

Shunning Lifeless Efforts

Hebrews 6:1

Nutshell: The first foundation item for Christians is a starkly different mentality about our own efforts at right, wrong, and relating to God. We turn from those lifeless efforts to receive what God has done for us in Christ.

I. Context: The Hebrews' spiritual immaturity .

II. Text

Heb 6:1 Because of this, having let go of the subject [“word”] of the initial *matter* about Christ, let us be borne on to full growth, not laying down again a foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God,

Literal Standard Version with modifications

The next four outline items, III. - VI., are based on the 4 uses of Scripture listed in 2 Tim 3:16 AND the 3 depictions of preaching in 2 Tim 4:2.

III. Teaching

A. Paul wrote an inspired book to a Jewish audience; 2 Pet 3:15-16; 1 Pet 1:1; 2 Pet 3:1. Hebrews is the only possibility.

1. The “us” of Heb 2:3 only puts the author outside the original 12
2. Peter speaks of the Apostles in the 3rd person as well, 1 Pet 1:12

B. Outline of Hebrews

Authority: God has at last spoken In Son (*Ἰερέφητ*), ← follow this font
His express image, 1:1-3a

Theme: **The SON** purified us from sin (Priest), then sat in authority (**King**), **1:3b**

I. **Supreme over** the angels, Inheritor by ordeal, 1:4-14
Therefore hear Him, 2:1-4

II. **Supreme as** man, 2:5-9

Psalm 8- Since man must inherit, 2:5-8a
but man failed, 2:8b, Christ became man, 2:9a

Theme reprise: crowned with glory and honor (**King**), **2:9b**
to taste the death of “each one” of His own (**Priest**), **2:9c**
to bond with them and help them, 2:10-18

freeing them from bondage to Satan and fear, 2:14-15

Therefore, think hard on Him, 3:1

III. A better stewardship than Moses, 3:1-6

Therefore hear Him, unhardening our hearts, (*Ἰερωφῆτ*)

Ps 95- for Moses' folk didn't inherit God's rest, 3:7-19

IV. A better Rest than Joshua, 4:1-11

♦ Therefore, fear, 4:1a, lest we also miss God's rest

Ps 95- David told his people not to miss that rest, 4:1b-3

The Promised Land was a type of God's 7th day rest,
which itself was a type of Salvation, 4:4-8

Christ's Salvation has become the final *Sabbatismos*, 4:9,
the Son resting from the work of Salvation as the
Father had rested from the work of Creation, 4:10.

We must EXERT ourselves to enter Christ's Rest, 4:11

For the Word penetrates, exposing us before God, 4:12-13

Theme reprise: Having the highest high priest (Priest), the
Son of God (King),

Let us hold to our confession of Him (*Ἰερωφῆτ*), 4:14

especially since He felt all our temptations +, 4:15

V. A better priesthood than Aaron, 4:14 - 10:18

VI. Exhortations based on Christ's supremacies, 10:19-13:21

VII. Concluding remarks, 13:22-25

C. "Let us approach" (Προσερχώμεθα) in 4:16 and 10:22

brackets the material between them

1. The material between = proofs of the superiority of
Jesus' priesthood (the bulk of the book)

2. The "let us approach" outside the brackets say that the
point of Jesus' priesthood is for us to approach God

3. Prayerlessness, then, is a dismissal of Jesus' priesthood

D. Now that we are in the main portion of the book, we see:

1. Christ's priesthood compared to Aaron's, 5:1-10

a. With *Melchizedek* founding Christ's priesthood

b. But the Hebrews too immature to learn of him, 5:11-14

2. Paul continues this admonition today

Kid-speak: Who was the main priest in the OT? (Aaron)

Who is the main priest now? (Jesus!)

E. Heb 6:1-3, Paul lays out beginning teachings that the
Hebrews should be moving beyond

1. V 1-2, Six items
2. V 3, Paul intends to move *beyond* these 6 basics

F. The structure of the list

1. There are four connecting words in the list: *kai* 2x and *te* 2x
2. Abbreviating the 6 items, the connections go like this:
 - a. repentance *kai* faith, v 1;
 - b. washings *te* hand-placing *te* resurrection;
 - c. *kai* judgment, v 2

Heb 6:2 of *the* teaching of washings, also of laying on of hands, also of *the* resurrection of the dead, and of everlasting judgment,

3. However, the word “teaching” in v 2 might be intended to make the last four items a group. “Teachings” about:
 - a. washings, hand-placing, resurrection, and judgment
 - b. As the word “foundation” in v 1 groups repentance and faith: “a foundation” of repentance and faith
4. A popular theological grouping puts the emphasis on *kai*
 - a. That makes repentance + faith a pair and resurrection + judgment a pair
 - b. Leaving washings and hand-placing as a default pair
5. (The Literal Version makes it a 7-item list, separating “washings” from “teaching”)

G. The basic teaching of the list

1. The 2 “foundation” doctrines describe the Spirit bringing us *to* and placing us *in* Christ
 - a. He grants us repentance; we turn
 - b. He grants us faith; we believe

Kid-speak: Paul talks about teachings that are at the bottom of everything else we believe in, holding everything else up. What do we call something at the bottom you build on- like with a house? A foundation.

2. The 4 “teaching” doctrines are the basics we first add to that foundation
 - a. Various baptisms (at least 3)
 - b. Hand-placing (several kinds; 1 in particular?)
 - c. Resurrection (the dead don’t stay dead)
 - d. Judgment (after death, God’s verdict determines our

eternal state)

3. Let's break it down a little at a time
- H. Heb 6:1, "Because of this"
1. Because they should be spiritually mature by now, 5:12-13
 2. *And* because the spiritually mature are expert in Scriptures, 5:14, they need to move on from foundational teachings
- I. "Having let go"
1. The main NT word for forgiveness, 143x, telling you its basic meaning: God "releases" us through Christ's sacrifice
 2. About half the time, it means leave, let alone, etc., as here
 3. "You've spent enough time on the basics. Time to leave them for the next stage."

Kid-speak: Why do we build the foundation teachings in our souls? So we can start building all the *other* teachings on top of them!

- J. "Of the subject of the initial *stuff* about Christ"
1. "Subject" is *logos*: word, saying, account, reason, motive
 2. "Beginning stuff," *arxé*, commencement
 3. "Leaving" the basics about Christ doesn't mean leaving it permanently, just leaving it like a builder moves on to building the rest of the house after finishing the foundation
 4. Paul has just used *arxé* in a very similar way, 5:12
 - a. They needed to be taught "the elemental starter stuff" of the Word
 - b. They hadn't grown beyond baby milk
 5. He will define this beginning stuff with the 6-item list
- K. "Let us be borne on to completeness"
1. "Borne on," regular word for "carried"
 2. This is nifty! Same word 2x in 2 Pet 1:21
 - a. OT prophecy wasn't "carried" by man's will; rather, the Holy Spirit "carried" holy men to write
 - b. *We* should be carried along by that Word and Spirit to full spiritual growth
 3. The passive voice shows that greater maturity means greater DEPENDENCE on God!
 - a. He carries us along
 - b. And, in our maturing state, we more and more cooperate with that 'wind in our sails'
 - c. We begin to recognize when we start trying to pull

ourselves along or puff wind into our *own* sails

Kid-speak: God doesn't just tell us what to do, He helps us do it. We're supposed to learn how the Holy Spirit carries us along. We stop doing things on our own and start doing everything trusting God.

4. Paul includes himself, "Let us be carried"
 - a. He sees himself as part of a continuing process
 - b. He invites the Christian Jewish community to join *him* at his level of maturity
- L. "Not laying down again a foundation"
 1. Again, once your spiritual foundation has been laid, its purpose is to build *onto* it, not have it alone
 2. Paul may be implying that their inclination towards Aaron's priesthood of symbols was forcing an examination of their foundational beliefs
 3. The wording of the first of the foundational beliefs seems to verify this:
- M. "Of repentance from dead works"
 1. Any trust in Aaron's priesthood showed that they hadn't turned from human efforts at salvation
 2. This is co-foundational with "faith towards God"
 3. Repentance is where true Christianity starts
 - a. And all true Christianity is built squarely **on** it, never leaving it (except by building upward from it)
 - b. All of Christianity is a **CONTINUATION** of repentance. We're *always* turning from what the flesh/ the Old Man tell us to do.
- N. "Repentance," lit., "mind change," not meaning a whim, but a structural change in thinking
 1. God must grant it, Acts 11:18; 2 Tim 2:25
 2. It was the *basic* message of Jesus' messenger, John, Mk 1:4
 3. As well as Jesus' first message, Matt 4:17
 4. It was the main evangelistic ingredient 4x in Acts, 2:38; 3:19 w/ 26; 17:30; 26:20 (which also has foundation #2)

Kid-speak: Repentance is where we start as Christians. It's when we *stop* trusting ourselves and *start* trusting Jesus instead. We stop trying to pay for our own sins, and we thank Jesus for paying for them.

5. “Mental Transformation” is where godly sorrow always takes us, 2Cor7:10, turning us around, not leaving us whining
6. But this “thought process transformation” is from a particular danger:
 - O. “From dead works”
 1. Dead works were the Jewish people’s (or any people’s) efforts to please or satisfy God by what *they* did toward God rather than seeing what *He* did for them
 - a. In other words, it was approaching God without an understanding and experience of Grace
 - b. It could even include an understanding that forgiveness came from God. I just have to do ___ to get that.
 2. Of course, all people can fall into this mentality, including pagans, Acts 17:22

Kid-speak: What’s the natural way we relate to God? We say, “OK God, You say *I* have to do __, then You’ll be satisfied.” But God is saying, “*You’ve* already done everything wrong. You need what *Jesus* did for you.”

3. The Hebrew people were the most CONSCIENTIOUS of all people on earth
 - a. How? All men have consciences, and sometimes the Jews were *worse* than their neighbors, Ezek 5:6
 - b. “Conscience” (Gk., Latin, Eng.) means “with knowledge.” The Jews always had the most knowledge because they had the Word.
4. But **natural** conscience leads us two basic ways: telling us “You should” and/or “You shouldn’t”; hence,
 - a. **Self-justification**, including by God’s tools, or
 - b. **Self-condemnation**
 - c. But mostly a combination of the two
5. The Jews, even with the Word, always tended to salve their conscience by THEIR observance of God’s instructions: “I did __; God accepts that,” including with tears and sincerity
- P. Paul uses “dead works” again in 9:14, where we find all its essential elements
 1. Christ’s sanctified human life, His goodness and good deeds (“offering Himself up to God without blemish through the eternal Spirit”)
 2. made His “blood” a purifying agent,

3. applied particularly to “our CONSCIENCE”
 - a. It no longer simply condemns us
 - b. And we no longer seek self-justification
4. But when purified, conscience still tells us of our misdeeds,
 - a. but also of Christ’s contrasting, thorough goodness
 - b. and of the sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice to cleanse us of our misdeeds
5. Our conscience is *cleansed from* “dead works”
 - a. or **lifeless efforts**, through which we had tried to make ourselves acceptable to God
 - b. Our conscience no longer triggers in the wrong directions. It appeals first to Christ.

Kid-speak: What is conscience? Conscience tells us about 3 things: Right, Wrong, and God. When you are a Christian, your conscience still tells you those 3 things, but it says, “You did wrong here. You need God to take what Christ did right and count that *for you*.” Then God says, “NOW I can start teaching *you* to do right.”

(Parents: what are the theological words for the first “right” and the second “right”? Justification and Sanctification.)

6. “to serve the living God”
 - a. Uh- He’s actually there. “I’m ‘in the room’- stop talking *about Me*.”
 - b. We can say He’s a “living God” and still treat Him like a lifeless idol
- ★ c. It has to go from concept to conversation: “OK God. You said . That means .”
- d. ... “What’s this grace stuff? You forgive and cleanse me? Thank You!” Then life is a lived Thank You.
- e. You know you’ve got it when it puts a smile on your face and sets you at liberty- and that the liberty only wants to do good and please God.

Kid-speak: God is a living God. That means we don’t just think *about* Him. We listen TO Him and talk TO Him.

- Q. James says that faith without works is dead, 2:17, 20, 26
1. He’s saying the same thing from a different angle

2. We relate to God lifelessly if we merely agree with Him
- R. Turning from lifeless efforts leads to “being carried along” (Beware of “being carried along” as its own end)
- S. Travesty of travesties! Dead works can result from being a “little-faith,” Matt 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; Lk 12:28
 1. We **know** (agree) that God takes care of us
 2. But we still worry. We still control. We still do not rejoice.

IV. For the Walking Wounded (1 Thess 5:14, “Uphold the strengthless”) Well! My crippled efforts weren’t essential anyway!

V. Conviction (2 Tim 4:2, “Convince, rebuke”): **What have I done wrong? How have I lost righteousness?**
How much do I carry *myself* along?

VI. Correction/ Realignment (2 Tim 4:2, “Exhort/encourage”):
How will I correct my error? How will I regain uprightness?
I will repent of self-effort in my sanctification.

VII. Schooling in Righteousness: **How do I take this on the road?**
“God, I want to please You, knowing that Your ways are agreeable ways!”

Wrap-up: Conscience makes all of us lawyers. We’re all making a case about our rightness, mentally or mouthily, all our lives—or at least the insistence that we don’t have to (“can’t,” we say) turn from our wrongs. We will take this case right into God’s presence.

Most men take this case to God in *this* life. Making this case on our own, apart from Christ, is “dead deeds.” It is our lifeless attempt to fix our lifelessness. It is an insistence that my lifelessness can be adequately revamped.

Many make this attempt *without* reference to God. That’s just one degree more foolish.

God will fix our lifelessness with life. Death has to be brought to life. It always involves the shunning of our own lifeless efforts. I’m not trying to save or fix myself anymore.