

THE EPISTLES TO THE HEBREWS

HEBREWS 4:14-10:18, THE SUPERIORITY OF THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST

INTRODUCTION

- A. Outline of Hebrews (to be finalized at completion of Hebrews study)
1. The superiority of the person of Christ (1:1-4:13)
 - a. Christ has the superior message (1:1-2a)
 - b. Christ is the superior person (1:2b-3)
 - c. Christ is superior to angels (1:4-2:18)
 - d. Christ is superior to Moses (3:1-4:13)
 2. The superiority of the priesthood of Christ (4:14-10:18)
 - a. A superior confession (4:14-16)
 - b. Superior qualifications (5:1-10)
 - c. A warning to keep moving forward (5:11-6:20)
 - 1) A dangerous spiritual condition (5:11-14)
 - 2) A call to spiritual maturity (6:1-12)
 - a) An encouragement to become mature (6:1-3)
 - b) A warning concerning apostasy (6:4-8)
 - c) An encouraging prospect (6:9-12)
- B. Review of Hebrews 5:11-14
1. Four marks of spiritual immaturity
 - a. Dullness toward the Word of God.
 - b. The inability to teach the Word of God.
 - c. The need to be continually taught basic principles.
 - d. Difficulty in applying the Word of God.
 2. Raymond Brown, *Somehow or other, however busy he or she may be, every Christian needs to find a regular opportunity for serious study of the Bible.*
- C. Comments on Hebrews 6:1-12
1. Raymond Brown, *The solid foundation of Christian truth is of immense importance but, once that is well and truly laid, there is no need to go on repeating that process, laying again a further foundation.*
 2. Douglas Mangum, *Having rebuked the readers for their immaturity, here the author transitions to a direct warning for them to move beyond the spiritually childlike character at least some of them are apparently still exhibiting.*

HEBREWS 5:11-6:20, A WARNING TO KEEP MOVING FORWARD

HEBREWS 6:1-12, A CALL TO SPIRITUAL MATURITY (6:1-12)

- A. An encouragement to become spiritually mature (1-3)
1. The writer calls the readers to move from the basics of the faith to spiritual maturity (1a), *Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity,*
 - a. *Therefore*
 - 1) The writer moves from the problem of Hebrews 5:14 to its solution in this section.
 - 2) William L. Lane, *The warning expressed in 5:11-14 finds an emphatic continuation in 6:1-12.*
 - 3) H. D. M. Spence, . . . *it is so incumbent on us to advance out of the state of milk-fed infants.*
 - 4) J. Dwight Pentecost, . . . *they are saved. They are genuine believers. Thus their need is not knowledge; rather, they need to use the knowledge they possess.*
 - 5) Thomas Constable, *Since they needed stretching mentally they should not be content with their present condition. . . Spiritual maturity does not come by our striving in self-effort but by our cooperating with God as we do His will depending on His help. It comes as we follow the Holy Spirit who leads us (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:16).*

- b. *let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ*
- 1) The call to spiritual maturity is for everyone.
 - a) The writer included himself.
 - b) Paul included himself, Philippians 3:12-14, *Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*
 - 2) The readers needed to move on from relearning the basics of spiritual truths and grow deeper in those truths.
 - a) William Barclay, *The writer to the Hebrews was certain of the necessity of progress in the Christian life. Teachers would never get anywhere if they had to lay the foundations all over again every time they began to teach.*
 - b) Zane Hodges, *To have reviewed the fundamentals would only have left them where they were. The author preferred "radical surgery" and decided to pull them forward as rapidly as he could. Indeed this was the solution to their problem.*
 - c) William L. Lane, *When the writer urges his readers to leave standing . . . the elementary Christian teaching, he is not dismissing it but regarding it as so well established that the urgent need is for a fuller appreciation and application of that teaching.*
- c. *and go on to maturity*
- 1) *Maturity* can mean *perfection* but the better meaning in context is *maturity*, not complete knowledge but deeper understanding and fuller application.
 - 3) William Barclay on the writer's meaning of *maturity*, *They should have a deeper grasp not only of the facts but also of the significances of the Christian faith. . . As people grow older, their lives should more and more reflect Christ.*
 - 4) Warren Wiersbe, *It is normal for Christians to grow; it is abnormal for them to have arrested growth.*
2. The writer identifies a number of elementary teachings concerning Christ (1b-2), ***not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.***
- a. Introductory notes
- 1) R. Kent Hughes, . . . *the six facets of "the elementary teachings about Christ" (v. 1) listed in verses 1-3 outline the primitive catechism used in Jewish churches to induct converts. Thus, we get an intimate glimpse of "the basics," the foundation you would have been taught before being baptized and accepted into a Jewish church 2,000 years ago.*
 - 2) William L. Lane, . . . *in 6:1-2 the writer is not asking the community to discard one aspect of Christian instruction for another but to build upon the solid foundation already laid for them.*
 - 3) Warren Wiersbe, *The writer lists six foundational truths of the Christian life, all of which, by the way, are also foundational to the Jewish faith. After all, our Christian faith is based on the Jewish faith and is a fulfillment of it. "Salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22).*
 - 4) Donald Hagner, *It is striking that the six items mentioned all find parallels within Judaism. This may suggest that the readers were attempting somehow to remain within Judaism by emphasizing items held in common between Judaism and Christianity. They may have been trying to survive with a minimal Christianity in order to avoid alienating their Jewish friends or relatives.*
 - 5) Thomas Constable, *The structure of this sentence in Greek suggests that the last two pairs explain the first pair. Laying the foundation of repentance and faith consists of instruction regarding washings . . . laying on hands, resurrection, and judgment.*
 - 6) As already noted, each teaching in the list was part of Judaism as well as Christianity. The list will identify the distinction between the two. The key to understanding the meaning of verses 1-3 and the understanding of 4-8 centers on the Jewish converts' commitment to the Christian meanings and not turning back to the Jewish meanings.

- b. The list of basic principles
- 1) The first two mark the beginning of spiritual life.
 - a) *not lay again a foundation of repentance from dead works* (1b)
 - 1] Old Testament views
 - a] R. Kent Hughes, . . . *in this Jewish context, turning away from the dead works of the Law and one's doomed attempt at self-salvation. But the instruction would have also included turning away from personal sin itself, which works death, just as John the Baptist and then Jesus had called for* (cf. Matthew 3:2; Mark 1:4, 15; Luke 3:8).
 - b] Raymond Brown, . . . *because of its Jewish background, the call is to repent from dead works, from man's futile attempt at self-salvation.*
 - 2] New Testament views
 - a] William Barclay, *It may be that the writer to the Hebrews means that Christians have broken away from the meaningless rituals and conventions of life to give themselves to the things which deepen character and develop the soul.*
 - b] R. V. Tasker as quoted by F. F. Bruce, *an abandonment of the attempt to obtain righteousness by seeking to obey the precepts of a lifeless moral code . . .*
 - b) *of faith toward God* (1c)
 - 1] Old Testament views
 - a] Donald Hagner, . . . *faith in God, is of course also very important in Judaism. Thus, at the beginning of the list we encounter repentance and faith, two of the most central aspects of Jewish piety—both taken up by Christianity* (cf. Acts 20:21).
 - b] R. Kent Hughes, *No doubt the necessity of faith was hammered home with an exposition of the faith principle from Old Testament Scriptures such as Genesis 15:6 ("Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness") and Habakkuk 2:4 ("but the righteous will live by his faith")*.
 - 2] New Testament views
 - a] Faith is tied to repentance in that turning away from sin requires a turning to God.
 - b] R. Kent Hughes, *Merely turning from dead works would accomplish nothing. Repentance must be joined with faith—a personal relationship of trust in God, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. . .*
 - c] Acts 20:21, *testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.*
 - 2) The next two deal with one's relationship to the local church.
 - a) *of instruction about washings* (2a)
 - 1] Old Testament views
 - a] It could refer to ceremonial washings and/or different types of baptisms: of John, of Jewish proselytes, of the Holy Spirit. Every Jewish home had a basin by the entrance for the family and visitors to use for ceremonial washings. True cleansing goes below the surface.
 - b] Thomas Constable, *A different Greek word describes Christian baptism. This means the writer here referred not to baptism but to spiritual cleansing.*
 - 2] New Testament views
 - a] Acts 19:4, *And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus."*
 - b] Titus 3:5, *he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.*
 - c] R. Kent Hughes, *The idea here is that the Hebrew church employed the customary Jewish cleansing rites, as well as the Old Testament customs of laying on of hands, to teach the deeper, ultimate significance of Christian baptism and laying on of hands—namely, the baptism of the Holy Spirit* (cf. Matthew 3:11; Acts 1:5; 1 Corinthians 12:13) *and also commissioning and empowering for Christian service* (cf. Acts 13:1–3).
 - d] Donald Hagner, *Christian baptism thus could well be classified as one, if not indeed the culminating, rite of purification.*
 - e] Ray Stedman, *The point the writer wishes to make is that baptism is an initiatory rite and must not be regarded as fulfilling all that a Christian is expected to know or do.*

- b) *the laying on of hands* (2b)
- 1] Old Testament views
 - a] Under the Old Covenant the person who brought a sacrifice had to put his hands on it, to symbolize his identification with it, Leviticus 1:4, *He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.*
 - b] William Barclay, *In Jewish practice, the laying on of hands was significant in three ways. (a) It was the sign of the transference of guilt. . . (b) It was the sign of the transference of blessing. . . It was the sign of setting apart to some special office. Individuals were ordained to office by the laying on of hands.*
 - 2] New Testament views
 - a] Donald Hagner, *The laying on of hands is yet another Jewish custom taken up by the Christian church, often as a symbol for the imparting of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 8:17; 9:17; 19:6), but also in connection with healing (Acts 9:12; 28:8) and, as in the OT and rabbinic Judaism, special commissionings (Acts 6:6; cf. 1 Tim. 5:22; 2 Tim. 1:6).*
 - b] Ray Stedman, *The laying on of hands was widely practiced in the early church, sometimes for the imparting of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17), sometimes for healing (Acts 28:8), sometimes for ordaining or commissioning (Acts 13:3). Though borrowed from Judaism, its Christian usage would need to be explained to the new convert. It is an act of identification, tying the individual to either the activity of God or that of the body of Christ.*
 - c] The sacrifice brought by Christians is our High Priest, Jesus, the Lamb of God.
- 3) The last two deal with the future.
- a) *the resurrection of the dead* (2c)
 - 1] Old Testament views
 - a] Ray Stedman, *It was taught in the Old Testament (Is 26:19; Dan 12:2) and was important to the Pharisees (Acts 23:6). . .*
 - b] Job 19:25-26, *For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God.*
 - c] Warren Wiersbe, *The Old Testament teaches a general resurrection, but does not make the doctrine clear.*
 - 2] New Testament views
 - a] Our great High Priest is our hope of resurrection based on His resurrection, John 11:25, *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,*
 - b] Warren Wiersbe, *The New Testament teaches a resurrection of the saved and also a resurrection of the lost (John 5:24–29; Rev. 20:4–6, 12–15).*
 - c] William Barclay, *From the beginning, Christianity was a religion of immortality. It gave people two worlds in which to live; it taught them that the best was yet to be and thereby made this world the training school for eternity.*
 - d] Ray Stedman, *Since his resurrection is an essential element of the Melchizedek priesthood, it would be especially important that Christian converts be fully informed on this matter.*
 - b) *eternal judgment* (2d)
 - 1] Old Testament views
 - a] Ray Stedman, *The theme of judgment to come is also clearly taught in the Old Testament. . .*
 - b] Genesis 18:5, *Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?"*
 - c] Ecclesiastes 12:14, *For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.*
 - 2] New Testament views
 - a] William Barclay, *Christians were never allowed to forget that in the end they must face God, and that what God thought of them was infinitely more important than what other people thought of them.*
 - b] 2 Corinthians 5:10, *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.*

- c] Raymond Brown, *The future implications of the faith were an essential aspect of early Christian instruction.*
 - d] Ray Stedman, *The author will refer to such judgment in 9:27, but the full development of this theme awaits the recognition of Jesus as the one who speaks from heaven (12:25) before the terrible shaking of the heavens and the earth.*
3. The writer affirms their ability to move on to maturity as God permits (3), *And this we will do if God permits.*
- a. The writer desires that every Christian would become spiritually mature.
 - 1) Zane Hodges, *What he wanted them to do was to press forward. But he was perfectly aware that this required more than his effort to challenge his readers to make progress.*
 - 2) Charles Spurgeon, *We must keep on going forward; there is no such thing in the Christian life as standing still, and we dare not turn back.*
 - b. The writer knows spiritual maturity is the work of God.
 - 1) Donald Hagner, . . . *any arrival at maturity by readers or author depends in the last analysis upon the sovereign enabling of God (cf. Acts 18:21).*
 - 2) Sanctification is a picture of a person's choosing to move toward spiritual maturity in conjunction through the empowering of the Holy Spirit.
 - 3) Ray Stedman, *Far from being a polite cliché or pious wish, these words God permitting form the fulcrum on which the warning of verses 4–8 turns.*
4. Comments on Hebrews 6:1-3
- a. Thomas Constable, *What does a stagnant, sour believer need? He or she needs to mature. How does growth toward maturity take place? It happens when, by God's grace, the believer responds positively to further revelation beyond the basics.*
 - b. Raymond Brown, *The doctrinal and spiritual importance of all these topics cannot be denied, but the author regards these foundational truths as basic Christian knowledge. It has been observed by some scholars that these six elementary doctrines can be paralleled in Judaism. Perhaps some of these first-century readers were retreating back into these aspects of faith which, in some measure, Christians had in common with their Jewish neighbours.*
 - c. R. Kent Hughes, *It was possible for Hebrew converts to yield gradually to hostile pressures from the old life and give up more and more of the distinctives of their new faith without much notice—and some were doing just that! . . . if we are sliding, losing our grasp on things that were once clear, caring less about God and holiness and the world, we had better drop everything and tend to our souls.*
 - d. Warren Wiersbe, *The lesson of the paragraph (Heb. 6:1–3) is clear: “You have laid the foundation. You know your ABCs. Now move forward! Let God carry you along to maturity!”*

To be continued, Lord willing.

- B. A warning concerning apostasy (6:4-8)
- C. An encouraging prospect (6:9-12)