

Lesson Ten

(6:13-20)

GOD: THE SOUL'S ANCHOR

¹³For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, ¹⁴saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you." ¹⁵And thus Abraham, having patiently endured, obtained the promise. ¹⁶Men indeed swear by a greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. ¹⁷So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he interposed with an oath, ¹⁸so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God should prove false, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to seize the hope set before us. ¹⁹We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner shrine behind the curtain, ²⁰where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.

Many years ago Priscilla J. Owens wrote the words and William J. Kirkpatrick added the music to a beautiful hymn, "Will Your Anchor Hold?"

TWENTY-SIX LESSONS ON HEBREWS

“Will your anchor hold in the storms of life,
When the clouds unfold their wings of strife;
When the strong tides lift, and the cables strain,
Will your anchor drift, or firm remain?
We have an anchor that keeps the soul,
Steadfast and sure while the billows roll;
Fastered to the Rock which cannot move,
Grounded firm and deep in the Savior’s love.”

God’s steadfastness is the ground of our trust in him. As was pictured in ch. 1 in the description of his son, ages may come and go, but God is the same, for he casts no shadow by turning, James 1:17.

Our immediate text presents two good reasons why the first readers (and us as well) should trust in God: 1) his promise, and 2) his oath, both of which receive their character from God himself. Upon these things we all cast our life, our hope, our faith, confident that though all else may fail, God is the same, “he changeth not.”

6:13 — **Abraham** — This Bible personality is probably as well known as any, whose life was such that he became the father of our faith. The basis for his life was a trustworthy God, who promised and because Abraham was faithful, honored his promise. Hence, Abraham was an ideal example to use.

V. 14 — **Surely I will bless you** — God actually repeated his promise to Abraham more than once (Genesis 12, 13, 15, 17, 22) and included a number of things in it, all of which he kept. Some of them were not kept in the earthly lifetime of Abraham, but all were kept.

V. 15 — **patiently endured** — A good parallel text to read here is Romans 4:1-25, because the whole chapter is directly related to the life of Abraham, with explicit application for all who believe. A major point for consideration is in the words of the text: Abraham patiently (*μακροθυμία*, as in 6:12) endured. Note that it is not said he “perfectly” endured, for he did not. At times in his pilgrimage he was distrustful of God, or tried to do things his own way, failing. However, he kept on believing his heavenly father, over a span of many years, and consequently was rewarded. Thereafter, the watchword was: “I am the God of Abraham, . . .”

V. 16 — **an oath** — This involves an assertion about something, and a call to witness to the truthfulness of the assertion by God.

In Jesus’ day, this practice had degenerated considerably until he felt the need to address himself to the problem more than once. In Matthew 5:33-37, reference was made to an Old Covenant teaching about oaths (some versions use the term “swear.” Both “oath” and “swear” have double meanings). Biblically, they were not profanity, but rather as explained above. Hence, Peter affirmed that he knew not Jesus, and

called God to bear witness to his assertion, Matthew 26:74. In the Matthew 5 text, the obvious thing is that the Jews had so degenerated in their integrity that everything was being used to back up their statements. More insight into the problem can be gained in Matthew 23:16-22, where it is clear that evasiveness was common, and even oaths were used to trick the unsuspecting. In both texts, Jesus taught that every oath and word were directly related to God, and ought to be so treated.

As far as taking an oath, Jesus did before Caiaphas, Paul placed himself under oath many times (as in II Cor. 1:23), and in our text God used an oath. It ought to be clear that it is not wrong for us to do so. We ought to be of such integrity, however, that nothing more is needed than our "yes" or "no." Because of the fact that men are liars and not true, however, (which is the point in Matthew 5:37 and hinted at in James 5:12), some places may require an oath of testimony. It is better though to avoid such, if possible, and be trustworthy.

V. 17 — The need for God to confirm his word was simply because of the weakness of man, and was a condescension on God's part.

the unchangeable character of his purpose — In the case in point, God had purposed before the world's foundation to redeem it by virtue of the Son, who was to come through Abraham's lineage. However, from the viewpoint of Abraham, he had to trust God, and in trusting, received the promise. Note carefully that God tested Abraham once and again before confirming his promise, Genesis 22:16-18.

V. 18 — **unchangeable** — Insofar as God was concerned. However, no covenant in the Old Testament was unconditional. All covenants made with man were conditional, hinging upon their faith. Even the covenant in the garden with Adam and Eve was conditional upon their obedience. Some things God said were of a limited duration (as in Genesis 8:22 concerning how things would be as long as the earth remains) or had nothing to do with man's activity (as the rainbow, 8:21). In regard to the Mosaic Covenant, it was presented to the people for their acceptance, and when given, was circumscribed with conditions (Read Deuteronomy chs. 27-30 for details.).

false — The Greek term is *ψεύδος*, 'to lie.' God is not characterized by such things. However, as mentioned above, because much of his dealing with man is of a conditional nature, when man fails to keep his part, God is not obligated to keep his part. In this sense, then, sometimes it is said that God repented. Stated differently, from man's viewpoint, God changed his mind. However, to change a course of action that is predicated upon another's action does not necessarily indicate bad thinking or an inherent falseness. As Christians, we must never place God on the witness stand, but rather trust that God is always just/right in what he does. Any other course of action makes us out as an accuser of God, and will, if continued, ruin our ability to trust God.

TWENTY-SIX LESSONS ON HEBREWS

Directly bearing upon the argument at hand would be the nature of the Mosaic Covenant. Many Jews (and some today who are not Jews) thought that it was of a permanent nature. Alas, they failed to see what even Moses himself saw: that it was but temporal, destined to pass away. The text in II Corinthians 3:7ff. plainly shows this to be true. Hebrews 8:8-13 will quote a prophetic utterance from Jeremiah confirming the idea that God never intended it to be anything but preparatory for the real thing: the New Covenant. All the types and shadows built into the Mosaic law should have been seen for that to which they pointed. God didn't primarily plan before the world's foundations to give the Mosaic law, but rather to send Jesus, that men might be saved. Hence, in the fullness of time, Jesus came, even as God purposed. We, as they who were first to read this letter, should be quick to discern the importance of all these things, and hold fast to that which is eternal, encompassed in "the hope set before us," which hope is founded upon Jesus.

V. 19 — **sure** — From ἀσφαλῆς, not liable to fall or fail; hence dependable.

steadfast — As in 2:4 (valid) and 3:14 (firm).

anchor of the soul — So that we might not be "tossed to and fro" with every doctrinal breeze that enters our sails.

inner shrine — The thrust is this: the Christian's hope is not based upon anything earthly, all of which will prove false. Instead, Jesus is our hope of glory, Colossians 1:27, and he has taken his place at God's right hand, there to abide.

V. 20 — **on our behalf** — Once more, the idea in 2:16 crops up: Jesus did all that he did for man. How privileged are we!

Notice that the discussion returns to the concept in 5:6, 10, that Jesus was a high priest after the type of Melchizedek, and not like Aaron. This will be further developed in ch. 7, but note that Jesus is at God's right hand where Aaron never was. Already the contrast is one-sided.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 10:

92. What is the intent of 6:13-20 for the reader?
93. Do you have any trouble trusting God? If so, why?
94. Name the two points given to provide confidence for trust.
95. Why do men require an oath?
96. Are oaths based upon something (or someone) higher?
97. Did God need to use an oath to the heirs of promise because of what they were or what he was?
98. Who is identified in our text as the heirs of promise (who has fled for refuge, v. 18)?
99. What certainty does Jesus provide for our hope being in the inner shrine, behind the curtain?
100. Do you have an anchor for your soul that is steadfast and sure?