

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (4-2-1979 Strandtown Baptist Church)

Hebrews 5:11-6:20

Introduction

This is definitely one of the most difficult chapters to harmonize with others. Difficult to fit in with our doctrinal basis. Not going to dodge the issue, but to see it as part of larger issue in this section – urging advance and growth, and warning of the dangers and shame of not growing. Also positive teaching about how to do so.

The shame of immaturity

The writer was finding it difficult to teach these people because of their immaturity. Although they ought to be teachers by now (Hebrews 5:12), they still needed someone to keep going over elementary truths – the simple ABC of Christian life. Constantly going back to square one. Cannot be fed on solid food, but only with milk, because they are such babies in the spiritual sense. Should be mature now, and able to distinguish for themselves good from evil. The writer does not want to lay foundations again – about repentance, baptism, resurrection and judgement, the things which suggest they are Jewish Christians. Instead he wants to move them on to maturity and perfection (Hebrews 6:1).

Maturity is one of the great needs of Christians today. The pressures from outside are tremendous. Bombarded by so much propaganda from increasingly secular society. Many Christians know their Bibles so little. They lack certainty and conviction. Even within the evangelical world, gimmicks and sensationalism, excitements and entertainment, the lightest of diets is the order of the day. So many do not know whether they are on their heads or their heels. Lack real depth. This passage suggests some questions we need to ask about ourselves. C.f. 5:11 – how much can we take in? Can we cope with solid teaching, or do we prefer to listen to easy anecdotes? Are we “dull of hearing”? 5:12 - have we mastered the first principles? Can we lead people to Christ and show them how to go on? A good sign that we have grasped a subject in depth is the ability to express it to someone else; 5:13 – are we able to feed ourselves? 5:14 – have we discernment? Can we distinguish true and false in books and broadcasts?

Such great need for people to put into words what they believe. So many are tongue-tied, not because of deeply spiritual reason, but because they simply do not know. “Peter Pan”, the boy who would not grow up – the story line may make a charming screen-play, but what a tragedy when a Christian man or woman does not grow up. Are we where we were at the beginning in our knowledge and experience? Or have we moved on to spiritual adulthood? Inside Cromwell’s pocket Bible were the Latin words, translated “he who ceases to be better, ceases to be good”.

Dangers of apostasy

Linked with what went before – the next stage down from immaturity is apostasy. One great argument in the Christian life is “Use it, or lose it”. Now we come to the most serious warning in the whole of Bible, and one of its most difficult problems.

What is the problem? **For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame** (Hebrews 6:4-6).

There are a variety of views here. Some would say this passage is only about deliberate and absolute rejection, and not about unconscious decline or backsliding. The Armenian would say the saved *can* be lost. Many Calvinists would say the person who is described here was not truly converted in the first place. He had light, but not life, like Judas. He “tasted”, but not “digested”, his spiritual experience was not new birth. But another Calvinist would argue that even a child reading this passage would say the person intended here was a real Christian, for Christians could not be described in more explicit terms.

Another opinion is that the person described will face judgement, but not loss of eternal salvation, only **nigh unto cursing** (Hebrews 6:8). Another, that the whole argument is only hypothetical or theoretical, because in practice, divine grace would never permit it to happen. Or some interpret ἀνασταυρουντας – keep on crucifying afresh after they have fallen, therefore impossible to keep on renewing them (ἀνακαινιζειν). This implies that when active hostility to Christ ceases, restoration can take place.

Some would argue that eternal security is like a coin with two heads – on one side is the power of Christ keeping us, on the other side is my following after Christ. One must go with the other, so He keeps me, no matter whether I follow. But the writer was happy to record that this was not the case with the Christians he was writing to – there was evidence of holiness, growth and obedience: **But beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation** (Hebrews 6:9).

It is not easy to come down firmly in one place on this argument. Perhaps it is theoretical, perhaps it is just “nigh unto cursing”, or maybe restoration can take place when hostility ceases. It is about deliberate apostasy, and not back-sliding, certainly. But whatever way we look at it, it is a serious warning about arriving at a state of heart and mind where repentance is no longer possible. John Bunyan saw the road to Hell from the gates of Heaven. We are called to follow on to know the Lord, to make our calling and election sure, not to dabble or play with sin, nor to be content with casual attitude. The call goes out to become mature. **We desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end** (Hebrews 6:11).

Means of growth

After the rebukes and warnings there is positive teaching about growth. **Be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises** (Hebrews 6:12). Then the writer directs our eyes to Christ, urging us to flee to Christ for refuge from sin, guilt and judgement. In Him we have hope – **We might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us** (Hebrews 6:18). We are encouraged to seize that hope, **which hope we**

have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil, whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever (Hebrews 6:19-20). He who is in Heaven waiting for us is the hope and anchor for our soul. The image used here comes from the ancient harbours in the Mediterranean and other inland seas – in every harbour there was a great stone, or a stone embedded in the ground near the water’s edge – this was called the “anchor”. It was a mooring for little vessels. But sometimes a ship might not be able, by means of sails, to make its way to secure mooring within the harbour. In this case, a “forerunner” would go ashore in a small boat with a line, which was made fast to the anchor. This was sure and steadfast and immovably imbedded in the ground. Then those on the ship had to hold fast onto the line and, by means of it, gradually drew to shore.

Our anchor is not within the harbour, but within the veil, i.e. heaven. We are to grasp the line and gradually be drawn to heaven. We need to take fresh hold of that rope every day, every hour of every day. Being occupied with Christ is the secret of progress, and safeguard against failure. Just as the body needs water, air, food and exercise, so Christians need prayer, Bible and exercise in Christian service – all centring on Christ.

The remedy against ministerial backsliding is “be much occupied with Christ”. Cling to Christ with a consciousness of danger and helplessness, and with the tight grasp of despair. Anchored to Christ we have calm in sorrow, triumph over temptation and trouble. Whatever winds may blow, we may ride safe. This is the secret of dignity and patience and victory, steadfastness and security. Fasten the little vessel of our lives to the great anchor – Christ – who has died and who lives for us.