THE HOPE THAT ANCHORS OUR SOULS

Hebrews 5:11–6:20

Key Verse: 6:19

“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain…”

To what do you aspire? In life in general, if we live in despair, it’s so easy to settle and become petty, doing the bare minimum, just going through the motions and enjoying small pleasures. But if we have a clear hope, we have direction and a reason to struggle. The same is true in Christian life. In today’s passage the author of Hebrews admonishes Christians not to be lazy, but to have God’s hope. What is this hope? How can we be sure of it, and why do we need it? May God open our hearts and speak to us through his word today.

Beginning in 4:14, the author introduces the main subject of this book, that Jesus is our Great High Priest. But it’s a truth that, sadly, not many Christians really digest or take seriously. So in today’s passage the author gives his third of five warnings. Look at 5:11. The author wanted to explain many things about the meaning and importance of Jesus being our Great High Priest. But he was concerned that his audience was not so interested. He says here, “…you no longer try to understand.” In Greek the expression can literally be translated as “lazy.” The author uses the same word in 6:12, where the NIV translates it as “lazy.” Why do we become lazy to understand? It’s because we don’t want to struggle. We become satisfied with what we already know. We become habitual. It may seem like a small matter. But actually, it’s serious, and, dangerous.

Read 5:12. This verse tells us that when we’re spiritually lazy, it stunts our growth, and we begin to forget even the basics of Christian life. It’s a shameful rebuke for those who’ve supposedly been living the Christian life for a long time. God wants us all not to live as nominal Christians, always receiving, but to grow as Bible teachers for others. It’s not for special people, but part of normal spiritual growth.

In verse 12b the author introduces the analogy of milk and solid food to help us understand how we can grow spiritually. Babies love to drink their mother’s milk. It’s hard to get them to stop, and they become very used to it. But they need to be weaned off of milk and taught to start eating solid food so that they can grow with the proper nutrition. Read verses 13,14. Here, “solid food” is “the teaching about righteousness.” The “milk” may be the message of God’s love. God wants us to enjoy his love, but he wants us also to grow in his image as his righteous people. Righteous people are those who can tell good from evil and who choose good. But we grow in such discernment, it says here, only through “constant use” and self-training. It means having a personal spiritual struggle. If we only enjoy God’s love but don’t struggle to grow deeper into living the kind of life God wants, we remain as spiritual babies who lack basic spiritual discernment. Being mature isn’t about age but about a constant spiritual struggle.

Read 6:1–3. What is the author trying to say here? He’s basically talking about people who just keep slipping back into their sins and need to keep coming to Jesus for forgiveness. This is the extent of their spiritual struggle. It’s like being on a spinning wheel for a hamster. We come to Jesus, then we sin, then we come to Jesus again. If we stay only on that level, we won’t ever become mature Christians.

But there are some important things to note here. We do need to repent and put our faith in God. We need to be baptized and blessed by God’s servants. We need to believe in the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. These things lay a spiritual foundation for Christian living. But we can’t just remain there. The author says in verse 1 that we need to move beyond these things and be taken forward to maturity. How can we? He says in verse 3 that we need God’s help. Only God can help us get off the spinning wheel of sin addiction.

Then the author goes on to give a very serious spiritual warning. Read verses 4–6. The key words here are “fallen away.” What does it mean to fall away? The word is also translated as “apostasy.” It means to reject the Christian faith. It means to defect, leave, or even rebel, to switch sides. During the Cold War some Americans left and joined the communists, and some communists left their countries and became Americans. But in this case it means to leave the Christian faith and re-join the world—in other words, to go back to the life of sin, with no intention of repenting. Throughout the Book of Hebrews the author warns about this. In 2:1 he writes: “We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.” Falling away can happen slowly and gradually, especially when we stop listening seriously to God’s word. In 3:12,13 he writes: “See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called ‘Today,’ so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” Here, falling way means turning away from the living God, and it happens when our hearts become sinful and unbelieving and we become hardened by our sin. According to 10:24–26 “falling away” means giving up meeting together and deliberately to keep on sinning. According to 12:15,16 it means to allow a bitter root to grow in our hearts, to become sexually immoral and godless.

Here in 6:4–6 the author warns that even if we enjoyed the many blessings of being in the Christian community, if we fall away and rejoin the world, it’s “impossible” to be brought back to repentance. Many people debate what this means. Some think it’s possible to lose one’s salvation. But the main point here is not to know the ultimate outcome, but instead, not to play around or flirt with spiritual temptations. This is what spiritually immature people do. God can help anyone repent. But we should not try to outsmart God; we should fear God and take his warnings to heart so that we can persevere and grow in maturity.

In verse 6 the author mentions that the Son of God was crucified. This is God’s only solution to our problem of sin. If we turn our backs on what Jesus did for us, even God can’t help us. When we intentionally sin, it’s like we’re crucifying Jesus again and bringing his name into public disgrace. Sin always looks tempting and enticing. The only way we can see sin properly is when we look at Jesus who was crucified so that we could be forgiven and saved. This is why we need to fix our thoughts and our eyes on Jesus (3:1; 12:2). We should not focus on ourselves, on other people, or on what the world considers normal, but on Jesus who was crucified for my sin.

Read verses 7,8. Here the author uses a familiar analogy to warn us what kind of people God wants us to be. Some people are like land that just keeps receiving rain and cultivation but just produces thorns and thistles. Others are those who produce the fruit God wants. If we keep producing the bad fruit of sin in our lives, we’re in danger of being cursed and burned.

Read verse 9. Though the author has given some of the most intense warnings, here he comforts his readers. He calls them “dear friends” and assures them that “better things” will happen in their lives, “things that accompany salvation.” It means he’s sure God has worked in them to give them saving faith. Read verse 10. In these words we see the kinds of fruit God is looking for in our lives: real labor and love for God. God doesn’t want to be in a one-way relationship with him, with him always giving and us always taking. God wants it to be two-way, reciprocal, with God loving us, and us truly loving God back. How can we work for God and love God? We do it especially in helping his people. Helping God’s people is a sign that we love God. It’s also a sign that we are growing in spiritual maturity. Why does the author give so many dire warnings? Read verse 11. It’s all about perseverance. We need to be diligent in our Christian faith “to the very end.” When we live a diligent spiritual life, the author says “what you hope for may be fully realized.” What we know in our minds is one thing, but how we live is quite another. It’s only through practical Christian living that our hope is fully realized. How can we live a diligent, persistent Christian life to the very end? Read verse 12. It says we need to imitate the faith of those who held onto God’s promises with patient faith. It’s so easy to abuse God’s grace and become spiritually lazy. The best way to overcome spiritual laziness is not just to work hard and try to do many things; it’s to really believe and hold onto God’s promises and wait patiently on God.

To help us, the author gives a famous example. Read verses 13–15. The emphasis here is on God’s promise to Abraham. He even swore an oath by himself. God promised him many descendants. Nothing happened for 25 years, but eventually God began to work when Abraham waited patiently. The reality around is usually discouraging. But God’s promise is sure and unchanging. Like Abraham we need to grab onto his promise and wait patiently on God.

In verses 16–18 the author goes on to explain further why God swore an oath. People swear oaths to confirm their promises and put an end to all argument. God confirmed his promise with an oath to “make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear.” It was especially for the descendants, the spiritual heirs of Abraham, to help them hold onto his promises as well. It wasn’t just those who are physically Jews, but those who inherit Abraham’s faith. Read verse 18. The two unchangeable things are God’s promise and God’s oath. God wants us to hold onto them and be greatly encouraged. This verse mentions “we who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us.” “Fled”? The original Greek word means “to take refuge.” Refuge is for those who have been suffering. In this world we suffer for many reasons, but mainly because of our sins and all the temptations thrown against us. But we flee to take refuge in Jesus, and his promise to forgive and save us gives us the hope of God’s kingdom. God doesn’t lie about this: he promises it to us, and we can believe it and wait patiently for it. Hebrews repeatedly describes it as a “city” (11:10,16; 12:22; 13:14). Hebrews 12:28 says we are “receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken.”

Read verse 19. This is the third time in today’s passage that the word “hope” is mentioned. It says the hope of heaven is an anchor for our souls. This hope keeps us from drifting away. This hope keeps us from despair and from the power of sin waiting to lure us. This hope gives meaning to all our struggles and motivates us to endure. This hope makes us spiritually firm and secure. This is why we need to really accept and believe this hope. It’s a hope in heaven we can have through our Great High Priest Jesus (19b,20).

Today we mainly thought about God’s promise of our hope in heaven through our Lord Jesus. There are so many temptations to fall away and give in to sin. May God renew this hope in us and make us firm and secure. May he inspire us to grow in Christian maturity in this new year. May he help us grow as Bible teachers who can plant this living hope in others.