

"BABIES, COUNTERFEITS AND DOUBTERS"

Hebrews 5:11-6:8 ("Babies and counterfeits")

3/24/96

(3/31/96 sermon on 6:9-20 ("doubters") completes this one)

Do you remember from your childhood ever being mocked by an older sibling or schoolmate and being called a "baby!"

From their point of view you were acting immaturely and so they slandered your maturity by calling you a "baby"

I remember one of my daughters was one time taking care of an infant who was for no apparent reason crying a "mad" kind of cry.

In mock-frustration my daughter at one point looked at the child and exclaimed "you're such a baby!"

That stated description of someone who obviously isn't chronologically a baby has the effect sometimes of making the person look at their behavior and even change it -

That is if it isn't a brother who calls you that and you hit him instead.

Kent Hughes, Pastor of College Church in Wheaton,IL, tells of his second son, William, who when two was addicted to sucking the knuckle of his index finger.

Candid family pictures of those years universally show him with his knuckle in his mouth.

His parents tried everything to get him to quit - they tried reason, rewards, cajoling - but nothing worked.

But something happened to change that.

Now before I finish that story I must admit I'm getting ahead of myself.

Finishing up my sermon at the end of this past week I realized I had bitten off more than I could chew in attempting to deal with the issue suggested by the title in your bulletin.

My working title was "Strong to the End - the Perseverance of God"

But as I finished preparation I realized I needed two weeks to deal with the next text in our study of the book of Hebrews.

Next week I will finish this sermon by addressing the Perseverance of God and hence the perseverance of His people.

And so I have changed the title of the sermon to match the specific text we shall study today. And the new title is: "Babies, Counterfeits, and doubters"

Please look in your Bibles to Hebrews 4:14-5:10

What was the subject of those verses?

We looked at them last week:

In the crises of life, when my faith is on the line - I need a Priest
- and the Priest I need is Jesus!

The author finished that section by introducing us to someone with whom many of us not very familiar:

5:6 & 5:10 Speaking of Jesus as the High Priest - the author introduces "Melchizedek" - another "high priest".

BUT look at 5:11 "While we have much to say about this I can't yet because, why? "You are slow to learn"!

At that point the writer digresses - from 5:11 through 6:19.

Look at 6:20 and 7:1 The author has returned to theme he introduced back in chapters 4 & 5 - a comparison of Jesus and Melchizedek as high priests.

So from 5:11 - 6:20 the author digresses:

What I want you to see next is that this digression, this excursus which begins at 5:11 has three subjects all related to each other:

In 5:11 - 6:3 The author talks about babies - SPIRITUAL BABIES.

In 6:4-8 he writes about SPIRITUAL COUNTERFEITS.

And in 6:9-20 he addresses the SPIRITUALLY INSECURE - THE DOUBTER.

It is this important digression we will look at today and next week.

Well, back to Kent Hughes' son, William - the knuckle sucker.
 One day Barbara Hughes overheard an older playmate of William's say to him, "You're a baby. Babies suck their thumbs"

"That night as she tucked him in bed the knuckle reflexively went in his mouth.

"But he consciously withdrew it and said, "I not a baby!"

"And that was the last time we saw him with his knuckle in his mouth."
 (K. Hughes, Hebrews Vol 1 p 145)

A little shame added to an insatiable desire to grow-up brought about definite change.

The author of Hebrews used a little shame to motivate his readers.

According to the English dictionary "shame" is a feeling of distress caused by consciousness of the guilt or folly of oneself"
 (Oxford Encyclopedic Dict. 1991 p1332)

Shame isn't all bad, contrary to what some say today.

No, we wouldn't want a shame-based religion
 and "no" we wouldn't want people to only act out of shame but shame is an excellent tool -

God's Spirit makes us feel shame when we have sinned.

How we respond to shame is quite another thing - do we move to feelings of worthlessness alone or do we admit guilt and move to change?

As we will see later this author is confident that shame coupled with instruction will have the desired results.

How does he use shame - and what is the subject?

READ 5:11-14

Some of you are spiritual babies!

Now, mind you, the author is not just "name-calling".
He is very specific about the problem.

First of all, he writes, "I'd like to teach you more advanced things about the Lord Jesus but you are "slow to learn" or "dull to hear".

That phrase "slow to learn" doesn't mean stupid or incapable.
It actually reads, "you HAVE BECOME slow to learn".

There was a time when you couldn't get enough of God's Word -
you read it, you wanted to learn everything about it -
but you have grown cold toward it.

Now you hardly ever read it, much less do you put yourself in the
place to study it and interact with other believers about how it applies
to your life.

You don't study it on your own, you don't avail yourself of a
Sunday School class, you don't even participate in a small
group which is studying together.

And what has happened as a result:

See V12" You are "milk" drinkers (babies).

Now that would be fine if you hadn't been Christians for so long.
But by this time you ought to be teachers.

How long have you been a Christian?

Are you able to help others grow in their relationship to Jesus?
I'm not asking if you have the gifts to teach a whole class of
people - I'm asking if you have the personal spiritual experience
with Jesus and of his Word to teach even one other person how
to grow as a Christ-follower.

Spiritually immature: Is it alarming to you how many Christians still:
spend and invest their money as if only they and maybe their own
families mattered - but no real investment in the kingdom of God.

Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God" -
That doesn't characterize their lives.

Is it alarming to you how many Christians define success in terms of money
and position just as the unbelievers do -
rather than in service, obedience and holiness.

Is it alarming to you how many Christians spend dollars and hours in front of a television or motion picture screen watching powerfully told stories that violate nearly every aspect of godliness -

filling their minds and their children's minds with pictures and ideas that are specifically and intentionally contrary to God's word and will.

Is it alarming to you HOW some Christians TALK when not in church, what they find humorous in jokes and stories, how they rationalize dishonesty or theft in school, business, and taxes.

Is it alarming to you how many Christians find revenge to be a greater motivation than forgiveness.

Murder and mayhem is more exciting to their minds than mercy and grace.

Arnold Schwarzenegger, Jean Claude VonDam, and Chuck Norris are more stimulating to their souls than stories of forgiveness, love, and sacrifice.

Greed is stronger than charity.

They can't or won't give testimony of their own coming to faith in Christ much less ever step out to tell someone else why Jesus is so important to them and others.

Is it startling to you to learn that premarital sex, adultery, abortion, divorce and marital and family strife are nearly as common among church-goers as among the general population.

And these are the Christians.

Oh, they may have started well but they "have grown slow to learn - dull of hearing - uncaring about being a Christ-follower.

Look at V 13 - "Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching of righteousness."

Or as he writes in V12 "you need someone to teach YOU the elementary truths of God's word all over again."

Maybe there was a time when God's Word shaped your life - even if you knew only the elementary things.

But you have grown so cold that not even the most basic truths shape your thinking and lifestyles any longer.

Apparently some of the Hebrews said they were Christ-followers but they acted much like the world around them.

WHY IS THE AUTHOR SO HARD ON THESE PEOPLE?

Because he knows that if they are not sufficiently anchored in truth, if the truth has not become part of the fabric of their thinking, they will fall flat on their faces when the crises of faith come.

Years ago Jim Means used an analogy that has stuck with me - "patch the roof before the rains come."

I fear for many of us who call ourselves Christians -

I can only imagine what would happen if our faith was on the line as it was for many in the days of the writing of this book.

We are shocked at what happened in Rwanda just a couple of years ago - So-called Christians of one people group slaughtering so-called Christians of another people group.

We look now with horror on what the church in Germany allowed to happen.

But if a race war broke out in this country, would church-goers join it or would there be enough spiritual maturity to bring truth and peace to bear on the war?

Some would like to think those people, in Germany or Rwanda acted that way because they weren't TRUE Christians.

I'm afraid, just as true, is that some of them were unprepared - they didn't have the spiritual muscle to do the right thing.

In Verse 14 we are given a solution to this spiritual immaturity - this spiritual flabbiness:

"But solid food is for the mature who have trained themselves through practice (through exercise) to distinguish good from evil

They have trained themselves through the practice, the exercise of obedience to God's word.

Application of the Word of God and the will of God to life's situations when doing so "bites" or contradicts our natural inclination is what develops maturity -

Giving when we'd rather use the money on ourselves.

Forgiving when it runs counter to our selfish desire to take revenge.

Serving when we'd rather use the time on ourselves.

Choosing the ethical way even when it costs us money.

The author says it is the practice of godliness that brings maturity.

Knowing what to do and DOING IT brings growth!

I remember hearing of a very successful business man being asked the secret of his success.

He said, "Good decisions"

And he was then asked "how did you learn to make good decisions?"

"Ah", he said, "by making bad decisions".

The moral of the story is not to make bad decisions - the moral is - practice!

In every decision of life - asking what Scriptural truths bear on this decision - and then ACTING on it, is what builds maturity.

With each obedient response to God's word the habit gets more ingrained and the response becomes second nature.

God may be shaming those first readers of this letter and also shaming us - but He is making his point, isn't He?

What will we do about it?

Are there some changes necessary in our lives?

The author has been fairly hard on these readers.

Do you suppose he's angry?

Do you think he is speaking as one who has given up on them and is just venting his frustration before leaving them?

Look at the first part of the 1st V of chapter 6:

"Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity..."

He is not saying these teachings about Christ are unimportant, when he calls them "elementary" but that they are basic - and in spite of the spanking he has just given them - he wants them to "press on" with him to deeper things about Jesus.

Look at V3 "And God permitting, we will do so."

The author has confidence in these Christians that this challenge will result in a desire on their part to change.

He knows a spiritual truism:

Where there IS spiritual life there is growth.

Knowing what else he knows about them, he is confident they will respond - so he's ready to push on with his subject.

II. BUT BEFORE HE DOES SO he gives a severe warning to some others who were in the church -

He's not addressing the "babies" now but he's writing to the "COUNTERFEITS".

Look at Verses 4-6 READ

I can't know everything that was going on in the mind of the author but

given his words I get the impression he was thinking like this:

Many of the people in this church, to whom I'm writing, are immature Christians - they are spiritual babies.

And it is NOT JUST because they are new Christians but because they have neglected the Word of God.

I have just scolded them and I know that God's Spirit will use the admonishment to bring about some change.

But I don't want that misunderstood.

There are SOME in their midst who aren't even babies.

There are some in the church who aren't even Christians.

And my scolding about immaturity is NOT WARNING ENOUGH for them. I'm concerned there are some reading this who are "counterfeits".

And what they need is not "training in righteousness" but conversion!

They need to realize they are playing with fire - and they are more than likely to get burned.

I know this is a passage over which first and second year Bible college and Seminary students argue at great length.

The argument is whether the author here is describing Christians who lose their salvation or "counterfeits" who are in great danger of losing any opportunity of becoming true Christians.

When you look at verses 4 and 5 and see how the author describes the spiritual experience of these particular people you are left with a decision to make:

Is he describing one who actually becomes a Christian and then walks away from it OR is he describing someone who has every advantage of hearing about Jesus but rejects Him?

Look at the phrases:

"they have once been enlightened"

"They have tasted the heavenly gift"
 They have shared in the Holy Spirit
 They have tasted the goodness of the Word of God
 And they have tasted the powers of the coming age."

All those descriptions could denote a true Christian
 BUT they may JUST AS WELL be describing a person who comes close
 but doesn't respond to Christ as saving-Lord

The words and phrases used here don't, in themselves, give us the
 answer as to which these people are - saved but in danger of
 becoming lost or never saved and in danger of never being able to be
 saved.

To know which it is we must look to the larger context, which I have already
 been explaining and to the largest context - that is the rest of the teaching
 of the Bible.

Listen to other passages from the Bible:

He who has begun a good work in you..will perfect it until the day Jesus
 comes again. Phil 1 and Luke 14

Scripture asserts that not even life can separate believers from the love of
 God in Christ Jesus. Rom 8

Scripture asserts that those who are elected, called and justified will also be
 glorified. also Rom 8

Scripture asserts that believers are "kept by the power of God thorough faith
 unto final salvation... I Peter, Jude, and II Timothy

Scripture asserts that true believers are "sealed by the Spirit unto the day of
 redemption Eph 4

Scripture asserts that those who fall away were never true believers
 otherwise they wouldn't have fallen away I John

Scripture asserts again and again that new life in Christ is "eternal". What
 would that word mean if it could end?

Jesus said, "I know my sheep and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. John 10

Given all the biblical instruction we have regarding the keeping power of God (what I, following others like to call "the perseverance of God (and the perseverance saints) it is contradictory to make this passage assume genuine believers are being described here as ones who can be irretrievably lost after having once been saved

Look at 6:9 with me for just a moment:

Even here in this immediate context the author indicates that he is not talking about the true believers in the church - "Even though we speak like this, I am confident of better things in your case - things that accompany salvation."

**This warning is a solemn warning to those in the church who are hypocrites - "counterfeits".

they claim something by their identifying with the church,
by singing the hymns,
by giving every outward impression when in church that they believe what is being said - when in fact they have never yielded to the Saving-Lord Jesus Christ .

They want all the benefits of feeling religioius without any true commitment or life-style change.

The author is saying "you have had all the advantages of the gospel - you have heard it,

you have seen it to be real in others,
you have lived in the blessing of the church -

benefitting from its ministry to yourself and your family,

But YOU have never responded to Jesus Christ.

You have held him off as a concept to be intellectually assented to but not a person to be related to and personally followed.

God, through this writer, says BE WARNED!

My Spirit will not always strive with you -

I will not always leave the door open -
 I will not always give you such clear understanding of the truth.

The author says be careful, be warned - It is to your peril that you sit in the light with your eyes intentionally closed.

You can cross a line, even this side of death, where there is no turning back

-

where it will be impossible for you to repent -

when you will have no stirrings in your heart to respond to Christ -

when God will have turned you over to the logical and spiritual conclusion of your stubbornness - eternal spiritual death.

What does the Bible say?

"impossible to be brought back to repentance" -

Impossible to be brought back to that place where you could turn to Christ or would turn to him.

Judas is a classic example of this whole sad condition:

He was with the Lord himself.

He looked like the real thing - no disciple, even after three years with him had any idea he was counterfeit.

He had all the advantages of the good news - he saw it all - he was so close he tasted it - but he never responded.

And there came a day when it was too late - Satan entered him and there was no turning back.

Don't play with this - Don't wait to deal with this - Don't think you can put it off and deal with it later.

The issue is not that you might physically die before doing so - the greater likelihood is that the Spirit of God will stop pursuing you!

I think these verses make it clear you may cross a line, long before you die.

Jesus, in Mt 12, spoke of the unpardonable sin -
the full-knowledge rejection of Jesus Christ.

Some of you may be young and you live under the misguided notion that God would never do that to you.

You may think you have plenty of time to turn around.

I don't see anything in these verses that give comfort to the young.

I see: those who have had the most light are the most liable.

You've been reared in a Christian home, you've heard the gospel many times in Student groups, you've seen the difference between your life and those who truly follow Jesus.

How about you? How long will you sit in church, live in a Christian family, even associate with Christian friends but reject the light of the gospel - reject the person of Jesus?

Why do you think God included this warning here?

Was he just announcing doom on some?

NO - this is a gracious warning to the counterfeit in the church, to lose no time in bowing before the Lordship of Jesus Christ and truly becoming a follower of His.

This was a straight from the hip, strongly-worded, but love-filled plea -
Come to the Lord Jesus.

Elders/Pastors/Adult Sunday School teachers/Jr/Sr Hi teachers and adult staff/ 1st through 6th grade teachers **STAND**

If you need to get this straightened out today -
see one of these people before you leave this building.

Maybe God's shaming description of some as immature - a "baby" is accurate of you.

Maybe God's warning to "counterfeits" is aimed right at you.

This is the day to respond - to make a change - to humbly come to Jesus.

Come right after we dismiss / Pastors, Elders, teachers and leaders
- please stay right where you are for just a few minutes after the
service - allow people to find you.

Will the rest of you please stand now

HYMN 337 Vss 1,2,3

PRAYER