

### Leaving the Elementary Doctrine of Christ

*Father, I would ask You today that You would permit us to leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and press on to maturity. I hope that there's some that are here that say, "I don't understand that," cause that's what we have to address and it's incredibly important. And so I ask Father that You might permit us, that means You're going to have to come and strengthen me. It means You're going to have to energize me. It means You're going to have to keep me from speaking error. You're going to have help me to speak plainly, clearly, the way I ought to hear. That means You're going to have to give this congregation energy and strength to listen because we get real lazy and we think about lunch, and about the Chiefs and the Raiders, and we're not thinking about what it means to leave the elementary doctrine of Christ. But if You permit it, if You allow it, You would come and visit us this hour. And that's what I ask for, Lord, I pray that no one will walk out of these doors this morning who will not understand what it means to leave the elementary doctrine of Christ. And they'll understand just how important it is. So we ask these things in Jesus' name, according to Your will, knowing You will hear us because we're praying according to Your will. Amen.*

Well if you're here with us the first time we are going through a study of the book of Hebrews, a rather detailed study of the book of Hebrews. And I can tell you this morning that we're under a severe thunderstorm warning, and I'm not referring to weather outside. I'm referring to the passage of Scripture that we've come to. This morning we come to a section of Scripture that many regard as the most difficult in the New Testament. Welcome to Faith Community Church, because we are at a passage of Scripture that is one of the most difficult in the New Testament. The difficulties that we will see this morning in the text I would call a "severe thunderstorm warning." Troubling, difficult, call it Section A. Next week if you come back we're going to be talking tornado warnings, we're going to be talking serious difficulties. We'll call it Section B. Section A is really chapter 6, verses 1-3. It's a thunderstorm warning. It's difficult, probably can weather it out, but if you get battered up by that and you come to chapter 6, verses 4-6, you've got a tornado on your hands, and it can be very difficult and very distressing.

I think it is appropriate to think of these difficulties in this text as “storm warnings” because for the delicate conscience, for the one that’s not understanding, the words that are spoken here can be very unsettling. We’re speaking about a person’s salvation and their eternal security. Hebrews chapter 6 says that, “those who fall away, they can never again be restored again to repentance.” So it’s very important that we understand these passages of Scripture. So this morning we’re under a thunderstorm warning.

I’m convinced that a lot of the difficulties about Section B, chapter 6, verses 4-6, that’s the second section next week, a lot of the difficulties about that section arise because of misunderstanding and misinterpretation of Section A, which we’re talking about today. And that means if we understand Section A, if we understand this section this morning, it’s going to go a long ways to preparing us and helping us understand the really difficult section, which is next week, Hebrews 6:4-6.

I meant to unsettle you. When you open up your bulletins if you read the title, “Leaving the Elementary Doctrines of Christ,” I hope some of you went, “What?” Some of you I know read ahead and try to study ahead before we go to a text, and I always appreciate to hear those that do that. I hope some of you have read through this text. Actually someone after the first service told me they have been doing that very thing and they were at this passage of Scripture and they were very confused because it is a very difficult text. But I made the title of this message, “Leaving the Elementary Doctrines of Christ,” to unsettle people, to expose the difficulty of this text. And I didn’t just make that title up, it comes straight from the text. Verse 1 of chapter 6, “Let us therefore leave the elementary doctrine of Christ.” What does that mean? “And let us go on to maturity.”

Before we delve into the difficulties of this text, I want to just look at the context again, I want us to look at the big picture of what the author of Hebrews has done so far. I realized this morning this is teaching, this is explaining, and I know it’s hard and that’s why I’m praying that the Lord will give energy to hear and wisdom to understand. I want us to think of the context for a moment. To this point in the book of Hebrews the author has been extolling the superiority of Jesus Christ over angels, over Moses, over Joshua, over the Aaronic priesthood, the high priests. The high priests? Yes, they represent man to God, but they still have sin. Jesus

is without sin. So everything that the author of Hebrews has done to this point is to extol the superiority of Jesus Christ over all these Old Testament figures.

But when we come to chapter 5, at the end, and we get into verse 11, it really ends with a rebuke. The author of Hebrews says, "I'm not going to go on talking about Melchizedek, because you have become dull of hearing. I've been telling you good news, but it hasn't been having the right effect, the desired effect. Your ears are dull, sluggish. Instead of, 'ah' it's 'mmm.' You're dull of hearing, you're slow to hear." This chapter really ends with a rebuke that says in essence, and it's rather severe, "You're spiritually retarded." That's what the author says. "You're spiritually retarded. You ought to be teachers." Chapter 5, verse 12 says, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food." The picture that the author paints is rather grotesque. It is that of an adult who is still nursing. "What's wrong with you? You're still infant. Why are you still needing milk?"

I draw your attention to verse 12 again. "You need someone to teach you again the basic principles." The word in Greek is *stoicheion* and it literally means the foundational elements. It was a word that was used for the letters of the alphabet. The ABC's, literally. "You need someone to teach you again the ABC's. You're in senior high; what are you doing in kindergarten? You're acting like you need someone to teach you the letters of the alphabet again." In essence the author is saying, "I can't go on to form words and talk to you about these concepts because you still don't understand the letters of the alphabet. You need someone to teach you the ABC's of God's Word. You need milk, you don't need solid food."

Now we're going to come back to this warning about dull ears, but before we do I want you to do something very important. I don't usually ask you to take notes or even mark in your Bible because it's somewhat arrogant that I can say anything worthy of taking notes or marking in your Bible. But I'm at a point where I think this is very helpful for you, and I know a lot of people take notes and you lose the piece of paper. You never have the notes again, so maybe write this in your Bible. But I want you to do three things, things that I did that I hope will help you understand this text. You go to chapter 5, verse 12, you come to this phrase, "basic principles." I put a box around that. "You need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the

oracles of God,” and then he reiterates it, he says, “You need milk, not solid food.” I put a box around “milk.” So I’ve got a box around “basic principles,” then I’ve got a box around “milk.”

And I keep reading, I come down to chapter 6, verse 1, “Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ.” I put a box around “the elementary doctrine of Christ.” And the reason I did that, and I drew a line and I connected all three of them is, because those terms are synonymous. When he’s talking about the basic principles, he then refers to it as milk. And after referring to milk he comes to chapter 6, he goes, “Now we’ve got to leave the elementary doctrines.” These are synonymous terms. So whatever he means by the “basic principles” of verse 12, and whatever he means by “milk,” he means the same things in verse 1 of chapter 6, “elementary doctrines.”

So many commentators and so many commentaries come to this text of Scripture and they look at those concepts and they assume that the author is referring to the gospel. That the basic principles, the milk, the elementary doctrine of Christ, is the gospel. And then they go on to interpret this passage when it comes to verses 1 and 2 of chapter 6, about these 6 doctrinal things of repentance from dead works, and faith towards God and instruction in washings, laying on of hands, they interpret that as Christian doctrine.

So what happens if you are to listen to a sermon or go to the typical commentary on the books of Hebrews and it comes to chapter 5, and a lot of times it will treat verses 11 through verse 14 as one section, you will hear a lot of sermons about spiritual maturity in the church. Some of you are babes in Christ and you should be more mature. And it’s always applied to Christian maturity, because they assume that the basic principles, the milk, the elementary doctrine is the gospel, and the implication is, “You need to grow up and grow from just getting beyond faith in Christ and start getting into some serious teaching.”

So then they come down to chapter 6 and they begin to speak about those 6 things that are listed in verse 1 and 2 as Christian doctrine. Well, a couple of problems that arise. The author of Hebrews says in chapter 6 verse 1, let’s leave the elementary doctrine of Christ. Now that doesn’t sit well with any exegesis. We’ve been saying all along in the book of Hebrews how the author of Hebrews has been telling us to hold onto the gospel, not leave the gospel. You can go

back to chapter 3 verse 14 and he uses very similar words for, “We share in Christ if indeed we hold the beginning,” which is the word for elementary doctrine there, “We share in Christ if indeed we hold our beginning confidence firm to the end.” So how in the world can the author of Hebrews say, “We need to leave the elementary doctrine of Christ”? How does that square with Paul who says in 1 Corinthians 15, “I present to you the gospel in which we stand.” You never leave the gospel, you never get out of the gospel, you’re always standing in the gospel. It doesn’t square. It’s confusing.

Then you come to chapter 6 and it becomes even more difficult because he says, “we need to leave the elementary doctrines and not lay again a foundation of repentance from dead works.” And again, if we’re thinking of Christian doctrine here, well you know repentance is a regular part of the Christian life. Leave that and don’t again lay again repentance? Leave faith in God? And leave talking about baptisms, and leave laying on of hands, and resurrection and judgment? I don’t understand this. That’s not elementary doctrine, that’s high doctrine. And you read many commentaries, the passage becomes extremely difficult, confusing and frankly contradictory.

Let me give you a couple of examples. Four hundred years ago Matthew Henry in his commentary, and when I quote these men, actually every one of the men that I’m going to quote from are men that I love, I have learned a great from, and I highly regard. And yet I’m just going to show you the inconsistency and the contradiction in their interpretation as they try to interpret this passage. Four hundred years ago Matthew Henry, about this passage, Hebrews chapter 6 said, speaking of Christian growth he said, “In order to their growth, Christians must leave the principles of the doctrine of Christ. How must they leave them,” he asks? “They must not lose them, they must not despise them, they must not forget them. They must lay them up in their hearts and lay them as the foundation of all their profession and expectation.”

Does that sound confusing to you? Here’s how you’re supposed to leave the elementary doctrines of Christ. Don’t lose them. You must not despise them. You must not forget them. I mean frankly, it’s incredible confusing, if not contradictory. And yet as you follow the progression of commentaries throughout the centuries, that same line of thought is there in so many. So you come to more recent commentaries; Richard Phillips, Kent Hughes – these are

again, great men of God, men that I have learned great from. You read their commentaries on the book of Hebrews – they come to chapter 1 and 2 and they speak about these six things, about repentance from dead works, and faith towards God. Again, they're interpreting them as Christian doctrine. So they have come up with this hypothetical thing that these doctrines are what they would teach baptismal candidates, and those that would grasp these six doctrines would then be baptized.

But it says you're not to lay again a foundation of these things. And it still doesn't address, "leaving the elementary doctrine of Christ." Here's what Richard Phillips says again. Thus far his commentary's been excellent. But he says this, very similar to Matthew Henry, "The point is not to abandon these truths, but to establish them as a sure foundation for later building." It's difficult how these commentators can leave this seeming contradiction unaddressed. "Leave" doesn't really mean leave, it actually means "keep." It becomes all the more apparent when you look at the word "leave" in the Greek, and it is a very strong word. Do you know the word means, "to send away, to abandon, to forsake." Do you know that that word "leave" in the Greek was the word used for divorce? "Send her away. Don't keep her." She's sent away, I'm divorcing her, I'm abandoning her, I'm letting her go. Moreover did you know that word "leave" in the New Testament is the same Greek word used for the remission of sin? God takes our sin and He sends it away from us. He separates us from it. He leaves our sins far away. We are separate, left from our sin.

Can you imagine how up in arms we would be if someone took this term about the forgiveness and say, "How do we leave our sins? How are we forgiven of our sins? Well, we must not lose them, we must not despise them. We must not forget them." We say, that's insane. Our sins are separated from us. They leave, they're sent away. That's the exact word that the author of Hebrews uses. "Let us leave, abandon, forget the elementary doctrine of Christ." There's clearly a tension here that has to be resolved.

Do you know what the problem is? The problem isn't with the author of Hebrews, the problem isn't with the word "leave," the problem is with a misunderstanding of what the basic principles, the milk and the elementary doctrine of Christ is. It's not the gospel. If there's anything I would have you do and write in your Bible, is put a box around those 3 terms and mark, "This is not the

gospel.” This is not referring to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The ABC’s of God, that’s not the gospel, the milk is not the gospel, the beginning doctrine of Christ is not the gospel. This *stoicheion*, these elementary teachings about Christ, the ABC’s of Christ, they are the Old Testament figures and pictures and ceremonies that all point to Jesus Christ.

The author of Hebrews is writing to a group of Jews who have been living under the Old Testament and the Old Testament teaching. They had high priests and they had sacrificial systems, they had ceremonial cleansings. They are to leave the ABC’s of God. That’s the ABC’s, that’s the milk of God. They are to leave the figures and the pictures of Christ, because the person of Christ has come. When you start to understand this text in that light, it starts making perfect sense.

It reminded me of the days, my first year in college, I was a freshman in college. I went to the school my son is going, The Master’s College. And I was in California but I was very distracted when I was in California because I had a very pretty girl in Kansas City that I couldn’t stop thinking about. Her name was Lori Glenn. Now it’s Lori Juhnke, but it was then Lori Glenn. And I specifically remember when I was in college, I had this one picture of my future wife. She was probably a sophomore, she still had braces, but she was beautiful. And I remember just a number of times in college, just pulling out that picture and going, “Wow, she’s beautiful.”

Can you imagine how strange it would be if Jim and I (we met in college, he was next door in the dorm), I’m there in my room and I’m looking at this picture, just admiring the beauty of my someday wife, and there’s a knock on the door and Jim says, “Tim, Tim, come quick. Lori Glenn is down in the lobby.” “OK Jim, we’ll see. This picture is beautiful.” That doesn’t make any sense. Why would you keep looking at the picture when you got the real thing? That’s the argument of the author of Hebrews.

Let me give you another example. Suppose you knew a couple and they had very little money, virtually homeless, but they were able to scrape up together enough money to buy a small plot of land and to build a basement, a foundation. That’s all the money they had. They moved in there, and if they didn’t have that they’d be homeless and without shelter, but at least they have a foundation. They’ve got a tarp over it, so they have some shelter. It’s rough, but it’s

home. Imagine that you came back to this couple ten years later and to your horror, they're still living in the basement. And the horror is, that on top of the basement is a beautiful mansion, a house. And you say, "What are you doing in the basement?" And they say, "Well, we like it down here. It's kind of homey. We don't want to go upstairs." "Are you crazy? There's a beautiful house here for you. What are you doing living in the basement?"

The author of Hebrews is writing to a group of people who've been presented the person of Jesus Christ and have an understanding of who He is as the Messiah. They should be a senior in high school, and they're wanting to go back to kindergarten and talk about the ABC's again. About the principles, the pictures, the figures of Christ; and the author of Hebrews says, "You've got to leave that, man." The real thing is here. You've got to leave the ceremonies and leave all the pictures. Those all point to Christ, but He's here.

Now when you begin to understand that, then you come to chapter 6, and he says, "Let us leave these elementary doctrines of Christ, the ABC's of Christ. Let's go onto maturity, not laying again," and then he lists these six doctrines. And these six doctrines are not New Testament teachings. It's not Christian theology. It's unfulfilled, incomplete, Old Testament theology, and that's why he says, "Don't lay again the foundation."

Let's go through these six things and let's interpret them as Old Testament teachings and not New Testament revelation. Look at this – repentance from dead works. You need to leave these elementary doctrines. Don't lay again a foundation of repentance from dead works. So many commentaries I read talk about, yes, repentance is such an important part in the New Testament. We are to repent from sin. Yes, that's very true. But that's not what the author of Hebrews says. The author of Hebrews says we need to leave that, and don't lay that foundation again. What? Don't lay the foundation again of repentance? The author of Hebrews is not talking about repentance of sin as it is presented in the New Testament. He is talking about repentance from dead works. He is talking about repentance not from sin, but from good works. He is talking about putting to death the notion that you can earn merit to please God. "Do we have to lay this foundation again to you Hebrews, that you cannot do good things to find favor with God? You can't keep the law. Let's put this to death once and for all."



If you want an illustration of this you can turn to Philippians chapter 3. In Philippians chapter 3 what did Paul say? "If anybody could have confidence in the flesh, I could. I'm a Hebrew of Hebrew. I was circumcised the eighth day. I'm a Pharisee. As to zealous in keeping the Law, I was blameless." That's works. But what did Paul say? That's dead works. But he didn't call it dead works, what did he call it? He says it's garbage. All those good works will never gain me favor or acceptance before God. The author of Hebrews says, "Do we have to lay again the repentance from dead works, that we cannot merit our salvation before God? Put that to rest once and for all. Salvation is by faith alone, by grace alone."

Notice "faith in God." Man this really turns commentaries upside down. What do you mean, "Don't lay again the foundation of faith in God. I thought faith in God is what we're all supposed to have all the time." Again, he's not talking about New Testament truth. He's talking about the limited revelation of God in the Old Testament. And he is in essence saying, "Listen you Jews. You better put away the notion that faith in God will save you, because faith in God apart from the revelation and the person of Jesus Christ will not save you." There are thousands, perhaps millions of people today who believe in God who are going to hell. The author of Hebrews is saying, "You better lay aside the notion that you can trust God without trusting Jesus Christ."

This is the argument from the Gospel of John. If you're going to honor the Father, you have to honor the Son. If you're going to believe God, then you've got to believe the Son of God. And that is exactly what the author of Hebrews is addressing here when he says, "Don't lay again the foundation of faith in God. It's not a generic faith." I want to tell you, that's a message that we need today, because I hear so many professing Christians and they talk about faith in God in such generic terms, as if it's salvific. Faith in God is not salvific. Faith in God will save no one. It is faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ who was sent from God, who is the Son of God.

And then he goes on, instructions on baptisms. Again, so many commentaries, "Oh this is the baptism of John and the baptism of the Holy Spirit." It is not any of the New Testament teaching on baptism. First of all, it's plural. The ESV and the New American Standard do a great service to us. They do not translate them "baptisms," they translate them correctly as "washings." The word that is used these for baptism is not the word that is used for Christian baptism in the New Testament. It is referring to washings. It was the ceremonial purifications in ancient Israel that

they had to go through in order to appear before God. Read through the book of Exodus. Read through the book of Leviticus and they are always having to wash themselves, cleanse themselves. In the temple there was a basin that the priests had to wash themselves. They had to cleanse themselves. You read throughout Jesus' ministry. The Pharisees had to go through elaborate ritual cleansing ways. The author of Hebrews says, "Put aside all these instructions about all these various ceremonial purifications that you have to go through. Forget it, because now a person is made clean before God through the blood of Jesus alone. So put it away." You don't have to worry about, "Oh, I got too close to a Gentile. Got to go through and clean this, or oh, we did this." There's only one way to be clean before God and that's through the blood of Jesus Christ. Put away all these instructions about ceremonies and ritualistic cleansings.

And then look, "laying on the hands." Again, so many commentaries, "Laying on the hands – this is ordination, this is them teaching the disciples about ordination. Paul lays the hands on Timothy." That is not what the author of Hebrews is talking about. Read the book of Exodus. Read the book of Leviticus. When a family, a man came before God, he had to bring a lamb. And what did he have to do when he brought it before the sanctuary, before the synagogue? He laid his hands on it to transfer his sins on that lamb, so that that lamb dies in his place. And the author of Hebrews says, "Quit worrying, talking about laying hands on a lamb. The only thing you need to do is lay hold of Jesus Christ. He alone can bear your sins."

I tell you what; this text is one of the most decisive statements in the New Testament about the end of the old order, the Old Covenant, and the establishment of a new and different way into the presence of God. This is one of the most decisive statements of the Old Testament that says, "All these Old Testament laws and all these ceremonies and rituals – they're over. Leave them, divorce them, forget about them, abandon them. There is a new way.

And I'll tell you there's a lot of commentaries that you will read. Some of them just miss it and they're just ignorant, they're just perpetuating what they already read. But there are others that I'm convinced they see it, but they hedge on it, because it doesn't fit with their system. And I'm thinking specifically of some of my covenant theologian brothers and sisters – those who see such a continuity between the Old and New Testament. They see this blatant statement, "Leave it." And they don't like it because it doesn't fit their system. And many of

these reformed commentaries that I read, men that I love and hold in regard, it is a direct challenge to much of their theology because sometimes they want to bring Old Testament into the New Testament.

Could you imagine what it would be like in the first century? What a contradiction it would be for a Jew to be presented with the claims of Jesus Christ, to see Him fulfill all those Old Testament prophecies, and to receive Him. You know what? Jesus, He must be the Messiah. He must be the Lamb of God that takes... "I believe in Jesus, the Messiah. Now can you tell me where I need to offer my lamb? I need to sacrifice this lamb. I'm going to lay my hands on it and sacrifice this. Can you tell me, where's your altar?" "We don't have altars here because Christ has finished the sacrifice. There's no more sacrifices." That is why this is such a decisive statement on the part of the author of Hebrews. "Leave it, there's no place for it. The reality is here. That was just the shadow. That was just a picture pointing to the person of Christ."

Look at the last two – resurrection and judgment again. You know these seem to be Christian doctrines, right? Yes, of course the New Testament addresses the resurrection. Of course the New Testament addresses judgment. But so does the Old Testament. The Old Testament speaks about resurrection. The Old Testament speaks about judgment, but you know what? It's incomplete. Actually the Old Testament says very little about resurrection. Enough though that by the first century it was commonly held that there would be a resurrection. You can go to John chapter 11, there's a great passage there. John chapter 11, remember Lazarus has just died. Jesus is there. He says to Mary, "Your brother's going to rise again." What does she say? "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection." She believes in the resurrection. But what does Jesus say to her? "I am the resurrection. He who believes in Me, though he dies, yet shall he live again." You see the teaching about the resurrection in the Old Testament was incomplete. And if you don't teach about the resurrection and include Jesus as the only way for the resurrection, you got it incomplete. Most Jews believed they were going to participate in the resurrection simply because they were Jews. Jesus says, "I am the resurrection. All the teaching in the Old Testament points to Me. I am the resurrection. He who comes to Me, he will live again even though he dies."

The same thing about judgment. The Jews believed in judgment. They believed that God was going to judge the wicked. But most Jews believed they would be spared the judgment of God just because they were Jews. You better lay aside all that, because there's a new way now. There's a fuller way. Jesus said in John 5:22, "Not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son." If you try to understand the doctrine of eternal judgment apart from the person and work of Jesus Christ, you will be misled, because the Bible says there's coming a day when everyone will give an account to Him, and they will stand before Him and they will all bow to Him and He will judge everyone. So, lay it aside.

I tell you what, the author of Hebrews here has just established, I think revealed for us the hermeneutical, exegetical key to the Old Testament, and it is evidenced in all the apostles. If you try to study the Old Testament, if you try to read the Old Testament outside of the person, work of Jesus Christ, you will come to incomplete, wrong conclusions. And so you find the apostles as they quote from the Old Testament. They are constantly interpreting it in the light of the person and the work of Jesus Christ. And it is because of that very thing, because the reality of what the Old Testament was foretelling, has now come. The author of Hebrews says, "Leave those elementary principles. Leave the ABC's of God. Those were to teach us about Christ. Those were teach us about what He's going to do. But now He's here.

And if you start to understand this, then it will explain so many of the difficulties and confusion that many commentaries will lead you into in this passage. And I believe it will help you next week to understand the great warning passage that we will find there.

So leaving the elementary doctrine of Christ – that's not the gospel. We're to stand in the gospel. The milk there, that's not the gospel. You know what the gospel is? The gospel is the solid food. I want to just draw your attention to verse 13. Everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness. You know what I take that to mean? Everyone who is living under the economy of the Old Testament is unskilled about the word of righteousness, which is what? Righteousness through faith. Imputed righteousness. That's just not, if you're living in Old Testament with the Law and the demands of the Law and the ritualistic cleansing and ceremonies, you're going to be unskilled in the concept, the idea that righteousness is a gift from God on the basis of faith, not of works. So the milk here, it is not the gospel.

Do you know what the gospel is? It's the solid food. It's the solid food. And it is, according to the apostle Paul, what brings us to maturity. If you believe and obey the gospel, you're a mature man. This isn't talking about levels of Christian maturity.

Let me go back now and talk for just a minute and make brief application to us, specifically as we think of the author of Hebrews stopping and not telling them anymore about Melchizedek because they had become dull of hearing. He's writing to a group of Jews. They've heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. He's been telling them about the person of Jesus Christ. He's been telling that Christ is superior to angels. He's superior to Moses. The most revered man is all Israel, Christ is superior to him. He's superior to Joshua. He's superior to all the Aaronic priests. But he stops. He says, "I can't go any farther. I'm not going to go any farther, because you've become dull, you are hearing good news but you're not embracing, you're not acting upon it. You've become dull of hearing."

It's seems as if you could say that these Hebrews were a group of people who had heard the good news of Jesus, who had heard the gospel, who had received Him, sorta, kinda. Is that a word, kinda? Sorta? They saw the glory of Christ. They saw the mansion above the foundation. They would go into it but they wanted to come back down into the basement. They saw the person of Christ but they kept wanting to go back to the picture. They were, as in the prophets in the days of old under the prophet Elijah, they were halting between two opinions. Remember Elijah? He had the two altars and he says to them, "Listen, why are you still halting between two opinions? Why are you still faltering between two opinions? If Yahweh is God, serve Him. If Bale, then follow him."

But here the author of Hebrews is contrasting not the religion of Yahweh and the religion of paganism; he is contrasting for them the Old Covenant, the ABC's of God against the full, complete presentation and realization of Christ. And he says, "Listen. I can't tell you anymore about Christ because you haven't acted on what I've already told you. You're still faltering back and forth." They'd seen the glorious mansion that God had built for them in the person of Christ, but they were vacillating.

Or you know you could better explain it the way Jesus said. In the words of Jesus, what did He say? "You can't put new wine into old wineskins." That's exactly the concept here. You can't embrace Jesus and the New Covenant and then go back into the Old Covenant, and then try to live it out and fit Jesus in there. He blows the things to bits. That's why the author of Hebrews say, "You've got to leave that old system, and you have to embrace Jesus Christ as He is presented in the New Covenant, the Christ of the New Covenant." You see the problem was, these people, they had become dull of hearing because they had not fully and decisively come to Christ. And until they do, the author of Hebrews is in essence, saying, "Anymore teaching, anymore revelation, it's not going to do you any good, because you haven't acted on what you've heard. You have heard good news and it has thrilled your heart, but you haven't acted upon it. And the more you sit under the good news, the less impressed you become. Your ears become dull, and I'm not going any farther," the author of Hebrews says.

I think there are some tremendous applications here for us. First of all, I think the church has fallen into much of the same trap today. We have services that are designed for the "unchurched." And we get these people into the church and what do we do? We give them all kinds of biblical principles for successful marriages, for successful families, for successful lives. People come to Christian counselors because they wanted them to fix their problems, when really the most basic problem is, they have never been presented fully and totally with the claims of Jesus Christ. They've never been brought to conviction of their sins, they've never been brought to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. They've never been changed, they've never been renewed. But what do we do? Instead of stopping there like the author of Hebrews is, we just keep piling up more and, "Let me give you this," and just try to polish the ship, even though the ship's sinking. The brass on the ship, but it's going down.

We need to be more like the author of Hebrews and present Christ and the gospel, and if you don't come to Christ and the gospel, I don't have anything else for you. I can't help you. It would be prostituting to give you more biblical principles to make your life better.

There is also application because I believe there are many in the church, very much like the Hebrews. They've grown up with the gospel, and by and large have accepted it, sort of, kind of. But they are faltering. "I believe in Jesus, but I really like the world." They go back and forth.

There has not been a whole-hearted embracing of Jesus Christ and a repentance from sin. They're faltering back and forth, back and forth. And I tell you the warning is this; the more you falter, the more dull you become in your hearing. The less impressed you become with the gospel, and you are the candidate of the worst, most dangerous, difficult text in all of Scripture of coming to a point where it is impossible to restore you again to repentance because you fall away. Man that's dangerous.

I know that there are people who have made professions of faith in Christ, but they won't get baptized. What's that mean? "Oh I'll come to Christ, but I'm too embarrassed. I don't to be baptized." What? How can you, how can you, that's exactly the mindset of the Hebrews. They're vacillating back... "yeah, I commit to Jesus Christ, sort of. I'll take the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, but I'm not so sure about discipleship. I don't think I'm going to make Him Lord." That's insane. Jesus Christ demands our total allegiance. And I trust that you, you will embrace Him today. Let's pray together.

*Father I believe that this is a very clear passage of Scripture, and that we are the ones that have complicated it. But the teaching is very clear. Leave those elementary doctrines that foreshadowed Christ. Leave those pictures and ceremonies and rituals that helped us to understand Christ, and leave them because Christ has come. And now in the person of Christ we receive Him, and we are made complete and mature in Him. The gospel isn't for babes in Christ, it makes us mature in our Christian faith. Father I pray that we will understand this. I pray that they'll be no generic faith in God here. That we won't have to lay again the foundation of a meritorious works-oriented righteousness. Do we have to lay that foundation again? Are you going to try to work your way to heaven, or are you going to repent of your sins and believe in Christ? And if you're going to do it, do it, and do it wholly and totally. Grab hold of Him, all or nothing. Father I don't want us to be dull of hearing, but there comes a point to some, they've heard good news preached again and again and again, and it really doesn't mean anything, and they are the very people that these next verses talk about. If they fall away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance. It is a judicial sentence on the part of God where He says, "That's enough. No more." That's a scary place to be. Thank You for Your word. May it build us up in this most holy faith. For it's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

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