

Heb. 6:1-3 Move on to Maturity

(As some of you may know, my commentaries on Hebrews include Calvin, Obrien, Owen, Mohler, Hughes, and Pink. And, only Pink proposes the view I take today on what it means to move on to maturity (J. MacArthur also). So, keep this in mind as this is really a part 2 from 5:11-14).

This morning as we come to cp. 6, we must know that these verses continue from cp. 5:11 and though this warning is for us, the context is made up of those Jewish Christians who had left Judaism and embraced God's Messiah, who was the fulfillment of all the OT teaching. They had come to the ONE who was superior to all the forms and shadows and picture found in the Scriptures. Yet, they had become "dull of hearing" (5:11). They were in need of being taught again the "basic principles of the oracles of God" (5:12). Some of them were becoming "unskilled in the word of righteousness" (5:13). In this way they had become "immature" (5:14). Let me say that we must remember this CONTEXT if we are to make sense of this passage.

There is so much here, and I don't want to give you too much at one time. So, today will really tie up some loose ends from 5:11-14. And I would like to answer with more clarity what I think the author means by moving on to maturity. I have 3 truths: 1) The mature knows that Christ is the fulfillment of the old covenant, 2) The mature does not add to the gospel of Christ; 3) The mature trusts the sovereignty of God.

1) The Mature Knows that Christ is the Fulfillment of the Old Covenant.

Let me recall my sermon from two weeks ago about the immature Christian. The immature Christian: 1) Cannot understand advanced truths, 2) Is always relearning the same truths, 3) Can never become a teacher, 4) Cannot apply truth, and 5) Is in danger of apostasy. That sermon had very little doctrine in it. It was practical. And I think it made us think much about ourselves and our maturity or lack of maturity. And these applications stand as needed. But, I don't think I really answered the question: "*What did the author mean concerning the 'basic principles of the oracles of God' from 5:12. In other words, 'What were they not moving on from?' 'What was their error?'*" In my first point I said that we should learn, keep, and move on from the basic doctrines of the gospel of Christ. And in this way we become mature. This application still stands. But, I don't think this answer is what the author had in mind (at least directly). In 6:1 he says "*let us go on to maturity.*" Now, OF COURSE we are to become mature in Christ as we go deeper into the gospel! But, in that CONTEXT I now believe he is speaking about moving on from the OT, Jewish foundations to the completion of those foundations with Christ. In other words, "*you move on to maturity when you know and understand that Christ is the fulfillment of the old covenant. You are not saved by keeping Mosaic Law. You are not saved by your traditions. Yes, the law was necessary, and it is good. But, Christ has fulfilled the law. Therefore, move on to maturity as you look unto Christ alone for your salvation.*"

I believe the entire Book of Hebrews teaches this truth. On every page we see the immeasurable superiority of Christianity over Judaism. This is the key which unlocks this meaning. I do not believe the author is contrasting two different stages of Christianity, an infant and a mature. (Though the applications from two weeks ago still stand in principle.) He is contrasting the

“substance over against shadows” (Pink). Think about a forest that sits on the edge of a field. And as the sun hits the forest, shadows are cast. And I tell one of my kids to go and touch the trees. Well, what if they run toward the shadows and not the trees. What will they find? Shadows. In the same way, the author is saying, don’t go back to the shadows. Look at the tree. Form cp. 5:11-14, this is the milk of all the types and shadows of the old covenant. *Don’t look back to those things as if they, in and of themselves can save you. Don’t mix Mosaic Law with the good news of the Gospel of Christ. Don’t move backwards. Move on to maturity. Judaism was temporary. Yes, it was foundational, but now the rest of the building has been built, with the coming of the Gospel of Christ. Don’t be dull of hearing. Move on to solid food. Move on from those “basic principles of the oracles of God.”* Then you will be skilled in the word of righteousness. Then you will have powers of discernment to distinguish between good and evil.

Now, quickly, before moving on, I must address the translation of 6:1. The ESV says, **“Therefore, let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity . . .”** This is far from literal. A literal translation would be better for our context. Literally, it says, *“Therefore, having left the word of the beginning of Christ.”* Or, another has it this way: *“wherefore, having left the of the beginning of the Christ discourse.”* It doesn’t say, “The Lord Christ,” but “Christ,” which is also translated “Messiah.” This parallels with 5:12: **“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.”** Taken together, I believe the best meaning is to leave the elementary teachings of what the OT teaches about the Messiah. In other words, *“Let’s move on to maturity by leaving what the Old Testament teaches about the Messiah and embrace the full revelation of the Son in the New Covenant revealed in the NT.”* **“Let’s move from the shadows to that which is real!”**

I believe this is the key to understanding this passage and the entire book. Think back to what we’ve read. Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son . . . He is the heir of all things. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. He is greater than the angels. He is greater than Moses. He is greater than Aaron. He is greater than Joshua. He is the rest for the people of God. He is our high priest who has passed through the heavens. The author is saying, “These are the things you should have gotten. And, by going back to the types and shadows and figures, you have become immature. And if this continues, you are in danger of apostasy (next week).

For us, who are not Hebrew Christians, what do we do. How does this apply? To the Hebrews it meant abandoning the system of Judaism and trusting in the Son of God revealed in the new covenant. For Christians, it means turn away from those things that absorbed your time and energy when you were unregenerate and find your satisfaction in Christ alone! For the Hebrews, I think of Jesus’ words, **“Believe in God. Believe also in me”** (John 14:1). For us today, this means that we must also look to our great high priest in heaven! Dwell upon him. Mediate upon him, who He is, and what He has done in fulfilling all God’s promises in the OT. In the end, this is the great doctrine of Christ Alone, which brings us to our next truth.

2) The Mature Does Not Add to the Gospel of Christ. Look at vv. 1-2 **“not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 and of instruction**

about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.” Look back at 5:12. These are the specifics of the “**basic principles of the oracles of God.**” These are the “elementary doctrines” of 6:1. As we’ve seen, those Hebrew Christians were immature because they returning to the old covenant in their understanding. They were going back to the “milk,” which caused them not be able to eat the “meat” of Christ in the new covenant. As the author says, they were “*laying again a foundation . . .*” And in essence what were they doing? They were adding to the gospel of Christ.

Here the author mentions 6 doctrines of the OT. And these doctrines are very important. He describes them as a “foundation.” Again, I do not believe he is speaking of elementary doctrines of experiences as a Christian, but instead they were the basics of the system of Judaism which paved the way for the full revelation found in the Gospel of Christ. Think of building. What comes first? It is the foundation. And then what happens? The rest of the structure is laid upon and built upon the foundation. The foundation precedes the building. And when the building is finished you don’t even see the foundation. You see the finished building. Such is the case with Judaism and all the OT. And even after the building is built, the foundation is still there. We just don’t lay it again. To lay it again would be to forsake the substance for the shadows. Do you remember what Paul wrote to the Galatians who were looking to the law and “falling from grace?” He says, “**So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.**”

With this in mind, let me briefly go through these 6 things.

i. Repentance from dead works. He doesn’t say repentance from sins, but repentance from dead works. I believe he is speaking of the works of the earthly Levitical system, particularly all the ceremonies. And the reason they are dead is because they were only performed by men in the flesh. This is the earthly priesthood of Aaron, which has no power over the heart. The blood of bulls and goats could never atone for sins. Heb. 10:1 says, “**For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.**”

ii. And of faith toward God. I believe this phrase speaks of the nation of Israel who “believed in God” as a nation. They were not like the Gentiles, who did not know God as Paul notes in his sermon in Acts 17: “**To the unknown God.**” As a nation, their faith was in God. It was a national thing to them. And often it turned to pride as they were the “chosen nation.” But when Christ came, they were told to put their faith in HIM, who is God in the flesh. Throughout the NT we are told to put our faith in Jesus Christ (See Gal. 2:16, 20; Eph. 1:15; Phil. 3:9; Col. 2:5; etc.).

Quick application: Think of having a conversation with non-Christians. It is usually easy to speak about God. But, when we begin to speak of Christ, what happens?

iii. Of the doctrine of baptisms. Again, here we miss something in translation. The word for baptism is in the plural. With this context I do not believe the author is speaking of Christian baptism by water or spiritual baptism or a baptism of suffering. This word is found 4 other times in the NT, and in all other cases it translated as “washings.” I believe he is referring to the

ceremonial washings of Mosaic Law. There are SOOO many commands to wash in the OT. And at times, they were rigorously followed. They washed their hands, their bodies, their clothes, their sacrificial instruments, etc. And all of these pictured the removal of sin. But, now Christ had come. It was no longer necessary to go back to these washings as a removal for sins.

iv. And of laying on of hands. I believe this refers primarily to the high priest laying his hands on the animal of sacrifice in the old system. Lev. 16:21 says: **“And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness.”** This was a huge part of the Day of Atonement, and those Hebrew Christians would have understood this.

v. And of the resurrection of the dead. Both Christians and Jews believe in the resurrection of the dead. And for most (except the Sadducees), they believed in a “general” resurrection of the both the just and the unjust. Martha said to Jesus concerning Lazarus: **“I know that he shall rise again the resurrection at the last day”** (John 11:24). Now, in contrast we read in Mark 9:9-10: **“And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead might mean.”** The Christian resurrection is one of the redeemed before that of the wicked. **“The dead in Christ shall rise first.”** I know there is a lot here, but in brevity, there is a shift from the OT understanding of the NT understanding with the resurrection of the dead. It changes from there is a “resurrection OF the dead” to there is a “resurrection FROM the dead.” In the OT there is a general resurrection. In the NT, there is a resurrection of the redeemed in Christ.”

vi. And of eternal judgment. Without going into much detail, there is a shift in the understanding of eternal judgment. In the OT is general as God will bring every work of man into judgment.” But, in the NT it has now become the judgment seat of Christ and the great white throne described in Rev. 20.

Now, I know I flew through those 6 things. And getting every point of explanation is not as important as the main truth. In our context those Christian Hebrews had confessed Christ. Their faith was in Him. But, through persecution and time, they began to question their confession and they were in danger of returning to Judaism, or at least holding on to those things and believing in Christ at the same time. They were in danger of forsaking the substance for the shadows. But, our author says, *“Let us leave these elementary, foundational doctrines and move on to maturity. Yes, the milk is good, but let’s move also to the meat. Let’s don’t relearn the same things over and over. Look unto Christ, who is superior to the old covenant. Then, you will be able to teach others. Then, you will be able to handle the word of righteousness. Then, you will be able to distinguish between good and evil.”* In the end, they were adding to the Gospel of Christ.

Look at 9:13: **“For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.”**

Application: The mature interprets the Scriptures through the lens of Christ. The Bible is one big book about Christ. It is the unfolding of God's revelation about the great plan of God to send his Son.

Application: The mature views all things through the lens of the person and work of Christ. ALL God's blessings come to us in Christ!

Application: When we add to the gospel of Christ, we tend to focus on works. And when we do this, we take away from the grace of God in Christ. We cannot add anything to our salvation. By laying again a foundation, their error was to shift the focus from grace to works. They were re laying the foundation. And in this they were adding to the gospel of grace. We do the same if we add in work on top of what Christ has already done.

3) The Mature Trusts the Sovereignty of God. I will only mention this third truth this morning. Look at v. 3: **“And this we will do if God permits.”** Here the author puts himself right in with his recipients. At the end of the day, He knew that salvation was from the Lord . . . ALL of it! He trusted in the loving character of God to show mercy to whom he will show mercy. As Paul says in Rom. 9:14-16: **“What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.”** The author of Hebrews knew this truth. If God wills!

I would say that the sovereignty of God in all things is foundational to our happiness. It is foundational to our peace and rest in this life. God is in control! He is working all things according to his great plan to bring glory to himself and do good to us. With this in mind, in conclusion turn with me to Eph. 2:8-10 as a good commentary on our truths today. These verses serve as a fitting application to end this sermon. **“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”** Studying Hebrews unlocks great mysteries of the gospel for us, especially as we read the OT. And this seems to be what the Apostle Paul is doing in all his writings. He is showing how the OT Scriptures are fulfilled in Christ. Therefore, our salvation is in Christ alone, apart from the works of the law. And if we are to be saved, it will be because of the great sovereign work of God, who created us in Christ for good works.