

Hebrews 6A (2014)

- This morning, we examine what is easily the most controversial and often debated warning in the book of Hebrews – the third warning
 - The heart of the warning is found in Chapter 6, but the issue concerning the writer begins at the end of Chapter 5, where we start today
 - As you remember, the writer was explaining the High Priesthood of Christ
 - And he was about to explain how Christ inherited a priestly order that is greater than the Aaronic priesthood, the one given through the Law of Moses
 - Christ's priesthood is in the order of Melchizedek
 - But then, the writer paused in 5:11 to chastise the church for not having the spiritual maturity to handle the discussion of Melchizedek
 - His comment reminds me of the famous line spoken by Jack Nicholson in the movie, *A Few Good Men*
 - You want the truth? You can't handle the truth!
 - The writer is worried his audience can't handle this truth
 - And yet they need this truth, because it will guard them from committing mistakes that injure their walk with Christ
 - So as we pick up again today, we will follow the writer's concerns for his audience and eventually enter into the warning itself
 - As I said, the warning generates a lot of disagreement among theologians and ordinary Christians
 - But that doesn't mean it's impossible, or even that difficult, to arrive at a correct understanding of the writer's meaning
 - After all, the Lord didn't author Scripture to confuse us
 - So if we remain confused, it's only because our biblical scholarship is lacking in some way
 - And I think you're going to see that the key to understanding this warning is a familiar refrain: context, context, context

- Let's start up again in v.11, and read through the end of the chapter

[Heb. 5:11](#) Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

[Heb. 5:12](#) For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

[Heb. 5:13](#) For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.

[Heb. 5:14](#) But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

- Concerning Melchizedek, the writer says, "we have much to say and it's hard to explain"
 - But as we learned last week, the phrase "hard to explain" in Greek literally means "to be susceptible to misinterpretation"
 - He knows his audience is likely to misunderstand the truth of Melchizedek because they aren't prepared for the complexity of the discussion
 - So it's not that the writer is incapable of explaining the truth
 - It's that his audience may not be prepared to understand it
 - He says they are dull of hearing, which means lazy at being taught the scriptures
 - Listening implies instruction
 - They weren't paying attention to the instruction of those sent by the Spirit to educate them on the scriptures
 - They weren't merely lazy at listening to the subject of Melchizedek
 - They were lazy at listening to God's Word in general
 - The issue is their dedication to biblical scholarship
 - This reminds us of the gifts Paul listed in Ephesians 4 – including, among them, teachers
 - For the edification of the saints and for the equipping for the work of ministry

- Although we are all taught by the same Spirit, we cannot pretend that we don't need teachers
- If we didn't need another human being to instruct us from time-to-time, we wouldn't have teachers in the Body of Christ by gift
- So having thrown down his gauntlet of an accusation, the writer goes forward on his tangent to explain what he sees wrong with this church's practices
 - This sidebar takes us through the entirety of Chapter 6
 - Only when we get to Chapter 7, does the writer start back up in his discussion of Melchizedek
 - So let's move into the reasons for his concern in this church
 - In v.12, the writer says these believers ought to be teachers by now
 - When he says "by now", he means at this point in their walk as Christians
 - These churches had been operating for a decade, at least, by this point
 - That's plenty of time to develop spiritual maturity and grow in knowledge of Christian doctrine
 - They can't use the excuse of time in explaining why they haven't learned these things yet
 - When he says they ought to be teachers, the writer isn't suggesting that the entire Church Body should be engaged in teaching, necessarily
 - He means individually, they should be able to teach
 - Obviously, if someone is capable of teaching others properly, then it's a sign they've become a good student themselves
 - Additionally, he means that the Church Body collectively should have matured to the point they could be a source of edification to others
 - Instead, they were still dependent on others' instruction, rather than being a source of blessing to others in need
- It's obvious this writer expected the church to mature to this point

- Every member of any church body is expected to embark on a journey of spiritual maturity
 - Simply put, spiritual maturity is not an optional pursuit, it's our call and mission
 - And maturity demands becoming knowledgeable about the Bible, including understanding even the most difficult passages and concepts
- We aren't to shy away from doctrine
 - Instead, we embrace conversations about soteriology, eschatology, ecclesiology, phenomenology, and the like
 - And if some of those words are foreign to your ears, then make it your goal to learn these concepts from Scripture
 - But this writer is clearly unhappy that the church hasn't been actively engaged in this walk
- Instead, they have become lazy, starting with a disinterest in learning the Bible
 - It should worry us that so many churches in our own day have abandoned serious study of the scriptures
 - We're at risk of raising entire generations of biblically ignorant Christians
 - And this can only lead to bad things for the Body
- In the second half of v.12 and v.13, the writer explains the consequence of failing to pursue spiritual maturity
 - He says the lazy Christians not only didn't mature, but they are now regressing in their understanding
 - They need re-education
 - They need someone to come back and re-teach them the basic truths of the Christian faith
 - He refers to the elementary principles of the oracles of God
 - The Greek word for "elementary principles" is *stoicheion*, which literally describes the letters of the alphabet lined up in a row

- And the phrase “oracles of God” simply means the “Words of God”
- In other words, he’s told them that they need to relearn their ABCs of the Bible
 - You can’t get more elementary than that!
- He’s says they’ve come to need milk instead of solid food
 - Obviously, when he speaks of milk and solid food, he’s not giving the church dietary advice
 - He’s using these terms as metaphors for the kind of Bible material this church can safely consume
 - Remember in our 1 Corinthians study in Chapter 3, we heard Paul saying something almost identical to that church

1 Cor. 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ.

1 Cor. 3:2 I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able,

- Both the writer to Hebrews and Paul are using similar language for similar purposes
 - They’re both explaining how the Spirit walks every Christian through a building block process of learning
 - When we’re new in the faith, everything is new and the Bible is foreign to us
 - We don’t know where to start, or even why, we should study the Bible
 - So the Spirit first introduces us to simple, core concepts of faith
 - We learn about the Lord, His commands, His life and death and the meaning of those things
 - We learn about the need to put away sin, to love one another, to wait for the Lord’s return
 - We begin to rethink what we believe about the beginning of Creation

- And our attention begins to look out into eternity, to the Kingdom, to the things Christ promised to us
 - Each step of understanding leads to the next, and all these steps are informed by a consistent study of the Bible
 - These early steps of learning are compared to the milk that infants need
 - Infants can't digest more complex food
 - They can only handle a mother's milk
 - But that milk is the perfect food, and as it strengthens the baby, it grows
 - That growth eventually allows the child to be weaned off the milk and turn to solid food
 - But what if the child persists on milk for too long?
 - They don't grow after a certain point
 - In fact, they regress
 - They grow weaker, malnourished, anemic
- That's the writer's concern for this church
 - Instead of using their knowledge of the ABCs of the Bible as building blocks to pursue more challenging concepts, they became lazy
 - They stopped maturing
 - They got the basics, and considered that enough
 - That's like a toddler refusing solid food and remaining content for milk alone
 - These Christians were not progressing and needed to relearn their ABCs
 - There's real danger in not making it our goal to be a life-long, diligent student of the Bible
 - We may think we have enough knowledge today
 - And perhaps we do, considering where we are in our walk with the Lord

- But what about tomorrow? What circumstances will we face? What false doctrines will we encounter? What crises of faith must we be prepared for?
- The writer is telling us that if we don't continue moving on to greater things, we're in danger of losing what we have
 - Whatever we have learned is no longer enough to guide us in a manner pleasing to the Lord
 - Because our flesh and the enemy never stop trying to take us astray
 - Like the old story goes, whichever dog we feed gets stronger
 - So if we're not feeding our spirit with solid food, then we should expect to regress as our flesh and the enemy gain a stronger foothold in our lives
- And at the end of v.14, the writer shares the reward of seeking spiritual maturity
 - Spiritual maturity gives us the ability to discern good from evil
 - Knowing how to recognize the schemes and temptations of the enemy is the fruit of spiritual maturity
 - Conversely, spiritual immaturity leaves us vulnerable to evil things
 - If we can spot evil, then we can steer clear of the consequences of engaging in evil
 - But evil does not show up wearing a black hat – when you think you know what the enemy looks like, you are ripe for a fall
 - He does not look like you expect – 2 Cor. 11:14 tells us he comes as an angel of light – he will look like the right thing
 - You will like it, but for the counsel of Scripture, giving you discernment – this is the value of Bible study
 - But if we lack that ability, then it's only a matter of time before we stumble and make an alliance with evil
 - Maybe we give in to our lust, anger, fear or greed
 - Maybe we succumb to a false teaching or practice in the church

- Maybe we offend our Lord with counterfeit or idolatrous worship
- Maybe we fall into occultist influences
- Whatever that evil may be, there are always consequences for playing with fire
 - We'll see those consequences here in the form of broken relationships, strife, suffering, emotional trauma and regret
 - And we're putting our eternal rewards at risk
- So we should seek for spiritual maturity, but securing that maturity is a matter of practice and training in God's Word, the writer says
 - You and I can't expect to simply become mature as a function of our physical age, or even the number of years since we've been born-again
 - It's not a matter of seniority or tenure
 - It's a function of practice and training
 - Practice refers to the regular exercise of spiritual disciplines, principally studying God's Word, prayer, worship, service and fellowship
 - And may I suggest that these disciplines should largely follow in that order
 - Our first priority is to learn all that the Lord has provided to us in His Word
 - It's been given to us for a reason
 - And until we've exhausted all that it offers, there is little reason to seek our answers elsewhere
 - That's the chief complaint this writer has against this audience
 - The second priority is prayer
 - Followed by corporate worship, service to the body and, lastly, fellowship
 - So often, I find Christian priorities are almost exactly opposite of this list, assuming they even have everything on this list
 - Christians love fellowship, and who wouldn't?

- But we'll fellowship for hours, but we won't spend more than a few minutes each week in study, prayer or worship
 - That is not a recipe for spiritual maturity
 - And therefore, it's not a recipe for avoiding evil in our lives
- So if we're stuck in an immaturity rut, where do we go next? The writer begins his exhortation in Chapter 6

Heb. 6:1 Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,

Heb. 6:2 of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

- First, the writer says we have to be willing to leave the elementary teaching behind
 - The Greek word for "elementary" here is different than the one used in Chapter 5:12
 - This word here means "the beginning of something"
 - In other words, the writer means leaving behind the beginning things we learned about Christ
 - Those are the things every Christian learns, or should learn, at the outset of their walk of faith
 - We learn these things as a foundation that we can build upon in years to come
 - They're essential, but they're just the beginning
 - So what kind of things are we talking about? What constitutes the elementary things about Christ?
 - The writer gives us six things that he categorizes as the basics, the beginning of our Christian education
 - The first teaching in this foundation is the teaching of repentance from dead works
 - The first thing we must learn as a Christian is that works don't save us

- Even after a Christian has heard the Gospel and been saved by faith, it's entirely possible for that person to continue thinking works play a role in obtaining righteousness
 - Paul wrote the letter to the Romans, in large part, to put an end to that kind of thinking
 - It's natural to think we give God an assist in our salvation, but Scripture stands ready to correct that thinking
 - So obviously, this is a foundational teaching
- Next, the writer says let's leave behind teaching on faith toward God
 - He's speaking of teaching of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone
 - The writer isn't diminishing the importance of that truth, nor the necessity of understanding it
 - He's simply saying once we understand it, let's move on
 - Leave it behind, in the sense that we use it as a building block to reach more challenging truths
 - Thirdly, we are to leave behind instructions about washings
 - The word "washings" is the word *baptismos* in Greek
 - It can refer to a variety of ritual washings, but in this context, it likely refers to teaching about baptism
 - Notice, he uses the word "instructions", which refers to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 28 on being baptized
 - Every Christian should be taught that water baptism is an essential requirement for following Jesus
 - And once that issue has been addressed, let's move on
 - Fourthly, there were instructions on laying on of hands in the Church
 - This concerns the anointing of the Holy Spirit for various gifts
 - Every believer is granted gifts by the Holy Spirit, which was often accompanied by the laying-on of hands in the early Church

- Teaching on the anointing of the Holy Spirit had been given by Paul in 1 Corinthians, which had been written and circulated well before this letter was written
 - So every believer should understand the ministry of the Holy Spirit to gift us
 - And knowing this, we move on, rather than treading over well-worn ground
- Fifth, we should all move on from teaching on the resurrection of the dead
 - When the writer says “the resurrection of the dead”, he’s referring to the resurrection day appointed for the Church
 - That day has come to be called a different name in the Church today
 - We sometimes call it the Rapture
 - It’s the day that all Church saints will be raised into new bodies
 - Our resurrection, in other words
 - Isn’t it interesting that this topic still holds so much fascination, and even controversy, in the Church today, yet the writer says this is simple stuff
 - This is an elementary teaching we should understand early in our walk
 - And then we move on from it
 - You begin to get a sense of just how immature the body of Christ corporately is today when you consider that this is considered an elementary teaching
 - And it should be elementary, because it represents the hope of our faith
 - The hope of the Christian faith is the confidence that Christ’s death conquered death for all of us
 - So that death no longer has power over us
 - When our body finally returns to dust, we will simply get a new body

- We will never see spiritual death because Christ paid that price for us
 - Yet today, we still have so many brothers and sisters who remain confused or ignorant about this essential teaching
 - How can they move on from something they don't yet understand?
- And then finally, we should leave behind teaching on eternal judgment
 - Eternal judgment refers to eschatology in general, but especially to the reality of judgment for both the unbeliever and the believer
 - For the unbeliever, we should know and understand that there is an eternal place of punishment for unbelief in Christ
 - The place begins as Hell
 - And it eventually gives way to the Lake of Fire
 - But it is an eternal place of torment for all who reject Christ
 - And there is no recovery
 - As elementary as this teaching is, you can find some within the Church today teaching either that Hell doesn't exist, or that unbelievers who enter will be "released" at some point
 - They maintain this despite clear scriptural teaching to the contrary
 - They've substituted wishful thinking for the counsel of God's Word
 - Yet this writer says these are not tough things: they are elementary
 - And we shouldn't be wasting time rehashing them...let's move on
- In each of these six examples, we can find individuals, churches and even entire movements or denominations that are trying to redefine the meaning of these things
 - They haven't moved on and matured, as the writer says we all must seek to do

- Instead, they've become lazy in their hearing of Scripture
 - And so they've consigned themselves to regressing into bad thinking, bad theology and ultimately, bad behavior
 - That was the writer's concern for the church in his day
 - And we should share that concern for ourselves, our families and our friends if we or they continue to neglect the Word of God
- Pressing on to maturity is the central concern of our Christian lives, and there is a real and present danger for anyone who fails to mature in this way
 - Notice the next verse:

Heb. 6:3 And this we will do, if God permits.

- Pressing on and maturing as a Christian is a matter of our both our diligence and God's grace
 - And so the question comes, if we aren't diligent, what will God do with our laziness?
 - V.3 suggests it's an open question: those who regress are not guaranteed rescue
 - There is no promise in Scripture that says if you become a Christian and neglect your spiritual maturity, God will rescue you
 - The Bible says when we are faithless, He remains faithful – but that's in reference to salvation, not sanctification
 - We will ultimately be sanctified by the glorification of the body someday – but that does mean your spiritual maturity will suddenly increase
 - Though our body will be made sinless, the degree of spiritual maturity we obtain now is what we will carry with us into the Kingdom
- That's the subject of the writer's warning, which we'll study next time...