The Supremacy of The Son of God

Studies in Hebrews

24)The third warning (part 2) Heb. 6:1-8

**Hebrews 6:1-6 Therefore**, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 Instructions of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. 3 And this we will do if God permits.

4 For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 [c]if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame. 7 For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; 8 but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.

**Outlines:**

A. Christ is **Superior to the Prophets** (1:1-3)

B. Christ is **Superior to the Angels** (1:4–2:18)

C. Christ is **Superior to Moses** (3:1–4:16)

            D. Christ is **Superior to Aaron** (5:1-10:18)

1. **Superior High Priest** (5:1-7-28)

a. The Priesthood of Aaron vs Christ (5:1-10)

Third Warning: Don’t Degenerate (5:11–6:20)

1) The Rebuke for Immaturity (5:11-14)

2) The Encouragement toward Maturity (6:1-3)

3) The Warning against Apostasy (6:4-8)

4) Reminder of the Promises of God (6:9-20)

b. The Priesthood of Melchizedek (7:1-28)

2. **Superior Priesthood** (8:1-10:18)

**v 1-3 Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us be carried forward to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. 3 And this we will do if God permits.**

**Therefore:**

After the author of the Hebrews rebuked his readers for their spiritual immaturity 5:11-14, he didn’t dwell on their need for “need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God” and their need for “milk and not solid food.” 5:12. Rather, he holds them by the hand and pushes through for maturity.

**Leaving the discussion:**

The participle “leaving ἀφέντες” does not imply contempt for or an abandonment of the elementary teaching. i.e. let us “omit the foundation”. The use of the verb in 2:8 (cf. Matt 22:22, 25; 24:2; John 11:48; 14:27) shows that the word may signify “leave standing, let remain.” The foundation with which they became acquainted a long time ago (5:12) is solid579. The author of Hebrews is “leaving the discussion of the elementary principles” by “not laying again the *same* *(italic mine for emphasis)* foundation.” He is building on the foundation of the elementary principles of Christ rather than going back to lay the same foundation again.580

**The elementary principles of Christ:**

The author of Hebrews presents the elementary principles of Christ in 2 groups581:

The Foundation that consists of repentance from dead work and faith toward God.

The Instructions of baptisms, laying of hands, resurrection from the dead and eternal judgement.

It appears from the Greek that the author of Hebrews is linking repentance from works that lead to death and faith toward God together. It also seems that he is linking resurrection from the dead and eternal judgment together.

Let us highlight few things here about the elementary principles of Christ:

**Repentance from works that lead to death and faith toward God:**

The author of Hebrews tells us the foundation of the Christian faith consists of repentance from dead works (negativily) and faith toward God “positively.” This is a clear scripture that links both repentance and faith together as the foundation of our relationship with God (cf. Luke 7:36-50)

**Doctrine of baptisms:**

The author of Hebrews here used the plural (baptismoi) which usually means “ceremonial washings”582  (cf. Mark 7:8; Heb 9:10) and not the word (baptisma) which is commonly used throughout the NT as a reference to the christian baptism. The choice of (baptismoi) in the plural form makes it highly unlikely that the author of Hebrews was referring to the christian baptism. Baptismoi also makes it difficult to understand how these “ceremonial washings” can be a part of the “Elementary principles of Christ.”?

If this epistle was sent to a group of believing Jews in Rome, the reference to "teaching about washings" may have had more direct significance than meets the eye of the twentieth-century readers.583 In Acts 19:1-5, we saw that the believers in Ephesus were baptized by the baptism of John till Paul baptized them in the name of Jesus.584

**Laying of Hands:**

In the early church people received healing by the laying hands (Mark 16:17-18)Acts 9:17), the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17-18; 19:6), the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1Tim 4:14; 2Tim 1:6), consecrated for the ministry (Acts 6:6; 13:3).

**v 4-6 For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.**

The ἀδύνατον, “impossible,” which is placed emphatically at the beginning of the sentence. Each of the positive statements is conditioned by the qualification ἅπαξ, “once,” which conveys the notion of definitive occurrence587. This is the first occurrence of the important term ἅπαξ, “once” (6:4; 9:7, 26, 27, 28; 10:2; 12:26, 27), which in Hebrews carries a qualitative rather than merely a numeric nuance. It connotes the sufficiency, validity, and permanance of what Christ has accomplished and is accomplishing.“As the sacrifice of Christ was an ἐφάπαξ (“once-for-all”) event, so is the believer’s participation in it.”588

**Enlightened:**

The Greek word φωτίζω phōtizō was used twice in the book of Hebrews. Here and in **10:32** “But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated φωτίζω phōtizō, you endured a great struggle with sufferings:” In 10:32, the author of Hebrews is speaking of a genuine, real enlightenment of the hearts. In the NT the term is used metaphorically to refer to spiritual or intellectual illumination that removes ignorance through the action of God or the preaching of the gospel (cf. John 1:9; Col 4:5; Eph 1:18; 2 Tim 1:10; Rev 18:1). What is signified is not simply instruction for salvation but the renewal of the mind and of life589.

**have tasted:**

The word “to taste” (γεύομαι) occurs 15 times in the NT (12 times outside Hebrews; 3 times in Hebrews). The usage outside of Hebrews can be divided into two categories. First, the word has the meaning of “experiencing” in a metaphorical sense (e.g. Matt 16:28; Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27; John 8:52; 1 Pet 2:3). Second, it is used in a physical sense to refer to “tasting slightly” (e.g. Matt 27:34; John 2:9) or “eating” in the sense of ingesting (Luke 14:24; Acts 10:10; 20:1; 23:14; Col 2:21)590.

Obviously, the word is used here in a metaphoric sense i.e. experienced. The author of Hebrews seems to use the term **to express a genuine, real experience. Other than 6:4,5, the term was used in Hebrews 2:9** “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.” Jesus didn’t sample or just came close to death. It is fair to assume that in the same manner the author of Hebrews here is taking about a real encounter that his readers has with God.

**They have tasted the heavenly gift v4 and the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come:**

The two clauses introduced by the repeated participle “γευσαμένους have tasted” expose internal and external aspects of conversion. The “gift from heaven,” which probably describes redemption as the free gift of God, and reception of the Holy Spirit were experienced by the congregation inwardly. The goodness of God’s word and the endowment of members of the community with charismatic gifts (2:3-4) are what they heard and saw. Together, the clauses describe vividly the reality of the experience of personal salvation enjoyed by the Christians addressed.591

**Partakers of the Holy Spirit:**

Whether it is possible for one who has been in any real sense a partaker of the Holy Spirit to commit apostasy has been questioned, but our author has no doubt that it is possible in this way to "outrage the Spirit of grace" (10:29). The people whom he has in mind have experienced the miraculous power of God 2:4, and have had the hands of apostles laid on them 6:1.592 Elsewhere in the book of Hebrews we see that they are partakers of the heavenly calling 3:1; of Christ 3:14; of God’s disciple for His children 12:8.

**if they fall away:**

If those who have enjoyed a full and authentic Christian experience should then fall away, a renewal to repentance is impossible (v 6). The aorist (past) tense indicates a decisive moment of commitment to apostasy593. In the LXX, the term παραπίπτειν has reference to the expression of a total attitude reflecting deliberate and calculated renunciation of God (Ezek 20:27; 22:4; Wis 6:9; 12:2). In Hebrews it is equivalent to the expression ἀποστῆναι ἀπὸ θεοῦ ζῶντος, “to fall away from the living God,” in 3:12. Apostasy entailed a decisive rejection of God’s gifts, similar to the rejection of the divine promise by the Exodus generation at Kadesh (3:7–4:2)594.

**they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.**

The nuance in the participle παραπεσόντας fallen away in v 6 is brought out sharply by the present participles ἀνασταυροῦντας, “crucifying again [the Son of God],” and παραδειγματίζοντας, “exposing [him] to public humiliation,” which express the odious consequences of the decision to spurn the gifts of God. This could entail a return to Jewish convictions and practices as well as the public denial of faith in Christ under pressure from a magistrate or a hostile crowd, simply for personal advantage (cf. Mark 8:34–38)595.

**it is impossible to restore them to repentance**

The author of Hebrews is talking here about the willful sin of deliberate apostasy. People who commit this sin, he says, cannot be brought back to repentance; by renouncing Christ they put themselves in the position of those who, deliberately refusing his claim to be the Son of God, had him crucified and exposed to public shame. Those who repudiate the salvation procured by Christ will find none anywhere else596.

**The dilemma of Hebrews 6:4-6:**

These 3 verses are probably the most problematic in the NT, if not throughout all the scriptures. Is the author of Hebrews talking about real believers who can lose their eternal salvation? if so, what does that mean to you and me? Should we never feel secure in our salvation since we also may follow their pattern and may start compressing, and eventually, we would utterly reject Christ? or is the author of Hebrews talking about some who never really have a genuine conversion experience?

Much debate has been taking place about the identity of the readers. Many commentators have argued that the experiences that the author of Hebrews is talking about here are not the actual salvation experience. To do so, they twist the text and impose their personal spin on it. As we have seen, these verses describe a real Christian experience consistent with the rest of the scripture.

So, can a real believer reach the point of utter apostasy?

In our Lord's parable of the Sower, no difference might have been seen for a time between what had sprouted on rocky ground and what was growing on good ground. It was only when a time of testing came that the difference became evident. It was a time of testing now for the recipients of the epistle, and our author is anxious that they should respond triumphantly to the test and prove that, in their case, the seed had fallen into good ground 597

For those who are born of God, John says in **1 John 3:9**, “Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.” and of those who abandon the faith, John said “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.” **1 John 2:19**

**I.E. PERSEVERANCE IS THE MARK OF THE SAINTS.**

The NT adopts a dual approach. On the one hand, it teaches the doctrine of eternal security, i.e., “once a Christian, always a Christian” (Rom. 8:28-30; 1 Peter 1:5; John 10:28-29; 1 John 5:13; Jude 24). On the other hand, it teaches that continuance in the Christian life is the test of reality (1 John 2:19). There is such a thing as temporary faith, i.e., a faith that is not genuine (Luke 8:13). The NT exhorts those who profess faith in Christ to persevere in that faith (Matt. 24:12-13; 26:41; 1 Cor. 10:12)598.

In America, these is a 50% chance that a newly married couple would end up in a divorce. So, if you go to a wedding and see a couple committing their lives together till death them part. Would you be able to predict if their marriage would last or not? No, you won’t. but time will tell. Listen, it is easy when you are experiencing the excitement of a new relationship to vow to commit all your life to that person. It is only when the hardships of life impact that marriage that the genuineness of this commitment or the lack thereof will come forth.

Part of the problem is that when people commit to Christ, they don’t really know what they are committing to. Jesus demanded utter and complete obedience because he showed utter and complete obedience as we have seen Hebrews 5:8-9. Paul always introduced himself as “Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ” with No rights, No will, and Nothing but a slave bought to only please his master. Jesus told his wanna-be disciples to count the cost. They must love him more than “his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life,” so much so that if you don’t “bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple” Luke 25-33.

Now if you are willing to make that kind of commitment to Christ, you don’t have to worry about your eternal salvation.

v 7-8 **For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; 8 but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.**

The presence of γάρ, “for,” establishes that vv 7–8 are an integral part of the argument in vv 4–6. The agricultural illustration clarifies the appropriateness of the warning in vv 4–6. The recital of the blessings and advantages enjoyed by the community in vv 4–5 demonstrates that they are like land that receives frequent rain and is cared for by God (cf. Deut. 11:11–12). There is a firm basis for confidence that the community will share in further blessing from God (v 7*b*; cf. 13:7, 17). But if the Christian community should become apostate, it would be like a field which was well watered and cultivated, but which then produced only thorns and thistles (v 8). In the parable all interest is concentrated on the harvest, rather than on preliminary stages of growth. What is decisive is what is produced. The issue is usefulness or worthlessness. The initial advantage described is the same; it is only the final result that is different.599

The formulation of v 8 makes a clear allusion to Gen 3:17–18, where the growth of “thorns and thistles” is the consequence of the curse invoked by human disobedience. According to v 8, the sober consequence of apostasy would be the consigning of life to the curse that hangs over a field producing only thorns and thistles.

whose “end” (τέλος) is to be set on fire. The significance of the imagery is driven home when subsequently in Hebrews fire is associated with the severity of the eschatological judgment that will consume the adversaries of God (10:27; 12:29; see 6:2)600

The illustration of verses 7-8 further enforces our conclusion of verses 4-6. We have concluded that the scripture teaches both principles: that those who are saved can rest secure in the assurance of their salvation based on God's promises. Yet, at the same time, the scriptures also teach that perseverance is the mark of those who are saved.

The connection between v7-8 and v4-6 seems to be as follows:

 The author of Hebrews seems to be arguing here that in spite of the experience they had with God, if persecution will result in apostasy, then their initial commitment to follow Christ was empty words.