

FAITH AND WORKS.

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, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. – Heb. 6:9,10.

This expression refers us back to the preceding verses of this chapter and the latter part of the fifth. Paul was disappointed in those he addressed, in finding less growth in grace and knowledge than he had reason to expect. They were still merely at the "first principles" of the doctrine of Christ, and not even very firmly rooted in them. And with his characteristic plainness of speech, Paul told them that for the time they had spent, as pupils in the school of Christ, they ought now to be teachers, but instead they needed some one to teach them again which be the first principles of the doctrine. They were still babes, having need of milk, and unable to receive the strong meat. For strong meat (advanced truth) belongs not to babes, but it is necessary to those more matured.

Paul then exhorts them to leave the first principles and go on unto perfection, and not to be forever laying the foundation of Christian character by repentance and faith in the plan of God for their redemption, and renewing their consecration; this they had done long ago, and now their faith should rest in the ransom – the foundation (provided) of God which standeth sure. (2 Tim. 2:19.) And they should diligently proceed in the work of building up a symmetrical Christian faith and character on this sure foundation. He proceeds to show the hopeless condition of those who FALL AWAY after having once been enlightened on these first principles – having tasted of the heavenly gift (justification through the precious blood

of Christ) and being made partakers of the Holy Spirit of adoption as spiritual sons of God, and as such brought to a knowledge (an understanding) of the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, or God's plan and power [R567 : page 6] in the coming age. "If they fall away – reject the truth from its very foundation – "it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify unto themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame; having thus, by open profession, been marked as sons of God and representatives of Christ in the world.

In chap. 10:29, Paul terms this esteeming the blood of the covenant, by which we are sanctified, a common or unsacred thing – an insult to the Spirit of favor. And who could otherwise regard it? Much as we might desire to reclaim such, Paul says: It is impossible to renew them again; and we are of those who believe that Paul was inspired to write, and made no mistake in this matter. And since he says "it is impossible," the stubborn facts may be expected to corroborate this statement. All sin has its hardening effect, and we cannot tamper with it with impunity. No sin is so hardening as that which is wilfully committed in the face of clear knowledge. The favor of God in Christ, our propitiation, once received, its necessity seen, its justification and other benefits accepted and partially enjoyed, seems to make an after rejection of these first principles inexcusable.

These having had such a clear experience as well as plain instruction on the subject, are reckoned guilty of ignoring the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. And having once professed him, this is rightly called putting him to an open shame. Thus they cast from them the favor of God, even their part in the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

Pride and ambition harden the heart and darken reason, and leave no room for a wedge of truth to effect an entrance. Where pride

and ambition have progressed to the extent here mentioned, in the very nature of the case recovery would seem "impossible," and when a reasonable amount of time, and patient, studious effort has been expended to recover out of the snare of the adversary those who seem to be stumbling into this sin; if they still wilfully pursue their course, we can but leave them where they place themselves – in the hands of a just God, unsheltered by the precious blood of Christ, in whom alone is redemption. (See Ex. 12:13,22,23.)

Thank God we have no fear of an eternity of torture for such, nor for any. No, to be eternally deprived of life and its blessed privileges is the final punishment of the disobedient. But O that all would esteem this favor of God, in the gift of his Son, and live. Paul says it is a fearful thing, thus out of Christ, to fall into the hands of the living God. The punishment of those who violated Moses' law was death, but from that death there was deliverance through the ransom; but of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God and esteemed as a common thing the blood of the covenant, and insulted the Spirit of favor. This sorer punishment is the second death, from which there is no resurrection; for there remaineth no more a sacrifice for sins. Heb. 10:26,29.

With reference to this sin unto death, we think that many make a great mistake. It is supposed by very many, that open, bold infidels, who blaspheme, and reject, and ridicule the Word of God entire, have come about the nearest of any to committing the sin unto death; but, by reading carefully Paul's description, we see that it does not at all apply to such, nor does it apply to what are often termed backsliding Christians. Very few Christians, even, have ever tasted much of the good word of God; they have had considerable of the perverted word of God, but Paul does not mention that. Very few know anything about the powers of the world (age) to come – God's plan in that age.

No, it is not the weak and erring ones, partially overcome by the world, the flesh and the devil, and many of whom sin contrary to their will, that it is impossible to reclaim. God still loves and pities such, and will discipline them in the furnace of affliction, or however he thinks best. These have not knowingly and wilfully insulted the Spirit of favor, and for these there is good hope of recovery.

But while showing the necessity of a firm establishment on first principles, and the impossibility of reclaiming such as had left them entirely, the Apostle assured the church that he believed they had not rejected the favor of God, for he says: "We are persuaded better things of you, though we thus speak."

These words were to guard them on a dangerous point, and to show them the uselessness of constantly disputing with rejecters of first principles. It is useless to spend valuable time and effort in the fruitless attempt to reclaim such. Therefore, having these things once established, settled, made plain, they should go on unto perfection: Not that we should fail to give first principles or milk to babes, or to help a weak or stumbling brother by re-enforcing him with the power of truth, which he may have let slip, for that should be our constant aim and effort: but that is quite different from wasting valuable time and effort in fruitless attempts to reclaim wilful rejecters mentioned by Paul, which it is "impossible" to reclaim.

All should make sure that the first principles are correct, and firmly established by the word of God; but if we go no further, we will never reach perfection. If a man, after laying a foundation for a building, should always be digging it up and turning it over and trying to fit the stones in some other way, how soon would the building be completed? There must come a time, and that before we begin to build, when we feel sure that the foundation is good and properly laid; and, in full confidence in that foundation, we may proceed with our building – go on unto perfection.

In the few verses following, Paul shows that the hope of the High Calling depends on our works – built, of course, on the finished work of Christ, the sure foundation. For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love." Is it possible, we sometimes say, that God will thus esteem our poor, imperfect works? And what are they? They seem so small that we feel ashamed to mention them; and yet it is our little all; rendered with carefulness according to our covenant, and though imperfect, it is rendered acceptable through him whose imputed righteousness makes up all the deficiency.

Our small influence is all cast on the side of truth, both by word and example; our little reputation we gladly part with in our effort to advance the truth and obey it; our few talents for preaching the truth, we use to the best advantage, according to our best judgment; perhaps some of us have no ability to tell the blessed story straight ourselves, but such can read it to others, or give it to them to read; and all can show its moulding and transforming effects in daily walk and conversation; we may have very little money, possibly no more than what will meet the bare necessities of life for ourselves and those dependent on us, and leave but a mite for the spread of the truth; yet if our all is consecrated to the Lord, and used with an eye single to his glory, it is acceptable and well-pleasing to him – "in the beloved."

Paul here mentions specially their labors of love in ministering to the saints. Many Christians seemingly fail to appreciate their privilege in this direction, and spend their principal effort for the world, forgetting the injunction: "Do good unto all men as you have opportunity, especially to the household of faith." The time is coming, and is not far distant, when there will be abundant opportunity to do good to the world; but the opportunity to do good to the saints, the body, the bride of Christ, will not long continue. Soon they will be glorified and no longer need your ministrations.

Remember the Master's words: A poor woman had brought a box of very precious ointment and poured it on his head as he sat at meat; and when his disciples saw it they said, "To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor." But Jesus answered, "The poor ye have always with you, but me ye have not always; she hath wrought a good work upon me." (Matt. 26:7-13.)

So, the body of Christ will not always be here to be ministered unto. Whatever we can do now for our fellow members of the body of Christ, the Head will reckon as done unto him. And our Father will not forget our labor of love in ministering to the saints. It is needless for us to suggest that as God is not unjust to forget labors of love for the saints, neither is he unjust to credit us with them, if we have done no labors for such – if we have not ministered. Paul urges that we continue to be very diligent in this labor of love, and suggests **[R567 : page 7]** that continued diligence will give the full assurance of hope.

O, how great is the inheritance which our little insignificant labor of love secures, when supplemented by the all-sufficient merit of our Lord! Let us appreciate our privilege of ministering to the saints in whatever way we find it possible, whether in temporal or spiritual things. In the language of our beloved brother Paul: "We desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end." Since our covenant is to sacrifice and spend ourselves completely, full assurance of receiving the reward can only come by diligence in self-sacrifice – ministering.

Let us see to it that we have a right faith, rooted and grounded in the infallible word of God; and being thus assured, let us leave the firmly established first principles of the doctrine of Christ, and go on to perfection – work out our salvation as new creatures – rendering the justified human in exchange for the promised divine nature.
