

Hebrews 3:1-6 – Holding Fast Our Confidence

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Open your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 3, as we're going to continue our study here on Sunday morning of the book of Hebrews, and the argument that is being made in this book, which is very very important for us to recognize. Hebrews chapter 3, we're going to be looking at the first 6 verses, and then we're going to open. So follow along with me as I read verses 1 through 6. It says,

"¹Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, ²who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house. ³For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. ⁴(For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) ⁵Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, ⁶but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope." (ESV)

Let's stop there. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, open our hearts to the ministry of your word this morning. Lord, every time we delve into the word, we need your help. We need your insight. We need, Lord, just that work of the Spirit to illuminate our hearts. We need to be able to grasp these things. And then, Lord, we need the strength and the courage to embrace, walk them out and just put them into practice in our lives. So teach us today and then guide us, Lord, as we walk these out. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Whenever we get into the book of Hebrews, I have to remind myself, when I'm doing my own study, and I feel like I need to remind you every time we start talking about this letter that it was written to Jewish Christians who, because of the persecutions they were enduring, were being tempted to back away from their faith in Christ specifically, and to revert to their roots of Judaism and to go back under the Mosaic law. And the author is writing this letter to systematically reveal the importance of Jesus Christ in the whole equation of salvation. That sounds like an incredible simplification, and it kind of is, but you know, you'll remember that he began back in chapter 1 by making the point that Jesus is God. He talked about the fact that He is one with the eternal God, creator of all things. And that's obviously huge. He went on to prove then in

chapter 1 and chapter 2 how Jesus is superior to any angel. And now in this section that we're looking at here in chapter 3, the writer is going to go on and make an argument that may not sound necessary to you and me, but he's going to talk about how Jesus is greater than Moses. And once again as Gentiles, we may not consider this necessarily an argument that's all that big of a deal to us. But you've got to know, again, he's writing to a Jewish audience and to the Jews., Moses was the man. I mean, Moses was the national hero that many people believed was greater than the angels. And that was just a belief on their part. It wasn't true, but that's how high they elevated this man. So, the author is going to talk about Jesus as it relates to Moses.

But first I want to bring out in this first verse the different ways that he speak of the people to whom he is writing. This is very important for us to see. I want you to notice that he begins by saying, "*Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling,*" now that alone, as he's just addressing them, it tells you so much about the fact these people are something special. "*Holy brothers,*" what does it mean to be holy? Well, holy is the Greek word *hagios*, and it essentially means, well, it can be translated saints. I don't know if you knew that, but you're a saint, at least as far as God is concerned. And but it essentially means, and the idea behind it is, set apart for God. So when the Bible refers to you as holy in that sense, it's saying that you are set apart for God. And that means that your life is His.

That's the opposite of what we hear in the world today, isn't it? Everybody wants to say, it's my life, it's my body. I can do what I want with my life and my body. If I put something in it that you don't like, it's no big deal because it's my body and it's my life. I can do what I want with it. I can go where I want, and so on and so on. Well, as Christians, we can't do that. We can't say it's my life. It's His life. As a *hagios*, as a holy one who is set apart for God, our life belongs to the Lord. Your body belongs to the Lord. The Bible says that you've been bought with a price. It means you can't just put anything into your body that you want because it belongs to Him. He has the last word on all of those things, and you are to live for His purpose and not your own. Now that's different from the world, let me tell you. Where the whole theme of living in this fallen world is to please yourself. You just need to do what makes you happy. That's a worldly thought. As Christians we're to do what makes the Lord happy. We're to please Him, to live lives that are pleasing unto the Lord (Colossians 1:10).

That's what it means to be a *hagios*, to be holy unto the Lord. But you know, holiness has kind of a dual meaning. Because it is also something that we're called to in terms of how we live our lives from the standpoint of our conduct.

Let me show you how this is expressed In Peter's first letter up on the screen, it says:

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1 Peter 1:15-16 (ESV)

...as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

It says, "*...as he who called you is holy, you also be holy*" (look at this) "*in all your conduct,*" all right, that means what you do "*since it is written, You shall be holy, for I am holy.*" Now, there's a lot of people, a lot of Christians, who read a verse like this and it really messes with their mind. And they're kind of like, what did he just say to me, that I am supposed to be holy as He is? Holy? I mean, good grief. How in the world can I be holy like God? God is God. I'm an idiot. I'm a fallen idiot. And I mess up all the time and He's saying, be holy as I am. Holy. Does He not know me? Does He think there's more to me than there really is? And we read verses like that and we kind of tilt, goodness gracious.

But you see when we apply the verse that way we're missing the point. We're missing actually what He's saying to us. When we say God is holy, we are saying that He is fundamentally different from anything that we know or can know. I like to use the word "other". When I'm referring to God, I like to say God is "other." You see, you and I know what life is like. We know what the world is like. We know what people are like, but God is other. God is not like you or me. God is other. We know what the world is like. The world is finite. The world is corruptible. The world is diminishing. God is other. He's other than anything we know. He is fundamentally different. Fundamentally other. And so we say God is holy. So, what God is saying to you and me is be fundamentally different from the world in which you live. Be "other". He said, well, what's the world like? Well, that's easy. We know what the world is like. We know how we acted before we came to Christ. We know how we still act from time to time. That is probably not pleasing to the Lord, but God says, be other than the world. There are some scriptures that are given to us that give a pretty powerful description of how the world lives, how the world operates. And one of them is in Paul's second letter to Timothy. Let me put this up on the screen because this is really insightful. He writes to Timothy and he says:

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2 Timothy 3:1-5 (ESV)

...in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.

in the last days there's going to come some incredible times of difficulty. And he goes on to describe people. And this is really a very accurate description of the world that you and I live in right now. He begins to say, people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, and on and on. But you could actually insert the command to be holy, which is to be different after every single one of those things.

You see, that's how the world lives and you're to be other. So you could kind of read it like this for people will be lovers of self, but you be different. You be lovers of God and lovers of others. He says people will be lovers of money, but you be different. Don't love wealth because you can't love wealth and love God at the same time, we've been told that (Matthew 6:24). He goes on to say, people in this world are proud but you, be other. You be different. People in this world are arrogant, not you. You be different. People in this world are abusive. You be other, you be different. You see, you could just go and do that after each and every one of those things.

And when you and I are other, we are being holy, by its basic definition of being other. Now, obviously, the only way you and I can be holy in an unholy world is to do it in the power of the Holy Spirit. But we've been given that power. We've received that power from God to be other, and so God can now say as I am other, you be other. You see, He's not telling you to achieve this standard of perfection that is His. He knows you can't do that. He's just telling you to be other. He's telling you to be different in your home, in your family, in your business, in your workplace. Be different.

You know how those other people like to gossip and argue and back bite? Not you. You be different. You know how people like to use vulgar and obscene language? You be different. Just be other. Be holy for I am holy. That's what the Lord is telling us to do because that is holiness.

The other word that the author uses here for the recipients of this letter is very simply the word brothers. He calls them "holy brothers." And there's really nothing tremendously special about this word because it could be used to

describe any brother anywhere. But in Christian circles, of course, it means belonging to the family of God. If I call you brother, if I call you sister, that means we're family members. And you are my brothers and sisters. If you're in Christ, we are family members and that's what that word is meant to communicate. And the reason that's important for you and me to see is going to come at the end of these 6 verses. I'm going to call your attention back to the fact that the writer of Hebrews is addressing Christians because whenever he says, "holy brothers," you know for sure he's saying, for those of you who are set apart, who are other and different and are brethren, in other words, part of the family, this message is for you. This is very important for you to see. Because when we get to the end of these 6 verses, I'm going to call your attention back to that.

The last thing the author says about his audience is in verse 1 is that they "*share in a heavenly calling,*" Did you catch that? That's a really important phrase, particularly for people who've been raised in Jewish households and who were raised under Judaism or the law of Moses to say to those people, now you share in a heavenly calling because you see that is different from Judaism. Judaism doesn't have a heavenly calling. They have an earthly calling. We've mentioned many times over the years that the Mosaic covenant is a physical material covenant. Our covenant with God is a spiritual covenant. What that means is the promises that went along with the Mosaic covenant were not spiritual promises. They were physical. What God said to the nation of Israel through Moses was Keep the law and here's what's going to happen. I'm going to bless you in the land. Your enemies aren't going to be able to stand against you. Your crops are going to be fantastic. Your kids are going to be healthy. Your community is going to be strong over and this is your land and nobody will take it from you.

That's what he told them. But it was all physical. It was all material. That's not our covenant. God came and made a new covenant. In fact, He made the new covenant with Israel too. They just reject it. But the new covenant through Jesus Christ that He inaugurated at the Last Supper is a spiritual covenant with spiritual blessings. Did you ever notice we weren't given land. We were never given the kind of promises that Israel was given. Those were given to Israel, not the church. It's different. That's why Paul wrote this when he wrote to the Ephesians:

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Ephesians 1:3 (ESV)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,

It says every spiritual blessing. And where are your spiritual blessings? Where are they? Did you leave them at home? Are they in your car? No. It says that they're in the heavenly places. Your blessings, your wonderful promises that you've received through the covenant of Jesus Christ, are hidden for you in heavenly places. And you better be glad that they're there because they can't go away. They can't be stolen. They can't get old and crusty and rotten and broken. It can't be taken away. The land that Israel got could be taken away and often was. Yours can't. That's a much better deal, let me tell you right now.

So this is an important thing to say to the believers when he says to them, in essence that you are recipients of these heavenly promises, and it sets the new covenant apart from the old. Now, let's read the rest of verse 1, as he tells them what to do in light of who they are and their calling and so forth. He says, "*consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, ²who was faithful to him who appointed him*" stop there for just a moment. What the author is telling these people to do is to focus on Jesus, and then he begins to define Jesus for them. The apostle and high priest of their confession. Now, high priest, we looked at last week and we talked about what a high priest is. We talked about the fact that under the old covenant, the high priest was a picture of what Jesus came to fulfill. Because what does the high priest do? He represents the people to God. He takes the needs of the people, the issues of the people, and he represents them to God. That's what a high priest does. And by the way, the author of Hebrews is going to have a lot more to say about high priests in the coming chapters.

We want to look also at this title of apostle. We know that Paul was an apostle and Peter was an apostle, but he says Jesus is the apostle of our confession. The word apostle means one sent forth with authority and Jesus being sent forth from the Father is our apostle showing us the way to be saved. And the reason that the author is highlighting these aspects, these titles for Jesus, high priest, apostle, is he's going to compare Jesus to Moses, as he kind of goes on in this. We have to remember these things were very important to a Jewish audience.

He goes on there in verse 2. I'm reading the last part of verse 2, look with me in your Bible, "*just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house. ³For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses – as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself.*" And then he goes on to say, parenthetically, "*⁴(For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.)*" He's saying Moses was a good guy and he was worthy of honor because he was a faithful man. He was faithful in the ministry that God

gave him, and he's worthy of honor in the house of the Lord because of that. But then he goes on to say, but Jesus is worthy of more honor than Moses in the same way that a builder is more worthy of honor than the house that he has built. Because Jesus, it built the house because he's God. And that's what he actually went on to say, the builder of all things is God. So He's the builder, but interestingly enough, even though as God Jesus built the house, He's worthy of greater honor because there's more to it than that. Look at verse 5, "⁵Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, ⁶but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son." And this is the key point that the author is making. This is very important, again, to a Jewish audience because they were raised with the idea of the difference between a son and a servant.

They knew very well between those two positions. A servant is there to serve. A son is there to inherit. He receives all that is the fathers. Okay? So they understand that the servant is never going to inherit. But the son inherits because he has a very special relationship to the father. So you see, for a Jew, this is kind of the grand slam of the argument that he's making here related to Jesus and Moses. Moses was faithful as a servant. Jesus is the son in the house of God, which He also built. So we keep talking about this house of God. What is the house of God? Is this the house of God? People say that all the time, and it really bugs me. Let's go into the house of God. This is not the house of God. This is a building, and it's a pretty modest one at that. What is the house of God?

Look at the very end of verse 6 in your Bible. What does it say? The very end of verse 6, "*And we are his house,*" we're his house. It's a house that's under construction. Did you notice that what Peter said? Well, let me show you this:

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1 Peter 2:4-5 (ESV)

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house...

Notice the present tense "*are being built up as a spiritual house.*" It's not done yet. And we like to say that to people, we're kind of under construction as Christians. That's kind of our way of saying, don't judge us too harshly because we're still being built. But we are being built and we're being built into a spiritual house. So don't think of yourself as having doors and windows and a roof and walls and ceilings. You're not that kind of a house. You are a house, a

spiritual dwelling in which God dwells. We, the church, are being built into a dwelling place where God will dwell. And I know that is a little weird to wrap your brain around, but that's what the word is saying here.

Now we know that each of us individually is a temple of the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote do you not know that you are a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), because the spirit lives in you as a believer. But together, your stones coming together, to be built into that place where God dwells.

Now let's deal with this last statement that the writer makes here in verse 6. And you'll notice it contains a word that makes a lot of people uncomfortable, and it's the word "if". Let's look at it here: *"And we are his house,"* and then we have that word *"if indeed we hold fast our confidence and are boasting in our hope."* We are His house "if." You guys remember your grammar. "If" always introduces a conditional clause in a sentence. My parents used to do it all the time. I was the youngest of four kids, and we'd be all packed into our car and my parents would have business someplace. And of course we're all at each other, and they'd say "if" you guys are good, maybe we'll swing by Dairy Queen on the way home. And we knew when my parents said that and they introduced that with the word "if," we knew that they were conditioning the promise of going to Dairy Queen on our behavior. And that meant we had to do something, or we had to perform a certain way in order to get what we wanted, which was of course a stop at Dairy Queen. "If" you guys are good, we'll stop at Dairy Queen on the way home. We rarely ever went to Dairy Queen. Because we were very rarely good, very rarely. But we understood that it was a conditional statement.

The writer of Hebrews has just made a conditional statement. He says, and we are the house of God. But then he introduces that conditional. If we hold fast our confidence. I like the word confidence. It's another word for faith. People will ask me from time to time what exactly does it mean to have faith in God? I tell him, you have confidence. You have confidence in God. What does it mean to have faith in the cross? It means to be confident. I am confident that what Jesus did on the cross was enough to save me from my sin. Sometimes I'll ask people, I'll say, so tell me how confident are you in your salvation? And what they think I'm asking is, how confident are they in themselves? And they always write back and they started telling me about their life. I've had a hard life, I haven't lived a perfect life. And I have to say, stop. I'm not asking you if you're confident in yourself. I would never do that. I'm not confident in myself. Why would I ask you if you're confident in yourself? I'm asking you if you're confident in Him. Are you confident that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross

and that work is finished and completed and nothing else that remains. Are you confident in that? Oh, okay.

You see, we just had this natural gravitational pull to apply everything to ourselves. It's all about me, isn't it? Isn't it all about me? You asked me about my salvation. It's about me. It's about my salvation. No, it's about the salvation He did for you on the cross, that He bought you on the cross. Are you confident in what He did? Yeah, I'm confident in what Jesus did. I'm not confident in me. People will always start off talking to me. They'll just say things like, I'm so wretched. And I go, I know . You're not surprising me when you say things like that. Of course you're wretched. So am I, right? Let's get our eyes off ourselves and let's get them on to Jesus. So you see faith, confidence, that's the condition. Well, we always knew that. Good grief, we always knew that faith is the condition. It's not a work. We're not saved by works. You can't get saved by being good enough. But there is a condition to your salvation, and the condition is faith.

You believe. You trust. You have confidence. I mean, good grief. Let's look at the most popular passage probably in the world:

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John 3:16 (ESV)

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that everybody saved no matter what they think, believe or do. No, it doesn't say that. It says He gave His only Son that whoever believes (and that's another way of saying whoever has confidence in that finished work of Jesus on the cross) that person isn't going to perish. But that person now has eternal life. Why? Because they met the condition by faith.

I believe. I believe Jesus died for me. Do you believe Jesus died for you? Do you believe? Are you confident in His death for you on the cross? Amen. Praise the Lord. That's wonderful. See, it's a conditional issue, right? I have to have faith. So let's go back here and look at what the writer of Hebrews is saying here in the end of verse 6 when he says, we are the house of God. We are that house. If we continue in our confidence, the confidence that we had at first, okay. Don't be uncomfortable with that. Christians don't want to introduce a conditional clause when it comes to salvation. They get very upset with me when I do it.

Because they don't want to think about it. They don't want to think about conditional clauses. But they're all through the Bible.

Why did I make such a big deal at the beginning of this message to tell you that he was writing to holy brothers? Because he introduced a conditional clause to believers. He was writing to believers. This letter is written to Christians who have put their faith in Jesus Christ and he says, continue in it. You are the house of God. If you continue in that confidence, if you continue in that faith, you see faith is the key. It is what our relationship with Jesus and our salvation is predicated upon. We put our faith in the finished work of Jesus on the cross, and it's a wonderful thing. Again, it's not a work. It's not something that you do that you earn or by your goodness, you don't put your faith in Jesus by your goodness. In fact, we recognize our badness. And that's really what motivates us to put our faith in Him.

But He is the one in whom our faith ultimately rests. It's in His work, His accomplishment, and so forth. And I bring this up because this letter to the Hebrews is filled with these kinds of conditional clauses. It's filled with warnings. Warnings written to Christians. Well Pastor Paul, are you saying we can lose our salvation? No. I'm not even entering that argument. I don't even want to get into that discussion. All I'm telling you is what the Bible says. It's written to believers and it's full of warnings. Don't let go of your confidence. Keep it on Jesus. Whatever you do. Can I just tell you satan's number one goal is to try to get you to get your eyes off Jesus and onto yourself. He can nail you if he does that because you're fallible, you're corruptible, you're imperfect. And so if he can get you to focus on this fallible, corruptible finite being such as yourself, you're just going to fall apart. You've got to learn to get your eyes off yourself, to refuse to look at yourself.

And I'm telling you right now, that goes against every fiber of your being because we love to think about ourselves. We think about ourselves all day long, and we don't even think about the fact that we're thinking about ourselves. It's just a knee-jerk reaction. It's all about me. And satan knows that. He knows that gravitational in us to be drawn into self. And so he's going to get you to think, and that's why he accuses, he's called the accuser of the brethren. He accuses you to yourself. I can't believe what you just did. I can't believe what you thought. I can't believe what you thought. And you call yourself a Christian. Pretty soon we're just like, that's it, I'm done. Unpardonable sin, here I come. And we're ready to throw in the towel. Don't let the enemy do that to you. Don't let satan do that. It's not about you. This is a shocker. This is one thing that is not about you.

It's about Him. It's all about Jesus. That's what the letter of Hebrews says over and over again. It's all about Jesus. You can't let go of this, guys, because it's all about Him. You let go of Him, and you're done for. It's all about Jesus and we just rest in Him.