

Text: Heb 6.1-3

Now we turn to Hebrews 6, a much-discussed passage. It is probably the most controversial, contentious passage in the whole book.

My commentaries devote page after page to the first twelve verses or so, and most of them don't agree with one another. I find myself arguing with almost every one of them as I read through their work, step by step.

The opening verses seem less controversial, but you wouldn't know it from the commentaries. And even in church history, the interpretation of these verses led to a split between Baptists, with entirely separate Baptist denominations formed around how they took these verses.

With all this controversy, what are we to do? Can we understand the teaching here at all?

I think that we can, and I think the basic meaning of these opening verses is to declare the author's purpose. So, I've given my message this title:

Authorial Intent: Maturity

Let's read our passage, then we can talk about what I mean by my title.

Read Heb 6.1-3

We are in a continuation of the argument from the last bit of chapter 5. One commentator said, "The chapter break is both unwarranted and unfortunate."¹

In chapter 5, the author lamented that the Hebrew Christians had "need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God" (5.12)

Here, he demonstrates his purpose to move on from the elementary principles. He intends to stretch them and call them to a deeper faith in Christ than they already have.

When I title my message, "Authorial Intent: Maturity," that is just what he is setting out to do, carry them along to maturity.

This is the purpose of Christian ministry. We start with the elementary principles, but we don't stay there. When Jesus commanded us to "make disciples," he expected us to actually make disciples.

¹ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1991), 139.

Proposition: The key to spiritual growth involves submission to God's will, not exerting our own will.

We won't cover everything in these verses today, but we will highlight four terms that teach us how to grow spiritually.

I. The foundation of spiritual growth

"elementary teaching of Christ"

A. The elementary teaching of Christ

1. Compare the "the elementary principles of the oracles of God" (5.12)
 - a. Lane makes a slight distinction in these terms
 - b. Perhaps one can think of the "ABCs" of a very preliminary acceptance of the Bible as the voice of God (5.12)
 - c. Then we could have the "ABCs" that produce a Christian, *i.e.*, the basics of Christianity

Not sure we should stress much of a difference here, though.

2. Clearly, "elementary teachings of Christ" = "a foundation of repentance ... and faith" (6.1c)

And just here rises a controversy which we can only touch on today...

- a. Six foundational items described here
- b. One of them, "washings" NAU, ESV, "baptisms" KJV, NET, and others: unique word usually referring to Jewish washings (except Col 2.12)

Col 2.12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

- c. Resting on the notion that this is a Jewish reference, some commentators make all these basics refer to the old Judaism of the Hebrews
 - 1) The word for washings here occurs only 4 times in the whole Bible, hard to make this definitive

2) The idea of foundations is clearly parallel to the “elementary teachings of Christ” in 6.1a

Many commentators (including well known radio/internet preachers) resort to this interpretation to avoid the problem of 6.6, in my opinion. I don't think it's that easy.

d. Besides this confusion, there is another controversy that led to the formation of two different Baptist denominations

B. The foundation and the elementary teaching speak to one thing: the starting point of spiritual life

1. At the beginning of spiritual life is repentance from dead works and faith towards God
2. At the beginning of spiritual life is teaching that informs about baptism/washings and setting apart to holy living
3. At the beginning of spiritual life is formed the hope of eternal life and escape of judgement to come

II. Preliminary attitude for spiritual growth

“leaving”

A. There is a sense of “leaving” that means “abandoning” or “leaving behind”

1. When someone becomes a Christian, they are leaving behind their old life, old ideas, old culture
2. In this sense, the old is replaced with the new

B. Here the sense is more “progressive” — “leave standing, let remain”²

1. We are called to advance from a starting point
2. We stand on a foundation, we build the structure around us
3. We aren't occupied with constantly building the foundation, we are occupied with building *on* the foundation

² Lane, 131.

It does seem that many in the Christian church are stuck on building the foundation:

- Sometimes this is on the preachers: they constantly preach gospel messages with little challenge to spiritual development
- (Some preachers don't even bother preaching the gospel, but that's another issue)
- Sometimes this is on the believers: they are satisfied with having sins forgiven and the hope of heaven, don't bother me with doctrine

Remember, last week we said that if you don't progress spiritually, you don't just stand still, you go backwards

C. Conclusion: to progress, we have to let our foundation stand, and push forward

"The meaning here is not that of abandoning the basic teachings of Christianity, but rather the necessity of recognizing the foundational character of these teachings and thus the impropriety of going over the same ground. The readers are exhorted to move on to another level, a level commensurate with those who are mature..."³

III. Essential spirit enabling spiritual growth

"press on"

A. The heart of our verse: "let us press on"

1. No one should be satisfied with standing still
2. We should hunger for more, delight in more
 - a. This philosophy lies behind our preaching here: it isn't simple
Hopefully it is understandable (sometimes, maybe)
 - b. This ought to lie behind our devotional and daily life

³ David Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary 35 (Nashville, Tenn: B & H Publ. Group, 2010), 339–40.

- 1) I'm not reading my Bible just to check off the boxes on my schedule
- 2) I'm reading to know God, to discover more about him, to listen to his voice

(That sounds noble!) but how about it, why do you read your Bible?

B. The unique voice of our word: alt. trans. "let us be born along"

1. The focus isn't on my effort
2. Rather, the passive voice means something is carrying us along

"*let us be borne along,*' as by the current of a stream."⁴

"The thought is not primarily of personal effort, 'let us go on,' 'let us press' ... but of personal surrender to an active influence."⁵

3. What bears us along to higher levels of learning?
 - a. The word of God in general
 - b. The ministry of teaching in particular [*i.e.*, the ministry of the apostolic author of Hebrews]

"To have reviewed the fundamentals would only have left them where they were. The author preferred 'radical surgery' and decided to pull them forward as rapidly as he could."⁶

IV. Spiritual determination leading to spiritual growth (3)

"this we will do"

- A. The author has no interest in laying a foundation again – "not laying again a foundation"
 1. Interesting idiom: "laying" = "casting down"

⁴ Farrar, *Hebrews*, 79.

⁵ Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 145.

⁶ Zane C. Hodges, "Hebrews," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 793.

2. In our idiom, we could say, “been there, done that”

3. So now, we aren’t doing it again

B. The author has a determination to make progress (3a)

1. It would be one thing if the issue was returning to paganism

a. The ways of paganism are diametrically opposed to Christianity

b. Someone tempted by paganism would be throwing off Christianity completely, needing to get back to basics again

2. The issue with the Hebrews is a side-step back to Judaism

a. There *are* similar doctrines between Judaism and Christianity

b. There *is* a similar lifestyle

c. There *is* the same God behind both

F. F. Bruce: “For the writer to go on insisting on these things [the basics], therefore, would not really help them; it would be better to press on to those teachings which belonged to spiritual maturity, in the hope that the maturity would come with the teachings.”⁷

3. He is determined to press on from the basics to maturity

C. However, the author emphasizes again dependence on God “if God permits”

“The qualification, ‘if, that is, God allows,’ is not to be understood as merely a pious convention (Moffatt, 76; cf. Spicq, 2:149). The development of the christological structure of the foundational articles as well as the attainment of the goal of spiritual maturity places both the writer and his audience in dependence upon the blessing of God (cf. vv 1a and 7).”⁸

1. We sometimes will attach a phrase to our plans for the future, “Lord willing”

⁷ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 143–44.

⁸ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 140–41.

2. We don't want to be presumptuous: things could happen and the Lord could keep us from our plans
3. Here, the author reminds that our growth depends on God's spirit

Conclusion:

Proposition: The key to spiritual growth involves submission to God's will, not exerting our own will.

Note that I said "spiritual growth" here, not "Christian growth"

Even at the beginning of Christian life, the one converting to Christ has to submit to God's will

- I suspect that the difficulty in winning souls to Christ lies right here: it is not convincing unbelievers to want Christ, they have to decide to want Christ
- They have to submit
- If this is you, will you submit to the gospel today?

Ongoing spiritual growth requires our constant submission to the Word as well

- You can't assume, "now I've got it made, I've arrived"
- You can't come in with your presuppositions (often happens when we learn a theological system, it gets in the way of God's word)
- You must be renewed by the washing of the water of the word

Spiritual growth happens through submission.