

## LET US GO ON—UNTO PERFECTION

I was going to wait to finish our series on “Be ye holy, for I am Holy” *after* we all *became* holy, but that will take the rest of our lives, won’t it 😊? There is obviously much more that could be said, but I do sense the Lord wanting us to “go on” to something else, though, so today will *probably* be the last sermon in this series. (Note: I did not promise we would be looking at something else; I said “probably” 😊!)

Take your Bibles and turn to Hebrews 5. Similar to what we saw in 1 John, chapters 2 and 3 a couple of weeks ago, the chapter “break” between Hebrews 5 and Hebrews 6 is probably not in the best spot—at least according to some of the Greek texts. In the Greek, Hebrews 5:11-6:8 form one paragraph. I’m not going to preach on—or even read—the full paragraph, but please follow along as I read Hebrews 5:11-6:3.

Last week we focused on Hebrews 12:14 and the command that we are to “follow”—meaning pursue—“peace with all men, **and holiness**, without which no man shall see the Lord.” Today, we will be looking at a similar exhortation found in the middle of Hebrews 6:1—“let us go on unto perfection.” What does that mean—and how we go about doing that—is what we will be looking at this morning. Not much of an intro, but we have a lot of ground to cover this morning, so I want to jump right in.

### 1. *The Plea to Press On: “Let us go on unto perfection”*

#### A. The meaning of “go on”

The words “go on” come from the Greek word “*fer’-o*” which occurs 66 times in the NT. It means “to bear, to carry, or to bring forth.” Here it means to “be borne along like a ship by the wind.” Here are a couple of other references to help you get the idea a little better.

**Acts 27:17** “Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so **were driven**.” The wind “drove them;” it carried them along.

**II Peter 1:21** “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were **moved by** the Holy Ghost.” The men that God used to write His Word were “borne along by” the Holy Spirit. They were prompted; they were moved inwardly.

#### B. The meaning of “perfection”

**Perfection** here does not mean a state of **sinlessness** like Jesus is now—and like believers will be some day in the future. The Greek word that perfection comes from is “*tel-i-ot’-ace*” and, not surprisingly, is related to “*tel’-i-os*” which means “completed in all its parts, full grown, of full age.” A one-word definition, then, would be “maturity.”

Putting these two together, the writer of Hebrews is telling these Jewish believers to **press on** to maturity. To put it a bit more bluntly, he is telling them to “grow up!” Why do I say that? Because in the end of chapter 5 he tells them that they can’t handle meat—and need to have milk again!

### 2. *The Problem—They Were “Unskillful” in the Word*

Let’s look a little more closely at what the author says to these Jewish believers about their current spiritual state. A. Dull of hearing

Notice the end of vs 11 “seeing that you are dull of hearing.” What does that mean? Rest assured it does **not mean** that they were **physically hard of hearing** like many of us! The verb tense in the Greek indicates that they **had become** dull of hearing—indicating that they **had been** in a better spiritual state before. In other words, they had gone **backwards!**

Why do people **go backwards** in their Christian life? Kind of a loaded question, isn’t it? I’m sure there are more, but here are two reasons.

1) They don’t strive to go forward. Please know that there is no “neutral” in the Christian life. To **do nothing** does not mean we stay in the same place—it means we are **going backward!**

2) They disobey what they already know. **Failure to obey** is what is probably meant by “dull of hearing.”

Not only were they dull of hearing, they were also... B. Delayed in learning

We see that in vs 12 “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers....”

I want us to pause here for a moment. Let’s not hurry past the truth that is being taught here—God expects us to become mature enough to **teach others**—and there is a **time** when He expects us to be at that point! The “teaching” here does not necessarily refer to **holding the office** of a Sunday School teacher like Don does. It does, however, mean that you **understand salvation and basic Bible doctrines** well enough to be able to explain it to a believer that is “younger in the faith” than you.

How “**old** in the faith” do we have to be before we get to that point? It doesn’t say, does it? But we do know there **is a time** that it is expected—and it was **expected of these believers**. But they couldn’t teach others, could they? Notice the rest of the verse: “... ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God....”

Not only could they **not teach**—they had to be taught again “the first principles of the oracles of God.” Several commentators use **reading** as an illustration. Instead of them being able to teach others **how to read**, they had to be taught their A, B, C’s all over again!

We have a third description of these Hebrew believers found in the last half of verse 12 and verse 13.

Notice the end of vs 12 “...and are become such as have **need of milk**, and not of strong meat. For everyone that **useth milk** is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.” The third description?

C. Demanded milk instead of meat

It is interesting to me that they “**are become** such as have need of milk...” We again have the author implying that they **should be further along** in their knowledge of Scriptures and their walk with God than they were. It was almost as if he was saying, “You ate meat **before—but now** you have to go back to drinking milk again!” And rest assured it was not because they had lost their teeth!

So what is the **milk** of the word—and what is the **meat**? Here is my **deep, theological answer**: milk is easier to digest—meaning understand—than meat! Since that isn’t much of an answer, here is a little more.

1) Milk refers to the elementary teachings of the faith, some of which we will see in Hebrews 6:1-2.

2) Meat—solid food—has to do with more advanced truths which would certainly include what the author wanted to teach them about Christ but couldn’t because they were “hard to be uttered” (explained; v11).

How did the author describe these believers? They were dull of hearing...and delayed in learning...and demanded milk instead of meat. Lastly, they had... D. Difficulty in discerning good and evil

We see that in vs 14. “But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

Who were those who were skilled at discerning between good and evil? Those who **ate meat**—meaning those who were **mature**! Were **the recipients** “meat eaters”—or “milk drinkers”? Milk drinkers, right? Since they still needed milk, this implies they were not very good at discerning between good and evil.

We also see that in vs 13 “For everyone that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.”

Putting these two verses together, I believe the idea is this: Immature believers are **unskillful** in using God’s Word in such a way that it impacts how they think and live. They may **know certain Bible truths**, but there is a **disconnect** between God’s Word and how they live. Mature believers, on the other hand, **use God’s Word as the lens** through which to view life and solve their problems. They go to God—and His Word—to discern what is right and wrong—both **in doctrine** and in how **they live** their lives.

What about us? Let’s not forget—this is not just the author’s description of the readers—it is **God’s description**! And if there were believers **then** that were dull of hearing...and slow to learn and grow...and couldn’t get past the basics...and were unskilled in their use of God’s Word, it certainly could apply to us today. Are you characterized by one or more of these traits? If so, you need to press on—unto maturity!

### Thirdly, let's notice: **3. The Plan to Press on to Maturity**

So how were the readers to "press on" to maturity? How were they to "grow up?"

First, they were to... A. Leave the principles of the doctrines of Christ

We see that in Hebrews 6:1 "Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrines of Christ..."

At first glance, that seems like a **bad thing** to do, doesn't it? Why would we **leave anything** regarding the doctrines of Christ?

As you have probably already guessed, "leave" here does not mean **forsake** or turn our back on.

**David Allen** in his commentary on Hebrews wrote: "To 'leave' connotes the idea of to leaving something behind in order to pass on to something else.... The meaning here is **not that** of abandoning the basic teachings of Christianity, but rather the necessity of recognizing the **foundational character** of these teachings and thus the impropriety of going over the same ground. The readers are exhorted to **move on** to another level..." (The New American Commentary, Hebrews, pg 339).

Back to an illustration I gave earlier about reading. Knowing the alphabet is one of the elementary teachings of learning how to read. If **Graham** sung the A, B, C "song" to me—and annunciated each letter—that would be great. If **Gracelyn** did it, I would be thoroughly amazed. But if Ashlynn or Christopher or Loren sang the A, B, C "song" to me, I would **not be** impressed! Why? Because they should be well past that!

And you will be happy to know that they are 😊!

The second part of the plan to press on to maturity is a thing **not to do**. It is found in the middle of Heb 6:1...

#### B. Not laying again the foundation

"...not laying again the foundation" is the negative way of saying "leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ..." The Greek word that it comes from was used **literally** for a physical foundation of a building, but was also used metaphorically as "the beginnings, the first principles, of an institution or system of truth."

Just like we need to move past **knowing the alphabet** and get on to reading, we need to start **building on the foundation**—not add another foundation to the one we already have!

### **4. The principles they were to leave**

So what is the "foundation" that they were not to lay again—and the "principles of the doctrines of Christ" that they were to "move on" from?

--There are two listed in verse 1—"repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God"

--And four listed in verse 2—"Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment."

Most commentators lump them into 3 groups of pairs. Allen suggests the **first** pair focuses on the past, the **second** pair on the present, and the **third** pair on the future without really explaining why he makes that suggestion.

I take a slightly different approach. The first pair—"repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God" **led** to their salvation. The second pair "Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands" is what they **left behind** because of their salvation. And the third pair—"the resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment" is what they have to **look forward to** based on their salvation.

Before I make a brief comment on each of these pairs, I want to give a couple of disclaimers.

Disclaimer #1) It is difficult for us to know **exactly** what the author intended by some of these things. In other words, commentators are not in 100% agreement regarding the meanings of some of these phrases—especially "the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands."

Disclaimer #2) The original recipients **knew exactly what the author meant** by all 6 things they were instructed to "leave behind" and the foundation they were not to "lay again." There was no confusion whatsoever—**to them**—as to what God through the writer was asking them to do!

### A. Repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God

Why do I suggest this is the teaching that *led* to their salvation? Because we need to repent from believing that works will save us—and have faith in what Christ did for us on the cross! In Acts 20, Paul reminded the elders of Ephesus that that was the message he preached. **Acts 20:21** “Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, **repentance** toward God, and **faith** toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”

### B. Doctrines of baptisms and of laying on of hands

Of the 3 pairs, commentators disagree the most as to what these two phrases mean. Do **baptisms**—plural—refer to baptisms *of the NT* like John’s baptism, and the Christian baptism, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit? Or—since 2 of the 3 other instances where this word is used points to **ceremonial washings**—does this refer more to the **OT ritual washings**?

What about the “**laying on of hands**”? Does that refer to the **NT custom** of laying hands on someone as **symbolic to imparting on them a spiritual gift**—or does it refer to the **OT sacrificial system** where they “laid hands on” the animal that was about to be slain for their sins and thus “transferred” their guilt to the animal?

I lean toward it referring to OT teachings under the law for this reason—Jews that became Christians had a hard time **leaving the Mosaic Law behind!** That’s why the book of Galatians was written—and much of the book of Hebrews compares how Christ is far superior to the Mosaic Law and sacrificial system.

### **iii. Of the resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment**

Why do I suggest that this pair refers to that which they have to look forward to **because of their salvation**? Because a child of God who is knowledgeable about **the resurrection** from the Word of God knows it will be a wonderful, **glorious day!** Why? John says, “we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

I love how Paul puts it in his first letter to the Corinthians. **I Cor 13:12** “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”

Isn’t that a wonderful thought? We **see Christ** in God’s Word as through a glass, darkly. We have this picture in our mind—but our faith is not yet sight. But “What a day that will be, when my Jesus I shall see!”

I’ve given you a fair amount of doctrine—of information and teaching—this morning, so what I want to do now is try to tie it all together by looking at ... **5. Principles for Pressing on to Maturity**

1) God expects you to grow!

--They should have been teachers by now—but weren’t (Heb 5:12a)

--They should have been eating solid food by now—but weren’t (Heb 5:12b)

--They should have been skillful in the Word of God—but weren’t (Heb 5:13)

--They should have been past the basics—and on to more difficult things—but weren’t (Heb 6:1)

And that’s just from this passage! We also have “Be ye holy, for I am holy” (I Pet 1:16) ... and “desire the sincere milk of the word that ye may grow thereby” (I Pet 2:2) and “grow in grace” (II Pet 3:18) ...

2) God has given us the process for growth! Let’s turn to II Cor 3:18. In some ways, this verse is difficult to understand and explain. In some ways, though, it is very simple.

As we behold Christ—as we look at Him through His Word—God changes us! But do we go to His Word to hear Him and to see Him? A guy named Wagstaff wrote this about the Bible: “Let us regard the Bible, not merely as a **fruitful field** where we can quickly thrust in the sickle and reap upon the surface, but also as a **rich mine**, in whose deep recesses lie hidden many a costly gem, which our labour and our study, under the Divine blessing, may bring to the light.” (Bible Hub, Sermon on Heb 6:1)

Not only do we need to be beholding Christ in God’s Word, we also need to obey what God tells us in His Word!

Lastly, 3) God grows you at His pace, but you must do your part! The verb tense in the Greek indicates that God is the One who carries us along to maturity. He will always do His part—but we must do ours! What did Jesus promise to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness? They would be filled (Mt 5:6)!

So what would God have us do in light of His word?

1. Go on to maturity, right? But you can't grow from a baby Christian to a mature Christian if you are not a Christian! So becoming a child of God by repenting of trying to save yourself and putting your faith and trust in what Jesus did on the cross is always the first thing God wants you to do if you have never done that.

2. What about those of us who are saved? What does God want us to do?

He wants us to grow, doesn't He? Are you growing? If not, why not?

Be honest about your attitude toward His Word. Is God's Word something you can "take or leave"—or is it something you value and treasure and read and study?