

Looking Unto Jesus

Vision Baptist College

Looking Unto Jesus

Studies in Hebrews

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Chapter Six – *Going On Unto Perfection*

Memory Verse – Hebrews 6:1

Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God,

Introduction

It is important to remember that this entire chapter is a parenthetical passage regarding maturity. The main argument that the writer is discussing is the superiority of Christ's priesthood to the Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament time period. During that discussion the writer explained that Christ was a high priest after the order of Melchisedec, and was not from the tribe of Levi or from the family of Aaron. He further explains that in order for the reader to understand this concept, he must be mature enough to understand. Chapter six is an admonishment to these immature Hebrew believers to "grow up", so that they could understand these complex doctrines.

In order for them to grow up, they first had to be:

I **Secure in their Salvation (vs. 1 – 6)**

A **We must move past the foundation of salvation. (vs. 1 -3)**

God is not saying that the reader should forsake these truths, but that he should move past them. Basic addition and subtraction is foundational in the study of mathematics. As the math student advances, he builds upon the foundation. However, no matter how far he goes he will always need addition and subtraction.

There are six foundational truths mentioned in this passage:

- 1 Repentance from dead works
- 2 Faith toward God
- 3 Baptism

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- 4 Laying on of hands (probably a reference to receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:15 – 17)
- 5 Resurrection
- 6 Eternal judgment

Warren Wiersbe had this to say regarding these six things:

The writer lists six foundational truths of the Christian life, all of which, by the way, are also foundational to the Jewish faith. After all, our Christian faith is based on the Jewish faith and is a fulfillment of it. “Salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22). If the readers of this epistle went back to Judaism in order to escape persecution, they would only be abandoning the perfect for the imperfect, the mature for the immature.

The first two items (repentance and faith) are *Godward* and mark the initiation of the spiritual life. To repent means to change one’s mind. It is not simply a “bad feeling about sin,” because that could be regret or remorse. It is changing one’s mind about sin to the point of turning from it. Once a sinner has repented (and this itself is a gift from God, Acts 5:31; 11:18), then he is able to exercise faith in God. Repentance and faith go together (Acts 20:21).

The next two items (baptisms and laying on of hands) have to do with a person’s relationship to *the local assembly of believers*. In the New Testament, a person who repented and trusted Christ was baptized and became a part of a local church (Acts 2:41–47). The word “baptisms” in Hebrews 6:2 is plural and can be translated “washings” (Heb. 9:10). While water itself can never cleanse sin (1 Peter 3:21), baptism is a symbol of spiritual cleansing (“And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” (Acts 22:16) as well as our identification with Christ in death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6:1–4). The “laying on of hands” (Heb. 6:2) symbolized the sharing of some blessing (Luke 24:50; Acts 19:6) or the setting apart of a person for ministry (1 Tim. 4:14).

The last two items, the resurrection of the dead (Acts 24:14–15) and the final judgment (Acts 17:30–31), have to do with *the future*. Both orthodox Jews and Christians believe in these doctrines. The Old Testament teaches a general resurrection, but does not make the doctrine clear. The New Testament teaches a resurrection of the saved and also a resurrection of the lost (John 5:24–29; Rev. 20:4–6, 12–15).

The lesson of the paragraph (Heb. 6:1–3) is clear: “You have laid the foundation. You know your ABCs. Now move forward! Let God carry you along to maturity!”¹

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, pp. 295–296). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

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Note – Some have taken the position that these six doctrines were part of the Old Testament traditions within Judaism, and that as New Testament believers these Hebrew Christians needed to leave them behind and move forward in their New Testament faith.

Harry Ironside writes this in support of that position:

Here then we have all that was basic in the former dispensation.

Throughout the Old Testament and in the ministry of John the Baptist, the people were called to repentance from dead works and urged to put their faith in God, the God of Israel. Through the ceremonial baptisms or washings of the law (as in chap. 9:10, 13) the people were taught the need of cleansing, in order that they might have fellowship with God, a cleansing which was from physical defilement alone, “the putting away of the filth of the flesh,” as Peter puts it. The laying on of hands has no reference whatever either to the laying on of the apostles’ hands for the reception of the Holy Spirit as in Acts, or to ordination to the Christian ministry, as many have supposed. There is no *doctrine* of the laying on of hands to be found anywhere in the New Testament. Practice and doctrine are not the same thing. But under the Levitical economy when the offerer laid his hands upon the head of the sacrifice which was presented to God on his behalf, he was picturing a tremendous truth upon which this Epistle strongly insists. It was the identification of the offerer with the victim, and practically involved the transference of the offerer’s sins to the offering which was put to death in the stead of the sinner. Resurrection of the dead is a cardinal Old Testament doctrine, denied indeed by worldly-minded Sadducees, but insisted upon by the Pharisees, and recognized by the apostle Paul as eminently scriptural, when he declared himself in this respect still a Pharisee after he had been converted to Christ for many years. Eternal judgment, too, is part of the former revelation. “God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil” (Eccles. 12:14).

Now let us note the contrast between these six items and the outstanding truths of Christianity. In the later revelation we have:

1. Repentance toward God (Acts 20:21).
2. Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21).
3. The cleansing of the conscience from dead works to serve the living and true God by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost.
4. The one offering of our Lord Jesus Christ which which every believer is fully identified.
5. The out-resurrection from among the dead (Phil. 3:11, *Gk.*).

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6. No judgment for the believer in Christ.²

B We must understand the fact of salvation (vs. 4 - 6)

This is one of the most misunderstood passages of Scripture, and has been falsely used to teach that a person can lose his or her salvation. However, this interpretation is simply not valid when considered within the context of chapter six, and also compared with the rest of Scripture. (See notes from Chapter Two) Another important consideration is that most of those who falsely teach that salvation can be lost also believe that it can be restored, which would clearly not be supported by this passage if it in fact was teaching that the believer is not eternally secure under these conditions, *"for it is impossible ... if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance"*.

Among those who believe in eternal security there are also differences of opinion regarding this passage:

1 Some teach that the people referred to here were not true believers. They "tasted" but did not receive the Word of God. They were enlightened to the point where they understood salvation, but they eventually rejected Christ. This view also presents a problem in that it would also forbid the person referred to here from ever being saved.

2 Some teach that this warning only applies to Hebrew believers in the first century, before the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. The logic here is that if these "believers" were still participating in the O. T. sacrificial system they were crucifying Christ afresh.

3 Others believe that this passage has to do with loss of rewards, which, they say, cannot be re-claimed. (1 Corinthians 3:14 and 15)

"Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward." (2 John 1:8)

McGee states:

The whole tenor of the text reveals that he is speaking of *rewards* which are the result of salvation. In verse 6 he says, "If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance"—not to salvation, but to *repentance*. Repentance is

² Ironside, H. A. (1932). *Studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (pp. 74–76). Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers.

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something that God has asked *believers* to do. For example, read the seven letters to the seven churches in Asia, as recorded in Revelation 2 and 3. He says to every one of the churches to repent. That is His message for believers.

So the writer of Hebrews is talking about the *fruit* of salvation, not about the *root* of salvation. Notice verse 9 again: “But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that *accompany* salvation [he hasn’t been discussing salvation but the things that accompany salvation], though we thus speak.” He is speaking of the fruit of the Christian’s life and the reward that comes to him as the result. The whole tenor of this passage is that he is warning them of the possibility of losing their reward. There is danger, Paul said, of our entire works being burned up so that we will have nothing for which we could be rewarded. “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire” (1 Cor. 3:11–15). The work of every believer, my friend, is going to be tested by fire, and fire *burns!* The work you are doing today for Christ is going to be tested by fire. For example, when all of those reports that some of us preachers have handed in about how many converts we have made are tried by fire, they will make a roaring fire—if our work has been done in the flesh rather than in the power of the Spirit. We will have nothing but wood, hay, and stubble that will all go up in smoke.³

While it is certainly true that rewards can be lost, and it is also true that a person who falls doctrinally or morally will hurt the cause of Christ with their testimony, I believe that God will forgive and restore a believer who is truly repentant. He may not be completely restored to where he was before and he won’t get back the rewards that were lost, but he could still be used of God and receive new rewards.

What I believe the passage is really presenting a hypothetical argument teaching that it is impossible to be saved twice. Notice the word “if” in verse 6, indicating that the falling away is merely hypothetical. The writer was stating that “if” it were possible to fall away, then it would be impossible to get saved again; but it is impossible for a truly saved person to fall from grace.

³ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed., Vol. 5, p. 546). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

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You are either saved or you are lost. You cannot be born twice physically, and neither can you be born-again twice. It is an impossibility. Apparently one of the problems these Hebrew believers had was a lack of security. Verse nine sums up the argument:

"But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak." (Hebrews 6:9)

II Shewing (Display) Spiritual Fruit (vs. 7 – 12)

A God produces fruit through saved people. (vs. 7 – 9; John 15)

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." (Galatians 5:22-23)

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise. (Proverbs 11:30)

B God rejects those who produce bad fruit. (v. 8; Matthew 7:15 – 20)

C God rewards those who are fruitful. (vs. 10 – 12)

III Satisfied That God Cannot Lie (vs. 13 – 20)

The writer is explaining that we can take God at His word. He says that He will save those who have placed their faith in Him, and we can trust Him. The main thrust of this chapter is not loss of salvation, but rather assurance of salvation. God is assuring these Hebrew believers that just as Abraham believed and eventually received all that God had promised him, so we also can trust Him to deliver all that He says.

A God gave Abraham two immutable things.

1 A promise

2 An oath

B God gives us two immutable things

1 Christ died for our sins.

2 Christ rose from the dead.