

JESUS IS BETTER THAN APOSTASY
(*"HEALTHY MEANS HUNGRY – for God's Word"*
Hebrews 5:11 – 6:12)

In the early 1950s, a Chicago pastor named Vince Trimmer was organising a city wide evangelistic "crusade" as they were still called back then. There were 2 evangelists of "national renown" that Pastor Vince considered to attract non-Christians. He selected the one who was more *prominent*, more *gifted*, and had a *better track record* regarding numbers of "decisions" for Christ.

Afterward, Vince reflected, the first hint something was wrong was when this evangelist arrived on the initial night of the crusade and asked, "*Where is my dressing room?*"¹

The man's name was Charles Templeton, co-founder of *Youth For Christ International*, and America's most famous evangelist at that time.

By 1957, he'd abandoned the Christian faith.

At first Templeton remained pleasant to Christians, but as the years went on, he became increasingly hostile to the claims of Christ and Christianity.

Templeton went on to write many books, but his last was the most significant:

Farewell to God: My Reasons for Rejecting the Christian Faith

By the way, the other evangelist, the one not chosen by Pastor Vince was Billy Graham, Templeton's best friend.

What are we to make of someone so acquainted with Jesus & the gospel, so "active" in the church, even ministry . . . but *falling away* from the faith?

By 'Jettisoning Jesus', Charles Templeton is an appropriate introduction to a controversial section in the letter to the Hebrews, which says,

*"it is **IMPOSSIBLE**, in the case [a very particular case] of those . . . who have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance."* (Hebrews 6:4)

This text clearly 'means business'! But what does it 'mean'? What does it **not** mean? And how can we avoid falling away? That's our task this morning.

We are in the book of Hebrews, a book encouraging *struggling Christians* to fix our eyes on Jesus and endure in the faith, because Jesus is Better. Better than any person, any religion, any Saviour – in fact the only name under heaven by which people can be saved.

Some in that congregation receiving the letter of Hebrews were considering turning back from following Christ . . . an eternal mistake!

Last week we looked at a great section on Jesus being a *Better High Priest*: God took on flesh, becoming fully sympathetic to us, yet without sin!, giving us confidence to approach God's throne of grace *because of* Jesus sacrificing Himself to bring peace with God & men.

Jesus' priestly lineage is of a new order, not from the line of Aaron as per the old covenant, but from the line of Melchizedek, this mysterious person only briefly mentioned in Genesis.

But in 5:11 – 6:12 the writer of Hebrews takes a **purposeful pause**, from his discussion about Melchizedek & Jesus' Better priesthood, and warns us about falling away.

¹ Story shared by professor Don Carson, who knew Pastor Vince.

Listen to the pause of 5:11,

About this [Melchizedek & Jesus' Better priesthood] we have much to say, but it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

The problem is not the author's ability to explain, nor topic of Jesus' better priesthood.

The key word 'framing the bookends' to this warning section: "dull" / "sluggish"

"... you have become dull" (5:11)

"... [do] not be sluggish" (6:12) [same word in Greek, *nothros* (*νωθρός*)]

The NIV translates it:

"you no longer try" (5:11)

"We do not want you to be lazy" (6:12)

Note: they have a particular sort of dullness/laziness:

"you have become dull of HEARING" (5:11)

"[do] not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith & endurance INHERIT the promises." (6:12)

The writer notes their **peril** – some in the congregation are not, by faith, *applying* what they've heard, and so they are in real danger of falling away, *not enduring*.

He **wants** them to inherit the promise, and not be like the generation of the Exodus, exiting Egypt but not entering the Promised Land.

'Dull/lazy' is actually from a root word meaning an "*illegitimate child*." In Heb 12:8

*IF you are **without discipline** . . . then you are illegitimate children, NOT true sons and daughters.*" (Hebrews 12:8)

The author is lovingly but *gravely* concerned, describing the congregation's infantile immaturity.

Main Idea:

Persevere into spiritual Maturity, or you risk Perishing by Apostasy!

"Apostasy" is a word that simply means to "depart from where you are standing".

If you are standing on Christ/confessing Christ, it means to reject Him . . . permanently.

Outline:

- Problem of Infancy (5:11-13)
- Path to Maturity (5:14-6:3)
- Peril of Apostasy (6:4-8)
- Press on to Maturity! (6:9-12)

PROBLEM OF INFANCY (5:11-13)

Imagine entering a restaurant in the CBD at lunchtime, seeing a bunch of men & women dressed in business suits, but no one is eating anything. Instead, everyone is drinking... **milk** – and that – out of *baby bottles!* You think that's bizarre, but you really freak out when you learn that under their business attire, they're **wearing nappies!**

That's the picture portrayed of many in the congregation, look at 5:12-13,

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You use milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is an infant.

They're advanced in years, but not in maturity; they're "**old** infants"!

Milk is not bad for you.

But milk alone *stunts growth* for a child trying to attain maturity:

“everyone who lives on milk is **unskilled** in the word of righteousness”

He’s saying: failure to **Know** is a failure to **Grow!**

This is why Peter writes,

“Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord & Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18)

The congregations’ arrested development is not so much a *mental* problem but a *moral* one.

“by this time you ought to be teachers” Ought is a verb speaking of moral obligation.

This is not a reference to those who hold a teaching office such as a pastor or elder.

He’s addressing the members’ responsibility to *disciple other believers*, one another.

Notice the same word “**oracles**” (reveal word) of God tied in with in Rom 3:1-2,

What advantage is there in being a Jew?...

Much in every way! To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.

Jewish/Hebrew Christians were given a *historic head start, a leg up* on God’s word & will!

So when Jesus, the Messiah, came and fulfilled all righteousness, these predominantly Hebrew Christians *should* be the most mature, the most “ready” to disciple/to teach Gentile Christians all about the kingdom of God and **how great Jesus is!**

But in this congregation, they were far from it. Infants!

They were *behind in their development* & behind in their *duty*.

So, this dullness of hearing is a willful ‘not listening’.

Recall what the great word “shema/hear”: to truly hear is to heed/to obey/do

In Jeremiah 6, listen to how God warns His people about the **peril** facing them

As a well keeps its water fresh,

so Jerusalem keeps ‘fresh’ her evil!

Be warned, O Jerusalem,

lest I turn from you in disgust,

lest I make you a desolation (Jer 6:7-8)

Here’s the punch line

*To whom shall I speak and give warning, that they may **HEAR?***

*... behold, the word of the Lord is to them an object of **scorn**; they take no pleasure in it.*

If that’s you this morning, finding little to no pleasure in God’s word, unless it’s baby food, expecting others to make the ‘airplane sound’, manoeuvring the spoon of solid until you get finally get a bit interested in eating . . . you’re in real danger, my friend.

Apathy leads to **Apostasy!**

but

Solid food leads to Solid ground!

(not departing from where you stand). Thankfully, the writer offers us a . . .

PATH TO MATURITY (5:14-6:3)

They are not responding to their trials as spiritual grown-ups (like us at times!), so the author says, it’s time to **move from the “kids menu” to the “adults menu”**.

But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. [clearly speaking of moral/spiritual maturity] 6:1 THEREFORE let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and GO ON TO MATURITY, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits.

The verb translated "leave" is elsewhere translated "*abandon*"/"*be freed from*".

What are we supposed to "leave"? – literally, "first doctrines of Christ", 6 items:

- *repentance from dead works & of faith toward God,*
- *instruction about washings & the laying on of hands,*
- *the resurrection of the dead & eternal judgment.*

I do not think, as some do, that these first doctrines are gospel basics/good news of Jesus. Though we do *build on* the foundation of Jesus (see 1 Cor 3:11) We never *leave* the gospel behind, never *abandon* it. Paul *constantly* brings the gospel to bear on Christian living!

I take the other common view, that these are "elementary" or literally "first" doctrines of Messiah/Christ are more specifically old covenant ceremonial shadows pointing TO Christ.

➤ "**WASHINGS**"

This plural word is not used in the Bible for baptising a convert to Christianity.

When the author uses this word again in chapter 9, and is speaking of the ministry of the old covenant high priest, in the line of Aaron, he writes,

*"the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial **WASHINGS**—external regulations applying UNTIL the time of the new order." (Heb 9:9-10. See also Mark 7:4)*

The forward-pointing sign of ceremonial washings have been replaced by the reality in Jesus: "*the washing of new birth*" (Titus 3:5).

➤ Likewise with the "**LAYING ON OF HANDS**"

"Laying on of hands" was another prominent feature of Levitical sacrifices in the OT, the offeror was had to identify himself with his sacrifice by laying his hands on it (Lev. 1:4).

But now we must lay hold of Christ, our sacrifice.

You see, an old covenant Jew embraced all 6 of those things generally:

Repentance & faith, ceremonial washings & laying on of hands, resurrection & judgment

But now the specific object of that faith has arrived: **Jesus**

We repent of our 'dead works' & 'trust' in the live-giving work of Jesus.

Jesus is revealed as the 'Judge' of all; Jesus is 'the Resurrection' & the Life.

Many of these Hebrew believers were making little to no progress in maturing **because** they were still *tied to the apron strings* of the old covenant with its shadowy rituals.

Now that we have the fulfilment, the fullness of Christ, the author is saying infants should leave the nurse, leave these “first doctrines” / “forward-pointing” signs behind – don’t get ‘hung up’ on the shadows, and don’t turn back to the shadows:

*“food & drink, festival or new moon or Sabbath day — these are a mere SHADOW of what is to come; but the **SUBSTANCE** is Christ!”*

Angels (chap 1&2), Moses (chap 3), Joshua (chap 4), Aaron (chap 5ff.):

Shadows pointing to Jesus! Jesus is Better

Application for “us Gentiles”?

Negatively speaking, without that ‘historic head start’ of the oracles of God pointing ahead to Jesus, our Gentile *caution* is less about being hung up on shadows and more about getting hung up on peripheral issues, preferences that start to “define” us and sadly re-define/distort “Jesus/Christianity”:

- Musical instruments [Replace the pipe organ with a keyboard – that’s it. We’re gone!]
- Type of Schooling/Education [State, Private, Home]
- Politics [Liberal, Labor, boat people policy, whatever]

The problem here is when we tether Jesus and the Christian faith to such things, we are **dull, infantile, at risk** of making shipwreck of the faith, turning back from Jesus, when one of these “lesser” things is seen for what it is: *fallible, corrupt, limited*. Unlike Jesus!

Positively speaking, whether Jew or Gentile, the **Path to Maturity** is the same:

*Fix our eyes on Jesus through the **Solid Food of Scripture!***

But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. (5:14)

The recipients of the letter of Hebrews were struggling to **see Jesus rightly**, to see His value, His supremacy. We often have the same struggle, and need mind renewal.

It’s the struggle the 2 disciples had on the road to Emmaus, after the crucifixion.

They were thinking, ‘Jesus was NOT who we’d hoped!’ So, Jesus walked up & said to them:

“How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!

Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter His glory?”

*And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, Jesus explained to them what was said in ALL the Scriptures **concerning Himself**.” (Luke 24:26-27)*

As Paul writes his biblical letter to the Ephesian church, he writes,

*When you **READ** this [the letter to the Ephesians], you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ . . . the **boundless riches** of Christ!” (Ephesians 3:4,8)*

The spiritual mature have learned it’s not by mystical experience, or the general ‘vibe’, or by pulling a single verse out of context that we grow.

It’s by reading Scripture, meditating on the text, in context, that we KNOW Christ deeply, when Spirit who inspired the text illuminates our minds and hearts about the depths of God grace and holiness in the supremacy of Jesus and the new covenant He makes.

If you want to see Christ, know Christ, read your Bible!

That takes effort; sluggish laziness won't cut it. 5:14

But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

"*trained by constant practice*" is literally "*going to the gymnasium.*" No just "info"; practice!

The same word is used in 1 Tim 4, when Paul tells Timothy,

"train yourself to be godly."

It'd be wonderful if each of us had our own "*personal trainer*", spiritually speaking.

And discipleship can be a bit like that, "spurring each other on."

But first & foremost, we're responsible for training ourselves!

Here is well-phrased truth:

"The pupil who is taught without doing any studying for himself will be like one who is fed without being given any exercise: he will lose both his appetite & his strength."²

Contemporary Christianity in Australia struggles hugely here!

We've got lights and a cool groove. Don't worry about doctrine! Chapter & verse? Pffft!

The writer of Hebrews is challenging us to ***put away the baby bottle***, and press into Christ, by pressing into His word and seeing Him for who He is!

We live in an era of expert trivia: some people have amazing retention of sporting statistics, detailed knowledge of every character of Netflix season 1-7 of whatever show. But you ask a Christian to look up a verse, and it's like a ***spiritual dementia*** sets in:

Genesis . . . Exodus . . . ?

Is it really that hard to memorise just the order of the books of the Bible, the **ABCs**?

4-year-olds have it down pat! There are songs to make it easy!

For 95% of us, 'working out in the word' is not limited by *mental* capacity; but *moral* capacity.

The writer of Hebrews is saying, if we are not "working out" with God's word – we won't see Jesus rightly. We won't be standing on solid ground.

Seeing the worth of Christ is what stokes our endurance!

Without it, our **growth** will be stunted; we'll be **wimps** on the spiritual battlefield!

Not just *wimps*, but **wounded** . . . prone to sin and the apathy that leads to apostasy.

PLEASE HEAR THIS:

the VAST MAJORITY people who *fall away from the faith* do so because they **FIRST fall away from Scripture**, then fall into sin, which they lack spiritual strength to repent of.

*Your word I have **TREASURED** in my heart,*

That I may not sin against You! (Psalm 119:11)

"The Bible is revelation, a love letter from God – it tells us things about God we could never know otherwise. And most importantly, the Bible is all about Jesus.

It brings us into the war room of God's grand plan for salvation. It removes the spiritual cataracts from our eyes and shows us Christ and how we can know Him.

It destroys our dull, [sappy] ideas of who Jesus is and replaces them with the true, ferocious, category-five cyclone God of the Bible."³

² John Milton Gregory, The Seven Laws of Teaching

³ paraphrase of Stephen Altrogge, "Is the Bible Really a Love Letter from God?", 28 June 2017.

Some self-assessment Qs:

- When you open Scripture, do you feel like you're '**Home**'?...Or in *unfamiliar* territory, a 'stranger in a strange land'? [How does a place become home? Familiarity!]
- What **excuses** do you often hear *yourself using* about apathy towards meditating on God's word, or about your ignorance of biblical knowledge/spiritual understanding? Identify those excuses, repent of them, and put away the baby bottle.
- When you read scripture, do you see "*the **boundless riches of Christ***"? (Eph 3:4,8)
If not, what plan do you have help you mature in your reading, and see Christ?
Adult Sunday School on 'Loving the Word' is starting, I think, in Term 3.

By now, many of us here *ought* to be teachers. And thankfully, sincerely, many *are!* Hope is coming in the final verses, but first the sledgehammer:

PERIL OF APOSTASY (6:4-8)

This is hard-hitting passage about a very particular case. So before we consider these verses, please understand the particular case it describes . . .

- has nothing to do with a Christian who occasionally **doubts**, like most do at times.
- has nothing to do with a Christian who **stumbles**, but gets back up, morally speaking, and presses on in the faith.
- is not a case like Peter, who did "**deny**" *knowing Christ/being His disciple for 1 night*, to avoid persecution, but then powered on in the faith, leading the church *by faith*.
- Nor does this case contradict the parable of the young **Prodigal Son**, running back to God after a time of selfish rebellion, "back-sliding".

I'm reading Jeremiah in my devotional time, and I was freshly blown away at God's grace in Jeremiah 3. After God tells *adulterous* Israel that He – God – is writing a Israel a certificate of divorce (Jer 3:8). Yet just a few verses later, God says

*"Return, faithless people," declares the Lord, "for I am your **husband!***

"Return, faithless people; I will CURE YOU OF BACKSLIDING."

And they respond:

*"Yes – we will we come to you,
for **You are the Lord OUR God!**" (Jer 3:14, 22)*

Grace *heaped* upon Grace – to the chief of sinners. Forgiveness! Restoration! What a God!

And yet, Scripture also warns us, there is a "point of no return".

Now for the verses: Hebrews 6:4-6

For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

Jesus said there is only 1 'unpardonable' sin. And I think this passage describes that sin:
Having the full light of the gospel, experiencing the full fellowship of God's people & power, yet fully rejecting the Spirit's witness that Jesus is the Christ, the Saviour of the world.⁴

⁴ In Mark 3:22-30 (the 'unpardonable/eternal sin' passage), this is precisely the point: Jesus delivered a man from the bondage of evil. This He did through the power of the Holy Spirit, but the teachers of the law ascribed it to the power of Satan. In the full light of day, the powerful testimony of God's Spirit about Jesus as Messiah right before them, they fully turned to darkness.

Like Charles Templeton.

KEY: what's being spoken of here is **not** *an isolated act*⁵ but a settled condition of the soul.

The *inability* of the person involved being restored, is because the sinner has refused God's forgiveness, found ONLY in Jesus Christ, whom they've rejected.

The writer places the term "impossible" as very first word, for emphasis.

Yoda serves us well here: "*Impossible it is . . . to fall away and be restored!*"

This is a sobering set of verses!

At a glance, this appears to be speaking of *genuine* Christians, but this is *hugely* debated.

While there are quite a few views on it, there are 2 "main" ways it is interpreted:

1. What people refer to as the Reformed/Calvinistic interpretation (after John Calvin):
Once genuinely saved, always saved – eternally "secure"
2. What people refer to as the "Arminian" interpretation (after Jacobus Arminius)
speaking of those genuinely saved but *genuinely losing* their salvation.

Speaking of His sheep, Jesus the Good Shepherd is crystal clear:

*"I give them eternal life and they shall NEVER perish; no one can snatch them out of My hand."*⁶

But Jesus does not say "*no one can crawl out of My hand **by their own choice.***"

This is the heart of the Arminian view.

Only *you* can choose to give up salvation, turn away from Jesus.

And therefore Hebrews 6 speaks of genuinely losing salvation you once had.

It's so tricky a passage, respect should be granted to views you don't agree with.

To cut to the chase, the leadership here believes & teaches the Reformed/Calvinistic view of eternal security: once genuinely saved, always saved.

But this is a tricky passage, with *different views under the "Reformed" heading!*

Not even all the elders would understand this passage precisely the same way.

I see verses 4-8 as NOT describing *genuine, born again*, believers. Why not?

1] Apart from *many other* passages in Scripture which teach the perseverance of true believers, **context** matters: and Hebrews chapter 6 is meant to read after 1-5!

Chapter 3 already made it clear, *by definition*, a genuine Christian is a persevering Christian, or one who does *not apostatise/depart* from the faith. Hebrews 3:14

"we have come to share in Christ, IF indeed we hold fast our original confidence firm to the end"

The persevering does not save us – Jesus does.

The persevering is just *evidence* we are saved. [read sermon on Chap 3 for more verses]

2] The 5 'Descriptions' do not *necessarily* speak of one genuinely saved.

In fact, ALL of these terms

- *Enlightened*
- *Tasted the heavenly gift*
- *Shared in the Holy Spirit*

⁵ It's strange how Catholics & others come up with random acts, like suicide, as unpardonable. The text says nothing of such.

⁶ John 10:28

- *Tasted the goodness of the word of God*
- *Tasted the powers of the age to come*

apply to the generation who wandered in the wilderness, Exiting Egypt but NOT Entering the Promised Land.

- **“Enlightened” (v. 4)**

That generation of Israel was not “in the dark” about God – Moses was his prophet. More specifically about being enlightened:

“the Lord went before them & led them, by day in a pillar of cloud and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them LIGHT.” (Ex 13:21)

- **“Tasted the heavenly gift” (v. 4)**

Israel ate Manna in the wilderness, a heavenly provision from God, as the Jews told Jesus *Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”*

- **“Shared in the Holy Spirit” (v. 4)**

For constructing the Tabernacle & make the high priests consecrated garments

- **“Tasted the goodness of God’s word” (v.5)**

Hebrews 4:2

*“we had the **GOOD NEWS** proclaimed to us, just as they did”*

- **“Tasted the powers of the age to come” (v.5)**

This would be the many signs & wonders they experienced: 10 plagues, Red Sea parting

That generation experienced ALL of these, and yet that entire generation was **CHARACTERIZED** by unbelief. Not for a day or two, or for a time. Heb 3:9-11,

“for forty years they saw what I did. That is why I was angry with that generation; I said, ‘Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known My ways.’ So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’”

What’s being spoken of here is *not an isolated act* but a settled condition of the soul

That is why they cannot be *“restored to repentance”* (v. 6).

They’ve **experienced all** that God has to offer in Christ – grace & truth, sweet fellowship & practical love of transformed lives, miracles . . . and still they wilfully reject Him.

What more can be done for them? Nothing!

This is not Jesus on the cross, *“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do”* (Luke 23:34). This is knowing full well what they do, ‘in contempt crucifying Him again.’ This is absolutely tragic. Handed over to their chosen path in the hardness of their hearts

But I do not think it describes a true believer: Descriptions not in the list:

- Justified
- Adopted
- Forgiven
- Redeemed
- Born again
- Sanctified

The challenge for us is that “falling away” definitely describes professing Christians . . . baptised and active church members. Likely, sadly, some of us *here* this morning.

So, how can Christians know assurance of salvation?

The author is clear in v.11, he **desires** "each one . . . to have the full assurance of hope"
So does John, 1 John 5:13! (But John writes that at the end, after listing 'tests' of saving faith)

The author shows the way in the verses 7-12.

But we need to understand the difference between "security" and "assurance":

- 'Eternal Security' is **OBJECTIVE** – "No one can snatch true believers from Jesus' hand!"
- 'Personal Assurance' is **SUBJECTIVE** – "Am I in Jesus' hand?"

The biblical doctrine of assurance stands or falls on 2 'legs': FAITH & FRUIT.

1] **FAITH**: 1st in Priority + Chronology

*"Without **FAITH** it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6)*

*"If you confess with your mouth that '**Jesus is Lord**', and BELIEVE in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." (Romans 10:9)*

So a brand new believer can have a degree of assurance; but not "full" assurance.

2] **FRUIT**: the 2nd leg in priority & chronology, but crucial for *full* assurance

Because way more of people "profess" faith than "possess" faith, Jesus said,

*"You shall **know them by their FRUITS**. Not everyone who calls me 'Lord' will enter the kingdom of God, but the one who does the will of My Father" (Matt 7:21)*

We must be careful, not to equate 'participation' with spiritual 'transformation.'

If one has truly been transformed, it will be evidenced over a span of time.

The fruit 'leg' is the focus of the author in chapter 6. Verses 7 & 8 give the contrast

For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a CROP useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God.

But if it bears thorns & thistles, it is worthless & near to being cursed, & its end is to be burned

Jesus' parable of the "**Sower & Seed**" speak of this. The Gospel seed plants in 4 soils. Only the seed that grew to point of **fruit-bearing** revealed the soil was good – saving faith.

Biologically speaking, fruit-bearing comes with maturity.

When a believer has a degree of spiritual maturity, bearing some fruits of the spirit, that is when assurance of salvation **grows fuller**. SO . . .

PRESS ON TO MATURITY! (6:9-12) -

I love the encouragement of verse 9,

*Though we speak in this way [**tough love!**], yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation.*

On the surface, the author sounds a bit schizophrenic, doesn't he? On the one hand:

You're dull/lazy, you ought to be teachers, but instead you're milk-drinking infants, unskilled in God's word. I'm dreadfully concerned your apathy might lead to apostasy!

On the other hand,

Beloved, in your case, we feel sure of better things – salvation!

What's going on?

His congregation, like any congregation, including ours, is a **bag of "mixed fruit"**! – good fruit & not good fruit, or as Jesus puts it, a blend of **Wheat & Tares**, genuine believers & merely professing believers.

So His message is a warning to some (bearers of no fruit/not-good fruit),
And encouragement to others (bearers of good fruit), like v. 10,

For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for His name in serving the saints, as you still do!

Their primary fruit is **practical love** for the name of Christ evidenced by serving the saints – like visiting many in prison due to persecution, as we'll see in chapter 10.

This is exactly what Jesus said,

By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35)

But since we cannot always accurately distinguish Wheat from Tares, the exhortation is the same to BOTH groups: **Press on to Maturity!**

*we desire **EACH ONE** of you to show the same zeal to have the **FULL** assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but **IMITATORS** of those who through faith and endurance INHERIT the promises." (6:11-12)*

He's saying Glory is granted to those who **contend until the end**.

And "Full assurance" comes with "pressing on", hoping & trusting in Jesus until the end.

This is confronting passage!

I certainly do not want those who are *struggling-but-persevering* to leave despairing!

- If you are bearing fruit, loving God & serving His people from the heart, imperfectly . . . be encouraged, press on in hope and assurance!
- If you are genuinely concerned about having committed the unpardonable sin, that is probably a sure sign that you have NOT!

That sin is about callous rejection of Jesus, openly holding Him up in contempt!

Be comforted.

In *Finding Nemo*, the forgetful fish Dory said, "Just keep swimming, Just keep swimming!"

In Hebrews, the author says, "**Just keep hoping! Just keep trusting...in Jesus!**"

Jesus IS Better!

But I certainly don't want those who ought to be 'unsettled' to leave 'unphased', complacent in sin and spiritual apathy!

To do so would be unfaithful to this text of loving but strong warning.

*At the last supper, when Jesus told His disciples that 1 of them would betray their Master, each one enquired, "Lord, is it **I**?" There was not one who asked, "Lord, is it Judas?"⁷*

An important question for each of us to ask ourselves:

"Am I deceiving myself? Is my faith a fraud? Or is my faith fruitful?"

The musicians will come up now, to assist us in a song, an older hymn that highlights the 2 sharply different outcomes of 2 sharply different responses to Jesus highlighting the importance of self-examination:

Great God What Do I See & Hear?

⁷ Spurgeon sermon #3074, preached Thursday, 9 January 1908. See Mark 14:18-19 about the "Lord, is it I?"

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Main Idea:

Persevere into spiritual Maturity, or you risk Perishing by apostasy!

1] What does the word "apostasy" mean?

Problem of Infancy (5:11-13)

2] What is the *Problem/Risk* of spiritual Infancy?

A] The *immediate* problem? (5:13)

B] The *ultimate* problem (that the lack of skill & solid sustenance can *lead to*?)

Path to Maturity (5:14-6:3)

3] What's is God's ordained Path to Maturity? (5:14; see also 2 Peter 3:18)

In the catch phrase, "**To know is to grow**", what kind of knowing is in mind? (Psa 119:11)

4] Discuss the saying:

"The pupil who is taught without doing any studying for himself will be like one who is fed without being given any exercise: he will lose both his appetite & his strength."

5] When you open Scripture, do you feel like you're '**Home**'?...Or in *unfamiliar* territory, a 'stranger in a strange land'? [By what process does a place 'become' home?]

6] What **excuses** do you often hear *yourself using* about apathy towards meditating on God's word, or about your ignorance of biblical knowledge/spiritual understanding? How can you Identify those excuses, repent of them, and 'put away the baby bottle'?

7] When you read scripture, do you see "**the boundless riches of Christ**"? (Eph 3:4,8)

If not, do you have any *tools* that help you in this way of Christ-centred reading?

Will you take Adult Sunday School on 'Loving the Word'?

Peril of Apostasy (6:4-8)

8] Do you think the 'descriptions' in 6:4-5 **must** describe a *genuine* believer? Why/Why not?

In your discussion, include reflections the generation wandering in the wilderness, and also reflections on this quote from Calvin's commentary on Hebrews 6:5:

*"Why should God not grant the reprobate [unconverted person] also some **taste** of His grace, why He should not irradiate their minds with some **sparks** of His light, why He should not give them some **perception** of His goodness, and in some sort **engrave** His word on their hearts. Otherwise, where would be the temporary faith mentioned [in the parable of sorrow & seed]"⁸*

9] Do you think a genuine believer can lose their salvation? Why/Why not?

10] How does your view harmonise with Hebrews 3:14?

Press on to Maturity! (6:9-12)

11] How can you identify areas in which we are spiritually mature and also immature?

12] How does knowing the boundless riches of Christ stoke you towards endurance?

13] What are the 2 'legs' of assurance of salvation? (#1: Heb 11:6/Rom 10:9; #2: Heb 6:7-12, Mt 7:21)

A] Can/should a *brand new* convert have "assurance" of salvation?

B] What is/should be the difference between *basic* assurance and *full* assurance (6:7-12)

(TIP: why does John put verse 5:13 at the end of his letter about tests of saving faith?)

14] Does such a passage cause you concern/wake you up? Is that a good thing or bad thing?

⁸ The idea is God's "common grace", shown to even the wicked, as in Matthew 5:44-45 & Luke 6:35 & Romans 2:15.