

Hebrews

Chapter 6

Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. 3 And this we will do if God permits. 4 For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. 7 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. 8 But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned. 9 Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. 10 For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. 11 And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, 12 so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

6:1 *elementary doctrine of Christ.* (CSB)

Foundational teachings of the Christian faith. (TLSB)

foundation. One's doctrinal foundation, basic beliefs. (TLSB)

repentance. Rejecting those actions that do not flow from faith in Christ. (TLSB)

dead works. Without faith and without God's approval, all our works are useless and indeed lay a foundation of false confidence before God. (TLSB)

faith toward God. Trust in the promises of God, esp the promise of forgiveness in Christ Jesus. (TLSB)

6:2 *washings.* Gk plural of *baptismos*. John's Baptism and Christian Baptism stemmed from OT commands about ritual washings. Rabbis likely also washed converts to Judaism. These beliefs and practices would need to be distinguished. (TLSB)

the laying on of hands. Liturgical action that likely accompanied baptismal prayers. (TLSB)

resurrection of the dead. The raising, in the body, of all those who have died (cf 1Co 15), a basic doctrine that was much discussed. (TLSB)

eternal judgment. The final judgment after the resurrection of all. Cf Mt 25:31–46. (TLSB)

6:3 *if God permits.* Acknowledging God's direction and timing. (TLSB)

A common expression of dependence on the will of God (cf. 1Co 16:7). Only the Lord can open minds and hearts and bring spiritual maturity. (CSB)

6:4–6 The most common interpretations of this difficult passage are: 1. It refers to Christians who actually lose their salvation. 2. It is a hypothetical argument to warn immature Hebrew Christians (5:11–14) that they must progress to maturity (see v. 1) or else experience divine discipline or judgment (see vv. 7–8). 3. The preferable interpretation is that it refers to professing Christians who are in danger of apostasy. Note “if they fall away” (v. 6) and that the next two participles in the Greek text are in the present tense, which could be construed: “as long as they are crucifying ... and subjecting ...” (v. 6). The cause for such apostasy would be in the people themselves and not in God. This view sees chs. 3–4 as a warning based on the rebellion of the Israelites in the desert. As Israel could not enter the promised land after spying out the region and tasting its fruit, so the professing Hebrew Christians would not be able to repent if they adamantly turned against “the light” they had received. According to this interpretation, such expressions as “enlightened,” “tasted the heavenly gift” and “shared in the Holy Spirit” indicate that such persons had come under the influence of God’s covenant blessings and had professed to turn from darkness to light but were in danger of a public and final rejection of Christ. (CSB)

A challenging text. “Remember that God punishes sin with sins. This means that because of their self-confidence, lack of repentance, and willful sins, He later punishes with hardheartedness and blindness those who had been converted.... This punishment should not be interpreted to mean that it never had been God’s good pleasure that such persons should come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved” (FC SD XI 83). *impossible ... to restore them again to repentance*. Luther: “If anyone has fallen away from Christ, who is the true sacrifice for sins, and seeks another way or mode to be saved and go to heaven, he will never go there, he will not succeed” (StL 7:959). No person can bring back those who, having received faith, fall away from it and seek a way of salvation other than Christ. With God all things are possible (Mt 19:26). If you have loved ones who have fallen away, continually pray for them, that God may restore them. (TLSB)

6:4 *impossible*. The author is sternly warning those who are being tempted. (TLSB)

once ... enlightened. Refers to Baptism and its new, light-filled life. (TLSB)

tasted the heavenly gift. Repentance (cf Ac 11:17–18) and faith (Eph 2:8). (TLSB)

shared in the Holy Spirit. Those baptized into Christ have called out to God the Father through the Spirit (cf Rm 8:15). (TLSB)

6:5 *tasted the goodness of the word of God*. They received God’s word of mercy and grace in the Gospel and Baptism. (TLSB)

age to come. God’s miraculous intervention in their lives now anticipates the greatness of the blessings of heaven. It is as if heaven has invaded (cf Col 1:13). (TLSB)

6:6 *fallen away*. Rejected God’s gift of repentance and faith. (TLSB)

crucifying once again. Like the crowds calling for Jesus’ crucifixion, those who fall away viciously reject Christ’s mercy and forgiveness. (TLSB)

holding Him up to contempt. Opposite of confessing Christ; speaking and acting as if the sacrifice of Christ has no power. On the spiritual dangers involved. Luther: “I have already been preaching Christ and fighting against the devil in his false teachers for a number of years; but I have experienced how much difficulty this business has caused me. For I cannot repel Satan as I would like. Nor can I finally grasp Christ as Scripture propounds Him to me, but the devil often suggests a false Christ to me. Thanks be to God, however, for preserving us in the Word, in faith, and in prayer! We know that one should walk in

humility and fear in the sight of God and not presume upon our own wisdom, righteousness, doctrine, and courage. One should rely on the power of Christ. When we are weak, He is strong; and through us weaklings He always conquers and triumphs. To Him be glory forever. Amen” (AE 26:196). (TLSB)

6:7–8 A short parable graphically illustrating the warning just given (see Jn 15:5–6; 2Pe 2:20–22; 1Jn 5:16). (CSB)

Imagery of fruitful and unfruitful land is used frequently in Scripture (e.g., Is 5:1–7). (TLSB)

6:7 *receives a blessing from God.* Just as the land, blessed to be fruitful (Gn 1:11), produces a crop after rain, so the waters of Baptism bless God’s people with righteousness. (TLSB)

6:8 *cursed.* Those who receive God’s gifts through faith, but then fall away, will fail to bear the fruit of God’s Spirit. They become like weeds, sapping resources while producing nothing. (TLSB)

burned. Just as thorns and thistles, being unproductive, are burned off, so those who fail to trust God’s Word will face His judgment. (TLSB)

6:9 *feel sure of better things ... that belong to salvation.* Although the author has suggested the possibility that some of his readers may be in danger of apostasy, he is confident that God has been, and will be, at work among them. Changed lives and works of love (v. 10) suggest that many of these persons were indeed regenerated. (CSB)

Spiritual blessings that flow from a life of trust in Christ Jesus. (TLSB)

6:10 God has begun His work of salvation among them and will remember His own demonstration of love and service through them. Surely He will also show His righteousness in bringing their salvation to completion (cf Eph 1:13–14). (TLSB)

6:11 *until the end.* A call for perseverance in faith as an evidence of salvation. (CSB)

full assurance. Complete confidence in the promises of God. (TLSB)

6:12 *imitators of those who ... inherit the promises.* Follow the good example of those who lived by faith in God. This theme is developed in ch 11. (TLSB)

those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. For examples see ch. 11. (CSB)

5:11–6:12 Christians grow in maturity by building on the basic teachings of the faith and connecting God’s promises with the new way of life that He gives. Those who reject God’s promises should fear the just judgment of God. If we fail to be fruitful in love, mercy, and generosity, we become like thorns and thistles, fit only for His fire. However, we can be confident that God, who has given us the gift of salvation, will grow the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. • Come, Holy Spirit. Renew my trust in Jesus, and grow Your fruit in my life. Amen. (TLSB)

The Certainty of God’s Promise

13 For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, 14 saying, “Surely I will bless you and multiply you.” 15 And thus Abraham, [b] having patiently waited, obtained the promise. 16 For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. 17 So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, 18 so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God

to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. 19 We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, 20 where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

6:13 *God made a promise to Abraham.* The promise of many descendants was made with an oath to emphasize its unchanging character (see Ge 22:16–18). Ordinarily the swearing of an oath belongs to our fallen human situation, in which a man’s word is not always trustworthy. God’s swearing of an oath was a condescension to human frailty, thus making his word, which in itself is absolutely trustworthy, doubly dependable (see v. 18). (CSB)

God ... swore by Himself. Cf Gn 22:16–18, where God gave His absolute guarantee in promising His blessing to Abraham. (TLSB)

6:15 *having patiently waited.* For 25 years (see Ge 12:3–4; 21:5). (CSB)

obtained the promise. The birth of his son Isaac (Ge 17:2; 18:10; 21:5). (CSB)

6:16 *swear by something greater.* Something upon which they rely for blessing or security in life. (TLSB)

an oath is final for confirmation. The oath verifies the claims of the one taking it (cf Mt 5:33–37 for Jesus’ warning regarding oaths). (TLSB)

6:17 *the heirs of the promise.* All those who place their faith in Christ are heirs of Abraham, and therefore heirs of the promise made to him (cf Gal 3:29). (TLSB)

unchangeable character of His purpose. Unlike human beings, God’s purpose does not change due to time or circumstance. (TLSB)

6:18 *two unchangeable things.* God’s promise, which in itself is absolutely trustworthy, and God’s oath confirming that promise. *be greatly encouraged.* Since we look back on the fulfillment of the promise that Abraham saw only in anticipation (11:13; Jn 8:56). (CSB)

God’s purpose and oath (promise). Cf v 17. (TLSB)

it is impossible for God to lie. God’s promise and oath are unbreakable. We can be absolutely certain that God will remain true to His Word. (TLSB)

fled for refuge. God freely gives His protection from evil to all those who call out to Him (cf Ps 34:8; 46:1; 91:2). (TLSB)

the hope set before us. Hope of sharing with Jesus, by the Holy Spirit’s power, the eternal blessings of life with the Father. (TLSB)

6:19 *steadfast anchor for the soul, firm and secure.* Like an anchor holding a ship safely in position, our hope in Christ guarantees our safety. (CSB)

As an anchor holds in a storm, so the hope of eternal life gives us stability in the sufferings and temptations of life. (TLSB)

inner place that enters into the inner place behind the curtain. Whereas the ship's anchor goes down to the ocean bed, the Christian's anchor goes up into the true, heavenly sanctuary, where he is moored to God himself. (CSB)

Cf Lv 16:2, which refers to the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle (and later the temple), where the high priest would enter annually on the Day of Atonement. In Christ, we have access to the gracious and sanctifying presence of God. (TLSB)

6:20 *a forerunner.* Jesus, as both true man and true God, has prepared the path to the Father for us. (TLSB)

a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek. The grand theme that the author is about to develop (ch. 7). (CSB)

6:13–20 God's promise and oath to Abraham is certain. As heirs of Abraham, those who trust in Christ Jesus share in the blessing of life promised to Abraham. They experience unending stability and security through the Son's gracious access to the Father. If we doubt God's Word, we act as if God is a liar and miss the blessings that flow from a trusting relationship with Him. As we trust God's promises, we see that God tells the truth, and we share in the blessings of eternal life. • Lord God, in Christ You speak true mercy and forgiveness. Therefore, I will trust Your Word and receive what You graciously give. Amen. (TLSB)