

Hebrews 6:1 "Let Us Press On To Maturity In Christ"

What we have before us this morning is a portion of God's word which is designed to bring into focus the necessity to grow in our faith and not continue to live in the milk mode of our salvation.

Verses 1-3 are actually a continuance of the previous chapter when our writer says in HEB 5:11-14 "We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. 12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! 13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil."

Some who were being addressed were not getting on with their spiritual lives in the sense that they were useful for God's Kingdom. Whenever any of us spend more time dwelling on self instead of trusting God our ability to be used by God is hindered. Whenever any of us neglect the means for growing with Christ our ability to be used by God is hindered. And those means include being in the word of God, prayer, worship, fellowship with the saints and faith in our Lord who is faithful.

A neglect in these areas are what characterize, what our writer refers to as, a babe in the spiritual sense. And as I've mentioned before a babe in Christ is not necessarily one who has just come to faith in Christ. A babe can be a saint who's professed the Lord for many years and yet has not grown in the faith because of self-interests instead of the interests of God which is His will according to His word.

It also may not be trusting and obeying Him. The knowledge may be there, but the doing may not be. That retards growth.

And yet as we come to our text this morning what we find is an interesting approach to this whole problem of maturity in Christ as opposed to immaturity. We would suspect that our writer would now begin to lay the foundational truths to help reestablish those things which would help his readers in becoming more mature and yet that's not what he does as we see in our text.

HEB 6:1-3 "Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, 2 instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. 3 And God permitting, we will do so."

He moves on from elementary things and goes on to give more meat instead of force feeding with more milk. And we'll look at what these elementary things are.

What I find interesting about this is that in today's world there has been a dumbing down in the field of education. And the concept is that we'll tailor the learning process with the culture in which we find ourselves. And if one segment of our society has appeared to have been disadvantaged then instead of trying to lift them up to a higher level we will begin to bring the other group or groups down to where the playing field is more level.

If you were to chart the learning curve over the years, let's say, from the mid-sixties to the present you would find a rather abrupt drop in grades and in learning skills to where in many places in this country functional illiteracy is the rule rather than the exception.

All of this has taken place over a relatively short period of time, some thirty to forty years. But instead of trying to elevate children by employing a more rigorous approach to learning they continue to hinder growth by not challenging these kids in many places in this country. There are always exceptions to this, but the exceptions these days are, by-and-large, found in the private sector or home schooling.

The irony is that the same phenomenon is found in the church. Over the years I've seen Christians who can't express the difference between things like sanctification and justification. And it's not as though they're ignorant and unable to understand such beautiful truths of their salvation, but in many cases the leadership is not teaching these vital truths.

And I believe one of the reasons the meat of God's word is not being taught more often is precisely because it's believed such meat couldn't be chewed and digested by babes. And instead of elevating the babes to a level of competence in the word, there's the tendency to dumb down the entire congregation for fear that some wouldn't get it.

I believe this is a tragic mistake. In fact if you read the letters of Paul to the churches you find some of the most profound truths in all of the Bible. And yet many of those churches Paul addresses are full with many babes in Christ. He doesn't dumb down the message. But he delivers it in a way where it can be understood by even babes. And in some of those cases where the understanding is hard he expects them, as well as mature believers, to stretch a little and like the Bereans search the Scriptures to find the answers as they seek the help of the Holy Spirit.

This is part of what our writer of Hebrews is doing. He addresses the need for many in the church to grow beyond babes. And yet up to this point he has given them a great deal of meat as he has taught on things like the divinity of Christ, the priesthood of Christ which includes such things as propitiation or the satisfaction of God's wrath through the shed blood. He also touches on the priesthood of Melchizedek and so on.

When I used to teach in the church as an elder I remember other leaders telling me that it's not wise to give those in the class too much meat because it will only confuse them. My policy has always been and will always continue to be to spread a table where anyone and everyone can eat. There will be meat and potatoes, vegetables, as well as milk and cookies.

I personally like milk and cookies after a meal. And so I would hope there would be something for everyone. But to serve milk and cookies exclusively, or to serve meat exclusively or to serve veggies exclusively is not a balanced way of approaching God's truth.

And so if you give a wide variety of spiritual truths to dine on those who might only be prone to drink milk will still be exposed to the meat which they can taste and in many cases will come away having acquired a liking.

This is what we see here in the beginning of chapter six. He's been talking about the need to grow out of babyhood and yet notice what he says in the first verse.

HEB 6:1 "Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God,"

The question has been raised by many Bible scholars over the years, what is meant by leaving the elementary teachings about

Christ so that we can go on to maturity? Some would suggest that these elementary teachings which are stated in verses 1-3 are dealing with the basics of the Christian faith.

But we know according to other portions of God's word that the basics of the faith are not things we want to leave, but to build upon.

JUD 1:17-21 "But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. 18 They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." 19 These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit. 20 But you, dear friends, ***build yourselves up in your most holy faith*** and pray in the Holy Spirit. 21 Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life."

To build ourselves up in our most holy faith is to build upon the very foundation of Christ which is basic and yet we are to grow in this salvation. So what then could this idea mean of leaving the elementary teachings about Christ as we go on to maturity? By the way, a more literal translation would be "leaving the discourse of the beginning of Christ." And therein lies some answers to what this means.

Now, as I've taught you before, whenever you study the word of God you must keep it in the context in which it's found, otherwise you can create doctrines which don't exist or which can be blurred as to their real meanings.

What we have before us is the writer of Hebrews addressing Hebrew or Jewish Christians who had spent their entire lives studying and practicing Judaism or those things related to the Old Covenant.

And as our writer addresses these people he points out how there was a danger of many of them reverting back to the Old Covenant as they turned their backs on the New Covenant found exclusively in Christ. Or in some cases trying to add those things of the Old Covenant to the New and make them one, in spite of the fact that Jesus says there is salvation in no one else but Him alone.

There was nothing anyone could add to his or her salvation and bring it to the throne and say, I've contributed to my justification. And yet this is what happened to many Jews who fell into this trap because of false teachers.

I've mentioned it before, I'll do it again because it was a real problem with many Jews who had spent their entire lives engrossed in the law and didn't want to walk away from it; instead they wanted to join it to their new faith in Christ. After all wasn't the law given to them by God through Moses? How could that be bad?

And yet Paul addressed this real danger.

GAL 1:6-9 "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel - 7 which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! 9 As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!"

And by the way, don't think that for a second only the immature Jews in Christ were susceptible to this pressure to conform to the ways of the Old Covenant.

GAL 2:11-14 "When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. 12 Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. 13 The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. 14 When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"

Even Peter was tempted to look good in front of his Jewish brethren who adopted such unbiblical views as keeping the law of Moses as a way of demonstrating holiness and as a way of adding to what Christ did as if Christ had not fulfilled the law for their salvation.

Adding anything to the gospel of Jesus Christ is to add something of the flesh. And we know that nothing of the flesh can make holy or attain righteousness. And this too Paul brings out in GAL 3:3 "Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?"

So, what does all of this mean that we should "leave the discourse of the beginning of Christ", or as we have it in the NAS, "leaving the elementary teaching about Christ."? Well, it's all related to what has gone on before in this letter to the Hebrews. And what has gone before is to show the superiority of Christianity in Christ over Judaism and the law.

This is why Arthur W. Pink makes the comment: "The apostle is not contrasting two different stages of Christianity, an infantile and a mature; rather is he opposing, once more, the substance over against the shadows. He continues to press upon the Hebrews their need of forsaking the visible for the invisible, the typical for the antitypical."

In other words using the law as a means of growth which was really intended to point to Christ. Why would you want to dwell on the things which only "spoke" of Christ's coming when you can have the real thing by faith in Christ who has truly come in fulfillment of His word?

With this in mind let us look at these elementary teachings about Christ and discover what they really are and how they kept many of these Hebrew Christians from growing in grace and knowledge of the Messiah Jesus.

HEB 6:1 "Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God,"

First you'll notice that as we leave the elementary teachings about Christ we are then able to go on to maturity. But unless we understand what these elementary teachings are then we'll be confused as to how they could keep us from growing.

Let's deal with the first elementary teaching about Christ.

"Foundation of repentance that leads to death." This is the way the NIV puts it. A more literal translation could be found in the NAS which states, "not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works."

In the Greek the article which is connected to foundation is not "the" as the NIV puts it, rather it is "a". And so, instead of "the foundation of repentance", which suggests the true repentance which is found in Christ alone, the phrase is actually "a foundation of repentance." This is important because it clearly points out that this is "a foundation" but not "the foundation."

And so we are talking about a foundational truth but it's in connection to what the Hebrews would have been familiar with in their former days when the truth pointed forward to another who was to come and become "the foundation of our salvation."

What some of the Jewish Christians were trying to do is what some of those in Galatia were trying to do and that was to reintroduce such O.T. foundational truths which pointed to Christ. And in the process they were holding on to these truths as though they were the substance when in fact they were shadows of the One to come. It's not as though these foundational truths were unimportant, but they were not to replace what Christ fulfilled in them.

Pink points out "This is exactly what the Hebrews were being sorely tempted to do. To "lay again" this foundation was to forsake the substance for the shadows; it was to turn from Christianity and go back again to Judaism." And as we continue our study in this sixth chapter we're going to see the importance of not getting caught up in this trap and the dangers of falling into it.

But Paul shows us that though the law, which is a foundation which preceded Christ, is very important, it had a specific purpose which was to find its fulfillment in Christ. This is why he wrote in GAL 3:24-27 "So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. 25 Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. 26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."

By the way none of this is to suggest that the law in itself is bad. It is from God. Paul is simply stating that the way we use the law is very important in our understanding of our salvation. The law was not designed to save it was meant to lead us to the One who can.

And now, in Christ, believers have the law written on their hearts inwardly compelling them to follow Jesus and please Him out of thanks for so great a gift of salvation.

But what does it mean to say that we put aside this foundation of repentance from dead works? Isn't repentance important in our salvation? Absolutely! But keep in mind that the kind of repentance spoken of here is in relation to the Old Covenant; that which the writer of Hebrews has been contrasting with Christ who came to establish a New Covenant. Notice that our writer does not speak of repentance from sin, rather from dead works.

Dr. Donald Guthrie makes this comment: "Dead works, would be works which had only the appearance of works, but which lacked any effective power. In the present case there may be an allusion to the Jewish idea of attaining justification through works, which from a Christian point of view would be regarded as dead because ineffective. All those who turned from Judaism to Christianity would need to repent of their reliance on good works."

Pink also points out that "the reference here [to dead works] was to the unprofitable and in-efficacious works of the Levitical service. Those works of the ceremonial law are denominated "dead works" because they were performed by men in the flesh, were not vitalized by the Holy Spirit, and did not satisfy the claims of the living God."

And so, what our writer would be saying is that there is no longer a need to lay this foundation in the church again, since there is no longer a need to even consider the ways of the Old Covenant. If you're having to consider the ways of the Old Covenant then you should be considering in what you actually find your salvation. Nothing of the old will help, only the new found in Christ. He should be the focus, not the things of the past.

Yes, the law spoke of Christ and the law taught us about Christ but now that we've put those things behind in favor of Christ, to turn back and dwell on those things are not only unproductive but will keep us in a state of immaturity, is what the writer is telling his readers.

For you and I we can learn the same lesson. We have a tendency to live in the past. We have a tendency to not look forward by faith in the Son of God. We have a tendency to take our eyes off of our loving and yet invisible God and redirect our eyes on the visible things in this world which may satisfy for a time and yet only keep us from moving on to maturity in Christ, or keep our eyes on or circumstances in this world which can also cripple us.

And so, in practice what we do sometimes is to say 'God, I'll believe if I see'. God wants us to redirect our eyes in a way where we say 'God, I'll believe even if I don't see and I will trust You in all things.'

Our life is found in the new life we have in Christ, not in the things of this world. And if we have life in Christ then we have the ability in the power of the Spirit, who indwells us, to walk in that life. There's no excuse to go back to the ways of old any more

than there was an excuse for the Hebrews to go back to their old ways. And by faith in Christ we can put off the old and put on the new to the glory of God as He works in our lives.

Now the next thing the writer of Hebrews addresses is an elementary teaching about Christ which deals with the teaching of faith toward God. By the way what's interesting about these things which we find in verses 1-3 is that they are 6 in number, which is the number of man and would show us that these are man's attempts to substitute their ways of righteousness for the righteousness of Christ and His ways.

But we come to this phrase "faith toward God" and we have to ask what's wrong with that and how is that an elementary principle we should leave behind so that we can press on toward maturity?

Again, we must keep it in its context and understand to whom this letter was addressed and why. They were in danger of reverting back to the ways of old and in the process substituting those things their forefathers handed down to them as the real thing instead of forsaking the shadows for the reality of faith in Christ alone for their salvation.

Faith toward God is not necessarily faith in Christ. Many people today, for example, will claim a faith toward God. They say they believe in God and that He is even Creator. But when pressed they could not identify who this God is and that He has revealed Himself in His Son.

Others will even go so far as to say that they pray to God every day, but if they are asked if they know that they will go to heaven and how they will get there, they can't give an answer with any assurance.

JOH 14:1 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me."

Jesus is saying that to trust in God truly is to trust in Christ, and we see this even of the O.T. saints as our writer points out in Heb.11. But there was a sense in which some Jews believed God, or so they said, and yet didn't believe in Christ. This cannot be considered a true faith in God.

JOH 5:37-40 "And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, 38 nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. 39 You diligently study the Scriptures because you think

that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, 40 yet you refuse to come to me to have life."

The kind of faith expressed here in Heb.6:1 is not speaking about a true faith in the Christ of the O.T. Scriptures. And our writer is saying that to promote a faith in the things of God, as understood in His workings in the life of Israel, as foundational, is not the same as having a faith in God who wants a personal relationship by faith in Him as Savior. Many O.T. saints did understand the difference. But the faith many had was no faith at all since it relied on the faith of others, or on their own good works.

Pink puts it this way. "To the heathen, the one true God was altogether unknown. They worshipped a multitude of false gods. But not so was it with Israel. Jehovah had revealed Himself to their fathers, and given to them a written revelation of His will. Thus, faith toward God was a national thing with them, and though in their earlier history they fell into idolatry again and again, yet they were purified of this sin by the Babylonian captivity.....

..... Still their faith was more of a form than a reality, a tradition received from their fathers, rather than a vital acquaintance with Him. Israel's national faith toward God had, under the Christian revelation, given place to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ."

To revert back to the ways of the Old Covenant and miss the necessity of the New, which replaced it, was to move backwards and in a sense nullify the true faith in Christ. Even the world can have a form of godliness, but without a true faith in Christ they deny its power of a life changing relationship with God through Christ.

The writer of Hebrews didn't want these people going through the motions as they relied more on the written code on tablets, rather than on the true faith in Christ whose life was written on their hearts. This is what Paul meant in ROM 2:28-29 "A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. 29 No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God."

God's message for you and me is the same. He doesn't want any of us going through the motions of Christianity. He wants our hearts in a way that rely on Him by faith every moment. And that faith is first and foremost in the One He sent, Jesus Christ.

We'll pick up here next week. Let me end with this as an encouragement for us to seek God in a way where our walk will be one which is in His power and not in ours, in His love and not in our selfishness, in His will not ours.

HEB 10:22-24 "let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds."