

**Perseverance Desired***Samuel Stennet (1727–1795)*

Jesus, my Saviour and my God,  
 Thou hast redeemed me with Thy blood;  
 By ties, both natural and divine,  
 I am and ever will be Thine.

But ah! should my inconstant heart,  
 Ere I'm aware, from Thee depart,  
 What dire reproach would fall on me  
 For such ingratitude to Thee!

The thought I dread, the crime I hate;  
 The guilt, the shame, I deprecate:  
 And yet so mighty are my foes,  
 I dare not trust my warmest vows.

Pity my frailty, dearest Lord!  
 Grace in the needful hour afford.  
 Oh, steel this timorous heart of mine  
 With fortitude and love divine.

So shall I triumph o'er my fears,  
 And gather joys from all my tears;  
 So shall I to the world proclaim  
 The honors of the Christian name.

**ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ***In the Nick of Time***The Purpose of Hebrews***Charles A. Hauser, Jr. with Kevin T. Bauder*

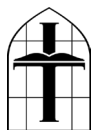
*Before his death, Charles Hauser wrote a draft of a commentary on Hebrews, leaving the work for Kevin Bauder to complete. The following is an excerpt from the introduction to that commentary. Some of the words are Bauder's, but the argument is Hauser's.*

The first pivotal question in determining the purpose of Hebrews is to decide whether the author intended to write to genuine believers. His terminology, if accepted at face value, indicates that he did. He calls them *brethren* (3:1; 10:19). Indeed, he addressed them as *holy brethren* (3:1), an expression that hardly seems applicable to false professors.

Furthermore, the author states that his readers were “once enlightened” (6:4; 10:32), a concept that the New Testament restricts to believers. Unbelievers are not said to be enlightened, but in darkness (Eph.4:18). For the recipients of Hebrews to be “once enlightened” would mean, not that they used to be enlightened but might subsequently lose their enlightenment, but rather that they were enlightened “once for all,” and that they continue to enjoy the enlightenment that they once received (the word *once* is used in this sense in 10:2 and in Jude 3).

The author also states that his readers have tasted both the heavenly gift and the good word of God (6:4-5). In another place, Hebrews uses the word *taste* of Christ tasting death for everyone (2:9). For Christ to taste death means that He actually experienced death. Otherwise, He could not provide salvation for human beings. If the word *taste* is read this same way in Hebrews 6:4-5, then the readers must have actually experienced the reception of the heavenly gift and of the good word of God. In other words, they were saved individuals.

The same principle applies to the statement that the book's recipients were partakers of the Holy Spirit (6:4). The word *partaker* is used elsewhere of Christ partaking of flesh and blood (2:14). In this passage, the word means that Christ actually became a human being. His incarnation was not a partial event, nor was it a mere outward appearance: beside His deity, the Second Person of the Godhead added a complete human nature. If His humanity was incomplete, then He was not qualified to pay the penalty for human



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sin. The same kind of partaking is emphasized in Hebrews 6:4. Just as Christ had a full share in human nature, so the recipients of Hebrews had a full share in the Holy Spirit.

In view of the description of the readers in Hebrews 6:4, the book is most likely addressed to genuine believers. The description is too precise to apply to individuals who have professed salvation without ever truly possessing it. To apply this description to non-believers, one must explain away the normal meaning of the terms as they are used both in Hebrews and in the rest of the New Testament.

Why, then, do interpreters sometimes question the salvation of the original recipients? The answer to this question is found in the warning passages—especially those in Hebrews 6:1-8 and Hebrews 10:26-32. Some interpreters fear that, if the book is addressed to genuine believers, then these texts might imply that Christians can lose their salvation. That fear is groundless. Rightly interpreted, these warning passages allow interpreters to accept the normal meaning of the words without understanding the warnings to threaten the loss of salvation.

One of the keys to Hebrews is that, unlike Gentile believers, Jewish converts already possessed a divinely revealed religion from the Old Testament. They could point back to Moses and to the revelation that God Himself had given. All the essential elements of Jewish worship came from God. In following Christ, these Jewish believers had to leave behind the old, Jewish forms and the worship of the Old Testament and adopt a new pattern of worship. More than that, they were experiencing persecution, and they faced expulsion from a way of life that they had considered holy. Perhaps modern Gentile believers should hesitate to condemn them too quickly for a bit of wavering in their new faith. From the distance of two millennia, the magnitude of this change is difficult to appreciate.

These considerations help to explain the structure of the letter. Essentially, the book alternates between two kinds of writing. On the one hand, the author tries to show his readers the superiority of what they now have in Christ. He never depreciates their previous, Jewish worship, but he shows that their position in Christ is clearly better. On the other hand, the author inserts warnings about the danger of failing to take advantage of this new position in Christ.

This element of warning is a key consideration, an indication that the life of faith is not a static thing in which God rewards maintenance of the *status quo*. God expects believers to use their new blessings in Christ to grow and to mature in the faith. If they do not, then God will discipline them as a human father disciplines his children. God's discipline does not display His wrath, but His love and his desire for every believer to grow and mature.

Nevertheless, if believers reject God's provision for growth and maturity, they can expect nothing except to be chastened—perhaps severely.

The desire to see his readers grow to maturity is the author's primary motivation in writing what he calls a "brief" word of exhortation (13:22). Throughout the text he emphasizes items that would be of interest primarily to people with a Jewish background. He also considers both the deity and the humanity of Christ. In his perspective, Christ is truly divine and truly human, but not a mixture of the two. Jewish people could easily stumble over the notion of a divine-human Christ, but the author demonstrates that both natures were essential to the work of salvation. Of the two, he is more concerned with Christ's human nature and humiliation. He demonstrates that Christ's humiliation resulted in glory, so that Christ now occupies an exalted position beside God the Father.

The writer also emphasizes the priesthood of Christ, showing that both His priestly office and His sacrifice are better than those of the Mosaic Law. The author argues from the superior priesthood of Christ to the fullness of the propitiation and cleansing that He accomplished. The discussion of Christ's high priesthood is no theoretical discourse. Rather, the letter demands practical application of this doctrine in the life of the believer. As with all Scripture, it is practical by its very nature, placing believers under obligation to practice what they have learned. For the author of Hebrews, faith is not only a requirement for salvation, but also essential for living the Christian life. Without faith, maturity is impossible. In the hands of this author, Israel's failures in the Old Testament serve as illustrations of the terrible consequences that follow the failure of faith.



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This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

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