

# Hebrews 6:1-12

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Hebrews 6 sweeps by repentance, conversion, baptism, laying on of hands, the resurrection, and eternal judgment with one sentence in an urgency to get to maturity, which also means perfection. Something perfect operates the way God intends it to. A perfect toothbrush is a toothbrush that gets teeth clean. A perfect car is one that gets you to your destination. Comfort may or may not be part of that. So perfection in Bible terms means that the instrument does its job, and instruments we are.

That sounds a little impersonal, but Romans 6 calls us instruments of righteousness or instruments of unrighteousness. The Bible does not deal in tools that do not do their job and function as God intends. Now about that toothbrush or car, either may have some imperfections, but we use them as long as they perfectly do the job. This meditation on Hebrews 6 is not a discourse on whether Christians sin or not, but I should say that the Bible says that we are dead to sin through our death, burial, and resurrection in Christ, and so we only continue in sin if we do not know this, which means also that we need to know the companion truth of being dead to the law, so that we do not live by our trying, but by the keeping of the Spirit.

The writer's point at this juncture in Hebrews is to say with absolute affirmation and exhortation that we ought to be getting on with the job of being perfectly what God means us to be, which is to say, intercessory priests, after the manner of our savior and brother priest Jesus, who offered himself as our atonement so that we might be made one with His body and continue in this world as he is, to phrase the issue like John does in his first letter.

The writer's view, therefore, here in Hebrews, after establishing Christ as the one unique eternal Son of God, greater than angels, or Moses, and after establishing Christ as fully human, fully tempted, and fully the only one able to save us from our sins, is that we are to know Him in a completeness that gets us into the life of those pressed to the uttermost to express God's complete passion to forgive, indwell, and then live all-out in the priesthood of Melchizedek.

This priesthood gets mentioned only a few times in the Bible, but the scarcity of mention is enlarged by the huge context in which the Hebrew's writer sets this priesthood. The mention of Melchizedek's priesthood in Hebrews has one purpose, not to get us dazzled and speculative about some new gadget of a concept that's far out and not pertaining to the ruts and suffering of everyday life: the mention of this priesthood is to anchor us in our one purpose here on earth for the few, fleeting years that

we're here, so that we gain the inheritance of who we are that carries eternal weight.

Our one purpose is to contain and express God's self-sacrificing nature, so that as priests, we might see Christ formed in others as Paul expresses this purpose. Though a man with a great mind, Paul did not live only to know truth, but to know truth formed in others. What good is a life if it does not get Jesus Christ formed in others? This does not mean that we bear the responsibility for others, as if we can determine their choices, but it means that we see our purpose to be the actual life of Christ formed in others.

This consuming commission does not go out to just a few elite Christians who know some "deeper life" and bask in that, though sadly, many like to defer the common commission to all Christians as some special calling to a few curiously different or esoteric--even a bit tipped in the head--Christians. The Hebrew's writer make his point plain that we go beyond basic Christian teaching, not to despise it or forget it, but to fulfill it in our own lives in union with the Lord. The point in the first part of Hebrews 6 is that one must be a partaker of the Holy Spirit, which means tasting the heavenly gift, the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come, and then settling into them as our continuous reality. The point is experiential knowledge of the very Spirit of God that operates in us according to His nature so that we live as His branches.

Hebrews 6 relies on the context of John 15 about the vine and the branch, without explicitly reviewing the principle of the vine and the branch. In another way, however, Hebrews 6 does concisely review that context by affirming that we are branches and that we either spring back to life from our dry, dead state inherited through the fall—or we taste the Spirit but then choose the dry dead state. One horror of the scriptures is that they proclaim the fact that some love darkness, wickedness, and deeds of evil, which also means, in biblical terms, a love of self at the expense of everything and everybody else. The final position of the self-for-self lover is this: "To hell with God and all; I will live only for myself." These branches end up cursed and burned, which does not mean that we try to determine who gets cursed and burned, but we do see who is absorbing water and growing as a branch and who is, at least for the moment, drying out and headed in the wrong direction.

Only God knows the final outcome for a soul, and the Hebrews writer urges us to preach basic Christianity where needed, obviously, but when preaching to those grounded in basic Christian truth, the preacher needs to aim right at first hand experience with the Holy Spirit of God whereby we learn through temptations, trials, and any continued sins (Shall we continue in sins? God forbid. But we do have an advocate with the Father if we do sin), that we cannot rescue ourselves or operate by any

strength in ourselves. When Paul in Corinthians says that weakness is the perfect container for God's strength, he means that. The Hebrews writer expects his audience equally to have learned that so that they no longer live as if still alive to sin or as if trying to produce the life of Christ from the vessel itself, which God means to *contain* the life of Christ.

The Hebrews writer does not dismiss his audience as having fallen without remedy. He urges them to quit preaching the basic Gospel all of the time to those obviously not interested in really knowing what salvation is about, a salvation that really means feeding continually upon the Spirit of God, the living word of God, and the power of the coming age—which is our age already to live in even while on the fallen earth still groaning and travailing in pain, awaiting the hope stored up for it. Those seeing what the writer talks about leave behind the sluggishness he mentions and enter into diligence, not as a human characteristic, but as a willingness to receive, which knows its reward now in the energizing by the might of the Spirit. In this condition we discover the meaning of two great Bible words, *faith* and *patience*.

The former means that we learn to live without seeing with the physical eye what we live for, thereby not putting all of our value into the things we see; and patience means that we learn the art of waiting. Those who cannot wait or endure do not yet know

how to suffer and therefore, progressively GIVE UP TOO SOON in more and more things.

Waiting and enduring sound hard, as if one can live the Christian life only with great difficulty. I find that walking in the Spirit is easy, but uncomfortable and even excruciating at times. This sounds like a contradiction, but if we see that ease of walking in the Spirit does not mean comfort, then we can do a thing easily even when it feels terrible.

This capacity entered into as a practice brings us increasingly into the suffering life which is the priesthood of Melchizedek, which is the point of the writer in Hebrews, which is to say that we accept ourselves as bodies that God made to contain His own passion. This is what He made us for, and a person can indeed find this perfection. It is the common call of the Gospel and the heritage of every member of the body of Christ. Has the church underestimated the nature of God in a believer to take that believer to a Christian life that we should not see as occasional among the brethren, but the expected and normal?