

Hebrews 6:2-3 "We Are New Creatures In Christ, May We Walk As Such"

Hebrews 6:1-3 ^{NAU} 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.

From our study last week we saw how these Hebrew Christians were spending more time with the shadows of the Messiah, found in the O.T. teachings about the Christ, rather than living in the reality of the substance of the One who came and fulfilled the Scriptures that we might have life eternal and fellowship with our God.

They, in a sense, left their first love for Jesus, not unlike what the Ephesian church had done when our Lord addressed them through the Revelation He gave to the apostle John.

REV 2:2-5 "I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. ³ You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. ⁴ Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. ⁵ Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place."

It's not as though the Ephesians weren't busy, seemingly doing the work of the Lord. But they had replaced their intimate relationship with Jesus with busyness, which was more of religiosity than a walking in dependence by faith in the One who called them to follow Him. Instead they were following their own agenda and desires without consideration of where the Lord wanted them to be.

We also do this at times in our lives. Maybe the Lord doesn't seem to be working as fast as we want Him to work or we don't like the situation we find ourselves in and instead of coming to Him and following Him by faith, as we trust He knows what He's doing, we have a tendency to lead the way ourselves. And if we do this over

a lengthy period of time we too may find that we have forsaken that first love in favor of that expedient or convenient action on our part. And we begin to lose sight of that fresh and vibrant longing for Christ, that commitment and standing in Him by faith.

But sometimes we, like the Ephesians, need to heed the words of Jesus, who in His grace extends this exhortation: 5 "Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first."

Those things we did at first were to trust the Lord in all things and go where He led as we were sensitive to the leading of the Spirit. Instead of lives which go through the motions of living for Christ He wants us to return to the life itself. That life is a person, not a set of rules. And that person is Jesus Christ.

This is where our writer of Hebrews is going with his readers. They were losing sight of the person and dwelling more on the mere teachings about the person. In a sense it would be like you or me given the option to either spend time in a book studying about Ronald Reagan, or going to his home in California and sitting down with him for the rest of your life getting to know him and learning first hand who he is.

The book we have about Christ can't be neglected, but it shouldn't be a substitute for walking hand in hand by faith with Christ on a daily basis. The word of God, unlike a book about any famous person, "is living and active and sharper than any two edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." (Heb.4:12)

And it will accomplish those things as we go to the word asking the Spirit to illumine our hearts and minds with the express purpose of knowing Christ more. But if we only use it as text book to gain knowledge it will be very easy to turn a relationship with the living God into an academic exercise where the brain might be fed, but the heart is still lacking nourishment.

Granted, God can use even the rote and mere habitual reading of the word of God, for the sake of reading, in a way to finally pierce the heart, but why not approach Him at the outset in a way to not only gain knowledge but also taste the life of the actual person who is spoken of in His word.

These Hebrew Christians needed to be reminded, as we all do at times, to get their eyes off of their religiosity and back onto their Lord. Because to continue on a path of shadows instead of substance will only cause one to go backward not forward.

Our writer doesn't want his readers going backward. He wants them to press forward and as we saw last week he says in **Hebrews 6:1** ^{NAU} 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,

We touched on what it meant to lay again a foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death and of faith toward God. And we discovered that these things had more to do with attitudes about the Old Covenant as they prepared the way to direct our eyes to Christ.

Repentance from dead works has more to do with the dead works of the law, and a faith toward God as we saw is not necessarily a faith in Christ and in the case of Israel it was more of a national faith, a faith not so much in the Messiah to come as much as a faith, as they understood it, that God chose them because they deserved to be chosen and in that sense it was more of a faith in self than in God.

These misguided understandings of the old covenant are not the kind of basics of the Christian faith upon which we must build. But picking up in our text we continue to look at these elementary teachings about Christ which we are to leave so that we may press on toward maturity.

In verse two we're told that they should also leave "instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment." (HEB 6:2)

In what sense are they to leave these things? And what are they? First, when we talk about leaving these things our writer does not mean that they should never be considered for our instruction. The O.T. is still the very word of God and we, as N.T. believers, should still study it and learn how it points to Jesus Christ.

But to use it as the touchstone of our faith when the Chief Corner Stone has already arrived is to misplace its function. So let's dig in and see what we've got. Instruction about baptisms, as the NIV puts it, or as the NAS say's instruction about washings.

To try and connect this word washings or baptisms to a N.T. norm would be stretching the matter. One could legitimately say Christians are baptized in a variety of ways including water baptism, baptism in the Holy Spirit, and we are baptized into Christ's death and resurrection. And so we would say that baptisms or washings would be very appropriate when talking about the N.T. experience.

But these are elementary teachings which we DON'T want to leave. These are elementary principles we want to build on. The more natural meaning of this phrase "instruction about washings or baptisms has more to do with the washings we find in the O.T. which were instructive about the washing away of uncleanness which spoke of sin. Those O.T. washings pointed to the One who would ultimately wash by His blood.

The word washings or baptisms is *baptismos* in the Greek and it's the plural form of the word. This is the same word used in MAR 7:4-5 "When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they **wash**. And they observe many other traditions, such as the **washing** of cups, pitchers and kettles. 5 So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with 'unclean' hands?"

There were certain ceremonial washings which Jews were to observe. For example we read in NUM 19:16-19 "Anyone out in the open who touches someone who has been killed with a sword or someone who has died a natural death, or anyone who touches a human bone or a grave, will be unclean for seven days. 17 "For the unclean person, put some ashes from the burned purification offering into a jar and pour fresh water over them. 18 Then a man who is ceremonially clean is to take some hyssop, dip it in the water and sprinkle the tent and all the furnishings and the people who were there. He must also sprinkle anyone who has touched a human bone or a grave or someone who has been killed or someone who has died a natural death. 19 The man who is clean is to sprinkle the unclean person on the third and seventh days, and on the seventh day he is to purify him. The person being cleansed must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and that evening he will be clean."

The list of ceremonial washings goes on and on as different circumstances arise. But it would seem that some of the Hebrew Christians were reverting back, as did some of the Hebrew

Christians in Galatia, to the Mosaic Law as a means of righteousness and holiness.

And our writer warns against such things. The next thing he mentions is the laying on of hands. Now this is a term we understand in the church and we see the laying on of hands in the N.T. sense to confer blessings or to anoint in a spiritual sense. We see this type of thing when Saul and Barnabas were commissioned in Antioch to their ministry to the Gentiles. The leaders in the church at Antioch prayed for them and laid hands on them.

ACT 13:2-3 "While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." 3 So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off."

The laying on of hands is symbolic of a spiritual reality. If I lay hands on you as I pray for you I don't confer any power through my own strength. But if power is conferred or healing takes place or prayers are answered it's because of the power of God according to His will.

We are His instruments through which He may be pleased to act. If you watch some Christian television today, you might get the idea that a person has the innate spiritual ability to be like some spiritual bartender dispensing power as he sees fit as he prays or lays on hands.

Remember, in Saul and Barnabas' case it was the Holy Spirit who called them out. The leaders were simply being obedient to pray and lay on hands. It was the Spirit who empowered them for the work, not those leaders and yet the laying on of hands is an important role in the church of an outward expression of an inward spiritual reality.

And as such it's not meant to be left aside, but to be built upon for our instruction concerning Christ. This is why the phrase "laying on of hands" conveys the idea of an O.T. practice which these Hebrew Christians were reverting back to instead of pressing on toward maturity in Christ.

Arthur W. Pink makes the comment: "(our writer) is here making mention of those things which characterized Judaism, which the Hebrews, upon their profession of their personal faith in Christ had left. The laying on of hands to which (he) refers is described in LEV 16:21-22 "He is to lay both hands on the head of the live

goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites - all their sins - and put them on the goat's head. He shall send the goat away into the desert in the care of a man appointed for the task. 22 The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place; and the man shall release it in the desert."

..... This was an essential part of the ritual of the annual Day of the Atonement. Of this the Hebrews would naturally think when (the writer) here makes mention of the teaching of the laying on of hands."

By the way, that passage in Leviticus is where we get the term *scapegoat*. But if you can picture how these Hebrew Christians were being tempted to go back to the Old covenant ways you can begin to see how this most important aspect of the laying on of hands, which was central to Judaism, may have been brought to bear on their N.T. faith. Our writer says leave these teachings and move on to maturity in Christ.

Next he mentions the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. This is certainly a N.T. teaching. But it didn't originate in the N.T. and it carried with it a little different direction in its O.T. emphasis. But in what sense are these Hebrew Christians to leave this elementary teaching about Christ and press on to maturity? Keep in mind that the Sanhedrin, which was the governing body of Israel, was made up of both Pharisees and Sadducees. You might remember from the Gospels and the book of Acts that mention is made of Pharisees believing in the resurrection of the dead while the Sadducees didn't.

Quoting a theologian whose initials are given as C.H.W., A.W. Pink addresses this. He says, "We make a great mistake when we assume that the resurrection as taught by the Pharisees, held by the Jews, believed by the disciples, and proclaimed by the apostles was one and the same."

When Paul was making his defense in front of the Governor Felix Paul said this in ACT 24:14-15 "However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, 15 and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked."

The Jewish hope included this. Remember what Martha said to Jesus the day He arrived after Lazarus had already been in the grave for a number of days and everyone was grieving?

JOH 11:23-24 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Remember what Jesus said after that? What He said after that was to contrast the emphasis which many Jews placed on the resurrection with what Christ wanted them to understand about the resurrection.

JOH 11:25-27 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" 27 "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

The resurrection which the Jews believed in was a general resurrection of all men where they would all stand before the Great white throne to be judged. The Jews hoped that their judgment would be a favorable one because they were the chosen people and they knew the judgment for the rest of the world would be eternal damnation.

What Jesus wanted them to understand is that our resurrection from the dead will not be a judgment to determine our fate. Our resurrection from the dead has already been established because Christ rose from the dead for us. Our hope doesn't lie in the Great White Throne judgment.

Our hope lies in the fact that our judgment was put on our Substitute who has risen victoriously from the dead. This is what Paul conveys in ROM 6:5 "If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection."

Christ is coming back for us and when He does we will receive our glorified bodies. Paul talks about our glorified bodies in 1CO 15:39-44, 50-57 "All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. 40 There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. 41 The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in

splendor. 42 So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; 43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. 50 I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed - 52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. 54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." (Isaiah 25:8) 55 "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (Hosea 13:14) 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

When does this take place? Jesus Himself makes it clear.

John 6:39-40 ³⁹ "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but *raise it up on the last day*.
⁴⁰ "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and *I Myself will raise him up on the last day.*"

John 6:44-45 ⁴⁴ "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and *I will raise him up on the last day.* ⁵⁴
"He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and *I will raise him up on the last day.*

The last day is the day in which both believers and unbelievers will be raised from the dead, the former unto eternal life, the latter unto eternal damnation.

John 12:48 ⁴⁸ "He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him *at the last day.*

This is also known as the day of judgment.

2 Peter 3:7 ⁷ But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for *the day of judgment* and destruction of ungodly men.

It is also on this last day, which is characterized by the last trumpet being sounded, that the saints who are alive will be raptured unto their glorified bodies right after the dead in Christ are raised first.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 ¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. ¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. ¹⁵ For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.

And it is this last day, also known as the *Day of the Lord*, in which the new heavens and new earth will be raised from the old earth and heavens.

2 Peter 3:10-13 ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. ¹¹ Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! ¹³ But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

It is on this final day that our hope in Christ is set as He ushers in His eternal kingdom on the new earth and the same day all believers will be united to Christ.

We look forward to Christ's return when we will be resurrected to glorified bodies to be with Him forever. Does that sound like something we should leave behind so that we can press on toward maturity in Christ? I don't think so. No, the contrast is that if we're placing our hope on the Great White Throne judgment there may be fear instead of hope if we don't understand that our judgment was nailed to the cross.

As Paul says in ROM 8:1 "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,"

We can have that hope today. We can rejoice today. We can be encouraged today with the words Paul delivered to the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 15:55-57 ⁵⁵ "O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; ⁵⁷ but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (Hosea 13:14)

What an encouragement! What a great salvation we have and what we have to look forward to in Christ. But, if our focus is not placed on Christ, as it should be, then our focus will be on those things which we try to find hope in: The things of this world, our feelings, other people, or, as in the case of these Hebrew Christians, being tempted to go back to the ways of old in a hope of a resurrection but not living in the reality of that resurrection life today which will fully come to pass at Christ's return.

Our focus on Christ and His promises is what gives us hope. But what does the writer of Proverbs say about hope?

PRO 13:12 "Hope deferred (postponed, delayed) makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life."

Our writer in Hebrews wanted to bring their hope back, their zeal back, their ability to serve Christ back. They were getting all caught up in what was religiosity in the old system of Judaism and he wanted them to see and appreciate the life they have in Christ which is to be vibrant and healthy, not just limping along, waiting for the end.

But the proper focus and our ability to trust God in Christ will be the only way that will ever happen. This is where we all must venture. And as our writer says in HEB 6:3 "And God permitting, we will do so." This is in reference to pressing on to maturity in verse one. We will press on in His grace and strength.

But before we move on to venture into the beautiful realities of life in Christ, which will be able to make our hearts and lives soar as we gain new strength which is lifted up on wings of eagles, our writer wants to bring a sobering truth to light to make an impact on our lives so as to make that commitment to move forward. And this is where we're going next week.

But before we stop this morning let me again encourage all of us that Jesus wants every fiber of our being. And as we submit to Him, as He is our all in all, our focus, then we will begin to enjoy Him in a way we couldn't even imagine. He will give a peace that passes understanding.

He's a great God who has much in store for us now and for the future.

REV 21:3-7 "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." 5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." 6 He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. 7 He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son."

We are sons and daughters of God in Christ. He is our Father and He loves us so much. Stay close to Him as you continually seek Him and love Him and desire to be used by Him. We are new creatures in Christ, because we've been given a resurrection life and a hope which is not deferred, but only a heartbeat away from the One who gives all hope through Christ.