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The Stumbling Block for All Mankind

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A STUMBLING BLOCK FOR EVERY MAN
OR
THE DOCTRINE OF NEGATIVE VOLITION

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF HEBREWS
NUMBER 19
HEBREWS 4:2

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HEBREWS 4:2 "For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it."

This verse begins with the little word "For" and it comes from the greek word "Kai." Then we have the little word "Gar" which is usually translated "for". So this should read "For also" or "For indeed." (In verse 1 of this chapter we studied that we ought to be afraid of letting doctrine flow by us, for this is the way to miss the blessings God wants to pour out on us. Super grace capacity determines super grace blessings. If you don't have a cup, then God doesn't pour. He can't pour, even though he has those blessings ready for you, but you are not ready. You are alive by grace and are saved by grace, but you will never advance to super grace until you learn doctrine. So verse one told us that we ought to be afraid of missing super grace. We ought to be afraid of missing his celebrity-ship.)

The words "Unto us" are not in the original, so drop them out. "Was the gospel preached" is a periphrastic. We have the present, active, indicative of "eimi" plus the perfect, passive, participle of "euaggeliz". It means this--they received the gospel. They were thoroughly evangelized. It was a complete job. They all heard the gospel and they heard it many times. In other words, the Exodus generation was totally evangelized. Two million left Egypt. They left saved, they left free, and they left wealthy. But now it is 67 A.D. and the same thing is being said of these Jews in Jerusalem. They had the Mosaic Law, they had the Temple, then had just passed through the earthly ministry of Jesus and they had experienced Pentecost. If ever a people had been evangelized they had been.

So this phrase is saying this--Here are two generations that had been thoroughly evangelized--the Exodus Generation and the 67 A.D. generation. So the gospel of salvation was not the issue with the Exodus generation. The gospel of salvation was not the issue with this 67 A.D. generation. Now that is true with you. Jesus as Saviour is not your issue. You have believed in him. Jesus is yours. You are already saved. The issue is no longer salvation. This issue is learning Bible doctrine. The issue is not "What think ye of Christ? but the issue is "What think ye of Bible doctrine?"

That Awful "NO"

These people had had The Tabernacle, then later they had The Temple. They had the sacrifices and the Holy Days. They had the teaching in the synagogues every sabbath. Moses taught them and Aaron taught them and even angels taught them. But they said, "No" to Bible doctrine. This same thing was true of the 67 A.D. generation in Jerusalem. They loved the ritual of the Temple. They loved form and ceremony, but they hated doctrine. They said in substance, "Don't worry me with those details. I am satisfied with ritual." They observed the Passover, but it wasn't pertinent to them because they had already been saved. The issue was doctrine and they rejected it.

Illustration

The issue is this--Do you realize the importance of doctrine? In the story of the Woman at the Well in John 4, Jesus said to the woman, "He that drinketh of this water shall thirst again" and he used the present tense for the word "drink." Every few hours she would get thirsty and would have to come back and drink again and drink again. Then Jesus said, "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him" and Jesus used the aorist tense and it means you drink once, and you never have to drink again. But remember this--you can't just sit down and faith-rest it for the remainder of your life. Faith-rest is to get you to the place where you are willing to take in doctrine every day. Move on and be a growing believer, and that means doctrine. God is just waiting to pour for you. So look at a correct translation of this first sentence in Hebrews 4:2. "FOR INDEED WE ALSO HAVE BEEN PERMANENTLY EVANGELIZED."

Then we have the word "kathaper" and it means "Even as, or just as." Next we have "as well as unto them" and the word is "kakeinos" and it means "They also." So this phrase says, "EVEN AS THEY ALSO WERE PERMANENTLY EVANGELIZED."

The Big Contrast

Now we are going to be shown the real trouble with both that Exodus Generation and the generation of Jews in Jerusalem in 67 A.D. They simply could not interpret history. (You would think when those thousands of people were bitten by snakes in the wilderness that it would have told them something, but it didn't. That leads on to another thought and that thought is "Jesus controls history." So the easiest way to properly interpret history is to be occupied with Jesus Christ. So the issue is no longer "Christ is Saviour" but the issue is "Christ in you leading you on to doctrinal knowledge and super grace.") So this word "But" which comes from "Alla" sets up this contrast. It sets up the contrast between salvation and doctrine. They had already answered "What think ye of Christ" now they must answer "What think ye of Doctrine."

"The word preached did not profit them." We have "Ho logos" and it refers to doctrine. But the word "preached" is not here at all. Rather we have "ahoe" and it means "of hearing." So we have "The doctrine of hearing." It refers to the doctrine with which you are inculcated.

"The word of hearing" is a technical name for doctrine. You can't learn doctrine just by sitting down and by reading the Bible. You have to have someone teach it to you. Through negative volition the Jews of the Exodus generation sowed what they reaped. Almost two million of them reaped the sin unto death and died in that desert long before their time to die. (A good commentary on this very thing is 1 Cor. 10:1-12.)

The next words we have in this sentence are "did not profit them" and the word profit is the aorist, active, indicative of "opheleo." This aorist tense gathers up forty years of teaching when they turned negative. They said no, and no, and no and they said it for forty years. They refused to transfer the doctrine taught them from their souls into their human spirits.

THE DOCTRINE OF NEGATIVE VOLITION

There are six areas of negative volition whereby one can fail to take in doctrine or utilize doctrine and thereby reach super grace.

1. THE REFUSAL TO HEAR.

This is primary negative volition. This is the person who rejects hearing the gospel. He hears it on radio and television and from the pulpit and in many ways, but still he doesn't hear. There are millions of unbelievers in this category. They absolutely refuse to hear.

2. THE REFUSAL TO REBOUND.

When people gather for worship, they can't get anything out of the service because they are out of fellowship. (David stayed out of fellowship for almost a year when he committed his awful sin and didn't rebound until Nathan came and told him a story which brought all of his sin in front of his face.) So when someone isn't present and they say to you, "I was there in spirit" that is just so much hot air.

3. THE REFUSAL TO USE FAITH.

This is what we call secondary negative volition. He is willing to hear, is willing to rebound, but is never willing to go on and launch out on faith.

This is the meaning of the phrase we have just studied here in Hebrews 4:2 "But the word of hearing did not benefit them."

An illustration of this is in James Chapter 1.

Verse 19 "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:" He hears, he rebounds, but he refuses to transfer it to his human spirit and have faith. This may be our most vulnerable spot. This is where people go astray. This 19th verse in James 1 says, "Know this" and it is a perfect, active, indicative of "oida." It is addressed to all believers. Then we have the word "Be" and it is a present, active, imperative of "eimi" and means keep on always being. Then we have "swift to hear" and this is a phrase of positive volition. Every time the word is taught, you be there. Have your Bible and notebook and be ready to take it in. It actually says "be swift for hearing." Now you can't talk and learn at the same time. Then it says, "slow to speak, and slow to wrath." This is a beautiful picture of positive volition at the point of gospel hearing.

Verse 20 "For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." This verse says you can't have the wrong mental attitude and take in doctrine.

Verse 21 "Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls." Look especially at the phrase "receive with meekness" and this is an aorist, middle, imperative of "dechomai" and it means to embrace. "Meekness" is the mental attitude you are to have when you take in doctrine. It simply means to find your place at God's great table and be fed. "Engrafted word" means the Word of God is actually living and growing inside of you. The phrase "which is able to save your souls" really means that the Word of God is able to deliver you.

Verse 22 "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."

"Be ye" is a present, middle, imperative of "ginomai" and means "keep on becoming." Now we have the word "doers" and it is from "poietes" and it is not referring to acts or works of good deeds. Notice it is "doers of the word." It is a function in the soul. It means keep on being doers of doctrine. Now this means you don't stop by hearing it in the soul, but you transfer it to your human spirit and become a doer in the human spirit. If you don't transfer doctrine into your human spirit, it never becomes productive. The words "deceiving your own selves" is a present, middle, participle of "paralogizomai" and means to defraud or deceive. The big problem is that people are big hearers of the Word but never transfer it to the human spirit and never become doers of the Word.

Verse 23 "For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:" This is an illustration to help you see the folly of hearing the word and not being a doer of the word. The man sees his face in the mirror. He recognizes himself for he has seen that image many times.

Verse 24 "For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was." This verse now says that he goes away and forgets what he saw. It is like hearing the Word of God but you don't transfer it into your spirit and you don't let it become a part of your living and thinking and doing. It was just so much ritual and form when you worshipped, but you didn't transfer it to your spirit and therefore you didn't become a doer of the word.

Verse 25 "But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." This word "looketh" means to stoop down and stare. This means intensity. Then we have "continueth" and this is an aorist, active, participle of "parameno" and it means day after day keep on being persistent in taking in doctrine. So in Hebrews 4:2 we have that phrase "The word of hearing did not benefit them."

4. THE REFUSAL TO BE CONSISTENT.

Many are like the people who run to Bible class when trouble comes or when adversity hits or death comes. In times of prosperity, they never think of Bible class. Negative volition is the chief cause of inconsistency.

5. NEGATIVE VULNERABILITY.

These are those who start in with a bang. They reach super grace quickly. They were consistent for quite some time. Then they became discouraged, they became disillusioned, and they reacted by dropping by the wayside. They lost their Edification Complex, their super grace, and they fell into an emotional revolt in the soul. Scar tissue began to build up in their souls and they fell back and their last state was worse than the first

6. NEGATIVE EMOTIONALISM.

Emotion may be the worst enemy of a stable soul. An emotional revolt in the soul means the blackout of doctrine. Emotion has brought on all kinds of excess in Pentacostalism and in the Charismatic movement. When emotion takes over, reason goes out the window. Emotion is wonderful when it is controlled by doctrine.

Verse 2 of Hebrews 4 goes on to say, "Them" and this is from "ekeinon" and it refers to the Exodus generation. They failed because they failed to take in doctrine so God had to discipline them. Why was this? The next phrase explains it. "Not being mixed" and this is a perfect, passive, participle of "sugherannumi" and it means to mix together, to blend. This is the tense of completed action. They didn't blend what was taught with faith. Now how did they get that way? Faith had brought them out of Egypt and into the desert but once they got out there, their blender stopped working. They were taught by Moses and Aaron and by angels and by manna and by water being furnished them, and by the biting of the snakes and a thousand ways. But they never blended any of it with faith. DOCTRINE NEVER BECAME THE WORKING OBJECT OF THEIR FAITH.

GOD HAS PRESERVED THE DOCTRINE HERE IN THE BIBLE.
 GOD HAS PROVIDED A PASTOR-TEACHER.
 GOD HAS MADE YOU A POTENTIAL HEARER.

And you are here right now by grace. Will you go positive or negative? This Exodus generation sent up negative signals, it was negative, negative for forty years--the only thing God was to do was destroy them and start over with a younger generation.

GOD WAITS TO POUR

Isaiah 30:18 says that God is just sitting there waiting, patting his foot, waiting to pour on you all the blessings that you will let him. Think in this connection of positional truth. Positionally, you are already in his presence. That's the place of victory over the Devil. God is just waiting to demonstrate to you the real power of doctrine if you will only let him. God will give you everything the Devil's world has to offer plus a million things besides.

THIS IS A GRACE PROVISION

Doctrine is God's great grace provider. He provided grace in salvation and then with every truth of doctrine he provided more grace. Doctrine brings grace intensified. This is why so many Christians have so little joy and victory in their lives. They have no doctrine within them and therefore grace is in short supply. HE EXPERIENTIALLY GIVES YOU THE ROBES OF A KING TO WEAR RIGHT HERE IN THE DEVIL'S KINGDOM RIGHT UNDER THE DEVIL'S NOSE. This is why this verse says, "not having been blended with the faith." "Them that heard it" is an aorist active, participle of "akouo" and it is also dative of advantage. It was to their great advantage to hear doctrine. They heard again and again. But they refuse to use their blender and therefore instead of eating faith milk shakes all through that desert, they ate disappointment, disaster and sin unto death.

SEVEN POINTS OF TWO GENERATIONS OF FAILURES

1. Here is a direct analogy of the people of the Exodus Generation in 1400 B.C. and the Jerusalem Generation in 76 A.D. just prior to the destruction of Jerusalem.
2. Both generations were saved. Salvation was not the issue with them. The issue with both generations was "What think ye of doctrine?"
3. The Exodus Generation was in reversionism for forty years.
4. The Jerusalem Jews were also in reversionism for forty years--from Pentecost in 30 A.D. to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.
5. However, the Book of Hebrews was a warning to them in their 37th year of reversionism. They had rejected the public ministry of Jesus in Jerusalem. Then they rejected the ministry of the apostles. Then they rejected the ministry of Paul. The Exodus Generation did give Moses and Aaron a hearing, but then went negative. The Jerusalem Jews didn't even give Paul a hearing. They didn't even let Paul speak at Wednesday night prayer meeting.
6. Only one thing would have delivered either generation--and that was positive volition toward Bible doctrine. (It delivered Caleb and Joshua in a most wonderful way.)
7. These reversionists in Jerusalem were about to reap what they had sowed, instead of reaping what God had sowed. They will all die in that destruction of Jerusalem or be taken captive. Four hundred ninety stood three years longer at Masada, but they too finally perished.