

Hebrews 5:11-6:20

Well welcome back, ladies! I'm excited to delve back into Hebrews with you. Before we get started on Lesson 6, I'll just give us a quick jet-ride through the first five lessons, so we remember a little of the context. In chapters 1-3, we learned how Jesus is better than the angels—both as the Son of Man, and as the Son of God—and how He's better than Moses. The author of Hebrews warned us not to drift from the Word, and not to doubt. In chapter 4, we saw how Jesus provides a better rest than Moses and the Law, and in Chapter 5, we saw how Jesus is a better high priest than all who came before, which leads us to Melchizedek, except the author wants to clarify some things first.

I. Don't Be Sluggish

We're going to start Lesson 6 by looking at the warning the author of Hebrews gives us in this passage, because he turns this warning into an encouragement of reassurance. It's important to first know who his audience is. Day 3 of the study addresses this, showing Hebrews is written to professing believers (of whom there are those with both false faith and enduring faith). Bearing this in mind, what is the warning the author gives in this passage? If you looked at the word study on "dull" or "sluggish," which appears in verses 5:11 and 6:12, you saw the author of Hebrews is calling out his audience for willfully failing to perform a customary duty (something expected of them). What is it they're expected to do that they willfully aren't?

To answer this, let's look at 5:12-6:1. "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God..."

There's a bit to unpack here. First, what is that elementary teaching? He explains in 6:1-2 that it's what brought you to Christ in the first place—the foundation of repentance from dead works to faith, to then be resurrected with Christ and face eternal judgment with both His gift of priesthood and sacrifice. But, as the author states, these things are only the beginning of our walk with God. They form our foundation, to be sure, but the point the author is making here is that we must press on toward maturity, as it says in verse 1. We must consume the meat of the Word, rather than just the milk. Don't willfully sit under teaching that only talks about these first things, but use them as stepping stones to diligently seek after God in His deeper truths.

Hebrews 5:14b mentions: "...the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil." So to be mature—to seek God's deeper truths—we need to train our senses to discern good and evil through what? Practice. We need to practice what God teaches in His Word. We can't just read His Word and let it be head knowledge. It has to matter enough to us that we put it into practice. Over time, God will work in us through our practice to train our senses to discern good and evil. That sounds to me like wisdom, which, according to Proverbs 3:15, is worth more precious than jewels.

Here's the question, sisters: do you believe it? Belief isn't just about head knowledge. To believe something is to practice it, to let the knowledge change the way you do things. It does you no good if you know God's Word, but don't live it out. I don't say this meaning you must work for your salvation—that's putting the cart before the horse and is "dead works," as the author says in 6:1. When we are saved, God works in and through us, and it shows. Enduring faith—or false faith—is shown by what we practice.

So what does it look like to train your senses? How can we advance beyond milk and be ready for the solid food of the Word? What does it mean to discern between good and evil? Don't be slothful toward the Word, but be diligent to press on toward maturity. What are some practical ways we learn God's Word and practice it? Sisters, this is one reason it's so important to be in God's Word and His community. His Word renews our minds, helps keep us from drifting, and is our living source of wisdom and knowledge to put into practice. His community can also help keep us from drifting, can teach us His Word, and can help keep us accountable to practice His Word—to endure. This is one reason it's so important to have a church that presses on toward maturity, instead of only teaching elementary principles.

Now, I'm going to skip the section in verses 4-8 about those who have fallen away for now, but we will come back to it, I promise. For now, I want to get into how this warning becomes a reassurance.

II. Our Hope

Hebrews 6:11 says, "And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end..."

Sisters, we all want that full assurance of hope until the end, don't we? I know there are times in our lives when we question whether or not we're saved. I know personally, there was a time when every time I read the Bible—looking to it for encouragement—I felt it instead condemned me. I saw themes in Scripture that say those who are in Christ love, and that this love is demonstrated in obedience. So if I'm not obeying Him, I'm not loving Him, and therefore, I'm not His child, right?

1 John 5:3 says, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome."

"...that His commandments are not burdensome." Woof.

I don't know about you, but I *very easily* shift to doing things for God out of duty—and duty is burdensome. I fall into the rut of doing something because I know I should. This isn't a bad thing in and of itself, but when we do this, it's important we direct ourselves back to *why* we do what we do. We don't follow Christ just because we know we should. There is a *joy* in following Christ.

When we lose sight of that joy, things start getting pretty muddy. Our vision narrows and we buckle down and do the work... but we start to do the work in our own power. We don't look to the Holy Spirit for His power to help us through. We don't look to God the Father for His sovereignty over our circumstances—that, as Romans 8:28 says, "He works all things together for good for those who love Him, for those who are called according to His purpose." We get lost in what *we* think of as good - like *feeling* good, and wanting others to feel good. We see the bad things that happen in this world and wonder why God isn't doing more good. But God isn't mainly concerned with whether or not things look good from the outside—like lack of suffering, or bodily pleasures and easing of pain. God is most concerned with what's happening inside our hearts, and He *uses* suffering to grow us. Are we only joyful when things are easy? Or can we endure, and hold onto that joy when things get difficult?

What happened to bring me to that point of feeling the Bible condemned me instead of encouraging me? Just as the Hebrews author warned back in Hebrews 2, my focus, and thus, understanding, had drifted. The important thing to remember is that God is the source of our faith *and* obedience.

Ephesians 2:8-10 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”

This doesn’t absolve us of responsibility to take action, but is where we get the ability to follow Him in the first place. God doesn’t expect us to be perfect—He *knows* we aren’t perfect. If we were perfect, He wouldn’t have needed to send His Son. If we were perfect, how would that bring other sinners to His feet?

What is it about Christ that is so attractive? That His love covers us *even in* our sins and imperfections. Our goal is a direction—a progression—toward being more like Christ. That’s what progressive sanctification is. Not perfection itself, but a heading toward it.

Does that mean on the days we falter, God is farther from us? On the contrary, God draws near to us to help us in our sins. Jesus already paid the price of our separation from God, so that we can enter within the veil of the Holy of Holies (Hebrews 6:19) and be *with* God. Romans 8:1 says, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” God isn’t considering how He needs to punish you, He’s already laid out a plan for your good and His glory. I like how John Piper puts it: “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.” We lose sight of the fact that God loves us *and* He’s good *and* He’s sovereign. God’s attributes do not change, nor do they contradict one another. They are all working together all the time.

So how do we take hold of this “full assurance of hope” mentioned in Hebrews 6:11? Let’s check the context. Verses 10-12 say, “For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. And we desire that each one of you **show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through *faith* and *patience* inherit the promises.**”

So full assurance is realized through diligence. He warned us against sluggishness (or, dullness, 5:11), and diligence is the opposite. Not only does diligence yield the fruit of righteousness when it has lasted to the end, it benefits you now. Diligence results in assurance now. So long as diligence continues, it is proof of our faith. I mean, diligence has a whole host of benefits for us—as does anything God tells us to do—but we’ll focus on this assurance for now.

He gives some examples of what diligence looks like here, in their love toward God and continued ministry to the saints. He tells us the way not be sluggish is to be “imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

Personally, when I first think of diligence, I see it as synonymous with duty. Duty doesn’t feel good, does it? I think this is one reason the author reminds us that those who endure to the end “inherit the promises.” What promises is he talking about? All the promises God gave His children. Of which there are many. The foremost is salvation. That’s a good reason to endure.

So who are these people we’re supposed to imitate? People who ran the race and endured to the end, and are now with Christ. These people are great examples because we **know** they’ve finished. These aren’t the only people we can imitate—Paul told us in 1 Corinthians 11:1 to imitate him, just as he imitated Christ. Part of the reason for the body of Christ—namely the church—is to have living examples we can imitate. The author brings up a great example here in Abraham.

Hebrews 6:13-15 says, “For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, ‘I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply you.’ And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise.”

Abraham endured to the end. What did Abraham do that we would want to imitate? If you go back to Genesis 22, where the author of Hebrews is referencing, God gives this promise to Abraham after Abraham nearly sacrificed his only son, Isaac.

Okay, picture it. God had already promised that He would bless and multiply Abraham, and then He asks Abraham to sacrifice His only son. God seemed to be asking him to do something that would directly contradict what God had promised. And Abraham still trusted God and followed through. There’s more to this promise than meets the eye, too. This promise —brought out even more by its context in Genesis 22—where God provides a substitutionary sacrifice, sounds a bit reminiscent of what Christ did. Christ was God’s only Son, and He really *did* die and become our sacrifice, saving us from our sins.

Now we can see Abraham had some serious faith in God, yes? So if God tells him something, he’s going to believe it, right? But God didn’t just tell him. Hebrews 6:16-17 points out, God went so far as to swear by Himself, since there was nothing greater to swear by, “so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.” —Hebrews 6:18

What is the hope set before us? God’s salvation. Being with Him beyond the veil—in the very presence of God. God promises this to His children. So it’s imperative that as God’s children, our salvation is shown by our diligence.

Now, there are people in this world who seem to be very diligent, and then fall away from God, aren’t there? It didn’t look like they were going to fall away—to not endure—beforehand. So how can we tell? We can’t—and our focus is in the wrong place. God knows. And if God chose His children from before the foundation of the world, then would He promise salvation to a child, only to take it away when they fell away during the course of their life? God’s promises and purposes do not change. If someone didn’t endure to the end, then their faith wasn’t genuine in the first place.

So here’s the real question, and the real focus: if God promised salvation to His children, then can anyone or anything nullify that promise?

Romans 8:38-39, “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Sisters, where does our hope lie? Does it lie in our own power? In our own ability? No! It lies in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—in joining Him in dying to ourselves (to our sins) and being raised in His newness of life! God’s no longer sees us as deserving wrath due to our sin, because He’s taken care of that. God now sees you in light of the sacrifice His Son made *for* your sins. We keep returning to our own sins—both in deed and thought—but it isn’t about us! *Christ* paid the penalty. Is that going to change? Can *anything* we do, say, think, or feel **change anything about what God has done or said?** In *this* lies our hope. In God’s unchangeableness. What He says He will do. What He does cannot be undone. Nothing you do can thwart His purpose. If He chose you before the foundation of the world, He will never let

you go. Remember, *He* is where our faith and diligence come from. We must rely on Christ... for our diligence... for our faith... for our obedience... and for our every next step in life.

So do we let go and let God? The author of Hebrews is clearly stressing a point not to be sluggish. Where do that push and pull meet? What does it look like to rest in God's work and to be diligent? I think 2 Peter 1:1-10 is a beautiful passage that parallels this concept in a way we can meditate on.

1 Peter 1:1-3 says, "To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, **by** the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that **His divine power** has granted to us **everything** pertaining to life and godliness, **through** the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence." So God has granted us everything pertaining to life and godliness through the true knowledge of Himself, which we get from where? His Word.

Continuing to verse 4, it says, "For by these [these being His divine power and the true knowledge of God—the Word] He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. **For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.** For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you."

Did you catch that, before Peter went into what to be diligent in, he said, "for this very reason"? The whole reason we do any of these things is because God has "granted to us His precious and magnificent promises," making us His children. We don't do these things **for** our salvation, we do them **because** of it. We can't put the cart before the horse. Our works come as a result of our faith. We press on to maturity because we love God, **because He first loved us** (1 John 4:19). It all points back to God. It's all about worship of God because of all the beautiful, unmerited, loving things He has done for us.

Hebrews 6:19 says, "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil..." This hope of God's promise, granted to us by God through grace by faith *He has given us*, that grants us access to God Himself. And He has sworn it. God swears to us—not for His benefit—but for ours. This is our hope, that it rests on Christ, and that's where our diligence stems from.

III. False Faith and Genuine Faith

Now in light of all this, it will be easier to return to Hebrews 6:4-8. At the beginning, I mentioned that the Hebrew author's intended audience is professing believers, which includes both those of genuine faith and those of false faith.

Hebrews 6:4-8 says, "For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son

of God and put Him to open shame. For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.”

This really got me at first, because when I saw “partakers of the Holy Spirit,” I read it as someone who was saved. What may be most helpful here is to take the example of what’s happening with the two types of ground in verses 7-8 first. The ground is representative of professing believers. What is the rain that’s falling on the two types of ground? Going back to verses 4 and 5, it’s “the heavenly gift... the Holy Spirit... the good word of God and the powers of the age to come.” In other words, it’s the experience of being among a healthy church community.

Going back to verses 7-8, what did the two types of ground do in response to that experience? One brought forth useful vegetation—or spiritual fruit, if you will—and the other brought forth thorns and thistles—or fruits of the flesh, if you will.

This is the same concept Jesus talked about with the parable of the seeds in Matt 13:18-23. “Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.”

Those who did not endure had false faith. Let me ask you: are there false believers among a healthy church community? Those who will not endure to the end? Yes. What does that mean? Does that mean we look at each other with suspicion? No. It isn’t about us, it’s about God. Ours isn’t to know whether or not our fellow is saved, but to show God’s love to one another—and *all* our neighbors; any person around us. We can’t do this out of duty, because it comes from God’s overflowing abundance of love, grace, joy, patience, and peace.

If someone professes to be a Christian, I’ll treat them as such. If they don’t act like a Christian, I’ll ask them why. As a community of believers, we’re called to hold each other accountable. If someone is faltering, it’s our job to help encourage them back on the path, keeping an eye on our own hearts, lest we falter, too. But God is the One who will work repentance in them if they are saved. The best example of a professing believer—who experienced the miracles of God, who had “tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come,” but had false faith was Judas. Judas even went out with the disciples performing miracles! Yet he betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. It can go the other way, too. We know people who grew up in the church, and could quote all the AWANA verses, knew all the right answers, but didn’t actually believe until their twenties.

Bearing this in mind, Hebrews verse 6 makes more sense, since someone who is saved cannot fall away, or they would be crucifying Christ to themselves again. If God chose His children from before the foundation of the world, they are either—from God’s point of view—always saved, or always not. If they are saved, they cannot fall away and then be saved again, since Christ cannot be again crucified.

Cornerstone Community Church
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Here again is our hope that we have as an anchor for the soul: Christ chose us from the foundation of the world, and He will work in us the faith and diligence to endure to the end.

Sisters, we need to constantly remind ourselves of God's everyday miracles. He holds every atom of the world and our solar system, and our universe together each moment so that we can breathe the very air we breathe. But He didn't stop there. God supplies all of His children's needs. But He didn't stop there. He paid for all of the nasty things we do that spit in the face of what He's done for us. He loves us anyway. He went so far as to provide a way for us to be with Him. With the God of the universe. I mean that's cool and all, but what really blows my mind is that **that God** loves me. And it's not because of anything I did, or anything I will do. It's because He chooses to. Nothing I do will ever change that.

So sisters, rejoice! Be diligent and press on **because** of His amazing love for you—and so that you can share that love with others! This is our calling. Press on to maturity so you can know this loving God more.