

A RESPONSE TO MIKE MUZZERALL'S ARTICLE: LEAVING THE CROSS BEHIND

WHO IS MIKE MUZZERALL?



Mike Muzzerall is an ordained pastor and a theology professor at Jimmy Swaggart's Bible College (WEBC). He and his wife lead the children's ministry (called Salvation Station) at Family Worship Center, which is Jimmy Swaggart's home church. He's also a regular panel member on Frances Swaggart's TV show (called Francis & Friends) where, according to them, "correct doctrine is professed and incorrect doctrine is exposed." His [info page](#) says he has been involved in ministry since 1980; first in leadership in a Charismatic Church North of Toronto, then at Family Worship Center. He moved to Baton Rouge in 1988 from Canada, leaving a successful business behind, in order to attend WEBC.

WHY THIS RESPONSE?

I have no axe to grind with Jimmy Swaggart or his ministry. While I disagree with many of the things he believes and teaches, I have always liked him personally and we have been blessed by his music over the years. Right now his ministry is enjoying a rebirth of sorts. His local church has nearly 1,000 attendees on an average Sunday morning and the ministry boasts some seventy-plus radio stations across the U.S. He also broadcasts three live services a week via Internet Television. Obviously, the ministry's isn't as big as it was before his fall, but it has an international presence and it continues to grow in scope and reach. This is due in no small part to a new message Mr. Swaggart has been promoting called "The Message Of The Cross".

It's not the purpose of *this* article to present a detailed expose of Mr. Swaggart's message. However, one of the errors it contains is the reason I'm responding to Mr. Muzzerall's article. He has decided to use his theological training to defend this message. It will be necessary, therefore, to provide at least an overview of it.

In an article entitled "[The Message Of The Cross](#)" Mr. Swaggart recalls that after his multiple sexual transgressions became public he spent six years seeking the Lord as to why he could not walk in victory over the lust that almost destroyed him. At a certain point he received a "revelation" about his problem and how to deal with it. He says:

"I had no doubt about what the Lord had told me. He said, **'the solution which you seek is found in the Cross!'** As the tears rolled down my cheeks and the Presence of the Lord filled my soul, I kept saying those words over and over again. In the days to come, He very speedily began to **open up to me the Word of God**, showing me exactly how it was, and is, the Cross."

"I was studying some material [written by the late Dr. Kenneth Wuest](#), a noted Greek Scholar and brother, whose great love for the Lord was obvious in his writings. Dr. Wuest was explaining the sin nature. All of a sudden, the Spirit of the Lord came over me, and He began to reveal to my heart the meaning of **this aspect** of our Christian experience. In a moment's time, I saw it, and I saw it clearly. I can remember getting up from behind my desk and pacing back and forth across my office, tears streaming down my cheeks. The Lord then spoke to my heart and said, **'You have asked Me the cause of your problem. It is the sin nature, and your lack of understanding about how it works and how it is to be controlled.'**"

According to Mr. Swaggart, his problem all these years has been a lack of understanding about how the sin nature works and how to control it. God told him the solution is “found in the Cross”. Thus “The Message Of The Cross” has become the centerpiece and focus of JSM. But what exactly is the relationship *between* the Cross and learning how to control the sin nature? I’m afraid you won’t find a clear-cut answer in that article. However, you will find various passages of the New Testament quoted from the Expositor’s Study Bible and they are enough to give you a general idea. [*Emphases mine*]

Romans 6:3-5 “Know you not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ (plainly says that this Baptism is into Christ and not water [I Cor. 1:17; 12:13; Gal. 3:28-29; Eph. 4:5; Col. 2:11-13]) were baptized into His Death? (When Christ died on the Cross, in the Mind of God, we died with Him; in other words, He became our Substitute, and our identification with Him in His Death gives us all the benefits for which He died; the idea is that He did it all for us!) For if we have been planted together (with Christ) in the likeness of His death (Paul proclaims the Cross as the instrument through which all Blessings come; consequently, the Cross must ever be the object of our Faith, which gives the Holy Spirit latitude to work within our lives), we shall be also in the likeness of His Resurrection. (We can have the “likeness of His Resurrection,” i.e., “live this Resurrection Life,” only as long as we understand the “likeness of His Death,” which refers to the Cross as the means by which all of this is done.)”

Galatians 6:14 “But God forbid that I should glory (boast) save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (what the opponents of Paul sought to escape at the price of insincerity is the Apostle’s only basis of exultation), by Whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” (The only way we can overcome the world, and I mean the only way, is by placing our Faith exclusively in the Cross of Christ, and keeping it there.)”

I. Corinthians 1:17 “For Christ sent me not to baptize (presents to us a Cardinal Truth), but to Preach the Gospel (the manner in which one may be saved from sin): not with wisdom of words (intellectualism is not the Gospel), lest the Cross of Christ should be made of none effect. (This tells us in no uncertain terms that the Cross of Christ must always be the emphasis of the Message.)”

The following statements present a clear enough picture of what his new revelation amounts to.

~ *The idea is that [Jesus] did it all for us!*

~ *The Cross must be the object of our faith, which gives the Holy Spirit latitude to work within our lives.*

~ *The Cross [is] the means by which all of this is done.*

~ *The only way [to overcome] is by placing our faith exclusively in the Cross of Christ and keeping it there.*

~ *The Cross of Christ must always be the emphasis of the message.*

Simply put, the new revelation is that we’re justified and sanctified by faith in what Jesus did for us at the Cross. As long as the object of our faith is what Jesus did for us (He did it all), as long as we place our faith exclusively in the Cross of Christ and keep it there, as long as the Cross of Christ is always the emphasis of the message, we

will be giving the Holy Spirit “latitude to work within our lives” (i.e.; sanctify us). Of course this all sounds very spiritual but it’s wrong. In fact, it’s just more of John Calvin’s “*it’s-all-of-God-and-none-of-you*” nonsense. Christians are not sanctified (in experience) simply by adopting the proper kind of faith—as described and promoted by JSM. We’re sanctified in experience as we take up *our own* cross daily. We’re sanctified in experience as we choose each day (with the help of God) to deny the desires and lusts of our fallen nature and yield to the conviction and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Mr. Swaggart’s new revelation is dangerous to those who genuinely desire to walk in victory over sin because it *misrepresents* our proper role and responsibility in the sanctification process. Sorry friends, but it takes more than faith in what Jesus did for us at Calvary to overcome sin! Being sanctified requires labor, struggle, self denial, and suffering on our part. It requires the exercising of our free wills in the *daily* choices we make. Trusting Jesus to sanctify us is certainly necessary; but that trust will only produce sanctification if we do our part, and doing our part is what’s *missing* from Mr. Swaggart revelation.

TWO VIEWS OF SANCTIFICATION

The question of man’s responsibility in the sanctification process has long been debated. Ever since the days of the Protestant Reformation, portions of the Church have believed what JSM is now promoting so it doesn’t need to be “restored”. In the end, there are only two possible ways to view sanctification. Either man has a part to play in that process; meaning, we are responsible to some extent for our own sanctification; or we have no part to play, other than to have faith (believe) that since God is responsible to sanctify us, at some point he will do so (as long as we keep *believing* He will).

The latter view has become an integral part of JSM’s “Message Of The Cross”. If the reader doubts that this is the case, take a few minutes and read Donnie Swaggart’s article, [**Why Does The Church Hate The Message Of The Cross**](#)? In that article he says very frankly that *both* justification and sanctification are by faith *alone*, that this is the message they are now preaching, and that the Church hates it because they are trying to be sanctified by “works” (which he calls “self-sanctification”). Below are a few quotes:

“I have no doubt that the title of this article caused some to do a double take. I’m sure there were those who asked the question, ‘Why would Brother Donnie say that the church hates the Message of the Cross?’ The answer is that **the Message of the Cross is the message of justification and sanctification**...There is no argument regarding the Message of the Cross and salvation from any true Bible-believing Christian or church. Salvation by grace through faith is understood, believed, and preached. **The argument is regarding sanctification.**”

“**Most of the church today believes in justification by faith and sanctification by works.** Religious man is very proud of the works in which he engages, and he loves to boast of those works. Incidentally, most of the time, those works are good things, such as prayer, Bible study, witnessing, etc. Some go to extremes regarding dress, makeup, jewelry, and the like; however, there are far more in the church today who are **trying to sanctify themselves** by that which is good and honorable than those who are involved in extreme legalism.”

“Religious man loves rules—laws of their own making—and when one boldly says **its faith and faith alone**, watch out because their ire is going to be aroused. When one stands up and says **it is the Cross and the Cross alone that sanctifies the saint**, then all of religious man’s self-made rules and works fall to the ground, and no one likes to admit that all he’s been doing and telling others to do falls by the wayside. When one says it’s not your confession, your water

baptism, your giving, your fasting, your taking communion every day, or whatever is being proclaimed, the lie is exposed. If it's not the Cross for justification **and the Cross for sanctification**, then it's another gospel, another Jesus, another spirit."

"At the moment of one's expression of faith in Christ, the same faith that justifies also sanctifies. Therefore, when one is wrapped up into the gospel of "self-sanctification," immediately, an anger rises up in opposition. This is because they don't believe that **Christ paid the full price for justification and sanctification**. Man's efforts are revealed for what they are—prideful of one's own works."

"We are noticing a more pronounced opposition from some in the church, preachers and laity, against the Message of the Cross as it regards sanctification. However, one doesn't realize that to dismiss and oppose the Message of the Cross and **the part it plays in sanctification** also belittles the great truth of justification by faith because they are inseparable."

LEAVING THE PRINCIPLES

Professor Muzzerall has taken up his pen in defense JSM's message. Maybe it's because he's aware of the "opposition" Donnie Swaggart referred to, or maybe it's because he's just trying to restore a (supposedly) lost truth to the Church. In any case, his article can be found in the February 2015 issue of *The Evangelist* magazine. An on-line version of the magazine can be viewed [here](#) (once it has been posted). I've also included a graphic version of it at the end of this article. He begins by saying:

"Sad to say, the Message of the Cross is viewed by most of Christianity as a **simple foundational teaching** meant only to introduce Christianity to the initiate. They maintain that once you have begun to mature in Christ, you must **leave the principles of the doctrine of Christ behind**. In their attempt to support this view, they look to Hebrews 6:1-2. They feel justified in **leaving the Cross behind**."

According to him, most of Christianity is confused about the message of the Cross because they view it as a foundational teaching that should at some point be forsaken, rather than understanding it should always remain the *focus* of our life. He's talking about justification and sanctification. He's saying most of the Church uses the message of the Cross to affect the sinner's justification, but then leaves that message behind and implements some form of *works* to produce the believer's sanctification. He agrees wholeheartedly with Donnie Swaggart's assertion that most of the church believes in justification by faith but sanctification by works.

Since he believes that faith in what Jesus did for us is the *only thing* we need to be saved and sanctified, and that this faith should remain *the focus* of our lives, it's only natural that he takes a dim view of Christians thinking they should *stop* focusing on that faith and *do* something (like leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ) in order to be sanctified. To him, this is nothing less that "leaving the Cross behind" and trying to be sanctified by works. Thus, he tries to convince the reader that they have mis-interpreted Hebrews 6:1-2.

He begins by asking what this passage really means. Then he quotes the passage from Jimmy Swaggart's Expositor's Study Bible, which is full of Swaggart's views and teachings (in Red), inserted into the actual text of Scripture. Mr. Muzzerall's article is a color article; yet when quoting from the Expositor's Study Bible the notes are in Black. I'm putting them in Red because that's the way they are in Swaggart's Bible.

“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, (*speaks of the 'first principles,' which refers to the Old Testament; Christ is the centerpiece of the entirety of the Bible*), let us go on unto perfection (*speaks of the New Testament sacrifice, the Lord Jesus, and the testament He inaugurated with His work on the Cross*); not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works (*refers to these Jewish Christians going back to the old sacrificial system, etc.*), and of faith toward God (*refers to faith toward God in the realm of the Old Testament way, which God will not accept now inasmuch as Jesus has fulfilled the Old Testament law*)

This seems self-explanatory. So you would think. However, there are those **opposing** the Message of the Cross who still maintain that these verses instruct us to leave behind the Message of the Cross.”

What makes the issue confusing is the way Mr. Muzzerall, as well as the rest of those involved with JSM, constantly use the phrase: “The Message Of The Cross”. The Cross has been a major theme in Pentecostal preaching for generations. You can’t read the Bible and not see the importance of the Cross to Christianity. Also, today the Scriptural message of the Cross has been abandoned in many churches and replaced with the humanistic preaching of a social (and at times Marxist) gospel. So when Mr. Swaggart stands up and says “*It’s time we get back to the message of the Cross*”—he strikes a chord in people who are really trying to serve God. Unfortunately, his version of the message of the Cross is not the Scriptural version; nor is it the version most older Pentecostals are familiar with and assume it to be.

After quoting Mr. Swaggart’s interpretation of this passage, Mr. Muzzerall says that you would think such an interpretation is self-explanatory, but it’s not because most Christians are blind to the truth. He says that in the face of what should be a self explanatory interpretation there are “those” (i.e.; most Christians) who still think these verses instruct us to leave (in the sense of *abandoning*) the message of the Cross.

Since I’m not sure who the “those” are that he is referring to, or what they are actually teaching with regards to this passage, I can’t speak for them—though in *some* cases I’d be willing to bet he doesn’t even understand what they’re saying and is misrepresenting their views. He’s certainly misrepresenting *my* view. I’m one of “those” who believe the writer of Hebrews meant exactly what he said—that we should *move beyond* the basic teachings of Christianity and go deeper into the purposes of God. I didn’t “leave behind the message of the Cross”. It’s part of the foundation of my Christian experience.

You could view what the writer said in the context of going to school. When we begin school we learn the principles of certain important subjects, like mathematics. The purpose for learning addition, subtraction, multiplication, etc., is so that *later* these skills can be utilized in the affairs of life. While we’re in school, they are the focus of our attention because we have to learn them. However, once we graduate from school our focus turns to the concerns of life. We don’t abandon or reject everything we have learned in school. Quite the contrary; we use that knowledge every day but it’s no longer the *focus* of our attention.

This is what Hebrews 6:1-2 is talking about. As we begin to mature in Christ, the first principles of Christianity are there for God to utilize in our lives. They are there to keep us grounded in truth. But they should no longer be the focus. If they remain the focus, not only will we fail to grow spiritually, we’re in danger of going backwards, which can eventually lead to apostasy.

Again, you could view what the writer is saying in the context of the difference between the foundation of a building and the structure itself. The foundation is absolutely essential. Without it there can be no building. But once the foundation has been laid the builders don’t keep re-laying it over and over again! The purpose of the foundation is to support a structure.

*According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, **I have laid the foundation**, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed **how he buildeth thereupon**. For **other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ**. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.*

I. Corinthians 3:10-15

*Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And **are built upon the foundation** of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom **all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord**: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*

Ephesians 2:19-22

The “principles of the doctrine of Christ” are the foundation of our Christian experience, both individually and corporately. Once that foundation has been laid, God expects us to start building a structure on it made from gold, silver and precious stones. As we each build upon our own personal foundation we are also being built together (by the Spirit) on that *same* foundation, into a corporate, living Temple.

What the writer of Hebrews is saying in the beginning of chapter six is so simple it’s hard for me to believe anyone would give any credibility to Mr. Swaggart’s interpretation, let alone view it as self explanatory. Even if such an interpretation were true (which it isn’t) it still wouldn’t be the natural (self evident) interpretation of any normal person—especially if they had recently read Second John:

*Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in **the doctrine of Christ**, hath not God. He that abideth in **the doctrine of Christ**, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not **this doctrine** [the doctrine of Christ], receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.*

II John 8-11

Here the term “doctrine of Christ” is explicitly a reference to the doctrines of Christianity. Now, a person who had just finished reading this passage and then flipped over to Hebrews 6:1, where the writer talks about the need to leave the principles of the doctrine of Christ, would *never* assume he was saying we should leave the doctrines of the Mosaic economy (which point to Christ) and accept the doctrines of Christianity. An unbiased mind would assume that just as “the doctrine of Christ” means Christian teaching in Second John, so “the doctrine of Christ” means Christian teaching in Hebrews 6:1.

Notice that the Expositor’s Study Bible’s interpretation of this passage contains the phrase “first principles” and it’s in quotation marks. It says leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ “*speaks of the 'first principles,' which refers to the Old Testament...*”. Having that phrase in quotation marks means he’s quoting it directly from Scripture. There’s only one place in the entire New Testament where the phrase “first principles” is found and it’s in Hebrews 5:12. There, the writer is trying to explain something about the priesthood of Jesus but the

believers in that church had become so dull of hearing they couldn't understand what he was saying. They needed to re-learn the "*first principles of the oracles of God*". It should be obvious that the writer is not referring to the doctrines of the Mosaic economy because if he were, he would be rebuking them for needing to learn *those* doctrines all over again. Clearly, he is referring to the basic teachings of Christianity.

By adding "first principles" to his interpretation and italicizing it, Mr. Swaggart is linking *both* usages of the word "principles" (one in chapter 5; one in chapter 6) and defining them *both* as doctrines of the Mosaic economy when in reality, the term in Hebrews 5:12 is clearly a reference to the principles of Christianity. This is sloppy exposition at best. At worst, it's a deliberate attempt to obscure the truth that is being stated by the author of Hebrews. Instead of filling the text of the Bible with his red letter teaching notes, maybe Mr. Swaggart should just go ahead and produce his own *version* of the Bible. That way he could avoid any confusion over the meaning of difficult passages. His version would probably read something like this:

"Therefore, let us leave the principles of Christ as found in the types and shadows of the Old Testament and embrace the Gospel of the New Testament, which the Lord Jesus inaugurated through His work on the Cross. Let's not keep sacrificing animals for the forgiveness of sin, or have faith toward God the Old Testament way, which God will no longer accept."

By the way, Mr. Swaggart's notes on this passage agree with the Kenneth Wuest translation of that passage. Coincidence? Maybe. But in his article he said it was while he was studying Dr. Wuest's commentary on Romans 6 that the Lord began showing him the solution to his problem. Is it possible his "revelation" (as well as many of his notes) came from Dr. Kenneth Wuest and not the Holy Spirit? Below is Dr. Wuest's translation:

"Therefore, **having put away once and for all** the beginning word of the Messiah [the first testament in animal blood, i.e., the Mosaic economy], **let us be carried along to** that which is complete [the new testament in Jesus' blood], not again laying down a foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the teaching of ablutions, and of imposition of hands, of a resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment, [doctrines of the Mosaic economy]. And this we will do if only God permits."

Now let's read that same passage from some other versions.

New American Standard: *Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings, and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And this we will do, if God permits.*

Contemporary English Version: *We must try to become mature and start thinking about more than just the basic things we were taught about Christ. We shouldn't need to keep talking about why we ought to turn from deeds that bring death and why we ought to have faith in God. And we shouldn't need to keep teaching about baptisms or about the laying on of hands or about people being raised from death and the future judgment. Let's grow up, if God is willing.*

New International Version: *Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and **go on to maturity**, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And God permitting, we will do so.*

English Standard Version: *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, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits.*

The Net Bible: *Therefore we must progress beyond the elementary instructions about Christ and **move on to maturity**, not laying this foundation again: repentance from dead works and faith in God, teaching about baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And this is what we intend to do, if God permits.*

Good News Bible: ***Let us go forward, then, to mature teaching** and leave behind us the first lessons of the Christian message. We should not lay again the foundation of turning away from useless works and believing in God; of the teaching about baptisms and the laying on of hands; of the resurrection of the dead and the eternal judgment. Let us go forward! And this is what we will do, if God allows.*

Weymouth New Testament: *Therefore leaving elementary instruction about the Christ, **let us advance to mature manhood** and not be continually re-laying a foundation of repentance from lifeless works and of faith in God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of the resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And advance we will, if God permits us to do so.*

Amplified Bible: *Therefore **let us go on** and get past the elementary stage in the teachings and doctrine of Christ (the Messiah), **advancing steadily toward the completeness and perfection that belong to spiritual maturity**. Let us not again be laying the foundation of repentance and abandonment of dead works (dead formalism) and of the faith [by which you turned] to God, with teachings about purifying, the laying on of hands, the resurrection from the dead, and eternal judgment and punishment. [These are all matters of which you should have been fully aware long, long ago.] If indeed God permits, we will [now] proceed [to advanced teaching].*

Bishop's Bible: *For this reason **let us go on** from the first things about Christ **to full growth**; not building again that on which it is based, that is, the turning of the heart from dead works, and faith in God, the teaching of baptisms, and of the putting on of hands, and of the future life of the dead, and of the judging on the last day. Now we will do this, if God lets us.*

What think ye? Is the issue in Hebrews 6:1 the need for Jewish believers to go on to spiritual maturity, or is it the need for Jewish unbelievers to leave the Old Covenant and enter the New Covenant? The answer to that

question is important for you see, even though Wuest and Swaggart refer to these people as Christians, their interpretation of the passage *means* they really weren't Christians. Wuest says they had left the Old Covenant but had not yet entered the New Covenant; while Swaggart says (in so many words) they hadn't even left the Old Covenant yet. In both cases, that would mean these people were not actually saved. Listen again to how Dr. Wuest translates the passage:

"Therefore, **having put away** once and for all...the first testament in animal blood, let us be **carried along** to that which is complete; the new testament in Jesus' blood".

The phrase "*having put away once and for all the first testament in animal blood*" is a past-tense statement. It means the thing has already been done. In other words, the Jews of that church had left the Old Covenant. The phrase "*let us be carried along to that which is complete; the new testament in Jesus' blood*" is a future-tense statement. It means they hadn't done it yet. According to Wuest, the writer of Hebrews is encouraging them to let God bring them to the New Covenant.

Swaggart says almost the same thing, but not quite. He says the phrase "*leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ*" means these Jews should put away the first testament animal blood, which also means they haven't done it yet. Then he says the phrase "*let us go on to perfection*" is talking about entering the New Testament through the sacrifice of Jesus. Again, this is something these people still need to do.

The Greek word that is translated perfection (as in, Let us go on to perfection) in this passage is "*teleiotes*" (tel-i-o-tace'). It's only used twice in the New Testament; here and Hebrews 12:2, where Jesus is described as the author and finisher (*teleiotes*) of our faith. It's directly related to various other Greek words, all of which come from the same root ("*tello*"), which means to set out for a definite point or goal. "*Telos*" (tel'-os) means growth to completion and is translated *full age, man* and *perfect* in the Scripture. "*Teleioo*" (tel-i-o'-o) means to complete or consummate something and is translated *consecrate, finish, fulfil* and *make perfect*.

All these terms convey the idea of moving from the initial stages of something to the completion of that *same* thing—in this case, the Christian faith. The context in which "*teleiotes*" (i.e.; finisher) is being used is the sanctification of believers, not the justification of unsaved Jewish religionists who hadn't yet made the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. Listen again to what the writer says to them:

*Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec. Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, **seeing ye are dull of hearing**. For when for the time **ye ought to be teachers**, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and **are become such as have need of milk**, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: **for he is a babe**. But strong meat belongeth to them that **are of full age**, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, **let us go on unto perfection**; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit.*

Hebrews 5:8- 6:3

It shouldn't take a college degree to understand what's being said here. Does it sound to you like the writer is talking to a bunch of *unsaved* Jews? Does it sound to you like he's telling confused Jews to leave the Old Covenant and enter the New Covenant? Would you call Jews who were still living under (or had returned to) the Old Covenant "babes" who are in need of spiritual "milk"? Would you tell Jews who haven't even entered the New Covenant that by now they ought to be "teachers" of that covenant?

The notion that these Jews had left the Old Covenant but had not yet entered the New Covenant (*Wuest*); or that they were being encouraged to leave the Old Covenant and enter the New Covenant (*Swaggart*) is absurd! I have no idea what possessed Kenneth Wuest to adopt such a preposterous interpretation but I know why Jimmy Swaggart did. It supports his new revelation, especially the sanctification-by-faith-alone part.

What's being said in Hebrews 5:8 - 6:8 is all connected. To put it very simply, the writer is telling the Hebrew Christians in this congregation that they have been stagnating and regressing in the Christian faith, and that they better start moving forward or they could find themselves cut off from God *eternally*.

The whole book of Hebrews is one long comparison between the Old and the New Covenants. In chapter five the author is dealing with the priestly office of the Lord. The Jewish people regarded *the office* of high priest as an essential feature in true religion. Thus, it was important to demonstrate to Hebrew believers that Christianity has a High Priest that in every way was equal to that of the Jews. In rank, in character, and in the sacrifice which he offered, he was more than equal to the Jewish high priest. This needed to be established so these believers could withstand the arguments and accusations that would naturally come from fellow Jews who rejected Christianity because (in their minds) it has no high priest. The writer wanted to assure them that when they left Judaism and embraced Christianity, they didn't lose it. The office was elevated from an earthly type and shadow to the heavenly reality and they got an *eternal* High Priest.

In order to press this point home he starts comparing the Jewish high priest with Jesus. He discusses the qualifications for the office, and the question of whether or not the Lord had met those qualifications. At one point he wanted to speak about the *eternal nature* of this priesthood and says that Jesus is a priest "after the order of Melchizedek". But he can't continue because they wouldn't even understand what he was saying. He tells them they ought to be teachers by now but instead, they need to be taught the first principles of the Christian faith again and are in need of spiritual milk.

There's nothing wrong with being a spiritual baby—as long as that's what you're supposed to be. The apostle Peter said: "*As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby*" (*I. Pet. 2:1*). He didn't say, "grow up already and stop drinking milk!" But this wasn't the case with the Hebrew Christians. They had been believers for years and they should have long since moved from milk to meat. After reproving them for not advancing he says: "*Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection...*". Then he enumerates those principles. Then he gives them the following warning:

*For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and {then} have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame. **For ground that drinks the rain which often falls upon it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.***

Hebrews 6:4-8 (NAS)

He's warning them to stop going backwards because if they don't, they could end up in serious trouble. They are the "ground" and the truth of the Gospel is the "rain" that has been falling on them. If they don't start advancing in the faith instead of regressing they will end up yielding thorns and thistles instead of fruit, and the result (being cursed by God and burned) will not be pleasant.

Salvation isn't a static legal position. It is constant spiritual movement, either forward or backward. Standing still is *not* an option. This is the danger of not progressing in the faith. We must continually press into Christ because the minute we start coasting we start going backwards. The degree of danger this backward motion presents is in *direct proportion* to how far we have advanced *before* we stopped pressing forward.



The guy who's just beginning to walk away from a giant hole in the ground with 100 mph winds blowing towards it, is in more danger of ending up in that hole if he *stops pressing forward* than the guy who's half a mile away. That's the situation these Jewish believers were facing. The strong *wind* was the persecution and pressure they were facing from unbelieving Jews. The *hole* represents returning to the Old Covenant. After being Christians for many years, they hadn't moved very far away from that hole! So the writer warns them that if they don't stop regressing they could end up back in that hole, cursed and cut off from God.

This is why the *sanctification-by-faith-alone* error is so dangerous. It produces Christians who are just as weak and unstable as the ones referred to in the book of Hebrews. It produces Christians who live in a continual state of fantasy and self delusion, imagining they're being sanctified without their full participation and co-operation. People who live in this kind of unreality will never mature. Moreover, they're in danger being blown back into whatever hole God pulled them out of. There are many areas of iniquity and rebellion in us and the *only way* these things can be dealt with is as we continually *examine* ourselves—our motives, our desires, and our deeds—while trusting Jesus to help us see the truth and help us take the appropriate actions.

IDENTIFYING THE PRINCIPLES

The reason Mr. Muzzerall doesn't want to accept the obvious meaning of Hebrews 6:1-2 is because he has accepted a false Gospel, which has been boiled down to a simplistic theological formula that says all you have to do is trust in the finished work of Jesus (i.e.; The Message Of The Cross) and He will do the rest. If the "principles" mentioned in Hebrews 6:2 are the basic doctrines of Christianity, and if we really do have to move beyond them in order to mature spiritually, (i.e.; be sanctified), then Jimmy Swaggart's "revelation" is a lie. It's imperative to Mr. Muzzerall therefore, that he prove they aren't the basic doctrines of Christianity. He says:

"The doctrines listed in Hebrews 6:2 do not refer to Christian doctrine, but they refer to the Judaic interpretation and usage of these [Old Testament] doctrines to obtain acceptance with God. [According to Moffatt & Robertson's Word Studies], the plural *baptismo* 'by itself **does not mean specifically Christian baptism either in this epistle (Heb 9:10) or elsewhere (Mk. 7:4), but ablutions or immersions such as the mystery religions and the Jewish cultus required for initiates, proselytes, and worshippers in general.**

After stating quite frankly that the principles of the doctrine of Christ are not “Christian” doctrines but Old Testament doctrines, he tries to prove this by utilizing the Greek language. The Greek word for Christian baptism is “*baptisma*”. The word that’s used in Hebrews 6:1 is “*baptismos*”. It’s only used a few times in the New Testament. In two of those places, referenced by Mr. Muzzerall, the term is talking about *Jewish* rites, specifically, ceremonial washing’s. So when he says the term *baptismos* “by itself does not mean specifically Christian baptism” he’s correct. However, what he’s not telling the reader is that *baptismos* doesn’t *exclude* Christian baptism either. As a matter of fact, the apostle Paul used *baptismos* when referring to the Christian practice of water baptism:

*And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: **Buried with him in baptism** (*baptismos*) in also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.*

Colossians 2:10-12

Do you think Mr. Muzzerall knows *baptismos* was used in Colossians 2:12 to describe a distinctly Christian practice? You bet he does! He left that little piece of information out of the discussion because it doesn’t support his argument. Beware of Greek scholars!

We’re certainly not against higher learning but the fact is, anyone who has mastered the Greek language is capable of *manipulating* it, just like you and I are capable of manipulating the English language. I’ve learned many good things from the labors of theologians and scholars who were godly, honest men; but for every *one* of them there are a dozen “professors” like Mr. Muzzerall, who’s agenda is not the discovery and dissemination of truth for truth’s sake, but the dissemination of their own views or the doctrines of their group (or in this case, the views of Jimmy Swaggart).

Why did the writer of Hebrews use the term “baptisms” (plural) instead of “baptism”? Maybe because there are *various kinds* of baptisms mentioned in the New Testament. Each one has a specific meaning and implication that would need to be taught to new believers. There was:

- (1) John’s baptism of repentance in preparation for the coming Messiah (*Mk. 1:4-5*).
- (2) Baptism into the name of Jesus when he came (*Acts 19:4-6*).
- (3) Baptism in the Holy Spirit (*Acts 2:1-4*).
- (4) The baptism of suffering that both Jesus and His followers would have to experience (*Matt. 20-23*). This is probably the baptism of “fire” John the Baptist referred to (*Matt. 3:11*).
- (5) The “one” baptism mentioned by Paul in Ephesians 4:4-6.

*There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, **one baptism**, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

This baptism is *symbolic*. It’s talking about embracing Christianity. Paul said the Children of Israel were “baptized unto Moses” when they crossed the Red Sea (*1. Cor. 10:2*). Baptism in this sense represents Israel’s entrance into the Old Covenant. Paul’s “one baptism” means the same thing, only he’s talking about our entrance into the New Covenant.

Since there are various kinds of baptism in Christianity, it's not unusual for the writer of Hebrews to speak about baptisms (plural). Mr. Muzzerall then gives his view of the rest of these doctrines and says they were fulfilled in Christ. Once again, he quotes Mr. Swaggart's Study Bible.

"According to The Expositor's Study Bible, the laying on of hands refers to the **Levitical offerings** where a person would lay his hands on the animal to be sacrificed for association and substitution. The resurrection here speaks of the incomplete understanding of Judaism in reference to the resurrection and of eternal judgment. All of these [Old Testament] doctrines are fulfilled in Christ. **We no longer attempt to please God through ordinances and laws but through the completed work of Calvary.**"

It's interesting to note that nowhere in the New Testament, with the *possible* exception of Hebrew 6:2, is the term or concept of the laying on of hands a reference to Old Testament practices. While there may be some similarities between the laying on of hands in the Old Testament and the laying on of hands in the New Testament, at no time did Jesus or the apostles ever say: "*This is the fulfillment of the Old Testament doctrine of the laying on of hands*" when they practiced it.

Jesus laid his hands on children to bless them, and on the sick to heal them (*Matt. 19:13; Mk. 5:23; Matt. 9:18*). The apostles also laid their hands on the sick (*Acts 28:8*). In addition, they laid hands on believers to impart the influences of the Holy Spirit (*Acts 8:17, Acts 8:19; Acts 19:6*) and ordain them to office (*I. Tim. 5:22; Acts 6:6*). However, they never even hinted that when they laid their hands on people they were fulfilling the Jewish rite of laying hands on an animal as a substitution for sin.

This is the difference between "exegesis" (*ek-si-jee-sis*) and "eisegesis" (*ahy-si-jee-sis*). Exegesis is the process of drawing meaning out of the text, based on its grammar, syntax, cultural setting, literary genre, and how it fits into the rest of what the Scripture has to say on the subject. Eisegesis is the process of reading meaning into the text, based on a pre-determined view or theological agenda. The dishonest scholar uses his knowledge and language skills to make the Bible say what *he* wants it to say. The honest scholar searches for the truth and goes *wherever* it leads him, even if it disagrees with his views.

After presenting Jimmy Swaggart's view of the "principles of the doctrine of Christ", Mr. Muzzerall says we must no longer try to please God through Old Testament ordinances and laws but "*through the completed work of Calvary*". The problem here is not so much his misrepresentation of what the writer of Hebrews is saying, but the fact that he would say the *same thing* about obeying the ordinances of the New Testament as well! This is because the underlying error in Mr. Swaggart's "revelation" is the same error that underlies today's "grace" message. That error is the idea that obedience to God is preferable and expected, but not absolutely necessary for salvation. Only faith (i.e.; belief) is necessary. This is a denial of the things Jesus himself said, as well as the writers of the New Testament, regarding things we must do and not do if we want to be sanctified (or even remain justified). Just a few of the *many* examples that could be mentioned are:

- ~ To lay hold on eternal life we must fight the good fight of faith (*I. Tim. 6:12*).
- ~ To remain in Christ we must abide in Him (*John 15:4-6*).
- ~ To inherit the kingdom we must stop practicing idolatry and sexual sin (*I. Cor. 6:9*).
- ~ To reap eternal life we have to sow to the spirit (*Gal. 6:7-8*).
- ~ To receive a Crown of Life we must be faithful unto death (*Rev. 2:10*).
- ~ To attain unto the first resurrection we must suffer and be conformed to Jesus' death (*Php.3:11*).
- ~ To reign with Christ we must suffer for Him (*II. Tim. 2:12*).

Mr. Muzzerall dismisses all of these (and many more) New Testament requirements and *belittles* those who seek to meet them because in his mind, any attempt to meet them is legalism and self-sanctification. He says all we have to do to meet these requirements is think about the Cross and trust in the Cross. He doesn't even say we should think about *Jesus* and trust in Him. Everything depends on our focusing on "the Cross". He thinks that doing this will release the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives to (magically) sanctify us. But the truth is, this kind of nonsense does just the opposite! It *short-circuits* the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

*Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless **it abides in the vine**, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. **If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.***

John 15:4-6 NKJ

Please notice that the Lord didn't say, if anyone stops "trusting in the completed work of Calvary" he'll fail to produce spiritual fruit and eventually be cut off and burned. He said, if a man "does not abide in Me", he'll fail to produce fruit, be cut off, and burned. Of course Mr. Muzzerall would say that trusting in the completed work of Calvary *equals* abiding in Christ but that's not how the Scripture defines it. The same apostle who recorded the words of Jesus in John chapter 15 also wrote I. John 2:6, where he tells us very clearly what it means to abide in Christ: "*He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked (I. John 2:6).*"

When discussing what it means to abide in Christ, notice that the issue of faith isn't even mentioned. The finished work of the Cross isn't mentioned. The idea that "Jesus did it all for us" isn't mentioned. The idea that "the Cross must always remain the object of our faith" isn't mentioned. The idea that the Cross "is the means by which" we abide in the Vine isn't mentioned. The idea that the only way we can abide in the Vine is by "placing our faith exclusively in the Cross of Christ and keeping it there" isn't mentioned. The proof of whether or not a person is abiding in Christ is in the *doing* (walking as Jesus walked), not the believing.

The "completed work of Calvary" or the "finished work of the Cross" are religious phrases which describe the teaching of men regarding salvation. They did not come from the Scripture. Jesus didn't die so we wouldn't have to do anything (other than believe in what He did for us) to be delivered from present and future sins. He died to empower us and show us how to walk in victory over sin. When He said "it is finished" from the Cross, He was saying His work was finished; not that our work was finished! Claiming that Christians have no "work" to do with regards to sanctification is a direct contradiction of the Scripture:

*Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.** For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*

Philippians 2:12-13

It's incredible how many Christians not only miss what Paul said in this passage, but teach the exact opposite! He told us to *work out* our salvation, yet many church leaders, including Jimmy Swaggart and his followers, say we have no work to do. "Just trust in the finished work of the Cross" they say, "for it's God who is working in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure". They spin Paul's words in such a way as to imply that God is actually *causing* us to do His will—which is not what Paul was saying at all! If that's what he was saying he would have never told us to work out our salvation. What's left to "work out" if all the work was done for us 2000 years ago and God is now *causing* us to obey Him?

Moreover, if all the work was done for us at Calvary and the only thing we are responsible to do is trust in that “finished” work, why did Paul say we should work out our salvation with “fear and trembling”? If God is *causing us* to do His will, why should we fear? Why should we tremble? Obeying God and experiencing victory over sin should be a piece of cake, right?

I’ll tell you why we should fear and tremble: because even though the Holy Spirit is working in us to do God’s will, is very easy to *resist* that work. We can choose to do *our own* will very easily. We can choose to go our own way, including our own *religious* way, very easily and end up defeating God’s purpose for our lives. If we do, we may find ourselves being judged by God. Resisting the Holy Spirit is very dangerous, especially in this hour. Not only does it jeopardize our sanctification, it can jeopardize our justification. Near the end of his article, Mr. Muzzerall makes the following statement:

“Leaving the Cross behind and going onward means that you have reckoned what Christ accomplished at Calvary as no longer necessary.”

This reveals his ignorance in two areas. First, as was already mentioned, he *equates* leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ with leaving the Cross behind because he has rejected the Scriptural teaching of sanctification and has accepted Jimmy Swaggart’s false revelation of sanctification by faith alone.

Second, he has a false view of what Jesus actually accomplished at Calvary. Jesus died to purify unto himself a peculiar people” (*Titus 2:13-14*); and to “present to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle” (*Eph. 5:25-27*). His death and resurrection makes all this possible but He didn’t accomplish it at the Cross. The actual accomplishment of this purpose requires our full participation and cooperation. We must *co-labor* with the Spirit if we want to be part of that spotless church.

Since the primary goal of the Spirit is to purify believers after they have been saved, and since we’re responsible to co-labor with him in that purification process, what better way for Satan to short circuit the whole program than by telling people they don’t have to co-labor with God in order to be sanctified? Isn’t this exactly what Mr. Muzzerall is doing when he accuses those who obey Hebrews 6:1-2 of reckoning what Christ accomplished on the Cross as no longer necessary?

If the Scripture teaches that what Jesus accomplished for us at the Cross is *the opportunity* to co-labor with God as He purifies us and conforms us to the image of Christ, what shall we say concerning those who claim we don’t need to co-labor with God to be purified? We must conclude that it’s *they* who are reckoning what Christ accomplished on the Cross as no longer necessary, not us.

Dan Mace
1/26/15

IN DEFENSE OF THE GOSPEL



LEAVING THE CROSS BEHIND PART I BY MIKE MUZZERALL

SAD TO SAY, THE Message of the Cross is viewed by most of Christianity as a simple foundational teaching meant only to introduce Christianity to the initiate. They maintain that once you have begun to mature in Christ, you must leave the principles of the doctrine of Christ behind. In their attempt to support this view, they look to Hebrews 6:1-2. They feel justified in *leaving the Cross behind*.

WHAT DOES HEBREWS 6:1-2 REALLY MEAN?

"Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, (speaks of the 'first principles,' which refers to the Old Testament; Christ is the centerpiece of the entirety of the Bible), let us go on unto perfection (speaks of the New Testament sacrifice, the Lord Jesus, and the testament He inaugurated with His work on the Cross); not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works (refers to these Jewish Christians going back to the old sacrificial system, etc.), and of faith toward God (refers to faith toward God in the realm of the Old Testament way, which God will not accept now inasmuch as Jesus has fulfilled the Old Testament law)" (Heb. 6:1, The Expositor's Study Bible). This seems self-explanatory. So you would think. However, there are those opposing the Message of the Cross who still maintain that these verses instruct us to leave behind the Message of the Cross.

WHAT ABOUT THE RESURRECTION?

You cannot grammatically separate Verse 2 of Hebrews 6 from Verse 1. This is a continuation of the list started in Verse 1. In Verse 2, we have "the doctrine of baptisms, laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment." If we are to believe that the writer is advocating that we no longer preach and teach the Message of the Cross, then we are to also believe that we are to no longer preach and teach about the resurrection. Without the resurrection, there is no Christianity. Likewise, without the Cross, there is no Christianity. The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ separate true Christianity from all other religions!

THE JUDAIC SYSTEM IN VERSE 2

The doctrines listed in Hebrews 6:2 do not refer to Christian doctrine, but they refer to the Judaic interpretation and usage of these doctrines to obtain acceptance with God. The plural *baptism* "by itself does not mean specifically Christian baptism either in this epistle (Heb 9:10) or elsewhere (Mk. 7:4), but ablutions or immersions such as the mystery religions and the Jewish cultus required for initiates, proselytes, and worshippers in general" (Moffatt) (Robertson's Word Studies). According to The Expositor's Study Bible, the laying on of hands refers to the Levitical offerings where a person would lay his hands on the animal to be sacrificed for association and substitution. The resurrection here speaks of the incomplete understanding of Judaism in reference to the resurrection and of eternal judgment.

FULFILLED IN CHRIST

All of these doctrines are fulfilled in Christ. We no longer attempt to please God through ordinances and laws but through the completed work of Calvary. "Then said he, Lo, I come to do your will, O God. He takes away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:9-10). Leaving the Cross behind and going onward means that you have reckoned what Christ accomplished at Calvary as no longer necessary. My friend, just as Jesus Christ is the central theme of the Bible (the Christocentric theme), the Message of the Cross is the central theme of all New Testament doctrines pertaining to righteousness (CROSSOCENTRIC theme), if not the whole New Testament. ✚