

## The Foundational Importance of Growing Up – Hebrews 6:1-12 Pastor Tim Rech

### Introduction

This morning we come to what has always been thought of as a difficult text. But it does not have if we keep two things in mind:

- 1) A believer in Christ cannot lose his or her salvation.
- 2) The context immediately before and at the end of this text and throughout the book of Hebrews is to remind and to warn God's people – remind them that Jesus is better than anything. And to warn them that we are not to neglect the great salvation He has made possible, to believe God in an obeying way and thereby enter His rest and not drifting or becoming sluggish. God uses warnings to His people as a grace to persevere them to the end of this life. And these warnings are serious – there is no middle ground.

Recently we have seen in chapter five the author beginning to explain how Jesus is our great high priest – a high priest like those of the Levitical priesthood but different in that He came after the order of Melchizedek. But here he had to pause, because it was hard to explain, and in 5:11-14, we see why:

*<sup>11</sup> About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. <sup>12</sup> For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, <sup>13</sup> for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. <sup>14</sup> But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.*

The problem was that:

- They were dull of hearing or sluggish which inhibited their capacity to understand.
- They should have been teachers by now but instead needed to hear the basic teaching of the Word of God all over again.
- Like children, they needed milk – not yet ready for solid food, the type of food needed to receive a deeper understanding of Christ and His Word.
- This deficiency in food was driven by their not receiving the basics of the Word and Christ and applying them in their lives therefore making it very hard to immediately take in solid food.
- And such may be the condition you find yourself today ...

But the author continues to push them and us forward. Let us begin at 6:1 ...

### The Foundational Instruction (6:1-3)

***6** Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, <sup>2</sup> and of instruction about washings,<sup>[a]</sup> the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. <sup>3</sup> And this we will do if God permits.*

*Time to Leave (6:1a)*

Having identified a lack of maturity as their spiritual problem, caused by not exercising with the milk of the Word they had already received, the writer gives them a foundational command. Leave the elementary doctrines of Christ and go onto spiritual maturity. Now this was not and is not an option. Christians must grow by intaking the Word, putting it into practice. There is no standing still. We must grow in Christ-like character. God does not save people without producing righteousness in them. God's people will bring Him glory. If we do not go onto maturity, we are disobedient and as we will see, possibly deceiving ourselves into thinking we are believers when we are not. It is a serious command. And besides, there ought to be a desire in our hearts to do so – a healthy dissatisfaction with our maturity level and with how un-Christ-like we really are.

Now leaving something can be unsettling. What you are going onto can be relatively unknown. Who has not felt this in changing jobs, moving to a new place, or starting in a new school? The change costs us familiar comforts and stretches us. But often, we look back and see that it was for the best. So, God commands us to go onto maturity, so we trust Him and obey knowing that it is certainly for our best.

#### *What to Leave Behind (6:1-2)*

The elementary doctrines or the basics concerning the Messiah that Christians are commanded to leave are described in three doctrinal pairs of truth beginning with:

Personal salvation (6:1b) – repentance from dead works and faith toward God. This is a significant shift in how a person relates to God. We turn from our natural bent to earn salvation to one of being entirely reliant upon God for our salvation by faith in Christ – the only way to please God and ...

Public confession (6:2a) – truths concerning the various ceremonial cleansings prescribed in the Old Testament and baptism which we are familiar with in the New Covenant. These washings are paired with the laying on of hands which set aside people for special service and ...

Future things (6:2b) – there will be a resurrection and a judgment. All views of the end contain these two events. Both are significant and change or should change how we live this life.

Note that in all three pairs, they are principles familiar in both the Old Testament and the New. The difference is in how they are used. For example, “washings” is not the same word as used in the New Testament (“baptizo”). In the OT, such washings were merely ceremonial, symbolic, and temporary. NT baptism, however, shows spiritual reality and is permanent. And pertaining to future events, both the OT and NT speak of the resurrection and judgment. So, all these doctrines are not exclusive to the New Testament.

But they are unique when related to Jesus Christ. This would not be lost on the Jewish Christian listener in this original audience. Jesus had come and completed His salvation work on earth. Now these basic truths concerning OT Messiah must be understood in the person and work of Jesus Christ. No longer could they go back to Moses. Remember Jesus is far better than those who the Jews prized, the prophets, the angels, and even Moses. The Old Testament spoke of Jesus' coming and He had come and now all doctrines of God must relate to Jesus. No going back.

And this was the issue – many were having a hard time crossing over to placing Jesus in the center of all God’s things. It is why when persecuted, their reflex was to return to their doctrine shaped by the OT and to prize and even worship the OT heroes. It may have been why they were sluggish and had made no real progress in or experience with the milk of God’s Word.

Now for us, we cannot relate to them in the same way. But where there is no difference is that Jesus is central to all that means to be a Christians. The basic truths must be seen through the lens of Christ. Trust in Christ by faith over trust in works, confessing such faith in Christ through baptism, and seeing resurrection and judgment through Christ gives.

And although the danger may differ from what these early church Christians faced, the danger remains for us. From what were you saved? When faced with trouble on all sides, do you want to go back? Maybe it is a defective church system or simply the world’s values and so-called “truths”. Might this be why you have not made no real progress in the faith?

God says “leave” these basic truths. Now this is not to say we discard these doctrines of Christ but rather build upon them rightly observed through Christ with what comes next – to “*go on to maturity.*”

#### *Going On to Maturity (6:1)*

Notice while leaving the elementary doctrine of Christ is of our own will, going on to maturity is done by God. Going on to maturity means our submission to being carried along by Him.

How does this work? Well, God has a process for us; regular intake and application of the Word, prayer, obedience, fellowship, and all the while, maintaining a disposition of faith and trust in Christ. Before we know it, we are maturing spiritually, increasingly able to discern and grasp deeper truths. It is God’s process – no shortcuts, no substitutions.

Thinking how a child physically grows is helpful here. A child cannot make him or herself physically grow. But by getting nutrition, sleep, and care, the child grows up over time. God’s growth process for a child just works.

But know this process relies upon the grace of God – see verse three, “*And this we will do if God permits*”. God brings it about at His shape and His pace. Some will grow faster and some will grow further. Regardless, we are reliant upon God’s grace. So, be careful in how we look at one another.

But this is not a call to be passive. We play our part by being faithful to follow His prescription for reaching this spiritual maturity. He has given us the power and understanding to do so.

#### **A Frightening Impossibility (6:4-6)**

Now we must keep the context of verses 1-3 and even 5:11-14 in mind as we tackle verses 4-8. By doing so, we will successfully navigate the seemingly rough waters and land safely on the shores of verses 9-12.

<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.*

So If we are commanded to leave the elementary things and be carried along to maturity at God's sovereign rate of change, then what happens to those who do not go on and worse yet, to those who fall away altogether?

### *No Way Back*

The central truth of verses 4-6 is expressed as *"it is impossible to renew to repentance those who fall away"* (after stripping the descriptive clauses). Some people in Christian circles simply fall away or fall alongside the path. They are traveling along I-75 for a time with eyes seemingly fixed upon Christ but then something else captures their eye and they simply exit the freeway headed for something or someone else more attractive. If continued, there is no way back.

### *Experiences over Reality*

Now if a person cannot lose their salvation, then who are these people described? They have experienced spiritual things; show some degree of understanding, shared in the Spirit, and tasted some of God's goodness and power. Are they believers? Or have they have never truly come to faith?

Some say that because they have "tasted" or "shared" in the Spirit, that they must be born again believers. At first glance, this may seem to be true but look closer. From what we know about the sureness of our salvation from the Scriptures (cannot be unborn from new birth in the Spirit) and the near and overall context of Hebrews, the preacher seems to be speaking of unbelievers – those who have spent time in Christian circles yet have never received Christ.

"Enlightenment" simply speaks of intellectual perception of biblical truth. This word here only means giving light by knowledge or teaching. There is no mention of responding in belief or unbelief. Many are enlightened but not saved. So, some take in biblical truth and offer no response amid others who take in, receive Christ and His teaching, and then apply it.

"Shared" in the Holy Spirit gives the sense of association rather than of taking hold. These people are simply present where the Holy Spirit is at work. Many examples in the early church of Acts where people are amid the Spirit's work but do not respond.

And "Tasted" in this context is sampling only. The term for "word" of God is not the usual "logos" but rather one that describes the parts rather than the whole. The people described here are sampling the Word of God and they even like it, and can see how it is beneficial, but they leave it there. They have tasted the power of God as well. To the original audience, they may have experienced firsthand God's power demonstrated and recorded in the book of Acts. Or like people today, have read its witness. In any event, these people stopped at tasting.

So, we cannot conclude that people sharing spiritual experiences are truly believers. Other places in Scripture say people can fool us into thinking they are believers when they are not. Jesus says to these people, *"I never knew you, Depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness"* (Matt 7:23). And the evil spirit

in Acts 19:15 tells the itinerant Jewish exorcists (the seven sons of Sceva), who had invoked the name of the Lord Jesus in trying to cast them out, “*Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?*”

### *An Impossible Position*

These people have put themselves in an impossible position. After being enlightened and sharing and tasting the things of the Lord, they have fallen away or fallen alongside the way and rejected Christ. They proved to not be genuine believers at all.

And this is not a position of neutrality they have come to, but one of active opposition. They hold Christ in contempt, crucifying Him again. In essence, they have seated themselves with the rest of the scoffers at Calvary who shouted, “*Crucify Him!*”, hurling the insults and mocking Him. {rejection = crucify again} Looking upon God’s one and only offer of salvation to them, they tragically say “NO”.

And it matters not the manner is how Christ is rejected – verbally or not, physically present among God’s people or not – Christ is rejected, nonetheless. And in holding this position, regardless of their familiarity with the church and their experiences, it is impossible to be restored to God.

Does this describe you today? See the danger.

### *A Familiar Illustration (6:7-8)*

The text makes the contrast with a familiar illustration using physical things to show spiritual realities:

*<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.*

The land is the hearts of all who hear the Gospel. Those in Christ drink in the rain of the Word and put it into practice and thereby produce a crop useful and blessed by God.

But those who settle for spiritual experiences only, rejecting Christ and His Word, thorns and thistles are the only things natural man can produce - with no future – things destined to be burned.

I think we have all seen examples of people in this category ...

Is this truly the end for such a person? Well, yes and no. “Yes” if a person continues to hold Christ in contempt and not receiving Him as Savior and Lord. “No” if they do receive Christ and are born again of the Spirit. I say this with great sadness – it is hard to watch those we know and love, often those close to us, reject Christ. But we can pray in hope.

### **A Great Assurance (6:9-10)**

Now preaching of the Word can be hard on those listening. It needs to confront the wayward heart to see its condition and where it needs to change. And so far, the teaching in Hebrews has been hard. But now the author assures the believers in the audience and in all generations to follow. And it is beautiful.

<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.*

#### *Beautiful Words (6:9)*

Take heart fellow Christians, you the beloved. With respect to you, I speak of better things brother and sister – things pertaining to salvation says the Spirit. This is the only use of the endearing term of “beloved” in Hebrews. “Beloved” is an expression of the highest kind of relationship. It is used many times in the New Testament – the Father speaks of His Son in this way and believers use it for one another. Do you?

This is a marked shift from the previous five verses that focused upon intellectual enlightenment only, tasting only, and sharing by association only the things of Christ – the things of experience without salvation. He is now talking of the things that belong to believers – the things that belong to salvation. What are these things? They are maturity, solid food, experience in righteousness, and repentance towards God. They are new life in the Spirit – true regeneration and transformation and not experiences only. These things are better and are attached to a saved condition of life.

#### *Convincing Evidence (6:10)*

The author has witnessed their marks of true belief – he is convinced. They were experiencing intense persecution, yet they were demonstrating sacrificial acts of love towards one another – “the saints”. Love towards the brethren – yet another mark that belongs to salvation. Above all things that we must put on as believers in Colossians 3, Paul writes, “*put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.*” (Col 3:14). And Peter adds, “*Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins* (1 Peter 4:8). The Hebrew believers were loving one another in the face of much difficulty.

But even more importantly, is the motive for their love – “*for His name*”. The key to properly love people is to love Christ and all that His name stands for. Love for Christ is directly related to proper love and ministry towards people. And God knows when our love is done for His glory and great Name.

Now he assures them God is just and will not overlook their loving service to one another and by doing so, serving Christ. We typically think of God’s justice in only one direction, that of judgment. But His justice also works positively and rewards those demonstrating righteousness and goodness – the things He approves. Now we need to remember, God is the One who brings this about in us, but He rewards, nonetheless. This is how He works, and it is a source of assurance to us.

#### **A Great Challenge (6:11-12)**

And now the author calls those who are sluggish to belief in an obeying way.

<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.*

Verses 11-12 could be cited as the purpose statement for the entire letter. Built into them are the warnings and the way to the end in our walk with Christ.

#### *An Urgent Desire (6:11)*

First, he tells them (and us) to show the same earnestness (or diligence) to possess the full assurance of faith. There is only one way to have assurance. It is by loving God by loving people sacrificially. There is an urgency to this challenge to be earnest – do not delay.

By doing so, we cease from our sluggishness. Show yourselves to be genuine followers of Jesus Christ.

#### *Imitate Those Around You (6:12)*

And you need to look no further than to the examples around you. {this is one reason why fellowship is so important} Look to those who are living by faith and with patience until the promises of God are realized. “*How long is that?*”, you might ask. Until the end of this life or until Christ returns.

#### **Reflect and Respond**

Heed God’s serious warnings knowing they are His way of persevering His people.

See Christ as central to your faith and superior to all things – go on to maturity in Him.

Unwilling to submit to God and go onto maturity? This is disobedience and you will not grow up or worse yet, you may not be saved.

Are you unmoved by the Word of God? Maybe you come here for other reasons. Know you are in danger of falling away from God completely and rejecting once and for all, the great and only salvation offered in Christ. Receive Him as your Lord and Savior.

Brothers and sisters - diligently love and serve God’s people for the name of Christ to the end. Confidence in God with a growing assurance of faith will emerge in your life - a life of better things – things that belong to salvation.

And know that God keeps His promises – promises you will inherit by faith and patience.