Interpretation of Hebrews 6

Assignment 6-1 for BI5500 Hermeneutics

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Hebrews itself is hard to interpret mainly because the author and audience is shrouded in mystery as John MacArthur puts it “Within the epistle itself, however, there is no identification of the recipients as either Hebrews (Jews) or Gentiles.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Even though we are left in mystery in some areas we can still grasp what the text meant because Hebrews does not focus on the readers situations. A Translators Handbook on The Letter to The Hebrews suggests that Hebrews is written as a general sermon when it states, “It has been suggested that Hebrews grew out of a collection of sermons preached to one group of Christians, and then sent to another church with a concluding note.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Not only do we see this stated in the previous resource but also in Grasping God’s Word when the author states, “The book actually reads more like a sermon and even admits to being a “word of exhortation”.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

Verse 1

The verse starts out with therefore so looking back at the previous chapter we see that the author was describing a “higher state when they first became Christians.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Leading into the next significant part of the verse we see the words leave/elementary doctrine of Christ, which is present tense so we can assume we are talking about the current state of the reader. This calls the reader to move on from “their present state, a lower and less favorable position.”[[5]](#footnote-5) Next the author describes going on to maturity, repentance from dead works and faith towards God, all which describe a calling and a warning. The calling is in going on to maturity, which is talking about salvation through faith in Jesus and avoiding repentance from dead works that the Jews “Too often only turned to God in a superficial fashion – fulfilling the letter of the law as evidence of his repentance.”[[6]](#footnote-6) The Greek word “pherōmetha” used here for going on “indicates swift and energetic movement.”[[7]](#footnote-7) The key point in this verse to the original reader is to not fall into the patterns of the OT but to mature into salvation having faith not only in God but also in Jesus Christ.

Verse 2

This verse is an extension of verse 1, they can be read as one sentence and used to understand each other. This verse hits four things that are notable including washings/laying on of hands/resurrection/eternal judgment. Washings refer to OT Levitical times, which was meant as an outward sign of how Jews were to show heart cleansing. The laying on of hands used to be a practice of the OT, which the person performing a sacrifice would lay hands on it symbolizing the substitution for sin. Resurrection and eternal judgment is called out to warn the readers no to just focus on these issues, which a lot of people fell into. The Pharisees are a clear picture here of what to avoid and many original readers would of caught what the author was doing as John MacArthur states “It is significant that all of the doctrines listed in Heb: 6:1-2 can be associated with the Pharisees.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

Verse 3

The author here states, “we will do” which most likely is referring to going on to maturity and leaving behind the elementary teachings. The New American Commentary made this connection well when it states “Since the two attendant circumstances are semantically connected to the main verb “let us press on,” they are pulled into its orbit and constitute the antecedent reference to “this” in v.3.” [[9]](#footnote-9)

Verse 4-6

In verses 4 – 6 we see a connection to the previous three versus with the use of a conjunction “gar” translated to “for”. This conjunction can mean a variety of things but the most likely are indicating the grounds for 6:1-3 and indicating grounds for the statement “God permitting” in verse 3. The use of “gar” can be used to “join two sentences as well as two paragraphs.”[[10]](#footnote-10) The author is stating five major points a Jew has to face in this section of verses which include, being enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, shared in the Holy Spirit, tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age and who have fallen away. In verse 4 the statement “it is impossible” flows down to verse 6 where we see “restore them again to repentance”. The word used to describe people that do this is “tous” which can more accurately be translated to “those who”[[11]](#footnote-11) so bringing it all together we see it is impossible to restore repentance in those who perform all five points above. The reason for this being impossible follows in verse with the reason being they are crucifying once again the Son of God. This chunk of versus is still wildly debated but is best thought to refer to those of genuine salvation because it mentions the sharing of the Holy Spirit and I believe that is exactly of the original readers would of interpreted this. This is not to say that there is no hope to those that are lost or have turned away as The Bible Exposition Commentary puts it “The writer did not say that these people could never be brought to repentance. He said that they could not be brought to repentance while they were treating Jesus Christ in such a shameful way.”[[12]](#footnote-12)

Verse 7-8

In these two verses we see illustrations comparing Christians to land. Bringing the previous verses to light in 7-8 we see “The author can make his assertions in vv. 4–6 because he knows that land which has been well watered with rain and cultivated receives the blessing of God if it produces a useful crop, but will be destroyed if it brings forth only thorns and thistles.”[[13]](#footnote-13) The first verse shows a picture of a land that drinks in the water that falls on it and thus grows a crop that is useful. Verse 8 then talks about a land that drinks the water but produces thorns and thistles which the original readers would of understood the land that is useful as a believer who is invested fully in Christ and therefore is fruitful in his endeavors while the second represents an unfruitful believer that drinks the same water and is purposefully disobedient.

Verse 9

This verse is a bit of a transition for the original readers, they would of just heard about how bad things have gotten and probably felt a bit dismayed which I believe is why the author transitions here to assure those true believers of their salvation. The author uses the word beloved here to emphasize his love for the readers. The author acknowledges and owns his past statements about judgment by using the words “though we speak in this way.” The authors original audience would of heard here that they should be assured of their salvation and his deep love for them as well as looking forward to better things that accompany salvation.

Verse 10

The author again uses the word “gar” here meaning “for” which ties together the last verse of encouragement in their salvation. The original audience can have full assurance in God that he will recognize their salvation and efforts of love they have put in for God’s name. The original audience is best described in A Commentary on the Greek Text when it says “The readers may be at an elementary stage of Christian understanding (5:12), but they have a proven record of Christian service, which God stands ready to reward, if they continue and advance (v. 11) on the same road.”[[14]](#footnote-14) The author is commending them on their service in this verse both past and present tense by which they showed their efforts of love.

Verse 11-12

These two verses are one sentence and should be interpreted as such. The author is referencing the previous verse when he states, ”we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end.” Breaking that statement down we see “each one of you” is referencing unbelievers most likely since the author desires they have the same assurance as the believers in verse 10. The unbelievers here seem to be better off than those seen in verses 4-6 because the author avoids the use of the word impossible but instead says they have the possibility of the same “full assurance of hope until the end.” In verse 12 the author begins with a contrast of lazy versus diligence. The New American Commentary states “The author contrasts diligence with laziness, using the same word nōthroi with which he began the discourse section back in 5:11. This inclusio has the effect of bracketing off this entire section as a semantic unit.”[[15]](#footnote-15)The author then ends this portion of the passage with a statement regarding “inheriting the promises” which has not been fully introduced yet in this passage but does describe the means of getting this promise, which is through faith and patience.

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