

HEBREWS - PRESSING ON/TAKING FLIGHT

Hebrews 6:1-12 – Warning Regarding Not Maturing (part 1)

Because the anonymous author of Hebrews is speaking to Jewish believers about their maturing in their faith, we read in Hebrews 6:1 – “Therefore. . . .” which continues the topic of spiritual immaturity from Hebrews 5:11-14 into Hebrews 6. . . .

CHAPTER FLOW FOR HEBREWS 6:1-12

Hebrews 6

Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,² of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

The readers had already learned the basic principles concerning the Messiah – which the OT teaches. The foundation of the NT is the OT. The Gospel is in the OT and in the NT. The entire Bible teaches against works; it teaches being cleansed by God’s Holy Spirit; it teaches that a substitutionary sacrifice is necessary; it teaches the resurrection and eternal judgment. These things the readers knew. God wants us to move on.

³ *And this we will^[a] do if God permits.*

⁴ *For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit,⁵ and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come,⁶ if they fall away,^[b] to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.*

READ Hebrews 10:26

We’ve come to what has been viewed as a very difficult passage. Is it?

The Readers of this book of Hebrews – this epistle - are believers – that has already been established in the book.

We need to note that the author uses the word IMPOSSIBLE in laying out this warning. We need to understand this passage within its own context – here in this chapter and within the book of Hebrews. Of what is the author warning the readers? Of NOT going on to maturity, of regressing.

These readers were under persecution and they were thinking of taking a break from Jesus for a bit and going back under the Mosaic Law and then when things got more peaceful in the world – they could go back to following Jesus.

The author is saying - Readers, my brothers in Jesus, you’ve been **enlightened** – you have come to know; you have become **partakers** – you are real sharers in the gift of the Holy Spirit; you have rec’d God’s gift of salvation. . . (Romans 11:29 – God’s gifts and calling are irrevocable – He does not take them back!)

The author is exclaiming to the readers – “WHAT ARE YOU THINKING? You CANNOT leave the FULFILLMENT of all that God has promised the Jewish people and THINK that you can come back to Jesus and NOT SHAME HIS NAME.

AND, under the law – there is no REDEMPTION (Rom. 3:20; Rom. 8:3; II Cor. 3:7-8). BUT – you have the FULFILLMENT NOW – JESUS is the only way to God. The law doesn't SAVE!! There's no other cure for sin. What you're thinking of doing – leaving and coming back – is impossible in the grand plan of God's salvation!

⁷ *For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God;* ⁸ *but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.*

The author is giving an illustration – an analogy – to support what he's just told the readers. This analogy drives home the picture of real consequences if they choose to go back – to regress – to not mature. Those consequences have to do with their being faithful in their Christian walk – or being barren!

This is a familiar analogy frequently found in Scripture. God has seeded a field and has provided rain. He expects fruitfulness.

We see the earth (singular) upon which the blessing of rain falls. That earth can either use God's provision to produce herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated. OR, that earth can receive the same blessing from God, but produce thorns and briers. The point is that Blessings from God may be used or misused. Blessings that are used produce that which is useful. While blessings **misused** produce that which is useless. Land that produces fruit is blessed. But land that produces thorns and briers is useless; its vegetation is burned off. (Isaiah 5:1-7; John 15:1-8) Adokimos (I Cor. 9:27 - disqualified; Heb. 6:8 - rejected). BUT the field is NOT destroyed!

After we become believers we are to produce fruit that will glorify God.

I Cor. 3:12-15 – “Now if anyone builds on this foundation (which is Jesus) *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³ each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. ¹⁴ If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”

The choice these Jewish believers make re: maturing in Christ will NOT determine whether they remain “saved.” BUT, it will determine if they experience God's blessing or if their lives will be barren and empty.

II Peter 1:5-11 - ⁵ But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, ⁶ to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, ⁷ to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. ⁸ For if these things are yours and abound, *you* will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his

old sins. ¹⁰ Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; ¹¹ for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

⁹ *But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. ¹⁰ For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of ^{cl} love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.*

But you, my brothers in Jesus – you are beloved – that’s your position in Jesus. I’ve been talking about “them” – “if they fall away” – I’ve been giving you an example – a hypothetical example. But of you we are confident of better things – things which ACCOMPANY what you already have in Jesus – your righteousness in Jesus because of Jesus. We are confident of your MATURING in the faith. You’ve demonstrated your earnestness as you have and are continuing to minister to your brethren. This has been a glory to God. God will NOT forget!

¹¹ *And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, ¹² that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*

“leaving the discussion of elementary principles *of Christ*. . . .”

- The root meaning of the verb “to leave” is to go from one thing to another. The picture is of building a superstructure upon a foundation.
 - God’s word to us – His plan – is a progressive revelation. We saw that in Hebrews 1:1ff – He communicated truth to the children of Israel through the prophets and continues to do so in His final word – the Son!
 - The truth revealed through the prophets was not final. It anticipated a complete revelation which comes through the Messiah Jesus.
 - The readers should NOT be content in going back to the shadow of that which was to come – all the types that we find in the OT which speak to Jesus. They had REALITY in Jesus!
 - Jesus is the SUBSTANCE (Col. 2:16-17)

Elementary/first principles – since the author is addressing building upon them – we need to realize that both Christianity and Biblical Judaism rest on the same foundation. Jesus didn’t come to start a new religion; He came to fulfill the law.

- Throughout the Scripture, God requires faith in Him alone – in His provision of the Messiah – for salvation (Gen. 15:6; Hab. 2:4). There must be “repentance from dead works” (Isa. 64:6). OT does NOT teach a works salvation.

- However, let's look further at this "dead works" phrase. Salvation by grace through faith has ALWAYS been God's message. OT saints were saved by God's grace through faith in HIM and in His promise of provision – of forgiveness from sin through the Messiah.
 - "dead works" – Heb. 10:4 – the blood of bulls and goats could NEVER take away sin.
 - "dead works" – Heb. 9:11-14 – the blood of the Messiah alone cleansed the conscience - which was guilt ridden throughout the 1500+ years when animal sacrifices were offered. Offering up animal sacrifices were regularly, continually offered up for sin – what did that do to a person's conscience? Remind them that they were guilty!!! Thus – while God gave the children of Israel the animal sacrifices to cover/atone sin – it was a "dead work". Romans 8:1-3 "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh (because of US), God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin."
- II Cor. 3:7 – "But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious. . . ."
- The message of the Bible is "faith toward God."
 - Bringing the animal sacrifices to the tabernacle or the temple for many demonstrated faith toward God as they were acknowledging their sin and seeking forgiveness from God.
 - AND, the readers of the book of Hebrews confessed their faith toward God – now they need to move on and live out that faith!
- "Baptisms" – the word used twice in the NT to speak to Jewish ceremonial washings (Heb. 9:10; Mk. 7:4) found in the Torah (Ex. 30:18-21; Lev. 16:4, 24, 26, 28; Mk 7:4, 8) – which addressed the necessity of removing external contamination from defilement and of being cleansed before one could have fellowship with God (Mk. 7:2-5).
 - Outward signs of heart cleansing.
 - John's baptism was one of repentance – preparing the people internally – attitude of the heart – for the coming of the Messiah.
- "Laying on of hands" – placing hands on sacrifice to symbolize identification with the sacrifice as a substitute for sin. Repeated for 1500 plus years until the ultimate sacrifice – Jesus.
- "Resurrection of the dead" – Job 19:26 – this is a fundamental OT doctrine (John 11:23-24 – Martha's comment to Jesus.)
- "eternal judgment" – OT teaches a coming "judgment" (Psa. 1:5-6; Dan. 12:1-2)

The problem was NOT that the readers had no concept of the elementary/first principles of their Christian faith. The problem was that they didn't apply/use what they knew to help them make the choices that their situation was forcing them to make.

These Jewish believers did not want to abandon *religion*, but they did want to make it less distinctively *Christian*. They didn't want to "stick out" so much. That's why the author is highlighting that Jesus is better than Moses, and that Jesus is better than the Aaronic Priesthood under the Mosaic Law.

And this we will do if God permits. – This should not be taken as implying that God may not want them to go on to maturity. Instead, **if God permits** expresses the believers' complete dependence on God. If we do press on to maturity, we realize that it only happens at God's pleasure. It could be similar to saying, "We will do such and such, Lord willing."

The author is attempting to shock them back to their senses by confronting them with their failure. "You can't go back to the promises. You have the fulfillment. You have the REALITY! Get real!!!"

The author has confidence in his readers – that they will go on to perfection (Heb. 6:1). Again, maturity is the topic of discussion – NOT justification (being declared righteous – being born again). The readers are believers in Jesus.

It is the author's conviction that the dullness has not yet settled into an irreversible state.

- Can there be an irreversible state?
 - I Tim. 1:18-20 – ". . . some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck,²⁰ of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme."
 - Paul put both men out of the Church – ending their influence on the Church and removing them from the protection and insulation of God's people.

NOTE: Per MacArthur, they were no longer in the environment of God's blessing but under Satan's control. In some instances God has turned believers over to Satan for positive purposes, such as revealing the genuineness of saving faith, keeping them humble and dependent on Him, enabling them to strengthen others, or offering God praise (Job 1:1-22; Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 22:31-33; II Cor. 12:1-10; Rev. 7:9-15). God hands some people over to Satan for judgment, such as King Saul (I Sam. 16:12-16; 28:4-20), Judas (John 13:27), and the sinning member in the Corinthian Church (I Cor. 5:1-5).

- I Corinthians 11:27-30 – physical death in connection with engaging in communion in an unworthy manner.

There is the view on the part of several Bible commentators that the author does recognize the possibility that one may have regressed so far that it is impossible to again make progress toward maturity. He, therefore, states in vv. 4-6 that it may be IMpossible to renew certain believers so that they can progress toward maturity.

Remember, in Hebrews 3:12-13: *Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; ¹³ but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*

If you have a heartfelt longing to live for Jesus, that desire alone shows that your heart has not been hardened to Him!

Hebrews 6:4-6 has caused many NOT to teach the book of Hebrews. It's a difficult passage when it's NOT taken within the context of the book of Hebrews - when we don't grasp what the author has been telling his readers!

WHY are some Bible passages so difficult?

- They cause us to depend upon the Holy Spirit to enable us to understand God's Word.
- Such difficult passages cause believers to study the Word more diligently resulting in greater times of prayer and thus, greater intimacy with God. ("God, please, reveal your truth to me because I want a closer walk with you and because I desire discernment.")
- Such texts challenge believers to think more deeply about the teachings of God's Word, and then to draw near to our Great High Priest for help in our times of need. It is by this means that we will know God better and find Him even more powerful, more faithful, and more worthy of our faith and worship. It is this deeper knowledge which will sustain us in the difficult times of life, which the Bible assures us we will experience.
- Those who have struggled with difficult passages can then instruct others. (II Tim. 2:2).
- Hard texts keep us from becoming arrogant about our knowledge of Scripture. Humility is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 11:2; Psa. 25:9).
- God wants us to mine His word – as if we're seeking treasure – because we are! Proverbs 2:1-8.

Difficult texts produce FRUIT in the believer to the glory of God!

Bible scholars have held different views re: Hebrews 6:4-6. What do you see in the text? Suggested "homework" for this week. Dig into those THREE verses and we'll discuss them next week!