



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI ◇ DEO ◇ GLORIA

## THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

### Sermon Notes

### *Maturing in Righteousness*

Hebrews 5:11-6:3

May 3, 2009

- ❖ This past September, Kimberly and I left the United States and travelled to Ethiopia to pick up our two new children, Scarlett Paige and Atticus Knox. When we arrived in-country, we were given two children who, although the biological age of both of them was almost four, they looked like they were two. Scarlett Paige was diagnosed as being malnourished, but both of them were sickly. In fact, they were within three months of their fourth birthdays and both of them weighed only 25 pounds.
- ❖ While in Ethiopia, we were allowed to take them to a few restaurants. And I will never forget what the first one was like. We were not sure what to order them, and so we went with the American child's staple: fried chicken fingers; however, neither one of our children cared to eat them. In fact, they did not eat much of the meal – consisting of fried chicken fingers and French fries.
- ❖ Then, a few days later, our driver brought us to a restaurant that served pureed chickpeas and flat bread. I could not even eat it, because it looked like mush. However, when the waiter put it in front of Atticus, you would have thought he had been given a lobster dinner! And, with a big smile on his mouth, he ate the whole meal.
- ❖ This problem continued when we arrived back in the states. As a matter of fact, the first restaurant we took them to when we arrived in Houston was Pappasitos, and they barely ate a thing.
- ❖ The problem was, was that they were very unhealthy, malnourished in fact, and all their little bodies could handle was food equivalent to baby food. We were quite concerned that, given their unhealthy state, they would be unable to fight any disease or sickness that they may catch. Our pediatrician even told us to take a cooked chicken breast and put it in the blender in order to get them the nutrients they needed.

- ❖ **And from a spiritual perspective, the readers of the Book of Hebrews seem like they were similar to Scarlett Paige and Atticus. They were spiritual infants, even though they were old enough in the faith to be considered adults.**
- ❖ And so, our author begins to exhort his readers to move past such spiritual immaturity.

<b>I. Spiritual Immaturity Leads to Dullness in Hearing</b>
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<sup>11</sup>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,

- This is the third major exhortation in the Book of Hebrews thus far. The first was in Hebrews 2:1. The second was from 3:6 through Chapter 4.
- The Hebrews author begins this section by saying, “About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.”
  - Certainly, the “this” he is referring to is the unique priesthood of Jesus Christ after the order of Melchizedek.
  - As the author articulates, it is difficult for him to explain the significance of the Melchizedekian priesthood to his readers because they are immature and, consequently, dull of hearing.
  - Consequently, the author concludes, there is truly no reason to continue discussing this subject with his readers, as they will not “get it” anyway.
- From Verses 11-12, it seems rather clear that the readers of this epistle were not new converts to the Christian faith.
- In fact, the author of Hebrews clearly states, “...by this time you ought to be teachers...” In other words, it is as though he is saying, “You have been a Christian long enough, that you should be able to train and teach others the tenets of the faith.”
- It seems that the individuals that the author is writing to are like those in contemporary Christianity who believe that the study of theology is boring and irrelevant. They would be like those who say, “Does it really matter if God is three persons or not? What matters is that we love Jesus!”
- Richard Phillips writes, “...we are living in a time when most church members are immensely ignorant of the Bible and its doctrines. Evangelicals heartily agree that the Bible is true, but they simply don’t take time to learn what it teaches.”

- In a reason poll among professing “evangelical” Christians in this country, people were asked if the Bible said, “God helps those who help themselves.” Of all of those evangelicals surveyed, 80% said “yes” it was a biblical statement (interestingly, it was Benjamin Franklin, a deist, who is credited with originally making this statement).
- According to famous pollster George Barna, the reason for the situation today among professing evangelicals can be traced back to “the glaring lack of knowledge about the Bible, basic doctrines, and the traditions of one’s church...[and] the superficiality of faith, with many people not knowing what they believe, or why.”
- In **1 Corinthians 3:1-2**, the Apostle Paul writes, “<sup>1</sup>But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. <sup>2</sup> I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready,”
- In his book *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church*, Michael Horton quotes George Barna who writes concerning the trend in the American Church (given his research):
  - “[Soon] it will be every man for himself, with no second thoughts or regrets about the personal or societal implications of this incredibly selfish, nihilistic, narcissistic way of life...Most Americans have at least an intellectual assent when it comes to God, Jesus Christ, and angels. They believe that the Bible is a good book filled with important stories and lessons. And they believe that religion is very important in their lives. But this same group of people, including many professing Christians, also believe that people are inherently good; that our primary purpose is to enjoy life as much as possible...In short, the spirituality in America is Christian in name only...**we desire experience more than knowledge.** We prefer choices to absolutes. We embrace preferences rather than truths. We seek comfort rather than growth. Faith must come on our terms or we reject it. We have enthroned ourselves as the final arbiters of righteousness, the ultimate rulers of our own experience and destiny. We are the Pharisees of the new millennium.
  - This statement would have certainly characterized the audience of the Book of Hebrews.

<b>II. Growing Christians Needs Solid Food</b>
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<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.

- The author of Hebrews, here, describes the characteristic of the one who lives on a diet of biblical milk: “[he] is unskilled in the word of righteousness”...and lacks the “powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.”
  - The idea is that the one who is spiritually immature is **easily led astray and can possibly lead others astray**. This type of person, when led astray, is essentially ineffective in being the “light on a hill” that Christ called us to be.
  - Further, such a person often lives a life of confusion and frustration, with little ability to battle the temptations and struggles that may come his way.
- The audience here is similar to Paul’s audience in Ephesians 4:11-14: “<sup>11</sup>And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup>until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, <sup>14</sup>so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”
- Tragically, far too many of us have fallen into this pattern.
  - Christian thinker and author, Os Guinness, comments in his book *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds*: “...**we are a people with a true, sometimes a deep experience of God. But we are no longer a people of truth.**”
  - Mark Noll, in *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* concurs, writing, “The scandal of the evangelical mind is that here is not much of an evangelical mind...Unlike their spiritual ancestors, modern evangelicals have not pursued comprehensive thinking under God or sought a mind shaped to its furthest reaches by Christian perspective.”

• **This is precisely the reason why the Church in America, although it is massive in size, is completely ineffective in being salt and light in this world – it is filled, even led, by Christians who live on a steady diet of milk.**

- Richard Phillips makes the following commentary, “...**theology bores today’s Christians, which is another way of saying we are bored with God himself, except as he feeds our consumer needs.**”
- I often hear Christians, even Pastors, say, “We just need to love Jesus and come together and follow Him.”

- Calls for unity are great, given that the unity is based upon orthodox Christian doctrine: such as the Trinity, the two natures of Christ, substitutionary atonement, etc. However, such “unity” is antithetical to biblical teaching. It should be of no surprise that a call for “Unity” is the central theme of nearly all ecumenical and heretical movements.
- Consider as well, one of the “Churches” in the Houston Area: *The Unity Church of Christianity*. On its website it states,

“Unity is a nondenominational church that welcomes people of all races, colors, religions, social backgrounds, lifestyles and economic levels in dignity and love. We take an extremely positive approach to life, emphasizing the good in people and all of life. The Unity teachings are based on the teachings of Jesus Christ, and the Bible is our basic textbook... We recognize Jesus Christ as our divine Teacher and Way-Shower, and we strive to apply His teaching to the situations of life today. But just because we designate Jesus Christ as our teacher and model does not mean that we do not recognize other religious teachers and movements of the world. We believe that there are many paths to God and to spiritual awareness, and that regardless of the individual religious beliefs, all people everywhere are seeking the same thing: God. We strive always to honor and to bless people on their individual quests for God...”

- How deceptive could such a movement be to someone not rooted in the truth of God’s Word!
- It should not surprise us, then, that 82% of Americans (and a majority of evangelicals) also believe that “all people pray to the same god or spirit, no matter what name they use for that spiritual being” and “if a person is generally good or does enough good things for others during their life, they will earn a place in heaven.” Quoted by Michael Horton in *Christless Christianity*
- Even President George W. Bush said, “I believe that all the world, whether they be Muslim, Christian, or any other religion, prays to the same God. That’s what I believe.”
- **So, what is the remedy for such deception?**

### **III. Christians Must Build on a Solid Foundation**

<sup>1</sup>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.

- Here, the author of Hebrews lays down what he refers to as “the elementary doctrine of Christ” or “a foundation” of Christian belief.

- Given the audience here (Jewish Christians), I would submit that these “elementary doctrines of Christ” are the shadows found in the Old Testament which pointed to Christ. Each one of these “foundations” finds its root in the Old Testament – a place that the readers would have been very familiar with. It is these “shadows” – **which, although, true, are obsolete because of Christ** - that the believers are to move past – and look to Christ – for that was the purpose of all of the *types* in the Old Testament.
- These “elementary doctrines” are easily divided into three couplets: (1) repentance from dead works and faith toward God; (2) instruction about washings, the laying on of hands; (3) the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.
- Yet, upon closer examination, these three couplets represent the three “phases” of our salvation which find their “foundations” in the Old Testament: (1) Past Punctiliar (Justification); (2) Present Continuous (Sanctification); (3) Future (Glorification).
  - **Justification**
    - “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...”
    - The *process* whereby God effectually draws us to Himself begins first with an understanding and conviction of sin. This conviction leads to an understanding that sin is an affront to a holy God, leading to *repentance*, that is a turning from that sin.
      - Yet, the repentance, according to the author, is *from dead works*. What could these “dead” works possibly be?
      - Well, given the audience here, the “dead” works may be those works of the law, particularly surrounding the sacrificial system, that they believed (at least at one point) would save them.
      - In other words, they had put their trust in themselves and their ability to keep the law in order to be saved. In fact, the purpose of the sacrificial system was to lead the worshipper to repentance, not give a prescribed “how-to” manual for salvation.
      - It is precisely from these works – which appear good and holy on the outside – that the reader should repent from.

- However, true repentance is always coupled with faith...and that faith is faith in a particular, specific object, Jesus Christ.

**And this was exactly the function of the “works” prescribed in the Mosaic Law of the Old Covenant – to bring a worshipper to the end of himself and to a repentant heart and faith in God’s provision for him – specifically the Messiah – the One God would provide for Himself (Genesis 22:14)**

- This is the *denial / negative [Repentance]* and *affirmation / positive [Faith]* aspects of our salvation. In fact, the event involving Faith and Repentance is properly referred to as our **Conversion**, not *technically* our salvation [for we have yet to be fully saved from the *presence of sin* in our lives].
- Although our complete salvation is sure at the point of our Conversion, for we are **Justified**, that is, declared righteous, on the basis of our Faith in Jesus Christ. At this point, the full and complete righteousness of Jesus Christ is *imputed* to our account, and we are then, therefore *covered* with righteousness of Christ. Consequently, when the Father looks at us, He then reckons us, declares us, righteous, even though within us we have yet to be made righteous.
- In fact, the readers of the Book of Hebrews would have revered Abraham, and this is exactly what he was known for – his faith. This is why Moses writes in **Genesis 15:6**, “[Abraham] believed Yahweh, and he reckoned it to him as righteousness.”
- And so, the readers should hear from this epistle that the *object of Abraham’s faith* was the Messiah. This is why Jesus says to the Jews in **John 8:56**, “Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.”
- And so today, our Justification finds its source in Jesus Christ. This is, indeed, the foundation of the Gospel.

Thomas Watson, the Puritan writer, wrote, “Justification is the very hinge and pillar of Christianity. An error about justification is dangerous, like a defect in a foundation. Justification by Christ is a spring of the water of life. To have the poison of corrupt doctrine cast into this spring is damnable.”

- **Sanctification**
  - The next “elementary doctrine of Christ” that the author mentions is “...**instruction about washings.**”

- In the Greek, the word for washings does not mean “the rite of baptism”; rather, it is exactly what the ESV states, “washings.”
- The Old Testament mentions several types of washings, especially related to the priesthood. However, one of the clearest passages is found in **Ezekiel 36:25**: “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleans you.”
- Certainly, the passage finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, particularly in the fact that Christ baptizes us into the Holy Spirit.
- And as ones regenerated and washed by the Holy Spirit, our sins are truly forgiven; whereas, in the Old Covenant, the ceremonial washing absolved no one of sins, they merely pointed to the work of Christ.

John MacArthur writes, “Every Jewish home had a basin by the entrance for family and visitors to use for ceremonial cleansings, of which there were many. It is these washings that the readers are told to abandon and forget.”

- The *washings* of the Old Covenant were external, physical, temporary types; yet, the washings of the Holy Spirit are spiritual, eternal and efficacious.
- Once again, it is the washing of the Holy Spirit that truly cleanses us. **Titus 3:5** states that the true cleansing comes from “washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.”
- The next “elementary doctrine of Christ” is “...**the laying on of hands**.”
- The “laying on of hands” was a common practice in the Old Covenant. It was prescribed in Numbers 27:18, 23; and Deuteronomy 34:9 when an individual was set aside and commissioned for public office.
- It was also used in the sacrificial system when the worshipper would lay his hands on the sacrifice, symbolizing identification with the sacrifice and the transference of guilt to the animal.
- In New Testament times, the laying on of hands was associated with blessings, healings, and ordination (Acts 5:18; 6:6; 8:17; 1 Timothy 4:14, etc.).



- Yet, the reader of Hebrews was to move past the Old Testament practice of the laying on of hands, and understand, too, its fulfillment in the salvific work of Jesus Christ.
- Yet, as Richard Phillips states, we should understand the fulfillment of Jesus Christ in terms of the “washings *and* the laying on of hands”:

**“Taken together, washings and laying on of hands have to do with our empowerment for the Christian life; that is, they point us to sanctification.”**

- **Glorification**

- The final coupling here in Hebrews 6 is “the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment...”
- The first of these is central to the Christian faith, “**the resurrection of the dead...**”
- The Old Testament does, in fact, speak of a resurrection. Consider **Job 19:26**: “And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God...”
- Also in **Isaiah 26:19**: “Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise...” **Daniel 12:2**: “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”
- Also, in the famous “Valley of Dry Bones” passage of **Ezekiel 37**, a resurrection appears to be rather clear.
- Yet, the author’s point is equally clear: the reader should leave the “elementary” understanding found in the Old Testament and seek a deeper contemplation of the work and fulfillment of Jesus Christ – in His bodily resurrection, on the Day of Firstfruits.
- The final point that author makes is, “**eternal judgment...**”
- Just like the truths that have come before this, the concept of judgment finds its roots in the Old Testament. In fact, God is depicted as the Judge of all the earth in the Old Testament (Genesis 18:25; Isaiah 33:22).
- Further, the ultimate judgment will occur at the eschaton, as revealed in Daniel 7:9-14.

- Yet, it is Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, who will be the Judge at the *eschaton* (Matthew 25:32; John 5:22, 27; Acts 17:31), thus fulfilling the great prophecy of Daniel.

**John MacArthur writes, “The point of Hebrews 6:1-2 is simply that the unbelieving Jews should let go completely of the immature, elementary shadows and symbols of the Old Covenant and take hold of the mature and perfect reality of the New.”**

- Like the Jews of the first century, we too must leave the elementary teachings that see “Jesus as the only answer” and pursue the deeper, more profound answer to the question, “**Why?**”

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- The final Verse of this section states, “And this we will do if God permits.”
    - The idea here is that moving beyond the ABC’s of the faith is something that requires God’s grace and help.
    - Yet, even as we move on, we must guard ourselves from **theological arrogance**, that is a belief that we have in some way “arrived” biblically and theologically.
    - Nothing is more abrasive than someone with “perfect” theology. And, whereas, we are called to a life of maturity, with that is **humility** as well.

❖ May we be like the man Jesus speaks of who built his house on a rock:

<sup>24</sup> “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. <sup>25</sup>And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. <sup>26</sup>And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. <sup>27</sup>And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

Matthew 7:24-27

❖ Therefore, may we strive to live lives of spiritual growth, rooted in the absolute truth of God’s inerrant Word, committed to the supremacy of Christ in all we do, and marked by a genuine humility resulting from a deep knowledge that we are saved **only** by the grace of God because of the vicarious work of Jesus Christ on our behalf.