

Hebrews 5:11 - 6:3

This portion of Scripture (including 6:4-8) is one of the more contested passages in the Bible to interpret. Many hold that these verses are speaking of immature Christians. But, the content of this book and the context of the warning passages suggest that these verses are addressed to professing believers in the Messiah, unsaved people. It is imperative to identify who is being addressed here to understand what this passage teaches.

"Before beginning a study of this difficult section, we must indicate its analytical structure. The section [5:11-6:12] consists of a description of the spiritual status of the Jew whom the writer wishes to reach, of a warning not to go back to the abrogated sacrifices of the Levitical system, and of an exhortation to put a heart faith in the New Testament sacrifice, the Messiah. It is one of the passages found throughout the book containing a warning not to go back to the type but to go on to faith in the reality.

"...We must be careful to note that this letter to the Hebrews is written to the professing church made up of saved and unsaved, but the concern of the writer is with reference to the unsaved. We are now ready for an exegetical study of the Greek text of the passage under discussion, based upon the analysis of the entire epistle, the only scientific way of going about our work.

Kenneth S. Wuest, Hebrews in the Greek New Testament, pg. 102-03

The ones addressed here, those "*dull in hearing*," must be a distinct group from those addressed in 6:9 ("*But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.*") and following because the writer is unable to speak to them about Melchisedec. In chapter 7 the writer addresses believers in great depth about Melchisedec. Thus those addressed in 5:11 - 6:8 (this would technically be the entire warning passage although the professing believers are encouraged to come to "*the full assurance of hope*" by accepting the Lord in 6:11) must be a distinct group from the possessing believers that are clearly addressed in 6:12 through chapter 7.

11 Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing.

The writer of Hebrews has much to say about Melchisedec but the recipients were not able to receive it.

The teaching was hard to "*explain*" (NKJV, NASV, NIV, ESV, RSV). The hearers had become sluggish in their thinking. The implication is that at an earlier time they understood the message but because of not responding to it they had lost the ability to understand.

"But they had not always been in that condition, as is shown by the word translated 'are.' The word means 'to become.' It is in the perfect tense which tense speaks of a process completed in past time having present results."

Kenneth S. Wuest, Hebrews in the Greek New Testament, pg. 104

Matthew 13:14-15 (see Isaiah 6:9-10)

14 *And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive:*

15 *For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.*

The traditions of the Temple and Judaism were blinding them to the realities of Jesus. Their heart over time has grown callous or dull.

12 For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.

They had heard so much they should have been teachers but they are in need of the basics.

The "*first principles of the oracles of God*" must be the same as the "*first principles of the doctrine of Christ*" since they needed to be taught these again, but in reality they needed to leave these teachings and go on to *perfection* (salvation), 6:1.

To these Jews the **oracles of God** would have been the "Old Testament".

"This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us:" Acts 7:38

"Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God." Romans 3:2

Need of milk would be the basic truths of Messiah and the gospel. Newborns are born with a need for milk. These **are become such as have need**. Because of their actions they had gotten to a position where they needed the basics once again. When one hears the gospel over and over again, without getting saved, he becomes dull of hearing, sluggish. The message becomes common place and meaningless to them.

They were unable to receive strong meat (the teaching about Melchisedec) and had need of the basics (how to get saved).

13 For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.

If one is restricted to just the basics he is unskillful, not able, to handle the word of righteousness. The word of righteousness generally speaks of the word of God but more specifically speaks of the word of God's declaration that mans need for righteousness only comes through Messiah Jesus.

the word of righteousness

John 16:8-11 speaks of the pre-salvation work of the Holy Spirit. The "righteousness" of verse 8 and 10 is the same Greek word (δικαιοσυνη dikaiosune) in Hebrews 5:13.

John 16:8 *"And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:"*

is a babe

"Babe" is not the translation of a Greek word that means *infant* such as used in Luke 2:16.

Nor from a Greek word translated *child* such as Luke 1:7.

It is from the Greek word *nepios* which means *immature* (as contrasted to *mature*).

7 times it is translated child or children

1 Corinthians 13:11 (4x), Galatians 4:1,3, Ephesians 4:14

1 time it is translated childish

1 Corinthians 13:11

6 times it is translated babe

Matthew 11:25, 21:16, Luke 10:21, Romans 2:20, 1 Corinthians 3:1 and Hebrews 5:12

"We must be careful to note that the Greek word 'babe' in itself carries with it no implication of salvation. The phrase, 'babe in Christ,' as used today, refers to a new convert. Paul's use of it in 1 Cor. 3:1 is different. There he refers to immature Christians...Furthermore, the word 'babe' needed the qualifying phrase 'in Christ' to indicate that these Corinthian 'babes' were saved. Therefore, the word 'babe' in our Hebrew passage cannot be made to show that the person referred to is a saved individual. It has no birth relationship idea about it. The analysis of the book and the context in which the word is found require that we understand it to refer to these unsaved Hebrews, who because of their neglect of New Testament truth and their turning away from it, have again become immature in their spiritual apprehension of the same."

Kenneth S. Wuest, Hebrews in the Greek New Testament, pg. 106-07

14 But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

The writer uses the contrast *"but"* to shift the thought in this verse to those who are able to handle *"strong meat."* These in view are obviously those who are truly saved, they have advanced beyond the *"milk"* stage, they are saved, and have used their mind to discern between good and evil.

The inference of this passage is that as those in need of milk needed to go back to the basics of what they needed from the word of God - salvation - these who have passed beyond the milk stage - they understood the gospel and are saved - have in their Christian life used the word of God to grow and be able to discern between good and evil.

The thought of discernment has to do not primarily with moral good and evil but doctrinal good and evil. Whether the teaching is good or evil. This is the entire premise of Hebrews. The old things were good but there is something better now. Discern the difference between the two.

If one teaches that following the Mosaic Law will get one to heaven is this teaching good or evil?

Is the Mosaic Law good or evil?

Romans 7:

- 7 *What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.*
- 12 *Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.*

Hebrews 6:

- 1 Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God,**
- 2 Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.**
- 3 And this will we do, if God permit.**

"Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ,"

Hebrews 6:1 tells the readers to leave behind the elementary teachings and go on. The context of the book and the warning passages can't be referring to New Testament truth but must be referring to the need to leave Old Testament truth and go on to New Testament truth (specifically sacrifice).

"When we consider the 'rudiments' one by one, it is remarkable how little in the list is distinctive of Christianity, for practically every item could have its place in a fairly orthodox Jewish community. Each of them, indeed, acquires a new significance in a Christian context; but the impression we get is that existing Jewish beliefs and practices were used as a foundation on which to build Christian truth. 'It is significant,' wrote Alexander Nairn, 'that the points taken as representing the foundation of penitence and faith are all consistent with Judaism.' 'Doctrines of washings - how unnatural are the attempts to explain this plural as referring to Christian Baptism; 'imposition of hands, resurrection of dead, eternal judgment-all this belonged to the creed of a Pharisaic Jew who accepted the whole of the Old Testament.'"

F.F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews, page 139

"We now come to a careful study of the two Greek words translated 'leaving' and 'let us go on.' A correct understanding of these is absolutely essential to the proper exegesis of the passage we are treating. The word translated 'leaving' is a verb meaning 'to put or place,' with a preposition prefixed which means 'off' or 'away.' The preposition implies separation and is used with a case in Greek which implies separation....Expositor's Greek New Testament translates it here, 'Let us abandon.'

"The act of abandoning is the pre-requisite to that of going on. One cannot go on first without separating one's self from that to which one is attached."

Kenneth S. Wuest Hebrews in the Greek New Testament, page 107-08

"Leaving in the Greek is *aphiemi*, which means to forsake, to put away, let alone, disregard, put off. It refers to total detachment, total separation, from a previous location or condition."

John MacArthur, Hebrews, page 118

Is a Christian ever told to leave the foundational teachings of our faith? See 2 Peter 1:12:

"Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth."

"His goal was to put the brethren 'in remembrance of these things,' to remind them of the themes of the Christian life...One important function of a Christian minister is to remind the congregation of basic Christian teachings." Louis Barbieri, First and Second Peter, page 101-102

"They knew it all, of course; the twin themes of faith and works, grace and effort, were not new to them or any of the early Christians. But they needed to be reminded *of these things*...Such is the (sometimes wilful) forgetfulness of the human heart that one of the prime functions of a Christian minister must be to keep the basic facts of Christian truth and conduct always before the minds of the congregation." 2 Peter and Jude, Michael Green, page 86

"let us go on unto perfection"

Perfection in this context in the book of Hebrews (and other places also) is used of the sacrifice of Christ not Christian maturity. Chapter 5:10 - 7:28 speaks of Melchisedec and how this priesthood and sacrifice (of Jesus) is better than the Levitical High Priest since it brings salvation.

"Telioo is used 9 times of 24 total NT uses in Hebrews, often in the sense of to make perfect or fully cleanse from sin in contrast to ceremonial (Levitical) cleansing. The writer is emphasizing the importance of perfection... (which should cause any Jew who is contemplating the worth of Christ and the New Covenant to realize his utter hopelessness to every attain perfection under the Old Covenant).

In sum the fundamental idea of telioo is the bringing of a person or thing to the goal fixed by God."
Hebrews, Verse by Verse Copmmentary, Bruce Hurt, MD

Hebrews 2:10; 5:9; 7:11,19, 28; 9:9; 10:1, 14; 11:40; 12:23

Hebrews 7:11 is τελειωσις tel-i'-o-sis

The rest of the above scripture references is τελειωω tel-i-o'-o.

2:10 *"For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."*

Jesus completed salvation for us through His suffering.

5:9 *"And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;"*

The same thought as in Hebrew 2:10 is here.

7:11 *"If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron?"*

The clear use of *perfection* here is that of salvation from the penalty of sin.

7:19 *"For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God."*

Perfect is the same as righteousness (before God) or our salvation.

7:28 *"For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated [perfected] for evermore."*

Jesus' life completed (perfected) the work God sent Him to do. That is, attain salvation for us.

9:9 *"Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience;"*

The Levitical system could never attain salvation/righteousness for the priests, let alone the worshipper.

10:1 *"For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect."*

The law could not provide salvation/righteousness for anyone.

10:14 *"For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified."*

The goal of God, perfection/salvation, is attained only through Jesus.

11:40 *"God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect."*

The "us" are believers today and the "they" are the earlier scripture saints, who would not be brought to the completeness/perfection of their salvation until the church age saints are.

12:23 *"To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,"*

These men made perfect are righteous in God's sight through Jesus.

"Teleioo is used repeatedly by the writer in Hebrews to emphasize the importance of perfection... (which should cause any Jew who is contemplating the worth of Christ and the New Covenant to realize his utter hopelessness to ever attain perfection under the Old Covenant). The Levitical ritual could not give a clean conscience, which is the goal of sacrifices for sins." HEBREWS, VERSE BY VERSE COMMENTARY, Bruce Hurt, MD

Of these 10 verses, 3 times it speaks of Jesus completing the work God sent Him to do in being our perfect substitute (2:10; 5:9; 7:28) and 7 times it speaks of salvation of sinners.

“Not laying again the foundation of”

1) repentance from dead works

Ezekiel 18:30

“Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.”

The dead works were the following of the commandments of the Mosaic Law, which could save no one.

2) faith toward God

Genesis 15:6

“And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.”

3) the doctrine of baptisms

909 βαπτισμος *baptismos* {bap-tis-mos'} (*baptizo* is used many times in the N.T.)

Meaning: 1) a washing, purification effected by means of water 1a) of washing prescribed by the Mosaic law (Heb 9:10) which seems to mean an exposition of the difference between the washings prescribed by the Mosaic law and Christian baptism

Usage: AV - washing 3, baptism 1

Baptisms should be translated washings - see Hebrews 9:10; Mark 7:4,8

“Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.”

“And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables.”

“For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do.”

4) laying on of hands

Leviticus 1:4

“And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.”

Leviticus 16:21

“And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness:”

5) resurrection of the dead

Job 19:26

“And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.”

6) eternal judgment

Daniel 12:2

“And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”

“And this will we do, if God permit.”

The writer is identifying with the people he is speaking to. The understanding of this makes sense when we understand that the next section (verses 4-8) is speaking of unsaved people who if they become apostate it is impossible for them to be saved.