

## Go on to Maturity

How many of you have a friend or family member that you trust, that is willing to tell you what you need to hear, even when it is hard to hear? Maybe it's a bad habit you're unaware of, or a friendship that really isn't good for you. Maybe you're spending too much time on your phone or need to exercise and stop eating whole bags of kettle cooked potato chips in one sitting. But it also comes with great encouragement and gives us hope.

The section of Hebrews we will cover this morning is like that friend. It is direct and to the point. Hard to hear. But ultimately, for our good to move us forward. This section is inserted parenthetically in the middle of the discussion about Jesus being a priest in the order of Melchizedek that we discussed last week. "The power of an indestructible life."

- BLUF – We need to grow up and have mature faith
- We need to make sure we are building on a good foundation
- We must endure and continue to love others and follow faithful examples to keep us from growing dull
- Our hope is in God's faithfulness, not our own
- This hope is anchored with Jesus in heaven

So make yourself ready, here come the rebukes!

## We need to grow up

We need to make sure we are not lazy, dull, or distracted in our pursuit of Jesus.

*Heb 5:11 There is much more we would like to say about this, but it is difficult to explain, especially since you are spiritually dull and don't seem to listen. 12 You have been believers so long now that you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things about God's word. You are like babies who need milk and cannot eat solid food. 13 For someone who lives on milk is still an infant and doesn't know how to do what is right. 14 Solid food is for those who are mature, who through training have the skill to recognize the difference between right and wrong.*

The author is telling these Christians that they:

- Are spiritually dull
- Don't listen
- Should be teaching instead of still learning the basics
- Are babies who can't discern right and wrong.

Recall the saying, the Bible wasn't written *to us*, but it is written *for us*. We might assume we're not like these guys. But let's take this to heart. I will admit for the world to hear that my growth as a believer has come in fits and starts. At times, I have been very diligent in pursuing the kingdom of God, and at other times I have been very distracted. Here is the test for us today: Ask yourself, "Am I dull"?

- Do you have the ability to understand more than the basics?
- Can you teach what you have learned to someone else?
- Can you discern right and wrong, biblically?

Now if you truly are a spiritual baby who has only been saved a short time then hey, great! We're glad you're here. But if you have been saved a long time and still find yourself to be unstable, unproductive, or on the sidelines, let's take stock and take action.

### Check your foundation - Make sure you have a solid foundation.

*Heb 6:1 So let us stop going over the basic teachings about Christ again and again. Let us go on instead and become mature in our understanding. Surely we don't need to start again with the fundamental importance of repenting from evil deeds and placing our faith in God. 2 You don't need further instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. 3 And so, God willing, we will move forward to further understanding.*

**Recall the overall theme** of Hebrews is relating to Hebrew Christians tempted to go back to Judaism due to persecution. The letter is showing them the superiority and sufficiency of Jesus as their king, high priest, and savior.

These doctrines are rooted in Jewish/OT background (repentance, cleansing rituals, laying on of hands, resurrection, judgment) and are now "fulfilled in Christ." So the Jewish believers would have experienced these (ie repentance, washings, laying on of hands, or were taught the Resurrection and judgment as part of their religious practice.

### **These are all fulfilled, once for all, in Christ!**

- Repentance - turn from dead works to the finished work of **Christ**
- Faith - trust in the death and resurrection of **Jesus alone (not our record)**
- Water Baptism identifies us with Jesus **burial and resurrection**
- Baptism in the Holy Spirit - proof of the ascension
- Laying on of Hands - commissioned by **Jesus'** Holy Spirit baptism, gifts of healing
- Resurrection – Jesus is the first-fruit, and we too will rise at the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of **Christ**
- Eternal judgement - **Christ** will judge all of the world upon his return

## Don't turn back now

Next we see a very somber warning for those who turn back from pursuing Jesus.

*Heb 6:4 For it is impossible to bring back to repentance those who were once enlightened—those who have experienced the good things of heaven and shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the power of the age to come— 6 and who then turn away from God. It is impossible to bring such people back to repentance; by rejecting the Son of God, they themselves are nailing him to the cross once again and holding him up to public shame.*

*7 When the ground soaks up the falling rain and bears a good crop for the farmer, it has God's blessing. 8 But if a field bears thorns and thistles, it is useless. The farmer will soon condemn that field and burn it.*

This is one of the more challenging passages in the New Testament, and one that Bible teachers have debated for 2000 years. This makes a great example of how we learn to take on the solid food of God's word! How do we seek to understand hard verses?

### Step 1 – understand the audience

We discussed above the context of **who this passage was written to and why**. This is written to Jewish Christians who were suffering persecution. And some were considering giving up on their faith.

### Step 2 – understand the words used

- Once enlightened – the same word is used in Heb 10:32 which links them to suffering for Christ
- Tasted and experienced the good things of heaven – tasted is experiential
- Shared in the Holy Spirit – again the same word is used in Heb 3:1 and 14 which talks of becoming partakers in Christ.

So we see this is talking about real believers, not just curious outsiders. Now what is it saying?

*Heb 4:6 who then turn away from God. It is impossible to bring such people back to repentance*

- Note, it doesn't say they cannot be forgiven, but rather that they cannot be brought back to repentance. We'll come back to this in a minute.
- The field bearing thorns and thistles is part of the curse of sin. It stands ready for judgement.

### Step 3 – understand the context of the book

Now let's consider the **nearby verses** – it is about continuing on to maturity, and so we see the potential consequence if we don't. We could turn away from God and be lost (v6).

Let's consider the **overall book**. Throughout Hebrews we see a call to **hold firm**.

- Heb 3:6 We are God's house if we hold firmly to our confidence and hope
  - Heb 3:14 We share in Christ if we hold our original confidence firm to the end
  - Heb 4:14 We have a great high priest, hold firmly to the faith we profess
  - Heb 10:23 We should hold fast to our confession of our hope without wavering
- Vs the warnings
- Heb 3: Don't harden your heart
  - Heb 4: Don't fail to enter God's rest
  - Heb 10:26-27 If we deliberately go on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no further sacrifice for sins remains, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume all adversaries.
  - Heb 10:39 Don't shrink back and be destroyed

What are seeing thus far: **If we hold firm to that truth, of Jesus as our savior we're fine. But if we turn from God and deliberately go on sinning we can only expect judgement.**

### Step 4 – How does it fit within the New Testament

Now let's consider the rest of the NT. And I won't go through all of that, but here are two highlights.

*Col 1:22-23 he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.*

Vs

*2 Pet 2:20 For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. 21 For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.*

## Step 5 – make your best conclusion from the evidence

**Conclusion:** It is clear from all the context that to be saved we must continue in the faith. We need to hold firm to our confidence in Christ alone to be saved. We must continue to follow Jesus till the end. A faith which doesn't endure doesn't cut it.

Now it doesn't say that a person who is a Christian but falls away **can't be forgiven**, but that they **won't be** restored to repentance.

The impossibility is because they've hardened the heart beyond repentance, not that God is unable or unwilling to offer it.

Let's take this warning to heart today. You are saved by grace through faith in the work of God, not your own work. True faith will hold onto that hope while following Jesus, becoming more and more like him as you grow and mature. Never "perfect". But complete. Now comes the encouragement.

## The expectation of a better outcome

*Heb 6:9 Dear friends, even though we are talking this way, we really don't believe it applies to you. **We are confident that you are meant for better things, things that come with salvation.** 10 For God is not unjust. He will not forget how hard you have worked for him and how you have shown your love to him by caring for other believers, as you still do. 11 Our great desire is that you will **keep on loving others as long as life lasts**, in order to **make certain** that what you hope for will come true. 12 Then you will not become spiritually dull and indifferent. Instead, you will follow the example of those who are going to inherit God's promises because of their faith and endurance.*

I want to be clear about this. You are not saved by your works, nor do you keep your salvation by your works. We are saved by trusting in Jesus salvation through the cross and choosing to follow him. We make certain our hope by continuing to love others and following the example of others who faithfully endure as they follow Jesus. This is how we avoid spiritual dullness that can lead to turning away from God.

## God's unchanging promise

*Heb 6:13 For example, there was God's promise to Abraham. Since there was no one greater to swear by, God took an oath in his own name, saying:*

*14 "I will certainly bless you, and I will multiply your descendants beyond number." 15 Then Abraham waited patiently, and he received what God had promised.*

God made a promise to Abraham. Abraham patiently waited until he received what God had promised.

*Heb 6:17 God also bound himself with an oath, so that **those who received the promise could be perfectly sure that he would never change his mind.** 18 So God has given both his promise and his oath. These two things are **unchangeable** because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us. 19 **This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain into God's inner sanctuary.** 20 Jesus has already gone in there for us. He has become our eternal High Priest in the order of Melchizedek.*

- The unchanging nature of his purpose makes us certain God won't change his mind
- We again **take hold and can take courage**
- We have a hope, and an anchor for our soul, firm and secure in heaven. In the presence of God, behind the curtain.

## My testimony of falling away

When I was a young man, still in my teens, I was very enthusiastic about following Jesus. I tried to be perfect – I wanted to do everything right. After a while, I got discouraged and quit. It was just too hard. I told God in my heart that I didn't want to do this anymore. For about 5 years, I walked in darkness. Eventually, I came to the realization that life without God made no sense. But I had a hard time feeling like I could come back. I thought I may have committed the unforgiveable sin. Afterall, I basically renounced God. In my early twenties, after Janet and I were married, I finally came to grasp the fact that my salvation never depended on me in the first place. That it was only in trusting in the completed work of Jesus did that mattered, not my personal holiness or perfection. I realized then that coming back was never a question. I just had to run to Jesus.

Our walk with God is based on faith, not our performance, from beginning to end. But it is a continual response. Learning to obey and follow Jesus. So where are you today?

- Are you growing in your faith?
- Are you teaching others what you have learned?
- How is your foundation?
- Are you loving others as long as life lasts?
- Are you following the examples of other faithful people?

Don't let discouragement or the lies of the enemy keep you from finishing strong. No matter where you are today, run to Jesus and find the grace you need!