why Jesus is here to eat with us to remind us that he's the one who loves us and gives us everything that we need for life and godliness it's why he sat with his disciples that night that he was betrayed and he took bread and he broke it and he gave it to them as I ministering in his name give this bread to you he said take and eat this is my body given for you do this in remembrance of me in the same way after supper he took the cup and said this cup is the new covenant in my blood shed for many for the forgiveness of sins drink from it all of you for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the lord's death until he comes I'm aware that it is certainly possible that a passage like hebrews 6 has some of us confused this morning about whether or not to come to the lord's table let me try to simplify it for those of you who have been baptized into

[36 : 26] Jesus as members of his church this one or any other if that's you and if in considering your weakness your immaturity your need today you look here and you see Jesus as the one you need as the one who meets those needs and that's what you see here then you come you come even come confessing more sin come seeking more grace come praying for more growth but come to the one who gives those things in himself if on the other hand you maybe you usually take the

lord's supper but even as you listen to this passage you realize that your confidence on the one hand or perhaps your fear on the other hand is based entirely on your performance or your lack of performance if that's what you look up here and see just another religious ritual to kind of mark you as a

Christian instead of something else I would urge you not to come take these elements this morning come running to Jesus make sure first that your heart is actually running to him he's the only one who can remove from you that need to perform to be good enough who can cover over the ways you failed to do that come and run to him we would love to pray with you ask him for fresh faith come receive from him fresh ears to hear and long for his truth and grace we'd love to share more about him with you let me pray and then we'll celebrate together Jesus would you by your spirit direct our hearts to our desperate need but also your grace that abounds all the more oh how we need it and would we taste of you as we eat with you use common elements for holy purposes because we so need you to we ask in your name amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org a network