

Light for Dark Times

You Must be Born Again!

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TULIP – The Fundamentals of the Faith by which we are Saved

Sermon #12 – Apostasy and the Word

March 20, 2022

Sermon Text: Hebrews 6:4-6

Scripture Reading: Heb 4:1-13

Heb 4:12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

“The Reformation in England was essentially the work of Scripture. The only true Reformation is that which emanates from the Word of God. The Holy Scriptures, by bearing witness to the incarnation,

death, and resurrection of the Son of God, create in man by the Holy Spirit a faith which justifies him. That faith which produces in him a new life, unites him to Christ, without his requiring a chain of bishops or a Roman mediator, who would separate man from the Savior instead of drawing him nearer. The Reformation *by the Word* restores that spiritual Christianity which the outward and hierarchical religion destroys; and from the regeneration of individuals naturally results the regeneration of the church.” [The Reformation in England, Merle d’Aubigne].

As we conclude our study of Hebrews 6:4-8, we come now to still another gracious gift of the Spirit which the apostate experiences and ultimately despises. Here it is:

Heb 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.

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

And now...

- Have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come

What is this “tasting.” What is the goodness of the Word of God. And what is this “powers of the age to come?” which the apostate tastes as well? John Owen helps us to understand these things once again.

Remember, the Apostle’s purpose in all this is to spur Christ’s people

on to renewed diligence in following Him, showing us the excellency of Christ and His salvation while at the same time soberly warning us of the eternal dangers of spiritual sluggishness. We must all stand before God and there is nothing more important in this life than to be prepared for the next.

“I do not plan to die today,” said Thor to his opponent.

“No one does,” was the reply.

It is true, is it not? No one plans to die today, and yet myriads will before this day is over. The Christian must live each day as if it could be his last on this earth. We do not love this world. We do not focus our energies on this world. We do not lay up our treasures in this world. Our desire in fact is to depart and be with Christ. These are the things this epistle of Hebrews is concerned with.

Tasted the Goodness of the Word

By “the Word,” the Apostle primarily means the gospel

preached to them, and to us. The gospel means “good tidings.” Good news. We are prone to forget this goodness and to take it for granted. In Christ God has poured out upon us all the spiritual blessings in heaven.

Eph 1:3-8 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, (4) even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love (5) he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, (6) to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. (7) In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, (8) which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight

This is the best news ever announced. We would love to wake up tomorrow morning and

hear the news that the enemy has withdrawn, evil men have been destroyed, and peace has returned to Ukraine. But the gospel is far, far better news than even that message would be. A peace treaty has been struck for us in Christ, and it is not merely a cessation in hostilities between us and God. It is a total destruction of the enemy and includes such a reformation that we *have become the children of God, He loves us and we love Him, we are heirs of all His promises...and more.* This is the good Word of God.

Now, the Apostle is careful to use this word once more – “tasted.” His intention is that we understand – and are soberly warned by – that there are people who actually taste, who experience, the sweetness of the good news of Christ, and yet:

...never by faith really receive, feed and live on Jesus Christ. It is as if he had said, ‘I speak not of those who have received and digested the spiritual food of their souls, and turned it into spiritual nourishment, but of such people as have so far tasted of it as that

***they ought to have desired it...”
but do not.*** [Owen]

Listen to this application Owen draws:

“There is a goodness and excellency in the word of God able to attract and affect the minds of men who yet never arrive at sincere obedience to it.”

Consider once more the Israelites under Moses. They heard the good word of God. The promise of His blessing, yet they never arrived at those promises. Why? Because they did not receive them by faith. They were excited about the promises – the Land flowing with milk and honey, the destruction by God of their enemies, the incredible fruitfulness of the Land...and yet they hardened their hearts against the goodness of His Word. They heard. They knew. But they did not obey.

What is the most common title worldly men and women give to the Bible? *The _____ Book.* And there are people who truly do know *and experience* the goodness of the

Word of God. But they only taste it. They do not feed upon Christ and received Him by faith.

Tasters, be warned.

“The goodness of the Word of God gives peace, satisfaction, and contentment. Darkness, errors, the lies of the enemy, and all such evils which fill man’s mind and enslave him to the devil, causing him to live in fear and dread...are all dispelled by the light of the good Word of God. It is only the good Word of God which gives us rest and peace, and so the Psalmist says: ‘more to be desired than gold, yes, than much fine gold...it is sweeter than honey and the honey-comb.’” [Owen]

The apostate then is a person who, by the gracious working of the Spirit, is given a taste of this sweet, life-giving honey called Jesus Christ, who agrees of its sweetness, and then spews it out like a pig returning to his slop.

Jesus spoke to such people of their response to John the Baptist:

Joh 5:35 He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light.

“When men through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ do escape the pollutions that are in the world...they taste a goodness, a sweetness, in the rest and satisfaction of their minds and carelessly suppose that they really do possess the thing (Christ) itself.” [Owen]

Understand? *You are not put right with God, you are not in true possession of Christ, if you have merely **tasted** the goodness of the gospel.* Consider our nation as an example. Has America tasted the good Word of God? Have the churches in this country tasted the sweetness of Christ through the preaching of the gospel? *But this mere tasting is not salvation. You must eat and drink of Christ, as represented in the bread and cup of the Lord’s table...you must eat and drink of Christ BY FAITH in that good Word of Christ – you must be born again!*

To merely taste of Christ and yet refuse to embrace Him by faith is to enter into the path of the apostate.

Heb 6:7-8 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. (8) But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

2Pe 2:20-22 For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. (21) For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. (22) What the true proverb says has happened to them: “The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire.”

Listen again to John Owen – I simply cannot state it as clearly as he does so let’s hear him again:

“By this taste the apostate may receive many effects of the Word on their minds and consciences, and therein have an experience of the Word as to its power and efficacy....This taste may be accompanied with delight, pleasure, and satisfaction in hearing the Word of Christ preached...so it was with Herod, who heard John the Baptist gladly, finding delight and pleasure in his preaching. So was it with multitudes that pressed after Christ to hear the Word; and so it is to be feared that it is with many in the days in which we live.

The Word gives them even a joy (though a temporal one) at the mercy, pardon, grace, immortality and glory the Gospel presents. And yet this joy is only temporal because they will not strive to enter by the narrow way. They will not exert any pains to getting a real saving share in Christ.”

Mar 10:17-22 And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (18) And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. (19) You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.’” (20) And he said to him, “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.” (21) And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” (22) Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

“All of this is but a tasting. The Word of the gospel and Christ preached in it is the food of our souls; and true faith not only tastes of it, but feeds upon it, and only in this is the Word turned into true nourishment in the heart...Give a

man ever so much food, if there be any unhealthy condition in his stomach which hinders it from digestion, it will in no way profit him; and until the Word of Christ heard is mixed in the heart with faith, it will be of no advantage to us.”

Some people have a mental disorder which causes them to eat and then vomit up their food soon after eating. If that course is pursued long enough it will be fatal. Give them the best and most appealing food, set a feast in front of them, yet in the end it will do them no good. This is the path the apostate follows, *and it is the path which the Apostle here is warning us against!* If we are truly in Christ, then we WILL feed upon His Word by faith and it WILL nourish our souls and we WILL be growing stronger and wiser and more like Christ. Not so the apostate.

“Multitudes relish the Word when it is preached, but never attain to life, or strength, or growth by it. The Word received as it ought to be will transform the soul into the

likeness of God, who sends us this food to change our whole spiritual constitution, and to render our nature like unto His, in ‘righteousness, and true holiness.’ These things a mere taste will effect nothing towards.” (Owen)

I remember many years ago when we first came here, there were numbers of people who claimed to be in Christ and yet who were quite mean, others were very worldly in their thinking and behavior, others coveted wealth – and they did these things characteristically. I am not talking about individual, specific sins which they repented of. I am speaking of ongoing character that defined these people. And the atmosphere in the church, produced by deficient preaching, was “well, they are Christians but they are just difficult people and we must love them anyway.” That is a lie. And that is not love. Love speaks the truth and does what the Apostle is doing here. He is warning people who evidence no signs of growth in Christ that they are not to carelessly assume. They must not *presume* they are in Christ

when in fact all they have done is *tasted* the good Word of God.

You must be born again, and if you are born again, the fruits of the Spirit WILL increasingly evidence themselves in you.

The Powers of the Age to Come

Here is another morsel tasted by the apostate through the Spirit of God declaring the Word of God to them. What is this? *The powers of the age to come.*

What is *the age to come*? Well, it is this age in which we live and in which God is progressively growing His kingdom in until that Day when Christ comes and the new creation comes in its fullness. But right now the “powers” of that kingdom are present. These days of the Messiah began at His resurrection and especially then at His sending of the Spirit on that day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is present in us and operative among us in a way that was not present in the Old Testament era.

We see examples of these mighty works of power in the New Testament scriptures which are samples, you might say, of the New Creation to come.

And this subject certainly relates directly then to what we often hear called “the unpardonable sin.” Or perhaps “the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.” Consider it here:

Mat 12:22-32 Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw. (23) And all the people were amazed, and said, “Can this be the Son of David?”

(24) But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.”

(25) Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. (26) And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? (27) And

if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges.

(28) But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. (29) Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house. (30) Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

(31) Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. (32) And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

You see, the apostate – of whom the Apostle says here in Hebrews – is a person who has been given these gracious works of the Spirit,

and yet in the end *falls away* by choosing the world instead of Christ, this apostate is guilty of the unpardonable sin.

The unpardonable sin, Jesus says, is this willful, knowing, informed, rejection of Christ, after the Holy Spirit has powerfully and clearly demonstrated the truth and beauty and glory of Christ to such a person.

The Pharisees saw the *powers of the age to come* when Jesus, by the Spirit, cast out that demon. Right in front of them all. They *experienced, they saw, they heard*, the new creation power setting a man free from the devil. They KNEW. But what did they do with this privilege? They despised Christ and specifically they spoke against this mighty work of the Holy Spirit – and from that moment on there was no forgiveness for them – in this age or the age to come.

And so we see that these scriptures are not teaching that a real Christian can be lost and end in hell. That can never happen.

Nowhere here are these apostates said to have been born again by the will of God, they are not said to have been justified, or sanctified, or united to Christ or to be God's children by adoption...nor are the fruits which characterize Christ's true people ever attributed to them. In fact, they are described by this picture:

Heb 6:7-8 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. (8) But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

We must consider these things very, very carefully. We have all often received the showers of the Holy Spirit graciously showing us the beauty of Christ. What kind of a crop do we see being produced in us by it? The fruit of the Spirit, increasing in its beauty? Or thorns and thistles?

May the Lord open all of our eyes more and more, show us any places

in our lives where we are being sluggish and dull in respect to believing and following Him, and to keep us far away from the apostate's path.