

(Hebrews - Part 15): How Firm a Foundation

by A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer's sermon challenges Christians to move beyond foundational teachings and pursue spiritual maturity for a deeper faith experience.

Duration: 25:12

Scripture: Hebrews 6:1-8

Topics: "Expositional"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the concept of arrested development in the spiritual journey of believers. He emphasizes that when development stops, it doesn't remain stagnant but regresses. The writer of Hebrews expresses difficulty in conveying deeper truths to the Hebrew Christians because they were dull of hearing. The preacher urges believers to make up their minds and be ready to learn and grow in their faith, comparing it to a soldier preparing for battle. The sermon also references Hebrews 6:1-3, which encourages believers to leave behind the basic principles of the faith and strive for perfection in Christ.

Transcript

The book of Hebrews, continuing. I had lunch on another day this week. I don't want to give the impression that I'm always out lunching with people, but this time, a man who was the head of the Christian Medical Society was in the city, and he was a good friend of mine, and he told me that he had been in London and had gone to hear Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones.

And he said, Dr. Jones got up and said, We are studying the book of Hebrews. We have been 12 years in the book of Hebrews. 12 years.

And he said, This is the third message on this verse. So this is the 15th talk only on the book of Hebrews, and we're nearly halfway through, so you'll see I go faster than Dr. Lloyd-Jones goes. The book of Hebrews, the sixth chapter.

Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, the doctrine of baptism and of laying on of hands and of resurrection of the dead and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permits. Since the next word is for, there's a break, and we'll start with verse 3. Notice what the writer said.

This was occasioned, these words here, were occasioned by a condition among the Hebrew Christians to whom this was written. Something strange had happened to them. They had reached a state of arrested development.

And as always the case, when development arrests, it doesn't remain there, it starts back. And that is what has happened. Have you ever noticed these most disturbing words preceding this? It says in the 5th and 4th verse back of it, in 5.11, "...of whom we have many things to say and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing." Now, the reason it was hard to say it was not that the writer found it hard to express what he had to say, but that the hearer wasn't getting it, and so it's difficult to say something.

Did you ever try talking to a person that didn't know a word you were saying, that didn't know your language? Stand and talk earnestly to him, and just shake his head, and maybe have one word that he learned meaning I don't understand. Well, that's the reason it was hard. "...we have many things to say, but I'm talking one language and you speak another," he said.

"...seeing you are dull of hearing. For, for the time that you have had, you ought to be teachers yourselves. For now you have need that one teach you again, which be the first principles of the oracles of God, and are become such." I want you to see, are become such.

They weren't such, but they have become such. "...have need of milk, and not of strong meat." They had actually regressed and gone back to their childhood state. After having obviously grown some, they started growing backwards.

"...for everyone that uses milk," he explains, "...is unskillful in the word of righteousness, for he's a babe. But strong meat belongs to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." Now, he said that we were to leave the first principles, that is, the elementary instructions of the Christian faith. We are to leave them, but not leave them behind.

I want you to notice that. That we are to not leave them as one would leave one house and go to another, or one city and go to another. We are to leave them behind as a builder who is building a house, lays the foundation.

Then he leaves the foundation behind as he goes upward. And if it's a building like some of the big buildings downtown, they leave that far behind. Then they go up a story, and another story, and another story, up and up and up, until they have 30 or 40 or 50 stories towering in the air.

And they have left the foundation, not that they've departed from it, but that they've built up on it. Now, that's what the man of God means. Now, what are these first principles which we are to leave? He names them for us so there'll be no misunderstanding.

He says, "...repentance, and faith, and baptism, and the laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. These are the elementary first principles of the doctrine, and we are to leave them as a builder leaves the foundation and builds on up. Not laying again the foundation, he says, but the structure must rest on the foundation.

However high it may tower into the sky, it must rest on the foundation. It rests upon the foundation of Christ and of who he is, and of repentance and faith in him, and baptism into the body of Christ, and the coming resurrection of the dead, and the judgment to come. These basic doctrines of the faith, they will rest upon them, and no matter how far we go in the Christian faith, we never leave these.

They're there as a foundation upon which we build. But the trouble here was that they never went beyond the foundation. They never went beyond the foundation.

The exclusive preoccupation with elementary truth is a characteristic of evangelicals today. The ignoring of Christian truth is characteristic of the liberals, but exclusive preoccupation with the first principles is characteristic of the average Church, even the average Alliance Church. He says that keeps us abate all our lives, for he shifts his figures of speech back and forth.

We're told in school never to do that. They call that mixing your metaphors. Our Lord Jesus mixed his metaphors plenty, and so did Paul, and so did everybody else that had anything to say.

You don't go by your metaphors, you go by what you're trying to say. Henry Ward Beecher, one of the greatest preachers of his generation, said, When the English language gets in my way, God help the English language. He said here, talking about a baby and drinking milk and a foundation and the elementary foundational principles, so we have them both before us.

I want to take this about the baby for a little bit and show you how it's possible to be frozen in your babyhood state. Have your growth suspended and stay right there. Notice the marks of a baby.

Beautiful in a baby, but terrible in a person when they get to be 18 years old or 20 or even 5. First is, a baby can't concentrate on anything very long. Have you noticed that? That a baby loses interest about as fast as it's possible to lose interest. It just disappears.

They'll scream and yell and grab for something delightedly and get it, and one and a half minutes later throw it down and be looking for something else. That is typical of a baby, and it's the way God meant a baby to be. But he didn't mean the baby's father to be like that, nor the baby's mother, nor the baby's seven-year-old sister.

He didn't mean them to be like that. That's characteristic of a baby, and it's characteristic of Christians who became Christians, fundamental Christians, and then froze and stopped developing, that they're unable to stick to spiritual exercises, they can't pray very long, and they can't meditate. In fact, they smile at the whole idea of meditation.

I think that was for Thomas Akempis. And Bible reading, they don't do it very much, or very much else that takes discipline and maturity. And I notice the second thing about a baby is that they have no relish.

That is, they're preoccupied with simple things, with foundational things. You never talk to a baby about existentialism or the Cold War. The baby's satisfied with a half a dozen little things, enough to eat, to keep warm and dry, and to keep its mother within yelling distance.

That's about all a baby cares about. And there are Christians that grow up, and they have no relish for anything spiritually advanced. They're preoccupied with their first lessons.

There, there, there, they go. The average church is a school with only one grade, and that's the first one. They never expect to get beyond that, and they don't want to hear a man very long that wants to take them beyond that.

If the pastor insists they do their homework and get ready for the next grade, why do they begin to pray the Lord will call our dear brother somewhere else? That happens so much. They say, Lord, bless our dear

brother. And the worse they hate him, the more they bear down on the words, Our dear brother.

They say, take him somewhere else. Well, all he's trying to do is prepare them for another grade. But that church is dedicated to the first grade.

And the first grade is going to remain and will remain. And that was it here. Paul said actually some of them went up into the second grade and gave it up and said, It's too hard here.

And they went back to the first. How long have you been in the first grade, Junior? Twelve years. Well, how long have you been listening to the same truth and hearing the same doctrine? You must be born again.

And there's a judgment and so on. Well, that's true. And we must not leave that.

We must use that to advance. But we don't do it. The whole generations of Christians grow up in the first grade, and they learn to read their Bible in the light of this.

To them, nothing in the Bible ever means anything beyond this elementary stage. They have Bible conferences dedicated to the first grade in the Christian life. Bible schools dedicated to the continuance of the first grade.

Well, for my part, I feel that I want a little ambition, a little spiritual ambition. Paul said, I forget the things that are behind, and I press toward the mark. There was a man not satisfied with the first grade.

And notice another thing about a baby is its cry for amusement. It loves to be amused. When I'm on the bus somewhere and I see a baby looking over a mother's shoulder, now if the mother sees me, I just sit there dignified as can be.

But if I can see the baby, I begin to do these things. And I invariably get to rouse the baby, and we have a nice time. And finally, the mother notices him, pulls him down, and wonders who that old fella is back there.

Well, I won't harm the baby, but they love to be amused. And it doesn't take \$100 to do it. You can do it by working your finger like this, or looking through your finger at them.

They love to be amused, and the cry for amusement in religion is an evidence that we are frozen in the first grade. We're still children, and we're going to remain that way. Children have to have toys, and they have to have novelties, and they have to have new playmates every once in a while.

And the Church is like that. And the religious entertainment has so corrupted the Church of Christ that millions don't know that it's a heresy. Millions of evangelicals throughout the world have devoted themselves to religious entertainment, and they don't know that it's a heresy, as much a heresy as the counting of beads, or the splashing of holy water, or something else.

Just as much a heresy and as far from being true. Now, to expose this, of course, raises a storm of angry protest among the people. One thing this man wanted to know about, that may I have talked to this businessman, he brother told her, he said, I don't make God out of you, but I follow you and I believe you.

And he said, what I'd like to know is why so many people like you don't know what you're talking about. And I said, Brother Reisner, I give it up. I have no idea why it is, but it's true.

But as soon as they think that you're exposing the love of religious entertainment, you're finished in a minute. One man wrote an article to the next birthday of me. He said that I claimed that religious entertainment was wrong.

He said, don't you know that every time you sing a hymn, it's entertainment? Every time you sing a hymn. Well, I don't know how that fellow ever finds his way home at night. I really don't know.

He ought to have a sea and eye dog and a man with a white cap just to take him home. When you raise your eyes to God and sing, break thou the bread of life, dear Lord, to me, is that entertainment or is it worship? Isn't there a difference between worship and entertainment? And a church that can't worship must be entertained. And men who can't lead the church to worship must provide the entertainment.

And that's why we have the great evangelical heresy on. The heresy of religious entertainment. And then a child can't read or enjoy advanced Christian or advanced literature, even when they get to be six years old or five or six years old.

They'll come and make you sit down and read the book through, but all it says is, I saw a cat and the cat was white. There's nothing much to it, there's nothing profound. If they never went beyond that, you'd feel very bad for your child.

When he first comes home and says, Mommy, listen to me, and no matter what you're doing or what's burning on the stove, he grabs you and pulls you down and reads. He can read how proud you are, he can read wonderfully. He never thought he'd make it, but he did.

Now he can read. Read the whole book. We never knew how much our kids memorized and fooled us, but anyhow, they were reading.

And suppose ten years from now he comes in, now he's seventeen, and he comes in and says, Mommy, I can read. The cat is red. You'd say to your husband, I think we ought to do something for this boy, I think we ought to take him somewhere.

That's exactly why the Holy Ghost wrote the book of Hebrews. He said, Let's leave this. Why stay where you are and remain forever engrossed in the fundamentals of religion and excuse anything by repeating you've got to be born again, and then have any kind of a show and then say, No, you've got to be born again.

Any kind of a show and then say, Be born again. First principles all over again. Well, he says here plainly, the Holy Ghost says, No, I'll let the Holy Ghost say this.

I'm not saying it. Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on toward perfection. Not laying again these early foundations of the doctrines of Christ and so on, but let us go on unto perfection.

Now, how shall we go on? Well, of course, perfection means maturity, just as when your son stands twenty-one years old and twenty-two years old, he's having his college degree, he's as healthy as they come and good-natured and well-balanced, and you're proud of that big boy. What's happened to him is, he's matured, that's all, but he's not perfect. Lots of times, go into his room in the morning and see what you see lying around there is perfect.

He steps out of his trousers and leaves them there, and his shoes over here. He's not perfect, but he's mature. He's come up to his maturity now, and you're happy and feel good, and if you're a Christian, you thank God my boy stands tall and straight and mature now and healthy.

That's what the Holy Ghost means. He doesn't mean become a wax saint without a speck of imperfection, without a freckle on your soul. He means become mature in God, grow up in God so that you're no longer a baby and having to be entertained with the first principles, but that you are now growing up in God, becoming a strong Christian, learning to carry heavy burdens in the Holy Spirit, learning to pray effectively and learning to suffer with the world and suffer with the church and carry the cross.

How do I go about it? Let me give you briefly, for it's Communion Sunday and I won't be long. Let me give you two or three things here, half a dozen. One is, make up your minds.

By making up your mind, you can't save yourself. But you can make up your mind to get saved, and you can make up your mind after you are saved to go on with God. And until our minds are made up, God won't work with an unmade-up mind, or if he does, he will work toward getting it made up.

Make up your mind. Get the loose ends tied up and get ready. As a soldier, some young man here called to the Canadian Army, he gets that nice little letter.

It says, nice verbal, beautifully worded, fraternal, nice-sounding letter, but it all means the same thing, you're it. And so the young fellow goes, and before he goes, he picks up his room and he has a last date with his girlfriend, and he goes down where he hangs out sometimes, talks to the boys and says, Well, I'll be seeing you in two years. And he sort of gets ready.

He says, Goodbye, and he gets ready. So a Christian, a Christian when he makes up his mind to go on with God and to grow up into God and to learn the deep and high and lofty things of God, he's got to make up his mind to do it and say, Now, I've fooled around the kindergarten long enough. This is a cat Christian long enough now.

I want to grow up until I know what God is talking about in the high, lofty things of the Spirit. Then the second thing is, put away un-Christlike things. Put away un-Christlike habits.

Put away un-Christlike acts and squelch within you un-Christlike desires, and put away un-Christlike plans, and get rid of hindrances and thoughts and thought habits. And then the third thing is, become preoccupied with the scriptures. Become preoccupied with the word of God.

This book of God is a powerful thing, powerful indeed. If you will read it, it will bring you out and take you on. This, when we say, Break thou the bread of life, we're praying that God will give us understanding of the scriptures.

And then we're by pushing it on a bit and raising it a bit to its mystical phase, we're saying, Lord, when we take communion, break thou the bread to me. That's all the same. So get preoccupied with the scriptures.

Don't just have a chapter occasionally, but read it until it warms your heart. Read it until it begins to talk to you. We haven't read the scripture as long as we're reading it, until it begins to talk to us, we haven't been reading it.

We only think we have been. So get preoccupied with the scriptures. Get a good, big-text Bible, and I recommend King James, but there are other good versions besides the King James, but the King James is a good, basic version always to have around and trust.

Don't let anybody fool you. You can trust it. Spurgeon preached out of this book, and Moody preached out of this book, and the great souls that have shaken the world used this book in the last 300 years.

And I, for my part, don't like the idea that the scholars are all running around telling us we can't trust it. I got saved on it, and I didn't know there was another one when I got converted on the King James Version. So I say, make it your basic version.

If you want a few others to get disappointed in, have them around, but make it your basic version. And then the fourth thing is, take up your cross. Learn how to suffer for the Lord's sake a little bit.

They tell us the reason that the Communists are slowly encroaching on us of the western world is that we of the western world love our comforts too much, and they are not looking for comforts, they are looking for victory. And the early Christians, they stole a lot of that from the early Christians. A friend of mine went to see a man who was the head of a local Communist cell in the local Communist headquarters where they sent out literature, and the Communist said, Come in, Reverend, and sat down.

He went in and sat down. He said, Now, we're Communists, you know that, and you're a minister. He said, Of course, we're miles apart.

But he said, I want to tell you something. We learned our technique from your book of Acts. He said, We learned how to win and conquer by you from your book of Acts.

And he said, You who believe the Bible have thrown overboard the methods of the early Church, and we who don't believe it have adopted them, and they're working. And what was the very simple method of the early Church? It was to go witness, give everything to the Lord, and give up all to God, and bear your cross, take the consequences. And the result was, in the first hundred years of the Christian Church, the whole known world was evangelized.

We don't know that now because our missionaries are telling us they are leaving the impression that they don't intend to do it, but they leave the impression that there are parts of the world that were not evangelized. Every part of the world was evangelized, and every part of the known world was evangelized in the day after our Lord about 100 years. And then the next thing is, get Christ in your focus.

Get the Lord Jesus Christ in your focus. Show me thy face, one transient gleam of loveliness divine, and I will never think or dream of any love save thine. And open your heart to the Holy Spirit, and I'm sure God will take us on.

This isn't a luxury. I'm not being argued here. Won't you have a luxury binding for your Bible? Won't you have a luxury car? Won't you have a luxury? I'm not asking this isn't a luxury.

This is basic necessity, that we forsake the first principles and give up our childhood and go on into God. It is basic necessity, for it is impossible for those who are once enlightened and have tasted the heavenly gift and have slipped away to renew them unto repentance. It says it here.

So this doctrine this morning, this teaching, this exhortation by the Holy Spirit to leave the first principles of the Christian doctrine and go on toward perfection, is not to make deluxe Saints. It is to make any kind of Saints, the most basic necessity in the Christian life. I think this will be a wonderful morning for all of us, as we have our communion a little late because of our missionary convention interfering.

We're coming in between. It's a few Sundays late, but it's communion Sunday, and I think it would be a wonderful time for us Christians. Instead of sitting there waiting for the service to end, if when the bread is received, we would think of that body broken for us and the wine is drunk, we would think of that blood shed for us, and the prayers are made and the songs are sung, we'd surrender and repent and yield and look up and trust.

We might go a long way this morning if we do this. And this will we do, as the Holy Ghost says, if God permits.

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