

**COUNTERFEIT**

# CHRISTIANITY

## Hebrews 6:1-12

*Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity (TELIOS!), not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, <sup>2</sup> and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. <sup>3</sup> And this we will do if God permits. <sup>4</sup> 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, <sup>5</sup> and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, <sup>6</sup> and then have fallen away, 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. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.*

*<sup>9</sup> Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. <sup>10</sup> For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. <sup>11</sup> And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, <sup>12</sup> so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*

Josh Harris has fallen away. On July 26 he posted this on his Instagram page.

I have undergone a massive shift in regard to my faith in Jesus. The popular phrase for this is “deconstruction,” the biblical phrase is “falling away.” By all the measurements that I have for defining a Christian, I am not a Christian.

Josh is intentionally using language from Hebrews 6. “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, <sup>5</sup> and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, <sup>6</sup> and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance.” He knows what this verse means and he very intentionally made use of its language. He is saying, “You know that passage about losing your faith in Hebrews chapter six? That’s me.”

Who is Josh Harris and why should you care? Some of you may not be familiar with Josh Harris. In his late teens or early twenties he wrote a best selling book called *I Kissed dating Goodbye*. It sold over one million copies and in many ways, it became the official handbook for Christians

attempting to navigate the hazardous waters of relationships and marriage. He also became a Christian superstar which led to his being chosen to pastor a megachurch at age 30 even though he had never had any theological training. He pastored the flagship church of the Sovereign Grace denomination. You should care about this because when someone of Josh's stature completely turns his back on his faith in his mid-forties after all of this impact on the evangelical world, we should give some time to understanding what happened.

First, let me remind you of our larger context. We were in Colossians describing the purpose, the pillar, the process and the power of making disciples. Then we moved to Hebrews chapters 5 and 6 to make see the practice of making disciples and to make a comparison between:

- The Immature Believer (5:11-14)
- The False Believer (6:1-8)
- The Mature Believer (6-9-12)

So I am using Josh Harris' story as an illustration of these principles. I don't want you to think I wrote a sermon just so I could talk about Harris. I had planned to preach this text but never in my life have I ever heard of a Christian who fell away and then self-identified himself as someone who fell away from the faith.

So based on this text and this real life example, there are three main questions I want to answer this morning.

1. What does it mean to "fall away"?  
As I said, Josh intentionally used that language and we need to dig into this text and understand what it means.
2. What happened to Josh?
3. How can we prevent it from happening to us?

### **What does it mean to fall away?**

Many of you know that Hebrews is a much debated text centering on the question of whether or not you can lose your salvation. So that is how some interpret this text.

1. You can actually lose your salvation and never again return to faith in Christ.  
One thing is clear in this text. It says that the person who truly falls away, it is "impossible... to restore them again to repentance." So right away this flies in the face of those who say that a true believer can lose his or her salvation. For those who teach this, I have never heard one of them also say that you can never again be brought to repentance. The typical teaching of these folks is

### **1. PURPOSE**

*that we may present everyone mature in Christ*

### **2. PILLAR**

*Christ in you, the hope of glory*

### **3. PROCESS**

*Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom*

### **4. POWER**

*For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.*

### **5. PRACTICE**

*But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.*

that you can lose your salvation so you have to repent again and get saved. This can theoretically happen to a person multiples times over their lifetime.

Let me say in no uncertain terms. We do not believe that a genuine believer can ever lose their salvation. I don't have time this morning to give a full defense of this belief and I have done so in the past, but let me draw your attention to two things.

First, on the back table is a handout called 33 Things That Happen at the Moment of Salvation. This gives a summary of Scripture's teaching on the secure position of the believer. In order to "lose your salvation," each of these miracles of salvation that Jesus did for you would have to be undone. They would all have to be reversed and I don't see anywhere in Scripture where it allows for this.

Second, a quick look at John 6 should make this clear.

All that the Father gives me **will come to me**, and whoever comes to me **I will never cast out**. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that **I should lose nothing of all that he has given me**, but **raise it up on the last day**. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and **believes in him should have eternal life**, and I will raise him up on the last day." (John 6:37-40)

- "All that the Father gives will come to me" reminds us that God is in sovereign control over salvation.
- "I will never cast out" Here we have Jesus' promise of our secure position.
- "I should lose nothing of all that he has given me" Jesus promises that we won't be cast out and that we can't be lost. And Jesus sealed that promise be also promising we will be raised up on the last day.
- "everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life" There's the clarity of the gospel message. Here's a wonderful intersection of divine sovereignty—"all that the Father gives me will come to me" and human responsibility—"everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life." And these believers are given the same promise—"I will raise him up on the last day." Not only is our salvation secured but so is our final resurrection.

This and fifty other reasons is why I reject the first interpretation that you can be truly saved and then lose you r salvation. Here is the other popular interpretation.

2. This is a hypothetical example. If it were possible, hypothetically speaking, to lose your salvation (but it isn't), under that circumstance you could not be brought back to repentance.

I won't go into much detail here except to say that this used to be my position and now I think it is just too confusing. I have opted for what I think is a simpler option that deals with the text better.

3. There are false believers who after they finally reject Christ, can never be brought to repentance and saving faith.

I'm not saying this is a comfortable position to hold but I do feel it is the clearest interpretation of the text. It's hard for us, though, because we all know believers who have fallen away, some of whom are very near and dear to us. So let me be very clear about something. You can't know if someone has fallen away and we should not make a final judgment about such. Of course you should warn them and do whatever you can to proclaim the truth to them but we should never conclude that they are lost forever. I think the text is very clear. Some people who appeared to be saved were actually false believers and they can indeed get to the point where they have rejected Christ to such a degree that it is impossible for them to come to repentance.

This can be hard to wrap our minds around, especially when we know people who seemed to be solid believers. Even the description in this passage seems clear. Here are the people who fell away.

- have once been enlightened
- who have tasted the heavenly gift
- and have shared in the Holy Spirit
- have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come

Doesn't that sound like someone who is a believer? If so, then how can they possibly fall away? Let's answer our second question.

### **What happened to Josh Harris?**

Lots of people have written about this story in the past two weeks but I'm going to approach it from a different angle and look at Josh's wife—soon to be ex-wife, unfortunately. Everyone was reading Josh's Instagram posts so I decided to look at his wife's posts for any clues.

June 24—Shannon

Where I am now has everything do with God and nothing to do with God... While I'm looking for something I don't know, I start remembering things. Things at the beginning. Most importantly, **the feeling of not feeling safe**. I had forgotten that I felt this way.<sup>1</sup>

July 5—Shannon

My fundamentalist conservative Christianity experience taught me to ignore my inner voice. It's not possible to unpack this in one post, using one scripture or angle. But early on, I learned to distrust and override myself **out of fear in an environment where those in authority held tremendous control over leaders and members**.<sup>2</sup>

July 8—Shannon

Healthy churches don't use fear, bullying or shaming. They don't need to **manipulate behavior or manage image**. Love feels: **Safe**.<sup>3</sup>

We see again and again that Shannon was expressing that she did not feel safe in her church and that they were abusing their power and influence. Now keep in mind that the church to which she is referring is the one her husband pastored for a decade, the flagship megachurch for all of Sovereign Grace churches. This church was such a mess that Al Mohler issued a public apology earlier this year for supporting its founder and the man who hired Josh Harris.

“As many are aware, I have recently apologized and asked forgiveness for serious errors I made in how I responded to concerns that were raised about Sovereign Grace Churches and CJ Mahaney.” In 2013 I was part of a statement supportive of CJ and dismissive of the allegations and concerns raised regarding SGC’s handling of sexual and domestic abuse claims.<sup>4</sup>

Do you remember what Jesus had to say about such things? “whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6). There has been a proliferation of scandals in evangelical churches and it sickens me to my core. On the one hand I’m glad for all of it to be exposed and hopefully rooted out but on the other hand, I am disgusted that it needs to be rooted out.

Now I don’t know if the abuse of power and cover up started by CJ Mahaney had an impact on Josh Harris or not. We won’t know until he tells us but it’s clear that it had an impact on his wife. Josh was handed an unhealthy, dangerous church as a 30 year old Christian celebrity who had no theological training. It was a recipe for disaster from day one.

At the end of the day. Josh bears responsibility for his own actions. If he continues to reject Christ, as Hebrews 10 says, he will have “a fearful expectation of judgment.” However, if you create a situation in which “little ones” can lose their faith, you will also be held liable. Little ones here are not just children but can be any believer who is enticed into sin or otherwise abused in some way.

Now let me show you Josh’s timeline of public comments and interviews.

July 17—Josh

“We’re writing to share the news that we are separating.”

July 19—Josh (sojourners magazine)

"I do think though that, for me, in that change of interpretation of such a fundamental level when it comes to sexuality, it's just hard for me to ... In a way it's almost easier for me to contemplate throwing out all of Christianity than it is to keeping Christianity and adapting it in these different ways."<sup>5</sup>

July 23—Shannon

I still believe in God.<sup>6</sup>

July 26

I have undergone a massive shift in regard to my faith in Jesus. The popular phrase for this is “deconstruction,” the biblical phrase is “falling away.” By all the measurements that I have for defining a Christian, I am not a Christian.<sup>7</sup>



August 4—Josh marched in a gay pride parade

Now this last one may shock you more than anything else you have heard and if it does, let me ask you this. Are you more concerned about Josh's life decisions or the state of his soul? All sin separates us from God and all sin can be covered by the blood of Jesus. We should be chiefly concerned for his soul and not his specific sins. The exact nature of the sin does not matter because if you outright reject Jesus, then your sins are left uncovered. You are in grave danger. Josh has declared that he no longer believes in Jesus or his commands. And in his own words, he has fallen away from God. Whether or not he remains in this state is yet to be determined.

Finally to our key question. **How do we prevent this from happening to us?**

In one sense, everything we do as a church is meant to build our faith in Christ and to mitigate those who would fall away, so the answer to this question is enormous. But partly based on the mature believer in verses 9-12, here are some thoughts.

1. Recognize that the truth does not always bear fruit.  
Look at vv. 7-8 again. "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." In this instance, the "rain" is God's truth in all its forms. This rain falls on the just and the unjust. Two people can have all of the potential benefits and blessings of God's truth but have two different effects. We just need to remember this. Just like anyone else, pastors can fall away.
2. Proclaim Christ by warning everyone and teaching everyone.  
Remember that Colossians literally says that in order to proclaim Christ we need to warn everyone and teach everyone. Many years ago we were helping a friend move from the basement of a house to her own apartment. This happened because her husband suddenly divorced her. I met with him and begged him to reconsider but he refused. On moving day, the owner of the house was helping us move our friend. It was a hot day so we had cups of lemonade sitting around. At one point our friend picked up a cup of lemonade and asked the owner, "Is this yours?" He said it was and she proceeded to drink from it. I knew right then in my heart that they were having an affair, but I never said anything. I regret it to this day. As I say all of the time, we need one another to fully follow Jesus.
3. Hold your leadership accountable.  
If I am right about the influence of the abusive church on Josh and his family, then it is all the more reason to hold your church leadership accountable. There have been a rash of failures of megachurch pastors of late and in every single case of which I am familiar, all of the church leaders enabled their senior pastors. They knew what was happening but they excused it. They were aware that some good things were happening in their churches so they downplayed and became blind to the growing concerns in their midst. Evil is enabled by other evil.

The shepherds of s church are tasked with protecting the flock, something we take very seriously at Grace. But none of us as individual or as an elder team are immune from sin and grace mistakes. We need to guard the flock, but you need to hold us accountable. This is the main reason we so careful in the selection of elders.

4. Be as honest and transparent as possible.

I know of a pastor who had multiple affairs while he was also in multiple men’s accountability groups. It seems clear that Josh has had some inward struggles that were not shared with close friends. This is our default. We may not intentionally lie to others but neither do we tend to be very transparent with one another. Doubts begin in the mind and the heart and the more they are allowed to simmer in silence, the more likely they are to chip away at your faith. As I have often said, there are healthy doubts and unhealthy doubts. A healthy doubt is one that is expressed and addressed and an unhealthy doubt is left to fester in your heart.

5. Imitate faithful believers but put your faith in Jesus.

Verse twelve tells us that we are to be “imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” Paul wrote, “Follow me as I follow Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). There is great benefit in being surrounded by people who are walking the same path of faith as you are. Better to imitate a faithful person than not. However, in our day of Christian celebrities and megachurches, we are prone to not just imitating people but essentially putting your faith in them. If someone you know falls away from the faith and it makes you think about you doing the same, your faith was probably in that person and not in Jesus Christ.

Karen met her general ed requirements in college within an extremely liberal philosophy program. In terms of attacking Christianity in the classroom, unfortunately, they were trailblazers. One day there was a vigorous discussion about the evils of the Crusades. Karen was feeling discouraged by the topic and the attack on her faith. Right in the middle of that class discussion, her liberal professor looked at Karen and said, Karen’s liberal professor “Karen, don’t feel you need to defend all Christians. You just need to defend Jesus.”

We don’t need to defend the actions of sinful Christians, but it is very helpful to imitate those who are faithful to Christ. Imitate them but put your faith in Jesus alone.

Pray for Josh. You can imagine that a return to faith in Christ would be much more powerful than falling away. Others...

**Rich Maurer**  
**August 11, 2019**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/p/BzHnzx1nuUK/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/p/BzjiPWdnJsN/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/p/BzrVF8gHzcA/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://news.sbts.edu/2019/02/15/statement-r-albert-mohler-jr-sovereign-grace-churches/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://sojo.net/articles/questioning-faith-after-purity-culture-conversation-joshua-harris>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.instagram.com/p/BORGD9\\_n\\_mG/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BORGD9_n_mG/)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/p/BOZBrNLH2sl/>