

# Hebrews 6:1-6

by St. John Chrysostom

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*St. John Chrysostom emphasizes the necessity of moving beyond basic teachings of faith to achieve spiritual maturity and the importance of true repentance in the Christian life.*

**Scripture:** Hebrews 6:4

**Topics:** "Spiritual Growth", "Repentance"

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## Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of progressing in faith beyond the foundational teachings of repentance, faith, baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. He warns against remaining stagnant in spiritual growth, comparing it to continually learning the basics without advancing to deeper truths. Chrysostom urges believers to move towards perfection by living a life of faith, humility, and continuous learning, highlighting the necessity of repentance, intense prayer, almsgiving, forgiveness, and avoiding anger. He stresses the impossibility of being renewed through repentance if one falls away after experiencing the heavenly gifts and the powers of the world to come, likening it to crucifying Christ afresh and putting Him to an open shame.

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## Transcript

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 we will do, if God permit.

1. You have heard how much Paul found fault with the Hebrews for wishing to be always learning about the same things. And with good reason: For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, you have need again that some one teach you the elements of the first principles of the oracles of God. Hebrews 5:12

I am afraid that this might fitly be said to you also, that when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye do not maintain the rank of learners, but ever hearing the same things, and on the same subjects, you are in the same condition as if you heard no one. And if any man should question you, no one will be able to answer, except a very few who may soon be counted.

But this is no trifling loss. For oftentimes when the teacher wishes to go on further, and to touch on higher and more mysterious themes, the want of attention in those who are to be taught prevents.

For just as in the case of a grammar-master, if a boy though hearing continually the first elements does not master them, it will be necessary for him to be continually dinning the same things into the boy, and he will not leave off teaching, until the boy has been able to learn them accurately; for it is great folly to lead him on to other things, without having put the first well into him; so too in the Church, if while we constantly say the same things you learn nothing more, we shall never cease saying the same things.

For if our preaching were a matter of display and ambition, it would have been right to jump from one subject to another and change about continually, taking no thought for you, but only for your applauses. But since we have not devoted our zeal to this, but our labors are all for your profit, we shall not cease discoursing to you on the same subjects, till you succeed in learning them. For I might have said much about Gentile superstition, and about the Manichæans, and about the Marcionists, and by the grace of God have given them heavy blows, but this sort of discourse is out of season. For to those who do not yet know accurately their own affairs, to those who have not yet learned that to be covetous is evil, who would utter such discourses as those, and lead them on to other subjects before the time?

We then shall not cease to say the same things, whether ye be persuaded or not. We fear however, that by continually saying the same things, if you hearken not, we may make the condemnation heavier for the disobedient.

I must not however say this in regard to you all; for I know many who are benefited by their coming here, who might with justice cry out against those others, as insidiously injuring them by their ignorance and inattention. But not even so will they be injured. For hearing the same things continually is useful even to those who know them, since by often hearing what we know we are more deeply affected. We know, for instance, that Humility is an excellent thing, and that Christ often discoursed about it; but when we listen to the words themselves and the reflections made upon them, we are yet more affected, even if we hear them ten thousand times.

2. It is then a fitting time for us also to say now to you, Wherefore leaving the beginning of the doctrine of Christ, let us go unto perfection.

What is the beginning of the doctrine? He goes on to state it himself, saying, not laying again (these are his words) the foundation of repentance from dead works, and faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms and of laying on of hands, of the resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

But if this be the Beginning, what else is our doctrine save to repent from dead works, and through the Spirit to receive the faith, in the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment? But what is the Beginning? The Beginning, he says, is nothing else than this, when there is not a strict life. For as it is necessary to instruct one who is entering on the study of grammar, in the Elements first, so also must the Christian know these things accurately, and have no doubt concerning them. And should he again have need of teaching, he has not yet the foundation. For one who is firmly grounded ought to be fixed and to stand steady, and not be moved about. But if one who has been catechised and baptized is going ten years afterwards to hear again about the Faith, and that we ought to believe in the resurrection of the dead, he does not yet have the foundation, he is again seeking after the beginning of the Christian religion. For that the Faith is the foundation, and the rest the building, hear him [the Apostle] saying; I have laid the foundation and another builds thereupon. 1 Corinthians 3:10 If any man build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble. 1 Corinthians 3:12

Not laying again (he says) the foundation of repentance from dead works.

3. But what is, let us go on unto perfection? Let us henceforth proceed (he means) even to the very roof, that is, let us have the best life. For as in the case of the letters the Alpha involves the whole, and as the foundation, the whole building, so also does full assurance concerning the Faith involve purity of life. And without this it is not possible to be a Christian, as without foundations there can be no building; nor skill in literature without the letters. Still if one should be always going round about the letters, or if about the foundation, not about the building, he will never gain anything.

Do not however think that the Faith is depreciated by being called elementary: for it is indeed the whole power: for when he says, For every one that uses milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe Hebrews 5:13, it is not this which he calls milk. But to be still doubting about these things is [a sign] of a mind feeble, and needing many discourses. For these are the wholesome doctrines. For we call him a perfect man [i.e. of full age] who with the faith has a right life; but if any one have faith, yet does evil, and is in doubt concerning [the faith] itself, and brings disgrace on the doctrine, him we shall with reason call a babe, in that he has gone back again to the beginning. So that even if we have been ten thousand years in the faith, yet are not firm in it, we are babes; when we show a life not in conformity with it; when we are still laying a foundation.

4. But besides [their way of] life he brings another charge also against these [Hebrews], as being shaken to and fro, and needing to lay a foundation of repentance from dead works. For he who changes from one to another, giving up this, and choosing that, ought first to condemn this, and to be separated from the system, and then to pass to the other. But if he intends again to lay hold on the first, how shall he touch the second?

What then of the Law (he says)? We have condemned it, and again we run back to it. This is not a shifting about, for here also [under the Gospel] we have a law. Do we then (he says) make void the law through faith? God forbid, yea we establish the Law. Romans 3:31 I was speaking concerning evil deeds. For he that intends to pursue virtue ought to condemn wickedness first, and then go in pursuit of it. For repentance cannot prove them clean. For this cause they were straightway baptized, that what they were unable to accomplish by themselves, this might be effected by the grace of Christ. Neither then does repentance suffice for purification, but men must first receive baptism. At all events, it was necessary to come to baptism, having condemned the sins thereby and given sentence against them.

But what is the doctrine of baptisms? Not as if there were many baptisms, but one only. Why then did he express it in the plural? Because he had said, not laying again a foundation of repentance. For if he again baptized them and catechised them afresh, and having been baptized at the beginning they were again taught what things ought to be done and what ought not, they would remain perpetually incorrigible.

And of laying on of hands. For thus did they receive the Spirit, when Paul had laid his hands on them Acts 19:6, it is said.

And of the resurrection of the dead. For this is both effected in baptism, and is affirmed in the confession.

And of eternal judgment. But why does he say this? Because it was likely that, having already believed, they would either be shaken [from their faith], or would lead evil and slothful lives, he says, be wakeful.

It is not open to them to say, If we live slothfully we will be baptized again, we will be catechised again, we will again receive the Spirit; even if now we fall from the faith, we shall be able again by being baptized, to wash away our sins, and to attain to the same state as before. You are deceived (he says) in supposing

these things.

Hebrews 6:4-5

5. 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, crucifying to themselves the Son of God afresh, and putting Him to an open shame.

And see how putting them to shame, and forbiddingly he begins. Impossible. No longer (he says) expect that which is not possible; (For he said not, It is not seemly, or, It is not expedient, or, It is not lawful, but impossible, so as to cast [them] into despair), if you have once been altogether enlightened.

Hebrews 6:6

Then he adds, and have tasted of the heavenly gift. If you have tasted (he says) of the heavenly gift, that is, of forgiveness. And been made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and tasted the good word of God (he is speaking here of the doctrine) and the powers of the world to come (what powers is he speaking of? Either the working of miracles, or the earnest of the Spirit 2 Corinthians 1:22) and have fallen away, to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame. Renew them, he says, unto repentance, that is, by repentance, for unto repentance is by repentance. What then, is repentance excluded? Not repentance, far from it! But the renewing again by the laver. For he did not say, impossible to be renewed unto repentance, and stop, but added how impossible, [by] crucifying afresh.

To be renewed, that is, to be made new, for to make men new is [the work] of the laver only: for (it is said) your youth shall be renewed as the eagle's. Psalm 103:5 But it is [the work of] repentance, when those who have been made new, have afterwards become old through sins, to set them free from this old age, and to make them strong. To bring them to that former brightness however, is not possible; for there the whole was Grace.

6. Crucifying to themselves, he says, the Son of God afresh, and putting Him to an open shame. What he means is this. Baptism is a Cross, and our old man was crucified with [Him] Romans 6:6, for we were made conformable to the likeness of His death Romans 6:5; Philippians 3:10, and again, we were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death. Romans 6:4 Wherefore, as it is not possible that Christ should be crucified a second time, for that is to put Him to an open shame. For if death shall no more have dominion over Him Romans 6:9, if He rose again, by His resurrection becoming superior to death; if by death He wrestled with and overcame death, and then is crucified again, all those things become a fable and a mockery. He then that baptizes a second time, crucifies Him again.

But what is crucifying afresh? [It is] crucifying over again. For as Christ died on the cross, so do we in baptism, not as to the flesh, but as to sin. Behold two deaths. He died as to the flesh; in our case the old man was buried, and the new man arose, made conformable to the likeness of His death. If therefore it is necessary to be baptized [again ], it is necessary that this same [Christ] should die again. For baptism is nothing else than the putting to death of the baptized, and his rising again.

And he well said, crucifying afresh unto themselves. For he that does this, as having forgotten the former grace, and ordering his own life carelessly, acts in all respects as if there were another baptism. It

behooves us therefore to take heed and to make ourselves safe.

7. What is, having tasted of the heavenly gift? It is, of the remission of sins: for this is of God alone to bestow, and the grace is a grace once for all. What then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Far from it! Romans 6:1-2 But if we should be always going to be saved by grace we shall never be good. For where there is but one grace, and we are yet so indolent, should we then cease sinning if we knew that it is possible again to have our sins washed away? For my part I think not.

He here shows that the gifts are many: and to explain it, You were counted worthy (he says) of so great forgiveness; for he that was sitting in darkness, he that was at enmity, he that was at open war, that was alienated, that was hated of God, that was lost, he having been suddenly enlightened, counted worthy of the Spirit, of the heavenly gift, of adoption as a son, of the kingdom of heaven, of those other good things, the unspeakable mysteries; and who does not even thus become better, but while indeed worthy of perdition, obtained salvation and honor, as if he had successfully accomplished great things; how could he be again baptized?

On two grounds then he said that the thing was impossible, and he put the stronger last: first, because he who has been deemed worthy of such [blessings], and who has betrayed all that was granted to him, is not worthy to be again renewed; neither is it possible that [Christ] should again be crucified afresh: for this is to put Him to an open shame.

There is not then any second laver: there is not [indeed]. And if there is, there is also a third, and a fourth; for the former one is continually disannulled by the later, and this continually by another, and so on without end.

And tasted, he says, the good word of God; and he does not unfold it; and the powers of the world to come, for to live as Angels and to have no need of earthly things, to know that this is the means of our introduction to the enjoyment of the worlds to come; this may we learn through the Spirit, and enter into those sacred recesses.

What are the powers of the world to come? Life eternal, angelic conversation. Of these we have already received the earnest through our Faith from the Spirit. Tell me then, if after having been introduced into a palace, and entrusted with all things therein, you had then betrayed all, would you have been entrusted with them again?

8. What then (you say)? Is there no repentance? There is repentance, but there is no second baptism: but repentance there is, and it has great force, and is able to set free from the burden of his sins, if he will, even him that has been baptized much in sins, and to establish in safety him who is in danger, even though he should have come unto the very depth of wickedness. And this is evident from many places. For, says one, does not he that falls rise again? Or he that turns away, does not he turn back to [God]? Jeremiah 8:4 It is possible, if we will, that Christ should be formed in us again: for hear Paul saying, My little children of whom I travail in birth again, until Christ be formed in you. Galatians 4:19 Only let us lay hold on repentance.

For behold the love of God to man! We ought on every ground to have been punished at the first; in that having received the natural law, and enjoyed innumerable blessings, we have not acknowledged our Master, and have lived an unclean life. Yet He not only has not punished us, but has even made us partakers of countless blessings, just as if we had accomplished great things. Again we fell away, and not

even so does He punish us, but has given medicine of repentance, which is sufficient to put away and blot out all our sins; only if we knew the nature of the medicine, and how we ought to apply it.

What then is the medicine of Repentance and how is it made up? First, of the condemnation of our own sins; For (it is said) mine iniquity have I not hid Psalm 32:5; and again, I will confess against myself my lawlessness unto the Lord, and You forgave the iniquity of my heart. And Declare thou at the first your sins, that you may be justified. Isaiah 43:26 And, The righteous man is an accuser of himself at the first speaking. Proverbs 18:17

Secondly, of great humbleness of mind: For it is like a golden chain; if one have hold of the beginning, all will follow. Because if you confess your sin as one ought to confess, the soul is humbled. For conscience turning it on itself causes it to be subdued.

Other things too must be added to humbleness of mind if it be such as the blessed David knew, when he said, A broken and a contrite heart God will not despise. Psalm 51:17 For that which is broken does not rise up, does not strike, but is ready to be ill-treated and itself rises not up. Such is contrition of heart: though it be insulted, though it be evil entreated, it is quiet, and is not eager for vengeance.

And after humbleness of mind, there is need of intense prayers, of many tears, tears by day, and tears by night: for, he says, every night, will I wash my bed, I will water my couch with my tears. I am weary with my groaning. Psalm 6:6 And again, For I have eaten ashes as it were bread, and mingled my drink with weeping. Psalm 102:9

And after prayer thus intense, there is need of much almsgiving: for this it is which especially gives strength to the medicine of repentance. And as there is a medicine among the physicians' helps which receives many herbs, but one is the essential, so also in case of repentance this is the essential herb, yea, it may be everything. For hear what the Divine Scripture says, Give alms, and all things shall be clean. Luke 11:41 And again, By almsgiving and acts of faithfulness sins are purged away. Proverbs 16:6 And, Water will quench a flaming fire, and alms will do away with great sins. Sirach 3:30

Next not being angry with any one, not bearing malice; the forgiving all their trespasses. For, it is said, Man retains wrath against man, and yet seeks healing from the Lord. Sirach 28:3 Forgive that you may be forgiven. Mark 11:25

Also, the converting our brethren from their wandering. For, it is said, Go, and convert your brethren, that your sins may be forgiven you. And from one's being in close relations with the priests, and if, it is said, a man has committed sins it shall be forgiven him. James 5:15 To stand forward in defense of those who are wronged. Not to retain anger: to bear all things meekly.

9. Now then, before you learned that it is possible to have our sins washed away by means of repentance, were ye not in an agony, because there is no second laver, and were ye not in despair of yourselves? But now that we have learned by what means repentance and remission is brought to a successful issue, and that we shall be able entirely to escape, if we be willing to use it aright, what forgiveness can we possibly obtain, if we do not even enter on the thought of our sins? Since if this were done, all would be accomplished.

For as he who enters the door, is within; so he who reckons up his own evils will also certainly come to get them cured. But should he say, I am a sinner, without reckoning them up specifically, and saying, This and

this sin have I committed, he will never leave off, confessing indeed continually, but never caring in earnest for amendment. For should he have laid down a beginning, all the rest will unquestionably follow too, if only in one point he have shown a beginning: for in every case the beginning and the preliminaries are difficult. This then let us lay as a foundation, and all will be smooth and easy.

Let us begin therefore, I entreat you, one with making his prayers intense: another with continual weeping: another with downcast countenance. For not even is this, which is so small, unprofitable: for I saw (it is said) that he was grieved and went downcast, and I healed his ways. Isaiah 57:17-18

But let us all humble our own souls by almsgiving and forgiving our neighbors their trespasses, by not remembering injuries, nor avenging ourselves. If we continually reflect on our sins, no external circumstances can make us elated: neither riches, nor power, nor authority, nor honor; nay, even should we sit in the imperial chariot itself, we shall sigh bitterly: Since even the blessed David was a King, and yet he said, Every night I will wash my bed, [&c.] Psalm 6:6: and he was not at all hurt by the purple robe and the diadem: he was not puffed up; for he knew himself to be a man, and inasmuch as his heart had been made contrite, he went mourning.

10. For what are all things human? Ashes and dust, and as it were spray before the wind; a smoke and a shadow, and a leaf driven here and there; and a flower; a dream, and a tale, and a fable, wind and air vainly puffed out and wasting away; a feather that has no stay, a stream flowing by, or if there be anything of more nothingness than these.

For, tell me, what do you esteem great? What dignity do you think to be great? Is it that of the Consul? For the many think no greater dignity than that. He who is not Consul is not a whit inferior to him who is in so great splendor, who is so greatly admired. Both one and the other are of the same dignity; both of them alike, after a little while, are no more.

When was he made [Consul]? For how long a time? Tell me: for two days? Nay, this takes place even in dreams. But that is [only] a dream, you say. And what is this? For (tell me) what is by day, is it [therefore] not a dream? Why do we not rather call these things a dream? For as dreams when the day comes on are proved to be nothing: so these things also, when the night comes on, are proved to be nothing. For night and day have received each an equal portion of time, and have equally divided all duration. Therefore as in the day a person rejoices not in what happened at night, so neither in the night is it possible for him to reap the fruit of what is done in the day. You have been made Consul? So was I in the night; only I in the night, thou in the day. And what of this? Not even so have you any advantage over me, except haply its being said, Such an one is Consul, and the pleasure that springs from the words, gives him the advantage.

I mean something of this kind, for I will express it more plainly: if I say Such an one is Consul, and bestow on him the name, is it not gone as soon as it is spoken? So also are the things themselves; no sooner does the Consul appear, than he is no more. But let us suppose [that he is Consul] for a year, or two years, or three or four years. Where are they who were ten times Consul? Nowhere.

But Paul is not so. For he was, and also is living continually: he did not live one day, nor two, nor ten, and twenty, nor thirty; nor ten and twenty, nor yet thirty years -- and die. Even the four hundredth year is now past, and still even yet is he illustrious, yea much more illustrious than when he was alive. And these things indeed [are] on earth; but the glory of the saints in heaven what word could set forth?

Wherefore I entreat you, let us seek this glory; let us pursue after it, that we may attain it. For this is the true glory. Let us henceforth stand aloof from the things of this life, that we may find grace and mercy in Christ Jesus our Lord: with whom to the Father, together with the Holy Ghost, be glory, power, honor and worship, now and for ever, and world without end. Amen.

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