

MOVING ON TO SPIRITUAL MATURITY

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Let's Begin

What is spiritual maturity? Should every Christian strive for it? Is maturity like aging, which comes whether or not one pursues it? What responsibility does the believer have in making sure he or she is maturing spiritually? What standard would be sufficient to use to gauge genuine maturity? In other words, would I know maturity if I saw it? Is the church responsible for the spiritual growth of individual Christians? If so, what part does it play?

All of these questions are indicative of the same questions with which the author of Hebrews dealt. He concerned himself with believers pressing on to maturity. Or, as he put it, "...let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God," (Heb. 6:1b).

Hence, as we make our way through chapter six, let's focus on the outline below:

- I. The Problem of Spiritual Immaturity: Undeveloped Faith (vv. 1-6)**
- II. The Product of Spiritual Immaturity: Unfruitful Lives (vv. 7-9)**
- III. The Promise of Spiritual Maturity: Unwavering Hope (vv. 10-20)**

I. The Problem of Spiritual Immaturity: Undeveloped Faith (vv. 1-6)

The author opens this insightful section of Hebrews by actually stating the solution to the problem of spiritual immaturity. He writes, "Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit" (Heb. 6:1-3).

First, he exhorts believers to forsake immaturity. He cites their "leaving" one phase in their spiritual journey to "go on" to another. Note: he is not encouraging them to forsake their foundational doctrines of Jesus Christ anymore than a builder is forsaking the foundation of a structure when he moves to a subsequent phase in the building

project. Rather, he builds upon the foundation. Similarly, the author is prodding believers to build upon the foundational doctrines of the faith. These essentials must forever remain as the fundamental platform upon which all subsequent truth is built.

In particular, the author cites among other things the "principles of the doctrine of Christ," "repentance from dead works," "faith," "baptisms," "laying on of hands," "resurrection," and "eternal judgment." While repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ are Gospel truths

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all the world needs to hear (cp. Acts 20:21; Rom. 8:1), symbolical truths like baptism and ordination are fundamental as well (cp. Titus 3:5).

Second, the author exhorts believers to follow maturity. In short, he says, “let us go on.” Or, perhaps more literally translated, the phrase means, “let us be carried on.” God desires to take full responsibility for our maturity if we will allow Him. He wants to carry us forward—“this will we do, if God permits.” Every believer must have a desire and will to allow God His full intention for his life. Indeed if believers will relax in Him, be submissive to Him, spiritual maturity is not only probable, spiritual maturity is inevitable! Therefore, the only thing keeping one from spiritual maturity is one’s own stubborn will.

In addition, the Hebrews author employs a negative example as a means to exhort believers to pursue maturity in faith. He writes, “For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame” (Heb. 6:4-6).

Before we examine these verses more in depth, we must concede these verses constitute some of the most difficult verses in all the Bible to interpret. There is considerable scholarly debate concerning this passage. Nonetheless, because we accept every passage in the Word of God as fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, we remain confident God has a clear word for us in these verses.

Note initially that the author is speaking to believers but a particular kind of believer—*backslidden* believers. Backslidden believers are pitiful Christians for two important reasons. First, backslidden believers are a *contradiction* in terms. As one reads the verses above, one senses the people the author is describing are redeemed people. Observe the characteristics listed:

- ♦ “Once been enlightened”: More properly, the meaning is to be enlightened *once for all*. In other words, the lights have been turned on in an unrepeatably event. A saved person is an enlightened person. Contrarily, a lost person is in darkness (cp. 2 Cor. 4:6; Heb 10:32).
- ♦ “Tasted the heavenly gift”: The gift God gives is salvation (Rom. 6:23). Some remind us tasting is not necessarily eating. However, the term “tasting,” as the author used it, means “experiencing” (1 Pet. 2:3; Heb. 2:9).
- ♦ “Partakers of the Holy Spirit”: The author uses a word which means “partnering.” We are partners with the Spirit of God. He is an active Partner in our lives at all times.
- ♦ “Tasted the good word of God” and “powers of the world to come”: This means knowing what the Scripture says and having hope for the glorious future.

Could the author be describing people who are not believers? It does not appear possible. Interwoven throughout the description is a beautiful tapestry of the victorious life in Jesus Christ.



Reflection Connection

Think about the beauty of the Christian life the author describes. Think of those times when your own life contradicted its beauty. Reserve a few minutes just to confess before God your sin, your failures and your inadequacies. Allow plenty of time after your personal confession to offer gratitude to Jesus Christ for washing all your sin way.

Nonetheless, there is a difficult hypothetical conjunction at the end, “If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame” (v. 6). Is the author revealing a genuine hypothetical case? Or, is a real possibility being raised? If it could not happen to these believers, why would the author mention it? *The fact is, it does happen.* Understand, however: the author is affirming neither apostasy nor falling from grace. The New Testament word for apostasy is not used in this passage. The term translated “fall away” means literally to “fall along side,” or “to deviate from the right path.” Used only here in the New Testament, the author claims these believers have broken covenant with God and are refusing to live like the Lord Jesus. In short, they are Christians living in sin similar to the carnal believers Paul addressed at Corinth (1 Cor. 3). The beauty of the Christian life as described by the author is decidedly contradicted by the life of unfaithful believers.

Furthermore, a complication now surfaces, a complication due to living a contradiction. The author says, “For *it is impossible...to renew them again unto repentance...*” The Greek term translated “renew” means “to restore”; that is, to bring back into original condition. It is similar to an old automobile in a junkyard “rusted out” so completely, to return it to its original luster remains hopeless. However, the hopelessness is only “while” they “crucify...the Son of God afresh” and live in “open shame.” The author’s severe warning should caution every believer to make repentance a daily experience. For when we live a contradiction to the Christian life, living in open sin, we shame the Son of God Who gave His blood for us. The world mocks and laughs at our Savior.

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II. The Product of Spiritual Immaturity: Unfruitful Lives (vv. 7-9)

After the author exposes the problem of spiritual immaturity, he transitions to precisely what is produced from spiritual immaturity—an unfruitful Christian life. It is as if the author is saying, “Just look what your life counts for if you remain spiritually immature.” Note well his words, “For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: But that which beareth thorns and briars *is* rejected, and *is* nigh unto cursing; whose end *is* to be burned. But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak” (Heb. 6:7-9).



Reflection Connection

The Bible teaches that all Christians will be judged. If our sins are forgiven through Christ—and the Bible makes it clear our sins are forgiven through the shed blood of Christ—for what will Christians be judged? Explain.

The image he uses comes from nature. On the one hand, a well watered plot of ground brings a rich harvest to those who faithfully work the soil, proving its worth by providing a lavish crop. Similarly, a Christian proves his or her worth to the Lord by bringing fruit worthy of the glory of the Almighty. The produce our lives bear is heavenly fruit. Bearing fruit demonstrates we belong to Jesus and are a thriving part of the living Vine (John 15:5).

On the other hand, however, if the life is unfruitful—or, *immature*, if you will—it can only bring cursing from heaven. Plots of ground are capable of both rich harvests and barren waste. We can produce glorious fruit and reap the blessings of God or remain waste and reap the cursing of heaven in the form of thorns and thistles. Consequently, we will be “rejected.” At judgment, while believers will be judged as believers and not as lost people, nonetheless the believer’s reward could very well go up in flames before the Judge of all the earth (cp. Titus 1:16; 2 Cor. 13:5; 1 Cor. 3:15). Please understand the crucial distinction between loss of reward and the loss of salvation. He is not talking about salvation *per se*, but “things that accompany salvation”, that is, fruit.

III. The Promise of Spiritual Maturity: Unwavering Hope (vv. 10-20)

The last and longest section in this chapter focuses on the Christian’s indisputable hope he or she has who stands faithfully on the promises of God. The author reveals four factors in keeping hope alive in the believer’s heart, thus fulfilling the promise of spiritual maturity.

The first factor in keeping hope alive is *appreciation* (v. 10). The Bible makes it clear we are not saved by what we do for the Lord. Instead what we do for the Lord is indicative of the salvation He has fully and completely provided. We are saved by faith not works. No truth in Scripture is more clear (Eph. 2:8-10). The Hebrews author speaks thusly, “For God *is* not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister” (v. 10). He clearly states our *motivation* for service—“love...toward his name...” Because He first loved us, we show our love to Him through our service (cp. 1 John 4:19; 1 Thess. 1:3-4). The way we prove our love to our fellow man is through our practical assistance, especially for those who are our family in Christ. Indeed what we do for our brothers and sisters in the Lord, it is counted as if we did it for the Lord.

In addition, the author reveals our continuation of service—“...ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister...” We never stop serving Jesus. No retirement exists for those who love the Lord. Even in the face of severe obstacles and despite the appearance of lasting success, we continue serving the Lord. Our hope rests in Him alone. His promise is sufficient.

The second factor in keeping hope alive is *admonition* (vv. 11-12). The author admonishes believers to “shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end,” and to resist being “slothful,” but instead remain “followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” The Greek word translated



Reflection Connection

Reflect on your present experience with the Lord. Do you find it difficult to remain confident and hopeful about the future? Be honest with yourself. Take any burdens you have to the Lord in prayer at this time

“diligence” is *spoudē*, and means primarily to do quickly and promptly, offering no excuses for delay. It is the direct opposite of being “slothful.” Christians must be earnest in all they do for the Lord. No wonder there must be “patience” to apply one’s “faith” for strength to get through tough times. Indeed this is the way to inherit the promises of God (cp. Heb. 10:36).

The third factor in keeping hope alive is *application* (vv. 13-15). Allowing the Biblical record to empower our lives moves us toward spiritual maturity. The stories of God’s people who struggled through difficult times remains a main source of inspiration to the people of God today. We learn to trust God’s promises by observing them trusting God’s promises. The Hebrews author uses Abraham to catapult believers toward spiritual maturity. Abraham’s faith becomes a pattern for our faith.

The promise God gave to Abraham was made after he surrendered his son, Isaac, totally to the Lord’s care (Gen. 22:16-17). The content of the promise was land given to Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 12:2). And, the promise God gave was sealed with a Divine pledge—“he swore by Himself.” God bound Himself by His eternal word. And, while Abraham personally faced insurmountable obstacles in obtaining the promise God gave to him, nevertheless, he “patiently endured,” the very thing the Hebrew believers were in danger of forgetting. God’s part is to extend the promise; our part is to wait in faith on the One Who never breaks His promise to His people.

Finally, the fourth factor in keeping hope alive is *adoration* (vv. 16-20). Three words characterize Biblical Christianity: faith (concerning the past), love (concerning the present), and hope (concerning the future). As believers, we celebrate in pure adoration what God has done, is doing, and most certainly will do in the glorious future.

The author writes, “For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which *hope* we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, *even* Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek (vv. 16-20).

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We express adoration to our God because of His *sure promise* (vv. 16-18a). We are “heirs” of His promise. What God did for Abraham He most certainly will do for us (cp. Gen. 15:4-5; Heb. 11:39-40; 2 Cor. 1:20; Rom. 6:23; John 3:16). His promise is sure because His “counsel” is “immutable” and His pledge is irrevocable (Rom. 11:29). In addition, we adore Him because of His *sure refuge* (v. 18b). He is a place in which we may flee from worldly oppression (cp. Col.



3:3). While sin haunts the sinner, Christ offers a spiritual pool to wash away all sin and guilt (1 John 1:9).

Finally, we adore Him because of His *sure anchor* (vv. 19-20). The author reminds believers about the “anchor of the soul” we possess in our Savior. He enables us to ride through the roughest storms of life. Our stability remains fully intact no matter how strong the winds of persecution or the height of the raging waves. The fact is, Jesus is a “forerunner” Who has successfully made the trek before us. He has “entered” behind the veil for us, making full sacrifice on our behalf. No believer can possibly fail who keeps his eyes on Jesus!

Golden Greek Nugget

While the author reveals some strong words to the recipients concerning their backslidden condition (vv. 4-6), he was “persuaded better things” pertaining to their actual salvation (v. 9). The term translated “persuaded” is the Greek term *peitho*, and means “to persuade” and therefore to move or affect by words and/or motives. In Acts, the mob agreed with Gamaliel concerning his judgment about the new “sect” of Christians (Acts 5:40). The term translated “agreed” is the same word the Hebrews author used. He was persuaded the believers were better than they were behaving.

Wrap Up

In chapter six, we have focused on spiritual maturity or lack of it. It is not too much to suggest that most problems we face as believers, we face because of spiritual immaturity. Undeveloped faith inevitably leads to unproductive lives. Consequently, when our lives bear no fruit, we cannot expect the Holy Spirit to produce hope in our hearts. And, without hope, we are destined to live out our daily existence miserably, void of the slightest resemblance of Biblical Christianity.

