

Faith That Will Last

Please open your Bible to Hebrews 6. Most of us know someone who at one time professed faith in Jesus Christ and then wandered away. At one time they were enthusiastic, engaged in the work of the church and there seemed to be evidence of spiritual life.

But then something changed. Over time, they seemed to lose interest. Having once made a clear profession of faith, they began to talk about “being on a journey,” and now there seems to be very little evidence of spiritual life — no love for Christ, no hunger for his Word, no desire to be with his people. It is a real issue that affects every one of us.

The Only Kind of Faith Worth Having

Faith that lasts is the only kind of faith worth having. There are three things in this world that last forever, ***“These three remain: faith, hope and love”*** (1 Corinthians 13:13 NIV). We know true love lasts, and ‘love’ that does not last is not true love; it is only infatuation. Real hope lasts, and ‘hope’ that does not last is not real hope at all; it is only a passing illusion. Genuine faith lasts, and ‘faith’ that does not last, by definition, is not genuine faith; it is only a passing interest. And a person is not saved by a passing interest in Jesus Christ.

The book of Hebrews makes this clear: ***“For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end”*** (Hebrews 3:14). Notice what this verse is saying: if our faith lasts, then we know that we have come to share in Christ. True faith perseveres. Saving faith, that is, faith that joins a person to Jesus Christ, is faith that lasts. And a profession of faith that does not last is, by definition, not true faith. It is not saving faith. ***“We have come to share in Christ, if we hold our original confidence firm to the end.”***

You find the same truth in 1 Cor. 15:1-2: ***“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you — unless you believed in vain”***

People are not saved by some passing interest in the gospel. People are saved by this gospel ***“If you hold fast to it; otherwise you have believed in vain.”***

There is a phrase that is often used among Christians that conveys a delightful truth, and at the same time, conceals a dangerous error: Once saved always saved. The delightful truth in this is that Christ guards and keeps his own. His sheep will never perish (John 10:28). But who are Christ’s sheep? They are those who ***“hold fast to the word”*** (1 Cor 15:2). They are those who hold their ***“original confidence firm to the end”*** (Hebrews 3:14). These are the ones who truly belong to Jesus Christ.

So, the dangerous error concealed in the phrase “Once saved always saved” is the idea that anyone who has ever made any kind of profession of faith at any time will be saved, regardless of whether they show any continuing interest in Christ. That error may be one of the devil’s greatest deceptions. It encourages people to think that they can safely live at a distance from Christ, because, having once professed faith in Jesus, all will be well with them in the end. And that is a house built on sand.

The writer of Hebrews was clearly concerned about the spiritual condition of these Hebrew believers. It was not clear to him that all would be well with all of them in the end. His concern is that some of them were in danger of falling away from the faith they had professed (Hebrews 4-6).

The Basic Principles of the Oracles of God

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. (Heb 5:12)

There are “basic principles of the oracles of God” that all of us need to grasp. These basic principles should be clear, established, and undisputed in the mind and heart of every believer (Hebrews 6:2). The writer is saying, “There are certain things that should have been settled for you long ago, but I’m not sure they are for some of you.” And that is why he is concerned.

What are these basic principles of the oracles of God that should be clear and settled in all our hearts? The writer lists 6 things and at first sight this looks like a very strange list.

A Very Strange List

Let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment (Heb 6:1-2).

It would be easy to assume that this must be a summary of the Christian faith, especially since in verse 1, he speaks of *“the elementary doctrine of Christ.”* But this cannot be a summary of the Christian faith.

If we handed out cards during this service and you were asked to write a six-point summary of what Christians believe about Jesus, you would have to have the following on your list:

1. The incarnation: How Jesus is truly God and man
2. The atonement: How Jesus bore our sins in his body on the tree
3. The resurrection: How Jesus triumphed over death and lives forever
4. The faith: How Jesus brings us into a right relationship with God by binding us to himself
5. The life: How Jesus gives the power and presence of the Holy Spirit to all who trust in him
6. The return: How one day Jesus will come again in power and glory

Christians may summarize what we believe about Jesus in different ways, but I am sure that if we handed out cards today no one would have “instructions about washings” and “laying on of hands” on their list. Whatever this list is, it’s not a summary of the Christian faith.

So, when the writer says, *“Let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation...”* (Hebrews 6:1). He is not saying that Christians should move on from Jesus. How could any Christian ever do that? The whole point of this letter is that you **cannot move beyond Jesus** (Hebrews 1:1-3).

When the writer says, *“You need milk, not solid food...”* (Heb 5:12). The milk is: why we need Jesus, as revealed in the Old Testament. The solid food is: who Jesus is and what he has done, as revealed in the New Testament. Every Christian needs the milk. We need be clear about why we need Jesus. This is foundational to a faith that lasts. But we must move beyond the foundation of grasping why we need Jesus, to embracing him, and receiving all that is found in him. That is how we go on to maturity.

I want to show you from these verses **three compelling reasons** to continue treasuring and trusting Jesus, irrespective of the cost. Here are the basic principles that need to be clearly settled in the mind and heart of every Christian believer. The Three Reasons:

1. Our best efforts are “dead works” and we rely completely on the provision of God....*repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.* (Hebrews 6:1) Repentance means “turning away from something.” What is turned away from here are “dead works” (cf. Hebrews 9:14). This verse is not talking about sinful works. We all must turn from sinful works for sure, but we also must turn from “dead works.” What does that mean? The point here is that our best efforts to live a good life — our most generous, most sacrificial acts — the best works any of us could offer to God in the hope of impressing him and winning his favor — **are dead works**. That is, they have no saving value at all. *“All our righteous acts are like filthy rags”* (Isaiah 64:6 NIV). So, we must turn from believing in ourselves and in our own effort to live a good life.
2. Our sins defile us and exclude us from the presence of God. *...instruction about washings, the laying on of hands...* (Heb 6:2) Commentators who view these verses as a summary of the Christian faith interpret the washing as Christian baptism, and the laying on of hands as an allusion to the gift of the Holy Spirit. Notice it does not talk about the “washing” of baptism, it talks about “washings” (plural). And while there are examples in the NT of the Spirit being given through the laying on of the hands, this was not the norm.

3. Our lives are eternal and we all face the judgement of God...*the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.* (Hebrews 6:2). Again, these truths are basic principles of the Word of God. Your life is eternal. There was a time when you were not, but there will never be a time when you will not be. However long you live in this world, it is just a flash of your entire life. Here is the ultimate reality that every one of us must face: *“It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment...”* (Hebrews 9:27). And then the writer of Hebrews says a little bit later: *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”* (Hebrews 10:31).

I’ve often noticed that people who have no faith in Jesus are sometimes very confident, even defiant, in the face of death. But the problem for the sinner does not lie in the event of death itself. It lies in the resurrection. The real problem lies in the fact that the sinner will be brought into the presence of the living God, and held accountable for every word, and thought, and deed. The real problem is the awful reality of facing justice as a sinner, and of that judgment stretching on into eternity — an eternal judgment with no end. Death can’t hide you from God.

There will only be one hope for any of us on the day, and that is, that Jesus will stand beside us and claim us as his own, that he will say, “Mike is one of mine. I died for his sins. All that eternal justice could ever bring to him fell on me. I bore it on his behalf and dealt with it forever on the cross.”

The resurrection of the dead and the eternal judgment is a basic principle of the Word of God. If this foundation of faith is laid in your life, if this basic principle is settled in your mind and heart — that death will not be the end for you – it will just be the beginning of living with almighty God forever. This because of the precious sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf.