

## Hebrews Chapter 6 – John Karmelich

1. My title for this lesson is, "Maturity Part 2: Understanding what God expects of us as believers". To explain that, recall from the last lesson I asked the question, "What is a mature believer in Jesus?" In Chapter 6, the topic continues, with an emphasis of what God expects of us in order for us to be considered mature believers. So what does He expect of us? For starters, that we understand that there is God, He is perfect, He knows all things and He is guiding our lives. OK John, that is old news. What does that have to do with Hebrews Chapter 6, or in other words, what does all of this have to do with being a mature believer? The answer involves our behavior as believers.
2. Before I explain this concept any further, it is important to state that many devout believers have problems with Chapter 6. There are a lot of Christians who read this chapter and think that it is possible for a believer to lose one's salvation. Let me respond to that:
  - a) To begin, recall from the last part of Chapter 5, the issue of the moment is maturity as a believer. Therefore, that same topic of maturity is continuing here in Chapter 6.
  - b) Back in Chapter 3, Verse 1, the author of this book refers to the readers of this letter as "Holy Brothers". My point being is that if the author considers the receipts of Hebrews to be saved, then realize that the main topic of the letter must focus on how we grow and mature as believers and not salvation itself.
  - c) In fact, the first few verses of this chapter say in effect, "Let us forget about the basic facts that most religions have about trust in God and go on to maturity". If one can remember that fact, Chapter 6 is going to be easy to read and understand.
  - d) Know that there are some wonderful bible teachers who I agree with on most issues but disagree with here. When it comes to Chapter 6, their opinions vary widely. My point is one can read and hear of many opinions about salvation and maturity as one studies this chapter and build a biblical case for whatever view one holds on that particular issue.
    - i) With that statement out of my system, I find this chapter reads best if one reads it in context of the text in the surrounding chapters. In that surrounding text, the main issue is maturity. If one keeps that in mind, my arguments about what is Christian maturity will make a lot more sense as we study this chapter.
3. OK, back to my title. How exactly do we become mature? Let me answer that question with an example of how a mature Christian should act: When we have been hurt in some way, there is the natural instinct to swing back at others. I have been correctly taught that, "Hurting people hurt others". Christian maturity (as an example) is to recall that Jesus taught that just as God the Father has forgiven all of our sins, so we should forgive those who have hurt us.
  - a) My point is Christian maturity is applying biblical principals to our lives and not just doing what our instincts may want us to do at any given moment. Maturity is about the willingness to trust God to guide our lives in order to make a difference for Him.
  - b) Christian maturity starts by forgiving those who have hurt us and forgiving ourselves for the mistakes we have made. (This is a separate issue from justice.) My point is maturity is not about salvation itself, but trusting God to guide us through our issues.
  - c) To summarize Chapter 6 in a single thought it is, "Stop worrying about the sins and faults we see in our lives and others around us, and realize that God's grace covers those issues".
    - i) What if one is permanently injured from someone else? We cannot always undo the damage done by others. One can still trust God through such issues. My point is trusting God through whatever we go through is a sign of maturity.
  - d) Think of "maturity" this way: It is more than believing in things that a religious Jew would believe. A religious Jewish person believes in a single God and believes we should avoid sin. Christian maturity is not only about trusting in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins, but is also about trusting Him to guide our lives for His glory. If one can remember that concept, one has a good concept of what this chapter teaches.

4. Hebrews Chapter 6, Verse 1: Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God,<sup>2</sup> instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.<sup>3</sup> And God permitting, we will do so.
- a) Verse 1 says, "We should leave the elementary teachings about (Jesus) Christ and go on to maturity". To understand what that means, it is best to discuss the illustrations listed in these verses and explain what they mean and what they don't mean: First, notice what Verses 2 and 3 do not say: They don't say, "Believe that Jesus is God, believe He rose from the dead and believe His death is our complete payment for sins."
    - i) Instead, these verses have these strange references to repentance of sins, baptisms, the laying of hands, and the resurrection from the dead. To understand these references, one must first understand that all of the subjects mentioned here in these verses are common to both Judaism and Christianity.
    - ii) I heard it explained well this way. In grade school, math teachers will often draw two big circles on a chalkboard that overlap. The idea is to show that each circle now has an area in common with the other circle. Like that common circle area, what is taught in these verses is taught in both Judaism and Christianity.
    - iii) At this point, let me explain what those things are that are listed in Verses 1 and 2, and then I will explain why they are important for us to learn.
  - b) The first issue discussed is the "foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death".
    - i) Think about it this way: Religious Jews believe that one should turn away from sinful acts in order to be pleasing to God. Religious Christians believe one should turn away from sinful acts out of gratitude for what God has done for us. Even Muslims and members of most major religions believe in turning from sin.
      - a) The point being that this concept has nothing unique to Christianity.
  - c) The second issue discussed is, "faith in God". Again, this is a common trait between Jews, Christians, or any other religion that argues for a single God.
  - d) The third issue described is "instruction about baptisms". Understand that the word that is translated "baptisms" here can also mean ceremonial washings. The point being that religious Jews have religious ceremonies that involve washings. Religious Christians have ceremonies that involve washings, including baptisms. Remember what Christian baptism is: a ceremony to show others around us what change has already occurred in our lives. Our baptism ceremony does not save us. It is just a sign to others of what has already occurred. The point is that washing ceremonies in both Judaism and Christianity don't clean us before God, but they are just symbolic acts to show our trust in Him.
  - e) The fourth issue is the "laying of hands". Again, this is a symbolic gesture to show one's association with another person. As an example, when many churches appoint a new leader, they will have a ceremony where the congregation or the elders of that church will lay hands on that leader. Both religions use laying of hands as a symbol of association.
  - f) By now, one sees the pattern. The fifth and sixth one listed are, "the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment". Both religions believe that God raises people from the dead and there is an eternal judgment of all people.
  - g) To summarize this whole section, the point is one can be a devout Jew or a devout Christian and believe everything in Verse 1 and 2. I'm not an expert on Islam, but I suspect that most of these ideas work for that religion as well. The point is not that any of these things are wrong. The point is that these things are not signs of maturity.
    - i) This leads me back to my comment about two big circles on a chalkboard. Let's call one circle "Christianity" and another circle we will call "Judaism". There is a lot of common ground in those two circles. So far, everything we have described fits in that area where both circles intersect each other.

- h) So what does all of this mean? (I thought you would never ask. ☺) It means we can believe all of the things listed in these verses and still not (notice the "not") be a mature Christian. A mature Christian believes all of these things listed in these verses, but so does a mature student of Judaism. If the author of Hebrews wants us to be mature believers, it must mean something more than what is common to both religions.
- i) My thanks to bible teacher David Guzik who provided the circle illustration.
  - ii) OK, John, so if a mature Christian is more than what is in the common circle, what does it take to be a mature Christian? That is the topic of the rest of this chapter. For those who don't want to read anymore, it is the belief that Jesus did die for our sins, Jesus is God and yes, it is about our trust in Him to guide our lives. Now that I've stated that, let us read the details.
  - iii) Oh, before I move on, Verse 3 says in effect that the author will explain what I've just explained over the last page if "time permits". In other words, it was the intent of the author to explain what I just stated over the last page of this lesson, but the writer wants to move on to the specific topic of what is a mature Christian.
5. Verse 4: It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup> who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, <sup>6</sup> if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.
- a) Know that verses 4 through 6 are considered three of the most difficult in the bible to understand and explain. I am convinced that Satan Himself, uses these verses to lead Christians away from thinking they are saved. Let me explain in this section what these verses are talking about and the controversies behind them.
  - b) Notice the word "impossible" in Verse 4. If one believes that one is "once saved, always saved" then this verse is difficult to explain because it implies that someone who has once one is a Christian but walks away from it, one cannot be saved again. Let me explain:
    - i) Stop and think of all the people throughout history who have turned away from following Jesus for a period of time and then decided to come back to Him.
    - ii) If this verse is saying it is impossible for someone to be saved once they turned away from Jesus, why should we still pray for such people? Is it too late for them? If that is true, one can understand how Satan can use these verses to say to people, "Look how bad you have sinned. Hebrews says it is impossible for you to come back based on how bad you have messed up now so you might as well give up now trying to making a difference for Jesus".
      - a) On a related note, what about the view that one can recommit their lives to Jesus as many times as necessary? The problem is then up to "us" to be saved based on how many good acts one has committed or based on how people commit their lives to Jesus.
      - b) In short, no matter how one looks at these verses, it is difficult to get once one thinks about the implications of these verses.
    - iii) There was such a fear that people could lose their salvation that at one point in early church history many people waited until their deathbed before they got baptized out of fear they could lose their salvation. In other words, the word impossible scared people so much, they didn't go through the ritual of baptism until right before they died out of fear of "backsliding" like this verse implies.
  - c) OK John, you've now beaten it over our heads that no matter what is one's view on eternal salvation, these verses are difficult to comprehend based on the single word "impossible". What do you say at this point, explain exactly what this it means? In other words, since it is impossible for people to return, what does "impossible" really mean?

- d) To understand these verses, let us come back to my lesson theme: Christian maturity.
- i) These verses are saying that understands and believes that Jesus died for our sins, one does become a mature believer. It is the belief that Jesus is God and we trust Him to guide our lives. Once we get that, it is impossible to "get that again".
  - ii) Let me explain it this way: Jesus said there is only one unforgivable sin: That is the lifetime denial that He is God. That in effect is what Jesus meant in Matthew 12:31 when He said that "denying the Holy Spirit" is the only unforgivable sin.
    - a) So if we get mad at God one day and deny Jesus is God, have we reached the point of "impossibility" as described in these verses? Of course not. However, if we spend our lifetime denying Jesus is God and never trusting Him to guide our lives, then it is impossible to be saved.
  - iii) Think of it this way: We can't read people's minds. We can only judge actions. Therefore, we see if people live their lives by what they believe. If they claim that Jesus is both fully human and fully God and they do trust in Him to guide their lives, their actions will follow that belief. To say it another way, yes we are saved by faith alone, but our actions should naturally follow what we believe.
  - iv) OK, so if I can't lose my salvation if I am trusting in Jesus, who is being described in these verses? It is describing those who hang out with Christians, but they do not accept the basic principals of Christianity. It is those people who spend their entire lifetimes denying that Jesus is God and denying He died for all of our sins.
  - v) The verse says that such people have "tasted" Christianity. I would describe this as people who are exposed to the Gospel message, but refuse to believe it. Does it mean such people can never be saved? Of course not. Only time will tell by the evidence of their lives. The point is not that such people can never be saved. The point is the lifetime denial of Jesus as God means it is impossible for such people to be with God forever in heaven.
- e) OK, John, you just gave us a full page-plus lecture on the word "impossible". What about the rest of these three verses? In effect, I have already done that. What they say in effect is that if a person spends their entire life rejecting what Jesus did on the cross, then such a person can never be saved.
- i) With that said, let me discuss the phrase in Verse 6 that says they are "crucifying Jesus all over again to their disgrace". This is describing people who think that Jesus payment on the cross is not sufficient for their sins.
    - a) It would be like bringing God a sacrifice for my sins and saying this is what I am bringing over and above what Jesus did for my sins historically. There have been a few times in history where people have even offered up themselves on a cross to die like Jesus. In such cases, one is again, saying that Jesus payment for our sins was not "sufficient".
    - b) If you think this is no big deal, stop and think of all the things that you and I say to God in effect, "Hey look at me now. You must be pleased with me based on my actions at the moment." I suspect we are all guilty at times of trying to please God with our actions as opposed to remembering that we were fully forgiven of all of our sins at the cross.
    - c) This is one reason why I reject the Roman Catholic belief in "purgatory". They argue this is a place some believers must go to for an unknown time period before one can go to heaven to pay for one's sins since we were saved. Know that there are no references in the bible whatsoever to a purgatory. To believe in purgatory means that one does not believe Jesus payment for our sins was sufficient to cover all of our sins, past present and future. The concept of purgatory means we still must suffer for our sins as if Jesus' payment was not sufficient for all of our sins.

- f) All of this leads me back to the idea of "impossible". It is impossible to please God with any actions over and above Jesus complete payment for sin. It is impossible to please God based on the good things we do in life.
    - i) If that is true, why do good things? We should do good works not to earn points with God, but simply out of gratitude for what He has already done for us.
    - ii) We should do good things for others to help them draw closer to God. We should do good things for others in order to make a difference for Jesus in this world. In other words, doing good things it is not about "earning points" for our salvation, but only to make a difference for Him in this world.
  - g) Let me pause at this point and state that if one can get past these last three verses in the bible, one can handle any other bible verse. I am convinced that one of Satan's greatest lies is telling Christians we can lose our salvation because we are not being good enough for God. That is why I gave this lecture on the topic of "impossible". The key point is not that one can sin enough to lose one's salvation. The key point is that if we spend our lifetime denying the fundamental issues of Christianity, we cannot be saved. If one can grasp that concept that it is our trust in Jesus, one has become a mature Christian.
    - i) OK, I think we are now ready for Verse 7.
6. Verse 7: Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. <sup>8</sup> But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.
- a) One of the most common illustrations used in both the Old and New Testament is that of rain falling on land used for growing crops. Jesus Himself used this analogy to describe believers who are making a difference for Him. The illustration being used in these verses is in effect the same as the one Jesus used in Matthew 13 and other places. Let me explain:
    - i) The idea is that God in effect blesses land that produces crops. The land that only produces worthless things is a symbol of cursed land. Coming back to the idea of maturity, the idea is that those who already trust that Jesus is God and are now trusting Him to guide our lives and make a difference for Him is like having a section of land that produces good crop.
  - b) Let me explain it another way: There are many non-Christians who make a difference in life and are already significant or famous in some way. I believe God is in effect saying to people who lack Christian maturity that you are not blessed by Me because you are just living in that "common circle" area where one thinks that any good effort is acceptable.
    - i) If one is living the "full circle area" of Jesus, (i.e., believing He is God, trusting Him to guide our lives) then we are like that land that produces good fruit as described in these two verses and one is a mature believer.
7. Verse 9: Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case--things that accompany salvation.
- a) Before I say anything else about this verse, notice the "we" in this verse. We don't know who the author is of this book (it is never stated), but we have a "we" here. Whoever did write Hebrews notice there is more than one person who worked on this letter.
  - b) In order to explain this verse, I need to define "salvation". (Courtesy of Jon MacArthur):
    - i) Salvation is what did happen to us Christians when we first believed in Jesus.
    - ii) Salvation is what will happen to us Christians when we get resurrected to heaven.
    - iii) Salvation is what continues to happen to us Christians as we grow in faith in Jesus.
    - iv) I give that multi-part definition, as one should understand it, to understand this verse. Notice this verse is not talking about salvation itself, but the "things that accompany salvation". To me, this is further proof that the topic of Chapter 6 is not about being saved, but about growing in maturity in our salvation.
    - v) With that said, the "better things that accompany salvation" are discussed in the next two verses, so let me move on to more verses to understand this point.

8. Verse 10: God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.
- a) I remember many years ago having a discussion with my father about the purpose of life. My father said in effect, "If we are just saved by just believing in Jesus, what is the purpose of life itself? Do all of the good things one does in life make a difference if we are only saved by faith alone?" That question in effect, prevents many people from becoming a mature believer, as they want to prove their worth to God.
  - b) The answer to that question of the good things that we do is here in Verse 10. The verse is speaking to Christians and is saying in effect that God does not forget the "work" that we do to show love to Him and by showing love to others. In other words, there are eternal rewards for our good things we do in this lifetime.
  - c) To explain this idea, think about Paul's life as described in the book of Acts. He believed he was saved after his first encounter with Jesus. Yet, the man worked hard the rest of his life to save as many people as possible to make a difference for Jesus.
    - i) My point is Paul believed he was saved by faith alone. At that point, he worked as hard as he could for the rest of his life to make a difference for Jesus.
    - ii) The question for us is in effect, "If we are only saved by our trust in Jesus complete payment for our sins, why is it necessary to live the rest of our lives in order to make a difference for God? Do we have to work hard like Paul? Do I have to go be a foreign missionary now and quit whatever I am doing? ☺
      - a) To answer that, first one has to remember that we can't get "more saved" by living to make a difference for Jesus. The topic here is rewards in heaven. Paul was convinced that one gets rewards in heaven based on living out his life to make a difference for Jesus once he got saved.
    - iii) So does that mean I have to quit my life and go out and be a missionary like Paul? The answer is yes and no. Yes, in the sense that God the Father calls all Christians to not only believe in Jesus, but then live out the rest of our lives in order to make a difference for Him. The answer is also "no", in the sense that He does not call all believers to go out on the road like Paul and do that type of missionary work.
  - d) OK, then, so what are we supposed to do with our lives? I am convinced that part of the joy of being a Christian is discovering what God calls us to do. Sometimes it is taking care of an issue that is right in front of us. Sometimes God calls us down a specific path in life.
    - i) Living the Christian life was never designed to be boring. I enjoy my life far more now than during all of my years prior to trusting Jesus to guide my life. Do I still have problems? Of course. If God somehow and someway does reward us in heaven for making a difference for Him, I would rather focus the most valuable commodity that any of us have, one's time, in order to make a difference for Him.
    - ii) The other morning I woke up bored with doing my same routine that I have been doing for many years now as a Christian. I am convinced that for now, God wants me to continue down this same path of writing, working to support my family and keeping up what He has called me to do. If there is some change to wants of me, I am sure He will make it known to me what that change is. I just suspect that whatever rewards I will receive in the next life will be far greater than whatever I could receive in this life if I only cared about making my life better at this time.
    - iii) OK John, I am happy that you have found what you believe God has called you to do. What about me? The answer is a combination of doing what one believes God is calling you to do with using whatever talents one has. If one is not sure what is one's "gifts", ask other people what it is you are good at. One can always just try doing different things. I find that if one is willing to submit to God and willing to help, the opportunities will arise.

- e) Let me describe the opposite problem: What if my life is so busy right now, that I don't have time to help anyone else? Start by taking a moment to pray if you are doing what God wants you to do at this moment. If one is really sick or injured, then one may have to just let others minister to you. We forget that we can make a difference for God just by being willing to let others help us when we are suffering through such difficult moments.
  - i) In summary, we are not all called to do "grand scale" things like Paul, but we are all called to do what we believe God calls us to do. If we are doing the wrong thing, I find He will make it obvious to us if He wants us to change. I will end this long discussion by simply saying, start by doing something to make a difference for God and I am positive He will guide us down the path He desires for our lives.
  - ii) Hey look, there are ten more verses in this chapter. ☺
- 9. Verse 11: We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. <sup>12</sup> We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.
  - a) At this point let us remember what the purpose of this book is about: understanding what living by faith means. If you recall from previous lessons on this book, I stated that the entire book of Hebrews is in effect a commentary on a half-verse quote from the Old Testament that goes, "The righteous shall live by his faith". (Habakkuk 2:4b NIV). My point as it relates here to Chapter 6 is that if we as Christians do have faith that Jesus is God, we should do something about it. The question of course is what should we do?
    - i) In the book of Acts, when Paul figured out that Jesus was who He said He was, it motivated Paul to work hard for the rest of his life to make a difference for Jesus. In effect, that is what the writer of Hebrews is saying here. It means that God desires that each of us to live to make a difference for Him. That is what being a mature Christian is all about.
    - ii) If we were to judge our own life as a Christian, would we say we were wasting our life, or would we say we were using our life to make a difference for Jesus? I'm not saying we can't have times to relax. The gospels records that Jesus Himself spent time alone in prayer and time alone with just the disciples.
    - iii) My point is God gives us each one life. The most valuable commodity that He gives each of us is "time". We each get an unknown amount of time to live in this world and as a Christian one has to ask God, how do You want me to use my time to make a difference for You? The answer that each of us gets is different. The point is we should use our time to make a difference for Him.
    - iv) In effect, that is what these two verses are saying. The original recipients of this letter were slipping back into their lifestyles of how they lived before they got saved out of fear of how others in their society would see them. The writer of this letter is in effect pleading with them, to go live their lives to make a difference for Jesus and not worry about one's family and friends think of them. What if I am already doing what I believe God is calling me to do? Then stick to it. I stated earlier how I woke up "bored" the other day. Sometimes God just reminds us to stick at what He has called us to do, as there is a purpose for the role He has for us.
  - b) So what is the purpose of all of this hard work for Jesus? Why did Paul work so hard if he believed he was saved by faith alone? One has to understand that there must be rewards in heaven based on how we used our time to make a difference for Him. Wont' there be great religious leaders with rewards far greater than mine? Never assume that.
    - i) It is not the size of the ministry that is important but our loyalty to whatever God has called us to do. In effect, our efforts for God do make a difference in our lives. It does not affect our salvation, but Paul understood that his eternal destiny was based on doing what God called him to do. We too should realize that our eternal destiny is based on what He desires each of us to do.

- ii) OK, John, what if I have messed up my life to date? Am I going to live in a small shack in heaven while others get a big mansion? ☺ I don't know what life is like in heaven, but I suspect even the smallest reward is better than never being there in the first place. I suspect that if we tell God that we want to make a difference for Him at this point onward, and live accordingly, it will eternally amaze us how much of a reward we will get by living to make a difference for Him.
  - iii) One of my favorite bible teachers (Chuck Missler) likes to talk about the "thief on the cross" who gave his life to Jesus right before he died. (See Luke 23:40-43.)
    - a) That man may have thought he would not get much of a reward in heaven. Chuck Missler speculates that in heaven God will show this man all of the multitudes of people who have given their lives to Jesus at the last moment based on that gospel story. My point is one never knows how God will use our lives until we give our lives to Him in the first place.
10. Verse 13: When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, <sup>14</sup>saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants." <sup>15</sup>And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.
- a) One of the hardest things to grasp is the concept of trusting in a God we cannot see nor hear. Yet I am asking all of us to wait on His timing to receive rewards for being faithful to Him. That is why the writer of Hebrews brings up Abraham at this point in the text.
  - b) To explain how this story about Abraham is relevant to the issue of our heavenly rewards for using our time based on our faith in Jesus, it would help to review some highlights from the life of Abraham as told in the book of Genesis.
    - i) God blessed Abraham with wealth, but he did not have any children. God made a promise to him that one day he will have many, many descendants. That is what Verse 14 is saying here in Hebrews, and is stated back in Genesis 22:17 and 26:4.
    - ii) A key point of that story in Genesis is that it took many years between the time God made that statement to Abraham and the time when he actually had a child. Abraham and his wife were each almost 100 years old when they had their own child (a son). Stop and consider would you still have faith in God to keep His promises if you and your spouse were almost 100 and nothing has happened yet?
    - iii) So why did God wait so long to make this happen? Part of the answer was to build up Abraham's trust in God to keep His promises even when such promises appear to be impossible to happen. For our lives, God wants us to trust that He will come through with His promises on His timing. That means there will be rewards in this lifetime and in heaven for trusting in God despite whatever our circumstances appear to be around us.
  - c) All of that leads me back to Verse 13. A point of here is that when God makes a promise there is no one to swear by, but Himself. To state it another way, God cannot say, "I swear by someone greater than Me so He swears "by Himself".
    - i) This leads to a simple point that most of us never consider: God is not capable of telling a lie. If God could ever lie even once, we can't trust what He has to say.
    - ii) The point as it relates to Abraham is simply that God made a promise that one day he would have a child. That child would eventually form a family tree with so many descendants that Abraham would not be able to count them all.
      - a) Since God is not capable of lying, that oath (promise) had to come true.
    - iii) Ok good for Abraham. What does that have to do with my life? The point for us is that the bible has hundreds of promises that affect our own lives. Since God is not capable of lying, we have to learn to trust in those promises. This gets me back to the concept of "faith and works". If we do trust in those bible-based promises for our own lives, then like Abraham, our actions should follow that trust.



- iv) Now let me come back to Abraham. How did he trust God to fulfill His promises? I suspect he had sexual relations with His wife on a regular basis even in his old age so God could fulfill that promise. In effect, Abraham spent the rest of his remaining life waiting for God's promise to come true, despite having to wait many years between that promise being stated and the event actually happening.
    - a) My point for us is not about being knowing the details of Abraham's life. The point is about realizing that the God we trust in, is not capable of lying and therefore, we too should trust in His promises for our live.
    - b) OK and what are those promises? The key promise is that Jesus did really live on earth, He really did die for our sins and He really is our intercessor between God the Father and us for our sins. If we believe all of that to be true, then we too, should use our time to make a difference for Him.
  - d) Now, let me come back to the issue of "maturity". Maturity for the Christian is to realize all of this is true, and therefore, we should not return to our lifestyles before we got saved. My goal here is not to "fire us up" so we could burn out fairly quickly for Jesus. My goal is to consider how we are each using the time that God has given us, and ponder if we are using our time for His glory. That is what Christian maturity is all about. It is realizing that God gave us the valuable commodity called time. He wants us to use it for His glory.
    - i) On that convicting thought, let me move on to the next verse.
11. Verse 16: Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. <sup>17</sup> Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. <sup>18</sup> God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.
- a) The writer to Hebrews continues to beat the point home that when we swear an oath, we swear by something very important to us. God by definition can't swear by anything higher than Himself. When God wants to make a promise, He swears by Himself. Those oaths that He makes are His promises as recorded in the bible for us to study.
  - b) Ok John, I accept the idea that God cannot lie and I accept the idea that the bible is full of promises to us that must be true. The question becomes, what I do about it practically? I get the idea that Abraham eventually had his son and I too should trust in His promises. If I accept the idea that Jesus died for my sins and I accept the idea that I can turn to Jesus to guide my life, what do I do next? In other words, how do I become a more mature believer? The answer to that question does not come from me, but from God Himself. One of the great things about being a Christian is that we can ask God directly what it is He wants us to do with our lives in order to make a difference for Him.
    - i) Let us suppose that we have prayed over this issue, but haven't received any great answer to what He calls us to do. I find the answer to that question is often just to do what is logical to do. Often the answer to that question involves regular time studying His word and even spending time with other believers. The key is to make an effort to do something for God and let Him work through us.
    - ii) It also helps to remember that what we are "good at" can also be used for His glory. It always amazes me to hear stories about people who always enjoy doing "this or that" and then combine that joy with doing something to make a difference for God. For example, I suspect Paul was the kind of person who liked to travel and meet new people. God used that joy of travel to inspire him to lead others to Jesus. One may enjoy just spending time with one's family. Let God use that time, in some way for His glory. I am not saying we have to use every moment focusing on God. I am saying that we should use the most valuable commodity we each have, which is our time, to make a difference for Him. That result of using our time that way is in effect the only thing that will last for all of eternity.

- c) OK John, nice speech. What does it have to do with these verses? The point here is that God is not capable of lying. If He is not capable of lying, then the greatest thing we can do with our lives is to trust in His promises, not to Abraham, but to us. Those promises include the idea that there are eternal rewards waiting for us in heaven, if we are willing to use our time to make a difference for Him.
- i) My point is maturity as a Christian is to not just to focus on being saved, but to use our time as believers to make a difference for God. Paul was obsessed with using his life to make a difference. God does not call all of us to go on the road like Paul, but He does call many to be missionaries. We each need to do something. What we each need to do is to ask God what is our "something" and focus on what He has called us to do. The point is to not waste our lives on things that don't make an eternal difference.
  - ii) What if you are wrong? What if there is no next life? What if some other religion is right? Maturity as a Christian does not mean we have our moments of doubts. What one has to do in such moments is to consider all the facts and say, "is this right?" Some of the facts being presented in these verses are proof that God exists and He is incapable of telling a lie. If we study the evidence that Jesus is who He claims He is and He is our priest between God the Father and ourselves, the real issue becomes "What are we doing about it?" Doing something about those facts is how we become mature believers in Jesus.
  - iii) In effect, the purpose of these verses is to encourage us. It is to remind us that God is there, He cannot lie and we should trust Him to guide our lives. If we accept that these facts about Jesus are true, we can live to make a difference for Him.
12. Verse 19: We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.
- a) I was just stating a moment ago about having moments when we have our doubts that all of this is real. Notice Verse 19 addresses those doubts. It is a reminder that we can be sure that all of this is real.
  - b) Let me explain this another way: If God is real, why doesn't He speak to us audibly? The quick answer is if He spoke to people audibly we would start thinking, "That person who God spoke to today is holier than me because He spoke audibly to Him several times today and I haven't gotten any verbal message lately".
    - i) The best way that God can prove to us that He exists outside of time would be for Him to give us history written in advance, which is why roughly a third of the bible is predictions. That same book then says in effect, "Not only do I (God) exist, but let Me tell you what I expect of you as a believer. It is not only to trust in My existence and not only to trust in Jesus complete payment for one's sins, but to become mature believers by using one's time to make a difference for Me."
  - c) All of this leads back to this bible verse, which says in effect we can have assurance that all of this is true. In other words, God's word is the "sure and firm anchor for our sole", especially during those moments when we have doubts about His existence.
13. Verse 19b: It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain,<sup>20</sup> where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.
- a) These verses require a quick discussion about the Jewish temple that existed at the time when Jesus was on earth. Within that temple was a special area that only the High Priest could enter once per year. One day per year the top priest would enter this curtained off location and offer up an animal sacrifice on behalf of all of those who trusted in God. That location behind the curtain represents where God's presence was represented.
  - b) After Jesus died, the curtain that separated this sealed off area mysteriously was ripped apart. (See Matthew 27:51, Mark 15:38 or Luke 23:45). Tradition has it that curtain was over a foot thick. Those gospel verses makes the point the curtain was ripped from "top to bottom" which is a way of saying that God Himself ripped it apart.

- c) The point of that story is that the separation barrier between God Himself and ourselves is no longer needed. Because Jesus Himself has paid the full price for sins, there no longer needs to be a barrier between "God's presence and ourselves". The reason God designed the whole "behind the curtain system" in the Old Testament is to show that we can't just approach Him based on our efforts. We have to come to Him on His terms, which means to seek Him for the forgiveness of our sins. When Jesus paid the full price for our sins, that curtain was no longer necessary and that is why God literally tore it apart.
    - i) What is interesting is that the book of Acts records that some of the religious Jews who were Pharisee's did become believers in Jesus. (See Acts 15:5). I've always suspected that it was the act of the curtain being torn in two that caused those Pharisee's to believe in Jesus.
  - d) So what does this story have to do with Christian maturity? That is why God Himself personally tore down that curtain. Because the price for our sins is now taken care of, we are now "free" to live to make a difference for Jesus.
    - i) Let me put it this way: As Christians, we are free to live however we want. No matter how we live, as long as we trust Jesus did die for our sins, we are saved.
    - ii) The question becomes, "What do we want to do with our salvation?" Do we want to be "barely saved" and get that small shack in heaven, ☺ or do we want to use the most valuable commodity we have, which is our time, to live to make a difference for Him? That realization of how we should use our time, is what Christian maturity is all about, and in effect is the main point of this chapter.
  - e) This leads us to understanding why Jesus is compared to Melchizedek, the final reference of this chapter, and the main subject of the next lesson: As a teaser for next week, the main point to get here is that we can't become mature believers without Jesus help.
    - i) The point is if we try as hard as we can to make a difference for Jesus, all that is going to happen is that we are going to "burn out" sooner or later.
    - ii) However, if we daily trust in Jesus in order to give us the power to make that difference, that is how and when we become mature Christians.
    - iii) I'll expand on that thought in the next lesson. Now it is time for prayer.
14. Heavenly Father, help us to become more mature Christians. Show us how we can use the most valuable commodity You give us, our time for Your glory. Show us how we can use our time and our talents today to make a difference for You. Help us to rely upon Your power in order to make that difference in the first place. Make it obvious to us, how we should use our time for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.