

Rev George Macaskill - Hebrews 6:1

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 00] Let's turn in our Bibles to the passage of Scripture which we read in the letter to the Hebrews and as God would help us, we'll just read again the first verse of chapter 6.

Let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not blame again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.

I'd like to concentrate on the words, therefore let us go on to maturity.

Now this passage which we read contains some alarming statements but actually on closer study they're actually very enlightening and actually very encouraging and strengthening to the genuine Christian.

The context is that the writer is unable to teach his readers some of the doctrines of Christ because they were so immature.

[1 : 31] In chapter 5, the previous chapter at the end there we read that by this time you should have been on to solid foods but I still need to give you milk.

They were still on baby milk when they should have been eating steaks as it were. Now according to verse 9 in chapter 6 it's pretty clear that the writer does not question the genuineness of their Christianity.

They were immature, they were immature but he never questioned the genuineness of their Christianity.

Immature Christians or weak Christians are to be distinguished clearly from non-Christians or unbelievers.

There's a world of difference. Immature Christians are like children. A child is weak in strength, weak in wisdom but he's a real person, he's a real human being.

[2 : 46] A child lacks discernment, he's got no experience of life, he's easily led astray, makes mistakes, he goes into dangerous places, well that's the same as a young, weak or weak Christian.

Now the reason why many today might be what we call weak or immature is because of the strength of the prevailing surrounding culture around us.

Immature is becoming a very powerful thing and just think about it. How long do you spend in church every week?

How many hours a week does the average Christian spend hearing Christian input, biblical input from God?

Six hours a week, spend four hours a week in church and maybe another two hours family worship, private devotions, I don't know, something like six hours a week.

[4 : 00] How many hours a week are we subjected to the philosophy of the world? Well some of his work, some work 40 hours a week. We're all at a time for these 40 hours, what are the hearing, what are the listening to, what are we confronted with but the philosophy of the world, the world's way of thinking, their ideology.

So you see that that's just at work. What about our neighbours, what about our Christian duties, what about our business we deal with? We have from eight to ten times more of a philosophy or a non-Christian philosophy being thrown at us or living in that environment than we have of Christian input.

So it's kind of natural that some people in some ages and some parts of the world are immature, they're not strong in the faith.

And so that was the case of these Christians, these Hebrews who were formerly Jews, who were grounded in the things of God as it were in the Old Testament but were taking the time to get the news to the new administration of God's ways.

Now some people get very alarmed about verses four to six in chapter six. It is impossible in the case of those who once been enlightened, tasted heavenly gift, shared in Holy Spirit, tasted the goodness of God and the powers of the age to have fallen away, to restore them to repentance since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm.

[5 : 53] Some people get very alarmed when it says here it is impossible to restore them again. But just think exactly of what it's saying.

Of course it is impossible to restore anyone again when they trample underfoot the one way of salvation.

If there is only one way to heaven and you remove that one way, well it's straightforward simple mathematics mathematics, one way minus one equals zero. It's not profound, it's not rocket science, straightforward mathematics, one minus one equals zero. Of course it's impossible to restore them again, but there's only one way and they discard and trample underfoot that one way. It's mathematically impossible. Now these people we refer to here were not what we might call shrinking violets that had made a mistake. They were assertive, aggressive, apostates. That's what they were. Now just look carefully, not so much as what is said about them but what is not said about them. These people spoke about in verses four to six. There is no mention there that these people had faith. Without faith it's impossible to please God. These people didn't have faith. There's no mention there that these people had their sins forgiven. Because you can't have your sins forgiven by God and then God changes his mind for some reason, that doesn't happen. These people had their sins forgiven.

There's no mention there that these people were born again. There was no mention there that these people had eternal life. But you see they were enlightened, yes, they were enlightened by the Holy Spirit. But they were not renewed by the Holy Spirit. They were informed by the Holy Spirit. But they were not transformed by the Holy Spirit. They only tasted the Word of God. They did not feed upon the Word of God. They were to feed upon the Word of God. These people tasted it and said, oh that's enough. That's enough of that stuff. I don't want more of that stuff. I don't like it. Ah but you see the shared did not in the things of the Holy Spirit. The shared in the Holy Spirit, yes. There were sharers of the Holy Spirit's provisions. Every one of us here are sharing in the provisions of the Holy Spirit. When you read the Bible, you're sharing what the Holy Spirit has provided for our salvation to buy. When you come to church, you're sharing in what the Holy Spirit has provided for our help and support. When you pray, that's a provision the Holy Spirit has given to us. If you've got people praying for you, you're sharing the prayers of this congregation. You're sharing, yes. But the term the Bible uses for true genuine conversion is you're indwelt by the Holy Spirit. This passage doesn't say these people were indwelt by the Spirit. They weren't transformed by the Spirit. They weren't renewed by the Spirit.

They were merely enlightened. They were merely tasted. They tried reading the Bible. They tried going to church. They tried saying the odd prayer. They said that's enough. We have to be indwelt by the Spirit. We have to be renewed by the Spirit. We have to be transformed by the Spirit. We have to feed upon the Word of God. These people were not amongst these, did not possess these genuine blessings of God. I suppose we could say, or it's helpful at this point, to distinguish between a backslider on the one hand and an apostate on the other.

[11 : 15] As far as we can make out, this is verse 2, apostates, but not to backsliders. So you say, well, what's the difference? Well, a backslider, his sin is passive rather than active. It's a loss of interest rather than a hostility against. The backslider is cold and indifferent to the things of God. He withdraws from the company of God's people. He opts out of fellowship, opts out of church activities, as it were, rather than up front with maliciousness against them. He withdraws from them and doesn't want to mix with them rather than be no poles against them. But something else very, very important about a backslider. The backslider always, always returns. You can't tell sometimes if you don't know somebody very well, you can't tell are they backsliding or apostasizing. Now with regard to the apostate, it's quite different from backsliding which we've mentioned. The apostate willfully, intentionally denies the Gospel, denies it. He publicly, not secretly, not privately, he publicly opposes Christ and his word. God is his enemy. Not just something he's lost a bit of interest in. He's his enemy. An apostate is against God and opposes God. The apostate unassimilably lives in open sin and refuses to obey God in any way. There's a difference. There's actually quite a big difference. Therefore, that being true, there is no such thing as a secret apostate. There's no such thing. The apostate is openly, openly against Christ, openly stating what he hates about God and

he's turned against it. It's public, not secret, not private. And it's an apostate. It's also, there's no such thing as an involuntary apostate. There's no such thing as somebody coming up to you and saying, oh, I didn't realize I was an apostate. Of course, you're not an apostate there. An apostate knows what he's doing intentionally, willfully, publicly denies and does what he wants. And that's the people referred to here. This is not the case of somebody becoming cold for a while and then returning and regressing his coldness. And so the apostle who is behind all this is trying to strengthen and encourage his readers to go on to maturity, be a strong Christian so that you'll recognize and realize these things and attend to growth and development. Let us, whom he says, is it verse nine? I've always spoken this way. He says, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things

that belong to salvation. We feel sure you're genuine Christians that develop, grow, become strong in the Lord and the power of his might. I suppose you could say that immature Christians like a child, he needs to learn things, needs to grow, needs to develop. But a child can only grow, a baby can only grow by being fed, by exercising and through time. It takes time to grow. You need to exercise and you need to be fed. No mother says, I want my child to be beg and size to stretch out his arms or his legs. Mother feeds the child and gets the child to learn to walk, to stand on his feet and to use his arms and his hands. It's through that exercise. If you don't use your limbs, I remember hearing, I can't vouch for this truth but I heard it in school from a teacher, someone in India somewhere, I'm talking about a hundred years ago, where someone vowed he would not lift his hand up for nine years, but was it seven? That is seven or nine. And he kept it. He kept it, didn't lift his hand up for seven or nine years. And when the nine years were up, he couldn't lift it up, became paralysed. We need to exercise our limbs. And if we want to grow on Christians, we've got to be active, we've got to exercise the graces and the spirit of what God has given to us. Now, that leads us to note this. You cannot simply just grow in Christian maturity or strength. One grows in maturity as a result of growing in other things. For example, you can't grow in maturity without also growing in knowledge. It's Peter who tells us, grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and saith you Jesus Christ. You can't grow unless you grow in knowledge of Christ. And sure some of you have discovered it already.

There's no verse in the Bible which says we are predestined to salvation. Sounds like heresy, does it? The Bible says we're predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ. That's the word. That's the term the Bible uses. Predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ. And the first stage, the first step in us becoming like Christ is to be converted, is to be saved, is to become a believer. Our salvation is about the first stage in the processes of us becoming Christlike. There's a verse in the Bible, holiness, without which no one can see the Lord. You can be converted without holiness. Your sins can be forgiven without holiness. Blessed be God, that's true. But you can't enter heaven until you become holy. It's a process from your conversion to your death. And that's what's been spoken about here. How on earth can we become like Jesus if we don't know what Jesus was like? So we have to study the life of Jesus. We have to study the sermons of Jesus, the teaching of Jesus. We have to study Him, what He says about Himself, what He says about life. Learn, grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior. And growing in knowledge of Him, maturity will take its own, will take over. We develop in growth by developing in other things the knowledge of our Savior. We grow in maturity by growing in faith. Do you remember that the disciples once came to Jesus and said, Lord, increase our faith?

And do you remember how the Savior replied? All He said was, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you'll be able to say to this tree, be removed and planted into the sea and it will obey you. And that's all He said. That's all He said. What was He trying to say? What was He teaching by that? Was He not saying when He said, you've a grain of mustard seed? Do you not say on another occasion, the Kingdom of Heaven is a grain of mustard seed, which is the smallest, smallest of all seeds, but it grows to be the largest plant, the largest shrub in the field. What was He saying then? Did He not answer the disciples' question, growing and increasing their faith by saying, you don't ask for more grains of faith from heaven. You say, oh Lord, I've only got a wee grain here. Give me some more grains. No, no, no, no. Was He not saying this? Look, you've got one grain. Use that one grain which you have. A grain of mustard seed size of faith can remove a tree. If you exercise it, if you use it. So the way to mature, the way to grow is not to all Lord give His whole faith, send it down. The way to grow is, Lord, help me use the little bit

[22 : 33] I have, and in using the little bit you have, it will develop and grow. We grow in maturity by growing in knowledge of Christ in particular, growing in faith and growing in love, with the growing love. The context of Luke 17 where the disciples came to Jesus and said, Lord, increase our faith. What made them ask that question? Look chapter 17. You remember it was that Jesus said, look, 17. They said 17. And He said to His disciples, temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom it comes. It would be better if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin. Pay attention to yourselves. If your brother sins rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in that day, and turns to you seven times saying I repent, you must forgive him. Then the disciples said, Lord, increase our faith. You see how they were exercised? I have to forgive my brother who comes to me seven times in a day saying, I'm sorry about what I did to you.

I don't know about you, but if someone did something to me seven times in a day, and for the seventh time came up and said, I'm sorry, I'd be rather inclined to say, you're not serious, brother. That would be my personal response. But it's not the response the Savior taught us. He says, learn to say. You must say, if he comes to you seven times in a day, you're to forgive him the seventh time. You see why we need faith? Do you see why we need love? We're to love our brother, we're to grow in love. We want to grow in maturity, we want to go in strength, grow in love. Love your brother, love your enemies. Now when we're to love our enemies, we're not being asked, think of them as very nice people, because some of them just jolly well aren't nice people. Some Christians are not nice people. They ought to be, they should strive to be or not, but we're still to love them. So how can you love someone you don't think is nice? You do something kind to them. You do something kind to them. That's how you love them. You do something for their good. Do good to those who hate you. Jesus was teaching on the sermon on the Mount. Do good to those who hate you. That's how you love them. Loving them does not mean thinking they're nice people. Loving them means doing something to help them, doing something kind to them. And by doing these things, we grow in maturity, in strength, grow in knowledge, faith, love.

[26 : 38] Service, we're saved to serve, you know. We're not saved to enjoy ourselves. We're saved to serve. In fact, does that not come out in verse 10? God is not unjust to overlook your work and the love that you've shown for his name in serving the saints as you still do.

Paul was writing to the Thessalonian church and saying your work of faith, verse 3, remembering before our God, your work of faith, your labor of love, your steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, our steadfastness of hope, our labor of love, our work of faith. You want to grow mature? Do something extra for God. Do something else to help the church, to help the calls of Christ, do something else for your neighbour? By serving God, by increasing your service to God, you grow in maturity. Grow in obedience, grow in submission. I used to be confused between the difference between obedience and submission until I understood we obey commands, we submit to God's will. You see, I can be keeping all the commandments.

I can be obeying all the commandments. And then God does something in my life. He gives me cancer. He gives me wife cancer. He gives me a financial re-election. I lose my job. Oh, I don't agree with that, Lord. That's not a nice thing to do to me. I have to submit to His will. We have to obey His commands. We have to submit to His will. He's got a plan. He's got a purpose. He's got to trust it. It doesn't look like as if that will lead to my blessing, but we have to submit to it. That's part of growth. That's how we grow.

Grow in obedience, grow in submission to His will. He does something awful in the church. You say, Lord, why did you let that happen? Submit to God. He's a governor. He's sovereign.

[29 : 36] He's got His purpose. And there's something else that's, that's, that's the Bible points out to us. It's important for our growth and development and maturity. It is tribulation.

It is trouble. Isn't it strange? Isn't it strange? We need trouble to sanctify us. We grow through trouble. The Thessalonians were a young, new church. And Paul writes to them and he says, I exhort you in your, I want to establish and exhort you in your faith that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. Or as the authorised version puts it, we are, we are appointed, the New King James it is, we're appointed to it. God has appointed tribulation for Christians so that we'll grow. So that we'll become holy. So that we'll become like Jesus. Jesus himself said, made it, made it very clear in this world, you'll have tribulation. Oh, don't worry about the next world is glory from the first moment. But in this world, in this world, you'll have tribulation. It's impossible to grow without a struggle, without problems. He has appointed it that

way. And he's suffering and he has a right. So that's how we go on to maturity.

Don't get upset when everything goes wrong, even in the church, even in your Christian life. Don't get upset. This is something God has sent to you that we might grow thereby.

Well, just in conclusion, four things very, very briefly. As a result of what I've tried to say, there is no such thing as a sinless Christian. There are always sins to confess and repent of. I used to think that a saint was a sinner who repented of his sins. Not very accurate. The truth is, a saint is a sinner who is constantly repenting of his sins.

It's not a case that we confess and repent once at the beginning of our Christian life. It's a constant activity because we're constantly sinning. We're constantly doing wrong things, making mistakes and being even rebellious in our hearts. We don't agree with what God's doing, but we have to learn that. So we have to confess and repent continually. A saint is not someone who's sinless. He's someone who's constantly repenting of his sins. Secondly, there's no such thing as an easy Christian life. It's a warfare. It's a battle. We wrestle against powers of darkness and we wrestle against them with a frail, sinful body. Thirdly, there's no such thing as sudden growth. I think we've mentioned it already actually. Blessed be

[33 : 51] God, there's such a thing as sudden conversion. Blessed be God, there's such a thing as sudden forgiveness of sin. There's no such thing as sudden holiness. Growth is gradual. Growth is accumulative. One thing on top of another. Growth is imperceptible. Did you hear the grass growing? Do you hear the leaves coming in the trees? Was there a, well I'd be cynical, was there a little bang when the leaves came in the trees? You don't hear growth. It's silent. You can be growing and not aware of it. Growth by definition is gradual and imperceptible.

You can't see it at the time, but it's happening all the time. And finally, there's no such thing as a warning, I suppose at the end. There's no such thing as standing still in the Christian life. If we're not going forward, we're sliding back. So let's make sure that we are taking our food, that we're feeding on the word of God. Let's make sure we're strong in the Lord and in the power of His grace, His might, His power. It's not our power, it's His power. Let's learn how to use His power. Let us in summary go on to maturity. May God bless His word to us. Let's just bow our heads in prayer. Our Father in heaven, we pray that you would take the things of Jesus Christ and make them known to us. Unite us in this saving faith to your Son. Make them all our salvation and all our desire. Keep us in your love. Keep us in your fear. Wash all our sins away in the fountain filled with blood. Drawn from Emmanuel's veins, for sinners plashed, plunged beneath that blood, lose all that guilty stains. Hear us in mercy and in peace as we pray only in Christ's name for your glory. Amen.