

Hebrews 6:13-20

Possessing A Strong Consolation

That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us – v. 18.

I believe that the phrase *full consolation* in v. 18 corresponds to the phrase *full assurance* in v. 11. Heb 6:11 *And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.* Both phrases, you may notice are related to our hope. *And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end – v. 11. That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us – v. 18.*

Full assurance of hope and a strong consolation regarding our hope, amounts to an inward sense of certainty that the promises of the gospel are sure. *These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; John writes in 1Jn. 5:13 that ye may know that ye have eternal life.* John's statement could be called a statement of full assurance of a statement of strong consolation.

You can know that you have eternal life. There doesn't have to be any doubt about the issue. You can have assurance that you're headed to heaven and that everlasting life is your portion. I'm sure many of you know in your experience that apart from a full assurance of heaven the gospel cannot bring peace to your conscience or joy to your soul. How could you know peace or joy if the issue of your eternal destiny is still a matter of doubt?

The Hebrew Christians to whom this epistle is addressed were not enjoying assurance of salvation. They hadn't counted on life being hard as Christians. They never imagined that their fellow countrymen would so persecute them that many of them would have to flee for their lives. The setting for this epistle to the Hebrews reminds me somewhat of that scene in John Bunyan's famous allegory – Pilgrim's Progress, where Christian and Pliable fall into the slough of despond. *Is this the happiness you have told me of all this while?* Pliable says to Christian. *If we have such ill speed at our first setting out, what may we expect 'twixt this and our journey's end?* And when Pliable manages to pull himself out of the bog he decides that he's had enough of that kind of religion and so returns to the city of destruction.

That's what the Jews were tempted to do that Paul is addressing in this epistle. Their minds and hearts had become clouded with doubts. Was Jesus the Messiah? Was He really supposed to die on a cross? Was salvation full and free really to be offered on account of Jesus' death? Maybe we should give it up and go back to our old ways, they were reasoning to themselves.

Paul knew that the thing the Hebrews needed more than anything else in the world was to gain full assurance of the hope or to gain a strong consolation regarding their new found faith. And so Paul makes known to them not only that he desired them to have this strong consolation but God Himself desired that they have full assurance of their salvation. This comes out most clearly when you read vv. 17, 18 together.

Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:

Do you see how this verse can be analyzed? God had something to show the Hebrews. He wanted to show them how His promises were immutable or unchangeable. And by showing them the immutability of His counsel they, in turn, would gain a strong consolation that their hope for heaven and eternal life was certain. But God not only wanted those Hebrew Christians to gain the fullness of assurance but God has desired that every succeeding generation of Christians gain the same fullness of assurance. This is why this epistle has been written and preserved by God so that Christians, right up to this present day may have the benefit of this strong consolation.

And so that's what I want to focus on this morning – this theme of a strong consolation. Simply put:

The Christian Can and Should Possess This Strong Consolation.

And in the remaining moments of our service I would like to draw your attention to how this consolation or this full assurance can and should be the portion of every believer in Christ. Consider with me first of all:

I. The Grounds for This Strong Consolation

This section of Hebrews 6 is devoted primarily to this subject of the grounds for this strong consolation. And simply put the consolation is grounded in the character of God. Verse 16 tells us about something that pertains to the realm of men. Notice what it says: *For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation [is] to them an end of all strife.* The general meaning here is that when a dispute arose between men an appeal to a solemn oath was allowed to settle the matter. You are familiar, no doubt, with the oaths that are taken by witnesses in our court system in which they pledge to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth so help me God. In a court of law a man under such an oath is regarded as truthful and if he is found not to be truthful he runs the risk of being prosecuted for perjury.

Such things are necessary in a sin-cursed world where lying is prevalent and means need to be employed for getting to the truth of a matter but such means have never been necessary for heaven. Lying doesn't take place in heaven and liars are not allowed in heaven. Lying is the devil's invention, he's the Father of it, according to Christ, so there

has never been a need for heaven to add solemnity to telling the truth. And yet such is the condescending grace of God that God Himself would bind Himself by an oath. Note the words of Heb 6:17 *Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed [it] by an oath.* The immutability of God's counsel confirmed by an oath! Here is God swearing by Himself because He could swear by none greater that His counsel would not change. His counsel, pertains to His plan of salvation. God has sworn that His plan of salvation would never change.

Specific mention is made of the oath that he swore to Abraham. Notice Heb 6:13,14 *For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee.* We know, of course, that Abraham understood God's promises not as merely pertaining to Abraham having many children and inheriting the land of Canaan but those promises pertained to a coming Savior. *Abraham rejoiced to see my day,* Christ says in John 8, *and he saw it and was glad.* We know that those promises also pertained to heaven. So we see in Heb 11:10 *For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker [is] God.*

Here, then, was strong consolation to Abraham which also becomes strong consolation to our souls regarding salvation and regarding heaven. God has promised it. God has promised it to those that believe in His Son. And in the making of His promises God has condescended to adopt a practice that is needful among sinful men – He has condescended to take an oath. He has bound Himself by His own faithfulness to be true to His promise. This is indeed a strong consolation and full assurance.

We've learned in our sinful culture that it's a very risky thing to take men at their word. Sinners are so clever in twisting and contorting and distorting that they become experts in finding ways to break their word. Contracts have to be written out so scrupulously in order to try to close any loopholes that clever sinners will utilize to get out of their obligations.

But God is not a man. I have often been struck by the way Paul begins his epistle to Titus. He writes in Titus 1:1,2 *Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began...*

So we have this strong consolation pertaining to our salvation – God cannot lie. And even though God cannot lie, He has, nevertheless, taken an oath to be faithful to His promises of salvation. You can be sure, therefore, that the promises of God are yea and amen to those who have closed in with Christ.

But would you notice from v. 18 that Paul makes reference to two immutable things. *That by two immutable things, in which [it was] impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.* The first immutable thing is not hard to detect. It's the promise referred to in v. 14 that was given to Abraham. That's the first immutable or unchangeable thing. But our text indicates

that there is yet a second immutable thing that contributes to our assurance of salvation also. The second immutable thing is the calling of Christ to the priesthood. We find reference to this in the last verse of the chapter Heb 6:20 *Whither the forerunner is for us entered, [even] Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.*

When we get into chapter 7 we will discover much more about this different order of priesthood. What I want you to see now is that the calling of Christ to be a priest after the order of Melchisedec also involved the use of an oath. Look ahead into 7:20-22: *And inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest: (For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:) By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament.*

These verses take us into eternity past into the counsel between the persons of the Trinity. For our full assurance and strong consolation we learn that God the Father promised to His Son a people if Christ would assume the role of being their Great High Priest to represent them and to offer Himself as a sacrifice for their sins. We're given more details about this counsel in Christ's High Priestly prayer which is found in Jn. 17. *I pray for them*, Christ says in Jn. 17:9 *I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.* And in a verse that transcends the history and the future of the church Christ goes on to say in v. 20 of Jn. 17 *Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word.*

Do you begin to see, then, the strong consolation or the full assurance of salvation that is available to those that believe in Christ. God gives us His word and confirms His word by an oath. And God gives His word also to His only begotten Son and confirms that word by an oath. This is why it is impossible for any believer in Christ to perish. This is why, come what may, the believer in Christ must land safely on heaven's shores. It doesn't matter how difficult things may be in this life – it doesn't matter what kind of afflictions we may experience here, those things cannot come between the believer and the love of His Savior.

This leads to my next point of consideration. We've seen the grounds for our strong consolation. Would you consider with me next:

II. The Benefit to This Strong Consolation

Notice in v. 18 the ones that are specified as the beneficiaries of this strong consolation. *That by two immutable things, in which [it was] impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:* Who gains this strong consolation? Simply put – the ones who have fled to Christ – the ones who find their refuge in Him – the ones whose hope is found in Him.

Our hope in Christ is the hope of having our sins forgiven and the hope of having eternal life and the hope of gaining entrance to heaven and the hope of being clothed with Christ's righteousness. It is our hope, on account of Christ, that on the day of judgment we'll be openly acknowledged and acquitted on the judgment day, not because we're good enough

to be acknowledged and acquitted but because our Savior is good enough for us to be acknowledged and acquitted. We'll be openly acknowledged and acquitted and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God forever. This is our hope and it's grounded in Christ.

And now notice in the next verse (v. 19) the present benefit we draw from this hope - *Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast*. I love the imagery here – an anchor of the soul. This hope provides us something that keeps us firmly grounded even when the storms of life are crashing all around us.

You see, as believers, we've never been promised that we would be exempted from the storms of life. This was what the Hebrews to whom this epistle was addressed were having so much trouble with. They were sailing through stormy seas, so to speak. They were being subjected to severe persecution from their kinsmen after the flesh. And the storms they were undergoing were severe enough to make them wonder whether or not it was worth it to follow Christ or whether or not they had made a mistake in believing in Christ.

This is oftentimes a mistake that professing believers in Christ make. They have the mistaken notion that life is suppose to get easier for those that follow after Christ. I remember hearing a sermon some time ago in which the preacher was exploding that myth by pointing out the many characters in the Bible that underwent even greater difficulties than they would have experienced had they never gained an interest in Christ.

We can certainly say with regard to the apostles that life did not get easier for them. Many of them would be tried and executed and they would seal their faith in Christ with their blood. We certainly know this to be the case with the apostle Paul. We're given something of a catalog of his afflictions in 2Cor. 11 where he writes beginning in v. 23 *in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.*

Paul's religion certainly didn't bring him flowery beds of ease and flowery beds of ease is a mistaken notion on the part of anyone who would contemplate following after Christ. What benefit is there, then, to following Christ? – one might ask. Why would I bother with a religion that in truth promises me trials and afflictions?

The benefit comes in this thing that is recorded in v. 19 - *Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast*. What the imagery of this verse presents to us is the settled conviction in the Christian's heart that come what may His God is with Him and His God is for Him. His anchor holds in the truth that Christ loves Him because Christ has died for Him and nothing, therefore, can separate the believer from the love of Christ.

I think the truth of the text is best illustrated for us by Christ Himself in Mk. 4. In the later part of that chapter we find Christ with His disciples crossing the stormy sea of Galilee. The disciples, who were experienced fishermen, were nevertheless scared out of their wits. The wind was boisterous and the ship was filling with water in the torrential downpour. It's not hard to picture them exerting desperate efforts to bail the water out of the sinking vessel while wondering if the wind was going to capsize the vessel. And during this whole ordeal how do we find Christ? Is He joining them in their panic filled efforts to keep the ship from sinking? Verse 38 tells us that *he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow*. Such was His confidence in the love of His Father that He could be at rest even amidst the storm.

This is the benefit that our assurance of salvation conveys to us. Having an anchor of the soul that is sure and steadfast enables us to face life with the consciousness that all is well between us and our God. We are not exempted from the storms but we've gained a strong consolation that keeps us anchored during the storms. We know that the issue of our storms has nothing to do with judgment for our sins because Christ has already borne the storm of God's judgment for us.

This is the meaning of Christ being the propitiation for our sins. He has borne the righteous wrath of His Father which was our due. He has borne the storm of hell, if you will, that there might be no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. What strong consolation we gain, therefore, from Christ – a consolation that enables us to be grounded in God's love – a consolation that says to us in the word of God *that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*.

It remains for us to consider regarding this strong consolation or full assurance:

III. The Means to This Strong Consolation

We've seen that this consolation is grounded in the character of God. He has gone so far as to confirm the promises of the gospel by an oath. And we've seen the practical benefit to this consolation – we have an anchor of the soul that is sure and steadfast. Let's think for a moment in closing on the means to this strong consolation.

Notice again from v. 18 the description of those that are given this strong consolation: Heb 6:18 *That by two immutable things, in which [it was] impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us*:

Underscore the phrase *who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us*. This description contains two action phrases that show us the means to gaining this strong consolation. The first phrase pertains to fleeing for refuge. Where do we flee for refuge? We flee to Christ, of course. Reference is made in the Psalms on a number of occasions to God being our refuge. I like, in particular, the words of Ps 57:1 *Be merciful unto me, O*

God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until [these] calamities be overpast.

This is a particularly relevant passage to cross reference in our study of Hebrews because it refers to present day calamities. *In the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast.* You'll notice also that there is a connection between trust and making God our refuge. *For my soul trusteth in thee: yea in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge.*

The means, then, to gaining strong consolation and full assurance of salvation is to do the very thing that a sinner does to gain salvation initially. You flee to Christ and you trust in Christ. If I could revert back to an earlier reference in Hebrews 4 – you rest in Christ by committing the well being of your soul to Him, trusting Him to keep that which you've committed to Him against that day.

And the other action phrase contained in Heb. 6:18 is the phrase *lay hold*. This strong consolation comes to those who have fled for refuge and who lay hold upon the hope set before them. We can cross reference this phrase to a phrase that occurs in 1Tim. 6. In 1Tim. 6:12 we read: *Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.*

We're to lay hold on eternal life. I think there is both a passive and an active element to the concept of laying hold on eternal life or laying hold upon the hope set before us. The passive element would involve an act of the will in opening our hearts to Christ – yielding ourselves to Him as it says in Romans 6. We respond to Him knocking on the doors of our hearts by opening the doors of our hearts to Him, imploring Him to draw near to us and to come and sup with us.

The active element of laying hold refers to the action of our will in embracing the promises of the gospel. You may recall from an earlier study in the WCF when we dealt with the subject of saving faith I referenced that verse in Heb 11:13 *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of [them], and embraced [them], and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.* Embracing the promises that we've seen and believe – that's what it means to lay hold of the hope set before us.

These are activities, of course, that can be accomplished in our worship. One of the reasons we come to church on Sunday is to exercise our faith by laying hold of eternal life or laying hold of the hope set before us. This should be an exercise of faith in your own personal devotions as well. The two things go hand in hand. We open our hearts to Christ and we lay hold of Christ by faith. And we spend time in the word of God and time in prayer so that our faith in Christ may be strengthened – strengthened to endure through all the trials of life.

And so I wonder this morning as we close – has this strong consolation that God has provided been ministered to your soul? You need this consolation if you would go on with God. You need this strong consolation to avoid being tossed to and fro by the difficult

circumstances of life. You need the full assurance that all is well between you and God on account of Christ. And you can gain it by banking on God's promises. God is faithful to His word and has confirmed His word by an oath. I trust that you'll know and believe and embrace the promises of Christ. These promises will become an anchor for your soul that can keep you grounded and settled in the blessing of Christ's love, come what may. And you gain the consolation by fleeing to Christ and laying hold by faith on the hope that is yours in the gospel.

May God compel you to flee to Christ for salvation if you never have. And may He compel you as a believer to draw from the strong consolation that He ministers to His people.