

Sermon Series on Hebrews

By John Atkinson (May 2000)

Sermon 4.

Sermon Four - The Danger of Apostasy (Heb 5:12-6:20)

The Danger of Apostasy (5:12-6:20)

- A. Failure to Progress in the Faith (5:12-14)
- B. Exhortation to Progress (6:1-3)
- C. No Second Beginning (6:4-8)
- D. Exhortation to Perseverance (6:9-12)
- E. God's Promise Is Sure (6:13-20)

Introduction

In the first address I dealt with the key theme of the sermon recorded in the book of Hebrews. Jesus is incomparably better than all that went before Him. Hebrews actually uses the term superior twelve times throughout the letter when referring to Jesus. This is the key message of Hebrews. Jesus is superior, He is greater than anyone or anything to which He might be compared.

In the second address in this series we looked at the issue of rest as a fundamental aspect of true spirituality – the kind of Spirituality that the Holy Spirit establishes in us.

We saw how the preacher to the Hebrews stressed that two things keep us from this Sabbath-rest

- A Unbelief – the refusal to believe and
- A A Hardened Heart – a heart used to refusing God.

In the third address the preacher to the Hebrews looked at Jesus our High Priest. The preacher considered the example of Jesus' submission to His Father, even to death. He called us to enter with confidence, because of Jesus our High Priest, into God's throne room to receive grace and mercy.

In this fourth section the preacher is pauses to deal with a problem he perceives in his audience. He would have gone into the spiritual significance of Jesus being a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek but he is aware that there is a hindrance to their appreciation of this and other spiritual truths.

Failure to Progress in the Faith (5:12-14)

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Heb 5:12 *For though by this time **you ought to be teachers**, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.*

Heb 5:13 *For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.*

Heb 5:14 *But solid food is for the mature, **who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.***

We don't have to be rocket scientists to work out the meaning of this portion. Maturity in this context means being in a position to teach others while you continue to learn. It is about progressing as a Christian. Allow me to ask you a few questions.

1. When did you become a Christian ?

How many years ago?

(If you have been a Christian less than a year this does not apply to you)

2. How far have you progressed?

Have you established a spiritual life?

Do you read your Bible?

Do you pray?

Are you a member of a small group?

Are you able to contribute?

3. Are you able to lead some else to commitment to Christ?

Are you able to teach the basics?

Are you able to lead a small group?

Are you practicing your faith or just stagnating?

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Now there are some people who have been Christians for many years and neither do, nor can they do, the things that I have mentioned. What's more some will suggest that the reason that they do not do these things, or cannot do them, is humility. "I prefer to avoid the limelight", they say. The problem is that if they were all involved it would cease to be the limelight! It would be normal because everyone was doing it and the chosen few would cease to stand out.

The Christian life is a journey, during which there is a great deal to learn. There is also a huge task to be accomplished. The world has to be won for Christ all over again in every generation. That means that there is no time to loose, not a single pair of hands that can be idle.

What do you need to do about your progress?

Exhortation to Progress (6:1-3)

*Heb 6:1 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,*

Heb 6:2 of instruction about baptisms and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

Heb 6:3 And this we will do, if God permits.

The preacher mentions the problem but he presses on. Unlike the Apostle Paul in **1 Cor 3:2** ("I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able *to receive it*. Indeed, even now you are not yet able), who continued to give his hearers "milk" because they were not ready for solid food, our preacher does not have the time not the inclination to stop. Nothing will be served by going over those elementary teachings. These elementary teachings which are listed are consistent with the teachings of Judaism at the time.

It is possible that he thought that when they heard the marvelous things contained in the teaching they would be motivated to do something about their state of inertia.

No Second Beginning (6:4-8)

Heb 6:4 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,

Heb 6:5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come,

Heb 6:6 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.

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Heb 6:7 For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God;

Heb 6:8 but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.

This is a difficult portion of the sermon. It is understandable that it should worry us as most of us know people who used to serve God and no longer do.

What is the preacher saying? First of all he is speaking into a context. That is, Jewish believers in Jesus who are tempted to revert to their former Judaism because of persecution. Second, he is speaking to a particular group. Not casual inquirers, but those who have;

A accepted Jesus as Messiah (been enlightened),

A known a relationship with God (tasted the heavenly gift),

A believed the Word of God and its life giving teaching (the good Word of God),

A experienced the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives (shared in the Holy Spirit)

A and have experienced the dynamic power of life in the Kingdom of God (the powers of the coming age)

When these people turn away and deny Jesus as Messiah and Lord they are unable ever to return to the relationship they once had.

The preacher says that their behaviour is tantamount to crucifying the Son of God all over again. When one becomes a believer in Jesus, one's sins are forgiven because of Jesus' substitutionary death on the cross. The sacrifice is not only effective for sins committed before one's new life began in Jesus, but also covers all sins thereafter – provided that there is genuine repentance over those sins. Therefore we do not need Him to be crucified again and again for our sins – His death atones for all sins for all time.

For all our sins except one perhaps. If anyone comes into a relationship with Jesus and then walks away from it denying its reality and efficacy, then it seems that the preacher is teaching that the relationship would have to start all over again. For such a person Jesus would have to be crucified all over again, a second time. What a humiliation for Jesus, for the world and for all who have put their trust in His once for all sacrifice. The whole thing is so awful to contemplate that the preacher says that it is impossible for such a person to be brought back to repentance.

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Christians have interpreted this passage in different ways over the centuries. Some today will tell you that this is evidence for the doctrine of instant apostasy while others do not take the teaching as literally as that and hold onto the doctrine of eternal security.

Whatever the answer is, we will certainly find out in the end. Instead of getting embroiled in theological arguments, however, let us take heed of the warning. The danger of turning away and denying Jesus as Messiah and Lord for any reason is a reality which we should take seriously.

Exhortation to Perseverance (6:9-12)

Heb 6:9 But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way.

Heb 6:10 For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.

Heb 6:11 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end,

*Heb 6:12 so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of **those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.***

This is a hard part of the sermon, and at the very least it should serve as a warning to us not to take God or our walk with Him for granted. The preacher is so concerned about the effects of apostasy that he warns against it on three other occasions (**3:12-19; 10:26-31; and 12:25-29**)

The preachers antidote to apostasy is threefold;

A diligence to the very end

Avoid spiritual laziness

An imitation of the faith and perseverance of good role models.

This hope we have as an anchor of the soul