

BABES IN CHRIST

Hebrews 5: 12-14; 6: 1-12

LESSON 437 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat" (Hebrews 5:12).

Dull of Hearing

"OF whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing."

Have you noticed how much stress the writer puts upon the matter of hearing the Word? What was it that had dulled the hearing of these Hebrew Christians? They had allowed unbelief and discouragement to come in. There are many things that can dull our hearing. One thing is our being preoccupied with our temporal affairs, our own interests. Another thing that dulls our hearing is the pleasure of this world. We of this faith do not object to legitimate pleasure, recreation, and relaxation. Jesus occasionally retired and went across to the other side of the sea with His disciples to rest. But whenever pleasure becomes a detriment to our spiritual life, it has gone too far. That thing will dull the hearing and the spiritual senses.

If our spiritual hearing becomes dulled, we have not the keen quality of discernment that God wants. Jesus complained to His disciples of that thing. He occasionally gave a parable and said, "Are ye also yet without understanding?" He did not marvel that those on the outside were without understanding, but He expected the disciples to understand the mystery of the Kingdom. And when He gave a parable He expected them to catch the spiritual significance of it.

If the Spirit of God in the heart and life is active, and we are right up to the chalk mark in our experience, and keep our intellectual faculties and our discernment alert to catch the things of the Spirit, we will not let the Word of God slip. Because of persecution, the Hebrew Christians were in danger of letting the Word slip. Discouragement had overtaken them.

May our prayer be: Give us eyes to see and ears to hear! The condemnation put upon the Israelites of old was that they had eyes but they saw not, and ears but they heard not. They had become spiritually blind. Notice men like Peter. All he had to see was a draught of fishes miraculously caught after he had toiled all night unsuccessfully, to fall at Jesus' feet and cry out, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Peter recognized immediately that He was the Christ.

Nathanael, whom Philip brought to Jesus, stood under the fig tree. All that Jesus had to say to him was, "I saw thee under the fig tree," and immediately Nathanael answered, "Thou art the Son of God"; and worshipped Him. On the other hand there were the scribes and Pharisees, the learned men who had the law of God before them and who were versed in it. They considered themselves the true seed of Abraham and others as sinners and outcasts. They saw miracle after miracle; they saw healing after healing. They sat in the synagogues; they saw the paralytic rise from the pallet and take up his bed and walk, they saw that man who was born blind come into their midst and testify to what had happened. They witnessed the miracles; yet through it all they failed to see that He was the Son of God.

They had eyes to see and they saw not-spiritual stupidity. They were twice dead, and plucked up by the roots. That is the condition that can come upon one who has sat under the light and hearing of God's Word and failed to abide by it.

Spiritual Senses

"For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat."

Here he is referring to the similarity between the body and the soul, and it is wonderful how they parallel all the way through. Just as the body is fed by food, is increased in stature and given strength, so the soul grows, increases and flourishes in proportion as it is fed. The meat on which the soul feeds is the Word of God. Job said, "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food." Job would rather go hungry-miss a

meal-than miss the Word of God. Isaiah said, "And let your soul delight itself in fatness." This means feasting on the things of God.

"For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.

"But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

You know how the touch can be exercised until it becomes exceedingly delicate. You who are playing violins know that by constant practice the touch is developed so that you know just the instant the finger is placed upon the string it is in the right place, without its being off a hair-otherwise you have a slide note to correct. The same is true of our other senses-hearing, seeing, tasting, all are made delicate in proportion to how they are used.

It is the same way with the senses of the soul. If one is walking softly before the Lord, and continues that way, making it his daily practice, he will get to the point where he will discern the leading of the Spirit right along. The promptings of the Spirit will become his daily guide. On the other hand, one who is careless in his walk and does not mind the promptings of the Spirit, but overrides them, will soon get to the point where he will no longer feel or discern the leading of the Spirit. That is what is meant by so using and exercising the senses that they will discern both good and evil.

Exercise and Chastening

"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Hebrews 12:11).

And the emphasis comes on that last clause: "unto them which are exercised thereby." This implies that if a man is not exercised by the chastening through which he passes it does him no good. If one fails in it, he will have to be brought up to the very same place again until he gets to the point where he is exercised by it. That means to go through the chastening or disciplining through which God is trying to put him and be able to stand and come through with the benefit that God intended it to bring him. That man is being exercised by it; and he is repaid a hundredfold for having stood it and gone through it, whatever the pain or torture might have been while he was in it.

He brings out here the difference between a babe and the man or woman of full stature. But he implies that these Hebrew Christians were in danger of remaining babes. Their growth might become stunted. Whereas they ought by this time to have been on strong meat, they were only able, as infants, to take milk-not the stronger and the greater things.

It does not take much to make an infant cry. A little thing can upset him, and what is true of an infant in a physical sense is also true of "infants" in a spiritual sense. Some people are very easily upset. Some little thing can offend them. They are just infants. The Lord help us to get to the point where we can take strong meat, where we can stand that which might at some previous time have downed us.

What is meant by being exercised by the Word? When we hear it, there is something in our heart that purposes to do it, to apply it. The school in which God trains His children is something more than an intellectual school. It means more than just sitting under the hearing of the Word and pondering it. It means applying it constantly to our hearts and lives: that we hear it and go down before the Lord in prayer and ask God to lay it as a template on our hearts.

The Word of God is a template to be laid upon our lives, to see that we measure up to the thing that God intends that we should, to apply that Word constantly to our hearts and strive to measure unto it.

On to Perfection

The Hebrew Christians had not gone beyond the first principles. We get an idea of what these principles are:

"Therefore leaving' the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God" (Hebrews 6:1).

The exhortation given is: leave the Law and come to the Gospel. Cease from Moses and come to the Messiah. The doctrines are enumerated here: repentance, faith, the doctrine of baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. We will find them all taught in a rudimentary way in the Old Testament.

Paul calls these Old Testament teachings the elements of the world. He states that they were foreshadowed by a worldly Tabernacle, and by the shadow of material things. He calls them "rudiments." He exhorted the Galatians, to whom he was writing, not to turn back to the beggarly elements of the world. They had fulfilled their mission, and their time was past. Why continue in the primary grades when we have graduated to a higher school of learning? Our spiritual development will not exceed at any time what we have received in the way of instruction in the Word of God. That is how essential it is to receive the teachings of the Word, and to have ears that hear, and eyes that see, that we may go on into perfection.

If our spiritual development is going to be measured by the extent to which we receive that Word—and it is—we see how essential it is that the instruction be received if we are to attain unto perfection. That was the object Paul had in writing to the Hebrew Christians.

". . . not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works . . ."

If you and I are better enabled to resist the onslaughts of the enemy today than we were ten years ago, if we can withstand the assaults that at that time would have bowled us over and put us down, it is because that Word has been incorporated into our being and has built us up in faith. That is why it is essential to lay hold of it, not only to receive it with these physical ears, but to receive it down into our very heart. That is where it is going to do the work.

The Hebrew Christians were so lacking in obedience to instruction that they were undernourished—babes without spiritual strength. This first verse indicates that they were constantly falling and having to repent from dead works. "Dead works" here means continuing the motions of Christianity long after the Spirit has taken His flight. There is plenty of that kind of Christianity in the world today. They found that they had to repent and go down before the Lord because they had not moved into the larger sphere that the Lord had for them. They were still in the primary grades, going back through their A B C's. The Lord wants us to get beyond this into the deeper depths.

Backsliding and Apostasy

We read from the 4th to the 8th verse another one of those stern warnings set forth in the Word of God. This is a very important one. This is a passage of Scripture that has caused much perplexity and misgivings among believers, especially among those who have backslidden, lost the grace of God out of their hearts.

This Epistle resounds again and again with warnings against the danger of turning away from God - the danger of letting our zeal or faith slacken in any degree, and thus laying us liable to drift into the state that is herein described. That apparently was the very danger which these Hebrew Christians were facing.

We are certainly facing a period of Christianity when we will need to have the strength that God has for each one of us. We do not know what is going to confront us in the crisis that is coming upon the world. There is only one thing that we can look to and one thing that we can hope for in these days, and that is God's grace which He manifested in His inspired Word and offered to us. If our study of this Word will help us and strengthen us in this regard, we have accomplished God's purpose. It is possible for a child of God to go straight through and maintain the victory without backsliding. It has been proved many times.

There is a great difference between ordinary backsliding and what is set forth in these verses. The Bible draws a distinction between backsliding and falling away from God. For the backslider there is every hope of his restoration, if he will repent and renew his vows to the Lord. There are too many exhortations and entreaties in the Scriptures directed to backsliders to admit to any other belief.

I have heard some people say that if you have had the baptism of the Holy Ghost and failed; there is no more hope for you. You do not find any such thing in the Word of God; and it has been disproved time and time again by those who have thus failed. But because God extends His mercy and grace to those who do backslide, let us not draw the conclusion that that is an excuse for letting down the standards or becoming less zealous in

our walk before the Lord. We should maintain the standards the same as though there were no way of getting back to the Lord.

But for the man who has fallen away from God and has reached the final stage that is depicted in these verses, there is no hope. John said, "There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it" (I John 5:16). Jesus alluded to the same thing when He spoke of the unpardonable sin. To fall away from God means to apostatize, to deny the faith; to reject the very means of faith and the only means by which we have access to God.

An apostate is a man who once has known the efficacy of God's saving grace (the only remedy for the disease of sin) and then has scornfully denounced and rejected this remedy which alone can save him from perdition. He has put himself in the same category with those who crucified Christ; he has crucified Him afresh and put Him to an open shame. That is, he is in just the same class as those who stood about the cross and mocked Him and looked on Him as an impostor. He has put himself out of utilizing the very means by which he has access to God. He is absolutely cut off from God by the position he has taken.

Saul's Example

But this dreadful state is not reached in a moment nor in a single leap. Saul was probably one of the most tragic failures chronicled in the Bible. But he did not reach that state in one or two steps. There were a great many false steps which led him into that condition.

Samuel, in rebuking him, said, "When thou wast little in thine own sight" (I Samuel 15:17). That would imply that pride had come in. There was a time when Saul walked softly before the Lord in humility. But after he had won several victories he apparently took the glory unto himself instead of giving God the glory. One has thrown the doors open to pride as soon as he does that.

Saul's next step was disobedience: "Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the LORD?" (I Samuel 15:19). Having taken things into his own hands it was easy for him to go a step farther and disobey the command that was given him. The next step down, we find to be self-justification: "I have obeyed the voice of the LORD" (I Samuel 15:20).

When one has done wrong and has started upon that course he will justify himself in his wrongs. Presently we find the trait of anger manifesting itself in Saul's life. This was when a company went out to greet David, and they sang in chorus: "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." "And Saul was very wrath, (I Samuel 18:7, 8). Next we find covetousness exhibited: "What can he have more but the kingdom?" (v. 8).

Then we find envy manifested. "And Saul eyed David from that day and forward" (I Samuel 18:9). Next we find hatred: "And Saul became David's enemy continually, (I Samuel 18:29). These are all quotations which give a panoramic view of Saul's downward course. The next is devil possession: "And the evil spirit from the LORD was upon Saul" (I Samuel 19:9). Then murder: "And Saul sought to smite David even to the wall with the javelin" (I Samuel 19:10). And the next step is witchcraft: "I pray thee, divine unto me by the familiar spirit" (I Samuel 28:8). He could no longer hear from the Lord, no longer receive any comfort or consolation. After having massacred the priests and their families at Nob he sought the advice of those who remained. He called in the prophets for counsel after he had persecuted them, but he received no reply from the Lord. There was a time when Saul had God's counsel, but he scorned it. Now he was in a position where he needed His counsel, and he could no longer receive it.

Then came his final step: "Saul took a sword, and fell upon it"— suicide. We have a good example in the life of Saul of a man who apostatized from the Lord.

Fight the Good Fight

"But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak."

They had not reached a state of hopelessness, but Paul's fear here was that because of the persuasions and persecutions of the Judaizers they would be so much discouraged that they would give up altogether and forsake the Lord. So this is an exhortation to continue to fight and go on, to fight against evil no matter how the odds may be against one. It is never a losing fight. Remember that.

What the Lord wants is that fighting spirit that will go on—not necessary in the military sense of today, but that will never give up the fight of right against wrong, that will never be discouraged or lay down our arms, or ever rest at ease as long as the battle is on. God rewards the man who has that spirit. You will find that true all through this Epistle to the Hebrews. Paul tells them that they have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. They had not reached the point where they had laid down their lives; but there were many others who had. I would rather die fighting, if I have to die, than to lie down and fold up.

James Lawrence was mortally wounded in a sea battle of the American Revolution. As they were lowering a boat to remove him, he said, "Don't give up the ship!" These words have been immortalized in our history.

John Paul Jones was another. His ship, the BON HOMME RICHARD, was badly crippled and sinking. The commander of the British ship, the SERAPIS, appeared on the deck and commanded him to surrender. John Paul Jones replied, "I have not yet begun to fight." He maneuvered his ship, in that sinking condition, beside the SERAPIS, threw cables across it and lashed his sinking ship to that British ship. His crew went aboard and fought hand to hand, overcame the crew, and took command and brought both ships to port.

He was a man who did not fold up; he continued fighting. God wants to put within us a little of that fighting spirit that will never give up the ship.