

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Lesson # 14 Dull of Hearing Milk Drinkers Sept. 10, 2017

Hebrews 5:11-6:3

Introduction

In lesson 5, in the introduction, I mentioned that all 5 of the warning passages in Hebrews pick up on a similar theme, and that theme can be identified. Although I mention this reference here, below I will add a bit more detail. All of the warning passages in Hebrews reflect the same 4 components: (1) a warning, (2) the hearers lest they, (3) sin by forsaking Jesus Christ, and (4) fall subject to the dreadful consequences of apostasy. The 5 warning passages ascend in strength and urgency, note;

- (1) Hebrews 2:1-4: Lest we drift away and not escape God's judgment.
- (2) Hebrews 3:1-4:13: Lest we harden our hearts and fail to enter God's rest.
- (3) Hebrews 5:11-6:12: Lest we fall away and not be able to repent.
- (4) Hebrews 10:19-39: Lest we sin willfully and be consumed by God.
- (5) Hebrews 12:12-29: Lest we refuse to hear and be punished.ⁱ

The warning passage we are now engaged in studying (the third one) falls in the middle of the 5, and is the most controversial of the 5, and perhaps, in a practical way, the toughest one of the 5 to decipher. As is almost always the case, asking the wrong question of the text can lead to a misunderstanding of what the text is about, and that is especially germane when we look at the warning passages, especially this one.

The question(s) we should be asking here are:

- (1) What purpose or objective does the warning passage serve?
- (2) What was the author's intention?
- (3) In other words, to what end was this passage penned?ⁱⁱ

This is important, because asking the wrong questions can bias the interpretation.

Most reformed theologians will fall on the "tests-of-genuineness approachⁱⁱⁱ or the "hypothetical-loss-of-salvation" view^{iv}. A lot of very good men stand on one or the other of these positions. Many of them were mentioned in Lesson 4, men like John Calvin, Wayne Grudem. John Owen, Roger Nicole, John MacArthur, etc.

In Schreiner & Caneday's book, they share the following;

"Because Grudem [Wayne] asks, "Were these people really saved in the first place?" he redirects the orientation of the passages from prospective warnings to retrospective characterizations of certain people whom the author of Hebrews singles out and addresses. Therefore, for [John] Owen, [Roger] Nicole and Grudem, the warnings have two retrospective functions. First, the warnings call on readers to examine whether their conversion is genuine. Second, the warnings tell the readers that apostasy will reveal that they were never genuine Christians. We believe that both of these themes are found in the NT. However, we do not believe that this properly explains the warnings in Hebrews, which

are prospective: if you apostatize, then you will not inherit the promised salvation. It is a case of correct theology from the wrong text.

The root problem with Grudem's interpretation of the warnings in Hebrews is that he fails to acknowledge that salvation, according to Hebrews, is fundamentally future oriented as [Scot] McKnight correctly demonstrates (cf. Heb. 1:14; 2:3,10; 5:9; 9:28)."^v

In his massive and extremely helpful "New Testament Theology", Schreiner, in the following lengthy but important citation, helps to elucidate his position,

"A few have maintained that believers are addressed in these verses, but that the punishment threatened relates to a loss of rewards and not to eschatological destruction. I have argued above that the threats are of such a nature that the punishment described cannot be limited to loss of rewards. Still others, as we noted previously, argue that those who are warned are "almost Christians." Hence, those who fall away were not genuine believers but only appeared to be Christians. The problem, with this view, as is often noted, is that there is no evidence, as we have seen, that the readers are described as "almost Christians." We cannot segregate the warnings in Heb. 6 from the rest of the letter, and elsewhere the readers certainly are addressed as believers.

I suggest a different answer to the controversy. The author of Hebrews writes to warn those in the church not to fall away. His purpose is not to answer the question, "Were those who have fallen away genuine Christians?" He does not look back retrospectively and assess the state of those who have departed from the Christian faith. The intent of the letter is quite different. The author addresses those in the church who were tempted to revert to Judaism in order to avoid discrimination and persecution. He does not cast a glance backward, contemplate the state of those who have lapsed, and ask whether they were ever genuine believers. He is walking forward, urging his readers to adhere to the gospel and continue in the faith until the return of Jesus Christ. The warnings are prospective, designed to prevent the readers from drifting away from the gospel they embraced. Certainly, the author hopes that his warnings will function as one of the means by which the readers will be impeded from apostasy. The author does not say that any of his readers have actually committed apostasy. He writes so that they will not turn away from the good news that they initially believed. We misread Hebrews when we ask the question, "Can genuine believers apostatize?" Asking the wrong question can frame the discussion so that a wrong perspective on what the author says is given. The author does not specifically address the question on whether Christians are capable of committing apostasy; rather he writes stern warnings so that they will avoid apostasy. But surely, one could object, the writer was aware of those who had departed from the Christian faith. Under the old covenant he mentions Israel in the wilderness (Heb. 3:7-4:13) and the defection of Esau (Heb.12:16-17). There is no doubt that the writer was familiar with some who had departed from the Christian faith. However, the point here is that he does not address that question specifically. There are some indications that believers have a certain hope that is irrevocable (e.g., Heb. 6:13-20; 10:14). The author functions as pastor, warning his readers not to depart from Jesus Christ and the atonement that he has provided. But he is also optimistic that his warnings will succeed (Heb. 6:9-12), for he also knows that God's promises are sure, like an anchor, providing a hope that reaches inside

the veil (Heb. 6:13-20). Hence, it seems that he believes that the warnings will actually be a means by which his readers will persevere and be assured of their salvation.”^{vi}

In the warning passages, this one included, God gets our attention to comprehend how He preserves His own people through warnings, admonitions and conditional promises. If we persevere to the end we will be saved; but if we fail to persevere, we will perish in the end.

This warning passage is not a separate or different sort from the others. It addresses the whole church, including the author so that its functions in the same way as the other 4. We will look at perhaps the most controversial verses in this passage (6:4-6), as we proceed (next lesson), but by way of introduction, Schreiner again comments, “God’s wrath is reserved for those who deny the gospel of Christ, for they no longer rely on the death of Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins. There is no atonement for sin for those who turn aside from the only basis for atonement. The call to persevere, as the whole of Hebrews clarifies, is a call to faith. Those who endure to the end put their faith in the death of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. They profess that their only hope on the day of judgment is the purification accomplished by Christ as the Melchizedekian priest. Only those who continue to trust God in the future by remaining within the Christian church reveal that they have found in Jesus Christ final forgiveness of sins.”^{vii}

You Have Become Dull of Hearing

Heb. 5:11-14

When the author says, “*About this we have much to say*”, the “*this*” is information regarding Jesus as High Priest in the order of Melchizedek and His superiority over Aaron and the Levite order of priests. However, before he does that, and He will (cf. chapters 7-10), he decides to warn and assure the readers to arouse and encourage them. In this warning passage, he shames them (5:11-16:3), warns them (6:4-8), and encourages them (6:13-20). Hebrews 6:9-12 is transitory, where the readers are consoled and also exhorted to persevere until the end and the section (vv. 13-20) closes with the assurance of God’s promises for all who take refuge in Jesus Christ.^{viii}

What the author wants to say is hard to say, but as deep as what he will say is, it is not difficult because of the recipients’ lack of intellect. The problem of reception of this teaching is anticipated as a result of spiritual dullness (NET – sluggish; ESV – dull; HCSB – lazy). The same word is used in 6:12 to form a sort of set of bookends for the section. The problem the author faces is a moral one rather than a cognitive one.

In v. 12, the word “*for*” means that an explanatory verse follows – explaining how sluggish many of the hearers were. They had been Christians (yes – these are believers being addressed) long enough that, had they diligently studied and learned, they could be teachers, however, the author uses the analogy of a baby – they are still on milk, and are not prepared to eat solid food yet. This means they were stuck on the basics and had no concept of the depth of God’s Word. Note Paul’s comments to the church at Corinth in I Cor. 3:1-2.

Really, though, the author would not expect all of them to actually be teachers or pastors, but their level of knowledge should have placed them in a camp where they were able to share with & lead others in the elements of the gospel, so that at the very least, they could be evangelists.

But they were in need of someone to teach them the basic or elementary principles of God's Word. What are the elementary or basic teachings the author has in mind? It is quite likely that what he writes in vv. 1-2 in chapter 6 is the answer to that question, and we will look at that soon.

Specifically (v. 13) the one who 'lives on milk' (i.e., majors on the basics) is "*unskilled in the word of righteousness*". They should have progressed beyond that youthful stage of early belief, and what this is probably a reference to is a theological deficiency regarding Christ as our righteousness. Paul uses the lack of this theological quality to illustrate the main problem of the Jews who had rejected Christ (cf. Rom. 10:1-4). Perhaps these converted Jews who were in danger of reverting back to Judaism were struggling with this basic but critical aspect of Christian faith. Note also verses like: Phil. 3:7-9; Titus 2:5; Gal. 2:15-16; Rom. 3:21-26; I Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21.

Hughes says, "It is on this foundation that the whole structure of the Christian faith is erected, and it is precisely this foundation which the Hebrew readers are in danger of despising and abandoning."^x To act this way exhibits that such a person is a child, or childish in their faith. That is expected of new believers, but not of those who have been believers for years, and it seems to be the case that this is who the author is addressing here.

If milk is the choice of sustenance for infants, then those who are mature eat solid food. Verse 14 is an interesting verse because no one but Jesus has ever achieved a perfect level of maturity or perfection. But believers are to strive for this, to 'have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.'

Hughes makes this comment;

"Perfection is, indeed, the goal toward which the Christian should always be advancing, as our author is about to emphasize (6:1; cf. 12:1f; MT 5:48), but which he will not attain until the appearance of the glorified Redeemer at the end of the age, when, seeing him as he is, the believer will at last be fully conformed to the likeness of the Lord (I JN 3:2). Meanwhile the Christian's maturity is relative – relative in terms of the degree to which he has advanced from his spiritual infancy on the journey to the perfection of Christ-likeness (cf. II Cor. 3:18). Hence Paul's declaration: "I have not yet reached perfection, but I press on, hoping to take hold that for which Christ once took hold of me" (Phil. 3:12 NEB). The criterion or canon, of maturity is always the fullness of the perfection of Christ (Eph. 4:13). Those who are not being nourished and strengthened by the solid food of sound doctrine are no better than spiritual infants in danger of never reaching Christian manhood: their great need is to grow up into Christ (Eph. 4:15)."^x

How are one's powers of discernment trained? By constant practise of how to distinguish good from evil? Of course, immediately, we have to say that the main tool to accomplish this is God's Word (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Frequent reading, studying, asking questions of the text, comparing Scripture to Scripture, then applying it to our lives is the way to mature. Psalm 119, for example, all 176 verses of it, is an immense treasury of wisdom regarding God's Word, as virtually every verse tells us something worth exalting God's Word to us. For example, Ps. 119:1-8, 9-11, 34-37, 67-72, 89-93, 127-128, 133, 173-176.

Our discernment is sharpened by constant decision-making based on the counsel of the Bible, and also based on our experience of outcomes as a result of some bad decisions too. John Brown, considered by many, to have written one of the best commentaries on Hebrews, said this:

“The spiritually mature man is a person, who, by the use of his faculties, under the influence of the Divine Spirit, in the study of divine truth, can examine doctrines, make a distinction between the things that differ, “refuse the evil and choose the good;” and from this habit this acquired he is qualified for entering, with pleasure and advantage to himself, on the study of every part of the Christian economy.”^{xi}

Because of their immaturity in the Christian faith, some of these people were in danger of stepping into apostasy. Since they were not advancing in their belief and in doctrine, they were stagnant, and not able to move forward. If they remained in that state, it is always easier to return to where you came from because it is familiar, and to drop out or fall away, and thus, the warning that comes to fruition in chapter 6 is urgent. Life and death are at stake.

The Foundation is Laid

Heb. 6:1-3

John Brown, writing in 1862, comments on the word “Therefore”, making a very interesting observation. This word usually has a retrospective (looking backwards) reference, but the statement of vv. 1-2 seem to demand that we instead look at it prospectively. It can have that meaning. Brown's argument is that it is strange to argue, as the author does back in Heb. 5:12, “*You need milk, not solid food.*” “Therefore, I will not give it to you.” “You are not capable (v. 14) of eating solid food, therefore I will give it to you.” You have need of someone to teach you the basic principles of (v. 12) the oracles of God, therefore, let's leave those principles. You require elementary instruction, therefore let us at once begin to ponder deep Christian mysteries.”^{xii}

He says that some connect “therefore” here with v. 14, “But solid food is for the mature...” that is what I will feed you. Others make the connection back to v. 12, “For by this time you ought to be teachers,,,” so, setting aside the way one would instruct novices, we will teach in a style more geared to those who have some maturity. However plausible these 2 ideas may be, Brown is convinced there is a more satisfactory interpretation.

That comes about in the prospective view of the word “therefore”. The writer realises that many had already sunk into an apathetic state of spiritual lethargy, so he decides to teach deeper things of Christ as that those disposed to and capable of benefitting from this instruction would do so regarding Melchizedek and Christ.^{xiii}

However, having given Brown the benefit of the doubt, I am not sure he is entirely correct. This seems to be saying the very thing he states it cannot say – that the author knows they need milk, but won't supply it because of their (many of them) ignorance and spiritual apathy. Only those who were mature already would get the deeper instruction, and the rest can fall away, or, in essence, that is what it seems he is saying. That does not fit our view of this or any of the warning passages. The point of the warning passage is to warn people not to depart from Christ, not to say that they had already done so. Note Heb. 6:9f. He feels sure that the situation he described in 5:11-14 is not the case for all of them, and he is not willing to let them fall completely away, so in some great sense, the Holy Spirit leads him to provide the warning and then to lay out for them a three-plus chapter masterpiece picture of Jesus' superiority as our High Priest.

I agree with Schreiner, “Progressing on to maturity should not be understood as the goal of elite Christians who are particularly godly. All believers must pursue maturity to avoid apostasy...the author realises that the readers will only progress if God permits [6:3]. Human beings are responsible for spiritual growth, but such growth ultimately comes from God Himself.”^{xiv} - note Phil. 2:12-13; II Peter 1:3-13.

When he says, “*leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity*”, he simply means ‘don't focus on the basics’. If the hearers are saved, they know the basics, so they need to move forward or risk falling into apostasy – the corollary is in Heb. 4:16.

I did run across something I believe resonates with the author's concern here, from the responses of John MacArthur to a couple of questions in an interesting book – “Preaching With Power”. Note what he says, with regard to questions about his study Bible which had just been published;

Preaching Magazine's Question - November December issue 1998

“As a preacher, an expositor, what kind of unique perspective does that give you as you are going into a project like this?”

Answer: “I didn't want to be superficial. I just really wanted to clarify the meaning of the text and the flow of the book. I was thinking more of not just a practical application, but of understanding its applicability. I stopped short in writing a study Bible of application. But I hope I got at least to the point of comprehension and understanding so the person says, “I understand what this is saying. I understand what that means.” Not only in the individual sense of this text, but by cross-referencing footnotes. I can see it in the bigger context and the bigger picture.”^{xv}

Preaching Magazine's Question:

“What do you actually carry into the pulpit with you when you are going to preach?”

Answer: “Of course, my Bible, and inserted in my Bible I carry some sheets of paper that will be about the size of my Bible page. Depending on my familiarity with the material and the structure of all that, I can have anywhere from three or four pages up to ten of those. And they would just be my own handwritten notes. I mark them up in a certain way to draw attention to them, and I don't have to refer to them except maybe to quote a Scripture or read a quote – just to sort of locate myself so I don't go off somewhere and can't find my way back . I don't memorize my sermons. I'm not particularly interested in preaching without notes. Preaching long sermons for many years in the same place demands that you say things in a new way – that you stay fresh – and it's very important to craft things. I'm not a great orator by any means, but I don't want to say things that sound so familiar.

Familiarity breeds contempt. You are teaching the same truths over a long period of time again and again. You have to be aware of forgetfulness – they do forget – but you also have to be aware of familiarity. You can't keep repeating things in the same way. Certainly the Scriptures do this. There are great truths repeated in Scripture in many places but with insights and illustrations and analogies that are new all the time. You sort of work that out; at least I do.”^{xvi}

Now, you may be thinking – “Why on earth did he just quote those things?” Here's my reasoning. These help illustrate the author of Hebrews' point. You don't just keep hammering on the basics. You must present the truth in all its glory, to help pull back the veil of mystery and bring the glory of Jesus Christ into full view. That means you deal with the basic materials in fresh ways, and you deal with the more difficult doctrines in ways that will help your readers grasp the depth of God's Word beyond the basics. That's what the writer is saying here in v. 1.

The writer is not saying by “*Let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ*”, that we are to abandon it. He means that, using the elementary things as a platform or foundation (much as the A-B-C's and basic grammar are a platform for higher language skills) to build on, we are to move on to deeper truth, to an understanding (in this case) why Jesus is superior to all the things mentioned thus far in this letter, and now why we need a High Priest and how He perfectly fulfills that critical role, and by the way, is superior to every other high priest who has ever lived, as well as the OT Levitical Priesthood. And also, why to know that, and then to ignore or reject it as critical would result in apostasy! The beginning – the A-B-C's so to speak, are not the place to stop learning, they are the springboard to achievement.^{xvii}

The writer breaks down the 6 components of the fundamentals into 3 pairs:

- (1) Repentance from dead works & faith toward God
- (2) Washings and laying on of hands
- (3) Resurrection and eternal judgment

1. Repentance from dead works and faith

There is no question that repentance is a primary element of our salvation. Hughes captures this very concisely;

“The call to repentance was clearly sounded also by Christ, who warned his hearers that if they did not repent they would all perish (LK 13:3ff); and it was a constant ingredient in the evangelistic exhortation of the apostles (cf. Acts 2:38; 3:19; 20:21; 26:20). Repentance is the changing of one’s mind and attitude, the reversal of one’s position, displayed in the renunciation of self-adequacy and in turning to God in sorrow for sinfully robbing him of the glory which is due to him alone. This is the first step on the road which leads the sinner back home to the Father. It is the moment when he “comes to himself” (LK 15:17), and in so doing turns away from the course he has pursued to this point. Thus, the author speaks of *repentance from*, and specifies that from which the repentant man turns as “*dead works*”^{xviii}.

And although repentance is foundational, we recognise that we need to repent continually throughout our lives, or risk going to the edge of that precipice that Spurgeon warned about in an earlier quotation. Note: Rev. 2:5,16,21; 3:3. Repentance, or the inability to repent is a large component in chapter 6:4-6 in this warning passage.

The idea of ‘*dead works*’ is simply a reference to the general teaching of Scripture about the state of the unsaved person and his / her activities. Before repentance and faith are exercised, Eph. 2:1,5; Col. 2:13 tell us that we are dead in our sins, and thus, everything we do in that state, except for coming to Christ, is a dead work in God’s eyes. The works of the flesh are evident: Gal. 5:19-21. (cf. James 1:14-15)

This is followed by the reverse of that – “*faith toward God*”. If repentance can be defined – as it is in the quote above – as turning away from dead works, then faith is to turn towards God for newness of life in Christ. Paul’s proclamation, wherever he went (once he’d been saved) to Jews and Gentiles alike was “*that they should repent and turn to God and perform deeds worthy of repentance*” (Acts 26:20; 20:21). Faith always presupposes repentance will accompany it. Both are lifelong elements of being a Christian, as Paul Washer explains,

“The writer of Hebrews identifies “faith toward God” as part of the ‘elementary’ teachings about Christ (6:1). At first glance, one might think that he is classifying saving faith among the more rudimentary doctrines of the Christian faith. However, this is not the case. The word, ‘*elementary*’ is translated from the Greek *arche* which means beginning, origin, or the first in a series. Thus, the idea being conveyed is that saving faith is among the primary and foundational doctrines of Christianity. Although it may rightly be called the beginning step of the Christian life, it is also the last. In fact, the entire Christian life may be properly described as a walk of faith. For the righteousness of God is revealed through the gospel from faith to faith.”^{xix}

The fact that the author uses the expression “*faith toward God*” rather than “*faith toward Christ*” is that it is through Christ’s ministry that we are brought back to God (JN 14:6; I Pet. 3:18).

2. Washings and laying on of hands v. 2b

Verse 2 is right from the start difficult to interpret. The first hurdle is to understand what “*instructions about washings*” means. Is it talking about Christian baptism? After extensive readings in the commentaries on this phrase, and in some cases, commentators go on for pages trying to figure it out, I think the simplest explanation is by Donald Guthrie in his brief commentary on Hebrews.

He calls this a reference to acts of a cultic kind. Both the first phrase and the second have parallels in both Judaism and Christianity, but have different significance when applied to Christianity. The plural “washings” or “baptisms” indicates this is not just one act, but is perhaps a number of ritual cleansings – much like is found in Judaism. However, the author is not likely (but could be) suggesting comparing Christian baptism with Judaistic ideas about washings. The word used here is used elsewhere. In Heb. 9:10, it is clearly related to cultic washings.^{xx} Whether it is the baptism we are familiar with or not, the author is saying that they no longer have to deal with the basics of it.

Most commentators believe that it has something to do with Christian baptism, but it is unclear exactly how due to the lack of context. However, the fact that the 2nd part of this is the “*laying on of hands*”, makes the connection make some sense.

Schreiner lays out some examples of “laying on of hands”,

“Hands were laid on people in the OT for blessing (Gen. 48:14), on sacrificial animals who atoned for sin (Ex. 29:10,15,19; Lev. 4:15; 8:14,18,22; 16:21; Num. 8:12), to commission someone for service (Num. 27:23; Deut. 34:9; Num.8:10), or on one about to suffer the death penalty (Lev. 24:14). In the NT the laying on of hands was for blessing (Matt. 19:13,15; Mark 10:16), healing (Mark 5:23; 6:5; 8:23,25; Luke 4:40; 13:13; Acts 9:12; 28:8), to commission people for service (Acts 6:6; 13:3; I Tim. 5:22), for receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17-19; 9:17; 19:6), and for receiving spiritual gifts (I Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6), although this last one may fit with commissioning someone for ministry.”^{xxi}

Because of the wide diversity of how this “laying on of hands” is used in the Bible, it is very difficult to be certain what the author has in mind. If the first part of this pair is in fact, Christian baptism, then it is likely that “laying on of hands” relates to receiving the Spirit – making both of these items associated with the inception of Christianity in a person. It is likely that the first recipients of the letter knew what was being said.

3. Resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment v. 2c

This final pair belongs together – the resurrection of the dead refers to the physical resurrection which is prophesied to occur on ‘the last day’. This is a basic yet key element in Christian faith and hope – as Paul indicates in I Cor. 15:12-19 – a masterful argument against those who taught against a physical resurrection. In I Thess. 4:13-18, Paul uses the fact of the resurrection to encourage the Thessalonian

church. In Acts 17:30-32, speaking to the philosophers gathered on Mars Hill in Athens, talked about Christ's resurrection and this provoked many to want to hear more and others to scoff at his evangelism.

Jude 14 refers to Jesus' return (attributing the prophecy to Enoch of Genesis 5 fame) with 10,000's of His holy ones (saints) – an allusion to those resurrected returning to earth with Him in victorious glory, and in the OT, Daniel 12:1-3 predicts a bodily resurrection, and the book of Revelation has the resurrection as one of its underlying themes. Daniel's quote forms a great segue for us into the 2nd element of the pair in Heb. 6:2 – judgment.

The author of Hebrews calls it 'eternal judgment', so this is without question a reference to the final judgment on the last day – cf. Rev. 20:11-15 – a judgment which is definitive and final; there is no court of appeal for this one. Hebrews 9:27 makes it clear that after death comes this final judgment for unbelievers, and despite the fearful and tearful pleadings of modern liberal theologians, according to Scripture, there is no 2nd chance to accept Christ after death.

So both of the elements in this pairing are fundamental to Christian basics as well, but the recipients of the letter must be mature enough at this point to be able to defend these truths and be moving on to think more deeply about things of Christ and God's Word.

“And this we will do if God permits.” v. 3. This is not just a pious cliché here. This sentence relegates vv. 1b-2c as almost parenthetical data as it completes the thought of v. 1a. *“Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity...and this we will do if God permits.”*

As is the case in virtually everything that occurs in a believer's life (& other people's lives, although they don't acknowledge it), we are responsible for our actions, in growing in the faith, yet our underlying ability to grow comes from the Holy Spirit within us, and God's guidance of each step we take. Sometimes He even puts up roadblocks, temptations, setbacks from suffering, grief, etc., because He is sovereign over all (cf Gen. 45:5,7-8; 50:20; Isa. 10:5-34; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; Rom. 8:28; Esther; etc.). Spiritual breakthroughs will only come as a result of God's permission &/or decree.

James 4:13-15 makes this clear and in fact, casts a judgment of arrogance on those who operate their lives without giving any thought to God's sovereignty over their lives. Paul, in I Thess. 2:18, comments that there can also be demonic or Satanic opposition to the right things to do. This sort of opposition is made evident by Daniel in Dan. 10:10-14, where the response to his prayer is delayed by demonic activity.

The author of Hebrews seems confident that this maturing of the Hebrew believers is what God will undertake if they desire it.

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- ⁱ Tom Schreiner and Ardel Caneday, The Race Set Before Us, IVP Academic, 2001, pp. 193-194
- ⁱⁱ IBID, p. 195
- ⁱⁱⁱ See definitions in Lesson 4 – Nov. 2015, pp. 4-6
- ^{iv} Same lesson – pp. 6-7
- ^v Schreiner & Caneday, p. 198-199
- ^{vi} Tom Schreiner, New Testament Theology, Magnifying God in Christ, Baker Academic, 2008, pp. 595-596
- ^{vii} IBID, p. 597
- ^{viii} Schreiner, Hebrews, p. 168
- ^{ix} Hughes, Hebrews, p. 192
- ^x IBID, p. 192
- ^{xi} John Brown, An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews, Banner of Truth, 1862, reprint 1964, p. 272
- ^{xii} IBID, p. 273-274
- ^{xiii} IBID, p. 274
- ^{xiv} Schreiner, Hebrews, p. 1774
- ^{xv} Michael Duduit (ed), Preaching With Power, Baker Books, 2006, pp. 108
- ^{xvi} IBID, p. 111-112
- ^{xvii} Hughes, p. 194-195
- ^{xviii} IBID, p. 197
- ^{xix} Paul Washer, Gospel Assurance and Warnings, Reformation Heritage Books, 2014, p140, FN # 2
- ^{xx} Donald Guthrie, Hebrews, Eerdmans, 1983 – 2002 reprint, Tyndale Commentary Series; p. 138-139
- ^{xxi} Schreiner, Hebrews, p. 176-177