

Hebrews 6:7-20

A Word of Encouragement

As we work our way through Hebrews chapter six we need to keep in mind the whole context of the book of Hebrews and the chapters that immediately precede and that follow.

This chapter contains the third warning passage in Hebrews and is one of the severest warnings in the Scriptures. But in that severity there are also strong words of encouragement. The true believer will heed the warnings, and hopefully the unbeliever will respond and be born again. Apparently, it is a mixed group who are reading the homily. Some have been truly spiritually regenerated and are saved; others are not saved and are considering returning to the old covenant sacrifices at the Temple and forsaking Jesus Christ. The author wants to take his readers to a deeper level of understanding and commitment to Christ. However, some have already become dull of hearing, sluggish or lazy mentally and spiritually. Their interests are on other things, and they are no longer ready to listen. By now, they should have matured and become teachers in the church. The author of Hebrews rebukes the spiritual immaturity of some of his readers. Spiritually they are like children who can only understand spiritual truths on the lowest level. He wants to take them on to higher level of maturity. The emphasis of this portion of the book is on making spiritual progress. There is nothing wrong with milk, you just need to progress beyond milk.

Note the four marks of spiritual immaturity in this passage: dullness or laziness toward the Word of God, inability to teach others the Word of God, a diet of elementary truths in the Word, and failure to apply the Word to their own personal lives. No wonder they had dried up spiritually.

These warnings have been interpreted by Bible scholars in four different ways. One group says these are believers who have fallen away and lose their salvation. Others think those who fall away are people who made professions and say they believed, but in reality are not. There is no evidence they were ever saved. Other scholars view this as a hypothetical situation. If a Christian could lose his salvation, which he cannot, it would be impossible for them to be saved again. Others interpret this passage as only Hebrew Christians living before the destruction of the temple could commit this sin of returning to the temple and therefore rejecting Christ.

When is repentance impossible? In the passage before us someone has a great religious emotional experience and receives a great blessing, and then the same person falls away, and in so doing re-crucifies the Son of God and puts Him to open shame. Then it is impossible to renew that person to repentance. Some of these readers have tried everything God has to offer, and have turned away from it. Christ died for them, so there is nothing more to present to them. To reject Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice for sin is to reject the only means of having a right relationship with the LORD God. Moreover, there is no such thing as being saved a second time. You are either saved or you are not.

Can a person be a partaker of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit and not be justified, i.e. declared righteous before a holy God? Can you taste and be a partaker of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God and the powers of the age to come and not be justified? Can you lose your standing before God as a truly saved person and be lost? Or is this passage teaching that you can have great religious experiences and never have been saved? Is it possible to have all these great blessings and experiences and not be born again or saved? Critical to these questions and interpretation is what is your personal relationship with Christ Jesus? In whom or what are you trusting for your salvation?

We are convinced of better things for you.

The author gives an illustration his readers would easily understand. "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" (Hebrews 6:7-8, NASB95). All Scripture references are from New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update unless otherwise noted).

The rain has fallen on the ground and the seed has produced an abundant harvest. It is an illustration of the true believer whose fruitfulness is a sign of the condition of his heart. God has blessed the believer and he is fruitful. The believers who drink from the fountain of God's Word produce fruit to God's glory.

What is your religious experience producing in your daily life? What kind of spiritual fruit is my life producing? That should be what every believer asks himself as he reads this passage.

Again, the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:3-23 comes to mind when we read these verses. The following verses demand justice and destruction when no good fruit is produced (cf. John 15:2, 6).

"But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way" (Hebrews 6:9). "Beloved" (*agapetos*) are "divinely loved ones." He now has believers in mind. The author of Hebrews does not believe his readers are apostates, or that they are potential apostates. He thinks they are truly saved. When he calls them "beloved" he is reassuring them of his genuine love for them. He has confidence in them as Christians.

"The better things for you" is the full salvation God has provided in Christ Jesus for the believer. It is the "inheritance" we look forward to in the future (Heb. 1:14). His goal is that they go deeper in God's Word and become Christlike. He wants them to produce fruits of righteousness. We are assured of better things to come referring to our salvation.

God has a perfect memory.

In the verses that follow the author does not think his readers have apostatized. His goal is to get them to focus their faith on Christ as their only hope. It is time to grow up spiritually. Beginning with chapter seven the author will pick up his refrain once again of the High Priestly ministry of Jesus. He will go on to teach solid food and spiritual meat.

"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" (Hebrews 6:10-12).

God is faithful. He is going to fulfill His eternal purpose in the life of the believer. He always finishes what He begins.

"God is not unjust to forget your work and love which you have shown toward His name, in ministering to the saints." That is encouraging to every true believer who serves Christ with a loving faithful attitude. Ministry is difficult in many churches. God forgets our sins, but He remembers our love for Him. Their "work" (*ergou*) was not what saved them; it is the evidence of their regeneration by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was producing "love" (*agapes*) in them. The service they were rendering was out of that love produced by the Spirit within them. It is in the present tense indicating that God is still producing this work in them. It reminds us of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23.

We have a sure hope centered in our Savior. The Lord has provided faithful models and mentors to encourage us. Hebrews chapter eleven is filled with these examples of men and women who have held to a steadfast hope in the Lord. Their lives are filled with faith, hope and love.

"Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good

deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near" (Hebrews 10:22-25).

There is no hope without faith in Jesus Christ because hope is centered in Him alone. Faith without hope in Christ is empty and worthless. In whom or what is your faith and hope focused? The only anchor of the soul is Jesus Christ. Any other anchor will be swept away by the hurricanes of life.

God promises eternal life to everyone who believes in His Son. Therefore, we as believers expect the promise of eternal life to be fulfilled.

This "full assurance" is a great help to spiritual growth when the heart is fully persuaded that the work of Christ is all sufficient. Our hope is centered in Him and all He has accomplished for us. Our hope is kept alive by trusting in the promises of God in His Word. Without full assurance the believer will not make progress in his or her spiritual life. I have yet to see a person who does not have the assurance of their salvation grounded in the great doctrines of grace make great progress in their Christian walk. Spiritual growth takes place when the Christian devotes himself to the revelation of God in His Word and exercising faith in the truth of the Scriptures. If there is no eternal security of the believer there is no sure hope that keeps the believer moving forward through the persecutions and tribulations in the Christian life. Christ is our righteousness; Christ is our blessed hope; Christ is our blessed assurance.

Remember God's Promises to Abraham

"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" (Hebrews 6:13-15).

God has fulfilled every promise He has ever made. He is true to His promises. The life of Abraham is a testimony to this great truth. God's promise to Abraham and his descendants is found in Genesis 12:1-3 and is repeated and renewed with his son of the promise, Isaac, and grandson Jacob and his descendants. The Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Genesis 12:1-3). Abraham waited twenty-five years to see that promise fulfilled in Isaac, but that was only the beginning of the fulfillment of the promise. It was a partial fulfillment. The foreshadowing and partial fulfillments point to the eternal consummation when Christ returns. God tested Abraham's faith on Mount Moriah by telling Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac. How could God bless Abraham with descendants too numerous to count if the promised son dies? Abraham "considered that God is able to raise men [Isaac] even from the dead; from which he also received him back as a type" (Heb. 11:19). That is a powerful testimony to us. Abraham's faith was alive. He was arguing with himself, literally, "considering" and coming to a definite conclusion. He was saying I will obey regardless of the cost.

God did what He promised to do. Every Jewish person we meet to this day is a testimony to God's promise. Moreover, there is even a greater fulfillment in that all who believe on Christ are the true children of Abraham. Abraham and all the heroes of faith in Hebrews eleven lived by faith and hoped for the coming of the Messiah, Jesus the Son of God. They walked by faith. The promise was fulfilled later when Christ fulfilled it. Abraham waited patiently for the coming of God's fulfillment to him in the promise of the coming of the Messiah. In fact, Jesus declared, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56). I would have loved to have been there when Jesus made that declaration. Abraham's attitude was one of exultation as he looked forward to that greater day. What is our attitude toward Him? Lord, Jesus, will I see you today.

What is written and all these promises are for us. Yes, they are for those of us who place our trust in Christ.

Heirs of the Promise have an Anchor of our Soul

"For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, 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. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 6:16-20).

God's Word is sure. God does not lie. We can depend on the truthfulness of God. He is faithful to His promises. What He says He will do. We can take Him at His word!

The idea that God swore to Abraham is simply saying God accommodated Abraham as He does so often in the Scriptures when He reveals Himself. He argues from the lesser to the greater. His whole argument is that we can depend upon the trustworthiness of God.

We look at the facts of how God has kept His promises in the past and know that He is still faithful. He will treat us the same way He treated Abraham. God said to Abraham, "I will bless you." And He did just that. Moreover, the writer of Hebrews takes these divine blessings to Abraham and makes them applicable to all believers by calling them heirs of God. "In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath" (Hebrews 6:17). The promise to Abraham extends beyond the history of Israel and in the person and work of Christ Jesus is relevant to us. The oath to Abraham encourages and strengthens us in our faith in God. These words of promise are for our benefit. The apostle Paul said the same thing, "Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham" (Gal. 3:7). A couple of verses later he assures them, "So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer" (v. 9). He includes us because we have faith in Christ. The issue is are you an heir according to the promise? "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise" (Gal. 3:29). This gives us encouragement; it causes us to go deeper in faith in Him. It causes us to want to feast on strong spiritual meat.

What is God's eternal purpose? Is it not to make us heirs? His purpose is to save the believers in Christ Jesus. He will always complete what He begins. He never leaves a project incomplete. His eternal purpose is firm, unchanging and unchangeable. The nature of His eternal purpose is unchanging.

Therefore, no believer should ever doubt God's will to save you. God has not changed His mind since the day He saved you. He will not betray His word. God gives His perfect assurance to the believer. The believer has eternal security because of the unchanging will of God.

Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes in Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life" (John 5:24). The question is, in whom or what are you trusting for eternal life? If you died and stood before the Lord God and He said to you, "Why should I let you into My heaven?" How would you respond? Would you make excuses? Would try to blame God? Would you try negotiating with Him? Would you tell Him how good you are and that your good deeds and religious experiences outweigh your faults?

Or would you confess to Him that you are a guilty sinner worthy of eternal condemnation, and that you are trusting the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross to cleanse you of all your sins? "The wages of sin is death." And you and I are guilty. We deserve eternal separation from the Lord God because we are sinners. However, God in His matchless grace and mercy paid our debt to His righteousness in full so He could pardon, forgive us our sins and give us a right standing before Him.

The believing sinner is “justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith.” That is the only way a just and holy God can “be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:23-27). We are not saved by law keeping, our good works or virtue or religious experiences or merits, etc. That is impossible because we are sinners. We have failed to be what God wants us to be. As sinners everything we touch condemns it. Are you trying to trusting in yourself to be right with God or are you casting yourself upon His mercy?

God cannot lie because He is God. His promises are unalterable. His promises are unchangeable. He is not a man that He should change His mind.

How reassuring and encouraging when I read, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). "He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:12-13). Jesus said, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out" (John 6:37). Our salvation depends upon God's sovereign grace, and not on our ability to keep ourselves saved.

The believer in Jesus Christ has eternal security because of the unchanging promises and the eternal will of God. Based upon the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross God has turned away His own wrath against the believing sinner. God made the sacrifice by sending His own Son to die in our place. God turned away His own wrath by offering up the only sacrifice that can deal with our sins. Sinners cannot appease a holy God. Sinners cannot offer a sacrifice that God can accept. Only a holy sinless High Priest can offer the perfect sacrifice for sin. Jesus did that when He gave Himself for us on the cross.

Hebrews 6:18 pictures believers under the figure of the Old Testament cities of refuge fleeing to safety. We have “taken refuge” in that “hope set before us.” The Christian believer has trusted in the promise that culminates in Christ, the unique one of a kind seed of Abraham. That hope is centered in Christ, not in ourselves. Christ is the very embodiment of our hope. The anchor of the believer's hope is Christ. Only Jesus Christ is worthy of our trust because He has gone on before us into heaven.

Hebrews six closes by picking up the theme the author has introduced earlier regarding the priesthood of Jesus according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 2:17; 3:1; 4:14-15; 5:5-6, 10; 6:20; 7:1ff). He is the anchor of our soul, a sure and steadfast hope because He has already entered within the veil in heaven, the very presence of the LORD God to intercede on our behalf. “Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order to Melchizedek” (Hebrews 6:19-20). Jesus is our great high priest forever. The Jewish high priest entered only one day a year, and when he died he had to be replaced. Jesus is an eternal priest because He is eternal. Jesus is in heaven forever. He has an eternal priesthood. What a comfort and encouragement that right now He intercedes for us. "Jesus . . . because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." (Hebrews 7:24-25; cf. Heb. 9:24; Rom. 8:34). He will never be replaced.

We can sing with all of our heart the assuring words of Fanny Crosby:

“Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.”

That is the work of God in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit gives us this assurance based upon the promises of His Word. You are either saved or lost. You either have life or you are dead spiritually. It is dangerously

possible for a person to possess and experience a lot of religious things that appear Christian without being a new creature.

My hope is built upon nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. My hope is anchored in the finished work of Christ who made perfect atonement for all the sins of His people. My prayer is that your hope is firmly fixed upon Him and nothing less.

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