

15—Hebrews 6:1-8—Let Us Go On to Maturity

By Pastor Jason Snider

I. Introduction

- A. Imagine you are asked to pray at a large event. Let's say it's a political event or even a large sporting event here in Nashville. But to do so you must abide by the rules. Let's just say they are: keep it general, do not say anything controversial and mainly, do not pray in Jesus's name. Just say amen at the end and only God throughout the prayer.
 - 1. You pause to think about it before answering. You begin to think how you might pray for things that need to be prayed for but there are people from different faiths. And the reason they asked me not to pray in Jesus's name is so that anyone could hear your prayer and plug in the god of their own choosing.
 - 2. Would you do it? If the rules are—nothing distinctly Christian and no use of Jesus's name—could you do it?
- B. I've shared this story about myself a few times but when I was a teenager I lived a double life. I faked it at church and lived in the world with my buddies.
 - 1. Some 20 years ago I took a great deal of time and effort to sort through my life back then.
 - a) One of the things that stands out is the lack of discipleship toward maturity.
 - b) The little rural church I went to seemed to practice that if you walked the aisle, talked to the preacher up front, got baptized the following week then you were good to go.
 - (1) In other words, you were in and nothing could change that.
 - (2) I can tell you, it didn't work. I jumped through the hoops of that small Baptist church but nothing changed about me. Whatever that was it didn't bear any fruit.
 - (3) I can tell you that I had trusted in the sinners prayer to fix me, not Jesus. I was very aware of my sin but I wanted to be forgiven and go to heaven when I died but continue to live my life as I wanted. That's not gospel.
 - (4) Those who make a profession of faith need to be disciplined and matured. When someone professes faith, we take that as genuine but if it doesn't mature as they wrestle with the world, the devil and the flesh then we have an obligation to say so through church discipline. When we don't do that, we teach people in the church that faith in Christ just gives you a license to live however you want but everything will not work out for your good in the end.
 - (a) 1 John 1:6–7 ⁶ If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.
 - (b) 1 John 2:15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

II. Main Point

- A. The main point is the warning. Let us go on to maturity for those who turn from Jesus cannot be renewed to repentance.
 - 1. The warning is intended to be the means by which God keeps us from abandoning the faith. Heed the warning and rejoice in God's severe kindness to shepherd us to heaven.

III. Outline

- A. Let Us Go On to Maturity
- B. This we will do if God permits
- C. Because it is impossible for those who turn away to be renewed to repentance
- D. The Illustration of the Fruitful or Worthless Land

IV. Exposition

- A. Last week we heard about the dangers of dull hearing. This dullness leads to immaturity. We considered how dullness and immaturity are a dangerous disease but we didn't get to the warning concerning how dangerous it is. The passage this morning is the warning he was leading up to. He wants to explain the priesthood of Jesus but he is concerned about the numbness of heart among the

people. The problem with dullness of hearing is that they most likely do not realize what they have become. This warning is intended to wake them up from their laziness to press on to maturity.

1. To press on the maturity they first must leave the elementary doctrine of Christ.
 - a) When I started working on this, I was struggling to understand this idea of leaving. Everywhere I looked in the Bible this word simply meant leave.
 - b) Some people understand this as not actually leaving but just moving on to maturity.
 - (1) Let me explain. I think the list that follows let us go on to maturity goes with leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ.
 - (a) Repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, and instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.
 - (2) So, in other words do not leave these foundational truths but let's go on and build the house on these foundational truths...go on to maturity.
 - (3) It initially sounded like someone building a sub-division of only foundations. Imagine driving through that neighborhood and seeing families living on a foundation and not a house. It doesn't make sense does it? That would not last very long.
 - c) However, the problem with that is this list isn't distinctly Christian. It's rather general and most Jews—certainly the Pharisees—could hold them without question.
 - (1) You might object to this because it says the doctrine of Christ. However, I think this can easily be understood as all the teachings about the coming Messiah we have talked about many times from the OT.
 - d) So, here's how I take this. These Jewish Christians had boiled down their beliefs to be so general that they could be considered Jews or Christians or both at the same time.
 - (1) These things were foundational and as Paul says about Timothy that they "made him wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." (2 Tim. 3:15).
 - (2) Look, we face similar temptations. We may desire to boil down the principles of our faith to avoid persecution from the world.
 - (a) We could say things so vague and general that anyone could hold them. It's like saying we all like food. Well that's general enough to include almost every human being. But if I say we must love only ribeye steak cooked medium rare with only salt for seasoning then those details would excluded a lot of people.
 - (b) However, the Bible is very clear and very specific about what we are to believe and practice.
 - i) Even someone from a Muslim background could almost agree to this list except the teachings of Christ.
 - e) Therefore, they must leave these behind and be distinctly Christian. They must go on to maturity in the faith.
 - (1) For example, they must believe that Jesus is the Christ not simply that the Christ is coming.
 - (a) In other words, can you say that? Can you confess that Jesus is the Christ?
 - i) Maybe you would do that among your Christian friends or at church but would you do that if asked in a secular situation?
 - ii) For years, I watched men cave under the pressure of Larry King. He was Jewish and he would ask people to come do an interview and he would inevitably ask the Christian—do you believe that Jesus Christ is the ONLY way of salvation.
2. So, there must be a leaving behind of these basic teachings about the Christ and go on to maturity.
 - a) But why is maturity so important to persevering in faith?
 - (1) One clear answer is that immaturity will likely lead to a premature death.
 - (2) Let's think about the parable of the sower.
 - (a) There are four examples. Only one of those turns out to be a true, fruitful believer.
 - i) The other three abandon the Lord for various reasons there in Mark 4:14–20
 - ii) If you remain immature or you return to immaturity through dull hearing, you will likely fall into one of the three categories that abandon the gospel.

- (1) Every new believer starts in the same place. They sprout up like a small tender plant. If they hear the gospel Satan fires one of his arrows and instead of continuing to think about the gospel, thoughts of that porn you looked at come to mind and the word is gone.
 - (2) Others sprouted but in soil with rocks under the surface. This one receives the word and sprouts up quickly with joy but there's no root when dry weather comes and it shrivels up and dies. The dry weather is the threat of persecution because of what you believe about Jesus. So, this one abandons Jesus to avoid pain.
 - (3) The other seed sprouts up in the midst of thorns but the thorns choke out the feeble little plant. The thorns are the cares of the world, deceitfulness of riches and the desires of other things.
 - (4) The fourth one is like that Psalm 1 believer who is like a tree that's planted by streams of water and it yields its fruit in its season and its leaves do not wither.
 - (a) So it is standing like the house that is build on the rock. When the storms come and waters rise the house on the rock stands.
 - (b) Do you want to be like that those massive oak trees across the street or flimsy cattail?
- B. I hope you are convinced that we all need to continue to mature in the faith. But it's not ultimately up to us. As verse three makes very clear—this we will do IF God permits.
1. Your first question might be—So, God might not permit them to go on to maturity?
 - a) The answer is, yes. He might not.
 - b) "There are some people who will grow dull in hearing the gospel that God will refuse to mature them". (Sermon, Bret Rogers)
 - c) God ultimately determines the things of this world. That's in part what it means for God to be God.
 - (1) You might say, that's unfair. But God has never been unfair. If we want God to be fair with us then we all go the hell. That's what's fair.
 - (2) God is sovereign and we are responsible.
 - (3) I think it will help when we look at the warning in the next verses but before we get there what do you think about those who were rescued out of Egypt, who didn't lose not even a hair from any of their livestock, nor their firstborn, who walked out of town with the plunder of the Egyptians, walked on dry ground through the Red Sea, made water burst forth from a rock, kept a million people alive in the desert, their shoes didn't wear out, he rained manna down from heaven, he gathered quail for them to eat, he protected them from every enemy, and under God's providential care caused them to safely arrive at the Promised Land all the while having made a golden calf for it to lead them back to Egypt, complained every chance they got. Was there any excuse for them not to believe? Do you think it was unfair for God to not permit them to enter the Promised Land?
 - (4) There will be more evidence than we can stand on that day to condemn us.
 - (5) We are saved by grace and kept by grace.
 - (6) All of it is under the sovereign Lord of the universe.
 - (a) To some he will say, "Depart from me, I never knew you" and to others he will say, "Enter good and faithful servant."
- C. Now the warning: why is it important that they and we go on to maturity? Because it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have turned their back on Jesus and rejected the gospel.
1. In similar fashion as I did with the people of Israel, so too here.
 - a) For those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of word of God and the powers of the age to come, and THEN fallen away, it is impossible to restore them again to repentance.
 - (1) Do you hear the warning? Do those verses do anything to your soul?

- (2) "Once more the preacher emphasizes that continuance is the test of reality. In these verses, he is not questioning the perseverance of the saints; we might say that rather he is insisting that those who persevere are the true saints." (Bruce 144).
- b) To fall away is apostasy. It is an intentional turning from Christ and the gospel.
 - (1) The person who does that cannot be restored to repentance since there in verse 6, they are crucifying once again the Son of God and holding him up to contempt.
 - (a) Dullness of hearing leads to this so wake up. Hear the gospel. Repent and believe.
 - (b) "To abandon the Son of God is to say that his death didn't save, that it was for nothing. Or to put it another way, apostasy says that Jesus should have been crucified, that he deserved to die on the cross. Instead of finding salvation in Jesus' death, they reject it and therefore confess that the shame and dishonor Jesus received was deserved." (Schreiner 189).
 - i) I heard Ben Shapiro say that very thing about Jesus. He said Jesus was an insurrectionist that got what he deserved.
 - (2) I have a few friends from seminary who walked away from Jesus. It was heartbreaking to watch.
 - (a) I could list names. I could share well-known pastors too. Regular members.
 - (b) There's a name listed at the end of Hebrews that illustrates what he saying here.
 - i) Hebrews 12:16–17 See to it ¹⁶ that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. ¹⁷ For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.
 - ii) You might ask, "Will genuine repentance be rejected by God? Don't make the mistake of thinking that Esau genuinely repented and was rejected by God. God does not reject genuine repentance. The text says plainly that he found no place for repentance. In other words, he couldn't repent. He was so hardened (see Hebrews 3:8, 15; 4:7) that he cried out for things to go better in his life, but inside he would not submit to God's terms. He was, as verse 16 says, "immoral and godless."
 - (1) Repentance is a prayer asking for deliverance from the circumstances and consequences of sin but plan to continue walking in those godless ways.
 - iii) Dullness leads to hardness of heart and the seed of the gospel will not grow in the hard soil of our hearts.
- D. Well, the passage ends with an illustration of its own. It is a test for us to ask ourselves.
 1. It goes with a simple farming story. It could be something else but this is easy to understand and to the point.
 2. There in verse 7 it describe a farmer's land that has had the needed rains to produce a crop.
 - a) The farmer had done the work of cultivating it. The soil was prepared. A nice seedbed was made. The seeds were planted. Let's just say it was corn and the it burst through the soil and over the next 100 days matures to healthy plants that produces a good crop.
 - (1) Do you know how many kernels of corn are on one healthy ear of corn? That is, that one seed turned into how many seeds on the ear? 800. Yep. That's a pretty good yield.
 3. However, imagine if it yielded weeds like thorns and thistles? What if you went to combine the cornfield and it was nothing but cockleburs in the grain tank?
 - a) Would you waste your time and fuel to combine weeds?
 - b) Why no. You would rightly think it was worthless.
 - c) It's end is to be burned.
 4. Does your life bear any fruit?
 - a) Fruit comes from faith in Christ.
 - b) You have favor with God by faith in Jesus. But real faith bears fruit.
 - c) Legalism is trying to win God's favor by doing good things. That's not how grace works.
 - (1) If it did you would receive the glory and not God.
 - (2) Grace is unmerited favor...unworked for favor. You did nothing to deserve it.

- (3) But when the Lord sets his grace on you and you turn from your sin to Jesus, you are forgiven and made right with God. You are no longer his enemy but his child—adopted into the family.
- (4) Therefore, we then start becoming like our Father. We love what he loves and hate what he hates.

E. Response

- 1. Likely some in this room heard the warning and God has kept you from abandoning Jesus. You are running to Jesus' new mercies afforded to you in Christ.
- 2. It's likely that some did not hear the warning and will go on to your eternal ruin.
 - a) You likely know you've been living in unrepentant sin for years. You act like a Christian here on Sunday but the rest of the week you live as though you are of the world.
 - b) Your sin and the church overlooking it has led others to think they can live like that too.
 - c) Christ calls us out of the world to be distinctly like him and abandon the ways of the world.
 - d) I hope if your heart is pricked that you will act on it today before it is too late.
- 3. But hear this, God sent his Son into the world to save sinners. In his justice, God must punish all sin. He cannot free the guilty by simply looking over our sin. He would be unjust to do so. However, he sent his Son to pay the penalty for the sins of those he came to save. Therefore, God's justice is upheld because our sins have been punished on Jesus and he can now show us mercy through faith in Jesus. Christ died the death we deserved that we might have eternal life in him. Will you receive the offer of forgiveness and being made right with God through faith in Jesus Christ?