

Hebrews 6: 1-9; “Going On to Perfection”, Sermon # 21 in the series – “Holding Fast our Confession”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on October 11th, 2020, in the Morning Worship Service.

From this text that I have just read to you, I would like to address what it means to “go on to perfection” in living the Christian life. There seems to be a lot of confusion as to what this phrase means in our day, among Christians; even much confusion about this whole passage in general. And therefore, I think that it will be important for us to understand it in its context. I want to attempt to prove to you that for these Hebrews, “going on to perfection” meant their really going on to know the Lord if they did not know Him, and their becoming more mature in the faith if they really were dull of hearing. By opening up the meaning of these phrases in their context and the historic setting in which they were given, I hope to be able to help us all to make better sense of this passage which has been so troubling to many.

So, what I want to do at this hour, is to 1st of all – Explain the meaning of the phrase in verse 1 – “Not laying again the foundation”. 2nd – I want to explain the meaning of the phrase in verse 4 – “For it is impossible”. 3rd – I want to explain the meaning of the phrase in verse 7 – “For the earth that drinks in the rain”. And 4th – I want to explain the meaning of the phrase in verse 9 – “things that accompany salvation”. And when I am able to do this, I believe that this passage will actually be seen to offer hope to us who are praying for the salvation of our loved ones who have walked away from Christ. Can they still be saved, even so?

1st of all – I want to explain the meaning of the phrase in verse 1 – Not laying again the foundation.

“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 the resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.” “And this we will do if God permits. Now, certain things need to be premised when we try to understand this difficult passage. One is that that Paul was speaking to Hebrews in this letter. And because this was so, we need to understand that the things that he mentions here in verses 1-3, are speaking of the doctrines and practices of the Jews which were familiar to them, as Jews, concerning salvation and Christ. They were the elementary principles of what it meant to know God in Old Testament times.

Let us remember that Paul was speaking to Jewish Christians who had become dull of hearing; those who ought to have been teachers since they had sat under the word for many years. But they had come to need the milk of the word instead of meat, because they were unskilled in the word of righteousness. They needed their senses trained to discern the difference between good and evil, which by the way, is one real indication of growth and maturity in a Christian. But the apostle did not want them to stay babyish Christians, and so he tells them here in verse 1 that he was going to leave behind the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, and he was going to attempt to bring them on to perfection. Now, when he said this, he was not telling them that he wanted to leave behind the major truths of the gospel; of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. These were the foundational truths of the true faith. He simply wanted them to go on from there and grow up into Christ.

So if we look at verses 1-3 we see that these are foundational truths and they do relate to salvation, but they do not speak enough, of the specifics of Christ’s finished work; they only pointed to it, in what He actually accomplished in His great redemption. Rather, what was listed here for them was principles, doctrines and practices which were very familiar to the Hebrew people of that day. These Hebrews were familiar with the fact that the Old Testament Scriptures taught that men should repent from dead works, and that they should have faith toward God.

They were familiar with the doctrine of baptisms, that is, the ceremonial washings according to the law. They were familiar with the laying on of the hands of the high priest on head of the sacrificial offering of a live goat, and that he would confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and how he would send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man. The goat would be bearing on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land, as it says in Leviticus 16: 20, and would then release the goat in the wilderness. This was a type of what Christ would do in His great redemption.

They knew some things about the resurrection of the dead, from what they read in the Old Testament Scriptures. Of how David said in Psalm 16, verse 9 – “Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices my flesh also will rest in hope.” “For you will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.” And they knew also that the Old Testament Scriptures speak of eternal judgment, as it says in Psalm 1, verses 4 and 5 – “But the ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away.” “Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.” “For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly will perish. The children of Israel, the Hebrews knew these things. These doctrines and ceremonial observances were given to them to preach the gospel in a shadowy way to them.

But unless they really had faith in Christ, unless they looked outside of themselves and could grasp the idea of someone else fulfilling the law on their behalf, they would not be saved. All of these ceremonial laws and all of the preaching of repentance in Old Testament times was not saying to them that they could do something themselves to please and satisfy the righteousness of God or atone for their sins. It was pointing to the fact that they need a Redeemer. They were going to need a work which was going to be perfect. They were going to need the finished work of Christ in fulfilling the law on their behalf. And so that is what we should we understand the apostle as saying here. He is saying that they needed to leave behind the elementary principles of Christ and go on to perfection.

The word “principles” is not in the original Greek of verse 1, and so it reads – “Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary things of Christ, or those things which they knew from the Old Testament Scriptures, which were said about the Christ; that they must therefore go on from them to see that there was much they needed to learn about Christ. They needed to believe that Christ was the fulfillment of all of the Old Testament promises. They needed to understand what He had done and to meditate upon it and believe in it, to the salvation of their souls if they did not know Him, and to become more mature as Christians by eating of this strong meat of the word of truth. Christ has accomplished redemption for His people. There is nothing more that needs to be added to it on your part. You simply have to obey the gospel and be saved.

These people who were familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures, they needed to go on to the perfection of seeing Christ as the fulfillment of the law; that He was their life and their righteousness. In Hebrews 7, verse 11, it says – “Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron?” These folks needed to see that Jesus was their Great High Priest, and that He was the One who had brought them nigh to God. He is the One in whom there is grace, abundant and free. It is in Him that we find all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. It is in Him that we find the strength to keep God’s commandments. It is through the New Testament Scriptures that I come to understand that it is Jesus who is the whole basis of our salvation and that He ever lives to make intercession for me.

So when Paul says – “Not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God”, he is not speaking about their leaving behind the basic truths of the gospel of Christ. Both those whom he was writing to, and we ourselves here today, need to constantly

remind ourselves of those truths and to believe them. Salvation is not by our works, and when we are saved, we look at the good works which we tried to do in the past, and we see that they were dead works. Those works did not the life of the risen Christ in them. Those works did not come from a heart and a spirit which had been made alive with Christ; a spirit which had made alive by having been born again. Those works were dead works because we did them based upon the idea that our own righteousness would be the basis of our being established in righteousness in the sight of the holy God. But this conception of ours was false, and those of us who promoted salvation by the works of the law were false teachers.

No, I believe that what Paul is saying is, that these Hebrews needed to go on to perfection; that is the perfection of seeing Christ as their all in all, in terms of acceptance with God, and in terms of their service to God; their being able to know God, and walk with Him in righteousness and holiness. Dead works come from men who are spiritually dead in their trespasses and sins. But now they should understand, Paul was saying, that they needed to continue to pursue repentance where they needed it, every day, in their heart and mind. They needed to pursue holiness, and that love for the brethren, without which no man shall see the Lord. They needed to see that their chief motivation for engaging in this everyday on-going life of repentance was their love to God for what He had done for them through our Lord Jesus Christ. The same is true for us.

2nd – I want to explain the meaning of the phrase in verse 4 – “For it is impossible”. (verses 4-6)

“For 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.” So what the apostle is talking about here is not the case of a person who has actually come to know the Lord, and falls away, for that is impossible. Rather, he is speaking of a person who has known many of the elementary principles and truths of Christ, but they have not really entered in, to believe in Him with a true and saving faith in Him, by believing and receiving to themselves all of His words so as to be saved. For look at the wording once again with me. It says there that these people were once enlightened, and further, that they had tasted of the heavenly gift, and that, further yet, they had become in some sense, partakers of the Holy Spirit. They had “tasted of the good word of God and the powers of the age to come”, and then they had fallen away.

My brethren, the terms which are being used here in these phrases are not the terms which indicate that they had ever come to saving faith in Christ. They indicate that they tasted of it, but did not really receive all the truth to Christ's salvation to their souls. The use of the words “were once enlightened”, and “have become partakers of the Holy Spirit”, may make you think that they had come to know a work of grace in them which was permanent and lasting, but evidently, they never really were born again; they never really were savingly enlightened. Why do I say that? Well, it is because the Bible tells us that a person can be enlightened; that is, they can by the Holy Spirit's shining light into their mind, perceive the beauty and the reasonableness of spiritual truth. It says in Matthew chapter 4, verse 16 – “The people who sat in darkness, saw a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned.” That Light was the presence of Christ among them, teaching them the way to God and the way to eternal life. It says in verse 17, “From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”

So, all of those people in that region, for a time, and in some ways, basked in the light of Christ's preaching and teaching them the truth of their need to repent and of their need of Him to be their Savior. They no doubt approved of the gospel and His word to them, in a some ways. Many of them probably went along with Him in what He was saying, for a time. They went a

ways down the road of Christian discipleship. They basked in the light which He was giving to them as the Sun of Righteousness. The same thing was true of many Jews in Jerusalem. In John chapter 12, verse 35, Jesus said to them – “A little while longer the light is with you.” “Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going.” “While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.” These words, “while you have the light”, refer to His being with them in the time of His earthly ministry, teaching them, illumining them, enlightening their darkness, and shining His light upon them, so they could know how to be saved, how they could come to know God; of how they could be more than religious with a ceremonial righteousness, how they could really know that they had eternal life. And some of them were able to savingly trust in Him, and some did not. It says in verse 42 of John 12, “Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”

Now this is pertinent to our study of Hebrews 6, because here it says that many among the rulers actually believed in Him, but I want you to understand that probably many of them did not go on to prove that theirs was a saving faith because it says that they did not confess Him publicly before men; that He was the Savior of the World and the Lord of all men, and their Lord who they had put their trust in for salvation from their sins. Nicodemus did, and Joseph of Arimathea. But at least of that time of Christ’s earthly ministry, not many more did savingly believe. If you truly believe in Christ you confess Christ. You will speak of Christ and what He has done for you; that He is your righteousness, that He is Your strength to do what is right, and your only hope of eternal life. These men had believed, but they would not confess. And listen to what Jesus said of such. Matthew 10: 32 – “Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is heaven.” “But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.”

So, here is the truth of what is being said in our text in Hebrews 6. It is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted of all of these good spiritual things, if they fall away from what common grace that they had been given, that they can be renewed to a true repentance; to a right consideration of their sins; that is, how they have dishonored God in all that He has done in sending Jesus Christ for them, to be their Savior from their sins. They will confess this. God had given them great common grace which had led them to believe in Jesus Christ, and they had been renewed to repentance, and to believe in Christ in a general way of human observation; to be impressed at what He said and did for sinners. But still, this great problem existed within them, that they were not yet changed in their heart. They still loved the praise of men, more than the praise of God. Therefore if they fall from this profession, and turn away from following Christ, no ministry of man can get them to renew their repentance by persuasive words of ministers or others. And God Himself will not give them saving grace to renew their repentance again, if they have sinned against the Holy Spirit in their apostasy from their profession of faith.

This is really the issue, concerning those who have apostatized from a common grace profession of faith. Can they ever hope to find real salvation in Christ? They need to ask themselves this question: That when they left their profession of faith in Christ, did they sin against the Holy Spirit? That is, did they committed the unpardonable sin, the sin unto death which John talks about in 1st John 5: 16; that sin for which John says that we should not pray about that? For if a person has sinned against the Holy Spirit, if they have done despite to the Spirit of Grace, then there is no hope for them ever; that they can ever be renewed to a true repentance. It is because if they would try to repent and return to Him, they would be crucifying again for themselves the Son of God, and putting Him to an open shame. Notice the wording – “They crucify again for themselves the Son of God”. When a person denies Christ in their

repudiating their profession of faith in Him they are actually saying by their words and their actions, whether they realize it or not, that Christ deserved to die for the supposed sins which He committed. Why was Christ put to death? It was for His saying that He was the Son of God. It was for saying that He and the Father were one. It was for saying that He was the Light of the World and the Bread of life.

When a person really comes to Christ for salvation, it says in Galatians they crucify the flesh with its passions and desires. That is what they do; they renounce their old sinful way of life, with all of its sinful passions and desires, and declare that by Christ's grace, which He purchased for them by His precious blood, that they will live a righteous and holy life before God. If a person who doesn't really know the Lord, but thinks that they do, makes a profession of faith, but they have objections to the way that God views them or objections to what He has said in the Bible, or the way that He does His work, they may be able to outwardly live as a Christian for a time, but later on, when their objections to Christ and His salvation become great enough for them to think that they are warranted in leaving Him, they will depart and follow Him no more.

I believe that the Scriptures are saying here that it is impossible for those who were once enlightened to be renewed again to repentance if they have sinned in an eternally fatal way against the Holy Spirit. Because in doing so, they crucify again for themselves the Son of God. And they may realize it, or they may not realize it, but they have put Him to an open shame. It was certainly the case with the Pharisees in Matthew 12: 24; that they realized it. What was the issue? Well, when they heard that Jesus had healed a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and the multitudes were saying – Could this be the Son of David; the text there says that they immediately said – This fellow cast out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons. That was the sin against the Holy Spirit. For Jesus immediately says in verse 31 – “Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men.” “Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.”

This seems to indicate that it is actually speaking against the good and holy and perfect work of the Holy Spirit; blaspheming the Spirit, despising the Spirit, that is the also the meaning of the words in our text – “For it is impossible” We know that all things are possible with God; that is even to those who have walked away from Christ and have not blasphemed the Holy Spirit. Sometimes this is hard to tell in individual cases, for only God knows the heart.

3rd – I want to explain the meaning of the phrase in verse 7 – “For the earth that drinks in the rain”.

“For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.” Here we have a further application of the truth that I am trying to help you to understand. A person can be enlightened to see the wonders of God's creation, and they appreciate it. They can even be enlightened so far as to see that the spiritual light of Biblical truth is good, and it is pleasant to the eyes of the mind. They marvel over the order and symmetry of doctrinal truth, and systematic theology. They are able to see to appreciate the love of the brethren for each other, and they see that it is right to come and receive the good word of God Sunday by Sunday in the preaching of the word. Here we have an illustration given to us by Paul of the truth concerning those who have said that were believers, and yet weren't and they fell away. The earth is the heart of a person who is drinking in the rain of the common grace of God on a regular basis, listening the word of God preached, and knowing the gift of the Holy Spirit's gracious influences on their mind and heart, and yet if they will not act upon all that they have been given, they will not bear fruit to God in holiness and righteousness.

If they do act upon it to really see that they have many things that need to change in their life, sinful things that need to be repented of, righteous things of keeping God's word and his commandments; if they do not see their need to receive Christ and to begin to have personal dealings with Christ over issues of righteousness and unrighteousness, they will not be able to bear fruit to God. If they do see their need, they will receive the further blessing from God of being saved. How can a person tell which they have been or which they presently are? It is found in examining yourself to see if you are bearing fruit to God. John 15: 1-8. Jesus says to all who would be His disciple – "I am the vine, and My Father is the vinedresser." "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away, and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit." "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you." "Abide in Me, and I in you." "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me."

"I am the vine, you are the branches." "He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." "If anyone does not abide in me, he is cast out as branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them in to the fire, and they are burned." (That is the person of our text in Hebrews 6.) "If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you." "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples." Now this is the way that is in the Christian life. Christ is the vine, the source of all of our spiritual life; His Spirit is the One who is at work in our hearts and minds to give us wisdom and discernment in terms of how we can pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and gentleness. We are totally dependent upon Christ for the grace and spiritual strength of the Spirit to live keeping the commandments of God, and yet we must consciously be abiding in Christ. But if We abide in Christ and His words abide in us, we can ask what we desire, things agreeable to His will, and it shall be done for us.

4th - I want to explain the meaning of the phrase in verse 9 – "things that accompany salvation". (verse 9)

"But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner." I will speak of this much more in my next sermon to you on this passage, but you can see here that the writer or writers of this book to the Hebrews saw every evidence of true and saving faith in those whom they were writing to, even though they had to speak to them by way of warning, that they would not allow themselves to continue to be dull of hearing. The things that accompany salvation were evidenced in their work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. They ministered to the saints, and continued to look for new ways to do so. May it be so for each one of us as well. Amen.