

INOCULATION

Scripture Reading: Read Hebrews 6

Nowadays, most children receive vaccinations that protect them from a host of diseases that a century ago would have potentially led to their deaths. By injecting the patient with a relatively small dose of a virus or bacteria, doctors expect their immune system to react and develop antibodies to fight the organism. The body then “remembers” the disease so as to fight against it should it encounter the disease again in the future.

Is it possible to be spiritually inoculated, to build up immunity against the gospel? After reading the opening section of today’s chapter reading (6:4-6), one might consider the possibility: *“It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.”*

Impossible? That’s pretty strong isn’t it? Is the author suggesting that falling into sin after salvation is unforgiveable? I’m certain we’ve all known believers who have experienced a time of rebellion in their Christian life, when they chose a season of backsliding, but then repented and were restored. Surely, the author of Hebrews is not speaking of an impossibility of repentance and God’s forgiveness by Christians in general. Such a concept goes against the whole of Scripture, the example of Peter after he denied Jesus, and the message of Hebrews regarding a faithful High Priest.

So, what is the point of this passage? Well, let’s go back to the big picture of Hebrews. The letter was written originally to reach Jewish Christians who were considering throwing away their confidence in Christ and returning to the old ways of Judaism because life was getting tough. Like the Israelites of old, the readers had experienced God’s deliverance and presence but were now in danger of missing out on God’s promises by abandoning Christ through unbelief.

This condition, however, was not quarantined to the first century. It still happens twenty centuries later. I’ve seen individuals who came to Christ with great joy and excitement turn their backs on him when they found themselves overwhelmed with circumstances down the road in their Christian life. I’ve watched the Spirit convict them again and again to repent but they repeatedly hardened their hearts until they become adamantly opposed to the things of God. In a way, by coming to Christ and then walking away and repeatedly rejecting the Holy Spirit’s conviction, they were inoculated and become immunized against the gospel. They no longer would or could turn back: not because God failed in any way or wasn’t willing to forgive but because their own hardened hearts and seared consciences prevented them from ever turning back.

Action Step & Prayer Focus: If you have been running from God, I urge you to repent today. Don’t harden your heart and become immunized against the gospel. Seek Christ instead with a broken and contrite heart and you will find forgiveness and restoration.

Take-a-way: *Repeatedly hardening our hearts to the Spirit’s call will inoculate us against turning back to Christ.*