

Mid Week • Hebrews 5:12-6:20

INTRODUCTION

One of the most crucial things the student of the Bible must understand is the importance of *context*.

One of the main reasons many people don't understand the Bible is because they don't see *what* they are reading in the larger context it lies in.

Romans 9:6-13 is a tough passage to understand.

But it becomes much clearer when you read ALL of chapter 9. Chapter 9 is tough until you set it in the larger section which stretches from 9 through 11.

Romans 9-11 are a tough section of chapters but when you understand the Apostle Paul's basic theme for the entire book of Romans, they fall nicely into place.

Imagine one of those pan away shots movies are famous for.

The camera is focused on a tiny vein.

As the camera moves back, you realize it's a vein on a green surface, a leaf comes into view, then a twig, attached to a branch, to a limb, to a trunk.

It's a tree, standing among a group of trees on a hillside, in a forest, covering a huge valley between two massive mountain ranges.

Now, as you think back to that first image of the vein, you understand it for what it is; a part of a valley forest.

One Wednesday evenings and Sunday mornings as I share from God's word, you may notice that I spend some time setting the context for the passage we are looking at.

I realize this can be repetitive from week to week and you may wonder why I spend the time to do so.

I do so because in any given study, there are people who are new and have not had the advantage many of you have had of being here each Wednesday night to know the context of what we are looking at.

And so, I begin tonight with a bit of recap and setting of context for the passage we will be covering tonight.

The writer of Hebrews is concerned with showing the superiority of the Gospel and of Jesus Christ to the Judaism of his readers' past. They were under pressure to renounce Christ and revert to Judaism.

He argues masterfully that that would be a ridiculous thing to do. In chapter 5, the writer shows that Jesus is a high priest from an order of priesthood that is superior to the priesthood of the tribe of Levi and the family of Aaron, who were the *traditional* priests of Israel. This argument of Jesus being a high priest is part of a *larger argument* showing how Christ has fulfilled *all* of the *ritual elements* of the Law of Moses that stretches from Chapter 5 through chapter 10.

As the writer moves on into chapters 6 & 7 to explain HOW Jesus could be of a higher order of priesthood, he moves into an argument that is a bit *deep*.

And as he prepares to do so, he stops and reflects that the fact he has to make this argument to his readers is *proof* of their spiritual lethargy and immaturity.

Though we covered these verses last week, look at the last 3 verses of ch. 5 . . .

CHAPTER 5

Vs. 12-14

¹²For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³For everyone who partakes *only* of milk *is* unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. ¹⁴But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

In a word, he calls them *spiritually immature*!

Enough time had passed that they ought to have been playing the role of *teachers* of the faith.

But they were still in the novice stage— actually, they had *reverted* to that!

The writer felt that the things he was writing to them were the *basics* of the faith and ought to have been settled in their hearts & minds long before.

The point of these verses is this – our understanding of the Faith ought to be *growing*.

Our personal *apprehension* of the Bible and our *application* of its truths ought to be in evidence in our intellectual and spiritual lives.

As time passes, there ought to be evidence of increasing maturity in spiritual things.

Virtue ought to be more evident.

The fruit of the Spirit; love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control ought to be increasingly in evidence as time passes.

When people first come to Christ and experience a genuine conversion of the Spirit, there's an obvious desire for God that's reflected in a hunger for God's Word.

They will often buy a brand new Bible and get a brand new cover for it, a set of highlighters and fine point pens to take notes.

F.R. Webber, in his massive 3-volume work, *A History of Preaching in Britain and America*, tells us that one of the curious by-products of the Great Awakening was a sudden interest in shorthand.

According to Webber, people studied shorthand so that they could take notes of the sermons they were listening to.

He said it was not unusual to see people with a portable inkwell strapped to them and a quill pen stuck behind their ear as they joined the crowds that were hurrying to the village green to listen to a preacher give a sermon from scripture.

But as the fires of revival cooled, so did people's passion for the Word and for being attentive to preaching.

This is what had happened to the readers of this letter.

Their conversion was real, but their passion and hunger for God had cooled.

They had become dull of hearing.

In v. 12, the writer says that though by this time they **ought to have been teachers**, they were in fact in kindergarten.

That phrase "**first principles**" literally means, "ABC's".

They'd forgotten the ABC's of the Christian faith because of

neglect!

There's an old adage that says, "Use it or lose it."

A person can work out and get buff in the gym, but if they don't keep at it and use the muscle they develop, they will lose it.

What's true of muscle is true of spiritual things as well.

Faith is a spiritual muscle that has to be kept in shape through constant dependence on God.

The potency and vitality of our spiritual life is in direct proportion to the degree we actually step out in faith and trust God rather than sight.

And in the argument as it is framed here – I can only know the superiority of Christ to all and everything if I am in daily communion and fellowship with the Lord and experiencing His surpassing greatness as I live in Him.

Use it or lose it.

The Christian Faith was never meant by God to be *left* in the realm of theology.

The Faith is not merely a philosophical premise, or a worldview by which to understand reality.

It starts there, but it is much more.

Christianity is first and foremost a relationship with the Living God through an intense faith in Jesus Christ.

We may first *learn* the truths of our Faith through Scripture – but we then experience them by the power of the Holy Spirit who indwells us.

It's critical that when we read the Word of God, we do so with a responsive heart that determines to DO whatever we find there.

I like what the Puritan pastor Richard Baxter wrote some 300 years ago . . .

"Make it your work with diligence to apply the word as you are hearing it . . . Cast not all upon the minister, as those that will go no further than they are carried by force . . . You have work to do as well as the preacher and should all the time be as busy as he . . . you must open you mouths and digest it, for another cannot digest it for you . . . therefore be all the while at work, and abhor an idle heart in hearing , as well as an idle minister."

A comedian once remarked that he was going to form a new college and call it the "Five Minute University."

It's purpose would be to teach in 5 minutes all that one will remember 5 years after graduating from college.

It seems the Hebrew Christians had forgotten the basics of the faith. And having lost a grip on these things, they were in danger of slipping away altogether.

The more I live and learn, the more I realize that the real power of the Christian faith is in it's most basic truths – the simple realities of the Cross and the Resurrection.

And these are things that are attainable by the simplest of intellects – even those with diminished mental capacities – because they are things that appeal to the moral sense as much as the intellect.

God has purposefully made it this way so that no one would have an excuse.

He is no respecter of persons so that only those with an IQ of 120 and above could enjoy the glory of heaven.

God has put the essentials, the critical issue of our faith on the lowest shelf so that children can reach them.

Now, the wall above is arranged with hundreds of shelves, like those old Libraries you see with the rolling ladders so researchers can climb up many feet to examine the volumes few read.

But the bottoms shelves are the foundation and the strength for all that comes above, and they are accessible to all.

The readers had let those lower volumes gather dust.

Notice how the writer says it is important that the followers of Christ USE what is given them -

14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*

I am gravely concerned for those churches where all the people hear are evangelistic sermons or stories and anecdotes about this new move of the Spirit and that latest word of prophecy.

After being taught the first principles, people need to be gently led into greater depth in the word and given an opportunity to put it into practice in their daily lives.

Once they've learned to take and digest milk, they need to be given meat.

They ought to move out of the spiritual nursery into grade school, middle school, high school and college, and graduate into a serious and consistent spiritual vocation.

I am so incredibly grateful to be a part of a church where there are so many people who are spiritually mature!

The great strength of CCO is this – we have a wonderful group of committed and mature Christians!

Of course, *thankfully*, we have a whole crowd of those who are novices and beginners as well – but they too are growing and for this we rejoice!

These last 3 verses of chapter 5 paint a picture of the Hebrew Christians like a bunch of spiritual babies, sitting in their spiritual playpen crying for a bottle of milk.

The author tells them it's time to grow up!

They were buckling under the pressure and trial they were enduring *because* they refused to grow up.

God intended to use that pressure to produce some *strength* in them – like a consistent, stiff summer breeze strengthens the wood fibers of a tree and helps it to stand when the winter storms come.

But they were being blown all over *because* they'd lost their confidence in Christ.

In the next verses, the author pens some words that were specifically calculated to shock them out of their spiritual lethargy.

Shocking they are, and have proven a *firestorm* of debate among Bible students ever since.

CHAPTER 6

Vs. 1-3

¹Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary *principles* of Christ, let us go on to perfection,

By **perfection**, the writer means *maturity*; the “perfecting of our faith” means *adding* to it so that it comes to the place of being *complete*.

Don't think the writer has some state of being *without error* here.

We won't attain that kind of perfection till we enter heaven.

But this life is one that aims in that direction – knowing we will be *perfect*, we move in the direction of *perfection*, and are *perfected* as we grow in faith.

So the writer says to his readers – **“Let's leave behind the ABC's of our faith, and let's press on now to add the DEF's and the XYZ's.”**

Then he lists some of the things he sees as the ABC's of the faith.

¹Therefore, 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,

The writer lists 5 things he considers the ABC's of the faith; here is the first: Repentance and Faith.

Repentance and **Faith** are two sides of the same coin that results in our apprehension of salvation.

The message we *first heard* that led to our salvation was that we needed to repent of our sins and believe in Christ.

This is precisely what Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost.

After his message to the crowd about the person and work of Jesus Christ, when they were convicted of their sin, they cried out – “What must we do?”

Peter said – “Repent, and let everyone of you be baptized.”

Baptism was equivalent to belief in Christ; it was their declaration of their putting their trust in Christ as the means of their salvation.

To **repent** means to turn around and go the other direction.

It means to respond to the conviction of the Holy Spirit Who is showing us the error & grievousness of our sin before God and prompting a desire to be free of sin; not only it's consequences, but the very sin itself.

But it isn't enough to merely turn away from sin, we must turn TO Christ – and that is what belief is.

We turn from sin to Jesus and accept His work on the cross as sufficient to pay off the debt our sins have incurred.

But, and here's the clincher for the first readers of this and for

us today – then we *keep moving toward Christ!*
Repent and Believe!
Make a 180 on the road of life – turning from sin , and
continuing toward the Lord.
That's A of the ABC's. Next is B . . .

2 of the doctrine of baptisms,

The writer here means water **baptism** and the **Baptism** of the Holy Spirit.

Water **baptism** was understood as the definitive act of public confession of Christ in the early church.

They did not believe that baptism saved a person, but that it was a necessary mark of identification with the Visible Church.

It was, if you will, an *initiation* and they saw it was an application of the words of Jesus that His followers must confess Him before men.

This is why they would recite the Apostles' Creed as part of the ritual of being baptized.

The **baptism** of the Holy Spirit was not the debate it's become today.

It was understood to be an *essential part* of the normal Christian life, and so why the writer calls it part of the ABC's of the faith.

of laying on of hands,

This phrase may seem a bit awkward to us since the laying on of hands is used today almost solely in Charismatic and Pentecostal circles and so doesn't sound like an *elementary* truth.

But remember the context – this is penned to Hebrew Christians; what would laying hand on someone bring up in their minds?

What was the OT usage of laying on of hands and what role did it play in the life of faith?

Laying on of hands was used in the OT as a mark of *identification* and *ordination*.

When a person brought a sacrifice to the temple, they would lay their hands on its head as a way to identify with the sacrifice which was then offered as a substitute for them.

When an elder, priest, or prophet was commissioning someone to a specific task for the Lord, they would lay their hands on his

or her head and thus officially recognize them as called by God.

The early church followed the same practice, welcoming those newly baptized into the church by laying hands on them in identification with them.

We repeat that today when we do our baptisms.

The elders serve communion to the brothers and sisters as they come out of the water, anoint them with oil and lay hands on them in prayer.

The leaders of the early church would also lay hands on those they believed were being called by God to a special office or ministry.

In Acts we see that the church at Antioch did this with Barnabas and Paul – and Paul gives instruction that elders are to be commissioned to their office by the laying on of hands.

All of this speaks to the reality of the leadership of the Holy Spirit in the affairs of the Church.

The laying on of hands is our visible participation in the work of the Spirit, looking to and trusting in His active role in the Body of Christ.

The elders of CCO realize that we've become rather sloppy in the way we've brought new elders on to the Church Council and have determined to tighten up our selection process and the way we affirm new elders.

They will be brought on at our annual business meeting in November and will be ordained to their office by the laying on of hands of the rest of the elder board.

The body will have an opportunity to affirm their eldership at that meeting.

Right now, we are considering a new candidate and the elders are each praying about his selection.

If they approve, then I will approach him and ask him to pray about it.

If he hears a release to take the office, we will then announce the candidate to the Body and give them a chance to affirm him through a vote at the meeting.

If he is then approved, we will bring him before the congregation on a Sunday morning and lay hands on him.

This may seem like deep stuff to us – very spiritual – but it was an elementary thing in the early church.

of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

The 4th & 5th things the writer sees as a basic teachings have to do with *the future*.

The **resurrection**, which was only hinted at and was rather shadowy in the OT, had become crystal clear in the **resurrection** of Christ. It was a foundational truth of the Gospel that the resurrection of our natural body by a transformation into a supernatural body was the destiny of all believers.

But even unbelievers will experience a resurrection when the end of history comes and all stand before God in final judgment.

The resurrected bodies of believers will enable them to experience the bliss of heaven.

The resurrected body of the lost will fit them to endure the torment of hell.

All of this was basic stuff; Truths the writer says don't need to be rehashed but need to be built upon.

3And this we will do if God permits.

What will we do? Go on to maturity.

Vs. 4-8

Now we get in to the controversy . . .

4For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶if 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.

These verses have created a firestorm of debate because they speak clearly to the issue of whether or not a person can lose their salvation.

As I am sure most of you are aware, there are two main schools of

thought on this subject:

- 1) Those who believe in what is called *Eternal Security*, and
- 2) Those who believe in *Conditional Security*.

Or, to put it more simply,

- 1) Those who believe you *can't* lose your salvation, and
- 2) Those who believe you *can*.

You know what – I am NOT going to get in to that tonight at all.

What we are going to do is simply look at what this passage says.

If we are good Bible students, we will not come to this passage with a premise or filter, but will let the text speak for itself.

So we want to understand this text in light of what the rest of the bible says on the subject of security? – Absolutely!

But we also want to understand the rest of what the Bible says about security in light of THIS passage – something that the debate over this issue often neglects to do.

Now – before we begin – you may be curious to know what my perspective is on the debate over the issue of security.

Do I believe in eternal or conditional security?

Do I believe once saved always saved, or do I believe a person can lose their salvation?

My answer is, yes and no, no and yes.

I believe a person is secure in Christ!

If they are abiding in Christ, they are secure.

If they aren't –they aren't.

The reason why I believe that is because I have studied this subject exhaustively and can say with all personal conviction, that is precisely what the Scriptures say.

Security is in Christ!

So, let's dig in and see what these verses teach us . . .

4For *it is impossible* for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶if 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.

The writer speaks of a group of people who, what?

Can't be renewed to repentance.

In fact, he says that it is **impossible** for them to be renewed to repentance, if they what?

If they fall away.

As we've already seen, **repentance** means to do a 180 on the road of life, turning AWAY from sin and TO the Lord.

Here the writer project a person whose done that, but then turned back around to sin.

They've *repented* of godly repentance, if you will.

Just as initial repentance is *purposeful* and *willful*, involving body, soul and spirit, so is this **falling away**.

The person makes a willful, purposeful, determined and conscious decision to reject Christ, just as before they rejected sin.

And they set their face to move toward a lifestyle that is void of God.

What's described here isn't *backsliding* in which a Christian gets caught up in some sin or stumbles due to some spiritual or moral weakness.

Most Christians go through a season of back-sliding in which their hearts wander from the Lord and drift into a place of cooled affection for God.

Their commitment to holiness weakens and they may actually fall into serious sin.

But the back-sliding Christians will once more know the conviction of the Holy Spirit and they will confess and repent of their sin and return to the Lord.

That is not the person described here!

This person has fallen *away*!

But now we ask, fallen away from what?

The answer is clearly spelled out here in five specific marks.

1) They were **once enlightened**.

The verb used here means to be **enlightened *once for all***.

It is used in 10:32 to refer to those who are *genuinely born again*.

This refers to the result of being born again and indwelt by the Spirit of God so that one becomes alive to the realm of the Spirit and able to understand the Scriptures, as is

described in 1 Cor. 2:14-16.

2) They have **tasted the heavenly gift.**

The word “taste” does not mean “sample” as some would interpret this.

In Hebrews 2:9 we read that Jesus – “taste[d] death for everyone.”

It means that He “experienced” death for everyone – fully and completely.

It speaks of full participation – not sampling.

And what’s **tasted**, what’s experienced here is the **heavenly gift** – salvation!

3) They have **become partakers of the Holy Spirit.**

To **partake** means to become a equal-sharer.

These people had been born again and indwelt by the very Spirit of God!

4) They had **tasted the good word of God.**

Meaning they had not only experienced the heavenly gift of salvation and been indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but they had moved into a place of some spiritual growth, as initial evidence of being born again and had made some slight progress in the Faith.

5) They had **tasted of the powers of the age to come.**

This is most telling for this indicates without doubt that the people the writer is referring to weren’t merely casual hanger-oners.

The **age to come** refers to the *Messianic Age*, the age in which Christ rules and the realm of the Spirit becomes manifestly more evident in the daily affairs of earth.

This is the realm in which believers operate today.

We get to see the power of the Spirit working through the gifts of the Spirit.

We get to witness the healing power of God.

We see His hand at work in the miraculous.

These 5 factors indicate without any doubt that the person described here was a “genu-wine” born again Christian who had been filled with the Holy Spirit, had made some progress in spiritual things, but who willfully turned away from the Lord and forfeit his salvation.

The writer says, if he or she does that – then they are lost – there is no possibility of that person repenting.

The possibility is lost because now, instead of Christ being the *glory of their salvation* through the Cross, they, through their apostasy, make the death of Christ something shameful and contemptible to themselves.

Now the author moves to give an example from nature . . .

7For 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; ⁸but if it bears thorns and briers, *it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.*

There's a patch of ground that is rained upon.

It's first crop is useful herbs. But after a while, it turns out weeds and thorns.

What's the consequence? The owner sets it on fire to kill the weeds and the earth is scorched.

The point is that it's the final fruit of the field that leads to it's treatment by the owner.

The writer means to say that it is the *final fruit* of a person's life that indicates the nature of the heart, and the heart will determine their treatment by God.

Having issued this very sobering statement about the danger of apostasy, the writer goes on to express His hope that none of those who read this would find themselves in the condition he just described . . .

Vs. 9-12

9But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner.

In light of what he's just said, the **things that accompany salvation** would be those evidences of being born again that he's just referred to – spiritual fruit and not thorns.

They were God's plot of land and God came looking for fruit.

And what God found, He would reward!

10 For God *is* not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, *in that* you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

One of the primary evidences of salvation is love, specially love for the Household of Faith – for other Christians.

It's interesting that the Apostle Paul regularly commended the churches he wrote to for the devoted love they had for one another.

The church at Corinth comes in for special *rebuke* because they LACKED this kind of love for one another.

The Hebrew Christians, despite their other failures, at least had this going for them – they loved one another with a love that was clearly evident as being from the Holy Spirit.

11 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end,
12 that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Just as they had been diligent in expressing their love for one another, they needed to be diligent in the rest of their pursuit of God.

They looked back at their heroes of faith and lauded their patience and perseverance in the face of obstacles and challenges.

The writer is helping them see that God is giving *them* the *same* opportunity He gave their heroes - to press on into an heroic kind of faith in the face of tremendous pressure.

Their faith was based on the promises of God – who cannot lie.

The writer now moves to speak about the promises of God . . .

Vs. 13-18

13 For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself,
14 saying, “*Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.*”

That's from Genesis 22:17.

The greatest hero of the Jew was **Abraham** – the consummate man of faith, and the man whose life proves that salvation is by *faith* and

not by works.

For it was about Abraham that we read, “He *believed* God and God *accounted* it to him for righteousness.”

Here the writer shows that Abraham lived his life on the promises of God.

¹⁵And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.

The promise was of a son and a land.

It wasn't until the last years of his life that Abraham saw the fulfillment of the promises of God – but he patiently endured – and realized them.

¹⁶For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation *is* for them an end of all dispute. ¹⁷Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability [unchanging nature] of His counsel, confirmed *it* by an oath, ¹⁸that by two immutable things, in which it *is* impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before *us*.

The author's point here is that the promises of God are absolutely rock-solid.

When men make a promise, they indicate their sincerity to *keep* it by binding themselves with an additional oath.

They say something like, “If I don't mow the lawn this weekend I will take you out to dinner.”

The idea is that one oath is meant to reinforce the surety of the other.

God cannot take an oath or appeal to any authority higher than himself because He is the highest authority there is.

So when He takes an oath and swears by His own nature, it's meant to be understood as something that is sure!

The adding of an oath to the promise of God is an act of God's grace, which appeals to us to cast ourselves in utter and unreserved confidence on Him.

And what is promised here, is that if we look in faith to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, no matter what this world throws at us, our

hope is unshakeable!

We are utterly secure in Christ!

Heaven is our home and destiny – and nothing can take it from us!

CONCLUSION

I will build off this idea as we take a look at vs. 19 & 20 on Sunday.