

True faith brings Hope.
Hebrews 6:9-13

Revelation 22

Matthew 10:16-22

Responsive Psalm 130:1-8

Last week we started going through chapter 6 which the Author here spent the first few verses warning about falling into apostasy. But not only that, he writes about the ramifications of apostasy. So this morning let us start out by reading Hebrews chapter 6, starting in verse 1 and we will read to verse 13 today focusing on verses 9-13.

As I had mentioned last week when we were diving into the first 8 verses here that even though he is warning them about apostatizing, that he is confident that a large portion to those he is writing to have not apostatized, but rather have been deceived or lead astray. So he warns them, but says, in verse 9 “beloved, we are confident in better things concerning you.” That being said though, it does not mean that his warning or the danger of apostasy is unnecessary or unrealistic. As we have seen going through this book, in the first 5 chapters this group or groups that he is writing to have in general so far not made any real spiritual progress in their faith and understanding, so much so that he needed to go back and teach them some of the most basic principles of the faith.

As I had mentioned before, complacency in the faith is a very dangerous place to find yourself. It can potentially be a warning sign into the validity of your faith, for Christ and the Holy Spirit produces in us a desire to grow, and to be more Christlike in our walk. If this is lacking, if there is little to no desire for the things of God then that raises some questions about your confession. In the very least complacency can also I a sense invite trouble. As we all know, and as scripture teaches persecution, and tribulations are vehicles that God uses to draw his people near. Much like the author here chastising these Hebrews for their lack of growth, there is a sense of frustration and a drive and purpose to bring them back.

There is a true danger to the local church if apostasy is allowed to settle in, in brings in division, for there maybe those who are wolves in sheep's clothing in the midst who stir up trouble, who do not display the love of God working through them but instead sow the seeds of doubt, and contention among the people. The danger is that these few, can bring down the rest causing such problems within the congregation that the gathered body there divides and the church organization loses their ministry and witness. The light of the church which could be once vital and flourishing may decline into apostasy and God may allow it to be extinguished. It is the warnings in Revelation to the 7 churches in chapter 2-3. In which to some of these God says, This I have against you, and warns them, turn and repent or judgment will befall you. Going to Revelations quickly, chapter 2:4 and 5, Speaking of the church in Ephesus “Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lamp stand from its place- unless you repent!” I could go probably into a whole sermon about leaving the first love, what that means and why it would bring such a judgment, but I think we all understand quick simply what he is talking about here. They have allowed other things to take place in their focus and ministry upon the gospel of Christ, so God says, repent, and return or I will snuff you out.

A little further down in chapter 2 he says to the church in Pergamos, verse 14, “But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold to the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.” Remember the warning about entertaining apostates in your midst, in this case the church seemed to be allowing out right pagans, and heretics to teach and deceive that fellowship.

Continuing on, verse 15, he says, “Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans which thing I hate, Repent or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.” Again, repent and turn or I will bring judgment upon you. And again we see a warning to the Church in Thyatira verse 20, “Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce my servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent, indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am he who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each of you according to your works.” Again, we see God warning that his judgment is coming unless they repent because they have allowed such things to continue in their midst.

These are a few examples that stand in scripture warning the churches, not just then, but today about entertaining, or allowing those who would bring deception and false teaching into the church. A case can be made here for the practice of church discipline, for instance in the case of the church in Tyatira, the teachings, and things that Jezebel was doing should have never been tolerated, should have been confronted and stopped. This shows a gross lack of discernment, and complacency to allow, or justify such a thing to continue. But as we see here in chapter 6 of Hebrews the author does not seem to be worried that this will be the end outcome of the church or churches he is writing to, for he says he has confidence of their salvation even though he is speaking to them in this manner. He is confident that they will do what must be done, repent and turn from their false worship of angels, and deal with those who had brought in such false teaching.

The reason that he can be so confident is because of his trust in God's absolute sovereignty and grace and his unfailing work in the lives of his children. From the beginning of regeneration, to the end of a Christians earthly walk in faith it belongs to God. Therefore since it is in the hands of the Almighty, Gracious, Sovereign God, it is secure. Those who are his children will never be lost, Man is fallible and insecure, but those who have experienced the power of God's redeeming grace in Christ know that it is God who fulfills all things according to his council and will. As Paul writes in Ephesians, “Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision made in the flesh by hands, that at the time you were without Christ, being aliens from the common wealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” Have been sealed, Christ shed blood for the atonement of God's people can not, and will not fail. That is how this author can write to them with some confidence knowing that there are still those who are Christs, but because of their lack of growth and understanding have become complacent and unable to discern when false teaching comes in and deceives.

We can also see his confidence in how he addresses them at the beginning of chapter 9, he calls them his beloved, which confirms his love and his confidence in them, to which he follows up in verse 10 some of the reasons why he can be confident in them. He says, "For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward his name, in that you have ministered to the saints and do minister." Their work of ministry and love toward the saints stands as a proof of God's love flowing through them. But it isn't just kindness, or acceptance, or things that we today can pass off as being loving, if we go to chapter 10 we can see a bit more what the author here is talking about their work, and love toward the saints.

Verse 32, But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings; partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated. For you had compassion on me in my chains and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. As we can see by this example these are selfless acts of love and care ministering to the saints that can only really flow out of the heart effected by God's grace to show such self sacrificing love. Inviting themselves to be persecuted even because of their association, because of their giving and provision to the Author while he was in chains. And as we can see here in chapter 6, this was not a fluke, for he says, that the still do minister in this way.

This was not just something they did in the past, it is something that they are still doing which again is a reason that this Author can have confidence in their faith, and that in the end they will not be apostates, but rather will turn, repent, and move forward. Moving on here to verse 10 which says, "For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward his name." This passage here talking about the assurance that God will not overlook them because of their love and their work is cited by the Roman Catholic apologists as supporting their doctrine of the meritorious character of good works. In other words, Good works, are deserving of a reward and gains favor with God, it establishes as it were, a claim upon God. Because of their good works, God owes them. This concept is as we know already, not what the bible teaches, for it is not by works, or by will but by God that we are justified. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians in chapter 15, "By the grace of God I am what I am.

Calvin explains this passage by saying, the author "is clearly not discussing here the cause of salvation, and therefore no conclusion should be drawn from this passage about the merits of works toward salvation." Or as another Theologian wrote, "There is no doctrine here of the merit of good works. Nor is there any suggestion of recompense for services rendered, but rather for the love which must issue in good works if it is real." So basically, what the book of James was about. Faith without works is dead, and works without faith is meaningless for justification before God. The works and merit that this Author here is talking about in Hebrews is not for some sort of justification, or salvation, but rather he is mentioning as a proof of their love toward the brotherhood, the love toward one another even if it marks them for ridicule and persecution they yet stand, and serve. It isn't the work that does anything, but the work stands as a proof of the validity of their faith for it is flowing out of the love of God working through their lives. We as Christians not only should, but will produce good works just as a good tree bears good fruit, and we are known by that fruit.

Even though the Author here does not doubt in their faith, he is concerned with their lack of growth which allowed an environment that produced the false teaching of Angel worship that he was calling them out on. We see this again in the following verses, 11 and 12, “And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” Here again we see the Author's plead with them defines his relationship with them. As earlier he identified himself with them, this passage shows his desire that he yearns for them to grow in the faith. Also notable here is that he says, “each of you” he has brought this down to a more personal level in a way of addressing each individual person. His desire is that each individual will grow in faith, and by such the whole body will flourish. Chrysostom observed that the author here does not treat them with the authority of a teacher, but rather with the affection of a father. Just as it is natural for parents to yearn and desire their children to grow and mature, so it is the same with his desire for each and every one of these he writes to.

So as we can see the warning still stands, that a stunted spiritual growth is dangerous and should not be something that defines God's people. The Christian life must always be marked by progress and perseverance until the end. The direction should be always onward and upward and hope is one of the distinguishing marks for it is securely founded on the promise and power of God, which in itself is the power that drives us to grow and mature. And it is this hope, this power of God working through us granting us the desire, and the ability to grow is as Calvin said, “True faith, always goes hand in hand with hope.” Faith in Christ is not something that we are given and then remains inactive in us, but rather drives us to perseverance and hope for Christ is not only the source of our faith, but the also the goal of our salvation, he is the alpha and omega, the beginning and end.

With the stagnation of growth in whom this Author writes to, there is a loss of this hope, he is alarmed that they have become sluggish and with that there is the possibility that their lack of enthusiasm for the faith they hold could cause them to even contemplate dropping out of the race. As Phillip Hughs put it in his Comentary, “sluggishness, which is only one degree away from stagnation, is a symptom of the clouding over of the perspective of hope.” The best example we have of hope in Christ really comes from the old testament heroes of the faith. Those who have not seen what we have seen, who do not have the complete word of God and his revelation to mankind, who received the promises and believed them, but did not see their fulfillment. Yet through faith in God's word, and patience, which bares witness to their hope they showed that they belong to the company of those who inherit the promises of God.

We must be careful that we do not become complacent, or sluggish in our faith but rather that we are ever growing, ever striving to mature, to grow in love toward our savior, and one another. I will close today by reading Roman's chapter 5, verse 1-5. “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice In the hope and glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulation, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance, and perseverance, character, and character hope. Now hope does not disappoint because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”