

## “The Condition for Maturity”— Hebrews 5:11-6:3

Brandon Holiski

Southern Oaks Baptist Church

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*[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, [www.welovethegospel.com](http://www.welovethegospel.com)]*

Take a Bible and let's meet in Hebrews 5...

Let's begin by reading the verses we have been studying this past month. This will be the final sermon on these verses. It's been a helpful mini-series within our series, at least in my life. I'm thankful for the time we have had with these verses and also for the opportunity to preach this sermon, which I hope will be a fitting conclusion. Follow along as I read, beginning in Hebrews 5:11 and down to 6:3. This is God's Word...

*“About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.<sup>12</sup> For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food,<sup>13</sup> for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child.<sup>14</sup> But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. **6** Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,<sup>2</sup> and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.<sup>3</sup> And this we will do if God permits.”* (Hebrews 5:11-6:3)

There are four major ideas we have explored over the past month, each of which we have drawn from these verses...

The Cost of Immaturity  
The Cause of Immaturity  
The Character of Immaturity  
The Cure for Immaturity

To these we will add perhaps the most neglected truth of them all:

### **The Condition for Maturity**

Since most of the literature on these verses gives such anemic treatment to this issue, I've decided to dedicate an entire sermon to the matter. The condition is explicitly stated in chapter 6, verse 3—“*And this we will do if God permits.*” That short statement packs a powerful punch. But before we explore its impact we should ask what exactly is the “*this*” that we will do if the condition is met? What will we do, if God permits? It's somewhat debated, but the most likely answer is that it refers to his readers pressing on to maturity (6:1).<sup>1</sup> These readers will grow up spiritually, “*if God permits.*” Their maturity is said to be conditioned on the will of God.

In fact, this point is emphasized. In English we generally express conditionals with one word—“if”—but in Greek (which is the language of the New Testament) there are several words that can be translated as “if.” The word translated “*if*” in 6:3 is very rare. In fact, it is only used two times in the entire New Testament, both in the book of Hebrews.<sup>2</sup> We have already encountered the other occurrence. It appears in arguably

the most important conditional in the book when it comes to understanding the famous “warning passages” that are sprinkled throughout.

In 3:14 the author said, “*we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.*” You might remember when we studied that passage that I explained that the word is an emphatic conditional. They don’t have exclamation points in Greek, but there are ways to make emphatic statements. One way is to add a certain suffix to a word and that’s what happened in Hebrews 3:14. The author takes a common word for “if” and adds a suffix to make it “IF!” That’s hard to bring out in translation because English translations are pretty restrained when it comes to exclamation points (perhaps because it looks less formal) and they’re not going to put a word in all capital letters (like we sometimes do to draw attention to a word) and italics are generally not used in English Bibles (except in rare instances). So how do you translate an emphatic “if”? Well in Hebrews 3:14 the ESV translates it “*if indeed.*” That helps us see the emphasis.

But, for whatever reason, when the same word is used in 6:3 the ESV just reads “*if*”—plain old “if”—which hides the emphasis. It’s not “and this we will do, if God wills.” It’s “and this we will do, IF GOD WILLS!” This is an emphatic and necessary condition. This is something that the author is really stressing and he’s employing a rare word so that his readers understand how important this condition is to their maturity. Their growing up depends ultimately on God.

Indeed this is anticipated in verse 1. Again it’s a bit obscured in translation, but when the author says “go on to maturity” he says it in the passive voice. This means that the act is expressed as being done to the believer not as done by the believer. The only major English translation that brings this out clearly is the NIV(2011):

*“Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and **be taken** forward to maturity...”* (Hebrews 6:1a; NIV)

Who then is carrying the individual forward to maturity? It’s not explicitly stated, which means it’s almost certainly God. You see in Jewish writings there is a tendency not to state the agent of the action of a passive verb when that agent is God. Why? Because they were concerned about taking God’s name in vain. So instead of explicitly saying God, they often use the passive voice with God as the implied agent. In Greek studies this is very common phenomenon that even has it’s own name—the “divine passive.” So the readers would have understood that the one taking them forward to maturity was God Himself.<sup>3</sup> And, in case that was ever in doubt, he adds the condition in verse 3 to make it crystal clear—we will mature *only if* God permits.

Why is this worth explaining? Because it reminds us that God is the one who deserves the glory for our spiritual growth. Tom Schreiner, a professor of theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and co-chair of the Translation Oversight Committee that brought us the CSB translation, explains it like this:

*“Spiritual maturity is given by God and is a result of his gracious work in the lives of his people... Here the writer acknowledges that progress will only be made if God allows it. True spiritual understanding is always a miracle... Spiritual maturity is a gift of God. This truth does not cancel out human responsibility and the authenticity of our choices, but it does remind us that God rules over all things and that any growth in holiness results from his grace.”<sup>4</sup>*

Do you see the balance there? God is sovereign over all even our maturity (i.e., our sanctification), but that doesn’t negate the fact that people are responsible for their actions. These two truths are affirmed throughout Scripture. “We have expended huge quantities of energy pitting God’s sovereignty against

human responsibility, when the Bible insists that these things belong together.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed the Bible often affirms both, as here, in the exact same verse or context.<sup>6</sup>

Here the writer of Hebrews is instructing his readers, implicitly or explicitly, to not be lazy listeners, to drink the milk of God’s oracles, to exercise discernment between good and evil, to advance beyond the basics of the doctrine of Christ, to not lay again the foundation of teaching that has already been laid, etc. But if they do that, verse 3, it will be because God permits it. None of that activity on the part of the readers will happen apart from God. And the writer could not have said it more emphatically than he has.

Think then of the implications of this. For starters it means that God governs the progress of our sanctification (a big word that simply means growth in holy living or Christlikeness). We will not advance unless God allows us to and we will not advance faster than He allows. Let me give you two examples of this from Hebrews. We’ll consider both more fully in the course of the series, but let me at least mention them now. First consider the benediction at the end:

*“Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant,<sup>21</sup> equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”* (Hebrews 13:20-21)

Who, according to these verses, equips us for everything good so that we can do God’s will? God Himself. And who works in us that which is pleasing in the sight of God? God. He is the author of both. He either works in us what pleases Him or He does not. In other words, “either he permits our progress toward maturity or it doesn’t happen.”<sup>7</sup> This reminds us that sanctification (like every other aspect of our salvation) is an act of God’s grace. It’s not something God owes us. We deserve only judgment from God. If we are saved from that judgment this morning through faith in Jesus Christ it is owing to the grace of God alone. And if we make any progress in Christian maturity and perseverance, it too is all of grace.<sup>8</sup>

There is, of course, a negative side to that truth. In chapter 12 we will find a passage that seems to suggest that Esau (from the Old Testament) sought to repent but was not given the opportunity and was rejected by God. What does that mean? Was he not allowed to repent? We’ll have to look at that passage when we get there. Or in places like Romans 11, Paul tells the Gentiles that their eyes were opened by the grace of God and therefore they should not be arrogant. Meanwhile, he says of the Jews, “*God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day*” (Romans 11:8). That would seem to be an instance where God did *not* permit progress. There are many difficult passages like that in your Bible, which I’m not in the habit of apologizing for. “Paul’s point”, according to Francis Chan, “was that any spiritual awareness was gifted from God, so it made no sense to boast.”<sup>9</sup>

So how should we respond to the knowledge of this grace? Should we just sit around and do nothing and trust that God will bring about what will be? Not if we understand the Scriptures. God’s governing hand in our sanctification does not remove our obligation. It enables it. There’s a difference. The commands of God are to be followed and pursued. We are responsible. But our activity toward obedience presupposes a work of God within us, without which we would make no progress. He sanctifies us. But He does so by means of our active progress that He enables. God determines the end and establishes the means. One writer put it like this,

“We are called to be diligent. We are called to make every effort (Heb 4:11; 2 Peter 1:5). But at the same time we will make no progress in our spiritual development without God’s work in our lives. We will not mature unless ‘*God permits.*’ We will not go on to maturity unless God ‘carries us along.’”<sup>10</sup>

In other words, He must work in us what is pleasing in His sight, but the evidence of that work is our progress in holiness and obedience. Therefore, when we obey and mature, we should give God the glory. Here's another example of this from Leviticus 20. God says,

*“Consecrate yourselves, therefore, and be holy, for I am the LORD your God. <sup>8</sup> Keep my statutes and do them; I am the LORD who sanctifies you.”* (Leviticus 20:7-8)

God commands Israel to “*be holy*” and then in the next verses says that He is the one who “*sanctifies*” them (i.e., makes them holy). So which is it? Are they to pursue holiness or is God the one who makes them holy? Is it active obedience on their part or passive trust in God's part? The answer is “yes.” “Israel is to exercise her will to be holy, and yet it is still God who causes her to be holy.”<sup>11</sup> The Bible puts the two ideas together. Here's another example, this time from the New Testament. Paul told the Corinthians,

*“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.”* (1 Corinthians 15:10)

Do you see both ideas there? Commenting on these verses, John Christenson writes,

“The apostle embraces the responsibility and reality of his efforts to labor in ministry and obedience to God's call. Yet he also understands that it is not his own energy that empowers and motivates him, but the gracious action of God working in him: ‘For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works in me’ (Col. 1:29; cf. Eph. 3:20).”<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, listen to how these ideas come together in these words Paul gave to the Colossians:

*“And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, <sup>22</sup> he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, <sup>23</sup> if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.”* (Colossians 1:21-23)

Is it true that Christ has reconciled to God by His death will be presented holy and blameless and above reproach before Him? Yes (cf. Romans 8:29-30)! Yet he also says that this promise is predicated on the believer's perseverance. He says we must “*continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel...*” Again, we see that God determines the end and establishes the means. “The ends are promised only by way of the prescribed means and the means are wholly directed by God.”<sup>13</sup> There are many other places where these ideas are taught in Scripture, but one of the clearest places related to our sanctification is found in Philippians 2. Let's look there together. Meet me there...

Did you find it? Look down at verses 12 and 13. Paul says,

*“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”* (Philippians 2:12)

First of all, let's note what Paul didn't say. D. A. Carson lays the options out nicely:

“It is vitally important to grasp the connection between God's sovereignty and our responsibility in verses 12 and 13. The text does not say, ‘Work to acquire your salvation, for God has done his bit and now it is all up to you.’ Nor does it say, ‘You may already have your salvation, but now

perseverance in it depends entirely on you.’ Still less does it say, ‘Let go and let God. Just relax. The Spirit will carry you.’ Rather, Paul tells us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, *precisely because* God is working in us both to will and to act according to his good purpose (2:12-13).”<sup>14</sup>

Is that not what we see here? We are called to “work out our salvation,” which is then fleshed out in the following verses that describe the absence of things like “grumbling” or fighting (i.e., Christian contentment, which is taken up by Paul a bit later in the epistle) and the presence of perseverance and joyful sacrifice that makes their leaders proud.<sup>15</sup> There are other things too, but they all have to do with our sanctification, our growing up in Christ, our spiritual maturity. Paul wants them to labor toward these things, but reminds them in verse 13, that “*it is God who works in you...*” The spiritual energy that stands behind our sanctification, writes Dane Ortlund, “is discovered *not by grace trumping and erasing our effort but by fueling it...* Human striving does not *compete* with but *completes* the sovereign will of God.”<sup>16</sup> Christenson puts it like this: “Without the prior ‘work’ of God within, there is no ‘will’ in us ‘to work for his good pleasure.’”<sup>17</sup>

Look again at Philippians 2:13. “[*I*]t is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” If there is in us any desire (i.e., any will) or any activity (i.e., any work) that is pleasing to God it is *only* because God has worked it in us. The New Living Translation captures this well:

*“For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.”*  
(Philippians 2:13; NLT)

Therefore, I say it again, any progress we make in sanctification is owing to God’s activity in and through us. “*And this we will do if God permits*” (Hebrews 6:3). God gets the glory for our sanctification. And this, by the way, was anticipated in Paul’s opening words to the Philippians...

*“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”* (Philippians 1:6)

What an amazing verse. The salvation that God began in us at our conversion (and note that He is the origin of it), He will bring it to completion when the Lord Jesus returns. So last week we considered the three tenses of our salvation: past (justification), present (sanctification), and future (glorification). This verse is referencing the first and third aspects of our salvation. Paul is saying here that if God produced the first, our justification, then He is “*sure*” to complete the last, our glorification. He can’t guarantee our glorification (our final salvation) unless He can guarantee our sanctification, which in the Bible is seen as prerequisite (e.g., Hebrews 12:14).<sup>18</sup> So the implication is that He will also sanctify all those whom He begins a good work in. He will grow us up one day. Not today. But one day, God will bring all Christians to maturity. He will work in us to will and to act according to His good pleasure in His way and in His time. The biblical view of sanctification is not you do your part and God does His part “making up for what we can’t do on our own or supplying us with the necessary support [like a divine copilot] to fly the plane of sanctification.” Nope, that’s not it. Instead, it’s: “we work 100 percent toward the progress of our sanctification while simultaneously trusting that God is 100 percent at work in us.”<sup>19</sup> Or as John MacArthur describes it,

“The truth is that sanctification is God’s work, but He performs it through the diligent self-discipline and righteous pursuits of His people, not in spite of them. God’s sovereign work does not absolve believers from the need for obedience; it means their obedience is itself a Spirit-empowered work of God.”<sup>20</sup>

I believe this is the biblical picture. It's why Peter can say, *"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness"* and then follow it up by saying *"For this very reason, make every effort"* to cultivate qualities of godliness, which he then says confirms *"your calling and election"* (2 Peter 1:3, 5, 10). It's why Peter can say elsewhere that Christians *"by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time"* We are guarded by God's power, but it's power that is being manifested through the means of our *"faith."* It's why Paul can say, *"by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me"* (1 Corinthians 15:10). He worked harder than all, but then he can say that his work was really God's grace working in him. Or to the Romans Paul says, *"I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me"* (Romans 15:18), which implies that all his work described in that long letter he considers to be what Christ accomplished through him. Is this not the same point he makes in Colossians 1:29? *"For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me."* Then there was Jesus who said things like, *"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out"* and *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him"* (John 6:37, 44). But how does the Father give Christ His followers? They *"come"* to Him because the Father *"draws"* them. It's why Luke describes, in Acts 13, many Gentiles being converted, saying, *"they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed"* (Acts 13:48). When Paul preached in Philippi we are told of a woman who believed the Gospel named Lydia. The text says, *"The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul"* (Acts 16:14). That's a real example of God working in Lydia to will and to act according to His good purposes. Lydia was a founding member of the church of Philippi, so you can imagine she would have let off a big *"amen"* when they first read Philippians 2:12-13 in her midst. We could keep going and going with examples, but you get the idea.

So what? Why does it matter, to bring us back to Hebrews 6:3, for the writer to say that his readers will grow up to maturity *"if God permits"*? Let me suggest three responses this truth from God's Word calls out of us...First...

### ***This Calls for Preaching the Gospel and to Get to Work***

Consider again Philippians 2:12-13,

*"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,<sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."* (Philippians 2:12-13)

We've considered Paul's main point that you *"work out"* because God *"works in."* We've considered what *"working out"* looks like in the verses that come next. But how does God *"work in"* us to will and to act? We can say the Holy Spirit or the Word of God or through spiritual disciplines or Christian community or a great number of other things that would all be tools that God could use to that end in our lives. But in this context, it is the Gospel that Paul has in mind. Notice that verse 12 begins with *"therefore,"* meaning the command to work out our salvation should be the logical outworking of what he has just described. And what did he just describe? The Gospel. Look at verse 5 and following...

*"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,<sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,<sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.<sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.<sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,<sup>10</sup> so that at the name*

*of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,<sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:5-11)*

Every knee will bow before Christ, “*therefore*” live in light of that and “*work out your salvation with fear and trembling.*” Christ obeyed, suffered for it, died, but was ultimately vindicated, “*therefore*” continue to “*work out your salvation with fear and trembling.*” Let Christ’s example shape the direction of your life. Have the mind of Christ. So the Gospel Paul just rehearsed—Jesus, the eternal Son of God, became a man, died on the cross, was raised from the dead, and exalted above all—is what propels obedience to the command that Paul gives in the next verse. So I would suggest to you that the Gospel preached and rehearsed is one of the means through which God works in us both the desire to do what pleases Him and the actual acts that please Him. So we must preach the Gospel daily and often—to ourselves and others—and we must get to work in light of it.

“The Bible does not say, ‘God is at work in you to bring about his good purposes, *therefore* stay in bed.’ It says, ‘Work out your salvation, *because* God is at work in you’ (see Phil. 2:12-13). God’s work does not make our work unnecessary; it makes it possible.”<sup>21</sup>

So preach the Gospel and get to work. Work at the things of God with all your might and trust that as you do it is God who is working in you. Second...

### ***This Calls for Praising God for His Gracious Work***

If our sanctification, our growing up spiritually, our Christian maturity, is owing to God’s work, then we must, as the biblical writers model so well, always give God the glory. Anything we accomplish individually or corporately as a church that has eternal significance is owing to the gracious work of God’s Spirit among us. We don’t get to take credit for God’s grace. It’s a gift. We should thank God for it. We should rejoice in Christ because of it. And we should deflect glory to Him at every chance we get.

Now listen, I know the past four Sundays that we have worked through these verses in Hebrews 5 and 6 it has been hard. The Holy Spirit has been convicting many of us something fierce. Many of us have had each of our toes bruised for the past several weeks. I get it. I can hardly walk myself. But it’s not all bad...at least, if you are a Christian.

Like you are here today. After all that beating many of you came back instead of running away from the Lord. Could that not be evidence of God’s work in you? Praise Him then for it. Is there any desire to follow Jesus and turn from your sin? “The desire a Christian has to die more and more to sin and to live more and more to righteousness evidences God’s gracious intervention and active interest.”<sup>22</sup> Is there any evidence in your life of works that are pleasing in the sight of God? Then God worked them in you. As Jesus said, “*let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven*” (Matthew 5:16). You should be the first to give Him glory for those good works. Have you made any progress since the day of your conversion? If you are a Christian the answer is “yes,” so give God the glory for it.

As Christians we may not be where we want to be spiritually, but we are not where we once were. We may feel like our spiritual lives follow the pattern of one step forward and two steps back. We may feel as though we are not making any progress. I get it, trust me. This is one of the reasons it’s helpful for us to try to measure our progress in the pursuit of holiness not through the snapshot of recent days, but over the course of months and years.

“As David Powlison likes to say, sanctification is like a man walking up the stairs with a yo-yo. There are a lot of ups and downs, but ultimate progress nonetheless. So don’t tie yourself up in knots wondering if Tuesday was godlier than Wednesday. Look at your trajectory over the last five months, or better yet, over the last five years. And this goes for judging others too. Don’t rush to criticize the spiritual progress of others without knowing how far they’ve come and in which direction they are heading.”<sup>23</sup>

And this leads to a final point...

### ***This Calls for Patience with Others as God Works***

I think that what we have considered today should also influence the way we view others who progress in maturity either faster or slower than us. Francis Chan hits the nail on the head...

“Think of it this way: if I bought my son a new Ferrari (which would never happen), and he judged his friends who rode their bikes to school, it would be absurd. He should have the wisdom to see that he was a spoiled kid who did nothing to earn his car. It was handed to him. He has nothing to brag about. In the same way, if you have even an ounce of humility, it is only by the grace of God. He blessed you with it. If we truly believe this, then it makes no sense to be angry at others for not having received the same grace. Thank God for any insight, wisdom, and humility He has graced you with. Quickly forgive anyone who has hurt you and pray God, by His mercy, would open their eyes.”<sup>24</sup>

God works at different paces in different people. He may not always move at the pace that we want and this can be frustrating, but it calls for prayer not for impatience. It calls for faith that the one who began the good work in you is faithful to complete it and the one who began the good work in your brother or sister is just as faithful to finish the job in their life.

So then, preach the Gospel and get to work in light of the Gospel. Praise the Lord for His gracious work in your life and in the lives of your brothers and sister. And be patient while God finishes the work. He will finish. Believe that.

Let me close with a quote from the only Christian born in Tyler, Texas, who is known all over the world—the late Jerry Bridges. His classic work, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, has sold more than a million and a half copies around the world (so far). In the opening chapter he wrote the following words, which could be considered the sermon in a few sentences:

“No one can attain any degree of holiness without God working in his life, but just as surely no one will attain it without effort on his own part. God has made it possible for us to walk in holiness. But He has given us responsibility to do the walking.”<sup>25</sup>

*And this we will do, if God permits...*

Let’s pray...

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<sup>1</sup> “What does the writer mean by ‘God permitting, we will do so’? The first issue one must address is the antecedent of ‘this.’ Four options exist: it may refer (1) to going on to maturity, (2) to the more advanced teaching, (3) it may refer to the author’s giving mature teaching enabling the readers to go on to maturity, or (4) not only to pressing on to maturity, but to both attendant circumstances expressed by the participles, ‘leaving behind the elementary teachings’ and ‘not laying again the foundation.’ The first and fourth options are contextually most likely. When the author employs ‘we,’ he is most likely indicating what he and his readers intend to do rather than stating what he intends to do, namely, press on to more mature, advanced teaching. Since the two attendant circumstances are semantically connected to the main verb ‘let us press on,’ they are pulled into its orbit and constitute the antecedent reference to ‘this’ in v. 3. The force of the Greek and the connection of v. 3 to v. 1 can be seen if we consider v. 2 a parenthesis for the moment and thus translate: ‘Let us be carried on into perfection, and this we will do, God granting us mercy that we may be so enabled.’ As Ellingworth and Nida pointed out, it is essential to treat vv. 1–3 as a unit for translation purposes and to show that v. 3 refers to pressing forward to maturity.” David L. Allen, *Hebrews* (NAC; Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 343–344.

<sup>2</sup> The word is ἐάνπερ. It may occur a third time in Hebrews 3:6, depending on which variant reading one chooses from.

<sup>3</sup> “In fact, the Greek is a passive verb. It’s not let *us* do something, but rather, quite literally (and it can only be taken as a passive; this is not a deponent anywhere in the ancient literature), let us *be borne* along to perfection, let us be *borne along* to maturity. That is, let us be borne along *by God* to maturity.” D. A. Carson, “Jesus Is Better: Don’t Apostatize,” in *D. A. Carson Sermon Library* (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2016), Heb 5:11–6:20.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews* (BTCF; Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 178. He also states, “It is imperative that we see that these two themes are complementary. The Scriptures regularly teach that human beings are responsible for their actions and that God is sovereign over all that occurs (e.g., Gen 45:5, 7-8; 50:20; Isa 10:5-34; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28).” *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> D. A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 62).

<sup>6</sup> For even more examples than what I provide below, one should consult D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 183-188; D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension* (Atlanta: John Knox: 1981), 9-38; 125-134. Carson has been very influential on my thinking and I share his understanding of compatibilism, which Scott Christenson defines as: “The biblical view that divine *determinism* is compatible with human *free will*. There is a dual explanation for every choice that humans make. God determines human choices, yet every person freely makes his or her own choices. God’s causal power is exercised so that he never coerces people to choose as they do, yet they always choose according to his sovereign plan. People are free when they voluntarily choose according to their most compelling desires and as long as their choices are made in an unhindered way. While God never hinders one’s choices, other factors can hinder people’s freedom and thus their responsibility. Furthermore, moral and spiritual choices are conditioned on one’s base nature, whether good or evil (i.e., regenerate or unregenerate). In this sense, one is either in bondage to his or her *sin nature* or freed by a new spiritual nature.” Scott Christensen, *What About Free Will: Reconciling Our Choices with God’s Sovereignty* (Phillipsburg, P&R Publishing, 2016), 254 (see his work for an accessible overview of the position).

<sup>7</sup> John Piper, “Let Us Press On To Maturity,” a sermon preached at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, MN, on October 6, 1996. Accessed online as of September 2018 at the following: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/let-us-press-on-to-maturity>.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Francis Chan, *Letters to the Church* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2018), 206.

<sup>10</sup> Josh Black, “Grow Up!,” a sermon preached to First Evangelical Free Church, Wichita, KS, on December 27, 2009. Accessed online as of September 2018 at the following: <http://firstfreewichita.org/sermons/sermon/2009-12-27/grow-up>.

<sup>11</sup> Christensen, 94.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Carson, *Basics for Believers*, 61-62. He continues, “Nor is God working merely to strengthen us in *our* willing and acting. Paul’s language is stronger than that. God himself is working in us both to will and to act: he works in us at the level of our will and at the level of our doing. But far from being a *disincentive* to press on, Paul insists that this is an incentive. Assured as we are that God works in this way in his people, we should be all the more strongly resolved to will and to act in ways that please our Master.” *Ibid.*, 62. Similarly, Michael P. V. Barrett writes, “God implants within us the principle of spiritual life, thereby creating within us a whole new disposition toward holiness that influences our desires and choices. The desire a Christian has to die more and more to sin and to live more and more to righteousness evidences God’s gracious intervention and active interest. The Bible makes clear that ‘it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure’ (Phil. 2:13). The relevance of this new principle of life to our sanctification should be apparent. We live holy lives not in order to attain spiritual life; we live in a holy way because of spiritual life. Sanctification flows *from* spiritual life, not *to* it. It is a growing in grace, not a striving to merit grace. We should have the confidence, therefore, that in regenerating us, God changes us from the inside out. Knowing that the very desire to be holy is God given should encourage us to draw from that provision of life. If we are spiritually alive, there is no reason we should behave as we did when we were spiritually dead. Sanctification is living in the reality of the new birth.” Michael P. V. Barrett, *Complete in Him: A Guide to Understanding and Enjoying the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, [2000] 2017), 213.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 62-64.

<sup>16</sup> Dane Ortlund, *A New Inner Relish: Christian Motivation in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2018), 117-118 (also quoted in Christenson, 96). “This dual principle critically orients our perspective regarding sanctification. In examining how Christians commonly think about their growth in Christ, several models of sanctification are deficient. First, sanctifying growth in holiness is not a matter of our working it out like a lonesome Texas Ranger pursuing a band of elusive Comanches across a barren prairie. We have no intrinsic power for Christlike growth on our own. We might call this *Me Alone* sanctification. Second, it doesn’t reflect the passive and powerless cliché ‘Let go and let God.’ We don’t sit comfortably and drink our tea while God infuses us with a mystical holiness. Although it sounds pious, this *God Alone* model falls short as well. Third, others think sanctification is a cooperative effort whereby we do our part and God does his. God is our copilot, either making up for what we can’t do on our own or supplying us with the necessary support to fly the plane of sanctification. This *God Plus Me* scenario might be mistaken as compatibilist, but don’t be misled. This position is actually more in line with Arminianism. Sanctification in this case is synergistic. God’s grace is necessary for a believer to persevere in her faith, but that grace is not sufficient for perseverance. The believer must cooperate with the grace by the exercise of her free will. Without such diligence, she can fall away from the faith and be lost once again. To be faithful to Scripture, however, we discover a wholly different model of sanctification. In this fourth model, we work 100 percent toward the progress of our sanctification while simultaneously trusting that God is 100 percent at work in us. We might call this the *All God and All Me* model of sanctification. The necessary trust in God’s sufficient power to achieve Christlikeness is attended by a corresponding and necessary obedience that he demands from us (Eph. 1:18-19; 3:16-17). In the end, ‘sanctification is God’s work, but he performs it through the diligent self-discipline and righteous pursuits of his people, not in spite of them. God’s sovereign work does not absolve believers from the need for obedience; it means their obedience is itself a Spirit-empowered work of God.’ Thus, our final sanctification (Phil. 1:6) is assured.” Christenson, 96-98.

<sup>17</sup> Christenson, 96.

<sup>18</sup> See also Kevin DeYoung, *The Hole in Our Holiness: Filling the Gap Between Gospel Passion and the Pursuit of Godliness* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 26-28.

<sup>19</sup> Christenson, 97.

<sup>20</sup> John MacArthur, “The Apparent Paradox of Sanctification,” available at <http://www.gty.org/blog/B140702>.

<sup>21</sup> John Piper, from the “Foreword” of David Mathis, *Habits of Grace: Enjoying Jesus through the Spiritual Disciplines* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 13.

<sup>22</sup> Michael P. V. Barrett, *Complete in Him: A Guide to Understanding and Enjoying the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, [2000] 2017), 213.

<sup>23</sup> DeYoung, 138.

<sup>24</sup> Francis Chan, *Letters to the Church*, 206-207.

<sup>25</sup> Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 10-11.