

Study 6: Going on to Pefection

The Hebrew christians, were missing the point of God's revelation, and wanting to confuse the Law of Moses with christianity.

In this study, the writer refocusses them towards the vitality of God's revelation, to not go back to their old ways, but look to Jesus the Messiah, the High Priest after Melchizadek.

What is the status of these christians? Were they new in the faith?

Where should they have been in the faith?

How should they have reached this maturity?

What was it that caused them to be in this condition?

What are they to do to address this problem (6:1)?

What are the elementary principles (ABC's) of christianity?

Why did the Hebrew christians need to "pull their socks up"(6:4)?

If they fall away, why can't they just come back again (6:4-6)?

So, What are you going to do – go backwards or forwards? (9-12)

What does he mean by "imitate those who through faith and patience..."? (vs 12)

How is Abraham presented as an example? (vs 13-15)

What is the application for us?

Concluding remarks

Homework:

Read the notes, and reflect on where the Hebrew Christians were in their walk with God.

- What is the application for us?
- How do we sometimes become weary in our faith?
- What do we need to do about it (Both as preventive medicine, and as a treatment when we have become this way)?

Read Chapter 7 in preparation for next week.

Study Notes for: Study 6: Going on to Perfection

Sometimes we just get tired and grow weary in our faith! We say “*what’s the point!*” or “*God has forgotten about us*”. The Hebrew Christians had become like that. They were turning away from Christianity and going back to the Jewish religion.

In this study, the writer refocusses them towards the vitality of God’s revelation, and Jesus the Messiah, the High Priest after Melchizedek. (5:11-6:20)

What is the status of these Christians? Were they new in the faith?

The writer tells them that “*by this time you ought to be teachers...*” Clearly they were not new to the faith, but had been Christians for some time. The clear implication is that while they “*should have been*” teachers, they had not picked up the responsibility, or had not grown to the point where “*they could be teachers*”.

More than that, they had not even reached a good grasp of the first principles of Christianity. (He gives us some examples of what these first principles are in chapter 6). Instead of that, they needed someone to teach them the first principles again!

They were like babies that were still being fed milk. They should have well and truly be being fed solid food, and of such maturity that they were able to teach others. And yet they were still only being “kept alive” (spiritually) by living on milk!

The writer is not specific in singling out individuals, but rather uses the broader term “*everyone who...*” (“Anyone who” NIV) They could clearly see that this applied *to them!*

Where should they have been in the faith?

They should have been teachers. They should have reached maturity in the faith. They should have the first principles “down pat”. They should have been getting their teeth into meaty parts of the faith. They should be mature.

They could not grasp the very basics of the faith, let alone some of the more meatier issues like Melchizedek.

How should they have reached this maturity?

Maturity in the faith is reached by having their senses exercised! This can only come “*by reason of use*” Those who are mature have studied God’s word, chewed it over, tested it by talking about it with others, and well understood the first principles, so that they do not need to go back and re-learn the basics again.

The writer describes this as those “*who by reason of use have trained themselves with their senses sharpened to distinguish both good and evil*”

What was it that caused them to be in this condition?

Their ears were “*dull of hearing*” (vs 11), in that they were not open to hear what God was revealing to them. It is most likely that they had closed their minds towards growing in faith because of the implications of leaving behind the Jewish system and heritage. (How could Jesus be a High Priest? – He came from the wrong tribe anyway!; How can Jesus be King? – The King is going to rule from David’s throne in Jerusalem – Jesus isn’t

here to do that!; How could we turn away from the faith of Abraham and Moses? – God has set as the great examples of the Jewish faith!).

It would appear that they had a problem in “letting go” and moving past the Jewish system, to accept that it was fulfilled in Christ. As a result, they were not listening to God, and were “dull of hearing”, and had not grasped the first principles of christianity, even although they recognised Jesus as a great teacher come from God (Jn 3:2).

What are they to do to address this problem (6:1)?

They needed to leave behind the elementary principles, and go on to perfection (completeness). There is an implication here therefore that they would first have a good grasp of the elementary principles – which the writer says that they needed to be taught again (5:12).

What are the elementary principles (ABC’s) of christianity?

- Repentance from dead works
- Faith towards God
- Baptisms
- The laying on of hands
- Resurrection from the dead
- Eternal Judgement

It is interesting that every one of these “ABC’s” have an origin in the Jewish religion, and would not be new in concept to the Hebrew christians. They do however, take on an entirely new meaning in the context of the gospel. The writer draws together here two distinct things – their familiarity with some of the practices of the Jewish religion – and the fact that had not grasped their significance when they were “carried over” into the gospel and given a new meaning and fulfilment.

The writer also uses the plural form for baptism, which would suggest that he does not just have in mind christian baptism, but that the Hebrews would also have a clear understanding of the distinction between that and the baptism of John, and also of Holy Spirit baptism.

Why did the Hebrew christians need to “pull their socks up”(6:4)?

They had started their walk with God, but had now started going backwards. There is no standing still. They either move forwards, or they will go backwards. Going backwards will inevitably result in “falling away” from God.

So they have a problem, in that they are “going backwards” – a fact attested by the knowledge that they once had of the ABC’s, (in order to obey them), but they now have need that someone should teach them these things again (5:12). The end result of this will be their falling away from God.

If they fall away, why can’t they just come back again (6:4-6)?

The writer tells them that if they were to fall and neglect their salvation, that it is impossible to come back. The problem is ***not*** that God closes the door, but rather the problem is that mankind will not open the door again.

Notice what the writer says: “...*it is impossible to renew them again to repentance...*”
The problem is that they will not allow themselves to be brought back to the point where they will repent!

Having turned their back on God, they have effectively numbered themselves with those who crucified Him. It is as if they crucified Him all over again. If they are prepared to do that, then they will not be willing to come back.

He uses an example from agriculture to illustrate the point (6:7-8):

The rain comes on the earth, which enables it to produce a crop. It could not do anything of itself without the rain – it was just barren dry and parched land – useless.

But with the rain – a blessing from God, the land itself becomes blessed and brings forth the crops – so the crops are really a blessing from God.

By contrast with the good produce are thorns, briars and weeds. If this is what the land produces, then it has gone back to being totally useless again.

The only thing that such land and weeds are good for is to be burned and destroyed. The point of all this, is that if in our lives we produce nothing but weeds and rubbish (instead of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22)), then we will face the same inevitability at the end of our journey.

So, What are you going to do – go backwards or forwards? (9-12)

Standing still is not an option. The writer edges the readers onwards and forwards “with confidence” that they have heard and understood the message, and that they would respond in the affirmative!

With the confidence of moving forward, they have the fruits of their labour to their credit in God’s eyes. Whilst He is Just and Righteous, He is not unjust! Jesus has been “*touched with our temptations*”, and “*can sympathise with our weaknesses*” (4:15)

The writer exhorts the readers (including us!) to press on with the same diligence that we started in our christian walk – and continue to the end. We have full assurance that we will receive God’s blessings.

What does he mean by “imitate those who through faith and patience...”? (vs 12)

One of the greatest things that the church brings is the family of God together. We are all striving with different struggles in our lives, but trying to reach the heavenly shore despite all of them! The encouragement that we get from our brethren really helps us to face the trials and tribulations of life.

Sometimes it is really hard to know what to do and how to handle some situations. We can get great encouragement by knowing that some of the brethren that we know so well have gone through exactly what we are facing (and sometimes worse). We can get great strength and encouragement in our faith by imitating what they have done.

The writer is to produce a wonderful expose of faithful people in the hall of fame of chapter 11.

How is Abraham presented as an example? (vs 13-15)

Abraham is repeatedly presented as the father image throughout the Old and New Testament scriptures. He is the father of all who have faith. If we have faith like Abraham, then we will be blessed by God like he was (Gal 3:9).

God's promises to Abraham were absolute, and assured. This is illustrated by God's guarantee (vs13) in that God swore against himself. God's word is enough, because it is impossible for God to lie, and so when He said that He was going to grant the promises to Abraham, then that is the absolute and guarantee of the matter. But God wanted to make sure that Abraham was assured of this, and so God gave the promises under oath. So who does God swear under oath against?

HEB 6:13 When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself,

God shows the absolute surety by two things, both of which are rock-solid certain (vs 18).

HEB 6:18 God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.

But the example of Abraham is given to illustrate that Abraham did not receive the promises straight away, and he had to be patient before he inherited them. This was not because God had reneged on them, nor because He had changed His mind, but the time of their fulfilment had not occurred.

The promises were made to Abraham when he was 75 years old, yet it was another 25 years before the birth of Isaac – so that Abraham might even have the basis of fulfilling the promises of making of him a great nation, and that through his seed all nations of the earth would be blessed.

What is the application for us?

We have been made right (justified) in God's eyes because we have been washed clean of our sins. Our hope is in the resurrected Lord Jesus who has shown that God has power over death, and promised that He would come again.

But our life is long, and we grow weary. Sometimes we just want to give up, and sometimes some of us actually do. We need to remember the assurance of God's promises – just like those he made to Abraham so long ago – and they will not (and cannot) be forgotten.

Because of this, do not grow weary, but remember the sure and steadfast hope we have as an anchor to our souls.

Concluding remarks

Jesus the great High Priest (the writer throws this one in again, but he is yet to really establish Jesus credentials as the High Priest) has entered into the presence of God “*behind the veil*”. In fact rather than the physical Temple Holy Place, Jesus has entered into “*Heaven itself*” (9:24).

We will deal with the implications of this in more detail in future studies.

But the implication that the Hebrew Christians needed to take heed of was that they should not give up on their inheritance. God’s promises are assured, and Jesus has taken away the Old Covenant, and established the New Covenant (the writer will further establish this point a little later) – so why would we give up and want to go backwards?

Go on to perfection!