

Bible Study – Hebrews chapter 5:11-6:12 Warning Against Apostasy

In our last study, we looked at Jesus as our High Priest, one who advocates for us as well as one who understands our temptations, struggles, and human frailties. Following in the order of Melchizedek, Christ is our High Priest forever.

In today's study, we will examine look at the warning that the writer is giving to his audience, namely to continue growing into Christian maturity and to avoid apostasy of their faith.

Read Hebrews 5:11-14; 6:1-12

The writer seems to stop in his exposition of Jesus Christ and his role as a high priest in order to address his audience's laziness towards the Word of God, which reveals itself through their continued elementary understanding of their faith, rather than knowing the more advanced teachings. He then goes onto warn that there are those who will turn back on their faith in Christ, which will be to their detriment. The writer then concludes with an encouragement for his readers to strive and continue in their growth and perseverance of their faith.

Q. (v.11-14) When the writer says they have become "dull of hearing", what do you think that means (also, what does this look like) and how did they get there? Why do you think this is a dangerous condition to fall into? What are some things a Christian needs to do in order not to fall into this condition?

- **Leader's Notes** – In passage of 5:11 – 6:3, it is important to note that the author is stating that there is a reversion to an earlier stage, rather than the believers not reaching maturity. There is a presupposition that the audience have already reached maturity, but rather than continuing in their spiritual quest towards maturity, they are going backwards (or at least tempted to go backwards).
- This is evidenced by the preceding verses, which seems to point to a need for advanced Christian instruction. Also, the writer does not review the elementary doctrine, as if they needed a review.
- Some conditions of what this looks like:
 - No longer listening carefully
 - No longer hearing completely (a sign of pride?)
 - No longer comprehending clearly
 - Not being able to discern the Word of God properly
 - Not being able to process what is being taught about the Word of God
- They have gotten there because of laziness towards the Word of God
- Evidence or symptoms of spiritual regression is as follows:
 - Dullness toward the bible
 - Sunday school class is dull
 - Preaching is dull
 - Anything spiritual is dull or uninteresting
- Some reasons why this is a dangerous condition
 - If we are called to obedience, yet we cannot hear or are hard of hearing, how can we then be obedient? We may start going our own way or follow what we think we are hearing, not necessarily knowing if it is truly right.
 - If we do not pass on what we know, we may begin to lose what we know. Eventually we may need to relearn the basic teachings of Scripture.
 - When we stop growing, we start shrinking. We cannot simply stay put.
 - An immature believer will listen to any preacher on the radio or television and not be able to identify whether or not he is true to the Scriptures
- What are some things a Christian needs to do?
 - Teach the word of God (1 Peter 3:15, cf. Romans 2:21)

- Two aims should be prayerfully sought by every Christian: his own edification and his usefulness to others
- A person becomes mature by gaining information and using it to make decisions that are in harmony with God's will
- Maturity – the ability to know good from evil, combined with the self-control to respond accordingly (Charles R. Swindoll)
- Practice is essential as we gain experience
- “As we grow in the Word, we learn to use it in daily life. As we apply the Word, we exercise our ‘spiritual senses’ and develop spiritual discernment”
- This section gives four marks of spiritual immaturity:
 - Laziness (dullness) toward the Word (v.11)
 - Inability to teach the Word to others (v.12)
 - A diet of only elementary truths in the Word (v.12-13)
 - Lack of skill in applying the Word (v. 14)

Q. (6:1-3) The writer lists six (6) elementary teachings that the readers are to leave behind. If you pair the teachings (e.g. 1 and 2, 3 and 4, 5 and 6), what does each grouping represent? What do you think v.3 means and why is it significant?

- **Leader's note** – This section is meant to reveal that the teachings above, whether they are in the Christian or Jewish/Judaism context, the readers need to move beyond these in order to grow in maturity so they can understand the more advance teachings of the bible and to use it for their own growth, as well as the growth of others.
- First pairing:
 - This appears to be God-ward, which represents the reader's relationship to God
 - Laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works
 - This can refer to
 - Faith toward God
- Second pairing:
 - This appears to be one's relationship to the church
 - Instruction of washings
 - This can refer to spiritual washings, in a general sense and can include baptism, which was meant to be a way to 'cleanse' oneself
 - Washings represents spiritual cleansing (cf. Mark 7:4, 8; Hebrews 9:10)
 - The laying on of hands
 - Laying on of hands represents sacrificial ritual (cf. Leviticus 1:4), transferring a blessing (cf. Genesis 48:14-15), and commissioning for public office (Numbers 27:18, 23; Deuteronomy 34:9, cf. Acts 6:6; 13:3)
 - Note to leaders – do not get stuck on the nuance of some of these truths. What the focus should be on is that these are things that was once taught, but the teachings that follow, in Christ, show how much better it is than what they were formally taught (especially the spiritual cleansing)
- Third pairing:
 - This appears to relate to one's relationship to the future life
 - The resurrection of the dead
 - Eternal judgement
- V.3 and its meaning
 - The writer again acknowledges dependence on God for spiritual growth.
 - We can continue to grow only as He enables us to do so
 - Christians are not meant to grow on their own, struggling to find their way, but rather, it is with God's help and enlightenment that each is able to grow towards maturity.

Q. (4-8) The writer now describes there are some who have believed and experienced the goodness of their salvation, are now turning away. How would you describe apostasy? In v.4-5, it talks about the

experiences of God's goodness to believers. Describe some of the goodness that you have experienced since coming to faith. Or if you are a non-believer, is there some goodness that you may have experienced in the presence of Christians? In v. 6, why is it impossible to restore fallen believers to repentance?

- Leader's notes – It will come up, but the discussion of what type of Christian the writer is referring to here is not in scope. The main message is that all Christians, whether true believers or nominal, should be cautious to not turn away from God. This is the main thrust and exposition that the writer is making to his readers.
- It should also be noted, that for the Christian to remain in spiritual infancy (or in this case, to return to spiritual infancy), is what can lead the Christian down the road to apostasy, since he does not know what is right and wrong any longer.
- Describe Apostasy
 - It entails a decisive rejection of God's gifts
 - To turn one's back to the goodness that Christ has shown to the person
 - Dictionary definition – an act of refusing to continue to follow, obey, or recognize a religious faith; abandonment of a previous loyalty
 - Greek translation – apostasia – a defiance of an established system or authority; a rebellion; an abandonment or breach of faith.
- Describe some goodness...
 - The point of this question is for people to remember the goodness that they have experienced in their lives when becoming a Christian. It is important for them to remember these things, especially during times of trials or difficulty, so as not to give up on their faith and to turn away.
 - It may be good for the leader to start off with an example of their own. It doesn't have to be grand, but something that you, as a leader, remember and to show how God can be good in big and small ways.
- Impossible to restore fallen believers
 - Repentance becomes impossible when a person has been fully exposed to the blessings of God's people, but falls away through deliberate unbelief and denial of Christ
 - When believers, or "so-called believers" make their decision, informed and by their own choosing, they may fall into a state where God gives them over to their desires, never to come back again (cf. Romans 1:28)
 - This is not to say that they may never return to the faith, however, the likelihood of that happening is remote, especially when they have seen and experienced the blessings and goodness that comes from God and his salvation
 - Their heart is so hardened that God may allow it to remain that way (cf. Exodus – Pharaoh and the hardening of his heart)
 - Leader's note – the discussion of truly saved and false believers may come up. Pastor Allan will give some commentary on that. Which ever they may be in this passage, it is still a warning to those who have come and experienced the goodness of God, through his salvation and the revelation of their state before God, having received grace and mercy, to not turn away as they may never return.
 - Also, by rejecting God and his Word, the believer, now apostate, is in some way agreeing with the same people who crucified Christ, thereby acknowledging that he is not God and that his death was warranted.
- V.7-8 – Parable/Illustration
 - Leader's note – you may ask a question on this passage, asking if this illustration sends an effective warning of how one receives and uses the blessings from God for God's kingdom. The way it reads, God has given blessing on the land via the rain. It can either produce a crop or bears thorns and thistles. Having received the same blessing of rain on the land, the resulting 'crop' will determine the state of the land and what it will receive (e.g. either additional blessing or be cursed and burned).

Q. (v.9-12) The writer gives the reader hope and encouragement so they can avoid falling away. What are some things that draw away your attention? What do you think you can do to make them less of a distraction? How can you make 'remaining faithful to God and waiting patiently' real in your life? How do you think you can help someone who is not maturing in their Christian walk?

- **Leader's Notes** – This encouragement is to show that there is hope as to not fall away completely. He uses the example of the reader's good works, which they do in all earnestness. He then encourages them to use that same earnestness to persevere in their faith, by listening, understanding, and practicing what they hear so they may not be sluggish and be imitators of those who do these things.
- The purpose of these questions are for people to reflect on their own lives and to take heed that they don't fall into a state where they are not growing, and in fact may be regressing.
- The result should be that people should remain vigilant to their own state of their faith, to be humble when they are called out for their 'dullness', and to eagerly be restored or get back on the path to maturity.
- As well, though we may call someone out for their Christian walk (or lack thereof), we cannot point and do nothing. We are called to help restore and to encourage our brother and sister so they can get back to the point to where they need to be. There needs to be action on our part if we call someone out.

The writer calls out the readers of Hebrews for the regression of their Christian life. Instead of teaching what they have learned and moving onto advance knowledge of God, they are stuck on the elementary teachings they once received. The writer also shows that this state can lead to apostasy, which is the willing rejection of God. When the Word of God no longer matters or has the same impact in a person's life (the dullness that he speaks of), that person may turn to other things which are contrary to the Word of God. This is something the writer wants all believers to avoid, especially since they have experienced the goodness of God in their lives from His blessings and gifts. He encourages them to persevere to the end, knowing that what Jesus has to offer is so much more superior than what this world has to offer.