

~Other Speakers S-Z: David Servant:

We gather from the last four verses of chapter 5 that the author of Hebrews was not pleased with the slow spiritual progress of most of his readers. They had become "dull of hearing" and should have been teachers by that time, but they had need for someone to teach them again "the elementary principles of the oracles of God" (5:11-12). Six of those "elementary principles" he lists, the first of which are "repentance from dead works" and "faith toward God" (6:1). How tragic it is that many evangelical ministers today are lacking understanding of these most basic of the "elementary teachings about the Christ" (6:1), having redefined faith so that works are not a component and having removed repentance from the gospel. "Dead works," by the way, are religious works that do not stem from a living faith in Christ, but instead from ingrained tradition.

"Instruction about washings" could be translated "instruction about baptisms," of which the New Testament speaks of three: the believer's baptism into the body of Christ, baptism by immersion in water, and baptism in the Holy Spirit.

By means of the "laying on of hands," another "elementary principle," healing power or an anointing of the Holy Spirit is transferred or bestowed (Matt. 19:13-15; Mark 5:23; 8:23; 10:16; 16:18; Luke 4:40; Acts 8:17-18; 9:12-17; 1 Tim. 4:14; 5:22; 2 Tim. 1:6). The baptism in the Holy Spirit is often administered through laying on of hands.

"The resurrection of the dead" refers to the foundational truth that every person, righteous and unrighteous, will one day be bodily-resurrected.

Finally, "eternal judgment" is the fundamental Christian belief that all persons will stand before God, and the results of each person's judgment will be eternal, something that seems to be rarely mentioned from many pulpits these days.

Taken at face value, 6:4-8 proves once again that it is possible for saved people to forfeit their salvation, which was, of course, one of the primary concerns of the author of Hebrews for his contemporary readers. It is in fact impossible, he wrote, for believers who have fallen away from the faith and who fit the five criteria listed in these verses to regain what they lost.

One who cannot regain the salvation that he lost first must be "enlightened" (6:4), which means he recognized his sinful condition and need for a Savior. Second, he must have "tasted of the heavenly gift" (6:4), that is, received the gift of eternal life. Third, he must have been born of and baptized in the Holy Spirit. Fourth, he must have "tasted the good word of God" (6:5), indicating more than just a beginner's understanding of God's Word. He grew beyond the "milk stage" into the "meat stage," no longer a baby Christian. Fifth, he must have tasted "the powers of the age to come" (6:5). That must mean that he had some experience with the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

If a person has reached that level in his Christian walk and then falls away, "it is impossible to renew [him] again to repentance" (6:6). He's compared to ground that was formerly fruitful but which now produces only thorns and thistles, reminding us of one of the soils in Jesus' well-known parable by the same name. Such a backslider, in effect, re-crucifies Christ and thus inherits a curse which will result in hellfire (6:6-8). It is incredible that any commentator would claim that those five criteria can be met by a person who is only considering becoming a Christian, yet many do in order to protect the false doctrine of unconditional eternal security.

Clearly, the author of this letter wanted to prevent the Hebrew Christians from the consequences of falling away from Christ. Their love for the saints, manifested in practical ways, proved their current genuine faith, and provided assurance of their salvation (6:9-12). Yet ultimate salvation was not "in the bag." It is through faith and patience that we ultimately inherit what God has promised us, as proven by Abraham, whose patient faith ultimately paid off. Similarly, our faith will be rewarded if we persevere. It is impossible for God to lie, and His promise is an anchor for our souls (6:18-19)!