

HEBREWS CHAPTER SIX

I've raised three children. Within the normal time frame each of them learned to roll over, sit up, crawl, pull-up, and then walk. If one of them had not mastered these things I would have consulted with the doctor. Why? Because physically healthy babies develop in this way. If they failed to sit-up or crawl then obviously something would have been wrong. Healthy babies grow and mature.

Christians should also grow and mature. This is normal and expected. There is something spiritually wrong if a Christian stays at the same level of maturity as a brand new believer. But this seemed to be the case with the audience of the book of Hebrews.

Beginning in 5:11, the author makes a sudden shift in topic from the High Priesthood of Christ to spiritual immaturity. In the middle of his discourse about Jesus' priesthood, the author is struck by the fact that his audience is too immature to understand these things. Therefore, he warns them about their immaturity and encourages them to work at growing in their faith. This abrupt shift most certainly captured their attention.

Grow up!

Read Hebrews 5:11-6:3

Describe the problem addressed here by the author.

What should they be doing by this time in their Christian life? What did they still need?

The word translated as "slow" in verse 11 of the NIV is the Greek word *nothros*. It connotes negligence or sluggishness in some area of life. These Christians had been lazy in their faith. The term "elementary truths," in verse 12, refers to the most basic principles of God's Word. Imagine a math student needing to learn to count from 1 to 10 over and over, and never moving on to addition and subtraction. That's what these first century Christians were doing in their faith.

Although they had been Christians long enough to be teachers they were not mature enough to teach. These spiritual babies still drank from spiritual bottles. They couldn't move on and understand the deeper things of God – like the priesthood of Jesus – because they were not ready for “solid food.”

Who did the author blame for this spiritual immaturity?

- God***
- Their pastor***
- Them***

What phrases and words does the author use to show that believers need to take responsibility for our spiritual growth?

Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 and 1 Peter 2:1-3

Paul and Peter also use the analogy of milk and solid food to describe spiritual immaturity and maturity.

List the characteristics Paul and Peter use to describe a Christian who is spiritually immature.

Although Paul and Peter use the analogy of “spiritual milk” in a slightly different way, the overall truths are the same. When we first become believers we need to feed on the basic doctrines – or the “spiritual milk” - of our faith. But once we have a healthy foundation, our diet must expand beyond milk to the solid food of God’s Word.

Make a list of what you consider the “basic” teachings of the Christian faith.

Do you feel you have been adequately taught and have a good grasp of these basics? If not, then why not? If yes, are you actively moving on to maturity?

The author of Hebrews lists several things he considers to be some of the basic practices or elementary teachings of the faith such as repentance, baptism, and the reality of eternal life. This list also includes parallels with Judaism's basic practices. For instance, "baptisms" can point both to Christian baptism as well as Jewish purification ceremonies. The dual nature of his list probably reflects the pressure that these Christians were feeling to revert to their former life of Judaism. If they remained here, at the entry level to Christianity, the alienation from their Jewish roots would be less than if they moved on to maturity. Here, they could remain, on a surface level, in both worlds.

Are you afraid to pursue Christian maturity because of what family, friends, neighbors or co-workers might think or how they might react? Explain.

Are you completely sold out to Christ or have you been trying to keep a foot in both the life of faith and in the world?

As we've seen, the author definitely gave the believers responsibility for their own spiritual growth. He admonished them for being lazy about their faith education. He encouraged them to "leave the elementary teachings" and "train themselves to distinguish good and evil." Every believer must be purposeful in pursuing spiritual growth. However, the author also took responsibility for teaching them. Optimally, a believer's spiritual growth is a partnership between the believer and the church.

What does your church do to help new Christians learn the basics and move on to maturity? What do you do personally to help believers "younger" than you grow?

What are you doing to foster your own spiritual growth?

A Stern Warning

Read Hebrews 6:4-8

This passage is one of the most controversial in all the New Testament. The best biblical scholars differ on the exact meaning of these four verses. The heart of the controversy is whether or not the person described in this passage is a true believer. Since much of the author's description is ambiguous, it is easy to allow preconceived understandings to influence the way we view these verses.

We could consider numerous variations of interpretations that would keep us right here for days on end. In an attempt to make the best use of your time and keep our brains from exploding, I have attempted to summarize the main views:

1. **Genuine Christian who fell away** – according to this view, the author is referring to individuals who were truly saved, born again by the Holy Spirit, but have lost their salvation because they rejected Christ.
2. **Christian in appearance only** – this view espouses that this passage refers to individuals who “confessed” to be Christians and initially even appeared to be, but were never really saved.
3. **Spiritual Seekers** – based on this view, the author is speaking of individuals who have explored Christianity, peripherally experienced God, but never made a decision for Christ.
4. **Immature Christians** – according to this view, the author is writing about true Christians who are stuck in immaturity and will therefore experience God's discipline if they don't move forward.
5. **Hypothetical** – this view says that the author merely put forth a rhetorical situation to produce a strong warning for his readers to move forward.

Before you make a decision about how to view this passage, let's talk about a few more things. First, let's remember the author's purpose and the context of the book. The author wanted to motivate his hearers to action. He wanted them to be diligent in their faith, leaving fear and laziness behind and move on to spiritual maturity that expressed itself in action. You could even say he desired to put the “fear of God” in them to keep them.

Second, difficult passages such as this must be interpreted in light of clearer passages. For instance, a number of other New Testament passages clearly teach the security of the believer. (See John 6:37, John 10:27-29, Ephesians 2:8-9.) For that reason, many scholars reject the possibility that Hebrews 6:4-8 speaks of true believers who lose their salvation.

Third, although the author himself is not omniscient, he obviously believes that his readers are genuinely saved. (See Hebrews 6:9.) Even so, we cannot put a decisive end to the debate. I encourage you to consider the things we know from other Scripture and prayerfully consider how God would have you apply this passage to your life. Let's start with the author's land analogy!

Reread Hebrews 6:7-8 and read 6:9-12.

The author uses the analogy of a planted field to describe two different spiritual conditions. Write your own description for both of these.

Based on verses 9-10, what evidence of salvation did exist in the lives of the original audience?

What words of encouragement does the author give them in verses 11-12?

Examine your own spiritual condition. Ask God to reveal to you how He sees your life. Write an analogy to describe your own spiritual condition.

Write an analogy for how you desire to see your spiritual life.

Even though we cannot establish a firm set of doctrinal beliefs on Hebrews 6:4-8, there are a couple of clear teachings in this passage we can note. First, anyone who stagnates in their Christian life is spiritually weak and in danger of God's discipline. Like the author of Hebrews, we must make every effort to encourage them to stand firm and to move toward spiritual maturity. Second, certain characteristics naturally accompany salvation.

A Hopeful Example

Read Hebrews 6:13-20

The author has been “chasing a rabbit” since the eleventh verse of chapter five. Now he is ready to get back on track and resume his teaching on the high priesthood of Christ. This section serves as a transition. After his harsh warning, he now encourages them with a positive example of a faithful believer who had trusted in God and His promises.

Read Genesis 22:1-18 and Hebrews 11:17-20.

God had made promises to Abraham. He would have an heir from his own body (Gen 15:4). His descendants would be as numerous as the stars (Gen 15:5). Through Abraham all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen 12:3). All these promises culminated in the boy Isaac.

What situation, which you read about in Genesis 22, seemed to threaten the fulfillment of God’s promises?

How did Abraham actively demonstrate his faith in God?

Read Hebrews 11:17-20. What additional information does this passage give us about Abraham’s faith?

For the first century Christians and for us, Abraham stands as an example of one who had realized his hope and received what God had promised. In Hebrews 6:16-18 the author uses legal language to affirm the absolute trustworthiness of God’s promises. Even in the face of difficult and seemingly overwhelming circumstances we can stand firm in the promises of God.

What are some things in which people today place their hope or sense of security?

How does the faithfulness of these things compare to the faithfulness of God?

Abraham waited decades for God's promises to him to be fulfilled. During that time, Abraham learned to trust in God and His faithfulness to keep His promises. The original audience of Hebrews was still learning about the character of God. They were in danger of turning back because of their lack of trust in God.

Do you have trouble waiting on God? What purposes can waiting on God serve in your life? Read Psalm 33:20-22 for more insight.

Search Hebrews 6:13-18 for characteristics of God's nature. List all you can find.

God made a promise. But He didn't simply leave it there. He confirmed His promise with an oath. These "two unchangeable things" – God's promise and oath – leave no doubt. God does not lie. We can trust what He says. We can firmly take hold of the hope He offers us. In fact, this hope is so secure it is like an anchor for our souls. When we tightly grasp this eternal hope, life's shifting circumstances will not move us. Persecution will not cause us to drift away from Christ. Instead, with our faith solidly planted in God we will receive the promise of our inheritance.

How firmly do you trust in God's promises? For today and for eternity? The faithfulness of God's promises cannot be separated from His nature and character. Voice your trust in God to Him now in a prayer.