

# The Book of Hebrews

מְאֹנְשׁ מִנְמָה דָא מִנְהָת אַקְלָא  
צְמַאַלְלָא נְתַחְצְרָה דְרַחְסָנָה סָקָה  
אַחֲרַ פְּקָלָא תְּסִנְ סְרְבָּאַלְלָה  
רַרְתָּא סָקָה תְּאַקְסָנָה דְמַמָּצָה  
תְּאַתְּפָלָשָׁה נְתַרְדְּנָה הַרְפָּרָה נְרַלְדָה  
תְּאַגְּשָׁה רַלְדָה מְלַלְצָה סָסָה תְּלָשָׁה



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# Outline of Hebrews

## “Jesus is Better”

- I. Jesus Is Better Than the OT Prophets (1:1-4)
- II. Jesus Is Better Than the Angels (1:5-2:18)
- III. Jesus Is Better Than Moses (3:1-4:13)
- IV. Jesus’ Priesthood Is Better Than the Levitical Priesthood (4:14-10:18)

# Outline of Hebrews

## IV. Jesus' Priesthood Is Better Than the Levitical Priesthood (4:14-10:18)

- A. Jesus Is a Compassionate But Sinless High Priest (4:14-16)
- B. Jesus Was Appointed By God to Be Our High Priest (5:1-10)
- C. Jesus Is Better – Don't Apostatize (5:11-6:20)
- D. Jesus Is a Priest After the Order of Melchizedek (7:1-28)
- E. The New Covenant Mediated By Jesus Is Better than the Old Covenant (8:1-13)
- F. Jesus' Sacrifice Is Better Than the Temple Sacrifices (9:1-10:18)

# Jesus Is Better – Don’t Apostatize; (5:11-6:20)

## - High Level Overview -

- Having begun his discourse on Christ’s appointment as a superior high priest, the author suddenly breaks off the topic and turns to confront his audience directly with the problem of their *spiritual immaturity* (5:11–6:3).
- The writer follows with a blistering *warning against falling away* from Christ (6:4–8), which in turn is followed by an expression of *encouragement and confidence* in the hearers’ commitment (6:9–12).
- And in this way, the author both *confronts* and *comforts* as he warns his readers concerning the dangers of falling away from Christ.

# Outline of Hebrews

## C. Jesus Is Better – Don’t Apostatize (5:11-6:20)

### 1. Warning (5:11-6:8)

- a. The Present Problem With His Readers (5:11–6:3)
- b. The Danger of Falling Away from the Christian Faith (6:4–8)

### 2. Assurance (6:9-6:20)

- a. The Author’s Confidence In and Desire for His Readers (6:9–12)
- b. God’s Promise Is Our Basis of for Hope (6:13–20)

# The Present Problem With His Readers (5:11–6:3)

<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,* <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 Present Problem With His Readers (5:11–6:3)

<sup>6:1</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.*

<sup>11</sup> *About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.*

- “*About this we have much to say*”, is a reference to the author’s statement in the *previous* verse concerning the appointment of Christ as a “*high priest after the order of Melchizedek*.”
- Indeed, the author **does** have a great deal to say about Christ’s Melchizedekian high priesthood and will do so when he *returns* to this topic later in chapter 7.
- Christ’s Melchizedekian high priesthood “*is hard to explain*” to these readers, **not** because it’s such a difficult idea to understand, but because the readers to whom he wants to explain it have become *spiritually hard of hearing*.

<sup>11</sup> About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become **dull of hearing**.

- The word translated “*dull*” here connotes culpable negligence or sluggishness.
- The author goes on to point out that the recipients of this letter are “*dull of hearing*” due to their inattention to the public proclamation of biblical teachings.
- This passage calls to mind the author’s previous exhortation in Heb 2:1 where he warns them that we must “***pay much closer attention to [the gospel message] we have heard, lest we drift away from it.***”

<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...*

- The author tells them that, given the length of time that they have been Christians, they **ought** to be able to **teach others** by now; but instead, they **themselves** need to be taught!
- Not only do they need to learn ideas of deep importance like the priestly order of Melchizedek, but they need to be reminded of the “*basic principles*” of God’s Word (“*oracles of God*”).
- In view of the time that has elapsed since their conversion to Christianity, they ought to be eating ***solid spiritual food***, like grown-up men and women.
- But instead, they are still unable to digest anything stronger than spiritual “*milk*”, the food of infants.

<sup>13</sup> *for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child.*

- Anyone “*who lives on milk*” is still an infant, and the demonstration of this, the author says, is that they are “**unskilled in the word of righteousness**”, or as it is, I think, **better translated** in the NIV: “**not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness**”.
- This is not an easy expression to translate. In the context of what the book has been saying so far, it’s probably best to understand this as referring to the “*teaching about righteousness*” which is **fundamental** to the Christian faith: that **Christ is** our righteousness, as explained by the Old Testament texts themselves when properly understood.
- Anybody who is really immature, like the original readers apparently were, will have a tendency to go back to the Old Testament types and miss the **real** teaching about righteousness in those texts that point us to **Christ** as the one who achieves what is needed and presents us as righteous before God.

<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.*

- “Solid food” like what the author is wanting to give his readers is for “*the mature*” – those who by “*constant practice*” have trained themselves to “*distinguish good from evil*.”
- This is not just talking about distinguishing “*good from evil*” in a *moral* sense, but also, in the context, good and evil, true and false, in a *discernment* sense – understanding what Scriptures really do teach.
- This requires that we be good readers of Scripture, carefully studying the Word on a regular basis (i.e., “*constant practice*”) to understand what it is telling us. And this is what the author is encouraging his readers to do.

6:1 *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...*

- Having assessed the spiritual condition of his listeners in the previous section (5:11–14), the author now **challenges them** to correct their present course and move on to “*maturity*”.
- But the opening words of this unit are not quite what you might expect.
- The author has just used strong metaphors to describe their immaturity and consequent inability to handle advanced teaching.
- We might have expected him to try to accommodate to their infantile appetites by giving them “baby food.”

6:1 *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...*

- If the readers needed to be taught the elementary principles of the faith again, should the author not do so?
- But instead, the author pushes his readers toward an “adult table” fit for mature appetites!
- They are not responding to their circumstances as spiritual grown-ups, therefore, the author says, it’s time to move from the “***children’s menu***” to the “***adults’ menu***”, leaving behind the fundamental teachings (i.e., “***elementary doctrine***”).

6:1 *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...*

- In the Greek, the verb translated here as “*go on*” is in the passive voice, or what is sometimes referred to as a “divine passive”.
- Perhaps a better way of translating is would be, “*let us... be carried on to maturity*,” implying that it’s not **ultimately** up to the author to move the community forward, but rather **God**, who will move both the author **and** the community (“*us*”) forward towards “*maturity*”.
- This move forward, however, **begins** by **leaving something behind**.

6:1 *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...*

- When the author suggests they “*leave*” the “*elementary*” truths of the faith, he is **not saying** that they should **reject** these elementary truths **altogether**, any more than children moving beyond the first steps of education reject the letters of the alphabet.
- Rather, the fundamental truths of the faith are **presupposed** as these believers move on to maturity.

6:1 *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 readers cannot allow themselves to remain at the level of the “*elementary*” teachings about Christ.
- In order to “*go on to maturity*”, the readers must **accept the author’s teaching**, recognizing the finality of Christ and his atoning work as the **true fulfillment** of the Old Testament promises.
- The “*foundation*” must not be repeatedly re-laid while the superstructure is never built.
- But this appears to be what the readers were in danger of doing.

<sup>6:1</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*.

- The author provides *six* examples of the kinds of things he has in mind when he refers to the “*elementary doctrine of Christ*”.
- It is striking that the six items mentioned all find *parallels* within Judaism.
- This *may* suggest that the readers were attempting somehow to remain within Judaism by emphasizing items held in common between Judaism and Christianity.
- They may have been trying to survive with a minimal Christianity in order to avoid alienating their Jewish friends or relatives.

6:1b *...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.*

- “*Repentance from dead works*” is not repentance from “*works of the law*” (in a Pauline sense – Gal 3:10) but repentance from “*acts that lead to death* (NIV)” – in other words, sin.
- This idea is certainly basic within Judaism.
- The second item, “*faith toward God*”, is of course also very important in Judaism.

6:1b *...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.*

- So at the beginning of the list we encounter “*repentance*” and “*faith*”, two of the most central aspects of Jewish piety—both taken up by Christianity:
  - *I did not shrink from... testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of **repentance** toward God and of **faith** in our Lord Jesus Christ.* (Act 20:20-21)

6:1b *...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.*

- “*Instruction about washings*” refers to purification rites of Judaism, as the plural seems to indicate.
- Christian baptism may well be derived from just such Jewish washings, one of which—for the purifying of proselytes from paganism—seems a particularly suitable source for the practice of baptism by John and the disciples of Jesus.
- Christian baptism thus could well be classified as one, if not indeed the culminating, rite of purification.

6:1b *...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.*

- “*The laying on of hands*” is yet another Jewish custom taken up by the Christian church, often as a symbol for the imparting of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 8:17; 9:17; 19:6), but also in connection with healing (Acts 9:12; 28:8) and, as in the OT and rabbinic Judaism, special commissionings (Gen 48:14; Num 27:33; Deut 34:9).

6:1b *...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**.*

- The last two items, “*the resurrection of the dead*”, and “*eternal judgment*”, were accepted by the Pharisees but not the Sadducees (cf. Acts 23:8).
- For the readers, of course, the resurrection of the dead included the resurrection of Jesus.
- These items, then, could be held by the readers without necessarily departing very far from their Jewish origins.
- The author, though, chides them for not pressing on to the full doctrine of Christianity, such as contained in the content of his epistle, and the specific argument immediately before them.

<sup>3</sup> *And this we will do if God permits.*

- Here the author sums up the admonition to move on from these basic teachings by expressing his confidence in the move forward. “*And this we will do if God permits*”.
- This statement expresses the author’s confidence his readers, which he will reiterate in Heb 6:9–10, along with his own submission to God’s will (“*this we will do*”).
- The last phrase (“*if God permits*”) acknowledges again that the ability of the author and his readers to leave behind the basic Christian teachings and move on to maturity, rests *ultimately* in the sovereignty of God.

# Class Discussion Time



## \*Class Discussion Time

- In the section we looked at today, we see an example of strong, but loving confrontation of our author towards his readers. As a rule, none of us like having to confront others (and if we do, we are probably doing it for the wrong reason) and yet we know that confrontation is a necessary part of what we must do to be a faithful member of the Christian community.
- As you look at this confrontation by a biblical writer, what kinds of things do you see modeled that might serve as a good example for us to follow as we find ourselves having to perform this necessary but difficult Christian duty from time to time?
- Do you have difficulty confronting others when you find it is necessary to do so? What is the cause of your reluctance, and how do you go about overcoming it?

## \*Class Discussion Time

- One idea that should come across loud and clear from our text today is that, as a Christian, you are expected to grow over time. Spiritual stagnation is not an option for a genuine Christian.
- One of the primary ways that we grow is by regular, in depth exposure to the Word of God. What are some ways that you have found to be helpful in getting this in depth exposure to God's Word?
- Have there been periods of your life where you allowed yourself to get away from getting the kind of in depth exposure to the Word that you need? What effect did that have on your spiritual life? How did you eventually break out of that?

## \*Class Discussion Time

- It appears that one of the reasons that the readers of this letter were reluctant to move on in their spiritual growth is they were trying to avoid clashing with their Jewish culture so as to avoid persecution.
- Do you see this kind of thing happening in the Christian church in our culture today?
- Are we guilty of this in any way in our own church?