

## The Marks of Apostasy Hebrews 7:1-8

Romans 8:12-36  
Mathew 12: 22-37  
Responsive Psalm 24

This week we are starting out in chapter 7, where we will find that the Author here is beginning to switch his focus, going from the elementary things of the faith and moving on into deeper theological meat. IF you remember last week finishing up chapter 6 he was chastising these Hebrews for for not moving past the basics, and therefore because of their lack of understanding and discernment they had been lead astray into the idolatry of Angel worship. But it isn't as if he has left the subject, the first word in chapter 7 here is Therefore, which as we all know is not a start of a new thought or subject, but connects what comes after from what came before. So let's read the first 8 verses this morning of chapter 7.

Having identified their lack of discernment and growth, the Author here is exhorting them to do something about it, not to just continue in their complacent ways, but to be active and vibrant in their faith. Strive to grow, seek to gain knowledge and understanding, be a people of mature faith able to stand in the face of deception and temptation having the ability to discern with biblical discernment that which is true, and that which is false. Right here in verse 1 there is an interesting phrase, he says, "Let us go on to perfection." This is interesting for while he is instructing these Hebrews that he is writing to, he uses the word us. In doing so he is equating himself with them, as being a part of them. He is not writing in such away that puts himself as the teacher up on a pedestal to be idolized and worshiped either as some teachers do, but rather equating himself with them and imploring them to "go together"

This is the makings of a good teacher, one who leads by example, through compassion and care of his students and not one who takes the roll of a dictator using his authority as a bludgeon to force his students into submission. He identifies himself with them, not looking down upon them in their state, but goes to them where they are and seeks to lift them up, he invites them to go with him in a united unit to progress forward and move past where they have been. "Let US go on to perfection not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God." This attitude, the way he instructs here shows his love and concern for these he considers his brothers and sisters in Christ. Having just finished instructing them about the importance of the high priest being taken from among the people, having suffered as the people they represent has suffered being one of them, who is then able to be compassionate, when the people fall. The author here is in a sense doing the same thing identifying himself with them. Showing that he to, is one like them, and it is what drives his compassion toward them in his instruction to draw them back to the faith which they first were founded.

In the Greek text, this phrase Let us go on, means literally "let us be carried forward." Which in identifying himself with them, implies that it is not he who is leading them, it is not a matter of the students being carried by their instructor toward perfection, but rather they are both being unified together are carried forward toward this mark by God. In this statement and in his identifying with them it shows that the Author here believes that these he writes to are children of God, and believes in the promise that they will not be forsaken, or that their turning away is because of a false faith, but rather it is the effect of a weak faith brought on by lack of understanding and spiritual growth.

\

In Romans 8 we read this morning, it says, “ all who are lead by the spirit are son's of God.” Those in whom the holy spirit indwells will not be left by the wayside, but the spirit itself will minister and drive the believer forward.

“Let us be carried forward” by God through the holy spirit as we seek to gain knowledge and spiritual growth and understanding. The indwelling of the Holy spirit is in many ways the catalyst for spiritual growth. If there seems to be lacking any spiritual growth, it is not out of the question to consider that person's eternal state before God. For the holy spirit works in us to strive forward, it causes us to hunger for the things of Christ, if that hunger and compassion are not there it brings into down whether that individual may have the spirit living within them in the first place. And it is with this sort of reality that the Author here writes in the next few verses with a stark warning of those who would ultimately leave the faith. Before we get into that though, we should note that the Author does not believe that these Hebrews are such a people, he does not believe they are ones who have fallen into apostasy and rebellion against God, but rather that they have been deceived and lead astray we see that in verse 9 “But beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation though we speak to you in this manner.”, He believes that there are many who will head his word, that the seed's he has planted in the first 5 chapters will fall upon good soil and take root, but also puts for this warning knowing that not all will be good ground, and that some, likely those who were the ones who brought in such teaching as angel worship that they were so struggling with will face eternal judgment. So in this letter he effectively is him coming down to them, unifying himself with them, and leading them out of their deception back to the path of the faith in which they started.

This type of ministry, this leading by example, identifying as one of them understands that it is God's work and it is God working through the holy spirit in them that will ultimately draw them back. Which ultimately stands for evidences of their true faith, separating those who are truly are brothers and sisters of Christ, and those who are making an empty claim. It is an understanding that since it is a work of God it can not return unfruitful, or unsuccessful. Through the power, and love of God, let us strive to move forward, to grow and never again be caught again in ignorance, or complacency.

Before we dive into the next few verse, there is more that we must say about the first verses here to setup a basis for understanding what follows. The author says, in verse 1. “therefore leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ” We must understand that he is not saying that we discard these elementary principles, for it is these principles that set up the foundation for our faith, and the foundation for all spiritual growth to be built upon. Very much in the same way that as a child we all learned our ABC's and while we never need to return to relearn them, they are always something that is present in our life and are the basic building block of our language system which as we have aged and matured has been built upon, and is in fact the basic principle of the tool used to gain further knowledge and maturity. So to is the basic things of the faith, never forgotten, always present but built upon as we grow. It is not that we ever leave these principles and teachings and move on to something bigger and better, without these basics there would be no bigger and better.

The point that the author is making here, and the error of the likes of the those he has written this letter, is that the basics are not a stopping point, the basics are not the end. Just as we had talked about last week, this is a problem in our churchs today, and why we see many of the issues that churches deal with. They never move beyond the basics, they never challenge, or instruct their people in the deeper aspects of the Christian faith, but are stuck on a loop, in an attempt to be non confrontational, and approachable by being “seeker friendly”

But as I challenged last week, being seeker friendly is not the roll of the gathering of the local body, it is to prepare the saints to go forth in faith, knowledge and confidence into this world and be a witness. The roll of the services on Sunday and the preaching of God's word is to equip the congregation with the tools needed for personal spiritual growth, building upon the basics to deepen their faith and understanding.

Again in verse 1, he says, "Let us go on to perfection not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God." As we know a foundation is nothing something that needs to be constantly rebuilt, or replaced. It is the basic, core part of any structure, He is saying the same thing here, that the foundation of the basics of faith does not need to be laid again for it has already been laid but in the case of the recipients of his letter, it was just never built upon. So he is imploring them to build upon the foundation that they have,

Verse 3, says, "And this we will do if God permits." There is a bit of controversy here in this statement in an attempt to understand what exactly the author is addressing here. Some understand it as to whether or not the author will be able to get to the more advanced teaching he has mentioned, In this case the plural pronoun we would be referring to the author alone. The other understanding understands this use of the plural we, designates both the author and readers together saying in effect, if God wills it we will go forward and mature together. I personally prefer the 2<sup>nd</sup> understanding here, for I believe it ties in better with the author's identifying himself with those who he is writing to which he does in the first verse with the use of the word us. But either way, we understand that this statement is an admittance and understanding of God's sovereignty and grace. The author here knows that it isn't his skill with words, or letter writing that will win the day, but it is God working through the hearts and minds of those to whom he has written, to God willing, build upon the foundation and grow into mature vibrant people of faith.

So having now setup some ground work going into this chapter, we can now jump into the fun stuff. Moving from the elementary, into something deeper. And in this case it is the issue of apostasy, or turning away from God. Let us read verse 4-6 again. "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift and have become partakers of the holy spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God and put him to an open shame." This is some heavy stuff, and at the surface level seems to hint that one could even lose their salvation. But if that were the case, then it would stand in a stark controversy with the rest of what scripture teaches, so it must be something else. It is not that the treat of apostasy isn't real, if that was the case then there would be no reason for this author here to spend any time on it but I think that the proper way to understand this passage is that it is not those who have the holy spirit indwelling in them that are in danger of ultimately falling into apostasy, but it is rather those who make the claim of faith with no real root, it is the parable of the seeds, the ones who fell upon stony ground and sprung up quickly and looked vibrant, but when the sun came up, with trials and hardships arise, they withered and died having no root, having no true faith.

This is the danger of a false faith, and a danger of false teaching creating such followers. For it creates a burned over effect, searing them from the gospel. The best example I can think of is the people I am sure we all know in our lives, who may have grown up in the church, but have now rejected it, who have turned away from the teaching of the bible believing that it has no effect. You can hear it in conversations about the faith, they seem to have a been there done that attitude toward Christianity, believing there time spent as "christians" was wasted and now that they have matured and grown up they don't need such silly nonsense.

I believe it is these types that the author here is warning against, and it could very well be these types who have come in and through false teaching has begun to lead the true followers into deceptive and false practices.

Tying this into last weeks message, again this is the danger of falsely presenting the word of God in ministry. The practice that we see in our churches here in this country today, of leaving aside the word of God and moving toward a social message, one that is “more relevant today” does not create an environment for spiritual growth, but rather creates a myriad of false believers, with a false faith. The dangers that this author is talking about of having once been enlightened, finding no root or meaning in this false faith, turn and reject it. Now that I have explained my understanding of these verses, let us break them down a bit to understand this state of apostasy, and it's dangers. There are a few things that defines those who would be those who the author says in verse 4, impossible for those once enlightened to return. The first is repentance, for as we know repentance is one of the basic foundations of the faith, you can not have this faith, without repentance. Repentance is not just the act of seeking forgiveness, but is also followed by the act of avoidance, a turning away, or running away from the sin which one has been caught up in. It should be understood as the author put forth in verse 1, “a repentance of dead works, and of faith toward God.” We are not talking about the repentance that we all do on a daily basis for the sins we commit, it is the repentance from a changed heart, the crying out to God when he reveals to us our vial state, and his holy nature, it is the repentance that flows from the new birth, this genuine, and true repentance, a turning away once and for all from the old life of sin and seeking to live a life following Christ.

This repentance is a once for all turning away from a life of rebellion, an unrepeatable moment in the transition from death to life. That is why the author says in verse 6, if they fall away to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the son of God and put him to open shame. Having to need to repeat this once and for all act of repentance puts Christ's work on the cross to shame. For the idea of needing to renew your faith, like couples renew their wedding vows means that Christ's sacrifice was not sufficient for your atonement. Christ's work on the cross is a failure, and thus you must keep crucifying him over and over again to stay in the faith. I think that this very much is dealing with those who have doubt's in the validity of their faith. Some tend to want to coddle these weaker Christians, and tell them that its all ok, we validate and confirm their faith by telling them once saved always saved...but we leave out the caviate, if truly saved to begin with. I was such a person, I would doubt at times that I was even saved, and would again repent, ask forgiveness, and the now sort of cliché'd act of asking Jesus back into my heart. But what it all came down to, was an understanding that it was never the act of me praying that saved me, but it was God who worked that in me. I did not need to keep crucifying him on the cross every time I doubted my faith to come back into the fold, but rather I needed to rely and trust upon God that the faith and repentance that he granted me was true. Which all again, comes down to the ministry and teaching, a large portion of the gospel I was given in the church at that time was focused upon my decision and ability to come to God. My faith was built upon the act of repentance, not on the new birth that came before. It was not until I understood and grasped God's sovereign grace in salvation, and that it was He who sought after me, and brought me in, who worked in my to give me the faith, and created in me a heart able to repent, that I found confidence and peace in my salvation.

The next thing the author mentions, is enlightenment. True enlightenment from the word of God effects every aspect of our being, it changes our thoughts, our intentions, our purpose and reasons and grants us hope and love which is only found and expressed through Christ. But we know one of Satan's favorite tools in his toolbox of lies and deception is to blind the minds of unbelievers. And what greater deception is there then for one to be fooled into believing they have already been saved when in reality they are just as lost as any other unbeliever. Just like a faith founded upon false belief, so to is a false enlightenment. A deception, a lie, driving one to doubt, despair and eventually apostasy.

Next he mentions, tasting the heavenly gift, and becoming partakers of the holy spirit. There are some who equate this to the Eucharist, taking the term tasting literally, but I think that is a wrong understanding of this passage in light of the rest of this passage. It would be better understood symbolically, the tasting of the heavenly gift, is having experienced at one level the forgiveness of sins, and God's grace, they have a taste of the christian brotherhood, the love in the community toward one another. But just like a false faith, and a false enlightenment, this to can be a temporary state.

So as we can see from this passage, this is not a case of true believers apostasizing, and turning away from God, but rather it is those who believe themselves to be and represent themselves as believer for a time. No true believer will turn from God, but those who's faith have no root, who's faith was never founded upon the foundation of Christ, but rather was based upon their own good works, or act, or their own decision are in danger of being an apostate. In closing, we see the Author here warns what happens to these who have turned their back upon God, verse 7: "For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessings from God; but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned. Again, that brings us to what I believe is the scariest reality in scripture. Matthew 7:21-23. When those with false faith, approach the throne of God. "Not everyone who says to me Lord Lord shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my father in heaven. Many will say to me I that day, in the day of judgment, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name and done many wonders in your name?" Notice the focus here is on their acts, their works, believing what they have done is justification enough, but God says, "And then I will declare to them, I never knew you, you were never one of my children, depart from me, you who practice lawlessness."

This should at some level strike fear into each of our hearts, and drive us to as the apostle says, make every effort to be sure your salvation is true. If you doubt, do not pass it off, do not attempt to console your doubt with the idea of once saved always saved, for your doubt may very well be the holy spirit's conviction that you were never truly saved in the first place. Be sure your salvation, do not be like those who find themselves before the judgment seat of God believing themselves righteous to only be turned away and cast into hell and eternal damnation. And like wise, we must be careful that in our ministry, and in our witness that we are true to the bible, that we grow in our knowledge and understanding so that we do not lead others astray. We must strive to not bow down to this idea of watering down the gospel, or attempting to become more seeker friendly, but instead stand strong upon the word for it is only the word of God that has the power to save. Not our words, nor our traditions, but it is only through the word of God, and his working of the holy spirit in us that we can enter into that eternal sabbath rest.

