Hebrews 6: Chap. 1, 8 verses

Cincinnati, March 5, 1828

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Sermon by McCaffrey

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Thelices of God was still retained, comparatively of his attributes and worship amidst all their prejudice and them for comprehending...
Hebrews 6:1-8

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 baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

And this will we do if God permit.

For it is impossible for those 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 unto 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 upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but that which receiveth thorns and briers, is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.

To the Jews had been committed the oracles of God; amongst them, was still retained, comparatively, a correct knowledge of his attributes and works. This knowledge, amidst all their piety and depravity, qualified them for comprehending...
the doctrines of the gospel, with more readiness for understanding them with greater clearness than any other people. So remarkably was this the case that the apostles were directed to teach at Jerusalem until they should be confirmed with power from on high. Hence, the apostles imparting to the Hebrews the way of God more perfectly by judiciously availing themselves of what they already knew of the matter, in order to abbreviate as much as possible the discussion.

In the preceding chapter, he upbraided them with stupidity and ignorance, reproving them for their forgetfulness of the first principles of the oracles of God. In the passage which we are to consider, he rekindles their knowledge sufficient to remove the necessity of laying again the foundation of several primary doctrines, which he enumerates, and therefore proposes that omitting these, they should hasten on unto perfection. Therefore he says, “leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ let us go on unto perfection.”

The doctrine of Christ comprehends all that is taught in the scriptures respecting a Mediator and redemption through him. The principles of this doctrine consist of that which is essential to be previously known in order to a correct understanding of the economy of redemption. This verse, according to the nature of the argument, and the previous knowledge or ignorance of the persons addressed.

In writing to the Hebrews, many things might safely be assumed, which in addressing the Gentiles, would require to be explained, established, and referred. The Jews, however, ready they might be to deny the divinity of Christ, and to misconceive the prophecies respecting him, were in no danger of creating an ally to the anti-Christian god; with the Athenians, nor, with the citizens of Samaria, likely to accredit a miracle, wrought in confirmation of the gospel, to slavishly nor to mistake an apostle for a god, as did the barbarians of Miletus.

They knew enough of the mercy of God to understand the nature of repentance, through of his veracity to believe on his word, enough of the washing of regeneration to comprehend the design of baptism—enough of the doctrine of imputation to perceive the import of the sacrifices laying his hand upon the head of the victim, and the priest upon the head of him, to receive the blessing; as was thus at first to the service of God, and in a peculiar manner devoted to him—enough of the
nature of man and the government of God to believe in a resurrection of the dead, and on eternal judgment, and, consequently, in a future state of rewards and punishments.

Repentance, from its effects, in turning the subjects from sin, and a course of apostasy, as must continue, in eternal death, is called repentance from dead works.

"Faith toward God" is so called because he is its object—and the state justivind is stated "eternal", from the consideration that the sentence thus passed will for irrevocably, the final destinies of both angels and men.

But, considerable as was the information of the laws in general, and the Hebrews extends to Christianity, in particular, they were far, very far, from that full, accurate, and complete knowledge of the doctrine and promises of the gospel, as typically set forth in the covenant with Abraham, and more especially in the figures and perpetuity of the law, which was necessary to prevent their relapsing into Judaism, or falling away into final apostasy. Such a knowledge of the oracles of God, is that the apostle here calls "perfection" a use of the term found also in his epistle to Timothy.

That the perfection here spoken of is a perfection of knowledge, and not of life or character, is evident, when we consider the means by which it was to be obtained—the ground of doubt, as to its being attainable, and the consequences ascribed to the acquisition.

The design is abundantly evident through out the epistle, as argument—a close investigation, and rigid exposition of the oracles of divine truth, proceeding from principles assumed by the one party, and denied by the other. — The ground of doubt, whether the Hebrews would ever attain to this perfection, seems to consist, not in any supposed defect in the subjects, or inadequacy in the means, but in a presumption, that such might not be the will of God. "And this," continues the apostle, with pious submission to the will of his divine master, "this will we do of God, permit" a reflection which it is not likely would have here occurred had it been contemplating that, which in the technical language of some divines, is called "Christian perfection".

But the effects ascribed to this perfection, to which the apostle appeals by the divine permission, to conduct the Hebrews, chief determines it to be different from those high attainments, uniformity of life, regularity
of temper, and propriety of conversation, which, perhaps, with more charity than truth, have been called "oneness of perfection."

The advocates of this perfection admit that, to fall from it, and relapse into sin, is quite possible; but the effect of that to which the Hebrews are exhorted to attain is "perpetual apostasy."

To have fallen from a state of sinless perfection does not, in the opinion of those who defend it, preclude the possibility of being again restored to the favor of God; but the apostasy intended by the apostate is considered as final, though all subjects were free from having made such rare attachments. It is expressly affirmed to be impossible to renew them again unto repentance and consequently to restore them to a state of favor and acceptance with God.

That a perfection of external knowledge is here intended, still further is evident, from the apostle's use of the term and its connection in other passages of his writing. Perfect men, wrote him, are such, as by reason of use, have their senses, or understandings, exercised to discern both good and evil. Perfection, he teaches, could not be.

predication of the Judicial priesthood, nor of the law, nor even of the faith and experience of the ancient church; because they were all but insipid evolutions of that great plan of redemption to be completed only when all the redeemed are brought home. And thus shall have delivered up the kingdom to the Father—God having provided some better thing for us that they without us sought should not be made perfect.

This, though it is true, that none can find in the uninspired annals of the apostles. Perfection; and that, absolute perfection, cannot be asserted of anything, previously to its completion; yet it is equally true that all may arrive at a correct, general understanding of that God has revealed, which constitutes a perfection of Christian knowledge. This must necessarily be different at different periods in the history of the Church. More knowledge became necessary as the revelations were made, and more still becomes necessary as the fulfillment of ancient prophecies continues to shed light upon that which before was but imperfectly understood.

Let it not, however, be supposed that knowledge, even the perfection of Christian knowledge is, of itself, sufficient for salvation. Knowledge puffeth up but it is charity that edifieth.
High attainments in knowledge are perhaps not often requisite for the conversion of the sinner—nor is the promotion of poetry, the necessary result of such attainments. Obey: a previous acquaintance with incorrect systems of either philosophy or religion has a tendency to fortify the mind against conviction. Yet it cannot be denied that an extensive acquaintance with the doctrines of revelation is the best security against error, and the most likely, as well as the most effectual means of promoting in its possessor all those traits of character which furnish the best evidence of true piety. Nor can he, who has once fairly investigated the matter, and candidly examined the evidence by which it is supported, avoid the conviction that, Christianity is true. If ever afterwards forget that, such was the unavoidable conclusion to which he was brought.

No matter, how hostile his heart may be to its precepts—no matter, how much he may affect, or even desire to disbelieve its doctrines—no matter, how repugnant his life may be to its requirements—he has been ascertained of the regular procedure of the mind in obtaining the conclusions and can never afterwards invalidate them to himself, nor obliterate the lasting conviction of their truth.
Thus, it is plain in what sense those to whom the apostle wrote were expected to arrive at perfection—and also in what way that perfection would secure them from dangers of relapsing into Judaism—an apostasy to which they could have neither motive nor inducement except from a belief that, the law of Moses was to be preferred to the gospel of Christ—A relapse from correct knowledge to entire ignorance, especially in a matter that, from its nature and importance, must constantly press upon the attention, so as impossible as a relapse from conscious existence. By proposing to instruct the Hebrews in the import of their own scriptures, the apostle teaches us that, their danger arose from ignorance—an ignorance too, for which they were culpable, in as much as, they had not improved their previous knowledge, nor followed out the instructions which they had before received on this account. Should they fall away, the light, and privileges which they had once enjoyed, would but enhance their guilt, render their apostasy final, and thus seal their doom forever. This apostasy from the Christian faith is considered not only as possible, but extremely probable—and that too, in cases of no ordinary attainments. The subjects of it are supposed to have been unenlightened— instructed, not only in the principles of natural theology, but also in the
sediments of the doctrine of Christ, so as to have become fit subjects for initiation into the church of Christ at least by the ordinances of baptism.

They had tasted of the heavenly gift—had experienced a release from that onerous ritual, which neither they nor theirs were able to bear: had learned that it was not necessary to resort either to Mount Gerizim or to Jerusalem, in order to true, spiritual, and acceptable worship.—They had been made partakers of the Holy Ghost—had witnessed the miracles wrought by the Spirit, in proof of the gospel—had, themselves, shared in those extraordinary dispensations of miraculous power which were at that time bestowed—had tasted the good word of God—had seen fulfilled the promises of the Father to send his Son for the redemption of the world—had witnessed and some of them professed to have experienced the resuscitation of the doctrine of the cross—the powers of the world to come, the commencement of Messiah's reign upon earth.

They had seen ignorance dispersed, prejudice removed, enmity overcome, idolatry vanishing—mercy abounding, the power of Satan and dominion succeeded and broken. They had seen the power taken from the mighty and the captive of terrible delivered.

But, after all, they had not laid their foundation upon the rock. They did not dig
deep enough to build upon that tried corner stone
which alone is a sure foundation. Their knowledge
was imperfect, their profession meager; their devotion
transient; their goodness like the morning cloud and
early dew that goeth away. Hence their inability
to apostatize from the faith of Christ. Thus the
apostle asserts with as little qualification as he
does that, they had been enlightened.

Following Berg, our translators have without
any other authority, chosen to express it as contingent
or conditional: “if they shall fall away,” instead
of “and have fallen away.” In sense which the original
will by no means admit. Yet this passage
does not militate against the doctrine of divine
perseverance. The effect of the attainments here
described is, it is true, upon the supposition of
apostasy, to render restoration impossible. But
the conduct ascribed to the apostates, of cru-
cifying to themselves the son of God afresh and
putting him to an open shame, is incompatible
with the character of those who have ever been
born again. Of the final perseverance of the
such, the scriptures contain the strongest assurance.

The perfections of God—his love, his faithfulness,
his wisdom, and his power, all are engaged
for their safety. They are chosen in Christ,
united to Christ—purchased by his blood—she
objects of his intercession, the subjects of the Spirit's operations, to enlighten, convert and establish them - so that their life being hid with Christ in God - it is impossible for them to fall away as for God himself to change. — Those then, who are liable to apostatize in the sense of the text, have never been the children of God what ever may have been their character.

But why should the renewal of such apostates be said to be impossible? Is anything too hard for the Lord? Is anything impossible to omnipotence? — It cannot be denied that with God all things are possible. Yet infinite power, sometimes sees fit to limit its operations by conferring itself to the employment of certain means. Whenever a system of means has been established, all that can be effected by them, is possible to the agent that employs them. But, whatever they are inadequate to effect becomes impossible to the agent - though his power, under other circumstances, might be fully adequate to the result. — This, though God has decreed the salvation of sinners and Christ is able also to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him, yet, from the nature of man, as a free agent, and from the established system of means, which God has seen fit to employ, their salvation under certain
circumstances becomes impossible. Such is the case before us. — The Hebrews had been excited to hoarun in point of privilege. They had for a while rejoiced in the light— and gained in the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free. — They had exhausted the evidence by which conviction is usually produced, or, by too hasty an assent, rendered what remained uninteresting, and further discussion tedious and exhausting. Thus from the self reproach of being, as they thought, too credulous—from the supposed inadequacy of the proof, arising from their imperfect acquaintance with it— from reluctance to resume an investigation the results of which had, in the heat, and novelty of their former zeal, appeared so plausible, but now so unsatisfactory: they were in extreme danger of relapsing into Judaism — the religion of their fathers — the religion of their country — a religion of more palpable rites and a more obvious atonement. — It was this that caused the apostle to doubt whether any thing could now be done to prevent their apostasy — and whether God would succeed his efforts in their behalf and thus make them instrumental in saving some of them. — But should the final step be taken — and to their present loathing of the Gospel, and particularly to the law — he added, the pride of opinion, the apparent
objects of his intercession the subjects of the Spirit's operations, to enlighten, confirm, and establish them so that their life being hid with Christ in God—it is impossible for them to fall away as for God himself to change. Those then, who are liable to apostatize in the sense of the text, have never been the children of God what ever may have been their character. But why should the renewal of such apostates be said to be impossible? Is anything too hard for the Lord? Is anything impossible to omnipotence? It cannot be denied that with God all things are possible. Yet infinite power, sometimes sees fit to limit its operations by confining itself to the employment of certain means. Whenever a system of means has been established, all that can be effected by them, is possible to the agent that employs them. But, whatever they are inadequate to effect becomes impossible to the agent—though his power, under other circumstances, might be fully adequate to the result. Thus, though God has cleared the salvation of sinners and Christ is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, yet, from the nature of man, as a free agent, and from the established system of means, which God has seen fit to employ, their salvation under certain
randon of renouncing false doctrines, and disclaiming all connection with impostors, together with the aversion which men naturally have to the charge of inconsistency. It would him be morally impos-
sible that, the apostle, or one risen from the dead, or an angel from Heaven, or, we may say, that God himself could renew them again unto repentance, without employing other means than those he has seem fit to employ for the purpose—seeing they had conspired to themselves the doom of God afresh, and put him by practically approving of the conduct of their countrymen and rulers in putting him to death. By thus openly avowing their belief that, he was an impostor, they would put him to an open shame, proclaiming to the world that, in their opinion, he had justly been made a publick example of what blasphemers ought to suffer and cry with those that cursed him, “we have a law, and by our law he ought to die.” Away with him! Away with him! It is not fit that he should. This view of the subject is confirmed by the apostle himself in the following verses. For the earth, that drieth up in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth the blessing from God; but that which heareth brim and thorns, is rejected, and
The consequences of his fault, rebellion against God's will, and the effects of the curse over all flesh and earth. The moral and spiritual decay over the earth, death and separation from God. The apostate prophets and religious leaders who did not heed the warnings and continued in rebellion.

The apostate patriarchs, including Abraham and David, whose houses were destroyed and whose kingdoms were divided. The suffering of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked. The whole world under the curse and the promise of deliverance through the Messiah.

The apostate priesthood, who were not in符合 the order to be attained, the spiritual world. The shift from the earthly to the spiritual realm. The apostate judge, who did not recognize the judgment of the Lord. The apostate king, who did not reign in the kingdom of God.

The apostate ruler, who did not rule in the kingdom of God. The apostate prophet, who did not prophesy in the name of the Lord. The apostate apostate, who did not preach the gospel of the kingdom.

The apostate apostate, who did not teach the word of God. The apostate apostate, who did not keep the commandments of the Lord. The apostate apostate, who did not obey the voice of the Lord. The apostate apostate, who did not walk in the ways of the Lord.

The apostate apostate, who did not pray in the name of the Lord. The apostate apostate, who did not fast in the presence of the Lord. The apostate apostate, who did not fast in the presence of the Lord. The apostate apostate, who did not fast in the presence of the Lord.

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case, violating any principle of moral freedom—
—nor from the incapacity of the agent—for
man has powers, both physical and intellectual,
adequate to the employment of the means
prescribed—nor from a want of power in
the author, to extend the means of cultivation
for he is mighty both in strength and in
wisdom. But the impossibility of reclaiming
both, the moral and material subject,
under certain circumstances, arises from the
creator’s having laid down determinate means
and, in infinite wisdom, designed that these should
be limited in their operation and partial in
their effects. In the one case, the soil that
by cultivation is rendered productive, receiveth
blessing from God—on the other, he that
believeth and is baptized shall be saved.

In the one, that which notwithstanding
it is watered by the rain from Heaven,
remains sterile, or barren only thorns and
briers is rejected—is nigh unto cursing. And
so that no man may eat fruit of it forever—
in the other, he that believeth not shall
not see life, but the wrath of God abideth
on him. — Of the one, the end is to be burned
abandoned to perpetual neglect and consuming
drought—of the other, to be cast into the lake that
burneth with fire and brimstone, where the worm
dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.
From the subject thus illustrated my first inference is, the importance of Christian knowledge. Religion consists of faith and practice. But how can we believe that of which we have no knowledge? Or how perform the duties which we do not understand? Though we cannot tell how far knowledge is absolutely necessary in order to salvation, yet we know that a certain degree is indispensable.

And who is there that deserves the appellation of Christian, who can sit down contented with that degree of knowledge which is barely sufficient to secure his safety—any more than with the lowest attainments in holiness or conformity to the will of God? The Christian cannot, in neglect of his own comfort, in neglect of the interests and edification of the Church, and, above all, in neglect of the express command of God, rest satisfied with barely a knowledge of the first principles of the oracles of God. Such is not the spirit of the gospel. The apostle himself did not consider that he had already attained or were already perfect. Nor will any real Christian relax his exertions, either in the acquisition of knowledge, or in striving after greater degrees of faith and holiness because forward his state is safe! It may be safe, but it must be comparatively comfortless.
My next inference is—the interest which we should, in instructing those who are out of the way. This is at once an important and a difficult duty. It devolves more or less upon us all. We should all be ready to be reason of the hope that is within us. We should all be prepared to direct enquiring souls to Jesus to recommend his religion, by our walk and conversation, to those around us—and be careful to give none occasion to the adversary to gainsay or blaspheme. We must suit our instructions to the age, the education, the prejudices the ignorance and even the exprience of those among whom we dwell. We must become all things to all men—omitting needless repetitions to the better informed, and carefully and fully treating our instructions and remarks to what time and place in the view of prudence may seem to require.

My third inference is the duties of confidence in God and resignation to his will. God seeth not as man seeth. He, make efficient the most unlikely means and render ineffectual the best laid schemes of human policy. When the path of duty is plainly marked out—we ought to pursue it with unwavering steps. Neither doubt nor fears nor difficulties, nor obstacles of any kind should
should be allowed to discourage or retard us.
On the other hand should we allow
an overweening fondness for our tribes to
bias us in their favour beyond what is obvious
duty—Our zeal, our benevolence, our affections,
our patriotism and and above all our parda
spirit may, ere we are aware entice us on
a course which at first appeared duty—but
while on a nearer inspection and more extented
acquaintance we discover to be questionable--and
upon such discovery we ought to pause, examine,
and upon conviction of our error relinquish
the whole business no matter how great a
favourite the plan may have been.—

We must show by the readiness with which
we change our course that from the first we
engaged we it only with the impression
that it was duty and with the sentiments of the
apostle in our hearts and his language upon
our lips—this will we do if God permit—

My last inference is the awful
responsibility of those who are away their
day of grace—especially in gospel lands.
It will be more tolerable for Sodom and
Gomorrah in the judgment than for them,
such is the character of the human
mind
speak that every days experience makes men either better or worse. A familiarity with sacred things will either have its appropriate effect of improving our moral and religious characters, or it will render us less likely to be benefited by subsequent opportunities.

To those who trifle with sacred things, religion loses its dignity, death and eternity their solemnity, revelation its evidence of authenticity, the character of God its awful grandeur and sublimity. Their perceptions of truth become blunted, their moral powers paralyzed as by the hand of death, their energies withered as by the bite of persecution; no motives can influence them, no fearsalarize no evidence convince them. They go onward and downward in the death-like stream of pleasure or stupidity, until awaked by the shock of the bottomless gulf into forever irremediable woe. — Because I have called and ye refused, I stretched out my hand and no man regarded. I also will laugh at your calamities, and mock when your fear cometh as desolation and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind. (Revel 13:10-12)