

Full Assurance

Lesson for June 23, 2024

Unit I: Experiencing Hope

Adult Topic: God is Trustworthy

Scriptural Background: Hebrews 6:9-20

Printed Text: Hebrews 6:9-20

Key verse: *“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, ²⁰ where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”* (Hebrews 6:19-20, NIV)

Regarding salvation and assurance, there are three groups of people: (1) those who are secure but not sure; (2) those who are “sure” but not secure; and (3) those who are secure and sure. Category one are conscientious believers in Christ who are saved but lack assurance. In category two are professing Christians who say, "Even though I'm living in sin, I'll make it. After all, 'once saved, always saved!'" The third group are born-again believers who enjoy a warm, secure relationship with Christ each day. The objective basis of our salvation is the finished work of God's Son on the cross. The subjective basis for our assurance is our believing the truth about Christ (I John 2:2,4; 2:15; 5:1), loving the brethren (I John 3:14, 18, 19, 4:7-8), and obeying Christ's commandments (I John 2:3-5).

Source Unknown

Unifying Principle

People become distrustful when they experience broken promises. Where can one obtain trustworthy promises in an imperfect world? The writer of the book of Hebrews assures believers that God's promises are guaranteed because it is impossible that God would prove false. (*Sunday School Commentary, 2023-2024*, Townsend Press, p. 379)

Key Terms

1. **Bless** (verse 14) – To pronounce a wish of happiness to one; to express a wish or desire of happiness. To set apart or consecrate to holy purposes; to make and pronounce holy.
2. **Earnestness** (verse 11) – a person who copies the behavior or actions of another. With fixed attention; with eagerness.
3. **Imitators** (verse 12) – A person who copies the behavior or actions of another. In the New Testament, followers of Christ emulating a God-approved example.
4. **Love** (verse 10) – To have benevolence or good will for.

5. **Patience** (verse 12) – The suffering of afflictions, pain, toil, calamity, provocation or other evil, with a calm, unruffled temper; endurance without murmuring or fretfulness.
6. **Salvation** (verse 9) – The redemption of man from the bondage of sin and liability to eternal death, and the conferring on him everlasting happiness.

Lesson Background

The author of Hebrews is unknown. Suggested authors have included Paul, Luke, Barnabas, Silas, Apollos, and others. The most common opinion is that the letter was written by Paul.

Much is unknown about the audience of Hebrews. Though it is addressed to both Jewish and Gentile Christians (since it mentions the Gentile Christian leader Timothy), much of the book emphasizes Christianity in relationship to Jewish teachings. The theme of persecution is strong, and the temple sacrificial system appears to still be in practice, indicating a time before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. A likely audience was Jewish converts to Christianity, in Rome, during Nero's persecution of Christians between AD 64 and 68. The most likely date is around AD 67 when some of the persecution had passed and Timothy had been released from prison.

The book of Hebrews is meant to challenge, encourage, and empower Christian believers. According to this letter, Jesus Christ is superior to all other prophets and all other claims to truth. Since God has given us Christ, we ought to listen to what He says and not move backwards. The consequences of ignoring God are dire. Hebrews is important for drawing on many portions of the Old Testament in making a case that Christ is the ultimate and perfect expression of God's plan for mankind. This book presents some tough ideas about the Christian faith, a fact the author makes specific note of.

Hebrews chapter 6 represents a high point in the letter. At the end of chapter 5, the author began another warning about the danger of rejecting the gospel in favor of a more culture-friendly faith. Specifically, this work is directed to persecuted Jewish Christians. Many such believers felt pressure to return to a less-controversial Judaism. Much of the material in this book is presented in a "good versus perfect" style. Hebrews shows how the relationship we have with Christ is the intended fulfillment of God's plan.

The last verses of chapter 5 accused the readers of being spiritually immature. Despite being Christians for some reasonable amount of time, they were still hung up on simple concepts. This criticism echoes other warnings given so far in this letter. God's intent for the Christian believer is not to be inert, but to experience continual growth and maturity. If we are lazy, disinterested, or careless, we not only miss the blessings of wisdom, we run the risk of disobedience or discouragement.

The author of Hebrews intends to explain some tough spiritual concepts, but realizes those reading this letter are probably not ready for them. All the same, his intent is to simply move along, presenting these truths as an opportunity for the audience to “catch up,” spiritually speaking.

Along the way, Hebrews chapter 6 presents comments about concepts such as “falling away” and “repentance” which are extremely easy to misunderstand. Context, here especially, is crucial in grasping the complete meaning of these verses. Many approach these verses superficially, and come away with the impression that the warning is about losing one's salvation. Taken out of the surrounding passage, this is an understandable mistake. But, in context, it's not nearly what the author intends.

The major interpretations of verses 4 through 6 include a loss of salvation (biblically impossible), those who are “almost but not quite” saved (contrary to the context), risk of disqualification from Christian service resulting in judgment based on disobedience (reasonable), and a hypothetical-but-impossible loss of salvation (also reasonable).

The ultimate meaning of these words is very similar to the example given of Israel's failure at the borders of the Promised Land, from chapters 3 and 4. When Israel failed to show trusting faith, the nation was subjected to harsh judgment before being able to take their rightful place in Canaan. Hebrews warns the reader not to make this same mistake. Then, in chapter 6, the point is made that those who have learned the basic truths of the gospel, yet “fall away,” find themselves in a precarious position. Like a field that only bears thorns, there is only one way to restore them: fire. In context, this is not hell, but the cleansing fire of God's judgment during one's earthly life—just as Israel was tried, but not destroyed, in wandering the desert for forty years.

After this, chapter 6 continues to warn against spiritual immaturity, but with a more uplifting tone. The reader is reminded that God is faithful to reward those who seek Him. In fact, the promises made by God are absolutely secure, since they are tied to the ultimate standard of truth: God Himself. This brilliantly motivating passage ties together prior images, such as Christ's high priesthood, the image of the Holy Places of the temple, an anchor, and a place of refuge. Our purpose in seeking to know God better, then, is fused to our trust in Him, and His promises, despite the struggles we may face in the world.

Lesson in Depth

I. **Remain Faithful** (Hebrews 6:9-12)

Even though we speak like this: The opening **even though** indicates that what follows contrasts in some way with what has been said. In the verse immediately before verse 9, the writer wrapped up his or her negative cautions to switch to a discussion of *better things*. The writer does not define or give specifics about these better things, saying only that they are things to anticipate.

We are confident of better things concerning you: Though he spoke so severely, the writer to the Hebrews was confident His readers would continue on with Jesus. He thinks of their continuation in the faith as one of the **things that accompany salvation**.

Though we speak in this manner: These encouraging words after the strong warning of Hebrews 6:4-8 should not be understood to mean that the warnings in the previous verses are not serious, or that the writer warned of impossible consequences. If anything, verse nine shows how badly these struggling Christians needed *encouragement*. Their spiritual danger was not so much out of a calculated rebellion, but more because of a depressing discouragement. They need warning, but also they needed encouragement.

God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love: When we are discouraged, we sometimes think God forgets us and all we have done for Him and for His people. But God would deny His own nature if He forgot such things (He would be **unjust**). God sees and remembers.

Sometimes our fear that God forgot our **work and labor of love** comes from relying on the attention and applause of people. It is true that some *people* may **forget your work and labor of love**, but God never will.

We desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end: The writer to the Hebrews encouraged like a coach, urging believers to press on. The followers of Jesus must keep up their good **work**; press on with that hope **until the end**; and imitate those who **inherit** (not earn) God's promises. When we fail to do this, discouragement often makes us **become sluggish**.

But imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises: Instead of giving in to discouragement, imitate those who found the key to gaining God's promises – **faith and patience**, as demonstrated by Abraham.

We are grateful to remember Abraham's life and to see that he did not have a *perfect* faith or a *perfect* patience. If Abraham had some of our weakness then we can have some of his **faith and patience**.

Do not become sluggish: The idea is that we should not let discouragement make us **sluggish**, leading to the sense that we may as well give up. First, we lose the desire to *press on*; then we lose the desire to *go on*.

Before he was king, David showed a great answer to discouragement: *David encouraged himself in the Lord his God* (1 Samuel 30:6, KJV). It is a blessing when others encourage us, but we don't have to wait for that. We can encourage ourselves in the Lord.

II. You Have an Example (Hebrews 6:13-15)

The patriarch Abraham is mentioned by name 10 times in the book of Hebrews. The emphasis here is on God, who *made* a certain *promise* to that man. The promise in view is found in Genesis 22:15-18. What was promised from God was that through Abraham's vast number of descendants, all the nations of the world would be blessed. While Abraham (Abram) was at Haran, God had promised him many descendants (Genesis 12:1-4). God began fulfilling that promise 25 years later when the 100-year-old Abraham had a son named Isaac (Genesis 21:5). Abraham's main task during those 25 years was to wait *patiently* as such would demonstrate his trust in God.

After he had patiently endured: A season of patient endurance is a time of spiritual attack. It seems that we may never obtain **the promise** of God in our life. It is easy to wonder, "Will God *really* come through in my situation?"

After he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise: God came through for Abraham, even sealing His **promise** with an oath. In fact, **because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself**. This oath showed that God's promises (like His character) are unchanging. Abraham's trust in this was the gateway to the fulfillment of the promise.

"This passage teaches us...that an oath may be lawfully used by Christians; and this ought to be particularly observed, on account of fanatical men who are disposed to abrogate the practices of solemn swearing which God has prescribed in his Law."
(Calvin)

III. You Have His Word (Hebrews 6: 16-20)

People swear by someone greater than themselves: This verse reflects Exodus 22:10-11. A person swearing an oath in that context was inviting God to witness the truth of the testimony. Ideally, this served to put an end to all argument of the case at hand (see Genesis 21:23). The compelling idea here is that people take oaths in light of something or someone who is greater. And there is nothing or no one greater than God.

Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath: In taking the oath, *God* communicated on the level of humanity's understanding at the time. He did so in order that there would be no doubt regarding His intention and commitment to implement His plan. This is reflected in the phrase, *the unchanging nature of His purpose*.

That by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation: The **two immutable** (unchanging) **things** are God's *promise* and God's *oath*. It is **impossible for God to lie** in either of these two things.

The *absolute reliability* of God's promise should impress us. "Now, brethren, who among us dare doubt this? Where is the hardy sinner who dares come forward and say, 'I impugn the oath of God'? Oh! But let us blush the deepest scarlet, and scarlet is but white compared with the blush which ought to mantle the cheek of every child of God to think that even God's own children should, in effect, accuse their heavenly Father of perjury. Oh, shame upon us!" (Spurgeon)

Strong consolation: God isn't content to give us mere **consolation**. He wants to give us **strong consolation**. Spurgeon described some characteristics of strong consolation:

- Strong consolation does not depend upon bodily health.
- Strong consolation does not depend upon the excitement of public services and Christian fellowship.
- Strong consolation can't be shaken by human reasoning.
- Strong consolation is stronger than our guilty conscience.

"It is a strong consolation that can deal with outward trials when a man has poverty staring him in the face, and hears his little children crying for bread; when bankruptcy is likely to come upon him through unavoidable losses; when the poor man has just lost his wife, and his dear children have been put into the same grave; when one after another all earthly props and comforts have given way, it needs a strong consolation then; not in your pictured trials, but your real trials, not in your imaginary whimsied afflictions, but in the real afflictions, and the blustering storms of life. To rejoice then, and say, 'Though these things be not with me as I would have them, yet hath he made with me an everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure;' this is strong consolation." (Spurgeon)

Who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us: This is another reason for encouragement, knowing that God has a **refuge of hope set before us**. We can think of this **refuge of hope** are like the cities of refuge commanded by the Law of Moses, as described in Numbers 35.

- Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are *within easy reach* of the person in need. The place of refuge is of no use if it can't be reached.
- Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are *open to all*, not just the Israelite. No one who comes the place of refuge is turned away in time of need.
- Both Jesus and the cities of refuge were *places to live*. In time of need, one never came to a city of refuge just to look around.
- Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are the *only alternative* for the one in need. Without this refuge destruction is certain.
- Both Jesus and the cities of refuge provide protection *only within their boundaries*. To go outside the provided refuge means death.
- Both Jesus and the cities of refuge provided full freedom with the *death of the High Priest*.
- However, there is a *crucial distinction* between Jesus and the cities of refuge. The cities of refuge only helped the *innocent*; the *guilty* can come to Jesus and find refuge.

This hope we have as an anchor: The **anchor** was a common figure for **hope** in the ancient world. Here the idea is that we are anchored to something firm but unseen (**which enters the Presence behind the veil**).

You don't need an **anchor** for calm seas. The rougher the weather, the more important your **anchor** is.

- We need the anchor to hold the ship and keep it from being wrecked.
- We need the anchor to stabilize the ship and keep it more comfortable for those on board.
- We need the anchor to allow the ship to maintain the progress it has made.

The ship must have hold of the anchor, even as we must lay hold of hope. The anchor itself may have a strong grip, and be secured to the ocean floor, yet if it isn't securely attached to the ship it is of no use. But there is also a sense in which the anchor has hold of the ship, even as hope has hold of us.

But the **anchor** analogy doesn't apply perfectly. We are anchored *upward in heaven*, not down in the ground; and we are anchored to *move on*, not to stand still.

“Our anchor is like every other, when it is of any use it is out of sight. When a man sees the anchor it is doing nothing, unless it happen to be some small stream anchor or grapnel in shallow water. When the anchor is of use it is gone: there it went overboard with a splash; far down there, all among the fish, lies the iron holdfast, quite out of sight. Where is your hope, brother? Do you believe because you can see? That is not believing at all.” (Spurgeon)

Which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us: This confident, anchor-like hope sees us into the very **presence** of God. **Hope** is exactly the medicine discouraged Christians need.

The forerunner...even Jesus: We are assured of this access into the presence of God because Jesus has entered as a **forerunner**. The Old Testament high priest did not enter the veil as a *forerunner*, only as a *representative*. But Jesus has entered into the immediate **presence** of God the Father so that His people can follow Him there.

A **forerunner** (the ancient Greek word *prodromos*) was a military reconnaissance man. A **forerunner** goes forward, knowing that others will follow behind him.

“We are told next that as a fore-runner our Lord has *for us* entered – that is entered to take possession in our name. When Jesus Christ went into heaven he did as it were look around on all the thrones, and all the palms, and all the harps, and all the crowns, and say ‘I take possession of all these in the name of my redeemed. I am their representative and claim the heavenly places in their name.’” (Spurgeon)

Yet if Jesus is the forerunner, we are then the *after-runners*. There is no forerunner if there are no after-runners. We should follow hard after Jesus, and run hard after Him. He has gone before us and He is our pattern.

Behind the veil... having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek: The temple analogy (**behind the veil**) reminds the writer to the Hebrews of his previous start into the subject of Jesus as our **High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek** (in Hebrews 5:6-10). This thought continues into the next chapter.

Lesson Summary

Hebrews 6:9-20 offers encouragement, reassurance, and a call to faithfulness. To summarize this lesson, it shows:

1. Encouragement and Confidence (Verses 9-10):

- Despite the stern warning given earlier, the author expresses confidence in the readers, believing that they are capable of better things that accompany salvation.
- God is just and will not forget their work and love shown in His name, particularly in their service to fellow believers. This encourages believers to continue in their good works and love, knowing that God sees and remembers their efforts.

2. Exhortation to Perseverance (Verses 11-12):

- The author urges the readers to show the same diligence to the very end in order to make their hope sure.
- They are encouraged not to become lazy but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised. This highlights the importance of perseverance and the active pursuit of faith and patience.

3. God's Promise and Oath (Verses 13-18):

- The passage reflects on God's promise to Abraham, emphasizing that God swore by Himself to fulfill His promise since there is no one greater by whom He could swear.
- This oath and promise serve as a powerful assurance for believers that God's promises are unchangeable and trustworthy. It underscores God's faithfulness and the certainty of His promises.
- The idea of God providing "two unchangeable things" (His promise and His oath) is highlighted, offering strong encouragement to hold firmly to the hope set before us.

4. Hope as an Anchor (Verses 19-20):

- Hope is described as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. This metaphor emphasizes the stability and security that hope in God's promises provides.
- The hope enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. Jesus is identified as a high priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.
- This points to the access believers have to God through Jesus and the enduring nature of His priesthood, offering reassurance of eternal security.

What are the lessons we can take away:

1. **God's faithfulness:** Trust in God's unwavering faithfulness and His promises, knowing that He is just and remembers the work and love shown in His name.
2. **Perseverance and diligence:** Continuously strive in faith and patience, emulating those who have faithfully inherited God's promises.
3. **Hope as an anchor:** Hold firmly to the hope provided by God's promises, which serves as a stabilizing force in the believer's life, providing security and assurance.
4. **Jesus' priestly role:** Recognize and take comfort in Jesus' role as the eternal high priest, who provides direct access to God and ensures the permanence of His promises.