Hebrews 6

Verses 1-3: ***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, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits.***

--**(1a)** ***Therefore. . .*** Having exhorted them to be mature and not babes in their reception and use of the oracles of God, the writer now encourages them to press on and warns them what will happen if they abandon their pursuit of maturity in Christ Jesus.

--The writer wants them to ***go on to perfection. . .*** which correlates to the ***full age*** **(5:14)** maturity of those who eat solid food.

--They are to leave the basic message Christ taught only in the sense that the foundation has been laid and now they are to build upon that foundation—not build the whole foundation again (Needing someone to teach us again what we have lost instead of growing in what we have gained).

--**(1b-2)** The writer then mentions six doctrinal topics in pairs. You will notice that each can be understood in a Christian context but is stated in Jewish terms. I believe this is because these are basic biblical teachings where the Jewish idea and practice needed to be refined within the message of Christ.

--1) ***Repentance from dead works and of faith toward God:*** The Jews were familiar with the idea of repentance, but the call to repent from John the Baptist and Jesus was unique **(Mt. 3:1-2; 4:17; 11:20; Acts 2:37-38: 8:14; 11:1; 20:21)**. They had to learn to surrender the ***dead works*** of ceremonial Judaism and the legalistic righteousness of Pharisaic traditions. Instead, they had to learn to put their faith in the work of Christ apart from the law.

Philippians 3:9:** ***and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;*

--2) ***of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands:*** The Greek word for ***baptisms*** (*baptismos*) is in the plural, and happens to be badly translated here. It is used three other times in the NT and is always translated *washings* **(Mk. 7:4+8; Heb. 9:10)** and is never used of the Christian idea of baptism, but always refers to the various forms of Jewish ceremonial washings of hands, cups, vessels, etc. Of course, leaving the ceremonial washings of the law and tradition for Christ's baptism was a difficult lesson.

--The practice of laying hands would remind them firstly of the sacrifices and the transference of guilt **(Lev. 1:4; 3:2; 8:14),** but also of blessing **(Gen. 48:14; Num. 27:18).** The early church laid hands on others for the reception of the Holy Spirit, healing, commissioning, ordination, prayer, etc.

--3) ***of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment:*** The Pharisees and Sadducees argued about resurrection **(Acts 23:6; 25:6)**, but the general belief was accepted. Clearly, resurrection was the keystone of the NT message **(1 Cor. 15)**, which directly shapes what eternal life and judgment look like **(2 Tim. 1:9-10; Rev. 20:11-12)**.

Acts 17:31:** ***Because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He had given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.*

--**(3)** ***And this we will do. . .*** the ***this*** he is referring to is either: 1) Go back over the necessary basic things they had forgotten, or 2) Move on with them into the solid food of maturity. I believe the heart to move on makes more sense with the present context and following warning.

--Christian teachers are not only to teach the basics and essentials of the faith. The foundational things must be clearly laid, but a foundation is laid to be built on. We are not to teach the primary things of God alone. We must be taught the whole counsel of God to become mature believers. In doing so, we encounter divine thoughts, thoughts much higher than our own; thoughts, truths, and mysteries we need—such as the fact that Jesus Christ is our High Priest after the order of Melchizedek.

Verses 4-8: ***For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.***

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; but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.

--**(4-5)** ***For. . .*** ties this warning in to his previous exhortation. He is warning these Hebrews what happens if they choose to turn away from Christ and not press on in Him.

--The warning here is a serious one. When he says ***impossible,*** he means it, as he does elsewhere in the letter **(6:18; 10:4; 11:6)**.

--I believe the peculiar language here, like in the last two verses, is due to the fact that this is a specific warning to these professed Hebrew followers of Jesus. It was a particular danger for the Jewish-background individual to ***fall away*** from the truth of the Messiah in the unique way described here.

--The clear New Testament language of salvation is noticeably absent. Nothing is said of predestination, justification, salvation, the elect, being one with Him, being in Christ, being held in His hand, eternal life, or even faith!

--The writer seems keen to describe a true experience of something, a profession of something, while particularly staying close to this word ***taste*** (which can mean exactly that as in **Mt. 27:34; Lk. 14:24; Jn. 2:9**). *The wilderness generation tasted of the fruit of the land but never entered into and possessed it.*
--I believe this is a warning regarding false profession, not the loss of true salvation or a hypothetical situation. You could easily describe the loss of salvation much clearer! But it would be hard to describe the false professor much clearer.
--The ***we/those & they & them*** contrasting language of **1-3** and **4-6** is undeniable.
--There are two separate fields in view **(7-8)**, and the writer later describes those he is warning as those who have ***things that accompany salvation*** **(9)**, which infers a contrast with those who do not have such things or such salvation.
--How does the writer describe these false professors?
--***Those who were once enlightened. . .*** These are people who have had the light of the truth shone upon them in Christ Jesus. The light of Christ has shone on all men **(Jn. 1:9: *the true Light which gives light to every man*),** and we know that not all men are saved.
--They have also ***tasted*** four things: ***the heavenly gift; become partakers of the Holy Spirit; the good word of God; the powers of the age to come.***
--All of these are various works of the Holy Spirit. The coming of the Holy Spirit, ***the heavenly gift***, is the distinctive promise of the Church Age.
--***Partakers of the Holy Spirit. . .*** Jesus Christ and the apostles did miracles through the power of the Holy Spirit. People became partakers of the Spirit's power through them. They were healed and still did not believe. They ate the loaves and fish and did not believe. Paul's sweaty rags made them whole, and they still did not come to repentance. *Jesus describes one man as "Not far" from the kingdom of God.*
--***Tasted the good word of God. . .*** Most directly, they heard the word of God, the gospel of Jesus Christ, and rejected it. They did so with Jesus in Nazareth **(Lk. 4:16-30)** and Paul in the temple **(Acts 22:1-23)**.
--***Powers of the age to come. . .*** The power of the age to come was evident. Jesus told His disciples to say the kingdom of God was among them! People saw the lame walk, the dead raised, and demons respond. Still, they did not believe. *Balaam and Judas doing miracles & "Lord, Lord. . ."*
--Notice how similar the warning is to **2:1-4.**
--**(6)** The impossibility here is explained. ***If they fall away. . .*** is not an accidental falling but a willing choice to turn and walk away. To reject Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit would leave them to ***crucify again for themselves the Son of God. . .*** which means they would be repeating the sin of the religious leaders who put Him to death and deserved the greater condemnation **(Jn. 19:11; Acts 2:36)**.

--***And put Him to open shame. . .*** Means that they would agree with His shameful treatment in being crucified. If Jesus was not the Messiah, the Son of God, then He deserved to be crucified. These Hebrews couldn't pick any middle ground. They couldn't worship the Son of God and honor the ones who killed Him. To walk away from Jesus was to revert to the religious Judaism that murdered Him.
--To reject the work of the Holy Spirit in revealing and lifting up Jesus Christ, and to willingly walk away from their Messiah, put them in the position of the wilderness generation. It was impossible to go back! Like Esau trading away his blessing, it was too late.
--Why this stern warning? Because the fate of the apostate was something these Hebrews should never forget! It was the ultimate end of dullness and sluggishness in following Christ. These words should not be explained away! They needed to accomplish their purpose in them and in us.
--That said, the Word of God that the Holy Spirit would use to search us, Satan will twist to stumble us. I would like to remove this section of Scripture as a stumbling block, but leave it as a landmark. *Read it like a sign warning of landmines!*
--But what about prodigals? Is it impossible for them to repent? Of course! *The writer is not speaking about prodigals.* He is speaking to believers about those who make profession but are apostates. Apostates who stay apostates.
--**(7-8)** The writer sums up the warning with an illustration. We have two fields with different soil. They have the same sun and rain, but different crops. After receiving God's blessing and tasting God's rain, one field produces herbs, and the other field produces thorns and thistles **(Gen. 3:17).**
--The fruitless field is rejected in the end and left uncultivated. Ultimately, it is burned. *I wonder if they would be thinking about Jesus' cursing of the fig tree?*
--Do we profess to know God's blessing? What does our life produce? Do we only have the form or the fruit? Not sinless perfection. Peter had fruit. Judas had form. This is a warning to measure our profession by the work of God in us. These warnings appear throughout the Bible: John the Baptist's axe at the foot of the tree; Jesus' warnings of our light becoming great darkness, our salt losing its savor, tares among wheat, or a lampstand being removed, etc.
--These Hebrews had a unique privilege in experience, but that also came with unique temptations. May we too be faithful to hear this warning and, by the grace of God, see ourselves as we are in the sight of God.

Verses 9-12: ***But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.***

--**(9)** ***But, beloved. . .*** It is the only time the writer calls these Hebrews beloved. He doesn't want his warning to discourage them. He is confident their salvation will be like the fruitful field! They will keep growing and produce the fruit that accompanies salvation.

--**(10)** God, unjust to forget our works? How is that? Because He promises reward!

--Our labor of love toward God is most often demonstrated in our actions toward His saints.

--**(11-12)** The writer wants their hope to be strong and stir diligence. Hope can have degrees of expression just like faith—little/great, weak/strong, etc. A strong hope will buttress our diligence, assurance, and endurance.

--Spiritual laziness was a constant threat for them and us. The writer knows we will need ***faith and patience*** to inherit all that God has for us.

--The writer will now use the life of Abraham as an example of hope, faith, and patience.

Verses 13-18: ***For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself, saying, "Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you." And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute. Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have hope set before us.***

--**(13-15)** The writer now refers to God's dealings with Abraham. He quotes **Genesis 22:16-17** to show that God made Abraham a promise, with an oath, and that Abraham had to patiently wait for both to be fulfilled.

--***He swore by Himself. . . "By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD (Gen. 22:16)***.

--**(16)** Two men in an argument have the dispute ended when one of them swears by something. *You ate my chips. . . I didn't. . . You did. . . I swear I didn't. . . *

--**(17-18)** ***Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath. . .*** God shouldn't need to swear at all. He is God! Nothing is higher than Him or His word. Why does He swear an oath?

--Because He so very very much wants to assure our doubting hearts of His goodwill toward men! God has willingly, voluntarily, and abundantly given more than any human could have asked or wished for.

--***Two immutable things. . .*** You and I have His word, and His oath.

--He cannot lie to us, just like He could not lie to Abraham. Our doubt should be proportional to His ability to lie. ***That we might have strong consolation!***
--If we struggle to believe what He says, it means that we don't truly understand who He is.
*Candlish (Sermons, pg. 172): *"The thing is to be so, not merely because God has said it shall be so, but also because it cannot but be so, God continuing to be, and to be the God he is. This is what, in swearing by himself, he means to tell us. . . It amounts to this, that your perishing is represented as alike and equally impossible with God's ceasing to be, or to be what he is. Your eternal welfare and God's essential immutability are inseparably welded together; blended; married; so as to be no more two but one. It is indeed, I repeat, an amazing thought!"**
--The promise of God, is reinforced by the oath of God, which declares the eternal High Priesthood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who stands in the presence of God for us.
--***Who have fled for refuge. . .*** The writer's reference here seems to be either to the cities of refuge **(Num. 35)**, or the horns of the altar **(1 Kings 1:50-52; 2:28).** Are they fleeing because they too are mankillers—having killed Christ?! Whatever the writer's mind was on, we cannot be sure, but we do know that anyone fleeing does so because of persecution or the need for protection. We need both, and we have both in Christ! ***To lay hold of the hope set before us.***

Verses 19-20: ***This hope we have as an anchor for the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.***
--**(19)** The hope we have in Christ is an anchor. What type of anchor?
1) An anchor ***of the soul***—God knows our souls need them!
2) An anchor ***both sure and steadfast.*** The anchor in Christ is fixed (unmoving) and firm (unbreaking).
3) An anchor ***which enters the Presence behind the veil.*** The anchor isn't linked to anything in this world. It is set in heaven. *Are we trying to be anchored to something here in this world?*
--**(20)** ***Forerunner. . .*** is used of Jesus only here in the NT. He has scouted ahead and gone in advance to where the rest of us will soon follow.
--Describing any high priest as a forerunner would be a wonderful new thought for the Hebrew believer. No one ever dared to follow the high priest. Though I am sure many dreamed about what stepping into the Holy of Holies would be like!
--Yet now, in Jesus Christ, we have a High Priest who is to be followed into the heavens and the very presence of God. Why has He entered? ***For us!*** The risen and exalted Jesus Christ, our Lord, Captain, High Priest, and Forerunner, is our hope. He becomes our solid and anchoring reality.
--He is the representative Son of Man, standing on our behalf, with all the promises of the Word of God, and the very oath of God, behind Him.

--On Christ the solid Rock I stand. . .
When darkness veils His lovely face; I rest on His unchanging grace;
In every high and stormy gale; My anchor holds within the veil.
His oath, His covenant, His blood; Support me in the whelming flood;
When all around my soul gives way: He then is all my hope and stay.