

LIFE Bible Study: Hebrews 6:13-20

For Discussion: What place does trust have in your relationships? What happens to the dynamic of a relationship when there is a lack of trust?

Read Hebrews 6:9-20

For review: In Hebrews 5:11-6:12, the author pauses in his teaching to warn his readers about the danger of spiritual immaturity. They were to persevere in their pursuit of ongoing growth because the symptoms of those who would only regress in their faith temporarily are disturbingly similar to those whose faith would ultimately prove to be false. Following that warning, he gives a word of encouragement and expresses his confidence that their lives of service arose out of a genuine love for God, despite their present dullness of hearing, and exhorts them to earnestly emulate the lives of those who faithfully persevered to inherit what was promised them. From there, the author proceeds to expound on why such a life of devotion is a worthwhile pursuit and the assurance that believers have from God as they dedicate themselves to it.

The author begins with a focus on the oath God made to Abraham and its significance (v.13-14). What is the purpose of an oath (Gen. 24:2-4; Ex. 22:10-11)?¹ Why are oaths necessary for transactions between people?²

¹Oaths (also called vows) were common legal devices in ancient times. They are a formal declaration that calls on a higher power to validate the person's words and often pertain to a commitment to do or not do something.

-It is the strongest way for someone to bind themselves to what they say, and it constitutes the final word in resolving disputes – an oath adds weight to a person's words.

-Oaths made to God are taken just as seriously (Jud. 11:29-40; 1 Sam. 1:9-11 & 19-28).

²Oaths are needed because of the sin and the fickleness of people. People have shown themselves to be unreliable, untrustworthy, and motivated by self-interest.

-Experience often tells us assurances are needed, especially when there is a lot on the line. For the most serious of matters, a person's word alone is not enough => Need oversight to ensure justice.

-If we are not immediately and unconditionally trusting, it may be the result of having been cheated, lied to, or let down, or seeing that happen to someone – sometimes suspicion/skepticism may be a reasonable response.

-We may be aware of our own unreliability/untrustworthiness and expect the same from others.

²People are limited not only in their willingness to make good on their words but also in their ability to do so.

Which aspects of God's character are revealed in His willingness to swear an oath by Himself, both as the one who swears the oath and as the one by whom the oath is sworn?¹ What difference does this oath make to His promise?²

¹Unchanging character and purposes (v.17, **Num. 23:19**, Jas. 1:17).

¹Absolute honesty (v.18, **Num. 23:19**, **Titus 1:1-2**, John 17:17).

¹Unwavering faithfulness (**Heb. 10:23**, 2 Tim. 2:11-13).

¹God is above all since there exists no one greater by whom to swear (**1 Tim. 6:15b-16**).

-It is a recognition of His supreme authority and the "infallible integrity of his own self" –Philip Hughes

¹God was under no obligation to make an oath, He did not owe us any proof of His faithfulness or intentions. Yet He subjected Himself to it to provide us with added assurance of His earnestness and resolve.

-Despite the inherent truthfulness of everything God says, He condescends to accommodate our weak and faltering faith.

¹Knowing our weaknesses, He responds with compassion and grace.

-We've had trouble taking God at His word from the beginning (Gen. 3:1-7).

²From God's perspective, the addition of an oath makes no difference, His word is no less valuable/true without an oath as it is more valuable/true with an oath.

²From our perspective, we receive a double assurance in that God can't lie and further swears to make good on His promise.

-The two unchangeable things are God's oath (v.13) and His inherently honest word (v.18).

Continuing from his exhortation that his readers be "imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (v.12), the author cites a very real example in which faith and patience led to the receiving of God's promise (v.15). What is significant about Abraham being chosen as the prime example of this (Gen. 12:1-4 & 21:1-5; Gen. 22:1-18)?¹ What commonalities might there be between Abraham's experience and ours of waiting for God to fulfill His promise?²

¹Abraham was the recipient of God's promise to make of him a great people (Gen. 12:1-3).

-The very existence of the author's Jewish audience is itself proof of God's faithfulness in fulfilling His promise of a multitude of descendants to their ancestor (v.14).

¹Abraham had to patiently endure in faith to receive what was promised to him (v.15).

-His first descendant (through Sarah) wasn't born for 25 years (Gen. 12:4 vs. 21:5).

¹Abraham experienced severe testing to the point of seemingly losing the promise (Gen. 22:9-10).

-After waiting so many years for the birth of Isaac, he obeyed God's command to sacrifice the one on whom God's promise depended (**Heb. 11:17-19**).

¹His faith endured on the basis of nothing more than the sureness of God's word (**Rom. 4:18-21**). It wasn't until after passing God's test that Abraham received the oath (Gen. 22:15-18) => He is an exemplar of unreserved hope in God – he had nothing else, he needed nothing else.

-In overcoming despite everything he faced, Abraham has become our model of what it means to wait in expectation.

²Looking to Abraham's life helps us to set our expectations for what we might encounter during our time of waiting: Tests of our patience (How long are we prepared to wait? What should we be doing while we wait?), Challenges to our faith (How do we approach times of difficulty? What do we do when presented with alternate sources of hope that appear more attractive/easy?).

-Abraham's "waiting" (v.15) was his faith in practice – different from simply passing time until something happened.

²We are equally living in a time of partial fulfillment, God has given us a taste of what we can expect but there is a greater realization of His promise to come.

What things tend to draw you away from believing something God has clearly said or make it difficult to wait in faith?¹ What would a response of faith and patience look like when faced with these things?²

¹We often tend to live by sight rather than by faith, preferring what is seen to what is unseen (vs. 2 Cor. 5:6-7).

¹Impatience and reliance on our own understanding to make sense of our experiences.

¹We may not actively dispute or disbelieve God's promises but we may not think on them or give full recognition to their relevance in our lives or what's at stake => Similar to dullness of hearing (Heb. 5:11).

¹Even if we don't face temptation to walk away from the faith, God is trustworthy in all that He says and we are called to heed His words in other matters as well (E.g., holiness and sanctification) => The response is the same: believe Him, act in faith, and be ready to do so for as long as He calls us to.

²Entrust ourselves to the one who granted us our faith (Phil. 1:29) => We don't originate our faith and we don't sustain it.

²Take hold of Christ and run to Him in prayer, submitting every aspect of ourselves to Him (E.g., thoughts, emotions, intentions).

²Saturate our lives in His word (E.g., memorizing and meditating on Scripture).

The author ends this section with reference to a curtain that Jesus has passed through on our behalf. What is behind this curtain (Heb. 9:1-7 & Lev. 16:2)?¹ What is significant in Jesus being a "forerunner" who goes behind the curtain?² How can this truth be a steadfast anchor for our souls (v.19)?³

¹God's presence dwells within the inner room behind the curtain (in both the tabernacle and the temple). The altar of incense and the ark of the covenant with the mercy seat are located there as well.

-God's presence is above the mercy seat (Ps. 80:1).

¹The high priest could previously only enter behind the curtain once a year on the Day of Atonement, and only with a sacrifice.

²A forerunner doesn't go anywhere esoteric/exclusive, he goes where others are meant to follow.

-We will enter after Jesus into the presence of God because He has opened the way for us to follow in His footsteps.

²He goes there to fulfill His role as our great high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (v.20).

³It assures us that it is by the work of another, not the strength of our own resolve or our ability to achieve the results for ourselves, that we receive what was promised.

³It reminds us of the unseen reality and helps us put our focus on God rather than relying on what we can see around us.

Reflection and application

We face a world that tells us that following God is simply not worth it. However, God's Word reveals that He is trustworthy in all He says and that the stakes are eternity. By His own initiative, God has gone out of His way to make Himself believable to us. His doubly confirmed, irrevocable promise is a hope that holds us steady as we go through the buffeting storms of life. In light of this, we can live with assurance that Jesus' own will one day follow Him behind the torn curtain because His life, sacrifice, and eternal high priestly office make us fit to draw near to God with confidence (4:16). Until then, we can also trust that God is steadfastly resolute not only to accomplish salvation on our behalf, but also to carry out to the utmost His sanctifying work to make us holy starting even now (Phil. 1:6).

What tests your patience and wears on your faith? God has made Himself known and proven that He is deserving of our trust. Take courage to hold fast to the salvation offered by the one who holds fast to you. He will supply the faith and endurance you need to see His purposes accomplished according to His perfect timing.