Sunday School Lesson
Hebrews 6: The Seriousness of Apostasy (February 22, 2026)

Setting the Stage

Exhortations in Hebrews:

- Chapter 2: A Call to Faithfulness - hold fast to your confession!
  Obeying God & continuing to work out our salvation is the only way to lasting satisfaction in life; neglecting God inevitably leads to inescapable consequences.
- Chapter 3-4: The Importance of Christian maturity - trust and obey!
  Without obedience it is impossible to please God.

Part 1 – The Call to Maturity

- Pythagoras divided his students into "the learners" and "the mature."
- Philo divided: "those just beginning," "those making progress," and "those beginning to reach maturity."
- Now comes, "Go on to Maturity!"
  At the end of Chapter 5, Steve Spangler pointed out that it is time to move from baby-formula/milk to SOLID FOOD! It is time to move on from the basics - infancy, and we will do so if God permits:

  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, [2] with instruction about ablutions, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. [3] And this we will do if God permits. – Hebrews 6:1-3

As Dr. Evans says in Ogilvie's series, the Hebrews author's message is "Come," "Get Ready," and "Go!" We should be in the Get Ready stage.

It is now time for training. Lesson1 – what is the goal of Christian life? Read **John 15:7-8**.

- Maturity of the mind: thought through important issues and developed critical opinions.
- Maturity in life: more and more you reflect Christ in your activities.

Elementary Teachings (The Milk)	Mature Faith (The Meat)[1]
Repentance from dead works	Active "labor of love" for others
Basic doctrine of baptisms	Deep trust in God's unchangeable oath
Laying on of hands / Resurrection	Entering the "inner sanctuary" with Jesus

From Barclay's book:
"Let me grow lovely, growing old;
The many fine things too,
Laces and Ivory and Gold and Silks,
Need not be new.
And there is healing in old trees,
Old streets and glamour old,
Why may not I, as well as these,
Grow lovely, growing old?" – nameless poet

Also, "It is told that on his pocket Bible Cromwell had a motto written in Latin – *qui cessat esse melior cessat esse bonus* – he who ceases to be better ceases to be good."[2]

Part 2 – Losing Faith

- "Once saved, always saved?"
- Definition from Merriam-Webster: APOSTASY is an act of refusing to continue to follow, obey, or recognize a religious faith.
- Apostate (one who leaves) vs. Apologist (one who defends), have a common root for "standing": one stands ***away*** and one stands ***beside***.

One of the hardest passages in the New Testament: read **Hebrews 6:4-8.**

- If you converted to Christianity and repented of your sins, but then later denounce Christ, or you attempt to shame Him, then you crucify Him again. How can you look Him in the eye after that and try to return to the fold?
- Arminians (followers of Jacob Arminius, a Dutch theologian who opposed the views of strict Calvinism) believe that verses 4 and 5 contain a description of a truly regenerate man who subsequently falls away. Such a person CAN lose his salvation.

[1] Table by Gemini AI
[2] Barclay, p. 52.

- Calvinists hold that the person described was not actually born again, but was only on the threshold of salvation. He never really had salvation yet.
- Results are the same![3]
- Some felt that baptism was such a significant milestone for a Christian, that there is no forgiveness for sins committed after baptism, so they delayed baptism until moments before death, just to be safe.[4]

Consider that this text was written at a time of great persecution; when submission or defection was reprehensible.

"A simplified restatement of this warning might be: 'It is impossible to restore again to repentance believers who fall away.' With this passage we enter into the controversy that has surrounded the epistle from early days. Novatian, a Roman presbyter, although quite orthodox in his views of Christology and the Trinity, nevertheless was a rigorist in matters pertaining to those who had defected the faith during the persecution of Decius (A.D. 249-50). Decius was the first Roman emperor to persecute Christians in a systematic manner, requiring that all show evidence of having sacrificed to the emperor. Many submitted (Sacrificati), although others escaped either by means of bribery (Libellatici) or through flight. After Decius's death (251), a great debate developed (the Donatist controversy) between Cyprian and Novatius regarding the lapsed or apostate – whether or not they could be included in the life of the church, or should suffer lifelong excommunication. Novatian was consecrated rival bishop of Rome and pled this epistle as reason for not offering concession to the lapsed. For this reason the Western church took a dim view of accepting this epistle into the canon.

"We must remember that this epistle was written during a period of growing persecution that had not yet come to its full force; our author appears to be a preludial figure for the rigorism of later periods."[5]

Part 3 – Upbeat

- God's relationships with us are personal & individual.
    - Exodus 33:17 "And the Lord said to Moses, "This very thing that you have spoken I will do; for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name."
    - Isaiah 45:3 "that you may know that it is I, the Lord,
      the God of Israel, who call you by your name."

Sometimes our work for Christ (attending worship, visitations, making & serving at coffee hour, singing in choir, ushering, printing & folding newsletters, etc.)

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[3] Harper Study Bible, footnote on p. 1810.
[4] Barclay, p. 56.
[5] Evans, p. 133.

seems less fulfilling and joyous – some of that "bearing your cross." But keep with it because the joy will return. From Jeremiah 29:11 "For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."

Part 4 – The Sure Hope of God's Promise

People swear oaths on something bigger than themselves. There is nothing bigger than God, so when He swears, it is on Himself. Read **Hebrews 6:13-14**.
Here, God made a promise to Abraham and confirmed it with an oath. The promise, indeed, came true.

17 So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he interposed with an oath, 18 so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God should prove false, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to seize the hope set before us. 19 We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner shrine behind the curtain, 20 where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest for ever after the order of Melchiz'edek.

Steve taught us about Melchizedek: king of Salem (thought to be early Jerusalem) and priest to El Elyon (God most high). Now, Christ is THE high priest, our intercessor, our connection to God.

Our hope is solid because we depend on God:

1) He is immutable (never changes)
2) His oath is immutable because He swore it on Himself

Summary:

- Don't keep relaying the foundation of your faith. Time to move on!
- This chapter is about moving from spiritual infancy to maturity by trusting in the unchangeable nature of God's promises.
- We are called to show "diligence" until the very end. Faith isn't a sprint; it's a marathon powered by God's grace.

References:

1. Asbury Bible Commentary (on line), https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search

2. Barclay, William, The Letter to the Hebrews, revised edition, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1976, pp. 51-71.

3. Evans, Jr., Louis H., Mastering the New Testament: Hebrews, Lloyd Ogilvie, General Editor, Word Publishing, Dallas, TX, 1985, pp. 127-144.

4. Gemini AI assisted with the joke and some relevant points in this lesson.

5. Harper Study Bible, Revised Standard Version, Zondervan Bible Publishers, Grand Rapids, MI, 1985.

6. RSV Bible on-line: http://www.devotions.net/bible/00bible.htm

7. Rudolph, Rev. Kevin, The Bible Tour Guide, Rich Publishing Co, Houston, TX, Day 348.

8. Free on-line commentaries:

http://www.freebiblecommentary.org/old_testament_studies/old_testament_studies.htm
http://www.gospelway.com/commentary/index.php
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