
authorities of the period to which they pretend to belong is the one way of unmasking the forgery and vindicating the genuine historical document.

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(*To be continued.*)

HEBREWS VI. 4-6.

IN this paper I shall say a few words of criticism about Dr. Milligan's exposition of this difficult passage; and shall then endeavour to shed some additional light upon it by careful examination of some of the grammatical forms therein used.

Dr. Milligan interprets Hebrews v. 11, 12 and chapter vi. 1, 2 and verses 4-6 as all describing the spiritual condition of the readers to whom this epistle is addressed. But, as we shall see, this identification is so unlikely that we cannot accept it without clear proof; and of such proof we have none, either in the verses before us or in their context.

It is quite true that in chapter v. 11-14 we have words of blame. The persons addressed are "dull of hearing"; they need that some one teach them the rudiments of the beginning of the oracles of God, and they need milk, being unfit for solid food. But this is very different from "having fallen away" and from "crucifying afresh to themselves the Son of God and putting Him to open shame." The one class of persons had failed to go forward, the others had lost the position they once possessed and were now openly hostile to Christ. This difference is not overturned by the word *γεγόναιε* in verse 12: "Ye have become men having need of milk." For even their stagnation was a sort of evil development. They who fail to grow become dwarfs, and thus become as different from

what they were in earlier years as a dwarf differs from a growing child. But even a dwarf is not necessarily an apostate or an enemy.

There is no indication that the men referred to in verses 4-6 are the same as those directly addressed in the preceding and following verses. The opening words of verse 4 rather suggest that the writer is turning from his readers to another class of persons: and this suggestion is raised to certainty by verse 9, "But we are persuaded about you, beloved ones, better things and things taking hold of salvation, if even we thus speak." He remembers, in verse 10, their kindness to the saints; and in verse 11 exhorts them to greater confidence and hope. Language so encouraging could not possibly be addressed to persons who had fallen away and were putting Christ to public dishonour.

On the other hand, verses 4-6 are given in support of the foregoing exhortation "Let us go on to maturity. . . . For it is impossible, touching those once enlightened . . . to renew them again to repentance." Evidently this description of the fallen ones for whom nothing can be done is given as a warning to the dull ears of the readers of the epistle. This implies that the two groups had something in common, but by no means implies that they were the same. The point in common is that even the apostates had once actual spiritual life. That they had fallen away, was good reason why those who were still, in spite of lapse of time, babes in Christ should press forward to maturity.

In his endeavour to prove that verses 4-6 describe the readers to whom the epistle is addressed, Dr. Milligan strangely dilutes the force of the terrible words here used. He says on page 370 that "no indication is given us that, after having for a time believed, they had at length completely rejected Christ." On page 372 he suggests that the

sacred writer may have somewhat overstated his case : " he may speak with some measure of greater sharpness than the strict circumstances of the case demanded." He adds, " but, even though it be not so, though every reproof spoken is to be taken in its utmost literalness, it is obvious that we have before us something very different from a complete departure from the faith of Christ." So on page 374 : " Our contention therefore is that *παραπεσόντας* in our present passage, while describing a condition into which the Hebrew Christians had fallen, does not speak of it as absolute apostacy, as a condition of alienation from God, in which they were sealed by His just judgment, in which no change of mind could be experienced, and from which there could be no hope of return. . . . They had sinfully departed from Christ as He was ; but they did not wholly and consciously deny Him." Here two different matters are confounded, absolute apostacy and final apostacy. It is quite conceivable that a man may be " rejected and near to a curse " and yet be capable, under certain conditions, of restoration. But if the words " crucifying afresh to themselves the Son of God and putting Him to open shame " do not describe persons who " wholly and consciously deny Him," it seems to me that no words can describe such persons.

We come now to look at the grammatical structure of the verses before us.

Nearly the whole sentence consists of accusatives governed by the active verb *ἀνακαθίξαι*. Touching certain persons whom he describes at considerable length, the writer declares that " it is impossible . . . to renew them to repentance. These persons are described by a series of aorist participles noting events in their past lives. They had been enlightened ; they had tasted the heavenly gift and had become partakers of the Holy Spirit ; and had tasted the good word of God and powers of the coming

age. But these happy events had been followed by another event widely different: they had "fallen away." This can only mean that they had lost the standing ground on which these heavenly gifts had placed them.

Of these persons, the writer says that "it is impossible . . . to renew them to repentance." Notice carefully the present infinitive, ἀνακαθίζειν. The comparative rarity of this form of the Greek verb gives emphasis to the word here used. It does not mean that it is impossible to renew them at some future time. This idea would be expressed by the more common aorist infinitive; as in verse 18, "impossible for God to lie," *i.e.* at any time; and in chapter xi. 6, "apart from faith it is impossible to please" God. The present infinitive is found in chapter x. 4, "impossible to take away sins"; in reference to a supposed process of pardon going on day by day. What is denied in the verse before us is a present renewal.

This grammatical meaning of the present infinitive is confirmed by the present participles following. These are accusatives in apposition to the accusative aorist participles preceding. Evidently the description begun by the aorist participles is supplemented by the present participles. And the change of tense from aorist to present, places the present participles in relation to the present infinitive immediately foregoing. The present participles describe here, as always, an action going on at the same time as, or a state contemporary with, the action described by the main verb to which the participle is subordinate. We have here two sets of participles, one aorist, the other present, describing the same persons, and both subordinate to one main assertion, "it is impossible to renew them." They have been enlightened, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit: they are now crucifying to themselves the Son of God, and are putting Him to open shame. Of such persons, the writer declares, not that they will never be

restored; but that it is impossible now to be restoring them. So long as this description remains true of them, their case is beyond reach of renewal.

This assertion by no means implies that the men referred to will never cease to dishonour Christ. And if they cease so to do, these terrible words still leave open to them a path of repentance.

It may be objected that it is tautological to say that repentance is impossible till men forsake open sin. But I think that the exposition just suggested gives a rational sense. The writer asserts that efforts to lead men to a better mind are wasted on those engaged in high-handed sin. And he says this in order to hold up as a warning certain actual cases of open and conspicuous apostasy, in order that these examples may prompt his readers to diligent effort after spiritual progress.

The distinction between the aorist and present tenses to which I have here called attention may be illustrated by a comparison between 1 John ii. 1, *ἐάν τις ἀμάρτη* and chapter iii. 9, *οὐ δύναται ἀμαρτάνειν*. Here an apparent contradiction is removed by a distinction of tenses which cannot without circumlocution be reproduced in English. John writes in order to save his readers from falling at any future time into sin: *ἵνα μὴ ἀμάρτητε*. He goes on to say that if, in spite of this effort of his, any one does fall into sin, we have an Advocate with the Father who is Himself a Propitiation for our sins. In apparent contradiction to this, he says in chapter iii. 9 that whosoever is born of God cannot sin. Notice here the perfect participle, *γεννημένος*. The writer means that, so long as the life received at the New Birth continues, its recipient cannot be committing actual sin, that sin and the new life are incompatible. But this by no means excludes the possibility that through lapse of faith the new life may cease, and that then one who was a child of God may fall into

sin. And in chapter ii. 1, even this possibility is graciously provided for.

It is now quite clear that in the verses before us the present participles attach a limit of time to the main assertion of the sentence. The impossibility of renewal is asserted only for such time as the apostates continue to dishonour Christ. This temporal use of the present participle may be illustrated by Romans vii. 3: "while the man lives (ζῶντος τοῦ ἀνδρός) she will be called an adulteress, if she become another man's." So Acts v. 4, "while remaining, did it not remain thine?" οὐχὶ μένον σοὶ ἔμενε.

It is also evident that the present participles give a reason and condition of the impossibility of renewal. The attendant circumstance contains the cause of that which it accompanies. Consequently here the present participle notes, as frequently, both a temporal and casual relation. Of these relations the Revisers put the latter in their text, "seeing they crucify"; and the former in their margin, "the while they crucify." This last rendering, Dr. Milligan commends. But why the definite article *the* should be put before the sufficiently definite adverb *while*, he does not say. Each of these renderings contains a part of the truth; but the Greek text does not distinguish between them.

We can reproduce accurately both the form and the meaning of the Greek by rendering, FOR IT IS IMPOSSIBLE, TOUCHING THOSE WHO WERE ONCE ENLIGHTENED, AND TASTED THE HEAVENLY GIFT, AND BECAME PARTAKERS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND TASTED THE GOOD WORD OF GOD AND POWERS OF THE COMING AGE, TO RENEW THEM AGAIN TO REPENTANCE, WHILE CRUCIFYING TO THEMSELVES AFRESH THE SON OF GOD AND PUTTING HIM TO OPEN SHAME.

This rendering does not reproduce fully the significance of the infinitive present *to be renewing them again to repent-*

ance. But, even in this English rendering, the present participles limit the main assertion to the continuance of the open apostacy. The pronoun rendered *to themselves* is the dative of disadvantage, and describes the men in question as themselves receiving the results of their rejection of Christ.

This awful description of actual apostates is held up as a warning to men who had become slow of hearing, and who after many years had still need to learn the rudiments of the Gospel. And experience has often proved that the terrible condition of the fallen has been a potent stimulus to rouse the flagging energy and watchfulness of those who have become weary in the Christian course.

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