



## First Baptist Church Selmer

JESUS IS BETTER • JESUS, OUR PERFECT HOPE • HEBREWS 6:1-6, 9-20 • 6/11/2023

### MAIN POINT

Jesus is our source for eternal hope which leads us to grow spiritually unto maturity.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Who is the best coach or teacher you've ever had? How was that person able to motivate you so well?**

**What are some general characteristics you think are essential for a leader to possess in order to motivate people?**

**What kind of person is a great member of a team?**

A great coach is not always defined by their wins and losses but by the impact that they make on the lives of the individuals in which they coach. John Wooden said it best, "A coach is someone who can give correction without causing resentment."

We will look at Hebrews 6 today with the author of Hebrews continuing to challenge the Jewish Christians about their need to grow in spiritual maturity. It is time for the readers to move forward not remain stagnant in their faith. The challenge is very much exactly what we need to hear today as well.

### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ HEBREWS 6:1-6.

*1 "Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. 3 And this we will do if God permits. 4 For it is impossible in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt." (ESV)*

As we read last week, the author chides the readers for their lack of maturity. Although they have been Christians long enough that they should themselves be teachers, they have regressed to the point that they are in need of being taught again the elementary principles of basic doctrine.

**How does the author's reproof of the believers' maturity contain love?**

**What types of things are mentioned as elementary doctrines?**

Two phrases are mentioned to start Hebrews 6 and both are important in Christian maturity. "*Let us leave the elementary doctrine and go on to maturity*". The second phrase "*go on to maturity*" is the Greek word '*pheromai*,' which means 'let us be carried on.'" The author is not expecting too much from the believers; he realizes that when followers of Christ can't go any further, Christ will carry them. Jesus makes our maturity possible.

Growing in spiritual maturity has both the desire to move away from childish things but also to pursue eternal things.

The six things mentioned in verses 1-2 are foundational to the Christian faith. The issue became that instead of the foundational principles being a foundation for growth into greater Christian doctrines, no growth was evident. Due to a lack of growth, the same basic doctrines were occupying the majority of the believers' minds and lives. Even today, the danger becomes that if we never grow spiritually, even the things that are foundational to our faith will begin to decay.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ HEBREWS 6:9-12.

9 *"Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things - things that belong to salvation. 10 For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. 11 And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, 12 so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises."* (ESV)

The mature Christian realizes the purity of the love he or she carries. Love is not selfish (see 1 Corinthians 13:4-8). The mature Christian is big enough to see beyond his or her own needs and love others unselfishly.

**Why do we equate maturity with biblical or theological knowledge? How can knowledge alone make us prideful or arrogant?**

**How can only focusing on "loving others" cause us to neglect growing in the knowledge of the Lord? Why do we need knowledge of God to become more loving like God?**

**In what ways is love "leaking the grace of the gospel" on others?**

Growing in maturity is not merely gaining more knowledge but living out the knowledge that you already have. It is where the rubber meets the road. But we are also called to grow in spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity is a result of growth both in knowledge as well as application of that knowledge.

It is a balance of love plus truth. If we are all truth and have no love, then we can become cold and harsh. But equally, if we are all love and no truth, we walk the line of compromise and heresy. The life of the believer is one of balance.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ HEBREWS 6:13-20.

13 *"For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, 14 saying, 'Surely I will bless you and multiply you.' 15 And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. 16 For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. 17 So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, 18 so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. 19 We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into*

*the inner place behind the curtain, 20 where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." (ESV)*

**What does the statement, "*it is impossible for God to lie*" mean?**

**How does this knowledge come as a sigh of relief for us?**

**Focus on verses 19-20. What is "*the inner place behind the curtain*" (v. 19)?**

**What does it mean that Jesus became "*a high priest forever*" (v. 20)?**

**Read Matthew 27:45-54. What was the significance of the temple curtains being torn in two at Jesus' crucifixion?**

A promise is a promise. If the Bible states that God promises to do something, there is zero chance that it will not happen. Why? Because not only would God never break a promise, He is incapable of breaking His promise.

Hebrews 6:19-20 refers to Matthew 27:51-54. The curtain temple separated the holy of holies from the rest of the temple area. The ark of the covenant was in the holy of holies. The word "ark" in Hebrew means "box." That box contained relics that proved their connection with the Creator of the universe. The high priest of Israel was the only one who could pass through the curtain and enter the holy of holies. He made offerings for the sins of the people of Israel. When the curtain ripped, history was made. Jesus tore down the separation between us and God. We don't need someone to represent us in the holy of holies—Jesus is the one who carries us toward maturity.

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**In what ways are we each important to the life and growth of other Christians? How can we encourage one another's spiritual maturity?**

**Why is it sometimes difficult for us to receive criticism and warnings that would help us mature as believers?**

**What steps will you take this week to "grow up" and move toward maturity in your faith?**

## PRAYER

Spend some silent time in prayer asking God to help you evaluate your current level of spiritual maturity and specific areas where you need to grow. Close in prayer by thanking God for His commitment to the spiritual growth of His people and for the grace He shows us when we most need it.

## COMMENTARY

### | HEBREWS 6

**6:1.** First, the verse presents an appeal with both a forward and a backward look. They were to leave the elementary teachings about Christ. These believers were to move beyond the initial understanding of Christianity with some similarities to Judaism. They were also to go on to maturity. They must desire the growth which only God could ultimately give them. They must escape from the doldrums of halfhearted commitment.

Second, six statements about elementary doctrine are presented. These statements called the readers to move courageously through them. The doctrines are grouped into three couplets. The first couplet included repentance and faith. The hearers were called to progress beyond teaching the need to repent of works that lead to death. Instead of involving themselves in dead works, they must respond in faith to God's provision in Christ.

We must settle forever the fact that we come to God by relying on the provision of Jesus. We cannot remain in a life of sin and disobedience. The readers of Hebrews may have dallied around with sin and may have avoided full commitment to Christ.

**6:2.** The next couplet of doctrines described external rituals. Instruction about baptisms referred to teaching about the importance of baptism or other types of washings familiar to Jews. Hebrew people often used ritual washings as a part of their spiritual routine. Perhaps the readers of Hebrews had lingered too long in reflecting on the importance of ritual washings in living the Christian life. The laying on of hands in the New Testament is often related to the conferring of special gifts (see Acts 8:17; 13:3). The writer may have called his readers away from being absorbed in ritual matters with little spiritual impact for their lives.

He also called them to progress beyond such doctrinal matters as the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. Both the future resurrection and judgment are important

Christian doctrines, but they should not be emphasized to the exclusion of further biblical understanding.

The six issues mentioned above contained important truths which Christians must understand. However, they were elementary truths. The writer of Hebrews wanted his readers to move beyond the elementary truths. Judaism had some of these same doctrines, and probably the readers did not differ greatly in their beliefs from non-Christian Jews. They were called to a mature understanding of Christian distinctives. They may have tried to live with a minimal Christian commitment to avoid alienating their friends. They needed to leap into the deep water of obedience and understanding.

**6:3.** The coming of Christ had provided a fresh understanding of some truths contained in the Old Testament. Doubtless, the readers of Hebrews knew some of these truths. They could have yielded gradually to pressures to compromise out of fear of persecution. They could have surrendered Christian distinctives and yet have retained an interest in repentance, faith, religious washings, laying on of hands, the coming resurrection, and eternal judgment. If they abandoned Christ and mouthed an allegiance to the teachings of verses 1–2, they could expect no help from Christ. They needed to remain committed Christians and move toward maturity in teachings with a Christian distinctive. God wanted the maturity of his people. They needed God’s help because this maturity would not come automatically. They must follow God’s conditions. They were called to consider those conditions carefully.

**6:4–5.** Debates on these verses between Calvinists and Arminians have often produced more flame than insight. Many different interpretations of this passage appeal for your acceptance. Among these are:

(1) Some feel the passage teaches that a true Christian can become lost. Opposing this interpretation are those passages of Scripture which assure believers that God will keep them in security (John 6:39, 40; 10:27–29; Rom. 11:29; Phil. 1:6; 1 Pet. 1:5). The writer of Hebrews did not attempt to write an essay on the security of the believer, but certainly he was not contradicting other inspired Scripture. Thus, we can conclude that he did not assert that Christians can lose their salvation.

(2) Others think the case discussed is purely hypothetical. The writer of Hebrews never says that this happened. Some interpreters feel that expressing the warning as a hypothetical case makes it more impressive. The urgent tone here makes it unlikely that the writer dealt only in hypothetical but unrealizable situations. The repetition of a similar

warning in 10:26–31 seems to oppose any attempt to interpret this passage as hypothetical.

(3) Still others see the threat as consisting of a loss of rewards rather than a loss of salvation. They see the readers as disobedient Christians who might lose their reward and escape with a bare retention of salvation (1 Cor. 3:12–15). Against this interpretation is the recognition that the warnings in 6:7–8; 10:27 promise divine judgment. This seems to involve more than loss of rewards.

(4) Some feel that the readers of Hebrews were near Christians and not true Christians. They feel that the reference to tasting the heavenly gift and sharing in the Holy Spirit refer to some activities of “common grace” which both Christians and non-Christians could experience. They feel that tasting the goodness of the word of God can refer to an experience common to both Christians and non-Christians. They feel that repentance is an impossibility because their resistance to the gospel has built immunity against it.

(5) This writer feels that the author of Hebrews addressed his words to those who profess to be Christians and urges them to show their genuine profession by their refusal to apostatize. The writer spoke to the readers as Christians. He could not clearly evaluate their inward condition. If the readers turned from Christ to Judaism, they would show their profession of faith in Christ had been false. Not all his readers were alike. It would be possible for some of the readers to have true professions and for some to have had false professions. The writer of Hebrews spoke to all of them as if they were true Christians, not wanting to make the judgment himself. He urged them to show their real faith by endurance in their commitment.

Some professing believers seemed to be toying with the idea of a return to Judaism. The writer of Hebrews assumed that continuance in commitment to Christ demonstrated real Christianity. The readers had professed some experiences with Christ. If they turned away from him after this initial start, their desertion would show that they were not real Christians. They needed to understand the seriousness of what they were considering.

It was impossible to renew those who had enjoyed the experiences of verses 4–5 if they fell into apostasy. These were people who claimed to have real experiences with Jesus. They might have received an inoculation of something which resembled Christianity but was not the real thing. Only their endurance with Jesus would demonstrate that they had the real thing.

First, the readers claimed to have been enlightened. They had some revelation of Jesus Christ. The idea of enlightenment appears in 2 Corinthians 4:4, where unbelievers fail to see in Jesus “the light of the gospel.”

Second, they had also tasted the heavenly gift. Probably this referred to the readers as people who claimed to have experienced a vital relationship with Jesus Christ (Ps. 34:8). They claimed to have faith in Christ. They were urged to demonstrate their faith by their works (v. 12).

Third, the readers had shared in the Holy Spirit. They had experienced some gifts, influences, and tugs from the Holy Spirit.

Fourth, they had tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age. Jesus himself had spoken of the day when some of his professing followers would say to him, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?” (Matt. 7:22). Jesus would reply to these startled disciples, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers” (Matt. 7:23). The readers enjoyed a sample of Christian experience, including a knowledge of the Christian message and some powerful experiences which seemed to be linked to the Holy Spirit.

The Scriptures offer encouragement to the weakest believer, but they declare alarming warnings to those who carelessly presume that they are on God’s side. It is possible for an individual to approach the Word of God without any relish for its message. It is possible for a person to have something resembling Christian experience without genuinely knowing Christ. The readers of Hebrews were looking, sounding, and seeming to be like believers; but they were urged to show the reality of their faith by enduring in their commitment to Jesus.

**6:6.** The severe warnings of this verse apply only to those who commit apostasy from Christ after having experienced an understanding of the gospel and some influences from Christ. The impossibility of restoration comes because those who turn away from Christ are guilty of crucifying the Son of God all over again. They also hold Jesus up for public contempt. The rejection of Christ after confessing him is an act of relentless hostility. The author of Hebrews condemned it as a condition from which a participant could not return to fellowship with God.

God will pardon all who truly repent. It is possible for human beings so to resist the grace of God that they arrive at a state of heart in which repentance is an impossibility. It is not impossible because God would not be willing to bring them to repentance, but it is



impossible because the person is so hardened he will not repent. This condition is described in Romans 1:28. People become so completely sinful that God gives them up to a reprobate heart.

The Bible promises that God will keep those who truly know him (John 10:28–29). It also reminds us that “man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7). Those who claim to have known God but who finally turn away from him demonstrate that they never knew him. Hebrews 6:6 presents a strong warning to willful sinners that they cannot expect restoration to God after their adamant rejection of his mercy. No person with an attitude as contemptuous as the descriptions of these verses (vv. 4–6) need expect repentance. The self-hardening has produced “an impenetrable casing which removes all sensitivity to the pleadings of the Spirit” (Donald Guthrie).

**6:7–8.** These verses use an agricultural illustration to present a spiritual truth. A farmer naturally expects that, given the right conditions of moisture and fertility, the land he cultivates will produce a crop. The fruitful ground responds to the conditions which God provides and produces useful results. The “thorny” ground shows that it is unworthy of God’s blessings and produces thickets and briars. A harvest of weeds, thorns, and thistles is fit only for burning. This is a picture of final destruction.

This agricultural analogy also applies to the spiritual realm. Those people or groups who produce no “good fruit” demonstrate their barrenness. The image of “burning” suggests that divine judgment lay ahead for them. Those who produce fruit give evidence that they are receiving God’s blessings. God will increase their productivity. Believers who persevere in faith are like fertile land and can expect further blessing from God. Those who profess Christ but turn from him and never produce credible evidence of commitment need the reminder that God is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29).

**6:9.** This verse moves from warning to encouragement. The writer of Hebrews offered a stern warning, but he hastened to assure the readers that he did not consider that his extreme description applied to them. He called them dear friends as an additional indication of his warmth and genuine hope for them. His statement we are confident used a Greek perfect tense which showed that his decision was not a “snap” judgment. He had reflected on his words, and he gave them with measured purpose. They needed to listen to his warning, but he was confident that their lives demonstrated things that accompany salvation.

His reference to better things as coming from them indicated that he expected them to enjoy a productive spiritual life. He was not looking for spiritual thorns and briars from

them. He will name some of these better things in the next verse.

**6:10.** What had the readers of Hebrews done to make the writer confident that they were believers? The readers' works and God's justice convinced him that his friends had given a demonstration of divine grace.

First, he mentioned the work of the readers. They had labored in Jesus' name. Their works included concern for others, righteous living, and other Christian virtues. Hebrews 10:32-36 points out additional details of righteous living.

Second, he pointed out the love of the readers. They had ministered to other Christians in the past. They continued to follow this ministry. We see a past and a present participation in their ministry.

Third, he cited the justice of God. In the face of such overwhelming moral evidence, it seemed inconceivable to the writer that God would overlook the works and the love which were evident products of divine grace.

We should be careful not to see this verse as offering support for any doctrine of salvation by works. God had no obligation to the readers, nor did they have any claim on him. Their works were the normal fruit which we should expect from believers. We would expect that God would look with favor upon the evidence of transformed lives which they put out.

**6:11-12.** Having commended his readers for their good works and love, the writer of Hebrews now described what he wanted them to continue to do and not to do. He encouraged, and he warned.

First, he asked them to continue to show this same diligence so that they might make their hope sure (v. 11). The strong urging here to certify their hope suggests that at the moment they lacked assurance. They may have had love for other believers and yet lacked assurance for themselves. The writer made his wish personal by emphasizing that he wanted each of them to experience this assurance.

He made another positive emphasis in urging them to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit God's promises (v. 12). They needed to emerge from their spiritual doldrums and become followers of the heroes of the faith such as we find mentioned in chapter 11. To reach these goals, they needed to demonstrate a faith in God's provision to them and a patience which refused to quit under pressure. In Galatians 5:22 Paul listed both of these traits as fruits of the Spirit.

Second, he warned them not to become lazy. He used the same word which appeared in 5:11 with the translation of slow to learn. He wanted them to check their movement toward sluggishness. If they did not put a halt to their spiritual drifting, they would never reach full maturity. Even though the author of Hebrews thought well of his friends, he gave them warnings and encouragement to hasten their progress toward the goal of full maturity in Jesus.

**6:13.** Abraham is mentioned here to show the reliability of God's promises. If God's promises were reliable, then his followers can claim the hope which he promises.

God had confirmed his promise to Abraham with an oath. Genesis 22:16 claimed that God made a promise and supported it with his own personal oath. God found no one greater than himself to whom he could appeal in an oath. God's Word itself was a foundation strong enough for our trust and confidence. When God added an oath to his Word, the addition made the promise even more certain.

**6:14-15.** In Genesis 12:2-3 and again in 17:6-8 God had promised Abraham that his blessing would come on the patriarch and his descendants. Since Isaac was the child of promise, Abraham surely was startled at God's command to offer Isaac in sacrifice. After Abraham responded with obedience to the command, God reinforced the earlier promise with an oath (Gen. 22:17-18).

The promise to Abraham involved the multiplication of his offspring and the blessing of the nations of the world through his offspring. Abraham saw the multiplication of his offspring. The blessing of the world was accomplished in the redemptive work of Christ on the cross.

Abraham endured the challenges of the trial concerning Isaac. He became an outstanding example of someone who obtained his inheritance by faith and patience (see 6:12). Abraham himself provided a pattern which the readers of Hebrews could profitably imitate.

**6:16-17.** Human beings use oaths to back up their statements because the promise of a human being is not reliable enough for trust. Jesus urged his followers to be so truthful that human beings could trust their "yes" and "no" (Matt. 5:37). The writer of Hebrews followed normal human conventions of requiring an oath to support a promise. People who make official promises need to swear an oath by someone in order to settle the issue.

Why did God make an oath? A mere statement of his intentions was sufficient to provide a foundation for our trust. Human beings, however, respect the value of an oath. Catering to the needs of the human beings who heard his promise, God supported his word with an oath to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear. God's use of an oath supplied evidence no one could doubt.

Whenever human beings offer oaths, they swear by someone greater than themselves. Since God had no one greater than himself, he swore by himself. He based his oath on his own great name, guaranteeing he would accomplish his purpose.

Some Jewish opponents of Christianity may have suggested that Christian teaching was a departure from the promises that Israel anticipated. The Christian hope was a fulfillment of the promises God had earlier offered to Israel. What God had done through Christ was a necessary step for both Jews and Gentiles to make. The work of Christ was not a change from God's previously announced plans for Israel. It was the confirmation of the hope of blessing the nations which he had earlier given to Abraham (Gen. 22:17–18). The heirs of that promise were the writer and his readers, who experienced in the gospel the reality of the oath God swore to Abraham.

**6:18–20.** The strength of God's promise provided hope and encouragement for the readers of Hebrews. Where did they find this hope?

First, they found it in the complete trustworthiness of God's Word. When God—who cannot lie—supports his statement with an oath, his followers find hope and encouragement.

Second, they could find it through their own tenacity in seizing the hope that was available. Retaining hope demanded strong action. The readers had drifted along aimlessly. They needed to understand and grasp the promises the Father had offered them. They should flee to Christ for security and protection from the uncertainty of the world.

Third, they found it in a safe and secure anchor—Jesus, our High Priest. We have a firm basis for our hope because Jesus finished his work on earth and continues that work in heaven as our High Priest, carrying us into God's very presence. He has gone before us as a forerunner and is the assurance of our admission into God's presence. His prayers for his people guard the church (Heb. 7:25) and give believers the hope of future glorification. Christians find a basis for hope in the completed and continuing work of Jesus.

Fourth, they found it because Christ is our High Priest forever. The fact that we have access to God's presence forever gives us a firmness for our hope. This is a new idea. The next chapter of Hebrews develops the relationship of Christ as a priest to the priest Melchizedek.

Jesus provides uninterrupted access to God's presence for his children. We will never have an outage of divine power. His presence before God fills us with hope, encouragement, and stamina. With the strength we receive from him we can find the staying power to endure in our Christian commitment. Let us rise up and claim our heritage!

Thomas D. Lea, Hebrews, James, vol. 10, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 108-116.