

The context of this passage is important for understanding the intent of the author. He is addressing Jewish background Christians, who have heard the gospel and seen signs (2:1–4), professed faith (5:14b), shown changed lives (6:10; 10:32–34), but are reconsidering or being tempted to reconsider Judaism. Therefore, he writes to demonstrate the superiority of Jesus Christ and to encourage his audience to persevere in the faith. Christ is presented as our High Priest (1:3; 2:17; 3:1; 4:14) after the order of Melchizedek (5:6, 10). But he interrupts that development with an extensive exhortation (5:11–6:20); the warning at its heart is in 6:1–8. Essentially he is telling them to embrace God's complete revelation in Christ, to persevere, or else hopelessly perish.

**Part 1: *Don't be satisfied with shadows***

- I. *If they are to leave the elementary teachings and not lay again a foundation (6:1a), what is the milk that they need and what is the sense of having to be taught again (5:11–12)?*
1. The “elementary truths of God’s word” (5:12, NIV) might better be explained as “the building blocks which are the basis for further understanding of what God has spoken”. Seeing in the OT God’s provision of salvation in the Christ, helped the Jew begin to understand more fully what God had said in the OT. Miss Christ and you have missed the purpose of the OT. The audience needs again to see the Christ in what God had spoken.
  2. The author calls them to “leave the elementary teachings about Christ” (6:1). It would be surprising if he meant leaving the discussion about Christ and certainly not abandoning the teaching of Christ.
  3. It is helpful to examine the meaning of “the elementary teaching of the Christ” which woodenly is “the teaching of the beginning of the Christ.” Following the lexicon’s suggested meaning for “beginning” this would be “the teaching of that which is the basis for further understanding about Christ.” Hence, it is not the truths of the Christ, but the things which prepare to understand the Christ.
  4. The OT gave Jews an opportunity to understand or be prepared for the Christ through such things as the sacrificial system. Some were intended as pictures of the person and the work of the Messiah. Once He had come, they needed to focus on Him and not the things that pointed to Him (cf. Col. 3:17).
  5. These were the foundation (or starting block) for the Jews, which they should not return to. (Note also that none of the gospel essentials are present which are mentioned elsewhere, e.g., 1 Cor 15:3–5; Luke 24:26).
- II. *Does this list, which the author gives, fit OT teaching, and if so, what is the significance (6:1b–2)?*
1. “Repentance from acts that lead to death and of faith toward God” — Cf. 9:14. The “turn from death-bringing deeds and faith toward God” is well illustrated by the ministry of John the Baptist (Mark 1:4–8). His OT message was right and good but insufficient for NT salvation as seen in the accounts of Cornelius (Acts 10), Apollos (Acts 18:25–26), and the disciples of John in Ephesus (Acts 19:1–7). The maturity to which the readers should advance is turning from dead works to Christ.
  2. “Instruction about baptisms” — “Washings” is better than “baptisms” (cf Mark 7:4; Hebrews 9:10) because it refers to ritual washings. There are various ritual washings in the OT and especially dealing with the sacrificial system (cf. Exodus 29:4; 30:18–21; 40:12, 30–32; Numbers 19). These pre-figured inward spiritual cleansing as seen already in Ezekiel 36:25–26. Jesus pointed inward to show cleanness or uncleanness (Mark 7:19–23). The NT message points to the washing of regeneration through Jesus Christ our Savior (Titus 3:5–6).
  3. “The laying on of hands” — The OT requirement of laying hands on the head of the animal sacrifice prepared for the work of the Messiah. It identified the person with the animal being slain as a substitute. But no animal sacrifice is sufficient to cleanse from sin those who are made in the image of God. It requires the One who is the exact image of God (Hebrews 1:3) to purify of sin. Cf. Romans 6:23; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24.
  4. “The resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment” — These two are often associated, but developed much less in the OT than in the NT. See Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 7; 12:2; Job 19:25–27. Even the few OT references prepared the Jew in a way that Gentiles were not (cf. Acts 17:31–32). But the fact of resurrection and judgment was not sufficient. They needed the One who is the Resurrection and Life, who is the Judge, and in Whom alone they could stand in the judgment.

This is the choice: turn from dead works and turn to Christ, receive forgiveness of sin in Christ, be cleansed in Christ from defilement, accept Him as Substitute. The Jews were to leave the shadow truths behind and embrace the full revelation of God in Jesus Christ. We must persevere in Christ our Savior.

**III. What then is the author’s desire (6:3)?**

His desire is move on to the things that encourage maturity as God would allow.

**Part 2: *Those who have experienced the reality but cling to the shadows will perish (6:4–8).***

*Questions for further consideration:* • What similar danger(s) might exist today for the Christian to focus on good but inadequate truths? • Is it sufficient for a person to believe in God? Why/why not? • Do unsaved people around us have any concept of spiritual defilement? What is it? How might it be used to move to the gospel message? • Are there analogies of substitution in our culture which might illustrate the gospel? • Belief in resurrection was not only a problem in Athens, but also in Corinth. How did Paul respond to their questions in 1 Corinthians 15?