

## Hebrews 6:1-3

### Go on to Spiritual Maturity

The author of Hebrews is concerned for his readers because they have not risen above the elementary teachings of the gospel. They haven't grown spiritually.

He has given them a stern rebuke of spiritual immaturity (Heb. 5:11-14). He wishes to instruct his readers regarding the solid food found in the fulfillment of the Melchizedek priesthood in the person and work of Jesus Christ. "Concerning Him we have much to say" is referring to both Melchizedek and Christ.

However, some in his audience are "dull of hearing." They are sluggish spiritually and lazy mentally. They have been in this state for so long that they cannot even comprehend the simplest teaching regarding Christ. If they had been truly born again they should have by now become spiritually mature so as to be teachers in the local congregation. Every believer is expected to be able to share his testimony of God's saving grace and defend the Gospel. These readers are like spiritual children; they cannot understand basic spiritual truth.

In the context of Hebrews five and six we are discussing the ABC's of Christianity, the most basic knowledge of what it means to become a Christian. These individuals cannot discern the most basic element of the righteousness of God. The "word of righteousness" is referring to God's revelation about righteousness of every believer. It is a right relationship provided by God in His grace through faith in Christ Jesus. Without His saving grace no one can possibly be saved. If that does not translate into a changed life something is wrong. We reach maturity through the word of righteousness. It is inexcusable that some of these individuals are inexperienced in the doctrine of the Christian faith. They have had plenty of time to mature. Some in the church are of full age and have advanced spiritual understanding. They are mature or full grown in the deep mysteries of God. This maturity is gained by mixing the promises of the Word of God with faith.

In the passage before us let's be care not to do eisegesis, reading into the Scripture what is not there.

### Let's go on to spiritual maturity (Heb. 6:1-3)

"Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. And this we will do, if God permit" (Hebrews 6:1-3, NASB95). All Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update unless otherwise noted.

### "Leaving the elementary teaching about Christ"

That would seem strange at first. Why would we want to leave the elementary teaching about Christ? There are some basic, fundamental teachings that never change. Our author wants to take his readers from first grade on to second grade without repeating the basic doctrines. "Leaving behind the discussion of the beginning about Christ," paraphrases A. T. Robertson.

What are these "elementary teachings about the Christ"? The metaphor for "foundation" refers to the ABC's or elementary truths as opposed to maturity. "The elementary teaching about Christ" is literally, "the word (or teaching) of the beginning of Christ." It is suggestive of the first presentation of the gospel, the plan of salvation.

Some of his readers have identified themselves to some extent with the Christian believers and have professed themselves to be Christians, but there is no evidence their profession is genuine. There is probably not much difference between them and their Jewish friends. They have distanced themselves some from Judaism, but have not been regenerated. They must make a break with Judaism in order to go deeper in the Christian life. Judaism laid the foundation for the coming of Jesus Christ and the preparation for their entering into the new covenant with God. But it was only a foundation. These individuals must go on to a mature faith in Christ.

The readers are assumed to be Christians. However, like any congregation there are those who attend who do not have a saving relationship with Christ. Some scholars see this as a hypothetical case to encourage the true believers to not drift back into Judaism because of the superiority of Christ's atoning sacrifice and the new covenant. I take it as a mixed congregation of believers with some unbelievers who give all the outward appearances of being Christians, but have never been regenerated spiritually. The specific hard words are addressed to these unbelievers who are tempted to go back to the Jewish rituals at the Temple. The true believers will take the words at heart and focus their minds on Jesus, the author and finisher of their salvation.

Note the contrast in these opening verses between the mature believers who want to make progress in their Christian life and those who are lingering behind. The author is not saying the Christian should despise or abandon the elementary doctrines of Christianity. The fundamentals are always basic to every stage of spiritual growth. We never forsake them; we grow on them. There is no stopping-place in the Christian life. We go from one stage to the next as we grow in our knowledge and faith in Christ.

### **“Press on to maturity”**

“Let's be moved along” is not our personal effort, but “a personal surrender to an active influence,” says B. F. Westcott. Literally, the author says, “let us be carried forward,” with the idea that it is not the learners being carried by their instructor, but of both the learner and the instructor being carried forward together by God. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. It has been called the divine passive, implying the agency of God. The reader is impelled by the Holy Spirit. Christ is moving or carrying all things on to God's eternal purpose for them. We need to get out of the way and let Him do it in and through us to His glory. The believer needs to make himself available to Christ so that he will be borne along unto perfection. He refuses to go back over old ground with his students. “For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Romans 8:14). The Holy Spirit is the true dynamic of spiritual growth.

The word for “maturity” or “perfection” is from *teleios* meaning mature. Let's move on from spiritual babes to mature adults. Let's move on from milk to solid spiritual food. As one of my seminary students who is a third grade teacher said recently, let's go on from second graders to third graders. Evidence of spiritual life will be seen spiritual development and progress toward Christian maturity. If there is no progress toward maturity it should be questioned if there is any genuine experience of the Holy Spirit. When the gospel seed has been planted in good soil it will produce a harvest to the glory of God. Where is the evidence of a right relationship with God in Christ Jesus?

The full revelation of God to man has been made in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He is no longer veiled in shadows and types as seen in the Old Testament revelation, but now the full glory of God is shown in the person of His Son. “For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). The types have been fulfilled in Christ Jesus; now let's move on to a mature faith in Him.

The author is not referring to “leaving” as in the sense of repudiating the basic teaching, but let move on to maturity. Let's go beyond the basics. Let's build on the basic doctrines and go on to Christlikeness. We will arrive at spiritual maturity when we allow the Melchizedek priesthood of Christ to work in our lives.

Are the six doctrines given in verses one and two Christian or Judaism? Important to the discussion is that only true believers could be challenged to “press on to maturity.” Someone who is unregenerate cannot be expected to become a mature believer. They are still dead in their trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1-3).

F. F. Bruce made this observation about the doctrines listed in these verses. He writes, “It is remarkable how little in the list is distinctive of Christianity, for practically every item could have its place in a fairly orthodox Jewish community. Each of them, indeed acquires a new significance in a Christian context; but the impression we get is that existing Jewish beliefs and practices were used as a foundation on which to build Christian truth” (*NIC, Commentary on Hebrews*, p. 112). Christianity rests on the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament. We know this to be a fact because the New Testament records the facts of this fulfillment. These are the ABC's of our faith.

These Hebrew readers of this letter were tempted to go back and lay the foundation again. They were tempted to turn from Christ and go back to Judaism. The author tells his readers, “Let's be carried on to maturity, and not go back again to the first grade. Let's build on the ABC's, but let's not stay there.”

The apostle Paul would be the first to tell us it is a relative perfection. "Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14). But there is day coming when we shall see Him as he is and be like Him (1 John 3:1-3). That is our blessed hope in Christ. Therefore, let us move on to perfection. The highest and most glorious things are found in Christ. As we make progress in the knowledge of Divine truth we will press on toward maturity. Jesus told His disciples, "You believe in God, believe also in Me" (John 14:1). It is a walk by faith and some of his readers were halting.

### **"Repentance from dead works"**

The last of the Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist issued a call to repentance. The message of the early church was a foundation of repentance and faith. The unbeliever must repent; have a change of mind, attitude, and behavior toward Jesus Christ, by putting his trust in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Repentance is the complete turnabout in the unbelieving sinner "from dead works." The apostle Paul said, "As sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 5:21). "Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19). The author of Hebrews will write later, "How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:14) Repentance is not enough to bring a person to God. Jesus said, "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins" (John 8:24).

What is to be turned from are the "dead works" because they produce death. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23a). His every sin is a dead work; it produces dead works because he is unregenerate. Men's works are "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1, 5). They separate man from a holy God. The Levitical sacrifices were ineffective for dealing with sin. They foreshadowed the perfect sacrifice for sin. "How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:14). "When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions" (Colossians 2:13).

### **"Faith toward God"**

The Old Testament covenants were based on faith in God (Gen. 15:6; Hab. 2:4). If repentance is the negative, turning from sin and unbelief, then faith is the positive side. It is a 180 degree change. The early church preached repentance of sin and faith focused on Jesus Christ. They turned from their dead works to faith toward God in Jesus Christ. Our author says, "faith toward God" perhaps with his Jewish audience in mind. However, he has already stressed that Jesus is God (Heb. 1:1-3; 3:1-6). Faith in Christ is a major theme in Hebrews, and the author will make a powerful application in Hebrews 11. The only way to enter into God's rest is by faith. "For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, "As I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest,' although His works were finished from the foundation of the world" (Hebrews 4:2-3). The word of promise must be mixed with faith in order to appropriate it. The apostle Paul went about "solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21).

Repentance from dead works must be accompanied by faith in Jesus Christ. "The just shall live by faith" (Hab. 2:4; Gal. 3:11; Rom. 1:17 quotes Hab. 2:4, "But the righteous man shall live by faith." A person must put their total acceptance and absolute trust in Jesus Christ. We depend upon Jesus Christ for time and eternity. I repent of my sins and unbelief and place my trust in Jesus Christ to save me for all eternity.

"For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'But the righteous man shall live by faith'" (Romans 1:17). Faith is simply the empty hand extended to receive Christ. The apostle Paul wrote to some believers who were being threatened by Judaizers who wanted them to go back to the Law. He said, "nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus,

even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified" (Galatians 2:16). Over and over again, the writers of the New Testament stressed to their readers: "faith which is in Christ Jesus." Faith in Christ is faith toward God. Focus your faith on Jesus Christ. It is not faith that saves you; it is Christ. Focus on Christ and that will take care of your faith in Him. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). "There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

C. H. Spurgeon said, "All the blessings of the gospel are connected with faith, but it is faith that rests in Christ. Justification, resurrection-life, the promises, the placing of sons, salvation, etc., are all spoken of as resting from faith which rests upon Christ. . . The apostle is directing his readers to look away from self to Christ, the Center, and the Sum of all blessing. This is not merely 'faith toward God,' but it is faith which comes to God by the way of the mediation and merits of His Son."

### **"Instruction about washings"**

This is not the term that is regularly used for Christian baptism (*baptisma*) in the New Testament. The author uses the plural *baptismos* which refers to Jewish ceremonial washings (Mark 7:4; Heb. 9:10). The use of the plural stresses the Jewish instructions regarding ablutions and cleansing rites (cf. Ezek. 36:25; Num. 19). The Jews practiced baptism of proselytes.

These ablutions in Judaism impressed upon the Jewish people that the LORD God is a holy God and all sin and defilement must be removed before the worshipper could approach God. These washings foreshadowed that perfect cleansing from sin that the atoning blood of Christ would provide for His people (John 1:29). The apostle Peter wrote, "knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:18-19). "You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin" (1 John 3:5). The Levitical washings only foreshadowed that atoning sacrifice of Jesus because only His blood can wash away our sins (Heb. 1:3; 9:24, 22, 24-28; 13:20; 1 John 1:6-7). There is no other detergent.

It is very doubtful that Christian baptism is in view here. The plural expresses a distinction between all kinds of religious washings and true Christian baptism.

### **"Laying on of hands"**

This was part of the sacrificial ritual in offering sacrifices (Lev. 1:4). An essential element in the Day of Atonement ritual was laying on of the hands by the High Priest. "Then Aaron shall lay both of his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the sons of Israel and all their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and he shall lay them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who stands in readiness" (Leviticus 16:21). I am convinced this is the reference to which the author of Hebrews is referring. It is the identification of the sinner with the substitutionary sacrifice that represents him.

### **"The resurrection of the dead"**

The resurrection of the dead was a doctrine of the Jews (Psa. 16:10; Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37:10; Dan. 12:2). Only the Sadducees did not accept it (Acts 23:8). The Jewish people worshipped the living God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, implying they were all living (Mark 12:26-27; Luke 20:37-38). Martha expressed this common belief to Jesus when she said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day" (John 11:24).

Moreover, the resurrection of the dead is a core belief in Christianity because Jesus is "the resurrection and the life." Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies" (John 11:24-25). The apostles testified to His resurrection (Acts 1:22; 2:32; 4:10). "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross" (Acts 5:30). The writer of Hebrews says, "Women received

back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection" (Hebrews 11:35).

The apostle Paul declared, "But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets; having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked" (Acts 24:14-15). "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

## **"Eternal judgment"**

The Jewish belief in the resurrection was closely connected with their doctrine of judgment. "For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

When we turn to Revelation chapter 20 we find the full detail of judgment before the Great White Throne. Hebrews 6:2 is the only verse in the New Testament that reads "eternal judgment." That is not to imply the doctrine is not taught in the New Testament, of course. There is a day of judgment coming and everyone must stand before the Lord God and give an account to Him.

The message of the gospel is that we must turn from trying to earn our salvation by trusting in our own self-righteousness, which is no righteousness, and receive by faith the gift of righteousness in Christ. This is what changes us from dead in trespasses and sins to a regenerated living child of God.

The important question is what did these practices mean to the first readers of the book of Hebrews? These readers had for the most part confessed their faith in Christ and had forsaken the shadows and types for the Substance who is the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Persecutions had come and their faith had waned. They were now tempted to abandon their profession of faith and return to Judaism. By so doing they would return to the foundation which they had left behind. Therefore, he encourages them to move on to maturity or perfection, full growth in their Christian faith. Put your trust in the all-cleansing, all-sufficient blood of the Lamb of God who takes always all sin. These are the ABC's. Don't go back to the ABC's; build on them and go on to maturity.

## **Some Abiding Principles and Practical Applications**

When you stop and take spiritual inventory of your relationship with God, do you see a pattern of change in your life? Have you repented of dead works and put your faith in Jesus Christ? Have you broken with your old life of unbelief and trusted Christ? We have to turn away from dead works that cannot save and place our faith in Christ.

Yes, it is possible for a person to participate in church where they experience enlightened instruction in the Word of God, see great worship services where people repent, and where the Holy Spirit is at work in powerful ways, but have never been born again, and have never had a true, saving response to the Good News in Jesus Christ. They can be quite emotional, and have a great religious experience and never be regenerated by the Holy Spirit. They are like land that receives much rain but bears no good fruit. They bear only thorns and thistles and weeds. They may have participated outwardly in worship services, and the blessings of Christian fellowship, but like the seed that fell on rocky ground in the parable of the sower, they have no spiritual roots. They fall away; there is no life. They truly never had a spiritual birth. They are still dead in trespasses and sins.

If a person continues to neglect the work of the Holy Spirit in his life he will demonstrate that he was only the subject of the pre-evangelism work of the Holy Spirit and was never regenerated. We know we have been born again because of continuance in the word of Christ. If we love Him we will obey Him. It is continuing in faith in Christ that demonstrates that true mature spiritual reality.

"The greater the sinner I know myself to be, the greater my need of Christ, and the more I am suited to Him, for He died for the 'ungodly' (Rom. 5:6)." A. W. Pink. Faith looks away from self and self-righteousness and is occupied entirely with Christ. Christ, not faith, is the sinner's Savior. What have you done with Jesus Christ?

"If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation" (Romans 10:9-10). There is no other way to be saved. That is your part. The Holy Spirit will do His work in you.