

## **THE DREADFULNESS OF APOSTASY**

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"For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame." [Hebrews 6:4-6]

Through the passionate apostolic missionary activity of the early Church, many people, both Jews and Gentiles, gladly received the Word with pleasure, got baptized and joined to the Christian Church. Though it was no provocation among Gentiles, it was a big challenge for the Judeo-Christian community. Jewish religious leaders brought out a determined effort to retract the new adherents of Christian faith and to influence them to come back to the Jewish faith and traditions. Due to these seducers and their seduction, faith of many new believers cooled down. The enthusiasm, vigor and spiritual energy of many believers were slackening by time. The Epistle to Hebrews is designed to address and warn those converted to the faith of Christ, whether from Judaism or paganism, against the dreadful sin of apostasy from the faith and to persuade and press them for a constant adherence to the Christian faith, and perseverance in it, notwithstanding all the sufferings they might meet to do so.

The Apostle very clearly describes in a serious manner of the dreadful nature and consequences to fall away after having gone so far in the profession of the religion. The author remind us that believing in Jesus Christ, getting baptized in Christ and to become the member of the Church of God is not a matter to be dealt with delicacy. It is not a undertaking to take lightly as joining any worldly organization. Apostle emphasize and highlight here five lofty experience through the affirmations of faith and being under the Grace of God. It is a special privilege that we receive through baptism as we are baptized into Jesus Christ by indispensably bound and merged with Him, who is the Light of this world.

Those who are baptized in Christ are an enlightened class. God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. Those who are merged with Christ should also live in the light. God made two great lights-the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. Though the Moon is not self-illuminating, God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light to the earth by the reflection from the Sun. In the same manner, the light of Jesus who is the source of light is being reflected through the ones who are merged with Christ. This is the real deliberation of the baptism in Christ. St. Paul exhort to the Ephesians that you

were formerly in darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord and walk as children of Light in all goodness and righteousness and truth. Not only that those who started to walk in light, now reprimands the acts of darkness and exhorts others to be the Children of light. So we are bound to keep up the nature of Christ.

Second privilege of the believers is that they had tasted the heavenly gift. Our early fathers taught us that we taste this heavenly gift through the Holy Communion by eating and drinking the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. We are the partakers of that one bread who is the Christ. Whosoever live and believe in Him shall never die. The assurance of Jesus is; 'He lives in Me and Me live in him.' To be the partakers of the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ is the biggest privilege, which is not granted even for the heavenly beings. It is the bread, which gives us an eternal life.

The third extraordinary and miraculous gift of being in the Church of God is that we are made partakers of the Holy Spirit. Those who are in Spirit, feel something of the efficacy of the Holy Spirit in their worldly operations upon their souls. In the Old Testament, we perceive the anointment of oil for three categories of people: Kings, Priests and Prophets. Anointing of oil is the act to consecrate, to be set apart and dedicated to serve God; to be imparted with enabling gifts and grace; to be divinely designated, inaugurated, or chosen for some specific purpose. St. Paul says in the epistle to Corinthians that those who are baptized in Christ are the anointed ones and God had sealed them and given them the earnest of the Spirit in their hearts. In the New Testament experience, the believers are a distinguished category of this world ranked as King, Priest and the Prophet, all in one. A normal building does not become a Temple of God unless it is anointed with oil. In the same way, through baptism we are anointed with oil as the Temple of God. St. Paul ask the Corinthians: "Know you not that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwell in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple you are." [1 Corinthian 3:6-7] It is the responsibility of each one to safeguard the holiness of the temple of God.

Fourthly, we have tasted the good word of God. God had given the word of God as Holy Scriptures to safeguard and foster our spiritual experience. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." [Psalms 119:105] "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart." [Hebrews 4:12]

Psalm 119 is the Song of Word of the God. The influences of the Word of God in man's personal life are enlisted in this Psalm. It is the biggest Psalm and majority of its verses can be categorized to 22 sections. The importance of Word of God,

it's pertinence, it's relevance and inevitability while we handle it etc. are described in this Psalm. I would like to bring one verse of this Psalm to your attention. "How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word." [119:9] The most important guideline for us to keep up holiness is the word of God. Our children should be trained in the word of God from their childhood so that they will not be defeated in midst of evils and abominations in future and will adhere to word of God in their life where ever they go for education or career. Many of the moral problems of our youngsters are from the temptations and enticing promises.

Finally, the Apostle reminds us that we had tasted powers of the world to come and have been under strong impressions concerning heaven. When we lead a holy and sacramental life in this world, at the same time, we are enjoying the power and assurance of the eternal life, which is waiting for us. Such an enticing experience is offered by the enlightenment through the faith in Christ.

A Christian should be well aware and responsible about this great privilege of being the Son of God and greatness of the sin of apostasy. The Apostle reminds us the bitter effect while retracting from this enlightenment. He points out mainly two important things. By retracting from the Grace once we enjoyed, we are crucifying the Son of God afresh, and putting Him to open shame. We are declaring our approval of what the Jews did in crucifying Christ 2000 years back. We do what in them lies to represent Christ and Christianity as a shameful thing, and would have Him to be a public shame and reproach. This retraction from the Grace of God enhances the pain of the Cross-on Calvary. With out any reservation, Apostle openly writes to us that it is not non-Christians but the Christians who crucify Jesus repeatedly. (10:39)

However, the author expresses his good hopes concerning them that they would persevere in faith and holiness with great encouragement they had from God. He freely and openly declares the good hope that they would endure to the end. 'But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul'. He proceeds to set before them caution and counsel how to attain this full assurance of hope to the end. He exhorts them three important things in order to live worthy to the Gospel. Firstly, you should observe the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end. Secondly, you should not be sluggish or slothful. Thirdly, imitate of those who through faith and patience inherited the promises. (11,12) We should follow the good examples of those who had gone before us. Apostle is very clear about this concept. The vigor of the spirituality should not be shortened for any season or occasion. But it should be diligently maintained for all the time, all the aspects of life and all walks and circumstances of life.

Apostle speaks much of the excellence and preach the plainest truths for the sake of the weak. The spirituality of today's Christians is limited as Seasonal, Occasional or Incidental. Though this may be good as a beginning, but Apostle do not accept it for the perfection in Christ and to endure till the last. Some time it may be the trigger in our life, however we should maintain the spirit till last. Psalmist say; "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes." (Psalm 119:71) Life is a combination of ups and downs. It is not desirable that we know the God only during our downs and forget God in our ups. "Trouble and anguish have come upon me; Yet Your commandments are my delight." Our Prayers and worships should be punctual and time bound. The sluggishness in our spiritual ways reveals our shallow relation with Christ. There should be a spark in our heart. St. Paul exhort to Philippians; "I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" [Philippians 1:27]

During the Crucifixion when all the disciples fled away for fear of their life, the courageous woman who stood with Calvary was Mary Magdalene. Jesus was her Guru and all and all who gave her a new life. The bond in her heart was so deep that she cannot flee away in any dangerous circumstances. It reveals her strong bondage with Christ. Scripture witness that she waited till it became dark and witnessed the funeral and seen the tomb and went home late and observed Sabbath on the next day. St. John very relevantly says that on the first day of the week she went to the tomb to embalm Him early in the morning while it was still dark. We don't see so much diligence in any of His disciples.

We should apply these words of God to our own life in order to excite our diligence and prevent apostasy and to declare the good hope in Christ till the last.