

February 22, 2015  
Sunday Evening Service  
Series: Hebrews  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
© 2015 David J. Whitcomb

*To Ponder . . .*

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Hebrews 6:1-12.

1. List some of the “elementary” doctrines of Christ.
2. Why are these important?
3. Why do we need to move on into deeper truths about Christ?
4. Do you know anyone who grew up in church, appeared to be part of church, but then abandoned it?
5. How did that come about in the person?
6. Do you have hope and assurance as you look toward the last days?
7. How do you encourage others in that area?

### **BUILDING UP THE SAINTS** **Hebrews 6:1-12**

Over the years I have heard old preachers express their opinions about how many professing Christians are actually born again. It is not unusual to hear the old timers claim that half the visible church is not actually on their way to heaven. On August 18, 1889, Spurgeon preached a sermon from the text in Romans 10:14-15 in which he stated, “I suppose that there are two or three thousand believers here tonight out of these six thousand people.” (*The Whole Machinery of*

*Salvation*, The Metropolitan Pulpit, vol. 39, p.621). Would you have been shocked if you were one of the six thousand who heard Spurgeon make that statement?

Generally folks brush such claims aside with little thought. First, why should they give serious consideration to a flippant opinion that has no proof or no evidence to back it up? Second, if it is actually true that half the visible church is unsaved, that would be the other half, not the half I’m in.

We could debate for a long time about what causes these preachers to come to these startling conclusions. But maybe the easy answer is found in things like the simple survey I referred to last week. In that recent survey taken by The American Bible Society, the majority of people who claim to know the Bible could not name the first five books of the Bible they claim to know and love. Is it likely then that they know the God of the Bible? Do they know the Savior who is revealed in the Bible? Do they really know what the Bible says about their spiritual condition, their eternal need?

How did things get like this? In an age of creature worship, even churches succumb to the desires of the creatures—which is almost never to know the Bible better so we can be more like Christ. That kind of stuff is too difficult and requires too much discipline. Rather, the motivating question that most pastors grapple with today is, “How do the people feel about themselves?” The pastors conclude that if they say something that will make the people uncomfortable, the people will no longer attend **their** services. There are too many other choices. So the pastor arranges everything about the worship to appeal to the peoples’ desires and feelings. That is creature worship. It always results in the wrath of God being poured out on those who reject the Creator in favor of themselves (Romans 1:18-25).

Here then is the dilemma. There are multitudes of these people who attend creature-focused ministries somewhat regularly. They don’t know much about the Bible. They can’t tell you much about God. They will argue with you about the difference between sin and sanctification. But they are sure they are on their way to heaven.

There were some folks like that who were part of the assembly of Jewish people who received this letter we are studying. They met with the Church fairly regularly. They witnessed the work of God as He regenerated sinners and sanctified saints. They saw it. They sang

songs with these people. They prayed with these people. They said “Amen” with these people. But they themselves were dull of hearing. They were satisfied to feed on spiritual milk all their lives. They never grew spiritually. They never produced fruit. And they were never going to heaven!

The author of this letter loved those people who met as a church. He loved them enough to warn them that they were in trouble. So along with encouraging the true believers in the text before us, God the Holy Spirit also warned people who really were not included in that group to wake up to the fact that they really were not included. We all are to be engaged in building up the Body of Christ of which we are a part. That requires us to challenge each other and to encourage each other. But in the process we need to admonish those who fail to produce fruit because the evidence of their lives causes us concern. Are we the eternal judges? Not at all. We are concerned friends who wonder why fruit is lacking.

### **Challenge: Keep Pressing on in Salvation (vv.1-3).**

To know that we need to challenge each other to keep on keeping on is to know God’s will (vv.1-2). The command is, *Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity (v.1a)*. Christians are expected to know what God would have us do. The opening word *therefore* calls our attention to the previous instruction. The instruction that follows is based on the understanding that spiritual babies need milk but spiritually mature Christians who have their sense of discernment trained through experience feed on the meat of God’s Word.

Know that principle, we are to be people who have already stopped focusing on the beginning words about Christ. That is not to conclude that there is a problem with the beginning truths about Jesus Christ. The beginning words are the fact that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh, born of a virgin, who lived perfectly, died innocently, and rose from the dead to provide salvation for repentant sinners. Those

are the elemental truths about Jesus. They are critical and important beyond debate. But there is more to learn about Him.

In the process of learning the deeper truths about Jesus Christ, we will be challenged or be pressed on toward completeness. The words **go on** in our English Bible translate one Greek word (*fero*), which means to bear, to carry, to patiently endure. Here it is a present tense, passive voice verb which can be translated *to be continually caused to carry or patiently endure*. How does that work in life? If you are truly born again, regenerated, indwelt by God the Holy Spirit, something will keep compelling you to learn more about Christ.

The goal for which you are striving is to be like Christ. We keep growing up into Him throughout life, which means we continually take on His traits and characteristics. While we will never reach the goal while we are in the flesh, we keep pressing on toward the mark. Finally when we see Him, we will be just like Him (1 John 3:2). That is why a pastor has cause to be concerned for people who need to be dragged or cajoled into deeper fellowship with Jesus. That is what God would have us do.

It is right and proper for Christians to know what God desires for us to do. It is also good to know what God would have us avoid. The text challenges us to stop repeating the basics about repentance and faith. We are to press on, *not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God (v.1b)*. In real life, we lay a foundation for a house or a building only once. If we have to lay a second foundation, it generally means we tore down the first building.

So in this picture, the person who is truly born again lays the foundation of repentance only once. At conversion, we turn from our works that were leading us to eternal death. Dead works are sins. Turning from sin unto righteousness is what the Old Testament prophets preached. It is what John the Baptist preached. It is what Jesus preached. It is what the apostles preached. There is no doubt at all that turning from sin through repentance is God’s will.

While it is true that we will often repent of sins that God brings to our conscience after we are saved, we lay the foundation of repentance only once. One laying of the foundation is all that is necessary because the blood of Christ is continually purifying our conscience from these sins that lead to death. The author will

emphasize that truth in a few chapters from this point by asking, *How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God (Hebrews 9:14).*

Christ's work keeps working. We lay the foundation of faith in Christ once. Faith is rooted in the object Jesus Christ. Because He is unchangeable, we don't have to keep changing the object of our faith. However if my faith is built on my ability to believe, that object keeps changing because I am fickle. We must not try to lay a foundation of faith in Christ over and over.

Second, Christians must stop repeating the basics about incomplete Old Testament pictures. Stop trying to lay the foundation of faith again *and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment (v.2).* That sounds confusing. To what did it refer? These Jews had practiced various cleansing ceremonies rooted in the Old Testament law. They pictured the cleansing that comes through faith in Christ. The cleansing is complete in Christ, so stop the ritual. The ancient Jews laid their hands on the sacrifices before it was killed. That is past and can be stopped. Jesus fulfilled that picture. The Old Testament taught about resurrection. But knowledge of this topic was limited as demonstrated by Job's simple statement and Martha's brief reference to the last day's resurrection. The Old Testament teaches little about eternal judgment.

Does the instruction challenge us to throw out the Old Testament? Not at all. God gave us the words and pictures of the Old Testament to teach us. But while all these things were true, they are completed or expanded in the teaching of Jesus Christ. Move on in faith in Christ.

Second, we are challenged to be determined to do God's will. The words, *And this we will do (v.3a)* should be a mantra for all Christians. Decide to do it. What? Decide to move up. Decide to know Christ better through His word to you. Decide to learn Christ through prayer and fellowship.

The first step in accomplishing any project is making a decision to do it. If you read the story of the Pilgrims coming to this land to establish a new society, you realize that at some point someone had to decide to leave home. There were various times when certain

leaders concluded they could no longer stay where they were. But the decision to go west was never made. Finally, God arranged enough trials and difficulties in the people's lives that they decided once and for all to get on a boat and sail for the new world. If you don't make the decision, there will be no new world in your life.

Oh! So it is all up to me? Nope. This we will do *if God permits (v.3b).* We decide to move up, but then we depend wholly on God to do it. We need to learn that in God's sovereign decrees He moves our hearts, compels our wills to decide to do what He wills for us. Prayer is like that. We pray fervently that God will do His perfect will in a particular situation. Then God answers that prayer. When He does, it appears that our pleading changed God's mind. But in reality, it was God who stirred our hearts to pray to the end that His will would be accomplished. Likewise, you must decide to leave the basic things and grow in Christ. When you do, you are simply desiring for God's will to be done in your life.

But what if a Christian never gets to the point that he really wants to be more like Christ, or never really wants God's will in life? These questions bring us to the second aspect of building up the body of Christ.

### **Admonish: Make Sure You're in Salvation (vv.4-8).**

A perennial problem for the local church is stated in verses four through six of our text. We must come to grips with the certainty that it is impossible to be saved more than once. This whole matter involves people who were once enlightened. *For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened (v.4a).*

To be enlightened is to understand intellectually the truth about Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Light of the World. Okay, then, that means that He came to enlighten people who are trapped in the darkness of sin. John introduced Jesus that way when he wrote, *In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it (John 1:4-5).* It is only fitting then that His ministry is described as, *The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned (Matthew 4:16).*

But we know that most of the people whose sin was exposed through the light of Jesus' teaching and miracles never repented. That is truly a sad reality, especially in light of the description of enlightened people in the last part of verse four and verse five. Enlightened people are people *who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit (v.4b), and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come (v.5)*. Here we learn that enlightened people taste the heavenly gift. They have observed sinners convicted of sin by the work of the Holy Spirit. They have heard the offer of the free gift of salvation like the Samaritan woman heard from Jesus or the people at the Feast of Tabernacles heard Him invite them to eat Him *the Bread*, or be enlightened by Him *the Light*, or have their spiritual thirst assuaged by Him *the Water*. All of those people tasted the heavenly gift but did not eat or drink it.

Enlightened people share in the Holy Spirit. They have been associated with the work of the Holy Spirit. Probably they have experienced conviction of sin through the Holy Spirit's work. They have witnessed the work of the Holy Spirit in other people in the assembly. They are not at all unfamiliar with the Holy Spirit. But they are not indwelt by Him.

Enlightened people taste the goodness of the Word of God. They have experienced untold sermons where the Word of God was preached. Maybe they even tasted and saw that the Word of God was good (Psalm 34:8). Maybe they have read the Bible on occasion and might even be able to remember some favorite verses. They might even be content to have the milk of God's Word (5:11). But they never consumed the Word of God so that it shapes their character.

Enlightened people taste the powers of the age to come. The power of the future age would be demonstrations of God's eternal power—the norm in heaven. These people were familiar with the various evidences of God's power in history. The author of this letter wrote a reminder near the beginning of it, *How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will (Hebrews 2:3-4)*.

People in the local church that received their letter knew a lot from experience. But they proved that it is possible to fall from grace. *For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened (v.4a). . . . if they then fall away, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt (v.6)*. These people fell away from God's multiple demonstrations of His grace. That in spite of the fact that they are part of the assembly. They participate, at least physically, in the praise and worship of God. They hear God's Word. They see God's work of grace in the lives of others. But instead of responding to God's conviction by confessing sin, repenting of sin, and putting their faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ, they fall away.

What does that look like? Maybe they just abandon "church" altogether. Maybe they find an assembly that does not evidence God's work and Word. Maybe they resort to attempting to win God's favor through their works. These responses are incredibly dangerous because these people were at the best point of repentance when they experienced all the works of God. To turn back from God's work of grace, God's convicting them through evidence of His power, and preaching of His Word would be to reject Jesus Christ. This is precisely what the Jews did to Jesus. They saw His miracles, heard His teaching, and were convicted by the Holy Spirit. But they chose against Jesus, rejected Him and His grace, and crucified Him.

The person who is privileged to experience God's grace in conviction of sin and then turns away without repenting also rejects Jesus Christ which is tantamount to agreeing to crucify Him. This rejection is to their own harm because there is no other way to be saved. God the Father draws us to salvation through God the Son by using His power and His Word to convict us of sin. We do not control the miracle of conviction of sin. That is God's work. If He is gracious enough to show the need for salvation, do not walk away by rejecting Christ, because you have no guarantee it will ever happen again.

The picture drawn reveals that in the same local church there were people who had experienced God grace and power through conviction of sin. They confessed sin, repented, and were born again with the result that they were producing fruit commensurate with their spiritual source (Jesus the Vine). At the same time, there were

people in that local church who also had experienced God's conviction of sin, who had heard the Bible preached, who had seen God's work in other people's lives, but they never repented and never confessed sin. Often these people reject God's work of grace by saying, "I'll take care of that later." Later never comes. They still go to church, but they never produce fruit that looks like Jesus.

The writer illustrates the problem for us with a picture that everyone ought to be able to understand (vv.7-8). Fruitful land reveals God's blessing. *For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God (v.7).* The rain of God's blessing falls on all the land. Just like Jesus the Sower of the seed scattered seed on all different kinds of ground. Everyone in the world receives the rain of God's common grace. Paul put it like this: *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse (Romans 1:19-20).* Many people receive even greater blessing from God as they are associated with assemblies of God's people where they hear the Word and observe God's power.

Some parts of the land produce useful crops—fruit that is useful to God because it demonstrates conformity to Jesus Christ. This brings glory to Christ which pleases the Heavenly Father. Fruit like that is also very beneficial to others. Fellow fruit-bearers are encouraged by love and good works. Sinners are able to experience God's grace of conviction. Fruitful people manifest God's blessing. We produce fruit that looks like Jesus only because of God's work in us. We are testifying with our lives that God is good and right.

Fruitless land is destined for judgment. *But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned (v.8).* Much of the land that receives the same blessings of God's grace produce useless fruit. Useless fruit is the fruit of the flesh. It is lifestyle and practices that are focused on selfish ends. It is more characteristic of Satan the father of lies and self-centeredness. It is condemned by God. In the end, people like this will literally burn for eternity. We all experience the same grace of God but produce far different results. Therefore, we need to admonish each other so that

if there is someone who is contemplating rejecting God's grace by rejecting Jesus, they will stop to consider the consequences.

There is one other trait of building up the saints included in this test.

### **Encourage: Be Encouraged in Salvation (vv.9-12).**

God knows how you are involved in things that belong to salvation (vv.9-10). He expects true Christians to inspire confidence in others. *Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things – things that belong to salvation (v.9).* Yes, there are sinners in association with saints who need to be challenged to wake up to reality. How encouraging it is to associate with the objects of God's love who live for the better things of salvation. Things that belong to salvation obviously bring glory to God. It is a privilege to fellowship in that kind of setting.

That picture is revealed when true Christians serve saints in love. *For God is not so unjust as to overlook your work and the love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do (v.10).* We need to keep on showing works of love for the saints. The works of love are not sappy, emotional and yet insincere things. Works of love are regular ongoing practices that often require sacrifice on our part. We do these sacrificial things for the good of true believers—and are glad to do it.

Your involvement in the things of salvation inspire assurance (vv.11-12). The rule is quite simple: Demonstrate diligence and you will have assurance. *And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end (v.11).* People who are zealous about doing works of love to benefit the saints seldom struggle with assurance of salvation. People who are negligent in good works often lack hope toward the end. They do not read their Bible, they do not pray, they do not assemble with God's people faithfully, they do not get involved in encouraging other Christians. They live a very self-centered life. We should not be surprised then that those folks complain about lacking assurance that they are saved. Maybe they are not.

Enjoy your assurance of salvation and share the hope with the weaker brother. There is a reason for us to do this. People with

assurance are not dull. We show others zeal in hope, *so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises (v.12)*. The word for *sluggish* (*nothros*) is the same word translated **dull** in 5:11. People who enjoy full assurance of salvation are not dull of hearing, and they are not sluggish in their work. We do well to imitate saints who lean in full dependance on God all the time, and who patiently press on to inherit the promises.

There is always work to be done in the local church. We need to challenge each other to keep pressing on in salvation. We need to admonish some who are not producing Christlike fruit. We need to encourage those who do demonstrate Christ in their lives. This is the accurate picture of Christ's plan for His body.