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SIGNS OF DEGENERATION Hebrews 5:11-14

Hebrews 5: 11 We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. 12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! 13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

INTRODUCTION

The story is told of Franklin Roosevelt, who often endured long receiving lines at the White House. He complained that no one really paid any attention to what he said. One day, during a reception, he decided to try an experiment. To each person who passed down the line and shook his hand, he murmured, "I murdered my mother-in-law this morning." The guests responded with phrases like, "Marvelous! Keep up the good work. We are proud of you. God bless you, sir." It was not till the end of the line, while greeting the ambassador from Bolivia, that his words were actually heard. Nonplussed, the ambassador leaned over and whispered, "I'm sure she deserved it, Mr. President."

The reason why I mentioned this story is because the author of Hebrews had to pause all his explanation and say in verse 11

Hebrews 5: 11 We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand.

Now, TO get the right interpretation of this passage, we need to understand again the context.

First, no one knew who the actual author is. If it was Paul, he would have introduced himself and this was not his style of writing. Some say Apollos, or Barnabas or Silas or Clement but no one really knows.

Second obviously, these were written to the Hebrews.

Note : The author of this letter did not write, "to the Hebrews" but based on what was written and how it was written, we can conclude that it was written to the Hebrews. It is full of reference to the Old Testament and the Levitical laws. - Only those who are familiar with them would know this and they are the Hebrews.

By the way, some of you might wonder **the difference, between Hebrews, Jews and Israelites.**

- Hebrews – anyone during that time who came from the lineage of Abraham, Isaac.
- Israelites – This is coming from the nation Israel when Jacob's name was changed to Israel and are part of the twelve tribes of Israel.

- Jews – Anyone who was part of the Southern Kingdom – the Kingdom of Judah.

Note : All Israelites and Jews can be called Hebrews but not all Israelites can be called Jews.

Today, you don't call the citizens of Israel, Israelites. They are called Israeli. And not all Israelis are Jews. **And Hebrews nowadays only refer to the language but not the people.**

Back to the lesson :

Since the audience are the Hebrews, there are three types of Hebrews that are being addressed here based on the context. (By God's grace, I have to re-read and re-read the whole letter again) to understand who the audience is.

There are two types of audience here.

- **Believers :** believed that Jesus is the only way to be saved and that the Old Testament is the – the rituals, the laws, the temple worship was a shadow of the Messiah that is to come.
- **Unbelievers :** Unbelievers who are attracted to the Good News of Jesus Christ and who understand that the Old Testament rituals, laws and temple worship was a shadow of Him but has not made any commitment in their hearts to follow Jesus Christ.

Baptism Illustration: It's just like any church nowadays too. **Not everyone who attends church are believers.** They have heard the Gospel and they like hearing the Word of God but has never really made a commitment to follow Jesus Christ as the only way.

We will have a baptism class this afternoon in our church. There's this man who started attending the church. He got invited by another member of the church. He started hearing God's Word. In one service, he talked to me and cried and he started telling that he attended a born-again church in the Philippines. But afterwards, here in Canada, he's attending the Catholic church because of his wife. So he attends the Catholic church in the morning and then goes in the afternoon to attend our worship service. You can see he loves hearing the word and the Gospel was taught and explained to him several times. We announced the baptism class and he said he will attend. He wants to be baptized. I explained to the church that baptism doesn't save a person but it's a profession to the whole world that you are already saved, born -again, a follower of Jesus Christ. But then last Sunday, I reminded him about the baptism class and then he said, he is not yet ready.

So he's like some of the Hebrews that the author was addressing – they are attracted by the Good News but has never made a commitment to Jesus Christ and still thinks that good works and rituals are still needed to save you.

This is what the author mentioned in the verse right after the passage we are studying :

*Hebrews 6:1 Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, **not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works** and of faith toward God,*

Dead works here are “useless rituals”. How do we know this? It is mentioned in verse 13.

*Hebrews 6:13 For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, **purify our conscience from dead works** to serve the living God.*

What the author is saying, yes, the sacrifice of animals (RITUAL) was created in order to cover our sins temporarily before God but it is really the blood of Christ that truly cleanses us before God.

Now that God sacrificed His own Son Jesus Christ for us, **there’s no need for the sacrifice of animals – in short, these are dead works... already.**

That’s why Jesus said in

*John 6:28 Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?” 29 Jesus answered, **“The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”***

Oh how I would love to preach to you on this whole book of Hebrews but at least now you know there are two types of audience that the author was addressing at the same time.

Believers AND unbelievers who know the Gospel and attracted to it but hasn’t made a commitment to follow Jesus Christ as the only way.

AND THIS IS THE KIND OF UNBELIEVER THAT THE AUTHOR WAS ADDRESSING FROM the passage we are studying.

That’s why as you read Chapters 1-5 up to verse 10, you can see that the author was excited to quote passages in the Old Testament that points to Jesus Christ and how Jesus Christ is greater than Moses, and then pauses in the middle of Chapter 3

*Hebrews 3: 12 See to it, brothers and sisters, **that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart** that turns away from the living God.*

Then the author writes again how the Sabbath is a reflection of resting from works again and then explains that Jesus is the High Priest in the line of Melchizedek. It means He is chosen by God Himself to be the mediator between Him and people...and then the passage...**you can see the pause... it’s almost like a “sigh”...**

He remembers again the unbelievers who gladly accept the Word of God but wasn't committed and are now addressing them.

These are like the hearts in the Parable of the Sower that Jesus mentioned

Matthew 13: 20 The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. 21 But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.

Note : Please remember that the Hebrews were being persecuted at that time and the author was also encouraging them at the same time and warning them.

Businesswoman Illustration: This is the story of the businesswoman who was invited to attend our church. She was so excited at first. We had Bible study at their home. I see her reading the Bible. In fact, she told me that she finished the whole Bible. There were Chinese lucky charms (octagon mirrors, frog with coin in mouth and the waving cat) in her office and I told her that those are not from God and is demonic and she took it away. But then suddenly, she stopped attending church and Bible study. So my wife and I visited her at her office and we saw her and her employees rearranging the office. She saw us and wasn't excited to see us. I asked her why she was re-arranging the office and she said for good feng-shui and then I noticed all those Chinese lucky charms again were back and then I asked her why she wasn't attending church and Bible study anymore and she said in Tagalog, "Simula nung um-attend ako ng born-again, born again bumagsak and Negosyo ko" (Ever since I started attending these born-again church, my business began to drop)

(Show Passage Hebrews 5:11-14) So as you can see in the context, THE PASSAGE WE ARE STUDYING is not a matter of maturity, even of the word, "mature" is in the text and I'll show you later. It's the matter of unbelievers who heard the Gospel and attracted to it. They have never been born again (regenerate is a fancier term) and has never made a commitment to follow Christ.

I CALL IT danger of DEGENERATION. It means they are already in a better state, knowing the Gospel, how Jesus Christ is the one being pointed by the rituals, sacrifices and laws and yet they are in danger of falling from a higher state to a lower one.

Again, the businesswoman I mentioned has already degenerated. She showed signs of believing but has never truly believed in heart regarding the Gospel.

But the unbelievers that the author is addressing here are showing signs of degeneration and that is what he is addressing.

THE DANGER OF DEGENERATION – No understanding. No growth. No discernment

I. NO UNDERSTANDING

Hebrews 5: 11 We have much to say about this, (NOTICE THE PAUSE HERE – He was explaining and explaining the connection of Jesus to the Old Covenant and then stops)

but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. (You can almost hear the “sigh” here.)

Eala Illustration: It’s almost like you are trying to explain to someone that Alexandra Eala can become No.1 and giving an explanation on how she started when she was young and she was trained by Rafael Nadal Academy since 13 and how in one year she jumped from the top 100 and now in the top 20 and has beaten most of the top seeds and then you see your friend not listening anymore because although she likes Alexandra Eala she doesn’t believe that she can be No.1 one of these days. Your friend *no longer try (ies) to understand.*

That’s the first danger that a person is degenerating – no more understanding.

KJV : *Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing.* (nothros akoe) – this means (nothros...slow sluggish...akoe... hearing...means understanding)

To truly hear someone means to understand what they’re saying.

Wife Illustration : Sometimes my wife will test me when she catches me not paying attention. She will ask me, “Narinig mo ba sinabi ko say o?” (Did you just hear what I said?) and then I will answer yes, and then she will ask another question “So, anong sinabi ko?” (So what did I just say?) She knows I did not hear because I did not understand.

The writer said you are already dull or slow or sluggish in hearing.

We have a term in Tagalog for that... “wala ka nang gana”

We know we are degenerating because there’s no more effort or enthusiasm to understand... no more understanding. That’s why the author wrote

12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers,

Etymology : teachers “didaskalos” it’s a very broad word...used sometimes as Master, or someone given the gift of teaching... or even someone who can impart what they know.

It comes from didasko : to explain things; to impart instruction... in order for others to learn.
So this word didaskalos here is used in the general term.

So the author is saying, with all the knowledge of Jesus Christ that has been shared with you, you should be able to share it and impart it to others so others would learn that the Old Covenant, the laws, the rituals, the temple sacrifice point to Jesus.

But how can you be teachers, when you don't even now try to understand what I'm trying to say to you? **We cannot teach what we do not understand.**

Illustration: I cannot teach Algebra because I don't understand Algebra and I have no enthusiasm to understand Algebra.

Second sign of degeneration

II. NO GROWTH

12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! 13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness.

Quick note: When we truly hear and understand believe God's word, there will be growth. Let's go back to the Parable of the Sower again.

Matthew 13: 23 But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

And this is what's happening to the unbelieving Hebrews. As mentioned earlier, they are attracted to the Gospel but there's no conviction that it is the finished work of Christ that saves us, that makes us acceptable to God, and we need to believe that.

*12 In fact, though by this time **you ought to be teachers you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!***

So here's a basic question and answer thing :

When you ask someone, "when you die, do you think you're going to heaven? And they answer, "Yes, I believe so." And then ask them why? And they reply, "It's because I believe I'm a good person." How would you answer that?

The answer should be, "The Bible tells us that we have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23. This means no amount of good works can save us, (Ephesians 2 and we have sinned against a Holy God. And if we have sinned against a Holy God, our just punishment is hell. But God loves us so much that He gave His own Son Jesus Christ to take the punishment for our sins. And the proof He is the Son of God and God accepted His sacrifice is He rose from the dead. We need to trust only on what Jesus Christ has done on the cross as just punishment for our sins. That's why Ephesians 2 says, For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this not from yourselves. It is the gift of God, not by works so that no one can boast.

That's the elementary truth of God's Word!

And the author was saying, someone needs to explain this to you again!!!

That's why the author added.

13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness.

Being still an infant (nepios...not paedia), - what's the one characteristic of an infant? They don't fully understand and comprehend what you're saying to them.

Illustration: My grandson who is in Montreal is now 2 ½ years old. My wife spent time with him for a couple of days in their house taking care of him. When Mica and I finally went to their house, he opened the door and saw me his "lolo" and his "Tita". But he was excited and this is what he said to his lola, pointing to us, "Lola, your friends!" It was funny but he still doesn't fully comprehend the world around him.

And this is 2 ½ years old, imagine an infant. Even if we say, "I'm Lolo"...he'll just look at us when he was a baby but doesn't understand yet what Lolo means.

Note : This is not the same in 1st Corinthians

1 Corinthians 3:1 Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ.

The key word there is "*in Christ*". These are believers who acts as if they are not followers or believers of Jesus Christ.

The infant in Hebrews 5:13 is the characteristic of an infant, they don't fully understand or comprehend things...that's why there's NO GROWTH!

How do we know they are unbelievers? It's because of this line :

is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness.

Etymology : apeiros "acquainted" "a" non or no "peira" no experience
"teaching" there is not didaskalos but "logos"

In short, they don't understand the meaning of what it is to become righteous before God.

They still believe that to be righteous before God is by following the law, by doing the sacrifices, by doing good works and etc.

But to be righteous before God is through Jesus Christ.

Romans 3: 20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.21 But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

That's why there's no growth, they do not understand. It's because they're spiritually dead!

Remember this, anyone who's life is connected to Christ, has growth.

John 15:5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

This brings us to the third sign of degeneration.

III. NO DISCERNMENT

*14 But solid food is **for the mature**, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.*

Etymology: mature, full age "teleios" perfect, complete.

In other parts of the book of Hebrews, it's used to describe those who are saved.

Examples:

*Hebrews 7: 11 **If perfection** (teleiosis) could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood—and indeed the law given to the people established that priesthood—why was there still need for another priest to come, one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron?*

*Hebrews 10:1 The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, **make perfect (teleioo)** those who draw near to worship.*

*14 But solid food is **for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.***

ESV *But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.*

In short, those who are saved, because they are exposed to God's Word AND OBEYING IT can distinguish TRUTH FROM ERROR and BEHAVIOUR THAT IS HOLY AND UNHOLY.

Illustration: There's this Netflix documentary, "Death of a Pastor's Wife". I didn't want to watch it at first but you already know the church was on a downward's slope when they still allowed the pastor to pastor or preach in the church and be in a position of leadership even if he already has a wife and then divorced the wife because he was attracted to another man's wife in the congregation and that woman divorced her husband also and then they still got married in church and celebrated it.

When it's clear in the Bible that a pastor/elder should be.

1 Peter 5: 1 So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: 2

shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

So the pastor is also part of the elders!

And look at the qualification of an elder.

*Titus 1: 5 This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— 6 **if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife**, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. (refer also to 1 Timothy 3:1-7)*

And you know what happened next in that documentary, the situation between the new couple degenerated, the pastor degenerated and the church degenerated. Why? It's because there's no discernment between good and evil.

You know there's Degeneration when there's no Discernment.

CONCLUSION:

The question now is how does a person prevent themselves from degenerating.

THEY NEED TO BE REGENERATED! BORN AGAIN.

That's why Jesus said :

John 3:3 Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again. (Regenerated)

But you might say, how can I be born again? Is it by joining a church? Joining a church cannot make you a Christian, just like entering a garage cannot transform you into a car.

So how? Same chapter

*John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, **that whoever believes in him** shall not perish but have eternal life.*

Some of you know the Gospel but you have never truly believed. (Evangelize)
Breaking of the bread.

S.G.D.