

Going on to Maturity

About this we have much to say that is hard to explain, since you have become dull in understanding. ¹²For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic elements of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food; ¹³for everyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is unskilled in the word of righteousness. ¹⁴But solid food is for the mature, for those whose faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil.

¹Therefore let us go on toward perfection, leaving behind the basic teaching about Christ, and not laying again the foundation: repentance from dead works and faith toward God, (Hebrews 5:11-6:1).

The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews has a serious purpose. Without us knowing precise details of who or where the readers were,¹ we can reasonably conclude that they were people who had come to Christ through the labors of those who had personally heard Christ (the apostles?) and whose experience at that point included the whole range of ‘signs, wonders and various miracles, and ... gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to his will’ (Heb. 2:3-4). Later they are described as those ‘who have once been enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come’ (Heb. 6:4-5). These experiences would hardly have been unnoticed by the new believers, but neither would another aspect of their Christian lives:

But recall those earlier days when, after you had been enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, ³³sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and persecution, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. ³⁴For you had compassion for those who were in prison, and you cheerfully accepted the plundering of your possessions, knowing that you yourselves possessed something better and more lasting. (Heb. 10:32-34)

Now the purpose of the letter is plain. It is a word of exhortation (Heb. 13:22) to those who are still being tested (Heb. 2:18). They need to persevere. But the situation is more than *just* that. It is not only perseverance in the face of external hostility; it is that, of course, and Jesus is the pattern to which they must look.

Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart. (Heb. 12:3)

But the writer continues:

In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. (Heb. 12:4)

The various battles they are facing against persecution from sinners are because God is disciplining them in their struggle against sin. So their problem is not really other people; it is themselves. They have become dull! In the same way that the Ephesians were reminded that they were not wrestling against blood and flesh but against vast

¹ It is amazing how little we really do know about the various churches etc. in the New Testament. Research does reveal certain matters, but in the end all we have are the answers which the New Testament documents provide while knowing much less than we might want of the questions to which they are responding. I suggest that that may well be a benefit in the long term. If we could precisely define the particular circumstances, we may be tempted to limit the answers given to those situations which exactly match those in the first century. Without denying the validity of good theological and historical research, I am sure the Scriptures speak more widely to all human needs.

spiritual enemies (Eph. 6:12), the Hebrews needed reminding that the human enemies were being used by God to bring them to the goal of sharing his holiness (Heb. 12:10). The real issue is sin.

In that battle the readers have become dull and tired. As a result, they have become insensitive to the great things that God is doing. They are possibly drifting away from what they have heard (Heb. 2:1), neglecting salvation (2:3), losing their grip on their confession (4:14), becoming sluggish in their hearing (5:11) and in their faith and patience (6:12). And the list goes on.²

HEARING THE WORD

A friend of mine recently spoke of ‘engaging with the word’. This phrase is not intended to sound mystical; rather it simply affirms that the word of God is personal—God himself speaking. It is also personal in the sense that we hear the word within ourselves, so that hearing the word of God is a person to person affair. Of course, we call the Scriptures ‘the word of God’, and rightly so, but for up to three hundred years after the birth of the church there were no New Testament Scriptures as we now know them. There were the various documents but they tell us that there was more. There was the powerful word of God in the church, spoken definitively through the apostles and ‘livingly’ through the prophets. What was more, the word of God was the work of God. He spoke and faith came to the hearers (Rom. 10:17), he spoke and the new creation was born (2 Cor. 4:6) and light comes to both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 26:22-23).

Two things quite plainly belong together: the proclamation by human agents and the word uttered by God in Christ. The power of the proclamation does not lie in human wisdom but in the personal communication of Christ himself. Similarly, the Scriptures are the word written, however their power lies not in their material substance, paper and ink, nor even in the information they contain, true as that is, but in them being the personal communication of the risen Lord Jesus. And that is precisely what comes to men and women today as it came to the first believers.

The account of creation shows us that humanity is structured to hear the voice of God. Being in the image of God does not mean being a passive reflection of God but an active, personal, participant with God. Naturally, the man and the woman could only be this if they were fully one with the glory of God, the fulness of his being, his moral being. The participation means communication. Hence Genesis 2:16-17, while specifically a warning against encroaching on the domain of God, is also a simple indication that God spoke and that Adam and his wife heard and responded (see Gen. 3:2-3).

This picture is expanded in Genesis 3:8-10.

They heard the *sound* of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ ¹⁰He said, ‘I heard the *sound* of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.’

² See Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1993, p. 78f.

(The word translated as ‘sound’ in verses 8 and 10 (*NIV* omits it in verse 10) is the Hebrew קוֹל (*qol*), which in some older versions is translated as ‘voice’. In verse 17, where God again addresses Adam, we read:

And to the man he said, “Because you have listened to the *voice* of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life...”

Once again the word is *qol*, only here it is translated as ‘voice’.³ In the Greek Old Testament, the word is φωνή (*phone*) which also means ‘voice’.⁴

The point is simply this. Men and women are created for communion with God and that communion surely includes communication as a fundamental element. This is seen clearly when God chose Israel as his means to restore the nations to blessing:

Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine... (Ex. 19:5).

When they were gathered at Sinai, they heard his voice:

Then the LORD spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound [*qol*] of words but saw no form; there was only a voice [*qol*]. (Deut. 4:12)

For ask now about former ages, long before your own, ever since the day that God created human beings on the earth; ask from one end of heaven to the other: has anything so great as this ever happened or has its like ever been heard of? ³³Has any people ever heard the voice of a god speaking out of a fire, as you have heard, and lived? (Deut. 4:32-33)

From heaven he made you hear his voice to discipline you. On earth he showed you his great fire, while you heard his words coming out of the fire. (Deut. 4:36)

When there is guilt, however, the former sweetness of the communication is lost. Adam’s reaction, as we have seen, was to hide himself when the voice of God addressed him. Similarly, even with the great events of the exodus from Egypt behind them, Israel did not want the immediacy of hearing the voice of God. After reminding them of the ten commandments, Moses then told the people of Israel of their response:

These words the LORD spoke with a loud voice to your whole assembly at the mountain, out of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, and he added no more. He wrote them on two stone tablets, and gave them to me. ²³When you heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, you approached me, all the heads of your tribes and your elders; ²⁴and you said, “Look, the LORD our God has shown us his glory and greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the fire. Today we have seen that God may speak to someone and the person may still live. ²⁵So now why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any longer, we shall die. ²⁶For who is there of all flesh that has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of fire, as we have, and remained alive? ²⁷Go near, you yourself, and hear all that the LORD our God will say. Then tell us everything that the LORD our God tells you, and we will listen and do it.” (Deut. 5:22-27)⁵

³ *qol* is also correctly translated as ‘sound’ in a number of places in the Old Testament. It is the conjunction of the man hearing God’s voice with fear and his hearing and obeying the voice of his wife which is perhaps significant here.

⁴ For a fuller discussion, see O. Betz. φωνή κτλ. in TDNT, Vol. IX, pp. 278-285. I am assuming a natural connection of ‘voice’ and ‘word’.

⁵ Meredith G. Kline (‘Deuteronomy’ in Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison (eds), *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, Oliphants, London.,1962, p. 163) wrote: ‘Such reluctance to experience the presence of God is a far cry from man’s original delight in communion with his Creator in the Garden. And therein is exposed the exceeding cursedness of the curse upon sin. There are, of course, ultimate limits to man’s qualifications for the vision of God (cf. Ex. 33:20). But even though, within those limits, redemptive grace makes possible the

The deep resistance of Israel to the voice of God, to true communion, is summarised in Deut. 9:23-24:

And when the LORD sent you from Kadesh-barnea, saying, "Go up and occupy the land that I have given you," you rebelled against the command of the LORD your God, neither trusting him nor obeying him [lit. *obey his voice*].²⁴ You have been rebellious against the LORD as long as he has known you.

While the phrase 'to obey the voice' may mean 'to obey what is said', there is, nonetheless, the constant principle that God continues to speak to the humanity he has made. The words may not always be audible, but they are confronting. The psalmist said: 'The heavens declare the glory of God' (Ps. 19:1) and that 'The heavens proclaim his righteousness and all the peoples behold his glory' (Ps. 97:6). The fact that it is his righteousness that is declared makes it easy to understand why guilty humanity should persistently 'by their wickedness suppress the truth' (Rom. 1:18). The voice of God, the word of God, is always the word of righteousness and so always a torment to guilty men and women.

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets... (Heb. 1:1)

Israel may have chosen to shut its ears to the voice of God, but God was not thereby silenced. He spoke through the prophets, and equally those prophets became the objects of the opposition of those who found their word a threat. 'Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute?' (Acts 7:52) was Stephen's question before he was murdered and Jesus said:

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! (Matt. 23:37).

The fact that many of these prophets of old had committed to writing the word God had given them meant that they were still a testimony against Israel. Jesus told his opponents:

You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. ⁴⁰Yet you refuse to come to me to have life. ...⁴⁵Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. ⁴⁶If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. (John 5:39-40, 45-46)

He also criticised the Sadducees for knowing neither the scriptures nor the power of God (Mk. 12:24). Some early Church Fathers claimed that the Sadducees rejected any scripture beyond the books of the Law, that is, the writings of the prophets.⁶

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets,² but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. (Heb. 1:1-2).

Speaking by a Son is defined by John's Gospel as the creator Word becoming flesh and revealing the Father's glory (John 1:1, 14). John claimed:

He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. (John 3:34)

enjoyment of a vision of God, fallen man regards the experience as a threat to his life (e.g., Gen. 33:20; Jud. 6:22, 23). In God's holy presence at Sinai, the Israelites were so keenly conscious of their defilement that they feared to venture further with their unique privilege (Deut. 4:33).

⁶ W. J. Moulder ('Sadducees' in I.S.B.E. Vol. 4, p. 279) argues: 'Most modern scholars believe that the Church Fathers were in error' and that the Sadducees merely rejected oral tradition, oral law, as binding.

And Jesus said:

Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life. ²⁵Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. ²⁶For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; ²⁷and he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice ²⁹and will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. (John 5:24-29)

Here is the Son expressing the truth of the Father. To see him is to see the Father (John 14:9). To hear him is to hear the Father:

“I have much to say about you and much to condemn; but the one who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.” ²⁷They did not understand that he was speaking to them about the Father. ²⁸So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me.” (John 8:26-28)

I declare what I have seen in the Father’s presence; as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father. (John 8:38)

...I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak. ⁵⁰And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I speak, therefore, I speak just as the Father has told me. (John 12:49-50)

Furthermore, as one hearing the Father, Jesus’ words are powerful because when he speaks it is more than repeating what was said; he is at one with the Father’s word:

Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. (John 14:10)

Here is the intimacy which Adam knew but lost.

Of course, the hostility to the living word, to the voice of God, which is hostility to God himself, then climaxed when those with the opportunity had Jesus crucified.⁷ Failure to hear the voice of God was not accidental but deliberate and habituated. It was more than some religious matter; it was and is the deepest resistance of the creature against the Creator. Dullness of hearing is culpable!

We are responsible to hear the voice of God. What is more, we have been recreated by the word to hear the word of God.

For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake. ⁶For it is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Cor. 4:5-6)

This is the word by which creation came into being coming to men and women through the preaching of the gospel and bringing the new creation into being. That, of course, was the very point later made in the same letter, in 2 Corinthians 5:17. Then to the Ephesians Paul wrote that those who were dead in trespasses and sins are brought to life by the great action of grace and that even the faith which the newly alive exercise has been *given* to them. The result is that ‘we are what he has made us,

⁷ Given the opportunity, all would have participated in the crucifixion, since all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Note also the comment by Walter Marshall: ‘all mankind were in Adam’s loins, when the first sin was committed’ (*Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*, Evangelical Press, Welwyn, 1981, p. 66).

created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life' (Eph. 2:10). Here is the new creation now alive in faith. In spite of some illustrations used to describe faith, it is far more than a conduit by which we receive the gift of God; faith is our active response to God himself. He speaks and we now hear him and believe what we hear. But note what Paul wrote to the Romans:

...how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? ¹⁵And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" ¹⁶But not all have obeyed the good news; for Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" ¹⁷So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes *through the word of Christ*. (Rom. 10:14-17)

Verse 17 (here the *NRSV*) is perhaps better translated as 'So faith comes from hearing, and hearing from the word of Christ'.⁸ Cranfield comments:

Faith results from hearing the message, and the hearing of the message comes about through the word of Christ (i.e. through Christ's speaking the message by the mouths of his messengers).⁹

This is confirmed by the language of Ephesians 4, though the translators of the *NRSV*, *RSV* and *NIV* have added the word 'about'.¹⁰

Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds. ¹⁸They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart. ¹⁹They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. ²⁰That is not the way you learned Christ! ²¹For surely you have heard [about] him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus. (Eph. 4:17-21)

'Surely you have heard him'!

I am not trying to set up some sort of mysticism, as if we hear the voice apart from the scriptures, or something like that (though by saying that I am probably accommodating myself to a modern problem and not to one faced by the early Christians). But I am saying that the New Testament understands that Christ himself speaks, and that the Spirit goes on speaking to the churches (see Revelation 2-3). Paul knew that Christ was the content of his preaching but at the same time told the Corinthians:

...Christ is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful in you. (2 Cor. 13:3)

The church does not function with the memory of the voice. It has the risen Jesus and the Holy Spirit present to it at all times. For instance, Galatians 3:5 speaks of God going on supplying the Spirit¹¹ and of the Spirit continually directing and guiding. Thus Acts 13:2; 16:6, 7 and 20:23. Of course, they understood that the Spirit was also the one by whom the Scriptures had come (Heb. 3:7; 10:15) for the scriptures are

⁸ The Greek word ἀκοή (*akoe*) can mean both the act of hearing and what is heard. This range of meaning would be less of a problem to the first readers than to us. See James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16* (W.B.C. 38B), Word, Dallas, 1988, p. 623. Similarly, ῥῆμα (*rhe'ma*) can have the meaning 'a spoken word' as well as being the content of the spoken word, the message, as in Rom. 10:8. On this latter, Dunn suggests there is a deliberate ambiguity (p. 606).

⁹ C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Volume 2), T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1979, p. 537.

¹⁰ Contrast *AV, ASV, RV, NASB*.

¹¹ The Greek present tense implying continuous action.

God's utterance (2 Tim. 3:16), his 'outbreathing'. But the point is that God, in Christ, in the Spirit, is present to the church, speaking and guiding and directing.

Jesus said that there had been prophets from the beginning (see Luke 11:49-51). He specifies Abel as the first to lose his life as a prophet and it would not be hard to understand Adam to have been 'prophetic' prior to his refusal of the voice of God. This would be borne out by the understanding of Jesus, the last Adam, as Prophet, Priest and King. But if there was the prophetic word in the beginning, we are surely not surprised to discover the gift of prophecy in the church.

The church knows prayer and prophecy (1 Cor. 11:4-5), the two-way communication between God and humanity. This in no way minimised the authoritative place of the apostolic testimony (any more than it could minimise the law, the prophets and the writings in Israel) but did mean that the church could consciously live in the presence of God and hear his voice. They knew what was a genuine word from God and what was a false word precisely because of the apostolic testimony. This is Paul's strong argument in Galatians chapter one: no one may deviate from the gospel once preached! But the presence of false prophets hardly calls genuine prophecy into question; it merely demands close attention to the apostles' teaching.

DULL OF HEARING

So we understand that the readers of Hebrews were those who had been enlightened, had tasted the heavenly gift, had shared in the Holy Spirit and had tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come. As such, they would surely be those who would eagerly receive the author's word about Christ and Melchizedek. The author has had an insight into the high priesthood of Christ and is eager to share it, but he cannot.

About this we have much to say that is hard to explain, since you have become dull in understanding.¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic elements of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food;¹³ for everyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is unskilled in the word of righteousness.¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, for those whose faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil. (Heb. 5:11-14).

They ought to be actively hearing, engaging with the word, but instead it is as if 'the basic elements of the oracles of God' had not been heard. They are 'dull in understanding' which is literally 'sluggish in hearing' (a sense repeated in Hebrews 6:12, 'so that you may not become sluggish'¹²). The delight has slowed down and as a result they cannot take the solid food the author wants to serve. There is nothing wrong with milk but there is more—and they cannot take more. The revelation which had come was 'the word of righteousness' but they are unskilled in it. They have not been active in that word so they now find it beyond their capacity. John Brown wrote:

The habit of spiritual dulness of hearing not only prevents progress, but it absolutely produces retrogression. That man not only does not improve, but he 'loses the things which had been already wrought in him'.¹³

¹² In 5:11, it is *νωθοι γέγονατε ταῖς ἀκοαῖς* and in 6:12 *ἵνα μὴ νοθοὶ γένησθε*.

¹³ John Brown, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Banner of Truth, London, (1862) 1964, p. 265.

THE WORD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

To be unskilled in the word of righteousness is a serious matter. The issue here is that the readers have found the word of righteousness too onerous and have opted for a less demanding alternative (cf. Isa. 30:10). While ‘the word of righteousness’ may certainly refer to teaching *concerning* righteousness, the heart of the Christian gospel, the implication here is not that the readers cannot engage in a discussion of deeper doctrine. Rather, they have not engaged in the action of righteousness. The mature are those ‘whose faculties have been trained *by practice*¹⁴ to distinguish good from evil’ (Heb. 5:14).

Here the meaning of the word ‘sluggish’ becomes obvious. The readers have lost their energy. They are too tired for the action. The word of righteousness has possibly been reduced to good information, possibly even for discussion, but it is no longer burning within them.

If the word of righteousness is teaching concerning righteousness then it had certainly come to them in a totally different form from mere information, as we have seen. It was a dynamic communication of righteousness.¹⁵ That was Paul’s confidence in the gospel, expressed in Romans 1:16-17.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, “The one who is righteous will live by faith.”

The gospel does not just provide information concerning the righteousness of God, it communicates the righteousness of God. God does not treat the unrighteous as if they were righteous, he makes the unrighteous righteous. He takes them into himself so that they are one with him. Put another way, the word which came to them at the beginning was God communicating himself. God spoke and the unrighteous became righteous and as a result they were made alive to hear him and to respond in the action of righteousness. So how could the righteous not *be* righteous? The language of Hebrews 6:4-8, though strong, makes sense.

For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶and then have fallen away, since on their own they are crucifying again the Son of God and are holding him up to contempt. ⁷Ground that drinks up the rain falling on it repeatedly, and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. ⁸But if it produces thorns and thistles, it is worthless and on the verge of being cursed; its end is to be burned over.

Failure to be what we are is a terrible contradiction of the voice of God (cf. Heb. 10:26-31). Similar is 2 Peter 1:3-11.

His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may

¹⁴ Gk. διὰ τῆν ἔξιν. ἔξιν means habit, use, experience (G. Abbott Smith, *Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1937, p. 160).

¹⁵ A number of commentators have recognised that the teaching of Hebrews concerning righteousness is different from Paul’s teaching. That may well be correct, but it is plain that there is no contradiction between them. In the long run, it seems that a basic agreement in this area was crucial in the Letter to the Hebrews being included in the canon of the New Testament. There is only one gospel, even if various facets of it are more prominent in some places.

escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature. ⁵For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, ⁶and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, ⁷and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love. ⁸For if these things are yours and are increasing among you, they keep you from being ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹For anyone who lacks these things is nearsighted and blind, and is forgetful of the cleansing of past sins. ¹⁰Therefore, brothers and sisters, be all the more eager to confirm your call and election, for if you do this, you will never stumble. ¹¹For in this way, entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly provided for you.

Here the problem is the deliberate forgetfulness of having been cleansed from our old sins (v. 9). Obviously it does not mean that we might think ourselves guilty again (though some might do so), but that the dynamic of forgiveness has been replaced with a lethargy that drains us of any interest in the great things of God.

There is strong meat to be communicated, those great things which are in God himself, but that strong meat is only received by the mature, by those who are alive in the action, by those who, having received the Spirit are functioning as men and women of the Spirit.

Solid food is for the mature...so let us go on to maturity!

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| 1. Come, Bride of Christ arise,
Shake off the sleep of death!
Upon your Husband set your eyes,
And let your idols rest! | 2. O set your eyes on Him
Who has from heaven come.
In love He sought you from afar,
And with you is now one! |
| 3. Come dwell upon His face,
And there your glory see.
No other glory will you find,
No other glory be! | 4. All that is yours is His,
Your sin He fully bore,
And all the riches of His grace,
On you He loves to pour! |
| 5. Your life is not your own,
You dwell with Christ in God.
No other refuge do you need,
Nor need no other rod. | 6. His rod and staff alone
Full life to you do give.
No other master will you find
Whose rule can make you live! |
| 7. O Bride of Christ arise
And lift your eyes to Him.
No longer seek some earthly prize,
But look and long for Him. ¹⁶ | |

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¹⁶ Noel Due, 1991 (*New Creation Hymn Book*, 2001, Hymn 254, Copyright, Used by permission).