

Hebrews Chapter Six

In the sixth chapter of Hebrews we learn that through Jesus we have better promises than those given to Israel. In order for the Israelites to receive their promises two requirements had to be met: faith and patience. The readers of this book were told to have the same qualities. Abraham is given as an example (verse 15) as we are to imitate him (verse 18).

Spiritual progress (verses 1-8)

This chapter begins with the word, “Therefore” indicating that we must look back to what has been previously written to determine the path we should take. In chapter five verses 12-14 we learned that solid food belongs to those who are spiritually mature. The writer refers back to this argument as chapter six begins.

We must leave behind what is elementary and go on to spiritual perfection. This does not mean that the elementary principles are unimportant, only that we should not be satisfied with them resulting in no further spiritual growth. Too many Christians are satisfied with maintaining the minimum amount of knowledge, spirituality, and faithfulness. We should never be satisfied with barely getting by spiritually.

The elementary principles are listed as repentance from dead works; faith toward God; doctrine of baptisms; laying on of hands; resurrection of the dead; and eternal judgment. Each of these will be discussed below.

Repentance from dead works is listed first as an elementary principle. Jesus told us that there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine persons who need no repentance (Luke 15:7). Peter instructed the crowd on Pentecost to repent and be baptized in order to receive the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy

Spirit (Acts 2:38). We know that repentance is required in order to be saved (Luke 13:3). So, it is not that repentance is unimportant, it is that other things are equally important.

Faith toward God is required for our salvation. Jesus tells us that whoever believes in Him will be saved (John 3:16). The Ethiopian was told that he could be baptized if he believed in Jesus (Acts 8:37). Paul tells us that if we believe with our heart we will be saved (Romans 10:9). Like repentance, faith is required for salvation, but should not be viewed as an end unto itself.

The doctrine of baptisms is mentioned as an elementary principle. Notice that the word is plural. We are familiar with the notion of baptism in water (Acts 2:38), but the writer is here also bringing to our mind the idea of another baptism, the baptism of the Spirit. Paul describes this baptism in 1 Corinthians 12:13 while water baptism is described in Galatians 3:27.

The laying on of hands is categorized with elementary principles. It was customary in the first century to set individuals apart for a special task through the laying on of hands. In Acts 6:6 we find that when the first deacons were set apart in the church they were set apart through the laying on of hands.

The doctrine of the resurrection of the dead is something that Christians hold very strongly. Jesus said that He was the resurrection and the life (John 11:25). Because of His resurrection we have the promise of our own. But, this doctrine is listed as an elementary principle and not an end to itself. The same can be said of the doctrine of eternal judgment. In Hebrews 9:27 we find that all are appointed to die and that the judgment comes after death. Each of these doctrines are considered by the writer of Hebrews to be elementary principles.

We are urged to leave the discussion of the elementary principles behind and to go on to perfection. Jesus tells us that we must be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48). In Hebrews 13:20-21 we are told that God is able to make us complete (perfect).

The concept of apostasy, or falling from salvation is discussed in verses 4-8. This has been a very controversial subject in the minds of many Christians. The writer describes those who are in danger of apostasy as having once been enlightened, having once tasted the heavenly gift, and having been partakers of the Holy Spirit (verse four); also they are described as having tasted the good word of God, and having tasted the powers of the age to come (verse five). There is no other conclusion to be drawn than that these individuals were Christians at one time, but can no longer be considered as such.

Paul discusses the process of being enlightened in Ephesians 1:18 while Peter warns us of the dangers of falling away from enlightenment in 2 Peter 2:20-22. Tasting the word of God is described by David in Psalm 119:103. The problem is that these individuals have turned their backs on Jesus and all of the advantages they formerly enjoyed.

The writer says that it is impossible to renew them again to repentance. John describes people in this situation in 1 John 2:19. We are also warned in Hebrews 10:26-31 about the dangers of falling away. The reason they cannot be renewed to repentance is that they are crucifying Jesus again and putting Him to an open shame. There is no room for repentance in their hearts. They are compared to briars and thorns choking a field, weeds that need to be removed (verses 7-8).

Better things (verses 9-12)

The better things accompany salvation. After warning the readers of the dangers of apostasy, the writer of Hebrews turns our thoughts to better things. He reminds us that God does not forget our ministry and diligence to help others. We are also encouraged to be diligent to the full assurance of hope and warned not to be sluggish, but full of faith and patience.

God's purpose in Christ (verse 13-20)

God's promises are sure. We can depend upon this. Verse 14 is quoted from Genesis 22:17. The readers are reminded of the promise God made to Abraham. God had promised to make him a great nation with many descendants, but for years and years, that promise had gone unfulfilled. At last, after Abraham was 100 years old and his wife, Sarah was 90, God fulfilled the promise and Isaac was born (Hebrews 11:8-10 and Genesis 21:5-7).

We are reminded that when God gives an oath, He carries it out. Using the example of Abraham, the writer encourages us to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope in Christ is an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast, and allows entry behind the veil into the most holy place (Hebrews 10:19-20). Once more, Jesus is described as a priest after the order of Melchizedek. Much more will be said about this in the next chapter.