

## Lesson Nine

(5:11 — 6:10)

### THE MATURING DISCIPLE

<sup>11</sup>About this we have much to say which is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. <sup>12</sup>For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need some one to teach you again the first principles of God's word. You need milk, not solid food; <sup>13</sup>for every one who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a child. <sup>14</sup>But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil.

**6** Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, <sup>2</sup>with instruction about ablutions, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. <sup>3</sup>And this we will do if God permits. <sup>4</sup>For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup>and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, <sup>6</sup>if they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on

their own account and hold him up to contempt. <sup>7</sup>For land which has drunk the rain that often falls upon it, and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. <sup>8</sup>But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed; its end is to be burned.

<sup>9</sup>Though we speak thus, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things that belong to salvation. <sup>10</sup>For God is not so unjust as to overlook your work and the love which you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do.

Christianity is always practical — it is not “pie in the sky” by any means. While it offers hope for the hereafter through the eternal salvation, 5:9, the here and now is never out of sight. In fact, oftentimes when the future life is discussed, immediate application is made for the life that now is. Note II Corinthians 4:16 — 5:10, then read 5:11.

So it is with our book — while we have been presented with the glories of a great high priest and all that he means, yet there is application for the present. Like Paul, every Christian needs to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ (with the promise of being with God forever), but at the same time buffet one's body so that the life now lived will be pleasing to him “with whom we have to do.”

The immediate text is not concerned with the basic theme of the book but rather with the first readers of the book. Their spiritual condition, as a group, was known to the author and left much to be desired. They needed to be farther along the pilgrimage of life than they were. *As a lesson for us, while no one is perfect, all ought to be making progress in that direction.* If not, a rebuke is in order, such as is in 5:11-14, and encouragement, as in 6:9-20.

5:11 — **hard to explain** — The importance of the subject, coupled with its difficulty, meant that the reader needed to be in “top form” to get all that was available. The deplorable condition of the first auditors was not going to be conducive to such a discussion; hence, the subject would be difficult to interpret to them.

V. 12 — **by this time** — They had become something God never meant them to become: dull (sluggish, slow) of hearing. Their pilgrimage from the mind of the flesh to the mind of Christ had ceased, and regression was taking place. The warning flag was up because of their drifting.

Every generation of Christians must learn the same lesson: grow up. Many times the admonition found in II Peter 3:18, “Grow in grace and knowledge” is found in scripture in one form or another.

**teachers** — If Christianity is to continue, every one must teach. Moreover, since Christianity is not an inherited religion or any such thing,

## TWENTY-SIX LESSONS ON HEBREWS

but rather a system that must be heard and accepted personally, it is imperative that people hear if they are to be saved. So, all must be taught; all must teach.

**first principles** — Defined in 6:1ff.

**milk** — What this term means is not explained. See I Peter 2:2 for a similar expression. Paul has this idea in I Corinthians 3:1-3. Evidently he found the Corinthians like these people were.

V. 13 — **unskilled** — The better state for every Christian is that in II Timothy 2:15, the ability to rightly handle God's word. If those who were to receive this letter would have been "up to par," they would have been aware of the infinite betterness of the covenant based upon Jesus, and would not have needed such exhortation.

**word of righteousness** — This term probably means the whole of God's revelation that they had, and including the knowledge of the first principle.

V. 14 — **solid food** — Not the milk, but such as is found in this book. In fact, the writer just goes right on and develops the intended theme, even though his hearers are not all they could be.

**mature** — The same basic word (*τέλειος*) as in 5:9 ("perfect").

**faculties** — Refers to the "us" that thinks, the inner person that directs our body. It is found in Luke 9:45 in reference to the apostles who did not perceive what Jesus had said.

**trained** — Exercised (as in a gym) to be discerning students and good teachers of God's Word, not the inexperienced and untested (unskilled, v. 13). It takes time and effort to be the Bible student one ought to be. The task is great enough that most are unwilling — more's the pity!

6:1 — **let us leave . . . go on** — Growth is not optional for the disciple who is to be a learner. The disciple needs to be so interested in the things of God that he will be carried along from one stage of growth to another.

**not laying again** — The six things that comprised the foundation, the beginning point, are listed next. Each of them represent an important aspect of doctrine even for us today as well as for those long ago.

**repentance . . . faith** — These were preached by Jesus and by the apostles to everyone. They are always foundational, yet are also to characterize the maturing disciple who must maintain faith and repentance until death. Repentance is essentially a change of mind. As the pilgrim leaves the mind of the flesh and proceeds to the mind of Christ, he will be constantly changing his mind. Repentance, then, is implicit in all the N.T. books — "Read, believe, obey" = repentance. The fruit of repentance is the changing life.

V. 2 — **ablutions** — Some translate baptisms (immersion). The idea is always brought up because the Christian religion has the act of immersion

at the start. Many other religions have some form of washing. The Jewish religion had the washing of the priests, and other rites involving water. Hence, part of the foundation for any Christian beginning is this point.

**laying on of hands** — Some religions then, including Judaism, had this as one aspect of the cleansing of sin (like the confessing of sins in the Old Covenant, Leviticus 16:20-22; or of priest's dedication, Leviticus 8). The Christian religion doesn't have such usage in some respects, but laying on of hands did play an important part in some phases of the early church life, Acts 6:6; 13:1ff; also Matthew 19:13; Mark 7:32.

**resurrection . . . judgment** — Like faith and repentance, these form the major areas of concern for Christians. The idea of a resurrected Christ who passed through the heaven and took his place at God's right hand, after living among men and dying for men, is the cornerstone of the system. Christians are never allowed to live except in light of the judgment. Certainly the concept of a final judgment was part and parcel of all the early preaching (cf. Acts 17:30-31), and is to be seen throughout the New Testament.

In all of these principles we can see their application to the situation then present, and for any Christian at any time. Faith and repentance are all-inclusive, while the remaining four were/are definite areas which need instruction — and all at an early stage in Christian growth.

V. 3 — **This we will do** — That is, the author is going to take his first readers right on from where they are unless God intervenes. As a Christian, one ought always to make plans in the light of God's will (James 4:15ff.).

V. 4 — **It is impossible** — Several problems attend this section. One of them is of a theological nature, involving those who do not believe that a Christian can be lost. Since that position is not held by the author of the Hebrew epistle, it is superfluous to comment about it. A second problem relates to the linear arrangement of vv. 4-6. A more readily understood arrangement would be to place the "if" clause first, and then follow with the rest. So: "If they (as described in vv. 4, 5) commit apostasy, it is impossible to restore them to repentance."

With this done, however, additional problems remain, such as 1) what does it mean to commit apostasy, and 2) why is there an impossibility? Many different answers are given. We suggest the following in a brief statement: the text has in view people who are Christians (no other position makes much sense in the context of Hebrews). To commit apostasy (to fall away, as in 3:12) means to leave Christ, to cease being sanctified by him, united with him. The "impossibility idea" is present because such a state is a deliberate act of the will, whether it was reflected in drifting away or more sudden action. Unless said person can be persuaded to renew his commitment to Jesus, it is not possible to produce repentance, since repentance is a change of mind. As is clear by the continued action

## TWENTY-SIX LESSONS ON HEBREWS

indicated by the "crucifying," etc. in v. 6, said person has had no change of mind. Thus it stands. (The same basic position is considered in 10:26-31.)

V. 4 — **enlightened** — To be made knowledgeable, acquainted with, in this case, Christ and Christianity.

**tasted . . . heavenly gift** — As in 2:9, to participate in, share or enjoy. The "heavenly gift" can be salvation, or Jesus, or the Holy Spirit — it makes no essential difference, though salvation is most likely, since the next phrase involves the Holy Spirit.

**partakers** — The same word as in 2:14 and 3:14, to have as a possession, such as is taught in Romans 8:9, II Corinthians 1:22.

V. 5 — **goodness . . . power** — Descriptive of the enjoyment that is through being the people of God. The scriptures teach that there are blessings here as well as salvation ready to be revealed at the last day, I Peter 1:5, the coming age.

V. 6 — **crucify . . . hold up** — Both the Greek terms are present participles, indicative of continued states. Hence, the person so doing has decided to leave Christianity, and is maintaining that state. As such, no change is possible.

Jesus died to make it possible for (all) men to be saved from sin, to be reconciled to God, to enjoy what God has prepared. To reject Christ is to be disobedient and, in effect, reject all that Jesus did. While we may not completely understand all the terms involved, the total picture is clear enough. The text in 10:26 picks up the identical point, and brings the sad fact to light that Jesus died in vain, insofar as the apostates are concerned. Furthermore, since no other sacrifice is planned or possible, unless the condition is changed, said person(s) is doomed to eternal hell. A good parallel text here is Romans 11:17-24. This text has in view Jewish people who were once "in the tree" (i.e., faithful) but who became unfaithful (it was not "once in the tree, always in the tree"). God declared that they could be placed back in the tree if they became believers again. There is no reason to suppose that the same sort of treatment would not be accorded to any person. In fact, there is no New Testament text that depicts people, in this life and prior to death/judgment, standing and pleading with God but receiving a "no" answer. Instead, the converse is true: God is not willing that any should perish, II Peter 3:9.

V. 7 — **land** — In some respects, land and people are alike: both can produce fruit in accordance with their own nature. Romans 6:20 — 7:5 teaches that every person produces fruit, whether the fruit be good or bad, and by said fruit judgment is to be meted out, Matthew 25:31ff.; II Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:11-15. Unlike land, which is non-human, people can decide what they will produce in a general sense. Land, of course, can only bear what is planted there, and can not improve its character, etc. So there are similarities and differences.

**a blessing** — The end product determines the reward given, and is evident in v. 8, which is the point of the illustration. Applied to our text and those who were to first read it, the point is clear: if you go on and mature, then God will bless; if you fall away, like the Israelites did in the wilderness, God will curse.

V. 9 — **beloved** — The previous word used has been “brethren.” Now, it is “beloved”; probably because of the immediate text with its subdued but explicit criticism.

**better things** — While in need of improvement, yet the recipients are still among those saved and being sanctified. (Note 10:9.) Hence, there is hope and challenge.

V. 10 — **God is not . . . unjust** — This fact is one of the major factors upon which the Christian builds: God can always be counted on to be just, for he is that. He may also be merciful, but he is always just. (The Greek word is a form of *δικαιος*, which is also translated as righteous, depending upon the individual context.)

**work . . . love** — They, as those in Thessalonica (I Thess. 1:3) were characterized by faith, hope and love, and which things God, who sees all, 4:12-13, will reward with blessings.

**you still do** — They had done these things (as is manifest by their own lives and in the lives of others, 10:32ff.) and yet were. They were now doing as well as having done. They needed to keep on.

The Greek term translated “serving” and which also lies behind “still do” is the familiar word *διάκονος*, commonly transliterated as “deacon.” The New Testament concept is that of someone serving, whether that person be man or woman, or whatever the task. That is its general use. It is also used specifically as in I Timothy 3 in regard to certain people specially chosen for some designated task.

V. 11 — The plea is for all the readers to maintain and even to increase their fruit for God, and to press on until the stature of Jesus is attained. The end result is spelled out in v. 12.

V. 12 — **sluggish** — The word was in 5:10, indicating a non-desirable state that must be remedied or avoided.

**imitators** — not those of Israel mentioned in 3:7ff., but those of Israel mentioned in chapter 11.

**patience** — The Greek word *μακροθυμία* indicates a quality of character that does not return evil for evil, is the opposite of anger and despondency, and reflects in a continued hope. In this case, as vv. 13-20 will show, the hope that comes is based upon the promises of God, which are as certain as God himself.

## TWENTY-SIX LESSONS ON HEBREWS

### QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 9:

76. How does this section fit in with the discussion of Jesus and Melchizedek?
77. Does lack of progress in the Christian life make it hard to understand things, or to have things explained? (Have you ever thought that the teacher was a poor instructor, being unable to explain something for you? If so, who was to blame?)
78. Is lack of Christian growth a problem in every generation?
79. What happens if one generation of Christians does not teach?
80. Are faith and repentance good starting points for anyone anytime? (Note Acts 20:21.)
81. Have you had any problem with immersion in your life?
82. Do you live as if Jesus were a resurrected Lord, and the coming judge of all?
83. Name some problems in the exegesis of vv. 4-6.
84. What parallel text might help to understand how a person might believe, then cease to do so, and yet have the possibility of coming to faith again?
85. Does God "forget" what one has done, be it good or bad?
86. How is land like a person? Unlike?
87. The point of the illustration in vv. 7-8 is what?
88. What encouraging observations were made in vv. 9-10 about the first readers?
89. How long would they need to show that same earnestness to realize the full assurance of hope?
90. What would said earnestness prevent in their life?
91. Which group of Israelites were the readers to mimic?