

Pressing on to Maturity

Hebrews 6:1-3

Part Two

Little children want to grow up. This is natural. They want to go from being fed to feeding themselves. They want to go from being dressed, to dressing themselves.

They want to grow up and this is a wonderful thing. And it is also a necessary thing for otherwise they will always remain, not only unproductive, but also vulnerable and that of course would be a tragedy.

The same thing is true in the spiritual realm. When an individual comes to faith in Christ and becomes a spiritual infant, they will want to grow up. They will want to follow Christ and they will want to become more like Christ. And just like with a young child, this is a wonderful thing and it is also a necessary thing. For if they do not grow up, they will not only, just like a young child, remain unproductive and but they will also remain vulnerable. And this brings us back to our study.

We are presently studying the Book of Hebrews. This book was written by an unknown author to a group of struggling Hebrew Christians living in Rome, who under a great persecution were considering leaving the Christian faith in order to return to Judaism.

The author in response to this struggle wrote this particular book in order to strengthen their faith so that they, in having their faith strengthened, might be able to persevere.

And what was at stake? Their souls, for if they did not persevere it would demonstrate that they never truly possessed genuine, living, saving faith, that kind of faith that is given by God and is protected by God. So obviously there was a lot at stake in the mind of this author as he penned this letter.

So how did author within this letter go about strengthening the faith of his readers? He focused, on Christ's superiority in matters related to Judaism.

So, what have we seen so far? We have seen that Christ is superior to the Old Testament prophets in **Hebrews 1:1-4**. We have seen that Christ is

superior to the angels in **Hebrews 1:5-2:18**. We have seen that Christ is superior to Moses in **Hebrews 3:1-4:13**. And now we are seeing, in our ongoing examination of this epistle that Christ's priesthood is superior to all other priesthoods (Hebrews 4:14-10:18). This section began in **Hebrews 4:14** and will continue all the way down through **Hebrews 10:18**. So how did the author begin this particular lengthy section?

The author of Hebrews in Hebrews 4:14-16 focused his readers on Christ's heavenly high priestly ministry. These verses served as an overlapping transition that tied what he had said earlier in the epistle about Christ's high priestly ministry, which was very limited, to what he was about to say in a far more expansive way. And because it was so expansive we have divided it into two parts. So, what is the first part?

After having focused his readers attention on Christ's heavenly high priestly ministry the author then addressed Christ's appointment as high priest according to the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:1-10, 7:1-28). This is the first part. So how did the author go about developing this particular part?

The author in Hebrews 5:1-10 began with a simple introduction. In this introduction, the author made it very clear to his readers in **verses 1-6** that Christ, their great high priest, had not been divinely appointed their great high priest according to the old order of priesthood that had been established under the Law, but rather according to an entirely new order of priesthood, which the author referred to as the order of Melchizedek. This order of priesthood did not flow out from the Old Covenant, which was rooted in animal sacrifices, but rather it flowed out from the New Covenant, which was rooted in Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

The author then concluded this brief introduction in **verses 7-10** by outlining Christ's path to that appointment, which was the path of suffering, obedience and perseverance. So, what happened next?

The author, after having introduced the Son's divine appointment according to the order of Melchizedek, then took a strategic detour in order to warn his readers in Hebrews 5:11-6:20.

So how did the author begin this warning section? The author began this warning section with an exhortation (Hebrews 5:11-6:3). This exhortation section began in **Hebrews 5:11** and concluded in **Hebrews 6:3**.

So what did this author do in order to prepare the way for his exhortation within this section of scripture? The author in preparing the way for his exhortation began with a negative assessment of his reader's spiritual maturity.

So how did this author begin his negative assessment of his reader's spiritual maturity? First of all, the author began his negative assessment of his reader's spiritual maturity by stating their problem in Hebrews 5:11-12. And what was their problem? This is was their problem. When it came to hearing the word of God they had become **“dull of hearing”** or in other they had become “sluggish of hearing” or perhaps better said, that they in respect to their hearing of the word of God, had become like “slugs” and because of that they were no longer maturing.

But even worse than that, because of their **“dullness of hearing”** they had actually begun to regress. And because they had regressed not only were they now not able to function as teachers but they also, had to be taught again **“the elementary principles of the oracles of God.”**

So after stating the problem what did the author do next? After the author stated the problem for his readers he then graphically illustrated the problem in Hebrews 5:12-13. And how did he illustrate their problem? He illustrated their problem by comparing their need, to once again to be taught the elementary principles of the oracles of God, to an infant on a milk diet, who if they remained on that diet would never be able to grow into maturity. So then what did the author do?

After the author stated and illustrated the problem for his readers he then provided them the cure (Hebrews 5:14). So, what was the cure? The cure was to get off the bottle and start eating a diet of solid food or in other words to get on a diet that did not consist of **“the elementary principles of the oracles of God”** but rather that consisted of those teachings that were more advanced concerning Christ, that when practiced would allow them to follow Christ down the path of suffering, obedience and perseverance.

A path that if not followed would certainly leave them, spiritually speaking, extremely vulnerable, to being devoured by the stuff of life, which was exactly what was happening to many of his readers, in the midst of the persecution they were suffering.

So after the author prepared the way for his exhortation by his negative assessment of his readers spiritual maturity in Hebrews 5:11-14 that consisted of him stating their problem, illustrating their problem, and providing them a cure for their problem what did the author do next?

The author after preparing the way for his exhortation then exhorted his readers to **press** on to maturity (Hebrews 6:1-3). So now let me now read for you **Hebrews 6:1-3** and see if this is not so. **“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, (2) of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. (3) And this we will do, if God permits.”** So did the author, after preparing the way for his exhortation by his negative assessment of his reader’s spiritual maturity, then go on to exhort his readers to press on to maturity? Absolutely! This is exactly what he did.

This exhortation to press on to maturity is first of all stated positively at the beginning of **verse 1** and then negatively at the end of **verse 1** through **verse 2** and finally it concluded with a statement of resolve in **verse 3**. So let us first of all look at how the author stated his exhortation positively at the beginning of **verse 1**.

So how did he do it? **“Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity.”**

Now this statement may be somewhat surprising to us, for it is not what we might have expected in light of the fact that the author had just used some strong descriptive language to describe for his readers how truly immature they were and consequently how truly unprepared they were to handle advanced teaching concerning the Christ.

But even in spite of how he had just described them, here we find him not acquiescing to his reader’s immaturity and infantile appetite but rather, with

this exhortation, pushing them to the “adult table more fit for mature appetites.”

So why would he do this? They were in trouble and the cure for the trouble they were in was not for them to continue sucking on a bottle. They needed to move on from the children’s menu to the “adult menu” thus leaving behind the foundational but elementary teaching about the Christ.

So how would they be able to this? How would they be able to leave the elementary teaching about the Christ and press on to maturity? They will be able do this because God Himself will provide for them what they need. How do we know this?

The word translated “press on” (PHEROMETHA) is passive implying that it will be God who will move both the author and his readers forward to maturity as they in obedience pursue it.

So we have now considered how the author stated his exhortation at the beginning of **Hebrews 6:1** positively, but let us now consider how the author stated his exhortation negatively. And we see how he stated it negatively at the end of **Hebrews 6:1** through **verse 2**. So now let us read this section of Scripture. **“Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity [there is the positive side of the exhortation now here comes the negative side], 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.”**

The author at the end of **Hebrews 6:1** through **Hebrew 6:2** listed six different teachings or practices rooted within Judaism and that were used as a foundation to build Christian truth upon.

These six different teachings or practices can be divided into three groups of two. The first group, “repentance from dead works” and “faith toward God,” is the most important of those three groups for the other two groups flow from this first group. So how were these initial teachings and practices, which all rooted within Judaism, used in order to form a foundation for Christian truth?

So let us now look at this first grouping of two. “Repentance from dead works” and “faith toward God,” which can be found in the Old Testament, were probably used to sum up the initial step of Christian commitment. The former refers to the turning from the acts of sin that have resulted in our death (Romans 6:21) and the latter the basic orientation for those who have turned to God in belief and obedience.

So now let us look at the second grouping of two. “Washings” and “laying on of hands,” which can also be found in the Old Testament, were probably used to communicate the results of our initial step of Christian commitment.

So now let us look at the last grouping of two. “The resurrection of the dead” and “eternal judgment,” which can also be found in the Old Testament, probably provided the opportunity to introduce Christ’s role in those end-time matters.

We have now considered how the author stated his exhortation at the beginning of **Hebrews 6:1** positively. We have now considered how he stated it negatively at the end of **Hebrews 6:1** through **verse 2**. And now we will consider his concluding statement of resolve in **verse 3**.

The author’s statement of resolve in Hebrews 6:3 expressed the author’s confidence in his readers, which he will reiterate in Hebrews 6:9-10.

May God give us the grace to build on what we already know of Christ so that, as we pursue maturity, we may be able to walk the same path of suffering, obedience and perseverance that He walked.