



## Going On and Growing Up as Heirs Hebrews 6

### Introduction

The High Priesthood of Christ is a deep doctrine. Implicit in it is our need of an intercessor, a confessor, and a counselor. Explicit in it is the qualifying of Christ for the office through suffering. These two themes, Christ's past sufferings and His present role on our behalf, are disquieting to believers who are content to "play church". Needing exhortation, they are jolted by the writer who calls them dullards and babies.

According to some commentators this section, Hebrews 5:11 to 6:20, is parenthetical. They believe it is meant to get the readers on the right track again by strengthening their theological foundation, encouraging them to endure temptations to forsake their faith. When we truly understand who Jesus is, and His purpose for us, we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13). In Hebrews 6, the writer seeks to stimulate these immature, sluggish, underdeveloped believers to get on to maturity!

Three reasons are given to move on. First, salvation is complete, there is no going back. Second, do not stop at salvation, for nothing more happens there after receiving Christ. Third, there is so much more ahead, and God means for us to progress. He saved us for full development and fruit-bearing.

### Outline of Hebrews Chapter 6

- I. Pressing On To Maturity – Hebrews 6:1-9
- II. Heirs of Promise – Hebrews 6:10-20

#### I. Pressing On To Maturity - Hebrews 6:1-9

We tend to become comfortable at every stage of life. Inertia sets in and we resist change and challenge. We choose the familiar and take our eyes off the goal we once pursued excitedly, particularly if the going gets rough. Isaac Watts aptly wrote,

"Must I be carried to the skies  
On flowery beds of ease,  
While others fought to win the prize  
And sailed through bloody seas?

No, I must fight if I would win  
Increase my courage, Lord,  
I'll bear the toil, endure the pain  
Supported by Thy word."

#### A. Leaving the ABC's of Salvation – Hebrews 6:1-3

##### 1. The doctrine of Christ - 6:1a

Here is the fifth *let us* :

- 4:1 - Let us fear falling short,
- 4:11 - Let us labor to enter rest,
- 4:14 - Let us hold fast our confession,
- 4:16 - Let us come boldly before the throne of grace.

*Therefore* refers to all the preceding, 1:4-5:14. *Therefore*, since Christ is better than prophets, angels, Moses, Joshua and Aaron, let us be certain of who He is and move on to maturity. Who Jesus is, is the foundation of our faith. Jesus asked His disciples, *Who do men say that I the Son of Man am?* And *But Who do you say that I am?* (Matthew 16:13-16)? It is a question everyone will have to answer some day. Peter gave the correct answer. Will you?

Having once confessed Christ with your mouth and believed in your heart that God raised Him from the dead (Romans 10:9-10), thus being a true child of God (John 1:12), the matter of your salvation is settled forever. There is nothing to add to it or take away from it. That means it is time to advance from the doctrine of who Christ is, and the elementary principles, to other doctrines. But what are the elementary principles from which believers graduate?

##### 2. The elementary principles - 6:1b-2

###### a. Repentance from dead works

*Dead works* include all our deeds, including sin, before we came to Christ. We were *dead in trespasses and sins* (Ephesians 2:1), when by some miracle of grace we were quickened by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:5) to repent of our sins and acknowledge our need of a Savior (Isaiah 55:1, 6-7). At that time we may not have understood all that was involved, but we knew we were unworthy of heaven and under the wrath of a Holy God (John 3:36).

###### b. Faith toward God

God, who is rich in mercy, hears the sinner's cry, *God, be merciful to me, a sinner*, and save me now for Jesus' sake (Luke 18:13). God gives the gift of faith, *it is the gift of God* (Ephesians 2:8-9), so that we believe in Jesus

as having died for all sins in general (1 Corinthians 15:3) and our own sins in particular, as did the dying thief (Luke 23:39-43, Acts 3:9; 5:31).

- c. Assurance of cleansing and new life, portrayed by baptism

Baptism is the outward symbol of inward change. *Repent... and be baptized* is what Peter preached on Pentecost (Acts 2:38). Water baptism signifies cleansing from the old life. Baptism by immersion is a symbolic portrayal of rising from the cleansing to a new life.

- d. *Laying on of hands*

This meant acceptance into the fellowship of believers and commissioning for service (1 Timothy 5:22; 2 Timothy 1:6). Every church member was expected to be a church worker.

- e. *The resurrection of the dead*

New believers love to discuss what we will be like when our bodies are glorified (1 Corinthians 15:35-36). Easter sermons are usually on proofs of Christ's literal, physical resurrection because so many untaught people are present in churches on that day. The seasoned believer does not need it. Maturing believers do not need to be convinced. They need to be fed.

- f. *Eternal judgment*

The matter of future judgment, how many judgments there are and who gets judged is the stuff of Bible conferences and friendly discussions among Christians. But active maturing believers spend little time on it, except to acknowledge it.

## B. Bypassing the Road of No Return – Hebrews 6:4-6

### 1. The problem

We now come to a passage Dr. Ray Stedman calls, "The knottiest problem passage in Hebrews, if not the whole Bible" (What More Can God Say). The writer presents the worst case of apostasy, or falling away, to give every believer a case of *Lord, is it I* (Matthew 26:22)? The purpose is to make certain of the reader's personal salvation. Yet, we want to say, "Lord, tell us who it is" (John 13:24)? Who are the *those* in verse 4? What is meant by falling away in verse 6, and what is the fate of these people? Is the case real or hypothetical? Are the persons saved or unsaved? Is renewal truly impossible or only impossible, humanly speaking? There are several possible explanations to this interpretative challenge and we will discuss them.

### 2. The possible explanations

#### a. Saved people who deny Christ

Are these people who were once saved (*Those who were once enlightened*), but now deny Christ and thus lose eternal life? This explanation must be rejected as being contrary to the rest of Scripture which teaches that salvation means having life that is eternal (John 5:24; 10:27-28; Romans 8:1). However, such a careful expositor as G. Campbell Morgan takes this position (An Exposition of the Whole Bible).

#### b. A hypothetical case

Is the case hypothetical? Note that verse 6 reads, *If they fall away*. In this reasoning the case is not happening, but if it could happen it would be dangerous.

#### c. Professing, but not true, believers

Are these people who claim to be Christians but are not? This explanation rests on the fact that there is no word for "if" in the Greek, thus describing the persons as *falling away*, a Greek word used nowhere else in the New Testament. In this scenario, the people would be counterfeits like the tares among the wheat of Matthew 13:25 and the five foolish virgins of Matthew 25:2-3, 11-12 who had lamps but no oil. These are people with profession but no possession.

#### d. The passage has no application today

This explanation really begs the question. It is also a contradiction of 2 Timothy 3:16, *All scripture...is profitable for doctrine for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness....* There is nothing to indicate a change that would limit application to the original readers.

#### e. The key word is *impossible* (6:4)

The whole scenario is an impossible one. Anyone who would turn to darkness after so much light would forfeit forever all claim to salvation.

#### f. Fruitfulness is the issue

In this case, the writer is not talking about salvation but rather fruitfulness. There is good logic to this view inasmuch as it fits the context.

Dear Reader, credible, admired expositors hold each of the above views. Your own study, meditation upon the words and your earnest prayer to God for enlightenment will guide you to a satisfactory interpretation (John 16:13). See Through the Bible by J. Vernon McGee, for fuller treatment.

## C. Two Kinds of Earth – Hebrews 7:7-8

## 1. Fruitful

Jesus taught a parable of soils representing conditions of the heart (Matthew 13:3-9). The good soil received and retained the seed, God's Word, with resulting fruitfulness. Productivity is the test and the goal.

## 2. Unfruitful

Unfruitfulness of a professing believer has dire consequences, as seen in Jesus' cursing of the barren fig tree (Mark 11:12-14) and the uselessness of a lukewarm church (Revelations 3:14-19). Babies, as those in Hebrews 5:12-13 who are dull of hearing, are not productive.

## D. Confidence in The Christians - 6:9

The writer expresses confidence that the "worst case" given above does not describe the readers of this letter. God gives His children the benefit of the doubt. He encourages and cheers us on. His Holy Spirit is our Comforter, meaning Strengtheners, so that we can do all we are called to do. Verse 9 is like the sun breaking through the clouds of verses 4-6.

**II. Heirs of Promise – Hebrews 6:10-20**

## A. God's Recognition and Encouragement – Hebrews 6:10-12

The fruitfulness of the recipients of this letter is evident in their work, their love for His sake, their serving of the saints, and their earnestness in realizing full assurance of hope until the end. God remembers our good works, and even our good intentions. The cure for dullness is to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit promises. (Editor's note: Pearl Hamilton, the writer of these lessons is surely an example of one, who *through faith and patience inherit(ed) the promises.*)

## B. God's Promises – Hebrews 6:13-20

Like the original recipients of the letter, all Christians need persevering faith to inherit the promises of God. The writer gives encouragement through the example of Abraham, the great example of faith.

## 1. God's promise to Abraham - 13-16

God made a promise to Abraham and he believed. His faith is to be imitated.

## a. God swore by Himself

God's promise was a unilateral oath, *Surely blessing I*

*will bless you and multiplying I will multiply you*, quoted from Genesis 22:16-17. God said it and this insured that it would be fulfilled.

## b. Abraham endured and inherited the promise

It is a significant fact that the above promise was given to Abraham immediately after he had confirmed his faith by his willingness to sacrifice his son, Isaac.

After this, Abraham *patiently endured* although he did not live to see the the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises. However, Abraham was *assured of them* and *embraced them* (Hebrews 11:13).

Most people in our world today seek "instant gratification". Are you like the people of the world or are you like Abraham?

## 2. Two Immutable Things - 17-18

The *two immutable things* are God's word and His oath. *Immutable*, in the Greek, is a word used of a legal will. It refers to being "unchangeable". God's solemn promises do not change! And God cannot lie. God swore by Himself because there is none greater than He. Human promises sometimes falter and fail, but God's promises never do.

## 3. The Hope - 19-23

Hope is one of the themes of Hebrews. Hope anchors our souls in times of distress and doubt. Hope keeps us secure when the world storms around us. Hope is our *strong consolation* and our refuge.

## a. Refuge

The Greek, *fled for refuge*, is a reference to the Old Testament cities of refuge, of which the Hebrew readers would be familiar. The cities of refuge were set aside by God to protect those who had accidentally killed a person and were being hunted down by avengers of blood. The unintentional manslayer was safe and protected in a city of refuge. See Numbers 35:9-34; Deuteronomy 19:1-13; Joshua 20:1-9.

## b. Anchor

A believer's hope is the *anchor of the soul*. Hope anchors us in our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no reason for a believer to be *tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine* (Ephesians 4:14), to "backslide", doubt (James 1:5-6), or drift away from the truth (Hebrews 2:1). Our hope is anchored in One who is unchanging, the Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 13:8).

c. *The forerunner*

Our hope is in Jesus Christ who has entered into the very presence of God on our behalf and He has opened the way for those who will follow Him. He is *The author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God* (Hebrews 12:2). See also Ephesians 1:20-23. As our merciful and faithful High Priest, Christ has opened the way for us.

d. *According to the order of Melchizedek*

We will learn more about Melchizedek in chapter 7, but here we see the chief glory of his order of priesthood. "He is a Priest for ever, a Priest in the power of an endless life, a Priest who opens to us the state of life to which He Himself entered in, and brings us there to live here on earth with the life of eternity in our bosom (The Holiest of All, Andrew Murray).

**Applications**

1. Are you encouraged to renew your zeal for God? How will this change the way you live?
2. Are you pressing on to maturity by pursuing the depths of God's word daily? How will you make time for this?
3. What works of yours does God recognize and encourage?
4. How will you imitate those who through faith and patience inherit God's promises?
5. Are you, with joy, following Jesus your Forerunner? Even though you do not fully understand, will you commit to follow His path of humility and obedience? As Andrew Murray puts it, "He will bring you in!"