

## **Spiritual Maturity**

### **Hebrews 6:1-6**

#### **Introduction**

We find ourselves in a most difficult chapter in the Bible. But it is also a rewarding chapter. The writer encourages the reader to long for spiritual maturity. The necessary exhortation to spiritual maturity is prompted by the fact that the Hebrew Christians were not growing spiritually; they had grown dull (5:11-14). The Hebrew Christians were in a kind of perpetual infancy. Most of us are familiar with the author J.M. Barrie's book *Peter Pan*. It is the story of a boy who can fly and lives in a place called Neverland in perpetual childhood. In this place of perpetual childhood he has many adventures. Barrie mentions in Peter and Wendy that Peter Pan still had all his "first teeth". He describes him as a beautiful boy with a beautiful smile, "clad in skeleton leaves and the juices that flow from trees". In the play, Peter's outfit is made of autumn leaves and cobwebs. His name and playing the flute or pipes suggest the mythological character Pan. On occasion children from the real world are allowed to enter Neverland.

There are perils for those who remain in a kind of perpetual childhood.

The Hebrews were in a kind of religious Neverland. God had spoken in the Lord Jesus Christ. But the Hebrew Christians had neglected God's Word and found themselves drifting away from Jesus. The writer encourages the spiritually immature to grow up. He seeks to do that by demonstrating that Jesus is better than religion; Jesus is superior to Judaism; Christ is superior in His person (chapters 1-6); His priesthood is superior to that of Aaron (chapters 7-10) and the principle of faith exceeds in all ways the principle of the law (chapters 11-13).

The Hebrew Christians had a moral problem; they were behind in their duty (5:12-14). But they also had a spiritual problem; they were behind in their development (still babes; in need of milk).

The chapter begins with an appeal (vv.1-3); go on to perfection (spiritual maturity). The writer then expresses a concern (vv.2-3). The concern centers around those who have understanding of the things of God and then turn from those things. The writer then makes an argument that centers not on the subject of salvation but repentance—what is our attitude about the Word of God (vv.4-6) The writer illustrates his point in verses 7-8 and then provides assurance for the true believer.

#### **Grow Up (v.1a)**

*Hebrews 6:1 (NKJV) "Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, . . ."*

We find in this verse the main message of the book; "let us go on to perfection (spiritual maturity). According to J. Vernon McGee "Leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ" is literally "leaving the word of the beginning concerning Christ" (p.104). He uses the illustration of a builder leaving the foundation to begin the work of building the project or a child in school who leaves the ABC's to work on college degrees. The writer is preparing the reader to take a

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trip to the throne room of God. “Going on to perfection” is a description of a journey that will lead to spiritual maturity.

The word perfection is the same word used in the Parable of the Sower in Luke 8:14 (“and bring no fruit to perfection”); the image will tie in latter when the writer uses the illustration of the field (vv.7-8).

*“Let us go on”—or borne or carried—sometimes translated ‘upholding’.* The writer is not suggesting self effort but rather allowing God by His Spirit to carry you forward! We yield to the power of the Holy Spirit. **We are carried by the awesome power of God who created the Universe.**

Instead of going forward some of the Hebrew Christians were going backwards! Many had already returned to Neverland (the land of perpetual adolescence). They were tempted to return to Judaism; thus laying again the foundation (the revelation of the Old Testament) that had prepared the way for Christ—and the light of the life of Jesus.

The writer is insisting that they forsake immaturity! I think the idea here is to make the decision and don’t turn back!

The writer lists six truths; “foundational facts in the Old Testament which prefigure Christ in ritual, symbol and ceremony” (McGee p.104).

Two are listed in verse 1; four more are given in verse 2.

Does the Old Testament contain ritual, symbol and ceremony? The answer is yes. Are New Testament believers discouraged from embracing ritual, symbol, or engaging in ceremony?

Not necessarily. Is there value understanding Hebrew ritual and symbol and ceremony in Christ? Very much so.

### **Go Forward In The Doctrines of Grace (vv.1b-3)**

*(1b) “. . .not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God”*

*2of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.*

1. Repentance from dead works.
2. Faith toward God.

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3. Doctrine of baptisms.
4. Laying On of Hands.
5. Resurrection of the Dead.
6. Eternal judgment.

What do all of these have in common? They are Biblical truths revealed in the Old Testament and fulfilled in Christ. What is the author saying? These doctrines are unimportant and only for the immature? I don't think so. They are vital. But they are basic.

### **Repentance From Dead Works**

The dead works are a reference to the works of the Mosaic Law. What does this mean? The Hebrews and then the Hebrew Christians were involved in a never ending cycle of trying to keep up with the Law of Moses. Both Jews and Hebrew Christians never met a law they didn't break.

Just like immature Christians. Know the Law. Break the Law. Be sorry. Try to keep the law. Fail again. Sorry. This is all baby stuff.

### **Faith Toward God**

The Old Testament taught faith in God. Again people will say; "I believe in God." James says, "Good for you. The demons believe and tremble."

To simply say, "I believe in God" doesn't tell us much or speak of a great maturity. You believe in God? Good for you. Jesus says, "believe also in me" (John 14:1). For some to simply believe in God feels like they have taken a long journey. The writer of Hebrews suggests you haven't come very far.

### **Doctrine Of Baptisms**

The baptisms here probably do not refer to the New Testament rite of baptism or Christ's command to baptize disciples. It probably means Old Testament washings or ritual cleansing in the Hebrew ritual baths (Levitical washings). The Hebrew Christians were tempted to return to these external rites of cleansing when in fact the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.

Mark 7:4-5; "When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches. (5) Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, "Why do

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Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?”

Do you remember the answer Jesus gave? He quotes Isaiah and calls them hypocrites. How they honor God with their lips but their heart is far away. They laid aside the commandment of God and embraced the traditions of men—the washings of pitchers and cups, and many other things you do”—in other words—the ritual cleansing described in the law was extended to inanimate objects! The problem—they were all too willing to abandon the commandments of God and embrace the traditions of men.

### **Laying On Of Hands**

The laying on of hands is a reference to the priest laying hands on the animal sacrifices. The priest would lay hands on the sacrifice to identify with that sacrifice and then offer that sacrifice. The animal was taking the sinner’s place on the altar of sacrifice. Jesus is our sacrifice. The reference might be to the Day of Atonement (Lev.16:21).

### **Resurrection From The Dead**

Some Jews denied a literal resurrection. The Old Testament’s revelation allowed for a resurrection. Jesus told the religious leaders that God is the God of the living and not the dead. Clearly every Bible believing Jew embraced the notion of a future resurrection and the judgment that follows that resurrection.

### **Eternal Judgment**

The Old Testament repeatedly affirms that God will execute judgment for sin.

*3And this we will do if God permits.*

What is the danger of moving backward instead of forward? It meant forsaking the substance of Christ and Christianity for the shadows of Judaism!

Give up Temple sacrifices. Give up the rituals. Give up the priests. Jesus is our sacrifice. Jesus is the fulfillment of the rituals. Jesus is our priest.

The writer is ready to go forward; there is something higher, better, brighter. Their immaturity was not only disgraceful but dangerous. They must make up their minds to go on.

I am not suggesting a New Year’s resolution.

### **Grasping What’s At Stake (vv.4-6)**

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*4For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit,*

*5and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come,*

*6if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.*

There are literally dozens of interpretations of this passage.

1. The writer is describing the sin of apostasy; where Christians turn from their faith in Christ and abandon both Christ and faith.

2. The writer is describing the make-believer; the person who is exposed to Christ and Christianity and faith but never is truly born again; and who makes a pretense of faith and then abandons a faith they never truly embraced.

3. The writer presents a hypothetical case where people do in fact lose their salvation; but argues that such a thing is not possible.

4. The writer describes a sin possible only to Jews living while the Jewish temple exists.

Which is it? Are these believers who lose their salvation? Are these make-believers who were never saved to begin with? They are one or the other. No one can be both saved and unsaved.

J. Vernon McGee used to say; “I believe in the assurance of the believer, and I believe in the non-assurance of the make-believer.”

Are any of those explanations fair to the text?

### **Can Christians Lose Their Salvation?**

How are we to understand this passage?

The key to understanding the passage is to read it in its context and understand the writers plain statement. The issue is not salvation but rather ‘repentance’. “For it is impossible to renew them unto repentance”.

If the passage is teaching that a Christian can lose their salvation, they can’t get it back once it is lost.

Can a Christian lose his or her salvation?

The overwhelming evidence seems to be that a Christian is saved by grace and kept by grace. The Bible has several passages that give us great assurance of our salvation.

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(v.4) “once enlightened” those who have come a significant way in real faith—but have they come far enough? Have they known Christ and are now returning to Judaism?

I think the word means once and for all enlightened—their eyes have been opened once and for all to what God offers in Christ—it cannot be repeated.

Have they seen the truth? The Hebrews see the truth (enlightened); savor the truth (taste of the heavenly gift). What does that mean? They have tasted the character of Christ—a person can put their spoon in bowl of Posole—and taste the Chile—but they refuse to finish the bowl. Can you imagine—taste the gift; the gift of the Scriptures; the gift of Christ; the gift of His Spirit; the gift of salvation. Partake of the Holy Spirit (6:4a); the work of the Holy Spirit is to convict of sin; of righteousness and of the judgment to come; and to make Jesus real to the soul (see John 16:7-11). They have not just tasted the spiritual character but the spiritual content (tasted the good word of God; 6:5a). John Phillips; “The types of the Tabernacle, the preaching of the prophets, the songs of the Psalmists—all these fulfilled in Christ. New Testament truth does not contradict Old Testament truth but completes it. All the tributaries and rivers of the Old Testament pour their united floods into the ocean of Christ. This had been seen by these Jews. They had tasted of the good word of God” ( Exploring Hebrews; p.72).

Tasted “the powers of the world to come”—seen miracles—supernatural workings wrought by Christ, by the Apostles—seen evidence of the transformation of thousands of lives—evidence of change of the Jews—who accepted Christ. In the lives of Peter, Paul, John—the powers of the word to come was already evident.

You can’t be saved and lost and saved and lost and saved and lost.

### **Fall Away (v.6)**

Two key words appear in this verse; “fall away” and “crucify”. The word fall away translates a Greek word; *parapipto*—*not apostasia*—*where we get our word apostasy*.

*Apostasy is a word that means to fall away from the faith.*

The word here means “to fall beside; or turn away or wander. It is very much like the word ‘trespass’ (see again Wiersbe; p. 692).

Wiersbe: “So, v.6 describes believers who have experienced the spiritual blessings of God but who fall by the side or trespass because of unbelief. Having done this, they are in danger of divine chastening (see Heb. 12:5-13) and of becoming castaways (1 Cor. 9:24-27), which results in loss of reward and divine disapproval, but not loss of salvation. The phrase “seeing they crucify” (v.6) should be translated “while they are crucifying.” In other words, Heb. 6:4-6 does not teach that sinning saints cannot be brought to repentance, but that they cannot be brought to repentance while they continue to sin and put Christ to shame. Believers who continue in sin

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prove that they have not repented; Samson and Saul are cases in point. Hebrews 12:14-17 cites the case Esau as well” (*Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the New Testament*; p.692).

Paul does not worry about losing his salvation. But there is something he does fear (1 Cor. 9:24-27); “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receives the prize? So run that you might obtain. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beats the air; But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway”. The word castaway is translated in RV “rejected”. It means disqualified to receive a reward. Paul isn’t thinking of salvation; but receiving a crown. Sinners don’t get to run in the race. It’s a race reserved for Christians. Paul expresses the same ambition in Philippians 3:13-14; “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark (finish line, the goal) for the prize (crown—laurel wreath) of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus”.

The passage is not a theological examination of whether or not the believer can lose salvation. Hebrew 6 speaks of Christians who begin a race and then fall by the wayside. Lot’s of people may start a marathon but some drop out.

Have you started something you failed to finish? Has God repeatedly warned you about sin? Will God set you aside if you continue in rebellion in disobedience? Then God will deal with you at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

The subject is spiritual immaturity—and repentance—the believer’s attitude toward the Word of God (see Wiersbe’s Outlines p. 692).

### **Conclusion**

Are you a child of God? Then you have a responsibility to God. Grow up. Abandon willful sin. You don’t want to be ashamed when Jesus shows up. Paul said, “Let a man examine himself. . .for if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened (disciplined) of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world” (1 Cor. 11:28. 31, 32).

Have you heard the gospel message? Have you made a confession of faith and a profession of faith only to renounce it and return to some dead religious system? Then you are on thin ice. You need to plant your feet on the firm foundation of Christ and grace.