



Talmid תלמיד a Hebrew word that means “a true disciple who desires to be what the Rabbi Jesus is.”

Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did. 1 John 2:6 (NIV)

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STUDY TO SHEW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDETH NOT TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY
DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH. 2 TIMOTHY 2:15



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The Mystery of Prayer

Jesus and the Mystery of Prayer

As we enter into this subject I need you to listen to the following testimony: On the morning of September 11, 2001, Stanley Praitnath was riding in the elevator of the south tower of the World Trade Center when American Airlines Flight 11 struck the north tower. Being in the elevator, he had not heard the explosion from the north tower. But when Stanley walked into his office on the 81st floor (he was an assistant vice president at Fuji Bank), he saw a red-orange

flame coming from the north tower.

With others, he went back down the elevator. But in the lobby loudspeakers assured everyone that their building was secure; they could return to their offices. With others, Stanley got back on the elevator.

He was back at his desk, on the phone, when a giant airplane caught his eye out the window. He heard its engines rev as it grew bigger and bigger, coming head-on. He dove under his desk—on top of which he always kept a Bible—and he said a prayer: “Lord, I can’t do this. You take over.”

The nose of United Airlines Flight 175 crashed into Stanley’s very floor; a “wing,” he said, “sliced right through the office.” There was a deafening explosion (Stanley would suffer temporary hearing loss), a ball of flame, and then darkness. Stanley was the only one left on the 81st floor. In fact, upon impact everyone on floors 78–82 had been swept away. Stanley at first thought they had heartlessly left him behind, before he realized later what had happened. The ceiling was caved in, part of the floor collapsed, partitions and walls flattened, and every piece of furniture and computers destroyed. Everything except for Stanley’s desk, under which he huddled, somehow alive.

The documentary that told Stanley’s story (*Miracles in Our Midst*) pointed out that with the epicenter of the crash less than 50 yards from Stanley’s desk, and

thousands of gallons of jet fuel igniting, “the banker’s chances of survival should be nonexistent. Yet when the cataclysmic roar of the crash subsided, Stanley Praimnath is very much alive.”

Stanley, after more answers to prayer, made it out of the building. He said, “... there is a God, and He hears and intervenes.”

Stanley Praimnath credited his miraculous escape to a prayer.

THE MYSTERY OF PRAYER

As a former mediocre Roman Catholic who had an experience with God through a simple, heart-felt prayer, I understandably have been fascinated by prayer ever since. In that moment 30 years ago, I became aware, quite suddenly and surprisingly, of the supernatural power of prayer.

In my years as a pastor, I’ve had the privilege of seeing many prayers get answered—prayers of individuals, prayers by congregations, and a fair number of my own prayers.

Prayer is exciting.
It is also mysterious.

First of all, sometimes prayers don’t get answered. For example, I am sure that many other prayers on 9/11 went unanswered, even as Stanley Praimnath was escaping. Why is it that some prayers don’t get answered?

Second, even though I know prayer is the Great Invitation—to talk to Almighty God, King of the Universe—sometimes I’m not motivated to do it. Why is that?

Third, there are many different approaches to prayer, so much so that it can be confusing. For example, in an ad in my local paper, a New Age group said the thing to do is find a quiet place and sing the sound HU (pronounced “hue”) as a song of love. For some, the time of day and the posture of prayer are important. We’re all familiar with television images of devout Muslims kneeling in prayer together. For others, the place is important. We’re all familiar

with television images of devout Jews who practice prayer at the “Wailing Wall.” In the religion I grew up in, the number of prayers was important. To be forgiven for our sins, we were instructed to pray specific memorized prayers a certain number of times.

And there are various other approaches to prayer—from lighting candles, to wearing certain articles of clothing, to meditation. I even came across a uniquely modern approach to prayer: a website that offered to send your prayers via radio wave transmitter to the place in the universe where the Big Bang may have occurred, and which was, therefore—according to the website—“the last known location of GOD.” Which of these approaches is right?

WHO HAS THE ANSWERS?

Who should we listen to when it comes to the mystery of prayer?

My choice is Jesus Christ. According to the pages of the New Testament, Jesus had insight into prayer that no one else has ever had. In the Gospel of John, he prayed, “*So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me.” “I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me.”* ([John 11:41–42 NASB](#), emphasis added).

Jesus said that he knew God always heard his prayers, which was another way of saying that God always answered his prayers. Who else could make such a claim? Jesus did—and then backed it up by raising Lazarus from the dead in response to his prayer! “**When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth.” The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”** ([John 11:43-44 \(NASB\)](#))

In the next chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus prayed spontaneously, “*Father, glorify your name!*” The Bible says that a voice came from heaven: “*I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.*” God was carrying on an *out loud* conversation with Jesus from heaven. (The people were so shocked that some said that the voice from heaven must have been thunder.) It is im-

pressive enough that God would carry on an out loud conversation with Jesus from heaven, but it is perhaps even more impressive that this did not impress Jesus! He said to the bystanders, *“This voice has not come for My sake, but for your sakes.”* Prayer was so real to him, silent or otherwise, that he did not need to hear the sound of God’s audible voice to make it more real ([John 12:28–30 \(NASB\)](#)).

Not to mention the fact that he walked on water, calmed storms, and healed all kinds of sicknesses and disabilities—all of which, he said, came from his prayer relationship with the Heavenly Father: *“I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does”* ([John 5:19 \(NASB\)](#)). If Jesus *saw* what the Father was doing, that means he was in communication with him. Communication with God is another name for prayer.

The same is true of his teaching, which has changed the world—he said he got it from his prayer relationship with the Father: *“So Jesus answered them and said, “My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me”* ([John 7:16 \(NASB\)](#)).

Who should we listen to when it comes to the mystery of prayer? I think the answer is Jesus Christ.

THE MODEL PRAYER

The good news is, Jesus taught us what he knew! He taught about prayer in many places in the Bible, but especially in the Lord’s Prayer—or, as it is often called, the Model Prayer.

[Matthew 6:9-13 \(NASB\)](#)

⁹ **“Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.**

¹⁰ **‘Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.**

¹¹ **‘Give us this day our daily bread.**

¹² **‘And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.**

¹³ **‘And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]”**

I prefer “Model Prayer” to “Lord’s Prayer” as a

name for this prayer **for two reasons**. **First**, this prayer contains a line that Jesus himself could never have prayed: *“Forgive us our debts”* ([v.12](#)). The Bible is clear that Jesus was sinless ([1 Peter 2:22](#); [Hebrews 4:15](#)), so he could never have personally prayed this prayer.

[1 Peter 2:22 \(NASB\)](#)

²² **“WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH.”**

[Hebrews 4:15 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁵ **“For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.”**

Second, this prayer was meant to be just that: a *model* for prayer. Sometimes Christians pray this prayer word for word. There is nothing wrong with that, especially in group situations, like in church. But if the repetition of this prayer becomes an empty ritual, just words we repeat over and over because we think they will earn us favor with God, then we are violating Jesus’ own words in his introduction to the Model Prayer: *“And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words”* ([Matthew 6:7 \(NASB\)](#)). Jesus gave this prayer to us as a model—to show us the kinds of things we should pray about, and how we should pray about them.

THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING THE MODEL PRAYER

I was on my way to give a member of our church a ride to prayer meeting. As I drove, I was thinking about [verse 10](#) of the Model Prayer: *“your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”* (A practice of mine, since early in my Christian life, has been to pick a verse of Scripture, run it through my mind and heart, and ask the Lord, “What does this verse mean to me? How does it change my life?” This is meditating on the Scriptures.) As I thought about this verse, it dawned on me: Jesus would not have told me to pray a prayer that didn’t work. Therefore, when I ask for his kingdom to come, it must come in some form or fashion.

Well, that was an exciting thought! I couldn’t wait to get back to the prayer meeting and start praying for his *kingdom to come* in some areas!

I felt like that thought had come from the Lord himself, and I realized that it must be true for every line of the Model Prayer. *If Jesus told us to pray it, it must be because it will work.* As I began to look at the Model Prayer with this truth in mind, I began to see it in a whole new light: as the basis—or springboard—for a *real*, exciting relationship with God.

Understanding that Jesus would not have told us to pray a prayer that didn't work is the key to understanding the Model Prayer. It means that everything he told us to pray in the Model Prayer will bring results: it will result in real communication with God, real answers—a real relationship.

In the coming teachings, we'll look line by line at the Model Prayer. We'll see how each line of the prayer was meant to bring about *answered* prayer, and a personal experience with God.

But we'll start with the verses that introduce the prayer, because they contain one of the most exciting promises in Scripture.

CORAM DEO (Before the face of God)

Integrity, *Coram Deo*

(Continuation from last edition)

A NEW LIFE

When you were brought into God's kingdom, you were totally transformed. You became **“a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come”** ([2 Corinthians 5:17 \(NASB\)](#)). You **didn't just receive** something new—you **became someone new**. Paul said, **“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me”** ([Galatians 2:20 \(NASB\)](#)).

This new nature is not added to the old nature but replaces it—an exchange occurs. The transformed person is completely new. In contrast to the former love of evil, the new self—the deepest, truest part of a Christian—now loves the law of God, longs to fulfill its righteous demands, hates sin, and longs for deliverance from the unredeemed flesh—

where sin still resides. Sin no longer controls you as it once did, but it still entices you to obey it instead of the Lord.

Knowing full well the temptation that sin is, Paul addressed the Ephesian Christians regarding their new nature. By contrasting the lifestyle of the wicked unbeliever with that of the spiritual Christian, he sought to demonstrate that a changed nature demands changed behavior. In [Ephesians 4:17-19 \(NASB\)](#) Paul describes the former wicked lifestyle we all followed: **“So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.”** The word “Gentiles” represents all ungodly, unregenerate, pagan people. Like the church in our day, the churches at Ephesus and in almost every non-Palestinian area in New Testament times were surrounded by rank paganism and its attendant immorality.

Pastoral in Nature

Your Preaching Is Unique

The experiences we preachers go through are not accidents; they are appointments.

—WARREN W. WIERSBE

It doesn't make sense!” said my pastor friend.

We were lingering over lunch and discussing the Bible conference I was conducting in his church. I'd just commented that the church was having a strong influence on the students and staff of the nearby university.

“What doesn't make sense?” I asked.

“Where you and I are serving,” he replied.

“You're going to have to explain.”

“Look, I'm really a country preacher with a minimum of academic training, yet I'm ministering to a university crowd. You write commentaries, and you read more books in a month than I do in a year, yet your congregation is primarily blue-collar and nonprofessional.

It doesn't make sense."

The subject then changed, but I have pondered his observation many times in the intervening years. I've concluded it's a good thing God didn't put me on his "Pastor Placement Committee" because I would have really messed things up. I never would have sent rustic Amos to the affluent court of the king; I'd have given him a quiet country church somewhere. And I'd never have commissioned Saul of Tarsus, that "Hebrew of the Hebrews," to be a missionary to the Gentiles; I'd have put him in charge of Jewish evangelism in Jerusalem.

Why is it, then, that so many preachers do not enjoy preaching? Why do some busy themselves in minor matters when they should be studying and meditating? Why do others creep out of the pulpit after delivering their sermon, overwhelmed with a sense of failure and guilt?

The difference a witness makes

Without pausing to take a poll, I think I can suggest an answer: they are preaching *in spite of themselves* instead of preaching *because of themselves*. They either leave themselves out of their preaching or fight themselves during their preparation and delivery; this leaves them without energy or enthusiasm for the task. Instead of thanking God for what they do have, they complain about what they don't have; and this leaves them in no condition to herald the Word of God.

A *Christianity Today*/Gallup Poll some years ago showed that ministers believe preaching is the number one priority of their ministries, but it's also the one thing they feel least capable of doing well. What causes this insecure attitude toward preaching?

For one thing, we've forgotten what preaching really is. Phillips Brooks said it best: Preaching is the communicating of divine truth through human personality. The divine truth never changes; the human personality constantly changes—and this is what makes the message new and unique.

No two preachers can preach the same message because no two preachers are the same. In fact, no *one* preacher can preach the same message twice if

he is living and growing at all. The human personality is a vital part of the preaching ministry.

Recently I made an intensive study of all the Greek verbs used in the New Testament to describe the communicating of the Word of God. The three most important words are *euangelizomai*, "to tell the good news"; *kerusso*, "to proclaim like a herald"; and *martureo*, "to bear witness." All three are important in our pulpit ministry.

We're telling the good news with the authority of a royal herald, but the message is a part of our lives. Unlike the herald, who only shouted what was given to him, we're sharing what is personal and real to us. The messenger is a part of the message because the messenger is a witness.

God prepares the person who prepares the message. Martin Luther said that prayer, meditation, and temptation made a preacher. Prayer and meditation will give you a sermon, but only temptation—the daily experience of life—can transform that sermon into a message. It's the difference between the recipe and the meal.

I had an experience at a denominational conference that brought this truth home to me. During the session at which I was to speak, a very capable ladies' trio sang. It was an up-tempo number, the message of which did not quite fit my theme; but, of course, they had no way of knowing exactly what I would preach about. I was glad my message did not immediately follow their number because I didn't feel the congregation was prepared.

Just before I spoke, a pastor in a wheelchair rolled to the center of the platform and gave a brief testimony about his ministry. Then he sang, to very simple accompaniment, "No One Ever Cared for Me Like Jesus." The effect was overwhelming. The man was not singing a song; he was ministering a word from God. But he had paid a price to minister. In suffering, he became a part of the message.

The experiences we preachers go through are not accidents; they are appointments. They do not interrupt our studies; they are an essential part of our studies. Our personalities, our physical equipment, and even our handicaps are all part of the kind of ministry God wants us to have. He wants us to be witnesses as well as heralds.

The apostles knew this: **“For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard”** ([Acts 4:20 NIV](#)). This was a part of Paul’s commission: **“You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard”** ([Acts 22:15 NIV](#)). Instead of minimizing or condemning what we are, we must use what we are to bear witness to Christ. It is this that makes the message *our* message and not the echo of another’s.

The myth of “The Great Sermon”

It’s easy to imitate these days. Not only do we have books of sermons, but we have radio and television ministries and cassettes by the thousands. One man models himself after Charles Spurgeon, another after A. W. Tozer; and both congregations suffer.

Alexander Whyte of Edinburgh had an assistant who took the second service for the aging pastor. Whyte was a surgical preacher who ruthlessly dealt with human sin and then faithfully proclaimed God’s saving grace. But his assistant was a man of different temperament who tried to move the gospel message out of the operating room into the banquet hall.

During one period of his ministry, however, the assistant tried Whyte’s approach, without Whyte’s success. The experiment stopped when Whyte said to him, “Preach your own message.” That counsel is needed today.

I am alarmed when I hear seminary students and younger pastors say, “My calling is to preach, not to pastor.” I am alarmed because I know it’s difficult to preach to people whom you do not know.

As an itinerant Bible teacher, I know what it’s like to “hit a place and quit a place,” and I can assure you it is not easy. After thirty years of ministry, which included pastoring three churches, I’ve concluded it is much easier to preach to your own congregation week after week. You get to know them, and they get to know you. You’re not a visiting Christian celebrity, but a part of the family. It is this identification with the people that gives power and relevance to your preaching.

Every profession has its occupational hazards, and in the ministry it is the passion to preach “great sermons.” **Fant and Pinson**, in *20 Centuries of Great Preaching*, came to the startling conclusion that “great preaching is relevant preaching.” By “relevant,” they mean preaching that meets the needs of the people in their times, preaching that shows the preacher cares and wants to help.

If this be true, then there are thousands of “great sermons” preached each Lord’s Day, preached by those whose names will never be printed in homiletics books, but are written in the loving hearts of their people. Listen again to Phillips Brooks:

The notion of a great sermon, either constantly or occasionally haunting the preacher, is fatal. It hampers the freedom of utterance. Many a true and helpful word which your people need, and which you ought to say to them, will seem unworthy of the dignity of your great discourse. Never tolerate any idea of the dignity of a sermon which will keep you from saying anything in it which you ought to say, or which your people ought to hear.

Preaching Christ, not myself

Let me add another reason for insecure feelings about our preaching. In our desire to be humble servants of God, we have a tendency to suppress our personalities lest we should preach ourselves and not Christ.

While it is good to heed Paul’s warning (**“For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake”**—[2 Cor. 4:5 NIV](#)), we must not misinterpret it and thereby attempt the impossible. Paul’s personality and even some of his personal experiences are written into the warp and woof of his epistles; yet Jesus Christ is glorified from start to finish.

During the past twenty years, I have been immersed in studying the lives of famous preachers of the past. Most of these ministered during the Victorian era in Great Britain, a time when the pulpits were filled with superstars. If there’s one thing I learned from these men, it is this: God has his own ways of training and preparing his servants, but he wants all of them to be themselves. God has put variety into the universe, and he has

put variety into the church.

If your personality doesn't shine through your preaching, you're only a robot. You could be replaced by a cassette player and perhaps nobody would know the difference.

Do not confuse the art and the science of preaching. Homiletics is the science of preaching, and it has basic laws and principles that every preacher ought to study and practice. Once you've learned how to obey these principles, then you can adapt them, modify them, and tailor them to your own personality.

In my conference ministry, I often share the platform with gifted speakers whose preaching leaves me saying to myself, *What's the use? I'll never learn how to preach like that!*

Then the Lord has to remind me he never called me "to preach like that." He called me to preach the way I preach!

The science of preaching is one thing; the art of preaching—style, delivery, approach, and all those other almost indefinable ingredients that make up one's personality—is something else. One preacher uses humor and hits the target; another attempts it and shoots himself.

The essence of what I am saying is this: You must know yourself, accept yourself, be yourself, and develop yourself—your best self—if preaching is to be most effective.

Never imitate another preacher, but learn from him everything you can. Never complain about yourself or your circumstances, but find out why God made things that way and use what he has given you in a positive way. What you think are obstacles may turn out to be opportunities. Stay long enough in one church to discover who you are, what kind of ministry God has given you, and how he plans to train you for ministries yet to come. After all, he is always preparing us for what he already has prepared for us—if we let him.

Accepting what we're not

I learned very early in my ministry that I was not an evangelist. Although I've seen people come to Christ through my ministry, I've always felt I was a failure when it came to evangelism.

One of the few benefits of growing older is a better perspective. Now I'm learning that my teaching and writing ministries have enabled others to lead people to Christ, so my labors have not been in vain. But I've had my hours of discouragement and the feeling of failure.

God gives us the spiritual gifts he wants us to have; he puts us in the places he wants us to serve; and he gives the blessings he wants us to enjoy.

I am convinced of this, but this conviction is not an excuse for laziness or for barrenness of ministry. Knowing I am God's man in God's place of ministry has encouraged me to study harder and do my best work. When the harvests were lean, the assurance that God put me there helped to keep me going. When the battles raged and the storms blew, my secure refuge was "God put me here, and I will stay here until he tells me to go."

How often I've remembered V. Raymond Edman's counsel: "It is always too soon to quit!"

It has been my experience that the young preacher in his first church and the middle-aged preacher (in perhaps his third or fourth church) are the most susceptible to discouragement. This is not difficult to understand.

The young seminarian marches bravely into his first church with high ideals, only to face the steamroller of reality and the furnace of criticism. He waves his banners bravely for a year or so, then takes them down quietly and makes plans to move.

The middle-aged minister has seen his ideals attacked many times, but now he realizes that time is short and he might not attain to the top thirty of David's mighty men.

God help the preacher who abandons his ideals! But, at the same time, God pity the preacher who is so idealistic he fails to be realistic.

A realist is an idealist who has gone through the fire

and been purified. A skeptic is an idealist who has gone through the fire and been burned. There is a difference.

Self-evaluation is a difficult and dangerous thing. Sometimes we're so close to our ministry we fail to see it. One of my students once asked me, "Why can't I see any spiritual growth in my life? Everybody else tells me they can see it!" I reminded him that at Pentecost no man could see the flame over his own head, but he could see what was burning over his brother's head.

A word from the Scottish preacher George Morrison has buoyed me up in many a storm: "Men who do their best always do more though they be haunted by the sense of failure. Be good and true; be patient; be undaunted. Leave your usefulness for God to estimate. He will see to it that you do not live in vain."

Be realistic as you assess your work. Avoid comparisons. I read enough religious publications and hear enough conversations to know that such comparisons are the chief indoor sport of preachers, but I try not to take them too seriously. **"When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise" (2 Cor. 10:12 NIV).**

Although we are in conflict against those who preach a false gospel, we are not in competition with any who preach the true gospel. We are only in competition with ourselves. By the grace of God, we ought to be better preachers and pastors today than we were a year ago.

If we are to be better pastors and preachers, we must be better persons; and this means discipline and hard work. The "giants" I've lived with these many years were all hard workers. Campbell Morgan was in his study at six o'clock in the morning. His successor, John Henry Jowett, was also up early and into the books. "Enter your study at an appointed hour," Jowett said in his lectures to the Yale divinity students in 1911-12, "and let that hour be as early as the earliest of your businessmen goes to his warehouse or his office." Spurgeon worked hard and had to take winter holidays to regain his strength.

Obviously, we gain nothing by imperiling our

health, but we lose much by pampering ourselves, and that is the greater danger.

The gift is sufficient

If God has called you, then he has given you what you need to do the job. You may not have all that others have, or all you wish you had, but you have what God wants you to have. Accept it, be faithful to use it, and in due time God will give you more.

Give yourself time to discover and develop your gifts. Accept nothing as a handicap. Turn it over to God and let him make a useful tool out of it. After all, that's what he did with Paul's thorn in the flesh.

Often I receive letters and telephone calls from anxious chairmen of pulpit committees, all of whom want me to suggest a pastor for their churches. "What kind of pastor do you need right now?" I always ask.

"Oh, a man who is about forty years old, a good preacher, a love for people."

If I don't interrupt them, they usually go on to describe a combination of Billy Graham, Charles Spurgeon, Jonathan Edwards, Mother Teresa, and the Lone Ranger.

"Forgive me," I usually say when they take a breath, "but that's not what I had in mind. What kind of ministry does your church need just now—evangelism, missions, administration, teaching, or what? After all, very few people can do everything."

The long silence that follows tells me the chairman and the committee have not really studied their church to determine its present and future needs. How, then, can they ever hope to find the right pastor to meet those needs?

Preaching is not what we do; it's what we are. When God wants to make a preacher, he has to make the person, because the work we do cannot be isolated from the life we live. God prepares the person for the work and the work for the person, and if we permit him, he brings them together in his providence.

God knows us better than we know ourselves. He'd never put us into a ministry where he could not build us and use us.





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Hebrews 6 Overview – Part 1

Author's Note: The overview study for each chapter of Hebrews is intended to simply provide a basic understanding of some of the various key elements of each chapter and is not written as an in-depth theological treatise. However, because of the critical importance of properly understanding Hebrews 6, additional time will be given to the overview of this chapter.

Continuing with the overview study of [Hebrews 6](#), we want to look at some of the key verbs that are used in this chapter. The first key verb occurs in [Hebrews 6:1](#) – “let us **go on**”. Clearly this is the thrust of what the author is trying to do – to get his readers to “**go on**”, to “**press on**” (NASB) into something. So, the question that has to be asked is “**Go on** into what”? In v1, he calls it “**perfection**”, but the better word would probably be “**maturity**” (NIV, NASB, ESV). Obviously this all comes from [Hebrews 5:11-14](#) and what he called going from “**milk**” to “**solid food**”, from immaturity to maturity, and from the “**elementary principles of Christ**” as outlined in [Hebrews 6:1-2](#) to those principles of the Christian life that lead the believer into a much deeper knowledge and experience of God’s

wisdom and outworking in their life. That is what the author is driving towards as he begins [Hebrews 6](#).

So, the clear message of [Hebrews 6](#) is that of going on into spiritual maturity, and in order to do that the believer **must** feed on “**solid food**”. Now, without over-repeating the issue that has constantly been before us, a non-believer cannot go into spiritual maturity. Their issue is never one of growing in the Christian life simply because they have never been saved. An unbeliever is never involved in sanctification. To further reinforce the author’s direction, it must be understood that he has not mentioned one word regarding the issue of salvation – not one word. What he has clearly been addressing for these Hebrew “**brethren**” ([Hebrews 3:1,12](#)) has been issues of their perseverance, issues of their faithfulness, and issues of their commitment to the things of God. In [Hebrews 2:1-3](#) they were failing to give “**earnest heed**” to what they had heard and they had been guilty of spiritual “**neglect**” of “**so great a salvation**”. I.e., someone cannot neglect a salvation that they do not have. A person has to be a Christian to neglect the Christian life. In [Hebrews 3:1-6](#) he speaks to the “**brethren**” about being faithful. It would not even make sense to be encouraging unbelievers to be faithful. For them the issue would not be one of faithfulness, but that of salvation and faith. The clear implication is that it is quite possible for a believer to be unfaithful. In [Hebrews 3:7-8, 15](#), he warns them about hardening their hearts to what they have heard. In [Hebrews 3:12](#) he indicates that they can have “**an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.**” Once again, an unbeliever cannot depart from God simply because they have no relationship with Him whatsoever. In [Hebrews 3:13](#) he indicates that they can “**be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin**”. In [Hebrews 3:14](#) he encourages them to hold fast to their confidence. In [Hebrews 4](#) he is constantly encouraging them to enter into God’s rest. And then in [Hebrews 5:11](#), he states that unfortunately they have become “**dull of hearing**”.

Well, no wonder they have become “**dull of hearing**”! They have failed to give earnest heed to their salvation, have neglected their salvation, have demonstrated attributes of not being faithful, have hardened their hearts to the things of God, have demonstrated an evil heart of unbelief in departing from God, have been hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, and have failed to enter into God rest. No wonder they have become “**dull of**

hearing” and need to leave the milk and elementary things of Christ and go on into maturity. So, the simple point of all of this that precedes [Hebrews 6](#), and especially [Hebrews 6:4-8](#) is that the encouragement in this chapter is for these believers to go on into maturity and to press on into what is spiritually valuable and profitable for their Christian life. Not one single word has been addressed to an unbeliever. Everything is related to **personal spiritual growth**, and that can only happen in someone who is **saved**. A lost person **CANNOT** experience spiritual growth.

Notice in [Hebrews 6:1](#) that the author says that these believers need to “leave” and to “go on”. Then, in [Hebrews 6:3](#), he makes a very important statement and says “**this we will do if God permits**”. Now, once again please do not lose sight of the fact that it is possible (and it is not known when this may occur in a believer’s life) for a believer to reach a point of no return in their spiritual life. It is like the husband who has cheated on his wife so much that it is impossible for the marriage to ever be restored. In the same way, a believer can ignore, neglect, be unfaithful, and depart from that which is godly and be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin in their life. THAT IS THE WHOLE PURPOSE OF WHAT THE AUTHOR IS COMMUNICATING! However, for whatever reason unknown to us, the author clearly believes by this statement in [Hebrews 6:3](#) that these believers will “go on to perfection”, or “maturity”. That is what the phrase “we will do” or “let us do” is referring back to. So, the author’s clear intent is to take his readers into a deeper discussion related to their spiritual growth and maturity, and in order to do that, beginning in [Hebrews 6:13](#) through [Hebrews 10:25](#) the author begins to talk about the high priestly ministry of Christ on their behalf. He cannot take them into anything any deeper than what he will do in these next five chapters. The whole purpose of this letter is to cause the believer, to motivate the believer, to affect in the believer this deep, deep hunger for Christ. It is the believer’s relationship with Christ that makes them mature and useful. It is their relationship with Christ that gives them the spiritual hunger and desire to “go on” into the deeper things of Christ.

No believer can grow and mature without having an abiding and meaningful relationship with Christ. That is exactly why the idea of someone just “coming to church” is virtually meaningless if they do not have an enduring and steadfast personal intimacy with the person of Christ. Just as a practical example of this, there are so many people that are legally married, but they have no intimacy whatsoever in their marriage relationship. In a sense, their marriage died on the vine many years ago. They are just going through the motions of marriage, but for the most part are not even in love with each other anymore. What a tragedy – and why? It is because they neglected their personal relationship with each other and became pre-occupied and absorbed in “other things”. They became too busy for one another. In each wedding ceremony that I perform I always tell the couple that one of the biggest hindrances to intimacy in a marriage is a busy schedule. It happens all of the time, and couples just begin to drift further and further away from each other in an intimate way, and for many of them, once the children leave home and it is just the two of them left, they do not know how to relate to each other and wind up getting divorced.

Once again, the simple truth is that believers cannot grow and mature spiritually without having and maintaining an intimate and personal relationship with Christ - and that is exactly where the author is about to lead his readers. However, before he can do that he has to convince them that something extremely vital is missing in their life. He has to spiritually wake them up. He has to almost spiritually shock them into seeing where they really are in their Christian life so that they may change the direction of their life. If they do not change their spiritual direction and focus, then the bottom line will most likely be that of [Hebrews 10:29](#),

²⁹Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

That is exactly where a believer’s continued spiritual neglect will lead – to not taking Christ seriously, to not taking their salvation seriously, and to not taking the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit in their life seriously. Where is that point in a person’s life? No one knows, but we should never want to find out!

Now, the ongoing sequence to this verse is found in [Hebrews 10:30](#) where the author states that “**The Lord will judge His people**”. There is a limit as to how long and to what degree that a believer can simply ignore and neglect the things of God. Obviously there is some kind of spiritual consequence and personal impact associated with the issue of neglect. Someone is surely going to ask what that consequence is, and the answer is still the same – no one knows. However, if knowing all of that causes the neglectful believer to re-evaluate their true spiritual condition and then to re-focus the spiritual direction of their life, then the warning has served its purpose. In essence, that is exactly what the warning is designed to accomplish. The key for the committed believer is simply not being neglectful or becoming dull of hearing so that they never have to find out what the consequences may be. The writer addresses some of these issues more in [Hebrews 12:5-11](#) where he talks about God’s chastening on the believer’s life. The only attribute that the writer identifies concerning that chastening is that it will be “**painful**”. It is a Greek word that is often translated as sorrow, heaviness, or something grievous. Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words says that it signifies “pain of body or mind”. In [John 16:21](#) it is translated as “**pain**” in relation to childbirth. So, it is not what could be considered a fairly pleasant term for the believer to experience.

So, when the author arrives at [Hebrews 6:4-8](#), it should be clear by this point that he has not changed his audience or his subject matter and is still addressing immature believers who are not going on into maturity in their Christian life. He has not gone from clearly talking to believers about their sanctification to suddenly talking to unbelievers about their salvation. His pastoral concern for these immature believers who are not progressing should be more than obvious by this time. However, he is being more than honest with his audience by clearly stating that they have some significant issues to overcome simply because they have been “**enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come**”. Spiritual knowledge always creates spiritual responsibility – always. The more that someone knows, the more accountable they become,

and the more that God has enlightened a believer, the more responsible they become to that light. Now, without over-repeating the obvious, if a believer is genuinely and sincerely following Christ and enjoying a meaningful and intimate relationship with Him, then these verses should not frighten them in any way, but rather give them great assurance and comfort. It would be no different than the person who has slowed down to the 25mph speed limit on the sharp curve on the mountain parkway. They should have great confidence that they will not have a wreck. The warning sign served its purpose, and rather than frightening them, it actually encouraged them – and that is exactly what each of these warnings should do for the committed believer.

So, what is the real issue that the author is addressing in [Hebrews 6:4-8](#)? Well, it is **not** the issue of salvation, but is identified in [Hebrews 6:7-8](#) as not bearing good and “**useful**” fruit, but bearing what the writer calls “**thorns and briers**” in v8. In v7 the one who bears useful fruit finds God’s blessing on their life and in v8 the one who does not bear useful fruit finds themselves “**near to being cursed**”. What is that curse? No one knows. What is known is that the Greek word for “**being cursed**” is “*katara*”. The prefix “*kata*” means down and is used to intensify the meaning of a word. The normal word for cursing or a curse is “*ara*”, but when the prefix is added to make it a compound word, the meaning becomes intensive. Now, whatever that means in a practical spiritual sense is not known, but whatever it is cannot be considered pleasant. The Old Testament is full and replete with example after example of God’s chastening of His “**rebellious people**”. [Isaiah 65:2](#), for instance, says,

²I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, according to their own thoughts.

In fact [Isaiah 65:2-12](#) speaks to this whole issue and concludes in v12 with these words,

¹²...When I spoke, you did not hear, but did evil before My eyes, and chose that in which I do not delight.”

So, the issue that the author defines in [Hebrews 6:7-8](#) is simply that if a believer continues to bear “**thorns and briers**”, they cannot “**go on to perfection**”, or maturity. That should be obvious, so please do not lose sight of

what the author is trying to do. He wants his readers to “**go on into maturity**”. That is his goal, but he clearly understands that a believer can never have a positive outcome if they willingly and knowingly continue to keep ignoring Christ. A Christian can never obtain what is right by continually doing what is wrong, and at some point in their life they will reach a place where it is “**impossible....to renew them again to repentance**” (v4 and 6). Just the word “**again**” lets the reader know that God is patient, forbearing, and longsuffering. The simple word “**again**” implies that God has been overly patient in His dealings with these individuals. None of this is God’s fault, nor should it in any way cast a shadow over His dealings and His discipline in a case that fits the description of these verses. No one should be naïve and think that every believer is mature or that every believer makes all the right decisions. That simply is not accurate or realistic.

The problem that the writer describes is further illuminated with the use of the word “**bears**” in v8. It is in the present tense active voice which could be translated as “**bears and keeps on bearing**”. The use of the active voice signifies that the believers’ actions are a very willful and deliberate act on their part – something that they know is wrong and an area that they have not been willingly to change. The NASB translates “**bears**” as “**yields**”, the NIV as “**produces**”, and the Amplified comes the closest by translating it as “**persistently bears**”.

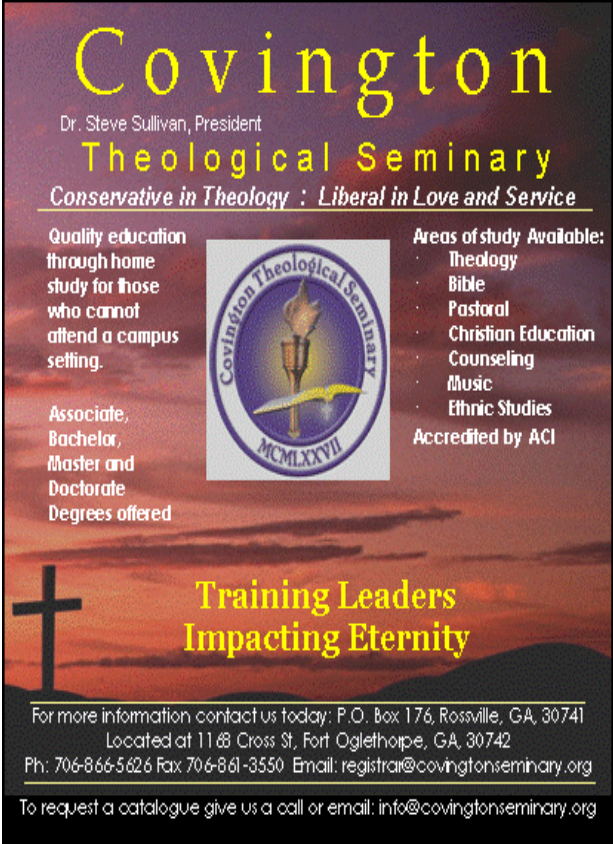
So, what is the conclusion? Really, it should be very simple to understand. If a believer truly wants God’s blessing on their life, then they must honor both Christ (v6) and His Word ([Hebrews 5:11-14](#)). A believer cannot continue to “**crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame**” (v6). It should be more than obvious that if a believer continues to dishonor Christ (v6) in their life and to ignore and neglect God’s Word in their life that they cannot and will not experience God’s blessing on their life (v7-8). We do not know the “actual” consequences, but they cannot be good.

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Notes


Notes



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