

The certainty of God's promise

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[0 : 00] Verse 11, about whom we have much to say which is hard to explain since you have become dull of hearing.

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of God's Word. You need milk, not solid food.

For everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, those who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil.

Therefore, let us leave the elementary principles of the doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.

With teaching about ritual washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

[1 : 16] And this we will do if God permits. Then turning over to John's Gospel, chapter 17, and there at verse 6.

John chapter 17, reading from verse 6. And here Jesus is speaking and indeed praying.

I have manifested your name to the men whom you gave me out of the world.

They were yours, and you have given them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you.

For I have given them the words which you gave me, and they have received them. And know in truth that I came from you, and they have believed that you have sent me.

[2 : 22] I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.

All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you.

Holy Father, keep them in your name which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.

Amen. May the Lord bless those these readings. May they be to his praise and to his glory. We concentrate on the first three verses of Hebrews 6.

Therefore, let us leave the elementary principles of the doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, with teachings about ritual washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment, and this we will do if God permits.

[3 : 41] When you turn to any of the commentaries on the epistle to the Hebrews, their introduction is composed of three related but separate questions.

Who wrote it? Where was it written from? And to whom was it written? And if you read further, you'll find that there's no actual definite answer to that.

But there's a number of solutions that could be proposed. When we go to the final words of the letter in chapter 13, he says this, I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.

You should understand that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon. Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings.

So from these verses, it would appear that whoever this author was, at some stage he must have been part of the Pauline circle.

[4 : 51] So on that basis, it could have been either Apollos or Barnabas. Both of these people were well versed in Jewish tradition and in the Jewish understanding of Scripture.

The letter would appear to have been written after the death of Peter and Paul in A.D. 65, so it could be dated to somewhere about 67 A.D.

It can be surmised that it was written to a group of Christians who were resident in Rome, either by themselves or in the Christian synagogue.

And it was probably written from Corinth or Ephesus. But in these verses, chapter 6, verses 1, 2, and 3, there's first of all a challenge.

And this teaches us something very practical. And that practical lesson is that you and I, we can't stagnate in the Christian life.

[5 : 55] We need a challenge. Thus, the challenge to the Hebrews, let us leave the elementary principles of the doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity.

And what is he saying? He wants them to develop. He wants them to become Christ-like. He wants them to stand for their faith.

He wants them to mature. That's the meaning of the word there. Maturity, completeness, or perfection. But this need is actually reinforced by what he said towards the end of chapter 5.

In verse 12, he says, Well, by this time you ought to be teachers. You need someone to teach you again the first principles of God's word. You need milk, not solid food.

Now, that particular quotation is very similar to what Paul says to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 3, verse 1. But I, brothers and sisters, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, even as babes in Christ.

[7 : 12] I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it, and even yet you are not ready, for you are still of the flesh. So, from the Corinthian perspective, we can understand that they were equally unable to take solid food because their appetites and the things that they thought about weren't of the things of God, but the matters of the world.

And Jesus himself in the parable of the sower almost describes their condition. Matthew 13, 22.

And as for what was sown among thorns, this is he who hears the word, but the cares of the world and delight in riches choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

Now, from all of this, you can see for you and me, there's a great responsibility placed on us as we listen to the word of God being read and preached.

And in the case of the Corinthians, they had not paid attention to that which was taught them by Paul, Peter, and Apollos. The result was they had not progressed in the Christian life as they should have done.

What about the Hebrew Christians? What can we learn about the way they received the gospel? In chapter 2, verses 3 and 4, the writer says this, How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?

[8 : 58] It was declared at first by the Lord and was attested to us by those who heard him, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his own will.

So in that statement, the writer is saying this, He's not part of the original team of disciples who had heard the Lord in person.

Rather, it is the case that the original disciples who had listened to Jesus, it was they who preached the gospel to him. In making that statement, He's also told us that the Hebrew Christians, they also were those who had heard from the original disciples or apostles.

Now, one of the traditions that survived from the early church and which has recently been confirmed by archaeology is that towards the end of his life, Peter the Apostle was in Rome.

And he makes a statement in 1 Peter 5 verse 13 where he says, the elect lady who is in Babylon greets you.

[10 : 25] That's generally reckoned to be written in code because Nero, the emperor, had his spies everywhere. And the elect lady is the church.

And Babylon is a synonym for Rome. If that's the case, then it could be that it was from the mouth of Peter himself that these Christians had indeed heard the gospel.

If we turn to Hebrews 10, you'll see the stand that they made for the gospel. Hebrews 10 verse 32.

But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes probably exposed to abuse and affliction, and sometimes being partners of those who were so treated.

So they'd stood for the gospel amongst great opposition. And he goes on in chapter 12 to say the same thing, verses 3 and 4.

[11:39] Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself that you may not grow weary or faint-hearted. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood.

Now, the reason for mentioning all this is to show the way the Hebrew Christians had received God's word. Not only had they received it, they'd stood for it, but not to the point of being martyrs. So he now makes this appeal. Let us leave the elementary doctrines of Christ and go on.

And the appeal is necessary because what had happened was that the force of the persecution and hostility was so severe they'd lost sight of Jesus Christ in all of this.

Now, this business of persecution and hostility is not unique to the Hebrew Christians. Indeed, the Apostle Paul tells us that all who desire to live godly lives in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

[13:08] And if you by your own way and I by my way are living this life, then you are going to encounter opposition.

And so in that circumstance, we redirect our thoughts not to the opposition, but to the one who endured such hostility against himself in the first place.

Moving on. The failure of the Hebrews. Hebrews. Let us leave the elementary principles of the doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a repentance from dead works and a faith toward God, with teachings about ritual washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

And this we will do if God permits. So here we are with the failure of the Hebrew Christians. In that verse chapter 5, verse 12.

For this time you ought to be teachers, yet you need someone to teach you again the first principles of God's word. You need milk, not solid food.

[14:26] So despite their faith, despite their perseverance, despite their standing against all hostility, they had lost sight of their master.

In the case of the Corinthian Christians, they also had lost sight because they had become obsessed with who the preachers of the gospel were.

What I mean is that each one of you says, I belong to Paul, or I belong to Apollos, or I belong to Cephas, or I belong to Christ.

And because of these factions that were growing up, that led to a lack of division and a lack of spiritual development, their problem in the case of the Hebrew Christians is found in chapter 5, verse 11.

About whom we have much to say, which is hard to explain since you have become dull of hearing. Now, when we read through the epistle to the Hebrews, in particular chapter 7, we're aware that there's a lot of things being said which don't, are not the same as what Paul would have said in his letters.

[15:55] So, in chapter 5, he talks about the humanity of Jesus, and in that chapter, verses 8 to 10, he says this, although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered, and being made perfect, became the source of eternal salvation to all who obeyed him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

So that what is being taught in the epistle to the Hebrews, he's got more to say about the humanity of the Son of God and the high priestly ministry of Jesus.

His insights into the humanity of Jesus are indeed quite unique. Now, when we come to Paul, we find that his contributions are to stress the divinity of Jesus and his work on the cross.

Listen to Colossians 1, 15 to 16. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in him all things were created, all things were created through him and for him.

And later in the same chapter, for in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

[17:29] So Paul is talking about the divinity of Jesus, his preexistence, and the work that he achieved on your behalf and mine in the cross.

Whereas the epistle to the Hebrews, without denying his divinity, stresses his humanity. Hebrews 2, verses 17 to 18.

Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God to make propitiation for the sins of the people. for because he himself has suffered and has been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.

The theme continues at the end of chapter 4, verses 14 and 15. Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God.

[18 : 40] let us hold fast our confession. But we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

And this is the aspect that the writer to the Hebrews wants the Hebrew Christians to take on board. It is they who are undergoing this severe trial.

And what he wants them to see is that they have a resource in Jesus Christ to help them withstand the trial.

I repeat again what he says in chapter 4. We have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Now, in the epistle to the Hebrews, he's got a lot to say about the high priestly ministry of Jesus. So, finally, I want to talk about the revelation to the Hebrews.

[19 : 56] Again, these first three verses. verses, therefore, let us leave the elementary principles of the doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, with teaching about ritual washings, the laying on of the hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment, and this we will do if God permits.

Now, in that appeal, he says it's not necessary to lay again the foundation of faith.

And in that verse, we find that the foundation of faith is repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.

There isn't any need, he says, to repeat that. Now, we find that in the teaching of Jesus, we read in Mark 1, 14, 15, that this is what he did.

After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God and saying, the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the gospel.

[21 : 20] gospel. So, the foundation of faith is there. They have repented and they have believed in the gospel. But there's something else here.

And towards the end of the verse, he talks about with instructions about ritual washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

what is this additional teaching all about? Some of the commentaries would suggest that it's elements of elementary Christian teaching.

But I don't think it is. And I'll tell you why in a minute. I think these four things are additional statements that he wants to make about the high priestly ministry of Jesus.

He had said, about whom we have much to say, which is hard to explain. Take the first of them, with instruction about ritual washings.

[22 : 32] baptism. I've translated it that way because in the older versions, it's translated as baptisms. But here's a fact. The Greek word used there, baptisimos, is never used of Christian baptism, but only on the Jewish practice of ritual cleansing by water.

And that same word appears again in Hebrews chapter nine. Hebrews chapter nine, where the writer is talking about the former day of atonement and how Jesus has fulfilled it.

In chapter nine, verse nine, he says, according to this arrangement, that's the arrangement of the day of atonement, gifts and sacrifices are offered, which cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, but deal only with food and drink and various ablutions, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.

So what we're being talked about here isn't baptism. It's ritual washing as practiced by the Jews.

Mark seven, verse four comments, when the Jews come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they purify themselves, and there are many other traditions which they observe, the washing of cups and pots and vessels of bronze.

So what's being said here in Hebrews six verse two about ritual washings has a particular application, which we'll see in a minute. Now the next one is teaching about the laying on of hands.

[24 : 29] It is a case that such practices did occur in the acts of the apostles for purposes of healing, but it also occurred in the ordination of somebody to a religious office.

And because I think that both of these things refer to the ordination to the priesthood, in Exodus 29 we read this, verse four, you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the door of the tent of the meeting and wash them with water.

A ritual washing. And then in verse seven, you shall take the anointing oil and pour it on his head and anoint them. That's the laying on of hands.

So what he's now saying is this, in drawing to this additional teaching, he's drawing their attention to the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ has a more effectual ministry than any of the high priests of old.

So the next statement is about with instruction about the resurrection from the dead. Now in Hebrews seven, verses 23 to 25, the writer picks up on this theme of resurrection from the dead.

[25 : 58] The former priests were many in number because they were prevented by death from continuing in office. But he holds his priesthood permanently because he continues for all time.

Consequently, he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him since he always lives to make intercession for them.

And the fourth aspect of eternal judgment. If you look at the Old Testament and in particular the book of Leviticus, you'll find that it was the right of the priesthood to pronounce on sin, such as incurred by the jealous husband, or adultery, or the presence of leprosy.

But what the writer is saying here is, the high priest with whom we now have to do is able to enter in and pronounce a judgment that is not biased, not corrupted by bribery, it's pure and perfect.

So these four statements, with teaching about ritual washings, the laying on of the hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment, all relate to Jesus Christ as your high priest and mine.

[27 : 30] Now having said that, what does it mean for the Hebrews? We've seen from the letter that they had to endure severe hostility and persecution for the message.

So the point is, is it not? Examine the teaching of Jesus and his life and you'll find one that encountered severe hostility and persecution.

In such persecution, a lot of Christian people today and then, suffer from the problem of depression. It's a very real problem and I don't minimize it at all. What about Jesus? In Matthew 27, he hung on the cross and in the blackness of the day or the hour cried out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And that's a cry of dereliction, a cry of abandonment. And if Jesus has been there, which he has, he's able to do something about it for you.

[29 : 08] That is what the epistle to the Hebrews is saying in these opening verses of chapter six. There is one who is closer than a brother or who can intercede and does intercede on your behalf.

So when you and I think all is lost, remember this, he prays for you.

My name, said Augusta's top lady, is engraved forever in the palm of his hands. God what a marvelous truth that is.

So making that teaching, he makes his appeal in chapter 10, verse 22. Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

He prays for you, draw near to him, and pray to him. That is the teaching of the epistle to the Hebrews.

[30 : 33] Amen.