

"BABIES, COUNTERFEITS, AND DOUBTERS" PT 2

Hebrews 6:9-20

3/31/96

Some time ago a man called me and asked to meet.

It seems a certain passage of Scripture had pricked his conscience - and caused him to begin seriously questioning the direction of his life.

That passage was from II Cor 13:5 where Paul writes, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith, test yourselves."

It seems the man dared to take a look at his own life and when he did - he didn't like what he saw - and in light of that verse - it frightened him.

He came, wondering if possibly he wasn't truly a Christian.

Have you ever had a time or times in your life when you wondered if YOU were truly a Christian?

I have a Christian friend who several years ago went through a period of time when his own sinfulness was no longer secret - no longer only in his mind - but it broke out into open sin, disgraceful sin, and public sin.

Always before he could admit his potential for sin, even great sin, but he never actually believed it could happen.

Then, it did and he realized that his sinful conduct only reflected his sinful interior - his sinful heart.

Like King David of Israel, hundreds of years before, my friend saw himself as God sees him, and me - wicked to the core.

With that new awareness, he wondered like never before "Am I even a Christian?"

The man, I mentioned earlier, who had come to see me was at the same place.

Have you ever been there?

Oh, maybe your sin isn't public but you know your own heart - and you wonder, "Am I even a Christian?"

The sermon I preached last week, from Hebrew 5:11- 6:9 certainly had the potential of making people think about their true spiritual condition.

The author writes that some of his readers were spiritual babies!
 That wouldn't be a bad thing if you had just become Christians but
 that isn't the case - you should be mature now and instead you are
 immature - mere infants.

And the trouble is you are in that condition intentionally:
 6:11 "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.

Maybe there was a time when God's Word shaped your life but you have
 grown so cold that not even the most basic truths shape your thinking and
 lifestyles any longer.

When God turned that search-light on the hearts of those first readers, I
 can only imagine how some of them must have squirmed.
 Like some of us, they humbly admitted - that's me!

And when they admitted that, a question could easily have come to mind:
 "Am I even a Christian?"

No sooner did the author turn God's searching light on those who were
 immature than he turned the light up even brighter and began to identify
 another kind of person in the congregation - the counterfeit.

In 6:4-6 the solemn warning is to those in the church who are hypocrites -
 "counterfeits".

These counterfeits claim something by identifying with the church,
 by singing the hymns,
 by acting like they belong,
 they indicate 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 religious without any true commitment or life-style change.

Some have held Jesus off as a concept to which they intellectually assent but not as a person to whom they relate and personally follow.

And the most frightening thing God says through this author is that some of those hypocrites are dangerously close to crossing a line of NO RETURN - a time when God's Holy Spirit will no longer pursue them but will turn them over to the logical and spiritual consequences of their stubborn refusal to follow Jesus -
they will NOT BE ABLE to come to Jesus.

Can you imagine the spiritual insecurity some of those first readers must have felt - even some of those who were truly Christians?

As they looked at their own lives, I suspect, as I said earlier, some of them asked as we sometimes do, "Am I even a Christian?"

The author has said some of you are spiritual babies when you should be mature.

He has written that some of you are hypocrites - counterfeits.

And the clear implication, as we saw last week, is that those to whom God is speaking should confess that and turn to Christ.

But with a pastoral sensitivity, the author apparently knew that some who shouldn't have been indicted by the warnings would nonetheless begin to feel spiritually very insecure.

His warnings may have produced insecurity where none was warranted -

There may have been some NEW Christians listening to this letter and there may have been SOME WHO WERE STRUGGLING in their faith as a result of a recent or on-going crisis.

And it to these that the author now turns his attention.

Last week I said the title of the sermon, based on this text was: "Babies, Counterfeits, and Doubters"

It is the "doubters" he now addresses.

Look please at Hebrews 6:9 "Even though we speak like this, dear friends

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Even after this solemn warning to the spiritually immature and to the unbelievers -

even after a warning that probably makes all of them investigate the true nature of their faith - the author wants the most of the readers to know that based on his knowledge of them (in spite of their immaturity) they are genuine - they truly belong to Christ.

PLEASE NOTE V11 where he writes: "We want each one of you" - the author is not only speaking to the church corporately but to each Christian individually.

"Dear Friends" he says.

This is a warm, heart-felt, affectionate affirmation of them.

"We are confident of better things in your case."

We are confident that in your lives there are things that accompany salvation -

Your actions have demonstrated spiritual life.

What kind of actions?

Your work, love and hence ministry to God's people.

THE POINT OF THE VERSE is that the author has seen evidence of their genuineness.

Do you remember earlier I told you of a man who came in to see me because he was wondering if he was truly a Christian?

When he voiced that insecurity - I asked a question?

I said, "Why are you here in my office talking to me?"

"Well," he said, "I want to make certain that I am a Christian."

"I want to follow Christ."

I knew the man and so I said to him,

"Look at yourself!" "Look at where you are."

It is late on a weekday afternoon in Denver, Colorado and here you are, a grown man, an intelligent man, a man with business responsibilities, sitting in a CHURCH office with a PASTOR - asking about spiritual life - why do you care?

You care because God is at work in your life.

You are here and not sitting in some "happy hour" because God has invaded your life.

How many men do you know at your work - who even care about the things you are here talking about?

Why are they where they are this afternoon and you are here?

Is it because you are smarter than they are or better than they are?

We both no better- it is because God is in your life.

No, my friend, you are not a counterfeit - I am confident of better things in your case - things that accompany true salvation.

That is what the author to the Hebrews is saying to some of his readers.

But please notice he does not say "there that takes care of it - any insecurity you may have felt, I'm certain is now gone because I have told you "I'm confident of you."

No, he writes to them in the next few verses how they can know FOR CERTAIN they belong to Christ Jesus.

These true believers were feeling insecure and God wanted them to live not in doubt but in confidence.

And what we have in these next verses are TWO major sources of confidence.

Two ways by which you can live with assurance - confident that you

belong to Jesus.

Please look at verse 11.

It is important to note what we ARE talking about and what we are NOT talking about here.

Vs 11: "I want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, IN ORDER TO" what?

He wants them to do something for a purpose - what is that purpose?
"IN ORDER TO make your HOPE SURE"

The NASB translates it a little differently getting at the same idea - "so as to realize full assurance of hope"

The author wants these Christians to be confident of their relationship to Christ - he wants them to be "sure" to have "full assurance."

So please notice what the author is NOT here talking about:

He is NOT talking about HOW these people BECOME Christians. He has already said he is confident THEY ARE.

What he is concerned about is that they have CONFIDENCE in that rather than living insecurely all the time.

Now WHAT ARE those TWO WAYS whereby Christ's followers may have confidence, assurance, certainty about their relationship to Jesus?

Verses 10-12 give the first of the two ways AND
Verses 13-19 give the second.

Those two ways, in two words, are OBEDIENCE and TRUST.

Now again, I remind you we are talking about our SENSE of confidence, our FEELINGS of assurance.

These people's sense of their own relationship to Christ had been shaken - A close look at themselves in the light of some very severe warnings had reduced their level of confidence.

Some of them, with tender spirits and sensitive consciences, could potentially have begun to doubt their genuineness - "Am I truly a Christian"

they wondered.

God says, let me show you the foundations of assurance.

I. Let's look again at V11 and see that first foundation - OBEDIENCE

Again I remind you, he is writing that he wants them to have assurance - to do something "in order to make their hope sure" -

What are they to do?

"We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end."

Do you want to have assurance of your relationship to Jesus Christ?

Then, God says, be diligent about that relationship!

The author had already commended them for their work for the Kingdom of God, for their love for others, and for their help given to other Christians.

Basically he says, keep it up.

Paul wrote, "By grace we are saved through faith...and not by works.

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Please bear in mind, that good works are not what MAKE us Christian, we are saved by grace through faith, but good works, are what DEMONSTRATE that we ARE Christians.

To the Philippians Paul wrote, "continue to work out your salvation...for it is God who works in you to will and to do his good purpose.

He also wrote to the Corinthians, "By the grace of God I am what I am - yet not I, but his grace to me was not without effect - No, I worked harder than all of them - yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me."

Do you want to have assurance of your relationship to Christ - then diligently follow Christ -

OBEDIENCE BRINGS CONFIDENCE.

But the author to the Hebrews goes on in V12 to give the other side of the

same idea:

"We don't want you to become lazy/sluggish"

Laziness or sluggishness will cloud over your confidence.

Earlier ,of the immature-the babies, he had said they "had become slow to learn - they had ceased to care about the things of God - they weren't in the Word, they weren't actively serving others - they had become lazy.

The author doesn't tell them to get busy JUST because he wants more work done - he urges, he begs them to stop being lazy because he knows what will happen to their sense of confidence - their assurance - when hard times come or when they sin - they will doubt.

If you have ever truly lived with the pain of spiritual doubt you can appreciate why this pastor wants assurance for his readers.

If you want assurance of your relationship to Christ, the author writes, then be diligent about your obedience, don't be lazy.

AND notice also in V13 - "imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised".

In the next verses the author will give an example of someone who patiently believed God - Abraham.

In chapter 11 the author will give many such examples.

Here, his point is "what I am asking you to do has been done by many others - by God's grace."

The examples of faithful men and women, he will show them, are meant to be an encouragement.

I have probably said this before but it is appropriate here:

I love Sundays.

I love walking into this place and seeing men and women I know and some I am only getting to know.

I love seeing these very normal people affirming their faith one more

time - because it's the same faith I have.

I love seeing them serve one another - they are proving by their actions that not only their faith, but my faith is real, God is who he says he is, and that the grace of God changes lives - including my life.

AS I watch you and imitate you in service and faith - I grow in confidence and assurance - this life of faith in Jesus is for real.

So the first foundation of assurance, of confidence, regarding your relationship to Jesus is OBEDIENCE.

As we obey the Lord, as we not lazily, but diligently imitate those who walk with Jesus, our own assurance grows.

But in VV 13-20 God gives the SECOND FOUNDATION of assurance - It is TRUST in the Promise and character of God.

It is fairly simply set forth - will I believe God?

Look at V13: To whom does the author refer? Abraham.

Please look in your Bible at Genesis 22:16

Most of you have heard of Abraham.

For over 50 years God had been promising Abraham that he would be the father of many and that through him all the world would be blessed.

The older Abraham got the harder, it would seem to us, it would be for Abraham to believe that he would have a son and God's promise would come true.

Finally when way past child-bearing years - God again promised.

Then miracle of miracles - Sarah had a son - his name was Isaac.

Abraham's faith certainly would have been greatly strengthened.

But then the unthinkable was asked of him - God told Abraham to sacrifice his own son - kill him.

With what, to us, is almost unbelievable faith in God, Abraham set out to obey God .

When you read the story you can almost feel the struggle that

would have gone on in your soul or mine if we had been called to do that.

But the Bible says Abraham believed God so much that he knew God would do something - even if it meant raising Isaac from the dead.

But as Abraham was about to complete his obedience - God spoke out to him from heaven and stayed the sacrifice.

And then God did something he had never done before.

Several times God had promised Abraham that God would make of Abraham a great nation of people BUT THIS TIME:

Look at Gen 22:15 "The angel of the Lord said, "I swear by myself" declares the Lord, I will surely bless you and do everything I have promised.

It is this "swearing by himself" that the author of Hebrews picks up in our text - Hebrew 6:13.

"When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself."

In verse 16 we are told the significance of this:

When men or women want someone to believe them they claim some more permanent person or object as a witness to their promise:

We will "swear on a stack of Bibles" that we will do such and such.
Or we will say, "so help me God".

In either case we are appealing to something or someone with more credibility than we have, to back us up.

Well according to V17 when God wanted to express his promise to Abraham AND TO US in such a way as to give us absolute confidence that it would happen - God took an oath on himself.

God in essence said, "I God, so help me God" will do as I promised.

V18 says God did this so that on the basis of two things we could be greatly encouraged -

on the basis of two things we could have absolute confidence in God.

Those two things are God's PROMISE and God's OATH, two things that are unchangeable and thus make it impossible for God to lie.

Abraham listened to God, knew God's character, and trusted God's word.

He believed God.

He believed God when Abraham couldn't see how the promise could possibly be fulfilled

He believed God when he couldn't see how this circumstance could possibly bring about the promise of God.

He believed God when he was asked to do something that appeared, and was, absolutely contrary to the promise of God.

In the book of Genesis and quoted in Romans we know Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.

God said, you trust me and I will save you - you will be mine.

You trust me and I will do what I tell you I will do.

Now what has all this to do with assurance of Salvation - confidence that you belong to Christ Jesus?

God says, "Not only do I promise that you belong to me but I swear to it."

God said, "As many as received Christ, to them God gives the right, the authority to be properly called the Children of God."

"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead - you will be saved."

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life."

Is your faith in Christ alone for the forgiveness of your sins?

Is your faith in Christ alone to give you his righteousness and thus make you acceptable to a holy God?

Is your faith in Christ alone for the spiritual life that places you in God's family?

Then how do you know you are truly a Christian?
Because you have God's word on it.

I looked across the table at that friend in my office and said,

The REALITY of your relationship to Jesus Christ is based on one thing only : God's gracious action whereby, in Jesus Christ, he gave you spiritual life through the means of faith.

But your SENSE of that reality - your assurance, your confidence in that relationship is based on at least two actions:

Obedience and Trust.

If you will obey God and if you will believe that God can't lie - you will have the assurance of your salvation that will enable you to overcome doubt - and live positively before God and people.

Do you want assurance of your relationship with God?

Then obey Him - don't be lazy, but be diligent about imitating those who love and serve Jesus.

Do you want the assurance of your relationship with God?

Then trust Him- He has put his word on it.

I love the way the author finishes the idea: V19

Using a metaphor we can all understand: This hope is an "anchor" for the soul - firm and secure.

Something to which my soul can attach that is so secure, so firm, that I know, I have confidence, I have assurance, I belong to Jesus.

HYMN 349 Trust and Obey (the editors of the hymnal placed this hymn under the right heading: "Assurance and Trust")

And notice the two foundations of assurance: Trust and Obey

VV 1 & 4