

Hebrews

Hebrews 3:12-4:13 – Part II

January 11, 2009

I. Introduction

- A. Three topics of importance found in this portion of Hebrews:
 - 1. What the scriptures teach about falling away from the faith.
 - 2. Why God speaks of fear and diligence as necessary to prevent falling away from the faith.
 - 3. The two kinds of “rest” spoken of in Hebrews and what they mean for us today.
- B. Quotes from the early church father’s expressing their view of falling away.)
 - 1. **Quote** from Clement of Alexandria (c. 195): “He who hopes for everlasting rest knows also that the entrance to it is toilsome and narrow. So let him who has once received the Gospel not turn back, like Lot’s wife. Let him not go back either to his former life or to heresies.
 - 2. **Quote** from Clement of Alexandria (c. 195): “It is neither the faith, nor the love, nor the hope, nor the endurance of one day; rather he that endures to the end will be saved.”
 - 3. **Quote** from Tertullian (c. 197) “No one is a Christian but he who perseveres even to the end.”
 - 4. **Quote** from Commodianus (c. 240): “Being a believing man, if you seek to live as the Gentiles do, the joys of the world remove you from the grace of Christ.”
 - 5. **Quote** from the Apostolic Constitutions (c. 390): “He who sins after his baptism, unless he repents and forsakes his sins, will be condemned to Gehenna.
- C. Today, I want us to look at why fear and diligence go hand-in-hand as necessary measures to prevent falling away from the faith.
- D. **Hebrews 3:12-19, 4:1-13 . . .** Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. [13] But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called “Today,” so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. [14] For **we have become partakers of Christ, if** we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end, [15] while it is said, “Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your

hearts, as when they provoked Me (*God*). [16] For who provoked Him (*God*) when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? [17] And with whom was He (*God*) angry for forty years? Was it not with those who **sinned**, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? [18] And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were **disobedient**? [19] So we see that they were not able to enter because of **unbelief**. [4:1] Therefore, **let us fear if**, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. [2] For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but **the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith** in those who heard. [3] For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, "As I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest," although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. [4] For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works"; [5] and again in this passage, "They shall not enter My rest." [6] Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them **failed to enter because of disobedience**, [7] He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." [8] For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. [9] So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. [10] For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. [11] Therefore **let us be diligent to enter that rest**, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience. [12] For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. [13] And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

E. Prayer

- II. Hebrews 4:1 . . . Therefore, **let us fear if**, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it.
 - A. Fear and diligence are co-workers in preventing us from falling away from the faith.
 - B. **Why should we fear?**

1. **Proverbs 22:3** . . . The prudent sees the evil and hides himself,
But the naive go on, and are punished for it.
 - a. In a general sense:
 - (1) Fear drives caution, focuses our attention, sharpens our thinking, and produces physiological responses within our body – all of which increases our ability to deal with the fear.
 - (2) Fear motivates action that is appropriate for dealing with the fear.
 - b. In direct relation to falling away, fear compels us to live in such a way that we have no reason to fear falling away.
2. On the other side of fear, we have the lack of fear. The lack of fear means living as if risk of falling away were so minimal that we need not be concerned about it, and as if the eternal loss of falling away was so unlikely that we can ignore its possibility.
3. When we have no fear of falling away from the faith, we live the Christian life as if believing on Christ for salvation is our responsibility and living a godly life from that point on is either God's responsibility or it doesn't affect our eternal salvation.
4. When we have no fear of falling away, we live as if unbelief could never happen to us, and as if persevering to the end were a Biblical footnote put there by God for someone other than us.
5. When we have no fear of falling away, we live the Christian life as if we were naive or in denial or unconcerned about things we ought to be very concerned about.

C. Other Scriptures speaking of fear in the way God speaks of it here in Hebrews 4:1 – and a quote from Tertullian

1. **Deuteronomy 6:4-5, 10-15** . . . Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! [5] You shall **love the LORD** your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. [10] Then it shall come about when the LORD your God brings you into the land which He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you, great and splendid cities which you did not build, [11] and houses full of all good things which you did not fill, and hewn cisterns which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant, and you eat and are satisfied, [12] then **watch yourself**, that you do not forget the LORD who brought you from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. [13] You shall **fear *only* the LORD** your God; and you shall worship Him

and swear by His name. [14] You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who surround you, [15] for the LORD your God in the midst of you is a jealous God; otherwise the anger of the LORD your God will be kindled against you, and He will wipe you off the face of the earth.

2. **Psalms 103:11, 13, 17-18** . . . For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His lovingkindness toward those who **fear Him**. [13] Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the LORD has compassion on those who **fear Him**. [17] But the lovingkindness of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who **fear Him**, And His righteousness to children's children, [18] To those who keep His covenant And remember His precepts to do them.
3. **Matthew 10:28** . . . Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather **fear Him** who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.
4. **II Corinthians 7:1** . . . Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the **fear of God**.
5. **Philippians 2:12** . . . So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with **fear and trembling**;
6. **Acts 9:31** . . . So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the **fear of the Lord** and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.
7. **Quote** from Tertullian: “We ought indeed to walk so holy and with such strong faith as to be confident and secure in regard to our conscience – desiring to be of a good conscience before God to the end. Yet, we should not presume that we will. For he who presumes, feels less apprehension. He who feels less apprehension takes less precaution. He who takes less precaution runs more risk of falling away. Fear is an important part of salvations foundation. Presumption is an impediment to fear. Therefore, it is more useful to consider that we may possibly fail than to presume that we cannot. For seeing the possibility of failure as real leads to fear, which leads to caution, which leads to securing salvation by persevering to the end. On the other hand, if we presume, there will be neither fear nor caution to save us.

- D. Counsel concerning fear – There are at least two kinds of fear:
1. For the sake of this presentation, I will call them Irrational Fears and Rational Fears.
 2. **Irrational Fears** magnify risk, exaggerate danger, and inflate vulnerability while minimizing your sense of competence in dealing successfully with whatever it is you are afraid of.
 - a. Irrational fears assume the worst and in so doing make false evidence appear as real and the worst case outcome appear as certain. In this way, irrational fears are a source of misery – whereas a healthy fear of God is a source of joy.
 - b. Irrational fears promote a sense of panic and confusion about what to do – which in turn often promotes a sense of despair and hopelessness – which often leads to giving up and doing nothing to solve the real problem. In this way, irrational fears are a terrible affliction whereas a healthy fear of God is a great benefit.
 - c. Sometimes, irrational fears are more about saving face than dealing realistically with the issues, circumstances, or problems at hand. In this case, irrational fears lead us astray whereas a healthy fear of God keeps us in the narrow way.
 3. **Rational Fears** do not paralyze us or bring us to despair. Rather, Rational Fears compel us to see reality as it is, consider our options, and take appropriate action.
 - a. Rational Fears often produce a whole body response that prepares us for action (mental, chemical, physical).
 - b. Rational Fears increase awareness of the problem and perception of options for dealing with the problem.
 - c. And for Christians, Rational Fears drive faith in God to the point where we fear without anxiety, we pursue solutions without hysteria, and we patiently wait for God to work things out for the good of all involved.
 4. **Fear and Love** – There is a constant tension between fear and love for the child of God. Both provide motive for living a godly life. Both are essential to living a life that is pleasing to God and a life that enjoys intimacy (*communion and companionship*) with God. The wise, maturing Christian keeps them together because –
 - a. Godly, rational fear promotes caution and remembrance that God is the Judge and we must stand before Him one day to give an account of all we have done.

- b. Love for God motivates us to submission, surrender, sacrifice, and service – the kinds of behaviors that show God just how much we love him.
- c. Therefore, though we are likely to start the Christian life fearing God for more self-serving reasons – such as avoiding the consequences of getting caught or the losses accompanying reaping what we have sowed – we should make it our goal to grow to that level of Christian maturity where our fear is mostly directed at failing to please the One we love – for His sake, His enjoyment, His pleasure, and not ours.

E. What should we fear?

- 1. Falling away from the faith and dying in a “lost” condition.
- 2. Sin, rebellion against God, an impure heart, and the practice of sin.
- 3. The absence of fear in relation to God and sin and temptation and falling away.
- 4. The any diminishing of caution and perseverance.
- 5. Measuring our righteousness against others instead of against Christ and the Word of God
- 6. Thinking we can sin without reaping destructive consequences, without hurting God, without losing closeness to God, and without damaging our character and hence our usefulness to God.
- 7. Living in denial or clinging to a false sense of security concerning our Christian life.
- 8. Lack tears over our sin and the absence of deep sadness over anything that puts distance between God and us.

F. Why is diligence needed in relation to falling away?

- 1. **Hebrews 4:11-13** . . . Therefore **let us be diligent to enter that rest**, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience. [12] For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. [13] And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.
- 2. When it comes to fearing God and persevering to the end, diligence is the antidote (remedy) to fear.
 - a. **Webster’s Dictionary:** Diligence is constant and earnest effort to accomplish what is undertaken. Diligence is evidenced

by a persistent exertion of body and mind without any delay or idleness. To be diligent is to give the kind of attention that is required to accomplish a particular thing.

- b. Remember, the Christian life is likened unto a long-distance race. To win, or even to finish the race in time to be counted among those who finished requires diligent training, diligent mental preparation, and diligence when running on race day.
3. Also, if Israel could fall away and be denied entrance into God's rest such a short time after personally experiencing God's miraculous power in bringing them out of Egypt, taking them safely across the Red Sea, destroying the Egyptian army, and bringing them safely to the Jordan River – then it can happen to us if we do not remain vigilant to our dying day.
4. Finally, diligence is the antidote to fear and God's prescribed way to ensure entering His rest because
 - a. We cannot outwit or deceive God's Word – it will expose the truth about us as to whether we trust in God or are living in unbelief.
 - b. We cannot deceive God – He both sees and knows all there is to see and know about us. Nothing is hidden from Him, and especially in relation to our relationship to Him.

III. Conclusion

- A. God – the author of grace and mercy – calls us to make full use of fear and diligence in order to prevent falling away from the faith.