

Lake Geneva Bible Conference 1984-04

Hebrews 6:1

by William MacDonald

The sermon emphasizes the importance of leaving the elementary principles of the Old Testament and moving on to maturity in the Christian life, as described in Hebrews 6:1-2.

Duration: 1:02:22

Scripture: Hebrews 5:11-13

Topics: "Conference"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the temptation to turn back from following Christ under pressure. He highlights how some Jews who had professed faith in Christ turned back to Judaism, abandoning and repudiating Him. The speaker emphasizes the need for believers to move from elementary principles to maturity in their faith, laying aside the types and shadows and becoming engrossed with the substance of Christ. He concludes by sharing a story of a wife longing for her husband's return, illustrating the longing believers should have for the return of Christ.

Transcript

Before we go to today's passage, I'd like to just add a little postscript to last night. We were really pressed for time, and several questions have been raised about that expression in 1 Peter 3. He went and preached to the spirits in prison. I mentioned that I believe that that refers to the Lord Jesus preaching through Noah to the men of Noah's day who rejected the message and are now in prison.

However, there is the other view known as the compartment theory. That's good, I call that one a theory. I never use that word theory of my own.

But there is this compartment theory that at the time of the Lord Jesus' death, Sheol, or Hades, was divided into two compartments, the saved and the unsaved. And that at the time of his death, the Lord Jesus went to Sheol and emptied the saved compartment and took those people home to heaven. I believe that in the Old Testament, the saints went directly to heaven, not to Sheol.

Well, it raises a question because in Ephesians chapter 4, there are two expressions there that are used in connection with the compartment theory. And I'll just read them to you. Ephesians chapter 4, verse 8 says, Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.

That expression, led captivity captive, is used to explain Jesus going down into Sheol and taking home the redeemed with him to heaven. Verse 9, Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? That verse is also used to picture the Lord Jesus going down into that compartment in Sheol. And questions have been asked about those two expressions.

He led captivity captive and he descended into the lower parts of the earth. With regard to the expression, he led captivity captive, turn back to Judges chapter 5 and verse 12. Judges chapter 5 and verse 12.

This is the song of Deborah, one of the most majestic poems in the whole Old Testament. It says in verse 12, Awake, awake, Deborah, awake, awake, utter a song, arise Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam. Now when it says lead thy captivity captive, it's not talking about leading your friends captive, but leading your enemies captive.

This is the other use of that expression in the Bible. Lead thy captivity captive. And so what I believe it's saying in Ephesians chapter 4 is that the Lord Jesus, in his glorious ascension, led captivity captive.

It was a glorious triumph over his enemies, not in connection with his friends. With regard to the expression, he descended into the lower parts of the earth. I'd also like you to turn back to Psalm 139.

In Psalm 139, David is describing his birth. And actually he's describing his formation in his mother's womb. And beginning in verse 13 of Psalm 139, it says, For thou hast possessed my reins.

And that possessed means formed. It speaks of God putting together the various parts of the body in the womb. Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.

And the word covered there really means knit. And it's a very picturesque word describing how the muscles and nerves and ligaments and veins and arteries are all knit together in the human body. Beautiful.

I will praise thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Marvelous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well. My frame, my substance.

The word substance there really means frame. It means the skeletal structure, the skeleton. My skeleton, my frame, was not hidden from thee when I was made in secret and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.

That's a strange expression, isn't it? He's describing the formation of the fetus in the mother's womb. And he says, curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Was David formed under the ground? Not at all.

The lowest parts of the earth, there is a figurative, poetic expression. Strange as it may seem, it's a poetic expression for the mother's womb. You say, I don't understand.

Neither do I. But you have to get used to figurative speech when you study the Bible. It says, verse 69, I did see my substance. And there, it's really my imperfect substance.

It's just another expression for the fetus. And in thy book were all my members written, which day by day were fashioned. But as yet, there was none of them.

His whole diary was written ahead of time, before he ever came to the birth. Well, I mentioned that the lowest parts of the earth, in this verse of scripture, if you study the passage carefully, the lowest parts of the earth can only mean the mother's womb. And I believe that's what it means in Ephesians chapter 4. It's referring to the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's referring to Mary's womb. Now that he ascended, what is it but that he first descended into the lower parts of the earth? The argument there is that in the psalm you read about the Messiah ascending back to heaven. How could he ascend back to heaven? He always lived in heaven.

It assumes that he first came down to the earth in incarnation, was born of the Virgin Mary. Now, if any of you have any further questions or would like to talk about it further, I'd be delighted to talk to you about it. But I just wanted to add that postscript.

Leading captivity captive in the Bible has nothing to do with emancipating friends and taking them to a brighter sphere. It has to do with triumph over one's enemies. The lower parts of the earth could mean the surface of the earth.

I believe here it means the womb of the Virgin Mary. And the Lord Jesus came down in incarnation, suffered blood and died, and then ascended back to heaven. Now, the passage I had particularly in mind for this morning was Hebrews chapter six.

And a lot of people have asked if we were going to speak about that. And so let's read the first part of Hebrews chapter six. We'll begin with verse one.

Hebrews chapter six, verse one. And I might just say I've been very gratified by the interest that's been shown in Bible study this week. It did my heart good to look out this morning and see a couple of fellows just standing there with their Bibles open and discussing the word of God.

That makes me rejoice. It really does. Hebrews six, verse one.

And 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 and the doctrine of baptisms and of laying on of hands and of resurrection of the dead and of eternal judgment. And this will we do if God permits, for it is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come. If they shall fall away to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh and put him to an open shame for the earth, which drinketh in the rain that cometh off upon it and bringeth forth herbs meat for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God.

But that which beareth thorns and briars is rejected and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned. But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak. For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward his name, and that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope, even to the end, that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. The book was written to the Hebrews. It was written to the Jewish people in the early days of the Christian faith.

The nation had been sleeping for centuries in a sense. But all of a sudden the announcement comes of the Lord Jesus Christ. And some people think, is this indeed the Messiah? There was a movement toward Christ in those days.

Some people, some Jewish people came and genuinely received him as Lord and Savior. They were truly born again. Others wanted to get on the bandwagon.

Others professed to be followers of the Lord Jesus. They were never really born again. But they professed to become his followers.

They were baptized and perhaps received into fellowship in local congregations. Of course, when Jews then as now professed faith in the Lord Jesus, a terrible storm of opposition arose. They were traitors.

They were considered renegades. They were thrown out of their homes. They lost their employment.

They were subjected to all kinds of harassment. They were persecuted. And in some cases, they were put to death.

The pressure on a professed believer in Jesus was enormous then as it is now. Some years ago I was in Israel. I was introduced to a young fellow who had recently confessed his faith in Christ.

We tried to carry on a conversation with him. I think we were with him about a half an hour. And during that half hour, he did nothing but weep, sob convulsively because of the pressures he was being subjected to.

It's important to see that in connection with this epistle. Under such pressure, there was a temptation to turn back. You can hear the rabbis presenting all the strong reasons why they should turn back to Judaism.

The beauty of the Judaistic system, the priesthood, the sacrifices, the elaborate garments, the furniture of the temple, and so forth. Some Jews who had professed faith in Christ turned back to Judaism. They abandoned Christ.

They turned their backs on him. They utterly repudiated him. They were never truly born again.

They were what we call apostates. An apostate is a person who professes faith in Christ. He may be baptized.

He may have been in fellowship. It doesn't make any difference. But he subsequently repudiates Christ and maliciously turns his back on Christ.

He renounces the Christian faith. He's an apostate. And throughout the book of Hebrews you have these very solemn warnings against apostasy.

That's what it's all about. I don't think you can understand the book of Hebrews unless you see this very clearly. I have read, I can't document it today, but I have read that when a Jew wanted to go back into Judaism, when he could no longer take the pressure and decided to abandon his profession of faith in Christ, that they have a little ceremony that he went through, where they put the blood of an animal down on the floor and they said, Okay, if you want to come back to Judaism, that represents the blood of Christ.

Walk over it. And in many cases, they did it. They walked over it.

That's the background of what we're going to be reading this morning. I'd like to go back to the previous chapter, chapter 5. And there's a lot of part of that chapter. The writer says, verse 11, Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing that ye are dull of hearing.

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you, which be the first principles of the oracles of God. And have become such as of need of milk, and not of strong meat. For everyone that uses milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness, for he is a fiend.

But strong meat belongs to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Now I should just explain that the Jewish people living under the law were being taught by God the elementary principles of religion. That's what the Old Testament was all about.

We give children blocks. The blocks have A, B, C on one side. They have 1, 2, 3 on the other.

The children are learning the elementary principles of the alphabet, of words, and also of numerals as well. They're playing with blocks. That's what Israel was doing in the Old Testament, was playing with the elementary principles of religion.

God was teaching Israel basic principles in those days. Now the full revelation of the Lord Jesus had come, and there was the necessity of leaving those things and going on to maturity. And that's exactly what the writer is saying here in verse 1 of chapter 6. He's therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ.

Of Christ, the word Christ there of course has the idea of the Messiah. We're not to leave the Messiah, but we're to leave those elementary principles that led up to Him. Elementary principles connected with the Messiah, and go on unto perfection.

And of course perfection doesn't mean sinless perfection. It does not mean absolute holiness, but it means maturity. And here it means the maturity of the Christian faith.

They were to stop playing with blocks, as it were, and become enamored with the Lord Jesus Himself. They were to lay aside the types and the shadows, and become engrossed with the substance. There's a businessman who goes off on a trip, and his wife has a picture of him up on the piano.

And every day she goes up to the picture and she says, Darling, I really love you. I miss you. I wish you would come back home.

And he does. After two weeks he comes back home. And the next morning she goes up to the picture and she says, Darling, I love you.

I miss you. I wish you would come home. Is he already home? She shouldn't be occupied with the picture, should she? When he's already there.

But that's what they were doing. They were still occupied with the types and the shadows that Savior had come. And so the writer says we want to leave these ABCs of religion and go on to maturity in the Christian life, not laying again the foundation up.

Now in the next words he's going to describe some Old Testament doctrines. Very important to see this. The list of things that we have now have nothing to do with the New Testament.

He's describing things that Israel learned in the Old Testament. Repentance from dead works. What does that mean, repentance from dead works? Well, it means from the works of the law.

The works of the law never could produce life. They were given by God, but they could never produce life. Of faith toward God.

The people in the Old Testament were taught faith toward God. You read all about it in Hebrews chapter 11. The great patriarchs of the Old Testament and how they put their faith in God.

But notice it doesn't say faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. In the New Testament invariably Christ is said to be the object of faith. Of the doctrine of baptisms.

When you come to baptisms here we naturally think of Christian baptism. We think of baptism by immersion. We think of baptism of the Spirit.

That's not what's referred to here. The baptisms here are the ceremonial washings of the Old Testament. How the parts of the sacrifices had to be washed.

How the priests had to wash themselves. How the people had to go through these cumbersome ceremonial washings. I think if you put the word washings there instead of baptisms it will be clearer for you.

Because whenever we think baptism we see it through New Testament eyes. But you mustn't see this through New Testament eyes. You must realize that it's Old Testament teaching.

The teaching of baptism and of laying on of hands. Once again we see it through New Testament eyes. And we see the laying on of hands ordaining or appointing to office.

But that doesn't mean it. This is the laying on of hands where the offeror stands and lays his hands on the head of the sacrificial victim. Identifying himself with the sacrifice.

So we think of it as the laying on of hands that you find in the book of Acts. Think of it as the laying on of hands that you find in Exodus and Leviticus. And of resurrection of the dead.

But that's not in the Old Testament. That was one of the Old Testament thoughts. And mind you it wasn't that clear in the Old Testament.

But a man like Abraham looked for a city which had foundation. Whose builder and maker is God. Job said that in his flesh he would see God.

So you get what he means of life as far as the resurrection of the dead in the Old Testament. And eternal judgment yes. That too was an Old Testament thought.

So in verses 1 and 2. The writer to the Hebrews is saying look. We've got to read the basic elementary doctrines that you were taught in the Old Testament. And we've got to go on to maturity.

That is the maturity of the New Testament revelation. Then he says and this is what we do with God's permit. And in verse 4 he begins to describe a people who are known as apostates.

We call them apostates. Once again I'll define the apostate. He's a man who has both flesh and in Christ.

He may have been baptized. He may have taken his place in a local fellowship. But he subsequently repudiates or maliciously repudiates the values of Christian faith.

And in this case goes back to a system of ceremonial religion. A good illustration of an apostate in the New Testament is Judas. Judas was never born again.

He was never truly saved. He accompanied with the 11. And with the Lord Jesus.

He held the bag. Made a good show of the bag. But he subsequently did not have divine life.

There's a difference between an apostate and a backslider. Peter was a backslider. Judas was an apostate.

Keep those two names in mind and I think you'll have the difference. Peter went away from the Lord but he was restored to the Lord. Judas sold the Lord for 30 pieces of silver and went to his own place.

And I was going to describe apostates. It says it is impossible for those who are once enlightened. It's possible to be enlightened with the gospel.

To grow up in a Christian family. To know the gospel. From beginning to end.

And yet never truly be born again. Judas was enlightened. He saw the marvelous miracles that the Lord Jesus performed.

He heard those gracious words that proceeded from the mouth of the Savior of the world. He never appropriated Christ for himself. He was enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift.

I believe the heavenly gift here is the Lord Jesus Christ himself. The gift of God sent down from heaven. Now I know about the conflict between Judas Apostate and actually can't prove anything from the word taste.

Because sometimes taste means to taste completely. And other times it means just to taste but to refuse or to give him a reflection. It says in this very book in Hebrews chapter 2 verse 9 that Christ tasted death for every man.

And I'll tell you when he tasted it. He tasted it to the full. Death.

But also in Matthew 27 verse 34 when they gave him the vinegar. We know this God he tasted it but he would not drink it. So the word taste is inconclusive in the argument.

You can't prove anything from it. I believe it's possible to taste the heavenly gift. I think back to my own unsaved days where I certainly knew about the Lord Jesus without accepting.

When they showed pictures of all these people I found strong evidence that all these people were saved. I would tell you if I was a 15 year old boy who was saved before I was ever saved. I was a practitioner of his convicting ministry.

I knew what a deep convicting work of the Holy Spirit of God was and how he came into my life and showed me that what I was inside was a lot worse than anything I had ever done. It was glorious revelation that was to me and it was incomparable. And it was wonderful.

The dialect makes a great effective note. God of the strictest material call. Every word allows it to mean very much.

That's what they say. They say the spark people. The Sabbath and everything else.

They can get their hands in the world. That's the kind of world I was brought up in. And I knew, I knew the convicting power of the Holy Spirit.

I was a practitioner of the Holy Ghost in that sense. All I can say, I claim here this morning that you can be a partaker of the Holy Spirit and not continually on it's way. It's such a taste of the good word of God.

I certainly have tasted the good word of God. I used to witness the kingdom. I'm able and I will be able to save myself.

It's a good scripture that I have never come to Christ for salvation. And when you say the power of the Holy Spirit. The towers of the days ago.

You will hear me on the days of the church of Christ, the Lord Jesus, the apostles. The whole unit of the word towers means that it's biblical. The days of time, the millennium.

The miracles that were performed when the Lord Jesus came the first time will be performed again when it comes the second time. The miracles of the age become the miracles of the millennium. Are you with me? I claim this morning that all of those things can be true.

All of me am unfaithful. I'm sorry to say that the way I'm entering into what made us years ago stupid and stupid. Used to walk with us on the street car, 64th and Hallstatt.

Used to give us testimony and pray for comfort. Went off to college. Went into the service.

And completely and utterly re-communicated with Christians. I won't let us do it until the infant tears. Instead of a copy of the Lord, I believe in the Bible and the Word of God.

That's all. The cup came back to me and it was mine. I'm not stricken.

And the Lord said, Take the Bible. Bring it here. And put the Christian in it.

Put God in it. Cry out. Howl.

And pray to God. Never. Try to believe in the miracle of the Lord.

And put all these things together. It says here in this. The last time since I was that somebody asked the question, What wrote Christ? The Lord.

Christ himself. The baby. He said, I'll have it with my blood and soul.

Well. What am I saying? I believe there are three unforgivable things. Three unforgivable things.

Unforgivable. And God. No.

Not just God. It's not just God. It's the Lord Jesus.

It's the Lord God. And it is with God in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It says.

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net