



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Epistle of St. Paul to the Hebrews

Chapter 6

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Introduction

- St. Paul encourages the Hebrews to move on to spiritual maturity
- Although they were in spiritual infancy, he still did not lose hope in them
- The first step is to go beyond the elementary teaching (i.e. foundation)
 - ❖ This does not mean that the foundation is not important



A Call to Perfection (6:1-3)

- Basic teachings of Christ:
 - ❖ Repentance from sin
 - ❖ Faith in God
 - ❖ Baptisms
 - ❖ Laying on of hands (Chrismation, Priesthood, Unction of the Sick)
 - ❖ Resurrection of the dead
 - ❖ Eternal judgment



A Call to Perfection (6:1-3)

- Going on to perfection; we will do if God permits (v.3)
- Perfection does not mean only growing but *steadfastness* in Christ till the end
- It is *practically impossible* to restore repentance to those who apostate, especially after becoming spiritually mature



The Danger of Apostasy (6:4-8)

- V. 6 is a practical truth and not a theological truth
- Theologically repentance from apostasy is acceptable
- Practically it is impossible on our part, but for God everything is possible



The Danger of Apostasy (6:4-8)

- The spiritually mature people:
 - ❖ Were once enlightened (Baptism)
 - ❖ Have tasted the heavenly gift (Eucharist)
 - ❖ Have become partakers of the Holy Spirit (Chrismation)
 - ❖ Have tasted goodness of the word of God
 - ❖ Have tasted the powers of the age to come



The Danger of Apostasy (6:4-8)

- *Fall away* (v.6) is not just any sin, it is apostasy
- Apostasy here is not out of ignorance or error it is *deliberate*
- The Ex-believer can perish!
- He is similar to the Jews who after having seen and heard the Lord, they crucified Him



The Danger of Apostasy (6:4-8)

- Apostates can only be rehabilitated through *repentance* not re-baptism (v.6) (St. John Chrysostom)
- Apostates are equivalent to *unfertile land* which bears briars and thorns instead of useful herbs
- “It is *rejected* and near to being cursed....” (v.8)
- Still there is hope in God only; not in them

Encouragement To Persevere (6:9-12)



- A word of encouragement and comfort is *needed* and *offered* (v. 9)
- This comfort is unmistakable because it is rooted in:
 - ❖ Confidence in the justice of God (v. 10)
 - ❖ Acknowledgement of their work and labor of love:
 1. Toward His name
 2. Through continuous ministry to the saints

Encouragement To Persevere (6:9-12)



- How to persevere to the end and not to be sluggish?
 - ❖ Diligence (v.11)
 - ❖ Imitate those who through *faith* and *patience* inherit the promises (v. 12)
- The fruit of perseverance:
 - ❖ Full assurance of hope until the end (v.11)

God's Promise is Steadfast (6:13-20)



- In order to encourage them to persevere, St. Paul has to prove the reliability of Lord's promises
- God's promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:2-3 & 22:16-17)
- Why Abraham?
 - ❖ The appeal to the oath (they can count on God)
 - ❖ Prepares the way to return to the subject of Melchizedek in chapter 7

God's Promise is Steadfast (6:13-20)



- God swore by the highest power available to Him, *Himself*
- God was both the one who *swore* the oath and the one who *guaranteed* the oath
- The very existence of the Jewish Christians, proved that God had kept the promise to Abraham to bless and multiply him

God's Promise is Steadfast (6:13-20)



- Psalm 110:4 speaks of a priest according to the order of Melchizedek
- The promise of Psalm 110:4 was affirmed by an oath of God
- Faithfulness of God to His promise-affirmed-by-oath to Abraham in Genesis 22 anticipates the faithfulness of God to His promise-affirmed-by-oath in Psalm 110 to Christ to be a priest like Melchizedek

God's Promise is Steadfast (6:13-20)



- God's promises are reliable because He never changes
- We need to *endure patiently* to obtain the promises (v. 15)
- Two unchangeable things which support our faith:
 - ❖ God's promise
 - ❖ God's oath
- The faithfulness of God is a strong encouragement to lay hold of the hope that is set before us

God's Promise is Steadfast (6:13-20)



- The hope of salvation is like an anchor, which during the time of trouble, protect us from drifting away
- The hope is:
 - ❖ Sure: can be trusted
 - ❖ Steadfast: unchangeable
- This hope opened the path to the very presence of God in the Holy of Holies

God's Promise is Steadfast (6:13-20)



- The Lord Jesus, as a forerunner, has already entered there as a priest to intercede for us
- Since only the high priest could enter that inner sanctuary in Judaism, and since the Lord Jesus is there on the right hand of the God → Jesus is the ultimate High Priest



Conclusion

- What is apostasy? Why is it impossible from a practical standpoint to restore apostates to Christian faith and practice?
- If we take seriously the exhortation to exercise both faith and patience, what effect does that have on our Christian life?
- In what sense have we “fled to a place of refuge”?