

The Assessment of Faith and Spiritual Immaturity

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[0:00] Starting together now to the letter to Hebrews and chapter number 6 and we can read at the beginning of that chapter. Hebrews chapter 6 at verse 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 towards God and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead and eternal life.

And this we will do if God permits. And so on through the following verses and also taking into account the verses at the end of chapter number 5.

I guess in every area of life there are times when we can be discouraged. There are times when we can be distracted. There are times when we can be disappointed and never become disengaged from everything that is happening around us.

And I'm sure at different times in life we have experienced that. When we think of the life of faith and read of the life of faith in the Bible, we see exactly the same thing.

[1:15] Faith belongs to those who are the children of God. They believe that he exists and that he is the rewarder of all those who diligently seek him.

And even in this letter itself we see that there can be discouragement. We see that there can be distraction and disappointment. And we can see that there is the danger of becoming completely disconnected from the gospel itself.

That's the nature of life for this people. And it is the nature of life as we live as the children of God here in this world. And as we do read through this letter, we recognize first of all that there is the kind of crisis that Scott McLeod referred to this morning.

There is a crisis in the hearing and the listening of the people. And where there is such a crisis, then faith is really threatened. There is a crisis in the way that they want to worship God.

They are wanting to fall back from the worship that is now in place through what Jesus Christ has done. They want to fall back into old habits.

[2:41] Does that remind you of yourself? Does that remind me of myself? We are prone to fall back into old habits and to lose sight of where we are and what we are doing.

And then that is the kind of thing that leads to the crisis of faith. And there are two things that the writer does in order to address these crises.

And first of all, he wants to show to them the importance of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and his redeeming work.

That is what he is doing up until this point. We are kind of stepping into this whole discourse about who Jesus is and what he has done. Then he goes on to describe faith and how faith works in that great chapter about faith, chapter number 11.

But time after time, he throws in a wake-up call to those to whom he is writing.

[3:46] These are warning passages that speak to those who are going to hear this letter read so that they will pay attention to what he is saying about Jesus, pay attention to what he is saying about faith, and be on their guard.

A wake-up call. And sometimes I know that is what I need. And I think it is true of all of us at different times in life. We need a wake-up call from God to remind us of what is important, and when we become distracted, to realign our lives with where we should be and what we should be doing.

And against that, back in this evening, I want to think of this passage and to think of the assessment of faith and spiritual immaturity. I want to think, first of all, that we have in this passage a review.

That is, there is a formal assessment by the writer with a view to bring about change. It happens in my workplace. It happens in my school life.

It happens in education circles. A review is the kind of assessment that is necessary from time to time to introduce change where it is necessary.

[5:06] And when we look at review in this passage, we see that the writer has to interrupt his discourse about the Lord Jesus because of what he discovers in his review.

And we go back to verse number 11 in chapter 5. About this time we are much to say, and it is hard to explain since you have become dull of hearing.

He is telling them about the Lord Jesus. He is telling them about the work that he has done. He is telling them about this great high priest of God who is our redeemer, who is our mediator.

Then he pauses because he is thinking of them. And he is realizing, as he is writing this letter to them, he is realizing that there is a problem.

There is a problem with his hearers. And we could say that it is the problem of attitude. In any kind of learning circle, my progression in my learning depends on my attitude, my mindset, the feelings that I have, and the way I think of events and things that are brought before me.

[6:21] It is exactly the same in our faith. We need to have the right attitude in order to develop in our faith. And if we do not have that, then we will stall, we will stop where we are.

And instead of climbing upwards or even going horizontal, we will begin to decline. Attitude is really important.

And we find here that he is unable to carry on with this great message about the Lord Jesus because of this problem. They have become dull of hearing.

It is a kind of incapacity in receiving the message of God and an incapacity, a sluggishness, in putting the word of God into practice.

They are not hearing the way that they should and they are not putting into practice. They are not breathing in the word of God that is written to them, that is spoken to them.

[7:26] They are not breathing it in to take it into their own lives. And they are not breathing it out in the sense of living out the faith as they should. It is a real crisis.

They are not receiving the gospel as they should. And because of that, they have become exhausted in the life of faith.

They are beginning to grind to a halt. It's too much for them. That's what happens to your faith and mine. Once I stop receiving from God and once I stop living the kind of life that that produces, once that stops, then faith becomes all about what I can do myself.

And when it becomes what I can do myself, then I realize I can do very little. And then I begin to stall and I begin to stop. That is where they were.

And the simple reason for that, it seems to be from what the writer is saying, the simple reason for that is their lack of discipline.

[8:40] Being able to train themselves. And that's what he refers to in verse 14 of chapter 5. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment, trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

Their powers of discernment, the way they're going to receive knowledge and use that knowledge in their lives, they have lost the ability to do so.

And they have lost that because of their failure to train themselves, to discipline themselves in the ways of God, in the things of God, and in the Word of God.

And the writer is using an image that comes from the Greek athletic scene where the athlete would not only discipline and training themselves, but would discipline themselves in removing all of the clothing that was going to stand in their way so that they could compete with all of their energy. Nothing was going to stand in their way. And the writer brings up something similar to that in chapter number 2. Laying aside every weight and the sin that so easily besets us.

[10:00] Here we are. We build up baggage along the journey of faith. We build up things that slow us down. We build on perhaps clothing, garments, the garments of the world in a symbolic way.

And we begin to lose our way in the life of faith. We have lost our discipline. And God wants you and me tonight to consider that.

This is God's review of your life and of mine. And He wants you and me to think of gratitude towards the things of the Bible and the things of the Gospel.

He wants us to look at our own lives and to think of perhaps the fact that we have stopped listening the way that we were listening. And because of that we stopped living the life that we were living.

And it's all because we are not disciplined. We are not watching over ourselves. I go to, the children go to their classroom and they need to be disciplined.

[11:11] And they are reminded about the discipline that they need by those who are teaching them. and being disciplined in their learning they are going to benefit from all that they are taught.

And the same principles apply in everything that we are going to learn and they apply here in the Gospel. That you and I have to ensure we have the right attitude to receive.

That we have the discipline that enables us to focus on what we are hearing and that therefore we are able to live out the life that God wants us to live.

A review that caused an interruption and that caused him to think of where the people were. And in any kind of review there must be something that needs to be done to address the situation.

And what must they do? What must you and I do? In verse number 13 he speaks of the way in which they ought to be teachers.

[12:21] They were supposed to be helping others. That's why God has called us to be his children to be his disciples. All of us here tonight who have faith in the Lord Jesus we are to serve him.

We are to teach each other. We are to teach those who are around us. We are to teach not only your children but all those who are on the journey of faith with us. We are all teachers because we have the spirit of God in our hearts and God has given to us the subject matter in his word.

But they were unable to be teachers and instead of that they needed in verse number 12 you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God.

He is saying about them that with regard to faith they are back in their childhood. They are back where they were at the very beginning of their Christian journey.

Imagine a parent receiving a review a report on their child from school and the child is years up into learning for example in primary school and the review the assessment at the end of the year is going to say that your child is like a child who needs to go back to the basic level of understanding and teaching school.

[13:55] How heartbreaking that would be. How distressing that would be. that's something of what the writer here is referring to.

That here are the people of faith and God is saying about them you should be way up in the standard and the progression and development in the kingdom of God you should be up there teaching those who are around you and teaching those who are younger than you in the faith. But in actual fact you are like a child yourself. and if it's distressing for a parent to hear that about their own child in school what do you think God thinks tonight?

If that's where this review finds you in your faith that it's childish that it's back to be more or less unnoticeable.

that it's back to the basic principles that need to be learned once more to show what faith should be like. How do you think God feels if that's where you are tonight?

[15:18] a review with regard to their faith and it finds that their faith that they are immature in their faith and there are many hundreds in their lives that cause them to be back where they actually started.

a fearful situation that needs attention. It is as I said in the beginning it is one of these passages which is a wake up call and perhaps for all of us wherever this review finds us and wherever God finds us tonight perhaps it is at one level or other a wake up call to us all.

There is a review. Secondly there is a recommendation. If that's the situation advice must be given for the best course of action to address such a poor attitude and such a lack of discipline.

And there is the message that we have then as we move into chapter number six. There is a reference to the elementary doctrine of Christ and it's the basic building blocks that is the very beginning of me coming to know the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior.

The very beginning of things. We have a list of them there. The foundation of repentance from dead works and faith towards God. That's my coming to faith. Then there is the instructions about washing and the laying of hands.

[17:14] The way in which we're devoted to the Lord Jesus and the way in which the Spirit of God dwells in our hearts. The resurrection of the dead. The future and eternal judgment.

And this is what we do of God. Permits basic things. It's the kind of things that we learn in Sunday school. that in our infant years there were things that were taught to us.

The basic things about salvation. The shorted catechism. The messages that we were taught. The recommendation is that there must now be a departure.

A moving on. And not in the sense of leaving these things as if they did not matter. It's building on these as the basic building blocks that begin a life of faith.

And now building on that and he says to them, let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity.

[18:27] It is the sense of bearing a burden the going on. It's not simply stepping forward and running along. It's going on in the sense of bearing a burden.

And we would be kidding ourselves if we're going to live the life of faith and we're not going to carry the burden. The yoke of Christ as Christ himself calls it, there is that sense of bearing the burden, of bearing the yoke, there is that moving along, bearing the burden of responsibility, of learning, and of developing faith.

And interestingly, when the writer speaks about going on to maturity, in the Greek language it is the sense of being passive.

And we're not saying that to be complicated, but we're saying that because it draws attention to the fact that God is carrying them along and will carry them along as they go on to maturity.

He is not saying to them, go off on your own and here is where you're at, but go and embark on this journey and go towards maturity and you're going to be on your own doing it.

[19:53] God doesn't work like that. He gave us faith. He gave us of His Holy Spirit in our hearts and He gives the strength to us to carry on in the life of faith.

It is not quite carrying us along, but it's giving us the strength to go along life's way. And that's the encouragement for you and for me this evening that in our good to answer the difficulties in our faith and our failure to be as far on our faith as we should be that we have to go on towards maturity. Maturity in faith, of course. We read back in chapter 5 and the writer speaks about that Jesus Himself, He learned obedience from what He suffered and being made perfect, becoming mature, He became the source of eternal salvation.

It's perfection, it's maturity in the sense of being what God has designed us to be and to be grown up people of faith and the children of God, walking at that level at which we should be walking in comparison to the number of years that we have lived the life of the Christian.

God wants me and you to hear this recommendation. He wants us to remember the building blocks and He wants us to use these as a springboard from which He Himself will give us strength to go along through this world in all of its discouragements, in all of its distractions, in all of its disappointments, discipline to go forward in life with a kind of faith that grows strong in the midst of all the challenges and that shines forth in the midst of all the examination.

[22:08] We know our children, we know how well they've learned and studied when they have their examination results and we see results and we can say wow and we can say that because there has been discipline, there has been hard work and now we have the results.

It's the same in the life of faith. And let's be clear, that is not to say that this is faith by works, that we are depending on what we do ourselves, but our development is dependent on what we do.

We have to work out our salvation with fear and trembling because it is God that works in us. It's God and us and it's us and God and so he carries us along.

And in any stage of education there is that sense of age and stage relevance and age and stage development and God does not expect the person who has newly put their trust in the Lord Jesus to be at the same stage along this journey as the person who has for a long life lived trusting in the Lord Jesus.

It is age and stage relevant. God expects the development at every stage but maturity is God's design and God's goal and that's where we're all moving towards.

[23:51] And in many ways if there's an examination as to how much we have learned in the Bible the examination is what proves the genuineness of my faith.

And when God is reviewing your life and he finds that things are not the way they should be and he's calling upon you recommending with this imperative that you go on to maturity he is saying that that's how you prove that your faith is genuine it is real.

And that's a wake up call. faith is not the kind of thing that can be hidden. We cannot see it but we can see the evidence offered.

By the fruits you shall know them. A good tree will bring forth good fruit. How much does your life confirm that your faith is genuine?

genuine. That's challenging for me. It must be challenging for you. That life is what confirms.

[25 : 13] That's where the examination result is seen. What kind of life do you live? What kind of life do I live? How much does that life show that our faith is genuine?

And the flip side of that of course is that unless our lives show that our faith is genuine then it raises the critical question do we have faith at all?

And we know that James speaks about faith without works being dead. That's the way it is. Genuine faith shines out in the challenges of life in the midst of all the disappointments all of the disillusionment everything that knocks us down is where faith springs up and comes to the surface and it begins to shine.

There is a review there is a recommendation and finally there is a reflection. reflection. A reflection that calls for careful and thoughtful consideration of what he has said.

And reflections are really important and the way reflections take shape and the way they happen they are crucially important. And the writer here brings them to reflect on something that is really critical to their faith, critical to their Christian experience and concerning which they must be very mindful.

[27 : 10] If it's a warning from God it's worth listening to we have to listen to it. And the reflection that he does have he places the spotlight on a group of people and he describes that group of people in verse number four.

Those who have once been enlightened those who have tasted the heavenly gift who have shared in the Holy Spirit and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the perish of the age to come.

They were once enlightened. The light of God's Spirit shone into their lives. They're part of this Christian community and as being part of it they themselves received that measure of light.

Along with that they tasted the heavenly gift. They tasted something of the grace of salvation.

We can taste something and not swallow it because we don't like it. We can taste it and swallow it.

But here are those who have tasted something of the experience the grace of salvation.

[28 : 42] And they are also those who have shared in the Holy Spirit tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come. The word of God has touched their lives.

The kingdom of God which is future which is not yet has touched their lives also. Their lives have been impacted by the word of God and by the gospel the good news of Jesus Christ and they have seen the light.

And it draws our attention to what can happen and to how much can happen and yet there is no genuine faith.

life. And that alarms me tonight. And it should alarm all of us that we can look as if we have all the characteristics of being a person of faith and being the child of God and has gone no deeper than passing experience in life where because of the fact that we're in the community of faith and under the ministry of the gospel where the Holy Spirit of God is working that because of all of that our lives were impacted for a while.

We need to allow ourselves to reflect upon that as the writer wanted them to reflect upon it.

[30 : 21] They were bearing all the hallmarks of genuine faith and Christianity. it seems that if we were going to look at this group of people that he is referring to and we to observe where they're at we would conclude these are Christians they are people of faith.

And the reflection takes us to the way in which he speaks about something that's impossible. impossible. And we know that in the Old Testament the Bible tells us with God nothing is impossible.

He has the power to do everything that he must do in order to fulfill his own plans. Nothing is impossible with him. In this letter itself it's impossible for God to lie.

It simply cannot happen. And here there is something else that is impossible. And it is in relation to God but more especially it's in relation to you and to me.

And the impossibility is with regard to those who may fall away. If they then fall away.

[31 : 48] If they disappear over the edge they're on the edge anyway because the faith that they have is not genuine it hasn't really changed their hearts.

And because of the disappointments and the distractions and the discouragements they are ready to become disconnected and if that happens if they fall over the edge if they abandon their faith what is it that's impossible it's impossible to restore them again to repentance the repentance that is at the very beginning of the journey of faith the repentance where I change my mind about my sin because God has shone his light upon it and I turn away from my sin and I seek to put my trust in the Lord Jesus there is that physical turning around in the Old Testament there is that heart turning around in the life of faith in the New Testament there is that repentance and the writer is saying here that if there are those and they did taste something of Christian experience and it didn't really reach their hearts then if they subsequently fall away for whatever reason then it is impossible for them to be restored again to repentance there is no lifting up what has fallen down in this case but regularly through the Bible we see that God is the person who lifts up those who are cast down he lifts up those who fall those who are as genuine people but in this case they are a separate case they don't have the genuine faith they have claims they could be confused but they don't have the genuine faith and if they fall away they cannot be restored it is impossible and it is impossible he says because they are crucifying once again the son of God to their own harm and told him up to contempt which of course literally cannot happen Jesus died for sin once and he will return at the end of this age as we read in chapter 9 at the end of this age without sin he will come to save his people he died once for sin but what the writer does mean is that when this happens the falling away leads to them aligning themselves with the kind of people that actually hated the Lord Jesus and crucified him on Calvary's cross aligning themselves with those who are the enemies of Jesus and who are the enemies of God's kingdom and there is an example in chapter 11 and chapter 12 of this letter and it's the example of Esau the brother of Jacob he sold the blessing he sold the birthright they were meaningless he didn't see any value in them but though he sorted with tears afterwards there was no place for him to have them restored and that's an awful place to be that I can fall away from where I am and be in a place where I cannot be restored and like Esau I come to the place where I suddenly realize what I've lost and yet it's without my reach it's out there and I let it go I turned my back upon it and it's no longer available to me the reflection

[36 : 25] I'm going to close with a reflection from personal experience which I don't do often but when I was struggling and trying to seek the Lord and trying to put my trust in the Lord Jesus and struggling with all that was happening around me I found myself in a place and the following morning I woke up from that place and I realized that unless I straightened out my life that the most precious thing that I could see in life would be lost to me it was reflecting on something like this this is what I want more than anything and I'm not now going to let anything else get in the way of that so I give my life to seeking to know the Lord Jesus and perhaps you may be like that this evening struggling with faith with issues of faith struggling and coming to put your trust in the Lord

Jesus well if you are God is telling you tonight don't let that go don't shut that door pray that God will help you through that process and will bring you through the door into his kingdom and be in the place with the people of God concerning whom it is through that it is impossible to get them out of the kingdom and that it is impossible for anyone to take them out of the hands of God may God help us to review may help us to hear the recommendation and may help us to reflect for the improvement of our faith and for the transformation of our everyday lives may God bless his word let us pray most gracious God we rejoice in you as the God who speaks into our lives and who highlights for us the dangers that we are open to and who draws our attention to the riches of your grace in the gospel help us oh Lord

God tonight to see both of these things and help us to see more and more of the value and the preciousness of the redemption you have secured in the Lord Jesus and give to us to put our trust in his name day by day and to live for you to hear what you have to say to us to live our lives in accordance with it and to so discover the joy of knowing that you are our God and our saviour our father in heaven who cares for us endlessly we pray hear us and accept us for Jesus sake Amen the closing psalm is psalm number 71 in the Scottish Psalter at verse number 14 psalm 71 at verse number 14 it's on page 3 1 1 but I with expectation will hope continually and yet with praises more and more

I will thee magnify and we're singing from verse 14 to verse 17 to God's praise but I with expectation will hope continue and yet with praises more and more I will be magnified thy justice and salvation I must approach a true in over it for

I thereof that numbers do not know and I will haunts and be go on it's strength of God the Lord!
[41 : 17] of thy own righteousness in life alone I will report for even thought my youth O love I thee
I have been told and never do I have been here the wondrous the Lord I been here after the
malediction I go to the door on my right the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of
God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forever more Amen