

Hebrews 6

In the previous chapter, the writer started talking about the Old Testament character Melchizedek and making strong comparisons with the Lord Jesus, based on the text of **Psalms 110**, a psalm with recognised Messianic connotations. But then he allows himself to become side-tracked by the fact that his readers are not so mature in their understanding as they really should be, so in the last 4 verses of **chapter 5** he has written about spiritual immaturity and so leads into **6:1-8**, taking the point further and considering the possibility of an even worse situation . . .

6:1-2 He wants to move on from the very basics, not forgetting them but hoping that he can take it for granted that his readers have already come through these stages:

a) 'Elementary teaching about the Christ'. Literally, 'the word (*logos*) of the beginning about the Messiah' – a basic understanding of who Jesus is and what he has done for us.

b) 'Repentance from dead works'. Reminder: the word here (*metanoia*) doesn't just mean being sorry for wrong things we have done, but having a radical change of mind and attitude towards them. Those 'dead' works include things we have done wrong and also the useless things we once did to try to earn favour with God. That's why they are 'dead' – they are useless and ineffective.

c) 'Faith toward God'. Absorbing the teaching and having a radical re-think about our lifestyle are not enough on their own; they need to result in our **expressing trust towards God**. I like 'towards' (it's there in the Greek!). It shows direction of movement, something active, **not** passive!

d) 'Instruction about washings'. Some translations have 'baptisms', but that would be a different Greek word (*baptisma*). This word (*baptismos*) is only used in three places in the New Testament ¹ and means ceremonial washings, which were a common practice in Judaism.

e) 'Laying on of hands'. Associated with healing and receiving the gift of the outpoured Holy Spirit, sometimes with specific prophetic input. See also **Acts 6:6, 8:17-18, 9:12,17, 13:3, 19:6, 28:8, 1 Timothy 4:14, 5:22, 2 Timothy 1:6** – and numerous occasions in the ministry of the Lord Jesus! Room for lots more study here . . .

f) 'The resurrection of the dead'. Right there, at the heart of the gospel, not simply speaking of the bodily resurrection of Jesus but also of 'the dead'. In other words, they were not teaching about 'going to heaven when you die' but about the return of the Lord Jesus and the bodily resurrection of 'the saints' to share with him in his Kingdom on this earth. Again, we could get into a lot more on this subject! (See *Resurrection and the Renewal of Creation* by N.T.Wright.)

g) 'Eternal judgment'. Perhaps not a subject which you would have expected to be in the 'word of the beginning', but there it is, apparently an essential ingredient of our spiritual foundations!

6:3 'We are going to move on from these basics', the writer says, 'moving on to maturity – if God permits.'

6:4-8 And why or how might God not permit him to move on? He is still on the same thought that he wrote about in **5:11-14**: at least some of his readers are still like inarticulate babies and need to move on to maturity, but could the situation of some of them be even worse? If we look at the 'level' of spiritual progress of the people he describes in **6:4-5**, we can see folk who have apparently moved forwards significantly in their walk with the Lord:– 1) They have 'been enlightened' – they have 'seen' the truth that is in Jesus. 2) They have 'tasted the heavenly gift' – the gift of the outpoured Holy Spirit. 3) They have 'been made partakers (sharers) of the Holy Spirit' – they have known the Spirit of God at work transforming their lives. 4) They have 'tasted the good word of God' – they have received, and possibly even passed on, prophetic words from the Lord. 5) They have tasted the 'powers of the age to come' – miraculous powers similar to what the Lord Jesus demonstrated in his ministry, as a foretaste of the coming Kingdom of God.

Wow! If we met people like that, we might well be impressed and think that they were really spiritually mature and solid pillars of the church. BUT, says the writer, it is possible for even them to 'fall away' (literally, 'fall to the side') and if they do, there is no way that they can be restored. They are abusing the price that Jesus paid on the cross and putting him to open shame (**6:6**).

¹ **Mark 7:4, Hebrews 6:2, Hebrews 9:10**

This sort of rejection of the Lord is not something that could possibly happen by accident; this is a very conscious and deliberate action on their part.

A simple agricultural illustration: well-watered land that is fruitful and productive for those who cultivate it is a real blessing and blessed by God. But if that land produces only thorns and thistles, it is 'near to a curse' (either being cursed or being a curse in itself!) and will end up being burnt (**6:7-8**). Serious warnings!

6:9-12 BUT, says the writer, he is pretty sure of better things for his readers. ('Convinced' is a bit strong: 'persuaded' might be a better translation.) Better things that are closely associated with salvation.

The fact that they have worked and demonstrated their love for the Lord's name, have served other believers and are still doing so – these are indicators of their good standing before God. So, he says, **each one of you** needs to demonstrate the same diligence (literally 'speed', and so 'eagerness' or 'earnestness') **towards** 'the full assurance of hope' until you reach the goal, the point at which everything is completed. Don't be sluggish or dull (same word as in **5:11**) but copy the example of those who (right now, present tense) are currently taking hold of the promises of their inheritance through exercising faith and patience (steadfastness, endurance).

6:13-20 The Promises of God. *(Here he seems to get side-tracked again, but eventually comes back to his original point about Melchizedek before launching into the next chapter. Diversions like this remind me of Paul's style of writing!)*

It's worth looking back to God's promises to Abraham when he had been ready to sacrifice Isaac. See **Genesis 22:15-18**. He didn't simply promise, he said "By myself I have sworn . . .", because he wanted to show 'the unchangeableness of his purpose' to the heirs of the promise. Not just to show to Abraham, but to all the heirs, right down to the present day.

Abraham demonstrated steadfastness (**6:15**) and we know that he 'believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness' (**Romans 4:3, Galatians 3:6, Genesis 15:6**), so he also serves as an example of 'faith and patience' – to be imitated.

Incidentally, just look at both of these occasions:– first (**Genesis 15**) when Abraham believed God that he would give him an inheritance when he had no son, and then (**Genesis 22**) when the LORD confirmed that 'I will surely bless you and multiply you' after Abraham had been prepared to sacrifice that same precious son through whom the inheritance was to come. In both cases, God is making promises about the inheritance, and we are heirs of that same inheritance: "In your seed/descendant (singular!) all the nations of the earth shall be blessed." As we find in **Galatians 3:15-29**, that promise was made specifically looking forward to the Messiah and, as Paul writes there, "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise."

Back to **Hebrews 6**! That oath, the LORD swearing by his own Name, is a 'strong encouragement' for us to really take hold of (literally, 'seize'!) those promises, 'the hope set before us'. We have taken refuge (literally 'run for safety') to Jesus and the writer is still urging us to move on to maturity in him (**6:18**).

And that hope is an 'anchor of the soul', a completely reliable one which is attached to the 'bedrock' in the presence of God ('within the veil' – more in **chapter 9**!). The Lord Jesus is already there as 'a forerunner for us according to the order of Melchizedek.' Back to him again in **chapter 7**!

But, before we go, 'an anchor of the soul'? Someone has said that our soul is the very essence of who we are, our mind, will and emotions. Sometimes those do need anchoring, don't they?

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