

Once Enlightened

by Tricia Berg

For it is impossible to renew to repentance those who were once enlightened, who tasted the heavenly gift, became companions with the Holy Spirit, tasted God's good word and the powers of the coming age, and who have fallen away, because, to their own harm, they are recrucifying the Son of God and holding Him up to contempt. For ground that has drunk the rain that has often fallen on it and that produces vegetation useful to those it is cultivated for receives a blessing from God. But if it produces thorns and thistles, it is worthless and about to be cursed, and will be burned at the end. Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. Hebrews 6:4-9

This passage has the power to strike terror into our hearts, doesn't it? But God doesn't intend for believers to live in fear, except to have enough understanding of His great, infinite power that we have respect Him. When we realize how His power is completely self-controlled, matched by His perfect love, compassion, wisdom and faithfulness, we know that we have nothing to fear if we are His obedient children. He is not hot-tempered and rash, but rather long-suffering and patient. He wants us to live out the joy of our salvation, with great anticipation of our future inheritance in heaven. (Ephesians 1:3-14, Colossians 1:11-14, 1 Peter 1:3-9) I think that if we are concerned about this, that is a sure sign that we are not the ones to whom the above passage from Hebrews refers (although this would certainly be a good time to make sure that we ARE saved by having believed in our heart and confessed with our mouth that Jesus is OUR Lord). (Romans 10:8-13)

Notice the similarity of today's passage above with the Parable of the Weeds (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43). When the field is ready for harvest, the weeds are gathered first and burned so that the wheat is not harmed by pulling the weeds prematurely while they are all growing together. The weeds were sown by the enemy, so even though they are in the same field with the wheat, they do not represent children of God, but of the devil. (1 John 3:1-10) Later in Hebrews, Paul reminds the believers that when they were first "enlightened" they suffered persecution. This

is important, because this shows that something was different about them that caused others who were not saved to notice them. They were the wheat growing among weeds. This resulted in persecution, through which they persevered because they knew their inheritance was in heaven. If they had just gone along with the world, behaving as "weeds," that would have been a sign that they were not even born again to begin with--not children of God (John 1:12-13). The world would not have persecuted them in that case. (John 15:18-21, 2 Timothy 3:12-13)

But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. For, "Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; but My righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him." But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls. Hebrews 10:32-39

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. 1 John 2:15-20

If I'm not mistaken, the ones referred to in our passage for today do not want to accept the forgiveness offered to all. I don't believe that they seek forgiveness but none is offered, but rather that they have committed

the only unpardonable sin--utter and complete rejection of their Savior, denying their need for Him as a sinner--quite probably insisting that they are NOT sinners. (Matthew 12:31-32, John 3:16-18, 1 John 1:8-10, 1 John 5:1-12) There are many people today who say there is no such thing as sin, that it is all a matter of personal choice and no one else's business. If that were the case, then Jesus would not have had to die for our sins. To say there is no sin is to say that God is a liar and Jesus died for nothing. If that is not rejection, then I don't know what is! But if we are consciously aware of our sin and cry out to God, we WILL find forgiveness in Jesus. There are warnings in the Bible about not quenching the Holy Spirit so that we no longer hear Him convicting us of sin. (1 Thessalonians 5:14-24, Ephesians 4:17-32, Titus 2:11-14)

God gave us free will and enough information to choose serving Him over serving ourselves. We would all do well to heed it, not out of fear of losing our salvation, but out of unending love and gratitude **for** our salvation. The more we know Him from reading the Holy Bible, seeing all of the marvelous works He has done throughout history and in nature, the more we love Him and realize how worthy He is of all praise, honor and glory. He is most certainly worthy of our living in a way that pleases Him--not only having GOOD INTENTIONS to do so, but actually doing it. (James 1:22-25) "It's the thought that counts" is a saying we often hear, but let's prove our faith to be real and not just hypothetical--not something we read about, or something on our bucket list. How will God be honored by that kind of "faith"? (James 2:14-26, also see the Parable of the Sower: Matthew 13:1-23)

The best part is that we are not even expected to do this under our own power--His Spirit comes to dwell inside of us when we are born again, helping us. (Philippians 2:12-13, John 14:15-21) Notice in this next passage that it says work "out" not work "for." *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Philippians 2:12-13* There is a HUGE difference. Salvation is FREE, but it costs you your LIFE. (Matthew 16:24-26, John 12:24-26)

Did you ever try to make someone love you? It can't be done, can it? They either do or don't, but it helps if they KNOW you--we don't really

love anyone we don't even know. So it is with God. To truly know Him is to love Him wholeheartedly. He doesn't force anyone to do either. If He had wanted robots with no choice but to do His will, He is more than able to have designed them instead of humans.

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator. Colossians 3:1-10

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and excellence, by which He has granted to us His precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1:3-11

As the previous passages show, when we are baptized into Christ (Matthew 3:11, Galatians 3:27, with fire, by the Holy Spirit), our old self "dies" and we are a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). Then we can bring forth fruits of righteousness (Philippians 1:9-11), fruits of His Spirit within us (Galatians 5:22-23). If we have these, then we have assurance that we are saved. If there is no "fruit," then now is the time to examine your own heart to make sure that you have actually been born again. The answer is not in someone else's assurance that you are a "good person" or in someone else's accusations that you don't measure up to their standards. The answer is found by holding up God's own word as a mirror to see if our actions reflect that we love Him with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:30)--that we are His child washed clean by the blood of His precious Son (1 John 1:6-7), not wanting to become stained by the world or portray Him in any way that dishonors Him (James 1:27). If we have no desire to read the Bible and to live in a way that pleases God, then we should be asking ourselves why not? If we do, then we should believe God and trust in His promises.

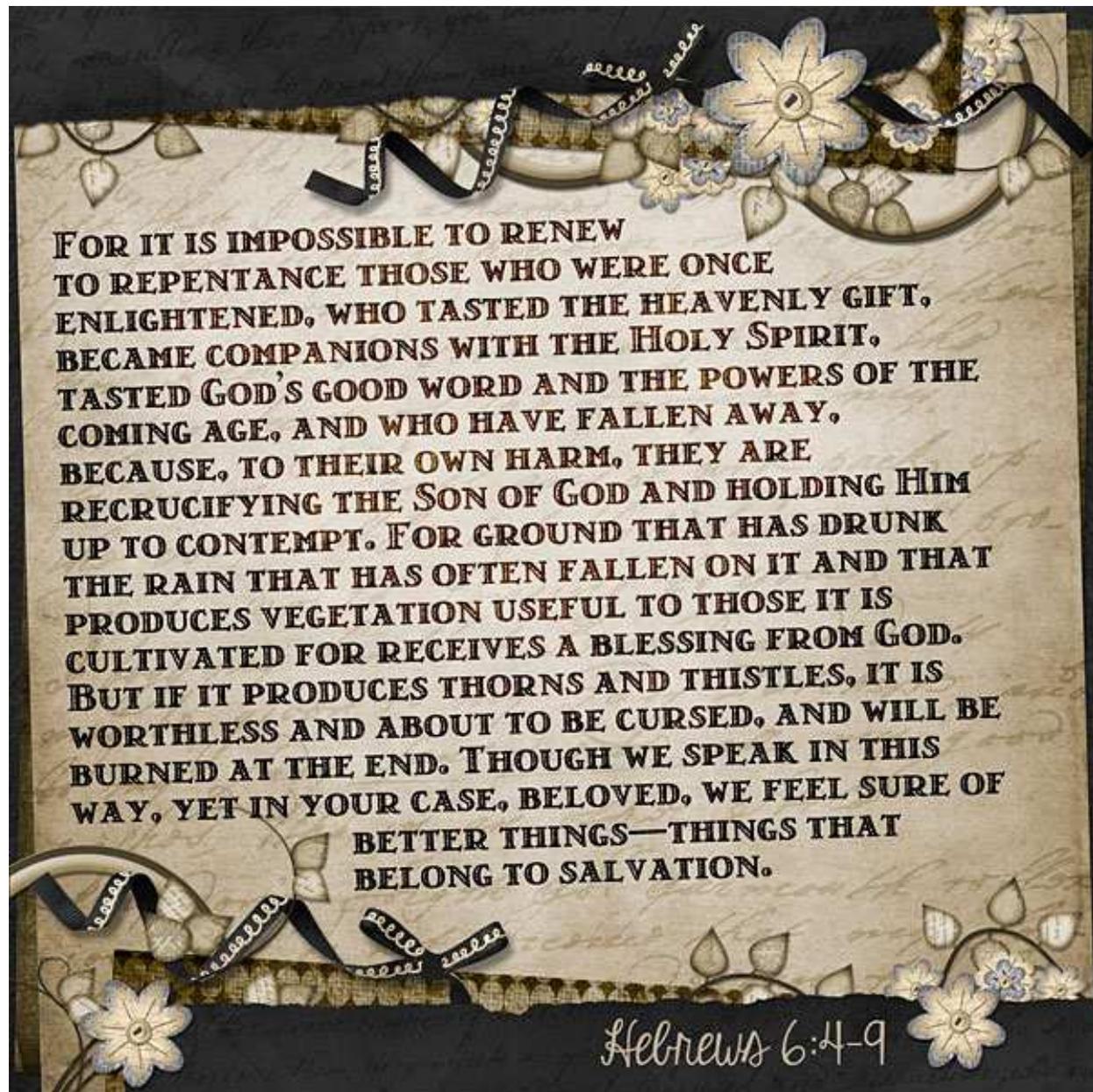
You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood. Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us.

This is how we know that we live in Him and He in us: He has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in

God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because He first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And He has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister. 1 John 4:4-21

Written by Tricia Berg, October 2016, updated April, 2017
(6 pp. + digital scrapbook layout)

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