

MOVING ON TO MATURITY

HEBREWS 6



T. M. Moore

A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Moving on to Maturity: Hebrews 6

Moving on to Maturity: Hebrews 6
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Hebrews 6: Introduction

Chapter 6 begins with a warning and ends with a promise of hope. Those first readers needed to be shocked out of their fear and complacency into renewed obedience, patience, and faith. Hanging around the elementary principles of Christ would not be sufficient to enable them to withstand opposition or persecution. They needed move on to maturity, looking to Christ and their faithful forebears.

The writer of Hebrews believed his first readers were sincere Christians. But they were sincerely in danger of drifting from the hope of rest in God, because they had taken their eyes off Jesus and were looking to their circumstances for relief from trial. They had been diligent, patient, and faithful at the beginning of their walk with the Lord. Now they needed to get back on track with that pattern, lay hold on the hope of rest in God, and move on to greater maturity in the Lord.

We're pleased to make this resource available for personal or group study at no charge, and we hope you will find this series helpful in realizing more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom of God.

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1 Let Us Go On

Introduction

The writer now addresses the problem which caused his readers to drift from the Lord. They had laid a foundation for their faith, but they were stuck there. Like Israel, returning from exile, they made a good start, but then became distracted. They needed to consider their ways and move on. Foundational doctrines are important, and we need to make sure we understand and believe them. But they may not be sufficient when trials and tribulations beset us. If we're going to persevere through these, we need to move on from the foundations to the solid food of Jesus Christ.

Read Haggai 1.

Read Hebrews 6.1-3.

Think it through.

1. What does the writer include as the “elementary *principles* of Christ”? Why are these teachings foundational for true faith? Can we move on to maturity in the Lord without understanding and embracing these teachings? Explain. The cornerstone of our doctrinal foundation is *repentance from dead works and faith toward God*. Can we have true faith in God without repentance? What is repentance?

2. Let's take a closer look at the other *elementary principles*. Why does the writer mention *baptisms* – in the plural? Are there more than one kind of baptism? The doctrine of *laying on of hands* refers to teaching about proper order in the church (cf. 1 Tim. 4.12-16; 2 Tim. 1.6; Tit. 1.5; Eph. 4.11, 12). Of what does that order consist? Why are these two doctrines foundational? The last two doctrines (end of v. 2) point toward the hope we have as believers. Explain.

Meditate.

“‘The Word of Christ.’ What sort of word? The word of teaching that it is necessary to lay down a foundation of repentance from dead works, the word of teaching that it is necessary to believe in God, the word of teaching that one must be baptized, the word of teaching that one must be deemed worthy of the Holy Spirit, the word of teaching that there will be a resurrection and that there will be a judgment. For the word and the teaching have a common origin in every respect.” *Photius (820-891 AD)*

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. 1 Corinthians 3.1-3

Heavenly Father, thank You for helping me thus far in my walk with Jesus. Help me to move on from here toward maturity, so that...

Pray Psalm 127.

Ask the Lord to show you where He needs to do some more “building” in your life, and how you can progress from being a child to being a more fruit-bearing, mature follower of Jesus.

Psalm 127.1-5 (*Leominster: Not What My Hands Have Done*)

Unless God builds the house, the workers toil in vain;
unless He watches o'er us all, the watchmen have no gain.
In vain we early rise, and late retire to rest,
for God gives precious, needed sleep to those He loves the best.

All children are a gift and treasure from the Lord,
a token of His constant grace, the fruitful womb's reward.
Like arrows in our hand, the children of our youth
we, trusting Jesus, shape and send to bear the Word of truth.

The blessings of the Lord on fruitful families rest.
Both friend and foe alike shall know that they by God are blessed.
Praise God, Who builds the house, and watches o'er us all,
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2 Those Who Fall Away

Introduction

The problem with some people who identify with Christ is that identify is all they ever do. They're like nibblers at a banquet. They sip a bit of worship, munch a little fellowship, and sample the Bible studies, preaching, and other resources of faith. But they never truly sink their teeth into the Christian life. When it comes time to pay the price the whole meal requires, they excuse themselves and move on. Such people have no root in themselves, so it's no wonder that, come persecution or other distraction, their Christian identity goes undercover. Rather, they forsake their Christian identity to identify more with the people they want to please, beginning with themselves.

Meditate on Mark 4.1-9, 13-20.

Read Hebrews 6.4-6.

Think it through.

1. That word *impossible* is very strong. In the Greek, it's literally, *not powerful to or unable*. To what does this word refer (v. 6). To whom does this word apply (v. 4)? Is *tasting* of the "heavenly gift" and "the good word of God and the powers of the age to come" the same as coming to saving faith? Explain. Some *enlightenment* may occur in such people, and they may even *become partakers of the Holy Spirit*. But are they saved? Could it be possible that such people are deceiving themselves? Explain. Why would it be *impossible* for such people to be renewed "again to repentance"? Is God necessarily bound by what, to human beings, may be *impossible*? Explain.

2. Enlightenment is not conversion; tasting the Word of God and the powers of the Kingdom is not the same as entering the heavenly gift of God's rest; and partaking of the Holy Spirit is not the same as having Him dwelling within. Can you see why someone in this condition might easily *fall away* from faith? The writer is indirectly urging his readers to consider whether this might be their condition. When people do *fall away* from this condition, have they lost their salvation? Do you see why it is so important always to be pressing on toward maturity in the Lord? Explain.

Meditate.

"I might also say to anyone who thought that this passage spoke of repentance, that things which are impossible from the human point of view are possible with God. God is able whenever God wills to forgive us our sins, even those which we think cannot be forgiven. And so it is possible for God to give us that which it seems to us impossible to attain." *Ambrose of Milan (333-397 AD)*

But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Matthew 19.26

Lord, feed me today with the solid food of Your Word. Let my roots go down deep into Your Spirit, so that today I will...

Pray Psalm 127.

Note that word *unless*. Without the grace of God, *everything* would be impossible for us. Thank God for the ways His *unless* works to build and guard and bring forth fruit from your faith.

Psalm 127.1-5 (*Leominster: Not What My Hands Have Done*)

Unless God builds the house, the workers toil in vain;
unless He watches o'er us all, the watchmen have no gain.

Moving on to Maturity: Hebrews 6

In vain we early rise, and late retire to rest,
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3 By Their Fruit

Introduction

The proof of Christian faith is in the fruit that comes from our lives (Matt. 7.20). Those who have only tasted of the good things of God's heavenly gift will not bear the fruit of grace in their lives. And those who, because of suffering, drift from their firm convictions, are not likely to bear much fruit, either. In which case, they need to heed the warning of today's verses. As the psalmist reminds us (Ps. 1), there are only two kinds of people – those who bear the fruit of righteousness, and those who are blown away like chaff whenever the wind of God's wrath rises.

Read Psalm 1.

Read Hebrews 6.7, 8.

Think it through.

1. The earth drinking in the rain (v. 7) is a symbol of the myriad ways God pours out His blessings on us throughout the day. How many examples of His daily goodness and grace can you cite? In response to such good rains, the earth bears herbs that bless others. What is God expecting from us who enjoy His daily blessings? And as we bear such fruit, what can we expect from God (last part of v. 7)? What forms will that take?

2. Verse 8 is a warning: Where God's grace is daily received, but instead of the fruit of blessing, "thorns and briars" are the result, what can we expect? Three verbs suggest a progressive condemnation of such a way of life. Explain how each of these works out in the experience of those who bear no fruit for the Lord: *rejected, cursed, burned*. God does not judge the wicked all at once. Meditate on Romans 1.18-32. How does this progressive-but-sure condemnation appear in these verses? Should Christians remind one another of this, as a way of encouraging greater faithfulness and diligence? Explain.

Meditate.

"Our earth, that is, our heart, receives blessings if it receives 'the rain' of the doctrine of the law 'that often falls upon it' and brings forth the fruit of works. But if it does not have a spiritual work but 'thorns and thistles,' that is, cares of the world or the desire of pleasures and riches, 'it is worthless and near to being cursed; its end is to be burned.' For that reason, each one of the hearers, when he assembles to hear, receives 'the shower' of the Word of God; and, if one indeed brings forth the fruit of a good work, one will obtain 'a blessing.'" *Origen of Alexandria (185-354 AD)*

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Romans 1.18-21

Heavenly Father, make me more mindful of Your daily gifts and blessings, so that I...

Pray Psalm 127.

As you pray, ask God to show you what your "house" should look like as He builds it and guards it, and as you rest in Him.

Psalm 127.1-5 (*Leominster: Not What My Hands Have Done*)

Unless God builds the house, the workers toil in vain;
unless He watches o'er us all, the watchmen have no gain.
In vain we early rise, and late retire to rest,
for God gives precious, needed sleep to those He loves the best.

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4 Better Things

Introduction

Having admonished his readers about the dangers of failing to press on to maturity, the writer now turns to encourage and exhort them to perseverance. They cannot expect to be mature overnight. Maturity in Christ comes from having the right focus and living patiently by faith. We must seek the Lord and His rest, and not the temporary rest we seek from the tribulations that come with living in Christ's Kingdom.

Read Jeremiah 29.11-13.

Read Hebrews 6.9-12.

Think it through.

1. The writer says he was confident of “better things” from his readers. Better than what? These “better things” are the things “that accompany salvation.” What does this suggest about the things he’s been writing about so far in this chapter (vv. 1-8)? Those who fall away from such things do not fall from *salvation*, but from merely *tasting* the Lord’s gifts. Those to whom the “better things” apply are truly saved, and cannot fall from grace, since grace is God’s work in their lives. What evidence of that grace and those “better things” does the writer point to in them to indicate that his readers are among those who are truly saved (v. 10)? How did he hope this would encourage them?

2. But we don’t live in the past, and we do not rest on our laurels, but in the rest God is preparing for us day by day. Thus, what must they do who are truly saved so that they might enter that rest (v. 11)? What does that involve? The opposite of being diligent is to be “sluggish.” What does one look like who has become sluggish? We want to “inherit the promises.” What promises? Are these promises the same as God’s rest? What do “faith and patience” require of us as we focus on those promises and “show the same diligence” as those who are truly saved?

Meditate.

“We desire each one of you to show the same earnestness in realizing the full assurance of hope until the end. Hope, he means, carries us through. It recovers us again. So do not despair, lest your hope be in vain. For one that works for good hopes also for good and never despairs of himself.” *John Chrysostom (344-407 AD)*

And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” Acts 14.21, 22

There will always be troubles, trials, temptations, and testings, Lord. This I know. So I pray that you will help me today to...

Pray Psalm 127.

As you pray, ask God to prepare you for the trials and challenges you will face today in building your house for His glory.

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5 Patiently Endure!

Introduction

The writer turns to Abraham, considered the father of the Jewish religion, to show how he persevered through trials to obtain the promise of God. The God Who blessed Abraham so abundantly has not changed; He will bless all those who persevere in waiting on Him. We have His Word on it!

Read Genesis 12.1-3; 15.7-17.

Read Hebrews 6.13-18.

Think it through.

1. Let's recall that the first readers of the book of Hebrews were slinking back into Judaism, hoping to find rest from the persecution their Hebrew friends and brethren were inflicting on them. Why does it make sense, therefore, that our writer should now bring out Abraham (v. 13) as an example for them to emulate? But beyond the faithfulness of Abraham, the writer points to the faithfulness of God (vv. 13-17). How can you see this, and why was it important that the writer should do this? His readers were hoping to find "rest" in Judaism; the writer insisted they look only to God for their true rest. The writer uses the language of *promise* for what he had previously referred to as *rest*; here the promised rest is referred to as *blessing*. What does it mean to be blessed of God? Why is *rest* a good way of thinking about God's blessing?
2. God promises rest/blessing, and He swore an oath to provide it. To whom? To everyone? Or to those who follow the example of Abraham? And what is that example? Verse 17 probably refers to the event that occurred in Genesis 17.7-17. How did God take an oath upon Himself in this situation? What are the "two immutable things" the writer mentions? What does the writer mean when he says we "have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us"? To what hope is he referring?

Meditate.

"Through this' oath 'God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise' that God's promise, because indeed it is God's, will never be changed. God's oath was infallible in its being interposed, that is, between God, the angel and Abraham." *Ephrem the Syrian (306-373 AD)*

Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all as it is written, "I have made you a father of many nations") in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did... Romans 4.16, 17

My rest is in You, O Lord, to Whom I flee daily for refuge from the tribulations and trials of this life. Help me to...

Pray Psalm 127.

Meditate on the phrase "bread of sorrows" as you think about the day ahead. Use this time of prayer to prepare for any trials you may face today.

Psalm 127.1-5 (*Leominster: Not What My Hands Have Done*)

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6 Anchor of the Soul

Introduction

The writer introduces the concept of *hope* as important for grounding our spiritual lives and keeping us on course to God's rest. David seems to have known this hope, as we see in many of his psalms. This hope, the writer of Hebrews says, "we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast." It seems important we be very clear about just what this hope entails.

Meditate on Psalm 23.

Read Hebrews 6.18-20.

Think it through.

1. First, what is hope? How does it function in human life? Can we live without it? Can hope disappoint? Explain. What is the Christian's hope (cf. Rom. 5.1-5; 1 Pet. 3.15)? How does this serve to "anchor" the soul? What makes this hope "sure and steadfast"? How should this hope shape our daily lives in the Lord, so that we do not drift from Him for any reason?

2. Our hope is sure and steadfast because we know Christ has secured it for us "behind the veil." What does this mean? The writer says that Jesus is our *forerunner*. John the Baptist was Christ's *forerunner*, and now Christ is ours. What are the implications of this for us, and how should this affect our hope? Christ is our High Priest forever. What does He do for us in this role?

Meditate.

"As the anchor, dropped from the vessel, does not allow it to be carried about even if ten thousand winds agitate it but, being depended upon, makes it steady, so also does hope." *John Chrysostom (344-407 AD)*

...that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ... Ephesians 4.14, 15

Anchor my soul to the hope that is in Jesus, today and forever, O Lord, and I will gladly...

Pray Psalm 127.

As you pray, meditate on the images presented in this psalm, and how they help you in thinking about the hope which anchors your soul.

Psalm 127.1-5 (*Leominster: Not What My Hands Have Done*)

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7 Diligence, Patience, Faith

Introduction

After chiding his readers in chapter 5, then warning them in the first part of chapter 6, the writer turns to encouragement, saying he is confident they are truly saved, and urging them to press on toward the hope of rest in the Lord. Taking his own advice seriously, he points his readers to Jesus, exalted and interceding, and calls them to lay hold on the hope that is set before them.

Read Philippians 3.12-16.

Read and Meditate on Hebrews 6.

Think it through.

1. What are the “elementary principles of Christ,” and what role do they play in the life of faith? What should they produce in one who has more than “tasted” of the Lord’s gift of life and rest? Why was the writer of Hebrews confident that his readers would move on from there to greater maturity in Christ (v. 10)? And how would they know that they were making progress in Him?
2. Twice before the writer urged his readers to look to Jesus (2.9, 3.1). Here he directs their eye of faith to Jesus, our forerunner, exalted in glory as our great High Priest. As you contemplate this image, how does it appear to you? How can meditating on this vision of Christ exalted help you to exercise more diligence, patience, and faith in following Jesus? How does the hope that awaits us in Jesus serve as “an anchor of the soul”?

Meditate.

“He augmented their confidence with the name forerunner: if he is our forerunner and has gone up for us, we too must follow and be granted ascent” *Theodoret of Cyr (393-466 AD)*

...but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 3.18

Thank You, Lord, for being my High Priest. Help me to exercise greater diligence, patience, and faith by...

Pray Psalm 127.

As you pray, focus on Jesus, exalted in glory, and thank Him that He is building His Church, and not even the gates of hell can stand against it (Matt. 16.18). Thank Him for the all the ways He is building His Church through you.

Psalm 127.1-5 (*Leominster: Not What My Hands Have Done*)

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Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. Why do you suppose some Christians have such a difficult time getting off the “elementary principles of Christ” and on to “solid food”? Do Christians have a responsibility toward one another in this matter?
2. What evidence does the writer cite to indicate that his readers had truly come to salvation?
3. Jesus is mentioned in this chapter as forerunner and High Priest. Why is each of these roles important to us?
4. The writer brings Abraham into his argument in this chapter. What was his point in doing this? How does this apply to believers today?
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.