

# Hebrews

## Chapter Six

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**Heb 6:1-3 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, <sup>2</sup>of instruction about washings, and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. <sup>3</sup>And this we shall do, if God permits.**

The author says “Enough of the baby talk!” Now they know that Jesus Christ is the High Priest and he wants to delve deeper and not lay the foundations of the faith again. He then lists some of these foundational matters. Christianity is like a science in that, to learn a science, one first has to master the fundamentals and then proceed to apply those basics to other aspects of the science. One similarly progresses in a sport by first mastering the basics. If the basics are not mastered then one cannot apply the advanced material. Many – maybe most – people attending churches instead treat the concepts of Christianity like random items that can be forgotten unless they are directly applicable to current events in their lives and then it seems – based upon the actions of most people in the world – they information is put into short-term memory.

Certainly repentance is a foundational concept and would have been understood by the people to whom the Scripture was written:

*Matt 3:2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

*Matt 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

*Mark 6:12 And they went out and preached that men should repent.*

*Luke 13:3 "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."*

But what does he mean by “repentance from dead works”? He could mean by dead works the legalistic following of Jewish works but he probably means that the dead works are evil actions that belong to those not born again. Actually the first would be a subset of the second if the people were not born again. Even very ethical acts done by a non-Christian are sin: *Rom 14:23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and **whatever is not from faith is sin.***

Faith is certainly a foundational issue but is also one of the most misunderstood by most people in churches today but may have been understood by the people at the time this epistle was written. Faith is not synonymous with trust or belief. It is not something developed by people. Faith is the enabling power of God so that the person can trust and believe and is a gift of God (see <http://livingtheology.com/Faith.htm> for details). One must always distinguish between cause

and effect. In this application, faith is the cause and trust and belief are the effects. The problem with people understanding this concept is that trust and belief are used so often relating to worldly applications such as saying that “I trust that Jack will turn in his proposal on time” or “I believe that the train will be on time”. People will even say that they have faith that the plane will get them to their destination safely. To properly use the Biblical word faith it would be better if we used different words in worldly applications. Wherever one would use the words faith, trust, believe in a worldly sense it would be better to use the word “confidence”. Then we should say in all of the worldly application just given: “I have confidence in .....” There are many Scriptural verses pointing us to the proper understanding of faith such as:

*Rom 12:3 For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as **God has allotted to each a measure of faith.***

*1Cor 2:5 that **your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.***

*Eph 2:8 For by grace you have been saved **through faith**; and that not of yourselves, **it is the gift of God**;*

*Heb 12:2 fixing our eyes on **Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith**, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

There is a second proper utilization of faith in a Biblical context and that is that one can talk about the faith of a religion, meaning the doctrines of that religion.

So, assuming that they know what faith really is, the author can move on and build upon the foundation. “Instructions about washings” is sometimes translated as “baptisms” and is certainly the subject of the author. Since it is plural he is not referring to Christian baptism but to the ceremonial Jewish washings. “Laying on of hands” was widespread in his time and practiced also in the early church (Acts 8:17, 2 Tim 1:6, Acts 8:17-19). The resurrection of the dead was a new concept to many people in his day and would be a very important topic to new converts regarding their accountability before God. Among people in his time who did not believe in life after death were the Sadducees. Eternal judgment is all that gives meaning to life here for if there is no righteous judgment then life here is meaningless. But knowing that Christians will be resurrected and that Jesus is their High Priest would bring much comfort to them and would be a foundational issue of the faith. Let me stress again that Biblically there are only two definitions for faith: one is the faith given by God to His children (the enabling power of God) and the second refers to the doctrines of Christianity or even some religion such as Islam. He ends this paragraph by allowing that he will only be able to proceed with giving issues past foundational ones if God allows it.

**Heb 6:4-8 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, <sup>5</sup>and have tasted the good**

**word of God and the powers of the age to come, <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>For ground that drinks the rain which often falls upon it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; <sup>8</sup>but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.**

Now we get into a sticky issue that has bothered a lot of people. On first reading, in a very rudimentary and immature fashion (; -), this paragraph seems to say that a person can lose his salvation and will never get it back. About 30 years ago a young man in a Bible study group in our home was terrified by these verses as he thought that, since he had sinned after “becoming a Christian”, his salvation was gone forever. However we know that, in Biblical context, this cannot be a correct conclusion (John 6:37; 10:27-29; and elsewhere). The author starts the paragraph with the word “for” and we know that relates to the previous section. He is pointing out the danger for someone who has begun the foundational walk and then becomes apostate. The enlightenment refers to having received the knowledge of the light of the world:

*John 1:9 There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.*

*John 1:10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.*

*John 8:12 Again therefore Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life."*

*2Cor 4:6 For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*

*2Peter1:19 And so we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.*

Note that the author does not say that they cannot be forgiven or cannot be given salvation but that they cannot be renewed again to repentance. Being brought to repentance and actually repenting are two different conditions. A person can be brought to the city limits without actually going into the city. Verses four and five are addressed to specific conditions experienced by the person. Tasting of the heavenly gift refers to only participating in the grace offered by God to a group of people like attending a worship service where the gospel message is clearly taught. Being made partakers of the Holy Spirit is again only participating in a worship service where Jesus is spiritually present: *Matt 18:20 "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst."* Having tasted the good word of God and the powers to come again means only participated as in the Lord's Supper, baptism, and other aspects of a group worship service. Jesus told His disciples to eat His body and not to just taste it: *Matt 26:26 And while they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."*

Paul warned people about three preliminary actions they could take before actually participating (or eating) in sin: *Col 2:21 "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!"* It is very dangerous to get so close to sin as to handle, taste, or touch it for the temptation might be too great for a person to refuse. However until one progresses past these initial states, he has not sinned. Similarly one can handle, taste, and touch worship items without actually worshipping. Jesus also warned of a church that was in a very bad state so that it was very distasteful to Him: *Rev 3:16 'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.* Eating involves chewing, tasting and swallowing. Until one actually swallows it the food does not enter the body. Similarly only tasting a concept without actually making it an integral part of your conscience is not permanent. So these people had “tasted” all of the elements of a true worship service and so were totally familiar with the person and meaning of Jesus as the Christ.

So in verse six, the author is saying that if such people fall away from this position they are actually crucifying Jesus themselves. The situation is similar to that of Simon Magnus who is said to have believed, been baptized and then continued with Philip (Acts 8:13). But Peter said to him that his heart was not right before God and that he was full of bitterness and captive to sin (Acts 8:21-23). Simon **appeared** to be counted among the believers but he was not repentant. From what we are told, it does not appear that he did repent and since he now knew the truth perhaps he did not repent because he could not do so:

*Acts 8:22-24 "Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that **if possible**, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. <sup>23</sup>"For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity." <sup>24</sup>But Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."*

The author of Hebrews closes this section with an application from agriculture, which is reminiscent of the parable of the seeds. In this parable the seed is the Word of God and it is depicted as falling on four types of soil. Only on the good soil does the seed bring forth fruit but on all the other soils there is no fruit (Luke 8:11-15). Thus in an application of this parable 75 percent of the actions of putting forth the Word of God do not produce repentant people since there is no fruit. Could it then be that only 25% of the people tasting the presentation of the Word of God in churches today are truly repentant people and the rest cannot be brought to repentance since they have “tasted” of the knowledge of Jesus? This may not be a rigidly perfect application but it certainly seems reasonable based upon the actions of most people who leave church “services” and go into the world.

**Heb 6:9 But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>And we desire that each one of you show**

**the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, <sup>12</sup>that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.**

The author uses the royal “we” that just refers to him. He addresses them for the first time with a very tender term of greeting, “beloved” and he is trying to encourage them to proceed in the path of righteousness. He does not want to believe that any of the people to whom he is writing are those who cannot be brought back to repentance based upon the works that he knows they have done (see James for works of the faith). However just because a person is doing works of the Lord does not mean that he has true faith (Matt 7:21-23). In verse ten he states the obvious for God cannot be unjust. In antiquity the name of a person was the character of the person and he is saying that God will not forget how they have responded to Him in love and how they have ministered to other saints. Remember in Matt 25 that Jesus said that when we love and help other saints we are also ministering to Him. They also seem to be demonstrating the true love from God that John stated was a mark of a Christian (1 John 4:19-21). In verse eleven he then says that he desires that each of them show the same kind of love toward each other and any saints so that they will comprehend the full assurance of hope forever. Perseverance is often mentioned by the author for such is the only way that someone can be reasonably certain that someone else is truly saved. Love, faith, and hope are often linked in NT writings and should be today also. If a person has real faith from God then he will show love and experience hope until the end. Paul spoke of these actions:

*Rom 5:1-5 Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup>through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup>And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; <sup>4</sup>and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; <sup>5</sup>and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*

In verse 12 he exhorts them to not become lazy but to imitate those who have been and are demonstrating their love for the Lord with their actions based upon faith from God. It is not clear if he means those saints of the past or those contemporaneously with them but even both could be the case. In any event, there are plenty of excellent examples of people serving the Lord faithfully so we should all imitate them. Two thousand years later we have even more excellent examples to follow and many to reject.

**Heb 6:13-16 For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, <sup>14</sup>saying, "I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply you." <sup>15</sup>And thus, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. <sup>16</sup>For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute.**

He next seems to use the example of Abraham who had to trust God for many years before seeing results of God's promises. But all must remember that God has the perfect timing and we have to submit to that timing even if we never see the results. The NT frequently speaks of Abraham in relation to his submission to the promises of God (Acts 3:25; 7:17; Rom 4:13; Gal 3:8, 14, 16, and 18). Since there was going to be some time passing between the promise and the event there was the need of an oath. Of course there is nobody greater than God so God has to give an oath in His name. In verse 14 the author is quoting from Gen 22:17 and the proof that such was an oath is in Gen 22:16. Here is the first use of the word "bless" in this epistle. The blessing here is for the descendents of Abraham who will become a great nation and then be the source of blessings to other people. Isaac was not born until 25 years after the promise was given so Abraham had to demonstrate considerable patience and trust in the Lord. Abraham's grandchildren were not born until another 60 years had passed and only 15 years before his death. Of course Abraham did not live to see the completion of the promise but he saw enough so that the author could say that he received the promise. The readers of this letter should then be encouraged by the example of Abraham to trust God to answer His promise. Christians have been waiting over 2000 years for the promised return of Jesus Christ but we know that it will happen in God's perfect timing.

When a man makes a promise he has to make it in the name of someone greater than him and that person could then exact punishment upon him if the promise were not fulfilled. This oath is guaranteed by a higher authority and thus ends any argument as it is a surety. The words used relate to an Egyptian legal formula meaning that the issue is in effect settled.

**Heb 6:17-18 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, <sup>18</sup>in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement, we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us.**

Similarly God gave an oath to demonstrate to the recipients that His great desire would be fulfilled since His word is absolute. God does not speculate or depend upon any events outside of His control when He says something will happen. He is sovereign and never changes so He is totally dependable. The importance of the word "heirs" is that such includes not only all of the physical descendents of Abraham but also the spiritual descendents (Gal 3:7), which includes the church in 2010. The two unchangeable things are the promise and the oath. Of course God cannot lie so we should have the utmost confidence in His promise. What we have fled from must be life in a sinful world for Christians are set free from the practice of sin and our refuge is God, the One who made the promise. If we only could see the sinful world we would certainly be in despair but we have hope (the opposite of despair) because we have a vision of the life offered by God for His people. This vision of the completion of salvation for all of God's people and for the world itself is that which we should grasp unto with a dead man's grip.

**Heb 6:19-20 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, <sup>20</sup> where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.**

The anchor is a strong metaphor to me and is an integral part of my picture of salvation. Although we remain in a sinful world, our anchor is set in heaven (within the veil) and that anchor will hold because it is set by God and not dependent upon our grasp. A ship anchored securely in a harbor will not drift into dangerous currents and will not be moved by impinging winds on the harbor. This hope possessed by Christians is our firm anchor holding us all of our life until we finally go home to be with the Lord forever. The hope we have is sure and never fading. When he says that it enters the veil he is picturing the inner sanctuary of the tabernacle where its curtain shut of the Most Holy Place that symbolizes the presence of God where people were not allowed to enter. But our hope does enter that place and so enters the very presence of God. This verse would have been extremely satisfying and encouraging for the recipients of this letter and so should it be for us.

The last verse refers to the Day of Atonement when the high priest would enter the Most Holy Place on behalf of the people. Our High Priest did enter that holy place for us and exceeds by far anything that an earthly priest could do for us since Jesus made atonement with His one offering for all of His people. In the next chapter he will return to expound upon the comparison of the function of Jesus to that of Melchizedek.