

Hebrews 6. Chap^t 1-8 verses

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~~Handwritten scribbles~~

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sermon by McGuffey
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Hebrews 6th Chap^{er} 1-8 verses

"Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

And this will we do if God permit.

For it is impossible, for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.

For the earth, which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but that, which beareth thorns and briers, is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned."

To the Jews had been committed the oracles of God.

Amongst them, was still retained, comparatively a correct knowledge of his attributes and worship.

This knowledge, amidst all their prejudice and depravity, qualified them for comprehending

the doctrines of the gospel with more readiness,
and ^{for} understanding them with greater clearness
than any other people.

So remarkably was this the case that the
apostles were directed to tarry at Jerusalem
until they should be endued with power from
on high. ^{as their knowledge would more than counterbalance} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~apostles~~ ^{in appointing}
to the Hebrews the way of God more perfect-
ly; judiciously avails himself of what they
already knew of the matter, in order to abridge,
as much as possible, the discussion.

In the preceding chapter, he upbraides
them with stupidity - and severely reproves them
for their forgetfulness of the first principles
of the oracles of God. In the passage
which we are to consider, he reckons their
knowledge sufficient to remove the necessi-
ty of laying again the foundations of several
primary doctrines, which he enumerates, and
therefore proposes that, omitting these, they
should hasten on unto perfection. "Therefore,"
says he, "leaving the principles of the doctrine
of Christ let us go on unto perfection."

"The doctrine of Christ" comprehends all that
is taught in the scriptures respecting a
Mediator and redemption through him.
The principles of this doctrine consist

of that which is essential to be previously known
in order to a correct understanding of the economy
of redemption. This varies according to the nature
of the argument, and the previous knowledge or
ignorance of the persons addressed.

In writing to the Hebrews, many things might
safely be assumed, which, in addressing the
Gentiles, would require to be explained, established,
and enforced. The Jews, however ready they
might be to deny the divinity of Christ, and to
misconstrue the prophecies respecting him, were
in no danger of erecting an altar "to the unknown
god"; with the Athenians - nor, with the citizens
of Iconium, likely to ascribe a miracle, wrought
in confirmation of the gospel, to Jupiter - nor to
mistake an apostle for a god, as did the barba-
rans of Miletus.

They knew enough of the mercy of God -
to understand the nature of repentance -
enough of his veracity to believe on his word -
enough of the washing of regeneration to compre-
hend the design of baptism - enough of the
doctrine of imputation - to perceive the import
of the Sacerdotes laying his hand upon the head
of the victim, and the priests upon the head
of him who received the blessing, or ^{who} was thus
set apart to the service of God and in a
peculiar manner devoted to him - enough of the

nature of man and the government of God to believe in a resurrection of the dead and an eternal judgment, and, consequently, in a future state of rewards and punishments.

Repentance, from its effects, in turning its subjects from such a course of conduct as must eventuate in eternal death, is called "repentance from dead works"

"Faith toward God," is so called because he is its object - and the last judgment is styled "eternal," from the consideration that, the sentence then passed will fix irrevocably the final destinies of both angels and men.

But, considerable as was the information of the Jews in general, and the Hebrew converts to Christianity, in particular - they were far, very far, from that full, accurate and complete knowledge of the doctrines and promises of the gospel, "as typically set forth in the covenant with Abraham, and darkly expressed in the figures and prophecies of the law," which was necessary to prevent their relapsing into Judaism, or falling away into final apostacy. - Such a knowledge of the oracles of God is what the apostle here calls perfection - a use of the term found also in his epistle to Timothy. 2 Tim., 3:17

That the perfection here spoken of is a perfection of knowledge, and not of life or character, is evident, when we consider the means by which it was to be obtained - the ground of doubt, as to its being attainable - and the consequences ascribed to the acquisition.

The means, as is abundantly evident, throughout the epistle, was argument - a close investigation, and rigid exposition of the ancient oracles of divine truth, proceeding from principles assumed by the one party and admitted by the other. - The ground of doubt, whether the Hebrews would ever attain to this perfection, seems to consist, not in any supposed defect in the subjects, or inadequacy in the means, but in a presumption that, such might not be the will of God. "And thus," continues the apostle, with pious submission to the will of his divine master, "thus will we do if God permit" - a reflection which it is not likely would have here occurred had he been contemplating that, which in the technical language of some divines, is called "Christian perfection." - But the effects, ascribed to this perfection, to which the apostle proposes, by the divine permission, to conduct the Hebrews, chiefly determines it to be different from those high attainments - uniformity of life - regularity

of temper, and propriety of conversation, which, perhaps with more charity than truth, have been called "sinless perfection".

The advocates of this perfection admit that, to fall from it, and relapse into sin is quite possible - but the effect of that to which the Hebrews are exhorted to attain, is to prevent apostasy.

To have fallen from a state of sinless perfection, does not, in the opinion of those who defend it, preclude the possibility of being again restored to the favour of God - but the apostasy intended by the apostle is considered as final - though the subjects were far from having made such rare attainments. It is expressly affirmed to be impossible to renew them again unto repentance and consequently to restore them to a state of favour and acceptance with God.

That a perfection of christian knowledge is here intended, still farther is evident, from the apostle's use of the term and its ^{correlates} ~~conjugates~~ in other passages of his writing.

Perfect men, with him, are such, as by reason of use, have their senses, or understandings exercised to discern both good and evil.

Perfection, he teaches, could not be

predicated of the Levitical priesthood, - nor of the law, - nor even of the faith and experience of the ancient church; because they were all but incipient evolutions of that great plan of redemption to be completed only when all the redeemed are brought home and Christ shall have delivered up the kingdom to the Father - "God having provided some better thing for us that they without us might should not be made perfect."

Now, though it is true that, none can find out the thoughts unto perfection; and that, absolute perfection cannot be asserted of anything, previously to its completion: yet it is equally true that, all may arrive at a correct general understanding of what God has revealed, which constitutes a perfection of Christian knowledge.

This must necessarily be different at different periods in the history of the Church.

More knowledge became necessary as further revelations were made, and more still becomes necessary as the fulfilment of ancient prophecy continues to shed light upon that which before was but imperfectly understood.

Let it not however be supposed that, knowledge, even the perfection of christian knowledge is, of itself, sufficient for salvation. Knowledge puffeth up - but it is charity that

High attainments in knowledge are perhaps not often requisite for the conversion of the sinner - nor is the promotion of piety the necessary result of such attainments. Nay: a previous acquaintance with incorrect systems of either philosophy or religion have a tendency to fortify the mind against conviction. Yet it cannot be denied that, an extensive acquaintance with the doctrines of reformation is the best security against error, and the most likely, as well as the most effectual means of promoting in its possessor all those traits of character which furnish the best evidence of true piety. Nor can he, who has once fairly investigated the matter, and candidly examined the evidence by which it is supported, avoid the conviction that, Christianity is true - or ever afterwards forget that, such was the unavoidable conclusion to which he was brought.

No matter, how hostile his heart may be to its precepts - no matter, how much he may affect, or even desire to disbelieve its doctrines - no matter, how repugnant his life may be to its requirements - he has been ascertained of the regular procedure of the mind in obtaining the conclusions and can never afterwards invalidate them to himself, nor obliterate ^{from his mind} the lasting conviction of their truth.

Thus, then, it is plain in what sense those to whom the apostle wrote, were expected to arrive at perfection, and, also in what way that perfection would secure them from danger of relapsing into Judaism - an apostacy to which they could have neither motive nor inducement except from a belief that, the law of Moses was to be preferred to the gospel of Christ. - A relapse from correct knowledge to entire ignorance, especially in a matter that, from its nature and importance, must constantly press upon the attention, is as impossible, as a relapse from conscious existence. -

By proposing to instruct the Hebrews in the import of their own scriptures, the apostle teaches us that, their danger arose from ignorance - an ignorance too, for which they were culpable, in as much as, they had not improved their previous knowledge, nor followed out the instructions which they had before received.

on this account, should they fall away, the light, and privileges which they had once enjoyed, would but enhance their guilt, render their apostacy final, and thus seal their doom forever. -

Thus apostacy from the Christian faith is considered, not only as possible, but extremely probable - and that too, in cases of no ordinary attainment. - The subjects of it are supposed to have been enlightened - instructed, not only in the principles of natural theology, but also in the

rudiments of the doctrine of Christ, so as to have become fit subjects for initiation into the church of Christ - at least by the ordinance of baptism -

They had tasted of the heavenly gift - had experienced a release from that onerous ritual, which neither they, nor their ^{fathers}, were able to bear - had learned that, it was not necessary to resort either to mount Gerizim, or to Jerusalem, in order to true, spiritual, and acceptable worship. -

They had been made partakers of the Holy Ghost - had witnessed the miracles wrought by the Spirit, in proof of the gospel - had themselves shared in those extraordinary dispensations of miraculous power which were at that time bestowed - had tasted the good word of God - had seen fulfilled the promise of the Father to send his Son for the redemption of the world - had witnessed, and some of them professed to have experienced the irresistible efficacy of the doctrine of the cross - the powers of the world to come, the commencement of Messiah's reign upon earth. -

They had seen ignorance dispelled - prejudice removed - enmity overcome - idolatry vanishing - immorality, ^{of Satan} receding - the power and dominion of ^{Satan} speared and broken. -

They had seen the prey taken from the mighty and the captive ^{of} terrible delivered. -

But, after all, they had not laid their foundation upon the rock. They did not dig

deep enough to build upon that tried corner stone
which alone is a sure foundation. Their knowledge
was imperfect - their profession insincere - their devotion
transient - their goodness like the morning cloud and
early dew that goeth away. - Hence their liability
to apostatize from the faith of Christ. Thus the
apostle asserts with as little qualification, as he
does that, they had been enlightened. -

Following Berg, our translators have, without
any other authority, chosen to express it as contingent -
or conditional - "if they shall fall away" instead
of "and have fallen away" - ^{The former is a} sense which the original
will by no means admit. - Yet this passage
does not militate against the doctrine of the saints
perseverance. - The effect of the attainments here
described is, it is true, upon the ^{in case} supposition of
apostacy, to render restoration impossible. - But
the conduct ascribed to the apostates, of cru-
cifying to themselves the son of God afresh and
putting him to an open shame, is incompatible
with the character of those who have ever been
born again. - Of the final perseverance of
such, the scriptures contain the strongest assurances.
The perfections of God - his love, his faithful-
ness, his wisdom and his power, all are engaged
for their safety. They are chosen in Christ -
united to Christ - purchased by his blood - the

objects of his intercession—the subjects of the Spirit's
operations, to enlighten, conform and establish them
— so that—their life being hid with Christ in
God—it, ^{is} as impossible for them to fall away
as for God himself to change. — Those
then, who are liable to apostasy in the sense
of the text have never been the children of
God what ever may have been their character.

But why should the renewal of such
apostates be said to be impossible? Is any thing
too hard for the Lord? Is any thing impossible
to omnipotence? — It cannot be denied that,
with God all things are possible. — Yet infinite
power, sometimes sees fit to limit its operations
by confining its self to the employment of certain
means. Whenever a system of means has been
established, — all that can be effected by them, is
possible to the agent that employs them. — But,
whatever they are inadequate to effect becomes
impossible to the agent — though his power, under
other circumstances, might be fully adequate
to the result. — Thus, though God has
decreed the salvation of sinners — and Christ
is able also to save them to the uttermost
that come unto God by him, — yet, from the
nature of man, as a free agent, and from the
established ~~system~~ ^{of grace} of means, which God has
seen fit to employ, their salvation under certain

circumstances becomes impossible. Such is the case before us. — The Hebrews had been exalted to heaven in point of privilege. They had for a while rejoiced in the light and glared in the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free.

They had exhausted the evidence by which conviction is usually produced, or, by too hasty an assent, rendered what remained uninteresting, and further discussion tedious and ~~exhausting~~ ^{irksome}. Thus, from the self-reproach, of being, as they ~~supposed~~ ^{thought} too credulous — from the supposed inadequacy of the proof, arising from their imperfect acquaintance with ^{it} — from reticence to resume an investigation, the results of which, had, in the heat, and novelty of their former zeal, appeared so plausible, but now so unsatisfactory — they were in extreme danger of relapsing into Judaism — the religion of their fathers — the religion of their country — a religion of more palpable rites and a more obvious atonement. — It was this that caused the apostle to doubt whether any thing could now be done to prevent their apostasy — and whether God would succeed his efforts in their behalf, and thus make him instrumental in saving some of them.

But should the final step be taken — and to their present loathing of the Gospel, and particularly to the law be added the pride of opinion — the apparent

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But should the final step be taken — and to their present loathing of the gospel, and partiality to the law, be added the pride of opinion — the apparent

candour of renouncing false doctrines, and disclaim-
-ing all connection with impostors, together with the
aversion which men naturally have to the charge
of inconsistency - it would then be morally impos-
-sible that, the apostle, or one risen from the dead,
or an angel from Heaven, or, we may say, that
God himself could renew them again unto
repentance, without employing a ~~thera~~ means than
he has seen fit to employ for the purpose - seeing
they had ~~conferred~~ ~~to~~ themselves the love of God
afresh, and ~~put him~~ by practically approving
of the conduct of their countrymen and rulers
in putting him to death. By thus openly avowing
their belief that, he was an impostor, they would
put him to an open shame, proclaiming to the
world that, in their opinion, he had justly been
made a publick example of what blasphemers
ought to suffer and cry with those that crucified
him, "we have a law, and by our law he ought
to die." Away with him! Away with him! It is
not fit that he should ^{live}. This view of the subject is
confirmed by the apostle himself in the
following verses. "For the earth, ^{which} ~~that~~ ~~dresseth~~
in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth
forth herbs meet for them by whom it is
dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but that
which beareth briars and ^{thorns} ~~bruis~~ ~~and~~ ~~thorns~~,
and

and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.

Man, by disobedience had fallen under the curse. The ground also was cursed for his sake.

The moral subject of the curse exhibited, as the consequence of his fall, rebellion against God - ~~an~~ heart fully set in him to do evil.

Thorns and thistles; sterility and drought - inscribed derangement, in legible characters, on the natural world. But these effects of the curse

were not, in either case, left wholly without remedy.

Separate systems of means were adopted, in order to their redress, suited to the different ends to be attained. The Son of God undertook to apply the one - while man, himself, was required to employ the other. Each was designed to be exclusive though not universal in its application and effects.

As man was left free to fall; so also, he ~~may~~ ^{is free to} resist the means, ^{of grace} and reject the offer of salvation - And to convince him that success depends entirely upon the sovereign will of his Creator, the most assiduous cultivation is, in many cases, found insufficient to overcome the natural sterility of the soil. - In such cases, to render the ground productive is justly said to be impossible. - Yet it is obvious that the impossibility arises, neither from the untractable nature of the subject - for the Creator could easily change its qualities without, in this

case, violating any principle of moral freedom.
- nor from the incapacity of the agent, ^{employed} for
man has powers, both physical and intellectual,
adequate to the employment of the means
prescribed - nor from a want of power, in
the author, to extend the means of cultivation -
for he is mighty, both in strength and in
wisdom. But the impossibility of recla-
-ining both, the moral and material subject,
under certain circumstances, arises from the
Creator's having laid down determinate means
and, in infinite wisdom, designed that these should
be limited in their operation and partial in
their effects. In the one case, the soil that
by cultivation is rendered productive, receiveth
blessing from God - in the other, he that
bebeeth and is baptised shall be saved. -

In the one, that which notwithstanding
it is watered by the rain from Heaven,
remains sterile, or beareth only thorns and
bruiers is rejected - is nigh unto cursing, ~~there~~
so that no man may eat fruit of it forever -
in the other - he that bebeeth not shall
not see life, but the wrath of God abedeth
on him. - Of the one, the end is to be burned -
abandoned to perpetual neglect and consuming
drought - of the other, to be cast into the lake that
burneth with fire and brimstone, where the water
dreth not, and the fire is not quenched. -

From the subject thus illustrated my first inference is, - the importance of Christian knowledge. Religion consists of faith and practice. But how can we believe that of which we have no knowledge? Or how perform the duties which we do not understand?

Though we cannot tell how far knowledge is absolutely necessary in order to salvation, yet we know that a certain degree is indispensable.

And who is there that deserves the appellation of Christian, who can sit down contented with that degree of knowledge which is barely sufficient to secure his safety - any more than with the lowest attainments in holiness or conformity to the will of God? The Christian cannot, in neglect of his own comfort, in neglect of the interest and edification of the church, and, above all, in neglect of the express command of God, rest satisfied with barely a knowledge of the first principles of the oracles of God. Such is not the spirit of the gospel. - The apostle himself did not consider that he had already attained or were already perfect. Nor will any real Christian relax his exertions, either in the acquisition of knowledge, or in striving after greater degrees of faith and holiness because forsooth his state is safe! It may be safe, but it must be comparatively comfortless. -

My next inference is - the interest which we should ^{take} in instructing those who are out of the way. This is at once an important and a difficult duty. It devolves more or less upon all. We should all be ready to ^{give} a reason of the hope that is within us. We should all be prepared to direct enquiring souls to Jesus - to recommend his religion, by our walk and conversation, to those around us - and be careful to give none occasion to the adversary to gainsay or blaspheme. We must suit our instructions to the age, the education, the prejudices the ignorance and even the caprice of those among whom we dwell - We must become all things to all men - omitting needless repetitions to the better informed and carefully suiting our instructions and remarks to what time and place in the view of prudence may seem to require.

My third inference is the duties of confidence in God and resignation to his will. God seeth not as man seeth. He ^{can} make effectual the most unlikely means and render ineffectual the best laid schemes of human policy. When the path of duty is plainly marked out - we ought to pursue it with unwavering steps. Neither doubts, nor fears nor difficulties, nor obstacles of any kind should

should be allowed to discourage or retard us.
Nor on the other hand should we allow
an overweening fondness for our schemes to
bias us in their favour beyond what is obvious
duty - Our zeal, our benevolence, our affections,
our patriotism and and above all our party
spirit may, ere we are aware, entest us in
a course which at first appeared duty - but
which on a nearer inspection and more extended
acquaintance we discover to be questionable - and
upon such discovery we ought to pause, examine,
and upon conviction of our error, relinquish
the whole business - no matter how great a
favourite, ^{with us} the plan may have been. —

We must show by the readiness with which
we change our course that from the first we
engaged ^{us} it only with the impression
that it was duty and with the sentiments of the
apostle in our hearts and his language upon
our lips - this will we do if God permit. —

My last inference is - the awful
responsibility of those who "run away their
day of grace" - especially in gospel lands. —

It will be more tolerable for Sodom and
Gomorrah in the judgment than for them.
Such is the character of the human
mind

mind that every days experience makes men either better or worse. A familiarity with sacred things will either have its appropriate effect of improving our moral and religious character, or it will render us less likely to be benefited by subsequent opportunities.

To those who trifle with sacred things, religion loses its dignity, death and eternity their solemnity, revelation its evidence of authenticity, the character of God its awful grandure and sublimity - their perceptions of truth become blunted, their moral powers paralyzed as by the hand of death - their energies withered as by the blast of perdition - no motives can influence them, ^{no hopes excite} no fears alarm - no evidence convince - they go onward and downward in the death-like stream of pleasure or stupidity until awaked by the shock of the bottomless gulph they sink forever ⁱⁿ irremediable woe. Because I have called and ye refused, I ^{have} stretched out my hand and no man regarded - I also will laugh at your calamities, and ^{will} mock when your fear cometh - when your fear cometh as desolation and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind. (Rev. 1st 24-27)