

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

HEBREWS LESSON 4 (Chapters 5-6)

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

“Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God” (Heb. 6:1). Welcome to our study of the Book of Hebrews, a book that exalts Jesus as supreme and perfect. The Hebrew writer is encouraging Christians who were thinking about going back into Judaism to stay faithful to Jesus. Christ is greater than anything under the Old Law, and he wanted them to go on to perfection as a Christian and not go back into Judaism. Hebrews 5, 6, and 7 are interesting chapters in the book. In Hebrews 5:1-11, the writer begins a discussion about how Christ is greater than Aaron and the Levites because He is of a different priestly order—the order of Melchizedek. But the writer stops in the middle of his argument, and in verse 11 he says that he has many things to say about this, and that some of them are hard to understand. Then he also says, “Shame on you, because you are not ready to hear such things.” Beginning in verse 12, and going through the end of chapter 6, he includes a sort of “parenthesis-type statement” as encouragement. His point is that the Christians to whom he is writing need to grow up, stop acting like babies, and go on to perfection. Then in chapter 7 he finishes the argument he began in chapter 5 concerning Melchizedek, and how Christ is greater than the Levites.

In today’s lesson we are going to look at the Hebrew writer’s encouragement for us to go on to perfection and to not give up on Jesus, but instead to go on growing as Christians. In Hebrews 5:12-14, the writer teaches these Christians that they need to stop acting like babies. In chapter 6, he urges them to go on to maturity or perfection in Christ. The problem was that some of these Christians had been members of the body of Christ possibly as long as twenty or thirty years. They were not new to Christianity. They had obeyed the Gospel a while back in their lives. The point the writer makes, then, is that some of those Christians ought to be teachers, yet they needed to be taught again. Hebrews 5:12 is perhaps one of the strongest rebukes in the Bible. “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.” He says, “By this time, you ought to be teachers. Yet you need someone to come to you to teach you the first principles of God’s Word.” This illustrates for us that there is a time in a Christian’s life when he ought to be a teacher rather than the one who is receiving the instruction. There ought to be a time when we grow enough that we can teach someone the Gospel. In reality, isn’t that what Jesus said we ought to do? All of us ought to be teachers. Jesus told us to “go into all the world and preach the Gospel unto every creature.” The Bible teaches that even women are to reach a point where they can teach the younger women about godly mothers, godly homes, and how to love their children (Tit. 2:3-4). In fact, the Scriptures teach that all of us are to be ready always to give an account for the hope that is in us, with meekness and fear (1 Pet. 3:15). We are to stay ready to teach someone about God and His plan of salvation.

The practical lesson for us, then, is this: How long have we been members of the Lord's church? Maybe 20, 30, or 40 years? Can we teach others about the Lord? By this time, we ought to be teachers. We ought to be able to teach others about the oneness of the church. Jesus built only one church (Mt. 16:18). Denominationalism is not a part of God's plan. We ought to be able to sit down with people and teach them the basic plan of salvation revealed in Scripture. We ought to be able to tell others about the acts of worship, why we worship in a certain way, and why alterations to worship are not authorized. We ought to be able to tell others from the Scriptures how to live for Christ. In fact, the point is going to be made that if we cannot teach others about Jesus, then we ourselves are still babes in Christ. The writer stressed, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food." What would you think if you walked into a grown person's home for dinner, and that person was sitting at the kitchen table with a bib around his neck, drinking out of a baby bottle? Why, if you saw a grown person do such a thing, you would think to yourself, "I'm going to get out of here as quickly as I can because they need to take this fellow to the loony bin!" Why? What is a grown person doing drinking from a baby bottle and wearing a bib? That is an odd image, isn't it? Now look at this matter from a spiritual perspective. How does God feel when people who are supposed to be mature in Christ are still "stuck on the bottle," spiritually speaking, and are still acting like babies? The text of 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 tells us that the multitude of problems that the church in Corinth was experiencing was due to the fact that the Christians there were still babes in Christ who had not matured. In 1 Peter 2:2 we read, "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby." It is true that we start out as a baby. But we take that milk, and we grow and mature. In 2 Peter 3:18 we are told that it is a continual process whereby we "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior." We are to hunger and thirst after righteousness so that there comes a point where we no longer are babes in Christ. We mature and go on in the faith. In fact, the message for some of us is that we need to "get off the baby bottle" so we can move on to the meat of the Word. There comes a point where we must put the bottle behind in order to move on to things that are more needed—things that are deeper, that will help our understanding, and that will help us to grow in the knowledge of God.

There is a passage in the Minor Prophets that teaches us about moving on so we can till new ground. Hosea 10:12 says, "Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, till He comes and rains righteousness on you." Any farmer knows that fallow ground is the top of the ground that has not yet been tilled. It is hard, and nothing can grow there because it has not been cultivated. We, as Christians, need to break up our fallow ground in the sense that we move away from the elementary principles of Christ to things that are needful. Jesus said in Matthew 4:4 that we are not to live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. How we need that encouragement today. We need to move away from the things that are elementary and go on toward perfection (Heb. 6:1).

But how does a child go on to achieve perfection and maturity—to the point that he does not need someone to take him by the hand like a baby and lead him around? The way we do that is to leave behind the elementary principles, and move on to deeper things. Look at Hebrews 6:1-3 where the encouragement is for us to move on to weightier matters.

"Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits."

The point is that we must move away from some of the things we have heard over and over again, and with which we are comfortable, in order to move out of our comfort zone to deeper things. This requires that we become diligent Bible readers and diligent students of God's Word. We cannot simply "stay with that which is easy." Baptism may be easy. We can come to an understanding of what the laying on of hands meant in the New Testament. Repentance and dead works may be easy. All of those things are elementary principles. But we need to move on to weightier matters such as grace, mercy, God's love, faithfulness, and things that will really challenge us to open up our Bibles and really study. Did you know that moving away from the elementary principles in order to study deeper things is a great way to exercise your mind? Hebrews 4:12ff. says that we are to exercise our senses to discern between good and evil. We need to grow and to challenge ourselves to do more now than we have in the past.

There also is another way that we can go on to perfection. We need to get rid of sin in our lives. We need to make sure that our lives do not have sin in them. Notice Hebrews 6:4-6—

"It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if 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."

If we really are going to go on to perfection, we must be sure to get sin out of our lives. We are told in Hebrews 6:4-6 and Hebrews 10:26-29 that it is impossible to bring certain people back to the Lord by renewing them to repentance. What does that mean? In the context of the Book of Hebrews we see that these Christians were thinking about going back to the Old Law, which was no longer in effect and which no longer offered any sacrifice for sin. If these people were to leave Christ in order to go back to the Old Law, it would be impossible to renew them again to repentance. They could not be saved under the Old Law, since it was no longer available. The practical application today is that if men and women leave Christianity in order to go to some other alleged system of salvation, and if they remain in that state, they cannot be saved. They can come back to Christ and repent, of course. But they must choose to do so. They cannot be forced. They have to make that choice on their own. The Bible makes it clear that if a person sins and falls away, he can be forgiven. Look at some examples in the Bible. In Acts 8, for example, Simon the sorcerer tried to buy the gift of God with money. Right after obeying the Gospel, he immediately fell into sin. Yet the apostles told him that he needed to repent and pray to God so that the evil thoughts of his heart could be forgiven. Notice the example in Luke 15. The prodigal son went into a far-away land and lived a wasteful life. Yet he still could repent and come back to God. We must not think that Hebrews 6:4-6 is saying that if a person falls away, he or she can never come back to the Lord. What is saying in the context is that if a person tries to go back to live under the Old Law, that person will not be saved. Or, if a person lives a life of sin and remains in that state, he or she will not be saved. The practical lesson, then, is that we must stay true to Jesus. We must make sure that we go on to perfection, that we have removed sin from our lives, and that we are trying to live a life that is faithful to God.

In Hebrews 6:9 the writer then says that if we are going to move on to perfection, then we must possess the things that accompany salvation. "But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner." This is the only time the word "beloved" occurs in the Book of Hebrews. It occurs in almost every other New Testament book multiple times, but right after the strongest re-

buke in possibly the entire Bible, we find the writer using this endearing term. “Beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you.” The writer is saying that he knows that the people to whom he is writing can do better. He loves them, and God loves them. But to do better, those people needed to possess the things that accompany salvation. There are certain things that must occur in our lives if we are really going to be saved. What kinds of things accompany salvation?

First of all, we must have a work of love. We must be diligent workers in the kingdom of God if we are going to be saved. God did not call us into the kingdom (the church) just to take up space on a pew or to put our names on a roll or register. That is not why God called us into the kingdom. God called us into the kingdom to be diligent workers who work for God every day because of our love for Him. In Hebrews 6:10 we read, “God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.” One of the things that had to accompany these people’s salvation—once they had come up out of the waters of baptism and knew that they were right with God—was to get to work doing something for the cause of Christ. I believe that too many people fall away too quickly because we do not find something for them to do in the kingdom. If a person does not feel needed, or does not feel like he is a part of something, then it is unlikely that he will remain faithful. If we do not see that in Christianity we have a purpose and that God wants us working in the kingdom, then we may not see the real value of our salvation. Over and over again in the Scriptures we are told that we must be diligent workers. In 1 Thessalonians 1:3 Paul praised the Christians in Thessalonica for their work of faith and their labor of love. True faith is a working faith. In James 2:18 James said, “You have faith, and I have works. Show me your faith....” How can you show someone your faith? You cannot do it—without getting out and doing something for Jesus. That is James’ point. Any faith that is pleasing to God is a faith that can be identified by the things a person does in his life. James 2:18 goes on to say, “Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” In John 9:4 Jesus said “I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work.” Now is the time, and today is when we have the opportunity, to be working. I am intrigued by the illustration that Jesus used in Matthew 20, where He spoke of the kingdom as a vineyard. What is a vineyard? A vineyard is a place of work where fruit is produced. Isn’t that a perfect illustration of the church? The church is a place of work where spiritual fruit is produced for God (Jn. 15:1-5). Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:58, “Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain.” Revelation 14:13 says, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.’” What accompanies salvation? It is a working Christian life that is motivated by the love of God. God so loved us that He sent His Son to die for us. God is love (1 Jn. 4:8). It is the love of God that compels us every day to live for Jesus (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

There is a second attribute mentioned in Hebrews 6. We must have diligence or endurance unto the end. Notice Hebrews 6:11—“We desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end.” We must have a hope that endures to the end. Jesus said, “Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life” (Rev. 2:10). People have to know that when they obey the Gospel, they must be faithful Christians to the very end. That is the only way we will make it with God. We are not our own (1 Cor. 6:19), and to be saved we must endure to the end (Mt. 10). So we must realize that we need endurance and perseverance. In Luke 9:62 Jesus used an illustration. Imagine that a person is plowing in the field. Today, that person would have a tractor with a cultivator behind it. What would happen if the driver kept looking back? Before you knew it, the rows would look like a snake. Jesus said, then, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and

looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” The only way to make a straight path, and to make it to Heaven, is to stay focused on that which is ahead. We must keep going in the right direction. Hebrews 12:1-2 says,

“Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.”

Because of the hope that we have, we need to endure to the end. This hope we possess is our “anchor of the soul” (Heb. 6:19). We are saved “in hope” (Rom. 5:1-5). That hope does not disappoint. It is something of which we can be assured. We must allow that hope to motivate us to live faithfully before Christ every single day, regardless of what comes.

There is a third thing that accompanies salvation. Christians, instead of getting lazy, need to imitate faithful servants of God from the past. Notice Hebrews 6:12—“Do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” He talks about several people like Abraham, Moses, and others who endured in olden times. The principle is that we must not get lazy. Rather, we need to imitate those who faithfully followed God in the past. The Book of Proverbs illustrates in a rather humorous way how lazy some people can be. Proverbs 10:26 and Proverbs 12:27 mention a man who is on his bed. He says, “I cannot get up and work because there is a lion in the street.” Was there really a lion in the street? No. It was merely an excuse. Another man is discussed in Proverbs 19:24. Imagine this picture. This is very lazy fellow. He puts his hand in the bowl, and is so weary that he cannot even pull his hand back to put food into his mouth. You talk about a lazy fellow—there he is! He has a big bowl of fried chicken in front of him. Can you imagine putting your hand into that bowl, grabbing a drumstick, and then saying, “I’m so tired I can’t bring it back to my mouth”? That’s how lazy the fellow was. It is a humorous illustration to show the extreme. We as Christians do not need to be like the man who refused to get out of bed, and who then made the excuse, “There’s a lion in the street.” We do not need to be like the man who could not pull his hand back to put food into his mouth because he was so wearied by his own feeble effort. Rather, we need to imitate those faithful examples of old (1 Cor. 11:1). We need to imitate Jesus. Imagine what the Savior suffered. He walked great distances. He went about healing those who were hurt or afflicted with evil spirits. He confronted the Jewish leaders daily. Talk about weary! That would cause Him to be weary. We need to follow the examples like that of Noah who was a preacher of righteousness. He preached to the world of that time for many years, but only eight people were saved (him, and his family members). Think of a person like Moses, who endured the mumbling and grumbling of the Israelites during the Exodus leading up to the Promised Land. He endured all of that. Think of people of old who never gave up. Think of prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah. They faced many trials, yet they endured. The principle for us is that instead of being lazy and slothful, we need to imitate those good examples of old who never gave up.

A fourth thing that accompanies salvation is trust in God and His pledge of salvation. Notice Hebrews 6:18-19—

“By two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil.”

A firm trust in God must accompany our salvation. He is the God Who “cannot lie” (Heb. 6:18). He is the God Who does not change. “I am God; I change not” (Mal. 3:6). Titus 1:2 says that we live “in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began.” God is “the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8). Thus, we must trust

God, and know that whatever He says, He will accomplish. We must trust Him enough to faithfully follow Him. It is the “obedience of faith” (Rom. 1:5; 16:26) that produces the kind of truth we are discussing here. Proverbs 3:5-6 says, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.” We must trust God enough to know He will never leave us or forsake us. We must realize that all things work together for good to those who love the Lord (Rom. 8:28). We must trust God in view of the hope of salvation. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul. Stop and think about that image. An anchor is an important part of a ship. If a ship moves into the anchor, it must set its anchor in order to stay in the same spot. The anchor holds it fast and steady—even when the winds and the waves strike the ship. The anchor is what keeps it steady. Look at this beautiful image. This hope—the hope of salvation—is the Christian’s anchor. Amidst the storms of life, when trials and tribulations beset us and when it seems as if we cannot hang on much longer, what is it that holds us steady? It is the hope we have that serves as the anchor of our souls. It is both sure and steadfast. We know that if we remain true to God, then we will live with God. We are not talking about the type of hope that is expressed in a sentence like “I hope it rains tomorrow.” That is wishful thinking. Hope in the Bible is “assured anticipation.” We know that something will happen, and we are waiting longingly for it. We have assured anticipation that what we have been promised will one day come true. It is the hope of Heaven. In John 14:1-3 Jesus promised,

“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.”

We know that God will lead us to Heaven if we are faithful. We are just longingly waiting for what God has promised us. Thus, we must let the hope of salvation and our trust in God cause us to be faithful all the days of our lives. Hebrews 5 and 6 provide powerful encouragement to go on to perfection.

As a child of God, has your life been lived like it should have been? Or, are you still a “babe in Christ?” Or, are you even a Christian? Have you obeyed the Gospel? If you have never obeyed the Gospel, there is nothing more glorious and wonderful than living the Christian life. You can believe in Jesus, repent of your past sins, confess Christ before men, and be baptized in water so that you can become a faithful child of God. The encouragement for us is that we must not go back. We must live faithfully before Jesus all the days of our lives and go on to perfection, knowing that we have the promise that we have the promise from the Supreme One—Jesus Christ—that He will lead us to Heaven. May we be encouraged to live for Jesus today.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR HEBREWS LESSON 1 (CHAPTERS 5-6)

1. Hebrews 5:12 contains one of the strongest rebukes in the Bible. What is the subject matter of that rebuke?
2. What does 1 Peter admonish Christians to always be ready to do?
3. According to 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, what was one of the main problems in the church in Corinth?
4. According to 1 Peter 2:2 it is acceptable for new Christians to “desire the pure milk of the word,” but what is the ultimate goal of doing that?
5. What does 2 Peter 3:18 admonish Christians to do?
6. In Hebrews 4:12, to what is the Word of God compared?
7. In Hebrews 6:1, Christians are encouraged to leave something behind. What is it?
8. In Hebrews 6:1, Christians are encouraged to move on to something. What is it?
9. What does Hebrews 6:10 mention as one of the things that must accompany our salvation?
10. In 1 Thessalonians 1:3, for what did the apostle Paul praise the Christians in Thessalonica?
11. According to James 2:18, how does a Christian exhibit his or her faith?
12. In Matthew 20, Jesus compared the church to something that produces fruit. What was the comparison that Christ drew in that chapter?
13. In John 15:2 Jesus spoke of “fruits” and “branches.” What point was Christ making in that particular discussion?
14. According to Paul’s statements in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, what is it that pushes Christians to do more and to do better?
15. In Hebrews 6:11, what did the writer urge Christians to do?
16. In Revelation 2:10, what did Christ urge Christians to do?
17. What did Jesus mean when He said in Luke 9:62, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God”?
18. What does Hebrews 12:1-2 urge Christians to do?
19. In Hebrews 6:18-19 the hope of every Christian is compared to something. What is that “something”?