

Dull of Hearing
Hebrews 5:12

1 Corinthians 9:16-27

2nd Timothy 4:1-9

Responsive Proverbs 16:1-9

Today we are going to continue our journey through Hebrews finishing out chapter 5. Last week we spent our time doing a recap of sorts of what we have gone through so far since it had been so long since we were last together. If you remember the main thrust of the Author's argument up until this point has been about Christ's superiority in all things. How Christ is superior to the Angels, to Moses, to the levitical priesthood. We spent quite a bit of time focusing last week on Christ's superiority over Moses and the law, showing that Moses as the author of Hebrews here says was a servant in the house of the Lord who God used to keep his house until the promised Messiah, or the Master of the house arrived. Now that Christ has come, the one greater than Moses, who is not a servant in the house of God, but the Son the servant who was given the responsibility to watch over the house no longer has that responsibility. Such is the function of the law in the believer, now that Christ has come we have been free from the law given by God through Moses, for as scripture says, the law condemns, but the spirit gives life.

Notice I said the function of the Law for the believer. The question was raised up last week, to paraphrase, is not God's perfect, and eternal? To which the answer is yes, that is what scripture says as well, but it is the function of the law. As we know the law was not given as a means, or a mode of salvation, but rather as Paul says, it was a ministry of death, a curse to all who live under it. It is a curse, and a ministry of death for it is impossible for mankind to fulfill God's holy, righteous and just law. So does the law still function today? I would argue yes, it's purpose has not changed, it functions in the manner it always had, as a guide pointing to the need of a savior and a Messiah, showing man's hopeless state before a Holy and Just God. But what happens when the Holy spirit works in a person, to convict them of their sin and they turn to Christ and repent and believe? The curse, the condemnation of the law is no longer binding upon the Christian for their identity is that of a Child of God through the blood of Jesus Christ who has come and took the condemnation, and punishment of eternal separation from God on our behalf, releasing us from the bonds and curse of the law.

So when we are talking about the law passing away, or no longer having power, or necessity, we are talking about in the life of the believer. The error of the Hebrews here, turning to worship other heavenly beings, or the error of the Galatians who were being deceived that they must return to the law and traditions at its core is the same issue, it is putting anything above Christ. Or making anything other than salvation through Christ an added necessity. It is not Christ+ the law, or Christ+ traditions for salvation, it is only Christ. This was also the error of Israel, they did not see, nor understand that God through progressive revelation was revealing to them the Messiah, but not only the person, but the need. By the time Christ had come, Israel had turned to a type of Idolitry, not like they did in the wilderness with the Golden Calf, but elevating the law and the prophets beyond their intended purpose to the point that when the Messiah who all of these things spoke of and pointed to arrived they did not worship and follow him, but rather sought to kill him for he was a threat to their entire system. A system that made many very rich, and very powerful, and as we can see from reading the new testament it seems the motive of the leaders to at first discredit, and then later kill Jesus was largely driven out of their fear of losing their power and sway over the people. Jesus had become a threat, to their livelihood, their authority. We know that their motives were not purely out of the protection of their faith, because in the end they broke one of the very commandments that is fundamental to the law they claimed to uphold, thou shall not kill.

So I hope that clears up a bit some of the question's that may have come up after last weeks message. I believe the law still exists of course, it is God's eternal and perfect law, but it has been fulfilled in Christ for the believer. So when Paul uses language like, the law is passing away, we must remember that he too is talking to believers, he is not witnessing to the unbeliever but he is telling the believer that now that Christ has come they are no longer under, or condemned by the law. And it is the same when we use the same language today, it is the function of the old covenant law in the life of the believer that has passed away, for it is no longer needed to point us to Christ, for he has already come, and if we are his children then we are saved in his blood, not by the letter of the law, but by faith in perfect Son of God who came in the flesh and in all things fulfilled the law and the prophets, even the temple traditions which pointed to his holiness, and his sacrifice have all been fulfilled. So for the believer, the old covenant is dead, it has passed away. Casey explained it this way last week when he was here with us, We see God as if looking through a mirror darkly, its muddled, it isn't clear, but as God is revealed more and more that mirror becomes clearer. Before Christ there was a separation between God and man, symbolized by the Holy of Hollies in the temple. But what happened when Christ died? The veil that was in the temple that separated mankind from God was ripped in 2, revealing the hidden God which is clearly portrayed not as through a mirror, not through prophets, laws and traditions but through his son.

Which brings us to chapter 5 here in Hebrews which talks about Christ being the superior High priest. Let us turn and read chapter 5 in it's entirety this morning. The high priest of Israel would enter into the Holy of Hollies once a year, with a blood sacrifice to make atonement for Israel. It was only at this time that the veil between God and man was breached, but Christ's death destroyed that veil, being both the high priest to offer sacrifice for the sins of his people, and the perfect holy spotless lamb of God himself, being both the one who offers, and the one who was sacrifice for the people has made access to God not only during a certain time, or in a certain place, or by a certain person, as it was in the days before he came, but now through Christ, by all who are his children, anywhere and everywhere they are. The superior high priest of this faith, the one whom all others were just a shadow, a dark mirror reflection to teach us of the one and true high priest who was coming.

So moving on this morning, looking at the last 2 verses' here of chapter 5, we can see a shift in the author's writing. He has gone from some basic instruction trying to explain the nature, the necessity, and superiority of Christ. Which these are basic fundamental principles of the faith, these are things that every believer should at least on one level have a pretty firm grasp of. Even the newest Christian should at least understand that it is Christ in whom salvation has come. So having set up again these basic things, the Author here turns and reprimands these Hebrews for not understanding even these basic things. For turning away from the faith that they were first taught, to something else entirely. In verse 11 he calls them dull of hearing and says that they are still babes needing to still be taught the basic things of the faith. This is not a good place to be, for the reality is that if our faith is true and grounded in Christ, then it should be a vibrant, growing faith seeking to know Christ more, seeking to love him more, seeking to conform our life to be more like Christ.

We are not called to merely believe, but to believe, and to grow, to believe and to learn, to believe and to minister. As the author says here, you should by now be teachers, your knowledge of the faith should be to a point where you can mentor others, where you can minister to others but you are still babes needing the milk of the word and not solid food. There are consequences of never moving out of being one who's faith and understanding has never grown and who needs to be constantly fed the basics and reminded the simple things of the faith. And we see one of those consequences here, the danger of being lead astray by false belief, by false doctrine.

We can look at these Hebrews here and think, how in the world could they having been taught Christ, having turned in faith toward him then turn and begin worshiping Angels? Well, do we not have the same problem in the larger church today? By larger church, I mean all encompassing those who claim Christ. We see so many false teachers, preachers, who amass 10's of thousands of followers and deceive them often for their own gain. They manipulate and abuse those who follow them, deliberately never moving past some simple feel good teaching to keep their congregations in a state of ignorance and compliance. You can see this because instead of the word of God being front and center, it becomes more about the emotional experience of faith, it becomes about how it makes you feel, Your feelings become a guide, and not the word of God. What you feel about the faith becomes more important then your knowledge of your faith. But as we see, this is a dangerous place to be for it opens you up to deception not being grounded in the knowledge of the word, as the Author here says in verse 14, we should be adults in the faith, who are eating the solid food of the word so that we are able to discern such things.

In light of the passage today, I believe that there are poor Christians who have never moved past the basics of the faith, who indeed never even fully grasped the basics of the faith and they get caught up in the celebrityism of these charismatic, likable false teachers. And in many ways it shows that our ministry is not only to the fallen world around us, but to those who are also in the church. Take the apostles as an example, we have a collection of letters which comprise the new testament in our bibles. which is the apostles writing to churches that they had established in various places around the area. If you spend any time reading these letters you will notice that They always seem to need to reprimand, or teach, or to remind and draw them back to the faith which they were first given. I think there is a tendency to always look outward when it comes to ministry, always seeking the lost which don't get me wrong is exactly what we as Christians are called to do but I do not believe that we do so at the cost of leaving the importance of the ministry to those in the faith as well. As we know there are many who claim Christ, who are not Christs, who sit in the churches on Sunday mornings, and as we see 10's of thousands gather and hear false messages by false teachers believing the faith that gives them goose bumps, the faith that they feel, is the faith that they have. But true faith is not goosebumps and excited feelings during a worship hour, true faith is practiced and exercised not when things are good, but when things get bad. Our reaction to trials and hardships is he proof, and outworking of our faith and God working through us to comfort and provide. And even this itself is a ministry to the faith that we hold, to remain hopeful, and at peace when in the eyes of the world we should be crumbling. We must be aware that the sad reality is, our churches are as full of unbelievers as our streets.

So how do we fix this problem? How do we fix the problem of churches full of people who have an outward appearance of faith, but have no true grounding faith in them? How do we fix the problem of church attendance? Of the youth leaving the church? It seems that if we look at what church organizations are doing to day it does not seem to be helping the issue, rather only making it worse. The watering down of the gospel, the catering and marketing to make ourselves sound more entertaining, more hip, more interesting hasn't helped. Once that newness wears off, the people still leave. The reality is that gospel has been gutted, it is no longer being taught and has been traded in many cases for a more socially acceptable, entertaining, less offensive message. Or as we have been seeing lately if you follow whats going on in this country at all, an out and out liberalization of organizations who are now accepting, and applauding things they once called out as sin. Which is just a further attempt to make themselves ore invited to fix the problem they have of people leaving.

So the reality is that the issue is this very thing the Author here in Hebrews is chastising them about. The same can be said to many of our own churches, many of our own Christian organizations. They have watered down the gospel to be ineffective, they keep the congregation on the milk of the word no longer challenging, or promoting spiritual growth but creating an environment of complacent followers who are happy in their ignorance. Just as we see with these Hebrews, and with the Galatians, and in our churches today this is such a dangerous place to be for it allows false preachers, false teachers, manipulators, liars, and those who use such things as tools to gain their own glory and fame to come in and deceive these people having little to no knowledge of the word, or ability for discernment.

So to answer the questions I posed, how do we fix the problems in the church? In the wider Christendom today? It is quite simple, faithfully, truthfully, preach and teach the gospel. Leave the social, and political messages and return to the word of God. Drop the emotional driven programs and instead seek to ground believers in the faith, so that when the inevitable trials arise they have the knowledge of the word, and the strength provided by God to endure instead of faltering. We must be about aiding in the transition from milk to meat. We must not allow ourselves, or our Christian brothers and sisters remain complacent for we are not doing them any favors. That is one of the major issues I have with a lot of the street ministry programs, there is a surface level sharing of the gospel then it seems those who come and seemingly make a claim of salvation are left to their own devices without any shepherding or guiding. Even if they truly were saved through such ministry, they are left to the wolves and can be quickly caught up into false teachings. This is a failure on the part of the church, this is a failure on the part of such ministries and we must be careful that this is not a failure on our part within our own witness as well. We are not just to minister to share the gospel with the unreached, or the lost, but just as importantly we are to shepherd and mentor, to instruct and teach. This is not a calling just to ministers, or scholars, but to each and everyone of us. We are all ministers of the word of God, we are all teachers, and all preachers sharing and spreading the gospel. How can we do so if we have not had anything other than the milk of the word, if we have never moved beyond the understanding of the basics we are not going to be able to teach, or minister as we ought.

In our own personal walk of faith, we should always be pressing forward, moving upward, gaining knowledge and understanding, growing in faith, and we should be encouraging those around us to do the same. This is the roll that I believe that local church body performs, the roll of outreach, to the lost should not be the focus of the church organization, but rather it is the preparation of the congregation to go forth and minister. Church's must stop being quote unquote seeker friendly, and instead focus on teaching their people to grow in faith, and prepare them to go forth and be a witness within their own circles of family and friends, or people they meet. And the church must be there for these new people to come in, giving them a place of peace and comfort with the brothers and sisters in Christ to help these babes grow into adults who can also become teachers and mentors.

This is how the church body must operate if they want to fix the problems they have been complaining about now for a long time. Focus on the ministry that God has given, be faithful in the teaching and preaching of this word, equipping the saints with the spiritual food that is needed for growth and you will have a vibrant, stable, active local body of believers, who are invested not in the physical church, but in their faith and growth, and through that will grow a greater love, a greater peace, and greater understanding. Let us always strive to be this type of church, one who will remain focused upon the message of the word of God, who hungers for the meat of the word, and never be side tracked by the issues of the day, or the next trendy ministry program. Let us strive to be compassionate, and give aid and help to those who have been disenfranchised and damaged by the practices and ministries of others who have used their ministry to manipulate and control.

