

The background of the cover is a photograph of a stone wall, likely part of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. On the left, there is a stone tower with a small arched window and a larger arched entrance below. People are visible walking through the archway. The wall on the right is a large, light-colored stone wall with some texture and shadows.

The Epistle to the HEBREWS

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Presents

Commentary on the book of Hebrews

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #1

JESUS, THE BRIGHTNESS

OF GOD'S GLORY

“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high; having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they” (Hebrews 1:1-4, NASB).

INTRODUCTION

Here is a book that is the center of much controversy. It should not surprise us that this is the case. Any writing that exalts the Lord Jesus Christ is bound to be the focus of attack from the evil one. He will attempt to neutralize the power of the message by diverting our attention to inconsequential matters.

Authorship

There is, by no means, unanimity on the authorship of this book. Scholars are divided because God has not revealed it. Some are adamant in their opposition to Paul being its author, while others are equally insistent that he is. The following page contains a brief overview of the opinions of men on this subject. I share it

with you to confirm that wise men differ where God has not spoken.

We must make it our business not to become distracted over the person used by God to write the book. I am of the opinion that the thoughts did belong to Paul. Who actually penned the book is of almost no consequence. For that matter, it is really of no consequence who among men was responsible for setting down the tenants of this book. God the Father purpose and revealed the book through the Holy Spirit, and gave it to us by the Lord Jesus, through Whom He has spoken in these last days. Little value will be gleaned from the book until we perceive and embrace this. It is a principle in Scripture that the Word is always to be associated with God, its ultimate Author; the Son, Who is the embodiment and personification of Scripture; and the Holy Spirit, through Whom it was given.

The book calls upon us to hear Who is speaking from heaven--not who is writing upon the earth. Hear the solemn declarations of this volume. *“In these last days has spoken to us in His Son”* (1:2, NASB) . *“As the Holy Spirit says . . . ”* (3:7). *“The Holy Spirit is signifying . . . ”* (9:8). *“And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us . . . ”* (10:15). *“See to it that you do not refuse Him who is . . . much less shall we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven”* (12:25).

This book is a message from God, by Jesus, and through the Spirit. It is written to professed believers to jar them from the evil propensity to Law. With great power it affirms the superiority and adequacy of the Son of God, as well as His indispensability in the totality of salvation. It pulls us away from trust in self, routine, or position, warning us of our continued dependency upon the appointed Deliverer.

Eusebius said, *“Who wrote the Epistle God only knows certainly.”* Origin took the position that the thoughts belonged to Paul, while Clement of Rome or perhaps Luke, actually wrote the book. Clement of Alexandria thought Paul wrote it in Hebrew, and that Luke translated it into Greek. Eusebius also thought it was originally written in Hebrew and translated by Clement of Rome. Martin Luther thought it was written by Apollos, and John Calvin denied Paul wrote it. In North Africa, the authorship was attributed to Barnabas. Martin Luther suggested Apollos might be the author. One man, of more recent times (Harnack), felt it was written by Priscilla. A significant number of theologians felt the thoughts did belong to Paul, even if they might have been actually written by someone else. Origin, for example, did not dispute the Pauline origin of the Epistle. After him, Dionysius of Alexander, the bishops who succeeded him, and all the ecclesiastical writers of Egypt, Syria, and the East received the Epistle as Paul's. Jerome wrote that this epistle had come to be accepted as Pauline in the West as well as in the East. Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory of Nazianzen, the canon of the Council of Laodicea, and the eighty-fifth of the Council of Carthage, of Hippo Regius, of Carthage; Innocent I, Gaudentius and Faustinus refer to the epistle as Paul's. (***J. Barmby, Hebrews, Pulpit Commentary***)

Since the author is not named in the book itself, many have speculated as to who the author was. Luke, Clement of Rome, Priscilla, Barnabas, Apollos, or a Hellenist like Stephen have all been suggested. The early Church Father, Origen, was probably more correct when he said that only God knew who wrote Hebrews. Hebrews was not accepted as part of the New Testament canon in the Western church until after A.D. 367 when the Western church finally accepted the Eastern church's theory of Pauline authorship. (***Holman's Bible Dictionary***)

That this epistle was written very early appears from hence, that it was imitated by Clement of Rome, in his epistle to the Corinthians, who took whole sentences out of it; and therefore it could not be a new work, as Eusebius {a} observes: it has been denied to be authentic by some heretics, as the Marcionites and Arians, but has been generally received as such by the orthodox: some indeed doubted of it, because it was not received by the Roman church, as an epistle of the Apostle Paul {b}; though others, who have thought it was not his, as Origen, yet looked upon it as genuine {c}. It has been ascribed to different persons, as to Barnabas, to Apollos, to Luke the Evangelist, and to Clement of Rome, but without any just reason. Clement of Alexandria, a very ancient writer, asserts it to be the Apostle Paul's {d}; and his name stands in the title of it, in all R. Stephens's exemplars, and in all Beza's copies, excepting one, and so it does in the Vulgate Latin and Arabic versions; and that it is his, is highly probable from the agreement there is between this, and other epistles of his; compare #Heb 1:2,3 with #Col 1:15,16 and #Heb 5:12-14 with #1Co 3:1,2 and #Heb 12:1 with #1Co 9:24 and #Heb 13:7,17 with #1Th 5:11,12, and #Heb 13:9 with #Eph 4:14 and #Heb 13:18 with #2Co 1:12 and #Heb 13:20 with #Ro 15:13 16:20 1Th 5:23 and many other places; and also from the order and method of it, first treating of doctrines, and then proceeding to practical exhortations, which is the common form of Paul's epistles: to which may be added various circumstances; as that it was written from Italy, where Paul was a prisoner; and the mention the author of it makes of his bonds, and of Timothy, as well known unto him, who was Paul's companion; besides, the token of his epistles appears in this, namely, his usual salutation to the churches; see #Heb 13:23-25. But above all, the testimony of the Apostle Peter is greatly in favour of its being his, #2Pe 3:15,16 from whence it clearly appears, that the Apostle Paul did write an epistle to the Hebrews; for to them Peter wrote; see #1Pe 1:1 2Pe 3:1 and what epistle could it be but this? and what Peter refers to is to be found in it; see #Heb 10:25,36,37 and which is written with great wisdom; in none of Paul's epistles is there a greater discovery of his knowledge of divine mysteries than in this; and in it also are things hard to be understood, #Heb 5:11. The common objections to its being his are, its not bearing his name, the diversity of its style, and the author of it seeming to be not an apostle, but a disciple of the apostle's: as to his not setting his name to it, the reasons might be, because he was the apostle of the Gentiles, and not so much of the Jews; and because of the prejudice of the Jews against him, both believers, and unbelievers; wherefore had his name been to it, it might have prevented the usefulness of it to the one, and have stirred up the rage of the other: as to the difference of style, different subjects require a different style; and yet in many things there is a likeness, as before observed: and as to the author's not being an apostle, which is concluded from #Heb 2:3 the word "us" there is to be understood of the believing Hebrews, the disciples of the apostle, and not inclusive of the author, by a figurative way of speaking often used by Paul; and besides, the apostle received a confirmation of the Gospel from Ananias, who might have been an hearer of Christ, though he was at first taught it by Christ himself; add to this, that whoever was the writer of it, it was written before the destruction of Jerusalem, and when several of the apostles were living, and therefore he could never design by those words to put himself in a succeeding generation. (*John Gill's New Testament Commentary*)

We will find a strong appeal to believers to maintain faith and confidence. They are warned to avoid a purely sacramental, or ritualistic, form of religion, placing the emphasis upon faith. You will not find a syllable in this book that coincides with the contemporary emphasis of the professed church. Nothing will be found here that promotes institutionalism. There is no emphasis upon recruitment (called "evangelism" and "missions" by the moderns). Domestic issues or political strategies are not the focus of the revelation of God. When it comes to institutionalism, the book of Hebrews soundly condemns it! It belonged to the First Covenant, and was replaced by the personal knowledge of God in the New Covenant.

I realize the book of Hebrews is not the whole Bible. However, it is close to the heart of it! We are here provided with an overview of our salvation that is remarkably detailed. The current ministry of Christ, with the need for and effectiveness of it, is developed at length. You will be hard pressed to find such detail anywhere else in Scripture. What is more, the beauty of this volume has refreshment for the Spirit that is scarcely equaled.

In this book, we will come to grips with our need for Christ. We will also see the Father's need for Him. The effects of Jesus' death will be expounded, together with His present administration of the effects of that vicarious death. The reason for the incarnation is expounded, as well as the logic behind His intercession. The absolute superiority of Christ Jesus in every circumstance, and from every vantage point can be perceived with joy. The danger of falling away is sounded, together with the keeping power of faith. We will see the relationship of faith to spiritual growth, and will behold the effectiveness of faith in those that have gone before us.

Time spent in this book is time well spent! We will find spiritual keys here that are indispensable to the comprehension of our great salvation. Let us approach this volume in great expectation of good things! Intend to behold and consider the greatness of Jesus and the glory of the New Covenant. This represents an emphasis that is relatively unknown in the "*church world*." However, it is requisite to the experience and understanding of your salvation.

GOD SPOKE LONG AGO

It Is God That Has Spoken

It is imperative that this truth be seen! When it comes to heavenly messages, the Source must be traced back to God! He is the One that has spoken to humanity, whether in the past or in the present. It is His will that is being made known, His purpose, His objective! Care must be taken not to be sidetracked by an earthly view of authorship. When an awareness of Divine authorship fades into the background, the Word ceases to have eternal relevance.

The Bible is a literary work, but not primarily so! It is basically a word from God Himself, and must be so viewed. Whatever your perception of the writers of Scripture, you must not miss the fact that it is God that has spoken! He is the real Author!

The book of Genesis alone contains the words "**GOD SAID**" 28 times (1:3,6,9,11,14,20,24,26,28,29; 2:18; 3:1,13,14,22; 4:25; 6:13; 9:12,17; 17:9,15,19; 20:6; 21:12; 35:1,10,11; 41:51). The words "**THE LORD SAID**" are found in Genesis alone 18 times; 213 times from Genesis through Malachi! You cannot read Scripture discerningly without confronting a speaking God! The book of Hebrews assumes an awareness that God has communicated with humanity. That cognition must be dominate in our thinking if we are to obtain a blessing from this book.

The Bible is a literary work, but not primarily so! It is basically a word from God Himself, and must be so viewed. Whatever your perception of the writers of Scripture, you must not miss the fact that it is God that has spoken!

"At Sundry Times"

The aggressiveness of the Divine initiative is seen in the diversity of the communication. He spoke "*at sundry times,*" or "*many portions*" (NASB). The NIV translates

it “*many times*,” while the NKJV uses “*various times*.” This expression points to the diversity of the utterances more than to their number. He did not speak one time, but many times. He was divulging His Mind, His Purpose, His will! His intention was not merely to set forth a code of human conduct, but to reveal what had been determined on the trestle boards of eternity!

He spoke in Eden, revealing His intent for mankind to administrate the works of His hands (Gen 1:28). He spoke to Satan, making known a plan formed before the foundation of the world (Gen 3:15). He made known to wicked Cain that He recognized the doing of good (Gen 4:7). He revealed His intolerance for sin to Noah, and saved him and his house because of their faith (Gen 6-7). **God spoke at sundry times!**

Every word from God was not the same, even though it projected the same purpose. God did not merely repeat the same message at different times, nor did He speak in the same way. He spoke in “various ways”, or ”many portions.”

To Abraham He unfolded His purpose to bless the world through a man (Gen 12:1-3). The Lord spoke to Israel through Moses, revealing the only acceptable morality (Ex 20). He spoke through Judges, Priests, and Kings, making known His will. The Prophets were used to communicate the reactions, purpose, and heart of Jehovah God. **He spoke at sundry times!** These “*sundry times*” spanned over 1,000 years, and involved at least twenty-seven different writers.

Worldly religions do not have such a god! Their “*writings*” are voluminous in words, but not developed over long periods of time. They are not consistent as are the Scriptures. It was **God** that spoke at sundry times. For that reason, there is perfect consistency in all that He said.

These times were not planned by men. God did not speak until He wanted to do so. Men may have desired a word from God, but that required more than human desire. The analysis of wise men could not produce a word from God then, and it cannot today. Whatever the time of the message, it is God that has spoken it. Whether it is in Eden, on the verge of the flood, or at the foot of the tower of Babel--it is God that has spoken. The times were not all the same, but the words were all from the same God.

“In Divers Manners”

Every word from God was not the same, although it projected the same purpose. God did not merely repeat the same message at different times, nor did He speak in the same way. He spoke in “*various ways*” (RSV), or “*many portions*” (NASB).

How marvelous and abundant are the “*manners*.” He spoke in promises, curses, and commitments. There were audible words, dreams, visions, and writings. He spoke through holy men as they articulated their deep yearnings and aspirations. There were specific prophecies, or distinct predictions. Adam and Eve heard words of promise. Noah received advance word the world would never again be cursed with a flood. Abraham heard about blessing, and saw a night vision. Jacob and Joseph received dreams, in which Divine purpose was made known. God spoke through angels at Sinai, and even through Balaam’s burro. **God’s words were in “many portions.”**

A cursory recollection of some of the *“manners”* through which God spoke is arresting. Dreams (Gen 10:3; 37:5; Num 12:6), visions (Gen 15:1; Ezek 11:24; Dan 8:1), voices (Ex 19:19; 1 Kgs 19:13; Job 4:16), and angels (Gen 31:11; Num 22:35; 1 Kgs 13:18) are included. There were similitudes (Num 12:8; Dan 10:16), sacrifices (Heb 5:1; 8:3; 9:9), and even the Urim, carried by the High Priest (Ex 28:30; Num 27:21; 1 Sam 28:6). Think how often He put a burning word in the heart and mouth of His prophets, which they could not ignore--a *“burden of the Lord”* (Jer 23:33-38; Isa 13:1; 15:1; Nah 1:1; Zech 9:1; 12:1; Mal 1:1). Think of the variety of writing included in this speaking. There was history (ex., Genesis through Deuteronomy), biographies (ex., Nehemiah, Job, and Ruth), legislation (ex., Exodus, Deuteronomy), true philosophy (ex., Proverbs), and even poetry (ex., Psalms). Where can such diversity be found but in God’s Word?

But all of these were fragmentary. They were only *“portions,”* and not the whole. As for Divine intent, they were only introductory, although the seed of Omnipotence was in them. They were not enough--they were only *“a portion.”* It is not that they did not contain enough information — the purpose was there, but could not be discerned with the finite mind. Someone had to come and open the Scriptures, showing what was hidden beneath the written surface.

These *“portions”* revealed not only a speaking God, but One with purpose and power. If men gave heed to them, they sensed their greatness. The “holy prophets” were not content merely to pass them along to men. They wanted to see into them. Peter says, *“As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow”* (1 Pet 1:10-11, NASB).

A Divinely originated catalyst was required to produce spiritual insight, or understanding. The unregenerate condition of humanity has rendered man incapable of putting the *“portions”* together in a profitable manner. Those out of fellowship with God do nor have such abilities.

“The Fathers”

Our text is yet more focused! These words were addressed *“to the fathers by the prophets”* — by *“holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit”* (2 Pet 1:21, NKJV). The words were not simply thrown out into the air, or placed in public libraries, to be found only by prodigious thinkers. These were words to be spread to all the world!

God spoke *“to the fathers.”* The contemporary church does not make much of *“the fathers”* — i.e., the fathers of the faith. These were epitomized in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex 3:15,16; 4:5; Deut 1:8; 6:10; 9:5; Luke 1:55; Acts 3:13). Stephen, quoting from Moses, reminded his critics of God’s words. *“I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob”* (Acts 7:32). The emphasis of the contemporary church has turned the consideration of men away from *“the fathers”* to other things. To some, *“fathers”* means *church fathers*. To others, it means the *fathers of our country*. Such views are unbecoming for the sons and daughters of the Most High God!

ENOCH (3052-3187 B.C.)

3500 B.C. Menes unites kingdoms of Egypt, introduces irrigation.

NOAH (3118-2168 B.C.)

2780 B.C. Imhotep designs first step pyramid at Saqqara, Egypt.

2700 B.C. Cheops builds Great Pyramid at Giza.

2697 B.C. Huang-ti becomes legendary "Yellow Emperor" of China.

2640 B.C. Si Ling-chi introduces silk production in China.

THE FLOOD (2518 B.C.)

THE TOWER OF BABEL (2403 B.C.)

2340 B.C. Sargon establishes Semitic and Sumerian civilizations.

ABRAHAM (2166-1991)

JOSEPH IN EGYPT (14898-1805 B.C.)

1750 B.C. Hammurabi, Babylonian king, issues code of laws.

MOSES (1526-1407 B.C.)

PERIOD OF THE JUDGES (1367-1015 B.C.)

1270 B.C. Abulfaraj, Syrian historian, compiles first encyclopedia.

1100 B.C. Pa-out-She, Chinese scholar, compiles first dictionary.

DAVID ANOINTED KING (1025 B.C.)

KING SOLOMON (968 B.C.)

ELIJAH (868 B.C.)

ELISHA (852 B.C.)

OBADIAH AND JOEL (850 B.C.)

AMOS AND JONAH (760 B.C.)

760 B.C. Homer, poet, writes Iliad and Odyssey.

HOSEA/MICAH/ISAIAH (740 B.C.)

730 B.C. Ahaz, prince of Judah, invents sundial.

700 B.C. Sennacherib, Syrian king, builds first aqueduct.

673 B.C. Terpander, Greek musician, develops stringed instruments.

NAHUM/ZEPHENIAH/JEREMIAH/HABAUKKUK (636 B.C.)

DANIEL AND EZEKIEL (605 B.C.)

600 B.C. Lao-tze develops philosophy of Taoism.

563 B.C. Siddhartha Gautama develops Buddhist philosophy.

559 B.C. Cyrus establishes Persian Empire.

551 B.C. K'ung Fu-tzu develops philosophy of Confucianism.

550 B.C. Confucius

550 B.C. Anaximander invents star charts and model of spherical Earth.

540 B.C. Pythagoras, mathematician, studies musical harmonics.

HAGGAI AND ZECHARIAH (516 B.C.)

508 B.C. Cleisthenes introduces democratic government in Athens.

485 B.C. Aeschylus writes first early Greek tragedies.

480 B.C. Sophocles writes early Greek tragic poems.

460 B.C. Pericles establishes democracy in Athens.

EZRA/NEHEMIAH/MALACHI (450 B.C.)

450 B.C. Euripides writes Greek tragedies; Herodotus becomes known as father of history.

440 B.C. Democritus introduces concept of atomic structure of matter;

Hippocrates becomes known as father of medicine;

Socrates teaches that virtue and knowledge are identical.

400 B.C. Aristophanes introduces political satire in Greek comedies;

Plato writes dialogues that help shape Western thought.

PERIOD OF DIVINE SILENCE UNTIL JOHN THE BAPTIST

340 B.C. Aristotle contributes to development of logical thought.

334 B.C. Alexander the Great begins conquest of known world.

321 B.C. Chandragupta forms first great empire in India.

300 B.C. Euclid develops deductive system of mathematics;

Meng-tse spreads philosophy of Confucius in Orient.

250 B.C. Aristrarchus develops modern concept of universe.

236 B.C. Asoka, emperor of India, becomes Buddhist missionary.

221 B.C. Shih Hwang-ti, first emperor of China, begins Great Wall.

220 B.C. Archimedes, Mathematician, develops physics and mechanics.

218 B.C. Hannibal leads army from Spain over Alps to Italy.

160 B.C. Hipparchus develops trigonometry.

78 B.C. Julius Caesar begins his climb as ruler of Roman Empire.

63 B.C. Cicero, orator, compiles record of Roman life.

38 B.C. Horace, Roman poet, classic satires.

30 B.C. Virgil, Roman poet, writes Aeneid.

27 B.C. Caesar Augustus becomes first Roman emperor.

In a foundational sense, *“the fathers”* refers to the progenitors of the Jewish nation, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In the immediate context, it refers to the chosen people themselves. Often the term is used in this sense. *“For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you”* (Acts 3:22). *“And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus”* (Acts 13:32,33b). *“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers . . . ”* (Acts 22:3). Similar references may be found in John 6:31, Acts 7:11-19,38,39,44,45, Acts 28:17, and 1 Corinthians 10:1. It is essential that God’s people speak in words that the Holy Spirit employs! We must not allow ourselves to forget, *“salvation is of the Jews”* (John 4:22). The Spirit states the case with undeniable strength in Romans 9:4-5. *“ . . . Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen”* (NASB). God did not speak to the Gentiles about a coming Messiah, but to *“the fathers”* --the Jews! After all of the concocted theories about the contemporary status of the Jews, it is still true: *“But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you”* (Rom 11:17-18, NASB). Have a wholesome regard for *“the fathers!”* It is because of them that you are blessed, and the *“root”* of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob still supports you!

Whatever we may think of the “great men” of the world, a higher priority must be placed on the holy prophets. They were spokesman for God! We must not allow ourselves to forget, “salvation is of the Jews”

Although the world had produced many supposedly *great philosophers and thinkers*, God did not speak through them! There have been renown historians, poets, and thinkers--but God spoke *“to the fathers by the prophets,”* not by the worldly-wise! The table on page five lists the names of individuals that are considered great by this world. While they were responsible for some remarkable accomplishments, God did not speak to the fathers by them! They were not unique by heaven’s standards. Whatever we may think of the *“great men”* of the world, a higher priority must be placed on the holy prophets. They were spokesmen for God! We must not allow ourselves to forget, *“salvation is of the Jews”* (John 4:22). The Spirit states the case with undeniable strength in Romans 9:4-5. *“ . . . Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen”* (NASB). God did not speak to the Gentiles about a coming Messiah, but to *“the fathers”* --the Jews! After all of the concocted theories about the contemporary status of the Jews, it is still true: *“But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you”* (Rom 11:17-18, NASB). Have a wholesome regard for *“the fathers!”* It is because of them that you are blessed, and the *“root”* of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob still supports you!

We must not allow ourselves to become enamored by the world’s wise men. Their wisdom, however astute, has neither moral nor spiritual power. It cannot

adequately address the matter of sin, nor can it justify us before God. The Lord has not spoken to us through them, but through the Son! Let us bow before Him, and Him alone! Let God's people develop an unquenchable appetite for the word of Christ! Let them see the Scriptures as His message. Let them behold Jesus as their Theme, their focus, their message! If we do not relate Jesus Christ to Scripture, we only have a lifeless book of law--one that cannot confer the life we so sorely require. The Bible reflects Christ's Person!

IN THESE LAST DAYS

The message of God has been clarified in these times! The vista of revelation has been extended! As time has progressed, the message of God has been marked by greater clarity.

History--particularly Divine history--is interesting. However, it is nothing to compare with "*these last days*." The message of God has been clarified in these times! The vista of revelation has been extended! As time has progressed, the message of God has been marked by greater clarity. All of this has occurred because God "*is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*" (2 Pet 3:9). You are living in the most advantageous times in the history of the world. This is not because of the events that are taking place in our day. It is not because of technological advances, or the sudden explosion of worldly wisdom. Those enamored of spiritual trends may even suppose the expectation of a possible awakening makes it the greatest of all times. But this is not the case. This is time in which Jesus is speaking!

The Holy Spirit proclaims the advantage to be the source of Divine communication. God has reserved His best and most thorough Spokesman for "*the last days*." If one cannot read the signs of the times, then the consideration of the One through Whom God is speaking will identify the times for us. These are "*the last days*."

Micah spoke of "*the last days*" as a time of increased spiritual appetite and knowledge--a time when people would be taught by God in a glorious way. "*And it will come about in the last days that the mountain of the house of the LORD will be established as the chief of the mountains . . . the peoples will stream to it. And many nations will come and say, Come and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD and to the house of the God of Jacob, That He may teach . . .*" (Micah 4:1-2). The prophet was speaking of the time when the work of God would reach its apex. It would be "*last*" in respect to the Lord's work in the world in its temporal state.

From another viewpoint--one particularly relevant to this book--the "*last days*" were the conclusion of the dispensation of Law. The Revised Version translates the verse, "*at the end of these days*." With the advent of Christ, the age of first covenant was "*becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear*" (Heb 8:13b, NASB). As glorious as the message of Moses and the Prophets was, it paled in the bright light of God's last Messenger!

"*These last days*" are the last of the supremacy of Moses! The Prophets are now secondary! The Law has lost its original glory! The ancient people are no longer the center of Divine attention. The First Covenant has been replaced with one of greater glory! This is "*the day of salvation*" (2 Cor 6:2). What is more, the marvelous period in which we live will conclude with the consummation of all things. It will usher in the fulfillment of all that was spoken by the holy Prophets. It will conclude with the passing of the heavens and the earth, and the unveiling of the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwells righteousness. The devil and his angels will be cast into the lake of fire, together with all that have rejected the Lord and His Christ. As for the saints, the greatness of God's kingdom will

be given to them, and they shall reign with Jesus (Dan 7:18,22,27).

This is the era called **“these last days.”** God has a special Spokesman for these days--a superior Spokesman. He has no peers, and will judge the world by the very words He has spoken (John 12:47-48). How fitting that we consider this Representative and Who it is that speaks through Him! His message will transcend all others in both content and effects.

HE HAS SPOKEN THROUGH HIS SON

We dare not approach this declaration in a mere academic manner. Here is something faith must grasp. Properly seen, this truth will compel us to adjust our priorities. The focus of our lives will change. Here is a message that goes deeper than intellect can reach. It is more profound than worldly wisdom can grasp.

Note with care what God has said. He has spoken to us during this closing era of time **“through His Son.”** Prior to Jesus, God did not speak to the world through the wisest and most astute of their number! He spoke only through prophets, often obscure and crude. If God did not speak through worldly spokesman before Jesus, you can be sure He does not do so in **“these last days.”**

Those with a penchant for the worldly-wise do well to give heed to the word of the Lord! Our churches have been inundated with a flood of worldly counsel. It covers everything from physical disorders to church growth. There are people that wear the name of Jesus that have more respect for etymology, philosophy, and rules of logic than they do for the words of Jesus. Some have taken upon themselves to even tamper with the words of Jesus--all in the name of purported scholarship. They cause people to question the words of the Son, and to feel comfortable with contradicting His teaching.

When it comes to the consideration of the Lord Jesus Christ, we stand in the Holy of Holies. There is no more lofty consideration than this! We will find the Father has placed everything in the hands of the Son, then given Him to us as Head of all things!

Because **“every knee”** will bow to the Son, and **“every tongue”** confess that He is Lord (Rom 14:11), we do well to hear Him. God said from heaven, **“Hear ye Him!”** (Matt 17:5). This is the Father’s Spokesman, the exclusive Means through which He speaks to us. We do well to make much of **“the Son.”** Contemporary views of Jesus Christ are shallow, unbecoming, and often grossly distorted. Well meaning students of religion (I speak charitably) speak of Christ’s “Divinity,” but rarely of His Sonship. They do not know that His Godhood is wrapped up in the term **“the Son of God.”** The prevailing issue that faces men is whether or not Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Those that believe this overcome the world (1 John 5:4-5). Whoever confesses this dwells in God, and God in him (1 John 4:15). The person believing this **“has the witness in himself”** (1 John 5:10).

The book of Hebrews is said to have been written about 62 A.D. It goes without saying that our text, therefore, is not referring to Christ’s earthly ministry. This is a spiritual ministry, discernible only by faith. It includes the words Jesus spoke while among us. Jesus has not ceased to speak. He is now **“speaking from heaven”** (Heb 12:25). He still teaches those that come to Him (Matt 11:28-29). When you submit yourself to

the Word of God, you are not alone. Christ teaches you! He is the Spokesman from heaven. He is the exclusive Expositor of God (Matt 11:27). If the Ephesians *“heard Him”* and were *“taught by Him”* after He returned to heaven (Eph 4:21), why should it be thought strange that the same thing occurs today? The Spirit speaks expressly on this subject, and we do well to give heed to His words. *“But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast. So, as the Holy Spirit says: Today, if you hear his voice . . .”* (Heb 3:6-7, NIV).

The Son of God uses means--primarily Scripture--but He is the real teacher. His name is still *“Wonderful Counselor”* (Isa 9:6-7). If you have an ear to hear, you will still hear Him speaking to the churches, counseling them, and tutoring those that come to Him. His perspective is the ONLY perspective! His emphasis is the ONLY emphasis! His objective is the ONLY objective! When you read His words in the Gospels, you are being introduced to the One through Whom God is speaking NOW. Listen to Him!

AND WHAT OF THE SON?

Our minds are to be stretched in our consideration of the Son! When it comes to Jesus, let men abandon restrictive views, and stunted concepts.

Because this is intended to be an overview, we will not only introduce these remarkable aspects of the Lord Jesus. Candidly, this is exceedingly difficult for me. I have confidence that you will pursue the implications of these things on your own, thereby deriving the meat of the text. When it comes to the consideration of the Lord Jesus Christ, we stand in the Holy of Holies. There is no more lofty consideration than this! We will find the Father has placed everything in the hands of the Son, then given Him to us as Head of all things! This is intended to build your confidence, and encourage you to run an effective race, fight a good fight, and finish the course that has been set before you by Omnipotence.

Appointed Heir of All Things

Elsewhere it is written, *“For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created by Him and for Him”* (Col 1:16). Jesus is the reason for the world, and for humanity. Things that can be seen, and things that cannot be seen were made for Him. All forms of power are His; He is the reason for their existence, and they will all be brought under Him. *“The kingdoms of this world”* themselves will yet *“become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ”* (Rev 11:15). Everything is going to be gathered into one in Christ! That is the Divine appointment. The history of the world is nothing less than the outworking of this eternal purpose. As it is written, *“He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fulness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth”* (Eph 1:9-10, NASB).

Who is a more suitable Spokesman? **He speaks with this appointment in mind.** His words will prepare us to participate with Him in this glorious heirship. Remember, *“He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son”* (Rev 21:7, NKJV). Such are *“joint heirs with Christ”* (Rom 8:17)--a staggering consideration! Jesus is speaking to bring men into the ultimate inheritance with Himself! His design is not simply to tell us what to do, but to orient us to reign with Him (2 Tim 2:12).

Through Whom God

Made the Worlds

Creation is larger than it appears! Our world is the focus of redemption, but it is not all that was created by and for Christ Jesus. Through the Son, God made “the worlds” (touj aiwnaj). Different translations use the word “*universe*” (NIV) and “*the world*” (NASB, RSV). Darby and the ASV also use “*worlds*,” while Young’s Literal Translation uses “*the ages*.”

Contemporary views of Jesus Christ are shallow, unbecoming, and often grossly distorted. Well meaning students of religion (I speak charitably) speak of Christ’s “Divinity,” but rarely of His Sonship.

The phrase “the worlds” (touj aiwnaj) is used 32 times in the New Testament Scriptures. It is used in a variety of ways. It is translated “*forever*” (Matt 6:13; Lk 1:33; Rom 1:25; 9:5; 11:36; 16:27; 2 Cor 11:31; Heb 13:8; Jude 25) “*forevermore*” (Gal 1:5; Rev 1:18), and “*forever and ever*” (Phil 4:20; 1 Tim 1:17; 2 Tim 4:18; Heb 13:21; 1 Pet 4:11; 5:11; Rev 1:6; 4:9,10; 5:13; 7:12; 10:6; 11:15; 14:11; 15:7; 19:3; 20:10; 22:5).

This text, however, appears to use the word in a unique way. Later, in the eleventh chapter, the Spirit uses this word in regard to creation. “*By faith we understand that the worlds (tou.j aiwv/naj) were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible*” (NASB). Doubtless, this refers to the expression in our text, “*through Whom also He made the worlds.*” Elsewhere in Scripture, the extent of creation is also mentioned. The book of Colossians contains an expression almost identical to the one we are considering. “*And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together*” (Col 1:15-17, NASB). Herein is a most wonderful declaration!

Our minds are to be stretched in our consideration of the Son! When it comes to Jesus, let men abandon restrictive views, and stunted ideas. The heavens and the earth are involved in the creation. It is probable this is larger than what men call “*the universe*.” Everything in our universe consists of things that “*can be seen*.”

Invisible Things

There are also things that cannot be seen; i.e., do not accommodate themselves to human vision. This is **not** referring to things that can be seen with the naked eye, but require a microscope, or some other mechanism, to enlarge them for our vision! **Invisible things cannot be seen with any earthly assistance.** They are **not** things that merely need to be made larger. They belong to another dimension. Think of angels, spirits, cherubim, seraphim, the devil, demons, etc. These are some things that are “*invisible*” --all made by and for Jesus. The only exception is God Himself, Who also is “*invisible*” (Col 1:15; Heb 11:27).

Thrones and Dominions

There are “*thrones . . . dominions . . . rulers . . . authorities*.” On the lower side of this hierarchy are earthly kings and potentates, but they are nothing to be compared with spiritual authorities. Daniel was told of powerful spiritual powers. Two were mentioned in particular: “*the prince of Persia*,” and “*the prince of Grecia*” (Dan 10:13,20). John the Revelator wrote of angels that had “*power over*

fire” (Rev 14:18), and “*the angel of the waters*” (Rev 16:4-5). These, together with every other form of authority, were made “*by Him and for Him.*” For that reason, no personality or influence from the seen or unseen realm can separate us “*from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Rom 8:35-39).

The Brightness of God’s Glory

This thought has challenged the greatest minds of our race--as well as that of angels. Jesus is “*radiance of God's glory*” (NIV), or “*the brightness of His glory*” (NRSV). Darby’s translation, and the ASV, says it this way; “*effulgence of his glory.*”

The Spirit is not referring to a physical impression of God, like Israel experienced at Sinai (Ex 24:10). God’s Person is comprehended by a perception of His purpose, His work, His glorious objectives. Looking into the face of Jesus is not an activity of the flesh, like those that beheld Him before His death and resurrection. As it is written, “*Therefore from now on we recognize no man according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer*” (2 Cor 5:16, NASB).

God the Father is most clearly seen in Jesus! He is not perceived with such clarity anywhere else! The church, even though it is raised and sanctified, does not project such glory. It is not the “effulgence” of the glory of God! If men are ever to become acquainted with God, they must become acquainted with Christ Jesus!

God the Father is seen most clearly in the Lord Jesus Christ. As it is written, “*For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ*” (2 Cor 4:6). Only in Christ is an accurate perception of God found! Study cannot appropriate such knowledge, the analysis of nature, or a finely-spun Scriptural hermeneutic. Men search in vain to comprehend God apart from Christ Jesus. As it is written, “. . . so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:2-3, NIV).

When we behold the significance of Jesus--His Person and accomplishments--we are seeing the glory of God! We obtain insight into the “*love of God*” (1 John 3:16). His desire to transform and receive men is seen in Jesus. When you are confronted with the Son of God in the Gospels, you are beholding God! The responses of the Savior to the infirm, children, religious bigots, earnest seekers, and those that are contrite reveal the heart of God! Jesus is the brightness of God’s glory! You could not see this glory in Moses--even when his face shone as the noonday sun! You could not see it in Elijah, even when he was translated into heaven! Nor, indeed, could this glory be seen in the Law of Moses!

God the Father is most clearly seen in Jesus! He is not perceived with such clarity anywhere else! The church, even though it is raised and sanctified, does not project such glory. It is not the “*effulgence*” of the glory of God! If men are ever to become acquainted with God, they must become acquainted with Christ Jesus! They must learn the significance of His words and works. They must be captured by the glory of His Person. If the church is going to do the work of God, it must major on Christ Jesus. It will not do to become occupied with what it conceives to be the work of God if Jesus is neglected! To the extent Jesus is obscured, God is veiled, and His work cannot be discerned!

God's Express Image

Our text does not stop here. It continues to emphasize the indispensability of Jesus to the work of God! In His humbled state--that of the Man--Jesus is still *"the express Image of God."* The NRSV translates this, *"the exact imprint of God's very being,"* while the NIV reads, *"the exact representation of His being."*

Paul refers to Jesus being *"in the form of God"* (Phil 2:6), and John calls Him *"the Word"* which was *"in the beginning,"* was *"with God,"* and *"was God"* (John 1:1). However, both texts refer to Jesus in the pre-incarnate state. Our text calls Him a glorified Man! Prior to His incarnation, the Word could not be studied by men. He was beyond their reach, outside of the sphere of human experience. In substance, there was no difference between the Word and God; they had the same *"form,"* or spiritual constitution. Both were "spirit," and, consequently, beyond the realm of human analysis.

Prior to Jesus, men could only study the RESULT of God's work. They could, for example, behold His thumb print in creation. Something of *"His eternal power and divine nature"* could be seen in what He had created (Rom 1:20, NRSV). The representation, however was fragmentary, crude, and nothing to be compared with the fulness of the glory of God! Nevertheless, this is not the case with Jesus. He is not a partial revelation of God, or an introduction to Him with Whom we have to do! He is *"the very image of his substance"* (ASV), exact in every detail. In creation, the limitation was in the revelation itself. In the Law, the same limitation existed. In Christ, however, the limitation is in our vision, not in the revelation!

It is staggering to consider that the *"fulness of God"* could dwell corporately in *"the Man Christ Jesus."* Yet, this is the revealed truth. Hear the proclamation, and stand in wonder. *"For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him"* (Col 1:19, NIV). *"For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form"* (Col 2:9, NIV).

This Divine arrangement makes it possible for us to receive of this *"fulness"* -- for the Divine nature to dwell within us! *"And of His fullness have all we received, and grace for grace"* (John 1:16). The point of the *"fulness"* of God dwelling in Christ is not the mere increase of information about God--although that certainly takes place. **The conferment of the Divine Nature upon redeemed humanity is the point!** Now men can *"participate in the Divine Nature"* (2 Pet 1:4). This simply could not take place before. **Men cannot be brought into fellowship with God through partial means!** The Law, not being *"the fullness of God,"* could not bring men into vital union with God. Holy men like Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Job, Moses, Samuel, and Elijah could not make men holy. They did not have the capacity to confer the Divine Nature upon men, because they did not possess the fullness of God.

Nevertheless, that is not the case with Jesus! Because He is the *"express Image of God,"* we can be conformed to His image (Rom 8:29). He can pour Himself into His people without affecting His own nature. This is why the church is called, *"the fullness of him who fills everything in every way"* (Eph 1:23, NIV). It is why every believer can himself attain *"to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ"* (Eph 4:13, NIV).

The Holy Spirit is not giving us a philosophical view of Jesus. He is showing the relevancy of Christ to the salvation of God! Men may imagine themselves capable of measuring up the Divine expectations through human effort alone. That is only a vain imagination, to be cast down with our spiritual weaponry (2

Cor 10:3-5). As indispensable as the Scriptures are, they are empty and powerless without Jesus Christ! They are not the “*express image of God*” --Jesus is! The “*fulness of God*” does not dwell bodily in them--it does in Jesus! The “*brightness of the glory of God*” is not contained in Scripture, but in Jesus!

Let no one suppose for one moment that this is speaking derogatorily of Scripture. We will not allow such a foolish thought to dominate our thinking! Because the “*fulness of God*” is found in Jesus--because the “*brightness of the glory of God*” is in Him--because He, and He alone, is the “*express Image of God,*” it is written: “*You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me to have life*” (John 5:39-40, NIV). We are never justified in falling into Bibliolatry, or the worship of the Bible. It is the appointed means through which the Savior works--but the Savior is the real point! I fear many with whom I have walked have, like the studious Jews of old, actually allowed their approach to the Bible obscure the “*brightness of the glory of God.*”

The Glorified Sustainer

How marvelous are the attributes of Jesus! Everything in every dimension was made by Him, and it was all made for Him! But it does not end there! He sustains it all!

How marvelous are the attributes of Jesus! He made everything in every dimension, and it was all made for Him! Still, it does not end there! He sustains it all! He is presently “*sustaining all things by his powerful word*” (NIV). Elsewhere the Spirit testifies of Jesus, “*He Himself is before all things, and in Him all things hold together*” (Col 1:17, NRSV). The word “*hold together,*” or “*consist*” (*sune,sthken*) is an interesting one. It means to “*put together, or cohere; to stand together, or have existence; i.e., to continue.*” Men speak of the law of gravity, centrifugal and centripetal force, and other “*natural laws.*” They speak as though the universe was held together by laws that have been set in motion. Their analysis of things may appear to justify their conclusion, but it is still wrong. The exalted Christ keeps the universe from disintegration. The orderliness and precision of the creation are owing to its Creator, not laws or principles.

Technically speaking, there is no happenstance in what men call “*nature.*” These forces are all marshaled and controlled by the Son of God! He can “*call for*” a “*judgment by fire,*” which dries up the great deep and devours the land (Amos 7:4, NIV). By His word He can call for an increase of grain (Ezek 36:29), or for a famine in the land (Psa 105:16). Even in a “*whirlwind and the storm,*” He has His way (Nah 1:3). He can cause rain to come or cease to come (Deut 11,14). He can extend a day, causing the sun to shine in its brightness beyond its appointed time (Josh 10:12-13). If He commands ravenous birds to bring food to His prophet, they will do so (1 Kgs 17:4). In Him is the word fulfilled; “*When the earth totters, with all its inhabitants, it is I who keep its pillars steady. Selah*” (Psa 75:3, NRSV). It is no wonder that the twenty-four elders before the Throne speak thus of Him. “*You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being*” (Rev 4:11, NIV).

Yet it is not nature alone that is held together by the “*word of His power!*” The whole redemptive economy is in Christ’s hand! If we marvel at creation, we will marvel more at the “*great salvation*” over which He presides. Why is it that “*all things work together for good to them that love God, who are called according to His purpose*” (Rom 8:28). It is not because things have been locked into a specific direction and appointed end! It is “*the Word of*

His power” that brings things together for our ultimate good! This is why **“no man”** is able to remove the believer from the grasp of Deity (John 10:27-29). It is why Paul, under great

There, in the Son, God judged the sins of the world. He poured out His indignation upon the Son. His holy, righteous character came into sharp conflict with the transgressions of humanity. It was then that the “chastisement of our peace” was experienced by Jesus

duress, could say, “ . . . *I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance*” (Phil 1:19, NIV).

Our salvation, down to the most meticulous detail, is supervised and held together by the Lord Jesus Christ. He mediates the covenant in which we find ourselves (Heb 9:15; 12:24). He intercedes before the Father on the behalf of those that have received the atonement (Heb 7:25). He monitors our temptations, not allowing them to exceed our ability, and seeing to it they come with an escape route (1 Cor 10:13). Our Lord dispatches angelic hosts to protect and minister to us (Heb 1:13-14). Even the Holy Spirit functions under Him for the good of God’s people! Our complete confidence in Him is fully justified from every conceivable view.

He Purged Our Sins

The closer we are to the Lord, the more we will make of the removing of our sins. In a sense, this work was introductory, but we must not allow that consideration to diminish the magnitude of this accomplishment! God could proceed no further with His purpose for humanity until sin had been dealt with, and that decisively! The thrice holy God could not overlook sin, or simply pass it by. As it is written, “ *The LORD . . . by no means clearing the guilty*” (Ex 34:7, NRSV). Nahum said of God, “*the LORD will by no means clear the guilty*” (1:3). His nature will not allow Him to look past guilt. It must be removed, and that in a righteous way; i.e., a manner that does not comprise the integrity of God, or coerce mankind, made in the image of God. This, by no means, is a small or inconsequential task! 1,500 years of sacrifices under the Law did not remove so much as a single sin. No guilty conscience was purged, and no individual regenerated under that ancient system—even though it was God-ordained!

With the entrance of Jesus into the world, hope sprang forth like a

Mark it well, Jesus did not “purge” our sins by a Divine fiat! He created “the worlds” with His Word, and “upholds all things” by His Word--but it is not so with the purging of our sins! He could summon a universe into existence by His word, but He could not speak our sins away!

beautiful flower. A resolution to the sin problem loomed on the horizon of time. John the Baptist saw it and cried, “*Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*” (John 1:29). Everything that was created was “*made by Him!*” It was all made “*for Him.*” It is all sustained “*by Him.*” Yet, He is the one that dealt with the wretched condition of humanity. God Himself “*laid on Him the iniquity of us all*” (Isa 53:6).

Mark it well, Jesus did not “*purge*” our sins by a Divine fiat! He created “*the worlds*” with His Word, and “*upholds all things*” by His Word--but it is not so with the purging of our sins! He

could summon a universe into existence by His word, but He could not *spe*ak our sins away! That would require a sacrifice--the ultimate sacrifice! He must be ***“made to be sin for us”*** (2 Cor 5:21), bearing ***“our sins in His body on the tree”*** (1 Pet 2:24). This would involve being ***“made a curse for us”*** (Gal 3:10-13), and being forsaken by God (Matt 27:46). For our sins to be ***“removed,”*** the Son must, for a season, be removed from God! God would raise Him, but not until He had ***“delivered Him up for us all”*** (Rom 4:35; 8:32). The Father would not allow His soul to remain in hades, but it must go there (Acts 2:27). Jesus, by Himself, was made to ***“taste death for every man”*** (Heb 2:9).

He ***“by Himself”*** purged our sins. It was a solitary work, performed by a solitary person. The KJV carries the sense of this text-- ***“by Himself.”*** Other versions lighten the sense of the text by saying, ***“When he had made purification for sins”*** (NRSV), and ***“After he had provided purification for sins”*** (NIV). The expression translated ***“by Himself”*** (diV eautou/ , Scriveners Greek NT; aurtou/ , UBS Greek New Testament) is ***“an intensive pronoun to emphasize identity, setting the individual person or thing apart from others . . . ”*** 1 The point is not only that He accomplished, but that He did it alone! The purging of our sins was not a joint work! Jesus did it ***“by Himself.”*** He accomplished this like David accomplished the defeat of Goliath, or Samson the overthrow of the Philistines.

This is elsewhere emphasized in Scripture. The prophets foretold the accomplishment. ***“I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with . . . the year of my redemption has come. I looked, but there was no one to help . . . so my own arm worked salvation for me, and my own wrath sustained me”*** (Isa 63:3-5). The ***“day of vengeance”*** (Isa 63:4) may be interpreted to be the final public judgment of God’s enemies. However, we do well not to confine it to that event. The Gospel of Christ, or the announcement of the purging of sin, is also the announcement of the revelation of the ***“wrath of God . . . against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of man”*** (Rom 1:16-18). There, in the Son, God judged the sins of the world. He poured out His indignation upon the Son. His holy, righteous character came into sharp conflict with the transgressions of humanity. It was then that the ***“chastisement of our peace”*** was tasted by Jesus (Isa 53:5). When Jesus was sin incarnate, He became the curse of God personified (Gal 3:10-13). It was God Himself that ***“did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all”*** (Rom 8:32, NIV). He was ravaged by the devil, principalities and powers, and the peoples of the world. Like a Lamb, He was led to a ***“slaughter,”*** the likes of which no mortal is capable of conceiving (Isa 53:7).

Jesus ***“purged our sins”*** by removing them from the face of God--from Divine consideration. He fulfilled the type introduced in the pair of goats employed to deal with sin under the Old Covenant. ***“And he shall take of the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats for a sin offering . . . then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering, that is for the people, and bring his blood within the veil . . . and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat: and he shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins . . . And there shall be no man in the tabernacle of the congregation when he goeth in to make an atonement in the holy place, until he come out, and have made an atonement for himself, and for his household, and for all the congregation of Israel . . . And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness: And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness”*** (Lev 16:5-22).

How marvelous the shadow! How much more extraordinary the

Until full atonement had been made, none would could go into the presence of the Lord. But more is involved than this. The sin itself must be removed. It is not enough to make an appeal to Divine mercy if the sin, in fact, remains.

reality! *“Two kids of the goats”* were used to portray coming redemption. One would be used to appeal to Divine mercy; one to take the offence away from view. The appeal to Divine mercy would be made with *“no man”* in the tabernacle of the congregation! Until full atonement had been made, none could go into the presence of the Lord. Nevertheless, more is involved than this. The sin itself must be removed. It is not enough to make an appeal to Divine mercy if the sin, in fact, remains. Aaron, the High Priest, was to confess the sins of the people while laying *“both his hands upon the head of the live goat.”* In one vicarious act, he transferred the sins of the people, *“putting them upon the head of the goat.”* Now, the sins will be removed to a place uninhabitable--where no man could dwell. It would take a *“fit man”* to accomplish the task. Once the man arrived in the desolate land, he would *“let go the goat in the wilderness.”* Never again would that goat be seen! He was left where mortal could not dwell.

How suitable the figure. The Lord Jesus is at once both goats, the High Priest, the mercy seat, and the *“fit man.”* He took the responsibility for our sins, then, by bearing them *“in His body on the tree”* (1 Pet 2:24), removed them to a place where they can never be seen again. They have been removed from those in Christ, and can never be united with them again. *“As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us”* (Psa 103:12).

Who is not willing to spend and be spent for such a Savior as this? What Law is there as compelling as the Lord Jesus Christ? If God has placed everything in His hands, what timorous soul would fail to place their small challenges in that Almighty hand?

He Is Seated

At God’s Right Hand

The purging of our sins did not complete the work of Jesus--it only finished the earthly phase of it. Upon the basis of His vicarious, or substitutionary, atonement, Jesus now sits on the Father’s right hand. He is administrating the covenant, interceding for the saints, and bringing them to glory. He is bringing them through fire and water, trial and tribulation, valleys and mountains! He is subduing their enemies, dispatching angelic forces to aid them, and filling with joy and peace in believing. This is all work to be accomplished from the right hand of the Father.

Mark ends His Gospel with the inclusion of these words. *“After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God”* (Mark 16:19). On the day of Pentecost, Peter credited the mighty display of the Holy Spirit to the working of Jesus at the right hand of God. *“Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this that you both see and hear”* (Acts 2:33, NRSV). Later, the Apostle associated the giving of repentance and the remission of sin to the Savior at God’s right hand. *“God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins”* (Acts 5:31, NRSV). In his violent death, Stephen was afforded the privilege of seeing Jesus *“standing at the right hand of God,”* as though to receive the first to shed his blood because of the Gospel (Acts 7:56). In one grand expression of praise, Paul shows the extent of Christ’s redemptive work. *“Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us”* (Rom 8:34, NIV). The Colossians were reminded that here--where Jesus is--is the only

appropriate place for our affection. *“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God”* (Col 3:1).

Here, at the Father’s right hand, is the place of authority, favor, and effective guidance! It is the Father’s *“right hand”* that is *“full of righteousness”* (Psa 48:10)--and it becomes accessible to us through Christ! Mortals are upheld by this right hand (Isa 41:10), made adequate to the challenges of the faith-life. The Psalmist spoke of *“the saving strength of His right hand”* (Psa 20:6)--and that is where the Lord is! His presence there guarantees the salvation everyone that abides in Christ!

The angels are inferior in every way to Him. His Person is transcendent to theirs. Even in a low and humbled state, when He entered as a Babe into the world, the cry reverberated throughout all of heaven, “Let all the angels of God worship Him!”

It is a *“holy”* right hand, and a victorious one, that is the present residence of our Savior (Psa 98:1). When the Father exerted His mighty power in the resurrection of Christ, *“He raised him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places”* (Eph 1:20). There, He is transcendent to and ruling over *“all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come”* (v 21). The purpose for this exaltation is that He might finalize your salvation, bringing you all the way to glory. His presence there means your faith is not vain, your labors are not vain, and your hope is solid and secure.

He Has Inherited A More Excellent Name

Jesus is superior to all angels; both individual and collective. Take that vast and *“innumerable company of angels,”* and stand them next to Jesus. They are inferior in every way to Him. His Person is transcendent to theirs. Even in a low and humbled state, when He entered as a Babe into the world, the cry reverberated throughout all of heaven, *“Let all the angels of God worship Him!”* (1:6). Here is the declaration. It is grand conclusion to our introduction to Jesus. *“So He became as much superior to the angels as the name He has inherited is superior to theirs”* (Heb 1:4).

Our text does not say the Son is superior to the angels BECAUSE He has inherited a name superior to theirs. This is an affirmation of comparison. His name is as superior to them as His name is to theirs! We only know of the names of two angels, and both of them are favored and mighty: Michael and Gabriel. But what are their names to G1

compare with that of Jesus? They are *“servants,”* and *“ministers,”* He is the King of glory! They do the Lord’s bidding; He determines the bidding! They stand around the throne, He sits in the throne! He is eternal, they are created.

At the name of Jesus, every knee will eventually bow. Every tongue will eventually confess that Jesus is Lord of all! There is no possibility that this will not occur! God has made the appointment, and none can make it null or void. If, in this world, we choose to bow the knee to Jesus and confess that He is the Son of God, our participation in the day of universal confession will be joyous. To behold Jesus as He is NOW--in this world--and to embrace Him by faith, is salvation!

No angel has ever, or ever will, be afforded such honor. But this is not an honor given to Him out of grace or mercy. It is one He deserves. His Person is greater! He has a name that has been *“inherited.”* It is the reward for His grand and glorious work of redemption.

Because this subject will be developed at length in the next lesson, I will go no further with it here. We have reached a grand conclusion to a glorious introduction. We have been exposed to the Lord Jesus in a few short words that challenge the mind, grip and heart, and dominate our affection. A grander Savior we could never have. We have the best in Jesus, in Whom is no deficiency at all!

CONCLUSION

Settle it in your mind to concentrate on Jesus. It is He, and He alone, that has taken away your sins. He alone has at last satisfied a thrice-holy God. It is Jesus that created everything, and for Whom it has been created. It has not been made for you, but you will obtain it all if you remain in Him! His domain is infinitely larger than your small world.

Who can doubt the majesty of the Lord Jesus? He is worthy of our adoration, commitment, and fervent worship. Herein is the secret to spiritual productivity--beholding the glory of Jesus Christ. Let those that speak to the people of God make much of their Savior. This book was written, you must remember, to believers; to people that *“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). It is unfortunate that the gales of legalism have drawn many a frail vessel into tempestuous waters. While sailing in such troubled realms, faith grows weak, confidence takes flight like a wounded dove, and this world appears to be the primary one. These things are delusions, created by the mists of law-keeping.

While those in Christ are not *“without law”* (1 Cor 9:21), they cannot rely upon the Law for justification. When life is lived in dependence upon Law for Divine acceptance, a sound mind is not possible. Everything becomes distorted to such individuals. Hope is no longer vibrant and dominating. *“Full assurance”* (Col 2:2; Heb 6:11; 10:22) is not possible because of a defiled conscience. Salvation in Christ Jesus will not allow *“confidence in the flesh”* (Phil 3:3). The reason for this situation is straightforward. Law-keeping requires concentration on yourself. In such a case, the Lord Jesus no longer fills the vision.

Settle it in your mind to concentrate on Jesus. It is He, and He alone, Who has taken away your sins. He alone has at last satisfied a thrice-holy God. It is Jesus that created everything, and for Whom it has been created. It has not been made for you, but you will obtain it all if you remain in Him! His domain is infinitely larger than your small world. See to it that you do not live within the confines of personal experience, and that your vision extends beyond your own difficulties. The empire of Jesus included things seen and unseen. He is over dominions and powers, that take orders from Him and report to Him. He will rebuke the devourer for your sake, and summon heavenly hosts to aid you! When the storms of life rage against you, He will rebuke them. When you are faced with great floods, He will enable you to pass through them! When the fire looks as though it will ravish you, He will not allow it to kindle upon you, and you will not be burned. He is

the “*Breaker of Israel*” that goes before you, clearing your path to glory.

God has invested everything in the Son-- **everything** ! He had the responsibility of removing the defiling transgression. He alone could overthrow the “*accuser of the brethren*” (Rev 12:10), and plunder spiritual rulers that controlled entire segments of the world (Col 2:15). Only Jesus could fully satisfy the Father. Only the Son could enter into death and, through the power of the Spirit, triumph over death and the grave. Who else could be seated at the right hand of the Father, making effective intercession for us, and administering a “*better covenant with better promises*” (Heb 8:6)? He alone effectively expounds the Father and His purpose to the believer.

Those that are intent upon gaining approval because of their obedience, must do more than keep what they conceive to be the essential commandments. They must remove their own sin, destroy the devil, and thoroughly satisfy the Father. It is incumbent that they defeat death and the grave, ascend up into heaven, and occupy the throne of God. If this cannot be done, they require a Savior. Thank God that is precisely what we have! Furthermore, it is the Savior that speaks to us. He does so in a manner conducive to salvation. If you will give heed to Him, making Him your focus, you will obtain His “*great salvation.*”

Trust in this Savior, pilgrim! Make Him the center of your thoughts, and the goal of your faith. He has promised never to leave you or forsake you! Considering Jesus will bring the blessing. Who is able to calculate the glorious benefit of that!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

Commentary on the book of Hebrews

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #2

JESUS CHRIST

SUPERIOR TO ANGELS

“For to which of the angels did He ever say, ‘Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee’? And again, ‘I will be a Father to Him and He shall be a Son to Me’? And when He again brings the first-born into the world, He says, ‘And let all the angels of God worship Him. And of the angels He says, Who makes His angels winds, and His ministers a flame of fire. But of the Son He says, ‘The throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom. Thou has loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, The God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy companions.’ And, ‘Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of Thy hands; they will perish, but Thou remainest; and they all will become old as a garment, and as a mantle Thou wilt roll them up; as a garment they will also be changed. But Thou art the same, and Thy years will not come to an end.’ But to which of the angels has He ever said, ‘Sit at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies a footstool for thy feet’? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation? For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense ” (Hebrews 1:5 - 2:2, NASB).

INTRODUCTION

The superiority of the Son has always been an issue among religious people. It

has never been an issue with *“the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* In the minds of men, the Son has been seen as a threat to human institutions and modes of thought. Early Judaizers considered Him inferior to Moses and the Law. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus was opposed by those with an inordinate attachment to Law.

How many are the things that have been exalted above the Lord Jesus Christ. These represent considerations that dominate the minds of men, motivating them and determining the direction of their thinking. These competing considerations include religious institutions, the family, government, ecology, education, popularity, financial independence, and entertainment. Surface thinkers think nothing of saturating their minds with history, astronomy, mathematics, fiction, and poetry. They do not give sufficient time to hearing Jesus, even though He is the exclusive One through Whom God now speaks to them. Too often, those that come in the name of the Lord actually question the validity or applicability of Christ’s words. It is astounding how prevalent this condition is.

In our text, the Spirit is doing more than **asserting** the superiority of Jesus Christ. He is showing the unacceptableness of any other view. Because our affection is to be placed on things above, and not on things on the earth (Col 3:1-3), we are being led to consider the Son of God. The result of this consideration will be two-fold. First, we will be lifted out of ourselves, our weaknesses, and the distracting environment of the seen. Second, we will be brought within the range of blessing, where the ministration of Christ can be realized.

The Means to the Blessing

A word concerning the Divinely appointed means of appropriating salvational benefits is in order. This is particularly relevant as we review the Spirit’s exaltation of the Son of God. It is not enough to have an academic understanding of Scripture--particularly as it relates to Jesus. Mind you, we are not to despise such knowledge, but it is elementary, and incapable of bringing eternal benefits to you.

A word concerning the Divinely appointed means of appropriating salvational benefits is in order. This is particularly relevant as we review the Spirit’s exaltation of the Son of God. It is not enough to have an academic understanding of Scripture--particularly as it relates to Jesus. Mind you, we are not to despise such knowledge, but it is elementary, and incapable of bringing eternal benefits to you.

How wonderfully this is expressed in God’s Word. *“ . . . making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him ”* (Eph 1:16b-17, NASB). *“ . . . seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him . . . ”* (2 Pet 1:3, NASB). *“Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God , and of Jesus our Lord”* (2 Pet 1:2, KJV). *“For if after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ . . . ”* (2 Pet 2:20a, NASB).

The *“knowledge”* mentioned in these texts is not limited to intellectual knowledge. This is **experiential** knowledge. It speaks of spiritual involvement with the Son of God. The word *“knowledge”* comes from *evpignw,sewj* (epignosis, ep-ig'-no-sis); and means *recognition, i.e. full discernment, acknowledgment*. 1 Thayer’s Greek Lexicon says, *“to become thoroughly acquainted*

with, to know thoroughly; to know accurately, know well.” ² This is knowledge that comes from acquaintance with Christ Himself, not merely the record about Him. It necessarily includes Scriptural knowledge, but it extends beyond that. Faith goes further than the intellect. It is rational, but goes beyond rationality.

This means that our exposure to the text of Scripture must be coupled with a believing heart. Jesus has promised identity with the individual that is intent upon knowing Him. *“He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him . . . Jesus answered and said to him, If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him”* (John 14:21,23). This is the *“knowledge”* that characterizes the New covenant. *“ . . . they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest”* (Heb 8:11).

This is joyful familiarity with the Lord. It began with our exposure to God’s Word. It was brought to culmination by means of our faith, and through the power of the Holy Spirit. **There is no salvation without this type of knowledge.** In fact, eternal life, which is salvation in its totality, is knowing the Lord. As it is written, *“And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent”* (John 17:3, NASB).

Because the Spirit works with the Word of God (which is His *“sword”*), time will be spent proclaiming the Lord Jesus. He will be declared in His exalted state, which is altogether glorious. This proclamation will exert a compelling influence upon the hearts of men, drawing them into the circumference of Divine influence. There, in the light of the Son of God, recovery from withdrawals to a system of Law will be experienced. Thus, we are not merely viewing information in this text. Rather, we are being exposed to an undiluted proclamation of our Savior. These words will become the building blocks for our perception of Christ. That perception, if true, will be the vehicle through which the Lord will make Himself known to us.

Allow me to emphasize this important point. Our view of Christ is not based upon personal daily experiences. It is not what Jesus has done *“for me”* that brings the greatest degree of clarity, but how the Spirit declares Him in the Scripture. Without laboring this to the point of distraction, let me affirm it one more time. **Our spiritual familiarity with the Person of Christ is the means through which we are being saved.** The purpose of this section of Hebrews is providing the lofty view of God’s Son that is required to experience fellowship with the Son (1 Cor 1:9). There is no salvation without that!

TO WHICH OF THE ANGELS . . . ?

The Father’s View of the Son

Nothing--absolutely nothing--can be received from God that is not dispensed by Jesus! The Father has divulged His eternal purpose to the Son. Nothing, therefore, can be known concerning what God is doing that is not administered by the Lord Jesus Christ! The Father has also given the Son to have life in Himself; i.e., to be a life-giver! “Life,” in this case, means

a vital relationship with God. This is not possible without the Son of God.

The Spirit begins to shape our thinking by focusing on the Father's attitude toward the Son. This is a foundational view, and is essential to the apprehension of salvation. What we think of Jesus is of little consequence if He is not honored by the Father. That is not as elementary as it may seem. Jesus spoke on this subject, and did so with the greatest sobriety. *"All things have been handed over to me by my Father . . ."* (Matt 11:27a, NRSV). *"The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in His hands"* (John 3:35, NRSV). *"The Father loves the Son and shows Him all that He Himself is doing . . ."* (John 5:20, NRSV). *"The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son . . ."* (John 5:22). *"For just as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son also to have life in Himself . . ."* (John 5:26, NRSV). *" . . . the Son of Man will give you. For it is on Him that God the Father has set His seal"* (John 6:27, NRSV). *" . . . the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world . . ."* (John 10:36, NRSV).

Loving the Son, the Father has placed everything in His hand. Nothing--absolutely nothing--can be received from God that is not dispensed by Jesus! The Father has divulged His eternal purpose to the Son. Nothing, therefore, can be known concerning what God is doing that is not administered by the Lord Jesus Christ! The Father has also given the Son to have life in Himself; i.e., to be a life-giver! *"Life,"* in this case, means a vital relationship with God. This is not possible without the Son of God. There is no identity with the living God apart from *"fellowship"* with the Son (1 Cor 1:9).

You cannot make too much of the Father's attitude toward the Son. Your salvation depends upon the relationship of the Father to the Son. Remember, the Son is representing you. If the Father does not receive and honor Him, He will not receive or honor you! Do not take this truth for granted. Your mind is to dwell upon it. Take it into your heart and ponder it, for faith **must** have this perspective! A self-serving view of the Son will not sustain you. He must be seen as God's Son--One that is highly honored and favored! As *"the Son,"* He is implementing the will of the Father, not the will of humanity. **Enough is not being made these days of the Father's relationship to the Son.**

Our present and ultimate deliverance depend upon the ministry of Jesus Christ. It will require more than powerful angels to bring us home to God! There are an innumerable number of angels, sent to minister to the heirs of salvation--but more is needed than that to enable us to arrive safely in glory! Mighty archangels cannot *"bring us to God!"* Only the Son can do that!

Now the Spirit begins a remarkable comparison of the Son of God to the angelic order. His purpose is not to provide us with an academic comparison. His words bear directly upon our salvation. **Our present and ultimate deliverance depend upon the ministry of Jesus Christ.** It will require more than powerful angels to bring us home to God! There are an innumerable company of angels, sent to minister to the heirs of salvation--but more is needed than that to enable us to arrive safely in glory! Mighty archangels cannot *"bring us to God!"* Nor, indeed, can the six-winged Seraphim or the faithful Cherubim. Only the Son can do that!

Thou Art My Son

A poignant question is asked of us. We are to consider it with sobriety and expectation. *"For to which of the angels did He ever say: 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You'?"* (1:5, NKJV). This is a quotation of Psalms 2:7. This strong affirmation of the

divinity of Jesus was quoted by Paul at Antioch of Pisidia with reference to the bodily resurrection of Jesus. ***“And we declare to you glad tidings; that promise which was made to the fathers. God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You’”*** (Acts 13:33).

This is the confirmation of the accessibility of salvation! ***“Today,”*** as you must know, is a significant word in the redemptive economy. It is equivalent to ***“this is for you,” “this is the time,”*** OR ***“it is within your reach.”*** Do you remember some of the Spirit’s affirmations? ***“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”*** (Luke 4:21). ***“Today salvation has come to this house”*** (Luke 19:9). ***“But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called ‘Today’ ”*** (Heb 3:13). ***“Today , if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts”*** (Heb 4:7). It is as though the Spirit were saying, ***“This is the time of the fulfillment of all the glorious promises of old. The Father has, through the Son, ripped the veil in two, and opened the fountain for cleansing. In reliance upon the Father, and in fulfillment of His eternal purpose, the Son has brought this great salvation within our grasp!”***

There are places in Scripture where angels are called ***“the sons of God.”*** ***“Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them . . . “Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD . . . When (creation) the morning stars sang together, And all the sons of God shouted for joy?”*** (Job 1:2,6; 38:7). The Spirit, however, does not ask if the angelic order is called ***“the sons of God.”*** Rather, He asks if any single angel has ever been declared to be God’s son. Was there ever a point in time when one of these powerful creatures began to be the son of God! Emphatically, there was not! No angel is the ***“express image of God!”*** The fulness of the Godhead does not dwell in any angel. The six-winged seraphim, and the mighty cherubim do not precisely and fully reflect the glory of God!

That is something of what is involved in the term ***“Son of God.”*** God has never spoken to one of the angelic order in this manner. As faithful as they are, ***“who perform His word, Obeying the voice of His word!”*** (Psa 103:20), God the Father has never honored a single one of them by saying ***“Thou art my son!”*** This is not, then, a trite saying--a sort of theological buzzword!

The confession of Jesus as “the Son of God” is the single acknowledgment that qualifies the individual for Divine recognition. It is a confession that confirms the Father has blessed the individual (Matt 16:16-17). It qualifies one to be baptized into Christ (Acts 8:37). This mighty confession empowers the believer to overcome the world

The Son is associated with God in His majesty, and shares in His everlasting throne (Heb 1:3; Rev 3:21). How refreshing to read of the Son, ***“ . . . who was declared the Son of God with power . . . “*** (Rom 1:4, NASB). **149 times** the Holy Spirit refers to ***“the Son”*** in Scripture! 35 of those times, Jesus is called simply ***“the Son,”*** emphasizing the uniqueness of that term. 38 times we read of ***“the Son of God”*** , showing an exclusive identity with the Father. 69 times He is called ***“the Son of Man,”*** underscoring that He is the premier man, standing alone in distinctness. Twice God spoke from heaven saying, ***“This is My . . . Son”*** (Matt 3:17; 17:5). No elect angel has been afforded such an honor--even though they have no sin, are faithful to fulfill all of their commissions, and abide around the Throne of the Majesty in the heavens! The distinction of ***“the Son of God”*** is not **WHERE** He is, but **WHO** He is! Over and above even the work of the Son is His Person.

With men, **WHO** they are is generally the result of what they have accomplished. The work of our Lord, however, is impacted by **WHO** He is. It is true, He has been exalted because of His voluntary and vicarious death. However, that did not change **WHO** He was! It is not so with the angelic order.

The confession of Jesus as *“the Son of God”* is the single acknowledgment that qualifies the individual for Divine recognition. It is a confession that confirms the Father has blessed the individual (Matt 16:16-17). It qualifies one to be baptized into Christ (Acts 8:37). This mighty confession empowers the believer to overcome the world (1 John 5:4-5). More than that, this is what makes a believer a *“believer.”* We are not believers because we have accepted a humanly conceived creed, or because we do not question the doctrines of a denomination! It is because we believe Jesus Christ is THE Son of God. That sets Him apart from the entire angelic order, to say nothing of mankind!

I Will Be A Father To Him

The Father has never said to an angel--any angel-- *“I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son.”* Here, again, is a remarkable use of Scripture. As we sit at the feet of Jesus, and hear words spoken by the Holy Spirit, we begin to sense there is a MESSAGE in Scripture that transcends its historical setting and circumstance. This quotation is taken from 2 Samuel 7:14. *“I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men”* (NIV). The immediate reference of this text is to Solomon, David’s son (2 Sam 7:12-13; 1 Chron 17:13; 22:10; 28:6). The prophecy, however, reached further than Solomon, who was only an introductory fulfillment--a shadow of the Substance. Psalms 89:26-27, a contemplation of Ethan the Ezrahite, confirms this to be the case. *“He will cry to Me, ‘Thou art my Father, My God, and the rock of my salvation.*

I also shall make him My first-born, The highest of the kings of the earth” (NASB).

With Jesus in the capacity of a Savior, God was a Father to Him, and Jesus was His Son. That is to say--glory to God--the Father upheld the Son in His mission! Prophetically, it was stated this way. “Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold . . .”

The Father did beget the Son, and Jesus was born *“the Son of God.”* More is involved in this expression, however, than that. It is possible for a father to be unrecognized by his son, or for the son to be a disgrace to the father (Cain, Ham, Ishmael, Esau, Absalom, etc.). It is also possible for a son to leave his father (prodigal), or for it to be *“better”* that a son was never born (Judas). But this is not the case with Jesus! The relationship of the Father and His *“only begotten Son”* continued without a single interruption until His vicarious death upon the cross. Then, and only then, He was *“forsaken”* by God in order that He might be again received, together with all of the children God had given Him (Matt 27:46; Heb 2:13).

Who but Jesus could say, *“I always do the things that are pleasing to Him”* (John 8:29). Their relationship is so close that only Jesus can *“explain”* the Father (John 1:18, NASB). In fact, *“Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.”* (Matt 11:27). When it comes to the Son, *“no one knows the Son except the Father”* (Matt 11:27). This is something of the involvements of God being a *“Father”* to the Son, and our Savior being His *“Son.”*

But this is not a mere legal arrangement--something that is correct because of how Jesus was born, or due to the filial relationship between the Father and the Son while He tabernacled with us. **The Spirit is speaking of this relationship in**

association with our salvation! With Jesus in the capacity of a Savior, God was a Father to Him, and Jesus was His Son. That is to say--glory to God--the Father upheld the Son in His mission! Prophetically, it was stated this way. *“Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold . . . The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me . . . I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth . . . He will arise and shepherd His flock in the strength of the LORD ”* (Isa 42:1; 49:6; 61:1; Micah 5:4, NASB).

The confessions of Jesus during His earthly ministry also reveal the closeness of the Father to the Son. Those with eyes to see can behold Divine purpose in these statements. *“Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing . . . And the Father who sent Me, He has borne witness of Me . . . it is My Father who glorifies Me”* (John 5:19, 37; 8:54 NASB).

Jesus constantly resorted to the Father for strength. At the threshold of His ministry He did this (Matt 4:1-4), and at the conclusion as well (Matt 26:39). During His ministry, He spoke to and relied upon the Father (Matt 11:25,26; 14:23; Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16; 9:18,28; John 12:28-29; John 17). Jesus did not pray out of formality. He was being sustained in His mission! **This was a Father/Son relationship, requisite to the salvation of the world!**

What angel was ever so sustained? Angels have been sent on many missions, but none of them were upheld by the Father like the Son was! Their missions were minuscule next to His! They were sent to destroy a city (Gen 19:13), overthrow an army (2 Kgs 19:35), appear in a bush (Ex 3:2), and deliver the Law (Acts 7:53). But their ministries were never underwritten like that of the Son.

Let All the Angels . . .

Worship Him!

And how will the Spirit show the superiority of the Son of God to angels? Will He show us the miracles the Son of Man wrought? Will He compare those abundant displays of Divine power to the ministry of angels? His words are arresting. *“And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him " (Heb 1:6, NIV).* There is some question as to whether this refers to the incarnation of the Son, or His second appearing. The NASB and NKJV favor the latter: i.e., *“And when He again brings the first-born into the world.”* Grammatically, the solution is not simplistic. Of the dilemma one has said, *“ If palin [again] is taken with eisagaghl [brings] the reference is to the Second Coming as in 9:28. If palin [again] merely introduces another quotation (Ps 97:7) parallel to kai palin [”and again”] in verse 5, the reference is to the incarnation when the angels did worship the Child Jesus (Lu 2:13f.). There is no way to decide certainly about it. 3*

Bear with me while I reason upon this expression. First, we are not confined to one of these two views. The Son was *“brought into the world”* at His birth. He will also be *“brought into the world”* when He *“appears the second time”* (Heb 9:28). Consider, He was also

“brought into the world” at His resurrection, returning from the region of the dead (Psa 26:10; Acts 2:27; Rom 10:7). The sense of this text does not seem to be answered in an isolated view.

Remember--the point of our text is the superiority of the Lord Jesus to the angelic order. The relevance of both angels and men are seen within the context of God’s workings in the world. There is no question about the superiority of the Son to angels in heaven, whether before His incarnation or after His exaltation to the right hand of God. Prior to being *“made of a woman, made under the Law”* (Gal 4:4), the angels worshiped Him because He created them (Col 1:16-17). Following His exaltation, they worshiped Him because they were made subject to Him by the Father (1 Pet 3:22). What is more, when He is revealed *“the second time,”* the worship of angels is also taken for granted. They will accompany **Him**, He will not accompany them (Matt 25:31). Then, the angels will be His servants (Matt 24:31). They will gather the saints to Him.

Too, He will not be brought *“into the world”* at that time as He was the first time. The *“heavens and the earth”* will *“flee”* from before His face the second time (Rev 20:11). Make no mistake about this, the angels will surely be worshiping Him when He comes again--but that is not the point of our text.

SUNDRY VIEWS OF ANGELS

“An angel is a spiritual creature created by God without a body for the service of Christendom and of the church.” Martin Luther (1483–1546)

“Christians should never fail to sense the operation of angelic glory. It forever eclipses the world of demonic powers, as the sun does a candle’s light.” Billy Graham (1918–)

“Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth, unseen, both when we wake, and when we sleep: All these with ceaseless praise his works behold both day and night.” John Milton (1608–1674)

“The angels are the dispensers and administrators of the divine beneficence toward us; they regard our safety, undertake our defense, direct our ways, and exercise a constant solicitude that no evil befall us.” John Calvin (1509–1564)

It is when He was *“brought into the world”* the first time that particularly accentuates His superiority. This is Jesus in a humbled state, having divested Himself of all of the prerogatives of Deity. When, at birth, He was *“brought into the world,”* He could neither bless or curse, pray or preach, guide or feed. He had to be cared for, nourished, and protected. He had to be rescued from Herod, and raised to *“increase in wisdom, and in stature, and in favor with God and man”* (Luke 2:40,52). It was then, in that humbled condition, that the cry went out in heaven, *“Let all the angels of God worship Him!”* Who can forget the arresting words of Scripture: *“And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”* (Luke 2:12-14).

Such things never occurred at the birth of anyone else. As great as were Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Moses, the heavenly hosts did not praise God at their birth! The praises of angels were not even heard at the birth of John the Baptist! But when God brought His only begotten Son into the world, the angelic order was called into activity. An angel announced His birth (Luke 1:26-29), revealed the name of the Holy Child (Lk 1:31), allayed the concerns of Joseph (Matt 1:20),

and directed him in the care of the Child (Matt 2:13,19). Angels ministered to Jesus in His temptation (Matt 4:11), and one these holy ones strengthened Him in Gethsemane (Luke 22:43).

All of this confirms the superiority of the Son to the angelic order. They served Him **when He was in the world!** Michael, one of the chief angels, helped another angel in a conflict (Dan 10:13). That conflict, however, was not in the world, but in heavenly places. Angels did not come to the aid of angels in the world, but they did come to the aid of the Son. They worshiped Him when He was *“brought into the world.”*

Sit On My Right Hand

All of this confirms the superiority of the Son to the angelic order. They served Him when He was in the world! Michael, one of the chief angels, helped another angel in a conflict (Dan 10:13). That conflict, however, was not in the world, but in heavenly places. Angels did not come to the aid of angels in the world, but they did come to the aid of the Son.

The *“right hand”* of God is of especial significance. The term itself is used to acquaint us with aspects of God that can be known by the redeemed. His *“right hand”* introduces us to favor and blessing, as well as authority and purpose.

The overthrow of enemies is associated with His right hand . *“Thy right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy”* (Ex 15:6,12).

Satisfying pleasures are also related to God’s right hand. *“Thou wilt make known to me the path of life; In Thy presence is fulness of joy; In Thy right hand there are pleasures forever”* (Psa 16:11, NASB).

Salvation through loving-kindness is also tied to the right hand of God. *“Wondrously show thy steadfast love, O savior of those who seek refuge from their adversaries at thy right hand”* (Psa 17:7, RSV; 44:3).

The right hand of our God is related to upholding and protection. *“Thy right hand upholds me; And Thy gentleness makes me great”* (Psa 18:25, NASB). Here is a place of Divine activity! The enemies of God are subdued, and the people of God are blessed from this position. Tutelage and satisfaction are ministered from here.

The Spirit proclaims that Jesus has been exalted to this position--the right hand of God. He is now *“sitting on the right hand of power”* (Matt 26:64). In the concluding words of His Gospel, Mark declared, *“So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God”* (Mark 16:19). Peter proclaimed this truth on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:33,34). He continued declaring it in succeeding announcements of the Gospel (Acts 5:31). When dying at the hands of his fellow-Israelites, Stephen said He saw Jesus standing at God’s right hand (Acts 7:55-56). Paul proclaimed Christ’s exaltation to that position (Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1). The book of Hebrews repeatedly refers to this truth (Heb 1:3,13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2). Peter mentions it in his first epistle (1 Pet 3:22).

Our text asks if there has ever been an angel seated at the right hand of the *“majesty in the heavens.”* Indeed, there has not! Lofty heavenly spirits are around the heavenly throne. They are so described in the book of Job (Job 1:6-8; 2:1-3). Isaiah saw six-winged Seraphim

in the proximity of God's throne (Isa 6:2ff). Zechariah saw Joshua the high priest standing before a mighty angel, in the very throne room of God (Zech 3:1-5). Who can forget the powerful presence of angels depicted in the book of the Revelation (Rev 7:11). Yet, none of the angels were directed to sit on the right hand of the "*majesty in the heavens.*"

Jesus is superior to angels because He currently is seated at the right hand of God! What is the significance of that circumstance? Our Savior is **the exclusive means through which the grace, or favor, of God is experienced**. He has the sole power to guide, feed, strengthen, and illuminate. He alone can give righteousness, peace, and joy. The Holy Spirit Himself ministers to us in the behalf of Christ. **Salvation in its entirety is administered by Him.** He is the One that has charge of writing God's law upon our hearts and putting it into our minds. The fruit of the Spirit is under His government, as well as placement in the body of Christ. No angel has ever been given such responsibilities! The Son of God is superior to angels! If the cry goes out in heaven, "*Let all the angels of God worship Him,*" what of those on earth. Let there be recognition among all professed believers of the greatness of Christ's Person!

WHAT ARE ANGELS?

Jesus has not been exalted at the expense of angels. The holy angels have lost nothing with the Father's accentuation of the Son. They have not been lowered or made to occupy a lesser position. None of their ministry has been taken from them! If anything, the ministry of angels has been enhanced by the "*day of salvation.*" The reigning Christ enlarges all that is under Him.

This is certainly **not** intended to demean angels. It **is** intended to exalt the Son! Jesus has not been exalted at the expense of angels. The holy angels have lost nothing with the Father's accentuation of the Son. They have not been lowered or made to occupy a lesser position. None of their ministry has been taken from them! If anything, the ministry of angels has been enhanced by the "*day of salvation.*" The reigning Christ enlarges all that is under Him. Everything and every one aligned with Jesus is exalted, improved, and enlarged.

In order to draw a proper comparison between Jesus and angels, it is essential that we first review some of the remarkable ministrations of the angelic order. This will be concise, yet is designed to impress us with the greatness of this elect body of spirits.

The book of Job informs us of the presence of angels at the creation (Job 38:7). "*The Cherubim,*" members of this holy body, was responsible for making the tree of life inaccessible to humanity (Gen 3:24). Jude reminds us that angels were involved in the curse of the flood (Jude 14-15). An angel directed Hagar, after she had been expelled from Abraham's house (Gen 16:7-10; 21:17). Angels were sent to destroy Sodom, Gomorrah, and the cities of the plain (Gen 19:1,15). It was an angel that called out to Abraham as he raised the knife to sacrifice Isaac (Gen 22:11,15). The angels of God met Jacob as he went on his way (Gen 32:1). It was an angel that appeared to Moses in a flaming bush (Ex 3:2). Another angel led Israel out of Egypt, and protected them from the Egyptians (Ex 14:19; Num 20:16). The Law was given by the disposition of angels, and is called a word spoken by angels (Acts 7:53; Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2). Angels led Israel after they had received the Law (Ex 23:20,23; 32:34; 33:2). An angel touched the discouraged prophet Elijah while he lamented under a juniper tree--and even prepared a meal for him (1 Kgs 19:5-7). Angels were used to chasten the people of Israel (1 Chron 21:12-30). A single angel cutoff the mighty men of valor of the King of Assyria (2 Chron 32:21). An angel delivered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednigo from the fiery furnace (Dan 3:28). Another shut the mouths of the lions, in the den into which Daniel was cast (Dan

6:22). An angel talked extensively with the prophet Zechariah, showing him the relevance of visions given to him (Zech 1:9ff).

While the saints languish on minuscule spiritual diets, and humanly-devised programs are initiated to purportedly “reach the lost,” the Head of the church has marshaled the heavenly host to serve the heirs of salvation.

Ministering Spirits

Our text summarizes the entire ministry of angels in a few words. *“Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?”* (Heb 1:13, NASB). This is the **primary** ministry of the angelic order! They were used to curse the wicked in the flood, judge the Egyptians, and to destroy Sodom. However, that was not their primary work! They gave the Law, announced the Savior, and warned the wise men from the East. But that was not their primary ministry or service. God has made them to serve those *“appointed to obtain salvation”* (1 Thess 5:9). This is not their **ONLY** work, but it is their fundamental activity. An angel struck king Herod when he wickedly took too much honor to himself (Acts 12:23). However that is not the **primary** work of angels. Their main activity is ministering to the saints of God. **In Christ, this service is brought to its highest and most notable level.**

Angels are servants--servants to those redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. That is a noble ministry! It is not to be despised--particularly by those that benefit from it. We might note how this conflicts with much of the emphasis of the contemporary church. While the saints languish on minuscule spiritual diets, and humanly-devised programs are initiated to purportedly *“reach the lost,”* the Head of the church has marshaled the heavenly host to serve the heirs of salvation. This is, indeed, an arresting consideration.

However, what is their work compared to that of the Son of God? That is the point of our text! The Spirit takes the most imperial of all created beings, and places them beside the Son of God--in capacity of *“the Son.”* He does not compare them to God, but to the *“Son of God.”* He does not compare them to the Father, but to the One the Father commissioned to save the world. And how does the comparison appear? The Son shines like the noon day sun amidst twinkling stars. The angels in all of their greatness are but dimly lit lamps next to the Son of God! They are servants, He is the Head of the house. They serve, He reigns! They come to the throne, He sits in the throne!

WHAT IS SAID TO THE SON

Now our attention is turned to the theme of this book--the Person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Remember, our focus is **THE SON OF GOD!** He is superior to the angels, who themselves are superior to the best of mankind. What man is there who would compare himself with an angel of God? What group of men would dare to place themselves on par with the elect angels of God? No person has ever confronted an angel and thought himself to be significant--and angels have less significance than the Son! Too, remember we are considering the Father's view of the Son, not that of our peers, be they prophets or Apostles.

Thy Throne, O God . . .

The quotation is taken from Psalm 45:6. *“Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Thy kingdom”* (NASB). Here is a Messianic Psalm, written for the sons of Korah. Those with a penchant for context will find it difficult to find an obvious reference to the Son of God in this Psalm. The Holy Spirit informs us, however, that this is the Father speaking about the Son. *“But about the Son He says, ‘Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom’”* (Heb 1:8, NIV). The Father said to the Son, *“ . . . O God . . . ”* Christ’s humanity did not diminish His Deity. It is true, He *“humbled Himself,”* setting aside the prerogatives of Deity (Phil 2:6-7). However, we must not miss the point here. The Father called *“the Son” “God.”* Let us, then, be about using the term *“Son”* in reference to the Lord Jesus. No angel was ever so addressed!

The mark of Christ’s kingdom is righteousness! That is the evidence of His eternal reign. This is not mere humanly accomplished righteousness. It is not the result of law-keeping, notable though that may be. This is the righteousness announced in the Gospel.

A Righteous Scepter

The mark of Christ’s kingdom is righteousness! That is the evidence of His eternal reign. This is not mere humanly accomplished righteousness. It is not the result of law-keeping, notable though that may be. This is the righteousness announced in the Gospel. *“For in it (the Gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed . . . ”* (Rom 1:17a). There are two sides to the remarkable coin of salvation. Firstly, God Himself is righteous in the exoneration of sinful men. As it is written, *“ . . . whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus”* (Rom 3:25-26). There is not an angel in heaven or a demon in hell that can question the uprightness of our salvation. God Himself is righteous in removing our sins and accepting us into His favor. Wherever fallen sinners are recovered, having their sins remitted and their names written in the Lamb’s book of life, the righteousness of God is revealed! That is the scepter, or token, of Christ’s kingdom.

Secondly, the righteousness of God is not only proclaimed by the Gospel, it is *experienced* by the justified one. The glory of the announcement of God’s righteousness is found in the upright **giving** of it to the believer. As the Spirit says elsewhere, *“But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Rom 2:21-23).

The righteousness of God is experienced by the believer *“apart from the Law.”* That is, it is not conferred because of the fulfillment of the Law by the individual. The Spirit confirms there is no other way for men to become righteous: *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”* Ordinarily, this verse is used to declare that all men are sinners. That, of course, is a true statement. However, that is not the point of this text. **Righteousness is conferred upon men through faith, because there is no other way for it to be conferred.** Because *“all have sinned [past] and come [present] short of the glory of God,”* uprightness can never be earned. It can never be imparted to men upon the basis of their achievement. Where *“imputed”* or credited righteousness is found, you have the scepter, or mark, of Christ’s kingdom (Rom 4:6-8,11,22).

While Jesus does reign righteously over all men, including His people,

Lordship is not point of this text. That sort of rule existed independently of Christ's incarnation and vicarious atonement. He was *"before all things,"* and has always been *"Lord of all."* Our text is affirming the reign of Jesus as regards the salvation of men.

The Oil of Gladness

The dialog of the Father with the Son continues. *"You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions"* (v 9). The character of the Son perfectly reflects that of the Father. He relished righteousness and abhorred iniquity. The prophet Isaiah foretold this aspect of the Savior. *"Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good"* (Isa 7:15). How precious this was in the sight of the Father. The love of the Father for the individual that thinks as Himself is rarely known. However, it is epitomized in the Son. Behold it with joy, and aspire to partake of the Divine nature (2 Pet 1:4).

The joy of the angels is very much inferior to that of the Son of God. This is a quotation of Psalms 45:7. The sixth verse of that Psalm is quoted in the previous verse of our text. We learn here of the centrality of Christ in all of Scripture. He is the grand Subject that is always discussed, whether known or unknown by the prophets themselves.

The joy of angels, however, is nothing to compare with that of the Son. The gladness of the Son of God in respect to salvation is worthy of our consideration. Our text informs us that God has given Him this joy, anointing Him with superlative measures.

The joy of angels is not mentioned often. Jesus said, *"I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents"* (Lk 15:10). Their joy, however, is nothing to compare with that of the Son. The gladness of the Son of God in respect to salvation is worthy of our consideration. Our text informs us that God has given Him this joy, anointing Him with superlative measures. One of the unusual expressions of this joy is found in Luke 10:20-21. *"At that very time He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, 'I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes. Yes, Father, for thus it was well-pleasing in Thy sight'"* (NASB).

Showing the relevancy of this joy, Jesus spoke of it to His disciples prior to His vicarious death. *"These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full"* John 15:11, NASB). When Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, He again referred to this joy. *"But now I come to Thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy made full in themselves"* (John 17:13). What sort of joy was this? Why is it peculiarly Christ's?

This is the joy of the Godhead. It is the result of the fulfillment of God's *"eternal purpose."* This is not an imposed joy, like the supposed laughter in the Spirit that is being claimed today. The joy with which Jesus was anointed is a rational joy. It was given because of marvelous accomplishments. Jesus rejoices because Satan has been frustrated (Heb 2:14). The reconciliation of the world to God has produced joy in heaven (2 Cor 5:18-20). The casting down of principalities and powers that had plundered humanity is cause for rejoicing. Even above these things, Jesus rejoices because He has been given the *"heathen"* for His inheritance, according to the Father's promise (Psa 2:8). **If you are joyful over salvation, it is nothing to be compared with the joy of the angels. Their joy, on the other hand, is nothing in comparison with that of the Son.** He has been anointed

with the oil of joy above His heavenly companions.

Child of God, you have a joyful Savior! He is glad to see you come to Him, and rejoices at your reliance upon Him. We do not come to an angry God, or to a displeased Savior. Once this is perceived with some degree of clarity, the joy will spill over to the perceiving one. I acknowledge this is not a common view. Salvation is often preached as an obligation; i.e., God provided it, and you had better receive it! There is certainly an element of truth to that, but it is not the central element.

Thou Remainest

The eternality of the Son is joyfully proclaimed. The Spirit points us to the magnificent creation. In *“the beginning,”* the One that has saved us created all of these things. The Holy Spirit does not summon men to testify of this truth, although several prophets could be brought forth with glowing testimony. Instead, He continues relating **the words of the Father to the Son .**

This is the manner in which the Father views the Son--His *“only begotten Son.”* We must not allow the apparent simplicity of the declaration to obscure its greatness to us. *“You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands”* (1:10, NKJV). **THE MARVEL OF CREATION IS NOT ITS COMPLEXITY, BUT ITS CREATOR!**

As glorious as the created *“worlds”* are, *“they will perish”* (1:11). They are not to be the objects of our affection, or the focus of our attention. However complex and intriguing creation may be, it is still temporal. As such, it is improper to allow it to dominate our thinking. Like a garment, it is growing old, destined to *“pass away.”* But what of the Son? The Father says, *“You remain!”* To some, it may seem pointless for the Father to so address the Son. That is only because they have a flawed view of both the Father and the Son.

Creation cannot fail without the word of Jesus. The sun cannot fail to shine without a word from our King! Stars cannot fall from their heavenly places unless the Son of God speaks the word! Heaven and earth shall, indeed, pass away. But it will only occur when our Savior says it is time! No angel has ever been afforded such honor as this.

Remember, everything created was made by the Son and for the Son. He upholds everything by the Word of His power. Now the Spirit affirms the Son will induct the cessation of all things. Again, the Father says to the Son, *“You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But You remain the same, and Your years will never end”* (1:12, NIV). The point here is not that the years of the Son will never end, while those of angels will. Rather, it is the things that are made will not dissipate until the Son folds them up like a garment. He, and He alone, shall put off the tattered rags of mortality, that death in its entirety may be swallowed up of life (2 Cor 5:4). **Temporal things will not simply pass away by a schedule!** The Son of God, responsible their creation, is also responsible for their termination.

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such honor as this.

His Enemies

The Spirit continues the comparison of our blessed Lord with the angels. ***“But to which of the angels has He ever said: ‘Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool?’”*** (1:13, NKJV). Again, this is the Father speaking to the Son. The Father has never spoken to any angel like this! The Father is ordering the universe for the Son! **Every enemy--every personality at variance with the Son--will be brought into subjection to Him.**

The gravity of this statement is arresting. Wherever a word has been spoken that is incongruous with the words of the Son of God, a day of reckoning is coming. There is no way to avoid the confrontation. The Father will place all such personalities under the feet of His Son. Thus, God will be fully vindicated through the Son. As it is written, ***“Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written: ‘So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge’”*** (Rom 3:4, NIV). In view of this, men should take care that their words are harmonious with those of the Son.

Men whose objectives are at variance with those of the Son will bow before Him, acknowledging they were wrong. In this world, surface thinkers overlook goals that conflict with the revealed intentions of God. But this circumstance is not overlooked by the Lord. All who have objectives that are at variance with those of the Son will be placed under His feet. Men do well to examine their intentions, bringing them into harmony with those of the Son, through Whom, and for Whom, all things have been made!

Putting enemies under the feet is a phrase denoting absolute subjugation. It speaks of the overthrow of the subjugated one--the utter frustration of conflicting purposes, words, and works. We have a picture of this in the book of Joshua. Joshua defeated the Amorites, calling out in faith, ***“O sun, stand still at Gibeon, And O moon in the valley of Aijalon”*** (Josh 10:12, NASB). The sun and moon remained stationary ***“until the nation avenged themselves of their enemies”*** (v 13).

After the forces of evil have been frustrated, and brought down before an assembled universe, the leaders of the insurrection, Satan and his hosts, will be publically disgraced under the feet of Christ. The saints of God will be involved in this matter, much like all the chiefs of Israel were to Joshua. Scripture states it this way. *“And the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet”*

Five kings fled from that awful defeat, hiding themselves in the ***“cave of Makkedah”*** (v 16). Their hiding did not go unnoticed. Joshua commanded, ***“Roll large stones against the mouth of the cave, and assign men by it to guard them”*** (v 18). With the alien kings contained in the cave, the army pursued and overthrew all of their enemies. Following the triumph, called a ***“very great slaughter,”*** the Captain turned his attention to the contained kings. ***“Open the mouth of the cave and bring these five kings out to me from the cave”*** (v 22). It was then that ***“Joshua called for all the men of Israel, and said to the chiefs of the men of war who had gone with him, ‘Come near, put your feet on the necks of these kings.’ So they came near and put their feet on their necks”*** (v. 24).

What a marvelous picture of the subjugation of Christ’s enemies!

After the forces of evil have been frustrated, and brought down before an assembled universe, the leaders of the insurrection, Satan and his hosts, will be publically disgraced under the feet of Christ. The saints of God will be involved in this matter, much like all the chiefs of Israel were to Joshua. Scripture states it this way. *“And the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet”* (Rom 16:20, NASB).

What angel has ever been afforded such honor? The Son, and the Son alone, if the One to Whom enemies shall be subjugated. Our own involvement in the event is only due to our affiliation with the Son of God. He is *“all in all.”*

The Relevancy of The Things

The relevancy of these declarations to our salvation must be seen. Remember, some of the Hebrew believers had been reverting back to a system of Law. They were relying upon law-keeping to obtain the approval of God. In such an arrangement, angels received undue adoration, and Jesus was relegated to the background. Such tendencies have not ceased to exist. The purpose of this book is to accentuate not only the indispensability of Jesus, but His absolute superiority. It is unreasonable, from any point of view, to minimize the Son of God!

I have often said it, but must do so once again. **There is far too much relegation of Jesus to an inconsequential position in contemporary religion.** Much of what parades itself as *“Christian”* is nothing more than the wisdom of men. Often, it is even a poor representation of that. It is important to know that God will not tolerate the obscuring of His Son. The institutional fervor that pushes Jesus to the background will cause men to be put under the feet of Christ. This speaks of cursing, never of blessing! It is when the *“Stone”* falls upon and crushes those at variance with Him (Luke 20:18).

By way of contrast, those that are aligned with the Son will *be “joint heirs”* with Him (Rom 8:17). Rather than being placed under His feet, they will sit together with Him in His throne (Rev 3:21). How glorious to contemplate such a great Savior! What is a system of law-keeping to this? How does the outcome of independent human endeavor compare with being identified with the Son of God? The truth is, there is no comparison! As the Son is superior to angels, so the salvation that He brings is superior to that achieved by men. Were men to have the aid of the entire angelic hosts, but be without Jesus, they still could not be saved! God has made no provision for salvation apart from His Son--intimate involvement with His Son. All of this teaching is calculated to register that upon your conscience.

CONCLUSION

For This Reason . . .

The Spirit has led us to an inevitable conclusion. *“Therefore we must pay greater attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it”* (Heb 2:1, NRSV). Remember, we are speaking about God speaking to us through His Son- **-exclusively through His Son .** So far as the Father is concerned, there are no other voices, no one else with a valid

message. If we do not hear what Jesus has to say, we cannot know the mind of the Lord or be saved.

The soul that will be saved must come within hearing distance of the Son of God; within the circumference of Divine influence. Those that live with a lack of sensitivity to God are in a hopeless condition. He is speaking to us through His Son, but if we dwell in far off places, we cannot hear Him.

What is more, we must *“pay greater attention to what we have heard.”* We are living in a competitive and distracting environment. Our ears can be *“turned away from the truth to fables”* (2 Tim 4:4), but it will be at the expense of our souls. If we do not listen intently to Jesus, we will not hear Him. If we do not focus upon Him, we will not behold Him!

The soul that will be saved must come within hearing distance of the Son of God; within the circumference of Divine influence. Those that live with a lack of sensitivity to God are in a hopeless condition. He is speaking to us through His Son, but if we dwell in far off places, we cannot hear Him. How marvelously this is stated in the 65 th Psalm. *“Those living far away fear your wonders . . . ”* (v 8, NIV). The further you are from the Lord, the more you fear His workings, the less you speak of them, and the more infrequently you seek them.

There are intellectual and soulish lands that are *“far away”* from the voice of the Lord. When you inhabit these *“lands”* you are less apt to hear the Son of God. The land of academia is one such land, in which the individual can become immersed in the wisdom of men, thereby dulling his ability to hear the Son of God. The land of pleasure also desensitizes the soul to heavenly things. Pleasures of sin are only *“for a season”* (Heb 11:25). During that period, however, the voice of the Lord can scarcely be heard--if it can at all.

But our text is speaking of the stultifying effects of misguided religion--in particular a system that appeals to Law for justification. There is nothing more dulling to the spirit of man than this. This is why Jesus said to the bigoted Pharisees, *“I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you”* (Matt 21:31, NIV). The immoral, Jesus declared, were closer to the Voice than were the religious leaders! And why so? Because the publicans and harlots knew who they were. They still retained a sense of their aloofness from God, and the unacceptability of their conduct. The conscience of the Pharisees, however, had been dulled by their religion. They placed trust in their disciplined achievements and intellectual acumen. Their approach to the things of God had ushered them into a state where they had no ears to hear.

Plausible arguments can be introduced that emphasize the free will of man, and his ability to find the Lord at any time. All such arguments, however, fall to the ground as Jesus speaks this word. *“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to”* (Lk 13:24, NIV). *“I am with you for only a short time, and then I go to the one who sent me. You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come”* (John 7:33,34, NIV). *“I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come”* (John 8:21, NIV). Sobering words, indeed. Particularly for those who choose to sear their conscience by indulging in legalistic religion (1 Tim 4:1-3).

If God is speaking to us exclusively through the Son, and if the Son is Himself superior to angels, we must “pay greater attention to what we have heard” (NRSV). He means we are to pay closer attention than the Israelites at Mount Sinai, who feared and quaked at that

awesome event. Their attentiveness, however, was not owing to the compelling nature of the words, but the frightening circumstances that accompanied them.

The word of the Spirit is strong. If God is speaking to us exclusively through the Son, and if the Son is Himself superior to angels, we must *“pay greater attention to what we have heard”* (NRSV). He means we are to pay closer attention than the Israelites at Mount Sinai, who feared and quaked at that awesome event. Their attentiveness, however, was not owing to the compelling nature of the words, but the frightening circumstances that accompanied them. Terror so gripped them that they cried out, *“You [Moses] speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die”* (Ex 20:19, NRSV). *“Bounds,”* or limits, were set around the mountain of God, keeping the people from touching it. The solemnity of the occasion is seen in the Divine warning. *“Be careful that you do not go up the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. He shall surely be stoned or shot with arrows; not a hand is to be laid on him. Whether man or animal, he shall not be permitted to live”* (Ex 19:12-13). The people could only approach the sacred mount at the sounding of the *“ram’s horn”* (Ex 19:14).

That is not all! The Law sounded forth the awesome warnings. Violators of the Law were to be *“put to death”* (Ex 21:12,15,16,17,29; 22:19). The Law was truly *“the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone”* (2 Cor 3:7). It is in reference to this circumstance--the ministration of death--that the Spirit speaks in the last verse of our text. *“For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?”* (Heb 2:2-3a).

A greater Spokesman has been given to us (as compared with angels), and thus our responsibility is greater to hear what He says. I often ponder the poignant manner in which our hearing of Christ is affirmed in Ephesians 4:20-21; *“But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard Him, and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus”* (KJV). The phrase *“taught by Him”* is translated *“in Him”* in most modern versions. The idea of “in” is *“within . . . of place . . . denoting a position within boundaries . . . denoting specific location.”* 4

Jesus Himself is the environment of spiritual learning. He is the Teacher, the Communicator, the Spokesman for God! This is by Divine appointment, and is for our eternal advantage. If those that heard lesser spokesmen were punished for not giving heed to what was said, what will be the lot of those that ignore the Son of God?

For many, this is difficult to receive. Such cannot imagine the Son of God speaking today. They are willing to believe He spoke historically, but not contemporarily. The Word of God will not support such a view. Mind you, the Son of God uses means, but **He is the One that uses them.** It was the Son of God that spoke the message to the seven churches of Asia--nearly 60 years after He had ascended into heaven. He employed an angel to give it to John, and John topgave it to the churches — but **He is the One that gave the message** . It is Him speaking.

It is the same with us today. The Son of God is speaking to us through the Gospel. It is possible to hear His voice in your spirit, just like the Ephesians did, years after the Son of God had been seated on the heavenly throne (Eph 4:21). He has not ceased to teach His people. He still is the only One that knows the

Father. He still is the only One that can teach us of the Father. We still come to Him, to be taught by Him. The invitation is still true. *“All things have been committed to me by My Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him . Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me ,for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light”* (Matt 11:27-30, NIV). Who is the soul that will affirm this promise is no longer applicable? Does it not reinforce the affirmation of our text?

Take this word and fasten it in your heart and mind. *“See that you do not refuse the one Who is speaking; for if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we reject the one who warns from heaven !”* (Heb 12:25, NRSV). The Son is superior to the angels--and **their** word could not be rejected without penalty. The Son is superior to angels, and therefore His **Word** is superior. It brings better promises, strength, vitality, and hope to all that will; embrace it. Thanks be to our God for such a glorious Spokesman!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated
Presents

Commentary on the book of Hebrews

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #3

JESUS CHRIST

MADE LIKE HIS BRETHREN

“ For it became him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, In the midst of the congregation will I sing thy praise. And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, Behold, I and the children whom God hath given me. Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner partook of the same; that through death he might bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver all them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily not to angels doth he give help, but he giveth help to the seed of Abraham. Wherefore it behooved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren, that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted” (Hebrews 2:10-18, ASV).

INTRODUCTION

One of the fundamental thrusts of Scripture relates to the humanity of Christ Jesus. The fact of Christ’s manhood is basic to our understanding of both Him and His great salvation. This teaching is a potential stumbling block. If not perceived correctly, Jesus will be demeaned, and the sinful condition of men will be minimized. Properly seen, the humanity becomes a commentary on the commitment of God to save His people. It is one of the most arresting considerations of Scripture, unveiling the heart of God, the commitment of Jesus, and the depth to which sin brought mankind. No believer can afford to be deficient in this matter. An inadequate understanding of this aspect of the Savior will induce sleep. It will disarm you, and make you vulnerable to the devices of the devil.

The Son, worshiped by angelic hosts, was *“has been made for a little while lower than the angels.”* This remarkable descent was done voluntarily (Heb 10:7-9), in order that *“ by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone”* (Heb 2:10, NASB). He could not die as God! He must

become *“the Man”* to do that! He identified with us in order that He might drink the full dregs of death, both in His body and in His spirit. It would not be enough to experience the separation of the body and the soul. He must endure separation from God, which was the ultimate curse of sin. The death He *“tasted”* was the separation from God. That is something that will not be tasted again by those in Him.

It is *well to remember WHY Jesus* “tasted death for every man.” First, death is the appointed consequence of sin--any sin and every sin (Ezek 18:4,20; Rom 6:23). Second, men could not recover from death, the Son of God could. Because He died vicariously, or in substitution for us, and not for His own sin, God would bring Him back from the dead. He would, Hallelujah, rise again! He would recover from the curse, crushing the head of the serpent in the process. Never forget, He did this as our Representative! As Isaiah put it, *“Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him ”* (Isa 53:4-6, NASB). Blessed truth, that warms the heart, clears the understanding, and stimulates spiritual life! May it never grow old to you!

BECOMING TO GOD

Our text says Jesus becoming lower than the angels for a little while was becoming to God! That is, it was appropriate and fitting for Him to send the Son into the world to suffer death for every man. He was acting in strict conformity with His character.

Now we come to grips with the greatness of this truth. There is such a poverty of understanding within the professed church of this truth that it is staggering. The hallmark of the New Covenant is, *“FOR ALL SHALL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST OF THEM”* (Heb 8:11, NASB). Yet, myriads of people claiming identity with God are woefully ignorant of His Person. This condition is not unique to the twentieth century, or to our area of the world. It existed when the book of Hebrews was written. Even though conversion brings us into oneness with the Lord (1 Cor 6:17), Satan successfully diverts the attention of men from God to themselves, or an institution, or even to lesser things. Because of the aggressiveness of our adversary, those who fall asleep spiritually begin to drift away from the moorings of spiritual understanding and confidence. It becomes necessary, therefore, to once again stabilize them with an understanding of their Savior, and the God that sent Him.

Our text says Jesus becoming lower than the angels for a little while was becoming to God! That is, it was appropriate and fitting for Him to send the Son into the world to suffer death for every man. He was acting in strict conformity with His character. The Father did not depart from His Godhood in sending the Son to die a humiliating death for a fallen race! This was, in fact, an expression of His Person. In this remarkable act, we see more of God than in all the creation. It reveals more of Him than can be seen in casting of Adam and Eve out of the

garden, the flood of Noah's day, or the confusion of Babel in the plains of Shinar. More of God is perceived in the vicarious sacrifice of Christ than in the extensive revelation of Himself to Moses, and to the people at Sinai! Once God is comprehended to an acceptable degree, the sending of Jesus to die makes sense!

Unlike men, God never acts out of harmony with His character. An evil man, from one perspective, may occasionally do something good (i.e. Balaam giving a remarkable word about God--Num 23:19). A good man may also do something wicked (i.e., David sinning with Bathsheba and having Uriah killed (2 Sam 11:3-14). But God has never acted out of keeping with His character! He has no fits of anger, or times of insipid tolerance. When He has compassion, it is because He is compassionate! When He executes judgment, it is because He is a God of judgment! If He pours out wrath, it is because He is a consuming fire!

Looking at it from another perspective, you can look at what the Lord has done, and come to find what He is like. His works are like an index to His Person! O, what wonders are unfolded concerning His Person when we look at the sending of Jesus into the world, to "*taste death for every man*"!

THE DIVINE OBJECTIVE

He did not come to eliminate poverty and illness--although His Presence has an impact upon these unfortunate realities. He certainly did not come into the world to institute a superior form of earthly government, or to stabilize an existing one--although He does have an impact upon this arena!

But we must look deeper into our text. The aim behind the sending of Jesus must be seen. **He came to die** --that He "*by the grace of God, should taste death for every man!*" He did not come into the world to make it a better place to live--although that will result wherever He is embraced! He did not come to eliminate poverty and illness--although His Presence has an impact upon these unfortunate realities. He certainly did not come into the world to institute a superior form of earthly government, or to stabilize an existing one--although He does have an impact upon this arena! It is essential to remember the mission of Jesus did not revolve around human experience, but the settled will of God. He came into the world to die! His other activities were secondary to that appointed mission.

Jesus spoke clearly of this matter when He walked among men. As He approached His death He said, "*Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour*" (John 12:27). Again, He said, "*For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father*" "

(John 10:17-18).

The seriousness of the human condition is accentuated by this mission. Without His death, nothing would be remedied! Mankind could not be saved imposed by Divine power.. It required a death--an undeserved, but necessary, death! The alienation from God inducted by man's fall could not be resolved by a Divine fiat! The world's were summoned into existence by God's Word. Humanity is reconciled through the death of His Son! That is why Jesus came into the world. In His death, He brought an end to the Adamic order, terminated the reign of Satan, and satisfied God!

CROWNED WITH GLORY AND HONOR

Lest we forget Christ's sojourn in the earth and appointed death is the end of the matter, the Spirit reminds us He is "*crowned with glory and honor.*" Jesus is "*crowned*" (*estefanwmenon* , perfect passive participle of *stefanow* from verse 7), i.e., crowned already "*with glory and honor.*" The Spirit also declares this in Philippians 2:9-11, where He affirms our Lord is "*more highly exalted.*" So far as humanity is concerned, the reason for that exaltation is clearly stated: "*that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.*" There is more glory to come to Jesus surely, but he is already at God's right hand (1:3).

But this is more than a mere theological statement. The purpose of Scripture is not realized by the formation of doctrinal statements, as important as they may be. Mind you, we do not deride attempts to precisely state the accomplishments and current ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Care must be taken, however, to avoid a heady view of Christ that has no impact upon the heart. Our impression of Jesus will impact upon our life--our purpose for and focus in living. The exaltation of Christ, from this perspective, becomes a source of confidence for the believer. We will find the enthroned Savior is fully able to bring us to glory. Upon the throne, He can be effected by the feeling of our infirmities. His glorification is ensures the effectiveness of our faith and the possibility of our faithfulness.

THE WAY TO PERFECTION

Our text states "*It was fitting that God . . . should make the Pioneer (Captain, KJV, Author, NIV) of their salvation perfect through sufferings*" (Heb 2:10). Here is something that reveals the nature of God--the assignment of Jesus to "*suffer.*" What a large word this is! At the last supper, Jesus said, "*I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer*" (Lk 22:15). After His resurrection, the Savior told His disciples is was "*necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things*" (Lk 24:26). The word "*suffering*" refers more to the inner man than the outer man. An unconscious person, for example, does not "*suffer*" under excruciating difficulty as much as the one that is conscious and perceptive. With Jesus, it went further than this. The impact of being forsaken by His Father transcends the capacity of our understanding. Too, being rejected by those He came to save registered heavy upon the heart of the Savior. Who is capable of discerning the force of these words upon the heart of the Savior: "*The Son*

of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed . . .” (Luke 9:22).

However, we must not allow our thinking to stop here! There was a Divine purpose that mandated the suffering of Christ! The Father *“perfected”* the Son through this suffering. This does not mean Jesus was imperfect. This verse does not use the word *“perfect”* in the sense of 1 Peter 5:10. *“But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.”* With us, perfection involves the subjugation of a wayward nature and spiritual maturity. **With Jesus, perfection related to His High Priesthood.**

The Father was giving His people into the hands of His own Son. His purpose involved *“bringing many sons to glory,”* and that job was given to the Son. God knew the difficulties related to getting these *“sons”* to glory, or into His presence. In all of their weaknesses, they would face an adversary with 100% success in deceiving the world

The Father was giving His people into the hands of His own Son. His purpose involved *“bringing many sons to glory,”* and that job was given to the Son. God knew the difficulties related to getting these *“sons”* to glory, or into His presence. In all of their weaknesses, they would face an adversary with 100% success in deceiving the world (1 John 5:19). Even after becoming *“the sons of God,”* these people retained sinful inclinations in the lower part of their nature (Rom 7:18,21). Their journey to the glory would take them through enemy territory, with strong delusions and debilitating distractions. The way would be long, and the heat of trial would be fierce! They could not make in their own strength--they would need help from heaven!

The Word of God speaks frequently concerning the Father giving believers to the Son. A reminder of these statements will prove refreshing to your spirit. *“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day”* (John 6:39, NIV). *“I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word . . . I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours . . . Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am . . .”* (John 17:6,9,11, NIV). *“And again He (Jesus) says, “Here am I, and the children God has given me”* (Heb 2:13, NIV).

Hear with what confidence the Son spoke on this matter. He is in perfect unity with the Father in this project of salvation, and is fully capable of bringing us all the way home. *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one”* (John 10:27-30). Here is a passage of Scripture grossly neglected in many congregations. Too often, struggling believers are told what it does NOT mean, rather than being reminded of the reality it affirms. There is no ambiguity in the text! *“My sheep hear . . . I know them . . . they follow Me . . . I give unto them . . . they shall never perish . . . neither shall any man pluck them out . . . no man is able to pluck them out . . .”* It is difficult to conceive of anything being stated more strongly and clearly! If you have wondered about whether or not you will make it to the end of the race, put your faith in Christ! His work is to get you there. Your work is to *“believe on the Son”* (John 6:29). Do not imagine this will make you slothful, or that faith dulls your capacity to understand or your desire to obey! Such suppositions are imaginations, to be cast down and taken captive for Christ (2 Cor 10:5-8).

How is it the Son could speak with such confidence concerning the safety of His sheep? Is He going to save us by raw power, trampling over our opponents, and blazing a trail for us in the background, without any involvement from us? I am afraid many think so. But this a wicked imagination, to be cast down and brought into captivity to obedience to Christ (2 Cor 10:5-8). This salvation will be accomplished through our sensitivity to the Son. It will be realized as we become perceptive of His Person and present ministry. It will also be effected by a Savior that has experienced our situation in the world.

In order to qualify the Son to bring the sons home, the Father mandated that He live with handicap, in the enemy's terrain. He would be "*tempted in all points*" like those He was to save (Heb 4:15). He would have to "*put His trust*" in God (Heb 2:13), call out to God with "*strong cryings and tears*" (Heb 5:7), and "*learn obedience*" (Heb 5:8). He would live under the weight of restraint (Luke 12:50). If He wanted deliverance, He would have to pray for it--just like you (Matt 26:39,53; Mk 1:35; Lk 5:16; 22:44; Heb 5:7).

We had to have a Leader heard consistently by God, and Whom God would honor! The Father provided us such an One in the Lord Jesus Christ! He equipped the Son for His mission (*bringing many sons to glory*) by sending Him into the arena in which they lived- -
without the prerogatives of Deity

The purpose of all of this was to make Him a High Priest suitable for us. It would not do for us to have a high priest like Aaron. He was "*the saint of the Lord*" (Psa 106:16), but could not bring us to God! Moses was "*faithful in all his house*" (Num12:7; Heb 3:5), but he could not bring us to God! Both of these godly men failed. We needed a "*Captain*" Who had not failed--ever! He had to be one that had passed through the fire with Divine resources, and knew how to get them to us!

We had to have a Leader heard consistently by God, and Whom God would honor! The Father provided us such an One in the Lord Jesus Christ! He equipped the Son for His mission (*bringing many sons to glory*) by sending Him into the arena in which they lived- -*without the prerogatives of Deity* (Phil 2:5-8). This is the point the Spirit is making when He affirms the Son did "*become poor,*" even being "*crucified through weakness*" (2 Cor 8:9; 2 Cor 13:4).

Those perceiving the extent of Christ's humility will be constrained to live for Him. In that humiliation God has underwritten the faith of His "*elect.*" Their labor is "*not in vain in the Lord*" (1 Cor 15:58) because of their High Priest. There is no required resource He is not disposed to give them. There is no trial in which He does not identify with them. There is no temptation that is not accompanied with as way of escape, that they may be able to bear it (1 Cor 10:13). God's people have a High Priest precisely adapted to minister to them during the challenges of the faith-life. This is accomplished because of our Savior's identity with us.

The Spirit affirms it is becoming to God to have instituted this arrangement. It

reveals His propensity to save humanity, as well as His wisdom in providing an adequate Savior and High Priest. By doing things this way, the Father not only ensured our deliverance from sin, but our entrance into glory as well. Praise be to God!

HE IS NOT ASHAMED OF US

All too often, the Father is left out of contemporary preaching--but the Spirit will have nothing to do with such exclusions! As our Sanctifier, He makes us holy, and suitable for Divine employment. Holiness, or purity, is not an end of itself, but a means to an end. The objective is to be a “worker together with God”

How does the Lord Jesus feel about you? That is a critical question. His heart is tender to those God has given to Him. Often they do not know it, but that does not change the facts in the case. In order to assist them in the good fight of faith, the Spirit declares the Son’s attitude toward believers. Hear His words, and allow them to rejoice your heart. *“For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren”* (Heb 2:11, ASV). Some of the other versions reveal the power of this text. *“Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers”* (NIV). *“For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters”* (NRSV). What a marvelous affirmation! The One who sanctifies, or makes holy, is the Son of God. The ones who are made holy are those in the Son. Both the Son and the sons have a common origin--the Father. We should not balk at this. The Spirit has already told us God begat the Son; i.e., *“this day have I begotten Thee”* (Heb 1:5). God is declared to be the *“Father”* of Christ Jesus, Who is His *“Son”* (1:5b). Some sophists insist this declares the Son of God to be a created personality. But this is a delusion. The Spirit testifies that His *“goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting”* (Mic 5:2). He is *“without beginning of days,”* as typified by the written record of Melchizedec (Heb 7:3). Isaiah referred to Him as *“everlasting Father”* (Isa 9:6). John affirms He was *“in the beginning,”* and was *“with God and was God”* (John 1:1). Let no one place the Lord Jesus on the level of angels, which had a Divine genesis!

In the capacity of a kindred Redeemer, the Son was begotten of God. The Father *“sent”* Him into the world (1 John 4:14), sustained Him in His ministry (Isa 42:6ff), and raised Him from the dead (Acts 13:30), and exalted Him (Phil 2:9). In all of that, our God is the Father of Christ. Think not to question this! Jesus was not ashamed to speak in this manner, and we should not be reluctant to receive it. *“My Father . . .”* (Matt 10:32; 11:27; 12:50; 16:17; 18:10,19; 20:23; John 5:17; 6:65 . . . etc.). In the role of our **SANCTIFIER**, Jesus is “of God.” The Father appointed Him to this role (Heb 1:2; 5:4), sent Him to accomplish, upheld Him in the work, and placed Him at His own right hand in the heavens. All too often, the Father is left out of contemporary preaching--but the Spirit will have nothing to do with such exclusions! As our Sanctifier, He makes us holy, and suitable for Divine employment. Holiness, or purity, is not an end of itself, but a means to an end.

The objective is to be a *“worker together with God”* (1 Cor. 3:9). As our Sanctifier, Jesus accomplished this task. He removes our transgressions from us, thereby separating us from defilement. He then dispatches the Spirit to inscribe the Law of God upon our hearts, and place it within our minds. In all of this, He is our Sanctifier! God is His Father in this capacity, having initiated the process of our salvation in its totality.

The sanctified also owe their status to the Father. They are *“the sons of God”* (1 John 3:1-2). They owe what they are to the Father! It was He that placed them in the Son (1 Cor 1:30)! He is the One that washed, sanctified, and justified them (1 Cor 6:11). They have, in the very precise sense of the term, been *“born of God”* (1 John 3:9; 4:7; 5:1,4,18). The redeemed are *“His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works . . .”* (Eph 2:10). Everyone one of them can join with Paul in saying, *“By the grace of God, I am what I am”* (1 Cor 15:10).

It is this condition (being of God) that allows the Son to not be ashamed to call us brethren. It is not because of our moral attainments. Nor, indeed, it the lack of shame associated with our Scriptural expertise. It is our common Father that makes the Son unashamed of us. O, you must see this truth! Hear the words of Jesus, uttered as He prepared to return to the Father. *“I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God”* (John 20:17, NIV). And to whom were these marvelous words spoken? It was not to Paul, the Apostle that *“labored more abundantly than they all”* (1 Cor 15:10). It was not to Peter, who was used to open the door of faith to both Jews and Gentiles. Who, then, was it? It was to Mary Magdelene, out of whom He had cast seven demons (John 20:1-17; Mark 16:9)! What qualifications did she have to present? What wonderful achievements did this woman have to offer? Her chief qualification was the work of Christ! She had been delivered from Satanic dominion by the Lord Jesus Christ! We do not even know when it occurred! The account is not even found in Scripture--only the affirmation that it took place (Luke 8:2; Mark 16:9).

Dear child of God, Jesus was not ashamed to claim the Father of Mary Magdelene as His own. He was not ashamed of her, and He is not ashamed of you! Can you believe that? Your Father in heaven is His Father also! This is a truth that must get into the heart and soul of God’s people. Their minds must be able to entertain this thought without fear. If this is the way Jesus views us, how ought we to view lone another? If He is not ashamed of us, let nothing entice you to be ashamed of Him!

Because of the criticality of this teaching, the Spirit aggressively seeks to convince us of its truth. He does not merely state the case, but reveals to us from Scripture, that Jesus is really not ashamed of us. The unreserved acceptance of this affirmation will build confidence in the heart. It removes a the inclination to place a high estimation on our personal achievements, and constrains us to place the higher value on the Person of Christ.

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I Will Declare Thy Name

Hear the remarkable words credited to Jesus. *“I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises”* (Heb 2:12). This is a quotation of Psalms 22:22. To what does this refer? This alludes to Christ’s exposition of the Father to His people. He once declared, *“no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him”* (Matt 11:27, NIV). This teaching is the declaration of God’s name--the proclamation of His Person. The objective of the declaration is to acquaint us with the Lord.

“Thy Name” does not refer to an appellation, but the delineation of Divine nature, or character. You may recall that God once declared His name to Moses. That declaration is arresting. Allow me to rehearse that proclamation to you. *“Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name , the LORD. And He passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, ‘The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation’”* (Ex 34:5-8, NIV). What was it God revealed when He *“proclaimed His name”* ? He revealed Himself, giving Moses a more thorough acquaintance with Himself. He did not declare His titles, but His Name--His Person!

He is gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness--that is what God is like! You may never have perceived Him in this way, but that IS what He is like! He faithfully maintains love for multitudes, forgiving all manner of sin. Yet, He cannot merely overlook sin, or leave the guilty unpunished--that is what He is like! This was God revealing Himself at Sinai!

Jesus declares the name of God from a higher mountain--Mount Zion! He unveils an even loftier view of the Father, bringing us into closer proximity to His Presence. Time forbids us to provide details on this aspect of our subject. I have every confidence in your ability to ferret out many good things regarding our Lord’s proclamation of the name of the Lord. Suffice it to say, more is involved that receiving mercy and forgiveness, although that is marvelous. Not only is He “slow to anger,” He is quick to bless those that walk in the light. He will show them, His covenant, and tell them His secret (Psa 25:14). He can *“fill”* them *“with all joy and peace in believing,”* through the Spirit causing them to *“abound in hope”* (Rom 15:13). He can *“open the eyes”* of our *“understanding,”* so we can understand the hope to which we have been called, how great His inheritance is in the saints, and the exceeding greatness of the power that is for us (Eph 1:18-20). A peace that “passes understanding” can be yours (Phil 4:7), together with a *“joy unspeakable and full of glory”* (1 Pet 1:8). Ah, child of God, how much more can be said on this grand theme! You do well to focus on the Son of God.

Faith has always been sparse in the earth. Jesus indicated that the last days would be marked by an unparalleled scarcity of truth faith. *“However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”* (Luke 18:8). Let all who seek the Lord determine to live as He did--by faith.

Jesus is not merely delivering an academic discourse to us. He is acquainting us with the Living God--bringing us into joyful familiarity with the incomprehensible God.

I Will Put My Trust in Him

Here is one of the most remarkable statements concerning our Lord. The spirit of this expression is found in 2 Samuel 22:3 and Isaiah 8:17. *“The God of my rock; in Him will I trust: He is my Shield, and the Horn of my salvation, my High Tower, and my Refuge, my Savior; Thou savest Me from violence”* (KJV). *“And I will wait for the LORD . . . I will even look eagerly for Him”* (NASB). When Jesus was among us, He lived by faith. He trusted in God! In this, He identified with the people He came to save. In trusting in God, our blessed Savior was *“not ashamed”* to call us *“brethren.”*

Faith has always been sparse in the earth. Jesus indicated that the last days would be marked by an unparalleled scarcity of truth faith. *“However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”* (Luke 18:8). Let all who seek the Lord determine to live as He did--by faith. He was not ashamed to be identified with us, let us zealously avoid being ashamed of living like Him!

The Children God

Has Given Me

“Here am I, and the children God has given me.” This is quotation of Isaiah 8:18. Once again, observe the use of Scripture. This is not a sound academic approach to Scripture. It does not honor the contextual view of the Word. Isaiah was speaking of his own sons, Shear-jashub and Maher-shalal-hash-baz (Isa 7:3; 8:3). One might argue that Isaiah spoke of his own sons, while the text speaks of Christ’s brethren. The emphasis, however, is not *“children,”* but *“God has given me.”* In Isaiah’s case, God gave him children. In Jesus’ case, the Father gave Him brethren.

Because we have already addressed this subject, it will suffice to recall our Lord’s Gethsemane prayer. *“I have revealed You to those whom You gave Me out of the world. They were Yours; You gave them to Me and they have obeyed Your word . . . I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those You have given me, for they are Yours”* (John 17:7,9 NIV). See, He was ashamed of the ones given to Him by His Father. His lack of shame certainly was not owing to the advancement of the disciples--or of you. It was because God gave them to Him. He loves His people, and is pledged to bring them to glory. He will strengthen them, feed them, and lead them. There is no resource they require to please the Father and overcome the world that He will not provide for them. Their responsibility is to abide in His love, live by faith, and walk in the Spirit!

katargh,shl (katargeo) literally, "to reduce to inactivity" (kata, "down,"

argos, "inactive"), is translated "abolish" in <Eph. 2:15> and <2 Tim. 1:10>, in the RV only in <1 Cor. 15:24,26>. It is rendered "is abolished" in the KJV of <2 Cor. 3:13>, the RV corrects to "was passing away" (marg., "was being done away"). In this and similar words not loss of being is implied, but loss of well being.

The barren tree was cumbering the ground, making it useless for the purpose of its existence, <Luke 13:7>, the unbelief of the Jews could not "make of none effect" the faithfulness of God, <Rom. 3:3>; the preaching of the gospel could not "make of none effect" the moral enactments of the Law, <3:31>; the Law could not make the promise of "none effect," <4:14; Gal. 3:17>; the effect of the identification of the believer with Christ in His death is to render inactive his body in regard to sin, <Rom. 6:6>; the death of a woman's first husband discharges her from the law of the husband, that is, it makes void her status as his wife in the eyes of the law, <7:2>; in that sense the believer has been discharged from the Law, <7:6>; God has chosen things that are not "to bring to nought things that are," I. e., to render them useless for practical purposes, <1 Cor. 1:28>; the princes of this world are "brought to nought," I. e., their wisdom becomes ineffective, <2:6>; the use for which the human stomach exists ceases with man's death, <6:13>; knowledge, prophesyings, and that which was in part were to be "done away," <1 Cor. 13:8, 10>, I. e., they were to be rendered of no effect after their temporary use was fulfilled; when the apostle became a man he did away with the ways of a child, <v. 11>; God is going to abolish all rule and authority and power, I. e., He is going to render them inactive, <1 Cor. 15:24>; the last enemy that shall be abolished, or reduced to inactivity, is death, <v. 26>; the glory shining in the face of Moses, "was passing away," <2 Cor. 3:7>, the transitoriness of its character being of a special significance; so in <vv. 11,13>; the veil upon the heart of Israel is "done away" in Christ, <v. 14>; those who seek justification by the Law are "severed" from Christ, they are rendered inactive in relation to Him, <Gal. 5:4>; the essential effect of the preaching of the Cross would become inoperative by the preaching of circumcision, <5:11>; by the death of Christ the barrier between Jew and Gentile is rendered inoperative as such, <Eph. 2:15>; the Man of Sin is to be reduced to inactivity by the manifestation of the Lord's Parousia with His people, <2 Thes. 2:8>; Christ has rendered death inactive for the believer, <2 Tim. 1:10>, death becoming the means of a more glorious life, with Christ; the Devil is to be reduced to inactivity through the death of Christ, <Heb. 2:14>. See CEASE, CUMBER, DESTROY, DO, Note (7), OF NONE EFFECT, NOUGHT, PUT, No. 19, VOID. — Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson.

ELABORATING ON THE REASON FOR CHRIST'S ENFLESHMENT

This is a hallmark doctrine of Scripture! It is not intended to be a battleground for theologians, but a refuge for believers. There has been unnecessary consternation concerning the incarnation. The Spirit now opens the Divine reasoning behind the remarkable condescension of our Savior.

The word used in our text (**katargh,shl**) is used to proclaim the nullification of the wisdom of the world as a means to knowing God. " . . . *and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought* ("nullify", NIV; "reduce to nothing," NRSV) *things that are*" (1 Cor 1:28, ASV). It is also used to describe the final overthrow of all influences opposing Jesus. "*Then (cometh) the end, when he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have abolished*" ("put down," KJV; "destroyed," NIV, NRSV) *all rule and all authority and power*" (1 Cor 15:24, ASV). This same word is also used to describe the impossibility of nullifying God's faithfulness. "*For what if some were without faith? shall their want of faith make of none effect the faithfulness of God?*" (Rom 3:3, ASV). This speaks of making something ineffective, frustrating intentions, and causing to be impotent.

“Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same” (2:14, NASB). Here we enter into the citadel of Divine purpose. God ***“foreknew”*** the ***“children,”*** and sent Jesus in their form to save them. This term (***“children”***) is not a generic term for all mankind. This is a word for those within God’s favor. The term used here denotes an infant, one not yet mature. It is paidi, a (pahee-dee'-on), and means, *a childling (of either sex), i.e. an infant, or (by extension.) a half-grown boy or girl; figurative, an immature Christian:--(little, young) child, damsel.* 1 Places where this word is used, and is translated “children” or “child,” include, Matt 18:3; 19:13,14; Mk 10:13,14; Lk 11:7; 18:16; John 21:5; 1 Cor 14:20; Heb 2:13-13; 1 John 2:14,18.

From the standpoint of the ***“children”*** themselves, they have nothing to offer. It is Divine favor that makes them what they are. God knew them before they knew Him! As it is written, ***“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren”*** (Rom 8:29, NASB). Do not let this verse offend you! It is perfectly consistent with the rest of Scripture. ***“ . . . Who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity”*** (2 Tim 1:9, NASB). Remember, God is motivated by His own will, not by the human condition. This is expressly stated in God’s Word. ***“In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will ”*** (Eph 1:11, NASB). In his letter to Timothy, Paul declared the Lord’s view of things. ***“Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, The Lord knows those who are His, and, Let everyone who names the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness”*** (2 Tim 2:19).

When Paul was in Corinth, the Jews rejected him, resisting and blaspheming. It was there that Paul declared he was going to the Gentiles--and he did so in stern words. ***“And when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, Your blood be upon your own heads! I am clean. From now on I shall go to the Gentiles”*** (Acts 18:6). While many of the Corinthians did believe, together with Crispus, leader of the local synagogue, it did not look too promising. However, God is not moved by appearance, but by His Sovereign will. That very night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision. ***“Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city ”*** (Acts 18:9-10). It certainly did not look like the Lord had a lot of people in that city--but He did. What is more, He knew who they were, and made provision for them.

In a much larger way, God provided for the ***“children”*** He knew from the foundation of the world. Considering this arresting truth, some have embraced ***“limited atonement,”*** a doctrine that teaches Jesus’ blood was shed only for a select few. But this is not the point of our text, nor is it a true teaching. As the Lord is wont to do, He is considering the ***“end from the beginning”*** (Isa 46:10). This text finds the Father providing **for Himself** more than for the children. Mind you, He IS providing for the children, but that is not the crux of the matter. Because those that He was ***“bringing to glory”*** were ***“flesh and blood,”*** it was necessary for their Savior to also be ***“flesh and blood.”*** Salvation could not come from an angel, even though they are mighty enough to expel Satan from heaven (Rev 12). Men could not be reconciled to God by a Divine fiat in which sin was spoken away. Such a procedure would not have allowed God to remain just! No! When the Son came “in the likeness of sinful flesh” He cleared the way for the Father to be both ***“Just and Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus”*** (Rom 3:26).

This principle is seen in the triumph of David over Goliath. He fought for the people of Israel. His triumph became their’s. God used David to deliver Israel from the Philistines! So it is with the Man Christ Jesus--the Son of God. One

Person fought the battle for the race! One Man gained the victory for the race! A single Individual fulfilled the good pleasure of God, freeing Him to bless His offspring. It was becoming to God to make His Son like His brothers--the ones He would save.

Jesus volunteered to take upon Himself the human nature because the Savior must have something in common with those to be saved. The point of commonness could not be sin; that would disqualify Him as a Savior. He had to come into the arena of conflict like His brothers. His life must be lived in the crucible of conflict, yet be totally free from sin. A *“Man”* had to overcome the devil, triumph over death, and please God. He had to do it as the Representative of the human race. God needed a Man to save our race! The full reason will be unfolded in our text.

Salvation involves more than the deliverance from the guilt and power of sin! The people are to be *“conformed to the Image”* of God’s Son (Rom 8:29). That requires an active Savior! The Law of God will be written on their hearts and placed into their minds (Heb 10:16). The saved are to overcome the world, deny ungodliness, and perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord (1 John 5:4-5; Tit 2:11-13; 2 Cor 7:1). That requires a Good Shepherd! The daily conflict of believers must be addressed, with strength and Divine resources being dispensed appropriate to the battle. That requires an Intercessor who *“ever lives to make intercession”* for them (Heb 7:25). These requirements cannot be fulfilled by someone unlike us. Nor, indeed, will the needs of God Himself be served by one unable to identify with our situation! Christ’s death and consequent reign in behalf of the saints demanded that He be identified with us experientially! **Jesus traveled the entire range of human experience because He was appointed to carry us through life to glory!**

Destroying the Devil

How glorious is the affirmation! *“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He*

Few professed believers appear to be aware of the ferocity of Satan’s attacks against them. For this reason, they do not perceive the remarkable achievements of Christ. He is not their theological epicenter because they are ignorant of the situation in which they find themselves.

might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (v 14, NKJV). The devil has always targeted *“the children.”* It started with Adam and Eve, and it continues to this day. We see the work of the *“old serpent”* in the murder of Abel, the cyclical conduct of Israel, and the sins of great Jewish kings. To this day, he is involved in constant aggression against the saints of the Most High God. How graphically this is depicted for us in the Revelation. *“And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child. And the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, in order that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. And the serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, so that he might cause her to be swept away with the flood”* (Rev 12:13-15). Few professed believers appear to be aware of the ferocity of Satan’s attacks against them. For this

reason, they do not perceive the remarkable achievements of Christ. He is not their theological epicenter because they are ignorant of the situation in which they find themselves. The role of godly preachers and teachers is to proclaim Divine provision to them.

The dreaded reign of death had to be thwarted, and Satan had *“the power of death.”* The devil is said to have the power of death, not because he can kill and destroy men at will, but because he introduced sin, which brought death into the world (Rom 5:12). He was *“a murderer from the beginning”* (John 8:44), which is how he executes his power. To implement his work of death, he tempts men to sin, and then accuses them of it, frightening them with the prospect of death. In all of this, it is only by divine permission he inflicts death. One has said, “Satan daily urges us to sin.” How true! O that men were more aware of his perverse efforts! But Jesus came to frustrate the devil in the entirety of his work. Through death--something within Satan’s power--our Savior *“destroyed him that had the power of death.”* Darby’s version says *“annul him who has the power . . .”* The NASB says “render powerless him . . .” The word translated *“destroy”* is *katargh,shl* (ka-tar-gasa). The word does not annihilate, or utterly remove. Etymologically, it means, *to be (render) entirely idle (useless), abolish, cease, cumber, deliver, destroy, do away, become (make) of no (none, without) effect, fail, loose, bring (come) to nought, put away (down), vanish away, make void.* 2

The destruction is a nonphysical one. What is destroyed, in this case, is replaced by something superior; i.e., light destroying darkness. But this is only the language side of the equation. There is more to the destruction of the devil than an etymological view!

In Scripture, words transcend lexical definition. Words like “faith,” “love,” “Lamb,” “glory,” and “hope” have been expanded by the Holy Spirit far beyond the confines of the *“original language.”* This does not demean a linguistic approach, it only emphasizes they are only introductory, not exhaustive. *“Destruction”* speaks of the loss of all utility or usefulness. It speaks of the frustration of purpose or intent. *“Destruction”* is the opposite of “sanctify,” which speaks of use.

This is a prominent word in the Gospel. The Spirit declares that *“the body of sin”* has been *“destroyed”* (*katarghql*) in order that we might serve sin no longer (Rom 6:6). We are apprized *“the Law could not disannul”* (*katargh/sai*) the promise of blessing God made to Abraham (Gal 3:17). Our Savior, Jesus Christ, has *“abolished death,”* (*katargh,santoj*) the enemy that stalked the human race (2 Tim 1:10). The *“enmity, even the commandments contained in ordinances,”* has been *“abolished”* (*katargh,saj*) in order to bring Jew and Gentile together in Christ (Eph 2:15). Notice, what was destroyed, in a sense, still remained. *“The body of sin”* was destroyed, yet we still struggle against it. Death has been destroyed, but we still must die. The *“commandments contained in ordinances”* have been destroyed, yet you can still read and ponder them. In the same way, Satan has been *“destroyed,”* but we still are *“tempted”* (1 Cor 7:5) by him, and must *“resist”* him (1 Pet 5:9).

Believers are invincible as they “abide in Him” (John 15:5-10; 1 John 2:28). Satan is invincible if we do NOT “abide in Him,” walking in the light, by faith, and in the Spirit. To put it another way, the devil is impotent in heavenly places. He is omnipotent in “the flesh” and “this present evil

world.”

Satan has been “*destroyed*” in the heavenly places, where we have been raised “*together*” with Christ (Eph 2:6). In the realm of faith, the devil is impotent! Thus Peter writes, “*Resist him, steadfast in your faith*” (1 Pet 5:9). Believers are invincible as they “*abide in Him*” (John 15:5-10; 1 John 2:28). Satan is invincible if we do NOT “*abide in Him*,” walking in the light, by faith, and in the Spirit. To put it another way, the devil is impotent in heavenly places. He is omnipotent in “*the flesh*” and “*this present evil world.*”

This circumstance is pictured vividly in The Revelation. In this apocalyptic Gospel, the demise of Satan is traced to the triumph of the Son of God. How wonderfully it is stated. “*And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. And the dragon and his angels waged war, and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him*” (Rev 12:7-9). This series of events follows the birth and exaltation of Messiah (v 4-5), in spite of Satan’s aggression to thwart both the birth and the exaltation. Following our Lord’s enthronement at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, Satan’s days in the higher realms are numbered. He had occupied that place as an accuser. This is seen in the Divine narrative of Job’s trials (Job 1:6-9; 2:1-3). Now, however, there remained no place for him in that domain. With violence and authority, he is thrown down to the earth. What is the response of heaven to this eviction of the evil one? We are not left to conjecture!

“*And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation , and the power , and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them before our God day and night. And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even to death*” (Rev 12:10-11). The response of heaven is loud! The harmonious notes of joy and expectancy penetrates every word. We can learn from the shout something of the involvements of Satan’s expulsion. It is clear from the “*loud voice*” that an epoch has occasioned Satan’s fall. Salvation has come! The power, kingdom, and authority of the Lord’s Christ is now accomplishing that salvation. Prior to this, salvation was a prophesy, but now it is a reality. “The day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2) has come, and heaven is glad! Those that once were enslaved to Satan now overcome him. They do so indirectly, and not by their own strength. The “*blood of the Lamb,*” now taken within the holy place, is something with which the devil cannot contend. Those who trust in the efficacy of that blood fly free from the snare of the fowler! Their transformation is so dynamic, that even the “*word of their testimony*” enables their triumph over the evil one. Regeneration has changed their focus. They are now “*waiting for*” God’s “*Son from heaven,*” and thus they “*love not their lives,*” even “*unto death.*” SATAN HAS BEEN DESTROYED, and thus were triumph over him!

In Christ’s death the head of the serpent was “*bruised*” (Gen 3:15). He broke the power of death that was wielded by the “*old serpent.*” Paradoxically, He accomplished this

Jesus inflicted a mortal bruise upon Satan in His death, which occurred at His weakest point. As it is written, “*He was crucified because of weakness*” 2 Cor 13:4). Yet, in His “*weakness*” He struck the death blow to the our adversary! Be sure of this, what Jesus did to Satan in His death set a downward spiral in motion that will end with the devil in the lake of fire.

through death itself. Jesus inflicted a mortal bruise upon Satan in His death, which occurred at His

weakest point. As it is written, ***“He was crucified because of weakness”*** 2 Cor 13:4). Yet, in His ***“weakness”*** He struck the death blow to the our adversary! Be sure of this, what Jesus did to Satan in His death set a downward spiral in motion that will end with the devil in the lake of fire. It is not possible for him to recover from that bruise--and it was delivered in ***“death,”*** over which he had designated power! Principalities and powers that once appeared invincible have been plundered by the Savior, and it took place in the cross (Col 2:15). If this mighty victory was accomplished by the DEATH of Christ, what will be accomplished by His life? How poignantly the words are spoken by the Spirit. ***“For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life”*** (Rom 5:10, NIV)!

Could not God have “destroyed” Satan without Christ’s death?

This may appear a foolish philosophical question, but it is not. Those who insist on living on the surface of truth do not ponder such things, and thus they cannot derive the full benefit that comes from it. Our text affirms Jesus was sent in the body to die, that Satan might, through that death, be rendered powerless. Who is the individual daring to affirm this was one of several options open to the Father? Do not imagine this was done as a mere intellectual novelty. The devil could not simply be spoken away! More than a rebuke--even a Divine rebuke--was needed to render him powerless. Permit me to look at this more closely.

Satan’s Accusatory Capacity

Satan is primarily an ***“accuser of the brethren.”*** In this capacity, he has been banished from heavenly places! As it is written, ***“ the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them before our God day and night.”*** Prior to the death and exaltation of Christ, there was a basis for Satan’s accusations. Sin had not been expiated, and thus men remained under the weight of transgression. The prophets spoke of a time when a sin-bearer would come, but until Jesus, there was none. Isaiah promised that the Lord Himself would lay upon the Savior ***“the iniquity of us all”*** (Isa 53:6). Translated literally, the text reads, ***“made the iniquities of us all to meet on Him.”*** When He died, sin was localized upon the Son. It is as though it existed nowhere else. The Father gathered sin in its entirety, from every quadrant occupied by men, and placed it upon the Son. The very thought is staggering! Paul, in delineating this Divine act, said of it, ***“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf”*** (2 Cor 5:21, NASB). Peter wrote of the fulfillment of that prophesy. ***“He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross”*** (1 Pet 2:24). There, on the cross, in the Person of His Son, God cursed sin, judging it once and for all! In a vivid description of this cursing the Spirit says, ***“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us . . . ”*** (Gal 3:13, NASB). The largeness of this subject does not permit us to treat it exhaustively at this time. Suffice it to say, God has dealt decisively and thoroughly with sin through His Son. ***“Now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself”*** (Heb 9:26b). The singularity of that appearance confirms the accomplishment of the stated objective! Sin has been ***“put away”*** by the sacrifice of Christ! Satan was ***“bruised”*** in that act because, as the author of sin, his end was secured. He was cast out of heavenly realms because of the effectiveness of Christ’s sacrifice, which removed the basis for accusation. With sin expiated, accusation nullified, and God satisfied, Satan has thus been ***“destroyed.”*** His designs have been frustrated for all that are in Christ. He cannot implement his will against those that are ***“cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart”*** (Acts 11:23).

Until the vicarious work of Christ was accomplished, Satan’s purpose against men could not be thwarted. To put

it another way, as long as there was a basis for his accusation against men, he could not be *“destroyed,”* or rendered impotent.

Until the vicarious work of Christ was accomplished, Satan’s purpose against men could not be thwarted. To put it another way, as long as there was a basis for his accusation against men, he could not be *“destroyed,”* or rendered impotent. This should not be difficult for you to receive. Consider that right now, Satan freely *“works in the children of disobedience”* (Eph 2:1-2). He still can take men captive at his will if they are not living in Christ (2 Tim 2:26). Only the shield of faith can quench his *“fiery darts,”* or *“flaming arrows”* (Eph 6:16). The reason those in Christ can *“overcome the wicked one”* is because they are living in the realm where he has been rendered powerless. However, he cannot be overcome in any other realm--not a single one! Lest this reality escape your attention, permit me to say it again. Jesus assumed the nature of those He came to save because there was no other way to save them. Satan’s power against them could not be neutralized until He was defeated on his own turf, so to speak, by a member the race he had deceived. The sins of the people he accused had to be removed--utterly removed. Were it not for this situation, Jesus would never have come to earth! It is my settled persuasion that this truth has not registered upon the heart and mind of the average church goer.

Deliver Them All

“And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” Christ’s death accomplished two things in this regard. First, it accomplished the destruction of the devil. Second, it freed those who had been in bondage all of their lives. It is most remarkable that neither of these glorious accomplishments are often mentioned from the pulpits of the land. There is a thoroughness to this deliverance that is refreshing to the soul. Several translations say the deliverance was for *“all them”* (ASV, RSV, Darby’s). That is the intent of the verse! The accomplishments of Christ’s death reached as far as the effects of the fall! There is deliverance for everyone! Hallelujah!

The Spirit fastens, however, on the *“fear of death,”* which stalks the human race. Of old time, people stood in fear and dread of death. The Law thundered the thread of death from Sinai, constraining the people to make some effort to obey God, feeble though it was. Even David wrote of times when *“the terrors of death have fallen upon me”* (Psa 55:4). The day Adam and Eve fell from Divine favor, fear took hold of our race. Do you recall Adam’s words when confronted with a seeking God? *“I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid . . .”* (Gen 3:10, NIV). That fear, because it forbade us to draw close to God, enslaved us to sin. There is no freedom away from God, yet that is where fear places those dominated by it. If men seem *“without fear,”* and that certainly is the case, it is only because they are not aware of the Lord. Fear can slumber no longer when confronted with an offended God!

Notice, our text does not say Jesus delivered us from fear--although He surely did that. He came to deliver US! He came to *“deliver THEM who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”* Think of the craftiness of our adversary in this regard. He has promoted philosophies and activities designed to obscure the fact of death. People drown themselves in pleasure--some form of self-gratification. Is it any wonder that our part of the world is deluged with forms of entertainment. It has even crept into the religious world. People do not know they are in bondage because they never really confront the stark realities of life. This is bondage to the *“elements of the world,”* or to lower forms of knowledge that bring no real advantage. Those

subjected to this bondage are incapable of entertaining a proper view of God, life, or death. They are confined to the of profitlessness and vanity. They are in bondage to sin, and are dominated by guilt. They require deliverance, but it can come from no one but Christ Jesus. They cannot think their way out of bondage, nor can they work themselves out of it. Astute minds and multiple skills cannot extricate them from the dilemma of bondage! No wonder it is such good news! Jesus died and was exalted to deliver *“all of them!”* He could not speak them out, He had to **bring** them out!

Too often I hear speaking of being angry with God, wondering is He is there, doubting that He cares for them. They are baffled by the circumstances of life, and find it difficult to believe heaven is interested in them. All of this is evidence of Satanic influence! These thoughts are the fiery darts of the wicked one, and are sisters of unbelief.

Finally, consider bondage in relation to the Law. It was believers propensity to Law-keeping that occasioned the writing of this Epistle. Law is a harsh taskmaster. Do you recall the confession of Paul? *“And I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive, and I died; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; for sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me”* (Rom 7:9-11). O, what a dreadful bondage is that! It causes us to be enslaved to sin because it defiles our conscience, causing us to run from the presence of the Lord.

Help To The Seed of Abraham

“For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham” (v 16). What a provocative passage! The NIV reads, *“For surely it is not angels He helps, but Abraham's descendants.”* The NRSV reads, *“For surely it is not with angels that He is concerned but with the descendants of Abraham.”* And who are *“the descendants of Abraham?”* These are believers who, like Abraham, believe God. As it is written, *“Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham”* (Gal 3:7). This is a proclamation of the commitment of Christ to believers. I realize He died for the sins of the world, but that is not the point of this text. The Spirit is speaking to people that have chosen to place Jesus into the background. They had given heed to subtle teachers that offered them techniques instead of godly teaching, and procedures instead of precious promises.

The angels are called *“holy angels”* and *“elect angels”* (Matt 25:31; 1 Tim 5:21). They are faithful in the execution of God's will in every aspect. Yet, the Lord Jesus is not *“concerned”* with them! He does not despise them, to be sure! But He did not demean or humble Himself for them! He did not divest Himself of Divine prerogatives for the angels! It was not for angels that He *“humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross!”* He did not agree to be *“cursed”* or *“made sin”* for them! No! It was for those who, like Abraham, *“believe God!”* For them He came down! For them He trusted God! For them He suffered! For them He died! For them He lives at the right hand of God!

Do not take this for granted! I have grown weary of the doubt that is articulated by our generation. Too often I hear speaking of being angry with God, wondering is He is there, doubting that He cares for them. They are baffled by the circumstances of life, and find it difficult to believe heaven is interested in them.

All of this is evidence of Satanic influence! These thoughts are the fiery darts of the wicked one, and are sisters of unbelief. God has told us of Christ's commitment to save us. If "**works**" were the basis of receiving His help, He would given it to the holy angels, for they are faithful in maintaining good works! Instead, He took upon Himself our nature, lived where we lived, and fought in our behalf! From henceforth, let no person question the commitment of Christ to their salvation! He is solidly behind believers, having submitted to be made "**lower than the angels**" in order that they might be brought home to God.

CONCLUSION

For the first time in all the Bible, Jesus Christ is here called our High Priest! "**For this reason He had to be made like His brothers in every way, in order that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that He might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted**" (v 17-18 NIV). The NASB reads, "**Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things.**" There were no other options--no other way to bring us home to God! If Jesus was going to save us, He had to be properly equipped to do so!

It is essential that we see the emphasis of this text. It is rarely taught in our day. The thrust of the institutional church is "*evangelism*," winning the lost. None but a fool would oppose the rescue of men from death in trespasses and sins! But that is not the central work of Christ. His High Priesthood is not in order to the conversion of men, but to the perfection of believers! This is a revolutionary thought, and worthy of much meditation. When Jesus came, He had the seed of Abraham in mind, not merely the offspring of Adam! When God equipped our lord, He equipped Him to be a High Priest! His largest and most extensive ministry is in the behalf of believers. Keep in mind, this is His "**service to God.**" Even more than meeting your need, He has met God's need in order that He might receive us. No wonder the Spirit said, "**Christ also accepted us to the glory of God**" (Rom 15:7).

A Merciful and Faithful High Priest

Ultimately, Jesus was made like His brothers in order to an effective ministry in their behalf; i.e., "**a merciful and faithful High Priest.**" In order to arrive safely in the presence of the Lord, we require heavenly resources. We sorely need "**mercy, and grace to help, in the time of need.**" How will we receive it? It will be from our High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ! How wonderfully this is stated. "**For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted**" (v 18). The temptation of Jesus has been a source of controversy with some teachers. Some choose to believe Jesus could not be tempted, because, say they, He was God. They forget, however, that Jesus "**emptied Himself**" of the prerogatives of Deity to assume identity with us. The temptation of Jesus was so strong, the Spirit declares He "**suffered, being tempted.**" In the temptation in the wilderness, "**angels came and ministered unto Him**" (Matt 4:11). In Gethsemane His bodily constitution broke down as He agonized under the tug of temptation. It was then that "**an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him**" (Luke 22:43). The strength of Christ's temptation transcends our capacity to comprehend it.

Why did Jesus suffer such agony? After all, this was the Son of God! Was this necessary in order to expiate sin? Yes it was! The offering of Christ for sin required that He be put through the fire of testing. Not only must He be free of

sin, His sinlessness must have stood the test of trial. There is more. Suffering in temptation qualified Him to be both a merciful and faithful High Priest for His people. Now He is able to *“succor”* them--to nourish them through the time of temptation and testing. He can get heavenly resources to us in the hour of trial! If, in David’s day, the Lord could prepare a table for His people in the presence of their enemies (Psa 23:5), can you image what He is capable of preparing for us, now that a thorough atonement has been made?

Child of God, a place has been prepared that enables the people of God to survive the assaults of Satan! Jesus told John to tell the churches about this. *“And the woman fled into the wilderness where she had^a a place prepared by God, so that there she might be nourished . . .”* (Rev 12:6). You are not required to manage your temptations! The Lord Jesus will see to it that you are not tempted beyond your ability--but that is not all. He will also *“nourish”* or *“succor”* you through the temptation. He will do it mercifully and gently. He will be tender with you, because He knows the stresses related with temptation. Faithfulness is found in all of His strengthening. Those that trust in Him will find His mercies are *“new every morning.”* I implore you to trust in your High Priest. He became like you so He could carry you through the difficulties of life. You will make it to glory if you lean upon Him! You can count on Him to come through with consolation. God prepared Him for the ministry, and He has eagerly entered into it. How becoming this is of God!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated
Presents

Commentary on the book of Hebrews

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #4

JESUS IS GREATER
THAN MOSES

“Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession. He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house. For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end ” (Hebrews 3:1-6, NASB).

INTRODUCTION

From one perspective, the new birth was accomplished by the personal awareness of God’s only begotten Son. While it may contradict stilted theologies, it is still good to consider this truth. It is a matter of revelation.

The superiority of the Lord Jesus Christ is a suitable subject for contemplation. In the light emanating from His Person, everything else is clarified. Too, our own persons are affected by the consideration of Christ. As it is written, *“But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit”* (2 Cor 3:18, NASB). We are not transformed by rule-keeping, or the conveyance of additional information--although both are integral to our salvation. It is essential to grasp the REASON for our justification. The implications and effects of regeneration will never be attractive to us until we can see the foundation upon which God’s acceptance of us rests. A concentration upon Christ will result in moral change.

From one perspective, the new birth was accomplished by the personal awareness of God’s

only begotten Son. While it may contradict stilted theologies, it is still good to consider this truth. It is a matter of revelation. ***“For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”*** (2 Cor 4:6). This experience is the *illumination* referred to in the book of Hebrews. ***“But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated . . . (“enlightened,” NASB — “received the light,” NIV (Heb 10:32). Notice the means to our initial enlightenment-- “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God” is realized by means of “the face of Christ.” That is to say, the means to understanding the expression of God’s Person is the focused consideration of His Son! Who God is, and what He has accomplished cannot be comprehended apart from being occupied with the Lord Jesus Christ. Our regeneration was accomplished through this means, as well as our continued advancement in the Spirit. While this seems very apparent, your own experience will confirm that it is very elusive.***

The remarkable flood of worldly--and even theological--distractions, hide the face of Christ from men. It is common for seemingly devout *church* people to be occupied with things other than Jesus. It may be a career, a mission, or some other form of institutional fervor. What is even more, much of what comes from the pulpit and classroom obscures Christ, rather than bringing Him with the consciousness of the hearers.

The book of Hebrews was written to those captivated with Law--rules and regulations. For this reason, it is right up to date! No need for a historical analysis of the book to benefit from it--only a personal analysis! Mind you, there is nothing wrong with rules and regulations when they are correctly handled. As it is written, ***“We know that the law is good if one uses it properly”*** (1 Tim 1:8). However, when the Law, in any form, becomes the means of appropriating Divine acceptance, Jesus is consequently relegated to the background--if a place is reserved for Him at all. The danger of this approach is seen in the solemn words of the Spirit. ***“You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace”*** (Gal 5:4, NASB).

CONSIDER JESUS!

The remarkable flood of worldly--and even theological--distractions, hide the face of Christ from men. It is common for seemingly devout *church* people to be occupied with things other than Jesus. It may be a career, a mission, or some other form of institutional fervor.

Here is an arresting admonition. ***“Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession”*** (NASB). It is refreshing, is it not, to be called ***“holy brethren.”*** You may not consider this to be true of yourself. However, if you are in Christ Jesus, it is true. Notice the logic of the Holy Spirit. He does not say, ***“ . . . holy brethren, that have achieved perfection of life . . . ,”*** or ***“ . . . holy brethren, against which I can find no fault . . . ,”*** or ***“ . . . holy brethren, that have reached the goal”*** In this text, the Lord identifies us with His call, not our achievement-- ***“partakers of a heavenly calling.”*** Praises be to God for that association!

Allow me to develop this thought briefly. The appropriate consideration of Jesus requires a proper assessment of our calling. When we, by faith, view ourselves as ***“holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling,”*** will accentuate the grace of God. Paul spoke for every child of God when he said, ***“by the grace of God I am what I am”*** (1 Cor 15:10). That is an honest and insightful assessment that will color the way we look at Jesus. If we look at Jesus academically, He will be interesting. If we consider Him as a religious person, He will appear helpful--maybe even

necessary. However, if we contemplate the Son of God as someone made holy by means of a heavenly calling, He will be perceived as indispensable to our initial and continued acceptance by God.

The word **“consider”** (from **katanoh,sate**) means *to observe fully:--behold, consider, or discover*. It is not a casual word, nor does it describe a carefree recollection of Christ. The aim of this contemplation is to grasp the true significance of Jesus--to see Him from a heavenly perspective. The reason for this exhortation is twofold. First, no progress will be made in the faith without a due consideration of the Lord Jesus Christ. Second, we will be drawn aside into meaningless bypaths if we do not consider Jesus.

A consideration of Jesus will yield benefits and advantages nothing else can do. Too often men ponder things unrelated to their **“eternal salvation.”** They are invariably distracted from the goal by such considerations, disabled in their quest for eternal life, and brought down into the realm where Satan gains the advantage. But such is not the case when Christ’s Person and accomplishments dominate the heart and mind. In this consideration the understanding is cleared, the heart warmed, and the will sanctified. Remember, God has nothing to offer that does not come through His Son. Furthermore, those resources are realized ONLY when we are focused upon Christ Jesus. In the words of Scripture, **“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith . . .”** (Heb 12:1-2). I want to again emphasize that, in this book, the Spirit is bringing us to contemplate the Son of God. That is the Divinely appointed means to recovery, spiritual growth, and fruitfulness.

HE WAS FAITHFUL!

What a marvelous word is said of our Savior: **“He was faithful to Him who appointed Him.”** Do not take the faithfulness of Christ for granted! It was accomplished in the arena of temptation and struggle. In this world, faithfulness assumes opposition and distraction. That was never more true than in the earthly tenure of our Savior.

God sent His Son on a mission transcending the fondest expectations of both men and angels. How refreshing to read the various expressions of that mission in Scripture.

Do not take the faithfulness of Christ for granted! It was accomplished in the arena of temptation and struggle. In this world, faithfulness assumes opposition and distraction. That was never more true than in the earthly tenure of our Savior.

√ To be the Savior of the world -- **“And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world”** (1 John 4:14).

√ To fulfill the Law and the Prophets -- **“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil”** (Matt 5:17).

√ To reveal those that had hope, and those that did not -- **“For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind”** (John 9:39).

√ To bring abundant life to those in the grip of darkness and death -- **“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly”** (John 10:10).

√ To voluntarily lay down His life, and triumphantly take it back again -- **“No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up**

again. This command I received from my Father" (John 10:18, NIV).

√ To bring Divine illumination to the sons of men -- *"John 12:46 I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness" (John 12:46).*

√ To destroy the devil -- *"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb 1:14).*

√ To destroy the works of the devil -- *"For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8).*

√ To proclaim freedom, recovery of spiritual sight, the release of the oppressed, and announce the day of grace -- *"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19, NIV).*

Adam did not fulfill the expectation of the Lord, but Jesus did! Abraham occupied the land of promise in the capacity of a stranger (Heb 11:9), but Jesus occupied His domain in reality! Moses once spoke hastily with his lips, marring his impeccable record (Psa 106:33), But Jesus did not! The Son of God was flawless in His obedience, thorough in His work, and glorious in its accomplishment!

√ To testify to the truth of God, making it accessible to a fallen race -- *"...for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth..." (John 18:37, NIV).*

√ To save sinners -- *"Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners..." (1 Tim 1:15, NIV).*

√ To give His life a ransom for man -- *"Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt 20:28).*

√ To show His justice and justify sinners -- *"He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished--He did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus" (Rom 3:25-26).*

√ To condemn sin in Christ's flesh, and fulfill the righteousness of the Law in believers - *"God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom 8:3-4).*

√ That we might be made the righteousness of God in Christ -- *"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21, NIV).* What a noble purpose!

By saying the Son was *"faithful to Him Who appointed Him,"* the Spirit is affirming the above objectives--and more--were all accomplished by the Son. Adam did not fulfill the expectation of the Lord, but Jesus did! Abraham occupied the land of promise in the capacity of a stranger (Heb 11:9), but Jesus occupied His domain in reality! Moses once spoke hastily with his lips, marring his

impeccable record (Psa 106:33), But Jesus did not! The Son of God was flawless in His obedience, thorough in His work, and glorious in its accomplishment! The devil had no part in Him--no place in which to gain a foothold (John 14:30).

We must not allow the beauty of this truth to escape our attention, or grow so accustomed to hearing it that it means little to us. Christ's sinlessness was accomplished in the crucible of trial, temptation, and distraction. Our salvation was forged on the anvil of testing--an anvil that had brought the downfall of every son of Adam! The obedience of Christ was not "easy" because He was the Son of God. He "*learned obedience by the things that He suffered*" (Heb 5:8).

How marvelous the confession of Christ. "*For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak*" (John 12:49-50). ". . . *I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me . . .*" (John 14:31). The mission of our Savior was large, and the work exacting! Yet He fulfilled it to the finest detail. He was "*faithful to Him that appointed Him!*" Mark it well! What Jesus can do for you is important, but what He did for God is MORE important. The foundation of your salvation what he did for the Father! His obedience to God ranks even higher than what He did for you. In fact, that is what makes His work vicarious, or effectively substitutionary! Were the Son disobedient to the Father, or unfaithful in His mission, His death and resurrection would have no efficacy for us!

MOSES WAS FAITHFUL IN ALL HIS HOUSE

We live in a time of *fallen leaders* --professed spiritual leaders that have fallen into sin and disgrace. There is a tolerance of and sympathy for this sort of phenomenon that is uncomely.

Such men, who have access to far more than Moses, must go and sit at his feet, learning of faithfulness.

Aside from Jesus, Moses suffered more at the hands of God's people than any other man. If ever there was a man with a reason to be unfaithful (from the carnal point of view) it was Moses. However, he knew the truth declared by Paul centuries later: "*Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful*" (1 Cor 4:2). Even in Scripture, such men are rare. Hear once again what God has said about Moses. "*Moses was faithful in all God's house.*" What a remarkable testimony! Who is the man that will stand in criticism of Moses after hearing the Divine assessment of his person?

The remarkable faithfulness of Moses must be seen in view of his call and ministry. God commissioned him to appear before Pharaoh and order him to let God's people go (Ex 4:21-23; 5:1; 7:16; 8:1,20,21; 9:1,13; 10:3,4). Moses led the people out of Egypt, at one time, at midnight, with all of their children and possessions (Ex 11:4ff). He led them across the Red Sea, being commissioned to part it with a raised rod and faith in God--with the voice of murmuring Israelites in the background (Ex 4:10-14). He brought water out of a rock midst the voice of complaint (Ex 17:3-6). With faithfulness and wisdom, he judged the disputes among Israel (Ex 18:13-14). The Law, with all of its complexities, was "given by Moses (John 1:17)--without addition, subtraction, or modification. Jesus equated the Law of God with what "*Moses commanded*" (Matt 8:4; 19:7). The record of Moses confirms that he lived in harmony with God's agenda! When a clash arose between the world's agenda and that of the Lord, He chose the latter. Thus it is written, "*By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy*

the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered abuse suffered for the Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to the reward" (Heb 11:24-26, NRSV). Prior to Christ, he lived a more acute awareness of the Messiah than many professed believers of our time!

Think of what is said of Moses--He was *"faithful in all God's house."* God did not give Moses a house of his own, yet he was faithful in God's house. He discharged his ministry faithfully, even though those that were the beneficiaries of that ministry were calloused and ungrateful. *"By faith he left Egypt, unafraid of the king's anger; for he persevered as though he saw him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel"* (Heb 11:27-28). When he left Egypt, he was not running from Pharaoh as much as resorting to his Refuge! God says he was *"unafraid of the king's anger"* because he saw Him who cannot be seen! He saw far beyond Egypt and the desert into which he journeyed. That is why he was *"faithful in all God's house."*

We live in a time of *fallen leaders* --professed spiritual leaders that have fallen into sin and disgrace. There is a tolerance of and sympathy for this sort of phenomenon that is uncomely. Such men, who have access to far more than Moses, must go and sit at his feet, learning of faithfulness. Moses did not have what is now experienced in Christ Jesus. He saw the promises afar off, but, like all who lived before Christ, he died *"not having obtained the promise"* (Heb 11:13). He was *"faithful in all of God's house,"* and they are not! He will doubtless rise in the day of judgment against vacillating self-acclaimed leaders that fell into sin because they chose to live in darkness. Without fellowship with Christ, without the indwelling Spirit as it is in Christ Jesus, and without justification as it is in Christ Jesus, Moses *"was faithful in all of God's house."* A great man., indeed!

COUNTED WORTHY OF MORE HONOR

With all of the emphasis on the unworthiness of man, it is imperative that we consider the worthiness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our text is refreshingly to the point. *"For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses."* With men, glory, or honor, is not always associated with worthiness. It is possible to attain to worldly honor dishonorably, or to receive undeserved honor. It is also possible to receive glory and honor because of the corruptness of the times. This is not the case, however, with our Savior. He has been *"counted,"* or *"deemed worthy"* of greater *"dignity, glory, honor, praise, worship"* (do,xhj). This is the *"glory and honor"* referred to in 2:9. God Himself bestowed this *"glory and honor."*

With men, glory, or honor, is not always associated with worthiness. It is possible to attain to worldly honor dishonorably, or to receive undeserved honor. It is also possible to receive glory and honor because of the corruptness of the times. This is not the case, however, with our Savior.

This glory was granted to Him because of His obedience as a Man. This is important to note. The Father did not honor the Son because He was Divine, but because of His achievements in the war-zone of *"this present evil world"* (Gal 1:4). It was because He was *"faithful to Him that appointed Him."* Remember, that faithfulness related to the salvation of a fallen race; the reclamation of people sold to sin! The required work was so large that it could not be accomplished by an enumerable company of angels! Nor, indeed, could it be accomplished by the spoken word of the Almighty!

Keep in mind, God has bestowed honor upon Moses. A recollection of that honor is necessary if we are to grasp the significance of this comparison. God said of Moses, ***“Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household; with him I speak mouth to mouth, Even openly, and not in dark sayings, And he beholds the form of the LORD”*** (Num 12:6-8). How many men have received such honor? Let those that purport to have direct revelation from God compare themselves with Moses! Other men had their dreams, but that is not how God spoke to Moses! He was trustworthy-- ***“faithful”*** in all of God’s house. With him God spoke ***“mouth to mouth,”*** or ***“as by the means of blowing.”*** It is a prosaic way of saying God put His own words into Moses’ mouth. In speaking of the coming Messiah, Moses said God would ***“put His words”*** in the mouth of the coming Prophet (Deut 18:18). This was an honor higher than that of Adam, into whose nostrils God breathed the breath of life (Gen 2:7).

Of Moses it is said, ***“Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend”*** (Ex 33:11, NASB). Hear the glory and honor given to Moses. ***“Since then no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, for all the signs and wonders which the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, all his servants, and all his land, and for all the mighty power and for all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel”*** (Josh 1:10-12, NASB). So far as the Scriptures are concerned, Moses is the only man God personally buried (Deut 34:5-6). His miracles are unparalleled for magnitude. A man of remarkable meekness and humility, it is said of him, ***“Now the man Moses was very meek (humble, NASB, NIV) above all the men which were upon the face of the earth”*** (Num 12:3, KJV). The name ***“Moses”*** is mentioned no less than 848 times in the Word of God! Only the names of ***“David”*** (1,085) and ***“Jesus”*** appear more frequently (983 in the last 27 books of the Bible alone)! A number of the times ***“David”*** is used, it actually is referring to the coming Messiah, Who was the ***“son of David”*** (16 times; i.e., Matt 1:1; 9:27; 22:42), and was often called ***“David”*** (Jer 30:9; Ezek 34:23; 37:24). The kingdom of Christ was also called ***“the house of David”*** (Isa 22:22; Zech 12:10; 13:1).

While it may sound extremely strong, it is nevertheless true: institutionalism is the direct result of ***“not holding the Head”*** (Col 2:19). There is a natural enmity between institutionalism and the Kingdom of God, over which Jesus presides.

The frequency of the mention of ***“Moses”*** is staggering! We read of the ***“word of Moses”*** (Ex 32:28; Lev 10:7), ***“the face of Moses”*** (Ex 34:35; 2 Cor 3:7), ***“the hand of Moses”*** (Psa 77:20; Isa 63:12), ***“the law of Moses”*** (Josh 8:31; Mal 4:4; Lk 24:44), and ***“the book of Moses”*** (2 Chron 25:4; Ezra 6:18; Mark 12:26). His ***“body”*** is the only one ever involved in a dispute between the devil and an archangel (Jude 9). Time forbids us to elaborate on the things attributed to Moses; i.e., God led Israel by him (Psa 77:20; Isa 63:12). In fact, the Spirit states the people ***“came out of Egypt led by Moses”*** (Heb 3:16). Here was a man, greatly honored by God! Jesus equated believing the Law with believing Moses (John 5:46)! What a singular honor for Moses to have that also said of him! God did not speak to Moses in parables, similitudes, and ***“dark sayings.”*** Moses was able to come close enough to God to understand! That was a remarkable achievement.

What honor was given to Moses! Think of it! He was given to behold ***“the form of the Lord.”*** No one in all of Israel was afforded such an honor. Of wayward Israel it was said, ***“You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form”*** (John 5:37). But Moses did! It is not that God has a “shape” or “form,” even though some suppose He does. What Moses beheld was a similitude, or likeness--something that accommodated itself to his vision. God made Himself personally known to Moses!

Our text states that the Son has been counted BY GOD as worthy of *“of more glory than Moses.”* And why so? Because He did more! His works were of a greater order! Moses was dominating among men for 40 years, during which great things were wrought by his hand. The Lord Jesus was *“cut off out of the land of the living”* (Isa 53:8) at a relatively young age. Moses lives 120 years, and Jesus lived a little more than 33 years--but there is no comparison in their accomplishments! Jesus has been deemed worthy of greater honor than Moses!

Moses did not bring the people to God, because he could not change them. Jesus changes the people, and brings them to God! Moses, with all of the sacrifices instituted under the Law, which came by him, could never remove a single sin. Jesus *“put sin away by the sacrifice of Himself”* (Heb 9:26). Moses could not frustrate the devil, but Jesus *“destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil”* (Heb 2:14). Jesus was *“counted worthy of greater honor”* because He accomplished what God wanted to be done. He *“reconciled the world”* to God (2 Cor 5:18-20), and opened up the way to the Father (Heb 10:20).

Compare the people led by Moses at the conclusion of his ministry, and the people of God at the conclusion of their earthly sojourn under the tutelage of Jesus. In his valedictory address to the people he had led for 40 years, Moses said the following. *“You have been rebellious against the LORD from the day I knew you”* (Deut 9:24). Now, the result of Christ’s ministry, Who is worthy of more honor than Moses. *“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy”* (Jude 24). Who would dare to compare that achievement with the most noble of all of Moses’ works? The greatness of Jesus is unexcelled!

HE THAT BUILT THE HOUSE IS GREATER

I want to say this as strongly as I can, yet without deprecating the disciplined study of language. It is not possible to arrive at the meaning of key Scriptural words [particularly relating to eternal salvation] by a study of language alone.

There is a tendency in men to exalt the means above the objective, the worker above the work, and the servant above the Master. It is remarkable how this predilection dominates in religious circles. It is not unusual to hear evangelism emphasized above the Gospel, an apparently successful person above the work accomplished, or the one serving the Lord above the Lord Himself. This may be excusable in the world--but it is not in God’s Kingdom. When we speak of Jess, we are not speaking of One that simply has been given glory and honor. He is WORTHY of all glory and honor! The Holy Spirit now rivets this truth into our conscience.

“The builder of the house has more honor than the house.” Keep in mind, Moses was a servant in God’s house--he had no house of his own! He was a servant, Jesus is the Lord! He managed another Person’s house, Jesus administrates His own house. Israel was the house of Moses, a vast multitude which no man can number comprises Christ’s house! But note what is said here. It conflicts sharply with the thrust of much of today’s religion. Hear the affirmation again. *“The builder of the house has more honor than the house.”*

Often I hear zealous preachers and church representatives speak of the congregation as *“people centered.”* It all sounds very nice, and even has an air of religiosity about

it. You will not find these people-devotees, however, speaking much about Jesus. He does not seem to fit into their program. **The Person that built the house has more honor than the house!** Others--like the movement with which I have been identified--make the church (or "*the house*") their focus. That is what they are about, getting the church back where it ought to be. This too appears to be very noble. However, **The Person that built the house has more honor than the house!**

The "*house*" is precious, and is not to be despised — but the Person that built it has more honor than the "*house*." The "*house*" has brought us many benefits, and our closest associations on earth are in the "house" — but He that built the house has more honor than the "*house*." This "house" is nothing less than the "*temple of God*," indwelt by Deity and wherein truth and grace are found. As it is written, "*Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple*" (1 Cor 3:16-17). Have a zeal for "*the house*!" Take heed how you build upon it, and be sure you do not defile, corrupt, or pollute it. But always know, the One who builds the house is greater than "*the house*." Give the honor and glory to Him. The "house" did not save you, Jesus did! The "*house*" did not die for you, was not raised for you, and does not sit at God's right hand for you--Jesus does! Let the greater glory go to Him!

One last word on this pungent thought. Once the priority of the Son is seen and embraced, the individual cannot emphasize the institutionalism. While it may sound extremely strong, it is nevertheless true: institutionalism is the direct result of "*not holding the Head*" (Col 2:19). There is a natural enmity between institutionalism and the Kingdom of God, over which Jesus presides. The Son of God is over an eternal kingdom: institutions are temporal by nature and Divine appointment. Just as the temporal competes with the eternal, and the natural opposes the spiritual, so institutionalism competes with Christ's Kingdom. It will simply not settle for lesser glory, nor will it ascribe the greater glory to the Son. Even a lawful involvement in the institution will soon confirm this to your spirit.

TESTIMONY OF THINGS TO BE SPOKEN LATER

The Son of God and His redemptive ministry is what sanctified the tabernacle! Without Him, the entire tabernacle service would have been meaningless. That is why Moses had to be precise! If the shadow is distorted, the ability to discern the real Minister and the real tabernacle will be effected!

The ministry of Moses involved infinitely more than leading the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage and delivering the Law. There was an eternal perspective to his work that will challenge our thinking. The text says, "*Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that would be spoken later*" (3:5, NRSV). The point of the text is this: the PURPOSE for Moses faithfulness involves a preparation for what God would say at a later time. Like John the Baptist, he was preparing the way for the coming of the Son, Christ Jesus the Lord.

Think of Moses faithfulness! God said of him, "*My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house*" (Num 12:7). The benefits of that faithfulness are not limited to his generation, or even to his nation. By faithfully conveying the Law and its attending ordinances, he provided a series of types and a nomenclature that would be employed to elaborate on God's great

salvation! God was not merely giving the Israelites information and direction in the Law and its associated service, He was preparing the world to understand coming redemption! Moses was actually in charge of developing a spiritual vocabulary. He did not do it with a dictionary, but with type, symbols, and shadows. God used Moses to introduce and elaborate upon the concepts of sacrifice, blood, altar, holy place, holiest place, high priest, intercession, etc. I want to say this as strongly as I can, yet without deprecating the disciplined study of language. It is not possible to arrive at the meaning of key Scriptural words [particularly relating to eternal salvation] by a study of language alone. Regardless of the thoroughness of lexical aids, words like “lamb,” “sacrifice,” “blood,” “atonement,” “holy,” “mediator,” “salvation,” and “intercessor” cannot be properly understood without the ministry of Moses. He was charged with providing a framework for the development of these concepts--unique to the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. With this in mind, several verses in Hebrews come to life.

A Way to Understand Christ's Ministry

Those that labor under a system of Law, attempting to work their way into God's favor, know nothing of a heavenly Minister. They are looking for salvation to be affected upon earth. Actually, it is affected in heaven. Thus the Spirit says, *“Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man”* (8:1-2). The real message God wanted to get across to humanity was NOT the manner in which they were to live, but the living heavenly Minister, His only begotten Son! He knew that the knowledge of that Minister impacts upon human conduct. Moses oversaw the construction of the tabernacle. That portable sanctuary was “pitched” by man! They built it, and they set it up. That was, however, a figure of a heavenly residence, wherein an effective High Priest ministers. The PURPOSE for Moses' ministry involved preparing people to understand the idea of a heavenly High Priest, Intercessor, and Mediator. Just as heaven is superior to earth, so the ministry and Person of Jesus are superior to that of Moses! **Were it not for the Person and ministry of Jesus, there would have been no need for Moses and his ministry--none at all!**

Effective intercession was not made in the outer court, or even in the holy place. It was only accomplished within the holiest place--in contact with God.

Precision Required

Legalists are fond of pointing to the commission given to Moses as an example of punctilious obedience. Make no mistake about it, his ministry is, indeed, an example of such obedience. Further, any other kind of obedience is unacceptable. Having said all of that, it is refreshing to read WHY Moses was ordered to be precise in the construction of the tabernacle. *“...seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law: who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount”* (8:4b-5b).

The instructions for building the tabernacle were remarkably precise in every way. Length, height, and width were specified. The exact measurement of every article of furniture was given. The types of material to be used in the making of

the furniture, as well as the tabernacle itself and its veil, were outlined. Nothing was general. Everything was specific. The material of the altar of sacrifice differed from that of the altar of incense. A precise schematic was given for constructing the golden lamp stand that was to be in the holy place. Precision marked every aspect of the ark of the covenant: i.e., the material used to construct it, what was to overlay the material, and what was to be inside the ark. Precision, precision, precision (Ex 25-27)! God warned Moses to be precise in making the tabernacle--to carefully follow the detailed pattern provided to him in the holy mountain . *“And see that you make them according to the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain . . . Set up the tabernacle according to the plan shown you on the mountain”* (Ex 25:40; 26:30, NRSV).

The Son of God and His redemptive ministry is what sanctified the tabernacle! Without Him, the entire tabernacle service would have been meaningless. That is why Moses had to be precise! If the shadow is distorted, the ability to discern the real Minister and the real tabernacle will be effected! God was not showing the necessity of rules, but providing a way to comprehend the height and depth and length and breadth of salvation. The real secret to faithfulness is not detailed commands, but fellowship with the Son. We are *“called”* to such a fellowship (1 Cor 1:9).

The Way to God Revealed

The way of approach to God is revealed in the tabernacle service. This service was given to Israel, and pertained to them (Rom 9:4). It did not, however, end with them! They were the custodians of a *“service”* that prefigured, or foreshadowed, *“the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory”* (2 Tim 2:10). The *“way”* into the presence of God had not been made known. What is even more, the people were not capable of comprehending that way without being introduced to it. Apart from the tabernacle service, this *“way”* has no earthly parallel. It is not a mere matter of protocol, and thus was not prefigured by the approach to earthly kings. Nor, indeed, was it a matter of human ingenuity--a product, so to speak, of man groping for God.

In the tabernacle service, Moses revealed the way to God. *“ . . .into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people: the Holy Spirit this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing: Which was a figure . . . ”* (Heb 9:7-8). And how was the way revealed? This way involved Divine requirements, and therefore had to be precise. Because this will be covered later in our lessons, I will only summarize a few of those requirements here. Remember, this is the REASON for the tabernacle service--to depict these requirements.

The altar of sacrifice revealed the way to God necessarily includes a substitutionary sacrifice. An acceptable sacrifice must PRECEDE our acceptance in the presence of the Almighty.

The laver revealed that those approaching God must be washed--cleansed from

impurities. There--at the laver--the person was dedicated--set apart for Divine service..

The holy place was separated from the outer court, showing that only qualified and prepared people can enter the presence of God. It was not a place to visit, but a realm of service.

The tabernacle itself was covered with badger skins, yet inside, was a remarkable display of beauty and value. This taught men that fellowship with God does not appear valuable from the outside. It is, however, exceeding precious from the inside. A person simply cannot form a proper evaluation of spiritual life from the outside. External piety is good, and speaks to the world. It cannot, however, show the preciousness of life in Christ. That can only be seen from within the body of Christ. How true, we are not to judge according to appearance, but just righteous judgment. This was illustrated in the tabernacle itself.

Within the holy place, there as a lamp, declaring that illumination and enlightenment are found in fellowship with the Lord. With that enlightenment, one cannot see clearly enough to serve the Lord appropriately.

There was also a table with show bread, proclaiming that sustenance is experienced in the service of God. Sustenance, however, must be ministered within the sanctuary.

The altar of incense acquainted men with the necessity of being pleasing to God. Whoever approaches God must bring with them a fragrance that appeals to Him. An effective appeal must be made to God's good pleasure.

The veil that separated the holiest place from the holy place revealed that real fellowship with God can only be experienced on a personal level. It cannot be found by being in a certain place, or with certain people. One must personally enter into the presence of the Lord.

Those that come into this arena must be qualified--not by mere ritual, but through redemptive provision. Within the holiest place, God communed with the High Priest from the mercy seat, which covered the ark of the covenant. This showed that the deepest and most profound contact with God is based upon mercy, and that His mercy supercedes, but does not obliterate, His demanding Law.

Effective intercession was not made in the outer court, or even in the holy place. It was only accomplished within the holiest place--in contact with God.

This intercession also required the blood of the sacrifice. This teaches us that the blood of atonement is made effective in heaven, not upon the earth. The blood

of the atoning sacrifice touching the heart of God is what makes the sinner acceptable.

Do you see why Moses had to make the tabernacle according to the pattern revealed to him in the mountain? It was not a mere lesson in obedience, although that was involved. This was God's way of preparing the world for the way of salvation. The way to God was made known--a way absolutely indispensable to Divine acceptance. The One that built the house has more honor than the house--even though the house is built by God! What glorious things will be experienced by those that perceive this reality!

It is a great deliverance to see the reality of these things. "Pattern" theology has robbed many a soul, distorting the vision and corrupting preaching and teaching.

THE SON IS OVER THE HOUSE

Moses was a servant over God's house. The Son is over His OWN house. *"But Christ was faithful as a Son over*

His house." Some have argued over whether "His house" refers to God or the Son--whether the Son was over God's house, or whether it belonged to Himself. The technicalities of the language are of no consequence here. The distinction being made is that of a servant versus a son. *"Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant,"* while *"but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house."* Moses was a steward, Jesus has been given the house! From another view, the Israelites in the care of Moses, but they did not belong to him--they belonged to God (Judges 20:2; 2 Sam 14:13; Heb 11:25). In Jesus' day, some Jews called themselves *"Moses' disciples"* (John 9:28). That is not to be compared with being *"in Christ."*

Moses' ministry primarily involved testifying of things to come. He really did not give the people spiritual advantages. This was not due to any deficiency on his part; he was *"faithful in all of His house."* It was the nature of his ministry to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus Christ! He (the Son) was the appointed Head over the house. That condition confirms the superiority of the Son of God. If it was not for Christ, Moses would have had no ministry at all! The Son was the whole reason for the indispensable ministry of Moses, the man of God. He was also the reason for the Law, with all of its attending ordinances. The Son, on the other hand, provides eternal riches to His house, bringing them to God--something Moses could never do. What Israel had is not to be compared with the richness of our salvation.

WHOSE HOUSE ARE WE

The point of this treatise is to increase the confidence of the people in the Lord Jesus Christ. They had allowed teachers to turn them from God's appointed Person to procedures, from grace to Law, from the Son to a lifeless system. In salvation, our status changes. We are *"translated into the kingdom of God's Son"* (Col 1:13). We have not been called to a discipline, but to a Person. Our primary relationship is not to an institution, but to the Lord and His Christ.

In what sense is the Son *"OVER"* His house? For some, it is in the sense of Lordship. In a

sense this is certainly true--but this is not the sense of our text. I often hear the people of God told they should “*submit to the Lordship of Christ.*” All of this is spoken as though believers were really not reconciled to God. They are addressed as though their basic propensity is away from Christ. Left to themselves, they are told they would surely drift into darkness. It is as though they had not been born again, and were not really regenerated. Thus, they are told to “*submit,*” as though they had not already done so. This is the mentality that dictates the view of the Son being “*over*” His house in the sense of being Lord over it.

It is needful to remind you of the real status of believers. Although “*we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another,*” that is not the case with us now! Now, “*the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind*” has “*appeared.*” In that kindness, “*He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life*” (Tit 3:3-7, NASB). The transformation was real, constituting us “*new creations*” in Christ Jesus. “*Old things passed away,*” and everything became “*new*” (2 Cor 5:17).

As the Divinely appointed Householder, the Son of God is in charge of the household. His role is to feed, equip, and protect the people of God. He leads them in the paths of righteousness, opens the eyes of their understanding, and mediates the Covenant to them.

Isaiah prophesied of this remarkable change. The condition of the people, as well as their character, would be changed. “*Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes*” (Isa 35:5-7). Those that can see ought not be addressed as though they were blind! People that can leap should not hear sermons that represent them as lame! Those that can sing are not to be considered dumb. Where waters break forth, and streams are found, we no longer speak of the wilderness and desert. That is why the Apostles consistently referred to believers as people that had been changed by the grace of God. Even though they often had deficiencies, they were addressed as people that had been changed. “*. . . you also are the called of Jesus Christ; to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints*” (Rom 1:6-7, NASB). “*. . . to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus*” (1 Cor 1:2, NASB). “*you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God*” (1 Cor 6:11, NASB). “*. . . In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight*” (Eph 1:7,8, NASB). “*He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins*” (Col 1:13,14, NASB). This should suffice to confirm the point that is being made.

What does this have to do with the Son being “*OVER*” His house? A great deal, indeed. As the Divinely appointed Householder, the Son of God is in charge of the household. His role is to

feed, equip, and protect the people of God. He leads them in the paths of righteousness, opens the eyes of their understanding, and mediates the Covenant to them. They are answerable to Him, to be sure, and will give an account of the things they have done in the body, whether they are good or evil (2 Cor 5:10). There can be no diminishment of this perspective in our hearts. However, the most powerful motivation for godliness is not accountability, but insight into Divine provision. When speaking of his unusual labors in the Kingdom, Paul traced it back to *“the grace of God,”* not an awareness of being answerable to the Lord (1 Cor 15:10). Peter tells us how we become *“partakers of the Divine nature.”* It is not by trying to be like Jesus, as noble as that effort is. Nor, indeed, is it through perfect obedience--if there is such a thing.

The Holy Spirit moved Peter to say it this way. *“Thus He has given us, through these things, His precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature”* (2 Pet 1:4, NIV). *“These things,”* through which the provisions come, are His *“glory and virtue”* (KJV), or *“glory and goodness”* (NIV). His glory speaks of the expressive part of His nature, and His “virtue” or “goodness” speaks of His intention to bless. These most excellent attributes are the cause behind the provision--the means through which we will *“participate in the Divine nature.”* And what has been given to ensure we can be *“conformed to the image of His Son,”* becoming *“like Him”* (Rom 8:29; 1 John 3:1-2)? The Legalists would say *“the commandments.”* The libertine would say *“license.”* Do not miss the appointed means! They are *“HIS PRECIOUS AND VERY GREAT PROMISES,”* OR His *“EXCEEDING GREAT AND PRECIOUS PROMISES”* (KJV).

The Spirit is leading people away from the notion that Law is the means of obtaining the favor of God. Identity with Christ is shown in the fruitage of confidence and hope--to indispensable elements. It is interesting neither of these are considered essential by the Law-keeper. They are perceived as signs of presumption, and are vigorously opposed by those enamored of Law.

Why is this the case? Why not use commandments as the basis for conformity to the Divine image? Because only Divine commitments can stimulate faith! Paul well said, *“The law is not based on faith”* (Gal 3:12, NRSV). Commands give us something to do, promises give us something believe. Do not think for one moment this deprecates obeying, or doing the will of the Lord! Faith is the root, and obedience is the branch--and *“faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ”* (Rom 10:17, ASV). The Gospel is the announcement of Divine provision, not a demand to fulfill a code! For that reason, faith can take hold of it!

What does all of this have to do with us being the house of Christ? As the One “over” the “house,” the Son of God is providing the spiritual realities of which the promises speak. He is the appointed Provider for those that believe the promises. It is true, we *“through faith and patience inherit what has been promised”* (Heb 6:12, NRSV). It is the ministry of the Son, however, that brings it to pass. Were it not for Him, neither faith nor patience (perseverance) would be of any consequence!

This truth is brought home by this provocative statement: *“Christ was faithful as a Son over His house whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end”* (v 6, NASB). Note the power of these words. He does NOT say we are His house if we are faithful! Nor, indeed, is membership in Christ’s household traced back to our deeds. These observations are not intended to demean faithfulness or works--and none should imagine such things. The Spirit is leading people away from the notion that Law is the means of obtaining the favor of God. Identity with Christ is shown in the fruitage of confidence and hope--to indispensable elements. It is interesting neither of these are considered essential by the Law-keeper. They are perceived as signs of presumption, and are vigorously opposed by those enamored of Law.

When we came into Christ, we came in with *“confidence”* and *“hope.”* These accompany the new birth, and are invariably found in those born of the Spirit. That is why early believers *“gladly received the Word”* (Acts 2:41), *“rejoiced”* (Acts 8:39), and even *“took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance”* (Heb 10:34). Even the spiritually juvenile knew the Father (1 John 2:13), understanding their sins had been forgiven (1 John 2:12). The lack of confidence and assurance indicates a walk in darkness. These qualities are not associated with maturity alone, but with faith--something *“common”* to everyone in the body of Christ (Eph 3:12; 2 Tim 1:12; Heb 10:22).

Those in the house will receive spiritual nourishment. They will be under the care of the *“Good Shepherd,”* Who cares for His own (John 10:13-14). The prophets foretold of the ministry of our Good Shepherd, and their words are wonderful. *“Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd”* (Ezek 34:23-24). That is the ministry of the Son, Who is over His house. Under the Headship of the Son, the people of God are nourished and strengthened. This is one of the glorious traits of the *“day of salvation.”* As it is written, *“For He says: ‘In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you.’ Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation”* (2 Cor 6:2, NKJV). I like the word *“succored”* that is used in the King James Version. To me, it is a more specific word than *“helped.”* This word is translated from *evboh,qhsa*, which means *run to the aid of one who cries for help . . . help, come to the aid of, rescue*. It is not that Jesus is our Servant, running at the sound of our voice. The idea is that He is alert to our needs, able to be *“touched with the feeling of our infirmities”* (Heb 4:15). We are in His care, and He cares for us--with His heart. That is what it means to be over His house!

A sense of security grips our hearts when we walk with Christ. Hope becomes a jewel, nestled in our hearts, as we commune with Him. We are thus His house, becoming those to Whom He ministers, in a *“dry and thirsty land, where no water is”*

However, that care and provision will be directly proportionate to the *“confidence and the boast of our hope.”* These are the means through which identity with Christ’s house are realized. It is interesting to note the extreme rarity of these qualities in our time. If our hearts are not affected by this great salvation, we will not be succored by the Head of the house! Our tenderness makes us able to receive His nourishment! Our sensitivity to His presence is the means through which Divine resources are received. Our *“fellowship”* with the Son (1 Cor 1:9) is the appointed environment in which nourishment from the Head can be ministered (Col 2:19). Those experiential areas (tender hearts, spiritual sensitivity, and fellowship with the Son) produce *“confidence and the boast of our hope.”* A sense of security grips our hearts when we walk with Christ. Hope becomes a jewel, nestled in our hearts, as we commune with Him. We are thus His

house, becoming those to Whom He ministers, in a *“dry and thirsty land, where no water is”* (Psa 63:1).

“We are saved by hope,” , i.e., it provides the incentive to separate ourselves from the world and perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord (Rom 8:24,25; 2 Cor 7:1-2). Sanctification is too often preached from Mount Sinai--imposed as a duty upon men. To be sure, with holiness, *“no man shall see the Lord”* (Heb 12:14). The Holy Spirit declares the way this is accomplished, and it is related to hope. *“See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know Him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when He is revealed, we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as He is pure”* (1 John 3:1-3, NRSV). From the standpoint of our text, this joyous hope is what identifies as Christ's house! That has some arresting implications!

This confident hope requires interaction by the Son, for Whom we wait. How will we be able to *hold out* to the anticipated day of His return? For many, this is too challenging. They do not believe it is possible to endure the hardships of life, meet the demands of the Law, and labor in the Lord's vineyard. It all looks to difficult, and thus they give up.

Those with sensitive hearts already know you cannot mandate faithfulness under these circumstances; i.e., it cannot be accomplished by Law. Moses cannot give us what we require! We need a greater than Moses! This is the point of our text. We have found such a One in the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. By virtue of our confidence in Him and anticipation of His coming, we are in His house. He will see to it that we finish the race! He will underwrite our efforts, feeble though they may be. He is the *Finisher* as well as the *Author* of our faith! He is the *End* as well as the *Beginning* , and the *Last* as well as the *First* . You cannot be in His house and have deficient provisions! It simply is not possible!

WHAT GOD HAS STARTED, HE IS WELL ABLE TO FINISH! TRUST HIM TO DO IT

CONCLUSION

Dear child of God, you are *“complete”* in Christ Jesus (Col 2:10). He is superior to Moses because of Who He is, what He has done, and what He is doing! Moses could give the Law, but he could not place it within men's hearts. He could tell the people what God demanded, but he could not make them willing. He could bring them to the borders of the promised land, but he could not take them in! His ministry is a commentary on the nature of Law--any law that becomes a supposed basis for Divine acceptance. It is not that the Law is sin--it is holy. The Law is certainly not carnal--it is spiritual. The sinaitic code is not evil--it is good. It is not unrighteous--it is righteous. As it is written, *“Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good . . . For we know that the law is spiritual”* (Rom 7:12,14).

Moses could give the Law, but he could not place it within men's hearts. He could tell the people what God demanded, but he could not make them willing. He could bring them to

the borders of the promised land, but he could not take them in! His ministry is a commentary on the nature of Law--any law that becomes a supposed basis for Divine acceptance.

The difficulty was not with the Law, or with Moses--it is with the people to whom it is addressed! The Law is *“weak through [or because of] the flesh”* (Rom 8:3). We needed a Savior, not a code; a Deliverer, not information! Our need was a Householder--One that could care for the house, or the people. Moses was the meekest man in all the earth, but he could not bring the people one millimeter closer to God. He could not take away their sin, or tame their rebellious nature. If anyone could have done it, Moses could! He spoke with God *“face to face and mouth to mouth.”* He saw the glory of God in a private showing, and heard God expound His own nature. His face even glowed with the glory of God (Ex 34:29-30; 2 Cor 3:7)! If a fellow-sinner could bring us to God, it would be Moses. It was to Moses that God said, *“I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion”* (Rom 9:15, NIV; Ex 33:19). If we needed someone that did great deeds for the people, who could transcend Moses? Through his hand, God brought ten unparalleled plagues upon Egypt (Ex 3:19-20; 4:21; chapters 7-11). By him, the Red Sea was parted (Ex 15). He brought water out of a rock (Ex 17:6), and was used to bring bread from heaven (Ex 16:4; John 6:32). When his hands were held up, the Israelites would win the battle, and when they were lowered, they would begin to lose (Ex 17:10-12). Who can you find with better credentials among the sons of Adam?

“Eternal salvation” (Heb 5:9) required a greater than Moses! The requirement was greater, and thus a greater Deliverer was demanded. God’s house is larger, with greater demands than those experienced by the Israelites. Thus, we have a greater Savior and Provider! Thank God for the Son! Praise God, *“He is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy”* (Jude 24, NIV). You will stand at last before God, spotless and rejoicing, because of the Son. To be sure, your effort is involved. You believed! You received! You fought the good fight! You kept the faith! You race the race! None of that was done for you--YOU did it! But was it not for the Son, Who is over the house, you could not have believed, received, fought the fight, kept the faith, or run the race! All glory to the Son! He is greater than Moses, and His salvation is superior. The Son’s house is the confirmation of that fact!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

Commentary on the book of Hebrews

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #5

A SOLEMN WARNING

TO US ALL!

“Therefore, even as the Holy Spirit saith, To-day if ye shall hear his voice, Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, Like as in the day of the trial in the wilderness, Where your fathers tried (me) by proving (me,) And saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was displeased with this generation, And said, They do always err in their heart: But they did not know my ways; As I swore in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest. Take heed, brethren, lest haply there shall be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief, in falling away from the living God: but exhort one another day by day, so long as it is called To-day; lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin: for we are become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end: while it is said, To-day if ye shall hear his voice, Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. For who, when they heard, did provoke? nay, did not all they that came out of Egypt by Moses? And with whom was he displeased forty years? was it not with them that sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom swore he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that were disobedient? And we see that they were not able to enter in because of unbelief” (Hebrews 3:7-19, ASV).

INTRODUCTION

We now enter a section of great solemnity--one that is sorely needed in our time. Having proclaimed the superiority of the Son to angels and Moses, and His willing identity with humanity, the Spirit proceeds to expound the implications of Christ's excellence. Enlarging upon foundational truth is a matter of especial weakness in the contemporary church. Sophists call this “application,” or making the truth relevant to daily life. The Spirit approaches the matter quite differently. The “implications” of the truth relate more than mere daily life. They deal with our preparation for the culmination of our salvation. I have often said this, but must say it again. We now have the “*first fruits*” of our salvation, and not the fulness of it (Rom 8:23). The salvation in its fulness is “*ready to be revealed in the last time*” (1 Pet 1:5). That fulness is called “*the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ*” (1 Pet 1:13). The new birth was not primarily God's way of adapting us to live in “this present evil world.” Rather, it was the indispensable means “*to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you*” (1 Pet 21:4, NASB). The application of the Spirit is always about that Divine objective. To be ready for the appearing of the Lord, and able

to receive the inheritance is everything! If we come short of that, we have utterly failed, and will gain nothing!

A tender heart IS obedient! Religious procedure without spiritual insight or understanding has little, if any, value in the Kingdom of God. Keeping rules that you do not love counts for nothing with God!

Steadfastness Is Required

The Spirit declares that participation in Christ's "*house*" requires steadfastness. Inclusion in that sanctified number is conditioned upon "*holding fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end*" (Heb 3:6, NASB). Notice the language again! This is not referring to slavish obedience to commands that are contrary to our nature. It is not speaking of mere rule-keeping. Let no one imagine for one moment this allows for slovenly or careless response to the commands of the King! No such person has any hope of entering into glory! "*Holding fast our confidence*" and the "*rejoicing of the hope*" are **heart** matters--matters that decisively affect what we say and do. They relate more to sensitivity than procedure. A tender heart IS obedient! Religious procedure without spiritual insight or understanding has little, if any, value in the Kingdom of God. Keeping rules that you do not love counts for nothing with God!

The Law Could Not

Change Men

The Law could not change man's nature. It was not an economy of the heart! God said of Israel, "*These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men*" (Isa 29:13, NIV). This condition will not be tolerated in Christ Jesus. Provision has been made for the reconciliation of men to God, and the recreation of their basic nature. The redeemed not only CAN be sensitive to the Lord, they must **maintain** their status before Him! Israel remained the people of God in spite of their obtuseness and spiritual dulness. That is because the Old Covenant provided no means of being born again. The insensitivity of the people was a source of aggravation to God, but He graciously tolerated it **in anticipation of the coming Son**. Now that the Son is administrating the Kingdom in the behalf of the redeemed, sensitivity is imperative! Be known as a person of tender heart! God will bless those who are easily led, quickly influenced, and decisively moved by His Word.

THE RESPONSIBILITY TO HEAR THE SPIRIT

This is a quotation, if I may speak academically, from Psalm 95:7-11. These words of the Spirit belong to the people under both the Old and New Covenant. They speak of the responsibility of men to hear their God. They call upon everyone to profit from the past. In the midst of lofty praise to God, the Spirit sounds forth the words in reference. He has called us into His courts with praise, lauded the King above all kings, and extolled His virtues (Psa 95:1-7a). The point of the Psalm is this: a lofty God demands the attention of the people. Though high above the people, He is affected by their attitudes and attentiveness. He is not seen by the people, but the people are seen by Him. He is gracious, but will not countenance being spurned by those to whom He speaks. Now, the Spirit summons us into the arena of contemplation--to consider these arresting words of the Spirit.

Strange Language In Our Time

I do not often hear this kind of language. *“So, as the Holy Spirit says: ‘Today, if you hear His voice . . .’”* Those that labor under Law do not speak like this. The thrust of their religion is earthward, where things depend upon men, procedures, and human disciplines. **The Kingdom of Christ, however, is voice-driven!** The King is now speaking from

from heaven (Heb 12:25), and men are obliged to hear Him! He is speaking to sensitive hearts. Hard hearts cannot hear Him. He uses means in this speaking, (i.e., the Scriptures, exhortations, circumstances, etc.), but it is Christ that is doing the real communicating. Paul reminded the Ephesians that the redeemed can hear Jesus and be taught by Him. *“ . . . if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus”* (Eph 4:21, NASB). Jesus Himself said His sheep hear His voice and follow Him (John 10:27). Peter reminded his hearers that Moses had declared the necessity of hearing the voice of God’s Prophet, Jesus. *“For Moses said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything He tells you. Anyone who does not listen to Him will be completely cut off from among His people’”* (Acts 3:22-23, NIV).

See The Seriousness!

You must not overlook the seriousness of this prophecy. It denotes the nature of the Kingdom over which Jesus presides--the economy of salvation. It is not possible to be saved while remaining insensitive to the Lord Jesus Christ. The trite aphorism that says, *“Now that you have made Jesus your Savior, make Him your Lord,”* is unsuitable to be taken into our mouths. Much of contemporary religion allows for people to wear the name *“Christian”* without having an ear to hear the Son of God. That is only an imagination! God will not receive anyone that does not receive His Son — and you cannot receive His Son without hearkening to what He says!

Days of temptation are often days of provocation. But to provoke God, when he is letting us see that we entirely depend and live upon him, is a provocation indeed. The hardening of the heart is the spring of all other sins. The sins of others, especially of our relations, should be warnings to us. All sin, especially sin committed by God's professing, privileged people, not only provokes God, but it grieves him. God is loth to destroy any in, or for their sin; he waits long to be gracious to them. But sin, long persisted in, will make God's wrath discover itself in destroying the impenitent; there is no resting under the wrath of God. "Take heed:" all who would get safe to heaven must look about them; if once we allow ourselves to distrust God, we may soon desert him. Let those that think they stand, take heed lest they fall. Since to-morrow is not ours, we must make the best improvement of this day. And there are none, even the strongest of the flock, who do not need help of other Christians. Neither are there any so low and despised, but

the care of their standing in the faith, and of their safety, belongs to all. Sin has so many ways and colors, that we need more eyes than ours own. Sin appears fair, but is vile; it appears pleasant, but is destructive; it promises much, but performs nothing. The deceitfulness of sin hardens the soul; one sin allowed makes way for another; and every act of sin confirms the habit. Let every one beware of sin.

Matthew Henry, 1714

Today! Today! Today!

One of the great failings of an academic religion is its de-emphasis of sensitivity to God during the present time. Historical analysis is fine, but it cannot replace present sensitivity! Probing the future, majoring in what is conceived to be prophetic utterances, is not to be despised. However, it must not dull men's minds to hearing to Lord **TODAY!** In Christ's Kingdom, a salvation that is not contemporary, is no salvation at all! Our future participation in glory depends upon our present involvement! As it is written, "*being NOW justified . . . we have NOW received the reconciliation . . . NOW we have been released from the Law . . . There is therefore NOW no condemnation . . . NOW is the accepted time . . . NOW is the day of salvation . . . NOW faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen . . .*" (Rom 5:9,11; 7:6; 8:1; 2 Cor 6:2; Heb 11:1).

Jesus is NOW at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens! He is NOW mediating the New Covenant! He is NOW interceding for us! He is NOW giving us mercy, and grace to help in the time of need! Today He is speaking, guiding, and nourishing His people. He does not perform His ministry by mandate, coercion, or moral force. He uses sensitive, tender, malleable hearts! These are hearts that are aware of, and prefer, the will and objectives of the Lord. In the midst of circumstance, they can say with Eli of old and John the disciple, "*It is the Lord!*" (1 Sam 3:18; John 21:7). They are sensitive enough to say with Jacob, "*This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven*" (Gen 28:17).

The Real Question

The question is not whether or not we will hear the heavenly voice tomorrow. It is not if we **have** heard it in the past! It is whether or not we hear it **today** ! Now! Salvation depends upon hearing the Lord TODAY! There is no time when our ears are permitted to be "*dull of hearing,*" and our hearts insensitive to our Savior.

If You Will Hear His Voice

There is no question about Jesus speaking, or of the possibility of men hearing. Debating the possibility is foolishness, and will dry the well from which you must drink to live! The question is not whether the Lord is speaking, but whether men are hearing — whether or not they are listening! Are their hearts sensitized to the voice of the Lord? Do they have "*ears to hear?*"

While seeing is considered the predominating sense in nature, hearing is the superior sense in spiritual matters. Men speak of the “*eye gate*,” often saying that the things of God are best comprehended by “*visual aids*.” Whatever fragment of truth may be found in that statement, it is certainly not an accurate depiction of Kingdom realities! As God counts things, seeing is NOT believing, nor has it ever been!

A modicum of thought will confirm this to be the case. Jesus was “*God manifest in the flesh*,” yet His bodily presence gave little advantage to the people. He was “*in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not*” (John 1:10). Of the chosen people themselves it was written, “*He has no stately form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him*” (Isa 52:2, NASB). It was not until He was taken from the sight of men that faith sprang forth. What a devastating blow to the notion that seeing is the superior means of learning! Were that the case, faith would have dominated Jerusalem when Jesus was there in the body. Instead, it was ruled by an unbelief so strong, the people crucified the Lord of glory!

God Has Spoken Specifically

Of course, God has spoken specifically on this matter, thereby forbidding the entrance of any contrary notions. “*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing [comes] by the word of Christ*” (Rom 10:17, NASB). The conversion of the Ephesians was traced back to when they “*heard the word of the truth of the Gospel*” (Eph 1:13). The same thing is said of the Thessalonians (1 Thess 2:13). There is, in Christ, such a thing as “*the hearing of faith*” (Gal 3:2,5); that is, a faith that is conferred through the faculty of hearing--hearing the Gospel. The Word of the Lord is the means through which Divine provisions are revealed to men. Hearing, or the ability of the human spirit to associate that word with the Living God, is the appointed means through which faith “*comes*.”

Elaboration Is Necessary

It is necessary to elaborate on this point. From a heavenly point of view, the message of the Gospel is

logical--but **its logic is not the means through which faith is realized** ! The primary appeal of the Gospel is not to logic, but to the heart! In hearing, the heart [or essential part of man] senses it is a Word from the Lord. Whether it is fully comprehended or not, attentiveness is given to the message because of WHO spoke it.

I do not deprecate apologetics, strong appeals to human reason, or the association of Divine power with human need. None of these, however, are the means through which faith is conferred! Faith is associated with HEARING! When the individual associates what is heard with the Lord, and embraces the message, it becomes an effectual call--a summons--to participate in blessing! It no longer is simply a logical or orderly presentation. No one of sound mind will oppose logical presentations. It is on the part of wisdom to exercise ourselves to avoid scatterbrained and illogical preaching. God is not served by thoughtless and aimless speech. However, the power is not in our logic, but in the truth of the Gospel (Rom 1:16)!

Let no imagine for a single moment that the spiritual property of believing, or having ears to hear, is the product of human intellect! God has spoken too plainly on this subject to allow the entertainment of such a vain notion!

See How It Is Stated

Observe how the Spirit states the case! *“Today, if you will hear His voice!”* There is a spiritual dimension in life that must be perceived. In this text, the word *“voice”* comes from a word (fwnhj), which means *“a tone (articulate, bestial or artificial); by implication an address (for any purpose), saying or language:--noise, sound, voice.”* 1 *“Sound, tone . . . The sound of uttered words.”* 2 **This is heart-language!** The voice of the Lord cannot be discerned with the hearing of the natural ear! You must have *“ears to hear”* (Matt 11:15; 13:9). What is more, this capacity is given by God, and God alone! As it is written, *“Yet to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear”* (Deut 29:4, NASB).

Recall the words of the Spirit to the Philippians. *“For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake . . .”* (Phil 1:29, NASB). Again, Timothy was told, *“and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus”* (1 Tim 1:14).

The phrase *“If you will hear His voice”* imply two things. **First**, that there must be capacity to associate the message with the Lord of glory. **Second**, that the individual is willing to do this, and will not rebel against the Lord. In Christ, you **DO receive** *“ears to hear.”* That condition is called **having an ear** — an ear for the voice of the Lord! Precious capacity, indeed! Some people can only hear academically! They cannot hear spiritually. The Lord Jesus said this to the churches of Asia, and He says it to those of our day also. *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”* (Rev 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). How often Jesus said to the multitudes, *“He who has ears to hear, let him hear”* (Matt 11:15; 13:43; Mk 4:9,23; 7:16; Lk 8:8; 14:35).

The Spirit of the Text

This is the spirit of our text! **LET HIM WITH A CAPACITY TO IDENTIFY THE WORD WITH JESUS EMPLOY THAT ABILITY NOW !** Do not associate the Word primarily with duty, but with the exalted Christ! Let the **SOURCE** of the message dominate your thinking! Associate the Word with the heavenly Spokesman, and it will soon make sense to you! This is the meaning of the poignant word of Jesus to wondering Jews. *“If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself”* (John 7:17, NASB).

Do Not Harden Your Hearts

What is the meaning of this admonition, and why is it necessary? Notice the context of the admonition, *“If you hear His voice!”* There are those without this capacity, whose hearts are already hard and impervious to Divine influence. There are also those who are

conscious of the Lord, who sense His desire for them, and are sensitive to their need of Him. It is to the latter that the Spirit speaks. They remain in the land of jeopardy, *“this present evil world”* (Gal 1:4), and thus must be so addressed. If there were no danger of our hearts becoming calloused, this would be a superfluous word!

Two Kinds of Hardness

There is a natural hardness in men’s hearts from which we must be delivered. This deliverance occurs when God removes our stony hearts and gives us a heart of flesh (Ezek 11:19; 36:26). However, because the remnants of the old nature remain in us, we can acquire hard hearts again--hearts that are impervious to the voice of the Lord. These are hearts that are not moved by Divine pleas and the gentle wooing of the Spirit.

Because the remnants of the old nature remain in us, we can acquire hard hearts again--hearts that are impervious to the voice of the Lord. These are hearts that are not moved by Divine pleas and the gentle wooing of the Spirit.

This text is speaking of, what I have chosen to call, *acquired hardness* -- hardness of heart chosen by the individual. It has been prompted by the devil and encouraged by the environment of this present evil world, but it was the choice of the individual to obtain it. This choice was made, mind you, AFTER deliverance from hardness had once been experienced. We are speaking of a sin of unspeakable magnitude!

Confrontation of Law-Keeping

The situation confronted in the book of Hebrews was a return to Law-keeping. As noble as this approach to life with God may appear, it tends to make the heart cold and hard. The legalist has more difficulty with hardheartedness than anyone else. Such a heart will demand the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus over the objections of a reprobate political official like Pilate! Do not underestimate the danger of an approach to God by Law! Those that *“seek to be justified by the Law ARE fallen from grace”* (Gal 5:4)!

The Meaning of Hard Hearts

To harden the heart is to *“resist the Holy Spirit”* (Acts 7:51). Solomon called it the *“hardening of the neck”* (Prov 29:1), while Moses spoke of it as being *“stiff necked”* (Deut 31:27). This is to become stubborn and unyielding to God--to refuse to align ourselves with His will. One resource says of this condition, (*Matt. 19:8; Mark 3:5*). *Indicates a destitution of feeling, insensitivity to spiritual things, persistence in wrongdoing, wickedness; in common use-- stinginess, solidity, firmness. In (Ezek. 3:7) the reference is evidently to a moral hardening. To "harden" or "stiffen the neck" (Kin. 17:14; Neh. 9:29; Prov. 29:1); etc.) is to be stubborn, self-willed.* 3 Such individuals

become impermeable to Divine influence--a frightening thought! Paul spoke of it as *“being past feeling,”* or losing *“all sensitivity”* (Eph 4:19). He also identified it as having a *“seared conscience”* (1 Tim 4:2).

God Hardens Hearts

Frequently, the hardening of man’s heart is an action attributed to God Himself (Ex 4:21; 7:3,13; 9:12,35; 10:20,27; 11:10; 14:4,17; Deut 2:30; Josh 11:20; Isa 63:17; Rom 9:17-18). A remarkable example of this is described by the Spirit in Romans 1:28. *“God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper . . .”* As generally pictured, this is a response to man’s obstinance--the ratification of man’s refusal to hearken to the voice of the Lord. In the case of the Gentiles, they had refused to retain God in their knowledge, and became vain in their imaginations. God responded by delivering them over to their depraved wills--hardening their hearts (Rom 1:24,18). In the case of Pharaoh, he first hardened his own heart against the Lord (Ex 8:15,32; 9:34). The Lord, then, ratified Pharaoh’s choice, casting it in stone! The possibility of this was chronicled by Solomon. *“A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed--without remedy”* (Prov 29:1, NIV).

The solemn warning, *“Harden not your hearts,”* is given with these things in mind. Just as the Lord responds to faith, so He does to unbelief. Persistence in a refusal to hearken to the voice of the Lord will eventually result in an irremediable condition. Foolish, indeed, is the person that refuses to listen to the Savior who is appointed to bring him to God!

The Provocation

Remember, the things that occurred to Israel *“happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come”* (1 Cor 10:11). The Spirit now refers to a specific incident in their history. It was remarkably tragic, and is filled with profitable things. This event is called *“the provocation”* (KJV), or *“when they provoked Me”* (NASB). The NIV calls it *“the rebellion.”* What could this incident be? Israel was known for their frequent disobedience, rebellion, and hardheartedness. However, the Spirit now points out a single event that turned the course of their history!

Moses recalled Israel’s primary provocations to them. *“Again at Taberah and at Massah and at Kibroth-hattaavah you provoked the LORD to wrath. And when the LORD sent you from Kadesh-barnea, saying, ‘Go up and possess the land which I have given you,’ then you rebelled against the command of the LORD your God; you neither believed Him nor listened to His voice”* (Deut 9:22-23). At *Taberah*, the people displeased the Lord by complaining. As a result, He sent a fire that consumed all dwelling on the *“outskirts of the camp”* (Num 11:1-5). At *Massah*, Israel provoked the Lord when they were thirsty, charging Moses with bringing them into the desert to die of thirst. This is where the people challenged the man of God by saying, *“Is the LORD among us, or not?”* (Ex 17:7ff).

The Final Act of Rebellion

As if this was not bad enough, they finally provoked the Lord to exclude them from the promised land-- **THE PROVOCATION!** This tragic event occurred when they were told to go in and possess the promised land. It had been given to them by God Almighty! Do you recall what happened? Israel sent twelve spies to see the land. When they returned, ten of them affirmed the land could not be possessed. The obstacles were too great. *“The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that*

we saw in it are men of a great stature. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight” (Num 13:32-33).

“ *All the people*” believed these unbelievers, rejecting the testimony of faith brought by Joshua and Caleb. They “*wept all night,*” and lifted up their voice against Moses and Aaron. “*Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! And why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?*” (Num 14:1-3). The people determined to “*appoint a leader and return to Egypt*” (14:4). **THERE IS A CLASSIC EXAMPLE OF PEOPLE BEING ANGRY WITH GOD** — a trite and foolish response that has become common in our day. Even after Moses and Aaron pled with them in the name of the Lord, they sought to stone them with stones — their hearts had become hard (14:10)!

Testing and Trying God

Speaking of this grievous incident, our text says, “*Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, And saw My works forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation, And said, ‘They always go astray in their heart, And they have not known My ways.’”* Notice, God was angry with a “*generation*” — a body of people during a specific period of time, noted for unbelief and the rejection of God. Here was a generation that wearied God (Isa 43:24). He actually grew tired of them, and was distressed because of them! Scripture apprizes us of the Lord’s view of wayward Israel, and the words are most arresting. “*Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against His people, And He abhorred His inheritance. Then He gave them into the hand of the nations; And those who hated them ruled over them*” (Psa 106:40-41). Here is a God that is not well known in our day!

When God Swears In Wrath

Was God impervious to their unbelief? Indeed, He was not! He responded, “*How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them? I will strike them down with a plague and destroy them, but I will make you into a nation greater and stronger than they*” (Num 14:11-12, NIV). At this point Moses intercedes for Israel in a way unequalled in human history. Because of his closeness to God, and the strong appeals made to the Divine nature, God responded, “*I have forgiven them, as you asked.*”

Do you imagine this was the end of the matter? Indeed, it was not! The Lord continued. “*Nevertheless, as*

However, those that make a practice of resisting the Lord, stifling spiritual influences, and refusing to obtain what Christ has obtained for them, stand in jeopardy. They are on the periphery of the Kingdom, so to speak, and their prospects do not look good. The closer you get to the perimeter of the Kingdom, the more apt your heart will become hard!

surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the LORD fills the whole earth, not one of the men who

saw My glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed Me and tested Me ten times— not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. No one who has treated Me with contempt will ever see it” (Num 14:21-23, NIV).

The Point of the Text

The point of our text is simply this: those that choose to reject the Lord, being insensitive to His voice, are tempting God. They are in danger of Him cutting them off finally, without any hope of ever being saved. That point cannot be precisely defined by men. However, those that make a practice of resisting the Lord, stifling spiritual influences, and refusing to obtain what Christ has obtained for them, stand in jeopardy. They are on the periphery of the Kingdom, so to speak, and their prospects do not look good. The closer you get to the perimeter of the Kingdom, the more apt your heart will become hard! Tenderness of heart is a quality found at the heart of the Kingdom, in fellowship with God’s dear Son!

A Word About Our Times

I cannot leave this text without commenting on our times. They are perilous times, indeed! The lack of spiritual appetite is evidenced all around us. Brief messages, much entertainment, and shallow spiritual views dominate the religious scene. Very little of what parades itself as being from God actually requires Him. Nor, indeed, does it require that God’s people obtain what has been prepared for them.

It is an intolerable situation to God, and it must also be to us! The Lord will not long endure the rejection of Himself, a preference for the things of this world, and the lack of appetite for His good Word. Let men forever cease to explain these conditions, and devote themselves to their elimination. The life of the people is at stake! God is not as tolerant as some suppose!

THE EVIL HEART OF UNBELIEF

Believing IS Not An Option

Believing God is not an option in the Kingdom of God, but an imperative! *“Without faith, it is impossible to please God”* (Heb 11:6). Unbelief, therefore, is to be viewed with utter disdain and hatred. It is to be aggressively opposed, and vigorously thrust from us. **Unbelief stops the hand of the Lord**, prohibiting His work to be beneficial to the people. Do not marvel at this statement. It is said of the Lord Jesus, when He was in His hometown, *“Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief”* (Matt 13:58, NKJV). Mark writes of this incident, *“He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their lack of faith”* (Mark 6:5-6). This provides an explanation for the apparent absence of Divine power in many contemporary religious circles.

Unbelief Cannot Be Overlooked

The Lord CANNOT overlook unbelief! It would violate His nature to do so! After Jesus had risen from the dead, He confronted His disciples. They had refused to believe the faithful women that testified to them of the risen Lord (Luke 24:10). Was that simply a human weakness, to be overlooked by the Savior? Indeed not! When the risen Lord appeared to His disciples, *“He reproached (upbraided, KJV; rebuked, NIV) them for their unbelief and hardness of heart”* (Mk 16:14, NASB). The Spirit informs us that **UNBELIEF** is what provoked some Israelites to be *“broken off”* (Rom 11:20). Unbelief is not an innocent thing! Unless it is overcome, it will mandate the individual be cast into the lake of fire (Rev 21:8). The state of the condemned is described as a *“portion with the unbelievers”* (Luke 12:46).

Arm Yourselves!

Do not allow unbelief to dominate your thinking. The heart that does not believe--that does not trust in the Lord, or joyfully receive His Gospel--is an *“evil heart.”* In the words of our text, *“Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart.”* You are the custodian of your heart! Make sure unbelief has no place there! Your determination to exclude unbelief from your life will be underwritten by Omnipotence!

Do not allow unbelief to dominate your thinking. The heart that does not believe--that does not trust in the Lord, or joyfully receive His Gospel--is an *“evil heart.”* In the words of our text, *“Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart.”* You are the custodian of your heart! Make sure unbelief has no place there!

The Lord will come to your aid. The Mediator of the New Covenant will provide resources required to live by faith. Taking heed (KJV), or taking care, means we are devoted to maintaining a walk in the Spirit. We will not allow ourselves to be governed by seen things, but look beyond them to things that are not seen--eternal things (2 Cor 4:17-18).

What Of Those that Are Lax

Those that are lax in their intake of, and meditation upon, the things of God cannot keep unbelief from entering their hearts. It simply cannot be done! The contemporary laxness in obtaining spiritual nourishment is a most serious condition. When brevity marks religious activities, and longevity is the trait of entertaining ones, spiritual decline is present! Men cannot live without the Word of God (Matt 4:4), and those supposing they can are simply wrong — as well as *“dead.”*

Departing From God

The effect of unbelief is driven home with great power — *“See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God”* (NIV). The NASB speaks of *“falling away from the living God.”* The KJV, in reading, *“departing from the living God,”* accentuates the **willingness** of unbelief. Unbelief is never inadvertent. It is always deliberate, always a choice! The individual that does not believe God **CHOOSES** not to do so. Just as Israel chose to reject the promise of God, so the unbeliever of our time--particularly the one in church--

chooses to reject Divine testimony.

The result is that the individual is cut off from God. Unbelief voids prayer, thrusts away the Word of God, and judges the individual unworthy of eternal life (Acts 13:46). **An unbeliever tests the patience of the Lord**, like Israel tempted Him with their rejection of His Word. That is why, on one occasion, Jesus said to nine of His disciples, *“O unbelieving generation,’ Jesus replied, ‘how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you?”* (Mark 9:19). Preachers and teachers do well to remind sluggardly individuals under their influence of this Kingdom reality! Slowness of heart is always subject to rebuke, and is never justified! Of such, it is always true, *“O foolish men and slow of heart to believe . . .”* (Lk 24:25, NASB).

THE INDISPENSABLE ROLE OF EXHORTATION

Exhortation Is Required

The nature of the faith-life requires exhortation. The necessity of this activity is accentuated by its presence in the categorization of spiritual gifts. *“And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly . . . he who exhorts, in his exhortation . . .”* (Rom 12:8, NASB). New Covenant prophesying includes this ministration (1 Cor 14:3). Those proclaiming the Word of God are to give themselves to this holy activity (1 Tim 4:13). Coming from the word *parakaleite*, this word means *imploration, exhortation, solace: comfort, consolation, exhortation, entreaty*. 4 Encouragement and motivation are a strong emphasis in the ministry of exhortation.

The design of exhortation is to draw the hearers closer to their Lord--to bring them more within the center of Divine purpose, and away from the periphery of it. By it, the *“pure minds”* of the redeemed are *“stirred up,”* brought to a recollection of eternal things. *“Daily”* exhortation is required because the fight of faith is *“daily.”*

A New Covenant Ministry

Exhortation is a New Covenant ministry. The words *“exhort,” “exhorting,”* and *“exhortation”* are not found in standard translations of the Old Covenant Scriptures (KJV, NKJV, NASB, NIV, and NRSV). *“Commands”* are employed when speaking to people under the Old Covenant. Before Christ, although the people were involved in a Divinely originated covenant, they had no real affinity with God. Their hearts were not made new, they did not have the remission of sins as we do, nor did they have the indwelling Spirit. They lived under an economy of imposition, where ordinances were *“imposed on them until the time of reformation”* (Heb 9:10).

In Christ the situation is different. By God’s grace, we have been reconciled to God. We have experienced the *“circumcision of Christ,”* wherein the whole *“body of the sins of the flesh”* was cut away from us (Col 2:11-12). We are no longer enemies, and are not *“debtors to the flesh to live after the flesh”* (Rom 8:12). Having been *“washed,” “sanctified,”* and *“justified”*

(1 Cor 6:11), we enjoy the status of “*sons of God*” (1 John 3:1-3).

EXHORTATION ASSUMES THESE REALITIES. It is a ministry that urges God’s people to move forward in Christ, availing themselves of the graces and the power that belong to them. Exhortation is an appeal to the “new man,” which has been created after the image of Him that created him (Col 3:10).

Timeliness Is Critical

Exhortation is a “*daily*” ministry. It is a “*Today*” activity. “*But exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*” This presumes frequent contact with, and a preference for, the household of faith. I have long marveled at the upbraiding many of us receive because we prefer the company of the people of God. The argument that we must spend more time with the world is so utterly absurd one must close his Bible shut his mind to believe it. God Himself prefers the company of His people, walking IN them and dwelling IN them.

God will not dwell in a heart that is not humble and contrite, and offers no fellowship, or intimacy, to those alienated from Him. His Son dwells in the saved alone. He is present where people gather together in His Name, and intercedes for those who are believing in Him. I understand (I think) what these sophists are saying. They are reminding us that we are the only light the world has. But their whole argument is a juvenile redundancy! It is not possible to walk in the light as He is in the light and not illuminate those about you! You cannot walk in the Spirit and be undetected, or live by faith and go unnoticed. It is not possible to enjoy the fellowship of God’s dear Son (1 Cor 1:9), and the communion of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14) and be indifferent to the needs of sinners.

The Purpose of Exhortation

The design of exhortation is to draw the hearers closer to their Lord--to bring them more within the center of Divine purpose, and away from the periphery of it. By it, the “*pure minds*” of the redeemed are “*stirred up,*” brought to a recollection of eternal things. “*Daily*” exhortation is required because the fight of faith is “*daily.*” Temptation is “*daily.*” The influence of the condemned order has upon us is experienced “*daily.*” Our need for spiritual sustenance is “*daily.*” All of this assumes **frequent** contact with the people of God.

The Holy Spirit reminds us to prod one another heavenward every day. Let our speech and our manners be such toward each other as point us heavenward. If, due to the weakness of the flesh, we drift into other modes of speech, let us be swift to exhort one another Godward. “*The time is short!*” We do not have time

to be distracted from the heavenly goal!

Those that remind us there are no commands to meet frequently have failed to make this association. In reality, there are no commands for us to meet together at all. There ARE exhortations or admonitions to do so. Thus, the Holy Spirit reminds us to prod one another heavenward every day. Let our speech and our manners be such toward each other as point us heavenward. If, due to the weakness of the flesh, we drift into other modes of speech, let us be swift to exhort one another Godward. *“The time is short!”* We do not have time to be distracted from the heavenly goal!

The Alternative

What is the alternative to daily exhortation in the Lord? *“So that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.”* Who is the individual strong enough, under ordinary circumstances, to withstand Satanic assaults on their own? I say, *under ordinary circumstances*, because God will sustain a person experiencing uncommon trial — like Noah building the ark, Joseph in prison, Daniel in the lions den, or the three Hebrew children in a furnace of fire. But those are not the ordinary lot of believers.

Sin Is Deceptive

Sin is deceptive because of the one that promotes it. It is also deceptive because we are in its realm--a *“present evil world.”* Add to that the fact we are in a *“vile body,”* cohabiting it with an *“old man,”* or *“sinful nature,”* and you have the need for exhortation (Phil 3:20; Eph 4:20-24; Rom 6:6-8). The person that chooses to avoid daily exhortation, allowing his mind to be unaffected by the truth of God, will soon be living in sin. It may be, what men call, respectable sin, but it will still be sin. What is more, sin HARDENS the heart. The more we are exposed to it, the more apt we are to be hardened against God and His Holy Spirit. If the professed church were to take this word seriously, it would radically affect its entire program. Methinks buildings dedicated to God would have their lights glowing and their rooms filled more consistently and frequently.

WE ARE PARTAKERS OF CHRIST

Herein is a marvelous consideration--and it is the truth! *“For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.”* To be a partaker of, or participant in, Christ is worthy the forfeiture of all competing influences. He brings a satisfaction and fulfillment that cannot be realized outside of the Lord Himself.

This remains yours, however, by choice. It does not stay with you automatically. The reason for this is obvious: you are not in a vacuum. You are surrounded by competing forces, and assaulted by an intent enemy. You must hold on to your confidence with great tenacity! Confidence is an aspect of faith, which is the persuasion of things *“hoped for.”*

A Conditional Blessing

The blessings of God are generally conditional. The things that compete with the blessing of the Lord must be left behind before it can be obtained. Paul spoke of his personal

The struggle against temptation was so strong Jesus “suffered” in the experience of it (Heb 5:8). Yet, He did not lose His grip on, or preference for, the good and acceptable, and perfect will of God! He even “endured the cross, despising the shame” in anticipation of the “joy set before Him”

decision regarding fellowship with the Son. “*Yes, indeed, and I count all things to be loss, because of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, because of whom of the all things I suffered loss, and do count them to be refuse, that Christ I may gain, and be found in him, not having my righteousness, which [is] of law, but that which [is] through faith of Christ--the righteousness that is of God by the faith, to know him, and the power of his rising again, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, if anyhow I may attain to the rising again of the dead. Not that I did already obtain, or have been already perfected; but I pursue, if also I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by the Christ Jesus; brethren, I do not reckon myself to have laid hold; and one thing--the things behind indeed forgetting, and to the things before stretching forth--to the mark I pursue for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*” (Phil 3:8-14, *Young’s Literal Translation*). **This is the norm of the Kingdom!**

Look To Jesus!

If you wonder what it means to “*hold fast the beginning of your confidence,*” look at the Lord Jesus Christ. On the eve of His vicarious death, when He was going to experience separation from His Father, He held fast to His confidence. “*Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son may glorify thee*” (John 17:1). Later, in the throes of unparalleled agony He prayed, “*Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done*” (Luke 22:42). He was dominated by the purpose and will of the Father, even at the height of temptation and struggle! There you have a picture of what it means to “*hold fast the beginning of your confidence.*”

The struggle against temptation was so strong Jesus “suffered” in the experience of it (Heb 5:8). Yet, He did not lose His grip on, or preference for, the good and acceptable, and perfect will of God! He even “endured the cross, despising the shame” in anticipation of the “joy set before Him” (Heb 12:1-2).

Seen In Paul

You can also see it in Paul the Apostle. When he was about to leave this world, he declared, “*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day*” (2 Tim 4:7-8). He did not allow the most difficult of all experiences to drive a wedge between him and the hope of glory! He entered the holiest by the blood of Jesus when all was dark around him!

Steadfast Unto The End

Spiritual victory is not by fits and starts! **Faith cannot be seasonal!** If you are going to triumph over the evil one, you must stay in the battle, and continue the race--all the while “*looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of your faith*” (Heb 12:1-2). Speaking of those passing through great tests, Jesus said, “*But the one who endures to the end , he shall be saved*” (Matt 24:12,

NASB). Earlier in this chapter, identity with Jesus is affirmed to be conditioned upon maintaining our hope until *the end*. *“Whose house are we, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end”* (Heb 3:6, NASB).

Later in this book, the Spirit expresses the desire for a proper frame of spirit in all us at the time of the end. *“And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end”* (Heb 6:11, NASB). Participation in the world to come, Jesus declares, is conditioned upon keeping confidence to the end. *“To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations”* (Rev 2:26, NIV).

Make no mistake about this! We have been called into the life of faith until *“the end!”* Salvation is not a short-term arrangement, nor is it a mere novelty. Faith compels us to prepare for the *long haul* of life. Time is the great tester of the heart. It is what sifts out the feeble, fearful, and insincere. But time is on the side of those determined to *“keep the faith!”* Souls that fall away, draw back, and throw overboard the faith, are displeasing to God. Unless they recover from their inexcusable setback, they will be *“destroyed from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power”* (2 Thess 1:9). An unbelieving heart cannot take up residence with the Living God!

LEARN FROM THE FALTERING ISRAELITES

The church will use its time wisely dissuading men and women from falling away in the first place. They will find it less necessary to develop recovery programs if they spend time in daily exhortation, laboring for the souls of men. **The brief exposure the average church gives the people to the things of God makes its survival against the devil highly unlikely!**

The Provocation!

Intent upon bringing the Hebrew believers into the consistency of faith, the Spirit again mentions the provocation of Israel. He does not want them to provoke God--and unbelief and a lack of spiritual growth **DO** provoke Him! *“TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS, AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME.”* He does not leave us to surmise who He is speaking about, or why God was provoked. *“For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they should not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient?”* (3:17-18). He is not talking about the Canaanites or other heathen nations--although He was angered by them also.

He is speaking about the people He delivered--the ones *“who came out of Egypt led by Moses.”* He had been merciful to them, delivering them from oppression, and they dared to despise Him, reject His Word, and murmur against Him!

God Has Not Changed!

And do you think He is any different today? He will be provoked even more by people that have been blessed by Jesus, then returned like a sow that was washed

to its wallowing in the mire! The church will use its time wisely dissuading men and women from falling away in the first place. They will find it less necessary to develop recovery programs if they spend time in daily exhortation, laboring for the souls of men. **The brief exposure the average church gives the people to the things of God makes its survival against the devil highly unlikely!** Until spiritual life is on a “daily” basis, “defeat” will be the epitaph over every day!

Israel is the case in point! God was “*angry*” with them for “*forty years!*” He was not pleased with them, but His wrath was awakened against them! And why so? Because they did not respond to His overtures! They too soon forgot His deliverance, and rejected the one He gave them! The wilderness was cluttered with the graves of those Israelites. “*600,000 men on foot*” entered into the wilderness, but only TWO of them came out! That is .0003333 of 1%! Do you wonder, child of God--do you wonder how God feels about those whose love waxes cold? Look to the unbelieving Israelites, and let them testify to you!

Why did 599,998 men fall in the wilderness? Why did God forbid them to enter the promised land, and rest from their wandering? Because they “*were disobedient!*” He told them to enter, and they did not! He told them they could possess the land, and they did not believe Him! A land of milk and honey was theirs, but they chose to disbelieve! He let them sample the fruit of the land, and they still chose to disbelieve. He let them view the land in all of its splendor, but they could not believe it was for them!

What could be said of our situation today? Jesus has blazed the way to God, tearing down the obstacles, and clearing the way for us to enter the holiest of all. He has taken

Unbelief closed the door of blessing, forbidding their entrance into the very land promised to them! It simply was not possible for them to enter. There was no army capable of leading them into the land — no military strategy adequate of plotting victory over the enemy. **The day they chose to disbelieve Almighty God, they were rejected!**

away our sin, destroyed our enemy, and brought the blessing within our reach. God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think according to the power that is at work in us. Jesus has declared Himself to with us, among us, and in us! He has given us His Holy Spirit, His peace, and His joy. God has given us new birth and a living hope. He has provided an Intercessor that ever lives to make intercession for us.

What possible reason can be given for not advancing--for not growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. What person can say there are not enough advantages in Christ? Who can justify unbelief in any form, and in any measure?

Unbelief Locks The Door Of Entrance!

O, the solemnity of the word! *“And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.”* Unbelief closed the door of blessing, forbidding their entrance into the very land promised to them! It simply was not possible for them to enter. There was no army capable of leading them into the land — no military strategy adequate of plotting victory over the enemy. **The day they chose to disbelieve Almighty God, they were rejected!**

The Relevance Of It All

Of what relevance is all of this to the believer? A great deal indeed, although we hear precious little about it these days! God has urged us to *“enter”* into the *“holiest of all,”* and to do so with a true heart, a sprinkled conscience, and bodies washed with pure water (Heb 10:19-22).

With earnestness He calls for us to *“draw near”* confidently, and with great expectation. He tells us the *“eyes of our understanding”* can be opened, and that our *“inner man”* can be strengthened by His Holy Spirit (Eph 1:18-20; 3:16-18). He reminds us that there is power devoted to us, and that works now within us (Eph 1:20; 3:20). There is no reason for any child of God to *“fail of the grace of God”* (Heb 12:15).

CONCLUSION

The Prevalence of Unbelief

It is my persuasion that unbelief dominates the *average* congregation. There are several evidences of this condition. First, *the rarity of spiritual appetite* . Second, *the at-home-ness of the people in “this present evil world.”* Third, *the lack of spiritual vocabulary* . Fourth, *the ready acceptance of spiritually powerless preaching* . Fifth, *the dominance of religious law and ritual*. Sixth, *the propensity to religious entertainment* . Seventh, *the lack of involvement in the work of the Lord*. More evidences can be cited, but these will suffice to portray the condition as I see it.

The Cause of the Condition

What is the cause of this condition? Speaking through the prophet Jeremiah. *“An appalling and horrible thing Has happened in the land: The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule on their own authority; And My people love it so!”* (Jer 5:30-31, NASB). Notice, in God’s judgment, which is the ONLY valid judgment, speaking falsely in God’s name is *appalling and horrible* ! Ruling over God’s people with human authority is *appalling and horrible* ! When the people consent to such malpractice, it is also *appalling and horrible* .

What we see all about us is a conspiracy, instigated by the devil and received by those lacking Divine affiliation. Much of what is preached today has not come from God! The means being employed to govern (so-called) the people of God has been imposed by the authority of men. As if this were not enough, people identified with God, love the arrangement. They like the concocted vocabulary they have received--a vocabulary spawned in the dens of psychiatry and empty professionalism. The pulpit and the pew have united in the conspiracy of unbelief! Where this is NOT the case (and, bless God!, there are places where

this is **not** true), we have an **exception** to the rule! Few, if any, informed people do not know this to be true.

Unbelief is the most dreaded sin of all! It is direct rebellion against the Lord, and an outright rejection of His Word. When the Holy Spirit convicts, this is the sin of which He convicts men (John 16:8-11). It requires diligence on your part to stop unbelief from dominating you! God will underwrite your diligence!

Averting the Downward Trend

How can this condition be averted? Knowing how God feels about lifelessness among His people, we are constrained to do something about the condition. If the state of unbelief is not corrected, damnation is sure! **The answer can be found in the correction of the defective areas.** The prophets must begin to declare the truth. The leaders must bear rule by God's means. The people must love the **Divine** arrangement, and forbid to allow false teachers and ruthless rulers to enter their assemblies. If they do not do this, unbelief will surface! **You cannot have a strong faith when there is weak preaching! Followers of Christ cannot be produced by manipulative leaders!**

If this appears a bit strong, think of the passage we have reviewed again. There is no Divine tolerance in it at all! It is a solemn warning to us all, to **make war on unbelief in any and all forms** . It also alerts us to the propensity to unbelief that lies in all of us. Unchecked, it will soon drive us from the presence of the Lord!

Unbelief is the most dreaded sin of all! It is direct rebellion against the Lord, and an outright rejection of His Word. When the Holy Spirit convicts, this is the sin of which He convicts men (John 16:8-11). It requires diligence on your part to stop unbelief from dominating you! God will underwrite your diligence!

O, child of God! Remember: All of the Israelites were spared in the ten plagues against Egypt. They all came out of Egypt. They all passed through the Red Sea, being baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the Sea. They all drank water from the rock. They all ate angels bread, and their clothing did not get old or their feet swell (1 Cor 10:1-11; Deut 8:4). They were all led by the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night. They were all at the foot of Mount Sinai, and they all received the Law. They all heard angels delivering the Law (Heb 2:2), and they all saw Moses after he had been in the presence of the Lord (Ex 34:29-32; 2 Cor 3:7-10). **BUT THEY DID NOT ALL GET INTO CANAAN!**

Even so, there are many that have been spared the judgments of the Lord. They know what it is like to be delivered from the power of Satan, and to drink from the fountains of living water. They have eaten of the Bread sent down from heaven, and has tasted of the heavenly gift. They have been directed, led, and cared for by the Good Shepherd. But by and by, their hearts were hardened because of unbelief, and they departed from the faith.

Do not think yourself impervious to unbelief! Learn to detect it immediately, and thrust it from you quickly. Far better to be sensitive to the entrance of unbelief than to the things of this world! Such sensitivity will bring the blessing of God.

Faith springs forth in a tender heart. It grows, and reaches heavenward to appropriate the unspeakable riches of Christ. Unbelief flourishes in cold and unresponsive hearts. When it dominates, the individual becomes loses sensitivity to God, and hears His voice no longer. The world becomes dominant, and the things that can be seen occupy the attention of the unbeliever. See that this never is your condition!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

Commentary on the book of Hebrews

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #6

THE

REMAINING REST

“Let us fear therefore, lest haply, a promise being left of entering into His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had good tidings preached unto us, even as also they: but the word of hearing did not profit them, because it was not united by faith with them that heard. For we who have believed do enter into that rest; even as He hath said, As I sware in My wrath, They shall not enter into My rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He hath said somewhere of the seventh (day) on this wise, And God rested on the seventh day from all His works; and in this (place) again, They shall not enter into My rest. Seeing therefore it remaineth that some should enter thereinto, and they to whom the good tidings were before preached failed to enter in because of disobedience, He again defineth a certain day, To-day, saying in David so long a time afterward (even as hath been said before), To-day if ye shall hear His voice, Harden not your hearts. For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken afterward of another day. There remaineth therefore a sabbath rest for the people of God. For he that is entered into His rest hath himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. Let us therefore give diligence to enter into that rest, that no man fall after the same example of disobedience” (Hebrews 4:1-11, ASB).

A SUMMARY STATEMENT

The glorious benefits of the New Covenant are **preparatory** in nature. They are not an end of themselves! The ultimate objective of our salvation remains ahead of us. Presently, we are en route to the promised land, so to speak. Like Israel journeying through the wilderness, we are in a desert area. The Psalmist called this world “*a dry and thirsty land, where no water is*” (Psa 63:1). Indeed it is! Here and now, we face enemies, and must engage in warfare. Through Christ, God is, however, leading us to the realm where war does not exist. Hardship, testing, and struggle, will be

forever behind us. This state is called “*rest*,” or “*the sabbath-rest*.” We experience this rest now, but only partially, or in an introductory manner. Jesus spoke of this “*rest*” when He said, “*Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls*” (Matt 11:29). He spoke of a rest from the tyranny of sin, the weight of a condemning conscience, and the dominance of death.

In this preliminary rest, the tediousness of living is removed, and the element of hope prevails. At this time, faith is the predominating quality required by the saints.

This is the capacity to receive from the Lord--more specifically to “*hear*” Him that is speaking from heaven

In this preliminary rest, the tediousness of living is removed, and the element of hope prevails. At this time, faith is the predominating quality required by the saints. This is the capacity to receive from the Lord--more specifically to “*hear*” Him that is speaking from heaven (Heb 12:28). Faith has a two-fold ministry. **First** , it brings the capacity to know and respond to the Living God. **Second** , it enables its recipient to have a true perspective of the present time. The world is seen as a place of testing and proving, as well as working together with God (1 Cor 3:9). *Time* is seen as an opportunity to invest in eternity by acquiring and developing an appetite for heavenly things.

It is critical that the believer maintain the stance of faith — hearing and believing the Lord, Who is bringing us to glory. If the Word of God is not believed--trusted and wholeheartedly embraced--it brings no advantage to the hearer. Furthermore, those who do not believe God, provoke Him. Unless hardness of heart is averted, God will exclude such an individual from eternal rest. He has given us Israel as an arresting example.

Remember, there is a capacious difference between coming to God on the basis of doing, and approaching Him believing, or in faith. If you can see the vastness of the “*rest*” that remains, the foolishness of attempting to appropriate it by *working* becomes apparent. **The promise is too large to be gained by human accomplishment.** Only faith can obtain it. We are, therefore, to occupy ourselves with the work of believing God, and His Son Whom He has sent (John 6:29). By so doing, we will be prepared to enter His rest — which is everything! Suffice it to say, those that accentuate works above grace only acknowledge by their emphasis they have not seen the purpose of God’s calling. Let every soul so handicapped pray that God will “*open the eyes of their understanding*” (Eph 1:17-19).

INTRODUCTION

This is an arresting text of Scripture. It strikes at the root of unbelief, showing its absolute incompatibility with the Kingdom of God. It also proclaims the superiority of faith, the only means of appropriating the promises of God. Many men have chosen to argue about the role of faith in salvation. They suppose faith is weak and insipid, incapable of obtaining the promise. As we will see, this is not at all the case. Salvation is ever “*by grace through faith*” — not *by grace through works!*

Several Perspectives

There are several perspectives in this passage that will shape our thinking about the things of God. *First*, even though the promise of God is not attained by those to whom it is spoken, it still can be realized by those that will believe. *Second*, the Word of God brings no advantage in any way to those that do not believe it. Hearing and faith must be brought together to receive the promise. *Third*, God's wrath will be kindled against those that do not believe and thereby appropriate His promises. *Fourth*, the promises of God will never be abandoned. Those that dare to believe will obtain them, even though those to whom they were originally addressed are excluded from them. *Fifth*, the fulness of the blessing is yet to be obtained. *Sixth*, participation with God, and the cessation of living for self, is God's objective for every believer. *Seventh*, the obtainment of the promise of God requires diligent effort on our part. Where this is not found, unbelief will soon dominate, causing the individual to fall beyond the reach of the blessing. These are principle matters in our association with the Living God.

Weighty Matters

It is evident that we are speaking of weighty matters. Everything about salvation is conducive to thought as well as enjoyment, to contemplation as well as benefit. There are whole bodies of theology that fail to come to grips with these realities. Such are harmful to the soul in every sense of the word. The experience of salvation involves the entire person--spirit, soul, and body (1 Thess 5:23). So far as personal involvement is concerned, the whole "*heart*," "*soul*," "*mind*," and "*strength*" are effected in our deliverance from sin (Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27). This particular section of Scripture summons our minds into activity. We are called to ponder the objective of our calling, and the appointed means of realizing that objective.

LET US FEAR

"The privileges we have under the gospel, are greater than any had under the law of Moses, though the same gospel for substance was preached under both Testaments. There have been in all ages many unprofitable hearers; and unbelief is at the root of all unfruitfulness under the word. Faith in the hearer is the life of the word. But it is a painful consequence of partial neglect, and of a loose and wavering profession, that they often cause men to seem to come short. Let us then give diligence, that we may have a clear entrance into the kingdom of God. As God finished his work, and then rested from it, so he will cause those who believe, to finish their work, and then to enjoy their rest. It is evident, that there is a more spiritual and excellent sabbath remaining for the people of God, than that of the seventh day, or that into which Joshua led the Jews. This rest is, a rest of grace, and comfort, and holiness, in the gospel state. And a rest in glory, where the people of God shall enjoy the end of their faith, and the object of all their desires. The rest, or sabbatism, which is the subject of the apostle's reasoning, and as to which he concludes that it remains to be enjoyed, is undoubtedly the heavenly rest, which remains to the people of God, and is opposed to a state of labor and trouble in this world. It is the rest they shall obtain when the Lord Jesus shall appear from heaven. But those who do not believe, shall never enter into this spiritual rest, either of grace here or glory hereafter. God has always declared man's rest to be in him, and his love to be the only real happiness of the soul; and faith in his promises, through his Son, to be the only way of entering that rest." *Matthew Henry, 1714*

Keep in mind, this is written to believers — to people that were "*once 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 world to come*" (Heb 6:4-5, ASV). The "*fear*" of which he speaks is not a cringing fear that compels one to withdraw from God. Adam had that kind of fear.

As it is written, ***“I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid”*** (Gen 3:10, NIV). Israel also was dominated by a fear that caused them to withdraw from God. When hearing angels speak the Law (Heb 2:2; Acts 7:53; Gal 3:19), the people were so afraid they said, ***“Speak to us yourself (Moses) and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die”*** (Ex 20:19). It is said of them, when they confronted the glory of God in the face of Moses, ***“they were afraid to come near him”*** (Ex 34:30). This is not a sanctifying fear! **The further you get from God, the further you are from the blessing!** This is not the type of fear the Spirit urges us to have.

Fear Is Fear!

For the individual interested in the *original language*, the word translated ***“fear”*** is *Fobhqw/men* (phob-ath-o-men), which means *to frighten, i.e. to be alarmed; to be in awe of, i.e. revere:--be (sore) afraid, fear (exceedingly), reverence*. 1 Thayer says this word includes the idea, *“to be struck with fear, to be seized with alarm . . . to hesitate to do something for fear of harm . . .”* 2 Admittedly, this is an aspect of spiritual life with which few are acquainted. It does require some amplification. The Spirit is not promoting the fear of Sinai, but a fear that proceeds from faith--and there is a vast difference. The general absence of this type of fear (often called *reverential fear*) is evidence of aloofness from God. Its simply is not possible to knowingly dwell in the presence of the Lord and be disrespectful. Jesus apprized the unbelievers of His day that they knew not their ***“visitation”*** (Luke 19:44). They were in the presence of the Lord, but did not know it. That is why they were so presumptuous before Him.

The remarkable casualness that exists in the average American assembly calls for a summons to ***“fear lest any of you be judged to have failed to reach”*** the ***“rest”*** that ***“remains”*** (Heb 4:1). I do not mean to dwell upon this subject too long, or to appear as though I am too critical. It is my persuasion, however, that there is very little awareness of God in many of the circles that claim experience closeness to Him. The general lack of fear, repentance, sobriety, diligence, and fervency belies any profession of closeness to God. Where the qualities of faith are not found, faith is not found. It is not present by profession, but rather by possession. We cannot overemphasize this aspect of spiritual life. Faith is the cause, and ***“godly fear”*** (Heb 12:28) is the effect. If the effect is not present, it is due to the cause being absent.

Blessings Are Possessed By Faith

Everything possessed by the child of God is held by faith. Nothing is earned! Human achievement, however laudable, has not gained a single eternal benefit. The nature of God will not allow men to ***“boast”*** in His presence, or to claim worthiness on their own account. Few passages state this as succinctly as Romans 4:2-5. ***“If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about--but not before God. What does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’ Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.”*** What we are reading about in Hebrews is justification by faith. Whereas the book of Romans emphasizes faith itself, Hebrews underscores the Object of our faith, which is the Lord Jesus Christ. Just as Christ is indispensable to the accomplishment of our salvation, so faith is indispensable to the realization of it by the individual.

Further, spiritual blessings are not ours because we are identified with the correct religious movement, or have subscribed to the proper dogma. This is highly disruptive of much of the

religion of our day. Faith is the hand that takes hold of the blessing, and the eye of the soul that sees the promise. If we do not walk by faith, there is no hope of receiving the promise.

Further, spiritual blessings are not ours because we are identified with the correct religious movement, or have subscribed to the proper dogma. This is highly disruptive of much of the religion of our day. Faith is the hand that takes hold of the blessing, and the eye of the soul that sees the promise. If we do not walk by faith, there is no hope of receiving the promise. The benefit is too far away for flesh to grasp it. Although the promise speaks in a loud voice to faith, unbelief has no ears with which to hear.

Faith Can Be Cast Off

It is possible to “*obtain like precious faith*” (2 Pet 1:1), then “*cast off*” that first faith [pi,stin] (1 Tim 5:12). Faith **does** come from God, but **it cannot uphold the individual apart from personal involvement** . Living unto God is not artificial, and cannot be maintained by contrived means, like ritual or procedure. It is not possible to become a child of God by faith (Gal 3:26), then maintain that status by lifeless discipline, or identity with a mere religious movement. In Christ, faith is everything. Without it, “*it is not possible to please God*” (Heb 11:6). It makes no difference what is espoused intellectually, or what is wrought through human expression. If people do not believe with their hearts, they cannot obtain the blessing!

Procedural Religion

Lest we think this irrelevant, consider how much contemporary religion is only procedural. Real faith is rarely required by religious institutions. However, it is always required by God. Institutions will settle for a token admission to the creed. God will take nothing less than total reliance upon His Son! The involvement of the heart is not integral to procedural religion, but is imperative for Divine acceptance. Faith sensitizes the human spirit to the eternal realm, calling the individual into fellowship with God, Christ, the spirits of just men made perfect, the whole body of the redeemed, and a great company of angels (Heb 12:22-24).

Ignorant Worship

The Word of God is not a proof-text to the believer, but the source of spiritual life (Matt 4:4). It is remarkable how this clashes with much of the “*Christian*” activity around us. For some, a theological position is the fundamental thing, whether it is seen and embraced or not. For others, participating in sanctified activities, or liturgies, is the key element. It should not surprise you that myriads of professed Christians are more like the Stoics and Athenians of Greece than those that are in Christ Jesus. It was said of those heathen that they “*ignorantly worshiped*” an “*unknown God*” (Acts 17:23).

We Do Not Yet Have the Fulness

The point of our text is that we are not yet in the fulness of the blessing. As

Canaan was ahead of Israel, so the realms for which we are being adapted are beyond current experience. It is possible to have a noble beginning--like Israel being delivered from Canaan--and yet not enter into the land of promise. The Spirit admonishes us to be afraid of coming short of what God has promised. Jesus spoke of such when He said, *“Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”* (Matt 7:22-23). He was speaking of those that had no faith, who performed religious activities perfunctorily, without heart or spirit. The parable of the five foolish virgins accents the same truth (Matt 25:1-10). People began, but did not finish!

Although he had given himself to unusual activity for Christ, Paul gave attention to subduing his flesh and living by faith, lest after he had preached to others, he himself would become a *“castaway”* (1 Cor 9:27). It is not possible to attain to glory without this mind-set. It is the type of mind that Jesus had, and it is imperative that you have it also. Its possession compelled Paul to *“press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”* He urges us to think in the same way (Phil 3:14-16). The reason for the admonition should be apparent. The life of faith demands this posture. Without being concerned about coming short of the promise, laxity will set in, robbing the soul. Remember, we are still in the land of the enemy, hounded by the devil, and disadvantaged by a fallen nature that clings to us. All of this can be overcome by faith, but only so!

Accept the Challenge

Between you and glory, there are testings, challenges, and war. Only faith can successfully face these trials. It, and it alone *“is the victory that overcomes the world”* (1 John 5:4-5). The legalist fears this emphasis excludes obedience and ardent effort. He is wrong! The most avid workers for Christ are those whose faith is strong. How forcefully this is brought home by the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. The great men and women of the Kingdom were ALL motivated by faith. Faith propelled them into the will and purpose of God. Faith kept them from being ultimately deluded by the evil one. **Fear losing your faith!** Fear it enough to *“give no place for the devil”* (Eph 4:27), or make *“provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof”* (Rom 13:14).

The NIV translates our text, *“let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.”* That is too weak, and does not blow the trumpet loud enough in Zion. Assaulted by the devil, clothed in a frail and vile body, and surrounded by a cursed realm, we must, *“though we still have God's word that we may come into his rest, go in fear that some of you may be unable to do so”* (Basic English Bible). The handicap is unbelief! The advantage is believing! Israel could not enter the promised land because of unbelief. Joshua and Caleb entered because they believed.

PROMISED REST

God has left us a promise of rest. It is intended to be an incentive to us, to run a good race and fight a good fight. The *“rest”* is worthy of the most ardent effort. Poignantly Isaiah said of the coming Redeemer, *“His rest shall be glorious”* (Isa 11:10). Indeed, it is!

Defining “the REST”

Our text speaks of *“His rest”* — **God's own rest!** Later in the dialog, God refers to it as *“My rest”* (v. 3 & 5). What is this *“rest”* of which He speaks? The Spirit informs us that it occurred at the

conclusion of the creation. As it is written, ***“for He spake in a certain place concerning the seventh [day] thus: ‘And God did rest in the seventh day from all His works’”*** (Heb 4:4, Young’s Literal Translation). From the Divine perspective, we are told, ***“His works were finished from the foundation of the world”*** (Heb 4:3). The term ***“rest”*** refers to the Divine frame of Spirit that accompanied that completion. The word ***“rest”*** does not mean cessation of activity, but puts the accent on the completion of the work and God’s satisfaction with it.

We are talking about a Divine initiative that dictated the creation of the universe and all that is within it—including mankind! The purpose of God was the REASON for the creation of the heavens and the earth. The earth, in particular, is a stage upon which the drama of redemption is being enacted.

The Spirit has more in mind, however, than the **origin** of the ***“worlds”*** (Heb 1:2). The point being made is this: **God did not undertake the creation of the world until the reason for its existence had been established . His *“great salvation,”*** under the administration of the Son, was determined **before** the arena in which it would be enacted was designed. Jesus was, after all, ***“foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you”*** (1 Pet 1:20). **God has not adjusted to the human situation!** His objective is an ***“eternal purpose”*** (Eph 3:11), and therefore has never changed. We must not allow ourselves to view the works of God as a mere reaction to the activities of humanity.

To be sure, there are Divine reactions in Scripture. To name a few of them: (1) *The casting of Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden,* (2) *The flood,* (3) *The dispersion at Babel,* (4) *The faith of Abraham,* (5) *The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah,* (6) *The cursing of Israel at Kadesh-Barnea , etc., etc.* Our text rises, however, to a higher level, viewing the salvation which we enjoy from an eternal perspective. This is a good view, and worthy of our contemplations. Those that react in a slovenly manner to the grace of God must know He will react to their ways. Those that, by faith, embrace the redemption that is in Christ Jesus will experience a glorious and beneficial response from God. At this point in our text, however, the Spirit is lifting us higher, giving us a glimpse into what God has ***“prepared for those who love Him”*** (1 Cor 2:9-10). The principle of reaping and sowing is certainly true, but that is not the theme of this text.

The objective of the human enterprise was determined ***“according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began ”*** 2 Tim 1:9, NKJV). The aim of salvation is described as ***“the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began”*** (Rom 16:25). We are talking about a Divine initiative that dictated the creation of the universe and all that is within it—including mankind! The purpose of God was the REASON for the creation of the heavens and the earth. The earth, in particular, is a stage upon which the drama of redemption is being enacted. The spectators are the angels, and the display of Divine wisdom is the present outcome. However, on the trestle boards of eternity, God has designed a position and condition to be occupied by mankind. It is described in our text as ***“His rest.”***

When the creation was completed, ***“God did rest the seventh day from all His works”*** (Heb 4:4). He ***“rested”*** in anticipation of the fulfillment of His purpose. In due time, He would place the purpose in the hands of ***“His only begotten Son,”*** Who would carry it to its appointed conclusion. The Father trusted in the Son, willing to place everything into His hands. He endured faltering humanity in the prospect of the Son, Who would bring the purpose to its intended conclusion.

Divine Satisfaction

The Father's "*rest*" accentuates satisfaction--joyful satisfaction. This is not, as we have said, a term denoting inactivity. Rather, it declares the **satisfactory inauguration of a purpose that would be brought to sure fruition**. Briefly stated, men would be brought into the Divine purpose, enjoying participation in God's "*rest*." What He had planned for His offspring, in which He found great delight, and for which He patiently waited, would be enjoyed by mankind. That is why He made man.

From the beginning, the Lord sought for men to enter into this purpose--to enjoy Divine fellowship and be prepared for an eternal reign. As time progressed, the Lord divulged more and more of this purpose. It would be preceded by the absolute frustration of Satan (Gen 3:15), the blessing of the world (Gen 12:3), and the ultimate conformity of the redeemed to the image of His Son (Rom 8:29). Here and there, faith enabled individuals to be caught up in the purpose. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Job, and Abraham rose above their peers. In a preliminary sense, they entered into the "*rest*" of God. They believed in a

There must be willingness on the part of the hearer. However, if God were not active, willingness, of itself, would be powerless. Without the involvement of God Himself, faith simply is not possible. Without willingness on the part of the hearer, God will not involve Himself!

coming Savior, and chose to separate themselves from the cursed order, living in harmony with what was revealed to them. Moses and all the holy prophets did the same, entering into the introductory phase of God's "*rest*." They experienced the satisfaction that comes from believing the purpose of God would be fulfilled in a coming Redeemer. In anticipation of that blessing, they too rejected the world order.

Our text tells us Israel was also offered participation in the "*rest*." The ancient people could have joined with the Living God in the anticipation of the coming Redeemer. Like Enoch, they could have walked with God, and like Noah, they could have found grace in His sight. True, they were offered only a preliminary taste of it, but it was available to them. They did not believe, however, and thus did not join the Father in the joyful anticipation of the redemptive work of Christ. For them, entrance into the promised land constituted becoming part of the "*rest*." There, God would have prepared them more fully for the coming blessing. However, they preferred the cursed order, typified by Egypt, and were thus excluded from the blessing. They chose to desire Egypt rather than the blessings to which the Law and its attending ordinances pointed.

MIXING FAITH WITH HEARING

The words of the text are captivating. "*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.*" Believe it or not, the textual critics have a great deal of difficulty with this verse. One linguistic approach considers the proper rendering of the text to be, "*The word of hearing did not profit them, because they were not united by faith with those who not only heard, but hearkened and obeyed.*" In this case, the faith was not united with the Word, but with the faithful spies, Joshua and Caleb. This, in my judgment, is a clumsy view that clouds the text, making it difficult to profit the

hearer. The unacceptability of this view can be seen by the rendering of most major translations. “. . . *because it was not united by faith in those who heard*” (NASB), “. . . *because it did not meet with faith in the hearers*” (RSV), “. . . *because those who heard did not combine it with faith*” (NIV). The NIV adds in a footnote, “*because they did not share in the faith of those who obeyed.*” The point of the text is NOT that the unbelieving Israelites were not like the believing ones, but that they chose not to believe. The condition would have been just as true if no one had believed at all! Unbelief is the point, not identity with a body of believers!

The idea of the text is simply this, **hearing and faith were not joined together in those God refused.** It is written, “*faith comes by hearing . . .*” (Rom 10:17), but not irrevocably so! By that I mean, an individual can hear without believing, a circumstance that is altogether too common in our time. This is the condition Jesus referred to when He said, “*When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart*” (Matt 13:19, NASB). This is a condition of heart that finds the Word--even the good news of the Gospel--unreasonable and contrary to the bent of the heart. The individual does not believe because the Word contradicts his manner of thinking. When that condition ensues, the Word **cannot** profit the hearer. Thus, it is snatched from the heart by the devil, moved beyond the reach of the unbeliever. Notice, the Lord does not stop the devil from doing this. The devourer is not rebuked when unbelief dominates (Mal 3:11).

It is a blessedly simple and uncomplicated principle, yet myriads have missed it. The Word, particularly of the Gospel, is to be received as from God Himself. The heart is to be fixed upon it, and the desire to obtain it must dominate the hearer. God will then, by

Those with no heart for the Word of God pretend they are His children. They imagine that a brief weekly exposure to a modicum of Bible thoughts is sufficient to waft them into heaven. Nothing could be further from the truth! A casual academic approach to the Gospel of Christ is an open door to our adversary--and he will surely enter through that open door

His grace, mix hearing with faith, bringing eternal profitableness to the hearer. There must be willingness on the part of the hearer. However, if God were not active, willingness, of itself, would be powerless. Without the involvement of God Himself, faith simply is not possible. Without willingness on the part of the hearer, God will not involve Himself!

Wherever skepticism is allowed to penetrate our minds, unbelief lurks at the door. In such a case, Divine rejection is imminent! It is not enough to simply “*study,*” reviewing the truth of God as though it were a procedural annual, or an interesting and novel message. I am confounded by the prevalence of this attitude in Sunday Schools, congregational gatherings, and other “*studies.*” Those with no heart for the Word of God pretend they are His children. They imagine that a brief weekly exposure to a modicum of *Bible thoughts* is sufficient to waft them into heaven. Nothing could be further from the truth! A casual academic approach to the Gospel of Christ is an open door to our adversary--and he will surely enter through that open door. The frame of spirit in the average Sunday School class is not conducive to Kingdom advance.

The glory of the New Covenant is in its promises! It is a “*better covenant, established upon better promises*” (Heb 8:6). God Himself shares His purpose with men in order that they might participate in it. It is not simply information! Think what Israel was promised. (1) **A change of condition** --from slavery to freedom. (2) **A change of environment** --from Egypt to Canaan. (3) **A**

change in their future --from a gloomy future to a bright one--fertile soil, genial climate, and abundant fruitfulness. (4) **A change of government** --from the tyranny of Pharaoh to the protection of God. (5) **A change of status** --from building dwellings for others to have dwellings of their own.

Besides these temporal blessings, they were given the hope of a coming Prophet Who would bring them a message of spiritual liberation (Deut 18:15-18). As wonderful as the word to them was, it brought no profit to them--no blessing, no advantage! **They did not believe it!** That is why they did not act upon it! It is no different with people today. When they do not act upon God's Word--particularly His Gospel--it is because they do not believe it! It makes no difference what people say. If they are not acting upon the Word of God, it is because they do not believe it.

We Have Heard!

The point of our text, however, is not that **Israel** heard the Gospel, but that **we** have heard it! We have heard the message elaborated and expounded. Israel had it in embryo. If we are tempted to set the message aside, failing to **act** upon it, we must remember Israel. They could have had fellowship with God in the anticipation of the coming Redeemer and the expectation of the completion of His purpose. During the waiting period, they could have enjoyed an elevation of status, and the experience of Divine benefits and blessings. Instead, they chose to listen to doubters. Thus they did not act upon the promise, but allowed "*an evil heart of unbelief*" to enter them. No heavenly mandate could offset their unbelief. Therefore, they were excluded from the promise.

We cannot over-emphasize the importance of mixing faith with hearing today. God has promised marvelous things in the Gospel. Unless it is believed, however, there is no way to experience those benefits. Remission of sins, Divine direction, wonderful adequacy, our names written in heaven, and a reign with Jesus, are all **forfeited by unbelief**. What an enormous penalty is paid when men are diverted from the Gospel--when they are so distracted they do not believe the Word and move out upon it. **To hear the truth is not enough!** That hearing must be mixed with faith in those that hear it. It is not enough to espouse a correct position, although that must be done.

DEFINING THE TIME

There is a Divine time-frame within which the blessing can be appropriated. Outside of that window or season, it is not possible to obtain the blessing. The Spirit reasons with us on this matter. By using the word "Today," God has "set a certain day."

It is essential that we know the time--that we comprehend the period in which we are living. The Spirit admonishes us, "*Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."*" This is taken from Psalm 95:11, and is a Kingdom principle in place today. There is a Divine time-frame within which the blessing can be appropriated. Outside of that window or season, it is not possible to obtain the blessing. The Spirit reasons with us on this matter. By using the word "*Today,*" God has "*set a certain day.*" For Israel, the *window* of opportunity closed at the borders of the promised land. They assumed they had time to return to Egypt, and even determined to appoint a captain to lead in that presumptuous endeavor (Num 14:4). They did not see the time as **their time**! The promise was not related to "*Today!*" What an enormous penalty they paid!

Men are not to assume God will always call to them! The promises of God are not to be spurned. Men may not go on their way, choosing to disbelieve God, without forfeiting the blessing. As simplistic as that may appear, it is highly unfashionable in our Western world for the Gospel to be taken seriously. Somehow, men approach life in this world as though it were not going end--particularly when it comes to the things of God. The urgency of faith is not generally perceived. There is a spirit of casualness that grips even our present area. It is a cause for great alarm, for it is backing people away from the promises of God.

Much of contemporary theology presumes longevity. It allows for too much time in this world. One of the many banes of institutionalism is that it reckons on the duration of this world. When it comes to the promises and work of the Lord, it thinks more in terms of tomorrow than *“today.”* Its approach to Kingdom work over-emphasizes preparation and under-emphasizes the appropriating the promises TODAY! It is much like the *“fool”* that tore down his barns in order to build bigger ones (Luke 21:16-20). He thought he had a lot of time to remain in this world. How wrong he was! The very night he made his retirement plans, his soul was required of him. Mind you, we have nothing against plans when they are made with God in mind--but they must be so made. James, the brother of our Lord, said, *“Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.’ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that’”* (James 4:13-15). Beware of a posture of life that assumes longevity in this world!

The Promise Contains Adequacy

Faith sees adequacy as part of the promise of God. If we embrace the Gospel, God will make us adequate. That is what Israel did **not** see, and it is what myriads of our peers fail to see. I do not mean to be critical, but the *“TODAY”* mentality must once again grip the heart of the church. Strategy is fine in its place, but it must not be allowed to supplant *“today”* and *“now!”* *“Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation”* (2 Cor 6:2). When the church allows strategy to replace faith, its demise is sure, and its candlestick is about to be removed. Much of the church-growth and planning *movement that is all about us ignores “today,” forgetting that “Now is the accepted time, behold, Now is the day of salvation!”*

This Is the Time!

In regard to the book of Hebrews, *“now”* is the time to enter the *“holiest place”* --to fellowship with God and avail ourselves of His grace. *“Now”* is the time to have God’s Law written upon our hearts and put into our minds! *“Now”* is the time to *be enlightened, taste of the heavenly gift, share in the Holy Spirit, and taste the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age* (Heb 6:4-5). This is not a **goal** to set for yourself! This is the time when, by the grace of God, it can be done! Hallelujah! O, for a return of this spiritual frame! To be persuaded that we can come to the Lord NOW to *“obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need”* (Heb 4:15-16). This is the time when God will work in us *“both to will and to do of His good pleasure”* (Phil 2:13).

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I am not so foolish as to affirm men should not plan, purpose, and set goals. That must, however, be done within the framework of God’s *“Today!”* The first and preeminent thing to do is **appropriate what God is offering NOW** . That is His way of

preparing us for the “*ages to come.*” If we do not taste of the Lord now, we shall not live with Him then! If we do not possess what the Lord has provided now, we will not inherit the world to come. Those that balk at His “*unspeakable gift*” now, will never be able to dwell forever in the courts of the Lord, to behold His beauty, and inquire in His temple! The Father and the Son offer to make Their abode with us **NOW** (John 14:23). Today you can be “*filled with all joy and peace in believing*” (Rom 15:13). The “*joy of the Lord*” can be your strength right now (Neh 8:10)! Now--today--it is time to draw near to God with a true heart, availing ourselves of abundance of grace He offers!

A Sense of Urgency

There is a sense of urgency in faith that forbids slothfulness and indolence. Before a person can be slothful, he must be unbelieving. Before one can fail to enter into what God has promised, he must choose to ignore His promise and disbelieve His Gospel. That is why people make little or no progress in the faith. It is not because they are not adequate. It is because they have not believed the promises of God! **THEY DO NOT KNOW THE TIME!** How appropriate are the words of the Spirit. “*And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light*” (Rom 13:11-12, NIV). I find a near-total absence of this perspective in the average religious institution. Men are taught that planning is godly and wise, when the Spirit declares this is the time to believe, press forward, and obtain the promises!

A REST REMAINS

Faith is the Appointed Means

There is something to be obtained--something that has not yet been fully experienced. “*For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: "And on the seventh day God rested from all His work. And again in the passage above He says, "They shall never enter My rest. It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience*” (v. 4-6, NIV). The “*disobedience*” of this text (i.e., “*because of their disobedience*”), is a disobedience that results from unbelief. The KJV captures the sense of the text, using the word “*unbelief*” instead of “*disobedience.*” Technically, both are correct. But faith and obedience are NOT synonymous! Romans 1:5 reminds us that obedience (u`pakoh.n) “*comes from faith*” (pi,stewj). Unbelief was the cause, and disobedience was the effect. Romans 16:26 speaks of believing (pi,stewj) AND obeying (u`pakoh.n). Remember, “*the just shall live by faith*” (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38), not by obedience! We do not despise obedience, for to obey is “*better than to sacrifice*” (1 Sam 15:22). The Lord gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32). Jesus is the Author of “*eternal salvation*” to those that obey Him (Heb 5:9). Our text is showing the root of disobedience, which is unbelief. Likewise, the root of obedience is faith.

The True Sabbath

The rest “remains” to be enjoyed by the people of God. Now, they enjoy a “rest” from their own labors as a basis for entrance into glory. They now savor Divine acceptance upon the basis of their unreserved reception of Christ (John 1:12). Those that have tasted of this “rest” know how

appropriately it is named — “REST!”

Israel did not enter into the rest of God — the true Sabbath. This contradicts the doctrine of the Sabbatarians that affirm the seventh day is the proper day of worship. (Many of them affirm that honoring the first day of the week is a Satanic innovation.) If this were the case, Israel would have entered into the sabbath-rest of God. Though imperfectly, they did honor the Sabbath day. However, it is here declared they did not enter the “*rest*” God associated with the seventh day! If the cessation of creative labor on the seventh day is the “*rest*” to which our text refers, we cast upon the horns of a dilemma. The Lord said Israel did **not** enter His rest, yet they **did** keep the Sabbath day holy, as He commanded (though with much inconsistency).

God declared, “*They (the unbelievers) shall never enter My rest!*” The point is not merely that they **did** not enter, but that they “*could not*” enter! It was no longer offered to them! It was Not accessible to them. However, the seventh day was offered to them--yea, it was commanded they keep it, and do so in a holy manner. The most diligent Sabbath keepers in Israel, however, did not enter into God’s Sabbath rest! That is a matter of revelation. The Lord is not speaking of a ritual, but of a condition. He is not referring to a procedure, but to a culmination.

It is more than interesting that in Hebrews 3:11,18, and 4:1,3,5,10, and 11, the word “*rest*” is translated from the Greek word *kata,pausin*, which means *ceasing from ones work or activity . . . rest*. However, in the ninth verse, another word is used. “*There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God*” (NASB, NIV, NRSV). The word used here is *sabbatismo,j*, which means *a spiritual rest, a rest*. This is a use of the word from which the word “*Sabbath*” comes, and is the only place in the New Covenant writings that it is found. *Notice, it is yet to be inhabited, not observed!* It is something into which we “*enter,*” not something we keep.

Two Kinds of Rest

Here, there are at least two kinds of “*rest*” to be considered. First, **a rest from toil and exertion**. In this case, “*rest*” for the weary. This was foreshadowed by the seventh day Sabbath. In that day, there was to be a cessation of normal activity, and provision made for rest and contemplation. This cannot, of course, be applied to God Almighty. There as no need for God to “*rest,*” in this sense of the word. Creating the world did not fatigue the Lord!

The other kind of rest is a conclusion--a “*rest*” because something is completed. This is the “*rest*” God is said to have had. Both rests pertain to man, but only the latter applies to the Lord. For God, the Sabbath-rest marked the conclusion of the creation of the heavens and the earth. For Israel, the Sabbath-rest marked the conclusion of a week, and the preparation for further toil.

For those in Christ, the Sabbath-rest marks the conclusion of their orientation for glory, when they shall be “*conformed to the Image of God’s Son*” (Rom 8:29), glorified and ready to embark on an eternal reign with the Son of God. That rest “*remains*” to be enjoyed by the people of God. Now, they enjoy a “*rest*” from their own labors as a basis for entrance into glory. They now savor Divine acceptance upon the basis of their unreserved reception of Christ (John 1:12). Those that have tasted of this “*rest*” know how appropriately it is named — “*REST!*” To attempt to serve God with a defiled conscience is labor of the worst sort. It is fatiguing, discouraging, and hopeless! To serve Him with a cleansed conscience is liberty and rest of unspeakable magnitude! O, that it were known by more!

God prepared a “*rest*” from the beginning--a “*rest*” into which men could effectively and satisfactorily enter. From this perspective we have been saved in accordance with “*His own purpose*

and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time" (2 Tim 1:9, NASB). In a word, this rest is *"eternal life, which God, Who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time"* (Tit 1:2, NASB). It is as though the Lord reserved a place by Himself where mankind could reside, fellowship, and participate with Him. Israel chose not to avail themselves of that blessing.

The work of salvation is not complete until that *"rest"* is realized by the saved ones.

The "rest" is still there--to be inhabited by those willing to believe! There is still joyous satisfaction, rewarding fellowship, and a large inheritance! The unbelief that surrounds can be effectively resisted by the grace of God! We can believe God whether any one else does or not!

The unbelief of the Israelites provoked God to wrath. When He was angry, He swore they would never enter His rest--and they did not! Would God respond by removing the *"rest,"* as He did with the angels that fell? Indeed, He did not! The *"rest"* is still there--to be inhabited by those willing to believe! There is still joyous satisfaction, rewarding fellowship, and a large inheritance! The unbelief that surrounds can be effectively resisted by the grace of God! We can believe God whether any one else does or not! In fact, we MUST believe God, whether any one else does or not!

We are dealing with a high and lofty truth! We are **not** speaking of procedures or disciplines, as were mirrored in the Law. We **are** speaking of Divine fellowship, participation in the *"eternal purpose of God,"* and a joint reign with Christ. Here, we address the matter of complete absorption--willing absorption--in the will of the Lord. It is complete extrication from the quagmire created by transgression. The *"rest"* of God is not God providing a remedy for sin, but the enjoyment of a purpose for which the remedy prepares us. To put it another way, God's *"rest"* is the realization of the participation for which remission, intercession, and the gift of the Holy Spirit prepare us. Though this must be carefully stated, the contemporary church has exalted the means above the end. The result is that institutional constituents are not stretching forward to obtain the prize!

God Is Relying Upon the Son

It is important to emphasize this *"rest"* involves the Father's complete reliance upon the Son. Everything has been turned over to Him--the Lord Jesus Christ. As Jesus said, *"The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands"* (John 3:35; 13:3, NIV). One of the more familiar statements of Jesus is found in Matthew 28:18. *"All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."* In order to fulfill His mission, the Father granted the Son *"authority over all people that He might give eternal life to all those . . . given Him"* (John 17:2, NIV). Again, Jesus says, *"All things have been committed to Me by My Father"* (Matt 11:27, NIV). Of the Son, the Spirit affirms, *"For He (the Father) has put everything under His feet"* (1 Cor 15:27, NIV). To the Ephesians Paul wrote, *"God placed all things under His feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church"* (Eph 1:22, NIV). Peter declared Jesus has *"gone into heaven and is at God's right hand--with angels, authorities and powers in submission to Him"* (1 Pet 3:22, NIV). God is RESTING with complete confidence in His Son! Glory be to God!

The point of our text is that we can enter that rest with Him. We can rely completely on the Son to accomplish in us the good and acceptable, and perfect will of God. Do you wonder why the Apostle prays, *"Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen"* (Heb 13:20-21). Holy men have always known it is God

Himself that *“works in us, both to will and to do of His own good pleasure”* (Phil 2:13).

The Rest Remains

At least two things are implied by saying the rest *“remains.”* First, **the culmination of God’s purpose has not yet been realized.** The understanding of this will dissuade us from placing an emphasis on this world and our present attainment. Second, **we have not yet reached the fulness of what can be experienced NOW .** There is a largeness to salvation that can keep us pressing toward the mark. In both cases, we have not yet *“apprehended that for which we have been apprehended”* (Phil 3:12-13). If there is one glaring deficiency in contemporary religion it is this: men are blissfully unaware of the greatness of salvation. We must join the saints of past ages in praying they may *“may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God”* (Eph 3:15-18). Until measurable progress is made in this area, there is little hope of entering into God’s rest!

WE DO ENTER INTO REST

The genius of our salvation is found in the experience of its first fruits **now** . The affirmation of our text is wonderful. *“For we which have believed do enter into rest . . . ”* (v. 3). Faith brings us into the vestibule of glory. By it, we *“have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come”* (Heb 6:5). Later in this fourth chapter, the Spirit briefly elaborates on this facet of redemption. *“For those who enter God’s rest also cease from their labors as God did from His”* (Heb 4:10, NRSV). By this, He means the grief is removed from our efforts. Mind you, grief was not associated with God’s creation, nor was His *“rest”* a condition where He was relieved. God’s *“rest”* speaks of satisfaction and good pleasure. It also speaks of finality or completion. His *“eternal purpose,”* so to speak, was cast in stone. It only remained for it to be completed--for the children to all be brought home.

Those that labor under a system of Law suffer spiritual fatigue and frustration. They are never sure they have been received by God. They are never confident their names are written in heaven. They do not have the *“full assurance of hope,”* the *“full assurance of understanding,”* *“full assurance of faith,”* or a *“joy unspeakable and full of glory”* (Col 2:2; Heb 6:11; 10:22). The reason for this bankruptcy is not owing to their personality or lack of effort. Often, such people are engaged in profuse efforts for an institution, or some other cause. Yet, for all of their effort, they have not entered into God’s rest. They do not think in terms of *“fellowship”* with God’s Son, Christ Jesus (1 Cor 1:9). Subjects like justification, sanctification, and the coming of Christ are rarely matters of contemplation or communication. Generally, they are more enamored of this world than the one to come. They are *nice* people, but they are not confident people! Why so? They have been robbed by their religion! Scarcely do they hear that *“the Lord has done great things for them”* (Psa 126:2-3). Like Israel, they labor under a system of Law, which cannot bring the individual into God’s rest!

Faith brings you **into** the *“rest”* because it alone can appropriate what God has wrought. As a means to justification, *“work”* is wholly insufficient. It cannot bring ultimate satisfaction, arduous though it may be. No wonder the Spirit witnesses, *“So also David speaks of the blessedness of those to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works: Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the one against whom the Lord will not reckon sin”* (Rom 4:6-7, NIV). Faith can grasp that word, appropriating *“rest”* for the soul! You already know the necessity of such *“rest”* if you are going to successfully navigate through this world. Is it not refreshing to know you can enter it now by faith? All the while you are personally dissatisfied

with your attainments, you are gloriously satisfied with the work of Christ. Never forget, it is your view of the Son that enables you to join God in satisfying rest.

THE WORKS WERE FINISHED

Because of the reluctance of those under Law to believe the “*rest*” has been completed, the Spirit elaborates. The promised words of Jesus are a comfort to those who live by faith. “*Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*” (Matt 25:34, NRSV). That is equivalent to, “*The works were finished from the foundation of the world.*” In consideration of our text, this is the status and environment to which we have been called. By “*status*,” I mean we will enter into an eternal realm for which we have been duly qualified by virtue of our faith in Christ. By “*environment*,” I mean an habitation devoid of any element of dissatisfaction, exhaustion, trial, or opposition.

The “*works*” have already been finished! You have probably heard men say Jesus has been working on our mansion for nearly two thousand years. That may sound nice to the unlearned, but it is not! “*The works were finished from the foundation of the world.*” With a strong appeal to our faith, Peter speaks to our hearts. “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*” (1 Peter 1:3-5). Can you, child of God, enter into that rest by faith NOW! The anticipation of it, coupled with your assurance, will bring the first fruits to you now. The inheritance is completed! It is “*reserved in heaven FOR YOU!*” The Lord wants you to “*enter*” into it, and will provide all of the resources necessary for you to do so. “*Be not faithless, but believing!*” (John 20:27).

ENTERING INTO HIS REST

In our redemption, God prepares something for us--something into which we enter. It is provided for us, and faith enables us to appropriate it. It is complete in all of its facets, and is neither increased or made more stable by our persons or effort. It has been “finished,” and we “enter into” it.

The wording of the Spirit is precise. The “*rest*” of which we speak is not a human accomplishment. It is something that already exists--a rest into which we enter. As it is written, “*There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from His*” (NIV). The word “*enter*” comes from the Greek word *eivseleu, sontai*, which means *to come into, enter, take possession of, begin to enjoy, or begin to experience*. It involves more than simply making a transition to another place, like entering a room. Rather, it speaks of **possessing an inheritance**, realizing what faith has brought to the soul, and beginning a full participation in things preferred. The rest was created by God, man but enters into it. **It is not developed by man in any sense whatsoever**. If the rest were likened to a large brick house, there is not a single brick placed there by us. If it were considered a large tapestry, not a single stitch has been woven by man. This “*rest*” is wholly created by God. It is His, and His alone. By His grace, and because of Jesus Christ, we are allowed to enter into it. Praise be to His holy Name!

This represents a manner of thought that conflicts with both natural and legalistic ways of thinking. It vividly paints for us the nature of salvation. **In our**

redemption, God prepares something for us--something into which we enter. It is provided for us, and faith enables us to appropriate it. It is complete in all of its facets, and is neither increased or made more stable by our persons or effort. It has been *“finished,”* and we *“enter into”* it. Just as Israel did not create Canaan, so we do not construct the *“rest”* into which we enter by faith. It is *“prepared”* for us, and we come into it!

This condition puts the accent on faith, for faith appropriates what has already been prepared. It *substantizes* spiritual realities to our spirits, provided by God in Christ Jesus. By comparison, *“works”* (as a means of gaining God’s approval) do not recognize anything *“PREPARED for those who love Him”* (1 Cor 2:9). Those under the bludgeon of Law acknowledge that God has prepared a Kingdom, but they cannot conceive of it being *“for them.”*

In the glory, we will enter fully into a **Christ-centered awareness**. That is, then the magnificence of His vicarious death and our consequent salvation will burst upon us like the dawning of the noon-day sun. The prophet Isaiah depicted this *“rest”* in words of comparison. How marvelous they are. *“They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore”* (Isa 2:4, NIV). Micah writes precisely the same words, adding *“Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the LORD Almighty has spoken”* (Micah 4:3-4). That is the appointed *“rest”* which awaits the people of God. It will be intensely personal, satisfying, and productive. Mind you, it is not their rest, but God’s rest! The purpose of God was initiated by God’s identity with us. It shall culminate in our identity with Him!

CONCLUSION

I have briefly and lightly touched a massive subject. Yet, even though this presentation has been but introductory, it will have a sanctifying effect upon your heart and mind. It speaks of something God has done — something He has prepared for YOU! He has given indication of His great satisfaction with the Son. Jesus is His *“well beloved Son,”* held in high regard and given power over everything in heaven and earth. There is no aspect of our salvation the Father does not trust in the hands of the Son. He is *resting*, so to speak, in the anticipation of the fulfillment of His *“eternal purpose.”* The Son will complete the work, bringing many sons to glory. He will present them before the Throne, faultless and with great joy! He will shepherd them, protect them, and feed them. When they need heavenly resources, He will provide them. He will dispatch angelic hosts to camp around them, delivering them from fear of evil! The Father knows this, and rests the entirety of our salvation in Christ’s hands.

Now, God invites us to join Him in this confident and satisfying *“rest.”* We can enter into it with Him, enjoy its joys, and look forward to its culmination. The point of our text is for us to do it. Do not allow an *“evil heart of unbelief”* to keep you from entering into what has been prepared for you! Instead, take hold of the promises! Clutch them firmly, and refuse to let them go. Ponder them and speak of them! It will not be long, and you will be with the Lord, realizing the fulness of the *“rest”* — HIS REST — into which you can enter!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

Commentary on the book of Hebrews

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #7

AN EFFECTIVE HIGH PRIEST

“Since then we have a great High Priest Who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a High Priest Who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. Because of this he is bound to offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. And one does not take the honor upon himself, but he is called by God, just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not exalt Himself to be made a High Priest, but was appointed by Him who said to Him, "Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee"; as He says also in another place, "Thou art a Priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek." In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard for His godly fear. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience through what He suffered; and being made perfect He became the Source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, being designated by God a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek” (*Hebrews 4:14-5:9, RSV*).

INTRODUCTION

The present ministry of Jesus is not a novelty — it is the **heart** of our salvation, and is indispensable to our acceptance by God and safe arrival before Him without spot. As obvious as this is, it is arresting how very little is made of this in the contemporary religious environment. The

present ministry of Jesus is scarcely known among professed believers. Little, if anything, is made of Christ's current activity by the average minister. How tragic is this circumstance! It brings dishonor to the Son of God, and grieves the heart of our heavenly Father. It has also brought great handicap to those deprived of such proclamation.

The centrality of Deity in this text is remarkable. **When it comes to salvation, the emphasis is upon God and Christ, not man.** The thrust of Divine communication is upon what the Lord has done and is doing, not what man should do. To be sure, the involvement of man is not to be ignored. However, this is not the thrust of the Gospel. The believer must not allow any form of theological thought to dominate his thinking that relegates the working of God to a secondary position. As rudimentary as that may seem, contemporary churches have been inundated with teaching that does not have Deity at its center. The passage we now consider will show the relevance of this observation. In an elementary way, this is seen in the references to the Father and the Son in this passage. The following table provides a count of the references made to the Father and the Son. The repeated references to Deity are arresting, and worthy of your consideration.

A Summation

The Spirit urges believers to enter the holiest place, leaving the inhibitive environs of legalism, and introductory nature of the outer court. He does not do it by holding forth an obligation, but by focusing on the Savior.

This passage deals with spiritual motivation. Here is exhortation in its highest and most productive form! The Spirit urges believers to enter the holiest place, leaving the inhibitive environs of legalism, and introductory nature of the outer court. He does not do it by holding forth an obligation, but by focusing on the Savior. There are warnings and exhortations, to be sure. But they are not the strongest incentives of our text. We are summoned to consider our High Priest; to view Him in magnificent current activity. Now Jesus is administrating the New Covenant. He is shepherding His people, bringing them to God, and leading them to glory. This is the work for which He was ordained, the ministry for which He was chosen! His vicarious death was the necessary preparation for this work. His resurrection was the Father's validation of His atoning death, and the prelude to His glorious reign.

Heaven "*itself*" is the realm in which salvation is effected. The most significant ministry takes place there! The "*throne*" from which Jesus rules is one of "*grace*," not coercive power. Christ's reign is not primarily the execution of a "command-obey" situation. While He does command, and men are to obey, His reign is much larger than this. We did not need a glorified man to command us, and we did not need one to obey. Without being manifest in the flesh, God could and did command mankind. Without sending His Son, we were still obligated to obey God. What the reign of Christ does is enable saints to obey. It empowers them to successfully resist the flesh and walk in the Spirit. Provisions are granted from this throne of grace that make the child of God equal to the rigors of living by faith.

Because of this, we are urged to approach the throne in time of need--when Divine resources are needed to run the race and finish the course set before us. Ordinarily, a throne represents an aggressive imposition of the will of the ruler. However, this is not the picture here presented. The administration of mercy and grace to needy souls is proclaimed. That is the kind of Ruler the Lord Jesus is!

Rather, because of the Father's magnanimous Person and will, He has been appointed to reign in the behalf of, and for the ultimate glorification of, the people of God. When He walked among men, the Lord Jesus was equipped for His present ministry by trials and temptations. He also "*learned obedience*" so He could succor, or nourish sensitive and obedient souls in the quest of glory. Without His intimate involvement, saints could never realize the objective of their faith. There simply is no such thing as a salvation without an imminent and involved Savior. The Son of God was sent to affect the redemptive purpose of God, and allow the Father Himself, as well as the Holy Spirit, to be intimately involved with the people.

WE HAVE A GREAT HIGH PRIEST

The glory of the Gospel is found in its affirmations

I call your attention to the total absence of an institutional emphasis in this book. There is no mention of a "successful" or "growing" church. There is no career path here, no secrets to effectively starting a church or evangelizing a community. There is no mention of missions, the great commission, or "full time" professional service for Christ. The polity of the local congregation is not mentioned, nor is the procedure for electing leaders. You will not find here an extended discourse on the family, a nation, or an organization.

A message is proclaimed that declares things accomplished independently of our effort. This perspective must be seen before any measurable attainment can be made in the life of faith. The pivotal, or central, elements of the Gospel have nothing whatsoever to do with what you have achieved or can achieve. You had no input into their accomplishment, and yet they were brought about in your behalf. The Word becoming flesh, living a perfect life, and laying down His life, had no input from you! His resurrection from the dead, ascension into glory, and being seated at the right hand of God is completely separate from your own achievements. His exaltation by God, present intercession, and soon return are not made effective by one jot or tittle from you. These are the work of the Lord, the baring of His arm, the revelation of His purpose. The preaching of these realities is the means employed by God to save and succor men. Proclaiming these realities brings Divinity to bare upon the heart and conscience of men. This is a message to be grasped by faith alone.

It is necessary to establish this firmly to your heart. There is no discipline as powerful as the Gospel. No methodology, however refined and seemingly effective, can compete with the preaching of the Gospel of Christ. This book of Hebrews is nothing less than a delineation of the Gospel. It is an opening up of the greatness of the message which first compelled us to call upon the name of the Lord in joyful obedience. I do not find the Gospel extolled and proclaimed as the power of God today. I know the reason for this is primarily the blindness of men. However, I am also persuaded that proclaiming the Good News of Christ impinges upon men's careers and institutional prominence. It is not possible to become absorbed with Christ and, at the same time, promote purely human

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If you approach this book with theological tenets alone in mind, you will miss the message! This is not a message to merely correct a flawed position, but one to bring people into the favor and purpose of Almighty God. Proclamation--Gospel proclamation--does not ask what people want, it declares what they need! It does not investigate circumstance. It declares the real situation. This is a book of AFFIRMATION! Thus far, Jesus has been declared as God’s only Spokesman to humanity. It is affirmed that He is superior to angels, and Moses the lawgiver. The necessity of listening to Him is asserted. The announcement of a Rest for men is even declared. Now, the Holy Spirit is going to affirm with great effectiveness that Jesus Christ, the Son of God IS our High Priest.

Holding fast our profession, or holding firmly to the faith we profess, is an obstinate refusal to quit believing, trusting, or relying upon our God! It is the repudiation of any inclination to cease hoping or quit looking for the completion of this great salvation.

“Seeing then that we have a great high priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession” (Heb 4:14). [*“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess,”* NIV.] Do not miss the power of this admonition! Holding fast our profession, or holding firmly to the faith we profess, is an obstinate refusal to quit believing, trusting, or relying upon our God! It is the repudiation of any inclination to cease hoping or quit looking for the completion of this great salvation. This is

perseverance--the "*perseverance of the saints.*" And how will this determination to dwell with the Lord be realized? What is the catalyst for faithfulness? For some, it is being linked up with what they consider to be a lively church. For others, it is an occasional good convention or rally. Some think long-term decisions to keep the faith are made in an environment of hype and ecstasy. Whatever may be said of all those things--and they all have some value-- **there is nothing to compare with a consideration of our great High Priest, Jesus the Son of God.**

Look at the text again, and marvel at its powerful simplicity. He does not say, "*Since we have faith, let us hold fast . . .*" Nor, indeed, does He say, "*Because we have been saved by grace, let us persevere.*" **Hear him!** He does not say, "*Because we are the sons of God, let us continue in the faith.*" Nor does the Spirit admonish us to be faithful because our sins are forgiven and we have the gift of the Holy Spirit. All of these things are true, and within the proper context of life, they are sweet elixirs for the soul. But they are all subjective. They depend upon your assessment of your own experience and progress. I am constrained to tell you that, as essential and blessed as these are, they will not build a strong confidence. Let no one despise them, or consider them unavailable to the believer! The Spirit is taking us higher! He is grounding us in the One that has been charged by God with bringing "*many sons to glory.*" Ultimately, it is what Jesus is doing that will determine whether you can keep the faith or not! Were He to vacate the throne of grace, your efforts would all be for naught! But if He is enthroned, your labor is not vain in the Lord! It is just that simple, praise the Lord!

Notice, our blessed Lord is called "*a GREAT High Priest.*" He is "great," and exceedingly so, because of the dignity of His Person. He has a "*more excellent Name.*" He is also "*great*" by virtue of effectiveness of His vicarious sacrifice. It is the only sacrifice ever made that had eternal effectiveness with, and fully satisfied, the Father! Think of it! He is also "*a great High Priest*" because of the realm where He now ministers in unparalleled effectiveness-- "*heaven itself.*" His greatness is also measured by the continuation of His High Priesthood. Other High Priests were not allowed to continue because of their death. But it is not so with our Savior. He abides a "*Priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek*" (Heb 5:6).

Jesus is a "*GREAT High Priest*" whether men see it or not. His greatness does not depend upon our faithfulness, but our faithfulness does depend upon His greatness! Here we are urged to be faithful in view of Him! He will enable us to finish this course with joy, if we but trust Him. Let no soul suppose this exhortation mitigates obedience, or diminishes the necessity of human effort. We are called to ponder our "*Great High Priest*" in order that our efforts might be consistent, effective, and honored by the God of heaven. Jesus is "*passed into the heavens,*" and that is where He needs to be if we are going to finish this race! Once He entered into heaven, do you not recall the difference in the Apostles of the Lamb? You do not see them vacillating, denying, or being compulsive any longer. And why not? Because they had a "*great High Priest*" in heaven seated upon a throne of grace. Likewise, the effectiveness of our faith is underwritten by Jesus in heaven--NOW. In view of that, let us persevere to the end! There is every reason to be sure you can!

WE HAVE A SYMPATHETIC HIGH PRIEST

If our association with God is based purely upon a system of Law, then Christ's association with us is also on the same basis. Is there any so foolish as to assume Jesus intercedes for you only because God told Him to do so? Has He no genuine interest in our situation, our handicaps, the jeopardy in which we find ourselves? A resounding "NO!" must be shouted to all of these questions.

It is possible to have a representative that is not sympathetic with us--one that is merely carrying out a duty, or obligation. Here is an aspect of salvation that those under the Law do not consider. If our association with God is based purely upon a system of Law, then Christ's association with us is also on the same basis. Is there any so foolish as to assume Jesus intercedes for you only because God told Him to do so? Has He no genuine interest in our situation, our impediments, or the jeopardy in which we find ourselves? A resounding "NO!" must be shouted to all of these questions. The economy of salvation is one of grace, not Law! It is one in which intense interest is experienced by all concerned. The Father is intensely interested in saving us. The Son is profoundly devoted to our salvation. The Holy Spirit is deeply committed to us completing the race. The angels of God are devoted to helping us run this race. Believers themselves are preoccupied with their quest for glory and the will of the Lord. Law could never accomplish unanimity between God and men in these matters! Our text states this remarkably sensitive picture in glowing words.

"For we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (v 15). I particularly like the word "touched," over "sympathize," as used by later versions. It is just a personal preference, not a technical one. It speaks of the sensitivity of Christ to our circumstance. The verse is stated in a peculiar manner. Ordinarily we would say, *"We have a High Priest that can be touched [or that can sympathize] with our infirmities [or weaknesses]."* The Spirit, however, states what we do NOT have--and that for a reason.

He is undermining the notion that men can be justified by Law--that men can come to God upon the basis of procedure, or regimentation. Such a view, altogether too common in our day, does not see Christ as a sympathetic or merciful High Priest. Exactness of procedure is perceived as superior to the heart of the Savior. This is a heartless and devastating view that will not allow those embracing it to make much progress toward the Lord. Remember, closeness to the Lord IS the point! To come into His presence, consciously and confidently, is the heart of the matter. This will never be achieved by following a set of rules, however true and valuable they may be. To *"hold fast the profession of your faith,"* you must know more of Christ's attitude toward you than of your ability to reach Him. **You DO NOT have a High Priest that is unaffected by your condition!** Men are often tempted to think, however, that this is not the case. It has grown so fashionable in our heathenistic culture to question God. *"If God loves me, why am I going through these trials?" "Where is God when I need Him?" "Why are these things happening to me?"* . . . etc. These are all foolish questions, unworthy to be embraced or answered! They suppose Christ is NOT *"touched with the feeling of our infirmities."* Such imaginations are evidences of unbelief, and are to be abandoned with haste and immediacy!

How comforting the affirmation! *“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities.”* Our High Priest is involved with us at the most intimate level! Notice how precisely this is stated! Jesus is not touched with the infirmities, or weaknesses,

It is true, from one perspective, that Jesus is obeying the Father in caring for us. But that really is not the point of this marvelous text. His heart is in His work! He does not merely see you in this world, He is touched by what He sees, and is eager to give you grace to help in those times of need.

themselves, but with the *“FEELING”* of them (KJV, ASV)! Other standard versions say, *“to sympathize with our weaknesses,”* as compared with *“touched with the feeling of our infirmities.”* Although a technical point, it is one worthy of comment. The phrase here translated is mh. duna,menon sumpaqhsai. . While not a complex phrase, it is a sensitive one, depicting great feeling. The word *“sympathize,”* which is linguistically correct, does not carry the full weight of the declaration. The point is not simply that Jesus feels sorry for us, or that He regrets we suffer. The Spirit is showing us our Great High Priest is aggressive to DO SOMETHING about our situation--He is AFFECTED, or *“touched”* by it. It is possible for noble men to sympathize with the suffering, yet be able to do nothing about it. Thus did Paul languish in a cell with a suffering Epaphroditus, who was sick and nearly died (Phil 2:26). Paul had sorrow about the situation, but could not do anything about it! It was God that finally showed mercy upon him, relieving the sickness of Epaphroditus and the sorrow of Paul (Pail 2:27).

This is the point of our text! Our great High Priest, Jesus the Son of God, is fully able to DO something about our situation. He does it because He is affected by our condition, not out of a mere sense of obligation. It is true, from one perspective, that Jesus is obeying the Father in caring for us. But that really is not the point of this marvelous text. His heart is in His work! He does not merely see you in this world, He is touched by what He sees, and is eager to give you grace to help in those times of need.

Whatever deficiencies men may see in our “religion,” as they call it, they can see no lack of adequacy in our Savior and High Priest! Our churches may have lack, but our High Priest does not! As we examine ourselves, we may find a staggering number of flaws, but we will find none in our High Priest! **He is flawless in His character and in His ministry!** He is thoroughly adequate as a Redeemer and as a High Priest; as a Representative and as a Mediator!

He Was Tempted In All Points

Here is a battle ground for the sophists, whose view of Scripture can go no deeper than their own shallow minds and miniature hearts. *“ . . . One Who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin”* (Heb 4:15b, RSV). Some had affirmed that

Jesus did not sin because He could not sin--He was Divine. That may sound good to the academic master, but it does not sound good to the tempted ones. Jesus was really tempted! He felt the tug of the flesh, the drawing power of Satan's lure. Scripture goes so far as to say He "**suffered being tempted**" (Heb 2:18). Life in this world was difficult for Jesus! He was out of His element, so to speak, housed in a constrictive frame than held Him in. In His own words, "**But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished!**" (Luke 12:50, NKJV). There is no earthly language capable of fully stating that lament of Jesus! Our salvation was very costly to Him! It ought not surprise anyone that it is also costly to us!

The phrase "**in all points,**" or "**in every way**" means **in every area** . It does not mean Jesus was tempted to take narcotics, be a homosexual, or be drunk with wine. First, it is important to know that Jesus was tempted in the greatest way, because He is the greatest Person, and His work is the greatest work. Satan was more aggressive to bring down Jesus than he has been to overthrow you!

"All that is in the world," of every area of temptation, is defined in Scripture. "**For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world**" (1 John 2:16). These are domains in which human vulnerability exists, and in which Satan is aggressive. It is worthy of our attention to briefly comment upon them. "**The lust of the flesh**" is strong desires associated with our bodies. It has to do with areas of our senses, and ranges from immorality to bodily nourishment. In this case, the deep needs of men are sought to be gratified by giving attention to the frame of man instead of his real person. A man of God from a former period said of this sin, "*all unchaste desires, thoughts, words, and actions, fornication, adultery, rape, incest, sodomy, and all unnatural lusts; and which make up a considerable part of the all that is in the world: or else intemperance in eating and drinking, gluttony and drunkenness, excess of wine, surfeittings, rioting, and ravelings, and all the sensual pleasures of life, by which the carnal mind, and the lusts of it, are gratified; whereby the soul is destroyed, the body is dishonored, and a wound, dishonor, and reproach brought on the character.*" 1 "**The lust of the eyes**" an appeal to satisfy with what is seen — to gratify the longings of the heart by seeing something. At the bottom of this area are things like pornography, with the wide spectrum of entertainment in general at the top. It is interesting to observe that while men vaunt the "*eye gate*" as the superior means of learning, God represents it as a liability. Of this sin is has been said, "*the sin of covetousness is here designed, the objects of which are visible things, as gold, silver, houses, lands, and possessions, with which riches the eyes of men are never satisfied, and which sin is drawn forth and cherished by the eyes; and indeed a covetous man has little more satisfaction than the beholding his substance with his eyes, and in which he takes much sinful pleasure.*" 1 "**The pride of life**" deals with sinful ambition, the desire for recognition in this world. The individual is herein tempted to become the center of his world. Everything is measures by whether or not it yields temporary advantage to the person. One has said of this sin, "*by which seems to be meant, ambition of honor, of chief places and high titles, as in the Scribes and Pharisees, Matt 23:6,7, or of grand living, for the word signifies not so much life as living; living in a sumptuous, gay, luxurious, and pompous manner, in rich diet, costly apparel, having fine seats, palaces, and stately buildings, and numerous attendance; all which is but vanity and vexation of spirit; see Eccl 2:1,3-8,11. The Syriac and Arabic versions read, "the pride of the age"; and every age has some peculiar things in which the pride of it appears.*" 1 The Holy Spirit is careful to point out to us that none of these "**are of the Father, but are of the**

world" (1 John 2:17). They are all connections to a temporal order that will pass away. There is no good in any of them!

Satan did not tempt Jesus with a woman, but with a stone--not with a bottle of wine, but with a stone! Jesus was not thinking about indulgence, He was thinking about food! *"He was hungry."* The devil proposed that Jesus sit at his table, turning stones into bread--not to satisfy His hunger, but to prove He was the Son of God.

These are the three areas in which Adam and Eve fell. Satan leveled his temptation at these vulnerable areas. The *"lust of the flesh"* is seen in Eve's mis-assessment that the forbidden fruit was *"good for food."* The *"lust of the eyes"* is seen in her observation *"that it was pleasant to the eyes."* The *"pride of life"* is seen in the phrase, *"a tree to be desired to make one wise"* (Gen 3:6). Thus, Satan brought down the human race by appealing to the three things that are *"of the world."* All three of them had to do with this world. None of them had to do with identity with the Living God. All of them centered in the individual that was created, rather than the Creator that made him.

Our text states that Jesus was *"tempted in all points like as we are,"* and was *"yet without sin."* The *"first man"* fell, the *"Second Man"* did not! The panorama of our Savior's life doubtless contained frequent skirmishes with the evil one--times when flaming arrows of unparalleled magnitude were hurled at Him by the arch foe of God and man. His temptation in the wilderness, however, will serve to confirm the point. Here, when our blessed Lord was at His weakest in the body, Satan assaulted Him with ferocity. The Spirit tells us this concentrated temptation came after forty days and nights of fasting. *"And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit for forty days in the wilderness, tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing in those days; and when they were ended, He was hungry"* (Luke 4:1-2, RSV). Mark adds, *"The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him"* (Mark 1:12-13, RSV). The temptation lasted throughout the forty days, but was brought to a pinnacle after they had ended. Then, when *"He was hungry,"* the Tempter came. He approached the Savior in the same three areas (which are ALL the areas) that he had successfully tempted Eve.

First, *"the lust of the flesh."* The Spirit constrained Matthew to write, *"And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. And the tempter came and said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread'"* (Matt 4:2-3). To those living in the flesh, it all seems innocent enough. But you must

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remember, it is the NATURE of sin that is so contemptible, even though it sometimes comes clothed as a necessity. Satan did not tempt Jesus with a woman, but with a stone--not with a bottle of wine, but with a stone! Jesus was not thinking about indulgence, He was thinking about food! **“He was hungry.”** The devil proposed that Jesus sit at his table, turning stones into bread--not to satisfy His hunger, but to prove He was the Son of God. But Jesus would have no part of teaching the devil, or confirming Who He was to the one who left his godly habitation. His stomach was empty, but His heart and mind were not! Quickly He repelled the lie with the truth of God. **“It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God’”** (Matt 4:4, NIV). Keep in mind, this was an epochal temptation! The salvation of the world hinged on whether or not Jesus would succumb--and He was hungry! A very real temptation, yet Satan loses the first skirmish!

The second assault is even more fierce. Now, in an effort to defeat the *Second Adam*, Satan appeals to the **“pride of life.”** **“Then the devil took Him into the holy city; and he had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, ‘If You are the Son of God throw Yourself down; for it is written, ‘HE WILL GIVE HIS ANGELS CHARGE CONCERNING YOU’; and ‘ON their HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, LEST YOU STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE’”** (Matt 4:5-6, RSV). Ah, a shrewd approach, indeed. Satan takes Jesus to the “holy city,” Jerusalem itself, where God had chosen to place His name (1 Kgs 11:36). The issue is still proving to Satan He is the Son of God! Now Satan quotes Scripture to Jesus, reminding Him of the allegiance of the angels, and the commitment of God to His Son. This was a very real temptation--to prove He was the Son of God by calling upon angelic hosts to act in His behalf, as appointed by the Father Himself. How gratifying that would be, and how utterly frustrating to the wicked one! But Jesus will not teach Satan, nor engage in an effort to impress him. He has come to save men, not impress the devil! He draws the **“sword of the Spirit”** and again repulses the devil’s attack. **“On the other hand, it is written, ‘YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST’”** (Matt 4:7, RSV). Divine protection is not something to put on display, but to assist in completing His work! A very real temptation, yet Satan loses the second skirmish!

Now Satan becomes even more aggressive. He is going for the **“lust of the eye.”** He seems to sense the fruit of a tree will have no enticement to the Holy One, so He aims much higher than he did with Eve. He offers the greatest prize for the most diabolical act. **“Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory; and he said to Him, ‘All these things will I give You, if You fall down and worship me’”** (Matt 4:8-9, RSV). Keep in mind, this is a temptation, not a technicality. Jesus was “born” to be a King, by His own admission later (John 18:36). Here is an opportunity to seize the kingdoms of world early. He does not contest Satan, or suggest the kingdoms of this world did not belong to him. They were lustrous kingdoms, filled not only with pomp and pride, but with opportunity for self gratification and fulfillment. Luke tells us the devil **“showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time”** (Luke 4:5). This time the Lord strikes a final blow that ends the temptation for a season. **“Begone, Satan! For it is written, ‘YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY’”** (Matt 4:10, RSV). Not for the glory of ALL the world’s kingdoms will Jesus bow to Satan. How tragic that myriads have yielded to him for much less, to say the least! A very real temptation, yet Satan again loses the skirmish!

Our text associates Christ overcoming temptation with His ability to succor us! Because He was tempted in every area, He can strengthen in every area. Because He resisted in every area of temptation, He can identify what we need to overcome in those areas. You will not have a temptation that does not affect Jesus! He does not know what it is like to yield to temptation, for He never yielded. He does know, however, what it means to suffer being tempted, and is

disposed to help us when we go through those times. The time to obtain Divine strength is BEFORE sin occurs, not after it has conquered! When we are tempted, we can obtain mercy, and find grace to help in the time of need! These are resources you need to fight the good fight of faith! They are indispensable to your triumph over this present evil world!

LET US CONFIDENTLY DRAW NEAR

If you think for one moment that you can launch out against the devil in your own strength, and because you bear the family name, you had better think again! That view is simply wrong, and is not to be embraced by any one! Not even Jesus approached the adversary in self-confidence!

In view of the greatness of our High Priest, and His thorough competency to identify with us in our need, ***“Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need”*** (Heb 4:16, RSV). Such an admonition would be pointless if (1. Jesus were not accessible, (2. If He were not qualified to help us, and (3 If He were not disposed to aid us in the battle against sin. We can come confidently, i.e., expecting to receive what is required to resist the devil. Your effort is not enough! It is true, we are admonished to ***“resist the devil, and he will flee from us”*** (James 4:7) — but that is not sufficient! That exhortation is preceded by these words, ***“Submit, therefore, to God . . .”*** You might imagine that ***“submit”*** is confined to obeying some commandment relating to moral purity. It is true enough that you are to keep yourself ***“pure.”*** Make no mistake about that (1 Tim 5:22). At a much higher and effective level, however, you submit to God by taking advantage of the High Priest He has appointed for you. Coming close to Him with confidence to appropriate mercy and grace is an act of true submission.

One of the great deficiencies of much emotion-based religion is its approach to overcoming the devil. I have heard far too often this subject approached as though Satan were afraid of us, and runs at a threat or shout from us. While there is some element of truth in this view, it is certainly not a full representation. Even though you are a new creation (2 Cor 5:17), and are ***“the sons of God”*** (1 John 3:1-2) — even though you have been translated into the ***“kingdom of God’s dear Son”*** (Col 1:13), and have become ***“partakers of the Divine nature”*** (2 Pet 1:4), you are utterly dependent upon Jesus. If you think for one moment that you can launch out against the devil in your own strength, and because you bear the family name, you had better think again! That view is simply wrong, and is not to be embraced by anyone! Not even Jesus approached the adversary in self-confidence! ***“During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, He offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the One Who could save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverent submission [fear, KJV]”*** (Heb 5:7, NIV). You will never overcome the devil until you have learned to draw close to God, through Christ, to ***“obtain mercy and find grace to help, in the time of need.”***

Some are satisfied with an academic approach to mercy and grace--but that will not sustain you in the hour of need! Mercy and grace are to be appropriated by the individual. They are to be transferred from a reigning High Priest to a

suffering saint! They come from the “throne of grace” to the arena of trouble and temptation. What is more, they cannot be obtained at a distance. I am convinced that many prayers for Divine intervention are a waste of time. They are uttered from an unacceptable distance--from the outer court, so to speak. The mercy and grace of God are there to be had. They are freely and willingly dispensed by the Lord Jesus when they are needed. But you have to come close to get them. He will not throw them to you, but He will personally give them to you if you will confidently come close enough to receive them!

Let us once and for all have done with any and every form of religion that allows people to keep at a distance from God. Systems of religious thought and religious enterprises that permit their constituents to live with stunted spiritual appetites, and lives out of contact with God are to be forthwith and hastily abandoned. They are under the curse of Almighty God. The Son was exposed to the fierceness of spiritual warfare in order that He might succor those that are in that arena. The Father has seated Jesus at His own right hand in heavenly places. That is the place where mercy and grace are dispensed. They simply cannot be had anywhere else. Come therefore, come near with a bold and confident heart! You will see, Jesus will give you mercy, and grace to help in the time of need. If you can see it, the “*time of need*” is NOW!

THE FOCUS OF HIS HIGH PRIESTHOOD

The High Priesthood of Jesus has been established by God in order to the completion of our salvation. Without that High Priesthood, there is no hope of anyone being saved. Whatever people may think of reaching the lost, and that is a most noble work, **God has appointed our High Priest to provide mercy and grace for the saved!**

There is a marked tendency in professed *Christians* to focus on this “*present evil world.*” Unfortunately, this tendency has been nurtured by the contemporary church. Its programs and thrust do not require much from God, and thus people have concluded they can live in virtual absentia from the Lord. This is an imagination spawned in and nurtured by the power of darkness! The High Priesthood of Jesus has been established by God in order to the completion of our salvation. Without that High Priesthood, there is no hope of anyone being saved. Whatever people may think of reaching the lost, and that is a most noble work, **God has appointed our High Priest to provide mercy and grace for the saved!** The focus of His priesthood will testify loudly to that fact.

Chosen From Among Men

“*For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men . . .*” (Heb 5:1a, RSV). The concept of a high priest was introduced in the Levitical law. The guidelines for establishing the high priesthood were outlined by God to Moses in Exodus 28:1-14 and 29:1-37. The first high priest was Aaron, and he was taken “*from among the sons of Israel*” (Ex 28:1). Under the Law the

type of Christ's priesthood was developed. A man would represent men! Angels were employed to deliver men (i.e., *Lot* --Gen 19:15, *Israel* --Ex 14:19), but God would not employ them to represent men before Him.

This foreshadowed our Lord's High Priesthood. He did not take hold of the nature of angels, but of men. In keeping with the Divinely appointed type, the representative must be taken "*from among*" the people. Thus it is written, "*For verily He took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham*" (Heb 2:16). **It is Christ's humanity that enables Him to save us.** The Father, knowing what was in man, and the immensity of the work of saving him, knew it would take a tender and empathetic (not merely sympathetic) High Priest to save him. It is my persuasion that the largeness of salvation is generally unknown because the extent of man's fall is not known. Men speak too glibly about salvation, as though it could be accomplished with a casual word. This is not so! God could speak the worlds into existence, but the salvation of man would require much more! An adequate High Priest **must** stand continually before God in the behalf of men, else they will not be saved! No wonder the Spirit moved Paul to speak of the Son's humiliation in such lofty and arresting language (Phil 2:5-11).

Things Pertaining to God

" . . . in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness" (Heb 5:1b-2, RSV). In salvation, God is not basically providing for man's temporal needs. Health, wealth, cohesive families, and stable governments are all nice, but that is not the reason for Christ's High Priesthood. Those that look to Jesus to resolve their problems in this world severely limit themselves. Under the Law, the exclusive work of the high priest concerned man's relationship to God. It is essential that this be seen with a good degree of clarity. The High Priest dealt exclusively with matters in which God had to do with men. He presided over them in the name of God, declaring His will to them, and blessing them in God's stead (Num 16:46-48 18:1-3). He also dealt with matters in which men had to do with God. He appeared before God in their name, representing their persons, and offering their sacrifices to God (Ex 28:29; Lev 9:7).

The purpose of the high priest was not to settle family disputes. He was not an arbiter between men, but someone standing between God and man. If there were no "*things pertaining to God,*" there would have been no high priest. Whatever may be said about the involvement of Jesus with the individual, He has no ministry dissociated from man's association with God. God needs Jesus to bless

If men are not God-conscious, seeking Him, loving Him, and serving Him, there really is no need for Jesus. Perhaps that explains the startling absence of the Son of God in much of contemporary religion. He simply is not relevant to purely institutional causes!

men, and men need Jesus to receive the blessing. This is the heart and core of the *Christian religion*, to speak rather crudely.

He Offered for Himself

" . . . and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for

himself" (Heb 5:3). The high priest must be sanctified for his work. He could not embark upon standing between the people and Almighty God without due preparation. Under the Law, the high priest had to present an offering for himself before offering one for the people. Thus it is written, "... ***if the anointed priest sins so as to bring guilt on the people, then let him offer to the LORD a bull without defect as a sin offering for the sin he has committed***" (Lev 4:3; 9:7; 16:6-7). The high priest must not be tainted when he represents the people to God, or God to the people. He must be wholly set apart for the work to which he was appointed. What a marvelous picture of our Lord Jesus is seen here.

Under the Law, the high priest first made offering for his own sin. That, of course, is not the purpose for Christ's *first offering*, for ***He did not sin, neither was any guile found in His mouth***. Yet, Christ did make an offering before He "***laid down His life, a ransom for man***." That offering is declared in our text. "***Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared; Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered; And being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him***" (Heb 5:7-9). Prior to His death, the Lord Jesus sanctified Himself--offering Himself to God as a willing sacrifice. His prayer of dedication is found in the seventeenth chapter of John, and is marvelous in content. "***These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee . . . And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. . . . And now I am no more in the world . . . And now come I to Thee . . . And for their sakes I sanctify Myself .***"

Here Jesus sets Himself apart for the work He was sent to do--laying down His life, and taking it up again (John 10:18). He no longer deals with the multitudes. He ceases to preach, go about doing good, and heal those oppressed by the devil. He will not longer feed the multitudes, confront bigoted religious leaders, or travel across the sea to heal the demoniac. When the time of the appointed sacrifice came, it is written, "***As the time approached for Him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem***" (Luke 9:51, NIV). The KJV poignantly says, "***set His face to go to Jerusalem***." His focus now adjusts to the heart of His mission. He will "***pour out His soul unto death***" (Isa 53:12), an act requiring His total focus and commitment. His first offering, if I may call it that, was not for his sin [like the ancient high priest], but was an act of dedication. It was a difficult one, too, that so impacted His bodily frame that the night of His betrayal, "***In His anguish he prayed more earnestly, and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground***" (Luke 22:44, NRSV). The language here depicts "***thick, clotted blood***." 2

The sacrifice of Christ required all of His power, all of His energies--all of His mind, soul, and strength. In His case, He did not first offer FOR Himself, but He first *offered Himself*. He withdrew from every subordinate ministry in order to address the largest undertaking every conceived in heaven or earth--the reconciliation of the world to God

Who can fathom the immensity of that preliminary sacrifice! At that point, He left the disciples in the care of His Father, as He devoted Himself fully to laying down His life. Take His words into your heart, for they are marvelous. "***While I was with them, I protected them in Your name that You have given Me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to You, and I speak these***

things in the world so that they may have My joy made complete in themselves. I have given them Your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking You to take them out of the world, but I ask You to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth" (John 17:12-17, NRSV). The sacrifice of Christ required all of His power, all of His energies--all of His mind, soul, and strength. In His case, He did not first offer FOR Himself, but He first *offered Himself*. He withdrew from every subordinate ministry in order to address the largest undertaking ever conceived in heaven or earth--the reconciliation of the world to God (2 Cor 5:18-20). He was going to be "*made sin*" (2 Cor 5:21), and would become "*a curse*" (Gal 3:13). That required transcendent dedication and resolve.

Called by God

"And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was . . ." (Heb 5:4a, RSV). Men did not volunteer for the office of high priest! It was by Divine appointment only. Whatever may be said of man's choice, it was not the basis for becoming a high priest. That was by God's choice. This is the plain declaration of Scripture. God will not allow just anyone to represent Him to the people, or the people to Him. The office is too important to be tainted to pride and politics, which inevitably encroach upon purely human enterprises. Aaron was selected by God to be the high priest of Israel (Lev 8:2; Num 18:1ff). On one occasion, the God caused the earth to open up and swallow those who questioned God's choice (Num 16). God, and God alone, "separated" the high priest from among the people (1 Chron 23:13).

As elementary as it may, the Son is God's choice for our High Priest. It is true, the Word did volunteer for the assignment (Psa 40; Heb 10), but it was an act of acquiescing. In His redemptive work, the Son of God sought exclusively the honor of the Father that sent Him. He was chosen by God. As He said, *"Those who speak on their own seek their own glory; but the One Who seeks the glory of Him who sent Him is true, and there is nothing false in Him"* (John 7:18, NRSV). The ministry of High Priest falls under the general heading "Christ," or "Messiah"--God's anointed One.

The implications of this are far-reaching. If God has chosen Christ to represent Him to us, and us to Him, neither representation can occur apart from affiliation with the Son. Nothing will come from God to us apart from Christ, nor will anything from us be received by God independently of involvement with the Son. Without being unduly abrasive, the entire self-help movement that has invaded *Christian* circles denies this principle. Most of these efforts have been developed, and are marketed, independently of God's appointed High Priest. This circumstance is inexcusable, and is not to be tolerated by the redeemed of the Lord. Let no one be so foolish as to suppose the God of heaven will support any effort that does not have His Son--our High Priest--at its center.

Although of themselves, the redeemed cannot provide a just reason for God to lavish His grace upon them, our High Priest can! Because of Him, the Father can freely dispense His mercy to us, pour out His Spirit upon us, and direct us in His ways. All of this, because of our High Priest, is done in righteousness, without the forfeiture of any aspect of the

Divine nature.

God provided the High Priest primarily for Himself!

“ . . . *but He who said to Him, "THOU ART MY SON , TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN THEE"* (Heb 5:4a, RSV). It is true that we need a High Priest. That provision is an essential part of our salvation. It is also true that the primary ministry of our High Priest is to God Himself. In our High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, God has provided for the expression of His own nature. Although of themselves, the redeemed cannot provide a just reason for God to lavish His grace upon them, our High Priest can! Because of Him, the Father can freely dispense His mercy to us, pour out His Spirit upon us, and direct us in His ways. All of this, because of our High Priest, is done in righteousness, without the forfeiture of any aspect of the Divine nature.

Among other things, this unveils the eagerness of the Father to save us. Consider this statement in view of His appointed High priest. *“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance”* (2 Pet 3:9). Those words are addressed to the *“redeemed of the Lord”* (Psa 107:2). They are more than the statement of a heavenly technicality. They are supported by the continual ministry of our great High Priest. If you are ever prone to doubt God’s personal interest in you, consider His appointment of the Son as our High Priest! This allows the Father to fulfill His purpose toward you. He only needs your consent, and full acquiescence.

Our High Priest Did Not Glorify Himself

“ . . . *So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest . . .*” (Heb 5:4b, RSV). The mystery of godliness (1 Tim 3:16) is revealed in this expression. Remember, God does, in fact, glorify Himself. Jesus once prayed, *“Father, glorify your name!”* The Father responded, *“I have glorified it, and will glorify it again”* (John 12:28, NIV). However, the Son did not glorify Himself--particularly in His High Priestly role. This was something the Father did for the Son--not something the Son did for Himself. With unparalleled boldness and insight, Peter announced, *“The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified His servant Jesus . . .”* (Acts 3:13, NRSV).

By saying *“Christ did not glorify Himself,”* the Spirit is intending to show us the purpose of God. Salvation is not a reactionary plan, but a Divine purpose. Just as our Savior is *“the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,”* so the Father appointed Him to be our High Priest, to administer salvation, before He ever made the world. In due time, He *“glorified”* the Son, as *“the Man Christ Jesus”* (1 Tim 2:5), elevating Him to the ministry of representation. That glorification confirms the thorough satisfaction of the Father with the sacrifice of the Son. The Father *“sent”* the Son (1 John 4:14), *“beget”* the Son (Heb 1:5), protected Him in infancy (Matt 2:13-14), upheld Him in temptation (Matt 4:11; Luke 22:43), directed Him in ministry (John 8:28,38; 10:32,37), raised Him from the dead (Rom 6:4; Gal 1:1), and set Him at His own right hand (Heb 1:13). Nothing can be more plain! Jesus did not glorify Himself, but the Father did!

God will be favorably disposed to bless those that give due honor to the Son. How wonderfully this is stated in John 12:26. *“If any one serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there shall My servant be also; if any one serves Me, the Father will honor him.”* What a remarkably blessed circumstance! To be honored by the Father Himself! This is a commentary of the honor God has bestowed upon His Son. Because of His vicarious sacrifice, the Father regards Him so highly, He will save any and everyone that *“receives”* Him (John 1:12). How we must praise God for this blessed reality!

THE DAYS OF HIS FLESH

The mighty prophet Elijah became depressed under the juniper tree, but under His greatest trial, Jesus became for fervent in His quest to do the will of His Father. This is the manner of the Kingdom. It is the way Divine life reacts to the most fierce of all assaults, and the most challenging aspects of obedience.

The “*days*” of Christ’s “*flesh*” were the days of His trial, perfection, and ministry. They were the days in which He was made suitable to be our “*great High Priest*.” During these days He wrought many mighty signs and wonders. Our Lord was a prodigious miracle worker. This aspect of His ministry was motivated by His great compassion. It was not the primary thrust of His work, and did not yield the greatest fruit. In no way is this intended to minimize the works of Christ. Rather, we intend to see “*the days of His flesh*” from a higher vantage point—one that yields abundant fruitage in our very day. We will see that Christ’s tenure in this world was the appointed means of sustaining His brethren in as they live by faith in an alien world. In His life, He was being equipped to be a merciful High Priest in “*things pertaining to God*.”

He Offered Up Both Prayers and Supplications

“In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety [in that He feared, KJV]” (Heb 5:7, RSV). The fervency depicted in this expression is arresting. Prayers were “*offered up*” with fear and urgency. Supplications were made “*with loud crying and tears*.” These were made under Satanic assault, and the revulsion of His flesh against the thought of dying. The mighty prophet Elijah became depressed under the juniper tree, but under His greatest trial, Jesus became for fervent in His quest to do the will of His Father. This is the manner of the Kingdom. It is the way Divine life reacts to the most fierce of all assaults, and the most challenging aspects of obedience. He was being prepared to assist the saints of God through their trials, and thus He went through the experience Himself! His encounter was “*like*” ours, yet was transcendent to ours.

Our Lord’s experience was one which required all of His resources. It demanded that He pray! He needed assistance from the Father. He did not resort to His disciples for encouragement, but to His Father. He had to pray to the one that was “*able to save Him from death*.” The Word of God provides some of the words our blessed Savior uttered during this time. He had taken some of His disciples into this inner chamber of prayer. However, when He began to pour out His soul, “*He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt.”*” The second time He prayed, “*My*

Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Thy will be done." We are told He prayed prayer again the *"third time"* (Matt 26:39-44). Although He was tempted to a remarkable degree, His preference remained to do the will of God.

Ultimately, He was not seeking deliverance from death. We know this is the case by what He said earlier. *"Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Thy name"* (John 12:28-29a). His prayer reveals the intensity of the temptation, as well as the revulsion of His spirit to the coming contamination of the sins of the world. When He prayed, however, He prayed to the One that was *"able to save Him from death"* — whether He would or not! This is an aspect of praying in temptation that few have duly considered. There come times when God's people sense they are not going to be spared certain trials. The three Hebrew children facing the fiery furnace (Dan 3:17), and the Apostle Paul (2 Cor 12:8ff) are cases in point. But faith does not despair under such trying times! Instead, prayer is made to the One Who is *"able to save."* The fleshly outcome is not the point. The sustaining power of faith IS the point.

Here He learned to navigate through the craggy rocks of distracting temptations. He learned that obedience does not come easily--that it is yielded in the fact of great opposition. This passage is NOT speaking about Christ's obedience to His parents when He was young, or to the Law as He advanced in wisdom. The particular *"obedience"* that He learned related to His death.

In His fiery trial, the Lord Jesus passed through the most difficult of earthly circumstance, and the fiercest of all trials. He did it in order to qualify Him to be a *"merciful and faithful High Priest."* That was the real point of *"the days of His flesh."*

He Learned Obedience

"Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered" (Heb 5:8, RSV). The thought of the Son of God having to *"learn obedience"* challenges our hearts and minds. He *"learned"* it like you do, except to a greater degree--in the crucible of conflict! Obedience is learned in times of stress, when strong inclinations to disobey are felt by the soul. Remember, Jesus came into the world to *"die."* That is why he was born! His death would expend the wrath of God for the believer, and open the prison house of sin. No wonder He was tempted to avoid drinking the cup of man's sin. He was to taste the dregs of iniquity, which would compel the Father to forsake Him. But when He was tempted, He *"learned obedience."* He *"learned"* it so you also could *"learn"* it when tempted to disobey.

Suffering became the teacher. He *"learned obedience FROM the things which He suffered."* We would not be able to adequately *"learn obedience"* unless He did first! Here He learned to navigate through the craggy rocks of distracting temptations. He learned that obedience does not come easily--that it is yielded in the fact of great opposition. This passage is NOT speaking about Christ's obedience to His parents when He was young, or to the Law as He advanced in wisdom. The particular *"obedience"* that He learned related to His death. That was the most difficult of all obedience for Him, and it will be for you also! This is the obedience of which the Spirit spoke in Philippians 2:8. *"And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."* The suffering He endured in that death was diverse. He suffered at the hands of men, the devil, and God Himself!

He did this *"though He were a Son."* This teaches us that identity with God does

not exempt us from trials and afflictions. Those that balk at difficulty, as though “*some strange thing*” had happened to them (1 Pet 4:12) do greatly err. Our Lord Jesus has led the way through the terrain over which we must travel. He was tempted because we are tempted. He suffered because we must suffer. However, he did not do it simply to have the experience, or so that He might identify with us. This was surely accomplished, but that was not the primary purpose. The objective was to qualify to be the kind of High Priest we required to complete the race that is set before us!

He Became the Source of Salvation

“*And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation*” (Heb 5:9, RSV). Morally, Jesus was “*perfect*” all along. He “*did not sin, neither was any guile found in His mouth.*” The meaning of this verse is that Jesus was perfected as a High Priest. He became fully qualified to represent men to God, nourish them from the Throne of all grace, and lead them to glory. God would not give us a High Priest until He was ready to bring us all the way home.

This accents the nature of our salvation. There is nothing automatic about salvation. It requires the wisdom of God, the obedience of Christ, the power of the Spirit, and the support of angels. God must be involved in the process from beginning to end. Our Great High Priest allows that involvement to take place. Mind you, our High Priest had to be effective in His work, or we would not overcome. Thus He was perfected, or made complete, accomplishing His obedience. It is like this: if Jesus did not obey, we would not be able to obey. Men may boast of their ability to obey, but it is only because they do not know the fierceness of the assault of Satan upon those intent on obeying God. Consider your High Priest, and behold how He “*learned obedience.*”

Mind you, our High Priest had to be effective in His work, or we would not overcome. Thus He was perfected, or made complete, accomplishing His obedience. It is like this: if Jesus did not obey, we would not be able to obey.

The objective of our Lord’s suffering and obedience is now being realized. He is now “*the Author* [Source, NASB] *of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him*” (v 9). Note, salvation has a Source! It is initiated by the Son of God, not man. Salvation is something authored by the Lord Jesus Christ. This is not speaking of the initiation of salvation--like “*getting saved*” (whatever that may be). Our High Priest is the “*Author*” is a salvation that is “*eternal.*” This is not only deliverance from sin. Our Lord brings salvation to its culmination, which is glorification, or being brought to be “*like Him*” (Rom 8:29-30; 1 John 3:1-3). You owe the entirety of your salvation to the Son of God! Your hand has not been put to it, even as human tools were not put to the altar of God (Ex 20:24; Deut 27:5). While “*Lord and Savior*” is a fitting description of the Son of God (2 Pet 1:11; 2:20; 3:2,18), “*eternal salvation*” is the accomplishment of our “*great High Priest.*” It is evident from the expressions that we hear that this truth is not generally known.

Lest we suppose we are not ourselves involved in the process, the High Priest

is the *“Source of salvation unto all them that obey Him.”* Here is an important point to see. Our obedience is not the cause of our salvation--Jesus is the Source of it in its entirety. However, our obedience is the means through which that salvation is effected. It is the channel through which salvation is realized. But there is more to this than that. The obedience of which He speaks is the *“obedience of faith”* (Rom 16:26)--conformation to the *“good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”* This is obedience that is yielded in the face of opposing influences. It is not a slavish obedience, like that of Sinai. Rather, it is the result of a preference for the will of God, even when discomfort and hardship is the result. Such obedience is exceedingly rare in an age that prefers convenience! If men are to be saved, they will have to WANT to be saved more than to avoid suffering. For all such, the *“great High Priest”* will bring them safely through, ministering mercy to them, and *“grace to help in the time of need.”*

Designated A High Priest By God

“ . . . being designated by God as a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb 5:10, RSV). The grand summation of this glorious section of Scripture is that Jesus, because of His qualifying life, has been designated as our High priest. He is not a temporary High Priest, or a mere figurehead. He is a *“High Priest according (or after) the order of Melchizedek.”* That means is ministry in this capacity is unchanging, and thoroughly effective for the completion of the process. It is God Himself that has designated Him our High priest. The angels did not vote on it, nor is His High Priesthood the response of God to the cries of men.

Our salvation required a High Priest that *“ever lives to make intercession for us”* (Heb 7:25). Only Christ suited that requirement! His human experience, if I may so refer to *“the days of His flesh,”* qualifies Him to *“bring many sons to glory.”* God did not designate an angel, mighty though they are, to be our *“High Priest.”* Indeed, neither did He designate *“the Word”* which was *“in the beginning”* to meet this need. The Father needed someone that had lived in the arena of conflict, and had defeated the devil on his own ground, to bring us to glory. Such an One was found in the Son, and therefore He was designated to be our Great High Priest.

There is no way to adequately express my personal elation and gratification in the Father’s appointment of His Son as our High Priest. I see it as one the most remarkable incentives to holiness and hope that is available to us. No person seeing this can be can be ultimately overcome by the wicked one. No one!

CONCLUSION

Give thanks for your High Priest, and approach God confidently because of Him. You will truly find mercy, and grace to help in the time of need — all because you have a *“great High Priest”* that is *“passed into the heavens.”*

Perhaps you have not thought much about the High Priesthood of Christ Jesus. Much of modern religion, if not the preponderance of it, does not encourage such contemplations. I trust you have been able to see more clearly the indispensability this ministry of Christ Jesus. We are told He is *“able to save to the uttermost those that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever lives to make intercession for them”* (Heb 7:25). This being the case, forever purge from your mind the notion

that salvation is sealed upon your profession of faith. Were this the case, we would need no Intercessor, no High Priest, no Divine resources. Your salvation is in the process of being completed. To put it in the words of Scripture (combining spiritual things with spiritual words), you ***“are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time”*** (1 Pet 1:5, NASB). Again, it is written, ***“Therefore, gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you”*** (1 Pet 1:13).

Give thanks for your High Priest, and approach God confidently because of Him. You will truly find mercy, and grace to help in the time of need — all because you have a ***“great High Priest”*** that is ***“passed into the heavens.”*** Remember, your salvation is more owing to what is happening today in heaven, than what is occurring upon the earth. It is that heavenly activity that allows us to fight the good fight of faith in this world.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

Commentary on the book of Hebrews

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #8

LEAVING THE FIRST PRINCIPLES

“ Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits. For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame. For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned. But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises ” (*Hebrews 6:1-12, NKJV*).

INTRODUCTION

The book of Hebrews is a **Divine commentary on the nature of the New Covenant** . First and foremost, it is under the administration of the Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. Through Him, and Him alone, God speaks to “*us*,” clarifying the nature of redemption and preparing us for the “*world to come*.” In this Epistle, we have more than the statement of systematic theology. **Spiritual life is defined in this volume** , and we do well to give our minds to the contemplation of its words.

Men that are disposed to consider angels are to reflect on the superiority of the Son of God to angels. Those enamored of religious procedure and the emphasis of human conduct must consider the superiority of Christ Jesus to Moses and the Law. If men are inclined to be remiss in their commitment, let them remember

the plight of the unbelieving Israelites. Should it be possible that some imagine they have arrived at the acme of spiritual life, let them recall that there yet remains a rest to the people of God. If one dares to imagine they are locked into salvation, let them seriously reflect upon the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ, and its indispensability to their salvation. This book will correct flawed thinking!

Life in the New Covenant [*and there is no other real life*] depends upon the individual's identity and fellowship with the Son of God. This life involves ardent effort, strong faith, and sensitivity of spirit and soul. External identity with a group (i.e., like an Israelite with Israel) is no longer the basis of Divine acceptance. Not only are the children of God NOT begotten or born of the flesh (John 1:13), they crucify the flesh, together with its affections and lusts (Gal 5:24). That includes earthly values, goals, and aspirations. Because of the direction of contemporary *Christianity* , it is necessary to say these things. Institutionalized religion has robbed the souls of men, leaving them in practical alienation from God because of its earthly emphasis.

SOMETHING TO LEAVE

The appropriation of Divine blessing always involves the forfeiture of something. Abraham had to leave Ur of the Chaldees and his father's house in order to go to the promised land. Lot had to leave Sodom to be spared. Moses had to leave Pharaoh's house to be used by God. Israel had to leave Egypt to go to Canaan. Coming to Christ involves leaving the world. It does not end there. **Spiritual growth requires leaving an emphasis on elementary things.** This is a most vital aspect of spiritual life, and is rarely declared in the institutional church. [By *Institutional church* , I mean the religious body that is able to exist without fellowship with God through Christ, and by the Spirit.]

Coming to Christ involves leaving the world. It does not end there. **Spiritual growth requires leaving an emphasis on elementary things.** This is a most vital aspect of spiritual life, and is rarely declared in the institutional church.

The Mandate

"Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ . . ." (NKJV). Other versions translate this verse as follows. *" . . . leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ "* (KJV). *" . . . leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ"* (NASB, NIV). *" . . . leave the elementary doctrine of Christ"* (RSV). *" . . . leaving the word of the beginning of the Christ "* (Darby's and Young's Literal).

At this point we confront one of the great deficiencies of the contemporary church. The most favorable view of much religious activity is that it majors on--even remaining confined to--the *"first principles of the doctrine of Christ."* Much, of course, of the activity we see around us has not even come up to these *"principles,"*

but is enclosed by the even lower climes of flesh and blood. **Let it be clear that there are no acceptable alternatives to this to word from the Lord!** There is no provision for a lack of upward movement in the faith life — even though men may be dealing with *Bible matters*. Stagnation is dangerous in any realm, but especially so in the matter of spiritual life.

At this point, it is necessary to say a word about the movement with which I have been associated. It has been noted, particularly in recent years, for shallowness and restriction to “*first*” or “*elementary principles*.” Of course, this most serious deficiency is not confined to this particular movement. I receive a number of religious periodicals, as well as other *Christian* publications and church newsletters. The fare that is being served up, at the very best, falls into the category of “*first principles of the doctrine of Christ*.” By that I mean this is the *thrust* of their message. It is not conducive to productive thought or spiritual growth. Therefore, it is actually damaging to the faith of those that accept it. There is no neutral teaching.

Let it be clear that in “*things pertaining to life and godliness*,” the lack of progression in Christ equates to “*drawing back*,” “*falling away*,” and “*denying*” Christ before men (Heb 10:38-39; Luke 8:13; Heb 6:6; 2 Thess 2:3; Matt 10:32-33). There is no such thing as a non-growing believer, a spiritual person that is carnal, or a heavenly-citizen that is earthly-minded. Growth is not only the evidence of life, in Christ it is essential to the maintenance of spiritual life.

Although shallow religion is fashionable in our day, it is contrary to the nature of the heavenly kingdom. God does not tolerate it, and neither can His people. The mandate from heaven is clear: **MOVE ON!** If a professed believer refuses to do so, he stands in eternal jeopardy.

There is no member of Christ that is exempt from this admonition: “*Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ . . .*” Permit me to explore this statement for a moment. It is staggering how many professed leaders in the Christian community conduct themselves as though they were somehow excluded from this admonition. There are vast areas of professed *Christian ministry* that are noted for their lack of growth and advance in the Spirit. To mention a few, *Youth Ministries, Music Ministries, Senior Citizens Ministries, etc.* Throw in *Financial Ministries, Singles Ministries, Marriage Consulting, and often even Pulpit Ministries*. Many of the individuals associated with these activities admit that spiritual depth does not blend with their work. They see it as a threat and counterproductive in their field of professed expertise. However, after we have heard them speak, we must hear what the Spirit is saying! **Elementary views will not sustain the soul.** That is why we must move on, building upon them. Everyone associated with the ministries mentioned above do not ignore these kingdom realities. We praise the Lord for that holy remnant that see the need for “*leaving the first principles*.” In my judgment, however, such are an exception to the rule declared by the Holy Spirit. The truth of the matter is that **those insisting upon remaining in an immature spiritual condition are not suitable for continued Divine employment.** Individuals that are not advancing in their apprehension of the Lord are not ministering for in any decisive sense for Christ.

Allow me to say it again, in yet a different way. **There can be no standing still for the child of God!** This thought underlies this entire passage. The gales of temptation and temporality demand aggressive effort on the part of the believer. This effort cannot be made while one insists on continuing in the *“first principles.”* Although shallow religion is fashionable in our day, it is contrary to the nature of the heavenly kingdom. God does not tolerate it, and neither can His people. The mandate from heaven is clear: **MOVE ON!** If a professed believer refuses to do so, he stands in eternal jeopardy. That is the undeniable thrust of our text.

Spiritual maturity is to characterize every individual aspect of ministry. Our preaching, as well as our singing, is to reflect an acceptable level of advancement in Christ. It would be refreshing if all *ministry* was noted for spiritual growth. Whether we are ministering to children, homeless, or leaders, there is no place for lingering on the *“first principles of the doctrine of Christ.”* Suffice it so say, the unreserved acceptance of this Kingdom perspective would so revolutionize religious services the difference would be noted by all.

MOVING ON

It is not enough to simply refuse to linger in the area of first principles. **We leave that realm in preference for another** --one that rests upon the foundation. There is nothing about life in the Spirit that is not progressive. Stagnation contradicts the very concept of salvation. The thought of coming out of sin without progressing to life with Christ is as absurd as Israel coming out of Egypt without making progress to Canaan. The Israelites that came out of Egypt but did not get into Canaan are described with arresting words. *“And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?”* (Heb 3:17, NASB) . *“Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness”* (1 Cor 10:5, NASB). If the matter of progress was critical for Israel, it is even more so for those who have named the name of Christ.

The goal to which we are to make progress is identified. *“ . . . let us go on to perfection . . . ”* This epistle has already introduced us to the term *“perfection”* (2:10; 5:9). It is a **standard** in God’s kingdom. The Lord Jesus, because He was identified with us in the flesh, was also made *“perfect.”* Jesus ministers in a “more perfect tabernacle” (Heb 9:11). Now the Spirit addresses the matter of our *“perfection.”* No believer can remain content while not moving toward this objective.

Perfection is the manner of the kingdom of God! The Administrator of the Kingdom was made “perfect” for His ministry! Being made perfect, He now authors salvation in those committed to Him. He does this through a covenant that makes men *“perfect,”* and He does it in a *“perfect”* realm. The thought of being imperfect in such an environment is absurd.

The word from which *“perfection”* and *“perfect”* are translated is teleio,thta (from the root teleioo). The word speaks of fulness or maturity. More precisely, it speaks of *wholeness* , or complete adequacy.

The Captain of Our Salvation

In the case of the “*Captain*” of our “*salvation*”, God has made Him “*PERFECT through sufferings*” (Heb 2:10), or adequate to lead us to God. Therefore, “*being made PERFECT, He became the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him*” (Heb 5:9). In His humanity, Jesus was marvelously adapted to bring salvation to sinners, then bring them to glory.

In His present ministry, the Lord Jesus is constituted “*an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more PERFECT tabernacle*” (Heb 9:11).

The New Covenant

The New Covenant, called a “*better hope*,” is said to make men “*PERFECT*” (Heb 7:19). What a wonderful covenant, superior in every way to the first covenant which “*made nothing perfect.*”

Those Who Have

Finished the Race

Those who have completed their warfare are called “*the spirits of just men made PERFECT*” (Heb 12:23). They have completed their tenure in the strange world, and are not “*present with the Lord.*”

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What Is Perfection?

What is the “*perfection*” toward which we are to move? If it is moral flawlessness, with the total absence of all blemishes or deficiencies in our persons, there is no hope of any of us being saved!

Because this subject is developed extensively later, we will only introduce it here. The “*perfection*” in question pertains to the conscience. This is something that could not be achieved by the Law. Under the first covenant, the conscience was contaminated **when the sacrifice of atonement was made** (Heb 10:3-4). Thus, the people were afraid to draw near to their God. A defiled conscience constrains one to draw back from God. Going on to perfection involves the persuasion of Divine acceptance--a persuasion that compels one to come confidently to the throne of all grace, to obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need.

Leaving the first principles is not abandoning or despising them. Rather, it is building upon them. Life in the Spirit never leads us to repudiate these foundations, but to build for eternity upon them. They have not lost their utility, but no longer occupy the place of preeminence. We do not forget them, but we no longer emphasize them. We never reach the point in the faith life where principles are inconsequential or irrelevant. We are to, however, reach the point where they are not to be reestablished.

LAYING THE FOUNDATION AGAIN

Foundations are not meant to be repeatedly put into place. Once there, the superstructure must be erected. There is no purpose for the foundation without the structure, and were it not for that structure, the foundation would not have been positioned in the first place.

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There is no purpose for the foundation without the structure, and were it not for that structure, the foundation would not have been positioned in the first place.

Here is an aspect of the heavenly kingdom that is virtually unknown in our time. “ . . . *not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment . . .*” Suffice it to say, nearly all sectarian activity is related, at the very best, to the “*principles of the doctrine of Christ.*” I will wax bold and say that confinement to the first principles will inevitably result in a distorted theology and sectarianism.

A Look at the Principles

Here we have three pairs of principles. **Two inward experiences** : *Repentance and faith* . **Two outward ceremonies** : *Baptism and the laying on of hand* . **Two future events** : *The resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment* .

What thoroughness characterizes the principles of the doctrine of Christ! Within the man, *evidence of the grace of God* . Without, *the confirmation of faith* . The future, *encapsulated in the confrontation of humanity with the ages to come* . Mind you, these are the **elemental** points of Christian doctrine. That means you cannot get your bearings spiritually without an understanding of these things. Spiritual growth cannot take place without the apprehension of these principles. **A failure to grasp them gives Satan and flesh the advantage.**

Some have called them “*the simple Gospel of the apostolic age.*” The fact that these things are considered deep in our day is evidence of a remarkable deterioration in spiritual appetite and culture.

Notwithstanding the inability of the contemporary church to receive these things as elementary, that is precisely what they are. Those who are confined to them, lingering in the beginnings, and are thereby subject to unspeakable danger. They are in a backward stance, which is consistently condemned by God. Let the slothful soul take heed to these words.

Repentance From Dead Works

Participation with Christ begins with a renunciation of the way of the flesh-- *"repentance from dead works."* *"Dead works"* is a word for sin--expressions that proceed from a state of spiritual death. Apart from Christ, men are *"dead in trespasses and sins"* (Eph 2:1). Scripture apprizes us that even *"the thought of foolishness"* and *"the plowing of the wicked"* is *"sin"* (Prov 24:9; 21:4).

Repentance from dead works involves least three things. First, a **withdrawal** from a fruitless manner of life--a life characterized by death. Second, a **determinate renunciation** of manners that will not blend with eternity. Thirdly, the **recovery** of ground lost when alienated from God *"in our minds through wicked works"* (Col 1:21).

This is a *"first principle"* upon which godly living is built. Like other aspects of *"first principles,"* this is not intended to be a life-long emphasis. It is introductory in nature. In *"repentance from dead works,"* we cut the umbilical cord to the world. We repudiate our former manner of life, in which we were alienated from God. We also cease our dependence upon our own deeds to appropriate the favor of Almighty God. While such activity will be found throughout our pilgrimage, as we grow, it is no longer the primary activity.

Through faith we enter into a vital and saving relation with the living God. *"Faith toward God"* is the means of **approaching** Him. If I only speak of the means, and never get to the business of coming to God, living in Him, and walking with Him, nothing of lasting value has been accomplished. Moving on from this principle has to do with Divine fellowship, involvement in His eternal purpose, and reigning with Christ.

Faith Toward God

The language here is specific. He is not speaking of faith in the *"living by faith"* sense (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38), but in its introductory aspects. It is the initial focus of the soul upon the Lord after turning from the course of this world.

Elsewhere, the Word of God addresses faith from this fundamental view. *"Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness"* (Rom 4:4-5, NASB). Through faith we enter into a vital and saving relation with the living God. *"Faith toward God"* is the means of **approaching** Him. If I only speak of the means, and never get to the business of coming to God, living in Him, and walking with Him, nothing of lasting value has been accomplished. Moving on from this principle has to do with Divine fellowship, involvement in His eternal purpose, and reigning with Christ.

The Doctrine of Baptisms

There is a striking resemblance between this verse and Peter's comment about baptism in 1 Peter 3:21. *"The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."* It is unfortunate that some translations have obscured the meaning of this verse by using the words *"removal of dirt from the flesh"* (NASB), *"not the removal of dirt from the body"* (NIV). The Spirit is not referring to "washing" or "cleansing" in a sanitary way, but in a *ceremonial way*. Baptism in water is **not** a mere ceremony, and they

that so represent it do greatly err. It has spiritual significance, being the appointed means of appropriating a purged conscience.

Having said that, the plural baptismwn by itself does not mean specifically Christian baptism either in this epistle (9:10) or elsewhere (Mk 7:4), but ablutions or immersions such as the mystery religions and the Jewish cults required for initiates, proselytes, and worshipers in general" (Moffatt).

The disciples of the Baptist had disputes with the Jews over purification (John 3:25). By reverting to Law as a means to justification, the Hebrews were accenting form more than substance, and ceremony above reality. They were thus in the vestibule of truth rather in the holy of holies.

It is possible to spend so much time talking about being clean that we never get to the work for which cleanness equips us. Being clean is not an end of itself, but a means to an end. *"Depart! Depart! Go out from there, Touch no unclean thing; Go out from the midst of her, Be clean, You who bear the vessels of the LORD"* Isa 52:11). It is bearing the vessels of the Lord, i.e., being a *"worker together with God,"* that is the point! Ablutions, or cleansing, without that are of no eternal consequence. At some point, the people of God must cease to talk about the truth and begin to live in it. The results that flow from being clean are the point.

Laying On Of Hands

"The laying on of hands" may seem out of place in a list of elementary principles. However, it was common as a sign of blessing (Mt 19:13), of healing (Mk 7:32), in the choice of the first seven deacons (Acts 6:6), in the Apostolic conferment of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17f; 19:6), in separation for a special task (Acts 13:3), and in ordination (1 Tim 4:14; 5:22; 2 Tim 1:6). Prayer often accompanied this laying on of the hands as a symbol.

There is something else about these principles that knits them together. They all have to do with the activities of the saved. They are the ones that repent and believe, need cleansing and either lay on hands or have hands laid on them. They will be raised, and they will be judged. **Elementary principles have to do with us.** They are matters that assist in orienting us for Divine fellowship.

Whatever may be said concerning the laying on of hands, it is not an appropriate subject for emphasis among God's people. We do not speak against the practice, any more than we do against repentance, faith, or cleansing. But God will not allow us to remain in a position that allows for a continual discussion of such procedures. While valid, the laying on of hands is more related to procedure than vitality. It thus must not become a major emphasis. It is what results from the laying on of hands that validates the deed.

Resurrection of the Dead

Although it is rarely addressed by ministers today, the resurrection of the dead is a **principle** of the doctrine of Christ--a foundation upon which spiritual life is built. Jesus shed

light upon this grand subject, declaring that an hour was advancing toward us in which **“all that are in the graves shall hear the voice His (Christ’s) voice”** (John 5:28-29). The consideration of the resurrection of the dead will constrain one to discard personal earthly advantages for eternal ones (Phil 3:8-11).

However, if **“the resurrection of the dead”** is only a tenet of our faith - -a subject about which we frequently speak philosophically--it will have no moral impact upon us. Early believers built upon the resurrection of the dead. They laid down their lives in hopes of being raised again. (1 Cor 15:29-32).

Eternal Judgment

There is a judgment that is final, and from which no reversal is possible. Solomon once said , **“For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil”** (Eccl 12:14, NASB). In Christ, there is a more optimistic note, praise the Lord! We can have **“boldness in the day of judgment”** (1 John 4:17).

In Christ, we make preparations for the day of judgment. The day itself is not the point, but what will result from it. There must come as time in the life of the believer when there is no question about the day of judgment--when the anticipation of that time brings joy and gladness to the heart. Such a person will never forget about the day of judgment, but will prepare for that day.

The Common Factor

There is something common in these six principles. **They all have to do with the induction of men into the Kingdom of Christ .** They are all beginnings--introductions to a new realm. In **repentance** , we turn from the world and unacceptable pattern of life and thought, to embrace the Lord. In **faith** , we focus our trust in the Living God in order to the realization of the blessing. **Baptisms** are associated with preparation, as well as the **laying on of hands** . The **resurrection** of the dead will induct us fully into the eternal order, and **eternal judgment** is the beginning of either a reign with Christ or exclusion from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power.

There is something else about these principles that knits them together. **They all have to do with the activities of the saved.** They are the ones that repent and believe, need cleansing and either lay on hands or have hands laid on them. They will be raised, and they will be judged. **Elementary principles have to do with us.** They are matters that assist in orienting us for Divine fellowship.

However, the real heart of the message is not what we should do, but what God has done through Christ. The focus is not upon men, but upon Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Nothing about Jesus, for example, is rudimentary. The Gospel is characterized by remarkable depth, and is not elementary (Eph 3:16-21). No matter how long you are in Christ, Jesus and the Gospel must never be left!

If ever men are going to grow, they must make the transition from themselves to the Lord; from **their** works to **His** , from what is **required** of them to what is **declared** of

Him. This is an exceedingly difficult thing to proclaim, but it must be done. It is not difficult because of the proclamation itself, but because of the inability of the contemporary churchmen to receive the message. In Scripture, particularly in the epistles, the most powerful and effective proclamations do not pertain to human involvements. They always center in Deity, eternal purpose, and the culmination of Divine intent..As we become involved in God's purpose, we begin to grow.

IF GOD PERMIT!

Here is an arresting consideration! Going on to perfection--to strong confidence and a purged conscience--involves more than our will and effort. It also requires the permission of God. *"And this we will do if God permits."* The patience and longsuffering of God are not endless. He will not override the volitional capacity of any person. Neither, however, will He allow any one to endlessly impose upon His free will.

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No person can *"go on to perfection"* if God will not allow it! That is an activity that requires Divine aid. It simply cannot be accomplished by our will alone. The Word of God is too clear on this matter to entertain any doubt about it. *"So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy"* (Rom 9:16, NASB). There are matters that are, by Divine intent, *"hidden"* to men, and they cannot be discovered apart from God's involvement. As it is written, *"I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes. Yes, Father, for thus it was well-pleasing in Thy sight"* (Luke 10:21), NASB).

Let no one question for a single moment whether or not God will allow the humble and contrite spirit to *"go on to perfection."* God is still *"not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Pet 3:9). Those who *"press toward the mark"* can expect to obtain the prize (Phil 3:14). However, those that tamper with Divine mercy by lingering in the outer court, are putting God to the test! There comes a time when Esau cannot inherit the blessing, even when he seeks it with repentance and tears (Heb 12:17). There also came a time when many Israelites were denied the right to enter the promised land. God would not allow them to do so because they had hardened their hearts against Him (Heb 3:19).

The point of our text is that stubbornly remaining in spiritual infancy brings a hardness to the heart. An *"evil heart of unbelief,"* which is unquestionably condemned by God, can overtake the individual that is not advancing (Heb 3:12). We are not in a moral vacuum. If we do not deliberately and energetically *"grow up into Him in all things"* (Eph 4:15), a distance is being formed between us and God. Hearts are growing more hard, the conscience is becoming less tender, and the individual is losing sensitivity. God may not *"permit"* such sluggardly souls to *"go on to perfection."* They may *"die in their sin"* (Ezek 3:20). Jesus may come and find them unexpectedly (Luke 12:40). **Those that do not grow flirt with spiritual disaster.**

While it is not my intent to provoke unwholesome fear in any one, no un-advancing soul should feel comfortable in its rebellion against God! There is no place in the Kingdom of God for slothfulness! Those who do not aggressively seek to enter heaven's door will not do so! Jesus once said, "*Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able*" (Luke 13:24, NASB). Some day, the door of grace will close, and God will no more allow men to turn from their sin and come to Him. It is on the part of wisdom to move close to Him now, pressing diligently toward the mark for the prize of the high calling. Of God in Christ Jesus the Lord.

AN IMPOSSIBILITY, FROM ANY VIEW!

Some people imagine that a mere decision guarantees eternal safety. Let them examine this passage with care. There is a level of genuine participation that can be forever forfeited by lingering in the realm of spiritual immaturity.

For many, we have before us a very difficult text. Those that view Jesus as locking recalcitrant spirits inside God's will are very foolish. If God could tolerate personalities unlike Himself in His Presence, there would be no need for the new birth, the remission of sins, and the presence of the Holy Spirit. The very concept of justification presumes the total unacceptability of sin in the presence of the Almighty! The necessity of the new birth affirms that "*flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*" (1 Cor 15:50). Those who find it difficult to believe God will not "*permit*" some to "*go on to perfection*" have not considered the whole case. The Holy Spirit speaks powerfully to this point. "*For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.*"

Here is something that is "*impossible.*" Let no person, then, attempt to introduce a possibility where God has affirmed there is none! **Those locked in a backward motion--who have descended beyond the circumference of sensitivity--cannot be reclaimed!** Even though they once participated in the good things of God, if they did not "*go on to perfection,*" they shall lose their inheritance just as surely as Jacob lost his, and the unbelieving Israelites lost theirs.

Some people imagine that a mere decision guarantees eternal safety. Let them examine this passage with care. There is a level of genuine participation that can be forever forfeited by lingering in the realm of spiritual immaturity.

Once enlightened . The enlightenment of the soul involves a perspective of salvation. As it is written, "*For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*" (2 Cor 4:6). This is an experience involving deliverance from darkness, or spiritual ignorance (Col 1:13). The "*enlightened*" person sees the world for what it is, is convinced of the nature of sin, and persuaded

of the grace of God. He is also certain that Divine acceptance is attainable in Christ, by grace, and through faith.

Have tasted the heavenly gift . The word “*gift*” is here used to denote the entirety of salvation. “*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God*” (Eph 2:8). The word “*taste*” is not a light word, denoting superficial involvement. Rather, it is a strong word, describing genuineness in every sense of the word. Jesus is said to have “*tasted death for every man*” (Heb 2:9). That certainly is not the depiction of a shallow experience. Those who have “*tasted of the heavenly gift*” have learned from experience that “*God is gracious*” (1 Pet 2:3). Such have realized the joy of forgiveness and Divine acceptance.

A lively sense of the unseen world grips the soul, and things that are not seen become the focus of the individual. When it comes to personal consciousness, the believer is more aware of heavenly personalities than of those in the world.

Have become partakers of the Holy Spirit. God has given His Holy Spirit to those in Christ (1 Thess 4:8). Because we are sons, His Spirit is sent into our hearts, crying Abba Father (Gal 4:6). To partake of the Holy Spirit is to enjoy His communion and fellowship (2 Cor 3:14; Phil 2:1). The blessed Spirit “helps our infirmities” (Rom 8:26), coming along side, as it were, to help us navigate through the difficulties of life in the world.

Have tasted the good word of God. To “*taste the good Word of God*” is to be nourished by it: to have strength and joy imparted to us through our insight into Scripture. This experience is living “*by every Word of God*” (Luke 4:4). It is being made equal to the challenges of life, encouraged in the good fight of faith, and made joyful in the anticipation of glory.

Have tasted the . . . powers of the age to come. This is heavenly citizenship--being brought into the fellowship of “*the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and . . . God, the Judge of all, and . . . the spirits of righteous men made perfect, and . . . the mediator of a new covenant, and . . . the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel*” (Heb 12:23-24, NASB). A lively sense of the unseen world grips the soul, and things that are not seen become the focus of the individual. When it comes to personal consciousness, the believer is more aware of heavenly personalities than of those in the world.

Some might imagine that there is safety in such experiences--that once they are attained, the person can never be lost. Such benighted souls forget that we are yet subject to “*the wiles of the devil*” and a fallen nature. We still sojourn in a “*dry and thirsty land where no water is*” (Psa 63:1). We still have “*this treasure in earthen vessels*” (2 Cor 4:7). The Holy Spirit Himself can still be “*resisted,*” “*quenched,*” and “*grieved.*”

Here is something that an experience-centered religion overlooks! By

“experience-centered,” I mean a religious posture that looks for something to happen to them. There can be no more lofty experiences than those here mentioned. Yet, they are a **means** to an end, and not the end itself. **They are all orienting us for the world to come, in which we shall reign with Christ.** They assist us here to prepare for there.

If, however, they are viewed as great single blessings, and are not employed to make progress into the image of God’s Son, they will soon be gone! The purpose of God is to conform us to the Image of His Son (Rom 8:29). To aid us in this monumental work, He has granted enlightenment, the heavenly gift, the Holy Spirit, the good word of God, and citizenship, in heaven. All are designed to underwrite the good fight of faith, helping us to *“go on to perfection,”* where Divine fellowship is realized.

Those who *“fall away”* are those who *“neglect so great salvation”* (Heb 2:3). They are not pressing toward the mark, engaging in a fervent quest to *“know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that they may attain to the resurrection from the dead”* (Phil 3:10-11). The point of our text is simply this: **a lack of spiritual effort gives the advantage to the devil.** Digression is inevitable where progression is not made, and there are no exceptions to the rule !

The tragedy of this circumstance is that religion brought the Hebrews into spiritual danger. They had not, so far as we know, been flirting with immorality, or indulging in idolatry. Rather, they were falling back into a first-covenant-approach to God--one based upon procedure and conformity to a code. If that approach thrust them into danger, you can be sure that it does the same today.

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It Is Impossible

When God says it is *“impossible,”* to renew a person to repentance, that is precisely what it is! God has given us every advantage in Christ, but if we do not avail ourselves of His benefits, they will do us no good. This perspective is remarkably absent most everywhere I go. Myriads of people entertain the notion that a little amount of religious activity, and an allegiance to the institution is all that is necessary to stay in favor with God. They thus remain in a state of Scriptural illiteracy, and are unacquainted with the ways of the Lord. Their hearts are being draw toward the temporal order, and much of what they receive in *church* is nothing more than somewhat wholesome entertainment. The gravity of their situation is obscure to them. Actually, they are drifting away from God, away from grace, and away from power. The world, like a silent tide, is taking them away from the Lord that

bought them. As they drift away from their Lord, they are becoming less and less sensitive to Him. Unless their course is arrested, eventually they will drift to a place where their conscience is “*seared*,” and they are unable to hear the voice of the Lord.

By not availing themselves of Divine resources, “*they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame.*” They have again cried, “*Away with Him! Crucify Him!*” Those who do not “*go on to perfection*” are in the process of resisting the Holy Spirit. They tear Christ out of the recesses of their hearts, and refuse to let Him reign over their hearts, minds, souls, and wills. They insult God, pour contempt upon His Son, consider the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and grieve and quench the Holy Spirit of God. If all of that seems too strong, do not be deceived. This IS what happens when a soul refuses to make progress in the conformity determined by God. If we do not become like His Son, we will not reign with Him!

DIVINE REASONING

The Spirit does not let this matter go. The Hebrews had been resting in Law, and were satisfied with mere procedure--a posture occupied by far too many with whom we are acquainted. **It is unreasonable for a spiritually unadvancing person to expect Divine approval.** It is not right for them to expect their prayers to be answered, or to receive strength in the time of need. Such defies sound reason. Even nature refuses to allow us to entertain such folly. “*For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.*”

“*Thorns and briars*” are not merely sinful deeds, or the development of habits that violate the moral code of the Law. A focus upon things that “*are seen*” is a “*thorn*,” because it violates the entire thrust of Scripture, the intercession of Christ, and the convincing power of the Holy Spirit. A preference for the things of this world--even apparently lawful things--is a “*briar*” to the soul. Left unaddressed, these will eventually dominate the heart and cut one off from God. The Lord has lavished His grace upon us to a remarkable degree. To neglect that grace in preference for “*other things*” (Mark 4:19) is not innocent, and God will not tolerate it!

If you cultivated and fertilized a field, only to have it yield a patch of briars and thorns, what would you do? And what will the Lord God do if He has poured Himself out upon us abundantly, only to find us immersed in the world, thinking as men, and living without heaven in view? How will it go for those that have once been tender to the Lord, but are now calloused and insensitive to Him. They cannot long endure His Word, and have no demanding appetite for “*the things of the Spirit of God.*” How does it set with God when He has appointed a High Priest to continually represent the people to Him, while some of them make little or no provision for Him? The answer to these questions is obvious! Such people are very close to being cursed!

Let us not forget the point of this text. The salvation of God will not be effective in an unreceptive heart! A distracted spirit will NOT obtain the blessing! When we are not aggressive to reach the goal, we are actually losing ground, slipping back into a state from which recovery is eventuality impossible. If this single perception were generally known and embraced, it would have such an impact upon our churches you would not be able to recognize them.

SPIRITUAL OPTIMISM

Let us not forget the point of this text. The salvation of God will not be effective in an unreceptive heart! A distracted spirit will NOT obtain the blessing! When we are not aggressive to reach the goal, we are actually losing ground, slipping back into a state from which recovery is eventually impossible. If this single perception were generally known and embraced, it would have such an impact upon our churches you would not be able to recognize them.

The Spirit has pointed out how illogical it is to expect blessing while living at a distance from God. He has shown that such a posture violates the nature of God, as well as that of salvation itself. The danger in which the Hebrews found themselves was most serious. They were reverting to a system of Law, which permitted hard hearts and a distance from God--at least, that is what men think. Now a strong appeal is made to the slumbering spirits of men. Although they have been in a backward stance, He is going to reach into the depths of their spirit and seek to awaken the sensitivity they once possessed.

“But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner.” How glorious to have such *“confidence.”* One spark of sensitivity can awaken a zealous return to the Lord! How we must capitalize upon the hearts of God’s people, even when they are in a state of withdrawal! It was necessary to speak forthrightly and sternly, but He will not end on such a note. The writer knows that no thinking person wants to be rejected by God! He knows salvation comes with an inexhaustible supply of grace, and *“all things pertaining to life and godliness.”* These are *“things that accompany salvation.”* God can *“strengthen us with might by is Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith”* (Col 3:16). There is *“grace to help, in the time of need”* (Heb 4:16). It is still true, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9). These are all *“things that accompany salvation.”* There is no reason why these cannot be found in every believer!

What a blessed attitude to have--to be *“persuaded of better things”* in those that have been drawing back! How frequently this spirit is expressed in God’s Word. We do well to appropriate it for ourselves. *“And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will continue to do what we command”* (2 Thess 3:4). *“ . . . having confidence in you all, that my joy would be the joy of you all”* (2 Cor 2:3). *“I rejoice that in everything I have confidence in you”* (2 Cor 7:16). *“ I have confidence in you in the Lord, that you will adopt no other view . . . ”* (Gal 5:10). *“Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say”* (Phile 21). The power of such expressions can be sensed by all that hear them.

GOD WILL NOT FORGET!

Can you believe, child of God, that he will NOT forget your work and labor of love? If you can, that recollection will help you make any required recovery. How blessed your memory is when motivated by truth.

Here is why the writer had such confidence. He is saying he was persuaded God would “*permit*” their recovery from the snare of the devil. “*For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister .*” Looking into their past, the writer finds a ray of hope. The Hebrews had once “*ministered to the saints,*” and they were still doing so! How sensitive the Lord is to such conduct! Elsewhere the Spirit admonishes, “*So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith*” (Gal 6:10, NASB). God has appointed a High Priest over “*the house of God,*” having a special care for it. Those that have ministered to that house are, by virtue of their care for them, recognized by God. Of old time, a certain man was recommended to Jesus because “*he loves our nation, and it was he who built us our synagogue*” (Luke 7:5). How much more, those that have shown favor to those that are joined to the Lord!

“*God is not unjust (unrighteous)!*” Here justice is associated with mercy instead of condemnation. In Christ it is fulfilled, “*Lovingkindness and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed each other*” (Psa 85:10, NASB). And what is it that God will “*not forget.*” The loving work and labor bestowed upon His people! You will remember Jesus associated eternal life and condemnation with the response of individuals to His people (Matt 25:35ff). I have often thought how rare the consideration of God’s people is held in high regard in the institutional church. The absence of such regard is a sign of serious spiritual decline.

Can you believe, child of God, that he will NOT forget your work and labor of love? If you can, that recollection will help you make any required recovery. How blessed your memory is when motivated by truth.

WHAT IS WANTED FOR YOU

What is desired for the people of God? “*And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*” What a fitting conclusion for the people of God! Here the writer reveals the mind of God Himself. He wants the people to be noted for their diligence. He knows that slothfulness defeats the individual, robs the soul, and calls down the curse of Almighty God. He knows that properly directed diligence is always rewarded by the Lord.

But he also knows the value of “*the full assurance of hope*” --of knowing our status, and being persuaded of the reality of Divine commitments. Knowing who you are in Christ, and being fully persuaded that He can keep what you have committed to Him against that day, becomes a strong incentive to faithfulness. Too often faithfulness is preached from Sinai. Salvation, when correctly seen, provokes us to be faithful “*until the end.*”

People speak of role-models. Well here are some good ones: “*those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*” They will not allow the world to dim their eye and slow their pace. They are more convinced of glory to come, than of imagined advantages in “*this present evil world.*” Their patience refers to their perseverance, or continuation in the race. They have come “*through tribulation,*” but they have remained in the race!

To inherit the promises--that is the point! These are the appointed means of conforming us to the image of God’s Son (2 Pet 1:3-4). The desire of the godly is that their brethren will inherit the promises — that at last they will stand before

the Lord without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing! It is that their brethren will have their part in the throne of Christ, ruling and reigning, world without end. If that does not happen, little else matters! O, how such thoughts are to be articulated!

CONCLUSION

Let it be clear to every soul, spiritual juvenility is fraught with danger. Simplistic views of God, Christ, and the glories of the world to come are overrated in our world. People that are regularly subjected to spiritual froth are not to be content with such a situation. Preachers and teachers that dwell upon *“the principles of the doctrine of Christ,”* regardless of their seeming sincerity, have thrust us into jeopardy. They have made it more difficult for us to overcome the devil, run the race, and obtain the promises. Those that serve up a regular diet of milk are not our friends, and they are not God’s ministers. Our safety is found in our progression toward glory. As we make advancement into the holy of holies, into the very presence of God, we come into the safety zone. We are only as safe as our faith is strong--and faith cannot be made strong by continually dwelling upon *“the principles of the doctrine of Christ.”*

The tragic irony of this situation is that many of God’s people are not even being subjected to the *“principles.”* They are hearing about world issues, given humorous anecdotes, and receiving pep talks to pump life into a gasping organization. What shall be said of such activities at the judgment seat of Christ? I plead with you to be up and growing *“in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* *“Set your affection on things above, and not on things on the earth!”* See to it that, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust, you do not come short of glory!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

Commentary on the book of Hebrews

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #9

THE CERTAINTY OF GOD'S PROMISES

“ For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, "I WILL SURELY BLESS YOU, AND I WILL SURELY MULTIPLY YOU." And thus, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement, we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek ” (*Hebrews 4:14-5:96, NASB*) .

INTRODUCTION

Divine commitments have the accent in Scripture! There are obligations imposed upon men, and there are promises offered to them. Some have chosen to emphasize the obligations, and, indeed, there are certain situations where this becomes necessary. However, the overall thrust of Scripture is what God has promised. It is a golden thread, inserted in Genesis 3:15, and woven throughout the sacred text until the last promise in Revelation 22:20.

Of old time, Israel was admonished to recall what *“the Lord hath promised”* (Ex 12:25; Deut 1:11; 12:20; 26:18; Josh 23:10). The land given to Abraham is called *“the land of promise”* (Heb 11:9). In His exposition of the New Covenant--the great salvation that is in Christ Jesus--the Holy Spirit repeatedly refers to *“the promise”* (Lk 24:49; Acts 21:4; 2:33,39; 7:17; 13:32; 26:6; Rom 4:13,14,16,20; 9:8; Gal 3:14,17,19,22,29; 2 Tim 1:1; Heb 6:15; 9:15; 10:36; 11:39; 2 Pet 3:4; 1 John 2:25). Faith lays hold of Divine commitment--God's promise. Faith believes what God declares He has done or will do. Believing God involves infinitely more than believing you should obey Him--although that is an absolute indispensability. Jesus is *“the Author of eternal salvation to them that obey Him”* (Heb 5:9), and there will be no deviation from that principle. Obedience, however, comes from faith, which is convinced of the promise, and moves out upon it. The failure of men to obey the Gospel is expressly traced to the failure to believe God's report (Rom 10:16). It was when the people of Nineveh *“believed God”* that they repented (Jonah 3:5). We cannot make too much of the promises of God, particularly regarding eternal life, which is the ultimate promise--the summation of all Divine commitments. As it is written, *“And this is the promise that he hath*

promised us, even eternal life” (1 John 2:25).

The word “*promise*” places the accent on Divine initiative. The promise of God is not His response to an interrogation by the creature! Rather, it is an affirmation of our Father’s “*eternal purpose.*” Before we go further, permit me to share some of the great promises of God. If we are to be encouraged to believe the promises of God, we should familiarize ourselves with them. The conquering Offspring was promised in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:15). God promised Noah He would no more curse the ground with a flood (Gen 8:21-22; 9:1-17). A promise of blessing was given to Abraham--a promise that translates into the New Covenant we enjoy (Gen 12:1-3). A promise of a reigning Monarch was given to David (2 Sam 7:12-13,28; 1 Kgs 2:24). A New Covenant was promised through Jeremiah (Jer 31:31-34).

Were these promises to be removed from Scripture, it would become meaningless. God’s dealings with men, His patience with the human race, and the execution of His will, all revolved around these promises. The interrelations of God with men all revolved around His commitments--His promises. If you read the Word of God without the promises dominant in your thinking, it will become to you a mere history book, or a manual of conduct. In either case, it will cease to work effectively in you.

GOD MADE PROMISE TO ABRAHAM

“His object was to prove, that the grace of God is offered to us in vain, except we receive the promise by faith, and constantly cherish it in the bosom of our heart. And he proves it by this argument, that when God promised a countless offspring to Abraham, it seemed a thing incredible; Sarah had been through life barren; both had reached a sterile old age, when they were nearer the grave than to a conjugal bed; there was no vigor to beget children, when Sarah’s womb, which had been barren through the prime of life, was now become dead. Who could believe that a nation would proceed from them, equaling the stars in number, and like the sand of the sea? It was, indeed, contrary to all reason. Yet Abraham looked for this and feared no disappointment, because he relied on the Word of God. We must, then, notice the circumstance as to time, that the Apostle is reasoning may appear evident; and what he subjoins refers to this, that he was made partaker of this blessing, but that it was after he had waited for what no one could have thought would ever come to pass. In this way ought glory to be given to God; we must quietly hope for what he does not as yet show to our senses, but hides from us and for a long time defers, in order that our patience may be exercised. (*John Calvin, Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews, 1549 AD*)

The thought of God making a promise to a mortal is staggering enough! When the magnitude of the promise is considered, it is challenging to both heart and mind. This is the commitment the Psalmist called “*the holy promise,*” made to “*Abraham His servant*” (Psa 105:42). This promise is central to the understanding of Scripture and the “*great salvation*” heralded therein. It was nothing less than the promise of the New Covenant, to be ratified by the blood of Christ in order to the righteousness of Men (Rom 4:13-16; Gal 3:16-18).

It is essential to note that our text does NOT say God made an agreement with Abraham. This was not something negotiated; it was a Divine commitment--a promise from Jehovah! God divulged His intentions to Abraham, detailing that a global blessing would proceed from him, proliferating throughout the world. “*I*

will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12:2-3). The Lord elaborated on this promise in Genesis 13:16. *"And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered."* Again, in Genesis 15:5. *"And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee."* Again, in Genesis 22:17-18. *"That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice."* In Genesis 26:4, the promise was reaffirmed to Isaac. *"And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."* In Genesis 35:11, it was reaffirmed to Jacob. *"And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins."*

This is not to be viewed in the ordinary sense of making a commitment, or promise. It is not that man has sought something, and the Lord has committed to fulfill it. In this text, we have entered the citadel of Divine purpose. In the promise, God is making known a settled purpose, determined before the foundation of the world

It is with a view to **this** promise that God is called *"the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"* (Ex 3:6,15,6; 4:5; Matt 22:32; Acts 3:13; 7:32). Though so little is made of this marvelous promise in our time, it remains an axis upon which spiritual understanding turns. Salvation by grace through faith is equated with *"the promise"* made to Abraham, who is *"the father of us all"* (Gal 4:16).

The word from which *"made a promise"* is translated is *evpaggeila,menoj*. This is a strong word, indicated profound commitment, versus merely stating something. The very thought of God making a commitment to men is staggering! In Hebrews 10:23, men are represented as having made a commitment to God (a profession--from the same word *evpaggeila,menoj*). That appears to make more sense (i.e., man making a commitment to God rather than God making one to man). But this is not to be viewed in the ordinary sense of making a commitment, or promise. It is not that man has sought something, and the Lord has committed to fulfill it. In this text, we have entered the citadel of Divine purpose. In the promise, God is making known a settled purpose, determined before the foundation of the world (2 Tim 1:9).

Made Without Earthly Provocation

The promise was made without any provocation from men! Because of the faith of Abraham, which enabled him to receive the promise, God made it known to him. Mark this well, the promise was not something He negotiated with Abraham. It was not the result of a dialog with the patriarch. It is imperative that this aspect of the promise is seen if confidence is to be generated in the heart of the believer. All doubt proceeds from undue consideration of self, never from a consideration of God. If, therefore, believers are to become solid in the faith, they must hear about the promise from perspective of Divine intent rather than from the view of human need alone.

The point is this text is brought home forcibly in the book of Galatians. *“Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise. Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one”* (Gal 3:16-20).

Notice the powerful argument

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF GALATIANS 3:13-18

The promises were made to Abraham AND His offspring. The Divine commitment was not given to a nation, but to a person--the one through whom it was to be facilitated.

The offspring was singular, and is identified as Christ Jesus. Everything was going to depend upon a single Person, fully qualified, and accepted by God Himself as the suitable representative for those to be blessed.

This promise was actually the covenant of promise which we enjoy in Jesus. The intent of God has always been the same. In the beginning, the Lord spoke more of this intention, than of human obligation. He placed the star of hope in the sky of promise before He told men how they ought to walk.

The Law, elsewhere called the first covenant, was actually given AFTER the covenant of blessing. It was a means to an end, and not an end of itself. Regulation is never intended to be the apex of our religion. Promise always the most prominent feature, and rules are but a means for us to prepare us for involvement in the promise. The promise is the main thing!

The Law did not supercede the original covenant, or cause it to be nullified. It is still effective. God has not withdrawn His marvelous blessing, or changed His emphasis. The Law had no effect whatsoever upon the promise. It did not alter it, place it further from us, or nullify it.

The inheritance was only offered by promise, never by law. The inheritance (ultimately, eternal life) is not attached to Law, or perfect human conduct. It has been joined to the promise of God, which may be apprehended only by faith.

The Law was “added” to the promise to prepare humanity for the coming of the Seed. The Law served to alert humanity of its unacceptable state. From God’s view, however, it was given as a prelude to the coming of the Redeemer, or Seed, to Whom the promises were made.

The Law was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator (Moses), who stood between God and man. The Law called for agreement on the part of both God and man. Moses stood between God and the people, giving the conditions of the covenant. He informed the people of the requirements, and solicited agreement from them.

There is no need for a mediator unless there are two parties. From a covenantal viewpoint, the only reason for a mediator is the presence of two parties engaging in an agreement. If there are not two parties, it is absurd to have a mediator.

God is One — i.e., His purpose is determined within Himself, without consultation with other parties. The point here is the establishment of the promise, or New Covenant. He is not speaking of

a mediator in the sense of our Lord Jesus, Who is the Mediator of the new covenant (Heb 9:15; 12:24). God's promise to Abraham was not conditioned upon agreement. It was not a matter of intercession or negotiation. He was divulging to Abraham what He was going to do through the coming Offspring. That disclosure did not require a Mediator, for it was a revelation of Divine intent.

that the Spirit places before us. Unlike the Law, The promise (or New Covenant) was not given through a mediator. Primarily, it was the announcement of what the Lord would do. It could be stated unequivocally, and without a mediator, because its fulfillment depended upon the coming Savior. God made the promise to Abraham, but it would be realized through Abraham's single Offspring, the Lord Jesus Christ. Abraham set the tone for all that would enjoy the benefits of the coming covenant by believing God. However, firmness of the covenant depended upon the Seed, not Abraham. Thus God grounds the promise in Deity, thereby providing faith something to grasp. The making of the New Covenant was unilateral — one sided: i.e., "**God is One.**" Participation in the covenant requires faith on the part of the recipient — unwavering faith!

The Holy Spirit is giving us a reason to believe God. He is showing us that no amount of human effort can equate to the promise of God. On the other hand, the unqualified belief of this promise will exert a moral force upon the heart and mind which the law could not produce.

The Relation of the Promise to the New Covenant

The Spirit elaborates on this promise in the book of Galatians, showing us that it was nothing less than an iteration of the New Covenant. "*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: that upon the Gentiles might come the blessing of Abraham in Christ Jesus; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Brethren, I speak after the manner of men: Though it be but a man's covenant, yet when it hath been confirmed, no one maketh it void, or addeth thereto. Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. Now this I say: A covenant confirmed beforehand by God, the law, which came four hundred and thirty years after, doth not disannul, so as to make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no more of promise: but God hath granted it to Abraham by promise*" (Gal 3:13-18, ASV).

In this text, "*the promise*" and "*the covenant*" are synonymous! Think of the grandeur of these references to what we have in Christ, or the "*New Covenant.*" Those that insist upon thinking of the New Covenant as a set of rules do well to let these sayings sink down into their hearts. Here is how the Spirit speaks of the New Covenant. "*The blessing of Abraham . . . the promise of the Spirit . . . a covenant confirmed beforehand . . . the promise . . . God granted it to Abraham by promise.*"

As to its effects, the New Covenant is a blessing. As to its nature, it is a Divine commitment. Concerning its origin, it was first. From the standpoint of experience, it was "*granted.*"

HE COULD SWEAR BY NO GREATER

God is aggressive in His desire to make His determination known. More than requiring that Abraham believe Him, He earnestly desired for him to do so. Here is an aspect of God that is little known. Our text poignantly states, "*since there was no one greater for Him to swear by, He swore by Himself, saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants"*

God is aggressive in His desire to make His determination known. More than requiring that Abraham believe Him, He **earnestly desired** for him to do so. Here is an aspect of God that is little known. Our text poignantly states, *“since there was no one greater for Him to swear by, He swore by Himself, saying, ‘I will surely bless you and give you many descendants’ ”* (NIV). In his remarkably comprehensive prophecy, Zecharias, father of John the Baptist, also referred to the promise God swore. *“Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, the oath that He swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days”* (Luke 12:72-75, NRSV). The Genesis record also records Divine reference to taking the oath. *“By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee . . . ”* (Gen 22:16-17). Moses also reminded Israel of this singular event. *“Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven . . . ’”* (Ex 32:13, NRSV). The Psalmist referred to the “oath” God swore to Isaac (Psa 105:9-10). Even Micah the prophet refers to this oath. *“You will show faithfulness to Jacob and unswerving loyalty to Abraham, as you have sworn to our ancestors from the days of old”* (Mic 7:10, NRSV). This is, then, a central consideration of Scripture, and is to be viewed with intent by every believer.

Those that approach Scripture from a mere academic viewpoint cannot grasp the glory of this text. When hearing the word *“oath,”* or *“swore,”* their minds turn immediately our Lord’s saying. *“Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.’ But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond”* (Matt 5:33-37, NIV). Thus, some have concluded it is sinful to ever take an oath, or confirm something with an oath. A more thorough acquaintance with Scripture reveals that Abraham took oaths (Gen 14:22-23), and required one from his servant Eliezer (Gen 24:2-9). Isaac made an oath (Gen 26:26-31), and also Jacob (Gen 31:53). Joseph required an oath from the Israelites (Gen 50:25), and Rahab required an oath of the Israelite spies (Josh 2:12-24). Moses covenanted with Caleb by an attending oath (Josh 14:9). Others using oaths include Ruth (Ruth 1:17), Boaz (Ruth 3:13), Saul (1 Sam 19:6), Jonathan and David (1 Sam 20:3, 13-18), David to Bethsheba (1 Kgs 1:28-29), Solomon (1 Kgs 2:23), and Elisha (2 Kgs 2:2). Men that required oaths from others include Jehoida (2 Kgs 11:4), Ezra (Ezra 10:5,19), and Nehemiah (Neh 5:12-13). Our text even postulates the advantage of an oath: i.e., *“Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument”* (Heb 6:16, NIV). Repeatedly, the Lord God Himself is represented as taking an oath (Psa 89:35; 95:11; 132:11; Isa 14:24; 45:23; Jer 11:5; 22:5; 49:13; 51:14; Heb 3:11,18; 4:3; 7:21). **The point of our Lord’s words in Matthew 5, was that oaths were not to be entered frivolously.**

God speaks in this manner in an appeal to our faith. He does not swear upon the basis of your ability, but upon the foundation of His Person! That is because your confidence must not rest upon your accomplishment, but upon the Person of your God! Ultimately, you will be saved because of Who God is, not what you have achieved!

The Divine oath is for our benefit. Here we see the commitment of the Lord to His purpose. He will not be dissuaded from it. Of Christ, Who executed the requirements man could not meet, it is also said, *“He shall not fail nor be discouraged . . . ”* (Isa 42:4). The knowledge of this unwavering commitment is intended to undergird the saints in their good fight of faith. Although some have been presumptuous, using the cursory knowledge of this commitment to excuse their own slothfulness, it is of incalculable aid to those that

are pressing “toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:14).

Always, as our text states, men swore by someone that is greater; i.e., “*As the Lord lives*” (Judges 8:19; Ruth 3:13; 1 Sam 14:39,45; Jer 38:16). Because the Lord Himself is, without controversy, beyond all comparison, He swore by Himself. How frequently God says “*As I live, saith the Lord,*” in Scripture! (Num 14:21; Isa 49:18; Jer 22:24; Ezek 5:11; 14:16,18,20; 16:48; 17:16; 18:3; 20:3,31,33; 33:11; 34:8; 35:6,11; Zeph 2:9; Rom 14:11). It is as though He said, “*It would be easier for Me to die than to abandon my purpose.*”

Keep in mind, God speaks in this manner in an appeal to our faith. He does not swear upon the basis of your ability, but upon the foundation of His Person! That is because your confidence must not rest upon your accomplishment, but upon the Person of your God! Ultimately, you will be saved because of Who God is, not what you have achieved! When it comes to the matter of your confidence--something indispensable to your salvation (Heb 3:6,14), God anchors you in Himself. He appeals to you upon the basis of His unswerving, unchangeable nature. If you can take hold of God (Isa 64:7), you shall have taken hold of life everlasting! That is God’s purpose for taking an oath! He desires for us to know His commitment to our salvation. There is no question about what He will do if we will believe Him! Also, there is no question about what we will do if our faith is in the Lord! Just as surely as faith constrained the patriarchs to conduct their lives acceptably, so will it motivate you!

THE BLESSING THAT IS SURE

The blessing of this passage is a sweet elixir for life! If you will drink from this well, you will find satisfaction of soul, joy of heart, and strength of spirit. Hear the word of the Lord again: “*I will surely bless you and multiply you*” (Heb 6:14). Is there really a need for God to say, “*Surely!*” The carnal mind will reason that this is not necessary! God cannot lie, so should He affirm that He will “*SURELY*” do anything? It is not God that has the need, but those that are clinging to His Word! He speaks thus with us because He knows our frailties and proneness to doubt. He knows of the contrary “*law*” that is within us, pulling us toward evil when He draws us toward the blessing (Rom 7:21,23). His confirmed promise is not given because of moral weakness, but because of the “*feeling of our infirmities*” (Heb 4:15), as we fight to believe in an alienated and distracting world.

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When your heart is tempted to doubt, flee to the oath of God! “*I will SURELY bless you!*” He is intent upon bringing you to glory — determined to bring you into your “*desired haven*” (Psa 107:30). You may look upon salvation as something obligatory, or you may view it as something God fervently desires for you. I can tell you that the latter has more motivating power than the former. God does not say, “*As I live, saith the Lord, I will destroy you if you do not come to Me!*” Now, rest

assured, that is what will happen if you do not flee to Him for refuge, to lay hold on the hope set before you. Were it not for Jesus, He would no doubt speak like that to us. But Jesus has satisfied Him, having *“poured out His soul unto death,”* becoming *“sin for us,”* and being *“made a curse for us”* (Isa 53:12; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13). In was in the prospect of His Son’s accomplishments that God spoke so confidently--not your achievement!

Now God appeals to us differently than He did at Sinai. He has always wanted to bless humanity, but now a way has been made sure for Him to do so. A highway has been raised up in the desert because of the vicarious death of Christ, and men may get on that highway and go happily to the world to come (Isa 35:8). When faith cries out, *“Lord I believe, help Thou mine unbelief”* (Mark 9:24), God answers, *“I will SURELY bless you!”* How many times Abraham must have recalled these wonderful words! The recollection of them was required during the twenty-five years he waned for Isaac, the *“child of promise”* (Gal 4:28). Or, when Abraham took Isaac upon Mount Moriah, to offer him to God in fulfillment of the Divine commandment (Gen 22:1-10). Circumstances seemed to contradict the promise of God. Still, Abraham was *“strong in faith, giving glory to God”* (Rom 4:20). God had said He would “surely” bless him, and Abraham hung onto that promise! The firmness of the promise was conducive to strong faith. Child of God, it is no different for you!

ABRAHAM OBTAINED THE PROMISE

Abraham did not earn the promise, he obtained, or received, it! It is written, *“And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise”* (v 15). To hear the promise of God is one thing. To obtain it is quite another matter. In the heavenly Kingdom, time stands between the promise and its realization--the test of time. Abraham stood that test. When conditions appeared to contradict the promise, Abraham chose to cleave to the promise with all of his heart. That required unspeakable effort. It was a fight of faith--a battle to cling to the promise while Satan tried to wrest it from the patriarch. And how God was glorified by the outcome! Hear the comforting testimony of the *“father of us all.”* *“(As it is written, ‘A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU’) in the sight of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist. In hope against hope he believed, in order that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, ‘SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE.’ And without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform. Therefore also IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS”* (Rom 4:15-22).

Candidly, Abraham puts the average churchman to shame. We live in a time when people glibly speak about being “angry with God,” wondering whether He has forgotten them, and why difficult things happen to them. These are all expressions of unbelief. Such individuals are not “strong in faith,” and consequently do not bring “glory to God.”

The endurance here mentioned is persistence in believing God. Time, like a gigantic tidal wave smashed against the trust of the patriarch, attempting to push him away from Divine refuge. Abraham, however, took hold of the Word of God, and refused to let it go. How gloriously faith worked in the trusting one. *“Without becoming weak in faith,”* he refused to ponder the fleshly inability of himself and Sarah. Without a written Word from God, and with few explanations or elaborations, Abraham was *“fully assured that what”* God *“had promised, He was able also to perform.”* Candidly, Abraham puts the

average churchman to shame. We live in a time when people glibly speak about being “angry with God,” wondering whether He has forgotten them, and why difficult things happen to them. These are all expressions of unbelief. Such individuals are not “*strong in faith,*” and consequently do not bring “*glory to God.*”

In my opinion, there is altogether too much sympathy with fleshly responses in professed believers. It is an intolerable situation. God is not honored by those that are weak in the faith--particularly when they have been given advantages in Christ that Abraham did not possess. These days, there is a lot of talk in some circles about praising God and bringing glory to Him. Such cultures, I fear, are not generally noted for the kind of faith Abraham possessed, which faith is the standard for the Kingdom, not the exception.

An End of All Strife

The point of our text is simply this: strong commitment on the part of the one making the promise should end all doubt and question. “*For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute*” (6:16). Even men are satisfied by a confirming oath. Legally, when an affidavit is presented, trust results. A firm commitment, or promise, to do what is promised is considered binding in civil gatherings. Where this does not exist, there has been a moral decline.

WILLING TO SHOW THE HEIRS

Now we come to the heart of the Lord in this matter. Not only does He desire that His children trust Him unreservedly, He is willing to give them abundant reason to do so. It is not that He is obligated to confirm His word to us. It is enough that He has spoken. However, because of our location in an alien world, the presence of our adversary the devil, and an inward law that promote unbelief, God is willing to show the “*heirs*” more! “*In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath.*” The words “*in the same way*” refer to the ending of contention among men by giving an oath to secure the agreement. Here, man is mirroring God, and not vice versa.

Notice, God “*desires even more* (than mere mortals confirming a covenant) to certify the firmness of eternal counsel. God is not fickle, nor does He speak tritely about blessing. He knows His purpose is sure--He wants us to know it. He longs for us to see the unchangeableness of His purpose in Christ Jesus. Having created us in His own image, He knows that our persuasion of His faithfulness will produce unwavering faith. He has extended Himself toward us, knowing that we will reciprocate when faith takes hold of His Word.

God Himself is the most powerful constraint for both faith and obedience. The Lord did not reason with Abraham on the need for a deliverer. Nor, indeed, did He appeal to the honor that would be associated with him being the father of a miracle offspring. It is imperative that the church learns from the experience of our father Abraham. They are to offer the Lord Himself, with His purpose and promises, to motivate the people to keep the faith.

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Lord did not reason with Abraham on the need for a deliverer. Nor, indeed, did He appeal to the honor that would be associated with him being the father of a miracle offspring. It is imperative that the church learns from the experience of our father Abraham. They are to offer the Lord Himself, with His purpose and promises, to motivate the people to keep the faith. Too often this is preached from Sinai, with an emphasis upon human obligation rather than upon Divine commitment.

In a salient presentation of Divine means, the Spirit states the case marvelously through Peter. *“According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust”* (2 Pet 1:3-4). It is through the apprehension of the promises of God that men are conformed to the image of His Son. While the commandments of God provide us with a moral image of God, the promises of God confront us with His intent, or purpose. That purpose more precisely acquaints us with the Lord.

TWO IMMUTABLE THINGS

Something *“immutable”* is abiding, constant, and unalterable. The commitment of the Lord to our salvation is seen in its support by TWO things that cannot change--things in which it is *“impossible for God to lie.”* These *“immutable things”* are God’s *“promise”* and His *“oath.”* It is not simply that God WILL NOT lie. He CANNOT lie! He cannot misrepresent the case, exaggerate, or understate--He CANNOT! His Divine nature will not allow Him to lie, and He has no inclination to do so. No one who believes God will be disappointed (Rom 9:33; 10:11; 1 Pet 2:6, NASB).

In establishing justice, the Law of the Lord required two witnesses. *“On the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses, he who is to die shall be put to death; he shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness . . . One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established”* (Deut 17:6; 19:15). This law was regarding the conviction of a sinner! In the Abrahamic promise, God applies His own law to Himself. It is not to avoid injustice, or suppress an abuse of the law. Instead, it is to convince the believer of the sureness of the blessing.

I am reminded of our father Jacob, who placed the priority upon the blessing of God. Later in his life, Jacob prepared to confront Esau, whose birthright he had obtained. He was apprehensive about the confrontation, deciding to send his family across the brook Jabbok in interest of their safety. The Word of God then says, *“Then Jacob was left alone.”* In an unparalleled test of his faith, a heavenly visitor engaged the patriarch. It is written, *“a man wrestled with him until daybreak.”* We know from the events that followed this was not just another man. Remarkably, the visitor did not prevail against Jacob, surely holding his powers in check. He then dislocated the socket of Jacob’s thigh with a touch. Still, Jacob wrestled this heavenly messenger. Finally, as day began to break, the veiled message spoke to Jacob. *“Let me go, for the dawn is breaking.”* It is then that the faith of the patriarch surfaced. He saw the superiority of the blessing. *“I will not let you go unless you bless me,”* he said. That is enduring to the end! It is holding on when the thigh is out of joint, and night has waxed long! Jacob did receive the blessing, and that very night his name was changed to *“Israel,”* because he *“prevailed”* (Gen 32:24-32). Someone has said, *“The main thing is to get a blessing!”*

Little wonder God confirmed the promise to bless with two immutable things!

STRONG CONSOLATION

The Divine objective is stated. Here is why God confirmed the promise with an oath. It was not for Abraham's sake alone! He had us in mind when He buttressed His promise with an oath. It was in order that *"we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us"* (v 18b). The NASB translates it *"strong encouragement,"* while the NIV says *"be greatly encouraged."* Why was such a high priority placed upon our consolation or encouragement?

What a tragedy that so many believers attend gatherings where spiritual discouragement is experienced, rather than encouragement ministered. The setbacks stimulated by such deficient assemblies will be fully known only at the judgment seat of Christ! Building up the saints, and encouraging them in the faith, has top priority in the Kingdom of God. No work takes precedence over this one.

The life of faith requires encouragement and encouragement. The path to glory is too difficult and long to be traversed in a state of discouragement. Those that are running the race that is set before them (Heb 12:2) know the debilitating effects of discouragement. It is elementary, but so true: *"Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad"* (Prov 12:25). Little wonder we read, *"Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace"* (2 Thess 2:16). These gracious gifts are not luxuries, but necessities.

An abundance of encouragement requires attentiveness to the promises of God! The Lord Jesus Himself is called *"the CONSOLATION of Israel"* (Luke 2:25). God is known as One *"who gives perseverance and encouragement"* (Rom 15:5, NASB). Because of the nature of our situation in the world, Christ ministers consolation or comfort in copious quantities (2 Cor 1:5). What a tragedy that so many believers attend gatherings where spiritual discouragement is experienced, rather than encouragement ministered. The setbacks stimulated by such deficient assemblies will be fully known only at the judgment seat of Christ! Building up the saints, and encouraging them in the faith, has top priority in the Kingdom of God. No work takes precedence over this one. The reason for the demand ought to be obvious. The spiritual warfare into which faith has ushered us requires a high level of encouragement. God confirmed His promise with an oath in recognition of this.

THE HOPE SET BEFORE US

The objective of the *"strong consolation"* is that we might fully appropriate the *"hope"* that *"we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us."* *"The hope"* is the OBJECT of the hope that dominates our hearts. This is the *"hope of His calling,"* concerning which Paul prayed in Ephesians 1:18-20. It is the inheritance to which we have been called, which is *"reserved for us in heaven"* (1 Pet 1:4). In Christ we are called TO something that transcends anything every conceived in the hearts of men! The grandest aspirations of humanity have not touched the magnitude of this hope. As it is written, *"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him"* (1 Cor 2:9; Isa 64:4). We have not simply been called out of debilitating bondage to sin. We have been called into glorious liberty. And still, that is not all. We have also been called to *"inherit a blessing"* --one that is eternal (1 Pet 3:9).

Fled for Refuge

There is a note of urgency in these words that is not common in churchdom. In many services I have attended, I do not detect a sense of urgency in coming to Christ. It does not appear that the people are fleeing from something to Christ. Rather,

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there appears to be a blanket of carnal complacency seems to cover the congregation. There is too often a prevailing casualness that contradicts the nature of living by faith. A sense of the jeopardy that exists outside of Christ has apparently been obscured by commitment to having a good time, any enjoying the not an appropriate response to the Gospel of Christ!

The Gospel alerts the sinner to the seriousness of his condition. Apart from Christ, the individual is altogether *“dead in trespasses and sins”* (Eph 2:1). The *“prince of the power of the air,”* the devil himself, is working in them, and they are *“condemned already”* (Eph 2:2; John 3:18). Such are *“children of wrath,”* appropriately described as *“having no hope, and without God in the world”* (Eph 2:3,12). Such are not merely people without access to Divine assistance, they are actually on the broad road leading to destruction, with not a shred of hope. Satan works in them at will rapidly advancing to the day of judgment, in which they will *be “punished with everlasting destruction from the face of the Lord and the glory of His power”* (2 Thess 1:9). Those that give ear to the Gospel of Christ will begin to sense this dreadful situation. The Gospel, of course, announces a way of escape from this downward moral and spiritual spiral.

There is an allusion here to the cities of refuge established under the Law. Six of these cities were established, three on the other side of the Jordan, and three in Canaan (Num 35:11-14). These cities were established as a *“refuge”* for *“a place society of peers. However, this is of refuge for Israelites, aliens and any other people living among them, so that anyone who has killed another accidentally can flee there”* (Num

Believers have not fled to Christ only to gain a better life here. The resolution of earthly problems is not sufficient incentive to gain the prize of life eternal! If the individual is going to live a consistent life in Christ, blessings for the day will not provide the needed impetus.

35:15, NIV). Under the Law, the blood of the innocent was avenged by another. This was done quickly, when the killer was confronted (Num 35:19). The justice was exacted so swiftly, in fact, that one who had accidentally killed someone was in jeopardy. In mercy, the Lord provided six cities, spaced appropriately, for a refuge to those who inadvertently caused the death of another. With an absence of lengthy dialog and “due process of law,” as we know it, such people *“fled,”* running swiftly, to the closest *“city of refuge.”* They were safe there until the time came to *“stand before the congregation in judgment”* (Num 35:12). What is more, the seemingly innocent person was himself responsible for getting to the nearest *“city of refuge.”* Protection was not available until he got inside one of the six cities established for refuge. A person in the condition described was foolish to procrastinate, lingering outside a city of refuge in hope that everything would turn out all right.

How appropriate is the figure! Jesus described those remaining in unbelief as those upon whom the wrath of God is abiding. *“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him”* (John 3:36,

NIV). Sinners are living in a condemned world that is “*reserved*” for “*fire*” (2 Pet 3:7). However lovely this world may appear, it is the domain of the wicked one, Satan, who is its “*prince*” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Outside of Christ, individuals not only live in a body condemned to death, they are dominated by spiritual death, existing in a state of alienation from God. Their natures are actually hostile toward God, Who has revealed He will cast them from His presence unless they avail themselves of His “*great salvation.*” Those that perceive the situation “*flee*” from their wretched condition and environment to take hold on the good hope the Gospel sets before them! They flee from the world like Israel did from Egypt!

This is a day when men speak of SEEKER SERVICES. Understand, this is a purely human innovation, however noble it may appear. I certainly will not demean any godly efforts to reach those with a seeking heart. However, in view of the times, I would like to see more FLEEING services! The Gospel is more suited to a fleeing posture than one of casual seeking!

The reason for fleeing is plain: it is to “*lay hold upon the hope set before us.*” Hope, as you must know, is a prominent aspect of spiritual life. The Spirit affirms we are “*save by hope*” (Rom 8:25), i.e., saved in the sanctifying sense. We engage in the good fight of faith, working out our own salvation with fear and trembling, in the hope of glory. Glory that is beyond this world, outside of the domain of sense and time, has allured us! We have left this world to appropriate the one to come. The grace of God instructs us effectively in the requirements for obtaining that hope. “*For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ*” (Tit 2:11-13). The words “*looking for that blessed hope*” parallel those of our text, “*to lay hold upon the hope set before us.*” This is why we have left the world, repudiated our former lives, and declared war on sin!

Believers have not fled to Christ only to gain a better life here. The resolution of earthly problems is not sufficient incentive to gain the prize of life eternal! If the individual is going to live a consistent life in Christ, blessings for the day will not provide the needed impetus. In this world, some of our days are characterized by trouble, distress, perplexity, persecution, and being cast down. As it is written, “*We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not*

Our answered prayers, joy, and peace attest to the effectiveness of Christ’s vicarious sacrifice. But we have not “fled” to Christ simply to enjoy these things. It is the world to come that we seek. The inheritance reserved for us in heaven has captured our attention, and that is what we want! Coming to Christ for any other dominating reason will not be sufficient to sustain the soul in the good fight of faith!

in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed” (2 Cor 4:8-9). If you imagine that the awareness of daily benefits is adequate to the challenges of life, you must think again! We are not saved by daily blessings, but by hope! Salvation, in its ultimate sense, is not accomplished by deliverances in this world, but by hope. The sanctified life cannot be achieved by majoring on our experiences in this world. It takes hope to save the soul! It is the Object of our hope that we seek to appropriate when we flee to Christ.

Ultimately, our rejoicing is “*in hope of the glory of God*” (Rom 5:2). That “hope” is not confined to this world, for “*If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most*

miserable” (1 Cor 15:19). Let no one suppose this will allow us to despise the daily blessings of the Lord. God forbid! Walking in the Spirit and living by faith brings to the soul most precious things now, in this world. What I am saying is simply this: faith must reach forward into eternity for the consummate victory to be realized. Our “daily bread,” for both body and soul, are confirmations that God is for us. Our answered prayers, joy, and peace attest to the effectiveness of Christ’s vicarious sacrifice. But we have not “fled” to Christ simply to enjoy these things. It is the world to come that we seek. The inheritance reserved for us in heaven has captured our attention, and that is what we want! Coming to Christ for any other dominating reason will not be sufficient to sustain the soul in the good fight of faith!

INSIDE THE VEIL

If you imagine that the awareness of daily benefits is adequate to the challenges of life, you must think again! We are not saved by daily blessings, but by hope! Salvation, in its ultimate sense, is not accomplished by deliverances in this world, but by hope. The sanctified life cannot be achieved by majoring on our experiences in this world. It takes hope to save the soul! Believers are to be specialists in unseen things. That is where their focus is to be found (2 Cor 4:17-18). The faithful servant Moses, “*endured as seeing Him that is invisible*” (Heb 11:27). Speaking of hope, our text says it “*entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered*” (Heb 6:19-20). Hope is an anchor that is cast upward instead of downward, as with ships in the seas of earth. This is another way of saying **spiritual life is maintained by heavenly associations**. Living in an awareness of heaven is not simply a higher level of spiritual life — it is the ONLY way to live in the Spirit. Those that attempt to live without a dominating awareness of heavenly realms are destined to fall. They cannot survive the assaults of the evil one, or accept the challenges of faith. If it were possible to please God without the dominating awareness of which our text speaks, our anchor would not be cast into the heavenly sanctuary.

The purpose of an anchor is to prevent shipwreck, or drifting out to sea. If “*hope*” is an anchor, “*both steadfast and sure,*” it is what keeps the soul from being dashed upon the rocks of futility. It also prevents the individual from drifting into forbidden areas, away from the haven into which the Gospel has called us. All of that is fine enough to say, but the implications of these words are most arresting. Remember, “*hope*” speaks of a strong confidence. It is faith in it’s

forward posture. It produces a rejoicing in the heart that is not possible through any other means (Rom 12:12; Heb 3:6). The “*hope of salvation*” is the “helmet” that protects our minds, enabling us to survive the “*fiery darts*” that are hurled at us by the devil (1 Thess 5:8; Eph 6:18).

If these things are true, how can souls hope to survive if there is doubt concerning their place in glory? If a strong confidence is not resident in the heart, how will the attacks of Satan be repelled? How will discouragement and other normalities associated with life in the body be overcome?

If these things are true, how can souls hope to survive if there is doubt concerning their place in glory? If a strong confidence is not resident in the heart, how will the attacks of Satan be repelled? How will discouragement and other normalities associated with life in the body be overcome? The Spirit reminded the Hebrew believers of the powerful effect of hope upon them in their initial life with Christ. “*For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance*” (Heb 10:34).

Those that are not sure of a *“better and an enduring substance”* in heaven, are not apt to take *“joyfully the spoiling,”* or plundering of their earthly possessions.

In my perception, the greatest deficiency of the modern church is its lack of a dominating hope. There is very little *“full assurance,” “confidence,”* or *“rejoicing of the hope.”* In some circles, it is virtually unknown. What is more, the average fare that is being served up to the people of God is not conducive to the development of a strong hope, or the full assurance of faith. If this assessment is true, we have a most serious situation before us. People are being made vulnerable by their exposure to religion. Heaven is not becoming clearer to them, and earth is being accentuated. Less and less time is being spent feeding the soul and nourishing the sheep. More and more time is devoted to entertainment-like presentations and expressions that are more emotional, or soulish, than spiritual. People in this situation are not fleeing to lay hold on the hope, because they are not all that convinced it is for them. May the Lord raise up laborers for His harvest. How sorely they are needed!

THE FORERUNNER IS ENTERED FOR US

The *“Forerunner”* is the Lord Jesus Christ. The fact that He is a Runner at all is most remarkable! It is a sign of His humiliation--that He submitted to run the same course through which we must navigate. Right here, we strike at the heart of our faith. Jesus did leave us an example, but that was not His chief mission. In fact, the Scriptural representation of His example was that it was how to SUFFER. As it is written, *“If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps”* (1 Pet 2:20-21, NRSV).

Our text reveals the ultimate reason for Christ's race. It was the CONCLUSION of the race that was the point, not the race itself. In His worst suffering, the accent was upon *“the joy set before Him”* --that is what kept Him going (Heb 12:2). The *“Forerunner”* is the One that has completed the appointed course and reached the determined goal. In the case of unbelieving Israel, the twelve spies sent into the promised land were forerunners. They were spying out the land in the interest of the great congregation. In our case, the Lord Jesus is the Forerunner. He has entered the haven in our behalf, and is summoning us to *“come to”* Him!

Were it not for *“the children”* (Heb 2:13-14), the Son of God would never have been a Forerunner. It is *“for us”* that He entered the presence of the Lord as *“the Man Christ Jesus”* (1 Tim 2:5). His death for us was vicarious--substitutionary! His entrance within the veil is **FOR** us while we are in this world. It will be **WITH** us in the world to come. The point of our text is that an ultimate full union will be accomplished between the Forerunner and the runners, the Savior and the saved! Jesus is anticipating the gathering, and hope enables us to anticipate it also. When we are fervently and expectantly anticipating being with the Lord, it has a stabilizing effect upon the soul--like an anchor. It keeps us from drifting away from His Word (Heb 2:1). Our souls will not be carried away with the *“fashion of this world,”* which is passing away (1 Cor 7:19). How glorious is the soul's anchor!

CONCLUSION

The power of the promises is seen in the faithfulness of the One Who has made them. *“He is faithful that promised”* (Heb 10:23). Sarah received strength to bear the child of promise *“because she judged him faithful who had promised”* (Heb 11:11). And what of you, child of God? Is it not true, there is no reason not to trust your Lord? Is not the One that made the promise

faithful to fulfill it? Like your father Abraham, you can be ***“fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised”*** (Rom 4:21, NIV). In its essence, that is what ***“hope”*** is — being convinced of the reality of the promise of God, and living in accord with that persuasion.

God has extended Himself to convince you of His determination to save those in the Son. He has not only promised, but has undergirded His promise with an oath. He knows that pondering those two immutable things will propel us into the life of faith, and ready us to joyfully meet Him. If He is ***“willing to show”*** the heirs the unchangeable nature of His counsel, how will men stand before Him if they insist on living in doubt and unbelief? Does not His willingness confirm His dedication to our salvation?

Your consolation can be ***“strong,”*** able to hold you up during assaults Satan is allowed to level at you. You can be ***“filled with all joy and peace in believing,”*** and ***“abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit”*** (Rom 15:13). Now, be strong and of good courage! He that is in you is greater than he that is in the world (1 John 5:4-5).

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

Commentary on the book of Hebrews

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #10

A DIFFERENT KIND

OF HIGH PRIEST

“For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils, was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace. Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he abides a priest perpetually. Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils. And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest's office have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth from the people, that is, from their brethren, although these are descended from Abraham. But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham, and blessed the one who had the promises. But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater. And in this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on. And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him. Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron? For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also. For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests. And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according

to the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. For it is witnessed of Him, "THOU ART A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK" (*Hebrews 7:1-17, NASB*).

INTRODUCTION

The uniqueness of the New Covenant is glorious. Although it has escaped the attention of many, and cannot be perceived through institutional glasses, its singularity is a source of great consolation to "*the elect*" (Mark 13:22; Luke 18:7; Rom 8:33; Col 3:12; Tit 1:1; 1 Pet 1:2). There are areas of spiritual contemplation that are particularly productive. One is the matter of the New Covenant and its associated benefits. Of especial interest is the consideration of Christ's High Priesthood, an integral part of the New Covenant. This role refers to our Lord's **present ministry** from the right hand of God. Although Jesus is specifically called "**High Priest**" and "**Priest**" only in the book of Hebrews, His current activity in heaven is referenced numerous times throughout Scripture.

In this book, Christ's ministry is presented as the

With technical exactness, the Spirit presents the Son of God, His accomplishments and present ministry, as fulfilling the "pattern" given to Moses in the holy mount (Ex 25:9,40; Heb 8:5. The purpose of the book is not to introduce unique or new terminology, but to expound the present exclusive ministry of the Son of God. The perception of Christ's current activity is the foundation upon which confidence and assurance is built.

fulfillment of the types introduced in the New Covenant. The Law, in its covenantal aspects, contained a "*a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ*" (Col 2:17). With technical exactness, the Spirit presents the Son of God, His accomplishments and present ministry, as fulfilling the "*pattern*" given to Moses in the holy mount (Ex 25:9,40; Heb 8:5. The purpose of the book is not to introduce unique or new terminology, but to expound the present exclusive ministry of the Son of God. The perception of Christ's current activity is the foundation upon which confidence and assurance is built.

The present occupation of Jesus is the subject of much Apostolic teaching. Romans 8:34 describes Him as "*who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.*" Romans 5:11 declares Jesus is the One "*through whom we have now received the reconciliation.*" Ephesians 3:12 associates the living Christ with us being "*brought near*" to God. Personal direction is connected with Jesus in 1 Thessalonians 3:11. 2 Thessalonians 2:16 affirms that NOW the Lord Jesus "*comfort(s) and strengthen(s) your hearts in every good work and word.*" According to Romans 1:7, "*grace and peace,*" indispensable to the life of faith, come "*from . . . the Lord Jesus Christ.*" The Spirit reminds us we have been "*called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord*" (1 Cor 1:9). Speaking for all who live by faith, Paul affirmed, "*Christ lives in me*" (Gal 2:20).

Christ's present ministry is alluded to often in Scripture. Always, it relates to our acceptance by God and triumph over the world. Permit me to mention a few of them. Each of these affirmations depends upon the present activity of the Lord Jesus Christ. "*We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. By whom also we have*

access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Rom 5:2). “But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 15:57). “For through Him (Jesus) we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Eph 2:18). “Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ” (2 Cor 2:14). As the “Captain of their salvation,” He is “bringing many sons to glory” (Heb 2:10). With “angels and authorities and powers subject to Him,” the Son of God is reigning in regal splendor “till His enemies be made His footstool” (1 Pet 3:22; Heb 10:13).

As Shepherd He feeds, as Captain He leads, and as Mediator He dispenses covenantal benefits needed to complete the “race set before” us (Heb 12:1-2). At no point in this world do we become capable of completing the fight of faith alone. Christ Jesus is never unnecessary, never replaceable, never expendable. The book of Hebrews is elaborating upon His indispensability. In particular, it is now approached from the standpoint of His High Priesthood.

THE GREATNESS OF MELCHIZEDEK

Melchizedek has already been introduced in this book. He represents an order of priesthood that is fully answered in the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb 5:6,10; 6:20). Prophetically, the relation of Christ’s priesthood to that of Melchizedek is declared in Psalm 110:4. *“The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.”* Notice the certainty, and even finality, of this statement. Three key affirmations are provided for your faith. (1) *“The Lord hath sworn.”* (2) *“And will not repent.”* (3) *“Thou art a priest forever . . .”* The point being established is the Divine provision for your salvation. Under the Law, there was no consistent provision for the salvation of the people. Moses was an effective mediator that stood between the recalcitrant people and God — but his mediatorship was not sufficient to fulfill the purpose of the Almighty. Aaron, the high priest under the Law, was *“the saint of the Lord”* (Psa 106:16) was also effective in his role for the time then present. However, neither he nor the order of priesthood for which he stood, was adequate to fulfill the *“eternal purpose”* of God. This would require a different kind of high priest—one introduced by Melchizedek.

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It is important to note that this order of High Priesthood was introduced BEFORE the Law, in which the Aaronic priesthood was set in order. The Spirit is going to show us the superiority of both the Person and ministry of the Son of God. To do so, He must begin earlier than Sinai, for the purpose of God as revealed in Christ antedated the giving of the Law, or the First Covenant. Just as Galatians associates the Gospel with the promise made to Abraham prior to the Law, Hebrews relates the effectiveness of that salvation to the high priesthood of Melchizedek, who blessed Abraham. We are being anchored to Divine purpose, as distinguished from adherence to a code of law.

“Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils” (7:4). The records of this event are found in Genesis 14:18-20. It is a brief account, with little seeming significance. *“And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: and blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand”* (v 18-20). The significance of the text is found in the Person of Jesus Christ. Take Jesus out of the scenario, and the text is but a historical account. This is actually the pattern for all of Scripture. As it is written, *“Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me”* (John 5:39). And again, *“ . . . for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy”* (Rev 17:10). There is a sense in which Jesus is the reason for Scripture. It is through Him, and Him alone, that men come into vital union with the Lord, thereby participating in His eternal purpose.

Scripture apprizes us that Melchizedek *“met Abraham, returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him”* (7:1). The Genesis record informs us the high priest *“brought forth bread and wine”* for Abraham. This is a most remarkable text! So far as the book of Genesis is concerned, only two priests are mentioned: Melchizedek and Potipherah. Three times reference is made to Joseph’s father-in-law, “Potipherah,” who was “priest of On” (Gen 41:45,50; 46:20). His daughter, Asenath, was given to Joseph as a wife by Pharaoh. She bore to Joseph Manasseh and Ephraim. Prior to the giving of the Law, another priest is mentioned in the early part of Exodus. It was Jethro, father-in-law of Moses, who was *“the priest of Midian”* (Ex 2:16; 3:1; 18:1). Neither of them were appropriate types of the *“great High Priest”* to come (Heb 4:14). But when it came to revealing the “eternal purpose” of the Almighty and expounding the nature of our High Priest, the Son of God, only one priest of record is appropriate: Melchizedek. At least eight reasons are cited for the greatness of this high priest.

(1. He was not only a priest, but also a king. Apart from Jesus, the combination of King and Priest is found here alone. David was a King, but not a Priest. Aaron was a Priest, but not a King . . . etc.

(2 Even Abraham paid him tithes. This was done on a voluntary basis, which means Abraham recognized the greatness of this unique priest.

(3 he blessed Abraham. Apart from this incident, Abraham was considered a source of blessing. God had promised He would make Abraham a blessing--but here Abraham is blessed.

MELCHIZEDEK

There are a number of theological conjectures about Melchizedek. Some imagine that he was an eternal being. Others suppose it was a pre-incarnate appearance of the Lord Jesus (which is a contradiction of terms). It cannot be that this priest of Salem was eternal, for the Lord *“only hath immortality”* (1 Tim 6:16). If this was an appearance of the Word, He *“humbled Himself”* before He was sent into the world to *“save His people from their sins”* --a thought that sharply conflicts with the teaching of Philippians the second chapter. The Spirit is referring to Melchizedek’s record more than to his person. It is deliberately placed in Scripture to portray a the High Priest responsible for our salvation.

(4 he is the type of a Priest who lives for ever. Melchizedek himself was not eternal. The record presents him in that manner because he typified God’s appointed High Priest, Jesus Christ. Here, in literary form, God introduced the concept of an eternal priest .

(5 Levi, yet unborn, paid him tithes in the person of Abraham. The Divine manner of reasoning is so divers from than of mankind! Here the entire Levitical priesthood, initiated under the Law, is represented as paying tithes to Melchizedek. That simply means their priesthood was inferior to his!

(6 the permanence of his priesthood in Christ implied the abrogation of the Levitical system. With an entire book of Scripture devoted to the establishment of the Levitical priesthood (Leviticus), one might suppose it to be superior to that of an obscure priest during the time of Abraham. But this is not the case at all! God has reserved *“some better thing for us!”*

(7 he was made priest not without an oath. The Levitical priests were not made priests by Divine oath. As it is written, *“for others who became priests took their office without an oath”* (Heb 7:20). The point being made is that Christ’s High Priesthood, foreshadowed in that of Melchizedek, was not owing to fleshly identity. It was not a matter of human lineage, but of Divine appointment.

(8 his priesthood can neither be transmitted nor interrupted by death: “this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood.” The eternity of salvation is seen, among other things, in its High Priest. An *“eternal salvation”* requires a *“Priest forever”* (Heb 5:9; 5:6; 6:20; 7:3,17,21).

There are two other associations here that are glorious. They distinguish Christ Jesus, the *“High Priest of good things to come”* (Heb 9:11), as absolutely superior.

(1 Melchizedek, the type, remains a priest in the record; i.e., that is the only way he is represented. Christ Jesus also remains a priest forever, today sustaining those that come to God by Him.

(2 Melchizedek was not merely a king, but a “king of righteousness” and a “king of peace” (7:2). How precise is the figure! In Jesus *“righteousness and peace have kissed each other”* (Psa 85:10), being perfectly joined together in the justification of sinners. Where else was such a marvelous unity projected? They met together in Melchizedek, *“priest of the Most High God.”*

In a sense, Melchizedek’s greatness is measured by Abraham! The greatness of Abraham is defined by his faith, not his works. That cause him to excel before God, even being called *“the friend of God”* (James 2:23). In our text, the greatness of Melchizedek is not defined by who he was, but by who honored him. *“Even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils”* to Melchizedek. Such a presentation required a great man, indeed. It is more than interesting that tithing is mentioned before the giving of the Law. Nor, indeed, is Abraham the only one that gave tithes. Before the Law, and with no known command to do so, the patriarch Jacob said to God, *“Of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee”* (Gen 28:22). In both cases, faith and insight prompted the action, not Law. The Holy Spirit apparently saw no need for an elaborate explanation of these events.

The separation of Melchizedek from the Aaronic priesthood is emphasized. *“But he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises”* (7:6). The point is that Law is not the fountain of blessing, therefore its priests are inferior! Too, the Law could not confer a blessing upon Abraham. Not only was Abraham before the

Law, he received a promise that was superior to the Law, to which the Law was “*added.*” It is arresting to consider that in the body of the Law (Exodus 20-40), blessing is rarely mentioned (bless-Ex 20:24; 23:25; blessed-Ex 20:11; blessing-Ex 32:39). The original Abrahamic promise (Gen 12:2-3) contains more references to blessing than the entire Exodus 20-40! It is suitable, therefore, that the High Priesthood of Christ (which is one of blessing) be introduced apart from the Law in the record of Melchizedek.

THE LESS IS BLESSED BY THE GREATER

In every case, the greatness of the type was owing to its fulfillment in Christ Jesus. Abel, in offering a more acceptable sacrifice, was a type of Christ. Isaac, in being a child of promise, was a type of Christ. Melchizedek, as a king-priest, was a type of Christ. Solomon in all of wisdom and glory was a type of Christ. It is consistently the antitype that made the type great! Remove Jesus from the picture, and all of the prefigurements are reduced to nothing. God has bent history around the coming of His Son.

Here is a Kingdom principle, fulfilled in Melchizedek, obscure priest and king of Salem. I must comment at length upon the greatness of this man. Here was a king of righteousness in a most unlikely place. With Sodom and Gomorrah near on the one side, and the Canaanites on the other, it was unlikely one could find someone interposing for the Living God. Remember, the whole world was under the power of the evil one, with even Abraham’s father and family given over to idolatry. We have no record of any godliness, worship, or true blessing, at this time apart from Abraham and his family. How marvelous, therefore, that Melchizedek appears! He remains a priest of the Most High God, associated with both righteousness and peace. He recognized Abraham as worthy attention, feeding and blessing him. Were it not for the protection of a pure figure or type, we would no doubt have heard much more of this godly man! But God has covered his history with the cloak of Divine silence. There is not an historian in all the world that has been able to uncover more of this High Priest. The reason for his appearance in the historical record is to acquaint us with the order of Christ’s High priesthood. Were it not for that, we would have heard nothing of him at all.

A word concerning the appropriateness of humility is in order here. It is enough to be associated with the Lord Jesus Christ. In this world, no further recognition is required. Melchizedek stands as a towering example of this. We know nothing of him apart from his brief confrontation of Abraham and unique priesthood. Yet, where can a serious student of Scripture be found that does not entertain the greatest respect for this man? What follower of Christ has not been desirous to know more of him? And why is this so? Is it simply because there is not much said about him? Indeed, it is not! There are multitudinous men and women in Scripture of whom precious little is known. Think of the holy men of whom very little is known. Abel, Enoch, Seth, and Micaiah the prophet, to name but a few of antiquity. Paul also mentions godly men and women of whom we know very little. Phebe, Andronicus and Junia, Amplias, Urbane, Tryphena and Tryphosa, Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, Philologus, and Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympas . . . etc. And what do we know of these people? Why are they included in the sacred record without biography, listing of accomplishments, or association with mighty works? **THEIR IDENTITY WITH JESUS AND HIS PEOPLE MADE THEM GREAT!** Oh, what a lesson is to be learned from this!

If you are tempted to seek the accolades of men, run swiftly to our text and ponder Melchizedek, priest of the Most High God! Consider how great this man was! Ponder how he maintained relation to God in a wicked environment. Consider how alert he was in meeting Abraham, feeding, and blessing him! It was enough that he be known only as an appointed predecessor of Jesus Christ!

Little wonder Melchizedek could bless Abraham, who was singular for greatness himself--yet inferior to Melchizedek. It is a great person indeed that is capable of blessing Abraham! The point being made by the Holy Spirit is that Jesus is not merely that Jesus is greater than us, but that He will surely bless those that come to him. If Abraham was blessed by Melchizedek when met by him, what will be the lot of those who willingly confront the Lord Jesus? Hear it from the Word of God! *“Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you , in turning away every one of you from his iniquities”* (Acts 3:26). When an individual recognizes their smallness and insignificance in the presence of the Lord Jesus, they are about to be blessed!

LEVI PAID TITHES IN ABRAHAM

Ordinarily, progression is seen in individuals ordained of God. Here, however, this is not the case. The Levitical priesthood was inferior to that of Melchizedek, even though it came later in time. Ordinarily, that should have made it better, but we are dealing with something different here

Here is another marvelous principle of Scripture. The Spirit, recognizing the comparison some will make with the Levitical priesthood, further comments on the greatness of Melchizedek. Ordinarily, progression is seen in individuals ordained of God. Here, however, this is not the case. The Levitical priesthood was inferior to that of Melchizedek, even though it came later in time. Ordinarily, that should have made it better, but we are dealing with something different here. Melchizedek was a priest of another order, not belonging to that of the Aaronic and Levitical priesthood. Just as the *“better covenant”* came before the law (Gal 3:8), so the better High Priesthood came before that ordained under the Law. This speaks to us loudly of Divine intent. From the very first, the purpose of God was to bless the world through His Son. I want to emphasize this point because of some flawed theology that continues to plague believers. The present ministry of Jesus is a ministry determined before the foundation of the world. It is THE ministry of Jesus for men in this world, and will continue until the world passes away.

Real Gaps for a Real Purpose

This better priesthood, prefigured by Melchizedek, was vacant from that shadowy figure until Jesus. There are at least three other examples of this type of Divine working: i.e., something introduced hundreds, sometimes thousands, of years before it was to be fulfilled. Divine intentions were announced and prefigured long before they came in order to introduce men to the coming blessing, and induce hope in the heart!

First , in the Garden of Eden, God announced the *“Seed”* of the woman would deliver a mortal bruise to *the “old serpent”* (Gen 3:15). Although Eve had several children, including righteous Abel, the promised Offspring did not come for nearly 4,000 years.

Second , the “*Seed*” of Abraham was prefigured in Isaac, but fulfilled in Christ (Gal 3:16,29). Isaac was Abraham’s immediate offspring, but the real Offspring did not come for 2,070 years. First, the introduction of a “*promised offspring,*” then the reality!

Third , God promised David a king would reign on his throne--a king that would come from his own loins. As it is written, “ . . . *God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne*” (Acts 2:30). Although it appeared Solomon was the child of promise, the real Offspring did not appear until over 1,040 years later.

Again, we have a principle introduced to us that is to be understood: one person being represented by the actions of another . . . In this case, Abraham stands for his progeny. What he did is also credited to them.

In every case, the greatness of the type was owing to its fulfillment in Christ Jesus. Abel, in offering a more acceptable sacrifice, was a type of Christ. Isaac, in being a child of promise, was a type of Christ. Melchizedek, as a king-priest, was a type of Christ. Solomon in all of wisdom and glory was a type of Christ. It is consistently the antitype that made the type great! Remove Jesus from the picture, and all of the prefigurements are reduced to nothing. God has bent history around the coming of His Son. Divine dealings before Messiah were in preparation for Him. All contemporary and future blessing is because of Him.

Tithing, An Acknowledgment of Greatness

Under THE Levitical Priesthood, tithing was not necessarily a recognition of greatness. It was the provision of God for the Levites, who received no inheritance in the land (Num 18:20-21). However, the priests themselves were to give a “*tithe of the tithe*” to the Lord, honoring Him therein (Num 18:26-28). It was this latter action that was prefigured in Abraham giving tithes of all his bounty to Melchizedek. It was an acknowledgment of the priests perceived greatness!

Although there is not a word in Scripture about tithing being abrogated, many have taken the position that because it is not enforced upon God’s people, therefore it is no longer in place. This position is taken even though tithing antedated the giving of the Law by approximately 600 years. Stating the principle being established, our text says, “*Here tithes are received by mortal men; there, by one of whom it is testified that he lives*” (7:8, RSV). Traditionally, it is taught that Melchizedek is the “*one of whom it is testified that he lives.*” “*Mortal men*” are perceived as the Levitical priesthood. If this is, indeed, the case, “*here*” refers to *in the case of Levi receiving tithes* . “*There,*” on the other hand, would refer to the record of Melchizedek. Another view is that “*here*” refers to the administration of the Law, while “*there*” refers to prior to the law. My persuasion is that this is a statement of principle. It is fulfilled at three levels. First, in the Levites receiving tithes. Second, in Melchizedek receiving. Third, in the Lord Jesus Christ, God’s present High Priest, receiving them. It is witnessed, or testified, later in this chapter that the Son of God lives (Heb 7:25). Melchizedek is made to be like Christ by withholding information concerning his birth and death: i.e., “*Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he abides a priest perpetually*” (7:3, NASB). This is another way of saying the only reason for him being in the Divine record is as a type of the Lord Jesus. He was not, however, immortal.

One word concerning the position that tithing is never commanded under the New Covenant. The statement is made, *“No believers are ever told to tithe.”* This is true, but it is not as decisive an argument as it may appear. First, with tithing being introduced prior to the Law, it is not necessarily abrogated with the Law. Second, it is first mentioned in association with honor, not with obedience to a commandment. Third, it was commended by Jesus Himself (Matt 23:23). It is possible that this is a principle recognized in all ages by people of faith. It does not set limits, but defines a way of honoring our High Priest. As a point of principle, believers are not commanded to *“worship God”* either. It is something that is assumed in the New Covenant. There is no need for the people of God to denigrate the practice of tithing.

One Represents The Others

Again, we have a principle introduced to us that is to be understood: one person being represented by the actions of another. The text states, *“And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, payed tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchizedek met him”* (7:9-10). In this case, Abraham stands for his progeny. What he did is also credited to them. This argument does two things. First, it uproots any notions of the Levitical priesthood being superior or still in existence. If Levi paid tithes to the type of Christ, now that Christ is exalted, that priesthood defers to His. Second, the idea of a representative is enforced in our thinking--something essential to a proper understanding of justification and the New Covenant.

The priests came from precise lineage, were not distracted with an inheritance in the land, and devoted themselves completely to carrying out Divinely prescribed procedures. If pedigree, precision, or methodology could meet the needs of the people, they would be met in the Levitical priesthood! It is not possible to be involved in a more exacting set of procedures or regimen of life! Yet, the priesthood had to be changed!

Remember, the promises were made to *“Abraham and his Seed . . . which Seed is Christ”* (Gal 3:16). Christ, in this case, is the representative of all the justified ones. As it is written, *“If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise”* (Gal 3:29, NIV). Other statements declaring this principle follow. *“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive”* (1 Cor 15:22). *“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned”* (Rom 5:12). *“The many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!”* (Rom 5:15, NIV). *“For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ”* (Rom 5:17). *“For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous”* (Rom 5:19, NIV). *“For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died”* (2 Cor 5:14). The perception of this Kingdom principle brings home the power of this text. THE ENTIRE OLD COVENANT SYSTEM HONORED THE SUPERIOR PRIESTHOOD OF JESUS THROUGH ABRAHAM. For people to seek Divine approval, therefore, through the old order is completely

unacceptable. God has build into Divine history the acknowledgment of the superiority of His Son!

The argument is strong, and we are obliged to consider it at length. *“Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron?”* (7:11, NASB). Remember, the whole point of valid religion is to bring men into an adequate relationship with God. The Levitical order could not do this! It was remarkably disciplined, and provided for a variety of activities at precise times. There were sacrifice, service, cleansing, and prayer — but none of these activities brought men closer to God. None of them produced a cleansed conscience, a hatred for

The people, mind you, received the Law through the priesthood, but it did not effect a change within them! If it had resulted in the renewal of the people, there never would have been a mention of another order of priests.

sin, or a love for righteousness. The very mention of a new priesthood in Psalms 110:4 (*“Thou art a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek”*) proclaimed the inferiority of the Old Covenant with its attendant priesthood. It was to be superceded because it was ineffective to fulfill God’s ultimate purpose.

In this verse, an insight is introduced that is not, to my knowledge, found elsewhere--at least not with this exactness. The whole Law, with all of its attending ordinances, rested upon the priesthood. Its effectiveness, however measured, was found in the ministry of the High Priest. Notice the statement, *“for on the basis of it (the Levitical priesthood) the law was given to the people.”* The issue here is *“perfection,”* not routine or the fulfillment of a procedure. This is the perfection of conscience--cleansing from sin, if you please. A dedicated priesthood, with precise procedures, and the blessing of God, could not make the people new! With all of their exacting qualifications (Lev 21:17-24), the priests of the Old Covenant could not bring the people one cubit closer to God. Their hearts remained unchanged, their consciences remained defiled, and their steps remained wayward. The people, mind you, received the Law through the priesthood, but it did not effect a change within them! If it had resulted in the renewal of the people, there never would have been a mention of another order of priests. The mention of the new order confirmed the need.

THE PRIESTHOOD HAS BEEN CHANGED

If pedigree, precision, or methodology could meet the needs of the people, they would be met in the Levitical priesthood! It is not possible to be involved in a more exacting set of procedures or regimen of life! Yet, the priesthood had to be changed! The purpose of God was introduced by the Levitical priesthood, but it could not be accomplished through that means.

Remember, the High Priesthood of Christ does not conform to the Law. It is absolutely superior to the elaborate and prolonged Levitical priesthood. Because of the sound basis of Christ’s vicarious atonement, the priesthood has now been changed--the priesthood through which the people receive the law. Normally, we think of the priesthood being under the Law. But the Spirit here presents the Law as dependent upon the priesthood. See the truth, child of God! See the truth! What we needed was not another code, but another Priest! A set of laws was not our deficiency, but priests that were infirm! If the priesthood could not be changed, the people could not be changed, for they received the Law from the priests. The priests offered sacrifices for them, ministered in the tabernacle for them, sprinkled the blood for them, spoke to God for them . . . etc.

The priests came from precise lineage, were not distracted with an inheritance in the land, and devoted themselves completely to carrying out Divinely

prescribed procedures. If pedigree, precision, or methodology could meet the needs of the people, they would be met in the Levitical priesthood! It is not possible to be involved in a more exacting set of procedures or regimen of life! Yet, the priesthood had to be changed! The purpose of God was introduced by the Levitical priesthood, but it could not be accomplished through that means.

“For the priesthood being changed . . .” In the Divine economy, change is always for the better-ALWAYS! It is not so in the kingdoms of men. A *“saint of the Lord”* like Aaron can have children that are guilty of the sin of presumption, incurring the wrath of the Almighty (Lev 10:1-2). A godly man like Eli can have children that are *“sons of Belial”* (Judges 19:22). A righteous king like Hezekiah can be followed by a wicked son, unparalleled for spiritual debauchery (2 Kgs 21:1-17). Godly elders can be succeeded by men *“speaking perverse things,”* drawing men after themselves for personal gain (Acts 20:30). In the world, deterioration is normal, but it is not so in the *“Kingdom of God’s dear Son.”* The priesthood was changed for the better. The change produced better results . . . acceptable results . . . God-honoring results!

The priesthood was changed not only in order, but in Person. A different kind of priesthood required a different kind of person! Now, with a new priestly order, you could not have Aaron or his descendants as high priests. Priests from the old order could not occupy positions in the changed priesthood. Too, the Lord Jesus as new High priest could not fulfill His role within the old priesthood. Both the order and the priest had to be changed! There are parallels between the old and new priesthood, but the new is always better, and the old is always inferior.

THE LAW IS ALSO CHANGED

It is important to remember God is, in Christ, fulfilling the good pleasure of His will. That involves the justification of the people in this world, and their glorification in the world to come. This could not be accomplished through the Law itself, or the priesthood through which it was effected to the people. A total change was needed: one that involved both the priesthood and the Law ministered by it.

It is important to remember God is, in Christ, fulfilling the good pleasure of His will. That involves the justification of the people in this world, and their glorification in the world to come. This could not be accomplished through the Law itself, or the priesthood through which it was effected to the people. A total change was needed: one that involved both the priesthood and the Law ministered by it. The people would have remained unchanged if God had simply given a new Law to Aaron and the priests. That priesthood was not adapted to handle the New Covenant. Speaking of the incompatibility of the new with old, Jesus said, *“But no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear results. Nor do men put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out, and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved”* (Matt 9:16-17). If we have an old Law, the priesthood will not be effective. If we have an old priesthood, the Law will not be effective. Therefore, because the priesthood was changed, it was necessary to change the Law also.

This truth is taught throughout the Apostolic writings; i.e., the inauguration of the New Covenant, or approach to God (Rom 4; 8; 2 Cor 3; Heb 8, 10, etc). Here the change is associated with the High Priesthood of Christ. He was the reason

for the change. Just as the Israelites received the administration of the Law through the Levitical priesthood, so we receive the administration of the New Covenant through the Lord Jesus Christ, our great High Priest! We no longer come to God through *“the law of commandments contained in ordinances.”* The approach now is according to *“the law of faith”* (Rom 3:27), which relates us to our effective High Priest. The principle of approach has been changed! The means of approval has been changed! It has been changed because the priesthood has been changed. God has given the Son the responsibility of bringing us to Himself (Heb 2:10; 1 Pet 3:18)! He will not bring us to God through a code, because a code cannot change us, and only a willing people can be brought!

The Law has also been *“changed”* in its **location** . It is no longer a code written upon stones, but a laws written upon the heart. How precious the truth! *“I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts”* (Heb 8:10). *“I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them”* (Heb 10:16). From the standpoint of our text, this is a different law--a different rule. This is the law of the new creation! As it is written, *“For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God”* (Gal 6:15-16). Here the NATURE of those within the covenant is changed. By putting the laws into the minds of the people and writing them into their hearts, they themselves become new. They are thereby brought into agreement with God and made willing in the day of His power. This is the truth conveyed in these marvelous words, *“Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come”* (2 Cor 5:17).

That law, because it was subordinate to the ancient priesthood, was abolished when the priesthood was abolished. And Christ, being made an High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, became the teacher and interpreter of the new covenant.

This change has not been accomplished through human initiative, but by the great High Priest! Just as the Israelites received their law through the priests, so we have received the new covenant through our High Priest. He has written the law upon our hearts and put it into our minds! He has changed us! This is the meaning of 2 Corinthians 4:6. *“For 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 4:6, NRSV).

In the Law men found *“the embodiment of knowledge and truth”* (Rom 2:20). This was external to them, and therefore brought about their condemnation because of its contrariety to them. Those the continue to insist upon a relationship to God by the keeping of laws do well to consider this. The phrase *“the knowledge of the glory of God”* (2 Cor 4:6) depicts something superior to what was conveyed in the Law. It is the new law that is ministered through the Lord Jesus Christ, our great High Priest. It effects the transformation of men, required in order for them to be received by God. The shining of light into our hearts parallels the writing of the law of God upon them. It primarily consists of an illumination of God Himself, and is not limited to our obligation. This is the new birth from the subjective point of view.

The Law dealt only with types and shadows, and, in short, accommodated itself to the limited capacity of ignorant people. It does not rise higher than to puerile elements, or the *“rudiments of the world”* (Col 2:8,20). You can imagine the difficulties involved in imposing a law upon the people. Thank God, a change of the law has taken place in Christ Jesus. That law, because it was subordinate to the ancient priesthood, was abolished when the priesthood was abolished. And Christ, being made an High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, became the teacher and interpreter of the new covenant. This new Law, administered by our High Priest, is also

called *“the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus,”* and frees us from the *“law of sin and death”* (Rom 8:2). Because of this, sin no longer has dominion over us. As it is written, *“For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace”* (Rom 6:14).

ANOTHER PRIEST HAS RISEN!

The Spirit now reasons with us. He has declared that because the priesthood has changed, a change in the law has also occurred. This is to our advantage, and we are to take hope when we hear the message. Think of the Lord Jesus Christ. It ought to be evident to us that His priesthood is of another order. He did not come from the priestly tribe. His ancestry, according to the flesh, did not qualify Him to be a high priest under the Old Covenant. Thus it is written, *“He of whom these things are said (the Lord Jesus) belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar. For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests”* (v 13-14, NIV). The Old Covenant, in any sense, could not continue, then, under the administration of Jesus Christ. He was not qualified to be a high priest in that order.

The implications of this text are unusually strong. Those that represent Jesus as a lawgiver and mediator like Moses do greatly err. They are guilty of a most serious misrepresentation. Too, teachers that delude men into believing they can come to God upon the basis of procedure or works have, by their very teaching, ruled out the necessity of Jesus. Their message demands Moses and Aaron, not Jesus. Although I realize a lot of the teaching on this subject is flowing from the well of ignorance, it is nevertheless destructive. It bludgeons believers, pushing hope to the periphery, and making faith a secondary matter. Jesus will have no part of such a system. Coming from the tribe of Judah, He cannot mediate such an order.

You could not expect eternal consequences from their ministry. If the people received the Law through the priesthood as is declared, and if the priests died as they did, then nothing eternal could be expected from the Law. Eternal life could not be granted through that means, because the ministers of the covenant were themselves mortals. But what a glorious situation now exists!

Now the Spirit leaps to the obvious conclusion. The presence of the Lord Jesus at the right hand of God is proof enough that all that has been said is true. *“And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. For it is declared: ‘You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek’”* (v 15-17). The priests of old *“were prevented by death from continuing in office”* (Heb 7:23, NRSV). You could not expect eternal consequences from their ministry. If the people received the Law through the priesthood as is declared, and if the priests died as they did, then nothing eternal could be expected from the Law. Eternal life could not be granted through that means, because the ministers of the covenant were themselves mortals. But what a glorious situation now exists!

He is our High Priest by virtue of His Person, not *“on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry.”* This is one of the primary reasons we do not know Him *“after* (or according to)

the flesh” (2 Cor 5:16). He is our High Priest “*on the basis of an indestructible life.*” And why so? Because “*eternal salvation*” requires that kind of High Priest! Temporal interpositions cannot eventuate in eternal life! Regulations cannot produce an endless life. Suppressing sin cannot cause spiritual life to spring forth! A new law must be given to us--the “*law of the Spirit life in Christ Jesus.*” However, this cannot happen unless there is “*another*” High Priest--one that is after the order of Melchizedek! As long as the priesthood remains the same, so will the law. But if the priesthood is changed, a new day will dawn! A new law will be written upon our hearts. It will be harmonious with the old law, but will go much further, and be effective where the Law failed.

This is why Jesus is preached! His exaltation to the right hand of God proves a change in the law has taken place. If He is God’s Spokesman, we are in a new era--one in which freedom from sin and condemnation can be experienced. How the knowledge of this builds confidence in the heart! It makes us “*free from the law of sin and death,*” bringing us into a place of joyful acceptance. Another High Priest has arisen! Therefore, hope has blossomed as a flower, and condemnation has withered as the grass of the field. Rejoice, child of God! Rejoice!

CONCLUSION

The clash of teaching like this with much of contemporary theology and preaching is evident. Those enamored of the institution see little relevance to Christ’s High Priesthood. However, from this text, it is apparent this is a very large and essential doctrine. I will wax bold and say, the closer you draw to the Lord, the more significant this teaching will become. What Jesus is doing NOW confirms where we ARE now. It confirms the change in priesthood, and consequent change in Law.

Permit me to remind you of the types and shadows of Christ throughout the Law and the Prophets. They declare the uniqueness of Christ’s ministry and the glory of the New Covenant. What we have in Jesus is superior to all that was before Him, and is to be valued as such. Do not hesitate to fully embrace it!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

Commentary on the book of Hebrews

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #11

SETTING ASIDE THE LAW

Or, Disannulling the Preceding Commandment

“ For there is verily a disannulling of the preceding commandment on account of its weakness and unprofitableness. For the law made nothing perfect, but the introduction of a better hope {did}; by which we draw nigh to God. And inasmuch as not without an oath {he was made priest}:(For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath, by him that said to him, The Lord swore, and will not repent, Thou {art} a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek:) By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament. And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: But this {man}, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such a high priest became us, {who is} holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. For the law maketh men high priests who have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was after the law, {maketh} the Son, who is consecrated for evermore.”

(Hebrews 7:18-28, The Webster Bible)

INTRODUCTION

The preeminence of the New Covenant is freely declared in Scripture. It is superior in every way. It is a “better covenant,” with a Mediator that is accomplishing a better ministry. As it is written, **“But Jesus has now obtained a more excellent ministry, and to that degree He is the Mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted through better promises”** (Heb 8:6, NRSV). This glorious covenant is superior in value and importance. It accomplishes more, reaches further, and satisfies more. Note what this text says: **“to that degree He is the Mediator of a better covenant.”** The mediatorship of the New Covenant is accomplished through the excellent ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is not performing this ministry *on the side*, so to speak. He has poured Himself into it. This is His current

work, His present ministry, and the objective of His immediate reign. There is no better work being accomplished NOW than that of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no better covenant available to men than the one Jesus is administering NOW!

It is possible for even devout men to be distracted from the greatness of the ministry of Jesus and the New Covenant to lesser things. Men can be caught up in lesser things, but it will always be for the worse, and never for the better. The book of Hebrews is a presentation of Divine reasoning — *“the mind of Christ.”* It unveils the absurdity of reverting to a system of Law for justification. It confirms that Christ does not and cannot minister in the environment of the Old Covenant. It is not the basis of blessing, Divine acceptance, or the remission of sin. God has invalidated the Old Covenant as a means of approach to Him. Its high priesthood has been absolved because a greater High Priest has arisen.

As apparent as this may seem to be, much of the religion of our time has more in common with the Old Covenant than with the New. Such has an old way of approaching God--on the basis of a procedure. It has an old way of receiving from God--through an earthly priest. It also has an old way of pleasing God--upon the basis of works. All of these are inexcusable and unacceptable. God now speaks to us exclusively through His Son, and ministers to us within the confines of the New Covenant. That is more than academic precision, it is a truth that must be comprehended by the people of God.

DISANNULLING THE PRECEDING COMMANDMENT

The appearance of Jesus has constrained God to put aside the former covenant, with all of its ceremonies. This has been done in strict accord with His “eternal purpose.” In the Person of Christ, the Father now moves into the new order, but not without abrogating the old one.

Now, by the Holy Spirit, the writer immerses himself in God’s purpose in Christ Jesus. The appearance of Jesus has constrained God to put aside the former covenant, with all of its ceremonies. This has been done in strict accord with His *“eternal purpose.”* In the Person of Christ, the Father now moves into the new order, but not without abrogating the old one. He has truly reserved *“the best for last,”* as prefigured at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee (John 2:1-9). The language here is strong, and makes no provision for the legalist to insert profitless words. *“For there is verily a disannulling of the preceding commandment on account of its weakness and unprofitableness. For the law made nothing perfect . . .”* This is the *“abrogation of an earlier commandment”* (NRSV), and *“The former regulation”* being *“set aside”* (NIV). The strength of the statement causes the pharisaical mind to wither. The person relying on procedure and external piety cannot stand in the fiery blast of this text!

Something has been abrogated, removed, set aside, and disannulled. We do well to consider this statement with great sobriety.

Remember, the High Priesthood of Christ is the matter under consideration. Because Jesus is not qualified to be a High Priest under the Law, He cannot minister to us under its domain. If Jesus is going to benefit us, it must be *“apart from the Law”* (Rom 3:21). Do not allow the law-binders to pull you into the matrix of Law. It will condemn you, for Christ is not there. The Law is a *“schoolmaster,”* appointed to *“bring us to Christ”* (Gal 3:24). But having brought us to Him, the Law has served its purpose. Jesus will not step under the Law to

leads us to glory, for the Law will not allow Him to do so. He is of the tribe of Judah, concerning which the Law made no provision for High Priests (Heb 7:14).

The *“preceding commandment”* relates to the provision of a High Priest under the Law. The Spirit has already shown the superiority of Christ’s priesthood by relating it to that of Melchizedek. *“Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life”* (Heb 7:16). By *“carnal commandment,”* he does not mean evil commandment, but a commandment after the fleshly order, or according to fleshly lineage. The NRSV puts it this way: *“not through a legal requirement concerning physical descent, but through the power of an indestructible life,”* while the NIV says, *“not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life.”* Remember, the people received the Law THROUGH THE LEVITICAL PRIESTHOOD (Heb 7:11). That was the channel through which the covenant was brought within the reach of the people. Those men were not high priests because of the superiority of their character, longevity of life, access to Divine power. A *“carnal commandment”* qualified them for the function — a commandment that relied upon their ancestry and fleshly perfection (Heb 7:16).

I cannot emphasize this point too much. It is critical to our understanding of the *“great salvation”* we experience in Christ Jesus. Those who stand in defense of relying on a system of Law for Divine acceptance fail to realize the Lord Jesus cannot minister within such a system. The Law was given and he is the appropriate minister of that system. *“grace and truth,”* however, *“came by Christ,”* and He functions within that gloriously effective realm, and that alone (John 1:17).

When Jesus sat down on the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, assuming His reign of grace, the Law became unlawful as an approach to God. There was no longer a valid priesthood to administer it, and thus it could no longer be a covenant between the people and God. In that capacity it was *“nailed to His cross”* (Col 2:14). Now, upon the basis of His vicarious atonement the High Priest brings the people to God. They are presented cleansed and holy because of their acceptance of His *“atonement,”* or *“reconciliation.”* (Rom 5:11).

Jesus is our High Priest by virtue of His *“endless life,”* which text contrasts with a *“carnal commandment”*; i.e., one based upon fleshly ancestry. We could not be saved by a temporal High Priest—one that died. Nor, indeed, could we be brought to glory by a High Priest that presented us *“once a year”* to the Lord (Ex 30:10; Lev 16:34; Heb 9:7,25; 10:1,3). Our text will proclaim a High Priest that *“ever lives to make intercession”* for those that come to God by Him. The Law provided for no such high priest! Nor, indeed, is Jesus qualified to function as a high priest under the Law. Our salvation is not sealed in a moment of time, and therefore we need a living, active, High Priest! We remain in the danger zone, attacked by the devil, assaulted by our own sinful proclivities, and distracted by a cursed world. Thank God He has appointed Jesus as our High priest!

THE LAW MADE NOTHING PERFECT

The Spirit now presses the argument, showing the utter unreasonableness of returning to a system of Law when grace and truth have been brought to us. He bids us look at the Law, pondering its effects. He will consider the Law’s work from the standpoint of God’s objective.

The Spirit now presses the argument, showing the utter unreasonableness of returning to a system of Law when grace and truth have been brought to us. He bids us look at the Law, pondering its effects. He will consider the Law’s work from the standpoint of God’s objective. Thus the affirmation is made, and a strong one it is. *“For the law made nothing perfect . . .”* (7:19a). The

strength of the word “**NOTHING**” must not be overlooked. Priests made sacrifices for themselves and “**for the people**” (Ex 29:12-19; Lev 16:67; Heb 5:3; 7:27; 9:7). Yet, neither the priest nor the people were perfected by the sacrifices, multitudinous though they were. They were made no better, brought no closer, and remained defiled by their sins. This is the Law at its best — at its highest moment, the time of atonement. And what did it accomplish for poor sinners? Not a single thing! “**The law made nothing perfect!**” If procedural precision will accomplish the purpose of God, it will be accomplished by the Law! If orderly and exacting obedience will make men perfect, then it will occur under the Law. But perfection did not result, either for the priest or for the people. “**The Law made nothing perfect!**”

Because this particular facet of our subject will be developed more fully in chapter ten, I will only give some introductory thoughts here. The perfection of reference is not moral perfection. That will only come after the resurrection, we will be liberated from this “**vile body**” (Phil 3:20).

Neither any of the priests that offered sacrifices, nor any of the people for whom they were offered were perfected by the Law. It could not make satisfactory atonement for sin, or make men completely holy or righteous. It could not justify or sanctify, bring in a perfect righteousness, or bring men to perfect holiness. Therefore, the Law could not bring eternal life.

The Law “**made NOTHING perfect!**” Neither any of the priests that offered sacrifices, nor any of the people for whom they were offered were perfected by the Law. It could not make satisfactory atonement for sin, or make men completely holy or righteous. It could not justify or sanctify, bring in a perfect righteousness, or bring men to perfect holiness. Therefore, the Law could not bring eternal life. It was impossible, and remains impossible, for salvation to come through Law--any Law!

The heart of the “**perfection**” that could not be accomplished by Law was the cleansed conscience. As it is written, “**The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming--not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins” (Heb 10:1-2, NIV).**

The need of man is to have a purged, or cleansed, conscience. Repeated sacrifices under the Law only stirred up the remembrance of sin. Do not miss this, at the height of the Law system--the day of atonement--people became more aware of sin and their consciences became more defiled than it ever was before. That is a commentary on the nature of Law. What is more, those with a defiled conscience will not come into the presence of God, which is imperative if they are to be saved. Like Adam, they will hide, for the condemned conscience will not allow the individual to stand before a holy God.

Those that insist upon founding the hope of people upon law keeping, only drive them from the presence of the Lord. Such constrain people to rely upon procedures for a cleansed conscience. It will never happen! “**The Law made nothing**

perfect,” and it still does not!

A BETTER HOPE

The condition that has been described calls for a *“better hope”* --one that will provide an anchor for the soul! The Law, with all of its complexities and exacting procedures, did not yield perfection in **any** area. But what of the introduction of *“a better hope”* ?

The term *“better hope”* refers to the New Covenant. A marvelous contrast is here provided between the Old and New Covenants. The Law versus the Hope! This is seen, remember, from the standpoint of the High Priest. The best you could have with temporary High Priests was a Law that made no one perfect. Sins were not remitted, the conscience therefore remained defiled, and the way to God was closed. The Law did not accomplish the purpose of God, which as to usher purged people into His presence. Law--any Law--still is incapable of doing this. This it is written, *“For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law”* (Gal 3:21, NIV).

The Old Covenant measured man, and made no provision for the removal of sin. The New Covenant blesses man, having made full provision for the remission of sin. The Old Covenant left men *“dead in trespasses and sins.”* The New Covenant brings *“hope”* to the sinner. Candidly, I do not find this glorious proclamation being affirmed in our day--at least not to any measurable degree.

By Which We

Draw Nigh To God

Here is the grand purpose of it all--coming into the presence of the Lord, undefiled and prepared for blessing!

It is ever true that in God’s *“presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore”* (Psa 16:11). At last, in the Lord Jesus Christ Psalm 140:13 is fulfilled! *“Surely the righteous shall give thanks to your name; the upright shall live in your presence”* (NRSV).

The New Covenant has fundamentally to do with coming into the presence of God--drawing close to Him with confidence and the full assurance of faith. After all, that is where the High Priest is bringing us-- “to God.”

This cannot be stated too much. (1 Pet 3:18).

Not For Worship Alone

While here, we worship God *“in the Spirit”* (Phil 3:3). But I am going to wax bold and state this is not the primary reason for us being brought into His presence. Here, in close proximity to the Lord, a *“change”* takes place that makes us suitable for Divine fellowship and utility! How precisely this is stated in the Spirit’s delineation of the New Covenant in 2 Corinthians. *“And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit”* (2 Cor 3:18, NRSV). This is a reality that cannot be experienced at a distance. In can only occur *“in His presence.”* No one can be transformed while dwelling in the outer court--no one!

A similar expression is found in the fourth chapter of Second Corinthians. Again, this reveals the effects of coming into the Lord's presence through the New Covenant, or "*better hope.*" "*For 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. But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us*" (4:6-7, NRSV). The phrase "*in the face of Jesus Christ*" does not denote study habits, but spiritual proximity. Christ's face cannot be perceived from a distance, and neither can the change that fastening up His Person brings. Jesus is at the right hand of God, and the closer we draw to God, the more clear Jesus and His ministry becomes to us. Basking in His presence, transformation takes place in us. Our thoughts, motives, loves, and hates, and made new — praise the Lord!

The Law could not affect this change, but the "*better hope*" can. It is by the "*better hope,*" or New Covenant, that we come close to God.

The reason for this ability is not that we have learned a new procedure, or that hitherto revealed secret has been made known to us. It is because of the remission of sin [something the Law could not accomplish, Heb 10:4] that we boldly come into His presence.

This is the reality declared in Hebrews 8:11-12. "*And they shall not teach one another or say to each other, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more*" (NRSV). Knowing the Lord speaks of an familiarity produced by closeness and intimacy--coming into His presence. It is possible to become acquainted with someone academically. For example, in the case of marriage, we can learn a lot about a prospective mate by reading about the individual. Some biographies, autobiographies, news articles, school annuals . . . etc. But what is that to compare with being with them?

So it is with knowing the Lord. Some have never really fellowshiped with Him, coming into His presence. They have read about Him, and heard with the hearing of the ear. But they have never spent time Him--something which the New Covenant allows--yea URGES-- them to do.

It is "*by*" the "*better hope,*" or New Covenant, that we draw close to God. Being part of that covenant gives us the right and the power to approach the Living God! Our sins are remitted through the blood of the covenant. The laws of God are written upon our hearts and placed into our minds (Heb 8:11). God is our God, and we are His people! **The Covenant is made for approachers!**

It (the New Covenant) is not superior by wording, or by the nature of its commandments, but by the benefits that are realized through it! The passage before us confirms this is the case because of the One administering the covenant--the Lord Jesus Christ, our great High Priest! He is what makes the covenant superior!

By using the term "*better hope,*" the effects of the covenant are accentuated. The Arabic and Syriac versions use language that highlights this uniqueness. ". . . *seeing it should be an entrance to a more noble hope*" (Arabic). The Syriac version renders it, "*but in the room of it entered a hope more excellent than that*" (than the law). It is not superior by wording, or by the nature of its commandments, but by the benefits that are realized through it! The passage before us confirms this is the case because of the One administering the covenant--the Lord Jesus Christ, our great High

Priest! He is what makes the covenant superior!

Change

A change in the people takes place under this covenant. That is why they can draw near to God. Their sins are initially remitted through their faith, and the law is inscribed upon their hearts and minds. They are the people of God by nature as well as by declaration--something that could never occur under the Law, or Old Covenant.

Resources

The availability of Divine resources is remarkable under this covenant, or *“better hope.”* Coming near, we can *“find mercy, and obtain grace to help in the time of need”* (Heb 4:16). This privilege did not belong to the children of Israel. Their high priest could not bring THEM into the holiest. The Old Covenant did not THEM in God’s presence. Therefore, they did not have grace, mercy, and peace in abundant measures to help them. For them, grace was NOT being destroyed. Ezra’s great confession encapsulates that situation. *“But now, for a brief moment, the LORD our God has been gracious in leaving us a remnant and giving us a firm place in his sanctuary, and so our God gives light to our eyes and a little relief in our bondage”* (Ezra 9:8, NIV). How does that compare with the frequent blessing pronounced upon those in the New Covenant? *“Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue”* (2 Pet 1:2-3).

Such abundance was not known to Israel. To them, abundance spoke of rain, spices, gold, silver, and precious stones (1 Kgs 10:10; 18:41; 1 Chron 29:2). But those things cannot bring you into God’s presence, take away sin, or give the advantage in the good fight of faith!

Blessing

God promised Abraham He would *“bless”* the world (Gen 12:2). This blessing now occurs in *“heavenly places in Christ Jesus”* (Eph 1:3). These are blessings that enable the New Covenant person to be *“filled with all joy and peace in believing,”* and *“abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit”* (Rom 15:13). Spiritual stability is found under Christ that causes us to cease to be *“children, tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine . . .”* (Eph 4:14). Now we have a High Priest that can *“keep us from falling, and present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy”* (Jude 24). No such blessing existed under the Old Covenant.

Employment

To be use by God is glorious, to enjoy co-partnery with Him is better! Nebuchadnezzar was God’s servant (Jer 27:6), but not in the sense of the New Covenant. God *“stirred up the spirit”* of King Cyrus to do build Him a house (2 Chron 36:22-23). But what is that to compare with the *“opening”* of the heart of Lydia (Acts 16:14), or *“serving the Lord”* with *“fervency of spirit, while “rejoicing in hope”* (Rom 12:11).

Display of Wisdom

The heavenly host have always been aware of God's dealings among men. They were present at the creation itself (Job 38:7), were used to guard the way to the tree of life (Gen 3:24), and were present at the giving of the Law (Acts 7:53). Time would fail us to mention the deliverances they wrought, destroying the enemies of Israel, and leading them out of bondage. Once an angel prepared a meal for a judge of Israel (Judges 6:20-21). Under Christ, the holy angels are "*all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation*" (Heb 1:14). But more is involved in the New Covenant than the ministry of the holy angels.

Under this covenant, the comprehension of these holy creatures is expanded. Hear how they are involved in God's grand purpose. Salvation is being brought "*that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Eph 3:10-11, NIV). In this "*better hope*" heaven and earth and not only in close proximity, both are advantaged by the arrangement! Let there be no question about it being a "*better hope!*"

THE SURETY OF A BETTER COVENANT

Ever keep in mind, the New Covenant owes its strength to its Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ. Under the Old Covenant the people had a High Priest, a refuge, an offering, and a Mediator. They were all different, even though they worked together for the temporary good of the people. Now, however, the High Priest, refuge, offering, and Mediator are the same. They are all fulfilled in the Person of Christ. He Himself is the High Priest (Heb 2:17), place of safety (Col 3:3), the Passover Lamb (1 Cor 5:7), and Mediator (Heb 8:6). What a glorious covenant! In Christ, all of its benefits and blessings become accessible through faith!

But now our text declares Him to be the "*Surety of a better Testament*" (KJV) or "*Guarantee of a better covenant*" (NASB, NIV).

The word translated "Surety," or "Guarantee" is *eggouj* (eggous), which means *under good security, pledge, or down payment*. In the case of Christ, the word means a *guarantor or surety* (Thayer's Greek Lexicon). Of this verse, Robertson says, *It is not clear whether the author means that Jesus is God's pledge to man, or man's to God, or both. He is both in fact, as the Mediator (o` mesithj , 8:6) between God and man (Son of God and Son.* (Robertson's Word Pictures) This is a strong word, and justifies an extended commentary.

Jesus Christ is Himself the pledge of the New Covenant--the Guarantee of its effectiveness. There are two sides to this, and they are both glorious. He is the Guarantee that God is for us (Rom 8:34-39). He is also the Guarantee that we will be presented to God (1 Pet 3:18; 1 Cor 15:28)! This is fulfilled by the Son in the capacity of our High Priest. Hallelujah!

As long as the individual has Christ, all of the blessings of the covenant belong to him! Jesus is the "*Surety of a better Covenant.*" As long as God has Christ, the people are His for blessing. Jesus is the "*Surety of a better Covenant!*"

The fact that God swore with an oath that the Son is a *“High Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek,”* confirms the effectiveness of His priesthood. That is why he can be the Surety, or pledge. Not only has the Son fulfilled the Father’s will, the Father has accepted His sacrifice, and declared Him to be the Guarantee of the blessing! HE IS THE GUARANTEE GOD WILL BE BLESSED BY US. After all, the Father’s inheritance is *“in the saints”* (Eph 1:18-20). THE SON IS ALSO THE GUARANTEE THAT THE PROMISES OF THE COVENANT BELONG TO US!

Do not miss the reason for this guarantee of pledge. The Spirit is very precise, leaving the realm of generality. It is not because Jesus died. It is not because He was raised from the dead. It is *“by so much”* (KJV), or *“because of this oath”* (NIV). The oath, from which God will not repent, is the reason the Son is the Surety, or Guarantor, of this *“better covenant.”*

Let me state this another way. **It is what THE FATHER thinks of the Son that makes Him the Pledge of the covenant!** Your heart and mind, therefore, should be as familiar as possible with that perspective. You must not look at Christ *“after the flesh,”* viewing him from a human point of view. The modern presentation of Jesus as heavenly Solver of earthly problems is not only shallow, it is a great inhibitor to faith. As long as people view Him, from that vantage point, they will not receive the fulness of the blessing. We receive the blessing because the Father has declared the Son a *“High Priest forever.”* Do not allow that to become merely academic to you. It is a great Kingdom reality, without which you cannot possibly stand before the *“Judge of all the earth.”* Praise God for our High Priest!

BECAUSE HE CONTINUES FOREVER

During the 1,500 year administration of the Law, the need for an eternal High Priest was established. The need for something that conferred life was also confirmed. Man’s need could not be satisfied by external commandments, promises of temporal benefits, and an administrator that dies. Because he is in the image of God, he requires a blessing that brings eternal life--and a temporary priest cannot accomplish that requirement.

The reason for Christ’s unchangeable priesthood is His unending life. *“ . . . but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood”* (Heb 7:24). This is a pivotal truth upon which several Kingdom realities are suspended. The Law was temporary for several reasons. First, it was *“added”* to the Abrahamic promise, and therefore not intended to be a permanent arrangement (Gal 3:19). Secondly, it offered temporal benefits, and was embodied in *“carnal ordinances”* (Heb 9:10). Third, it was administered by priests that could not continue *“by reason of death”* (v. 23).

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All of this may appear to have little to do with our contemporary situation. Nothing could be further from the truth! If people want to benefit from the New

Covenant, they must come into the realm of the eternal. Life that is eternal must be sought, and the ministry of an eternal High Priest must be appropriated. A few liturgical procedures will not suffice to save the soul! After everything is said and done, the modern church is saying little about a *“better covenant,” “eternal life,”* and a High Priest that has an *“unending life.”* That means much of the religion of our day is irrelevant. It does not require Christ or His ministry, and consequently cannot meet the needs of humanity! **An eternal salvation cannot be implemented by temporal means.**

HE IS ABLE TO SAVE

The ability of Christ to save is not to be taken for granted. It is a matter of declaration, in order that faith may appropriate its reality. *“Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them”* (7:25). The phrase *“save to the uttermost”* is pregnant with meaning. Notice how the different translations put this. *“... able to save forever”* (NASB). *“... able for all time to save”* (RSV). *“... able to save completely”* (NIV). *“... able to save to the very end”* (YLT).

Our salvation depends upon an aggressive and compassionate High Priest! He never leaves His High Priestly station. He does not save us by acting during certain seasons. The reason for this situation is simple. That is not the nature of salvation.

Think of the magnitude of this affirmation. Salvation is forever because of an eternal High Priest! A salvation that reached backward to the beginning of the world, and forward to its consummation it owing to a High Priest that is *“alive forevermore.”* No aspect of salvation will fail of fulfillment because of a living High Priest! Those that abide in Christ can expect to be saved *“to the very end.”*

This ability to save in the fullest, yet most comprehensive, use of the term, is not owing to Christ’s authority. It is not traced back to His unquestionable power. Both of those conditions are found in the Lord Jesus, and are not to be doubted. However, salvation is of such a nature that an strong appeal must be made to the heart of the saved ones.

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Those that attempt to serve God seasonally or cyclically are in great error. They may appear very devout, but they are not. They have embraced a system of religion over which Jesus does not preside. Such a religion is more related to the Old Covenant than to the New, and thus has no relevance with God.

Our salvation is here related to Christ’s intercession: *“He always lives to intercede for them.”* Here is an aspect of the Lord Jesus that is rarely ministered in our time. Yet, here it is said to be what enables the Lord Jesus to save all saints, for all time, in the fullest sense. Everything God gives us comes through Christ--He is

our Intercessor! Everything we give to God goes through Christ. He is our Intercessor! God recognizes us only in Christ. He is our Intercessor! When we are tempted, Christ prays for us. He is our Intercessor! When we confess our sins to God, it is the Son that makes our prayers acceptable. He is our Intercessor! Our labors for the Lord are only recognized in Christ. He is our Intercessor!

Given these conditions, God is greatly to be praised that we have a High Priest that lives forever!

A BECOMING HIGH PRIEST

Our salvation precisely meets our need, and is peculiarly adapted to us. This means salvation in its fulness is accessible to all who desire it. God has, in Christ Jesus, placed it well within our reach. Sin has wrought no effect that is not fully and adequately addressed in Christ Jesus. Those who appropriate the “*free gift*” will find no deficiency in it. No valid area of life is ignored.

AS OUR MEDIATOR, THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IS EXACTLY WHAT THE FATHER REQUIRES. HE PRECISELY MEETS OUR NEED, AND IS DEDICATED TO THE SALVATION OF THOSE WITHIN THE NEW COVENANT. HIS PERSON AND HIS WORK ARE WITHOUT SPOT.

Our text associates the fulness of this provision with the High Priesthood of Christ--His present ministry at the right hand of God. “*For such an high priest became us . . .*” (v 26a). The NIV says, “*Such a high priest meets our need . . .*,” while the NRSV reads, “*For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest . . .*” The Spirit now identifies several of the characteristics of Christ that peculiarly qualify Him for His present role. A brief examination of them will reveal how far sin had thrust the human race from God. It will also confirm the nature of God, and why He cannot simply receive people into His Presence without a qualified and effective Representative. Again, I am impressed with how very little is being said these days about these things. Men have become more enamored of institutions and programs, than of the salvation purpose before the world began.

Here is the marvelous proclamation. “*Who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens . . .*” (v. 26). Notice, these represent Christ as He IS now. It is not that He has ever been anything else (saving for upon the cross, where He was “*made to be sin,*” 2 Cor 5:21). The point is that faith cannot rest in the past--2,000 years ago, so to speak. We are not saved by the historicity of Christ--although He is an historical figure, and His accomplishments are historical realities. It is Who Christ IS that saves us, not Who He was! It is what He DOES that is saving us, not merely what He did. NOW, in the presence of God, He IS effectualizing the atonement wrought out on the cross. It is what IS being done NOW, by Jesus on the right hand of God, that

validates His vicarious atonement for you! Salvation did not break forth until He “*entered . . . into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us*” (Heb 9:24).

Holy

Holiness is a predominating trait with God. Israel, inspired to sing praise when delivered from Pharaoh and his army, declared “*Who among the gods is like you, O*

LORD? Who is like you-- majestic in holiness . . ." (Ex 15:11, NIV). Those that worship Him are obliged to do so **"in the beauty of holiness"** (1 Chron 16:29; Psa 29:2; 96:9). This is the aspect of God that particularly produces fear in the hearts of sinners. The thought of an unholy High Priest strikes fear into the hearts of those desiring salvation. Regardless of our supposed advancement and piety, if our High Priest is not **"holy,"** there is no chance of us being accepted by God!

But what does it mean to be **"holy"**?--in particular, that our High Priest is **"holy"**? The word used here is found relatively infrequently in the New Covenant writings. It is not the normal word for **"holy,"** which is a`gioij (hagios). That word is used over 30 times in Matthew thru Revelation. However, in this text, the word is o[sioj (osios). It is used only three times in Scripture (Heb 7:26; Rev 15:4; 16:5), and always refers to Deity. Another form of it (o[sio,n) is also used three times (Acts 2:27; 13:35; Tit 1:8).

The word means **"holy, devout, and dedicated."** It denotes one that is sanctioned by the supreme law of God, and conducts himself with precise rightness in the presence of the Lord. It also carries the idea of commitment or dedication to the Lord. In this text, the holiness of Christ means this. **AS OUR MEDIATOR, THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IS EXACTLY WHAT THE FATHER REQUIRES. HE PRECISELY MEETS OUR NEED, AND IS DEDICATED TO THE SALVATION OF THOSE WITHIN THE NEW COVENANT. HIS PERSON AND HIS WORK ARE WITHOUT SPOT.**

Harmless

Other versions translate this word differently. The NIV and NRSV use **"blameless,"** while the ASV reads **"guileless."** The sense of this text yields great edification. The idea of **"blameless"** is not **"without fault or sin"** --although that is the absolute truth. The idea is **"without malice or evil intent."** Jesus is not at the right hand to **"make intercession against"** us, as Elijah did against Israel (Rom 11:2). So far as **"the elect"** Mk 13:22; Col 3:12; 2 John 1) are concerned, Christ will not harm them. God sent Him to **"bless"** us, not to curse us (Acts 3:26). The second time, He will come to **"judge the world in righteousness"** (Psa 9:8; Acts 17:31). Now, however, He is interceding to bring **"many sons to glory"** (Heb 2:10).

Undeclared (pure)

Our salvation could not be finalized from the earth! The sons of God could not be brought to glory by a High Priest in the world! Nor, indeed, could salvation be brought to its appointed culmination without the High Priest being next to the Father! That is how far sin had caused us to plunge. That is how contaminated an environment we presently occupy!

In the capacity of our High Priest, Jesus is **"undeclared,"** or without deficiency or flaw. This is true of Him in every aspect, without exception. However, the emphasis here is on His representation of us before God. Under the Law, High Priests were ceremonially undeclared, but not so in their character or life. Before they could offer sacrifice for the people, they had to first offer sacrifice for themselves (Lev 9:8; 16:6,11,17,24; Heb 9:7). Not so with Jesus! He is the kind of High Priest we need. He is also the kind God wants! He was cursed for our sins (Gal 3:13), but is not now contaminated by them! Absolute purity belong to Him, and He is our appointed Representative.

Separate

(set apart from) Sinners

When Jesus was among us, He was called **"A friend of publicans and sinners"** (Matt 11:19; Luke 7:34). This was, however, the appraisal of His enemies, not of God the Father. Jesus is

not the friend of sinners, but their Savior! Finely spun arguments may be concocted to justify the view that Jesus is a friend of sinners. But when all is said and done, their sin had to be put away, and they had to be *“made the righteousness of God in Him”* (2 Cor 5:21), before Christ could *“receive them to the glory of God”* (Rom 15:7).

God is so holy, that for His High Priest to effectively minister in the behalf of the saved, He had to leave the realm of sinners and enter the realm of the heavenlies. He is *“separate from sinners.”* Too, if you want to benefit from Christ’s indispensable ministry, you must also occupy *“heavenly places”* (Eph 1:3; 2:6). You cannot gain the advantage of *“eternal salvation”* by keeping your affection on the things of this world (Col 3:1-3).

Made Higher Than the Heavens

The Spirit continues to emphasize Christ’s exaltation to the right hands of God. It is the same type of language used in Philippians 2:9-11. *“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*

Our salvation could not be finalized from the earth! The sons of God could not be brought to glory by a High Priest in the world! Nor, indeed, could salvation be brought to its appointed culmination without the High Priest being next to the Father! That is how far sin had caused us to plunge. That is how contaminated an environment we presently occupy! Thank God for our *“great High Priest!”*

HE OFFERED HIMSELF!

Our High Priest ministers DAILY, but does not make daily sacrifices. Herein is a marked distinction between His High Priesthood and that under the Law. Thus it is written, *“Unlike the other high priests, he has no need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people . . . ”* (7:27a). Jesus is not making sacrifices, but intercession! The effectiveness of His intercession is based upon a single sacrifice offered one time. His offering was made *“once, when He offered Himself”* (7:27b).

The reason for the effectiveness of this sacrifice is not that it followed a precise procedure. Precise procedures were followed by the priests of old, who offered sacrifices repeatedly. **Because Christ’s sacrifice accomplished God’s determinate purpose, it never again will be offered!** Through it the world was reconciled (2 Cor 5:18), sin was put away (Heb 9:26), and the handwriting or ordinances that was against us was blotted out (Col 2:14). Through His sacrifice the devil was destroyed (Heb 2:14), principalities and powers were plundered (Col 2:15), and peace was made between God and man (Col 1:20).

These grand effects brought satisfaction to God. He will never again require a sacrifice for sin. Never again will He require satisfaction for sin! Those that receive the Son will be received by a satisfied God!

THE FORMER COMMANDMENT DISANNULLED!

Regarding the appointment of High Priests, the former commandment has been disannulled, or voided. Thus it is written, *“There is, on the one hand, the abrogation of an earlier commandment because it was weak and ineffectual . . . For the law appoints as high priests those who are subject to weakness, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever”* (Heb 7:18, 28).

No more temporal High Priests! No longer is there a priesthood that is weak and ineffectual! Lifeless formality has come to a grinding halt before God. It has no place in the Divine economy, and thus must have no place with us!

When God took an oath concerning Christ’s High Priesthood, He repudiated the old High Priesthood. It makes no difference if a person can trace his lineage back to *“Aaron, the saint of the Lord”* (Psa 106:16). God will only honor the Son as a High Priest.

And what does all of this mean for you? It means your faith in Christ will be fully honored by God. It means *“ . . . whoever believes in him will not be put to shame”* (Rom 9:33). It means *“hope does not disappoint us”* (Rom 5:5).

Lift up your heart and voice in thanksgiving, dear child of God. In Christ God has made complete provision for your salvation.

The former commandment, adapted for a High Priest with infirmity, has been abrogated! The fleshly order has no part in the courts of the Lord since Jesus has been exalted!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

Commentary on the book of Hebrews

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #12

PRIEST OVER

A COVENANT

“Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the sanctuary and the true tent which is set up not by man but by the Lord. For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; hence it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary; for when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, ‘See that you make everything according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.’ But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry which is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion for a second. For he finds fault with them when he says: "The days will come, says the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; for they did not continue in my covenant, and so I paid no heed to them, says the Lord. This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach every one his fellow or every one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more. In speaking of a new covenant he treats the first as obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away ” (*Hebrews 8:1-13, RSV*) .

INTRODUCTION

We cannot make too much of the New Covenant. It is the basis of our association with God. It is the focus of Christ's present ministry. This was the Divine anticipation in God's promise to Abraham. The Law was "*added*" to this ancient promise to define sin, "stop" the boasting mouths of sinners, and prepare people for the coming Savior (Rom 3:19-20; Gal 3:24-26). The Law was not the real point. The New Covenant, given as a promise to Abraham, was the Divine objective all along. Throughout Scripture, this covenant is the object of Divine attention and revelation. For this reason, it is imperative for the people of God to have a working knowledge of the matter.

Paul declares this was the essence of God's promise to Abraham (Gal 3:18). Jeremiah stated the Divine intention in most precise language (Jer 31:31-34). This covenant was the means through which the promises would be fulfilled to the people. It would involve the removal of a stony heart, and the impartation of as malleable one (Ezek 11:19; 36:26). This new covenant would bring the fulfillment of the promised blessing. "*In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS*" (Jer 23:6; 33:16). Isaiah spoke of it as a time of renewal. "*Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay*" (Isa 35:6-7). This New Covenant would be the "*way*" upon which the righteous would make their way to glory and to the Lord Himself (Isa 35:8).

The Lord Jesus spoke of the New Covenant in the establishment of the Lord's table (Matt 26:28). Paul reiterated this to the Corinthians (1 Cor 11:25-28). He also declared to them the Apostles were "*ministers of the new testament*" (covenant, NASB, NIV), 2 Cor 3:6. The great redemptive words of Scripture are fulfilled in the New Covenant. Words like justification, sanctification, redemption, and cleansing (Rom 4:25; 5:16,18; 1 Cor 1:30; 2 Thess 2:13; 1 Pet 1:2; Rom 3:24; Eph 1:7; Eph 5:26; 1 John 1:9). These are all benefits of the New Covenant. The book of Hebrews especially emphasizes this glorious covenant. It is twice called a "*better covenant*" (Heb 7:22; 8:6), and four times a "*new covenant*" (Heb 8:8; 8:13; 9:15; 12:24). Those who trample beneath their feet the "*blood of the covenant*" have "*done despite to the Spirit of grace*" (Heb 10:29). It is also called an "*eternal*" or "*everlasting covenant*" (Heb 13:20). The New Covenant is of critical importance to us! Our salvation is found there. The change of nature takes place there. Good hope and everlasting consolation flow from it. No one in Christ can be content to remain ignorant of this remarkable blessing! These things can and must be known by the child of God. To fail to know them will result in disaster.

THE POINT BEING MADE

Mind you, this is not a new teaching, but represents the thrust of the New Covenant writings, or the direction in which they point. The declaration of the present ministry of Jesus is a rich source of comfort and consolation for the saints of God.

"Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum" (KJV). *"Now this is the main point of the things we are saying"* (NKJV). *"The point of what we are saying is this"* (NIV). What a point is being made! It differs so significantly from the burden of contemporary preaching that it is staggering. Romans 8:34 proclaims, *"Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us."* Jude

breaks forth in doxology in Jude 24, “*Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy.*” Peter, declaring Christ’s present activity, affirmed, “*God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins*” (Acts 5:31, RSV).

Our text summarizes this aspect of our salvation. “*We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man*” (NIV). Notice these words, and allow them to “*sink down into your ears*” (Luke 9:44).

This is the condition that now exists: “*We DO have such a High priest!*” it is not only something we need, it is something we possess! This is an aspect of salvation that is altogether glorious! Job desired such an One, but did not enjoy the benefit (Job 9:23). The Israelites, with an extensive legal and moral system did not have a high priest like those in the New Covenant. Our Lord Jesus is a High Priest forever, and that adequately addresses every condition and circumstance conceivable. He is also appointed and approved by the Living God with Whom we have to do!

Having concluded His work upon earth, He is now reigning at the right hand “*of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.*” His present posture is not one of rest, but one of rule and dominion. He is reigning in the behalf

Whereas the ancient high priests went into the holy of holies once a year, our High Priest dwells there continually. He is representing us to the Father, directing our journey to glory, and appropriating spiritual resources required for our pilgrimage. Life in the New Covenant is not a cyclical or seasonal matter. Thus, our High Priest ministers continually!

of the saved, ensuring their faith and hope is not vain. He is ruling over all opposing forces and influences in order for those who run the race with patience may arrive safely at the goal. The term “*Majesty in the heavens*” is an intriguing one. It is the same phrase mentioned in 1:3, with the exception of “*on high,*” which is used there in place of “*in the heavens.*” The idea is that here is where the government of the Almighty is situated. Here is where the entire natural and moral universes are administrated. Everything is being ruled with the salvation of the people in mind. Here opposing forces are crushed, and heavenly powers are engaged to bring the sons of God to glory!

From the standpoint of our salvation, our High Priest occupies the “*sanctuary,*” which parallels the “*most holy place*” of the tabernacle.

There is no reason for you not to make it to glory! No reason why you cannot run the race that is set before you! Everything required is supplied in Christ Jesus! You can obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need. Your conscience can be purged, and you can enjoy fellowship with the Son. The Father is well pleased with the arrangement, and you can be also — yea, you MUST be! You have every reason to be optimistic, with the optimism of faith. You can expect your prayers to be heard and answered according to your faith! You can expect to abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit as you are filled with all joy and peace in believing (Rom 15:13). The eyes of your understanding can be opened to comprehend the covenantal blessings that are secured in Christ (Eph 1:18-20; 3:16-21). You can have “*everlasting consolation and good hope through grace*” (2 Thess 2:16). All of this is true because we DO have such an High Priest, ministering for us in the very Presence of the Almighty!

His presence in heaven assures our labors are not vain in the Lord!

AN OFFERING IS NECESSARY

“For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer” (8:3, KJV). The high priests of old were ordained to *“offer gifts and sacrifices”* to God in the behalf of the people (Num 18:5-9). No one could approach unto God without an offering. Even under the Law, the solemn injunction was given, *“Thou shalt keep the feast of unleavened bread . . . and none shall appear before me empty”* (Ex 23:15). *“All that openeth the matrix is mine . . . And none shall appear before me empty”* (Ex 34:19-20). *“Three times a year all your men must appear before the LORD your God at the place he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles. No man should appear before the LORD empty-handed”* (Deut 16:16). This was but a faint mirror of the requirement for an atoning sacrifice for the sins of humanity.

If the Son is going to stand before God in the behalf of mankind, He must have something to offer. He could resume His place in the heavenlies without having something to offer. He could appear before His God and Father *“empty.”* This aspect of God is not commonly perceived in our time.

Transgression creates indebtedness to God. This condition exists because sin robs God of His glory--His rightful glory. Its is an assertion of the human will against the Lord Whose image we bear. As unreasonable as it sounds to the flesh, an offering must be presented to God to atone for the sin. This requirement was pictured in the Law, but not fulfilled by it. It required the offering of an innocent victim in the behalf of the guilty Lev 4:20; 10:17; Num 29:5).

For some, this is a reprehensible thing--the innocent dying for the guilty. Some, in the foolishness of their ignorance, have affirmed that it is too bloody to be worthy of a loving God. But they have missed the point. Under the Law, animals were sacrificed, not people. They were offered in anticipation of a coming sacrifice that would be effective to remove guilt.

The great heart of God is revealed in this. Rather than let humanity go, He devised a way to cover their sin, thereby giving Him a reason to recover and bless them. The Divine nature cannot overlook sin, or allow it go to unpunished. To do so would be a violation of that Nature. If God were heartless, He would simply have let our race go--but He could not do it.

Not only did His nature forbid Him to overlook transgression, it also would not allow Him to abandon sinners.

God demanded an offering because He longed for the return of His offspring. The required sacrifice would allow Him to be *“just and the Justifier”* of those who received the atonement (Rom 3:24-26). Thereby He could remain righteous and, at the same time, provide a way for fallen men to also be righteous.

Under the Old Covenant, the Lord introduced what He was going to do. Not only was it seen in the sacrificial system, but in the high priest, who actually accomplished the atonement. That high priest was put in office to accomplish

these things. As it is written, *“For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices . . . ”* (Heb 8:3a). That was their role--the primary activity they fulfilled. And why so? Because they were introducing a concept to men, and putting God in remembrance, so to speak, of the coming atoning sacrifice.

“This man” refers to the Lord Jesus Christ, particularly in His high priestly office. Notice how emphatic the statement: *“so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer”* (Heb 8:3b). If Jesus made no offering, the type would have been violated, and God’s revealed will in both Word and type would have been nullified. Without Jesus, the sacrificial law was senseless, and without the sacrificial law, Christ’s sacrifice could not have been apprehended.

The Place of Offering

At this point a very important aspect of redemptive truth is established. The place where the atoning sacrifice was offered is of critical importance. The blood of the sacrifice was placed upon the horns of the altar, and sprinkled around its base (Ex 29:12,16; Lev 1:5,11; 4:7,18,25). But that is not where the atonement was made! The atonement was made upon the mercy seat which covered the ark of the covenant, and it was made inside the veil of separation (Lev 16:14-15).

Jesus could not simply step in and perform the sacrifices that were introductory under the Law. First, He was not qualified to do so. Second, there were already priests performing that function. As it is written, *“Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things . . . ”* (Heb 8:4-5, NASB). Not only does Jesus not function upon earth as a high priest, He did not make the atonement in this world. Like the high priest took the blood of the animal within the holy place, so Jesus took His blood within the heavenly sanctuary. It is there that He made the atonement for sin! As it is written, *“But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance . . . For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; nor was it that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood not his own”* (Heb 9:7, 24-25).

The Spirit emphasizes that Jesus did not enter heaven with the blood of another sacrifice, but with His own blood. *“He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption”* (Heb 9:12, NIV). There is something that could not be said of any Levitical sacrifice--that it obtained *“eternal redemption.”* Here is a sacrifice that is effective for all people for all time. God is thoroughly satisfied with the sacrifice. That is why it will never again be offered.

Jesus has presented the blood of His sacrifice to the Father--pure and *“innocent blood”* (Matt 27:4). What is more, that offering has been received by God, and is effective for everyone that receives it by faith. God is pleased with it, and its power will accrue to anyone who likewise is pleased with it. Salvation is a legitimate gift to be received.

FOLLOW THE PATTERN!!

One of the most profitable insights available in the New Covenant, is that of types and shadows. The principle behind this facet of revelation is fundamental to the understanding of

Scripture. There is an ultimate body of spiritual reality that is reflected in the ceremonies instituted under the Old Covenant.

Our text states it this way. *“They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: “See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain” (8:5, NIV).*

This is a very important text. It has occasioned the development of a view of Scripture called “pattern theology.” This is a corrupted view, created by man and for man. God is perceived as here stating an approach to Himself is to be regimented, and according to a “pattern.” Thus, some conceive of a set number of “elements” in worship. These must be present to validate worship. One sect classifies them as (1 preaching, (2 praying, (3 singing, (4 the Lord’s supper, and (5 fellowship. This is NOT the meaning of this text, and represents a serious corruption of it.

The Spirit is speaking of the ministry of the Lord Jesus as a faithful High Priest. Here, in the heavenly places, God has *“blessed us with all spiritual blessings”* (Eph 1:3; 2:6). These are being administered to us by the exalted Christ.

The Old Covenant introduced the glories of redemption. In the words of our text, the sanctuary was *“a copy and shadow of what is in heaven.”* It was therefore imperative that Moses *“make everything according to the pattern”* he received on the mountain. A brief review will suffice to acquaint us with this *“pattern.”* It depicts heavenly realities.

The *“pattern”* of reference was precise. It is reviewed in the ninth chapter. We will only introduce it in this lesson. Here is the *“pattern.”* *“A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand, the table and the consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover. But we cannot discuss these things in detail now. When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance”* (9:2-7). The following observations will suffice. They are representative of the proper approach to and service of the Living God.

1. The place of activity is a holy place, dedicated exclusively to the Lord. It is not used for any other purpose.
2. The holy place had continual illumination and bread.
3. The place of service was did not allow for direct contact with God. That was another area, called the **“holiest of all.”** It was separated from the holy place by a thick veil.
4. This is where effective representation of the people took place.
5. Because the “golden censer” was located here, the fragrance of incense was

strongest in this area of the tabernacle.

6. The ark of the covenant was also in the holiest place. Here was the essence of the covenant. The evidence of Divine sustenance was found in the golden pot of manna. The token of Divine guidance was found in Aaron's rod that budded. And, the "words of the covenant" were found in the tables of the covenant.

7. The basis upon which communication was made is seen in the covering over the ark of the covenant--a mercy seat.

8. Angelic creatures were over the mercy seat, overshadowing it and peering, as it were, into its provisions.

9. Once these things were set in place, the priests entered the holiest place, but never without blood. It was there the real offering was made for himself and the sins of the people.

The above details were a precise reflection of the approach to the Living God. They acquainted people with the necessity of someone being in the Presence of the Almighty in our behalf. The approach to God required illumination and sustenance. Once in the presence of God, He had to be well pleased--a circumstance depicted by sweet smelling incense. All of the workings of God are in remembrance there--i.e., how He led and fed us, as well as the covenant upon which His acceptance of us is based. Above all, the interposition of God into human affairs is upon the basis of mercy, and mercy alone. The blood appeals to His mercy.

Other aspects of this foreshadowing that is not here addressed includes: (1. Coming to God in separation from the world (seen in the presence of the outer court). (2. Approaching God upon the basis of vicarious sacrifice (pictured in the brazen altar). (3. Being washed and made clean (depicted in the laver of washing.

Moses was strictly commanded to make all things "*according to the pattern*" that was revealed to him on Mount Sinai. The reason for this demand was not the enforcement of procedure, but the establishment of the type. A distortion of the tabernacle pattern would result in a distortion of understanding. The nature and requirements of our acceptance would not be perceived clearly.

The seriousness of violating a type of shadow is seen in the occasion when Moses struck the rock instead of speaking to it. This event is recorded in Numbers 20:8-11. Once before, Moses was used to bring water from the rock by striking it (Ex 17:6). The second time, the Lord precisely told Moses to "*Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water*" (Num 20:8).

Instead of speaking to the rock, and because the people provoked him with their insolence and unbelief (Psa 106:33), Moses struck the rock. Here is the record. "*And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice . . .*" (Num 20:11). This

action resulted in Moses not being allowed to enter the promised land (Num 20:12). Why was God so stern in this matter?

Moses' action violated a type, or foreshadowing of Jesus. Jesus would be "struck" because of the sins of the people, and a fountain for sin and uncleanness would thus be opened (Zech 13:1). But He would be smitten only one time! The Spirit even makes an emphasis of this. "ONCE" is repeatedly used in reference to Christ's vicarious death (Rom 6:9-10; Heb 7:27; 9:12,26,28; 10:10). The presence of types and shadows in the tabernacle required--absolutely required--that it be made "according to the pattern" — else the reality would not be understood.

A MORE EXCELLENT MINISTRY

What Jesus is doing now is superior to everything that was before Him. His ministry is a grand and glorious one. With all of its pomp, splendor and liturgical beauty, the Old Covenant was a vastly inferior covenant. The high priests ministry compared to Christ's only as a type and a shadow. Those who glory in appearance do well to learn this. *"But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which He is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises"* (8:6, NIV).

Here the Spirit reasons from a different vantage point. Previously He has declared that a change in the priesthood necessitated a change in the law (the law concerning high

Again, I cannot avoid remarking about the rarity of references to Christ's current ministry in the pulpits of the land. His indispensable activity at the Father's right hand has nearly been pushed in oblivion in favor of other emphases. These range from giving priority to the church, to accentuating the Holy Spirit above the Lord Jesus Christ. It involves an emphasis being placed on interpersonal relationships rather than fellowship with God's dear Son, into which we have been "called," or summoned by God

priests). Now He looks at the superiority of Christ's present ministry is traced to superiority of the New Covenant. Emphatically, it is *"a better covenant, which is established upon better promises"* (8:6, KJV). (1 Cor 1:9). There is no acceptable answer for this transgression--a sin which has relegated the Son of God to an inferior position!

And what is Christ's current ministry? It is surprising how some theology represents salvation as not even requiring a present ministry on the part of Jesus. Some imagine that salvation can be accomplished by a Divine fiat -- a *"Let there be .."* , if you please. In the book of Hebrews alone, this is underscored several times.

1-He is *"bringing many sons to glory"* (2:10).

2-He is declaring the name of God to His brothers (2:12), expounding the Father to them as He said He would (Matt 1:27).

3-Jesus presently has charge of His house, supplying their needs and caring for them (3:5).

4-His presence at the Father's right hand ensures that we will be able to "hold

firmly to the faith we profess," appropriating mercy and grace to help "in the time of need" (4:14-16).

5-He is living to "make intercession for us" (7:25), and ministering the benefits of the covenant to us (Heb 8:1-13).

How is it that Jesus is able to minister so effectively to us? Why are the results of His ministry vastly superior to that of Aaron, and the entire Levitical order? From one point of view, it is because of the transcendency of His Person. From another, it is because of the effectiveness of His vicarious death in our behalf. Our text declares yet another reason. It is because of the superiority of the New Covenant, which is established upon better promises. This is a covenant based upon a satisfied God, a reconciled people, and change of heart. The words of the covenant are not written upon tablets of stone, but upon the fleshly tablets of the heart--they are inscribed upon our very nature. Sins have been remitted righteously and thoroughly. A way has been made for us to know the Lord, not merely philosophize about Him--to have intimacy with Him, not merely embrace a system of thought. If ever there was a message to shout to this generation, it is this one!

A NEW COVENANT NEEDED

The New Covenant is not simply a change, it is a necessity. But, why so? Because of God's desire for mankind. The Old Covenant did not allow God to fulfill His will for His offspring. It had no power to change them, and thus God could not receive them in the sense He desired. The Spirit is very particular on this point. *"For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second"* (8:7, KJV). God never makes changes needlessly. He does not seek novelty--or change for changes sake. In the heavenly Kingdom, things do not grow "old." That is a trait of heaven, not of earth. Change is facilitated only when it is necessary.

The words of this verse require further examination. It is stated precisely. *"For if the first covenant had been faultless . . . ,"* or *"if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant."* That covenant was NOT flawed in expression, but in results. It did not achieve what God wanted achieved. Elsewhere we are informed that its weakness was due to the "flesh," not the words of the covenant themselves (Rom 8:3). That is, it required more of men than he was capable of doing. What it more, it provided no resources for the accomplishment of its requirements. When man could not measure up, the Law condemned him, stopping his mouth and making him guilty before God (Rom 3:19).

It is not that the Law made unreasonable demands — they were impossible to the flesh, but not unreasonable. It only required what God Himself demanded. His nature was the reason for the demand. If He was to fellowship His offspring as He desired, they must be righteous--absolutely righteous. There could be no flaw in them from His point of view--and that is the only real point of view. The Law provided a means of convincing sinful man of his condition. Taken

seriously, that Law would lead him to Christ, Who is able to bring the individual to God, washed and righteous.

God was not looking for a reason to condemn humanity, but a reason to save it. As our blessed Savior said, “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17). If, therefore, salvation was going to be accomplished, a New Covenant would have to be enacted--one that was in keeping with His promised objective to bless the world (Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). Without a New Covenant, there would be no blessing.

THE DAYS HAVE COME!

Jeremiah heralded the coming covenant--a New Covenant within which the purpose of God would be accomplished. “*The days are surely coming, says the Lord . . .*” (8:8a, NRSV). God declares the end from the beginning, affirming what He will do without fear of contradiction. On one occasion He said, “*Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure'*” (Isa 46:9-10, NKJV).

It is as though the Lord challenges the old serpent and his hierarchy of evil to thwart His purpose. “The days are surely coming,” the Lord affirms, over 700 years before their arrival. It created anticipation in the hearts of those with faith, and anger in the adversaries.

(Lk 4:18-21).

From the standpoint of an outpouring of the Spirit (something the Law did not provide), Peter announced the New Covenant had come on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-22). All of the Epistles are a confirmation of the presence of the New Covenant and the passing of the Old. More than correcting conduct (which they do), the Apostolic writings show the unreasonableness of being dominated by sin under the New Covenant. This is, indeed, a better day!

The message of Hebrews also revolves around the subject of the New Covenant. Believers were drifting away from the blessing, back into the curse. Consequently, they were getting further from Christ, further from a cleansed conscience, and further from the power of God. They were settling for being in the outer court, when Jesus has enabled them to come into the holiest of all!

A DIFFERENT KIND OF COVENANT

The New Covenant is of another order. It is not simply another set of commandments, or the institution of another way of doing things. It is not a system of worship or a moral code. It is not a certain way of living, or a set of

tenets that can be embraced without the involvement of the heart. God declared, *“It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt . . .”* (8:9a, NIV). These words are taken from Jeremiah 31:31-34.

A *“NEW Covenant”* is a new order or kind of covenant. It is not a revamping of the old one, or an updated version of the Ten Commandments. It is a NEW basis of acceptance with God. It a NEW approach to God. It is a NEW way of appropriating righteousness. This is a covenant results n a changed nature. It is one in which sins cannot be remembered by God Himself. It is truly a *“NEW COVENANT.”*

It is unfortunate that much of the instruction given about this covenant falls far short of the Spirit’s proclamation. Too often it is presented as a set of rules and procedures, much like that of the Old Covenant. The Old Covenant presumed recalcitrance in the people. The New Covenant presumes reconciliation and the presence of a new nature. The Old Covenant kept the people at a distance. The New Covenant urged them to draw near. With its elaborate sacrificial system, the Old Covenant could never take away sin. In the New Covenant, God remembers transgressions *“no more.”* Under the Old Covenant, at the height of the sacrifice, sin was remembered. In the New Covenant, in the very presence of God, remission is remembered. The Old Covenant made nothing perfect. The New Covenant, because of Christ, finds people *“perfected forever”* (Heb 10:14). The Old Covenant had high priests that died. The New Covenant has a High Priest that is Alive forevermore. The Old Covenant was *“added because of transgressions.”* The New Covenant is the fulfillment of the original and supreme promise. This is truly a New Covenant!

MADE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL

Although not generally mentioned by many so-called preachers, the New Covenant was promised to Israel. Here is the Word of the Lord. *“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel . . .”* (8:10a, KJV; Jer 31:31). Here is a strain of thought that is woven throughout Scripture--the prominence of the Jews, or Israel. Incidentally, I once read a man who objected to the term “Jew,” thinking it was not Scriptural. In case you do not know, it is, indeed, a Scriptural word (Esth 2:5; 3:4; 5:13; 6:10; 8:7; 9:29; 10:3; John 4:9; 18:35; Acts 13:6; 18:2,24; 19:34; 21:39; 22:3; Rom 1:16; 2:9,10,17,28,29; 3:1; 10:12; 1 Cor 9:20; Gal 2:14; 3:28; Col 3:11).

The consideration of Israel is not owing to its achievement as a nation, its holiness, or its dedication to the Lord. It is because of the fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that they are the recipients of the New Covenant.

This truth is stated succinctly in Romans 11:28. *“From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable”* (NASB).

The Gospel is God’s *“power unto salvation, to the Jew first . . .”* (Rom 1:16). Punishment for evil will also be to the Jew first. *“Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile”* (Rom 2:28). Rewards as well will be distributed to the Jew first. *“But glory, honor, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile”* (Rom 2:29). Let no one doubt Divine priorities!

But the matter goes further. Rather than the Jews being summarily cut off, “some” of them were removed, and Gentiles were grafted into THEIR tree. Here is how the Spirit puts it. *“And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you”* (Rom 11:18-19). If, therefore, the Jews have been totally removed, so have the Gentiles, for it is their lineage that bears us!

Paul takes the matter even further, declaring the purpose for his Apostleship to be reaching the Jews. *“For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them”* (Rom 11:13-14). The Spirit reveals this to be according to Divine intent. It is not a mere reaction. *“Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!”* (Rom 11:11-12, NIV).

The covenant was made with Israel! Through the wisdom of God, their fall became the occasion of we Gentiles becoming a part of the life-giving root of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Praise the Lord for that reality! This opens a number of promises to us that were given to Israel, but were actually declarations of the New Covenant in which we now participate.

Isaiah foretold this covenant in terms of a moral change. *“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, And the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, And streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool, And the thirsty land springs of water; In the habitation of jackals, where each lay, There shall be grass with reeds and rushes. A highway shall be there, and a road, And it shall be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, But it shall be for others. Whoever walks the road, although a fool, Shall not go astray”* (Isa 35:5-8, NKJV).

Ezekiel spoke of the New Covenant also, describing a newness of heart. *“Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh . . . I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them”* (Ezek 11:19; 36:26-27). Zechariah spoke of the New Covenant in terms of provision for cleansing, *“13:1 In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness”* (Zech 13:1). Malachi viewed it as something remedial. *“But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings”* (Mal 4:2).

The point is that Israel received all of the promises — particular relating to the New Covenant and the benefits that would accrue from it. Paul put it this way. *“Who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen”* (Rom 9:4-5).

The phrase “*make with the house of Israel*” does not exclude the Gentiles. It does provide us a reference point concerning the magnitude of this New Covenant.

THE LAW WITHIN

The uniqueness of the New Covenant is now detailed. Remember, this was declared by Jeremiah over 650 years before Jesus. It was a word of anticipation then, it is a word of fulfillment now--a “*more sure word of prophecy.*” “*I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts . . .*” (8:10b, KJV).

In respect to the heart of the work of this covenant, it is unilateral. The covenant is a commitment from God Almighty. That commitment was promised by the prophets, but could not take place before Christ Jesus because of the weakness of the Law. Man’s hearing, perception, and will are all involved in the process--but the increase is of God. This describes a change of nature. Once God’s law was written on stones--now it is written in the heart of the redeemed, and “*put into their mind.*” That is remarkable language, and is not common in many religious circles. The expressions is actually abrasive to the person approaching God upon the basis of Law. This same truth is stated in a slightly different manner in Hebrews 10:16--a quotation of Jeremiah 31:33. “*I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds*” (NIV). This latter text reverses the activity. In Jeremiah 31:33 and Hebrews 8:10, the law is PUT into the MIND, and WRITTEN upon the HEART. In this text it is PUT into the heart, and WRITTEN upon the MIND. The meaning is not altered, but the emphasis is placed upon the heart rather than the mind.

This is nothing less than the impartation of the Divine Nature, of which we become partakers (2 Pet 1:4). It is a transaction that results in agreement with God. It involves an inclination to and preference for the laws of God. It also includes a spiritual intuition that sanctifies the intellect. I am careful at this point to avoid any statement that leads to an emotion-based grasp of truth. Both the heart and mind are involved.

This glorious transaction is not a substitute for exposing our minds to the good Word of God. The Scriptures have been written “*for our learning*” (Rom 15:4), and no acceptable learning can take place without them. In God’s Kingdom, however, our nature must be matched with the truth, else it will spill out, becoming inaccessible to our spirit. Remember, “*the carnal mind is enmity against (hostile to, NIV) God, for it is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be*” (Rom 8:7). Whatever a person may think about the capabilities of the intellect and logical thinking, it cannot compensate for coming “*short of the glory of God*” (Rom 3:23). It is possible for God to speak audibly from heaven, in human language, and religious people think it thundered (John 12:29). It is also possible for people to kill Jesus upon the basis of their understanding of Scripture (John 5:19). A fallen nature cannot think in a heavenly manner! Those who themselves are coming short of the glory of God cannot enter into His understanding. A change is imperative!

This aspect of the New Covenant addresses this problem. In the new birth, the Lord places an affinity with His Law within us. His commandments are no longer grievous (1 John 5:3). Now His Law is loved (Psa 119:97), and is served with our mind (Rom 7:25). That is a most marvelous transaction! Praise Him!

GOD AND HIS PEOPLE

Israel were the people of God by covenant, but not by nature. After having been with them for a long time, God said, *“All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people”* (Rom 10:21, NIV). They drew near to Him *“with their lips,”* but their heart was *“far”* from Him (Isa 29:13; Matt 15:8). They were not reconciled to God, were not born again, and did not have the indwelling Spirit. They were not in fellowship with God. Their involvement with God did not change their nature. Often they reverted to idolatry, forgetting Who had delivered, kept, and nurtured them (Judges 10:13; Jer 22:9). This is not the kind of people God sought!

The New Covenant addressed this situation. By changing the nature of the people, they now assumed a new relationship to Him. They do not rely upon Him because they had to, but because they prefer to. Hear the prophecy of Jeremiah, and declaration of reality from Hebrews. *“I will be their God, and they will be my people”* (8:10c, NASB, NIV). God promised this would happen to Abraham (Gen 17:8). He asserted this would happen for Israel (Ex 29:45). With Israel, they were His people because He remembered *“the covenant of their ancestors”* (Lev 26:45). With those in Christ, He is their God because He has begotten them and are His sons (James 1:18; 1 John 3:1-3).

The condition is much like that of the patriarchs of old. They *“confessed they were strangers and pilgrims in the earth.”* As a result, God *“was not ashamed to be called their God”* (Heb 11:13). Such people were an exception in those days, it is the norm in Christ Jesus!

It is RIGHT for God to be identified with those in Christ, and it is RIGHT for them to be identified with Him. *“I WILL be”* means God desires to be, relishing involvement with His people. *“They WILL be”* reveals the same condition exists in the saved. In the New Covenant a change of status takes place! A spiritual relation with God takes place.

KNOWING GOD

The benefits of the covenant now rise to their highest. The purpose that dictated the writing of the Law upon the heart and its placement in the mind is given. After extensive exposure to the Old Covenant, it was said of Israel, *“My people are fools; they do not know me. They are senseless children; they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil; they know not how to do good”* (Jer 4:22, NIV). Again, Hosea said of them, *“Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. For the spirit of whoredom is within them, and they do not know the LORD”* (Hos 5:4). Their natures were corrupt, like that of all of Adam’s descendants--even after ample exposure to the mind of God as revealed in the Law and the Prophets. The pinnacle of their obtuseness was revealed with the *“only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth”* (John 1:14). Rather they recognizing Him, the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, they *“knew Him not”* (John 1:10). Those most knowledgeable of Scripture--the doctors of the Law--together with the one in the highest religious office, *“crucified the Lord of glory”* (1 Cor 2:8). THEY DID NOT KNOW THE LORD!

All of this changes in the New Covenant. God’s people will no longer be like this. From the beginning of their spiritual life through their mature years, they all know the Lord. From novice to elder, they all know the Lord. From the least significant to the most significant, they all know the Lord. That is not only the promise, it is the reality. *“And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man*

his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest” (8:11, KJV).

There is growth in this area, but no one in Christ is without the good knowledge of God. That is the means employed in our escape from the pollutions of the world (2 Pet 2:20). Knowing the Lord involves our intellect, but it is not primarily intellectual. This is not knowing ABOUT the Lord. Israel had that kind of knowledge. Caiaphas the high priest had that kind of knowledge, as well as the Pharisees, scribes, Sadducees, lawyers, and chief priests.

Knowing God is an intensely personal matter. It is a familiarity that enables the individual to recognize God, and respond accordingly. There is a precious word said on this matter concerning young Samuel. When he was being raised by Eli in the house of the Lord, God called out to him. The lad assumed Eli had called him, and presented himself to the old priest. After the third time, Eli knew the Lord was calling Samuel, and instructed the boy concerning a proper response. The failure of Samuel to recognize the Lord is explained in these words. *“Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, neither was the word of the LORD yet revealed unto him”* (1 Sam 3:7). What was exceeding rare, even on a limited basis, in former times, is the standard for all within the New Covenant. This is a most remarkable benefit!

The term *“know”* is a large one. It comes from the Greek word *eivdhsousi* , and means *“having come to a perception or realization of . . . know, understand, comprehend . . . having come to knowledge through experience . . . recognize.”* When the Lord is known, some measure of recognition is experienced. Phrases denoting this recognition include, *“IT IS THE LORD!”* (1 Sam 3:18; John 21:7), *“THIS IS THAT!”* (Acts 2:16).

This is also a term of intimacy and personal involvement. In the beginning, *“Adam knew Eve”* (Gen 4:1). Joseph *“knew not”* Mary until Jesus was born (Matt 1:25). This is a process whereby we become *“one spirit”* with the Lord, in the same sense man and woman become *“one flesh”* (1 Cor 6:1).

There is no such thing as a born again person that does not know God. If God is not known, the person is not born again, and is not in the New Covenant. The statement is clear: *“They shall ALL know me.”*

The knowledge of God is not a mere novelty. It is essential to our escape from the world, survival of the warfare, and appropriation of the blessing of God. This is the means, or spiritual conduit, through which the life of God is ministered to us. How appropriately this is stated in Scripture. *“Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord”* (2 Pet 1:2). *“ . . . His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him”* (2 Pet 1:3). *“ . . . they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ . . . ”* (2 Pet 2:20).

By saying, therefore, *“They shall all know Me,”* God is saying the multiplication of grace and peace, and the reception of everything pertaining to life and godliness, belongs to ALL those in the New Covenant. They ALL have been called into the fellowship of His Son (1 Cor 1:9). That

fellowship results in knowing God, for Jesus acquaints us with Him. The Lord Jesus Himself said, ***“All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him”*** (Matt 11:27). This is the heritage of all that are in the New Covenant. Praise the Lord! All that are in Christ are heirs of the promise in all of his blessedness. That is the meaning of the Spirit’s affirmation in Galatians 3:29. ***“If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise”*** (NIV). What a singular privilege to be so blessed!

MERCIFUL TO UNRIGHTEOUSNESS

Your unanimity with God is based upon the remission of your sin, not the merit of your works. What is more, God is “merciful” because of what Jesus did, not because of your moral accomplishments. You owe your life to the Son, not to works of righteousness which you have done.

How is it that such remarkable benefits can be conferred upon the sons of men? It is certainly not owing to any moral progress on the part of humanity. The cause is clearly stated, and is refreshing to the soul. ***“For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more”*** (8:12, KJV). ***“For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more”*** (NIV).

This is the reason God can write His laws upon our heart and put them into our minds. This is why He can be our God, and we can be His people. This is why we know Him. If sin had not been removed, none of these things could have occurred! Sin was an insurmountable wall between God and man. I could not be scaled by any of our race. No amount of discipline or knowledge could remove it. God gave the world four millennia to correct the problem. 2,500 years without a code of law, and 1,500 year with one. From eating forbidden fruit to adultery and idolatry, not a single infraction of God’s will and law was removed. All sin remained, in the most minuscule detail, until Jesus came. He, and He alone, finished ***“the transgression,”*** made ***“an end of sins,”*** and made ***“reconciliation for iniquity,”*** bringing ***“in everlasting righteousness”*** (Dan 9:24).

This is a covenantal benefit, and you do well to take hold of it. ***“For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more”*** (NRSV). It is not that God MAY not remember them “no more,; He WILL not! That is to say, this is His will on the matter-- what He desires and is determined to do. He can fully facilitate this will because of the atoning death of His Son. He has accepted that death as full payment, and is fully satisfied. When men are also satisfied with it, God will be satisfied with them. It is just that simple.

David stated the case, and Paul affirmed its reality in Christ Jesus. ***“Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin”*** (Rom 4:6-8).

All of the blessings of the New Covenant are passed to men because of this condition. Those whose iniquities are not remembered by God will be blessed by Him. His Law will be written upon their hearts and put into their minds. They will be His people, and He will be their God. They will know Him, regardless of

the spiritual plateau they occupy!

This puts the blessing within our reach! No person who truly seeks will fail to find. Let your soul delight in the glory of this truth! Christ Jesus has provided the basis for this forgiveness, and is presently at the right hand of God to ensure the remembrance of His gloriously effective sacrifice. Praise be unto God for this reality

THE NEW MAKES THE FORMER OLD

Why is the Old Covenant an OLD covenant? Is it because it is the oldest one? Certainly not. First of all, it is NOT the oldest covenant. The New Covenant is the oldest one. It was given by promise to Abraham before the Law was given (Gal 3:16-18). The Law was *“added”* to that covenantal promise, because of transgressions, *“until the Seed should come”* (Gal 3:19). Time, therefore, is not what rendered the Old Covenant “old.”

When you find yourself in agreement with God, you have experienced the work of Jesus. When you can call God *“Father”* out of your heart, you have evidence of Christ’s effective and contemporary work. When you come into personal acquaintance with the Father, you have effectively tutored by the Son of God. Growth in these areas occurs because of Him. Your efforts to walk in the light and keep the faith are effective because of Him. Your resistance of the devil and determination to finish the race set before you are because of Him!

Our text informs us that the inauguration of the New Covenant is what made the former one “old.” *“In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away”* (8:13, KJV). *“By calling this covenant “new,” he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear”* (NIV). *“In that he saith, A new (covenant) he hath made the first old. But that which is becoming old and waxeth aged is nigh unto vanishing away”* (ASV).

The former covenant is “old” in that men cannot approach God through it any longer. It has been supplanted by a *“better covenant, which is established upon better promises.”* It is no longer the means through which righteousness is sought. It has been rendered obsolete by the coming of the New Covenant. The Old Covenant was in place as long as sin was not dealt with. As long as the people were not reconciled to God, the Old Covenant stood. Until the devil was “destroyed” (Heb 2:14), the Old Covenant could not be displaced. But once those things took place, there was no place for the Old Covenant as an approach to God. A better way, attended by strength and hope have not been established.

The Old Covenant began *“aging”* as soon as the New was set in motion. When Jesus entered into the heavenly sanctuary with His own blood, and was seated at the right hand of the majesty in the heavens, the Old Covenant began growing obsolete. It is true, men did not let go of it immediately, but it began growing old. In the beginning, noble souls still walked according to the Old Covenant and in harmony with its customs. Shortly after his conversion, James reminded Paul of “how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law.” These had difficulty believing circumcision and the customs of the law were not still in force (Acts 21:20-21). They were believers, but were not fully aware that the covenant with which they were most familiar was waxing old and fading away. That, of course, had no bearing on the reality of the matter.

You sense as you read the book of Acts there was sort of transition to the new order. The New Covenant was placed into effect instantly, but it was not so experienced by everyone. Even the baptism of John, bridging the gap between the two covenants, was apparently valid for some time. It was not formally invalidated until Acts the nineteenth chapter.

Of course, all of this was in the first century. There is no acceptable reason for seeking to come to God through an Old Covenant procedure in these days. If that covenant was *“ready to vanish away”* in the first century, it is surely not still with us! When the sun rises, men do greatly err seeking to do things by the light of the moon! The inadequacy of the Law to save appears *“evident”* in the light of Christ. As it is written, *“But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith”* (Gal 3:11).

The Old Covenant began *“aging”* as soon as the New was set in motion. When Jesus entered into the heavenly sanctuary with His own blood, and was seated at the right hand of the majesty in the heavens, the Old Covenant began growing obsolete. It is true, men did not let go of it immediately, but it began growing old.

God has repudiated the former covenant because of the New and better one. He has made no provision to pour new life in Christ into the old wineskins of the Law. Nor, indeed, can the new cloth of knowing God be sewn on the fabric of justification by the deeds of the Law (Matt 9:17; Luke 5:37-38). It is God that has made *“the first Old!”* Let us accept that, and go on our way rejoicing. Full provision is found in Christ, and therefore we can be part of the New Covenant. Full satisfaction has been brought to God through His Son, and therefore He can receive us. The whole transaction is righteous because of what Jesus has done. It is right for God to receive you. It is right for Him to put His law within you, and bring you to know Him. Now, what possible reason can you give for not embracing this New Covenant with all of your heart and soul. Full provision has been for all of your needs — and God’s as well. Take hold of it! Take hold of it! Let your soul delight itself in fatness!

CHRIST JESUS IS THE ADMINISTRATOR !

The point of this text is that Jesus is now administrating the New Covenant. It is He that has charge of placing God’s laws in your mind and writing them upon your heart. He is the One that makes God your God and you His son. The Lord Jesus is responsible for you coming to know the Lord. It is because of Him that your sins have been forgiven. He is the reason you now enjoy the benefits of the covenant.

When you find yourself in agreement with God, you have experienced the work of Jesus. When you can call God *“Father”* out of your heart, you have evidence of Christ’s effective and contemporary work. When you come into personal acquaintance with the Father, you have effectively tutored by the Son of God. Growth in these areas occurs because of Him. Your efforts to walk in the light and keep the faith are effective because of Him. Your resistance of the devil and determination to finish the race set before you are because of Him! Those are all covenantal benefits, and they are owing to Christ’s present ministry. Be glad, and rejoice. You have been highly favored!

CONCLUSION

What more can we say? We have stood in the holy of holies, and seen the remarkable effectiveness of Christ's death, resurrection, and intercession. God has been freed, so to speak, to bless the people as He intended--to fulfill the promises that He gave through the holy prophets.

Your work is to maintain this view. The work of preachers and teachers is to keep this matter before the people. Let those who represent Christ get out of the novelty shop, and into the antique shop! The "old paths" are the paths of blessing--the paths revealed in the Gospel of Christ (Jer 6:16). May you experience the freshness of the New Covenant, the glory of it, and the effectiveness of it. May your greatest knowledge be of God, and your closest fellowship with Him through Christ Jesus the Lord. Everything required for your full acceptance is in place right now.

"Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the sanctuary and the true tent which is set up not by man but by the Lord. For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; hence it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary; for when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, 'See that you make everything according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.' But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry which is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion for a second. For he finds fault with them when he says: "The days will come, says the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; for they did not continue in my covenant, and so I paid no heed to them, says the Lord. This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach every one his fellow or every one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more. In speaking of a new covenant he treats the first as obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away " (*Hebrews 8:1-13, RSV*) .

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

Commentary on the book of Hebrews

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #13

A NEW

APPROACH TO GOD

“Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary. For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place. And behind the second veil, there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant. And above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail. Now when these things have been thus prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle, performing the divine worship, but into the second only the high priest enters, once a year, not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed, while the outer tabernacle is still standing, which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation” (Hebrews 9:1-10, NASB).

INTRODUCTION

There is a remarkable tendency in mankind to be satisfied with introductory religion--a type of service to God that never really enters into His Presence. To stay on the surface is satisfying to the shallow soul, but not to the one desiring to dwell in the courts of the Lord. The phenomenal success of religion that does not require the heart, soul, mind, and strength of the people is staggering. Froth and foam are appropriate descriptions of the preponderance of popular religion. As with the waves of the sea, of course, froth and foam are present on the surface. They are unstable, changing, and shifting. It is as though the “old serpent” had foisted upon lethargic spirits a form of religion that accomplishes very little, yet salves the conscience. The Spirit calls this a “form of godliness that denies the power thereof” (2 Tim 3:5).

You will not find this type of approach to God in the book of Hebrews. Our

hearts and minds are summoned into the arena of holy contemplation as the Holy Spirit seeks to establish us in the faith. You will not find extensive dialog about the affairs of this life, or problems related to domestic, political, and sociological life. Of course, this is also true of the rest of *“the Apostles’ doctrine.”* The Person of Christ is the heart of this book, and the nature of the New Covenant its thrust. Here God shows us not only the way to spiritual stability, but the Divine commitment to underwrite the good fight of faith.

People are too often left in the outer court, remaining at a practical distance from God. In this position, they are not as sensitive to God as salvation allows. They are not as wise concerning the devil’s devices as salvation provides. They are not as active in the Lord’s vineyard as salvation requires. For all practical purposes, they are like a priest of the tabernacle remaining in the outer court

There are at least three glorious dimensions to God’s “great salvation.” **First** , it extricates us from sin, delivering us from confinement to the realm of the curse. **Second** , it also removes the personal contamination and defilement caused by sin, washing us from our transgressions. **Third** , it provides the means of remaining pure and clean in order to continually and confidently come before God. The latter provision is the emphasis of the book of Hebrews. This volume assumes people are *“in Christ,”* that they have been baptized into Christ (their bodies *“washed with pure water,”* 10:22). The assumption is that the faith has already been embraced. The maintenance of that faith is now the issue. This is seen in the following phrases of exhortation. *“How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation . . . But Christ as a Son over His own house; Whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end . . . For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end . . . For if we sin wilfully AFTER that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins . . . See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven”* (2:3; 3:6,14; 10:26; 12:25).

Here is a very neglected area in contemporary religion. People are too often left in the outer court, remaining at a practical distance from God. In this position, they are not as sensitive to God as salvation allows. They are not as wise concerning the devil’s devices as salvation provides. They are not as active in the Lord’s vineyard as salvation requires. For all practical purposes, they are like a priest of the tabernacle remaining in the outer court — never going into the holy place to actually serve the Lord, not going into the most holy place for communion with the Lord of hosts. Such a priest would have been ineffectual and pointless. The outer court was a place of preparation. It was never meant to be the place of perpetual service or of communion.

I would once again remind you that the outer court was left out of the measurement accomplished in John’s vision of the ages. John was directed by a holy angel to *“measure”* certain things. He was to put them to the test, seeing if they were acceptable to God. The words of this angel are arresting. *“Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, “Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles”* (11:1-2). Corruption had entered the church. The time had come to test

its substance by the Divine standard. Three items were to be measured: (1) the temple of God, (2) the altar, and (3) those who worship there. The *“temple of God”* is the people of God (1 Cor 3:16-17). The *“altar”* is the means of reconciliation and approach to God--a means which also sustains the soul (Heb 13:10). Those *“who worship there”* are the individuals claiming identity with God (John 4:23; Heb 10:2). John is here commissioned to test the validity of the professed church, the means by which they seek to approach God, and the individuals that wear His name. All are subject to Divine examination.

The instruction to John, however, did not end here. There was one aspect of religion which he was not to measure or test. It had to do with religion--professed allegiance to Christ--but God would have nothing to do with it. *“But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles”* (Rev 11:2). The approach to God had become an area dominated by those who were ignorant of God--*“Gentiles which know not God”* (1 Thess 4:5). If you are even casually familiar with the sectarian “Christian” world, you know of the remarkable diversity of approaches to God. They range from filling out a card and shaking a religious leaders hand, to praying the *“sinners prayer,”* agonizing at an altar, or repeating a pray constructed by some man. People are encouraged to come to God through a sort of human mediator, upon the basis of their own works, or by subscribing to a humanly-devised ritual or liturgy. The *“outer court,”* or approach to God, has been defiled!

Of the outer court, God says *“LEAVE IT OUT, and MEASURE IT NOT!”* This is NOT the area of emphasis for the man of God! Men may disagree with the assessment, but it is still there! To be sure, this area will eventually be measured by God, for He will be justified in *“all of His sayings”* (Rom 3:4). When dealing with alien sinners, the way of initial approach to God must be declared. But when it comes to speaking to the people of God, the outer court is not the message! Dwelling there is disastrous, for it is a place occupied by many who know not God and have no part in the inheritance. In the case of John the revelator, he gave Christ’s message to the churches. Thus, he was told to refrain from measuring the outer court.

Your familiarity with the book of Hebrews will confirm the absence of any reference to the outer court. It is *“left out.”* The *“altar”* is mentioned (Heb 7:13; 13:10), but not the outer court. The *“laver”* is not mentioned, although an illusion is made to the washing that occurred there (Heb 10:22). This is not a book outlining our initial approach to God! It is written to those that have been reconciled to God, and have passed the outer court. It delineates the provisions of the New Covenant, which are designed to bring us *“within the veil,”* into communion with the living God, through Jesus Christ His Son, and by the Holy Spirit. **THE NEW COVENANT IS DESIGNED TO ACHIEVE THIS OBJECTIVE .** The book of Hebrews, in particular, addresses this matter with great power. It declares that God has made provision for His people to come near. It also affirms the unquestionable danger and jeopardy associated with remaining at a distance from God.

To bring this point home to Jewish believers, the Spirit appeals to the tabernacle of old. The primary purpose of this portable structure was not to provide a routine for Israel, although that was accomplished. In its design, God mirrored the realities that would be accomplished within the New Covenant. It was a sort of projection of the approach to God that would be realized under the New Covenant. The picture is precise, and remarkably detailed. We do well to

consider it. The Israelites were custodians of this shadow, but it extended beyond them.

REGULATIONS OF DIVINE SERVICE

The heart of the Old Covenant was found in the Tabernacle. There is where the covenantal provisions took place. There is where effective the offerings were made, the washings were accomplished, and the service was accomplished. If the priest was to serve God effectively, he could not do so outside of the confines of the tabernacle provisions. Here is where the effective work was accomplished. Here is where the atonement was made. Here is where Divine judgment and direction were revealed. Here is where atonement was made.

“Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship .” Remember, the purpose for the regulations was the depiction of heavenly realities. They were not an end of themselves. Neither, indeed, were they an affirmation of the need for *“regulations [ordinances, KJV] of divine worship”* under Jesus Christ. These regulations, or ceremonial ordinances, were for the body, not the soul. They were peculiarly adapted for individuals that were NOT reconciled to God, and had not been born again. They were enactments of principles designed to prepare the way for the coming Savior of the world.

Note, men approached to God by procedure--lifeless procedure. However, that procedure, being duly ordained of God, was a precise depiction of the approach to God. It was similar to a stained glass window. Viewed from without, it was flat and dull. However, viewed from within, it obtains inexplicable beauty and meaning as the light shines through it. Thus the Spirit takes us within the redemptive purpose of God, and from that vantage point, He will view the ordinances of the Old Covenant. Just as a stained glass window is not an end of itself, but the image therein portrayed, so it was with the Old Covenant. The imagery seen therein is the point--imagery that points to Christ Jesus.

Notice, DIVINE service or worship is the point! The service of God, not man, is the issue. Approaching the Lord God takes the precedence in this text, particularly regarding service rendered to Him. The word translated service is **latreiaj** (latreias), which means *“religious service based in worship . . . service of God.”* This is an important concept. There is an aspect of religion that involves service to man. It is covered by the second table of the Law, and is summarized in the second summary, and subordinate, commandment, *“Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”* This is NOT the subject under consideration here. We are dealing exclusively with coming to and serving the Lord God. Throughout the Law, and in Christ Jesus, this emphasis is maintained. God first, man second. Service to God first, service to man second. The Spirit here elevates the aspect of the Law dealing with approaching to and serving God above everything else.

We are going to behold things in the Old Covenant procedures that were not seen by men of former generations. The ceremonial law will be seen as a precise prelude to the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. We will see that

if men do not come to God, nothing else really matters. The whole point of both covenants was to bring men to God. Under the First Covenant, the coming was typical. Under New Covenant it is in reality. Under the Old Covenant it was external. Under the New Covenant it is internalized.

There is a valid approach to God. It is both precise and effective. It is not haphazard, nor is it left to the whims of men. Human opinion is not only invalid in this matter, it is unlawful. The approach **MUST** be instituted by God Himself, down to the most meticulous required detail. The approach must address the matter of atonement, as foreshadowed in the brazen altar. It must also provide for cleansing, as typified by the laver of washing. There must be a place for service, isolated from the world, and a place for communion. The approach must provide for continual illumination, and regular sustenance for the individual.

AN EARTHLY SANCTUARY

Because the First Covenant was basically a fleshly one, the sanctuary, or place of service, was an earthly one. It was seen, and it was tangible. It was also constructed by men, precisely constructed according to a revealed pattern. *“Now even the first covenant had . . . the earthly sanctuary.”* A “sanctuary” is a holy place; an area where God alone is served. Such a place is not multi-purpose. Activities not performed unto God are not allowed in this place--it is a sanctuary. Here is where God is approached. It is where the consciousness of God dominates. The *“sanctuary”* is a place dedicated to God, and consecrated to His service. God is the **ONLY** reason for the *“sanctuary.”* Without Him, there is no purpose for such a dwelling.

No gold adorned the exterior or the tabernacle, no silver, no costly stones. The beautiful tapestry was all within, hidden from the eyes of those outside of the tabernacle. So it is with the true habitation of God. From without, men count it unworthy of their effort. It does not appear to be worth the forfeiture of all competing influences. That is why men do not sell all, as it were, to obtain it.

Let no one suppose that the New Covenant has an *“earthly”* or *“worldly sanctuary.”* Men may use the term *“sanctuary”* loosely, but the Holy Spirit does not. Remember, the *“sanctuary”* of the Old Covenant was part of the *“pattern”* which served as *“a copy and shadow of the heavenly things”* (Heb 8:5). It answered to several expressions found in the Psalms. Here was a place of protection, where the oppressed could hide. *“For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in His pavilion : in the secret of His tabernacle shall he hide me”* (Psa 27:5). An acute awareness of God was associated with the hiding place. *“Thou shalt hide them in the secret of Thy presence from the pride of man: thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues”* (Psa 31:20). Here is where the heart of David resided, and where he longed to be--in the presence of the Lord. *“ . . . I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever”* (Psa 23:6). *“One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple ”* (Psa 27:4). *“Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God”* (Psa 92:13). *“For a day in Thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God , than to dwell in the tents of wickedness”* (Psa 84:10).

There is a place where God dominates the consciousness, where His favor is known, and His grace is experienced. It is a place from which Satan has been expelled, and to which he has no access at all (Rev 12:7-9). Righteousness, peace, and joy are known in this place (Rom 15:13). Here life is lived *“unto the Lord,”* self is *“denied,”* and *“victory”* is experienced (Rom 6:11,13; 14:8; Matt 16:24; Gal 5:24; 1 John 5:4-5). This was foreshadowed by the tabernacle of old--a *“worldly”* or *“earthly sanctuary.”* A brief review of this *“worldly sanctuary”* will confirm the precision of the type.

First, it had a crude outward appearance. It was covered with *“badgers’ skins”* (Ex 26:14). No gold adorned the exterior of the tabernacle, no silver, no costly stones. The beautiful tapestry was all within, hidden from the eyes of those outside of the tabernacle. So it is with the true habitation of God. From without, men count it unworthy of their effort. It does not appear to be worth the forfeiture of all competing influences. That is why men do not sell all, as it were, to obtain it.

Second, it was beautiful within. Although crude on the outside, it was marked by unparalleled beauty within. The curtains that formed the walls of the tabernacle were comprised of ten curtains *“of fine twined linen, and blue, and purple, and scarlet: with cherubim of cunning work”* (Ex 26:1). These curtains were coupled together with 50 taches of gold (Ex 26:6). 50 bronze clasps were used to put the tabernacle together (26:11). The sides of the tabernacle were constructed of boards of acacia wood. These boards were overlaid with gold, and joined with silver sockets (Ex 36). The veil separating the holiest place from the holy place was made *“blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen: with cherubim made he it of cunning work”* 36:24). Pillars of acacia wood were constructed over which to hang the curtains. These pillars were also overlaid with pure gold (36:36-38). Infinitely more detail is provided in the “pattern” than this. This will suffice to confirm the absolute beauty and worthy of the interior of the tabernacle.

Third, angelic figures were prominent within the tabernacle. Upon the curtains around the interior of the tabernacle were *“cherubim of cunning work”* (26:1,31; 36:8,35). Our first exposure to cherubim is in the Garden of Eden. There, representatives from this holy number guarded the way to the tree of life, prohibiting any mortal from gaining access to it. The next mentioning of cherubim is in the book of exodus, where representations of them adorned the interior of the tabernacle. This was a marvelous depiction of the angelic hosts that minister in the behalf of the heirs of salvation (Heb 1:13-14). It also foreshadowed the fellowship with them that is enjoyed in Christ Jesus. We have, after all, come into the presence of myriads of angels in joyful assembly (Heb 12:22).

Fourth, there was a division between the place of service, or worship, and actual communion. There were two compartments within the tabernacle. One was for service, and was called *“the holy place,”* and the other *“the most holy”* (Ex 26:33-34). Work was done in one section, while communication and representation were accomplished in the other. A veil separated these compartments. The *“most holy place”* was precisely that-- *“MOST holy.”* It was superior to the *“holy place.”* The activity that took place in the *“most holy”* validated the remaining activity. Here was a marvelously precise picture of the superiority of Divine fellowship--a fellowship into which we have been called by the grace of God (1 Cor 1:9).

In summary, the *“earthly sanctuary”* acquainted men with the approachableness of God! That approach was limited in every way under the First Covenant. It was limited in regard to **WHO** could approach. It was limited respecting **WHEN** they could approach. The condition of the people did not allow the approach to be opened to all. But the thought was presented, and that with remarkable precision. God was showing men that once He was satisfied, He would be fully approachable by those

in His covenant! Glory to God! We are living in the day of approach, when the Lord cries out **“Come unto Me!”** Matt 11:28; John 7:37; Heb 7:19; James 4:8). There is no justifiable reason for standing aloof from God--for failing to come confidently to Him. The way has been provided and sanctified! Let the people of God arise and go to their Father!

THE HOLY PLACE

The Spirit now elaborates upon the particulars of the tabernacle. Remember, it is the revealed pattern of heavenly realities. **“For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place.”** The term **“outer one”** refers to the **“holy place.”** When you entered the tabernacle, this was the immediate room. It was, in a sense, the vestibule to the **“most holy,”** or **“holiest of all.”** The Lord isolates the things upon which He wants us to think.

The Lampstand

In this **“holy place,”** a remarkable light existed. It was not a single candle, but a multifaceted light--a **“lampstand.”** Scripture apprizes us it was constructed of a single piece of pure gold, and was as unusual piece of craftsmanship. It has a branch of support called a “shaft.” Three independent branches were found on each side of this branch, allowing for seven lights in all. Bowls for containing pure oil from beaten olives was on each of the six branches. Each bowl was to be **“shaped like almond flowers with buds and blossoms”** (NIV). Four additional cups were to be shaped **“on the lampstand,”** also **“shaped like almond flowers with buds and blossoms .”** Three of the **“cups”** were to be positioned under three pairs of the six branches. The instructions are precise. **“The buds and branches shall all be of one piece with the lampstand, hammered out of pure gold.”** Seven lamps were to be mounted on the lampstand to shed light before it. Wick trimmers and trays of pure gold were also to be made for the golden lampstand. The amount of gold used to construct the lampstand and associated articles was one talent, or 75 pounds (Ex 25:31-39). Further, God enjoined Moses, **“See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.”**

Here are several things to be seen in this shadow. **First** , it depicted the value of illumination, or spiritual understanding. How precious the knowledge and wisdom that comes from God! **Second** , it was found in the **“holy place,”** apart from the world. The golden lampstand was not used for light outside the tabernacle. It was to stay in the dedicated place, and was not available to anyone outside those confines. So it is that Christ is made unto us **“wisdom”** --it cannot be found outside of Him (1 Cor 1:30). Too, the comprehension of God is found alone **“in the face of Christ Jesus,”** Who Himself is the antitype of the lampstand (2 Cor 4:6).

He also is continually before the Lord as a Reminder of the people of God. As Representative, He always lives “to make intercession for us” (Heb 7:25). But Jesus is also for our consumption. The heavenly Bread must be eaten during the “rest” of faith! After all, we which believe “do enter into rest” (Heb 4:3). There is no question about the Bread God has provided — it is to be eaten if eternal life is to be possessed

Third , illumination from God, called **“spiritual understanding”** (Col 1:9), has a common source and objective. It is not divided, but is marked by the most precise oneness. That is why **“truth”** is always found in the singular, as well as **“doctrine,”** when applied to the teaching of God (John 1:17; 8:32; 14:6; Gal 3:1; Eph 4:15,21; 2 Thess 2:10; 2 Tim 2:18; Acts 2:42; 13:12; Rom 6:17; 1 Tim 1:10; 4:16; Tit 2:1,7; 2 John 9). It is true that the NIV uses the word **“truths”** four times (1 Cor

2:13; 1 Tim 3:9; 4:6; Heb 5:12). The only time *“doctrines”* is used by the Spirit, it has reference to invalid teachings. We read of the *“doctrines and commandments of men”* (Matt 15:9; Mark 7:7), the *“doctrines of men”* (Col 2:22), *“doctrines of demons”* (1 Tim 4:1), and *“strange doctrines”* (Heb 13:9).

The word consistently used for “truth” (**alhqeij**) is not used in any of those texts. The first text (1 Cor 2:13), uses the word **logoij** (logos), which is properly translated “words.” The second text (1 Tim 3:9), uses the word **musthriion** (musterion), which is properly translated “mystery” or “secret.” The third text (1 Tim 4:6), again uses the word **logoij** (logos). The fourth text (Heb 5:12), uses the word **logiwn** (logion), which means “oracles, sayings, or message.” Truth is a single body of interrelated realities. It has a single focus, and comes from a single source. It is only effective in one arena, and brings true understanding. How perfectly the truth of God is seen in the golden lampstand!

The Table and the Sacred Bread

Within the *“holy place,”* there was a table made of acacia wood, and overlaid with pure gold. It also had a number of utensils made of pure gold (Ex 37:10-16). Twelve loaves of unleavened bread were placed upon this table, representing the twelve tribes of Israel.. They were to be fresh every Sabbath, and were presented *“before the Lord.”* The older bread was eaten by the priests. Whatever was left was burned with incense as an offering to the Lord (Lev 24:5-9). Bread, placed before God as a reminder of His people--bread that was consumed by the priests, and was ALWAYS before the Lord.

Here is a most lovely picture of the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is *“the Bread of God”* (John 6:33). He also is continually before the Lord as a Reminder of the people of God. As Representative, He always lives *“to make intercession for us”* (Heb 7:25). But Jesus is also for our consumption. The heavenly Bread must be eaten during the *“rest”* of faith! After all, we which believe *“do enter into rest”* (Heb 4:3). There is no question about the Bread God has provided — it is to be eaten if eternal life is to be possessed. *“This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world”* (John 6:50-51). Mark it well, the Bread of God is eaten in the holy place, and during the rest of faith. How precisely the pattern speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ! You cannot partake of Christ in the outer court! You must come into the Holy Place to derive nourishment and benefit from Him!

BEYOND THE VEIL

One of the unique marks of the New Covenant is that it goes further than anything before it. At

Not only could this sacred cubicle not be entered, it could not be seen. The veil was thick--so thick it hung as an impenetrable barrier to both vision and entrance. The things “beyond the veil” could not be touched. They could not be handled. They could not be seen. They were out of reach and unlawful, except at the appointed time.

every part of the Old Covenant there was limitation. The non-priestly people could not enter the tabernacle. Those who were priests could have no blemishes or physical handicaps. The High Priest could only enter the Holiest Place once a year, and he could not enter without blood. The limitation is summarized by this phrase, *“And behind the second veil, there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies.”* Not even the High Priest could go *“beyond the veil,”* except at the appointed time--once a year.

Not only could this sacred cubicle not be entered, it could not be seen. The veil was thick--so thick it hung as an impenetrable barrier to both vision and entrance. The things *“beyond the veil”* could not be touched. They could not be handled. They could not be seen. They were out of reach and unlawful, except at the appointed time. Even then, no entry privileges were extended to the people, regardless of the disciplined manner in which they had conducted their lives. No curious glimpses were permitted. No parting of the veil! The veil stood as a barrier to the unqualified and the untimely.

This was the veil that was violently torn from the top to the bottom when Jesus poured out His soul unto death. The language that depicts this event is unmistakably awe-inspiring. As it is written, *“Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised”* (Matt 27:51-52, NKJV). Mark wrote, *“And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last. Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom”* (Mark 15:37-38). Luke wrote, *“Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two. And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, ‘Father, ‘into Your hands I commit My spirit.’ Having said this, He breathed His last”* (Luke 23:44-46, NKJV). Each of the Gospel writers provides a key insight. Matthew accentuates the **triumph of the hour**, with graves being opened and many bodies of the saints being raised. Mark emphasizes the **culmination of Divine purpose** by mentioning Jesus crying out and breathing His last. Luke underscores **the precision of the moment** by mentioning the reign of darkness during the cursing of Jesus, and Christ’s committal of Himself to God. The Revised Version has the technically most accurate rendering, i.e., *“the sun’s light failed.”* The NIV says, *“the sun stopped shining.”* This was not an eclipse, but a convulsion of nature as the curse of the Almighty fell upon His *“only begotten Son.”*

But in all three accounts, the most significant event appears to be the tearing of the thick temple veil. What occurred at this time is so marvelous human speech fails to adequately describe it. Prior to the death of Christ, not only were men forbidden to eat from the tree of life, they could not enter into the immediate presence of the Lord. The imagery of the tabernacle precisely depicted the condition. There was an impenetrable barrier between the Almighty and His offspring that would not allow the intimacy between them God desired. Human initiative was to no avail to go beyond this veil. Should one venture to do so, he would pay with his life.

This stood for the human condition--the impact sin had upon our race. Even the chosen people were forbidden to enter into the presence of the Lord. The Levitical priests, with all of their privileges, could not do so. The High Priest, chosen by God, could only do so once every 8,736 hours--or once a year! Even in the hour of crisis, the High priest could not make an emergency entrance into the Most Holy Place. There was an appointed veil that kept him from entering, and the irrevocable law of God to keep him from presuming to do so. Sin had blocked the way to heaven, locked the gate, and threw a shroud of hopelessness over the human race! Men were separated from the Living God!!

But when Jesus died, the arm of the Lord was revealed, Satan frustrated, and the gates of death torn off their hinges! The veil was not torn from the bottom up, as though it were accomplished by humanity. It was not torn in two AFTER Jesus rose from the dead, so it could be accomplished by Him personally. It was violently ripped in two from the top. It is as though God took hold of the veil and tore it asunder in an expression of Divine joy. Matthew and Mark state the veil was torn from *“top to bottom,”* while Luke simply states it was *“torn in two.”* However, the point in all three is that it was an act of God Himself. Because of the vicarious atonement of Jesus, God refused to leave a barrier between Himself and the needy ones! He removed it so *“whosoever will” may come,* and *“take of the water of life freely”* (Rev 22:17).

Later in this book, this *“veil”* is identified with Christ’s *“flesh.”* *“Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh . . . let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of . . .”* (Heb 10:19-22, NASB). For some, this is a difficult text, but it need not be so. Simply put, when Christ’s *“flesh”* was taken from us, we gained access to God. When He left here, we were enabled to go there! His bodily presence, in a way, confirmed the inaccessibility of God. As long as He was here, those closest to Him were unable to decipher the mysteries of the Kingdom. They did not see Him as He really was. But when He died, and was exalted to the right hand of God, the redeemed gained something vision could not give them! They gained access to God, and it erupted in powerful and insightful proclamations, boldness, and a willingness to lay down their lives for their Savior!

Now, there is no more barrier, no more cyclical approaches, no more lengthy periods when God cannot be accessed. The veil has been ripped in two, from God to us! No more coercive fear in His presence, no more fearful ritual, no more exclusion from His presence! The veil has been torn in two, from God’s throne to our humble surroundings! God took the initiative, confirming He is satisfied.

THE MERCY SEAT

Within the Most Holy Place was the ark of the covenant. It stood as a token of God’s commitment to Israel because of the fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But the ark itself was not the primary unit. It is what covered it that was the basis of acceptance. *“And above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the*

mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail.” The *“pattern”* revealed to Moses in the Mount specified that the cherubim were to face each other, looking down at the mercy seat. Their wings were to spread upward, covering the mercy seat (Ex 25:19-20). Peter refers to this imagery when speaking of the great salvation we enjoy in Christ Jesus. *“It was revealed to them [the prophets of old] that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven-- things into which angels long to look”* (1 Pet 1:12). It is shameful that the salvation prepared for all peoples has not engaged the attention of those for whom it is designed, as much as the holy angels, for whom it was NOT prepared. Perhaps one reason for this lamentable situation is that men do not look more intently upon the seat of mercy. There is far too little talk about the grace of God these days. Consequently, grace has not impacted the lives of men as it could.

One of the hallmarks of the New Covenant is its accentuation of mercy. As it

is written, ***“FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE”*** (Heb 8:12). Over the Law, there is mercy. It stands as a mighty sentinel above demands of the Law. It is the reason for Divine guidance, as well as Divine sustenance. It is a deep repository of goodness that has been opened for sin and uncleanness. Oh, that men were more enamored of grace and mercy than of procedure. They would sooner do the works of God if they could only see His mercy! Let them emulate the holy cherubim, who are depicted as peering into the covenantal ark! The imagery is so rich, the Spirit cannot open the vastness of its goodness to us now. Suffice it to say, the mercy and grace of God are the dominating consideration in the Holiest Place. That represents closeness to the Lord, and access to His abundant goodness.

PERFORMING DIVINE WORSHIP

The RSV captures the sense of the text: *“performing their ritual duties.”* This was not an activity of the heart, or of discernment. It was a routine--a revealed routine. It was accomplished at a prescribed time, in a prescribed manner, and by a prescribed person. The activity prefigured an effective ministry that was to be accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ.

The “outer tabernacle,” or “holy place,” was the place of service. Thus it is written, ***“Now when these things have been thus prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle, performing the Divine worship.”*** Oh, what a word it is: ***“PERFORMING the Divine worship.”*** The KJV says ***“accomplishing the service of God.”*** The RSV captures the sense of the text: ***“performing their ritual duties.”*** This was not an activity of the heart, or of discernment. It was a routine--a revealed routine. It was accomplished at a prescribed time, in a prescribed manner, and by a prescribed person. The activity prefigured an effective ministry that was to be accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ.

The ***“Divine worship,”*** or ***“service of God,”*** did not take away sin, cleanse the conscience, or bring people into intimacy with God. It was a procedure--a lifeless procedure. If we look at it closely, we will see a prefigurement of the New Covenant. From evening until morning Aaron and his sons tended the Holy Place, keeping it in order (Ex 27:21). They took care of it much like Adam and Eve were to take care of the Garden. They burned incense every morning, when they trimmed the lamps. Likewise, every evening, when Aaron again trimmed the lamps, he burned incense. It was the role of the priests to keep a “perpetual incense before the Lord throughout all their generations” (Ex 30:7-8). A constant sweet fragrance was to emit from the Holy Place. Constant illumination, and perpetual fragrance were accomplished through a ritual--a ***“carnal ordinance.”***

Here is a most wonderful picture of things associated with the New Covenant. First, because of the atonement of Christ, there is a continual sweet fragrance before the Throne of God. Anything and anyone associated with the Son of God appropriates this sweet fragrance, becoming well pleasing to God. The condition is reminiscent of Noah’s sacrifice following the flood. ***“Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the LORD smelled the soothing aroma; and the LORD said to Himself, ‘I will never***

Jesus suffered “outside the gate,” or outside the confines of the city, Jerusalem. This circumstance fulfilled the type introduced by the Law. The body of the sin offering for the congregation was burned “outside the camp” (Lev 4:21). In Christ’s case, He died apart from fellowship with man or God. He was alone, in every sense of the word.

again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I

will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done” (Gen 8:20-21). This was a faint reflection of the effect of Christ’s substitutionary death. Too, the burnt offerings made under the Law were said to send forth “*a soothing aroma before the LORD*” (Ex 29:18,25,41; Lev 1:9,13,17, etc.). All of this was a shadow of the sacrifice of Christ. The factor that made them pleasant to the Lord was not the offering itself, but that it pointed to the ultimate sacrifice for sin. This “*soothing aroma,*” or “*sweet savor*” (KJV) is mentioned 36 times in Leviticus and Numbers.

The difference between the soothing aroma of the sin offerings and that of the incense in the Holy Place is significant. The fragrance in the Holy Place was perpetual, the fragrance of the burnt offerings were according to times and seasons. This more perfectly depicted the nature of the New Covenant. Christ’s presence at the right hand of God guarantees a continual sweet savor. God is never displeased with His Son--never dissatisfied with His atonement--always delighting in what He accomplished in behalf of lost humanity. He will never dishonor the Son by rejecting those who cleave to Him with purpose of heart. He will always forgive those in the Son who confess their sins to Him. Because of the continual fragrance of Christ’s atoning sacrifice, God is both “*just and Justifier*” of him that believes in Jesus (Rom 3:24-26).

Satan seeks to rob the saint of this awareness. If he cannot lure them into the indulgence of the lusts of the flesh, he will tempt them with the notion they can earn His favor. If he can provoke a believer to depart from the faith, that individual has also departed from the fragrance. Out of Christ men occupy an area in which God CANNOT BE PLEASED. In Christ Jesus, we are where God CANNOT BE DISPLEASED. Our responsibility is to “*abide*” in Him! No effort must be spared in this endeavor. Every competing influence must be subdued.

ONLY THE HIGH PRIEST

Those who imagine themselves capable of pleasing God on their own must look more closely at the shadow found in the Levitical law. However notably the priests performed in the Holy Place, it was ONLY the High Priest that could enter into the Holiest of all. “*But into the second ONLY the high priest enters, once a year, not without taking blood . . .*” Here was a function no person could take upon himself. ONLY the High Priest, and only once a year. No amount of noble activity could qualify one to enter the Holiest of all. Entrance was by appointment--an appointed individual at an appointed time, and for an appointed purpose.

This signified the entrance of Jesus into heaven itself to begin His ministry in behalf of His people. He was God’s appointed Representative. He entered the world at God’s appointed time (Gal 4:4). He died at an appointed time, and in an appointed way (Matt 26:18; Acts 2:23). He was raised from the dead at an appointed time (Matt 16:21; Acts 10:40; 1 Cor 15:4). He is now our appointed High Priest at the right hand of God (Heb 3:2; 5:5-6).

Just as the blood of the sin offering had to be brought inside the veil, so Christ’s

blood had to be taken into heaven itself. As it is written, *“Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us”* (Heb 9:12). He suffered *“outside the gate”* in order that He might *“sanctify the people with His own blood”* (Heb 13:12). Jesus suffered *“outside the gate,”* or outside the confines of the city, Jerusalem. This circumstance fulfilled the type introduced by the Law. The body of the sin offering for the congregation was burned *“outside the camp”* (Lev 4:21). In Christ’s case, He died apart from fellowship with man or God. He was alone, in every sense of the word.

However, that is not where the atonement was made. Jesus had to enter heaven for us to receive the merits of His sacrifice. The effectiveness of His death takes place in heaven, where the offended One resides. John saw the effectiveness of Christ’s present ministry when he was on the Isle of Patmos. He beheld the exalted Savior as *“a Lamb as it had been slain”* (Rev 5:6). The Lamb was alive, but bore the marks of a newly, or freshly, killed Lamb. The intention of this imagery is to show the effectiveness of Christ’s sacrifice. **It is not treated as an historical occurrence in heaven!** The merit of Christ’s death is as fresh today as the day He entered heaven *“with His own blood.”* God recognizes and delights in that death because it has allowed Him to justly confer righteousness upon all who come to Him through that Lamb. The closer you get to heaven in your thinking, the more convinced you become of the effectiveness of the death and intercession of Jesus Christ!

The earthly priesthood reflected the heavenly one, but not precisely. The purpose of the earthly High priest’s activity was to ensure the people were not destroyed. The purpose for Christ’s activity is to ensure we are brought to glory. A reconciliation of the enemies has now occurred, effectualizing His ministry. How marvelous that we have been made accepted in the Beloved ! Draw near and enjoy communion with Him!

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS SIGNIFYING

It is not that the saints of old had no access to God, and that is not the intent of the passage. The way was not FULLY revealed to them. It lay hidden in obscure prophecies, types, shadows, and sacrifices. Occasionally some one would catch a glimpse of the grandeur of access to God, but it was nothing to compare with what saints now can behold.

The Spirit of truth IS making a point in this matter. Note, it does not say He HAS signified something, but that He IS SIGNIFYING! After all, the Word of God is living and powerful. It is historical, to be sure, but it is infinitely more than that! The writings of Moses are also historical, but they do not have the power of the Gospel! It is ever true, and we do well not to forget it, *“The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life”* (2 Cor 3:6). And what is the Holy Spirit signifying to us? *“The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed, while the outer tabernacle is still standing.”*

Oh, what a truth is found here! From the viewpoint of Israel of old, as long as the tabernacle stood, the veil at the entrance of it kept the people from entering the holy place. The veil between the Holy Place and the Holiest kept the priests from entering the Most Holy Place. This was a withholding covenant--a prohibitive one. It was noted more for what the people could NOT do than for

what they could so.

But there is more to the text than this. As long as the outer, or temporal, tabernacle stood, the way into the real holy place remained obscure. Commitment to the type withheld the glory of the substance! The real way to God was not known! It was not until Christ that the “*Way*” became clear. It is He that inaugurated a “*new and living way,*” sanctifying it for us (Heb 10:20). It is the Gospel of Christ that brings “*life and immortality to light,*” formerly hidden to the most holy of men (1 Tim 1:10). Blessed are those who see!

It is not that the saints of old had no access to God, and that is not the intent of the passage. The way was not FULLY revealed to them. It lay hidden in obscure prophecies, types, shadows, and sacrifices. Occasionally some one would catch a glimpse of the grandeur of access to God, but it was nothing to compare with what saints now can behold. As it is written, “*Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit*” (Eph 3:5). But it is not confined to the “holy apostles and prophets.” We are apprized that we “*may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God*” (Eph 3:18-19).

But there is still more to this text. Those who insist on commitment to shadows and types--to form alone, when the substance is accessible--will be unable to see the grandeur of salvation. They will not know the way to God, and will flounder in practical alienation from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them (Eph 4:18). The way to heaven has been revealed, and it is a grievous sin to ignore it in preference for religious routine! When you gaze upon the shadow, the substance is hidden to you!

Just as Moses’ face glowed only when he beheld the Lord, so we are transformed only as behold the Lord Jesus Himself. There is no power in the type--the power is in the substance. There is no transforming efficacy in the shadow--that is only in the Substance!

Your gaze must be fixed on the Substance, which is of Christ, and not upon preparatory types. As it is written, “*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit*” (2 Cor 3:18). Just as Moses’ face glowed only when he beheld the Lord, so we are transformed only as behold the Lord Jesus Himself. There is no power in the type--the power is in the substance. There is no transforming efficacy in the shadow--that is only in the Substance!

Those who addict themselves to religious externals, to the neglect of the Substance, confine themselves to this world. Although little known by the contemporary church, the message to the Colossians is most appropriate. First, believers are not to allow anyone to bring them under enslavement to religious types. “*Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day-- things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ*” (Col 2:16-17). The reason for this condition is obvious. The Object to which the shadows pointed is here--received by God, and available to men. To ignore that Divine

provision in preference for what **prepared** men for it, is inexcusable. God simply will not allow it to go unchallenged.

Secondly, to attempt to appropriate righteousness by a disciplinary procedure, as they did under the shadowy Law, is completely out of order. That is why the Spirit says, *“Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations; ‘Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,’ which all concern things which perish with the using; according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh”* (Col 2:20-23, NKJV). A hearty embrace of this affirmation would dry up a great number of contemporary seminars and work shops!

Although it grieves me to say it, much of the religion around us has more in common with the tabernacle than with the risen Christ and the New Covenant! Such things ought not to be. Let us live in the New, not the Old. There is a staggering amount of time spent in useless activities in the average assembly--activities that have little, if anything, to do with coming to God and appropriating covenantal benefits. God’s people must declare war on such conditions! They are inexcusable. When the way has been cleared to God, it is sinful beyond imagination to dwell in far off places.

A SYMBOL FOR THAT PRESENT TIME

With all its beauty, craftsmanship, and precise ordinances, the tabernacle was only a *“symbol for the present time.”* I cannot help but observe, if such beauty adorned the symbol, what beauty must characterize the substance! Here is the affirmation of the Spirit. *“ . . . the outer tabernacle . . . is a symbol for the present time.”* The phrase *“the present time”* does not mean our time, or the period that now exists. This is an idiom meaning *“the time in which it existed.”* More precisely **“THAT present time.”** It was not for the past or the future, but only the time during which it remained. It was a temporary provision for a temporary period. It did not serve an eternal purpose, but only an introductory one. It conveyed to men an idea that would later be elaborated. It was suited for the age in which it was provided, but it is not suited for this age of greater illumination.

Interestingly enough, the word translated *“figure ”* (KJV), *“symbol”* (NASB), and *“illustration”* (NIV) is **parabolh** . (Parabola), from which we get the word *“parable.”* It is used in Mark 4:30 (*“comparison”*), Luke 8:9 & 11 (*“parable”*), and Hebrews 11:9 (*“figure”*). Here, in the tabernacle, was a unique parable of heavenly things. As with all parables, it was adapted to those with no intimate knowledge of Kingdom realities.

Now that Jesus has come, parables are not the superior form of teaching. When the realities are introduced, parables become secondary, at the best. Of His exaltation Jesus said, *“These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; an hour is coming when I will speak no more to you in figurative language, but will tell you plainly of the Father”* (John 16:25, NASB). That hour has come, bless God! What was once valid is no longer productive, and is therefore to be abandoned in favor of Reality.

AN IMPERFECT CONSCIENCE

The Spirit now comes to grips with the chief weakness of the tabernacle system. Remember, **this was the Law at its highest level.** This was the **PEAK** of its effectiveness. There were gifts and sacrifice, presented to God by one appointed by God. They were presented precisely and in a timely manner. They were accomplished in the specified place, and at the specified time. What of these sacrifices? How effective were they? Hear the Word of the Lord! ***“Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience.”***

Suffice it to say, preparatory ordinances can never bring to the heart what the Substance does. Men may devote themselves to that type of religion, thinking that all is well with them. But it is not! This is the day of salvation! The shadows have passed!

Although these gifts were offered for *“the worshiper,”* they had no real effect upon him. An observance was accomplished, and that in the proper manner. But *“the worshiper”* was left the same way. He was not *“made perfect in conscience.”* His sins still plagued him. He still stood condemned before a righteous God. A sense of forgiveness did not grip his heart. Instead of promoting a cleansed conscience, the highest point of the Law contaminated the conscience. In those sacrifices, the Spirit affirms, *“there is a reminder of sins”* (Heb 10:3, NASB). The sacrifice stirred up the recollection of transgression. The High Priest did not say to the people, *“Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you!”* No one went down to their house *“justified.”* And who will exchange the joy of sins forgiven for a system, ever so disciplined, that leaves the conscience defiled, driving one from the presence of the Lord?

Suffice it to say, preparatory ordinances can never bring to the heart what the Substance does. Men may devote themselves to that type of religion, thinking that all is well with them. But it is not! This is the day of salvation! The shadows have passed! ***“Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come”*** (2 Cor 5:17, NASB). That newness cannot be adapted to the old and obsolete order. Living by the rules is not enough. The justified ones live *“by faith”* and *“in the Spirit.”* Rules are not difficult for them. However, they are motivated by higher and more consistent principles. The *“Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”* has freed them from the law of sin and death. They are under no obligation to sin!

IMPOSED REGULATIONS

It is not simply that Israel had *“regulations,”* they were *“imposed”* regulations. Our text informs us that the tabernacle ordinances could never produce a cleansed conscience *“since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed . . .”*

Imposition

The word translated “imposed” (KJV, NASB, RSV), or “applying” (NIV) comes from the word **epikeimena** (epikeimena), which means *“to lay upon, press against, and be in control over.”* It is an unusually strong word. This is the only place it is used in this precise form. A variation of it is used in Acts 27:20, where it is said a great tempest *“lay”* on the ship in which Paul resided.

In a sense, these regulations were not something requested by the Israelites. They were *“imposed,”* or *“laid upon”* them. If they wanted to be preserved, they had no choice but to keep them. Even though they were not effective in removing a consciousness of sin, they still

had to keep them. God *“imposed”* them upon the Israelites, and that for a reason.

This imposition was necessary because of the recalcitrance of the people. They were stiff necked and obstinate. Their hearts were hard, and they were calloused. Such a condition requires Divine imposition! His Law was not written upon their hearts, nor was it placed in their minds. Thus, the laws had to be imposed upon them.

More for God That for Israel

If such an approach to God was not effective during the time God imposed it upon the people, how could it possibly be effective now that God has rendered it obsolete?? The utter absurdity of the situation is too apparent for any one with understanding to miss! A religious system that is ineffective to accomplish the intention of God, is unlawful for you! If it cannot yield what God has promised in Christ, it is to be abandoned with haste!

These ordinances would mean more to succeeding generations than they did to Israel. They also meant more to God than they did to the wayward children of Abraham. They served to remind the Lord (I speak as a man) of the coming of His Son, Who would address the human dilemma with effectiveness. They were to Israel what the rainbow was to Noah--a reminder to the Lord of what was to come. You will remember the Lord said of the bow in the sky, *“And it shall come about, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud, and I will remember My covenant, which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and never again shall the water become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the cloud, then I will look upon it, to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth”* (Gen 9:14-16).

***“The time of reformation”* is the time of correction, recovery, and restructure. It is the time when the curse is lifted and the blessing is give. It is the time when the Divine image is recovered, and even enhanced, within fallen man. This is the time of remission, the purged conscience, and of reconciliation to God! It is the first part of the process which will culminate in *“all things”* being made *“new.”* This is the time of rectification, of setting everything straight.**

What we have in the *“regulations”* imposed upon Israel is very similar to Noah’s situation. When those bloody sacrifices were offered, God looked and remembered His covenant to bless the world. He recalled the *“Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,”* Who would be manifested in the *“last times”* (Rev 13:8; 1 Pet 1:20). That enabled God to endure the hardness of the people. Oh, if you can see it, those sacrifices were more for God than for the people. They yield greater benefits to us than they did to them. They were *“imposed”* because the people would have soon forgotten their sin, were this not the case.

Carnal Ordinances

What is called *“regulations”* in the NASB, is called *“carnal ordinances”* in the KJV. Of course, all *“regulations”* are *“carnal ordinances,”* i.e., pertaining to the body. The NKJV translates the words *“fleshly ordinances,”* while the RSV calls it *“regulations for the body.”* The NIV uses the words *“external regulations.”*

Right here we strike at the root of the matter. The administration of Law--any Law--is not for the heart or spirit. It is for the body. Those who serve God under a system of Law consistently emphasize external matters. Mind you, it is not that

there are no external requirements in Christ Jesus. These are not, however, the heart of the matter. They are for people who walk at a distance from God, regardless of their profession.

The reason the sacrifices under Law could not cleanse the conscience is because they did not go that deep. The entire routine was external. Not a single aspect of it was internalized by the ordinances. They stood, or related only to, food, drink, various washings, and regulations for the body.

If such an approach to God was not effective during the time God imposed it upon the people, how could it possibly be effective now that God has rendered it obsolete?? The utter absurdity of the situation is too apparent for any one with understanding to miss! A religious system that is ineffective to accomplish the intention of God, is unlawful for you! If it cannot yield what God has promised in Christ, it is to be abandoned with haste! The time of ineffective religious activities has come to a grinding halt! Such vanities are not recognized by God, and they must not be by us! The time has come to declare war on any and every form of things that are not spiritually productive. Such fall into the category of “*imagination*” and “*high thoughts*” that “*exalt themselves against the knowledge of God*” (2 Cor 10:5-7). Fruitfulness is the trait of the New Covenant! Nothing about it is sterile or unproduction--nothing!

THE TIME OF REFORMATION

I will not take the time to comment on the remarkable prevalence of this type of religion all about us. If you were to remove us from our present bodies (which God will eventually do), some people’s religion would plummet to the ground. There would simply be nothing left for them to do. We are living in the better day, with a better covenant, established upon better promises.

Our text calls this the time of “reformation.” “ . . . *regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.*” Hallelujah, this is the time of “*reformation*” --a time of reconstruction. The day of new things!

The word “*reformation*” comes from **diorqwsewj** (diorthoseos), which means *a process of setting things straight, or setting things right*. It speaks of more than a reshaping, although that is integral to the process. We are not simply living in a time of new rules, a different law, and a fresh way of doing things. “*Reformation*” speaks of God undoing what was wrong, and bringing in what is right in His eyes. All of this is done righteously, without compromising any of His own qualities or violating the Divine imagery in His offspring.

Suffice it to say, preparatory ordinances can never bring to the heart what the Substance does. Men may devote themselves to that type of religion, thinking that all is well with them. But it is not! This is the day of salvation! The shadows have passed!

Among other things, this confirms that the Levitical system--which was the Law at its highest level--was intended to be temporary. That order of things was never intended to be the approach to God, nor were its ordinances designed to remain with us. Introductions are not meant to be forever, nor

are they intended to be the emphasis. Motivation by external means is not the way to God-- PERIOD! There was a time when God enforced it upon His chosen people, but it was only a temporary arrangement until the *“time of reformation.”*

“The time of reformation” is the time of correction, recovery, and restructure. It is the time when the curse is lifted and the blessing is given. It is the time when the Divine image is recovered, and even enhanced, within fallen man. This is the time of remission, the purged conscience, and of reconciliation to God! It is the first part of the process which will culminate in *“all things”* being made *“new”* (Rev 21:5). This is the time of rectification, of setting everything straight. The intentions of the Almighty can now be fulfilled! The requirements have now been met! The enemy has been *“destroyed.”* It is the time when things have been set straight! The law of commandments contained in ordinances, that was against us, has been taken out of the way, enabling us to come to God! Principalities and powers that held the world captive have been spoiled and plundered! It is the time when God has set things straight!

The prophets said this time would come. They spoke of the time when God would *“bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them”* (Isa 42:16). With glowing words, they spoke of a new age--one in which things would be set straight. *“I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel”* (Isa 45:2-3).

John the Baptist announced the times of reformation also. *“Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God”* (Luke 3:5-6).

Well, the days are here--the times of *“reformation.”* Men can be made right with God. The soul can be restored, and the heart renewed. No one need dwell in darkness any longer! Stand, then, holy brother, in the strength of the Lord! Lift up your heads, and be of good cheer!

CONCLUSION

This is the time when God is satisfied with everything Christ has and is doing. For the blessing to accrue to you, you must also be satisfied with His only begotten Son. You have learned from Israel and from personal experience that it is not possible to do enough to obtain a cleansed conscience. Routine, as necessary as it may appear to be, does not go deep enough to effect your heart and soul. You cannot be made new by a procedure. This is the day of *“reformation”!* It is the time when the alienated are reconciled, the blind see, and the deaf hear. This is the day when the dumb speak, and the lame leap. Waters now break out in the wilderness, and streams in the desert! This is the day of reformation, when things have been set straight. Those who had not obtained mercy, now have obtained it, and those who were not the people are now the people of God (Hosea 2:23; 1 Pet 2:10). Those

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desert! This is the day of reformation, when things have been set straight .

who were far have now been brought near (Eph 2:13), and those who were deceived have now received a love of the truth (Tit 3:5; 2 Thess 2:10). This is the day when things have been set straight! God is within your reach! The blessing of the Lord is not far from you! There is no reason why you cannot arrive safely, joyfully, and confidently, at the judgment seat of Christ.

This is a new day - a day of new approach to God! You **CAN** approach Him with a cleansed, or perfected, conscience (Heb 9:14). You **CAN** come with boldness and full assurance (Heb 10:22). You **CAN** resist the devil when he seeks to dissuade you, and cast down imaginations and thoughts that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God (James 4:7; 2 Cor 10:5-6). You **CAN** find mercy and obtain grace to help in the time of need. This is the time of reformation! You **CAN** confess your sin and experience a righteous God forgiving you and cleansing you from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). You **CAN** run the race that is set before you, looking expectantly to Jesus (Heb 12:1-2). This is the day of reformation--of a new approach to God. If you feel as though you are in a desert, God has raised up a highway in the desert that will take you straight to Him (Isa 35:8). If you feel as though you are in a dry and thirsty land where no water is, God can cause you to suck honey out of a rock (Deut 32:13)! Now is the accepted time. Now is the time of nourishment and direction! This is the day of reformation--a new day in which can rejoice and be glad! God is now for us, and not against us. He has reserved an inheritance for us, and keeps us by His power!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

Commentary on the book of Hebrews

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #14

CHRIST'S SANCTIFYING BLOOD

“But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, in order that since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives. Therefore even the first covenant was not inaugurated without blood. For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, "THIS IS THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT WHICH GOD COMMANDED YOU." And in the same way he sprinkled both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry with the blood. And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; nor was it that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood not his own. Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.” (Hebrews 9:11-28, NASB)

INTRODUCTION

When you study the book of Hebrews, you will sense a priority that significantly differs from that of the average church. The Spirit does not deal extensively with social or domestic issues, or congregational disorders. He is coming to grips with the foundations, and the necessity of embracing them with the whole heart.

There is no salvation apart from involvement--intimate involvement--with the Son of God. He is God's Spokesman, as well as Savior. Insensitivity to Him excludes one from salvation. A neglect of the great salvation which He has provided at great personal will result in condemnation--and there are no exceptions.

Christ Jesus is at the heart of the message, and the New Covenant is a dominant consideration. The seriousness of the message is seen in the most solemn warnings that have been spoken. *"How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation"* (2:3). *"Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it"* (4:1). *"For it is impossible . . . to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame"* (6:4-6). This is NOT a novel message, or a scholastic diversion designed to tantalize the intellect. This book is about our salvation, how it was provided, and what it entails.

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The Holy Spirit, however, is not willing for us to remain in that condition. With shouts and pleadings He summons us into the warfare of faith. He demands that we come close, where we can more easily hear the voice of the Savior. He cries out to us to listen to what He is saying. He points us to the marvelous provisions of the New Covenant, bringing us to ponder its magnitude and glory in its blessing. The Spirit is bringing us into a deeper consideration of the Lord Jesus Christ. Without that consideration, there is no hope of being saved--no hope of surviving the journey from time to eternity--no prospect of overcoming the devil. As simplistic as that may seem, there is a general lack of awareness of its truth. The casualness that dominates the average assembly of professed believers belies their profession.

This is an up-to-date message! Away with the notion that we just meet the people at the point of their personally perceived need. We must meet them at the point of God's declared need! We cannot be steeled against their difficulties, or refuse to supply any temporal needs they have. But we cannot make such things fundamental! There is no believer that has advanced beyond a need for this message. Nor, indeed, is there one that is not yet ready for it--not advanced enough to gain eternal advantage by giving heed to its solemn yet promising words! Here we deal with eternal things--things that will prepare people to live in this world, triumphantly face death, have boldness to stand before the Lord in the day of judgment, and finally enter with joy into the courts of the Lord.

HIGH PRIEST OF GOOD THINGS TO COME

What a marvelous reality will now be set before us. It is a large room, or place,

into which we now enter (Psa 31:8). Here is the event that is the crux of history--the hub upon which everything of significance turns! ***“But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come . . .”*** (NASB). When Christ came on the scene, everything changed! Those who heard Him knew there had never been a spokesman like Him (John 7:46). His words and works tower above everything before Him! But the book the Hebrews does not linger upon our Lord’s earthly ministry. He entered the redemptive arena for a higher and more noble purpose--an eternal purpose!

Jesus is a High Priest of ***“good things to come.”*** This verse reads differently in various versions. *“an high priest of good things to come”* (KJV, NKJV, NASB, Darby) , *“high priest of the good things that have come”* (RSV) , *“high priest of the good things that are already here”* (NIV) , *“chief priest of the coming good things”* (YLT) , *“high priest of the good things of the future”* (BBE).

These “things” were not provided to men before Christ, and they are not available to men now apart from Christ. He is the High Priest of them--the exclusive Distributor of them. They come from His hand, and are appropriated when we are in fellowship with Him. They are ministered from heaven--from the right hand of God. The closer one gets to that throne of all grace, the more available they become.

The ***“things to come”*** are things to which the tabernacle system pointed. They are things for which the Law prepared men. These “things” were not provided to men before Christ, and they are not available to men now apart from Christ. He is the High Priest of them--the exclusive Distributor of them. They come from His hand, and are appropriated when we are in fellowship with Him. They are ministered from heaven--from the right hand of God. The closer one gets to that throne of all grace, the more available they become. The further men are from that throne, the least apt they are to experience them. These are necessary ***“things.”*** Heaven cannot be gained without them. The Tempter cannot be overcome without them. They are requisite to every aspect of the heavenly Kingdom, every facet of spiritual progress, every aspect of kingdom productivity.

They are ***“things to come”*** because their fulness has neither been divulged nor experienced. ***“It does not yet appear what we shall be”*** (1 John 3:1-3). They are ***“things that have come”*** because we have tasted the first-fruits of them. Already, in this world, we have ***“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”*** (Heb 6:4-5, NIV). For those in Christ, these glorious realities are now experienced in measure. Our appetites are being whetted for eternity in our experience of them. The ***“fellowship”*** of the Son, into which we have been called (1 Cor 1:9) has yielded this foretaste of the coming age. He is the High Priest that has given them to us. He has been appointed by the Father to begin doing so now, and continue the glorious process throughout eternity.

Isaiah spoke of these ***“things”*** — eternal verities reserved for those who love God. ***“For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for Him”*** (Isa 64:4). Sin so stunted the capacity of men they could not even imagine the greatness of the blessing God had prepared. It extended beyond the vision of the seers of old, the holy prophets, and even Moses the lawgiver. The keen vision of David could not detect the details of their greatness, nor the eagle eye of Ezekiel, who saw ***“visions of God”*** (Ezek 1:1; 8:3).

Think of the ***“things”*** currently being administered by this High Priest! In this world we experience the remission of sin, the peace of God, the joy of the Holy Spirit, and the righteousness of God (1 John 1:9; Phil 4:6-7; Rom 4:4-8; 14:17;). Enlightenment is given to us concerning God and

His great salvation (Eph 1:18-20). The *“spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind”* is graciously granted to us (2 Tim 1:7). The grace of God teaches us to deny *“ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world”* (Tit 2:11). Everything *“pertaining to life and godliness”* has been given to us (2 Pet 1:3). Mercy and *“grace to help in the time of need”* may be had for the asking (Heb 4:16). By His grace we have been called into a transcendent fellowship, which includes God, the Lord Jesus, the holy angels, the spirits of just men made perfect, the vast fellowship of those whose names are

Those who desire to truly benefit from Jesus must obtain an interest in these *“things.”* Those who are not preoccupied with them will not experience the ministry of Jesus! This is a revolutionary thought, running counter to much of what is said in the name of Christ today. Vast numbers of “church” people remain in a state of abysmal ignorance concerning these *“things.”* They appear to have little appetite for them.

written in the Lamb’s book of life, and the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel (Heb 12:22-24). Everything is being worked together for our good (Rom 8:28), and we are *“more than conquerors through Him that loved us”* (Rom 8:37). All of these *“things”* have come from our great High Priest. That is something of what He is doing now!

But there is more to come! God will *“bruise Satan under our feet shortly”* (Rom 16:20). We will judge the world and angels (1 Cor 6:1-2), and *“reign with Him”* (2 Tim 2:12). Our names will be confessed before the Father and the Holy angels (Rev 3:5). Appropriate rewards will be given to those who have invested themselves in their stewardship (Matt 5:12; Rev 22:12). The overcomers will be given “power over the nations” (Rev 2:26), will eat from the tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God (Rev 2:7), and will receive a new name depicting an intensely personal identity with God (Rev 2:17). Such will be made pillars in the very temple of God, and will never again depart from blessing to enter into battle or trial (Rev 3:12). And how is it that these things will be ministered to us? Our great High Priest has been appointed to minister these things to come!

Those who desire to truly benefit from Jesus must obtain an interest in these *“things.”* Those who are not preoccupied with them will not experience the ministry of Jesus! This is a revolutionary thought, running counter to much of what is said in the name of Christ today. Vast numbers of “church” people remain in a state of abysmal ignorance concerning these *“things.”* They appear to have little appetite for them. Let us not be deceived about that type of circumstance! God has not provided salvation for the disinterested. There are no eternal benefits for the uninvolved. Those who do not *“hunger and thirst for righteousness”* will not be filled, and will thus be excluded from the Divine Presence. This book is a stern, yet refreshing, reminder that God has nothing to offer that is disassociated from Jesus. By Divine appointment, he is the *“High Priest of good things to come.”* Our experience of those glorious *“things”* will be determined by our participation in their first fruits now! If we share in them now, we shall participate in them then! The degree of our involvement now will determine the extent of it then.

HE ENTERED THROUGH HIS OWN BLOOD

When the Son returned to *“heaven itself,”* He did so in our behalf. He did not enter heaven in disassociation from His vicarious atonement. He returned as One that had completed a mission, having satisfied the requirements of a gracious, yet just, God. *“He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all”* (NASB).

It was wonderful when the Son walked among men, but it was more wonderful when He entered into heaven! It was good when Jesus “*went about doing good, healing all that were oppressed of the devil*” (Acts 10:38), but it was better when He entered into “*the holy place.*” Meeting with disciples in the synagogues and on the mountain side was glorious, but meeting with saints in heavenly places is “*rather glorious.*” Christ’s entrance into heaven had infinitely more effect than His entrance into the world. His ministry in heaven is more effectual than His Galilean ministry. This is not

He did not enter into heaven with our good works, but with His own blood. He did not enter with the merits of the most excellent of the sinful race, but with His own blood! He did not enter into heaven with the tables of the Law, but by His own blood! His submission to the wrath and curse of God lifted the curse from us. He entered by His own blood. Having submitted to the curse of the Almighty, not the Almighty could bless us. He entered by His own blood.

intended to diminish His entrance into the world, nor His marvelous works when He “*dwelt amongst us.*” God forbid! His entrance into heaven validated His death and resurrection on our behalf. It also sanctified the recollection of His powerful works and gracious displays of grace and mercy. Christ’s death would have counted for nothing if He did not return to heaven to minister its efficacy!

It was “*through His own blood*” that the Son “*entered the holy place.*” Just as the high priest under Law could not enter the holiest place without blood, so Christ could not enter heaven without the **efficacy** of His own blood. What is more, the high priest of old had to have **appropriate** blood to enter the expiatory realm. He could not enter with the blood of a turtle dove. It had to be the “*blood of the bullock*” or “*blood of the goat*” of the sin offering (Lev 16:14-15). Jesus could not enter heaven with the blood of “*goats and calves.*” He could not enter with the blood of Abel, or the holy prophets. He had to enter with His own blood--His own investment in our salvation! The forfeiture of His life became the basis of our acceptance by God! He entered heaven with **the evidence of an accomplished mission**. He was obedient to the Father, having laid down His life of Himself, and taken it up again in the power of the Holy Spirit.

He did not enter into heaven with our good works, but with His own blood. He did not enter with the merits of the most excellent of the sinful race, but with His own blood! He did not enter into heaven with the tables of the Law, but by His own blood! His submission to the wrath and curse of God lifted the curse from us. He entered by His own blood. Having submitted to the curse of the Almighty, now the Almighty could bless us. He entered by His own blood. If you dare to enter heaven with anything else, you will be rejected. Make no mistake about that. We do not come to God pleading the merit of our own accomplishments, but having “*faith in the blood*” through which Christ entered into heaven (Rom 3:25). Because He entered through that blood, so can we! God honors that blood, and if we honor it, He will honor us! This gives great weight to the Pauline phrase, “*faith in the blood*” (Rom 3:25).

HE OBTAINED ETERNAL REDEMPTION FOR US

The word “*eternal*” is intimidating to the flesh. It senses its own imminent demise, and therefore recoils at the word “*eternal*” or “*everlasting.*” It should not surprise you that significant bodies of

theology have been developed to neutralize the power of “*eternal.*” God is an “*eternal God*” (Deut 33:27). The righteous shall enter “*into life eternal*” (Matt 25:46). Those who ingest Jesus “*have eternal life*” now (John 6:54). Sufferings are working for us an “*eternal weight of glory*” (2 Cor 4:17). The things that occupy the focus and attention of the saved are “*eternal*” (2 Cor 4:18). The resurrection bodies that await us in heaven are “*eternal*” (2 Cor 5:1). The purpose of God is “*eternal*” (Eph 3:11). Salvation is “*with eternal glory*” (2 Tim 2:10). Salvation itself is “*eternal*” (Heb 5:9). Our inheritance is “*eternal*” (Heb 9:15). It should not startle any soul that the redemption Jesus “*obtained*” for us is “*eternal.*” “*But Christ . . . entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us*” (KJV). It was necessary for the redemption to be “*ETERNAL.*” It was to fulfill the eternal purpose of the eternal God.

Here is a marvelous expression, and we do well to extend ourselves to perceive something of its

From any perspective other than God’s, the reclamation of humanity looked hopeless. It looked as though the fall was too far, the gap too wide, and the malady too grievous to allow for recovery. The adversary was not only fierce, but “subtle” and crafty beyond human imagination. He had successfully orchestrated the fall of a great host of angels

magnitude. Note, Jesus did not enter into the holy place in order to obtain eternal redemption. Rather, He entered “*HAVING OBTAINED eternal redemption.*” The redemption was wrought in the earth, and was presented in heaven! The requirements of Divine justice were achieved by Jesus in the flesh, then presented in the behalf of fallen man in the heavenly realm.

The word “*obtained*” is an intriguing one. It comes from eura^{menoj} (hyoo-ris'-ko), which means “*to find after search, discover, come upon.*” There seems to be an illusion to Job 33:24. “*Spare him from going down to the pit ; I have found a ransom for him*” (NASB). This does not diminish the fact that salvation was enveloped in Divine purpose. Rather, it accentuates the wisdom of God. As David would say, God “*devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from Him*” (2 Sam 14:14, NASB). From any perspective other than God’s, the reclamation of humanity looked hopeless. It looked as though the fall was too far, the gap too wide, and the malady too grievous to allow for recovery. The adversary was not only fierce, but “subtle” and crafty beyond human imagination. He had successfully orchestrated the fall of a great host of angels (Matt 25:41; Jude 6; 2 Pet 2:4; Rev 12:9).

The Son left the glories of heaven and entered into the realm of restriction. He entered striped of the prerogatives of Deity, and submitted to life by faith, in complete reliance upon the Father. He “*learned obedience,*” “*suffered being tempted,*” and “*increased in wisdom . . . and favor with God*” (Heb 5:8; 2:18; Luke 2:52). From the moment He was born, it became Satan’s objective to destroy Him. He sought to accomplish this objective through Herod, when Jesus was an infant (Matt 2:13). He sought to bring the Son of down through temptation at the threshold of His ministry (Matt 4:4-10). Again, through the people, the devil engaged in an effort to destroy the Savior (Matt 12:14; Luke 19:47). Finally, in Gethsemane’s garden, he tempted the Son of God to withdraw from the redemptive enterprise in self interest (Matt 26:39ff). Even upon the cross, speaking through beguiled souls, Satan sought to turn Jesus from the work He was sent to do (Matt 27:40-42).

All of this is not to mention the apathy and indifference of Christ’s own people (John 1:11), the unbelief and obtuseness of His disciples (Matt 17:17), the restriction of His own flesh (Luke 12:50), and the contemplation of Divine rejection and cursing (Mark 15:34; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13). All of these things had

to be overcome to *“OBTAIN eternal redemption for us.”* The Son of God could not fulfill His mission casually. Men and women may enter half-heartedly into the work of the Lord, but Jesus could not do so. Had He approached His mission as many today approach theirs, we would all have dropped into hell! No! Jesus found the way through the morass of flesh, sin, obstructions, attacks, and handicap. He did not obtain it easily, but He obtained it. Praise the Lord.

The redemption is an *“eternal”* one-- *“ETERNAL REDEMPTION!”* Its power extends from the first man to the last; from the beginning to the ending. There is no facet of our salvation that Christ did not address; no Divine requirement He did not satisfy! Ours is an *“ETERNAL REDEMPTION!”* God will never require another redemptive offering! There will never again be a necessity for a sin offering! God will never again curse in order to bless, abandon in order to gather and reconcile. Christ has obtained *“ETERNAL REDEMPTION!”* This redemption extends to the saints in all ages--before Christ and after His earthly life. It brings the eternal benefits of peace, joy, glory, and life. It includes the conferment of immortality and removal of every aspect of the curse. It is an *“ETERNAL REDEMPTION.”* It is eternal in comparison to the offerings and ministries of the high priest under Law. It is distinct from temporal deliverance, like that of Israel from Egypt, crossing the Red Sea, and the river Jordan. It is an *“ETERNAL REDEMPTION!”*

But this redemption has been obtained *“FOR US.”* The phrase *“for us”* is supplied in the KJV. It is not out of order for it to be placed in the text. After all, *“us”* is the thrust of the Spirit’s application. God has spoken to *“US”* by His Son (1:2). It is *“US”* that are warned to fear (4:1). Those that are to labor to enter the provided rest are *“US”* (4:11). Those that are to come boldly to the throne of All grace are *“US”* (4:16). God’s High Priest is befitting and appropriate for *“US”* (7:26). The *“eternal redemption”* has been *“obtained”* for *“US!”*

It was not procured for angels, but for fallen humanity! That means we can be confident and assured of its effectiveness. If God does not doubt it, there is certainly no justifiable reason for us to do so. At some point, men must cease to view Christ’s vicarious atonement scholastically or academically. While there is food for thought here, and sufficient information to challenge the most prodigious mind, redemption is intended to be appropriated! Where study ends, faith can take over! Let no soul despise study, research, and the meticulous involvement of the mind. These are necessary involvements for us all. However, faith extends beyond the perimeter of the intellect, laying hold of redemptive realities transcendent to nature. It is when faith dominates the soul that *“eternal redemption”* is appropriated at the individual level. Remember, the *“eternal redemption”* was appropriated FOR YOU!

FORMERLY, THE FLESH WAS SANCTIFIED

Once again, the Spirit points out the superiority of Christ’s atoning death. Under the law, the death of innocent victims did not reach into the heart and soul of those for whom they were offered. Their effectiveness went no further than the flesh--the outward man. *“For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh”* (NASB). Those who could not enter the camp because of defilement, once cleansed, could once again enter. Their hearts were not changed, their sins were not remitted, and their consciences remained defiled. But they could enter.

Two offerings are combined here. The offering made on the day of atonement (Lev 16:14-16), and the offering of cleansing from defilement caused by touching a dead body (Num 19). The day of atonement was the highest of all days, and the offering presented then the greatest of all offerings. Offering was then made for general sin and defilement, whether known or unknown. The other offering, which involved the *“ashes of an heifer,”* was remarkably detailed. In this offering provision was made for continual and unavoidable defilement. Neither ceremony availed for anything but outward, or ceremonial, defilement. If the individual had been excluded from the camp because of outward defilement, the offering allowed him to again enter the camp.

A religion confined to ceremony remains ineffective to accomplish the purpose of God. Without the vitality and effectiveness of Christ’s atonement, everything else is vain. If **ordained** ceremonies could not reach beyond the outward man, how effective will humanly-devised ceremonies be? The New Covenant is one of spirit, not of flesh. It deals with the inward man, and does not view the outward man as primary. We enter the Lord’s presence in our spirits.

HE OFFERED HIMSELF TO GOD

The effectiveness of Christ’s atonement is not found in its presentation to us, but in its presentation to God Himself. If God had not received Christ’s offering, it would have no power with us! God’s view is the preeminent one! Now we come to a most refreshing contemplation. *“ . . . Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God . . . ”* (NASB).

First, notice that Christ, *“through the eternal Spirit,”* offered Himself to God. There is a fine distinction here that is to be considered. This is the only place in Scripture *“the eternal Spirit”* is mentioned. It is not a term ascribed to the Holy Spirit, even though the Holy Spirit is eternal. This is the Divine part of Christ Jesus, as opposed to the human nature He took upon Himself. There are at least three texts where the Spirit of Christ is contrasted with His flesh--where His Deity and humanity are pondered in a single expression.

“His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh . . . ” (Rom 1:3, NASB). Here *“His Son”* (Deity) is contrasted with His humanity (*“according to the flesh”*). Christ’s humanity without His Deity would have rendered His work ineffective. His Deity without His humanity would have rendered the work irrelevant.

“And by common confession great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, was vindicated in the Spirit . . . ” (2 Tim 3:16, NASB). Christ’s vindication, or justification, was not owing to Him being made known to us, but in His appearance before God. It is God’s view of His death that makes it effective for the believer. Both men and God saw Christ Jesus, but it is what God saw that put away the sins of the world!

“For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit” (1 Pet 3:18), NASB). Christ was *“crucified because of weakness, yet lives because of the power of God”* (2 Cor 13:4). Our Lord’s humanity enabled Him to die. It was His Deity that brought Him back from the dead.

In the energy of His Spirit, Jesus successfully resisted the temptation to withdraw, even sweating, as it were, great drops of blood falling to the ground (Luke 22:44). Amidst a hail of unparalleled temptation, He offered Himself “without spot” to God, thereby fulfilling the type instituted under the Law

Christ’s death was essential to our salvation. It was His **willingness** to do so, however, that made it effective. It was **“through the eternal Spirit”** that He offered Himself to God without a spot or moral blemish. Brute beasts were taken and offered under the Law. Their wills were not involved. As with the whole creation, they were **“subjected to futility, not of [their] own will, but because of Him who subjected [them] ”** (Rom 8:20). But it was not so with Jesus. He did learn obedience through the things that He suffered, but His offering was not presented to God out of cold obedience, as under the Law. His obedience was prompted by His Spirit, not the thunderings of Sinai. It was voluntary in every sense of the Word, although it involved a fierce struggle with the flesh. Jesus triumphed over the weakness of His humanity in His Spirit, thereby setting the tone for His disciples. He also presented His body **“a living sacrifice.”** It is no small thing, therefore, that He asks the same of us (Rom 12:2).

In the energy of His Spirit, Jesus successfully resisted the temptation to withdraw, even sweating, as it were, great drops of blood falling to the ground (Luke 22:44). Amidst a hail of unparalleled temptation, He offered Himself **“without spot”** to God, thereby fulfilling the type instituted under the Law (Ex 12:5; 29:1; Lev 23:12, etc.). There was no sin in Him, nor guile of deceptiveness in His mouth (2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 3:22). It had to be so, else humanity could not be reclaimed. We are not reconciled by omnipotence, but by the atoning death of Christ.

In His presentation to God, Jesus provides the example for us all. **The weaker is sanctified by the greater!** The new creation, which we have from God, is the compelling force in our life. It, and it alone, enables us to keep under our bodies, bringing them into subjection (1 Cor 9:27). As we give heed to the new man, the old man will become subordinate, even if it is against his will.

THE CLEANSED CONSCIENCE

Now we come to the glorious benefit of Christ’s vicarious atonement--the immediate advantage! Here is something never, before Christ entered into heaven, experienced in the sense of our text. **“How much more will the blood of . . . cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”** (NASB). A cleansed, or purged, conscience is of inestimable worth! This is the conscience in regards to our affiliation with God Almighty. One can have an uncondemning conscience owing to it being seared (1 Tim 4:2). This, as I understand it, is not a mere facet of our being, but stands for our entire moral consciousness in relation to God. It touches living, praying, serving, and worshiping. It deals with hearing, comprehending, pursuing, and enjoying the Lord. It is the absence of withdrawal, and the presence of an incessant quest for God.

The cleansed conscience is one that knows **“I am not condemned”** --that **“I am accepted by God, and welcome in His courts.”** It is a conscience that recoils at the thought of sin, and is repulsed by the intrusion of sinful thoughts, or Satan’s **“fiery darts.”** This is a conscience that seizes the Kingdom with violence, and is aggressive to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, while living righteously and godly in the world. It is a conscience tuned to heaven, that is poised to respond to the voice of the Lord. You cannot come into God’s presence without this conscience.

There is no empty ceremony that can appropriate such a

No matter how precisely the High Priest prepared the burnt offering, offered it, and sprinkled its blood, the conscience remained defiled. Those ordained activities could not make one welcome in God's presence. They could not produce a hatred for iniquity, a longing for the courts of the Lord, or a resolute spirit.

conscience. No matter how precisely the High Priest prepared the burnt offering, offered it, and sprinkled its blood, the conscience remained defiled. Those ordained activities could not make one welcome in God's presence. They could not produce a hatred for iniquity, a longing for the courts of the Lord, or a resolute spirit. Those who seek such benefits by mere adherence to a routine, must allow the Law to bring them to Christ so they can be justified!

The conscience is purged, or cleansed, from *"dead works."* Such works-- *"dead works"* --are like a faith that is dead. That kind of faith is no faith at all (James 2:20,26), and *"dead works"* are no works at all. They are not recognized in heaven, regardless of their supposed moral excellence. Outside of Christ, even the *"plowing of the wicked is sin"* (Prov 21:4). How well the Spirit states it in Titus. *"but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted"* (Tit1:15). *"Dead works"* is a synonym for sin--human expressions that miss the mark, are at variance with the nature of God, and center in human desire. They contribute to death, or alienation from God, giving it more power to separate from God, plunging the individual deeper and deeper into the cauldron of transgression and spiritual death.

Before an individual can willingly and effectively serve the Lord, the conscience must be purged from the guilt of sin. By this, the Spirit means the individual must be able to stand before God without being bludgeoned by the guilt of his own transgression. There must be a sense of forgiveness and, to some degree, an awareness of justification. Only the blood of Christ can produce this glorious effect. The cleansed one is therefore no longer intimidated by the presence of the Lord. Instead, a calmness of soul is experienced before the Lord. A frame of spirit is also possessed that cries out, *"Here am I. send me!"*

Right here we find a lovely aspect of baptism into Christ. Peter associates our baptism with the procurement of a good conscience, something coveted by holy men in old time. *"There is also an antitype which now saves us; baptism (not the*

In baptism, therefore, there is an undeniable association with obtaining a purified, or cleansed, conscience. This involves a persuasion that the sin of the individual has been put away by Christ, and is remembered no more by God.

removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 3:21, NKJV). The NIV, NASB, and RSV obscure the meaning of this passage by translating *"not the removal of dirt from the body."* The word "filth" (**rupou**), in this form, is used only here in the Apostolic writings. It is also used twice in verb form in Revelation 22:11). In that text it is obvious that it is not speaking of the contamination of the body with dirt. There, the meaning is moral contamination. The meaning of 1 Peter 3:21 is simply this: **baptism is not a ceremonial rite, resulting in ceremonial cleansing, like that of the Law .**

The language of the Spirit is strong, and does not fit into a sectarian mold. In our baptism there is an appeal to God for a cleansed conscience. Some versions

translate the verse, “*an appeal to God for a good conscience*” (NASB). Others say, “*an appeal to God for a clear conscience*” (RSV), “*the answer of a good conscience toward God*” (NKJV), and “*the pledge of a good conscience toward God*” (NIV). In baptism, therefore, there is an undeniable association with obtaining a purified, or cleansed, conscience. This involves a persuasion that the sin of the individual has been put away by Christ, and is remembered no more by God. That is a powerful effect, and is owing to the “*blood of Christ.*” In my years of exposure to preaching and teaching, I have heard very few references to this aspect of salvation. If my experience is common, it is no wonder confidence and assurance are so rare among *Christians*. Great numbers of professed believers do not think of the blood of Christ in connection with purging the conscience from the condemning power of “*dead works.*” Nor, indeed, are they aware that men appeal to God, in their baptism, for a cleansed conscience. The absence of a cleansed conscience accounts for the lack of service among these people.

When the conscience is purged, “*righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit*” are experienced in copious measures (Rom 14:17). It is then that the love of God “*is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit*” (Rom 5:5). Then we are “*filled with all joy and peace in believing*” (Rom 15:13). The “*fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ,*” into which we have been called, is realized to the satisfaction and empowerment of the soul (1 Cor 1:9). The cleansed conscience enables the believer to “*crucify the flesh, with its affections and lusts,*” “*resist the devil,*” and “*run with patience the race*” that has been set before us (Gal 5:24; James 4:7; Heb 12:1-2). But where the conscience is not purged, these results will not take place. A defiled and corrupted conscience will not allow the individual to linger in or relish the presence of the Almighty God! Nothing uncleansed can produce something that pleases God! Under the Law, everything used in the service of God, whether person, utensil, or garment, had to be “washed” before employed in sacred work. Only purgation by the blood of Christ can remove all stain! Thanks be to God for the blood of Christ, which is able to “*purge the conscience from dead works to serve the living God!*” **You cannot do without this!**

MEDIATOR FOR A REASON

The efficacy of Christ’s death qualifies Him to mediate the New Covenant. Before the benefits of the covenant can be ministered to the individual, his conscience must be cleansed from the defilement of sin. “*And for this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, in order that since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance*” (NASB). Those with a cleansed capacity to serve the Lord will be the recipients of the blessing of the New Covenant! These marvelous blessings cannot be ministered while the individual is at a distance from God, reluctant to draw near, and condemned by the Divine Presence. But, once the knowledge of the remission of sins is experienced, the extensive and effective ministry of Jesus begins!

Before Christ, the work of every Divinely appointed leader was terminated by his death. Moses’ leadership work ended when he died. Aaron’s high priestly work terminated when he breathed his last breath. The liberating and discretionary work of all the Judges ended when they died. The work of the mighty kings of Israel and Judah ended when they were “gathered unto their people.” What is more, the death of these patriarchs, judges, and kings, brought no reconciling efficacy. “*The blood of the prophets*” (Matt 23:0), shed because of their message, was unable to purge a single conscience! But it was not so with the death of Christ, praise the Lord!

Even as God's purpose was "*from the foundation of the world,*" so it involved those living from the

This condition--the settling of the accounts of the ancients--enables Jesus to mediate the New Covenant now. Were the sins of the patriarchs still outstanding, we could not experience the New Covenant. They, so to speak, had to partake of the fruit of salvation first, in order that God's promise to them might be fulfilled!

beginning. Thus it is written, "*in order that since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.*" The saints before us "*were not made perfect without us*" (Heb 11:40) i.e., the blessing of salvation could not be theirs independently of we who are in Christ. However, **neither could the remission of our sins occur until Divine satisfaction had been realized for their transgressions.** No sins would be atoned until ALL had been atoned! Sin in its entirety was dealt with in Christ. No trusting one was excluded! Christ could not mediate the New Covenant until all sin had been dealt with effectively, and Divine satisfaction was thorough. The sins of righteous men like Noah, Abraham, Lot, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, remained until Christ Jesus "*appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.*" The sins of David, Solomon, and believing kings and prophets, hovered, as it were, between heaven and earth. Satan was able to accuse the patriarchs of old because a satisfactory atonement had not been made. But he is not able to do so now! Men may take it upon themselves to speak against the godly of past ages, but their words will be condemned by God, for their sins are covered by the blood of Jesus! "*Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies!*" (Rom 8:33).

This condition--the settling of the accounts of the ancients--enables Jesus to mediate the New Covenant now. Were the sins of the patriarchs still outstanding, we could not experience the New Covenant. They, so to speak, had to partake of the fruit of salvation first, in order that God's promise to them might be fulfilled! Using a bit of holy imagination, it must have been a glad day when the atonement was announced in the heavenly realms. Oh, to hear the shouts of joy! Thus, it is written, "*Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death*" (Rev 12:10-11).

THE DEATH OF THE COVENANT-MAKER

This passage has perplexed many students of Scripture. It introduces the idea of a testament, or will, not hitherto discussed. The First Covenant was not a "*will*" in the ordinary sense of the word, and it did not require the death of its mediator, Moses, to bring it to the people. It did, however, require the death of a ratifying victim, and that is the point of this text. The covenant was made upon the basis of the shedding of blood.

The Spirit now establishes the necessity of Christ's death. We could not enjoy the benefits of the New Covenant, including remission of sin and the knowledge of God, until a satisfactory death occurred. "*For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives*" (NASB). The KJV and NASB, as well as other older versions, use the word "*Testator*" instead of "*the one who made it.*" This more precisely presents the case. In this case a text-study will yield greater benefits than a word-

study. Young's Literal Translation, in my judgment, captures the sense of the text. *"For where a covenant {is}, the death of the covenant-victim to come in is necessary."* As we will find, this idea was introduced by God Himself, early in His dealings with humanity.

The word *"covenant"* literally means *"a cutting."* When God made covenant with Abraham, He did so over a sacrifice. Abraham was commanded to take *"an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon,"* to be included in the covenant-making ceremony. Scripture apprizes us that Abraham cut the heifer, she goat, and ram in half, laying the pieces opposite of one another. The birds, however, he did not cut in two (Gen 15:9-10). Knowing the importance of these

The divided carcasses of the heifer, goat, and ram, together with the whole carcasses of the turtledove and young pigeon, were the ratifying victims of the covenant. The covenant was made while a burning lamp passed between the bodies of those victims, as though drawing attention to the loss of one life for the gaining of another.

ratifying victims, Abraham drove away the birds of prey that sought to get at the carcasses (15:11). When night time came, a *"deep sleep"* fell upon the patriarch, and a *"thick and dreadful darkness came over him"* (15:12). It is then written, *"when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces . In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram . . ."* (15:17-18). The divided carcasses of the heifer, goat, and ram, together with the whole carcasses of the turtledove and young pigeon, were the ratifying victims of the covenant. The covenant was made while a burning lamp passed between the bodies of those victims, as though drawing attention to the loss of one life for the gaining of another.

In the case of Christ, He is one making the sacrifice, the victim, the burning lamp, and the covenant itself. He *"offered Himself"* (Heb 9:14). He Himself was the offering, Lamb of God, or Passover lamb (Heb 10:10; John 1:29; 1 Cor 5:7). He is that *"light"* that illuminates the sacrifice and confirms its acceptance (Matt 4:16; Luke 1:79; John 1:5-9). He Himself is God's *"Covenant,"* given to the people (Isa 42:6; 49:6).

The Covenant Is Made With Jesus

In the strictest sense of the word, the covenant was made with the Lord Jesus Himself--the Father with the Son. Of this glorious covenant, the Spirit says, *"The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ"* (Gal 3:16). This is pivotal in the current consideration, setting the New Covenant apart from the old one. God's great salvation, from one perspective, is marvelously complex, though practically simply. It took a multiplicity of types and figures to introduce men to the glory of this salvation. The covenant was made with the Son. The Son Himself is the covenant. The Son is the ratifying victim of the covenant, and even offers the sacrifice. He is the altar, tabernacle, and High priest. He fulfills the type presented by the heifer, she-goat, ram, turtledove, and pigeon. He is the burning lamp that passes between the ratifying victim, illuminating its efficacy.

For those accepting the atonement, or reconciliation, all things rightfully inherited by the Son, pass to them (Heb 1:2; Rev 21:7). Everything pertaining to life and godliness becomes theirs because of Christ, the ratifying Victim. Mercy and grace to help in the time of need belong to them because of Him. The Law is now written upon their hearts, and they are brought into intimacy with God the Father, because of the Son--the ratifying victim. All spiritual blessings in

heavenly places are bequeathed to us because of the ratifying victim, God's Son! Where there is no recognition of the Lord's Christ, there can be no acceptance, no forgiveness, no administration of grace. Apart from Jesus--an emphasis upon Him--there is utter hopelessness, futility, and rejection! There is no way to overstate this. It is one of the great requirements of sound theology! You simply cannot make too much of Jesus! God initiates and culminates everything with Him!

INTRODUCED IN TYPOLOGY

The covenant was sanctified for the people, and the people were sanctified for the covenant. The place of ministry and the means of ministry were also set apart. Everything involved in the concourse of people with God had to be dedicated! What God had declared had to be set apart for the people. The people also needed to be set apart for God. God must be served in a dedicated place, and with dedicated people and vessels.

The Spirit now shows the sanctifying power of Christ's blood--its capacity to make us thoroughly acceptable to the very God from which sin alienated us. To accomplish this, we are taken back to the inauguration of the first covenant. It was inaugurated with the blood of a ratifying victim. *"Therefore even the first covenant was not inaugurated without blood. For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, "THIS IS THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT WHICH GOD COMMANDED YOU." And in the same way he sprinkled both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry with the blood. And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness"* (NASB).

A remarkable mixture was sprinkled upon the covenant itself, the book of the Law, and all of the people. It was a sanctifying mixture, consisting of blood and water, with scarlet wool, and hyssop. Even the tabernacle and all of the vessels employed in the service of God were sprinkled with this holy mixture. These events are recorded in Exodus 24:3-9. The Spirit here adds *"water and scarlet wool and hyssop,"* not mentioned in the Exodus 24 text. These are, however, mentioned in Leviticus 14:5-7,49-51 when blood was *"sprinkled"* on the leper and the unclean house. We understand that the hyssop was the media from which the blood was sprinkled, the scarlet wool the means of binding the hyssop together, and the water to prevent the blood from coagulation. We conclude, therefore, that this was the ordained way of sprinkling the blood, even though the details are not supplied in the Exodus account.

"Blood" speaks of the justifying efficacy of Christ's atonement. *"Water"* declares its sanctifying effects, cleansing and setting apart the individual to God. *"Scarlet wool"* was dyed wool, depicting Christ bearing our defiling transgressions in His pure Person and body. Hyssop was a small plant with absorbing qualities. It was used to put blood on the door posts at the time of the Exodus (Ex 12), and was used to present vinegar to Jesus whole upon the cross (John 19:29). It stands for the ability to transmit the effectiveness of Christ's vicarious death to the individual.

Notice the extent of the sprinkling, or setting apart. The book and the people were sprinkled, or sanctified. (9:19). The tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry were also sprinkled (9:21). The covenant was sanctified for the people, and the people were sanctified for the

Those who think lightly of sin must think again. It drove a wedge between man and God that could not be resolved without the forfeiture of an innocent life--a ratifying victim. Little wonder the central ordinance in the body of Christ involves the remembrance of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who gave Himself a ransom, to be testified in due time!

covenant. The place of ministry and the means of ministry were also set apart. Everything involved in the concourse of people with God had to be dedicated! What God had declared had to be set apart for the people. The people also needed to be set apart for God. God must be served in a dedicated place, and with dedicated people and vessels. The blood of a ratifying victim had to set everything apart, separating it from the sinful order. As it is written, *“And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness”* (9:22). All of this elaborate ceremony introduced the death of Christ, God’s requisite for the reconciliation of a fallen race. Here is the reason for the Levitical sacrifices, the Aaronic priesthood, and the divers procedures for cleansing and sanctification. They were all introductory to the coming sacrifice of Christ. Men needed to be acquainted with that sacrifice!

A SUBSTITUTE IS NECESSARY THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRETY OF REDEMPTION! From the beginning to the end--from inauguration to culmination--our salvation depends upon our Substitute.

Sin so defiled our race that every aspect of God’s dealings with us required the forfeiture of innocent life. It began in Eden’s garden, when God made Adam and Eve “coats of skins” (Gen 3:21), and it continued until the all sufficient sacrifice of Christ. Those who think lightly of sin must think again. It drove a wedge between man and God that could not be resolved without the forfeiture of an innocent life--a ratifying victim. Little wonder the central ordinance in the body of Christ involves the remembrance of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who gave Himself a ransom, to be testified in due time! No wonder Satan has aggressively sought to distort this feast of remembrance.

THINGS IN HEAVEN CLEANSED

Now we enter, as it were, into the holy of holies. We were not the only ones that required sanctification. Heaven was not yet ready for commerce with fallen man. A dedication of the things to be received by men must also take place. *“Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these”* (NASB). Notice, this is something that *“was necessary”!*

The language precisely applies to the ceremonies under the Old Covenant, but generally to things in heaven. The people, tabernacle, and vessels of the ministry had all been contaminated by sin. Heaven had not become contaminated, and that is not the intent of the phrase, *“but the heavenly things themselves [were cleansed] with better sacrifices.”* The idea here is that of DEDICATION, or setting apart for the enjoyment of redeemed humanity. The satisfaction of God Himself is portrayed in this imagery. We also see the readiness of Jesus to intercede for us, and minister to us the New Covenant. The employment of angelic hosts in ministering to the heirs of salvation is also intended in this expression. Include in this all of the *“spiritual blessings in heavenly places”* that are now ours, together with *“righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit,”* the *“fruit of the Spirit,”* the *“whole armor of God,”* and an *“inheritance”* reserved in heaven for us (Eph 1:4; Rom 14:17; Gal 5:22-25; 6:10-18; 1 Pet 1:4).

Do not take for granted your enjoyment of these realities! They have been sanctified to you by the blood of Christ, the ratifying Victim! Were it not for that, you could not have a single one of them! It is God's recognition of Christ that has caused Him to recognize you! It is your position in Christ that brings the marvelous gifts of grace to you. Your person is not the point in heaven! The Son of God is heaven's focus. Christ is the King of glory, and you are made accepted in Him. Jesus is not something, He is everything! How well this aspect of our salvation is summarized in the book of Galatians. *"If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise"* (Gal 3:29, NIV). The *"heavenly things"* were set apart for you by the blood of Christ. Your possession of and commitment to Him qualify you to enjoy them in abundance!

THREE REQUIRED APPEARINGS OF CHRIST

HE IS NOW APPEARING FOR US

Three appearances of Christ are now mentioned. They are not declared in chronological order. Rather, the Spirit proclaims them in a manner that will make for confidence in the believer. An earthly ministry in an earthly tabernacle could not effect a change in man's condition. Nor, indeed, could it bring heavenly resources to him. That required a heavenly ministry--the intercession of our Lord Jesus Christ. He returned to heaven to enter this indispensable ministry. *"For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us"* (NASB). We have commented at length on the intercessory ministry of Christ in earlier lessons. A brief summation of that good work is all that is required here.

Christ is able to save to the fullest extent every accepted person because of His intercessory work (Heb 7:25). The effects of sin are so pervasive that continual heavenly activity is required to save us. In my judgment, much current-day theology treats salvation too simplistically. It does not properly present the present activity of Christ--an activity required to bring us safely to glory. Christ

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entered into heaven upon the basis of His effective sacrifice. Because it was received, the Son Himself was received and exalted at the right hand of God. Because He is received, we too can be received! At this very moment He is representing you to the Father. He is the pledge of your soon gathering unto Him, that where He is, there you may be also.

HE HAS ALREADY PUT AWAY SIN

The reason for Christ's initial appearance in the world was to take away sin. *"... but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself"* (NASB). This is declared several places in Scripture, and is foundational to our understanding of salvation. John the Baptist announced, *"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"* (John 1:29). John the beloved wrote, *"But you know that He appeared so that*

He might take away our sins. And in Him is no sin” (1 John 3:5). Of the Messiah, Daniel prophesied He would, ***“finish the transgression, and . . . make an end of sins***” (Dan 9:24). Again, John wrote, ***“And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world”*** (John 2:2). In this way, Jesus was “the Savior of the world,” appointed to “bring us to God” (1 John 4:14; 1 Pet 3:18).

Admittedly, it does not look like sin has been ***“put away,”*** but it has--and effectively so, I might add! It was not put away from the world, but from the consideration of God. God does not behold the sin of those in His Son. In Him, sin is ***“put away.”*** Balaam, that strange and covetous prophet of former times, said this of God. ***“He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel”*** (Num 23:21). In a very unique way, that word applies to those in the Son. Their sins have been removed from them ***“as far as the east is from the west”*** (Psa 103:12). All of *the* prophetic expressions of forgiveness are fulfilled in Christ Jesus. ***“Thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back” (Isa 38:17). “You will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea” (Mic 7:19, NIV). “Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile” (Psa 32:2). “Thou hast taken away all thy wrath: thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger” (Psa 85:3). “Come now, let us reason together,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool” (Isa 1:18, NIV). “I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more” (Isa 43:25, NIV). “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins” (Isa 44:22). “I will cleanse them from all the sin they have committed against me and will forgive all their sins of rebellion against me” (Jer 33:8, NIV).***

All of this was accomplished when the Son of God first appeared in the world. He came to fulfill a divine requirement. God could neither receive or bless us as He intended, until our sins had been ***“put away”*** from His consideration. We know this was accomplished, because God raised Him from the dead, and exalted Him at His own right hand (Rom 1:4; Acts 5:31; Phil 2:9). This would not have been possible if sin had not been removed!

The implications of this should be obvious. Sin has no power over the individual that ***“receives the atonement”*** (Rom 5:11). Because sin has been ***“put away”*** it ***has no more dominion over us (Rom 6:14). Satan can be resisted, steadfast in the faith (1 Pet 5:8-9)! We can say “NO” to ungodliness and worldly lusts (Tit 2:11-12).*** The principle, or ***“law of sin,”*** remains in our lower nature, but we are freed from its power and enslavement (Rom 7:23-24). If we walk in the Spirit, we ***“will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh”*** (Gal 5:16-27). Why so? Because Jesus really did put sin away! Praise the Lord! This appearing is also imperative if we are to be saved.

HE SHALL APPEAR

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One more appearing is required for the salvation of ***“the elect”*** (Mark 13:22; Luke 18:7; Rom 8:33; Col 3:12; 1 Pet 1:2). This final appearing is as sure as the previously mentioned ones. Because that truth can escape men, the Spirit takes us to something more generally acknowledged--man’s death and judgment. This is known among those with the most rudimentary knowledge of the things of God. Hear, now, the testimony of the Spirit. ***“And inasmuch as it is***

appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await” (NASB).

This coming is called *“a second time”* because it has reference to His appearance to men. His current appearance is before God. His initial appearance was before men, in a disguised manner. His second appearing to men will not be in a disguised way, nor will it be private. This will not be an occasion where only a few shepherds are invited, or a solitary pair in the temple made privy to His appearance. No! When He appears the *“second time,” “every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him”* (Rev 1:7). A public appearing, indeed! His “second” appearing will be accompanied by the passing away of the present heavens and earth. With remarkable vividness and clarity Peter paints the picture. *“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat”* (2 Pet 3:10-12, NIV).

Jesus will appear “the second time” in order to finalize the great salvation of which He is the exclusive Administrator. He will not deal with sin, engage in a conflict with it, or make an additional expiation for it. When salvation is brought to its culmination, the insurrection of mankind will come to an abrupt and grinding halt! There will be no more opposition, nor more rebellion, no more attempts to throw off the yoke of Divine government. The lost will sense their hopelessness, and cry for rocks and mountains to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb (Rev 6:16)--but it will be no avail.

Men have chosen to theorize and speculate about the “second” appearance of Christ, when they ought to PREPARE for it. In a very real sense, our salvation will not be completed until that day. That is why Peter declared were begotten again in order *“to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time ”* (1 Pet 1:4-5).

Likewise Paul writes, *“And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed ”* (Rom 13:11). We presently have the first fruits of our salvation, but certainly not the whole of it. One major aspect of salvation that remains to be fulfilled is the transformation of our bodies (to say nothing of the removal of our adversary, temptation, and enemies). We know that God is set to “sanctify” us completely, *“spirit, soul, and body”* (1 Thess 5:23). It is obvious that your “body” has not yet been saved, or wholly sanctified. It is presently a “vile body” (Phil 3:20), noted for its frailty (2 Cor 5:1). But it will not always be so! Of our bodies, it is written, *“For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality”* (1 Cor 15:53). And when shall this occur? When will the completion of our salvation take place? When will we exchange these mortal bodies for ones immortal? *“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord ”* (1 Thess 4:16-17). In the very midst of the passing of the natural order, the piercing blast of the trump of God, and the mighty shout of the archangel, we shall experience the fulness, or culmination, of our salvation!

If you still have questions about when this noisy affair shall take place, and death be once and for all decimated, hear again the Word of the Lord. *“Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the*

twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Cor 15:51-52). All of this, when the Lord appears *“the second time.”*

But note, Jesus will appear “without sin” (KJV), or *“without reference to sin”* (NASB), *“apart from sin”* (NKJV), or *“not to deal with sin”* (RSV). The NIV provides the interpretive clause, *“not to bear sin.”* The point of the text is that Jesus will appear *“the second time”* in order to finalize the great salvation of which He is the exclusive Administrator. He will not deal with sin, engage in a conflict with it, or make an additional expiation for it. When salvation is brought to its culmination, the insurrection of mankind will come to an abrupt and grinding halt! There will be no more opposition, nor more rebellion, no more attempts to throw off the yoke of Divine government. The lost will sense their hopelessness, and cry for rocks and mountains to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb (Rev 6:16)--but it will be no avail. The bitter lament will be heard, *“The harvest is past, the summer has ended, and we are not saved”* (Jer 8:20, NIV).

The thought of a final battle with the wicked being fought after Jesus returns “the second time” is a concoction of men. It has served to lull men into complacency by making them more fearful of physical harm and persecution than of the wrath of the Lamb of God. The words “unto salvation” defines the conclusion of all things. The earth as we now know it shall have served its purpose when salvation is consummated!

CONCLUSION

We have surveyed a large text--one capable of challenging your thoughts for some time to come. The salvation into which you have been called is exceeding great in every sense of the Word. Its foundation was accomplished by a great Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is now being implemented by an interceding High Priest, and will be brought to its culmination when the High Priest leaves the Most Holy Place, heaven itself. Then, the intercession will be concluded, and the preparatory work completed. I ask you to lift up your eyes! Your redemption is drawing near!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

Commentary on the book of Hebrews

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #15

ONE SACRIFICE!

“For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: ‘Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come; In the volume of the book it is written of Me; To do Your will, O God.’ Previously saying, ‘Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them’ (which are offered according to the law), then He said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.’ He takes away the first that He may establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before, ‘This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,’ then He adds, ‘Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.’ Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.” (Hebrews 10:1-18, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

The thrust of the New Covenant is two-fold. First, it is built upon the accomplishments of Jesus Christ. Second, it involves the willing participation of the redeemed. The New covenant announces the involvement of men, i.e., *“they shall all know Me.”* Through its marvelous promises, it also provides the incentive for men to eagerly seek that involvement. In this, as well as other ways, it is superior to the Old Covenant. Notwithstanding these marvelous provisions, throughout history men had tended to understate the New Covenant, not availing themselves of its benefits. A remarkable tendency to a system of law had nearly dominated the church from the beginning. This is not owing to any deficiency in the New Covenant itself. It has occurred because men have not proclaimed the Gospel, announcing the superiority and effects of Christ’s accomplishments. There is no acceptable excuse for the failure of

If the church becomes slack in its emphasis of the Gospel, all of the above benefits begin to wane in the consciousness of the people. Both wisdom and righteousness will begin to dissipate, and sin will assume the preeminent position. Confidence will no longer be present, nor will the true

condition of the devil be known. Strange and divers doctrines will be embraced under the influence of demons (1 Tim 4:1), and Law will be preferred to grace.

men to do this. Jesus solemnly commissioned His followers to “*preach the Gospel to every creature*” (Mark 16:15), and “*that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations*” (Lk 24:47).

Nothing in Scripture leads us to assume this is to be one announcement to every person--or that it is to cease once the individual has “*received*” Christ (John 1:12). The book of Hebrews is a case in point. It is nothing less than an opening of the Gospel of Christ, and an exposition of the New Covenant. The frequent references to Christ’s death, intercession, and ministry will bolster the faith of the readers. The extensive commentary on the nature of the New Covenant shows how quickly the early church began to drift from the “*glorious Gospel of the blessed God*” (1 Tim 1:11).

Think of the extensive commentary on Christ’s atonement throughout the Apostolic writings. Romans 5-8; 1 Cor 1-2,15; 2 Cor 5; Gal 3; Eph 1-2; Phil 2-3 . . . etc., etc. The atoning sacrifice of Christ is declared to be the means through which we obtain “wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor 1:30). It is the incentive for morality (1 Cor 3:16-20), consideration of one another (Rom 15:7), the denial of self (Gal 2:20), and access to God with confidence (Eph 3:12). The death of Christ is associated with the destruction of the devil (Heb 2:14), the plundering of principalities and powers (Col 2:15), and the blotting out of the handwriting of ordinances that was against us (Col 2:14). It is the basis of His intercession (Heb 9:12) and of our acceptance by God (Eph 1:6). This is why God can now write His law upon our hearts and put it into our minds (Heb 8:10). It makes it possible for us to “know Him” and live in hope and confidence (Heb 8:11; Heb 3:6).

If the church becomes slack in its emphasis of the Gospel, all of the above benefits begin to wane in the consciousness of the people. Both wisdom and righteousness will begin to dissipate, and sin will assume the preeminent position. Confidence will no longer be present, nor will the true condition of the devil be known. Strange and divers doctrines will be embraced under the influence of demons (1 Tim 4:1), and Law will be preferred to grace. Such conditions are not minor. Nor, indeed, are they to be addressed with the wisdom of men. Instead of conferring with the wisdom of this world, men must return to the centrality Christ and His Gospel. Departures from the faith have taken place because of a neglect of the Gospel. The condition will be corrected only by a return to the Gospel.

This is what is being accomplished in Hebrews. We are hearing the Gospel of Christ expounded. The implications of the substitutionary death of Christ are being opened to us. The nature of the New Covenant is delineated with power.

SIX QUOTATIONS!

The Holy Spirit directs our thinking by anchoring it to Scripture. Six quotations are found in this passage. Each one undergirds the effectiveness of Christ's single offering--one sacrifice forever. Here we have true contextual preaching. The context is "*the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*" (Rom 3:24). This is real expository preaching, where an exposition of the New Covenant is accomplished. The exposition is erected upon six Scriptural pillars--quotations from the Psalms and Jeremiah. **Divine affirmation is the foundation of all sound doctrine--not human analysis.** A brief review of them will prepare us for our study.

A PHILOSOPHY OF SCRIPTURE

Our approach to the Word of the living God is important. We can look at "the volume of the Book" as a series of prophecies, letters, and treatises to other people. In such, the primary message belongs to someone else, and we are afforded the privilege of a few gleanings, which apply to us in principle. This mode of study views region, culture, and circumstance, as key to the interpretation of the Word of God. The book of Hebrews, therefore, is primarily for Hebrew believers in the first century, and emphasized circumstances unique to them. We obtain benefit from the book by virtue of common principles that apply to both the Hebrews and those of succeeding generations. Candidly, it is difficult for me to view the Word of God in this manner. It puts God in the primary position of responding, rather than that of revealing the outworking of an "eternal purpose." It tends to neutralize the text for me, and accentuate believers of other generations. Phrase such as "the author's intended meaning," "contextual considerations," and "the time during which it was written," (all of which have some value) are dominate considerations in this view. They become keys that unlock the text, and rely primarily upon scholarship.

There is another approach, however, to "the volume of the Book." Although I do not doubt that many have seen God's Word from this point of view, I do not recall hearing anyone speak of it in this manner. While Scripture was written to specific groups and individuals (Israel, Theophilus, Rome, Corinth, Timothy . . . etc.), they were more custodians of Scripture than objects of God's intention. Like the Jews of old, the Word of God was committed to their trust (Rom 3:2). Holy men wrote addressing common spiritual conditions, not unique ones. God thus unfolded aspects of His purpose to various groups of people. The correction of their spiritual deficiencies was not the ultimate reason for the writings. Rather, I would view it as two-fold. First, to bring them within the circumference of Divine influence, centering them in the will of the Lord. Second, to clarify the purpose and nature of the great salvation of which God had purposed from the foundation of the world. In this view, the real context is the "eternal purpose of God." The real region is the world, in which God is working salvation. The real meaning centers in Christ Jesus. The real application has to do with orientation for the

world to come. In my view, this is a more productive way to study the Word of God. Further, it is precisely the manner in which the Spirit deals with us in this marvelous book of Hebrews.

What God Did NOT Want

“Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure” (Psa 40:5-6). The New Covenant was required, among other things, because of the unacceptableness of the Old Covenant. The bodies of those sacrificial victims brought no satisfaction to God. The fragrance of those sacrifices was not “sweet” to God, for they did not provide a basis for the removal of sin. Therefore a *“body”* was prepared for Christ--a *“body”* that would become the ultimate sacrifice. The *“body”* was *“prepared”* by God Himself. It was the *“power of the Highest”* that overshadowed Mary, as God prepared the sacrificial body within her (Luke 1:35).

The Theme of the Book

“Behold, I have come; In the volume of the book it is written of Me; To do Your will, O God” (Psa 40:7). The glory of this great salvation is the Divine initiative that characterizes it from beginning to end. God prepared the body, and *“the Word”* eagerly came to fulfill the Father’s good pleasure. What was written *“in the volume of the book”*? The thrust of Scripture related to Christ Jesus. We assume this refers to the writings of Moses (Genesis thru Deuteronomy), since no other *“book”* was available to the Psalmist. The

Here is a Divine summation of New Covenant experience: the transformation of fallen men to think in harmony with Deity. Where this does not exist, the individual is not part of the New Covenant, for *“this IS the covenant . . .”* A propensity to spirituality is revolutionary, yet that is precisely what occurs in the New Covenant.

whole *“volume”* of the *“book of Moses”* (2 Chron 25:4; Mark 12:26) was about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He is triumphant *“Seed”* promised in Genesis 3:15, the *“Seed”* through Whom the world would be blessed in Genesis 12:3, and the *“Prophet”* to Whom the people would hearken of Deuteronomy 18:15,18. He is the *“Passover”* introduced by the paschal lamb of Exodus 12, and *“Lamb”* to which the sacrificial animals of Leviticus pointed. The *“volume of the book”* pertained to Him!

Unsatisfactory Offerings

“Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them” (Psa 40:6). Four kinds of offerings are mentioned in this text. *“Sacrifice* (animal offering--Lev 22) ,” *“offering* (meal offering--Lev 2) ,” *“burnt offering* (Lev 1,4) ,” and *“sin offering* (Lev 5-8) .” All of these offerings were associated with sin and cleansing. They represented a thorough appeal to God. Some living and pure had to be offered to God. Something that grew and matured was offered to Him. The offering was to be consumed by fire, and the only reason for it was the sin of the people. Yet, in all of these offerings, God was not pleased. They were not what He wanted, they only pointed to what He wanted. They were offered precisely and meticulously, but they were not effective to accomplish the determined purpose of the Almighty.

A Willing Savior

“Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God” (Psa 40:7). Prophetically, the reason for the incarnation the Word is here declared. The best efforts by the best men failed to yield Divine satisfaction. Obedience to the most exacting ritual failed to produce a satisfied God. The Son of God came into the world to die--to offer an acceptable and satisfactory sacrifice to God.

A New Covenant

“This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them” Jer 31:31). Here is a Divine summation of New Covenant experience: the transformation of fallen men to think in harmony with Deity. Where this does not exist, the individual is not part of the New Covenant, for *“this IS the covenant . . .”* A propensity to spirituality is revolutionary, yet that is precisely what occurs in the New Covenant.

A Better Promise

“Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more” (Jer 31:34). As long as God remembers the sins of humanity, there is no hope of recovery. It is no enough to do enough works to supposedly outweigh transgression [which is not possible]. An impact must first be made upon God before one can be made upon man. Something must be done that will induce God to never again remember the sin of the justified one.

THE POWERLESSNESS OF A TYPE

A type, or shadow, is instructional, even preparatory, but has no power. *“For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices,*

TRUE THEOLOGY

True and productive theology (the knowledge of God) cannot make FORM its emphasis. This in no way denigrates form, or make it inconsequential. Wherever there is God-ordained form, it is imperative that it be followed. Whether it was the precision of the procedures related to Israel’s deliverance from Egypt, the Levitical sacrificial system, baptism, or the Lord’s Table, men are not at liberty to despise or alter God-ordained forms. These forms, however, are not at the heart of sound doctrine. They are more a door than a room, and a candle-holder than a wick. Those who EMPHASIZE form or procedure do a great disservice to their listeners. They leave them in the vestibule of revelation, at a distance from God, and at the mercy of men and Satan. The power is in what the form contains, and not in the form itself.

The value of the types and shadows instituted under the Law was in what they foreshadowed. There was no purpose for the sacrificial system or order of High Priest apart from the coming Christ. Remove Him from the picture, and they were all empty procedures. They did not accomplish the ultimate purpose of God, but did introduce it. For coming generation, they made redemption comprehensible, enabling men to understand the nature and extent of the coming salvation.

Historically, men have grappled with this matter of form. What I am about to say is not to

be construed as a condemnation. I am pointing out the powerlessness of such an approach. Highly liturgical religions have chosen form as their primary form of identity and activity. In this approach, structures, elaborate attire, and precision of routine are fundamental. Others, rejecting that approach to form, have instituted extensive procedures that emphasize the involvement of the people. Their approach roots in emotion and experience, and is highly structured and stereotyped. Commonality of experience, whether in a worship service, or a spiritual experience, is critical in this approach. Still others have chosen to make selected forms as their emphasis. It may be baptism, the Lord's Supper, foot-washing, or any other of a number of procedures mentioned in Scripture. In every case, the power or life contained in the form is not the point, but the form itself. Such is not a proper approach. Of themselves, even God-ordained forms have no power. If Jesus were not risen from the dead, baptism would be inconsequential. If Jesus were not coming again, there would be no point to observing the Lord's Supper. If humility does not constrain the washing of disciples feet, it has no value.

which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect." The "shadow" was not itself good, but projected an image of "*good things to come.*" The contribution made by the Law was owing to the coming of Messiah. Were it not for that, the Law would have left men in a condemned state, with no advantage whatsoever. It was the "*very image of the things*" the Law projected that made it profitable in any sense. It was never designed to be permanent--never given to justify.

We are not dealing with something that was not probable, but with something that was IMPOSSIBLE. Upon the basis of the sacrifices offered under the Law, it was not possible to make the "*comers,*" or approaching ones, "*perfect.*" Mind you, they did not run from God, but approached Him. They did not ignore their sin, but brought a stipulated sacrifice in acknowledge of their transgression. Yet, they did not become "perfect" in their conscience. They never knew the joy of sins forgiven! They never rejoiced in Divine acceptance.

We must learn from this that a cleansed conscience is imperative. Without it, men can neither approach the Lord nor live in His presence. What is more, apart from that approach and life, there is no hope of being brought to glory. The Old Covenant was one of aloofness. Because it did not take away sin, it erected a barrier between God and man--the barrier of a contaminated conscience.

The New Covenant is one of nearness, not aloofness. There is no provision in Christ for remaining at a distance from God. If one chooses to live in ignorance of Divine provision, he will receive none. There are no safe "*outskirts*" in the city of Zion--no "*rural areas,*" so to speak. Because men find this exceedingly difficult to accept, the ordained procedures of sin offerings is here introduced. Israel was a body of people chosen by the Lord. They received the oracles of God, together with an extensive sacrificial system. The procedures involved in that sacrificial system had no power to purify the conscience of the people. They were at a distance from God, and the procedures only confirmed that to be the case.

A Reminder of Sins

Under Law, in the presence of the Almighty, the spotlight was turned on sin! Sin was the focus! Guilt was the point!

Transgression was the emphasis in the mind of the people. People simply could not stand before the Lord without being smitten with the enormity of their sin!

It is imperative that we do not take the blessings of the New Covenant for granted. What is more, we will find the power of the New Covenant is owing to what Jesus did, not what we do. This does not exclude our involvement. Rather, it sanctifies it.

Now we come to the heart of the matter. We will find that apart from the sanctifying blood of Christ, men have never been, nor will they ever be, able to stand before God. Their own conscience will drive them from His presence. Fear will strike every mortal down that stands before God apart from the sacrifice of Christ Jesus! Because of man's propensity to trust in his own accomplishments, the Spirit drives this point home to us. He will take the Law at its highest and most productive point--during the sacrifice of atonement--and unveil its powerlessness. **The powerlessness of the Law is seen in its inability to cleanse the conscience.**

“But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year.” Under the Old Covenant, the closer one came to God, the more acute was the awareness of sin. The offering for sin itself was identified by words that struck the conscience of the sinner-- **“SIN OFFERING”** (Ex 29:14,36; 30:10; Lev 4,5,6 . . . etc.). **Under the Law, SIN was accentuated, not offering.** Men could not come before God apart from a procedure that addressed their sin. In the offerings, the mercy of God was not seen, but the sinfulness of man. The death of an innocent victim had to precede every approach to the Almighty! Those who approached were sinners! They were sinners! They were sinners! They could not forget it. They were sinners! They were guilty, defiled, and unworthy!

Under Law, in the presence of the Almighty, the spotlight was turned on sin! Sin was the focus! Guilt was the point! Transgression was the emphasis in the mind of the people. People simply could not stand before the Lord without being smitten with the enormity of their sin! This effect is frequently mentioned in Scripture. When Israel confronted a veiled God at Sinai, they thought they were going to die. *“And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die ”* (Ex 20:19). When an angel came to announce the birth of Samson, the experience was so impressive it is written, *“And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God”* (Judges 13:22). Gideon had a similar experience when he confronted an angel (Judges 6:22-23). When Isaiah saw the Lord, high and lifted up, he cried, *“Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts”* (Isa 6:5). The Lord showed Zechariah a vision in which Joshua the high priest was *“standing before the angel of the Lord.”* Although the Lord had plucked Joshua *“from the fire,”* he was still *“clothed with filthy garments,”* denoting an acute consciousness of sin. Too, Satan was at his right hand to *“resist him”* (Zech 3:1ff). There was no direct communication with Joshua until he had been provided clothed with a change of raiment, and a clean mitre of acceptance placed upon his head (3:4-5). **No man could stand before God without becoming acutely aware of his sin and sinfulness!**

I cannot leave this section without commenting on the seriousness of an approach to God that does not include a cleansed conscience. I speak now to

those who have believed and obeyed the Gospel of Christ. When coming to God, you come through Christ Jesus, and Him alone. You dare not approach Him upon the basis of your own achievement. The blood of Christ is the means by which your conscience is cleansed, not the exactness of procedure or the fulfillment of His demands. My heart bleeds for myriads of people who lie before humanly devised altars, seeking acceptance upon the basis of their prayers, their works, or some religious experience. With contaminated consciences they lie prostrate before the Lord seeking merit, yet acutely aware they have none in themselves.

They regularly hear a false gospel that reminds them of their sinnerhood. They suppose that scolding will somehow make them suitable to enter the presence of the Lord, yet their conscience confirms this is not the case. Perhaps another man can gain acceptance for them. If saints gather around them and plead for them, maybe they will be able to obtain the blessing, or have their conscience cleansed at last. The thought of standing before God makes them tremble and quake, and they are told this is good--yet they sense it is not. Thinking they are close to God, they are actually at a distance, because their contaminated conscience will not allow them to be close. Trembling in the outer court, they are told they are in the Divine Presence. The travesty of such a religion cannot be overstated. Jesus did not offer Himself without spot to God to sanctify this kind of approach. Such existed before Christ. It was inadequate then, and it is even more inadequate today!

God Was Not Pleased

The pleasure of God is critical to Divine acceptance. If His eternal purpose is not served--if His ultimate will is not fulfilled--there is no hope of human acceptance. We are not speaking of meeting technical requirements under the Law. That was achieved in the sacrificial system. The animals were prepared for sacrifice

The pleasure of God is critical to Divine acceptance. If His eternal purpose is not served--if His ultimate will is not fulfilled--there is no hope of human acceptance. We are not speaking of meeting technical requirements under the Law. That was achieved in the sacrificial system. The animals were prepared for sacrifice with remarkable precision.

with remarkable precision. The proper animals were selected (Lev 1:3). They were cut into pieces appropriately (Lev 1:6). Parts were meticulously washed according to revealed procedure (Lev 1:9). The arrangement of the pieces upon the altar were according to exacting procedure (Lev 1:12). Carcasses were consumed with fire outside the camp (Lev 4:21). Even the dung of the animal, with the skin of the bullock, and all his flesh, with his head, and with his legs, and his inwards, were burned on wood with fire (Lev 4:11-12). Still, it is written, **“In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure . . . Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them” (which are offered according to the law).”**

The number of sacrifices offered for sin were staggering. Micah said it well when he asked, **“Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of**

rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" (Micah 6:7). Take, for example, the dedication of Solomon's temple. The sacrifices offered to God at that time are mind boggling. Hear the word of the Lord. ***"And Solomon offered a sacrifice of peace offerings, which he offered unto the LORD, two and twenty thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep"*** (1 Kgs 8:62-63). The offerings (including burnt offerings, meal offerings, and peace offerings) were so voluminous, the brazen altar could not hold them (1 Kgs 8:64). If the AMOUNT of offerings could obtain merit, surely this would be the occasion where that would be accomplished. **22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep!** God, however, was not pleased with that massive offering. It is not what He desired!

By this, the Spirit means the *"eternal purpose"* of God was not fulfilled by the offerings. They did not take away sin. They did not cleanse the conscience. They did not enable the people to enter into His presence. They did not free the Lord to bless the people as He desired. The sacrifices were not contaminated by sin, were not blemished, and had done nothing worthy of death. But they were not a

Suffice it to say, if God was not pleased with such sacrifices, there will be no lasting satisfaction for those who offer them, as well as those for whom they are offered. God cannot be satisfied with less than Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son. If men do not come to God through Christ, they cannot come! God does not desire less than Christ, and is not pleased with anything less than Him. Once learned, that single lesson propels one into unparalleled involvement in the will of the Lord.

moral creation. They had not sinned, but neither had they resisted temptation. They had not violated the will of God, but neither had they participated in it. They pointed to the necessity of a sacrifice, but they were not themselves an acceptable sacrifice. They were precisely offered in accordance with the holy Law, but they were not effective to accomplish the purpose of the Almighty. The people remained the same!

Suffice it to say, if God was not pleased with such sacrifices, there will be no lasting satisfaction for those who offer them, as well as those for whom they are offered. God cannot be satisfied with less than Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son. If men do not come to God through Christ, they cannot come! God does not desire less than Christ, and is not pleased with anything less than Him. Once learned, that single lesson propels one into unparalleled involvement in the will of the Lord. It is projected in the marvelous confession of Paul, and of which I never tire. ***"But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus"*** (Phil 3:7-14, NIV). The Apostle saw what satisfied God, and determined it would also be satisfying for him.

A BODY PREPARED FOR THE SAVIOR

The incarnation of Christ is one of the great pillars of the faith. The Spirit's approach to this singular event is not that of a melancholy event, much like that portrayed during Christmas holidays. Our text has the Word Himself commenting on the incarnation, or enfleshment of Deity . *"But a body You have prepared for Me."*

The **"YOU"** is the Father. He is the One behind our salvation--the One against Whom we have sinned. It was *"the power of the Highest"* that overshadowed Mary, protecting and enabling her to bear the Son of God. There has never before nor since been a body prepared as this one. Isaac's body was miraculously prepared within the formerly barren and aged womb of Sarah. The body of John the Baptist was prepared in Elizabeth, stricken with years. But their bodies were not like that of Christ. *They were born to live, Jesus was born to die!*

The body of Christ was a sacrificial body. He came into the world to bear the brunt of Divine wrath, suffer, and die for the sins of the world. He provides an example for us, but that is not the primary reason for Him coming. He had compassion on the multitudes around Him, but that is not the reason for His entrance into the world. We must not look at Jesus *"according to the flesh,"* or as one of our peers (2 Cor 5:16). His birth was the prelude to His death! It was the Divine means of providing an acceptable sacrifice for sin!

The Son was sent so God could *"condemn sin the flesh"* (Rom 8:3). Jesus was "made of a woman, made under the Law" in order to *"redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons"* (Gal 4:4). His obedience is pointedly declared. *"And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"* (Phil 2:8). How wonderfully this is declared precious in this book. *"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage"* (Heb 2:14-15).

The Lord Jesus could not effect our salvation without dying! The situation was that bad! God could not fulfill his eternal purpose without the sinless sacrifice of His only begotten Son. The situation was that serious! The Creator of the worlds could not bring us to God without a prepared body, in which He would bear the sins of the world and endure the curse of the Almighty. The situation was that challenging!

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This body was *"prepared"* before the foundation of the world. The universe was created with this *"body"* in the mind of the Lord! From the beginning, the Word contemplated His entrance into defiled realm, with defiled people! He is *"the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world"* (Rev 13:8). Under the direction of the Holy Spirit, Peter said it this way; *"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of*

a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you” (1 Pet 1:18-20).

Those who minimize sin make Jesus insignificant. When men emphasize social, political, and interpersonal relationships, they at once push Jesus into the background. A body was not prepared for Him to address political matters. That did not require an incarnation. God can correct political entities from without a sacrifice for sin, as He did Pharaoh, Sihon, Og, Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and Herod. He can raise up a nation from one man, deliver them from a bondage that exceeded 400 years, and cause them to pass through a Sea, without a satisfying sacrifice for sin! He can open the womb of the barren, grant unparalleled wisdom to Solomon, and deliver men from lions and fire without having, at that time, what He really desired. But He could not take away the sin of the world without preparing a body for His Son. He could not provide free access to Himself without the Word become flesh, dwelling among us, and laying down His life!

Jesus Came to Do God’s Will

Fulfilling the will of the Father was uppermost in the mind of Jesus Christ. *“Behold, I have come; In the volume of the book it is written of Me; To do Your will, O God . . . Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.”* Jesus had compassion on the people, but His focus was the will of the Father. He was not pleased with Herod the *“fox”* (Lk 13:32), but His mind was set on doing the will of God. He loved to teach the multitudes, to open the things of the Kingdom to His disciples, and to go about doing good, but His mind was fixed on fulfilling the will of the Lord.

His entire life was but a prelude to His death. He brought His prodigious earthly ministry to a grinding halt when the time came for Him to die. Of that time it is written, *“And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem”* (Luke 9:51). This was Christ’s *“meat”* — His source of satisfaction. He said, *“My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work”* (John 4:34). Speaking of His entrance into the world, he said, *“For I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me”* (John 6:38).

He Took Away the First Covenant

In His death, Christ accomplished the will of God. Here we learn of the dissolution of the first covenant. It did not accomplish the purpose of God, and thus must ultimately be removed. It could not, however, be removed until sin had been removed. The first covenant [embodied in the words of the ten commandments, which were called *“the words of the covenant”* (Ex 34:28)] defined and condemned sin. As long as sin remained, that covenant remained.

However, now that Jesus was put sin away, the first covenant is also

No more approach to God with inadequate sacrifices! No longer will men offer to God sacrifices in which He has no pleasure and which He does not desire! The time of ineffective sacrifices is now brought to an end. Defiled consciences will now be cleansed, and the way to

God opened wide to those once contaminated with sin!

taken away, to be replaced by a better covenant, established upon better promises (Heb 8:6). How glorious the words: ***“He takes away the first . . .”*** No more approach to God with inadequate sacrifices! No longer will men offer to God sacrifices in which He has no pleasure and which He does not desire! The time of ineffective sacrifices is now brought to an end. Defiled consciences will now be cleansed, and the way to God opened wide to those once contaminated with sin! No longer will those approaching God be under a covenant that is ***“weak through the flesh.”*** The people of God will not have a covenant described as ***“weak and beggarly elements of the world”*** (Gal 4:9)--NO MORE! That covenant has been **TAKEN AWAY** by the Lord Jesus. He took it away when He died! No longer does the Law ***“stop”*** the mouths of covenant-people, forbidding them access to God! No longer do we have a covenant that is ***“not of faith”*** (Gal 3:12).

He Established the New Covenant

Because of Jesus, we now have a New Covenant--a new kind of covenant! It is not a philosophical covenant, but an established one. It is not a mere idea, but it is a way to God. It is now in place because the former covenant has been taken away in order ***“ . . . that He may establish the second.”*** Mind you, this covenant is ***“established”***--it is in place! In former ages, ***“many prophets and righteous men”*** anticipated such a covenant (Matt 13:17). Even righteous ***“kings”*** longed for such days (Luke 10:24). But the covenant was not established in their days. Prophets that foretold the glorious covenant now enjoyed by us were told it was not for them. I never tire of recalling Peter’s words on this matter. ***“As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven-- things into which angels long to look”*** (1 Pet 1:10-12, NASB).

But the covenant is ***“established”*** now! We can come to God with a cleansed conscience, convinced our sins have been removed from us as far as the East is from the West! The law of God can now be written upon your heart and put into your mind. Now you can know the Lord, intimately and fruitfully. In this time, you can be the people of God, and He can be your God. That is the covenantal benefits that are now in place. This is the ***“day of salvation”*** in which spiritually nourishment is freely ministered (2 Cor 6:2). Away with a religion that keeps people at a distance from God, robbing them of the knowledge of God and the awareness of sins forgiven! The New Covenant has been established! It is in place, and the blessings of the Lord are available to those who unqualifiedly receive the Son.

Sanctified By The Offering of the Body of Christ

The consequences of sin are so gigantic, that multitudes still find it difficult to believe they are accepted in Christ. Beholding their own deficiencies, they imagine that God will surely have nothing to do with them. They have not done enough. They have not measured up to their own expectations, to say nothing of those of God. How can they be received by the great God of heaven? The answer is found in the single sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the New Covenant it ratified! ***“By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”***

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“That will” is the New Covenant. It is not so much a *“will”* in the sense of a *last will and testament*, although that is surely involved. The word *“will”* underscores God good pleasure with the sacrifice of Christ. Remember, God was not pleased with the sacrifices offered under the Law. He is, however, *“well pleased”* with the sacrifice of His Son. **The New Covenant is nothing less than the expression of that good pleasure!** Because of the satisfaction induced by Christ’s willing sacrifice, the offering of Christ’s body is effective. That single sacrifice has *“sanctified”* us, setting us apart for God.

The word *“sanctified”* is here used in a high sense. This is not a sanctification we do, as in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4. There surely is a work for us in salvation--one which requires diligent effort on our part. We are to *“cleanse”* ourselves of *“all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord”* (2 Cor 7:1). No doctrine must ever be allowed that will diminish the importance of this activity. It is absolutely requisite for every child of God, and *“without”* such holiness, *“no man shall see the Lord”* (Heb 12:4). But this is not the point of this text.

Practical sanctification, if I may use that term, can only be accomplished within the context of Divine acceptance. What is more, God cannot undergird our effort if an acceptable sacrifice has not been accomplished. The point of this text is this: Christ’s offering has brought believers into the realm of blessing. Their efforts are now undergirded by omnipotence. Sanctification is frequently mentioned from this perspective. *“But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption”* (1 Cor 1:30). *“But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth”* (2 Thess 2:13). *“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ”* (1 Pet 1:2). *“. . . as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word”* (Eph 5:25-26). *“Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate”* (Heb 13:12).

God’s people have already been set apart for God. Set apart for blessing! Set apart for Divine employment! Set apart for empowerment! There is no need to linger in the outer court, and remain in aloofness from your God. The embrace of Christ’s death, or *“faith in the blood”* (Rom 3:25), qualifies you! You can come near and find mercy and grace to help in the time of need! You have been set apart for God *“by the offering of the body of Christ once for all!”*

ONE SACRIFICE FOR SINS FOREVER

For four thousand years, God waited patiently for the appointed sacrifice. He tolerated the sins of His people in anticipation of that solitary sacrifice. Animal sacrifices did not satisfy Him--not for a year or even a day! He did not want many sacrifices, but an effective one! Jesus accomplished His will! *“But this Man, after He had offered*

one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God."

By saying "*this Man*," at least two things are underscored. First, Jesus is compared with all the righteous men of all ages. None of them could fulfill God's good pleasure. None of them could accomplish the will of God so He could receive the people freely. "*But this Man*," Christ Jesus, **DID** accomplish that will--and He did so with a single sacrifice. Secondly, a member of the race saved the race! "*This Man*" was one of us, "*made of a woman, made under the Law*" (Gal 4:4).

The accomplishment was so thorough, no further consideration of a sacrifice for sin is entertained in heaven! That accentuates the quality of this sacrifice. The Lord Jesus was spotless, without blemish or flaw of

Once sin was "taken away," God was satisfied, and Jesus was seated at His right hand. No more sacrifice is required! Now, it only remains for that one sacrifice to become the focus of men, as it is the focus in heaven. This is not a simplistic thing! The sacrifice was offered to God! It was offered by an able Savior, but also by a willing One! Because it satisfied Him, it is now offered to us!

any sort. He "*did no sin, neither was any guile found in His mouth*" (1 Pet 2:22). He was "*made to be sin, Who knew no sin*" (2 Cor 5:21). From the beginning of His consciousness to His death, He "*loved righteousness and hated iniquity*" (Heb 1:9). He was tempted in every way we are, "*yet without sin*" (Heb 4:15). In the most precise and thorough way, He "*is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens*" (Heb 7:26). He was truly "*a lamb without blemish and without spot*" (1 Pet 1:19).

"And ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins; and in Him is no sin" (1 John 3:5). Once sin was "*taken away*," God was satisfied, and Jesus was seated at His right hand. No more sacrifice is required! Now, it only remains for that one sacrifice to become the focus of men, as it is the focus in heaven. This is not a simplistic thing! The sacrifice was offered to God! It was offered by an able Savior, but also by a willing One! Because it satisfied Him, it is now offered to us!

Perfected Forever

The Gospel contains some expressions that are especially challenging. Here is one of them. "*For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are sanctified.*" Some versions the latter part of this verse, "*perfected forever those who are BEING sanctified,*" or "*being made holy*" (NKJV, NIV). This particular view introduces a difficulty. How has God "*perfected forever,*" or "*made perfect for all time*" (NASB) those that are being made holy? He has made individuals fully accepted in Christ and completely exonerated them because of the "*one offering.*" Upon the basis of that "*one offering,*" He is working in them "*both to will and to do of His own good pleasure*" (Phil 2:13). Because of that solitary sacrifice God can "*make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever*" (Heb 13:21).

Your role in the matter is to fight to maintain that perspective! Your faith is the means by which you maintain your view and grasp of the situation. It is eternal, but your faith is not! It is a daily matter, involving a daily fight, and daily commitment!

There WILL never be another basis of acceptance! There CAN never be another basis of perfection! Salvation is "*eternal*," and only eternal (Heb 5:9). If there are those who imagine this means they are not themselves involved in the process, let them think again. The purpose of Christ's death is to bring us into the salvation. We partake of it through faith, and we maintain that involvement

through faith. By saying “*perfected forever,*” the Spirit builds the confidence of the believer. They need not search for a better or alternative way. They are foolish to ignore this way. Perfection can be found in Christ alone, and it deals with an eternal relationship. There are no “*quick and temporal fixes*” in Christ Jesus--no seasonal or cyclical remedies! **You are never more accepted than you are in Christ, never more perfected than you are in Christ!** Your role in the matter is to fight to maintain that perspective! Your faith is the means by which you maintain your view and grasp of the situation. It is eternal, but your faith is not! It is a daily matter, involving a daily fight, and daily commitment!

The Spirit Testifies

“*But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us . . .*” Here the Word of God is personalized to us. The words to which we are referred were written hundreds of years before Christ. Yet, the Spirit witnesses them to us, enlivening them to our spirits. Jeremiah wrote them for us, and the Spirit speaks them to us. Those, therefore, who close their minds to the words of the prophets turn their ears from the witness of the Holy Spirit.

THE NATURE OF THE COVENANT IS GLORIOUS

Now the Spirit summarizes the New Covenant. He is proving to us its effectiveness and glory. “*This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them.*” Under this arrangement it becomes absurd to seek justification by the works of the Law, or return to a religion of empty procedure. How absurd it is to refuse a covenant in which Divine satisfaction has been achieved--a covenant where the Divine nature can be received by those who were once alienated! God “*puts*” His “*laws into*” our “*hearts*” because of the pleasing sacrifice of Christ, not because of the excellence of our works or the ardentness of our efforts. God cannot work with people who are at variance with Himself. Thanks be unto Him for a sacrifice so great and so effective that God can remain righteous while writing His laws upon our minds, and putting them in our hearts!

Where Remission Is

“*Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.*” Remember, there has been only “*ONE*” acceptable sacrifice. We know it is acceptable because the One that offered it has returned to heaven. He is now seated on the right hand of God because there is no more work for Him to do upon the earth--no more sacrifice for Him to offer. Under the Law, High Priests offered sacrifices continually. That condition was required because their sacrifices were not pleasing to God. They were not what He desired. But Jesus has offered what God wanted, what He purposed from the foundation of the world. The lack of requirement for further sacrifice proves sin has been removed, and we may draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith. Praise the Lord!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated Presents

Commentary on the book of Hebrews

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #16

PRESSING IN!

“Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:19-25, NKJV).

INTRODUCTION

The faith-life is one of spiritual aggression. Those in Christ have been provided spiritual weaponry designed to pull down bastions of false thought, imaginations, and every thought that exalts itself against the knowledge of God (2 Cor 10:5-6). When it comes to the *“flesh,”* or the Adamic nature, *“they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh, with its affections and lusts”* (Gal 5:24). With firmness of heart and purpose, grace has taught them to *“deny ungodliness and worldly lusts,” and to live “soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world”* (Tit 2:11-12). Faith has aligned them against spiritual forces that are staggering. Their foes are not flesh and blood, but *“principalities and powers, spiritual wickedness in high places, and the rulers of the darkness of this world”* (Eph 6:12). Their life is a *“race”* that has been laid out before them. It leads through craggy mountains as well as across dreary deserts. It is a race that must be *“run,”* and not casually walked as though there were no foes, or time was in abundance (Heb 12:1-2). From another perspective, living by faith is a *“good fight,”* in which foes are opposed (1 Tim 6:12). Both defense and offence are required in this posture.

Because of the nature of salvation, believers *“buffet,”* or pummel, their bodies, bringing them into subjection (1 Cor 9:27). They will not allow their natural appetites to dominate them, but *“crucify the flesh, with its affection and lusts”* (Gal 5:24). Acknowledging they are *“strangers and pilgrims in the earth,”* they *“abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul”* (1 Pet 2:11). Make no mistake about this, Divine resources are required for the effort into which faith thrusts us. An aggressive spiritual posture is not possible without these resources, or graces.

Believers must *“submit”* themselves *“to God,”* and *“resist the devil,”* the shrewdness of all foes (James 4:7; 1 Pet 5:8-9). What they have been given, they must *“keep,”* not allowing it to slip from their grasp, or be snatched from them by the devil

There is nothing--absolutely nothing--about the Gospel that encourages a disinterested spirit. The Holy Spirit never promotes or condones inconsistency or a lack of fervency. A quest for glory will not allow the individual to attempt a cyclical involvement with the Almighty. A lack of spiritual appetite, fervency of spirit, and awareness of the things of God, do not come from God. The Lord Jesus does not give them. The Holy Spirit does not encourage them.

(2 Tim 1:14; Heb 2:1; Matt 13:19). At all cost, the prize that is set before them must be obtained (Phil 3:14)! There is nothing about living by faith that will allow casualness--nothing at all!

The spiritual condition of the Western world requires a strong affirmation of the case. Any religion that allows spiritual casualness, apathy, or a lack of consistent involvement is not from God. Its claims are all spurious, it is not blessed by God, and it cannot facilitate the “*great salvation*” given to men through Christ Jesus. Wherever an assembly is found that creates a comfort zone for the uncommitted, the adversary of our souls is at work. The Spirit is being quenched in such an environment, regardless of a profession or theological position. Either the preaching and teaching are off-target, or the people have hard and calloused hearts. There is nothing--absolutely nothing--about the Gospel that encourages a disinterested spirit. The Holy Spirit never promotes or condones inconsistency or a lack of fervency. A quest for glory will not allow the individual to attempt a cyclical involvement with the Almighty. A lack of spiritual appetite, fervency of spirit, and awareness of the things of God, do not come from God. The Lord Jesus does not give them. The Holy Spirit does not encourage them. This is simply a statement of the case, and requires no further explanations.

This section of the book of Hebrews deals with these conditions. Here the Holy Spirit urges the redeemed to an aggressive spiritual posture. The nature of salvation requires this sort of comportment. Your own experience will confirm to you that a casual spirit causes a fog to engulf the things of God. When the way is clear, we “*see through a glass darkly.*” But when our hearts are not involved in the matter, the things of God become more and more obscure, until finally, they will not be seen at all. There can be no spiritual illumination without walking in the light. There can be no fellowship with God’s dear Son (1 Cor 1:9) without communion with Him. The leading of the Spirit in the mortifying of the deeds of the body (Rom 8:13) is not possible when He is “*quenched*” and “*grieved*” (1 Thess 5:19; Eph 4:30). What we will now view is the opposite of quenching the Spirit. It is the **only** alternative to grieving the Holy Spirit. I encourage you to take the words seriously. *They are not meant to intimidate or threaten, but to awaken the soul to the means through which the Lord Jesus is bringing us to glory.*

BOLDNESS TO ENTER

“*Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus.*” How refreshing to the soul! The people of God are addressed as those who **HAVE** boldness, or confidence, to enter into the very presence of God. Of this verse Robertson well says, “*Boldness (parrhsian). This is the dominant note all through the Epistle (3:6; 4:16; 10:19,35). They were tempted to give up Christ, to be quitters. Boldness (courage) is the need of the hour.*”¹ Through the years, I have observed a noticeable deficiency of spiritual boldness or courage in professed believers. It is a tragedy that is a source of great grief to me--chiefly because it does not need to be so!

A Large Word

The word “boldness” is a large word. It is an attitude of openness stemming from freedom and a lack of intimidating fear. It speaks of confidence and a joyful sense of freedom. Mind you, we are speaking of this quality in the very presence of God-- “*the holiest*” place. This is the “*liberty*” wherewith Christ has “*made us free*” (Gal 5:1). It is freedom to draw close to God without fear of being consumed or rejected. It is liberty to resist the devil, deny ungodliness, and subordinate passions that keep us from the Lord. In Christ this freedom obtained. Now the Spirit urges us to live in an awareness of it--to believe what He declares to have been accomplished. If you are “*in Christ,*” you can come to God. You can obtain His promises, enjoy His strength, and experience His guidance. In the Son of God, the promise of Isaiah is fulfilled to the believer: “*See, it is I who created the blacksmith who fans the coals into flame and forges a weapon fit for its work. And it is I who have created the destroyer to work havoc; no weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and this is their vindication from me,*” declares the LORD” (Isaiah 54:16-

It is freedom to draw close to God without fear of being consumed or rejected. It is liberty to resist the devil, deny ungodliness, and subordinate passions that keep us from the Lord. In Christ this freedom obtained. Now the Spirit urges us to live in an awareness of it--to believe what He declares to have been accomplished.

17). Unlike the Israelites of old, we are not shut out of the Holiest place. We have access to the “*true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man*” (Heb 8:2). The veil between man and God has been removed--not to merely peer into the holiest, but to **ENTER** into it. This speaks of experiential involvement with God, participation in His purpose, and the enjoyment of His blessing.

Having completed a doctrinal presentation of the Son of God, and His indispensable role in our salvation, the Spirit now deals with the effect the doctrine is to have upon us. You will quickly observe the thrust of His argument. He does not introduce a protracted dissertation about domestic life, political life, or other such involvements. He now associates our position with that of the high priest of old. The ordinary priests did not enter into the Holiest Place--only the high priest. What a remarkable parallel — the saints of God with the high priest of the Old Covenant! Dare we contemplate the glories of what Jesus has accomplished? As a member of the body of Christ, you can come into the very presence of God, to “*obtain mercy, and find grace to help in the time of need*” (Heb 4:16).

All *empty* ceremony is obviated in Christ Jesus! Dependency upon a merely ceremonial approach to God is superfluous and useless. It is out of harmony with the very nature of the New Covenant, and subtly denies the effectiveness of Christ’s substitutionary death. It is important to note the superiority of Old Testament types and shadows to parables and allegories. Jesus used parables (Matt 13:34-35), and Paul used allegories (Gal 4:24). However, neither of them was acknowledged as a superior form of teaching. Jesus used parables to obscure spiritual realities for which alien hearts were not suited (Matt 13:10-11,13-14). Paul used an allegory because of the carnality of the Galatians, who had lost a true sense of spiritual things (Gal 4:19-21). When the Spirit expounded the glorious ministry of Jesus, neither parable nor allegories were employed. Instead, He reaches into the God-ordained treasury of types and shadows. They are a reflection of heavenly realities. As such, they are

most suitable for the exposition of Christ's ministry and saint's privileges. Oh, that there were a return to this type of ministry today!

Spiritual freedom is experienced in the Holiest place--freedom to draw near to God, appropriate covenantal blessings, and be loosed from the tyranny of sin. Here effective prayers, intercessions, and supplications are offered. The joy of the Lord is appropriated in His presence, and never at a distance. Here is where the "peace of God" rules our "hearts and minds"

The right to enter into the presence of the Lord is a God-granted privilege. Yet, we can do so boldly, courageously, and confidently. The boldness is reflected more in the entering itself than in an emotional state. You do not well to ponder for long periods whether or not you have courage to enter. "*Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, And into His courts with praise*" (Psa 100:4). There is no magic in your thanksgiving and praise that guarantees the presence of the Lord. I fear this concept has been embraced by many, but it is a false notion. It is you yourself that enters, **WITH**, *not in*, thanksgiving and praise (Psa 95:2). Christ's death did not bring you the right to praise, but the right to **ENTER**! Jesus said "*the stones*" would cry out if humanity did not praise Him (Luke 19:40), but stones cannot ENTER into the holiest place!

To "**ENTER**" means to gain entrance into a place where we are welcome. Our entrance is attended by an acute awareness of our acceptance in the Beloved (Eph 1:6). No one will come approach the Lord with any degree of confidence that is not assured of the effectiveness of the blood of Christ. This is not an area for theological speculation! We are being urged by the Spirit of God come into God's presence, not speculate as to whether or not it is possible. He is not directing us to develop a position on the accessibility of the Living God, but to avail ourselves of the benefits of the New Covenant. Our entrance will find us acutely aware of the Lord, like Isaiah was when He saw the Lord "*high and lifted up*" (Isa 6:1-3). The world and its allurements will recede into the background, and the strength lust and pride will wither. Grace will be perceived as abundant and accessible, and the vileness of our bodies will be perceived with clarity. The purpose of God will supplant a self-will, pleasing the Lord will push sinful pleasure into the background, and fulfillment will be found in Christ alone.

Spiritual freedom is experienced in the Holiest place--freedom to draw near to God, appropriate covenantal blessings, and be loosed from the tyranny of sin. Here effective prayers, intercessions, and supplications are offered. The joy of the Lord is appropriated in His presence, and never at a distance (Psa 16:11). Here is where the "*peace of God*" rules our "*hearts and minds*" (Phil 4:6-7). As we come courageously and confidently into the Holiest Place, we are "*filled with all joy and peace in believing,*" and we begin to "*abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit*" (Rom 15:13). The things in "*heavenly places*" that we are admonished to "*seek,*" are found in the Holiest (Col 3:1-3). All "*spiritual blessings in heavenly places*" are dispensed in the Holiest place--the presence of the Almighty. The admonition to "**ENTER,**" is not an empty word. It is not a suggestion, or an option for those desiring to be super-spiritual. This is the ordained means of obtaining the effectiveness of Christ's sacrifice and the blessings of the New Covenant!

However, it takes spiritual energy and commitment to enter the Holiest--and that is the point of our text. Satan is resisting us as surely as he sought to resist Joshua the high priest of old (Zech 3:1). Our own flesh, or Adamic nature, works

at keeping us out of the Holiest place. The world throws obstacles before our path, and delusions before our eyes, in its attempt to keep us from the place of blessing. Principalities and powers align against us to obscure the way into the Holiest. Without commitment and spiritual aggressiveness, there is no hope of entering into the Presence of the Lord. Grace to enter can only be appropriated by an entering power. Grace is never granted to the complacent, unfaithful, or fearful and unbelieving-- **NEVER!** Grace is **ALWAYS** granted within the context of the activity of faith.

By the Blood of Jesus

The Spirit leaves no question about the means through which we enter into the presence of the Lord: *“by the blood of Jesus”!* As vividly pictured in the Levitical Law, there must be the intervention of blood if we are to enter into the Holiest. And why so? Because, as God declared of old time, *“For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul”* (Lev 17:11, NKJV). Although this is biologically true, it is a spiritual, not a biological, statement. In this case, biology reflects spiritual reality, and not vice versa. The blood is representative of the life itself. Thus Adam is referred to as the *“one blood”* from which all humanity came (Acts 17:26). When the conviction of his dastard deed burst upon Judas the betrayer, he cried out, *“Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood”* (Matt 27:4). The blood stands for the life. That is why the eating of blood was prohibited prior to the Old Covenant (Gen 9:4), during the Old Covenant (Lev 7:26-27), and the New Covenant era (Acts 15:20). The heart of men must not be drawn into practices that dull the conscience concerning the blood of the covenant--the blood of Christ.

As a practical consideration, when we remember the Lord Jesus at His table, it is imperative that no practices are admitted into our lives that will rob us of the gravity of the moment. When Jesus said, *“This cup is the new testament in my blood: this*

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do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me” (1 Cor 11:25), He sanctified this feast of remembrance. While it may appear foolish to the carnal mind, the Divine prohibition against the eating of blood is intended to free our minds from all competing notions. The only blood we may ingest is Christ’s blood. As it is written, *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you,”* and again, *“For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed”* (John 6:53,55). Some will be prone to speculate in this area, but their speculations are not in order. The Lord has spoken.

The phrase *“the blood of Jesus”* denotes the willing forfeiture of His life in our behalf. Expressions that paint the picture for us include, *“poured out His soul unto the death”* (Isa 53:12), *“became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross”* (Phil 2:8), and *“He [God] hath made Him to be sin for us, Who knew no sin”* (2 Cor 5:21). Additional expressions are, *“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every*

one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal 3:13), *"He was crucified through weakness"* (2 Cor 13:4), and *"No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself"* (John 10:18).

Think of the mighty affirmations of the Spirit concerning Christ's vicarious death. *"Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification"* (Rom 4:25). *"For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly"* (Rom 5:6). *" . . . when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son"* (Rom 5:10). *"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh"* (Rom 8:3). *"Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works"* (Tit 2:14). When we come into the Holiest *"by the blood of Jesus,"* we associate these glorious affirmations with ourselves. Faith grasps the truth that this was done for **ME** , and therefore confidently approaches the Lord in the merits of the *"blood of Christ."*

The Effectiveness of the Blood of Christ

Think of the declared **effectiveness** of the blood of Christ. The presence of this effectiveness explains why we can boldly and confidently enter into the presence of the Lord. We are brought within the proximity of Deity--made nigh-- *"by the blood of Jesus Christ"* (Eph 2:13).

This blood is so powerful, it can *"purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God"* (Heb 9:14). Never has there been such a powerful spiritual effect upon the sons of men. No philosophy, regardless of its supposed superiority, has even been able to do that! No human effort, regardless how arduous, has ever been able to produce a conscience that is at ease in the presence of the Almighty!

We have been "redeemed" from empty and vain way of life received from our fathers by Christ's blood. *"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the*

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precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet 1:18-19). In further elaboration of this redemption, the Spirit testifies, *"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace"* (Eph 1:7).

The election of God, according to His foreknowledge has been implemented through the convicting and separating power of the Holy Spirit, and the blood of Jesus. *"Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ"* (1 Pet 1:2).

As we walk in the illumination provided through the Gospel, the blood of Christ continually cleanses us from all sin. *"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin"*

(1 John 1:7). Faith in this blood produces a covering for sin. *“Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God”* (Rom 3:25). This is nothing less than *“being now justified by his blood”* (Rom 5:9; Col 1:14).

Peace has been through *“the blood of His cross”* (Col 1:20), thereby allowing us to fellowship with God and with one another. It has provoked God to rip the veil in two that separated men from Him, and battered down the wall that stood between Jew and Gentile.

Truly, the blood Christ *“speaks better things than that of Abel”* (Heb 12:24). Abel’s blood *“cried out”* from ground, demanding vengeance against Cain, who slew him (Gen 4:10). Christ’s blood shouts redemption, salvation, peace, justification, and reconciliation. There is no reason why you cannot enter into the *“Holiest”* through *“the precious blood of Christ”* (1 Pet 1:19).

A CONSECRATED WAY

“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter . . . by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh.” What a marvelous expression! The way to God is *“NEW”* --of a new order, or a new kind of way. It is marked by stimulating freshness and invigorating newness. Everything about it makes for alertness, spiritual optimism, and spiritual awareness. A religion that is not pulsating with life and vitality is a false one, detrimental to spiritual progress, and opposed to the very nature of salvation in Christ Jesus. Yet, it is not at all uncommon for such traits to be found within the professed Christian community. People are tempted to live with dead religion--to settle for lifeless settlements of alleged believers. But men must not allow this to happen. Jesus will have nothing to do with such an approach to God. He came to deliver us from such things. Woe to the person or system that encourages such involvements!

It Has Been Consecrated

The way to God has been *“consecrated.”* Several of the more modern versions use the word *“opened”* instead of *“consecrated”* (RSV and NIV). This is, in my judgment, a very weak translation, not communicated the Spirit’s meaning. It is true that the way has been *“opened,”* making it accessible to all who come to God through Christ. However, that comes miserably short of the power of this text! Supposed scholars do us no favor by imposing their linguistic expertise upon the text of Scripture.

The term *“consecrated”* comes from **evnekainisen**, and has a unique meaning. It can mean *“open,”* but not in the ordinary sense. Literally, it means *“to make new, as opening a way not there before”* (Thayer’s). More precisely, it means *“to put into force, or inaugurate.”* It is language instituted during the Old Covenant. Before anything could be used in Divine service, it had to be dedicated for use--set apart for association with the Living God. The high priestly robes of Aaron were dedicated, or

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consecrated (Ex 23:3; 29:29). The high priest himself was consecrated to wear these garments, and perform the service of God (Ex 28:41; Lev 21:10; Num 3:3). The system related to this consecration

was called *“the service of the sanctuary”* (Ex 36:1), or *“divine service”* (Heb 9:1). It was the appointed and solely accepted way of approaching Him safely. To draw near to the Lord apart from this dedicated way, or without following the ordained procedure, death was sure. Nadab and Abihu, two of Aaron’s sons, were consumed by fire because they offered *“strange fire”* to God--fire not ordained in the consecrated approach (Lev 10:1-2). When king Uzziah took upon himself to offer incense to the Lord, a function to be performed by the sons of Aaron alone, he was stricken with leprosy (2 Chron 26:19). The consecrated way was the ONLY way, and could not be violated. Under the Law this concept was taught with great effectiveness.

In Christ Jesus a new way has been *“consecrated”* --a way of access to God. It is Jesus Himself that has opened and dedicated this way. Thus it is written, *“a new and living way which He inaugurated . . .”* It is a way that enables and maintains spiritual life, and therefore it called a way that is *“living.”* This is the “way” that leads to refreshment, renewal, and spiritual vitality. Apart from this *“way”* it is not possible to sustain our life in Christ Jesus. Just as men live *“by every Word of God”* (Luke 4:4), so they are sustained by means of this *“way”* --this access to God. Those who do not come to God by this ordained means cannot live before Him! They cannot be saved! It simply is not possible.

It Is For Us

The “way” has not only been *“consecrated,”* or *“inaugurated”* by Jesus, it has been dedicated *“FOR US.”* It is adapted to our needs, and can be fully accessed by us. It is not for angels, but for the redeemed of the Lord. Those in Christ can take this *“way”* into the very presence of God. Through it, they can *“obtain mercy, and find grace to help in the time of need.”* It is for us! No conscientious effort to come to God by this means will be in vain. A person’s past cannot disqualify him/her, if they will take this way! Their weakness cannot prohibit their use of this way, if they will use it. They may be *“unlearned and ignorant,”* but they can take the way--it is for the one journeying to glory. It is, as Isaiah put it, for *“wayfaring men”* --those who are strangers and pilgrims in the earth (Isa 35:8; 1 Pet 2:11). How good and pleasant to remember, it has been *“consecrated for US!”*

Through His Flesh

Christ’s “flesh” is like that tabernacle veil. First, it prohibited men’s entrance into the presence of the Lord, because it hid His Divine nature. Those Who saw Him as a man could not behold the Lord as He is. His humanity obscured His Deity, veiling it from the perception of men.

The consecration was *“through the veil, that is to say, His flesh.”* The tabernacle veil covered the Holies, forbidding entrance to it, yet was what man passed through to get into the Holiest. From one point of view, it kept men from entering the presence of the Lord, concealing the glory of the Lord. It was an appointed division between the holy and the most holy (Ex 26:33). It was appropriately called *“the veil of COVERING”* (Ex 35:12; 39:34; 40:21). Yet, when entrance was made into the Holiest, it was through that very veil (Lev 16:12,15).

Christ’s *“flesh”* is like that tabernacle veil. First, it prohibited men’s entrance into the presence of the Lord, because it hid His Divine nature. Those Who saw Him as a man could not behold the Lord as He is. His humanity obscured His Deity, veiling it from the perception of men. That is why, after over three years of extensive exposure, *“Philip said to Him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us’”*

(John 14:8). After all that time, He had not seen Jesus as possessing the *“fulness of the Godhead bodily”* (Col 2:9). Christ answered him, *“Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?”* (John 14:9). Why had Philip and the rest not seen the Father in Jesus? It was because of His flesh--His appearance as a man. They knew Him *“after the flesh,”* something strictly forbidden now that He has ascended to the Father’s right hand (2 Cor 5:16).

But this is not the end of the matter. Now we enter into the presence of the Lord through the veil, *“that is to say, His flesh.”* What once obscured His Person now inducts us into the Lord’s presence. Why is the case? And what does this mean? It is Christ’s HUMANITY that is the basis for our coming to God. **His identity with US has enabled US to come to God!** Now we do not see Him as simply a man, but *“THE Man, Christ Jesus”* (2 Tim 2:5). The Holy Spirit has been making this point throughout the book of Hebrews, showing us the relevance of the Word’s incarnation. God brought His *“First begotten into the world”* (1:6). He was *“made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death”* (2:9). He was made *“perfect through suffering”* (2:10). Because those He came to save were *“flesh and blood,”* He *“partook of the same”* (2:14). He did not take upon Himself *“the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham”* (2:16). In *“all things”* He was made like unto those He came to save, suffering temptation in all points, like them (2:15).

This is not a sentimental view, designed to merely tug at our hearts. Rather, in His humanity, God was making provision for us to come to Him--to enter into His presence. We come to God because of Christ’s accomplishments as a Man. We do not come upon the basis of our merits. God cannot be approached because you have done enough, or done it right, or performed it frequently enough. I understand that moral purity is a requisite, from one point of view; i.e., *“Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully”* (Psa 24:3-4). That, however, is a condition realized only by coming to God through Christ in the first place. No person can cleanse their own hands--no person! Of ourselves, we cannot avoid lifting up our souls to vanity. We must enter the Presence of the Lord through Christ’s flesh--His humanity, or His identity with us. That is another way of saying we enter through the substitutionary death of Christ, which was the reason for Him becoming one of us. He was *“made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death”* !

Because Christ both died and was glorified as a Man, we can now come before the Lord. We can obtain what He has to give us, all of which is embodied in the term *“great salvation.”* But you must enter through the *“flesh”* of Christ--through the merits of His death! Only He has done enough to justify you from your sins, and enable you to come to God. This is the truth to which Jesus referred when He said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me”* (John 14:6).

If Jesus were not at the right of God--as a glorified Man--we could not come into God’s presence. We could not obtain mercy, or find grace to help in the time of need. We would be locked into a lifeless procedure that brought no real benefit to us--neither forgiveness of sins nor eternal life. God be praised for Christ’s effective work and our glorious deliverance from such things! Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from the power of the enemy! We

have been blessed! Let us live in that blessing.

GLORIOUS BLESSINGS

WE are the ones that have a High Priest, and therefore WE are the ones that are to come. The High Priest will ensure we will arrive in the Presence of the Lord--by faith now, and *“face to face”* in the day of the Lord. The High priest guarantees our welcome by the Father if we will come through Him.

Now we come to the exhortation--the summons to act upon the marvelous knowledge we have obtained. *“ . . . and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”* It is not enough to give intellectual assent to the correct things. We must act upon them. It is good and necessary to have the correct theological position on revealed matters, but it is of no lasting value unless we act upon that knowledge. The blessing will not be ours until we avail ourselves of what has been provided for us. The Holy Spirit will now show us the reasonableness of coming to God. There is no reason for not coming, and God will not allow any to be concocted by men. If men do not *“come to the Father,”* it is because they are unreasonable and deceived.

Having A High Priest

We presently have a High Priest *“over the house of God,”* or those who are in Christ Jesus in this world, as well as *“the spirits of just men made perfect”* (Heb 12:23). It is not that we HAD a High Priest, a historical One. Nor, indeed, is it that we SHALL have a High Priest, a prophetic One. Our High Priest is in the *“NOW”* ! *“NOW,”* when *“faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things hoped for”* (Heb 11:1), we have a High Priest! *“NOW,”* when it is *“a time accepted”* and *“the day of salvation”* (2 Cor 6:2), we have a High Priest! *“NOW,”* when there is *“no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus”* (Rom 8:1), we have a High Priest! *“NOW,”* when we are admonished to *“be filled with the Spirit,”* (Eph 5:19) we have a High Priest! Now! Today! At this very hour!

WE are the ones that have a High Priest, and therefore WE are the ones that are to come. The High Priest will ensure we will arrive in the Presence of the Lord--by faith now, and *“face to face”* in the day of the Lord. The High priest guarantees our welcome by the Father if we will come through Him. We have a High Priest NOW, so let us come NOW, without delay, and with our whole heart. There we will find healing balm for our ills. There, we will find strength, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Let us come to God because we have a High Priest!

A True Heart

Here is an absolute requisite for coming to the Father-- *“a true heart.”* The NIV and NASB use the term *“sincere heart.”* A *“true”* or *“sincere”* heart is a genuine and dependable heart. There is no pretension or guile in such a heart. The mind, desires, and intentions of such an individual are pure and undefiled by wickedness. Here is a heart that is *“perfect with the Lord,”* like that of David (1 Kgs 15:3). Like the men of war from

Until faith is strong, assurance will not exist; and until

assurance is presence, men will not boldly approach the Lord. What is even more, until we boldly approach Him, we will not obtain the benefits procured for us by Christ Jesus.

Zebulun, these are *“not of double heart”* (1 Chron 12:33). Those with a *“true heart,”* have a *“perfect heart and with a willing mind”* (1 Chron 28:9). Such are those who come to God with their *“whole heart,”* withholding nothing (Psa 9:1). This is nothing less than a *“clean heart,”* undevoted to the things of this world (Psa 51:10). Ephesians 6:5 refers to this condition as *“singleness of heart.”*

Let it be clear that this is an absolute prerequisite for coming to God. Admittedly, this is not evident in the Christian community, but it is still a Divine requirement. It is a personal matter, and not one in which we can judge other people--but we must judge ourselves in this area, and do so strictly. We cannot come to the Lord with divided interests--with a *“double mind,”* attempting to serve *“two masters”* (James 1:18; Matt 6:24).

Under the Law, high priests drew near to God bodily. Their attire was precisely specified. The time of their approach was limited to *“once a year.”* Theirs was a liturgical approach, requiring fear more than faith, and protocol more than heart. But it is not so in Christ Jesus. Only those with a *“true heart”* may come confidently into His Presence! This is the *“new heart”* of which Ezekiel prophesied (Ezek 36:26) — a *“heart of flesh”* upon which is written God’s laws (Heb 8:10; 10:16). This is a *“pure heart,”* devoted to the Lord and the apprehension of His promises (1 Tim 1:15; 2 Tim 2:22). Let it be clear, God cannot be boldly or confidently approached without a *“true heart.”*

Those with defiled hearts can still come to obtain forgiveness, and are urged to do so. *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9). That cleansing will purify the heart, making it *“true,”* and enabling the individual to come confidently into His Presence. However, it is imperative that this condition be maintained by those coming to the Lord. Without the confidence generated by a *“true heart,”* eventually the individual will cease coming, and condemnation will be sure.

Full Assurance of Faith

Boldly coming to the Lord also requires *“the full assurance of faith.”* Here, the Apostle points out the nature of faith. At the same time, he reminds us salvational benefits cannot be received unless we have a fixed and unhesitating conviction. The phrase *“in full assurance of faith”* (*en plhroforial pistewj*), is a most powerful one. *“Full assurance”* means full conviction of certainty. It is the absence of doubt--a circumstance in which the reality of God, Christ, and salvation is embraced wholeheartedly. This is NOT an assurance generated by human logic, but by faith, which comes from God (1 Tim 1:14; Phil 1:29). It is the *“full assurance OF faith.”* It occurs when one believes *“the record God has given of His Son”* (1 John 5:10-12).

Faith will produce a persuasion that *“what God has promised, He is also able to perform”* (Rom 4:21). It brings a one to the solid conclusion that God *“cannot lie,”* and therefore is to be implicitly trusted (Tit 1:2). Let us be bold to embrace this fact. Those who come to God boldly

must have a settled conviction that ***“He is, and that He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him”*** (Heb 11:6). This occurs only in those who believe. When this is perceived and embraced, the individual will seek to strengthen his faith. He will subject himself to hearing the Word of the Lord, for ***“faith comes by hearing . . . the Word of Christ”*** (Rom 10:17, NASB). The grace of God will be sought with great spiritual energy, for it is ***“exceeding abundant with faith . . .”*** Until faith is strong, assurance will not exist; and until assurance is present, men will not boldly approach the Lord. What is even more, until we boldly approach Him, we will not obtain the benefits procured for us by Christ Jesus.

Sprinkled Hearts

Observe, the objective of the cleansing is that we might ***“serve the living God,”*** being in His employ, and laboring in His vineyard. Coupling with our text, we learn service to God is not possible without coming into the presence of God. He cannot be served by those remaining aloof from Him. A lack of consciousness of God makes purported service pretentious and unacceptable to God.

Adam was afraid to approach God with a defiled conscience! A condemning conscience will have the same effect upon you. Your heart must be ***“sprinkled clean from an evil conscience”*** (NASB) by the blood of Jesus Christ. That is another way of saying you must be aware you have been forgiven. Under the Law, only the outward man was sprinkled, or a garment, vessel, or other tabernacle accessories. However, in Christ, the heart is ***“sprinkled”*** with the sanctifying, purifying blood of Jesus. Our faith brings this benefit, convincing us we are ***“accepted in the Beloved”*** (Eph 1:6).

Do not doubt the reality of the sprinkled heart! The Spirit earlier introduced the Divine logic in this matter . ***“For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”*** (Heb 9:13-14). Observe, the objective of the cleansing is that we might ***“serve the living God,”*** being in His employ, and laboring in His vineyard. Coupling with our text, we learn service to God is not possible without coming into the presence of God. He cannot be served by those remaining aloof from Him. A lack of consciousness of God makes purported service pretentious and unacceptable to God. God will not recognize labors that were performed in ignorance of His Person! Tragically, this eliminates a great deal of what is said to be done for Him.

Bodies Washed

We come to the Father as those whose bodies have been ***“washed with pure water.”*** Before coming into the presence of the Lord, the priests of old had to be washed (Ex 29:4; 40:12). With them, the act was ceremonial. With us, it is in actuality. Our ***“bodies”*** have been ***“washed with pure water.”*** The water itself was ***“pure,”*** sanctified by the Lord for an intended purpose. It is not *purifying* water, but ***“pure water,”*** meaning this is a means used by God to accomplish an acceptable cleansing in His sight. This is a reference to our baptism into Christ. Peter alludes to our baptism in the same manner. ***“ . . . eight souls [Noah and family], were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us; baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ”***) , NKJV. The ***“good conscience”*** is appropriated in this “washing of regeneration” (Tit 3:5), thereby enabling us to approach the Father confidently.

Those who deprecate baptism, an ordinance given by God, adversely effect the

confidence with which their hearers approach the Lord. The knowledge that our bodies have been “*washed*” in a sanctifying sense by “*pure*” or Divinely approved and instituted water, has a great bearing on how we approach the Lord. In our baptism, whether we knew it or not, we “*put on Christ*” (Gal 3:28), which qualifies us to come to God. If men remonstrate, saying this has no reference to our baptism, let them tell us in what sense, then, our bodies are “*washed with pure water.*” The one unacceptable part of us, our “*vile bodies*” (Phil 3:20) have been set apart to God, and are even now “*the members of Christ*” (1 Cor 6:15). Who, in this knowledge can hesitate to come to the Father through Jesus Christ?

Here, then, is the means by which we come boldly and confidently to God. It is in an acute awareness that we have a great High Priest over the house of God, Who has paved the way for us. A true, sincere, and whole heart enables us to approach Him, for He values such a heart. The assurance generated by unfeigned faith impels us to run swiftly to Him., while the absence of a condemning conscience enables to come with joy and great expectation. Even our bodies have been sanctified, washed with pure water. God’s great salvation is gloriously effective to accomplish His purpose! As we rely implicitly upon that effectiveness, we will be kept by the power of God, and be effective and adequate in our own ministries. It all depends upon us coming to God.

HE IS FAITHFUL!

We are not in heaven yet! We remain in a war-zone, with a fierce adversary seeking to devour us, and a world alluring us with its corruptible baubles. This is not the time or place for instability, which is an enemy of the soul. Therefore, the Spirit speaks to our hearts. “*Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised.*” The NASB and NKJV say “*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope,*” while the NIV says, “*Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess.*” But there is no contradiction in the statements. **Hope is faith in its forward posture.** The word from which faith is here translated is **evlpidoj** , which means *an expected and awaited good hope, expectation, or prospect.* Those who have “*received*” Christ (John 1:13), and are walking “*by faith*” (2 Cor 5:7) confess they are not of this world. They are being oriented for “*the world to come.*”

When we came to Christ (Matt 11:28; John 5:40; 6:37,40), we

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acknowledged the fundamental deficiency of “*this present evil world*” (Gal 1:4). We set out on a course that is preparing us for the end of this world, the day of judgment, and a presence “*forever with the Lord.*” Regardless of the theological confusion that exists within the professed church, you will not be able to maintain that status without effort. If you do not “*hold fast*” your confession, or profession, it will get away from you. We do not live

in a spiritual vacuum, and woe be to those conducting themselves as though they did. To ***“hold fast”*** our confession involves determination as well as action. Those who ***“hold fast their confession”*** set their faces like a flint to go to heaven. They refuse to be distracted by anything--anything at all. Without this level of determination, they simply will not be able to finish the race. That is why Paul forgot ***“those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,”*** pressed ***“toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus”*** (Phil 3:13-14).

Lest we forget the seriousness of this exhortation, remember the facts that undergird. We HAVE a great High Priest. By faith we have a TRUE HEART, a CLEANSED CONSCIENCE, and BODIES that have been washed with pure water. A way has been opened to us by Christ, by which we can come into the very presence of the Almighty. Our sins are remitted, we are justified and sanctified, and possess the Holy Spirit of God. All of these advantages are to no avail, however, if we do not ***“hold fast”*** the confession of our faith and hope. We are in a highly tenuous circumstance. This is not intended to produce doubt, but diligence. It does not provoke complacency, but faithfulness. Those who determine to ***“hold fast the confession of their hope”*** will be strengthened by God to complete their course.

CONSIDERING ONE ANOTHER

Exhortation is the practical aspect of sound theology. Therein, men are urged to bring their lives into comportment with the revealed purpose of God. In this particular exhortation we learn even more of the nature of our salvation. Not only is it based upon the accomplishments and present work of Jesus, it also requires our complete involvement.

Exhortation is the practical aspect of sound theology. Therein, men are urged to bring their lives into comportment with the revealed purpose of God. In this particular exhortation we learn even more of the nature of our salvation. Not only is it based upon the accomplishments and present work of Jesus, it also requires our complete involvement. But that is not all--we also need the influence of the people of God, and they need ours. God considers His people (Psa 34:15,17). It is certainly in order that we do so. ***“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another.”***

Our consideration of one another is not on a fleshly level. While we do minister to the temporal needs of our brethren as required, our consideration of them is much broader, extending into the realm of the spirit. Our good deeds toward them, as well as our words and personal actions, are to ***“stir up love and good works”*** within them. It is true, some believe they do not require this sort of stimulation or motivation, but they are wrong. The Spirit has spoken, and it is our obligation to hear what he is saying to the churches.

The fact that saints need to be ***“stirred up”*** confirms they are in a warfare. The ***“good fight of faith”*** tends to deplete our resources and diminish our efforts. This condition is not a sin, but is rather a fact with which we must contend. God has made provision for our strength to be renewed, and our love and good works to be stirred up. The means requires a personal identity with the Lord Himself, which involves coming to Him. It also necessitates exposure to other pilgrims en route to

the promised land.

How is it that this consideration is to manifested? *“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together!”* When you are tempted to do so, obey the word of the Lord, and do NOT forsake gathering with the people of God. One of my favorite texts on this subject is found in the book of Malachi. His prophecy was given during a very difficult time. The priests were negligent of their duties, the prophets prophesied falsely, and the people were robbing God. In every way, the state of the nation lay in shambles, with abuse and neglect dominating nearly every aspect of life. It was NOT a time conducive to growth in things pertaining to God. Still, even at that time, there was a group of people that held their profession fast, as it were. It is said of them, *“Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another.”* They did not allow the depravity of the times to deprive them of the godly influence of one another. As corruption increased, these people grew closer together. They did not speak once in a while to one another but *“often”* (KJV). Other versions say they *“talked with each other,”* but there is no conflict. The idea is one of constant, continual, or regular communication. They did NOT forsake the assembling of themselves together!

This admonition is not confined to one person communing with another. In fact, that is not its intent at all. The word used here is **evpisunagwghn**, and means *assembling together . . . a congregation increased by additions-- to gather together, assembly, gathering, meeting*. There is no substitute for the assembly of God’s people. It is an event with which men must not tamper.

A Lesson from Malachi

God Himself reacted to their

It is of interest to note that great spiritual awakenings have always been marked by frequent gatherings of believers. It started in the book of Acts, and it has not ceased to this day

faithfulness. He had the prophet record His reaction for our edification. It is clear from His statement that these people were not engaged in casual conversation, but in group communication. *“And the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in His presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name. ‘They will be mine,’ says the LORD Almighty, ‘in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves Him’”* (Mal 3:16,17, NIV). If this were the only verse in the Scriptures on the subject, it would still provoke frequent gathering of the faithful. The Lord Himself *“listened”* to the words these faithful spoke to one another. But it was not a casual listening, He *“heard”* what they said, giving particular attention their words, and finding delight in them. The gatherings were noted in heaven, and a book of remembrance was written *“concerning”* them! They were the subjects of Divine recollection--blessed thought! **He viewed their communication as honoring His Name!** And what will He do with this book of remembrance--the recollection of their gatherings? He affirms these very people will be exclusively His. The identity will take place when He makes up His *“treasured possession”* (jewels, KJV). He will also spare them, having compassion upon them as a man who spares a serving son. When men speak with one another concerning the things of God, it does have a blessed effect upon Him!

Do Not Forsake Coming Together!

Legion is the name of those who do not take this admonition seriously. Such people have always been around, subjects of Divine rebuke. In a sense, staying in the race involves frequent communication with fellow pilgrims. It requires the beneficial provocation that comes from the words and demeanor of faithful men and women. It is of interest to note that great spiritual awakenings have always been marked by frequent gatherings of believers. It started in the book of Acts, and it has not ceased to this day (Acts 2:46; 5:42). I have personally participated in such awakenings, and have witnessed a remarkable increase in both appetite and capacity among those whose hearts were touched by the Gospel. One such awakening occurred in Western Illinois, where I was ministering in 1956. During that time, I held a revival for fifteen consecutive weeks--105 days. There was an unparalleled thirst for living water that could not be assuaged. Again, in 1960, we started a fellowship in Northwest Indiana. The people insisted upon meeting two times during the week, as well as two lengthy periods on the Lord's day. We also had four week-end preaching festivals a year, which were anticipated by all. I sorely miss these type of gatherings, and pray our own are will soon be so effected by the Gospel of Christ.

Observe, the Spirit declares some people were marked by a "manner" most grievous. *"Not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some"* (NASB). Ah, there have always been the *"some,"* who find it easy to maintain earthly relationships at the expense of spiritual ones. There may be a hundred reasons these forsakers give for their action. They will range from a contempt for their brethren to fear of being reproached, the imagination that they are adequate without the influence of kindred spirits, or for an dominating love for the world. Whatever the reason adduced, it is unacceptable. God has no children that can stand without His other children! There are none so strong and consistent that they no longer require to be stirred up to love and good works. I have long observed that the most productive people in the Kingdom frequently communicate with those of like precious faith. **Neglecting assembling together has been, and remains, a perilous habit, against which the Spirit solemnly warns us!** No one can ignore this warning without being thrust into danger. Satan, principalities and powers, and the world, will NOT relax their relentless pursuit of your soul! You do not live in a vacuum, and dare not conduct your life as though you were. Give heed to the Spirit.

THE APPROACHING DAY

If God honored the assembly of those under the first covenant in Malachi's day (Mal 3:16-17), what will be said of assemblies that convene in Christ's name? They meet because of Him, to honor Him, and to hear of and from Him. They gather as the redeemed, the justified, and the sanctified. They meet because they are in quest for glory, and need to have their strength strengthened, their joy refreshed, and their hope renewed.

Exhorting one another is to increase in its intensity and content. *"... and so much the more as you see the day approaching."* What is approaching "day" in reference. As one might

suppose, there are a variety of views on this subject. Some believe it was the coming destruction of Jerusalem. In this case, believers were to strengthen one another for that Divine judgment. Others believe it is the second appearing of Christ, which is drawing closer all the time, being “nearer:” now than “*when we first believed*” (Rom 13:11). It is best to understand this text in view of the “*eternal purpose of God,*” which will make provision for both of the circumstances mentioned, but not be limited to them. First, to confine this to a warning of the destruction of Jerusalem limits its effectiveness to all generations. It is true, there were warnings issued in view of the “*present distress*” (1 Cor 9:26), but such warnings were never spoken in the tones of this text. There were options open to the Corinthians under a “present distress” (1 Cor 9:26-40) — but no such flavor can be found in the Hebrews text. There are no options open to us, only a most solemn warning in the next verse. “*For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins.*” I emphatically deny that such language can be applied to a warning about Jerusalem’s destruction! There is nothing in this Epistle that indicates the Jews to which it was written were located in or around Jerusalem. An exhortation of this magnitude, attending by such a solemn warning, cannot be confined to a certain place and time.

Secondly, the view that the approaching day is the “*appearing of Christ*” is true in general, but not in specifics. The point is that the approaching day is **SEEN** approaching, not merely that **IS** approaching. To be sure, there is a sense in which this is true. However, that does not appear to be the sense of the text. In my judgment, this is referring to the time of assembly itself. Jesus had spoken of such assemblies, and the saints took His words quite seriously. Do you recall them? “*Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them*” (Matt 18:19-20). If God honored the assembly of those under the first covenant in Malachi’s day (Mal 3:16-17), what will be said of assemblies that convene in Christ’s name? They meet because of Him, to honor Him, and to hear of and from Him. They gather as the redeemed, the justified, and the sanctified. They meet because they are in quest for glory, and need to have their strength strengthened, their joy refreshed, and their hope renewed. The time of the gathering is appropriated called “*the day.*” It is a day they can **SEE** approaching, in which profit and growth can be experienced. It is a time when they will meet with Jesus around His table, and declare His death until He comes again (1 Cor 11:26).

Of this “day,” Spurgeon well said the following. “**The presence of Jesus is the fixed center of the assembly, the warrant for its coming together, and the power with which it acts. The church, however small, is gathered in his name. Jesus is there first I am in the midst of them We are gathered together by the holy impulses of Christian brotherhood, and our meeting is in the name of Jesus, and therefore there he is; near, not only to the leader, or to the minister, but in the midst, and therefore near to each worshiper. We meet to do him honor, to hear his Word, to stir each other up to obey his will; and he is there to aid us. However small the number, we make a quorum; and what is done according to the laws of Christ is done with his authority. Hence it is that there is great power in united prayer from such persons: it is Jesus pleading in his saints. This should prevent Christian men from giving or taking offense; for if Jesus be in our midst, our peace must not be broken by strife.**”

Our consideration of one another includes exhortation concerning our common gatherings. They are times when the Lord Jesus meets with us. If He honors the gatherings of His people, what will be said of those who refuse to do so. This places a solemn obligation on every assembly to make their gatherings a place where the Lord Jesus is welcome. Let them be meetings where saints are stirred

up to love and good works--places where the people of God are fed, nourished, and assisted in the good fight of faith. Cursed be the assembly that is a handicap to the people God, were they are maligned, discouraged, and even neglected. If there be such, they are a contradiction of the very purpose of gathering together. But, blessed be those saints who meet to speak to one another of the Lord. Blessed are those who a strengthen the hands of their brethren, encouraging them to press in to the Father through Jesus' blood, availing themselves of the benefits of the New Covenant! Blessed be those sacred gatherings where the faith of God's people becomes more effective, where their peace becomes more pervasive, and their hope abounds. They will be remembered by God!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

Commentary on the book of Hebrews

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #17

DON'T THROW IT AWAY!

“ For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, ‘VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY.’ And again, ‘THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE.’ It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly, by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners, and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY. BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul ” (Hebrews 10:26-39, NASB).

INTRODUCTION

The gravity of this epistle is underscored by the passage we now consider. In a day when people play at religion, making a business of it, and using it as a means to promote entertainment and careers, this is a most sobering passage. While the thrust of the so-called evangelical world is getting men saved, the thrust of the thrust of the ministry of Christ is, so to speak, keeping them saved. We will find there is a condition that is worse than never having known the Lord at all. There is a state where condemnation is greater, and it would have been better never to have been born. What is more, all of God's people are subject influences that pull them toward that state. None are exempt from temptation, and thus none are exempt from danger.

We Do Aim to Produce Doubt

But I do not aim to produce doubt and debilitating fear in your heart. In His great salvation, God has provided a way of resisting the encroachments of the evil one. The solemn warnings of Scripture are not designed to thrust us from the Lord, but to alert us to the hostile influences that surround us. The Lord has gone to great expense to bring us to glory, and He will not abandon His good work. Angelic hosts have been marshaled for your protection, and the Sovereign of the universe sits at the Father's right hand to ensure your safe arrival in glory

Every step along the way, our salvation requires our consent. At no time has there ever been, nor is there now, a word of comfort or promise from God to unwilling people. Willingness is an absolute requirement for the blessings of God in Christ Jesus the Lord.

(Heb 1:13-14; Heb 5:10; 7:25-26). The Holy Spirit of God has been sent into your heart to strengthen, illuminate, and direct you, even making intercession for you when you do not know how to pray yourself (Rom 8:26). We have good ground for confidence!

Our Consent Required

Every step along the way, our salvation requires our consent. At no time has there ever been, nor is there now, a word of comfort or promise from God to unwilling people. Willingness is an absolute requirement for the blessings of God in Christ Jesus the Lord. That is why disinterest, lethargy, and casualness are so dangerous. They all effect the will, lulling it off to sleep, where God can not be heard because He is not desired. It is always *“whosoever will”* — always (Mk 8:34; Rev 22:17)! I understand, that in the last analysis *“it not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy”* (Rom 9:16). However, while the human will is not the CAUSE for the conferment of saving mercy, it is a requisite to its obtainment.

Our preaching, teaching, singing, and fellowship must have a strong appeal to the will of the people. Something must be said or done that awakens within the human breast a longing for God, and hunger for His righteousness, and the anticipation of Christ's return. Strong convictions and fervency of heart follow in the perception of Divine influence. We live in a time when people are content to spectate or be entertained. Sentimentality has replaced spirituality, and fleshly happiness the joy of the Lord. But such things will not sustain the soul. They will not put the armies of darkness to flight, nor summon the powers of heaven to your aid.

SINNING WILLINGLY

“For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES” (Verse 26, NASB). The gravity of this

text cannot be brushed aside with stilted theological views. Seemingly strong arguments may be produced that declare salvation “cannot be lost,” or we “cannot fall away,” or “once we are saved we are always saved” . . . etc. Those are powerless phrases, created by men who are attempting to cram Scripture into containers of their own making-- “bags with holes” and “broken cisterns” (Hag 1:6; Jer 2:13). But after all is said and done, the “*Spirit speaks expressly*” on this subject. This is not A VIEW of the subject under consideration, it is the ONLY valid view- **-the Divine assessment .**

To “sin willfully” is to choose sin in preference to the Savior. It is NOT to succumb to the Tempter in a single temptation, but to choose to LIVE in sin. This choice is a cultured one, resulting from giving in to temptation. When people indulge in transgression, they awaken in themselves an appetite for sin.

The condition under consideration is to be avoided by the means declared in verses 24-25. Those in Christ are working out their own salvation (Phil 2:12) in a realm fraught with jeopardy. Their full effort is required in the good fight of faith, else sin will become dominant within them. There is no provision in the New Covenant for the spirit of complacency. Disinterest gives the advantage to the adversary. Without putting on the “whole armor of God” (Eph 6:10-18), the conscience becomes dull, and a spirit of slumber descends upon the soul. The “*will*” thus becomes weak and emaciated, disarming the soul.

Sinning Willfully

“*Sinning willingly,*” or “*willfully,*” does not refer to being “*overtaken in a fault,*” as in Galatians 6:1. It does not fall into the category of sin mentioned in First John 1:9 and 2:1. “*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*” “*And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*” While no believer wants to sin, and full provision is made for sin to be denied, still “forgiveness is necessary because of our natural frailty. “*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*” (1 John 1:8). This, however, is not the type of sin described in the words “*sin willfully.*”

To “*sin willfully*” is to choose sin in preference to the Savior. It is NOT to succumb to the Tempter in a single temptation, but to choose to LIVE in sin. This choice is a cultured one, resulting from giving in to temptation. **When people indulge in transgression, they awaken in themselves an appetite for sin.** Men call this “*addiction,*” but that word is too scientific, and does not carry the weight of personal responsibility. The Scriptural view is “*entanglement*” (2 Pet 2:20), and is the result of moral compromise. It is the act of rebellion against the Lord. This is called “*presumptuous sin*” in Psalms 19:13, and is viewed with all seriousness. It is an act of defiance, when the individual sins by premeditation AFTER having had the advantage of great spiritual light. This is what Judas did when he betrayed the Son of God, after having been exposed to “grace and truth,” which came by Him. It is said of this apostate, “*he fell by transgression, that he might go to his own place*” (Acts 1:25).

This condition is mentioned several places, and in different ways. Here are a few of them. It is making “*shipwreck*” of the faith (1 Tim 1:19), “*departing from the faith*” (1 Tim 4:1), and “*departing from the living God*” (Heb 3:12). It is also “*falling away*” (Heb 6:6), forsaking the “*right way*” (2 Pet 2:15), and falling from “*steadfastness*” (2 Pet 3:17). Jude admonishes us not to take the matter casually, reminded us that Israel fell AFTER they were “*saved out of the land of*

Egypt,” and some angels lost their “*first estate*” (Jude 5-6). All of these occurred as a matter of choice, not coercion. Woe to the individual that believes himself incapable of making a wrong choice! Such a soul is surely deluded!

The phrase “*sin willfully*” does not apply to alien sinners. Were that the case, none could be saved. Rather, it applies to those “*who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come,*” then choose to return to the bondage from which they were delivered (Heb 6:4-5). They have been confronted with more than facts — they participated in the life of God, were illuminated, and enjoyed the blessing of the Lord.

Why does the Holy Spirit introduce this line of reasoning? Rest assured, this is not to establish an official theological position about the possibility of falling away--although it does do that. The Word of God is not a book of religious philosophy. In relegating the Lord Jesus Christ to the background of their thought, the Hebrews were entering the realm where men do “*fall away.*” When you minimize Jesus you maximize spiritual jeopardy! Let us be more specific. This is such a relevant message! Those seeking justification by a system of Law are moving backward, even though they suppose themselves to be moving forward. The Lord Jesus will have nothing to do with such an approach to God. He will not strengthen the individual to perform empty disciplines. The blessing of the Lord will not come to those whose hearts are removed from Him. As elementary as this may appear, the church has struggled against such inclinations from the beginning (Gal 5:4; Col 2:20-23).

When men do not love the Lord “*with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength*” (Mark 12:33), they begin to move backwards. There is no neutral zone in spiritual life! Furthermore, backward movement is always toward sin, alienation, and spiritual insensitivity. In saying “*If we sin willfully,*” the Spirit is saying, “*If we choose to live in sin, abandoning the faith.*” This is the condition to which Peter referred. Such “*turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again;*”

The Word of God is not a book of religious philosophy. In relegating the Lord Jesus Christ to the background of their thought, the Hebrews were entering the realm where men do “*fall away.*” When you minimize Jesus you maximize spiritual jeopardy!

and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire” (2 Pet 2:20-22). There is no person failing to press toward the mark that is not in danger of this condition!

Receiving A Knowledge of the Truth

The passage confronts those who have “*received a knowledge of the truth.*” Obviously, this is not mere academic or cursory knowledge. It goes much deeper than that. Jesus referred to this condition in one of His teachings. “*And that servant, which knew his lord's will , and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes*” (Luke 12:47). This knowledge is the “enlightenment” to which the Spirit referred in the sixth chapter: “*For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened . . .*” (verse 4). Peter speaks very poignantly to the subject. “*For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ , they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is*

worse with them than the beginning” (2 Pet 2:20). This knowledge results in the escape of the individual from the contaminating effects of the world.

Notice, this is a *“received”* knowledge, not a developed one. *“If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth”* (NIV). This is being *“illuminated,”* as in Hebrews 10:32), and being *“enlightened,”* as in Ephesians 1:18. This is when the *“secret of the Lord”* is with men, and He shows them *“His covenant”* (Psa 25:14). Permit me to elaborate on this. When men are delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son (Col 1:13). They experience enlightenment from the God of heaven. How marvelously it is stated in Second Corinthians 4:6. *“For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”* That is the *“knowledge of the truth”* referred to in our text, and it is glorious. It is the knowledge to which Jesus referred when He said, *“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”* (John 8:32). The person who *“sins willfully”* deliberately extinguishes that light in quest for this present evil world. Fellowship with Christ, into which we are called (1 Cor 1:9) is abandoned in favor of temporal things.

No More Sacrifice for Sins

Those who have concocted doctrines that say this cannot occur are guilty of disarming men, misrepresenting the Lord, and giving the advantage to the devil. Their transgression is neither innocent nor harmless. If the Spirit warns believers of descending into a state where there is *“no more sacrifice for sins,”* woe to that person who affirms such a state does not exist!

Here is a dreadful word — *“no more sacrifice for sins.”* It means, *no more provision for remission, no more way of escape, no more means of forgiveness.* This is another way of saying *“Christ is dead in vain”* for the individual (Gal 2:21). Remember, *“there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12). To choose sin is to reject Christ. It is to repudiate His vicarious atonement. It is to reject the Son of God, and not *“receive”* Him (John 1:11). **Note, they did not reject Him as a Friend or Helper, but as a Sacrifice for their sin!** The Son of God is not only *“the Lamb of God,”* but *“the Lamb SLAIN”* (Rev 13:8). Ultimately, to fail to believe on Christ is to fail to *“receive the atonement,”* or *“reconciliation”* (Rom 5:11).

Even Omnipotence cannot apply the sacrifice of Christ where it is not chosen. Where sin is preferred, there is no provision for remission! At some point, the will must be turned., and the Divine provision must be held dear. But, when the individual chooses to live in sin, the will becomes debilitated Godward, and the conscience becomes seared. Soon, sin is preferred where once it was despised. Even though the *“knowledge of the truth”* was received, and deliverance from the powerful grip of darkness was experienced, the heart is deadened by a return to sin--like a *“dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire”* (2 Pet 2:22).

There is only one Divine provision for sin--only one *“sacrifice for sin”* (Heb 9:26,28; 10:10,12,14). There will never be another one! It is possible to drift so far from this *“one sacrifice for sins forever”* (Heb 10:12), that it cannot again be accessed. That is the point of this sobering text.

Those who have concocted doctrines that say this cannot occur are guilty of disarming men, misrepresenting the Lord, and giving the advantage to the devil. Their transgression is neither innocent nor harmless. If the Spirit warns believers of descending into a state where there is “*no more sacrifice for sins,*” woe to that person who affirms such a state does not exist!

This is descriptive of an apostate condition, from which one cannot be extricated. It is the state mentioned in Hebrews 6:4-6, and, like salvation itself, involves two things: human choice and Divine decision. It is a point of total renunciation of the faith once embraced. Even when Jesus was upon earth, people abandoned Him who once followed Him. As it is written, “*From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with him*” (John 6:66). The Spirit foretold of a time when apostasy would be on a large scale (Matt 24:10-12; 2 Thess 2:2).

In case someone imagines apostasy is not possible, there were angels, dwelling in the very presence of God, who apostatized, and became unrecoverable (Jude 6; 2 Pet 2:4). This is not a philosophical argument, but a spiritual warning! It is possible to “*depart from the faith,*” and “*give heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons*” (1 Tim 4:1-3). There are not many instances of such departures in Scripture, lest our hearts be bludgeoned by hopelessness. Yet, there are the examples of Judas, Saul (1 Sam 15:11), Amaziah (2 Chron 25:14,27), and Hyenaeus and Alexander (1 Tim 1:19-20), to keep us from being lulled asleep in our spirits. Of apostasy, one has well said, “*An apostate's defection from the faith may be intellectual, as in the case of Ernst Haeckel, who, because of his materialistic philosophy, publicly and formally renounced Christianity and the church; or it may be moral and spiritual, as with Judas, who for filthy lucre's sake basely betrayed his Lord.*” (DWIGHT M. PRATT, from **International Standard Bible Encyclopedia**).

Sin has a dulling effect upon the conscience, moving the individual away from God’s “*sacrifice for sin.*” If that backward course is not averted by “*fleeing*” for refuge to Christ (Heb 6:18), and aggressively confessing sin (1 John 1:8-9), one will eventually arrive at a point where there is no provision for remission. **Rest assured, those who desire to return to the Lord can do so.** However, those who suppress that desire in preference for sin have deceived themselves. There is no guarantee that the person choosing sin can recover from the choice! **Every sin, regardless how minuscule, has the potential of hardening against the Lord’s Christ!** It is always right to be absolutely sober about sin. It is always wrong to view it with indifference!

What Does Remain?

If there remains no more sacrifice for sin, then what does remain? What does the person who chooses to abandon Christ have to look forward to? “*But only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God*” (Verse 27, NIV). This is strong language, but strong language is required where people are moving away from the Lord (as was the case with the

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Hebrews to whom this letter as written). It is not fashionable to speak of *“judgment and fiery indignation”* (KJV) in some circles--but the Holy Spirit so speaks! To know such is coming is one thing. To expect it to be directed toward you is something else! There is a day approaching that is called *“the day of wrath”* (Job 21:30; Rom 2:5). It is also called *“the great day of his wrath”* (Rev 6:17). It is the time when the wrath of God shall be focused upon His adversaries--those who have rejected His provision for sin. It will not be a chastening wrath (Psa 38:1), and consuming one. The Spirit speaks vividly of this day in the first chapter of Second Thessalonians. *“For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power”* (2 Thess 1:6-8).

God is set forth in Scripture as *“a consuming fire”* (Deut 4:24; 9:3; Heb 12:29). This means it is His nature to destroy everything opposed to or in conflict with His Person. Praise the Lord, this is not the ONLY aspect of His character! He also has mercy and grace! In Christ Jesus, He has provided a way of escape from the *“day of wrath”* — a way for those who were His *“enemies”* (Rom 5:10) to be reconciled and be *“saved from wrath”* (Rom 5:9). Those who *“cleave unto the Lord with purpose of heart”* (Acts 11:23) will be *“glorified”* on that very *“day of wrath.”* For them, that day will be the day of ultimate transformation, when they will be *“like”* Christ, for they shall *“see Him as He is”* (1 John 3:1-2).

But there will be no mercy for those who have chosen to go back to sin! The only thing they have to look forward to is the *“fiery indignation”* of God — dreadful thought! They will confront the God Who could have been their Savior, but they chose to reject Him in that capacity. After receiving the knowledge of the truth and escaping from the pollutions of this world, they deliberately chose to again *“enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season”* (Heb 11:25). It began with small and weakening compromises, but it did not end there. They elected to ingest the narcotic of transgression, having once experienced deliverance from the power of it. Soon, they were *“again entangled”* in snare of the fowler, unable to be extricated. To me, it is tragic beyond description that much of the religion of our day makes it easy for such retrogression to occur! But you must be allow this to happen!

SEVERER PUNISHMENT

Sin is such a serious matter, the Spirit must elaborate upon its consequences. No person can allow His words on this subject to become distasteful or repulsive. They are expressions of our Lord’s deep love for us, and desire that we be saved. It is written of those who are in Christ Jesus, *“The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance”* (2 Pet 3:9, RSV). He has extended Himself to save us. He has also made provision for us to *“kept”* by His power through the intercession of Christ (1 Pet 1:5; Heb 7:25). The *“blood of Christ”* still cries forgiveness to every believer that confesses His sins (1 John 1:9), and mercy and grace can now be appropriated to help in the time of need (Heb 4:15). An enumerable company of angels have been assigned as *“ministers for them who shall be heirs of salvation”* (Heb 1:13-14). If any person is lost, it is NOT because of the lack of Divine provision!

For this reason, the Spirit now directs our attention to the nature and severity of Divine punishment. *“How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him*

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who said, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY." And again, "THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE. It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Verses 29-31, NASB). It is not possible to read a text like this without our soul being jarred. We do well to *“gird up the loins of our mind”* and consider these sobering words.

God has always been noted for His punishments. They have been recorded for our learning, lest we think of God in dishonoring and complacent ways. Perhaps a cursory list of some of the punishments of Scripture will refresh our minds concerning the Divine nature. At the very threshold of revelation, we read of the punishment of Adam and Eve, *“driven out”* from the garden and the presence of the Lord (Gen 3:16-24). There was the punishment of Cain, the first murderer (Gen 4:11-14), and the curse of the flood which destroyed all by eight people (Gen 6:6-7; 7:21). The conspiring people in the plains of Shinar were cursed in the building of the tower of Babel (Gen 11:8). Who can forget the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19), Pharaoh and his armies (Ex 15), the murmuring children of Israel (Num 21:6), and covetous Achan (Josh 7). The Word of God has countless records of the punishing judgments of the Almighty.

However, the Spirit speaks with even greater strength on this matter. He compares punishment in an era of grace to punishment during the age of Law. *“Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses”* (NKJV). The words *“without mercy”* are startling to the soul. Some cannot conceive of such a thing as this--yet these are the words of the Holy Spirit. In the case of a murder, Moses law is specific and arresting. *“Then the elders of his city shall send and fetch him thence, and deliver him into the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die. Thine eye shall not pity him, but thou shalt put away the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with thee”* (Deut 19:12-13). The judgment of the Law against a false witness was also harsh and merciless. *“And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot”* (Deut 19:21). Even when a wife sought to aid her husband in a fight with another man by an indiscreet act, her hand was to be cut off, with no pity. *“Then thou shalt cut off her hand, thine eye shall not pity her”* (Deut 25:12). Those desiring to be justified by Law do well to ponder these passages!

Those, and other, punishments were severe — but not as austere as the punishment of those who forsake Christ Jesus. There was limited revelation under the Law, and thus the punishment was tempered. There is boundless revelation in Christ Jesus, and therefore the punishment for defecting from Him is unimaginably greater. **The greater the light from which one defects, the greater the**

punishment! Is there need for extensive comment? Think of the punishment of Judas, who walked with Jesus for three years. Think of the angels who chose to leave the very habitation of God. The more light one receives, the greater the punishment for leaving it.

Deserved punishment

The Spirit waxes eloquent and precise in His description of the apostate--the one who renounces Christ Jesus after once embracing Him. The punishment is richly deserved. *“How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished . . .”* The greater light shined into the heart of the person in Christ demands more severe punishment for those who extinguish that light by their love for and return to sin.

The Son of God Trampled Under Foot

“ . . . who has trampled under foot the Son of God .” What vivid language--and it is precisely what occurs when one leaves *“the Lord’s*

The defector from the faith tramples the Son of God in his will--his choice of sin. It is as though by returning to the morass from which he was extricated he pulls Jesus from the throne, trampling him in scorn and contempt. That is how God Almighty views their defection! What is more, that is how we must view defection also.

Christ.” The RSV version uses the word *“spurned”* instead of *“trampled under foot,”* as most other versions. This is descriptive of the disdain and contempt that arises in the heart when sin is chosen. This occurs at the entrance of *“evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God”* (Heb 3:12). This is even stronger than the expression used earlier, in the sixth verse of chapter six: i.e., *“crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame”* (NASB). The defector from the faith tramples the Son of God in his will--his choice of sin. It is as though by returning to the morass from which he was extricated he pulls Jesus from the throne, trampling him in scorn and contempt. That is how God Almighty views their defection! What is more, that is how we must view defection also. When we are tempted to return to Egypt, as it were, let us think of God’s view of such a return! He loves His Son, and has given all things into His hand. Woe to that person who takes it upon himself to remove everything from the hands of the Son!

Disregard of Christ’s Blood

“ . . . and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified.” There is no neutrality in the Kingdom of God. **Either the blood of Christ is highly prized or greatly despised!** There is no middle ground. Those returning to sin and renouncing their faith have made a statement about the blood of Christ. They have espoused a position exactly the opposite of that affirmed at the Lord’s Table. Rather than being *“the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot”* (1 Pet 1:19), *“the blood of Jesus”* (Heb 10:19) is viewed with contempt and disdain. It is not that a public disclaimer is issued by the apostate, declaring Christ’s blood as unholy. That statement may never be made. Still, that is what he has said by his action--by returning to the kingdom of darkness from which he was delivered. The blood of Christ sanctified him, but now he has repudiated it, and chosen to return to the defiled realm. This is how God sees the matter, because that is really how it is. Such a person has despised the sacrifice of God’s only begotten Son,

and it has not escaped the attention of the Living God. You dare not miss the severity of this language. Among other things, it confirms that once the blood of sanctified us, we can still renounce it and incur the wrath of God.

Insulting the Spirit of Grace

“ . . . and has insulted the Spirit of grace . . . ” (NASB). Here is one of the few places the Holy Spirit is associated with grace. Ordinarily, grace is identified with God and Christ Jesus (Acts 11:23; 14:26; 15:11; 20:24; Rom 5:15; 16:20,24; Gal 1:6; 2 Thess 3:18, etc.). In fact, I believe it is the only time. It is the Holy Spirit that brings the grace of God to our awareness. He does it through the Gospel, but it is He Who does it. Some portray the Holy Spirit as gentle, and hard to offend, when actually it is quite the opposite. We are solemnly admonished, *“And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption”* (Eph 4:30). And again, *“Quench not the Spirit”* (1 Thess 5:19). The Holy Spirit is devoted to our salvation, having set us apart for the Lord (Rom 15:16; 2 Thess 2:13; 1 Pet 1:2). He even *“makes intercession”* for us, bringing to us heavenly resources for the fight of faith (Rom 8:26). The *“Divine nature”* is reproduced in measure within the believer under His powerful influence (2 Pet 1:3; Gal 5:22-25). He can *“strengthen us with might”* in the *“inner man,”* so Christ can *“dwell in our heart by faith”* (Eph 3:16). All of this can be negated and lost by a choice to abandon Christ and return to sin! Those who renounce heaven’s Savior are viewed as having spit in the face of the Holy Spirit, a sign of utter contempt (Num 12:14; Deut 25:9; Job 30:10). This is what those who rejected Christ did to Him literally when he was crucified (Matt 26:67). It is what apostates do to the Spirit when they return to sin.

REMEMBER! REMEMBER!

Now the Spirit makes a strong appeal to the past experience of the Hebrews believers. A return to the bondage from which we have been delivered always obscures the time when we were delivered!

Now the Spirit makes a strong appeal to the past experience of the Hebrews believers. A return to the bondage from which we have been delivered always obscures the time when we were delivered! *“But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly, by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners, and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and an abiding one”* (Verses 32-34, NASB).

Being Enlightened

Our deliverance from sin was a time of spiritual enlightenment. The God of heaven *“shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”* (2 Cor 4:6). It was a time when we saw Jesus clearly! He was perceived as *“the Savior of the world,”* glorious accessible and *“ready to forgive.”* The understanding of our wretched condition was perceived in the light of His Saviorhood! Although we sat in *“great darkness,”* we were given *“light”* (Luke 1:79). AS it is written, *“The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up”* (Matt 4:16). What glorious enlightenment! We saw everything differently: God, Christ, sin, Satan, and the world. The Gospel was clearly applicable to us, and Christ seen as ready to receive and pardon us. In the influence of the light we were able to leave Satan’s camp and flee to Christ for refuge.

A Great Conflict

There were repercussions when we embraced Christ Jesus! The responses of the world to our faith took varied forms, but it all amounted to *“a great conflict of sufferings.”* Satan did not go out to lunch when you *“put on Christ.”* In some measure, all believers experience *“conflicts without, and fears within”* (2 Cor 7:5). Even our own flesh rose up against us as we experienced *“another law in [our] members, warring against the law of [our] mind, and bringing [us] into captivity to the law of sin which is in [our] members”* (Rom 7:23). Still, even though there was a great fight of affliction and contradiction, we chose to *“abide in”* Christ Jesus. We saw Him clearly, and it was completely unreasonable to do anything else. The sufferings we endured were *“not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us”* (Rom 8:18).

A Public Spectacle

The glorious effects of the grace of God was also seen in the public nature of the initial faith of the Hebrew saints. They did not hold their faith in private, but went public, as it were, with Jesus. They lived out their faith in a glass house, seen and held in contempt by their foes. The language used to describe this condition is vivid. *“ . . . partly, by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated”* (NASB). They were not looked upon with favor, but with contempt. Thus they were maligned

The very moment a person begins to compromise his faith, or dabble in sin--however inconsequential it may appear--confidence begins to erode. Soon., the world becomes gigantic, and the inheritance becomes small. It is not long until this life is everything, and the life to come is nothing. That condition ultimately leads to defection from Christ.

and treated harshly because of their faith. Often, they were beaten publically, and scorned in the market place. It was a time of testing, when they did not find *“favor with all the people,”* as at the beginning of the church (Acts 2:47). And how is it they endured this harsh and contemptible display of themselves? It was because they saw the Lord's Christ clearly, and were persuaded of His grace and their reward in heaven! They were not ashamed to be identified with those being persecuted by the world, as is poignantly declared in the words, *“partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated.”*

Joyful Acceptance

In the beginning, these believers passed most strenuous tests. Rather than enjoying prosperity and the guarantee of their goods being protected by God, their possessions were confiscated--taken from them. With great power the Spirit reminds them they *“took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.”* They were not happy because their possessions were taken from them, but because their real inheritance could NOT be taken from them by their enemies. They learned *“how to be abased”* and *“suffer need”* (Phil 4:12). It was a kingdom for which they suffered--a kingdom that would be given to them in the fulness of time (2 Thess 1:5; Luke 12:32;

Dan 7:18,22,27). The removal of their earthly goods only accentuated the glory of their inheritance! And why so? Because they ***“KNEW IN THEMSELVES they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance!”*** They were confident in Christ Jesus, and thus equal to the challenges of life!

But when men begin to sin, they cannot retain such confidence. The very moment a person begins to compromise his faith, or dabble in sin--however inconsequential it may appear--confidence begins to erode. Soon., the world becomes gigantic, and the inheritance becomes small. It is not long until this life is everything, and the life to come is nothing. That condition ultimately leads to defection from Christ. It will ultimately cause the individual to deny Christ, repudiate the faith, and return to bondage to sin.

CAST NOT AWAY YOUR CONFIDENCE

Sinning and believing cannot be married! Transgression and the full assurance of faith cannot cohabit the heart. When we are tempted, it is not only to sin, but also to cast away our confidence. Your personal experience will confirm this to be the case. I have known countless people who lost their confidence in Christ because they did not quench the fiery darts of the wicked one with the shield of faith.

How appropriate is the exhortation! ***“Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward”*** (Verse 35, NASB). See with what determination this action is accomplished-- ***“throw away!”*** Confidence in God is not lost inadvertently, it is deliberately discarded. **To take hold of sin, you have to let go of confidence!** You simply cannot be ***“fully persuaded”*** of Divine commitments and dabble in sin. Sinning and believing cannot be married! Transgression and the full assurance of faith cannot cohabit the heart. When we are tempted, it is not only to sin, but also to cast away our confidence. Your personal experience will confirm this to be the case. I have known countless people who lost their confidence in Christ because they did not quench the fiery darts of the wicked one with the shield of faith.

You must never forget the essentiality of ***“your confidence.”*** This is not a kingdom luxury, but a spiritual necessity. Surely you have not forgotten the Word of the Lord. ***“Christ was faithful as a Son over His house whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end”*** (Heb 3:6). And again, ***“For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end”*** (Heb 3:14, NASB). Assurance, or confidence, as an aspect of faith itself. Where it does not exist in some measure, faith does not exist. As it is written, ***“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”*** (Heb 11:1, NASB). The secret to Abraham’s victory was this, he was ***“fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised”*** (Rom 4:21, NIV).

Where this assurance is lacking, victory is not possible. Trying to overcome the world and Satan without confidence is like a fearful soldier of Israel trying to fight Goliath. It took a confident believer to defeat Goliath. Do you remember the words of his nemesis? ***“You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I***

come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give all of you into our hands" (1 Sam 17:45-47). In the energy of his confidence of faith, David did not hesitate to confront an apparently superior foe. He knew his God! That is the ONLY way to successfully overcome the foe!

The exhortation, *"Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward"* (NASB), is not a casual one. It is not a mere suggestion for those who want to go a little further than the *nominal Christian*. No! Salvation is at stake here! The Spirit has already warned us of falling away, to a state from which we cannot be recovered (6:4-6). He has also told us of a condition that shall consummate in tasting of the wrath of God Almighty (Heb 10:29-30). He is now telling us how to avoid state. **DO NOT THROW YOUR CONFIDENCE AWAY!** And how do you throw it away? Simply by choosing to take up an alternative! To take hold of the world, you must cast away your confidence, throwing it from you as a contemptible thing. You must forget God to sin! You must deny Christ to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season! You just quench the Spirit to yield to temptation! Those who choose to do this are flirting with death. Soon their choices will cast

This is why we must not throw our confidence away in preference for the fleeting pleasures or advantages of this world. We must not throw it away for a dead and lifeless religion either, where God is approached upon the basis of Law. Such an approach will not sustain us in the good fight of faith, because it does not rely upon Christ.

them into a pit so deep, extrication will not be possible. *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!"*

Allow me to be more specific in this matter. The confidence of which He speaks is not a the result of spiritual maturity. It is, rather, the MEANS to spiritual maturity. This confidence is associated with the *"beginning"* of our spiritual life, not with its maturity (Heb 3:14). The Hebrew believers enjoyed this confidence *"after they were illuminated"* (10:32). The Thessalonians received the Gospel in *"much assurance"* (1 Thess 1:5), and the Ephesians joyfully *"trusted"* when they first *"heard"* the word of their salvation (Eph 1:13). The Ethiopian eunuch went *"on his way rejoicing"* immediately upon rising to walk in newness of life (Acts 8:39). When a person is born again, they are born with confidence! That confident assurance grows, and is made more firm, but you start with it when you come into Christ. Your greatest spiritual triumphs have been owing to your confidence.

This is why we must not throw our confidence away in preference for the fleeting pleasures or advantages of this world. We must not throw it away for a

dead and lifeless religion either, where God is approached upon the basis of Law. Such an approach will not sustain us in the good fight of faith, because it does not rely upon Christ. Being justified by the Law relies upon YOU, not a Savior! Therefore, it thrusts you into a backward motion, away from God, away from grace, and away from power. Also, it makes an attempt to drag Jesus from the throne to be trampled under your feet. It views His precious blood as contemptible, and thinks nothing of spitting in the face of the Holy Spirit of God. If these affirmations seem strong, they are not. They are extremely mild in comparison to the wrath of God that shall be poured out *“without mixture”* upon the wicked.

WHAT YOU REALLY NEED

In view of these things, what is the need of the hour? What sort of exhortation is in order for the people of God? *“For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised”* (Verse 36, NASB). Is *“doing the will of God”* the end of the matter? Some certainly think so. **Perseverance in doing the will of God is the appointed means to receiving the promise, which is the**

Time is the great tester of our faith. Tragically, there are some who *“for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away”* (Luke 8:13). During the heat of conflict and opposition, they throw away their confidence, thereby excluding themselves from the inheritance. Do you think yourself incapable of such a thing? Remember, you are standing by faith, not by strength or even Divine mandate

fundamental thing! I hear so little about the promises of God these days. Remember, the *“exceeding great and precious promises of God”* are the appointed means of becoming *“partakers of the Divine nature”* (2 Pet 1:4). Whatever a person may think about DOING the will of God, it does have a priority in the Kingdom. Jesus said, *“Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven”* (Matt 7:21, NASB). Further, His will is to be done *“with the heart”* in anticipation of receiving the blessing of the Lord (Eph 6:6-8).

Time is the great tester of our faith. Tragically, there are some who *“for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away”* (Luke 8:13). During the heat of conflict and opposition, they throw away their confidence, thereby excluding themselves from the inheritance. Do you think yourself incapable of such a thing? Remember, you are standing by faith, not by strength or even Divine mandate (Rom 11:20). Because you retain your sinful nature, you have the ability to deny the faith. There are some who once held faith and a good conscience, yet dashed their faith upon the rocks of iniquity, making shipwreck of it (1 Tim 1:19).

The appropriation of the promise does not always immediately follow our obedience. Abraham was promised the land of Canaan (Gen 12:7; 15:7; 17:8), yet sojourned in it as in a strange land, having no possession of it while in the body (Heb 11:9; Acts 7:5). He had to persevere during tests of his faith, and will yet enjoy the fulfillment the Lord's promise. Thus it is with us. We are required to continue the race until its conclusion--to the end. *"But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved"* (Matt 24:13, NASB). *"For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end"* (Heb 3:14, NASB). *"And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end"* (Heb 6:11, NASB).

There is grace to do this very thing, persevere unto the end! Remember, doing the will of God is essential, but obtaining the promise is everything! What is more, keeping your minds fixed upon the promised inheritance will enable you to persevere in keeping the faith and your confidence. That was the secret of Christ's continuance under the most difficult of all Divine assignments--laying down His life for a ransom. Therefore it is written, *"Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God"* (Heb 12:2).

JUST A LITTLE WHILE

How long must we endure? Think if you were Adam, who lived 930 years (Gen 5:5), or Methuselah who lived for 969 years. Noah lived to be 950 years of age (Gen 9:29). How would you like to persevere for that long? To keep the faith in a hostile world for that many years? Thank God for the brevity of life! From this perspective, it is a mercy that death entered the world with the introduction of sin (Rom 5:12). Now, as a display of Divine mercy, *"The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away"* (Psa 90:10, NASB, written by Moses). Now we have the greatest of all resources and the reduction of life-span. However, we also are involved in the fiercest of all battles, *for "the devil has come down to [us], having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time"* (Rev 12:12, NASB). Now the Spirit informs us the knowledge of the length of remaining time is not known by the devil alone!

"FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY" (Verse 37, NASB). This is the language of faith. To some, the time has been too long, and thus they scoff about the return of the Lord Jesus. They say, *"Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation"* (2 Pet 3:4, NASB). But they are wrong! Everything has not remained the same! There was a time in the creation when the earth stood out above the water. There was also a time when it was submerged into water during the flood, and the world that then was perished (2 Pet 3:5-6). We are living in the time of *"delay,"* when faith is being tested and rewards are being accumulated. But it will not always be the time of *"delay."*

As faith reckons time, the return of Christ is not far away. Every generation since His ascension has been able to live

with this persuasion. The stronger the faith, the closer the day seemed, for faith transports us into the eternal realm.

The objective is to remain in the fold during the “*delay*.”

As faith reckons time, the return of Christ is not far away. Every generation since His ascension has been able to live with this persuasion. The stronger the faith, the closer the day seemed, for faith transports us into the eternal realm. The objective is to remain in the fold during the “*delay*.” This “*delay*” is not a secondary consideration of the Lord, or a shift in plans. It does not represent a lack of decision on God’s part, or the postponing of the day. This is language that accommodates itself to those living by faith. It accentuates that “*the time*” is in Divine control. It also highlights that it cannot be precisely known. Its surety can also be seen in the expression. Our mandate is to be ready for that return! It will occur suddenly, and without delay. When He comes, He will scan the earth, as it were, for faith. As He Himself said, “*I tell you that He will bring about justice for them [those praying without ceasing] speedily. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?*” (Luke 18:8).

I am convinced there must be more prayers for the perseverance of the saints--for their faithfulness until the end. No one will be saved without this endurance! It is an absolute requirement. Part of our spiritual weaponry is such prayer. “*With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints*” (Eph 6:18, NASB). Endurance is something we “**NEED!**” This is why the emphasis of Apostolic doctrine is on edifying the body of Christ. They need to endure. Never, nor at any time, is the reaching the lost emphasized in the Epistles--never! That is not to say there is not Divine commitment to this holy work. It is to say that a weak and emaciated church will never get the job done. It is also to say God has no Kingdom outreach-work for those to do, whose hearts are not confident and assured of their inheritance in heaven. Let their hands be strengthened in the Lord--let their confidence be bolstered and confirmed! When this happens, you will find a dynamo of spiritual power loosed in a sinful world that cannot be denied. Long before the inauguration of the New Covenant, David well stated this principle. “*Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee*” (Psa 51:10-13, NASB).

WHEN GOD IS NOT PLEASED

The Spirit now closes on a most somber note. While the nominal church has learned to live with nominal Christians, no such tolerance is found in heaven! The loving forbearance of God is not extended to those who choose to refuse the dominance of His Son. Jesus said the wrath of God remained upon such people every day (John 3:36). I dare not say how the Lord feels about the contemporary religion that is popular in the Western world. Those who are justified sustain their identity with God by means of their faith. “**BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul**” (Heb 10:38-39, NASB). No faith, no life! Unbelief cuts the umbilical chord to Christ. Life is

not sustained by doing, but by believing--being persuaded that ***“God is, and that He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him”*** (Heb 11:6).

Note how sensitive the Lord is to our spiritual posture. ***“And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him”*** (NIV). There is no way for this reaction to be avoided--no way at all. If the individual ***“shrinks back”*** from the Lord, He will NOT BE pleased with him--regardless of what else he may do. Again, there is no neutral or middle ground here. The individual is either ***“drawing near”*** (Heb 10:22) or ***“shrinking back.”*** The person who is not coming close is drifting away,

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bring drawn to an area from which deliverance is not possible. The person who is drawing near is putting a greater distance between himself and the curse of the Almighty. In the language of our text, the person availing himself of the access to God provided by Christ Jesus, is pleasing to God. The favor of the Lord is upon the one coming to Him through Christ Jesus. Such an individual may appear to be unqualified, having a sordid background like the woman with the alabaster box (Matt 26:7-12). It may be a person like Zacchaeus who was held in contempt because of his earthly position and manner (Luke 19:2-10). Perhaps the approacher may be like the woman at the well of Sychar, morally deficient and spiritually bankrupt. But the one who comes will please the Lord, regardless of their deficiencies.

But those who ***“shrink back,”*** being lured into the realm of the curse, will incur the displeasure of the Lord. By so doing, they are trampling the Son of God under their feet. They are considering the precious blood of Christ an unholy thing, and are doing despite to the Spirit of grace. Their church membership and arduous works all count for nothing (Matt 7:20-23). Those not availing themselves of Divine fellowship are, by that backward stance, readying themselves for the wrath of God. Those choosing NOT to draw near with a true heart and in full assurance of faith are living with the wrath of God upon their head. Such are ***“shrinking back”*** from the One Who desires to save them.

Believing to the

Saving of the Soul

The Spirit closes with an optimistic word. ***“But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul”*** (Heb 10:39, NASB). Notice, the ***“shrinking back”*** is to ***“destruction.”*** Unless that backward movement is averted, condemnation is sure! How this needs to be affirmed in *our* churches! Those identified with Christ have access to all of the resources required to fulfill the admonition to ***“draw near.”*** There is no deficiency in Christ!

This admonition does not affirm the impossibility of falling away, but the utter senselessness of doing so. Those in Christ have been ***“delivered from the power of darkness.”*** They can say ***“NO!”*** to all of his devices, and are taught to do so by the grace of God (Tit

2:11-12). Everything ***“pertaining to life and godliness”*** has been given to them, and is accessible to them by means of their faith (2 Pet 1:3). They have been called into an amalgamation of people who are ***“kings and priests unto God”*** (Rev 1:5-6). But everything depends upon their faith. It must be kept in the gale of temptation, the desert of testing, and the flood-tide of opposition. If we keep believing, we will keep persevering, and will receive the ***“end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls”*** (1 Pet 1:9). Holy on, child of God, HOLD ON! In due season we shall reap, ***“if we faint not”*** (Gal 6:9).

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated Presents

Commentary on the book of Hebrews

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #18

AN OVERVIEW OF FAITH

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear” (Hebrews 11:1, KJV). (“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen,” NASB). (“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see,” NIV).

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which appeared” (Hebrews 11:1, The Webster Bible).

“Now faith is {the} substantiating of things hoped for, {the} conviction of things not seen. For in {the power of} this the elders have obtained testimony. By faith we apprehend that the worlds were framed by {the} word of God, so that which is seen should not take its origin from things which appear” (Hebrews 11:1, The Darby Bible) .

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the sign that the things not seen are true. For by it our fathers had God’s approval. By faith it is clear to us that the order of events was fixed by the word of God, so that what is seen has not been made from things which only seem to be” (Hebrews 11:1, The Bible In Basic English).

INTRODUCTION

The emphasis of the Old Covenant was DOING. The emphasis of the New Covenant is BELIEVING. Therefore it is written, *“For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, ‘The man who does those things shall live by them.’ But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, ‘Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’ (that is, to bring Christ down from above) or, ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom 10:5-9). Under the Law, life--spiritual life--was contingent upon the flawless execution of a moral code. One failure, even though seemingly minuscule, made life with God inaccessible. The Law, or First Covenant, stood as a merciless sentinel, condemning any and every infraction of the words once etched in*

“Now,” the preceding chapter apprizes us, “the just shall

live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him” (10:38). If the soul is to be saved, the individual must press forward in believing, for the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory, cannot be appropriated apart from faith.

stone by the very finger of God. Wanting to do the words was not enough! They had to be obeyed, consistently and perfectly. That is how the Law speaks: “*the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness*” (NASB). Life was promised, then, upon the basis of personal accomplishment. No mediator, no forgiveness, no mercy!

But this is not the way the New Covenant speaks. It offers life on another basis--a blessing that is **obtainable** rather than a state that is attainable. It is **received** rather than achieved, and is based upon faith, not doing. That faith comes by hearing a message or proclamation, not a commandment. **Righteousness now comes by faith, not by doing!**

How does the righteousness that comes from faith speak? It tells us of a WORD that is sent to us--a word that is NEAR to us, and ACCESSIBLE to us by Divine initiative. “*The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart.*” It is a word that is “*preached,*” or “*announced.*” Whereas the Law declared an objective for men to achieve, the “*word of faith*” declares a righteousness to be received by sinners, whom the Law condemned (Rom 1:16-17; 3:21). It is a righteousness “*apart from the Law,*” and is conferred upon believers.

“*Now,*” the preceding chapter apprizes us, “*the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him*” (10:38). If the soul is to be saved, the individual must press forward in believing, for the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory, cannot be appropriated apart from faith. Thus it is written, “*But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul*” (10:39). Within the churches with whom I have had contact since 1952, I have found very little emphasis upon faith, or believing God. Apart from the preaching of my good father, and that of brethren for whom I ministered for 32-1/2 years in Indiana, the messages I have heard on faith have been few and far between. This is the tragic condition of a movement that has been dislodged from its moorings, and is being propelled down the broad road that leads to destruction. Where faith is not dominant, commitment and obedience are lacking, God is not pleased, and personal growth in grace and truth are rendered impossible. There is no acceptable excuse for failing to highlight faith!

To accentuate this reality, the Spirit now launches into a lengthy discourse on faith. The nature and effectiveness of believing are both declared and attested to by God-approved men and women in times past. The Spirit will show us that even before the law, faith enabled sinners to come into Divine favor. When the whole world was encompassed in moral depravity of staggering greatness, faith proved superior.

In times of adversity, testing, and trial, faith has always been the means through which the people of God maintained Divine acceptance and overcame

the devil. It is the appointed means of enduring unspeakable atrocities, as well as experiencing remarkable deliverances. Those of the household of God who have excelled, have done so because of their faith.

The Spirit now shines the light of Divine illumination upon faith, showing it to be indispensable to the experience of Divine approval. It is not possible to please God without faith. It makes no difference what is said or done, apart from faith it is *“impossible to please God”* (11:6a). Disciplined efforts to conform to a code are not enough. There must be an inward persuasion that *“God is, and that He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him”* (Heb 11:6b). Here is the accent of spiritual life, and the bloodstream of fellowship with the Lord. This is the appointed means of participation in the life of God. Every valid achievement is accomplished by faith! It is absolutely preeminent.

NOW

“Now faith is . . .” “Now,” in this case, does not relate to time: i.e., during the New Covenant age or dispensation. Rather, it is the continuation of the thought previously affirmed, *“the just shall live by faith”* (10:38). It is as though the Spirit were saying, *“Now, continuing the thought of the indispensability of faith . . .”* He will now show us the spiritual logic of the statement, *“the just shall live by faith.”* First of all, He will

A professed *“faith”* that does not move the soul toward salvation is no faith at all. It is spurious, and will not be honored by God. A *“faith”* that is not consistent, enabling the individual to live in a lively awareness of God, is no faith at all. Such is only a fabrication of human imagination, and has nothing whatsoever to do with the living God.

show us what faith is, then He will show us what faith has done.

When the Scripture speaks of faith, it is **not** speaking of a mere moral virtue--i.e., *the ability to trust in the word of another*. Nor, indeed, is it referring to intellectual assent to a proposition-- *I believe that George Washington was the first president of our country*. This is **not** the faith to do *“remove mountains,”* or perform other miraculous wonders, as in 1 Corinthians 13:2. Certainly, it is **not** a mere profession of faith, which can endure for only a while, as in Luke 8:13. Equally true, it is **not** the teaching about faith, or a compendium of doctrine that is embraced by the believer. This is the believing by which the soul lives spiritually, or is sustained in vital union with God. This is the faith to which the *“salvation of the soul”* is connected.

A professed *“faith”* that does not move the soul toward salvation is no faith at all. It is spurious, and will not be honored by God. A *“faith”* that is not consistent, enabling the individual to live in a lively awareness of God, is no faith at all. Such is only a fabrication of human imagination, and has nothing whatsoever to do with the living God. This chapter will show this to be the case. The most excellent of our race prior to Jesus will be cited as examples of faith. There will be no mention of mediocre, uncommitted people--no individuals who were aligned with God by name only. In every case, the sole recommendation of these individuals will be their faith. Recognized works will be seen as springing from faith--faith never springs from works!

This is the basic criterion by which men and women are measured by God. Where there is no faith, there is no acceptance, regardless of human achievement. Where faith is found, there are always recognition and acceptance. Where faith is found, there will also be response to God, activity, and godly expectation. In

my judgment, faith has been underrated by the churches with which I am familiar. It has not been held forth as superior, and generally is not declared as the means of maintaining spiritual life. Such a condition is an embarrassment, and constitutes a most serious deficiency.

The Spirit will now show us the relationship of faith to patience, or perseverance. There will be no faithfulness to the end without faith! The affirmation has been made that we will not reach the goal without “*patience*” (Heb 10:36). That continuance will not be accomplished by mere human effort. It can only be found where there is faith!

Viewed from the standpoint of a logical argument, the major premise is this: *We will not be able to arrive at the appointed goal without patience, or endurance.* The minor proposition will now be developed, which is: *Faith is the substance of things hoped for.* Faith directs our attention to things that, from the viewpoint of sense, are “*afar off.*” It is imperative that we learn to focus on these things--heavenly things. Without that focus, the trials of life will be too difficult to handle, and will overwhelm us.

SUBSTANCE OF THINGS HOPED FOR

Not Strictly A Definition

While it may appear this verse is definition of faith, strictly speaking, it is not. It is more a summation than a definition. “*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for . . .*” (NKJV). Some object to the word “*substance,*” but their objections carry no real weight. The term is translated from the word **upostasij** (hupostasis), which, lexically, *means the objective reality which gives a firm guarantee and basis for confidence or assurance.* As used in our text, it means *that which has actual existence; a substance, real being* (Thayer).

FAITH SUBSTANTIZES UNSEEN REALITIES TO THE SOUL. It enables the individual possessing to move resolutely through the difficulties of life, fully persuaded that the things for which the heart longs are real, and will be obtained. Faith is like the hand of the soul, taking hold of God, Christ, and the “*exceeding great and precious promises.*” Faith appropriates, takes hold of, and gains the blessing. Our appetite for the things of God is awakened by the melodious sound of the Gospel of Christ. The “*better promises*” upon which the New Covenant is based become our fervent quest. Faith persuades us of their reality **AND** their accessibility. We become so convinced of them, the world loses its attractiveness and trials become bearable.

Only One Faith

Only faith can give substance to the promises--not argument, however scholarly it may be. Philosophical arguments may very well be used to sweep away erroneous views of Scripture, and convince the doubter that he ought to pursue a better understanding. They cannot, however, produce

confidence--and that is a requisite to pleasing the Lord and successfully negotiating the straits of life in this world.

Mind you, there is but “*one faith*” (Eph 4:5), and this is it. It is the eye of the soul, by which things eternal are perceived and perceived. The Word of God is like the magnifying glass through which these things are seen. Faith clarifies them to the soul, bringing understanding and confidence to us. In the world, *seeing is believing*. But this maxim does not hold true in the Kingdom of God. Here, in fellowship with God, *believing is seeing*! The person who does not believe, does not see or understand the things of God. What they call understanding is not understanding as God counts it. It is only scholastic, or on the surface, and will yield no benefit to the soul.

Remember, the Spirit is commenting on living by faith and possessing patience to the end. The point of this text is simply this: We will not be able to complete the race unless we are driven by hope. The driving compulsion to dwell in the house of the Lord forever, and to obtain the inheritance reserved for us, can be maintained ONLY in the persuasion of them. If we are not sure they are supplied for us, we will not run to obtain them! If the things of God are not confidently grasped by faith, eventually we will fall. If they are vague and unsure to us, we will neither confidently hope for them, nor be able to stand against the wiles of the devil when he seeks to turn us from them.

Only Faith Can Do It

The believer is not persuaded of the reality of “*the things God has prepared for them that love Him*” (1 Cor 2:9-10) because of a weighty apologetic argument, or because of a hermeneutical principle. Those who affirm such things are simply not telling the truth. **Only faith can give substance to the promises** --not logical or even tangible evidence, however scholarly it may be. Philosophical arguments may very well be used to sweep away erroneous views of Scripture, and convince the doubter that he ought to pursue a better understanding. They cannot, however, produce confidence--and that is a requisite to pleasing the Lord and successfully negotiating the straits of life in this world.

Almost every presentation of evidences has to do with physical or logical validation. But here, in the Spirit, we have evidence that transcends both of those realms. Faith brings evidence to the soul so powerful that everything is seen in a different light.

Things Hoped For

“*Things hoped for*” are things God has promised. In summary, these include the resurrection of the body (Phil 3:11,20), the new heavens and the new earth (2 Pet 3:13), the possession of the heavenly country (Heb 11:16), and the possession of eternal glory ((Rom 8:17; 2 Thess 1:10). These are things that lie beyond “*this present evil world*” (Gal 1:4). They extend beyond the perimeter of time and

sense. Neither human eye nor logic can reach into the domain wherein they exist (1 Cor 2:9). But they are real, and we have been informed of them by the Word of the Almighty. Faith has convinced us of them. It has persuaded us of their accessibility, and has convinced us to pursue them with unrelenting vigor.

I must once again lament the near-total absence of such traits in the contemporary church. With few proportionate exceptions, the nominal Christian speaks little of these things. An appetite for them is not apparent, and longing expressions are not often heard. You do not hear people singing of *the glory* much these days. Preachers, for the most part, are **not** holding out the eternal prize as something worthy of the most fervent quest. Faith directs our attention to things *“afar off.”* **In the energy imparted by the persuasion of those things, the believer runs with patience the race set before him.**

Patience, or perseverance, is needed because the goal has not yet been reached. The fulness of the things for which we long is yet (from one perspective) far from us, to be obtained at the conclusion of the race. The person who is spiritually blind, however, *“is blind, and cannot see afar off”* (2 Pet 1:9). That is why he *“lacks”* the spiritual virtues necessary for survival (2 Pet 1:5-8).

Saved By Hope

If *“we are saved by hope”* (Rom 8:24), faith is indispensable--for it is the *“substance of things hoped for.”* It is what convinces us of their reality, and compels us to endure all things while running the race that has been set before us. Faith enables us to possess the blessings in our spirits before they are revealed without obstruction! Faith gave substance to the promised land to Abraham before he arrived there, and while he journeyed there as a stranger (Heb 11:8-9). Faith made the coming flood real to Noah he *“built an ark to the saving of his house,”* commencing the massive project 120 years before the flood came (Gen 6:3; Heb 11:7). Faith always makes the things of God real to the individual--so real they are energetically pursued!

EVIDENCE OF THINGS NOT SEEN

“Now faith is . . . the evidence of things not seen” (NKJV). The NASB and RSV translate this *“conviction of things not seen.”* This speaks of an inner conviction and confident assurance. It includes the ideas of verification and certainty. It is what Abraham possessed when it was said of him, *“being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform”* (Rom 4:21). In all of the studies of EVIDENCES to which I have been subjected, I have never heard an emphasis placed upon faith, or believing God. Almost every presentation of evidences has to do with physical or logical validation. But here, in the Spirit, we have evidence that transcends both of those realms. Faith brings evidence to the soul so powerful that everything is seen in a different light.

Normally, *evidence* is addressed to our senses. In the case of faith, however, the Spirit shows us things hidden to our senses--the knowledge

To obtain Divine approval is everything! When God is displeased, nothing else really counts. Holy men and woman have always sought to avoid Divine displeasure and appropriate Divine approval. The question now arises, How can this be done? How can the individual come into the favor of God.

of things beyond the perimeter of sense. Thus it is written, *“But as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for*

those who love Him.’ But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God” (1 Cor 2:9-10, NKJV). And how does the Spirit reveal them to us? It is through our faith! Whether we are speaking of the initial revelation of these things (as with the Apostles and Prophets), or of the opening of them to our understanding, faith is the appointed means of making them known.

Our Faith Is Evidence

Our faith is our evidence! Our senses contradict what our faith has enabled us to grasp. We have become *“partakers of Christ”* (Heb 3:14), and yet often appear to be dominated by Adam. We have *“eternal life”* (John 3:36; 6:47), and yet dwell in a corruptible body, daily experiencing deterioration and failing. We possess an inheritance that is *“incorruptible, and undefiled, and fades not away”* (1 Pet 1:4), yet are learning how to suffer need and be abased. We have been made *“kings and priests to God”* (Rev 1:5-6), yet often appear to be the tail rather than the head. Everything belongs to us (1 Cor 3:21-23), yet we often experience spiritual hunger and thirst as in a dry and thirsty land where no water is. We know that *“God is a very present help in the time of trouble”* (Psa 46:1), and *“is not far from every one of us”* (Acts 17:27), yet our prayers must often extend over long periods of time, as though we were not being heard. What soul has not felt the conflict of life in the body with the life of the soul?

Where would we be without the *“evidence of things not seen,”* the peculiar property of faith?? Faith makes us equal to these challenges, convincing us within of the reality of the things God has promised us.

Our faith is itself the evidence of their existence. We need no other argument, no high-sounding presentation that exalts the wisdom of men. Give us food for our faith! Tell us what the Lord has said! Declare to us the promises, and proclaim to us the Gospel! It is faith, and faith alone, that is our *“substance”* and *“evidence.”* It is our *“assurance”* and *“conviction,”* our *“surety”* and *“certainty.”* Feed our faith, and we will soar with the wings of an eagle, mounting higher and higher. We will survive the flood and the furnace, the blast of the storm and the plague of the locust!

It is faith that is *“the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.”* Thanks be unto God that His grace was *“exceeding abundant”* with faith (1 Tim 1:14). Glory to God in the highest that He has *“given us”* to *“believe”* (Phil 1:29). All praise to Him Who has *“given to every man the measure of faith”* (Rom 12:3). It is both indispensable and satisfying!

OBTAINING GOD’S APPROVAL

To obtain Divine approval is everything! When God is displeased, nothing else really counts. Holy men and woman have always sought to avoid Divine displeasure and appropriate Divine approval. A day in the courts of a pleased God is worth a thousand anywhere else! The question now arises, How can this be done? How can the individual come into the favor of God. What will it take for God to receive, as it were, a *“good report”* of us? Every conscientious believer is mindful of this.

“For by it (faith) the elders obtained a good report” (KJV). Who are these *“elders”*? These are not ecclesiastical officials, or those who simply lived to a ripe old age. He is

speaking of the “*ancients*” (NIV), or “*men of old*” (NASB), who were recognized and approved by God. He covers a period from the beginning of the world until the closing of the Old Testament era. The remainder of the chapter recounts these “ancients” by name, telling of their faith and its impact upon their thinking and conduct. The “*good report*” is evidenced by such terms as “*friend of God*” (James 2:23), “*man after God’s own heart*” (Acts 13:22), and “*saint of the Lord*” (Psa 106:16).

An Obtained Report

Notice, the “*good report*” is “**OBTAINED.**” Other versions say, “*obtained a good testimony*” (NKJV), “*were commended*” (NIV), “*gained approval*” (NASB), and “*received Divine approval*” (RSV). This approval, or commendation, was not taken for granted. It a state gained by “*the elders.*” Once they were NOT in it, yet they came into it.

Do not forget, the Spirit is showing us the superiority and necessity of faith. It is the means by which identity with God is realized. It is the channel through which all of the promises of God are realized. From the beginning, this was the exclusive means through which men obtained God’s approval.

This letter is written to people who were retrogressing to an Old

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Covenant mentality--or at least the way people thought under that former covenant. Those who failed to see the significance of faith had been known to boast in their heritage rather than their God. Jesus confronted such people, inflated with a false sense of acceptance because they were Abraham’s children (John 8:33). Even the early church found people depending upon their Jewish ancestry rather than faith (Rom 2:17). Ah, such a tendency has not flown from us. There are still people who boast in their religious heritage, though not a God-ordained one like that of the Jews. They imagine God receives them because of their theological position, or because of their organizational affiliation. Others, sinking even lower, consider their own good works as an adequate foundation for God’s acceptance. But “*the elders,*” noted for the most noble works of their time, were not approved by God because of their works, but because of their faith.

This is a perspective that is altogether too uncommon in the contemporary church. Faith must be held in high esteem. Your persuasion of the good things of God, and consequent embrace of them, is what brings the approval of God. This is a source of great joy to the believer, for he is never satisfied with the level of his obedience. Every intention to do good is accompanied by the influence of the presence of “evil” within. As it is written, “*I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me*” (Rom 7:23). If, therefore, I depend upon my own achievement for confidence of Divine approval, I shall forever be tossed on the waves of human emotion. But if I look to my faith,

confidence to run the race set before me will follow.

Look Back to the Ancients!

The Scriptural record of mighty men and woman of God has been supplied for our encouragement. In them we find living examples of the power of faith. The Divine record will confirm these individuals were not morally perfect. While they were not noted for disobedience, it would nevertheless erupt in them from time to time. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had to fight to maintain their faith.

They wrestled with temptation, recovered from setbacks, and had to regain ground from time to time. They were men, but they were not merely men! They obtained a *“good report”* because they gravitated to God, not to sin! Transgression was the exception in their life, not the rule. Faith brought to them the *“substance”* of the things they *“hoped for.”* They refused to forfeit their faith for this world! They were not morally perfect, but they obtained a good report! They had to confess to sin, but they obtained a good report! They often knew not where God was leading them, but they obtained a good report! They endured hardship, but obtained a good report!

THE WAY TO UNDERSTANDING

Now, we come to grips with a very sensitive matter--at least in some circles. Even though faith is preeminent in the Kingdom of God, the wisdom of this world has penetrated the nominal church, causing men to rest their confidence upon *“evidence”* NOT produced by faith. Thus great value is placed upon human sciences in the matter of substantiating the integrity of Scripture and validity of the Gospel of Christ. This is a trend fraught with jeopardy, as we will see.

“By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible” (NKJV). The Holy Spirit goes to the very foundation of reasoning — the origin of all things. There were finally spun philosophies in place at the time of this writing--philosophies that still are the foundation of worldly reasoning. The philosophers of the world who had already shaped thinking for centuries, remain well known. Thales of Miletus lived from 636 to 546 B.C. Zeno of Elea lived from 490 to 436 B.C. The well known Socrates lived from 464 to 399 B.C., and Plato from 428 to 348 B.C. Without profitless elaboration of the world point-of-view, suffice it to say, there were ideas concerning the origin of all things. But the Spirit does not lead us to wade in the shallow stream of philosophy. Rather, He anchors us in Divine affirmation, and points us to the superiority of faith.

Design in Creation

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NOT produced by faith. Thus great value is placed upon human sciences in the matter of substantiating the integrity of Scripture and validity of the Gospel of Christ. This is a trend fraught with jeopardy, as we will see.

There is intelligent design in the universe. The worlds were *“framed,”* or designed with purpose. The universe is not an accident, but a deliberate creation. Not even a speck of dust came into existence without the Word of the Lord! Whether we speak of things seen or things not seen, they all had their genesis with God. Thus it is written, *“For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him”* (Col 1:16). These *“all things”* were not the result of reshaping or reconstruction, but of creation.

He Spirit is showing us the superiority of faith to all the world has to offer. It is superior to reason! It is superior to tangible evidence! Reason can be a source of deception, as well as tangible evidence. It was *“reason”* that brought down our race in the first place. A corrupt view of tangible evidence was also at the root of the fall. There, in the Edenic paradise, both reason and evidence failed as a ground of Divine acceptance! The supposed improvement of both areas of knowledge has not changed the condition.

Faith and Understanding

Here is a superior form of understanding--understanding that cannot be taught in the classrooms of men. This understanding includes persuasion, assurance, conviction, and confidence. It is not merely academic, but spiritual. Thus Scripture refers to *“spiritual understanding”* (Col 1:9). It is understanding administered by the Spirit, but it is appropriated through your faith--your persuasion of the truth of Divine utterance.

This is a form of spiritual experience that allows the believer to handle eternal things. It is understanding that allows safe and proper navigation through the world, not being distracted by it, nor lured into its vices.

You can study planets and rocks, atoms, protons and neutrons, and you will never come to the conclusion these things were formed by a word! The most elaborate apologetic in the world cannot possibly produce this conclusion! Such things cannot explain the HOW of creation.

In the case of the *“the worlds,”* we *“understand”* they were *“framed by the Word of God”* -- spoken into existence. And how is it that we understand this? Is it by some philosophical rule? Has a humanly developed science led us to this conclusion, like geology, biology, astronomy, etc? Has the observation of design in the universe led us to this conclusion? Indeed not! You can study planets and rocks, atoms, protons and neutrons, and you will never come to the conclusion these things were formed by a word! The most elaborate apologetic in the world cannot possibly produce this conclusion! Such things cannot explain the HOW of creation.

But we do not need these sciences to affirm origin, nor support our faith! There is only one way we know this. GOD SAID IT! Remove the Word of God on this subject, and there is no mortal that will arrive at such a conclusion. It is because we believe what has been declared that we *“understand”* these things! We do not question the origin of creation, but rely upon the Creator to sustain the creation itself, and maintain us while

we are within its environs. He had made it also controls it — we *“understand”* this! As the Spirit says elsewhere, *“sustaining all things by his powerful word”* (Heb 1:3, NIV). And again, *“He is before all things, and in him all things hold together”* (Col 1:17, NIV). An understanding of this enabled Joshua to cry out *“in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed”* (Josh 10:12-13). Mind you, I am not saying you may command creation at will and find it obeying you. **The point to be seen is that understanding what God has said enables you to join in what God is doing!**

Remember, *“faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”* It is the appointed means to confidence and assurance--the way God convinces people of the reality of the things He declares. Faith brings satisfying understanding, unmixed with doubt and fear. We do not stagger at the origin of the natural order. God has told us how it began, and we confidently understand His Word on the subject. We entertain no doubts on this matter, nor will we allow the world to move our confidence from the Word of God to the wisdom of men.

Things we see were Divinely constructed from things that do NOT appear. He is not referring to atoms, protons, and neutrons! These can all be seen--you just have to magnify them enough, and you can see them. We *“understand”* this universe was made from nothing! We may not be able to explain it satisfactorily to the scientist, but we understand it! God did not gather together existing materials and shape the universe.

Note the plurality — *“the worlds.”* This is a correct rendering of the words **touj aiwnaj** . We were introduced to this terminology at the beginning of this book. God, *“hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds”* (11:2). This is intended to teach us of the vastness of the creation. It extends beyond our vision, regardless of how much we magnify it! There is a multiplicity of bodies, all summoned into existence by the Word of the Lord from nothing!

Salvation Is Greater

The real value of faith is not found in understanding of the source of *“the worlds.”* Its real purpose is to appropriate the salvation of God. It is even more effective to assure us of our acceptance in the Beloved, than of the origin of *“the worlds.”* The Spirit has taken us to the most rudimentary level of faith--believing that God created all things. We do not doubt Him at this point. Here is something which we confidently affirm, and which we will not allow false philosophers to take from us. That is how powerful faith is!

Something From Nothing!

God spoke into primeval chaos and created worlds from nothing. He has now spoken to us *“through His Son.”* This Word is more powerful than His creative word! It is a Word that will *“never pass away”* (Matt 24:35). The same Word that commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has commanded the *“light of the knowledge of the glory of God”* to *“shine into our hearts”* (2 Cor 4:6). That Word was as effective in you as the creative word was in the beginning! Just as surely as you can understand how the worlds were framed, you can understand how you have been cleansed and received by God through Christ Jesus.

None should be surprised that in salvation something was made from nothing.

We who were *“dead in trespasses and sins”* are now *“alive to God through Christ Jesus the Lord”* (Eph 2:1; Rom 6:11). Something from nothing! We who *“were not a people,”* are now *“the people of God.”* We, who *“had not obtained mercy, have now obtained mercy”* (1 Pet 2:10). Something from nothing! In us has been fulfilled the word of the prophet Isaiah, *“I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me”* (Rom 10:20; Isa 65:1-2). Something, praise God, from nothing!

You Can Believe!

You can believe Jesus appeared one time *“in the end of the world to put away sin”* (Heb 9:26). You can believe He *“ever lives to make intercession”* for you (Heb 7:25). You can believe He will appear *“the second time without sin unto salvation”* to all who look for Him (Heb 9:28). When God says, *“The just shall live by faith”* (Heb 10:38), you can believe it--understand it--launch out upon it!

Who cannot see that infinitely more has been declared about your salvation than about the creation of the world? God has revealed the enemy and his diabolical purpose will be crushed (Gen 3:15). He has made known His intent to bless *“all nations”* through the Offspring of Abraham (Gen 12:3). The Word of the Lord has revealed the Man through Whom the blessing will come! It has made known the objective to which this salvation is moving--conformity to the Image of the Son (Rom 8:29).

You Can Know More!

You know more about your salvation than you do about the creation! As surely as you can satisfactorily understand how the worlds were formed, so you can comprehend how you are made *“accepted in the Beloved!”* Gravitating to a system of Law for salvation is as unreasonable to faith as the theory of evolution, or the *“big bang”* theory. If, “by faith,” we can understand how the worlds were formed, even so *“by faith”* we can *“comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God”* (Eph 3:18-19).

Hope, As Aspect of Faith

From this perspective, *“hope”* is an aspect of the understanding of faith. Just as we do not look to creation to prove its source, so we do not look to ourselves to prove cause of our salvation. It is the Word -- the Word! — the Word! That Word brought the worlds into existence, and that Word begat you (James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23). That Word upholds, or sustains the worlds, and it sustains you (Rom 10:17; Luke 4:4).

They Must Hear the Word

If the people of God are ever to abound in hope, they must hear what God has said about their salvation! If they are going to be sustained by the Word of the Lord, they must expose themselves to it! That Word is more powerful in redemption than in creation; more potent in your salvation than in than in the creation of the worlds!

There has been enough neglect of the people of the Most High God! They are to

be fed, *“nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine”* (1 Tim 4:6). They will never make it without faith, and faith apart from the Word of God is not impossible. Faith has always come, and continues to come, by *“hearing, and hearing the Word . . . ”* (Rom 10:17). If understanding is to come, it will come by believing what the Lord has said! That is how we understand the origin of the universe, and it is how we comprehend source of our salvation. Our confidence is no more sure than is our faith. Our understanding of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus is directly proportionate to our faith--to the degree to which we have believed the Word of the Lord. The apprehension of these things has such a powerful effect upon the human spirit that it jars the very citadels of hell itself! Satan knows the effects of faith upon the heart, and therefore seeks to destroy it with great subtlety and aggressiveness.

CONCLUSION

The power of these things must not be missed. Salvation is wrought out in close proximity to the Living God. While it appears to the human eye as though we are being saved from a distance, we are actually being saved through integration with the Godhead. We are in Christ, and Christ is in us (2 Cor 5:17; 13:5). We are in the Spirit, and the Spirit is in us (Gal 5:17; Rom 8:9). We are in God, and God is in us (Col 3:3; 2 Cor 6:16; 1 John 4:16)! The further we get from God, the greater the liability.

But how does a person stay close to God? How do we *“work out of own salvation with fear and trembling”* (Phil 2:12). It is by *“drawing near with a true heart, in the full assurance of faith . . . ”* (Heb 10:22). That will not happen, however, if we are not confident--if we do not understand we are *“accepted in the Beloved”* (Eph 1:6). Therefore, this book gives us something to believe--something for faith to grasp! The Lord knows that when we believe, understanding will come. When that understanding is appropriated, we will fight a good fight, and finish our course with joy! That is the nature of the Kingdom of God!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated Presents

Commentary on the book of Hebrews

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #19

FAITH TRIUMPHS!

“ By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him"; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude; innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore . . . By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called,’ concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff. By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones. By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command. By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them”
(Hebrews 11:4-12, 17-28)

INTRODUCTION

When it comes to pleasing God, the emphasis is placed upon faith. Those who have been accepted by Him have always been people of faith, and without it, it is not possible to please the Lord. Whether the individual lived before Law,

during the Law, or during the New Covenant, believing God has always been the premier evidence of spiritual life and acceptance. The Scriptures place such a great stress upon this, it is difficult to conceive of it being overlooked. Notwithstanding this condition, men have always struggled with unbelief and doubt, twin arrows hurled at us by our adversary.

Warnings Against Unbelief

The disqualifying quality of unbelief is also declared. Think, for example, of the powerful statements made concerning unbelief. This was the besetting sin of Israel. *“Therefore the LORD heard and was full of wrath, And a fire was kindled against Jacob, And anger also mounted against Israel; Because they did not believe in God, And did not trust in His salvation”* (Psa 78:21-22). The work of the Lord Jesus was restricted by unbelief. *“And He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief”* (Matt 13:58). Jesus did not overlook unbelief—especially in His disciples, who refused to receive the testimony of the women concerning His resurrection. *“And afterward He appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at the table; and He reproached them for their unbelief”* (Mark 16:14). The unbelieving Israelites were excluded from the Divine promise. *“ . . . they (the Israelites) were broken off for their unbelief . . . ”* (Rom 11:20). Unbelief is the essence of wickedness, prompting the individual to withdraw from God Himself. *“Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God”* (Heb 3:12). Unbelief makes it

In my judgment, unbelief runs rampant in the churches, and it is inexcusable. Departures from God, the absence of the great works of God, and general hardness of heart, are evidences of the presence of unbelief.

impossible to obtain the promises. *“And so we see that they (Israel) were not able to enter [Canaan] because of unbelief”* (Heb 3:19).

In my judgment, unbelief runs rampant in the churches, and it is inexcusable. Departures from God, the absence of the great works of God, and general hardness of heart, are evidences of the presence of unbelief. This section of Hebrews will confirm to our hearts that God has never honored an individual dominated by unbelief. It has always been the reason for exclusion, and is unanimously cursed by God, with no exceptions. When the Lord diagnosed faith as *“little,”* He always rebuked the condition. It is a prelude to full-blown unbelief. The inability to trust God for daily provision occasioned the Lord remark, *“O men of little faith”* (Matt 6:30; Luke 12:38). When the disciples feared during a threatening storm, Jesus, before He rebuked the winds and the sea, said to His disciples, *“Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?”* (Matt 8:26). When Peter began to sink, after being distracted when walking on the water to go to Jesus, the Lord took hold of Him and said, *“O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”* (Matt 14:31). On another occasion when the disciples wondered at Christ’s saying to “beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees,” Jesus said, *“You men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread?”* (Matt 16:8).

It is imperative to see the seriousness of unbelief, doubt, and little faith. Unless

they are abandoned, they will be the cause for exclusion from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power! It is not to be tolerated, excused, or explained. With righteous zeal we are to make war on unbelief, not allowing it to encroach upon us. I fear for many of the assemblies in which I have ministered when I recall the remarkable expressions of unbelief I have heard when among them. It is possible for our spiritual senses to become dull to this condition because we are among *“friends.”* But we must not allow this to happen. The “unbelieving” are among those whose *“part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death”* (Rev 21:8). On the whole, I do not believe this perspective has reached an acceptable level among those claiming identity with Christ Jesus.

The Sanctifying Power of Faith

Faith, on the other hand, has a sanctifying power. Repeatedly the Holy Spirit affirms this to be the case. A few expressions will suffice.

Faith purifies the heart, purging from it lower interests and contaminating pursuits. *“And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith”* (Acts 15:9).

Faith sets aside the individual for the Lord--it sanctifies the person. *“ . . . to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me”* (Acts 26:18).

It is our conviction of these things, and our confidence they are for us, that brings the blessing! You cannot make these things real to the heart by logic, philosophy, or tangible evidence. As valuable as the historicity of Christ is, it is not the means through the appropriation of His Person and accomplishments are realized. Faith is the appointed means!

The righteousness of God is appropriated by faith. *“ . . . even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe . . . ”* (Rom 3:22).

Our justification is *“by faith without the deeds of the Law”* (Rom 3:28 5:1). Our access to God is through the avenue of faith, not procedure. *“ through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand . . . ”* (Rom 5:2).

Faith gives us the ability to stand, not falling away or being swept aside by Satan’s flood of delusion. *“ . . . for by faith ye stand . . . ”* (2 Cor 1:24).

An acceptable manner of life is lived by faith. Faith is the motivation for living, and the impetus behind expression. *“For we walk by faith . . . the just shall live by faith”* (2 Cor 5:7; Gal 3:11).

The bold announcement is made, *“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus”* (Gal 3:26).

The anticipation of righteousness in its fulness prompted by faith. *“For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness”* (Gal 5:5).

The appointed means through which Christ dwells in our hearts is *“by faith”* (Eph 3:16).

The effectiveness of Christ’s propitiation is appropriated through faith. *“Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood . . .”* (Rom 3:25).

The promise of the Spirit is received through faith. *“. . . in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith”* (Gal 3:14).

The grace of God, which brings salvation, is appropriated through faith. *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God”* (Eph 2:8).

It is our conviction of these things, and our confidence they are for us, that brings the blessing! You cannot make these things real to the heart by logic, philosophy, or tangible evidence. As valuable as the historicity of Christ is, it is not the means through the appropriation of His Person and accomplishments are realized. Faith is the appointed means!

It is not possible for a more extensive case to be made for the necessity of faith. Faith must be the dominating factor, not an auxiliary influence, within the child of God. Whatever is presented to God apart from faith is unacceptable. This is the reason for rejection of people who claimed to have worked extensively in the behalf of Christ. Remember the words of the Lord? *“Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity”* (Matt 7:22-23). What they called *“wonderful works,”* the Lord of glory called *“iniquity.”* Why so? Because their works were not wrought by faith. He does not deny they had accomplished what they said. The Lord does not charge them with lying, but with working iniquity. They themselves were dominated by unbelief. Therefore, their very best efforts were rejected. They themselves were thrust aside. Jesus *“never knew”* them. They did not work in fellowship with Him. The ramifications of this for the church of our day are startling!

A MORE EXCELLENT SACRIFICE AND A WITNESS

Adam and Eve were thrust from the Edenic paradise, with an acute awareness their exclusion was permanent. They were privy, however, to a promise that a coming Seed would bring an end to the *old serpent* who deceived them.

“By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the

testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks” (V. 4). When sin entered the world, death entered also (Rom 5:12,21). It appeared to be hopeless for humanity. A curse was placed upon the woman, the man, and the ground. Adam and Eve were thrust from the Edenic paradise, with an acute awareness their exclusion was permanent. They were privy, however, to a promise that a coming Seed would bring an end to the *old serpent* who deceived them. Clothed with coats of skin provided by the Lord (Gen 3:21), they began their tenure in a cursed world. It was not long until two sons were born to them--Cain and Abel.

The Scriptures move us through history to events of significance in the Divine economy. We do not know how long a period is covered by the first two verses of Genesis Four. *“And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD. And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground”* (Gen 4:1-2). Here is one of the brotherly pairs of Scripture that are presented as examples of flesh and spirit, natural and spiritual. The second pair is Isaac and Ishmael (Gal 4:28-29). The third is Jacob and Esau (Rom 9:10-13). In all three cases, God was pleased with one brother and displeased with the other. One was chosen and one was not. One was extraordinarily blessed, the other was not. In all three cases, the unaccepted one opposed the accepted one. What was said of Abel may also be said of Isaac and Jacob. They all *“obtained the testimony”* they were righteous because of their faith.

Sufficient time passed for Adam and Eve to have two sons who grew into young manhood, having life vocations. As time progressed, the race maintained a consciousness of the God against Whom the mother and father of all living had sinned. The words are arresting. *“And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering”* (Gen 4:3-4).

√ The first recorded offerings to the Lord!

√ *The first recorded offering that was accepted by God .*

√ The first record of an offering rejected by God.

√ *The first record of a person accepted by God.*

√ The first record of a righteous person.

√ *The first record of a blood offering .*

A significant event, indeed--and it is pertinent to our discussion of faith. The Spirit takes up the matter of Abel and his offering to God. He reaches further into the event than did Moses. Moses gives us the facts. The book of Hebrews unveils the **reason** for the facts. There, in those most primitive times, without a codified Law, without Scriptures, and with a minimum of Divine communication, God was honored by offerings and oblations. The Genesis text says these offerings occurred *“in the process of time.”* It is quite probable they were offered on the seventh day, which God consecrated in the beginning (Gen 2:2-3). There was a consciousness of God among that ancient family!

Cain was the first to bring an offering to the Lord, presenting the fruit of the ground as an offering unto the Lord. Centuries, such offerings were established as thank offerings (*meal offerings*), in recognition of the provision of the Lord (Lev 7:11-14). Whatever his motivation, the offering of Cain was not prompted by faith--the persuasion that God is, and that He is a Rewarder of them who diligently seek Him.

The testimony of Abel is marvelous--and it is all owing to his faith.

√ His sacrifice was offered by faith.

√ He offered a better sacrifice.

√ He obtained the testimony he was righteous.

√ God testified about his gifts.

√ Through faith Abel is still speaking.

Here is the first example of spiritual worship--worship "*in spirit and in truth*" (John 4:23-24). Cain's offering was not prompted by faith, did not involve his heart, and was for show. He was truly being "of the wicked one" (1 John 3:12), becoming the first murderer. We know he was corrupt in the manner in which he gave his offering. God said to him, "***Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it***" (Gen 4:6-7). But it was not so with Abel! His heart was right. Faith made it right. His offering was accepted because of his faith--because of his conviction of God and insight into His Person.

Abel's offering went further than Cain's. He took of the firstborn of his flock, and offered it to God. In this he prefigured the offering of the Lamb of God for the sins of the world. His offering cost him more, and evidenced more sensitivity. He had seen the implications of the covering coats God provided his parents, and offered a sacrifice in keeping with the nature of that covering.

It is still the same today. Faith prompts men and women to make acceptable sacrifices to God (Rom 12:1-2; Phil 4:18; 1 Tim 2:3; 1 Pet 2:5; 2:20). God will receive the most lowly offerings that are given by faith. The widow who gave all her living did so because of her faith (Mark 12:44). The Law did not require that she give everything she had. No it even the tradition of the elders made such a demand. It was her faith that, like Abel, made her acceptable to God.

Faith obtained a witness from God that Abel was righteous. It was not merely what he *did* that brought this recognition, but the motivation that prompted it. It was "*by faith*" that he "***offered God a better sacrifice***" (NIV). God still approves and speaks well of those who dare to believe--those who walk and live by faith. Men are still righteous because of their faith, for "***This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe***" (Rom 3:25). The triumphant nature of faith is seen in sacrifices made by the people of God, and His recognition of both them and their offerings.

FAITH PLEASES GOD

“By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God” (V. 5, NASB). Enoch is a marvelous example of the potency of faith. He lived in a moral and spiritual decline that consummated in the destruction of the world by the flood. Jude provides us with one of Enoch’s prophecies, which had to do with the flood itself. ***“And about these also Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, ‘Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him’”*** (Jude 14-15).

The genealogical order occurs in Genesis 5:4-20, in which Enoch is the seventh generation: (1) Adam, (2) Seth, (3) Enos, (4) Cainan, (5) Mahalaleel, (6) Jared, (7) Enoch. His prophecy was an announcement of the impending flood, which occurred approximately 460-470 years after his translation. Considering the times, his was a remarkable prophecy, during a time when prophecy was relatively unknown, so far as the Scriptural record is concerned. Interestingly enough, you will not find this quotation in the book of Genesis, which records Enoch’s birth, fatherhood, and translation. The quotation is taken from *The Book of Enoch*, part of what is called **“Apocalyptic Literature.”** It is generally conceded that *The Books of Enoch* are the most important of these writings. This quotation is purported to come from Enoch 1:9.

Enoch lived in a time of moral and spiritual deterioration. The decline would become so serious, that the Spirit of God would cease to strive with men, a prelude to the unparalleled judgment of the flood. In his generation, men did not have the advantage of a bible, nor were prophets in abundance.

The point of the Hebrews reference to Enoch is the effectiveness of faith in obtaining the favor of God. Enoch lived in a time of moral and spiritual deterioration. The decline would become so serious, that the Spirit of God would cease to strive with men, a prelude to the unparalleled judgment of the flood. In his generation, men did not have the advantage of a bible, nor were prophets in abundance. Yet it is said of Enoch, ***“And Enoch lived sixty and five years, and begat Methuselah: And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters”*** (Gen 5:21-22).

This is a most remarkable accomplishment in view of Adam’s expulsion from such fellowship. In the case of Adam, it was a face-to-face experience, where the presence of God was known even by the senses. But this was not the case with Enoch. In him we see the power and effectiveness of faith, which gains access to the God from which sin alienates us. The Scripture tells us ***“by faith Enoch was translated . . .”*** (Heb 11:50). God dominated his thoughts and was his preference. Though the prophet

of Enoch shows his alertness to the world in which he lived, his faith made him more aware of God than of the wicked world surrounding him. It was this condition that gave Enoch a perspective of the world that reflected the mind of the Lord; i.e., *“ungodly . . . ungodly deeds . . . ungodly committed . . . hard speeches . . . ungodly sinners . . .”* (Jude 15). His faith caused the world to be repulsive to him, and God to be precious.

God was so endeared to Enoch that He *“took Him,”* wafting him to the glory without him seeing death. By faith, Enoch walked so close to God that there came a time when he was closer to heaven than to the earth, so to speak. Then, *“God took him..”* He “took” Enoch because wanted him. He delighted in Enoch, or, as it is written, *“for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God”* (Heb 11:5b). Later, God would divulge His desire to find such a man (2 Chron 16:9)--a man whose heart was enthralled with God Himself. Such a man was Enoch.

Here is one of two men in the history of humanity that did not see death, and one of three that ascended bodily into heaven. Elijah also was translated into heaven y a whirlwind in a fiery chariot drawn by fiery horses (2 Kings 2:11). That prophet also dwelt in a time of departure and reprobation, but pleased God by his faith. The other to ascend bodily into heaven was the Lord Jesus Himself, the only difference being His death for the sins of humanity. God also attested to the faith of the Son by saying He was *“well pleased”* with Him (Matt 3:17). Three men from three differing ages! Enoch from the patriarchal age, before the Law. Elijah from the era of the Law. Jesus from the threshold of the *“day of salvation.”* These three instances attest to the power of faith and the reality of the world to come.

It is the peculiar property of faith to please God. Those persuaded of the Person and promises of God are near and dear to His heart. If you want to please God, believe Him! Thrust the world from the throne of your mind and affection, and seek those things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God (Col 3:1-3). This may not bring the accolades of men, but it will bring the praise of God. When the world troubles you, and the contemporary church becomes a source of vexation, look to Enoch and remember, you can please God in the midst of a society that angers Him!

SOMETHING IMPOSSIBLE

Surely every person knows the individual that displeases God will not be saved by Him. Although there is far too little talk about pleasing God, it is a premier activity in the Kingdom. God is to be pleased at all cost.

“And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a Rewarder of those who seek Him” (v. 6). Having declared the triumph of Enoch, the Spirit now affirms a primary consideration. Surely every person knows the individual that displeases God will not be saved by Him. Although there is far too little talk about pleasing God, it is a premier activity in the Kingdom. God is to be pleased at all cost. Paul prayed the Colossians would *“walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects”* (Col 1:10, NASB).

Even the matter of children obeying their parents is related to being *“well-pleasing to the Lord”* (Col 3:20, NASB). In his preaching, Paul affirmed he did not seek to please men *“but God, Who examines the heart”* (1 Thess 2:4, NASB). Answers to pray are related to us doing things *“that are pleasing in His sight”* (1 John 3:22). Pleasing God is pivotal in spiritual life!

With characteristic determination Paul affirmed, *“Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him”* (2 Cor 5:9, NASB). When God is active within His people, He always works *“in us that which is pleasing in His sight”* (Heb 13:21, NASB). One of the reasons cited for Christ’s effectiveness in accomplishing our salvation is this: *“the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand”* (Isa 53:10).

Displeasing God

There have been examples of people who DISPLEASED God, and they are all arresting. A man named Onan *“displeased the Lord,”* and was slain as a result (Gen 38:10). On one occasion, Israel began to murmur about their circumstances. The Scriptures say, **“Now when the people complained, it displeased the LORD; for the LORD heard it, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the LORD burned among them, and consumed some in the outskirts of the camp”** (Num 11:1). When David sinned with Bathsheba, it grieved the Lord. Thus it is written, *“But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD”* (2 Sam 11:27). As a consequence, the child conceived through Bathsheba died, the sword never departed from David’s house, and he was not allowed to build the temple. When David numbered the people, *“God was displeased with this thing; therefore he smote Israel”* (1 Chron 21:7). David once sang of the effects of God’s displeasure upon the people. *“O God, thou hast cast us off, thou hast scattered us, thou hast been displeased; O turn thyself to us again”* (Psa 60:1). Isaiah wrote of God being displeased because there was no sound judgment among the people (Isa 59:15). Zechariah wrote of Jehovah being *“sore displeased”* with some of the ancients (Zech 1:2), and *“very sore displeased with the heathen”* (Zech 1:15). Paul reminds us of the plight of the wayward Israelites saying, *“with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness”* (1 Cor 10:5). **WHETHER OR NOT GOD IS PLEASED WITH US, IS MOST IMPorTANT!**

Our text affirms **it is not possible** to please God without faith! Like it or not, that shuts people up to displeasing God and incurring His indignation apart from faith--personal faith. We dare not approach faith academically, coming up with fanciful and powerless explanations and definitions. Eternity is at stake here! In faith, God has made provision for Himself to be pleased with us. Our faith will be the sanctifying element in all that we do. It will be what makes our words and deeds acceptable.

Faith involves more than simply assenting to the truth of a proposition, although it does involve such assent. The Holy Spirit declares faith is GOD-centered. It is persuaded that **“GOD IS”** and that He is **“A REWARDER OF THEM THAT DILIGENTLY SEEK HIM”** (Heb 11:6b). Those are pivotal considerations for the soul. To doubt the reality of God Himself is to be shut up to displeasing Him. To question that He rewards those who persistently seek Him is also to displease Him. The alarming thing about this affirmation is its

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aggressive to know Him. But you must not yield to the temptation.

contradiction of many attitudes within the very church Jesus purchased with His own blood. There remain people who conduct their lives as though there were not God. They may appear to be good people, but they are not. You may be sure, Satan will tempt you to doubt God and His determination to reward those aggressive to know Him. But you must not yield to the temptation.

Without this kind of faith--the kind that is persuaded of the reality of God and Him being a Rewarder- **-it is not possible to please Him.** There is no form of religious service or worship that is acceptable to God apart from faith--none at all! If people are not motivated by the persuasion of God and conviction that He will reward their pursuit of Him, their religious activities only anger Him. This was the condition into which Israel's unbelief thrust them. Their religious activities were like many about us to day. God responded in an arresting manner. *"Bring no more futile sacrifices; Incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies; I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood"* (Isa 1:13-15, NKJV). Their *"sacred meetings"* were "iniquity" to God. And who so? Because they were not motivated by faith! They had immersed themselves in sin, refusing to cleanse themselves from things offensive to God. Their eyes were turned inward, a property of unbelief.

Believing That He IS

Believing that God "is," is not simply acknowledging that there is a God--not even that there is one God. James reminds us, *"You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe; and tremble!"* (James 2:19). Tremble they did! When confronting Jesus, these corrupt spirits were afraid He was going to *"torment"* them *"before the time"* (Matt 8:29). In this regard, they are more advanced than many people professing to be followers of Christ. But this is not believing that *"He is."*

Believing that God *"is"* involves believing the Scriptural representation of Him. It requires the unqualified acceptance of the revelation He has given of Himself. Abel had a comparatively limited revelation, but believed what He knew of God. Noah and Abraham followed by believing the revelation that was given to them. They believed the God depicted in the revelation *"IS."* As the revelation advanced, Moses received more and believed more concerning God. Believing that *"God is"* involves infinitely more than being persuaded He exists! In this *"day of salvation"* (2 Cor 6:2), believing God *"is"* requires the persuasion He is the *"God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Eph 1:3), the Architect of our salvation, and the One to Whom Jesus brings us. The God declared in the Gospel *"IS,"* and must be so acknowledged if He is to be pleased. God must be perceived and embraced as more than the Creator of the universe. He is also the *"Savior of all men, especially them that believe"* (1 Tim 4:10). Faith joyfully receives that!

A Rewarder

The point of this affirmation must not be obscured to us. Elsewhere, God has affirmed the same thing in other words. *"I did not say to the seed of Jacob, 'Seek Me in*

vain” (Isa 45:19). The Holy Spirit declares in Christ, “. . . *your labor is not in vain in the Lord*” (1 Cor 15:58). And again, “*God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister*” (Heb 6:10). How firmly the Lord Jesus lays down this premise--namely, that God is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him . “*And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward*” (Matt 10:42, NKJV).

However, the preeminent reward is God Himself. If, as the text states, He is “*a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him,*” then He Himself, Who is the Object of the quest, becomes the Reward. That is precisely how He revealed Himself to our father Abraham. “*Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward*” (Gen 15:1, NKJV). The ultimate fulfillment of this will be realized in the “*world to come.*” Then, as it is written, “*God Himself will be with them and be their God*” (Rev 21:3). This will be the fulfillment of the phrase “*heirs of God*” (Rom 8:17). That is what the child of God longs for--the Presence of the Lord Himself. The spiritual intimacy that will attend this union challenges the mind.

There is no way to adequately describe this blessing. In apocalyptic language, the Holy Spirit goes as far as He can in our language. “*He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name*” (Rev 21:3, NKJV). We will be IN God’s temple--in His most sacred Presence, like the Holy of holies. Those who inherit God will never again be without Him, in any sense--they will “*go no more out.*” Now, while we are present in the body, we are “*absent from the Lord*” (2 Cor 5:6). That will not be the case when God rewards us with Himself, praise the Lord!

Perhaps you have wondered why the Lord is called “*A Rewarder*” instead of “*THE Rewarder.*” This does not mean there are other rewarders distinct from Himself. The point of the text is that faith views Him as a Rewarder, while cringing fear perceives Him as a “*consuming fire.*” God is, in truth, a “*consuming fire*” --that is His nature (Deut 4:24; Heb 12:29). Faith, indeed, recognizes that, but goes further to lay hold of another aspect of His nature. He is “*a Rewarder.*” The perception of His indignation will compel one to avoid sin. The conviction of God being “*a Rewarder*” constrains a fervent quest for His Person and Presence.

But I must not wander far from the subject. It is not possible to please God without a dominating persuasion of these realities. Ritual does not please God. Mere activity does not bring satisfaction to the Lord. Unless we “*keep the faith*” we will not only be a disgrace to the Lord, we will incur His indignation. That being the case, there is no greater work among God’s people than nourishing their faith. In a hostile world, and hounded by a fierce adversary, our faith tends to dissipate and wane. It must be nourished! God gives us faith (Rom 12:3; Phil 1:29), but we must keep it, for “*without faith, it is impossible to please God.*” It is necessary to “*fight*” to keep this faith, refusing to make “*shipwreck*” of it or “*depart from*” it (1 Tim 6:12; 1 Tim 1:19; 1 Tim 4:1), for at the very moment we lose faith, it becomes impossible to please God!

TRIUMPHANT OVER SIGHT

“By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence [fear, KJV] prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith” (v. 7). In the world order, *seeing is believing*. Unless the matter is visual, doubt remains as to its reality. But this is not the way it is in the Kingdom of God. Faith triumphs over sight, giving substance to unseen things. Noah stands as one of the first examples of this. Until Noah, there is no record of rain upon the earth — no waters falling upon the earth from the heavens. It is written, *“Now no shrub of the field was yet in the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the LORD God had not sent rain upon the earth; and there was no man to cultivate the ground. But a mist used to rise from the earth and water the whole surface of the ground”* (Gen 2:5-6, NASB). The first mention of falling rain is made in connection with the flood, when a torrential and uninterrupted rain continued for forty consecutive days. Nothing like this had ever been seen before. In addition, there had never been a flood, particularly a global one. Noah, in every sense of the word was *“warned by God about things not yet seen.”*

Not only was Noah convinced the flood was coming, he was also

When warned by God of an impending flood, Noah took immediate action upon the basis of that word. He did not need a body of experiential knowledge to support the warning. No geological or astronomical information was needed to buttress the Word of God. Faith is superior to earthly knowledge. It exercises a more powerful constraint upon the individual, and produces a consistency that cannot be duplicated by the world.

onvinced he would be saved from it by means of the ark. The scope of his earthly knowledge did not justify such conclusions, but his faith triumphed over that impediment. Faith does not need to see the matter, it only needs to be told of it. Faith itself becomes the substance of things hoped for. When warned by God of an impending flood, Noah took immediate action upon the basis of that word. He did not need a body of experiential knowledge to support the warning. No geological or astronomical information was needed to buttress the Word of God. Faith is superior to earthly knowledge. It exercises a more powerful constraint upon the individual, and produces a consistency that cannot be duplicated by the world.

The power of Noah’s faith is glorious. It constrained him not only to begin the construction of the ark, but to carry the project through to completion. He prepared it for the saving of his household, thereby making provision for their salvation from the curse. He also condemned the world, towering above it in his persuasion of things to come. The world saw the activity of Noah, and should have inquired into his aggressive construction of the ark. They were without excuse--to be confronted with a man dominated by conviction. In his work, he condemned the world, a most remarkable circumstance. His faith also made him *“an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith,”* in very spiritually primitive times. What a marvelous triumph faith exhibited in Noah.

I cannot pass by this event without mentioning it’s parallel to our situation. The

presence of the ark actually condemned the world of Noah's day. Men should have beaten a path to Noah's door, so to speak, inquiring into the reason for its construction. Contemporary evangelists give the world too much credit. They speak of its failure to hear the Gospel as though it had no witness to the coming judgment of the world. But they are not correct. The very presence of a holy people, devoting themselves to the Lord, and preparing themselves for the end of the world, is reason enough to provoke them to inquire about these things. Little wonder Peter spoke of sanctifying the Lord God in our hearts, and being *"to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear"* (1 Pet 3:15). Wherever there are godly people, those who surround them are without excuse. If the testimony of the nature leaves the world *"without excuse"* (Rom 1:20), how must the testimony of an *"epistle of Christ,"* written with the Spirit of God, leave them (2 Cor 3:3)?

The Word of God tells us the world is reserved for fire (2 Pet 3:7). It reminds us that the heavens will pass away, as well as the earth and all of the works in it (2 Pet 3:10-12). It is just as foolish to study nature to see if these things are possible, as it would have been for Noah to research the possibility of a global flood. Whatever is seen remains inferior to faith. Faith can perceive beyond the visible, and prepare for what is coming.

TRIUMPHANT OVER KNOWLEDGE

"By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going" (v. 8). Abraham is our father, possessing the kind of faith that saves the soul. He obeyed *"when he was called,"* not when he understood. The account is found in Genesis 12:4-5. *"So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came."*

Faith moved Abraham to begin the journey, and to continue it. It is not enough to start the journey only to come short of the promised land, like Israel of old. He had to leave where he was located, and begin making progress to a land unknown--something illogical to the flesh. The knowledge of this world could never justify such actions, but faith triumphs over the knowledge of this world.

Our text affirms that Abraham did NOT know where he was going. God called him to a land, but did not, at the beginning, specify which one. God said, *"Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee"* (Gen 12:1). The land would be identified while en route to it. This contradicts the wisdom of this world. If we are going somewhere, in this world, it is imperative that we know where we are going. But this is not the manner of the Kingdom. Faith compelled Abraham to obey immediately-- *"when he was called."* Faith does not require an elaborate network of supporting arguments and evidence--just a word from the Lord!

Faith moved Abraham to begin the journey, and to continue it. It is not enough to start the journey only to come short of the promised land, like Israel of old. He had to leave where he was located, and begin making progress to a land unknown--something illogical to the flesh. The knowledge of this world could never justify such actions, but faith triumphs over the knowledge of this world.

As is His manner, the Lord sweetened the command with a promise: *“And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed”* (Gen 12:2-3). The promises of God are to faith what solid nourishment is to the body. They ignite faith as a fire ignites wood. One small promise will outweigh a thousand seeming facts, as the world counts facts. At some point, faith moves you into the unknown, where your knowledge has not yet ventured. It is the peculiar property of faith to rest fully in Divine commitments. It satisfies the soul, and the intellect, emotion, and will as well. Where faith is dominate, you will have no trouble obeying God.

Abraham headed for the land of Canaan as though he were going to take immediate possession of it. Faith has that kind of effect upon the soul. However, when h arrived there, *“the Canaanite was then in the land”* (Gen 12:6b). This knowledge appeared to contradict the promise of God. However, because Abraham had obeyed by faith, the Lord revealed more to him. *“To your descendants I will give this land”* (Gen 12:7). To the carnal, this would have been a discouraging word, but not to Abraham. Faith triumphs over knowledge! Instead of becoming cast down, Abraham proceeded from there to a mountain, where he built an altar to the Lord (Gen 12:8). It was there that he *“called upon the name of the Lord.”* Then, as though surveying the land, Abraham proceeded toward the south.

As though it was not enough that the Canaanite was in the land promised to Abraham and his seed, *“there was a famine in the land”* (Gen 12:10). This required Abraham to go down into Egypt for a season. There his faith was tried in new and challenging ways. Still, he came out of the experience, cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart. Faith always triumphs, and those who keep it will, by that means, become triumphant themselves.

Some Practical Words

When coming into Christ, extremely little was known of our ultimate destination. The bulk of the knowledge we possess has of our future home has been revealed to us en route to the promised land.

Faith propels the individual into obedience. Where there is no obedience, there is no faith. Obedience flows from faith like water from a fountain.

Whatever value may be ascribed to philosophical arguments, apologetics, and the like, they are vastly inferior to faith. Every form of human knowledge, regardless of the discipline it requires, must stand behind faith. With has a moral power that is unequaled, causing its possessor to stand in fire, walk through floods, or prepare an ark--whatever is necessary to be ready for the future. God is praised for the glorious provision of faith!

TRIUMPHANT OVER EXPERIENCE

“By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (v. 9-10). The experience of Abraham in Canaan appeared to contradict the promise given to him. First, the Canaanite was in the land, then a famine ravaged the land while he was there. Finally, the Spirit affirms, he lived as an alien in the very land he had been promised. He was like a foreigner in the land God had given to him, and had no permanent dwelling there. The same experience was endured by his son and grandson, Isaac and Jacob, *“fellow heirs of the same promise.”* That experience is enough to overcome anyone but a believer! Only faith is equal to such challenging experiences.

Abraham, though given a small amount of information, sensed the promise of God involved more than this world. Without a page of Scripture, and with comparatively minimal promises, *“he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”* How is it that he vision could be so keen? That is the characteristic of faith! **Faith always triumphs over experience, even when human deduction can produce no satisfactory reason to continue!**

The Parallel of the Believer’s Life

The parallel between Abraham as those in Christ Jesus is most noteworthy. We too have been called to a land which we will *“after inherit.”* We have been told we will *“inherit the earth,”* and yet it is now inhabited by hostile personalities. We must spend our time in this world as *“strangers and pilgrims”* (1 Pet 2:11). Often, and in special measures, we sense the famine that pervades the realm of nature. With David we cry out, *“O God, Thou art my God; I shall seek Thee earnestly; My soul thirsts for Thee, my flesh yearns for Thee, In a dry and weary land where there is no water”* (Psa 63:1; 143:6). Our experience seems to contradict the promise. We experience a fierce battle within, the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. Like a lurking Canaanite, we find *“another law in our members, warring against the law of our mind”* (Rom 7:23). Our present experience involves not only abounding, but suffering need (Phil 4:12).

Still, faith triumphs over these experiences, enabling the child of God to make progress in famine, and stand against enemies. Still, with perseverance, we *“press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus”* (Phil 4:12). Faith clings to the Word of the Lord, like Jesus, scorning the shame of contrary experiences (Heb 12:2).

TRIUMPHANT OVER NATURE

“By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised; therefore, also, there was born of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE” (v. 11-12). Faith deals with the realm of impossibilities. We have such a case in Sarah, through whose Seed the world was blessed. From nature’s viewpoint, Sarah has not ability to conceive a child. She was *“barren,”* incapable of having a child (Gen 11:30). No fertility drug could alter her condition! That this was the case is seen in the duration of her barrenness. She remained in that condition until *“even when she was past the age”* of childbearing (RSV). Nature was impotent in this case, even though given sufficient time to recuperate, were that possible.

Now faith did what nature could not do! It gave Sarah the ability to conceive--she *“received ability to conceive.”* Rather than looking to her inability, she considered the faithfulness of God, Who had promised she would bear a son (Gen 17:19). Sarah did have a bout with unbelief when both she and Abraham were *“were old and well stricken in age”* (Gen 18:13-16). But faith triumphed, and she took hold of the Word of the Lord. Because of her faith, the Spirit witnesses, she was visited by the Lord at the appointed time, and bore a son in her old age, contradicting the laws of nature (Gen 21:1-2). It is as though her faith was mingled with unbelief, which she chose to cast aside as contemptible. This is the spirit the father of a possessed child had when he cried, *“Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief”* (Mark 9:24). There too, faith triumphed over nature! At first, she rejected the word of promise. Yet, when she knew it came from God, she embraced it in triumph!

The Application To Us

Learn, child of God, that if you will keep the faith, God will honor it, and you shall triumph! Nature will often appear to contradict the promise of God. Men with haltering speech may be told they will testify before kings and princes--nature contradicting the promise (Luke 21:12-14). When summoned before the world's most prodigious rulers and thinkers, they were transformed into leaders. Moses was called to speak in a king's court, although nature denied him oratorical abilities (Ex 4:10). Yet, even Pharaoh eventually trembled at his word. Paul was summoned by the King of glory to turn men from darkness to light through speaking, even though that was an area in which he was comparatively contemptible (2 Cor 10:10). On one occasion, a ruler of Rome trembled at his powerful presentation (Acts 24:25). The disciples of Christ were, in the judgment of the world, *“unlearned and ignorant.”* Yet, when they stood before the world's astute men, their reasoning towered over them, to such an extent their enemies could not answer them (Acts 4:13). The religious elite could not resist the wisdom of Stephen (Acts 6:10).

How is it that these men became so adequate? It was their faith! Faith always triumphs over nature--over natural handicaps and disabilities. The history of the church is filled with powerful persuaders and prodigious Kingdom laborers that were denied natural advantages. But their faith was superior to their natural handicaps, and they triumphed. It can be the same with you! Whatever you may lack in nature, is more than compensated for by your faith. God does not take your natural abilities into consideration when calling you into His work, but your faith!

TRIUMPHANT OVER REASON

“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, ‘IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED’ He considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead; from which he also received him back as a type” (v. 17-19). Here is one of the great occurrences of Scripture, and it is written “for our learning, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (Rom 15:4). The event is recorded in the 22nd chapter of Genesis. Here one of the most dramatic tests of faith in history took place. God put Abraham to the test! Knowing the sensitivity of Abraham, God only had to call his name one time, and he heard: *“Abraham: and he said, Behold,*

here I am” (Gen 22:1) . **Faith does sensitize the heart to God!**

At the time of this test, Isaac was not a mere child. Prior to this, Ishmael, with his mother Hagar, had been expelled from the household of Abraham (Gen 21:9-14). Sufficient time passed for Ishmael to grow and become an archer, and finally be married (Gen 21:20-21). Abraham had also sojourned in the land of the Philistines for “*many days,*” or a lengthy space of time (Gen 21:34). He had grown accustomed to his son’s presence, as he had grown into young manhood. Isaac was the future heir of the world, and the one through whom the world would be blessed. Isaac was probably somewhere between his latter teens and early twenties when this trial occurred.

Those governed by sentimentality could never have obeyed that command! Neither, indeed, would a loose association with God have allowed for such obedience. The son to whom Abraham’s heart had been knit by both nature and spirit, was commanded to be offered up to God!

The trial was couched in heart-rending language. It was brief, and to the point. “*Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you*” (Gen 22:1). *YOUR* son . . . your *ONLY* son . . . whom you *LOVE* ! And what is it that God requires Abraham to do? He was to take him to the land of Moriah, and there offer him as a “*burnt offering.*” The specific place would be divulged later. As when God first called Abraham, he would have to move out by faith, not knowing the specific destination appointed by God. Those governed by sentimentality could never have obeyed that command! Neither, indeed, would a loose association with God have allowed for such obedience. The son to whom Abraham’s heart had been knit by both nature and spirit, was commanded to be offered up to God! Here was the one upon whom the hopes of the world had been suspended, and yet he was to be forfeited--offered up to God! What form of earthly reason would justify such a command? But faith is equal to the challenge.

Abraham does ponder the command. He does not evacuate his mind, and blindly proceed without due consideration of what God has commanded him. The Word of God tells us how Abraham reasoned, with the reasoning of faith. He “*reasoned that God could raise the dead*” (Heb 11:19, NIV). At this point of history, a resurrection had not yet occurred. The first resurrection of record would not occur until centuries later, when Elijah would raise a widow’s son from the dead (1 Kgs 17). Abraham could not look to the example of a predecessor for hope! Nor, indeed, had God spoken concerning a resurrection of the dead. There simply was no earthly basis for reasoning God could or would raise Isaac from the dead! But faith does not draw from the well of earthly wisdom. It feeds upon the promise of the Almighty!

Abraham believed the word of the Lord, that “*IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED*” (Heb 11:18). He knew God “*cannot lie*” (Tit 1:2), and that He is “*the faithful God, who keeps His covenant*” (Deut 7:9). He knew God would not command an action that would negate His promise. Faith persuaded Him of the nature of God, when fleshly reasoning would have stumbled at His Word. Rest assured, this was not accomplished in a vacuum or with a minimal amount of effort. The adversary was surely there to resist Abraham, even as he was with Joshua the high

priest (Zech 3:1). Just as Satan tempted Eve by introducing a contrary line of reasoning (Gen 3:1-6), he also must have assaulted Abraham. How he must have desired to have Abraham, as he did Peter (Luke 22:31-32).

See faith rise to the occasion. It is superior to earthly reason, having a reasoning pattern of its own. Technically, Abraham was not right. God was NOT going to raise Isaac from the dead. Nor, indeed, was he going to allow Abraham to take Isaac's life. But Abraham did not know this. All he knew is what he was commanded to do, and he rose up early in the morning to do it (Gen 22:3). Although technically incorrect, the manner of Abraham's reasoning was precisely correct. God was at the core of his reasoning, and for that reason, Abraham triumphed in trial. Even when he arrived at the mountain of sacrifice, Abraham knew he was going to come back down the mountain with a living Isaac. As he began the ascent to the place of offering, he told his servants *"Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship and return to you"* (Gen 22:5). On the way up the mountain, he also spoke words of faith to an inquiring Isaac, who wondered about the lack of a "lamb for a burnt offering." In towering and exemplary faith Abraham answered, *"Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship and return to you "* (Gen 22:8). Faith not only triumphs after the trial, it is triumphant throughout the trial!

The Purpose of the Trial

The purpose for this trial was not to persuade God of the ability faith gave to Abraham. The record confirms this was done for the sake of angelic hosts--not to mention ourselves. Following the preparation of the altar, Abraham *"arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood."* With unwavering faith he *"stretched out his hand, and took the knife to slay his son."* It was then, and only then, that a voice thundered out, forbidding him to kill Isaac. It was not the voice of the living God, but of an angel, who had great interest in the mountain event. *"But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' And he said, 'Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me'"* (Gen 22:9-12). Peter tells us of the interest of angels in God's redemptive work (1 Pet 1:12). How satisfied that angel must have been to witness the power of faith in a mortal! I cannot help but wonder how the angels react to the level of obedience they see in our time.

TRIUMPHANT OVER CIRCUMSTANCE

"By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come" (v. 20). Here is one of the great statements of Scripture, conducive to much contemplation. The circumstances under which the blessing was conferred were certainly not ideal, from a human point of view. Through the prompting of his mother, Jacob had feigned himself to be Esau. He came into his father with the skins of kids upon his hands and the smooth of his neck, giving him the feel of his twin brother, who was a hairy man (Gen 27:11,16; 23). Will these circumstances circumvent the blessing of the Lord? Indeed not!

You will recall the blessing of the firstborn was given to Jacob, while Esau lost

it, even though he was the firstborn. Nature, in this case, violated the promise of God. God declares that before Jacob and Esau were born He *“loved Jacob and hated Esau”* (Rom 9:11-13). Jacob’s heart was tender to the Lord, while Esau *“despised”* his birthright, being a *“fornicator and profane person”* (Gen 25:34; Heb 12:16). Although Isaac was not aware of these things cognitively, his faith took hold of the mind of the Lord. He pronounced appropriate blessings upon both sons *“concerning things to come”* --things that had not yet taken place. With the eye of an eagle, he spoke precisely concerning the future of both Esau and Jacob (Gen 27:27-40; 28:2-3). The circumstance was inferior to the faith of Isaac! The blessing was even conferred without the full awareness of the circumstances! Isaac trembled when he found out he had blessed Esau thinking it was Esau (Gen 27:33). But his faith would not allow him to recall the blessing! Faith triumphed over the circumstances, even though the extent of them was not known to the patriarch.

TRIUMPHANT IN DEATH

“By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff” (v. 21). For faith to be thoroughly effective, it must flourish in the time of death. In death we face the “last enemy” — the last bastion of the curse (1 Cor 15:26). The triumph of faith is seen in the death of Jacob, the last of the triad of fathers for whom Israel still remains beloved (Rom 11:28). The event in reference is recorded in Genesis 48:5-22 and verse 31. Once again, the blessing of the sons took a course contrary to nature. Having never met the sons of Joseph, Jacob (or Israel, as he is called in the Genesis record) said, *“Who are these?”* Giving glory to God, Joseph replied *“They are my sons, whom God has given me here ”* [in Egypt] (Gen 48:9). What a blessing it was to the aged Jacob to see them. With a thankful heart he replied, *“I never expected to see your face, and behold, God has let me see your children as well”* (v. 10).

However, in this case, God had determined that the covenantal blessing go to the younger, as He did with Jacob and Esau. How would the aged Jacob handle this case? Would faith prevail? He was not only nearly blind, but was sick, and ready to die.

Jacob called for the boys to be brought to him for a blessing, and Joseph took them from his knees to receive that blessing. The boys’ names were Ephraim and Manasseh, with Manasseh being the older. Joseph, knowing the eyesight of his father was failing, positioned the boys so that Manasseh was under the right hand of Jacob, and Ephraim was under the left. That was, he thought, the proper order for the blessing. However, in this case, God had determined that the covenantal blessing go to the younger, as He did with Jacob and Esau. How would the aged Jacob handle this case? Would faith prevail? He was not only nearly blind, but was sick, and ready to die. He had *“strengthened himself”* to sit up in bed for the occasion (48:1-2). Was faith equal to this occasion?

Indeed, faith does rise to the occasion! The record reads, *“But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, crossing his hands, although Manasseh was the first-born”* (48:14). As soon as Jacob had started the blessing Joseph remonstrated. *“Not so, my father, for this one is the first-born. Place your right hand on his head”* (48:18). Though himself a godly man, the faith of Jacob exceeded his in this case. It was no mistake that Jacob blessed the younger. Jacob replied to Joseph, *“I know, my son, I know; he also shall become a people and he also shall be great. However, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations”* (48:19).

This event would have been remarkable enough under ordinary circumstances, but Jacob was dying. He himself said during that occasion, ***“Behold, I am dying, but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers”*** (48:21, NKJV). His physical eyes were dim., but the eye of faith was not. He saw beyond the circumstances when he was at his weakest physical point. He even “worshipped” during this occasion, ***“leaning on the top of his staff”*** (Heb 11:21b, NASB). The Scriptures provide us with a vivid picture of Jacob’s departure. ***“And when Jacob had finished commanding his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people”*** (Gen 49:33). Faith unto the end! That is the way I want to depart! With the last exertion of his energy, he draws his feet into the bed upon which he will die, and breathes his last breath. It was then that he was ***“gathered to his people,”*** those kindred spirits who also had lived by faith.

This is but one of several instances in Scripture where the fear of death was dissipated by faith. Saints maintained their grasp upon the realities of the Kingdom as they were about to exit ***“this present evil world.”*** Blessed contemplation, that this can also be our lot, that in our death we shall keep the things of God in clear view! In the end, you too will be gathered to your people. Those ***“people”*** are the associations we develop in this world. May they be associations wrought by faith.

FAITH LAYS HOLD OF THE PROMISE

“By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones” (v. 22). Here is another case of a dying person with keen spiritual vision and determination. Joseph had lived his adult life in Egypt, and had been blessed of God in that place. He had risen to the second in the land, and was used of God to keep the covenantal people alive. Now, his time came to die. At 110 years of age, his pilgrimage was brought to its culmination. Before his brothers he now declares his faith, boldly and confidently. ***“I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you, and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, “God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here”*** (Gen 50:25-26).

Joseph knew Egypt was only a temporary residence for the covenant people. Although their deliverance would not occur for nearly four centuries, Joseph, by faith, declares the people’s deliverance. God had sworn with an oath to give another land to Israel, and they would surely come into it. Joseph had taken care of his people in Egypt, but now he is ready to die. Still, he has a mind for the seed of Abraham. He reminds them, ***“God will surely take care of you!”*** But these are not just empty words. Joseph has himself embraced the promise. Although he is dying, he wants his bones to be taken to the promised land, and not left in Egypt.

There are sophists who care nothing for the body once the spirit has left it. They have less understanding than did Joseph before the giving of the Law. When the day of deliverance came, by faith Joseph gave a commandment concerning his bones. ***“God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here.”*** The Holy Spirit declares he said this ***“by faith.”*** I gather that contrary views are said by unbelief. Incidentally, Israel passed these words along, keeping them alive until the exodus from Egypt. Of that eventful evening of deliverance it is written, ***“And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, “God shall surely take care of you; and you***

shall carry my bones from here with you” (Ex 13:19).

The faith of Joseph stretched forward, taking hold of a promise that would be fulfilled long after his departure. It will do no less for you. Like the ancients, you can see them afar off, be persuaded of them, embrace them, and confess you are a stranger and pilgrim in the earth (Heb 11:13). Faith still obtains the promise!

FAITH’S TRIUMPH SEEN IN MOSES

Faith Triumphs Over Fear

Faith’s triumphant traits are seen in Moses, through whom the Law was given (John 1:17). That faith was evidenced in his parents before him, who lived in extremely difficult times. The male babies were being killed when Moses was born, and it was being done by order of the king. However, Amram and Jochebed, his parents, had faith, and thus triumphed over fear. *“By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king’s commandment”* (v. 23). Indeed, the edict of the king had gone forth, but they did not obey the king. Their allegiance was to God, not to man. They perceived in Moses more than a mere baby.

He was, as the NIV puts it, *“no ordinary child.”*

A weak and vacillating church cannot have an appreciation for such boldness! After concealing the infant for three months, they could no longer hide him. They then became creative in their boldness, making a small ark for Joseph, seeing to it he would be saved by water, something like Noah (Ex 2:3). His sister, Miriam, was positioned a short distance from the ark to see what would happen to him. You recall, I am sure, the account of Pharaoh’s daughter finding the infant, and Moses’ sister seeing to it that Moses’ own mother weaned him in Pharaoh’s house.

How is it that such a blessing took place? It was because Moses’ parents lived by faith, not by sight. They were NOT afraid of the king, but took precautions to spare the child the king had commanded should die. Faith still has that kind of power. We do well to fight to maintain it, and keep it to the end! Lord, give us such people, that are not afraid when commanded by earthly dignitaries to act contrary to Your will!

Faith Can Make Bold Choices

“By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin; considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward” (v.24-26). To make choices is one thing, to make bold choices is quite another. For forty

He was given every imaginable worldly advantage. He was raised by a woman who he later refused to call his mother. There came a time when he had to make a choice between the advantages of this world and the disadvantage of being associated with the people of God. Many a soul has been dashed upon the rocks of this decision!

years, Moses was reared in Egypt--in the king's house. He was given every imaginable worldly advantage. He was raised by a woman who he later refused to call his mother. There came a time when he had to make a choice between the advantages of this world and the disadvantage of being associated with the people of God. Many a soul has been dashed upon the rocks of this decision!

Notice what Moses' faith prompted him to do. He **refused, chose, considered, and looked** ! With a dogmatism that comes through faith alone, he *"refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter"* --however good she may have been to him. Moses' own mother nursed him, then delivering him to Pharaoh's daughter, who gave him his name--Moses (drawing out), for, she said, *"I drew him out of the water"* (Gen 2:9-10). But when Moses was grown, *"he went out to his brethren and looked on their hard labors"* (Ex 11:24). He did not see them as Egyptian slaves, but as his brethren! Faith gave him that vision, and he joyfully received it. He deliberately chose to be identified with the suffering people of God, and he did so by faith. The "pleasures of sin for a season" were not rioting and drunkenness for Moses, but the luxury of Pharaoh's house, and being a ruler in the land. He knew such things were short-lived, but the promises of God would be forever. Faith can triumph over fleshly associations, even though they have developed over a long period of time.

Moses considered suffering with Christ of greater value than all the treasures of Egypt, which were the greatest in the world. He identified the people of God with the coming Seed that would conquer the old serpent, and deliver the people of God. He sensed the promised Messiah could not be enjoyed apart from identity with the people of God. So, for a while, he chose to endure the opposition of men that he might enjoy the approbation of God. He did not do this because he had to, but because he wanted to! Faith drove him to make this choice!

Although he could easily recall the splendor of ancient Egypt, he chose to look beyond the constrictions of time. He *"had respect unto the recompense of the reward."* Such bold choices are not unnoticed by God, and Moses knew it. Faith is always equal to the requirement for choice. It still can enable us to boldly choose what is right, and bear the temporary consequences for doing so!

Faith Can Abandon Without Fear

"By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen" (v. 27). On the surface, it may appear that Moses was, in fact, afraid of the king's wrath. It is true that when Moses killed an Egyptian who was oppressing his brethren, it says, *"Then Moses was afraid, and said, 'Surely the matter has become known'"* (Ex 2:14). This may appear to contradict what the Hebrews text affirms. First, when he fled, the fear of the king was not his *"dominant"* thought. While fear was present, it was inferior to the consideration of God and an exceeding great reward. Second, this more specifically applies to the final departure of Moses from

Egypt, when he led the people in triumphal exodus without any regard for the reappraisals of the wicked king.

Our choice to seek the prize of life eternal will be attended by the opposition of the world. The degree of opposition can vary, but it will surely be present. Faith, however, is fully equal to such a challenge. It enables the individual to choose Christ without fearing the devil or the world — to choose to follow Him regardless of the temporary consequences. I find such faith lacking greatly in the professing choice. Such a condition does not need to exist! Faith can constrain and empower us to leave the world without regard to what it thinks of our departure!

Faith Lays Hold of Deliverance

“By faith he [Moses] kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who destroyed the first-born might not touch them” (v. 28). The night of the Exodus was a fearful night from any perspective other than that of faith! An outbreak of plagues preceded the deliverance. A night of rigorous and disciplined activity was required. Beside this, a destroying angel went throughout the land, slaying the firstborn in every house not having the blood of the paschal lamb applied precisely as instructed. A meal had to be eaten, late at night, and with the people fully attired and ready to go. All of their belongings had to be ready, and everyone had to be alert.

Moses kept the Passover, the Scripture affirms, by faith. He instructed the people in the application of the blood, how the lamb was to be prepared and eaten, and all of the attending activities of the evening. All of this occurred in the land of the enemy, and in the midst of a plague more grievous than we dare to imagine. How can mortals--mere mortals--conduct themselves acceptably under such circumstances? How can all of the requirements be met, without an error or omission? How can the human spirit be that alert at the midnight hour?

I will tell you how. It is by faith! Faith accomplishes all of those things, ushering the child of God into a state of blessed triumph! Faith will be no less effective for those who are waiting and longing for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. That will be the hour of our final deliverance. It too will be attended by plagues of an unparalleled nature. The heavens and the earth passing away, all of the works of men being burned up, and nature convulsing in the throes of death. The wrath of God will then be revealed against the ungodly, the angels gathering out the tares, and all things that offend. How shall we endure such things? Our faith will take us through! If we live by faith now, we will live triumphantly here and now. In addition, when the consummation comes, we will joyfully respond at the appearing of the Lord, *“Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; Let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation”* (Isa 25:9). God be praised for the triumphant nature of faith!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated
Presents

Commentary on the book of Hebrews

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #20

PRIOR SAINTS

“All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them. And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect” (Hebrews 11:13-16; 39-40, NASB)

HUNGRY SAINTS SUPPLEMENT

“By faith they passed through the Red Sea as though they were passing through dry land; and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace. And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, in order that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground” (Heb 11:29-38).

The effectiveness of faith is again seen in its effects. Israel passed safely through the very Sea in which Pharaoh and his armies were drowned. The difference between them is that Israel believed. They were willing to risk upon the Word of the Lord. There was no reason to venture through that river bed apart from the command of God. It defied logic, and challenged their courage. Yet they did it. They were neither disappointed nor ashamed for trusting God in the Red Sea crossing.

When facing the first battlements of the promised land, Israel realized victory through faith. The walls of Jericho were formidable, yet they were like paper before the mighty tide of faith. Believing the Word of God, Israel circled the city walls for seven days--once each day, and seven times on the seventh day. Their involvement in the toppling of the walls was uncomplicated. The priests blew a long blast on the ram's horn, and the people shouted. The laws of physics do not provide for such action to cause walls to fall down. It was faith that caused the walls to fall contrary to the law of physics. They did not crumble, they “fell down flat” as though pushed from the inside out (Josh 6:3-20). God did it, and faith caused the Israelites to enter into the victory.

The account of Rahab the harlot also exemplifies the power and effectiveness of faith. ***“By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace”*** (11:31). When Israelite spies came into Jericho, Rahab was swift to recognize the city was about to be judged. The presence of the spies was reported to the king of Jericho. The people reporting the incident know where the men were from, and why they were there (Josh 2:2). When the king sent to inquire of Rahab, she said, ***“Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from. At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, the men left. I don't know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them ”*** (Josh 2:4-5). This was not an accurate portrayal of what happened. Scripture apprizes us, ***“But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof”*** (v.6). Some would call this a lie, but the Scripture refers to her deed as an act of faith. She protected the spies because she knew they were from God. She told the spies, ***“I know that the LORD has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you”*** (v.7). Rather than succumbing to fear, however, Rahab gave assistance to the spies--BY FAITH. The result was a marvelous deliverance. ***“Only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent”*** (Josh 6:17). She was unqualified for deliverance because she was not included in Israel. She was also unqualified because she was a harlot. Faith rose above these disqualifications, and brought the blessing to her.

There were also great victories wrought by faith--i.e., triumph was realized because the people believed God. A wide variety of accomplishments are listed. They include the subduing of kingdoms (2 Sam 8:11), working righteousness (Num 25:7-11), obtained promises (2 Sam 7:11-17) stopping the mouths of lions (Judges 14:5; 1 Sam 34:34-35; Dan 6:22-23), quenching the violence of fire (Dan 3:19-28), escaping the edge of the sword (2 Kgs 6:16-18), being made strong out of a state of weakness (Judges 7:19-25), becoming valiant in the heat of battle (2 Sam 23:9-10), putting alien armies to flight (1 Sam 14:13-15), and women receiving their dead raised to life (1 Kgs 17:22-24). Faith made those saints equal to the challenges they faced. They believed God, and thus were given Divine strength with which the world could not contend.

Faith also enabled past saints to endure unspeakable opposition and suffering. It provided people with the eagle eye of faith which saw beyond the adversities through which they passed. Some were *“tortured, not accepting deliverance.”* It was not the deliverance of God they rejected, but the deliverance of men. They chose to suffer unto death because of their persuasion of the resurrection. Rather than choosing deliverance from a prison in exchange for their denial of the faith, they chose to look forward to the resurrection of the dead, keeping their faith. The spiritual substance appropriated by faith enabled them to do this. Their persuasion of involvement with God enabled them to taste the worst the world had to offer--and to do it admirably. Heartless mockings, merciless beatings, chains and imprisonments were endured by faith. Some sent to glory in a hail of stones, and some was sawn in two. Others were thrust from society to wander in animal sins in a state of destitution, affliction, and torment. They became nomads, with no certain dwelling place, being hounded by ruthless enemies. Although they appeared to be the scum of the earth, the world was not worthy of them. It is not possible to get into a situation for which faith does not equip you. Faith makes people adequate for the greatest triumph and the greatest affliction--the height and the depth, abounding and suffering need!

INTRODUCTION

Sin has so affected the discretionary powers of fallen man, that extensive reasoning attends the promises of God. This reasoning is designed to persuade our hearts of the reality of the things God has promised to those who love Him.

It is not enough to provide an academic definition of critical Kingdom matters. The heart must take hold on the truth to profit from it. It is imperative that the world, with all of its delusions, is pushed into the background by our apprehension of the truth of God. Therefore, the Holy Spirit makes strong appeals to our heart, striving to motivate us for the glory of God. If we are not moved to abandon all for Christ, we will fail.

The objective of Scripture is to feed our souls, encourage our hearts, and our confirm faith is effectual. The introduction of prior saints provides all of this. Faith is depicted in the crucible of life. In prior saints we see how faith functions in triumph and seeming defeat. It can enable us to excel, as well as suffer need. In the last analysis, faith prepares us for the world to come. It is not designed to ensconce us in this world, but to ready us for the next one. A religion that leaves

people clinging to, and placing a priority upon, life in the flesh, is seriously deficient and out of harmony with heaven. The lives of prior saints confirm this to be the case.

DYING IN THE FAITH

At death, when you face the “last enemy,” and the warfare may be the most fierce, the glories of the world to come can envelope your soul. Your heart and mind can be dominated by what the Lord is going to do, rather than what you are passing through. At the hour you descend into the valley of the shadow of death, you can boldly say with the Psalmist, *“Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident”*

“All these died in faith, without receiving the promises . . .” Once again, this confirms the transitory nature of life in the flesh. Although these saints experienced marvelous blessings from God, they all (with the exception of Enoch and Elijah) *“died.”* Even in the cases of Enoch and Elijah, however, they left this world. They did not remain to live forever in a temporal body. Their faith had suited them for another world, and thus they had to leave this one. They did not *“die”* in the ordinary sense of the word, but they did leave this realm, and thus are included in the point under consideration. Make no mistake about this, the righteous do not die as other men! Even Balaam knew this. He said, *“Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!”* (Num 23:10).

What is *“the death of the righteous?”* It is the conclusion of life in a peaceful condition. As it is written, *“Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace”* (Psa 37:37). Simeon knew this, and requested the same following his viewing of the holy Child (Luke 2:29). It is a death that is *“precious in the sight of the Lord”* (Psa 116:15). It is also a deliverance from the *“evil to come”* (Isa 57:1-2). Death belongs to those who live by faith (1 Cor 3:21-22). It is an occasion belonging to the people of God--and they triumph in it.

Notwithstanding these circumstances, the blessedness of the death of the righteous is not automatic, or without human involvement. Prior saints confirm this to be the case. They all *“died in the faith,”* a condition requiring their diligent participation. When they heard a word from God, they had to keep their grasp of it, hiding it in their hearts. They had to think upon it, ponder it, and give it dominance when life circumstances appeared to contradict it. When the Lord visited them, they could not forget it, take it for granted, or treat it as a casual matter. Like you, they had to *“fight”* to maintain their faith, warding off contradicting and hostile thoughts (1 Tim 6:12).

Jesus spoke of *“faith as a mustard seed,”* declaring it was potent enough to move a mountain and make all things *“possible to you”* (Matt 17:20). Such faith does not involve minuscule effort, a stubborn heart, or an insensitive ear. The mustard seed is used to convince us of the POTENTIAL of faith. How excellently this is demonstrated in the patriarchs. With extremely limited revelation (comparatively speaking), *“these all died in the faith, without receiving the promises.”* This circumstance was not owing to any unbelief, but because they lived prior to the time appointed for the fulfillment of the Messianic or covenantal promises. While in the world Abraham and Sarah never did see all nations blessed through their offspring-- **but they died knowing it would come to pass !** Isaac and Jacob did not live to see their seed inhabit the promised land-- **but they**

died knowing it would come to pass ! While in this world, David did not see the promised King upon his throne--- but he died knowing it would come to pass !

To *“die in faith”* has more to do with your persuasion of the future than of the present. At death, when you face the *“last enemy,”* and the warfare may be the most fierce, the glories of the world to come can envelope your soul. Your heart and mind can be dominated by what the Lord is going to do, rather than what you are passing through. At the hour you descend into the valley of the shadow of death, you can boldly say with the Psalmist, *“Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident”* (Psa 27:3).

Believing God, does not depend upon realizing promised benefits in this world! At best, what we receive now is only a pledge, first fruits, or earnest. If you are to glorify God in your death (John 21:19), you must die in faith, *“fully persuaded that, what he had promised, He is able also to perform”* (Rom 4:21). Presently, you do not have an incorruptible body--but you can die in faith, persuaded you will have one (1 Cor 15:52). Now, Satan is not yet crushed under your feet--but you can die believing *“the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly”* (Rom 16:20). In this world, you shed tears, experience sorrow, and endure pain. But you can die in faith, believing you will enter a realm where *“God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain”* (Rev 21:4). Faith does not let go of the promises when we face death, but grips them more firmly than ever before.

I give tribute to prior saints, who did not bask in the bright sunlight afforded us now. They died believing the blessings we possess would be fulfilled according to God’s promise. I applaud those who died before the remission of sin, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and participation in the Divine nature. They died believing in the God of promise, knowing His word would not fall to the ground. What will faithless people say when they face these saints on the day of judgment? How will those who have stumbled appear when they stand before a body of saints who died believing, even though they never received the promise? Be challenged by these prior saints. Their experience was inferior to that which is offered to you, but their faith was not. It made them adequate to life’s challenges, and it will make you equal to every circumstance also. Without faith, it is impossible to please God. That is not a mere theological position. It is an unwavering Kingdom reality.

SEEING THE PROMISES

Faith sees what is inaccessible to the carnal senses. It reaches into eternity, and penetrates the mysterious realms that are beyond nature. Take saints before Jesus as an example of this. Even though they did not receive the promises, they saw *“them afar off, were assured of them, and embraced them.”*

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mysterious realms that are beyond nature. Take saints before Jesus as an example of this. Even though they did not receive the promises, they saw *“them afar off, were assured of them, and embraced them.”* For some of them, like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, *“afar off”* was measured in millenniums--thousands of years. For all of them, it was well beyond their own life, generation, and even dispensation. Not only were the promises *“afar off”* in the sense of fulfillment, they were also *“afar off”* in their clarity. Some past saints were given very little detail concerning coming blessing. They heard the promises in terms of *“the Seed of the woman”* (Gen 3:15), *“a Prophet”* (Deut 18:15,18), *“a King,”* and *“a Man”* (Isa 32:2). Some heard of *“finishing the transgression,” making an “end of sins,” making “reconciliation,” and bringing in “ everlasting righteousness”* (Dan 9:24). As time progressed, others heard of men receiving a *“new heart,”* and willingly walking in the ways of the Lord (Ezek 36:26-27). However, little was comprehended concerning HOW these promises would be fulfilled.

The patriarchs occupied a segment of time that was, by its very nature, *“afar off”* from the coming promises. Yet, this was not an insurmountable obstacle for faith. Faith reached past their generation, seeing the promises: comprehending them, and being convinced of their reality. The Word of God declares they *“were persuaded of them, and embraced them.”* That, of course, is a quality of faith. It persuades the heart of the reality seen, and brings the moral power to embrace it. Joseph saw Israel coming out of Egyptian bondage 400 years before it happened, was persuaded it would happen, and commanded his bones to be taken out with them (Gen 50:25). Before Joseph, Job saw the resurrection of the dead in the end of time and affirmed, *“Even after my skin is destroyed, Yet from my flesh I shall see God; Whom I myself shall behold, And whom my eyes shall see and not another”* (Job 19:26).

Faith convinces the heart of the reality of Divine commitment! That is its unvarying nature. Living at a distance from the fulfillment of the promise is no hindrance to faith. It persuades the individual of coming realities, and constrains its possessor to embrace them. It does not produce eloquent arguments designed to persuade the individual, but fastens upon the Word of a God Who cannot lie. The Person in fellowship with God sees the future from a perspective unknown to the children of darkness, and confidently embraces it.

STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS

“ . . . and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” These prior saints not only did not fit into the world order, they **knew** they did not, and acknowledged it without shame. Jacob referred to his tenure in the promised land as his *“pilgrimage”* (Gen 47:9). The land of Canaan, with all of its *“milk and honey”* (Ex 3:8) did not engross the attention of the patriarchs. Their affinity with the Almighty had so dwarfed the world and all that is in it, that they acknowledged they were *“strangers and exiles on the earth”* (NASB, RSV)-- *“aliens and strangers”* (NIV)! While in the world, they were away from their real home. They felt the conflict of the world, its chaffing temptations, and the lure of the transitory. **Faith produced this condition!** As it gave substance to things hoped for, and became the evidence of things not seen, a sense of *not belonging* arose in regards to *“this present evil world.”*

They did not have what you have! They did not have the indwelling Spirit (Gal 4:6). The Father and the Son had not taken up Their abode with them (John 14:21,23). Life and immortality had been illuminated for them (2 Tim 1:10).

Their

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conscience had not been purged from dead works (Heb 9:14). No! The day of those remarkable benefits had not yet dawned. The "*Sun of righteousness*" had not yet risen with "*healing in His wings*" (Mal 4:2). Still, the summons of the Almighty had opened a glory to them that eclipsed the best things of this world. The Divine call had uprooted their basic affection from the earth. They sensed the world could not give them what they now longed for. They were "*strangers and pilgrims in the earth,*" and they knew it and confessed it.

Faith reconciles us to God, but alienates us from the world. That has always been the case. The closer you are to the Lord, the further you are from the world. If the patriarchs knew this, how much more those who 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*" (Heb 6:4-5). When you participate in "*all spiritual blessings in heavenly places*" (Eph 1:3), you have indulged in things superior to this world. They satisfy the soul, and whet the appetite for eternal glories. That is what they are designed to do. Those in love with this world are not imbibing the things of God. They are not sitting at the King's table! Their at-home-ness in this world belies any claim they may make to being a Christian, or saved, or having a home in heaven.

There is an unavoidable conflict between heaven and earth, the eternal and the temporal, the unseen and the seen! Those who attempt to straddle, as it were, both worlds, living comfortably in them both, attempt the

Those who attempt to straddle, as it were, both worlds, living comfortably in them both, attempt the impossible. This is something for which Divine assistance is not possible! A heavenly citizen can live as a stranger in this world, but an earthly citizen cannot live under any circumstances in heavenly places! The power of God, through faith, can enable the individual to occupy a temporary residence--this world. However, nature cannot empower us to live in an eternal realm. The lower never strengthens for the higher. The flesh has no ability to acclimate us to the Spirit.

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are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please” (Gal 5:17, NASB).

Faith, in making us *“strangers and pilgrims in the earth”* empowers us to refrain from sinful indulgences. As it is written, *“Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul”* (1 Pet 2:11). Oh, that everyone in Christ saw this with greater clarity! An acute awareness of your citizenship in heaven will bring a disdain for sin. Notice the nature of Peter’s appeal. It is powerful! He pleads with us upon the basis of our alien status in the world. We do not belong here. Salvation has uprooted our hearts and affection from this realm. We are being conformed to the image of God’s Son, Who is in heaven. Spiritual life is readying us to occupy a glorified body. In view of these things, it is unreasonable to immerse ourselves in the world order! As *“strangers and pilgrims in the earth,”* and taught by the grace of God, we *“deny ungodliness and WORLDLY lusts”* (Tit 2:12). Those who profess godliness, yet are worldly in their outlook and manner, have, by that very condition, betrayed their affection is not set on heavenly things. They are not living by faith, and are not walking in the Spirit. They are therefore on the very precipice of eternal ruin. Their salvation depends on the correction of their condition. If men are not brought to live by faith, they cannot be saved!

SEEKING A COUNTRY

“For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one.” There is more to being godly than being separate from the world and refraining from fleshly lusts. Being discontent with the world is not enough! Having a hatred for sin is not enough! Unless our aversion to the world is produced by a longing for heaven, it is of no benefit to us. If our hatred for iniquity is not the result of our love for righteousness, it is meaningless.

The patriarchs, by their confession of strangership, made clear they were seeking another country--one with which they would be harmonious. They were not simply reactionaries, but genuine travelers--pilgrims! Faith produced this reaction and action within them. Mind you, there had not been much said about a *“heavenly country”* in those spiritually primitive times. The promises made to these men spoke of a country in this world, even giving the borders and dimensions of the land (Gen 13:15; 15:18-21; 17:8; 26:3). God did not speak to them of a heavenly inheritance. How is it that they desired *“a better country, that is a heavenly one?”*

It was their acquaintance with God Himself--their faith--that prompted their quest. Their hearts knew there had to be something better than a country in this world. They knew God had *come down* to walk with Adam (Gen 3:8-9), and even to view the work at Babel (Gen 11:5). Their longing involved more than a peaceful habitation. They were actually longing for the *“courts of the Lord.”* I do not doubt they were unable to articulate this desire adequately, but their heart had grasped it by faith. Their faith had brought them into acquaintance with God. They knew *“their own”* country had to be one where God Himself resided. They therefore *“looked”* earnestly and expectantly for that land.

Candidly, I am concerned that this mind-set is relatively strange in the contemporary church. The average *church service* will not convince you the people are

discontent with this world, and fervently in the quest of a heavenly country. But where this spirit is not found, faith is not found! Faith is what produces estrangement from this world and a longing for the *“world to come.”* It never fails to produce these results. They are in every believer, differing only in degree. Faith is uprooting us from the temporal realm, and creating an insatiable appetite for a *“better country, that is, an heavenly.”* In confirmation of this, the Psalmist cried out, *“One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the LORD, And to meditate in His temple”* (Psa 27:4, NASB). David once spoke of his pilgrimage in this world, and the anticipation of dwelling in the next one. *“Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever”* (Psa 23:6).

This is the objective of God, as

Faith brings a sense of this, even though we may not be able to articulate it clearly. Believing God makes us restless in this world. We have been called into an eternal realm, and yet we are surrounded by temporality. This condition makes us *“strangers and pilgrims,”* and urges us to seek a better country.

saliently stated in the Sixty-Fifth Psalm. *“Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth, and causeth to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple”* (verse 4). We must never forget that Christ is the Mediator of the New Covenant in order that *“those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance”* (Heb 9:15, NASB). Faith brings a sense of this, even though we may not be able to articulate it clearly. Believing God makes us restless in this world. We have been called into an eternal realm, and yet we are surrounded by temporality. This condition makes us *“strangers and pilgrims,”* and urges us to seek a better country.

It is our business to appeal to the regenerated in a proper manner. Frequent appeals ought to be made to their lack of affinity with this world. No approach to them should encourage them to be at home in this world. We will not counsel our brethren to blend in with the world, participate in its manners, or imbibe its mind. If faith has made them strangers and pilgrims, woe to the person that seeks to make them friends with the world. I am afraid that altogether too much effort is being expended to bring believers into harmony with this world. We do not belong here! Our citizenship is in heaven! Faith does not allow for our speech, manners, and appearance to make it difficult to distinguish between the world and us! We speak differently, because we are citizens of another country with a different nomenclature.

Our life in this world is a *“sojourn.”* We are journeying through the world to a *“better country.”* That makes our lives here temporary. But faith has suited us for the eternal, and is preparing us to enter an everlasting habitation. It simply is not possible to live by faith, and yet remain at home in this world. However cultured and likeable people may be, those who want to stay in this world have managed to suppress what measure of faith they may have. Faith will not allow you to settle down in the realm of the curse. It will constrain you to run the race that is set before you, and look for a place where we will no more wander, go out, or be confronted with contradiction.

If they had been mindful

The argument here is strong, and worthy of elaboration.

The patriarchs did not consider themselves strangers because they came from Mesopotamia. They might have been able to return to their homeland if they wanted to, but they did NOT want to. They left Ur of the Chaldees willingly. They were not driven out like the inhabitants of Canaan

“And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return.” He is speaking of the patriarchs, and of the land they left. As it is written, *“they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees.”* Israel thought about Egypt after they had been delivered from it, even seeking to appoint a captain to lead them back. *“And why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt? So they said to one another, “Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt”* (Num 14:3-4, NASB). But this is not the spirit that drove the patriarchs! Faith pushed them forward, not backward! It blurred what was behind them.

The argument here is strong, and worthy of elaboration. The patriarchs did not consider themselves strangers because they came from Mesopotamia. They might have been able to return to their homeland if they wanted to, but they did NOT want to. They left Ur of the Chaldees willingly. They were not driven out like the inhabitants of Canaan (Ex 23:23-31). When, therefore, the Spirit speaks of another “country,” the land from which they departed was not the subject. They sought a heavenly country. That longing made them just as much a stranger in Mesopotamia as in Canaan; just as much a stranger in Ur of the Chaldees as in the geographical land of promise.

I often hear people of age, or those suffering from a disease, speak of wanting to *go to heaven*, but not now. It all may sound innocent enough, but it is not. Their words betray the absence of a dominating hope and persuading faith. Whatever may be said of their church membership and allegiance to a theological position, they have admitted they are really not strangers and pilgrims in the earth. How, then, will they be able to resist its lusts, which *“war against the soul?”* It is time for the professed church to take seriously the at-home-ness of its members in this world. It is not acceptable to God, Who has called us *“out of the world”* (John 15:19; 17:6), and it must not be acceptable to us! The worldly mind-set is out of place in every facet of the faith life. It is to be thrust out of our churches with aggressive determination.

THE UNASHAMED GOD

“But as it is, they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.” Note, this was not a creedal profession

(i.e., I believe there is a heaven). The *“desired”* a heavenly country! If the Psalmist could *“long”* after God’s precepts, commandments, and salvation (Psa 119:40,131,174), what will faith in Christ provoke within the saints today? On one occasion, when cut off the house of God, David lamented, *“My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the LORD; My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God. The bird also has found a house, And the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, Even Thine altars, O LORD of hosts, My King and my God. How blessed are those who dwell in Thy house! They are ever praising Thee. Selah”* (Psa 84:2-4). He even envied the small swallow, who could build her nest in the upper parts of God’s house, dwelling peacefully there. There, the insignificant bird could lay her young upon the altars of God. But David was cut off from such privileges, and therefore envied the birds. What a sensitive spirit! No wonder this was a man after God’s own heart (1 Sam 13:14). I wonder how David would react to the spirit of our age, when people appear to have little longing to be in places identified with God, and among people in quest for glory. It will be interesting, to say the least, to hear him on judgment day!

God Is Not Ashamed

Why was God unashamed to be identified with these saints? It was not because they were a part of a condoned group--one that possessed all the truth, so to speak. Nor, indeed, was it owing to the accomplishments of these believers. It was because of their DESIRE! *“They desire a better country, that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God.”* The Spirit is referring to God’s open identity with the patriarchs. *“I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”* (Ex 3:6). There are precious few people in the history of the world of whom this is said. God was also known as *“the God of Elijah”* (2 Kgs 2:14), *“the God of Daniel”* (Dan 6:26), *“the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego”* (Dan 3:29), and *“the God of . . . David”* (2 Kgs 20:5). In each of the cases, their desire was Godward and heavenward. None of these men were willing to compromise their faith to prolong their life in this world. None of them were at home in the world, or sought the approbation of the world. That is precisely what endeared them to God!

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It is more than interesting that it has become fashionable in this unspiritual day for some preachers and teachers to criticize Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, speaking of them with a sense of shame. God is not ashamed to be identified with them, and neither am I! It is not on the part of wisdom to hold up to ridicule or disrepute those with whom God has identified Himself. Such actions will be called into account on the day of judgment. Those who judge these patriarchs as though they were common men, will themselves be judged, even as they have judged.

If God is *“not ashamed”* to be identified with those desiring a heavenly country, what of those who do not? How does God regard those who do not long for His courts and His Presence? How must He view those who have a preference for this world, when He gave His Son *“to deliver us from this present evil world”* (Gal 1:4)? When He has apprized us of the coming destruction of the world (2

Pet 3:10-12), how will He consider those who refuse to become detached from it? It appears to me [and this is an opinion] that we are being faced with a form of religion that brings shame upon its adherents. Much of what is going on in the name of the Lord will, in fact, be repudiated on the day of judgment (Matt 7:22-23). If God is **“NOT ASHAMED”** of those desiring a heavenly country, you will be hard pressed to deny He IS ashamed of those who do NOT desire the same.

He has prepared

for them a city

God is also unashamed of these desiring saints because He has **“prepared FOR THEM a city”** --a place where they will be at home! The word **“city”** is used because it is a society more than a place. It was said of Abraham, **“For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God”** (Heb 11:10). By faith, and in our spirits, we have already come **“unto the city of the living God”** (Heb 12:22). It is a city where God is dominant, where His will is preferred and prevails, and where the people are of one accord. It is a place in which to reside, not to visit. There we dwell, but do not sojourn! Jesus called it **“the city of My God”** (Rev 3:12). It is also called the **“holy city and the new Jerusalem”** (Rev 21:2,10). It has been prepared for those who have left the cursed order, and are strangers and pilgrims in the earth. Their appetites have been whetted for better things, and they will have them.

Throughout the history of the world, the people of God have been subjected to sorrow, difficulty, and often harm--from people. Abel was killed by Cain. Enoch walked with God in spite of a contrary society. Noah had to build the ark in the midst of a jeering and rejecting generation. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had to contend with the heathen. Joseph even had a controversy with his own brethren. The children of Israel were subject to abuse in Egypt, and Moses endured the contradiction of his own people. The prophets were rejected by the very ones to whom their words were addressed. John the Baptist faced the opposition of a wicked woman, and was finally beheaded. Jesus was rejected by the very people to whom He came. The Apostles were counted as the **“filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things”** (1 Cor 4:13). This world has never been a friend to the people of God!

Jesus said, **“If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you”** (John 15:19). No amount of culture can remove this basic enmity. The only way to avoid it is to deny the faith, and walk in the flesh. The patriarchs refused to do this, maintaining their walk of faith. The Spirit says emphatically, **“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution”** (2 Tim 3:12). The word **“will”** in this text denotes a preference to live godly, i.e., **“wills to live godly . . .”** The NASB states it this way, **“And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,”** while the RSV reads, **“In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”** **It is not so much what the saints DO that incurs the indignation of the world, but what they prefer.** The very thing that endears them to God separates them from the world. The world is not capable of receiving the believer, because the spirit of the world is hostile to the Spirit of God. No amount of worldly culture can remove this fundamental enmity. Faith enables us to confront it.

A BETTER THING FOR US

Whatever may be said of human achievement, it is nothing to compare with

believing God. The saints of old were all commended for their faith. That is what required the greater effort. It takes more of your person to believe God than it does to build an altar, offer a sacrifice, and fulfill the finest detail of the ceremonial law. Human discipline is highly lauded by men. Many have become independently wealthy in peddling their secret tips. But with God, faith is the qualifying factor. It is the ointment that sanctifies everything else.

“These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect” (NIV). Whatever may be said of human achievement, it is nothing to compare with believing God. The saints of old were all commended for their faith. That is what required the greater effort. It takes more of your person to believe God than it does to build an altar, offer a sacrifice, and fulfill the finest detail of the ceremonial law. Human discipline is highly lauded by men. Many have become independently wealthy by peddling their secret tips. But with God, faith is the qualifying factor. It is the ointment that sanctifies everything else.

Of particular note are those who suffered unspeakable atrocities and rejection, even being slain because of their faith. Of this notable group it is said, *“and others were tortured, not accepting their release, in order that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated”* (vs 35-37, NASB). Surely, this was the ultimate in rejection--sure evidence they were citizens of another world with other manners. Their motives were impugned, their names reproached, and their witness rejected. But, after the world had done its worse, God gave a good report of them all! By keeping the faith under duress, they brought great glory to God, and procured for themselves a place in glory.

Remember, the Spirit is contrasting for us the superiority of life in Christ and under the New Covenant. He is taking from lethargic spirits every excuse for being ungodly and not persevering in the faith. He will show us that in a time when the “Sun of righteousness” had not yet risen, and the grace of God was but a dim light compared to now, faith produced constancy in the saints.

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Obtained a good report

The KJV says the patriarchs *“obtained a good report.”* It was **God** Who gave that report. He attached a sense of Divine approval with the names of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah . . . etc. it is not possible to receive the Word of God concerning these saints and conclude they were at variance with God. The Lord aligned Himself with them, blessed them, and placed their names in Scripture as an example for those who would follow. Abel was given a *“good report.”* As it is written, *“God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh”* (Heb 11:4). We have heard of men testifying of God, and this is good. But it is most remarkable when God testifies of a person, giving

a good report of him!

On the day of judgment, those who lived by faith will receive the ultimate “*good report*.” The Lord Himself will say, “*Well done, good and faithful servant . . .*” (Matt 25:21,23). God will “*praise*” those who have maintained their faith in an alien world (1 Cor 4:5). Keeping the faith is everything! Without that, Divine commendation is not possible, with “*without faith, it is impossible to please God*” (Heb 11:6). Make it your aim to be “*approved of God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed*” (2 Tim 2:15).

Received not the promise

Even though they died in the faith and obtained a good report through their faith, still these saints did not obtain the promise. The failure of these saints to do that was not owing to unbelief on their part. *It was because the time of the promise had not yet come.*

Peter reminds us of the holy prophets, and their proclamation of the salvation we enjoy. “*As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow*” (1 Pet 1:10-11, NASB). They not only declared the promise, but they probed it, earnestly desiring to comprehend it. In other words, they believed the promise of coming grace. Their investigation was not academic, but spiritual. It was their faith that prompted them to know Who the Savior would be, and when He would appear.

The promises of God, however, are fulfilled at appointed times. The prophets were told the grace of which they prophesied was not intended for them. “*It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven-- things into which angels long to look*” (1 Pet 1:12, NASB).

The person who lives for the NOW could not have received this revelation. It had a strong appeal to faith, but was repulsive to the flesh. It meant the prophets would live, exercise their prophetic ministry, and die--all “*without receiving the promise.*” But faith is equal to that challenge. Think of the people who lived and died believing in a coming Redeemer. Some of them lived for centuries without obtaining the promise. Adam, Eve, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and the Prophets. How were they sustained for such a lengthy period of time? It was faith that enabled them to hold on!

Believers can continue a life of spiritual consistency by hope. Focusing on that bright, yet distant, star, the child of God can endure unimaginable stresses and challenges. A religion that does not emphasize faith places its constituents at a great handicap. Through all generations, faith has been the means of survival for the people of God. Given promises from God, they heartily embraced them, and lived under great handicap.

In Christ, we fellowship with them in some respects. While we have obtained the salvation which they anticipated, there are some things we have not yet

experienced, yet have embraced by faith. The second coming of Christ, deliverance from this “*vile body*,” God Himself being with us, complete conformity to the image of God’s Son, sitting with Jesus in His throne . . . etc. All of these have been promised, but have not yet been received by those “*in the body*” (Heb 13:3).

Yet, these promises are “*seen afar off*,” and “*embraced*.” It is that condition that gives the individual strength to continue running the race in storms of temptation, deserts of trial, and waters of testing.

A better thing for us

For the carnally minded, nothing could be better than being delivered from a 430-year bondage, receiving bread from heaven for forty years, and

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drinking from a river that gushed from a rock? But there is something better than that! For others, successfully commanding the sun and moon to stand still, defeating a towering giant, or overcoming 450 false prophets, are superior activities from bygone days. But this is not the case at all. Outward victories are not the greatest victories, and external displays of powers are not superior exhibits of Divine power. Our text declares the “*better thing*” was reserved for those in Christ Jesus.

It is important to see the comparison the Spirit is making. He is showing us the power and effectiveness of faith. Prior saints were brought safely through this world with but a spark of spiritual light. Comparatively speaking, the illumination they had was extremely small. Yet, faith in those embryonic promises made the saints able to survive!

But it is no spark of spiritual light that we now enjoy! The “*Sun of righteousness has arisen with healing in His wings*” (Mal 4:2). The Son of God is exalted above all things, and His light fills the world, illuminating “*life and immortality*” and showing the way to God. Things can now be comprehended that were never before seen as they are now. To name a few, *God, heaven, Satan, life, the world, death, and justification*. But the “*better thing*” is not merely our understanding.

The Spirit is emphasizing our access to God--our welcome into the “*holiest of all*.” This is something the ancients did not have. By the grace of God, we enjoy a “*purged*,” or cleansed, conscience. Grace has made us suitable for, and confident in, Divine fellowship. Those in the New Covenant are not continually faced with their sin, but with the remedy for their sin. We have a “*better thing*.”

We have not been called out of Egypt, but out of spiritual “*darkness*” --not into Canaan, but into His “*marvelous light*” (1 Pet 2:9). For us, washing and sanctification are not

ceremonial, pertaining only to the body. They are spiritual, qualifying us for to come to the throne of all grace (1 Cor 1:30; Heb 10:22). We have not been *“called”* to a solemn assembly, but *“into the fellowship of God’s dear Son”* (1 Cor 1:30). We have a *“better thing.”*

APPLICATION

In view of the superior *“day”* in which we live (2 Cor 6:2), what excuse can be given for not growing in *“the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (2 Pet 3:18). Given the advantages of the reign of Christ, how can an inability to discern good and evil be explained in those professing faith for some time (Heb 5:12-14)? What acceptable explanation can be offered for the remarkable level of carnality in the contemporary church? If God has provided a *“better thing”* for us, why should there be so many parallels between recalcitrant Israel and the contemporary church?

Given the advantages of the reign of Christ, how can an inability to discern good and evil be explained in those professing faith for some time (Heb 5:12-14)? What acceptable explanation can be offered for the remarkable level of carnality in the contemporary church? If God has provided a *“better thing”* for us, why should there be so many parallels between recalcitrant Israel and the contemporary church?

Why should professed preachers of the Gospel preach a message inferior to that of the prophets, if God has reserved a *“better thing”* for us? Why should less consistency be found in those who have been made *“kings and priests to God,”* than in the Levitical priests of old? If some *“better thing”* has been reserved for those in Christ, how could any professed believer imagine they could eat heavenly food once a week, when Israel ate it every day? The applications are endless! The time has come for the people of God to declare war on spiritual mediocrity, meager provisions for the soul, and insensitivity to God. These things are inappropriate and out of place in the time of the *“better thing.”*

They were not perfect

without us

Here we learn of the oneness of the people of faith. From times eternal, God determined *“That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him”* (Eph 1:10). In the expression being considered, we find unperfected believers for the first 4,000 years of history. But they were not destined to remain imperfect. The time would come when their perfection would be accomplished!

The saints of old were not made perfect *“without us,”* but they WERE made perfect WITH us! The atoning sacrifice of Christ reached backward as well as forward! As it is written, *“And for this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, in order that since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance”* (Heb 9:15).

The patriarchs, as well as those under the Law, never experienced the remission of sins in this world, as provided in Christ Jesus. The blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin (Heb 10:4). They remained guilty, believing in the coming Remedy! How often the contaminated conscience erupts in their writings,

as well as a longing for expiation and the purging of the conscience (Psa 32:5; 38:3-4; 38:18; 41:4; 51:2; 69:5). **“They were not made perfect without us!”**

When reading such expressions, one might suppose the ancients lived in continual transgression, sinning extensively every day. But this was not the case at all. They lived righteous and disciplined lives before the Lord, oft excelling those who now wear the name of Christ. Their frequent pleas were required because their conscience had not been **“purged from dead works.”** The defiled conscience drove their supplications.

But, praise God, they are defiled no longer! No longer does the sin of David plague him! He, together with all believers before Christ, have been **“made perfect.”** The blood of Christ flowed back into the Edenic Paradise, then rushed as a mighty torrent through history until the end of the world, purging and cleansing the conscience of all who lived or live by faith! Praise God for the effectiveness of the blood of Christ! Thank God the day of purging came for those of old who lived by faith.

Our text is another example of this Kingdom principle. Prior saints were first to believe God, but last to be **“made perfect.”** They were the first to experience deliverance, first to see the hand of God, first to hear the voice of God--but last to be **“made perfect.”** They were the first to speak the words of God, first to serve the Lord, and first to see their enemies subdued--but last to be **“made perfect.”**

Last become first

They were **“not made perfect without us.”** Here is a classic example of the first being last, and the last being first. As our Lord said, **“But many who are first will be last; and the last, first”** (Matt 19:30; 20:16; Mark 10:31; Luke 13:30). This is a Kingdom principle that is frequently adduced in Scripture. It is not to be viewed from a contextual view alone, but from one of principle.

Jesus revealed the application of this principle in His day. **“Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you”** (Matt 21:31). Publicans and harlots were the last to hear, but the first to see. The Pharisees were first in privilege, but last in apprehension.

Paul appeals to this principle in His proclamation of the acceptance of the Gentiles. **“What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness”** (Rom 9:30-31). As a people, the Jews were the first to hear, but the last to believe. The Gentiles were spoken to last, but were first in the embrace of the truth (Acts 13:46-48).

The resurrection of the dead also provides an application of this principle. **“And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven”** (1 Cor 15:45-47). Adam was first in appearance, but last in priority. Jesus was last in appearance, but the Head over all things. Our present bodies are first by reason of possession, but last by order of

importance. Our resurrected bodies will be last in time, but first in glory.

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Conversely, we were the last to hear from God, the last to be visited, and the last to hear the prophets--but the first to be *“made perfect.”* Those in Christ are last in time, but first in grace! Under such an arrangement as this, there is no reason why you cannot excel in the heavenly Kingdom! You may be the last to see a truth, but you can be the first to be moved to excellence by it. You may not have seen the marvelous truth of God until you were seasoned in years, but you can be first in the effective use of that truth. Only in Christ do disadvantages become advantages. When we are weak, we are strong!

CONCLUSION

Certainly you have seen the superiority of faith in this impressive chapter. We have only glanced at the jewels that lie hidden in this text, bringing only a few of them to the surface of consideration. But our glimpses have been sufficient to show us *“all things are possible to him that believes”* (Mark 9:23). Faith may not rank high in a religious institution, but it is highly regarded by God.

It is interesting to note that throughout history, great men of faith have largely labored alone. They did not seem to fit into the institution, or a religious organization. The reason for this is obvious. God does not work through organizations, but through faith. He saves us *“by grace THROUGH FAITH”* (Eph 2:8). We become His children *“through faith”* (Gal 3:18), and are justified *“by faith”* (Rom 5:1). Those who have subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, stopped the mouths of lions, and quenched the violence of fire, have done so *“through faith”* (Heb 11:33). It is *“through faith and patience”* that the promises of God are inherited (Heb 6:12).

It simply is *“impossible”* to please God without faith (Heb 11:6). Unless the soul is convinced that *“God is true, and every man a liar”* (Rom 3:4), there is no hope of making heaven--no hope of overcoming the adversary! Conviction, persuasion, and confidence are qualities of faith. They are what makes the child of God acceptable to and useable by God. Make much of faith! It is abundantly available to you. The grace of God is filled with faith and love, which you can experience in large measures (1 Tim 1:14).

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

Commentary on the book of Hebrews

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #21

A GREAT CLOUD OF WITNESSES

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin” (*Hebrews 12:1-4, NKJV*).

INTRODUCTION

“*All Scripture*,” being given by the “*inspiration of God*,” reflects the priorities of the Living God. The Word is not a manual of conduct, a lifeless history book, or an organizational charter. Its aim is not the mere reformation of wayward souls, but their transformation. God’s Word addresses the matter of man’s alienation from God, informing us of the effectiveness of a vicarious sacrifice, honored in heaven and proclaimed upon earth. All of nature has been blasted with the curse of the Almighty, and is destined for destruction (2 Pet 3:10-12). Scripture apprizes us of a means provided by God, through Christ, and by the Spirit, to “clean escape” the realm of the condemnation.

All of heaven is involved in the “*great salvation*,” which is being accomplished under the administration of Christ Jesus. Inactivity has not part in *God’s “eternal purpose.”* Jesus said His Father was working, and He was also working (John 5:17). The angels are intensely active, “*sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation*” (Heb 1:13-14). The Holy Spirit has been sent “*into our hearts, crying Abba Father*” (Gal 4:6). The Lord Jesus Himself “*always lives to make intercession for*” the saints (Heb 7:25). There is no room for passivity or inactivity in the Kingdom of God. When it comes to our personal

involvement in salvation, the “God-has-done-it-all” hypothesis falls to the ground. There is no such thing as a salvation in which the ones being saved are uninvolved! Noah built an ark! Abraham went into Sarah!

The book of Hebrews is calling believers into aggressive involvement with God. It summons them from the outer court into the “*holiest of all*” — into communion with the Most High. Taken seriously, it will develop a disdain for spiritual idleness and lack of growth. It awakens the soul to the jeopardy of retarded response to God, a lethargic posture, and the embrace of ceremonial religion. Faith cannot sleep, and hope cannot rest!

Joseph built storage houses for grain in Egypt! Israel went through extensive preparations in their deliverance from Egypt! David fought Goliath! In all of these cases, those being delivered DID something in faith. It was God Who saved them, to be sure. Yet, they were themselves involved in the process.

It is no different with us. While our works are not the cause of our salvation, they are involved in its realization. We are, after all, “*His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them*” (Eph 2:10). As to the cause and foundation of our salvation, it all belongs to Christ. But that foundation must be embraced by the individual, becoming the basis for arduous and consistent spiritual activity. Our entrance into the fulness of eternal life involves our “*labor*” (John 6:27; Heb 4:1). Hands that “*hang down*” must be strengthened to be raised (Heb 12:12)!

The book of Hebrews is calling believers into aggressive involvement with God. It summons them from the outer court into the “*holiest of all*” — into communion with the Most High. Taken seriously, it will develop a disdain for spiritual idleness and lack of growth. It awakens the soul to the jeopardy of retarded response to God, a lethargic posture, and the embrace of ceremonial religion. Faith cannot sleep, and hope cannot rest! Thus, the Spirit has reminded us of the faithful before us--those filled with faith. They were noted for what they DID--all of them. Read the eleventh chapter of Hebrews again, and let the record of doing saints sink down into your heart. You have not forgotten, have you? Elders “*obtained a good report,*” “*Abel offered unto God,*” and Enoch “*pleased God.*” Noah “*prepared an ark,*” “*Abraham obeyed,*” and Sarah “*bore a child.*” “*Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau,*” Jacob “*blessed both the sons of Joseph,*” and Joseph “*gave commandment concerning his bones.*” Moses parent “*hid*” him in an ark they prepared, Moses “*chose to suffer affliction,*” and Israel “*passed through the Red Sea.*” The walls of Jericho were felled with a “*shout*” from the believing Israelites, and Rahab “*hid*” the spies. Faith enabled its recipients to “*subdue kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.*” The notion that we can do nothing in the matter of our salvation contradicts both the nature and revelation of that salvation.

This activity, however, is prompted and enabled by faith, not fleshly abilities. It is God Who “works in us, both to will and to do of His own good pleasure,” but He does not do it without our involvement. It is that involvement that brings Him glory! This is the case because it contradicts every form of human reason and ability. Not a single accomplishment recorded in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews could have been wrought apart from God! Equally true, none of them were

wrought without the participation of the individuals involved.

Your salvation is to be seen from this vantage point. The **BASIS** for it has been accomplished by Jesus Christ, independent of your input. Currently, the Intercessory activity of Jesus at God's right hand is sustaining you. Your resources come from heaven through the channel of your faith. The appropriation of those accouterments, however, together with the successful employment of them, requires **all** of your heart, soul, mind, and strength. **THAT IS THE POINT OF THIS SECTION OF SCRIPTURE.** No casualness is allowed! Danger consistently lurks in the dark!

THEREFORE, WE ALSO

The contemporary penchant for present day examples is not bad, but it is not best! There is no more powerful incentive for a strong faith than the inspired record of people whom God confessed as His favored ones. This generation must not allow these accounts to slip from them in preference for the record of their peers.

“Therefore we also . . .” The Spirit is not merely provided the record of an illustrious heritage. He is not promoting institutional hype, or seeking to develop a wholesome respect for certain *“heroes of the faith.”* The foregoing references are germane to our life in Christ Jesus. There is a message here we need to hear. We have something in common with the saints of old time. Our successful involvement in the will of God requires faith in us, just as it did in them. What God asks of us is just as difficult, if not more so, than a barren woman having a child, an aged man becoming the father of many nations, and a man building an ark to the saving of his house! What God now requires of you is just as difficult, and more so, than Israel crossing the Red Sea, the walls of Jericho falling down, or Gideon defeating the Midianites. You can no more get to heaven without faith, than David could have overcome Goliath without it!

I particularly like the KJV version of this verse. It is more spiritual than academic. *“Wherefore seeing we also . . .”* Grammatically, it is true, the word **Toigaroun** (toy-gar-oon) means *truly for then, i.e. consequently: therefore, or for that very reason, then.* This is, however, a moral expression, not a mere literary one. It denotes spiritual insight, suggesting that seeing the significance of what has been said will have a powerful constraining effect upon us. Here we see the relevancy of the foregoing accounts to us. Some might call it an *application*, which it surely is. Elsewhere, Scripture apprizes us, *“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope”* (Rom 15:4, NKJV). While the will and activity of the individuals were involved in the matters in reference, it was all orchestrated by God in order to our instruction and encouragement. The Spirit even applies this reasoning to the record of waywardness in Israel. *“Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come”* (1 Cor 10:11).

These are not, then, simply *Bible Stories*. They reveal the nature and effectiveness of faith. In them we see how deeply the saints are involved in their own deliverance. They relate to us accounts from another era, a prior dispensation, and times when advantages we enjoy had not yet been given.

However, they show us how God works. They reveal the indispensability and effectiveness of faith. They also confirm it is not vain to trust the Lord! O, we must learn from these accounts. We must learn to lay our lives along the side of the ancients, and derive encouragement.

The contemporary penchant for present day examples is not bad, but it is not best! There is no more powerful incentive for a strong faith than the inspired record of people whom God confessed as His favored ones. This generation must not allow these accounts to slip from them in preference for the record of their contemporary peers. The record of Abraham's faith becoming the basis for righteousness, for example, is provided "*for us also, to whom*" righteousness will also be imputed, if we believe (Rom 4:23-24). The *hero-mentality*, so prevalent in our time, is not appropriate for believers. Abel, Enoch, Noah, and others, are not mere heroes or champions, but our examples. They show us what God can do in and through those who believe. **In our case, it is not only the subjugation of adversaries and overcoming difficult circumstances, but the appropriation of the very life and righteousness of God Almighty!**

WE ARE SURROUNDED!

Unlike those attending a mere game, however, these witnesses, or testifiers, remain. They are like a boundary around us. They form a circumference, and are among a gallery of witnesses that even include the holy angels, who themselves camp round those fearing the Lord (Psa 34:7).

"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses . . ." The word "surround" or "compassed" (KJV) means *to lie all around, i.e. inclose, encircle, hamper: be bound (compassed) with, hang about*. The expression denotes something presently experienced. It is not a historical perspective. The words **econtej perikeimenon** ("*compassed by,*" or "*surrounded by*"), are in the active voice, denoting something occurring NOW. We "**ARE**" compassed or surrounded by these witnesses. The imagery is that of a *great amphitheater, with the arena of the runners, and the tiers upon tiers of seats rising up like a cloud* . 1 Unlike those attending a mere game, however, these witnesses, or testifiers, remain. They are like a boundary around us. They form a circumference, and are among a gallery of witnesses that even include the holy angels, who themselves camp round those fearing the Lord (Psa 34:7).

While the angels protect and minister to believers (Psa 91:11; Heb 1:13-14), the faithful who have gone before us testify to us. They do not do so person-to-person, but through the record of their faith. Their lives provide a resounding confirmation of the effectiveness of faith. It is as though they were shouting to those struggling in the good fight of faith, "*You can make it! Run! Fight! Don't give up! God is with you! Consider us! Consider us! We went through fire and water, and made it to the other side! We did the impossible! Divine power was given to us because we willed to believe God! Do not*

look at the circumstance, but to the Lord! O, we need to hear them!

God of the living

Some object to this, saying that it is simply the record that is in reference, not the witnesses themselves. But this is not the case. We are not surrounded by a document, but by witnesses; not by a record, but by personalities. That is what the Spirit says! They are called a *“cloud of witnesses”* because of the vast number of them. Even if there had only been very few such witnesses, they should have aroused our slumbering spirits and fired our souls for the *“good fight of faith”* (1 Tim 6:12). But this is a vast and prestigious assembly that surrounds us. Millions kept the Passover, came out of Egypt, passed through the Red Sea, and drank from a rock in a wilderness! From Abel through the period of the Judges and the Kings, there have been people who lived by faith. In Elijah’s day, there were *“seven thousand”* who, by faith, refused to bow their knees to Baal (1 Kings 19:18; Rom 11:4). Every age has had its *“remnant”* (Isa 10:20; Ezek 6:8; Amos 5:15; Micah 2:12; Zech 8:12; Rom 11:5), and God has never left Himself *“without witness”* (Acts 14:17). Now, they ALL surround us.

Do not doubt the possibility of this! Jesus affirmed the present existence of those who died in the faith. *“But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the burning bush passage, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. You are therefore greatly mistaken”* (Mark 12:26-27). God will not raise those who are inactive or do not exist, but the living. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have left this world, but they have not ceased to be! We know this is the case because an extensive dialog the *“rich man”* had with Abraham from the very regions of hell (Luke 16:23-30). Abraham also *“comforted”* Lazarus, who suffered in this world (Luke 16:25). Peter, James, and John saw *“Moses and Elijah”* speaking with Jesus on the *“holy mount”* (Matt 17:3; Luke 9:30).

We are told of martyrs who presently are conscious, active, observant, asking questions, and receiving answers. *“I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’ Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed”* (Rev 6:9-11).

The *“rich man”* who died and lifted up his eyes in torment knew about his brothers upon the earth. He sought their welcome from the region of the damned. Do you remember his words? *“Then he said [to Abraham], ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father’s house, ‘for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’”* (Luke 16:27-28). Abraham himself had some

This cloud, or vast assembly of witnesses, are very real, and their observation of us is very real. In a very substantial sense, they lived out their lives for us--as a testimony to us of the unwavering effectiveness of faith. A specific journey was laid out for each of them, and they traversed

treacherous and threatening surroundings to complete it. You are in the same situation, and are called upon to hear their testimony!

awareness of things upon the earth. He answered the rich man. *“They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead’”* (Luke 16:29-31). Think! Both Moses and the prophets lived a considerable time AFTER Abraham. He knew nothing of either when he was in the world. Yet, he was fully aware of them on the other side.

No person, therefore should think it strange that we could be surrounded with a *“great cloud of witnesses”* who are intensely interested in race to glory we are running. If the rich man could be interested in his brothers in the world, why could not departed saints have a vital interest in the warfare of fellow believers in the world? Are we not told that we have come into fellowship with a family with representatives in *“heaven”* as well as the *“earth”* (Eph 3:15)? Is it not written that we are *“COME . . . to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven . . . and to the spirits of just men made perfect”* (Heb 12:22-23)?

This cloud, or vast assembly of witnesses, are very real, and their observation of us is very real. In a very substantial sense, they lived out their lives for us--as a testimony to us of the unwavering effectiveness of faith. A specific journey was laid out for each of them, and they traversed treacherous and threatening surroundings to complete it. You are in the same situation, and are called upon to hear their testimony!

Listen to their confession, and doubt not the ability of your faith to carry you through. *“But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive”* (Joseph, Gen 50:20). *“There failed not ought of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass”* (Joshua, Josh 21:45). *“Thus far the LORD has helped us”* (Samuel, 1 Sam 7:12). *“I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread”* (David, Psa 37:25). *“There hath not failed one word of all his good promise”* (Solomon, 1 Kgs 8:56). Hear them, child of God! Hear them! It is not necessary for you to suffer the same setbacks as those before you. Their record has been written to give us the advantage in the good fight of faith. You honor them by believing their record and running your race.

LAY IT ASIDE!

Impeding Weights

The *“race that is set before us”* is possible long, and leads through treacherous terrain. It requires agility of soul, and does not allow for excess baggage. Every believer faces will confront moral and spiritual *“weights”* that make it difficult to live by faith. Often, these *“weights”* are not unlawful of themselves. It is not so much that they contradict the Word of the King. Rather, they tend to detract from the goal, tempting the individual to make this world primary.

“ . . . let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us . . . ” The *“race that is set before us”* is possible long, and leads through treacherous terrain. It requires agility of soul, and does not allow for excess baggage. Every believer will confront moral and spiritual *“weights”* that make it difficult to live by faith. Often, these *“weights”* are not unlawful of themselves. It is not so much that they contradict the Word of the King. Rather, they tend to detract from the goal, tempting the individual to make this world primary. These *“weights”* are personal matters, and thus are not precisely defined. Their identity requires the assessment of the hearer more than the writer.

The nature of the faith-life, or running the race set before us, demands that we run with as few hindrances as possible. A cross country runner who carries a backpack laden with rocks, in the key race, is not wise, to say the least. A fighter who places a hundred-pound weight on one of his hands is should not expect to win the contest. Yet, I have witnessed people attempting to navigate from earth to glory with unnecessary weights and encumbrances. It was not long until they dropped out of the race from spiritual fatigue. That fatigue was owing more to the conflicting weights that they carried than the length or hardship of the race itself. Some will counter that runners do, in fact, practice with weights on their ankles. This is true. But none of them run for the prize with those weights--and you are running to *“obtain”* the prize (1 Cor 9:26).

The way leading to life is *“strait (difficult) and narrow”* (Matt 7:14). It will not allow for a lot of excess baggage. For one rich young ruler, his possessions proved too weighty for him to follow Jesus (Matt 19:16-22). For another, wrapping everything up at home stood between him and discipleship (Luke 9:61-62). For Judas, thirty pieces of silver proved too large a weight to allow entrance into life (Matt 26:15-16). For Esau, a desire for food was a *“weight”* that disqualified him for the inheritance (Heb 12:16). Whatever makes it more difficult to run the race is a *“weight.”* If it impedes your progress, it is a *“weight.”* Things require attention and commitment that belong to God alone are *“weights.”* Such things deplete your spiritual energy, but offer no corresponding spiritual value or resources.

And what are we to do with such *“weights ?”* We are to *“lay aside every weight”* (KJV, RSV, NASB). The NIV reads *“throw off everything that hinders.”* The word translated *“lay aside”* or *“throw off”* is *apoqemenoi* (*ap-ot-eeth'-ay-mee*), which means *throw off, to be done with; take off*. It is a strong one, and is not to be seen as a casual activity. In this form, it is used three other times in the Apostolic writings. (1) *“Therefore, putting away lying . . . ”* (Eph 4:25). (2) *“Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness . . . ”* (James 1:21). (3) *“Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking”* (1 Pet 2:1). The language suggests deliberation and firm resolve. This is not something done rashly or in haste. Our perception of the nature of this race, together with the recollection of the saints who have gone before us, will compel us to discard what hinders us.

This is an intensely personal thing. It is not something we are to apply to our brethren, but an activity in which we are to regularly engage. Our hearts are to be tender enough, and our vision clear enough to assess what is making it difficult for us to run the race that is set before us. Our decision is to be based upon spiritual understanding. We may suppose working for a living impedes our progress. Then, upon quitting our job, we find we have even greater hindrances. Live close enough to the Lord to be able to make this assessment, and receive

strength to thrust impeding weights from you. Your effort to cast aside such things will be undergirded by Divine power!

And the sin . . .

We are never to give the flesh the advantage, for that increases Satan's power against us. The person who insists on taking fire into his bosom will surely be burned (Prov 6:27). For some, this is the area of money, for others, indulgence, and for others prestige. Each one has areas of weakness created by our former lives, when we lived in the flesh. We more easily succumb in this areas, and are thus to cast them away from us in preference of eternal life.

We are also to "*lay aside . . . the sin which doth so easily beset us.*" The NKJV reads "*the sin which so easily ensnares us.*" The RSV reads, "*sin which clings so closely,*" while the NIV says "*and the sin that so easily entangles.*" While it is true that sin in general "*easily entangles,*" this text is speaking more specifically. Each of us have areas of especial vulnerability--areas where Satan can more easily make inroads into our thinking. For Achan, it was the sin of covetousness (Josh 7). For Ananias and Sapphira, it appeared to be pride and misrepresentation (Acts 5). From the etymological viewpoint, the word **euperistaton** (yoo-per-is'-tat-os) means *standing around, i.e. a competitor, thwarting in every direction.* ² The picture is that of a lion, ready to pounce on the unsuspecting. The imagery is extended in Peter's solemn warning about Satan. "***Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour***" (1 Pet 5:8).

Our "***adversary***" finds those he can devour through open doors, moral weaknesses, areas of indecision and insensitivity to God. The child of God is charged with closing off all areas of approach. In the words of the Spirit, "***Neither give place to the devil***" (Eph 4:27). From another inspired viewpoint, "***But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof***" (Rom 13:14). We are never to give the flesh the advantage, for that increases Satan's power against us.

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The language of this verse is arresting. It is the sin itself that is to be thrown off, aggressively cast away from us. We are not to allow it expression, suffocating it with the love of the truth and the shield of faith. Peter said it this way, "***Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord***" (1 Pet 2:1-3). Your "***flesh,***" or sinful nature, is like the "***daughters***" of the "***horseleach***" which cry "***GIVE, GIVE***" (Prov 30:15). It demands attention, but you must close your ears to its cries. Unless the flesh is crucified, it will take heaven from you!

You throw off the sin that *“so easily besets”* you by starving it, so to speak. You refuse to feed it, and you will not allow it to express itself--even in the areas where it is especially easy for it to do so. James put it this way. *“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls”* (James 1:21), KJV). The word *“superfluity”* comes from **perisseian** (perisseian) , which means surplusage, i.e. superabundance:--abundance., 2 prevalence, and excessive amount . The picture is of spring of water overflowing--a contaminated spring. It also might be likened to a boiling pot, which eventually overflows. Sin is like that. It is first contemplated within. The lower nature is fed by exposure to then things it craves. After a time, sin begins to fester in the soul, and eventually overflows in expression. How do we stop this from happening? How can the abundance of sin NOT overflow in our words and deeds, thereby hindering us in the race

The corrupt fountain of nature must not be allowed to boil. It must be removed from the fire of preference, and smothered by an affection set on things above, and not on things on the earth (Col 3:1-3). This is **HOW** we put off the *“sin that so easily besets us.”* As long as we allow our affection to be prostituted by the things of this world, sin will cling to us like an impeding weight, forbidding us to make progress to glory.

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RUN WITH ENDURANCE!

Salvation is not a series of wind-sprints: i.e., short and swift spurts of forward movement. Many individuals seek to make spiritual advance in the hour of crisis. That is when they seek prayer. That is when they attempt to draw near to God, fill their minds with Scripture, and devote themselves to eternal matters. They suppose such conduct will get them out of the crisis, gaining Divine favor for themselves. However, this is not a fair representation of the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. Jesus did not die so we could be delivered from momentary crises! He did not give Himself to affect a temporal deliverance for

us. That sort of thing occurred under the Old Covenant, and in ways most dramatic. *“Some better thing”* has been provided *“for us”* (Heb 11:40).

Faith enters us into a race with eternity in view. When we were *“given to believe”* (Phil 1:29), God did not have the correction of temporal circumstances in mind, although that often occurs. The Holy Spirit has extended Himself, so to speak, to provide us with a proper perspective of the faith-life. *“So that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”* (Rom 5:21, NKJV) . *“Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life ”* (Jude 21, NKJV). *“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen . For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal”* (2 Cor 4:17-18, NKJV). *“Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ”* (Tit 2:13, NKJV). *“Looking for and hastening the coming of the*

Remember, it was only AFTER Abraham had *“patiently endured”* that he *“obtained the promise”* (Heb 6:15). AFTER he had received the promise, he had to endure nearly 25 years of impotence. He experienced the conflict of his herdsmen and those of his nephew Lot. He had to endure Hagar and Ishmael, and the mocking of Isaac. He was required to have his faith sorely tested at Mount Moriah. He certainly could not have obtained the promise with a religion of fits and starts!

day of God , *because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?”* (2 Pet 3:12). *“For our citizenship is in heaven , from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself”* (Phil 3:20-21, NKJV). These passages could be multiplied many times. The point to be seen is this: **faith has eternity in perspective** — else it is not *“the faith of God’s elect”* (Tit 1:1).

“Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us . . .” However far you may have advanced in the Kingdom of God’s dear Son, there is much more to be attained. You have not ceased to *“hunger and thirst for righteousness”* (Matt 5:6), *“seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness”* (Matt 6:33), and *“wait for His Son from heaven”* (1 Thess 1:10). Faith continues to constrain you to *“wait for the hope of righteousness”* (Gal 5:5), *“purify yourself even as He is pure”* (1 John 3:3), and *“lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven”* (Matt 6:20). You look for the changing of your *“vile body”* (Phil 3:20), the wiping away of your tears (Rev 7:17; 21:4), and being delivered from the *“bondage of corruption”* (Rom 8:21-23). Our situation is similar to that of Israel in route to Canaan. We are out of Egypt, but in a wilderness. We still confront hostile personalities, are subject to various deprivations, and must think of where we are going. **We are seeking to put a greater distance between us and the world, and a smaller distance between us and heaven.**

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Remember these three cardinal points. **ENDURANCE! ENDURANCE! ENDURANCE!** No one who does not *“finish”* the race will obtain the prize! You must *“run to obtain the prize”* — not ONE of the prizes, but *“ the prize”* (1 Cor 9:24). Only ONE receives the prize, says the Spirit. Hear His words! *“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize?”*

Run in such a way that you may obtain it (1 Cor 9:24, NKJV). While our brethren are precious to us, there is a sense in which we do not run in clusters. There is a sense in which we run alone, and blessed is the person who sees it. If others do not obtain the prize, be sure that you obtain it! In the center of a most remarkable Apostleship, Paul confessed, ***“I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”*** (Phil 3:14, NKJV).

We live in a time when too many people are clustered around the starting line. For some, the ***“beginning”*** is everything. Their entire church strategy (if I may so call it) is designed to get people to begin the race. Everything is measured by how many START the race. But this not the posture of the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit. The saints who have gone before us are not overly enamored with starting either. They recall how some started the trip to Canaan, but were ***“overthrown in the wilderness”*** (1 Cor 10:5). The Apostles could remind us of one of their own number who ***“fell by transgression,”*** leaving a vacated ***“bishopric”*** (Acts 1:17-20). Paul can tell us of ***“Demas”*** who forsook him, “having loved this present world” (2 Tim 4:10), and Peter of those who ***“turn from the holy commandment delivered to them”*** (2 Pet 2:21). A penchant for statistics has enabled some sophists to account for the falling away of disciples. Some can even predict how many how many will depart from the faith in a specified period of time. They are starting experts!

You will find heavenly personalities clustered around the finishing line! It is finishing that is everything. If the race is not completed, nothing else counts. Believing, in such a case, was ***“in vain”*** (1 Cor 15:2). The faith was not ***“kept,”*** the race was not finished, and the prize will not be gained! What difference, therefore, will it make whether or not the race was started, if it is not finished? Eternal life, we are told, will be given to those who ***“by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality”*** (Rom 2:7). The time of reaping will surely come, if spiritual fatigue does not bring us down. As it is written, ***“And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart”*** (Gal 6:9). What, dear believer, is worth “losing heart” over? Stay in the race! Stay in the race!

LOOKING TO JESUS

Author and Finisher

“Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith . . .” The children of God assume a forward posture, not looking back as Lot’s wife to the realm from which they have been delivered. The secret to a proper focus on the future, is a consistent consideration of the Lord Jesus Christ. If He authored our faith, and alone is the Finisher of it, our attention must be focused upon Him. The strong implication of this text is that Jesus will not ***“finish”*** our faith is we are not looking to Him. When our attention is turned from the Son of God, we do the same thing Peter did — sink! (Matt 14:29-31). A religion that does not give the Lord Jesus the preeminent place is an impediment to the soul. If it is not overcome, it will bring condemnation upon the individual.

Faith, from this perspective, is under the administration of the Lord Jesus Christ. The NASB reads, ***“the Author and Perfector of faith.”*** The word translated ***“Author”*** (*archgon* , *archgon*) can also be rendered ***“Captain,”*** emphasizing the administrative role of the Savior. The point of our text is arresting. The Lord

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Jesus will not perfect or mature our faith while we are occupied with other considerations. Faith is not self-developed or sustained. It requires the Lord Jesus Christ Himself be initiated, nurtured, and brought to fruition. This condition requires an emphasis upon the Gospel of Christ.

A heavenly manner

Faith makes our manner of life heavenly. We are looking for our Savior to “*descend from heaven with a shout*” (1 Thess 4:16). That is where He is now. We look for Him to come from there to change our “*vile bodies*” (Phil 3:20,21). Believers are said to be “*waiting for His Son from heaven*” (1 Thess 1:10). Currently, Jesus is speaking “*from heaven*” (Heb 12:25), and our new house or resurrection body, will be brought to us “*from heaven*” (2 Cor 5:1-2). Heaven is where Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55; 1 Pet 3:22). Our hope is “*laid up*” for us “*in heaven*” (Col 1:5), being “*reserved*” there “*for us*” (1 Pet 1:4). The notion of a worldly-minded church is so utterly absurd it is repulsive to the believer. Endurance in the race is simply not possible without a due and invariable consideration of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What it means to LOOK to Jesus

Paul stated what is involved in “*looking unto Jesus.*” There is nothing casual about such vision. “*Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord , for whom I have suffered the*

We have endured too many sentimental views of a suffering Savior-- views that are distorted and tend to hide the truth from us. The Holy Spirit tells us precisely how Jesus was able to the curse of the Almighty. It was “*for the joy set before Him.*” His eye was set toward the future.

loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that *I may gain Christ and be found in Him , not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ , the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection , and the fellowship of His sufferings , being conformed to His death , if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus* ” (Phil 3:8-14).

Looking to Jesus involves the ascription of superior worthy to Him- **-the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.** Christ Himself is the Object of fervent quest-- **that I may gain Christ and be found in Him .** The only way to appropriate righteousness, which is indispensable to Divine acceptance, is through the Lord Jesus-- **righteousness . . . which is through faith in Christ .** Personal intimacy with the Lord Jesus is therefore sought. This involves participation in His resurrection, suffering, and death-- **that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.**

These are not simply the aspirations of the Apostle Paul. They are normative in the Kingdom of God, and are expected of everyone who believes. As it is written,

“Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you” (Phil 3:5). It is possible to not have this perspective, but that condition will not long remain if faith is kept. God *“will reveal”* this mind-set to those who continue in the faith. And why so? Because it is not possible to obtain the eternal inheritance without it!

Look to the example of Jesus!

How is it that Jesus was able to endure the cross? Some novices have suggested it was because of His profound love for us. There certainly is an element of truth in that observation, but it falls far short of Divine affirmation. We have endured too many sentimental views of a suffering Savior--views that are distorted and tend to hide the truth from us. The Holy Spirit tells us precisely how Jesus was able to the curse of the Almighty. It was *“for the joy set before Him.”* His eye was set toward the future. God has promised Him the heathen for His *“inheritance”* (Psa 2:8). He knew the Father would not allow His body to be left in the grave, nor soul to be retained in hades (Psa 26:10; Acts 2:27). The shame of this ignominious death was nothing to compare with the glory He was to experience! The unspeakable “shame” of the cross was *“endured”* in prospect of the future-- **the joy that was set before Him** . His exaltation to the right hand of God proves the effectiveness of setting your affection on the coming joy!

CONSIDER HIM!

“For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.” If it seems as though you have been required to pass through great difficulties, consider Jesus! If you have faced opposition and hostility from sinners, consider Jesus! No one has ever *“endured”* such remarkable hostility and opposition. In Jesus, the world became openly and unquestionably aligned against the Living God. The “kings of the earth” set themselves deliberately and

Much of contemporary religion is actually a distraction to the saints. It makes it exceedingly difficult to consider Jesus or focus upon Him. This world cannot be allowed preeminence in any sense without suffering spiritual retardation, fatigue, and discouragement. Unless that trend is reversed, and the heart and mind are set upon the Lord Jesus, our faith will not be perfected, and we will not enter into a glorious reign with Jesus.

determinedly against Him (Psa 2:2). They saw Him as a restriction upon themselves, and resolved to violently tear away that restriction (Psa 2:3). Although He was the appointed Cornerstone, determining the nature of God’s dwelling among men, the *“builders”* forthrightly *“rejected”* Him (Psa 118:22; Matt 21:42; Acts 4:11). Those rejecting Him struck Him, pulled the hair from His face, and spat upon Him (Isa 50:6). His *“visage,”* or appearance was *“so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the sons of men”* (Isa 52:14).

In addition to the direct hostility of sinners, He tasted the bitter cup of human transgressions, which were all *“laid on”* Him. His spirit had never been soiled with sin, nor had any guile or pretension been in His mouth. The experience to which He was appointed was itself

so repulsive to the Savior, He sought a way of avoiding it (Luke 22:41-44). We are not capable of perceiving the fulness of the hostility involved in our Lord's confrontation of the sins of the world, and even being "*made sin for us.*" Yet, we are to consider that hostility in its entirety--from the manger to the cross!

And why are we to consider such things? "*Lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.*" While some affirm that such a thing is not possible, the Spirit solemnly warns us of this condition. Were there no danger in it, a warning of this nature would not be required. Spiritual fatigue and discouragement can be lethal to the soul. If you do not keep Jesus at the heart of your consideration, the opposition of the world will wear you down. When we lose our spiritual bravery and determination, finishing the race becomes impossible. The Lord does not place us on a self-propelled vehicle to bring us to glory, but in a race--a race with other contenders. There are distractions, oppositions, and conflicts all the way. There are storms of trial, floods of affliction, and fires of testing through which you must run--all the while contending with fierce adversaries. How do you hope to finish this race if you become weary and "*faint in your mind.*" Such a condition invariably exaggerates the enemy and diminishes the Savior.

Our spiritual strength is fueled by our vision of Christ. If He is not seen, strength dissipates. There is no healing or renewal apart from "*the Sun of righteousness*" (Mal 4:2). I feel compelled to say the following because of my own experience in the faith. Much of contemporary religion is actually a distraction to the saints. It makes it exceedingly difficult to consider Jesus or focus upon Him. This world cannot be allowed preeminence in any sense without suffering spiritual retardation, fatigue, and discouragement. Unless that trend is reversed, and the heart and mind are set upon the Lord Jesus, our faith will not be perfected, and we will not enter into a glorious reign with Jesus.

NOT YET! NOT YET!

"*You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.*" Note, the striving is not against "*sinners,*" but "*against sin.*" Satan's objective is to lure us back into sin--into transgression. His temptations begin with thought, but they do not end there. One of his chief temptations is threatening the lives of the saints. Many of the early believers had given their lives for the Lord Jesus and the honor of keeping the faith. They had resisted the encroachments of the devil "*to bloodshed.*" In recognition of this

It is one thing to read about the suffering of others, it is quite another to suffer ourselves. By saying "*You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin,*" the Spirit is suggesting the path to glory may very well lead that way. No person can confront this type of opposition in a lethargic spirit. You may not yet have resisted sin to the point of shedding your blood, but you must arm yourself to do so.

condition, the Spirit cries out, "*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us*" (Rom 8:35-37). Early in the history of the church Stephen and James "*resisted unto bloodshed*" (Acts 7:58-60; Acts 12:1-2).

There was *“Antipas,”* Christ’s *“faithful martyr,”* also resisted *“unto bloodshed”* (Rev 2:13).

It is one thing to read about the suffering of others, it is quite another to suffer ourselves. By saying *“You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin,”* the Spirit is suggesting the path to glory may very well lead that way. No person can confront this type of opposition in a lethargic spirit. You may not yet have resisted sin to the point of shedding your blood, but you must arm yourself to do so. This is not a morbid message. Rather, it highlights the enmity of the Spirit against the flesh, and the flesh against the Spirit (Gal 5:17). It is written, *“If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?”* (Jer 12:5). Resisting *“unto bloodshed”* is contending with horses. It is facing the Jordan at flood-tide. All other temptations, stresses, and oppositions are like aggravating footmen. If we do not learn to run heartily and consistently on the plains, what will we do when we face the mountains?

CONCLUSION

Now is the time for a strong determination. This is the time to strip from ourselves impeding weights, and learn to run with endurance. Remember, the race must be completed in order to receive the prize! You have been called to a life of intense spiritual activity. It is not one lived in a moral vacuum, but one where opposing thoughts are distracting influences are regularly experienced. Faith is fully equal to these challenges, but only if it is kept.

God has placed you in a race that will bring Him glory. You appear to be at a great disadvantage, but with Jesus, you are not. The circumstances of your race are designed to take from you every vestige of trust in yourself and your abilities. Christ’s strength will be made perfect within you by means of your weakness. What appears to be a handicap is actually your means of accessing Divine strength!

Hear the text again, and let it *“sink down into your ears”* (Luke 9:44, KJV). *“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood”* (Heb 12:1-4, NIV).

The spirits of just men made perfect challenge you to complete your race as they completed theirs. They summon you from the other side. If you will listen, you can become a partaker of the *“powers of the world to come”* (Heb 6:5).

Now, put your hand on the plow, and refuse to look back (Luke 9:62). Determine to *“run with endurance the race set before you,”* always keeping your eyes fixed on Jesus. Think

of His race, and the hostilities He faced. Think how He maintained His walk with the Father, refusing to allow anything to sever the life-giving bond! Let your heart and mind take hold of the “*prize*” that awaits you at Christ’s right hand. It will not be long until the race is over. But until it is, you must run with endurance, not fainting or becoming weary in your mind.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

Commentary on the book of Hebrews

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #22

ENDURING CHASTENING

“And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: ‘My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.’ If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.”

(Hebrews 12:5-13, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

It is imperative that God’s people have a sound view of spiritual life. Misconceptions of Divine intent and spiritual life have led many a soul to despair, and some, to an abandonment of the faith. One of the chief purposes of Scripture is to clarify the nature of salvation, and assist us in identifying our participation in the “*eternal purpose*” of God. This is not apparent to those who have been victimized by institutionalized religion. Those caught in the snare of recruitment and the promotion of the organization cannot perceive the purpose of Scripture. They view God’s Word as a manual of

conduct, or the appointed means of proving they are in the right group. Nothing could be further from the truth! The Word of God has been inspired of God to ensure the person of God is ***“complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work”*** (2 Tim 3:16-17). That is another way of saying God’s Word is intended to bring us to a point where God can work in and through us. As it is written, ***“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them”*** (Eph 2:10).

The section of Scripture before us clarifies HOW God deals with us. His objective is to bring us to partake of His holiness, and produce glorifying fruitage within us. Doctrine is placed before us that must be remembered. We will be confronted with believers that forgot a relevant word from God, and thus were thrust into backward motion. They did not assess life correctly, and therefore stood in jeopardy of being cut off from God. The chastening of the Lord--a subject requiring our understanding.

YOU HAVE FORGOTTEN!

“And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to YOU . . .” This can also be viewed as a question, i.e., ***“And have you forgotten the exhortation . . .”*** (RSV). Either way, the meaning remains the same. If considered a question, it is a rhetorical one, not an inquiry for information. The stresses, temptations, and difficulties of life had moved them away from the due consideration of Scripture! This is not an uncommon experience, yet it is not always viewed with the sobriety reflected in this text. Remember, we are dealing with the matter of salvation--with drifting away from the moorings of the soul, and getting beyond the circumference of hearing. No one will land safely on that heavenly shore who insists on living at a distance from the Captain of their salvation. We must never forget that spiritual safety is found in closeness. Jeopardy is always related distance from and insensitivity to the Savior. Although this is elementary, it can easily slip from our grasp.

The proper application of Scripture

The text brought to our attention is taken from Proverbs 3:11-12. It might appear from that passage that

It is only as God’s Word is perceived as addressed to us that it truly becomes profitable. Scripture is not limited to the province or the time in which it was written. Notice, the Spirit says the exhortation of Proverbs 3:11-12 ***“speaks to YOU!”*** Solomon did not have YOU in mind when he said this, but the Spirit did when it moved him to do so.

Solomon was addressing the words only to his son. While they were given to his son, they are not limited to him. ***“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable . . .”*** (2 Tim 3:16-17). It is only as God’s Word is perceived as addressed to us that it truly becomes profitable. Scripture is not limited to the province or the time in which it was written. Notice, the Spirit says the exhortation of Proverbs 3:11-12 ***“speaks to YOU!”*** Solomon did not have YOU in mind when he said this, but the Spirit did when it moved him to do so.

Earlier in this book, we are admonished to “hear” what the Spirit said in Psalm 95:7,8,15; 4:7. ***“To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your heart, as in the provocation,***

and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness.” The account of Israel rejecting the Lord at Kadesh-Barnea is not simply a historical event. It is a key to the nature of God’s dealings with humanity. What He offers must be received! What He commands must be obeyed! The steeling of the heart against Divine influence must be avoided at all cost!

Those who deprive the people of God of access to and instruction in Moses and the Prophets have done a great disservice to them. Some professed leaders are so immersed in the affairs of the day and contemporary situations, they scarcely have time to peruse the things that *“happened”* to the ancient people *“as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come”* (1 Cor 10:11, NKJV). O, the inestimable value of what has been written. *“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope”* (Rom 15:4). Discard no section of God’s holy Word! Consider no part of it pointless or vain!

The seriousness of forgetting.

How serious is it to *“forget”* the exhortations and admonitions of Scripture? How important is it to maintain a lively awareness of Scriptural exhortations? Most serious, indeed! These are one of the appointed means of calling us back into *“the fellowship of God’s Son, Jesus Christ our Lord”* into which God called us (1 Cor 1:9). Our recollection of Divine utterances plays a key role in the maintenance of our faith. It is not possible to keep a Divine perspective without our hearts and minds being regularly exposed to the expression of that perspective.

Forgetting God and the things of God is consistently associated with retrogression, sin, and an unacceptable condition. *“Of the Rock who begot you, you are unmindful, And have forgotten the God who fathered you”* (Deut 32:18). *“My zeal has consumed me, Because my enemies have forgotten Your words ”* (Psa 119:139). *“Because you have forgotten the God of your salvation, And have not been mindful of the Rock of your stronghold, Therefore you will plant pleasant plants and set out foreign*

Suffice it to say, forgetting God and the words of God is not an innocent omission. It is the direct result of being diverted to the mundane, earthly, and temporal. Unless the tendency to forget matters having to do with God is averted, it will eventually lead to condemnation. The words of our text are a solemn warning, not an academic diversion.

seedlings; In the day you will make your plant to grow, And in the morning you will make your seed to flourish; but the harvest will be a heap of ruins In the day of grief and desperate sorrow” (Isa 17:10-11). *“ . . . Yet My people have forgotten Me days without number”* (Jer 2:32). *“They have forgotten the LORD their God . Return, you backsliding children . . . ”* (Jer 3:21-22). *“ . . . Because you have forgotten Me and trusted in falsehood”* (Jer 13:25). *“Because My people have forgotten Me, They have burned incense to worthless idols”* (Jer 18:15). *“My people have been lost sheep. Their shepherds have led them astray; They have turned them away on the mountains. They have gone from mountain to hill; They have forgotten their resting place ”* (Jer 50:6). *“When they had pasture, they were filled; They were filled and their heart was exalted; Therefore they forgot Me ”* (Hose 13:6). *“For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness,*

and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins” (2 Pet 1:9).

Suffice it to say, forgetting God and the words of God is not an innocent omission. It is the direct result of being diverted to the mundane, earthly, and temporal. Unless the tendency to forget matters having to do with God is averted, it will eventually lead to condemnation. The words of our text are a solemn warning, not an academic diversion.

Insensitivity

Forgetting the exhortation of the Lord is a form of insensitivity to Him. You simply cannot forget that to which you are sensitive! A love for the Lord, an appetite for His Word, and a longing for righteousness will not allow spiritual insensitivity! However, when the individual neglects the “*great salvation*” which is found in Christ Jesus, a lack of sensitivity to that salvation ensues.

Dominated by the consideration of other things

To forget the exhortation, other things must dominate the heart and mind. In a word, “*all that is in the world; the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life; is not of the Father but is of the world*” (1 John 2:16). With consistent and unwavering aggression, Satan seeks to divert our attention to these things. He appeals to the “*old man,*” or “*flesh,*” within us, attempting to entice and draw us aside through the lust resident in our members (Eph 4:22; Col 3:5; James 1:14-15). Those who succumb to his temptation invariably begin to forget the exhortation of the Lord. Our minds simply cannot dwell upon the things of this world and retain a grasp of the Word of the Lord. Without “giving the more earnest heed to the Word,” we soon lose our grasp of it, no longer profiting from it (Heb 2:1).

Cross-bearing

At this point, a word concerning cross-bearing is appropriate. Our Lord Jesus spoke of taking up our cross every day and bearing it with determination and strength. “*If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it*” (Luke 9:24). While taking up our cross is not confined to being chastened of the Lord, it does involve the experience. Chastening is an appointed means of separating us from things which cannot transfer to the world to come. It alerts us to personal involvements that inhibit Divine fellowship, disqualify us from the race, and dull our spiritual senses. When we are chastened, let us nobly pick up our cross, and make some advance to the city of our God! We are not enduring a strange thing, but an experience common to every member of the household of faith.

Life in Christ is attended with challenge, pain, and difficulty. Those who do not realize this will eventually stumble because of the normalities of spiritual life.

DO NOT DESPISE

The Lord has a glorious purpose in chastening. Therefore, blessed is the one chastened! The person being chastened is

NOT happy because he is experiencing the chastening hand of the Lord. Rather, it is the OBJECTIVE of the chastening that brings a sense of benefit to the suffering one.

“My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him . . .” The words spoken by Eliphaz the Temanite to Job were correct, even though his application of them was flawed. *“Behold, happy is the man whom God corrects; Therefore do not despise the chastening of the Almighty. For He bruises, but He binds up; He wounds, but His hands make whole. He shall deliver you in six troubles, Yes, in seven no evil shall touch you. In famine He shall redeem you from death, And in war from the power of the sword”* (Job 5:17-20). The Lord has a glorious purpose in chastening. Therefore, blessed is the one chastened! The person being chastened is NOT happy because he is experiencing the chastening hand of the Lord. Rather, it is the OBJECTIVE of the chastening that brings a sense of benefit to the suffering one.

This is a solemn word: *“Do NOT despise the chastening of the Lord!”* The word *“despise”* describes a most subtle reaction. It does not denote a harsh reaction, but a lethargic one. The word means *to have little regard for, i.e., to disesteem*. It means, *do not regard lightly, disparage, or brush aside*. This is what Israel did when they confronted hardship in the wilderness. They were being tested by God, or chastened (Deut 8:2-3). Their reaction: they *“murmured,”* thinking lightly of God’s dealings with them (Ex 15:24; 16:2; 17:3; Num 14:2; Deut 1:27; 1 Cor 10:10). They thought nothing of criticizing God, having no fear of Him. They spoke against Him and His servants. They *“despised”* the chastening of the Lord.

First, it requires a degree of spiritual sensitivity to know we are being chastened of the Lord. Some people are so dull of spirit, they never associate difficulty and hardship with the hand of the Lord. The Psalmist, acutely aware of His God, associated great difficulties with the hand of the Lord. *“For all day long I have been plagued, And chastened every morning”* (Psa 73:14). An insensitive soul would never have made such an association. Even when crushed by the weight of trial, the man of God cried out, *“The LORD has chastened me severely, But He has not given me over to death”* (Psa 118:18). The Apostle put it this way, *“as chastened, and yet not killed”* (2 Cor 6:9). Even Israel, in its more sensitive posture, sensed God dealing with her. Of her God said, *“I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself: ‘You have chastised me, and I was chastised, Like an untrained bull; Restore me, and I will return, For You are the LORD my God. Surely, after my turning, I repented; And after I was instructed, I struck myself on the thigh; I was ashamed, yes, even humiliated, Because I bore the reproach of my youth”* (Jer 31:18-19). Those are the words of one who does not *“despise the chastening of the Lord.”*

Many a soul has been caught in the maelstrom of transgression because they were not sensitive to the rebuke of the Almighty.

We live in a spiritual climate that requires this exhortation: *“Despise not the chastening of the Lord!”* I will be bold and say words like *“I am angry with God,” “Why did this happen to me?”*, and *“I do not understand why I am going through all of this,”* are all expressions of despise. They reflect a spiritual insensitivity that is not appropriate for a child of the King. They are an

incorrect assessment of experience with the Almighty, and a confession of a fundamental ignorance of the Lord and His ways. While the religious world concocts positions that tolerate such actions, giving hope to those who express them, God declares, ***“Despise not the chastening of the Lord!”*** I know this is not a popular word, but it is a necessary one. We do well to be more sensitive to God than to circumstance!

Notice that chastening is equated with Divine ***“rebuke.”*** The Lord will not allow His people to continue in an unlawful and unprofitable course without rebuking them. The rebuke is not an audible word uttered from heaven, as when Peter sought to build three tabernacles (Matt 17:4-5). It comes in the form of chastisement. The Lord is graciously correcting a wayward bent, pointing us away from the path that leads to death. Our ways and manners are not always as innocent as they seem. Many a soul has been caught in the maelstrom of transgression because they were not sensitive to the rebuke of the Almighty. David associated rebuke with chastening. ***“O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your anger, Nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure”*** (Psa 6:1; 38:1). We do well to do the same. Chastening may be our lot, but it does not have to be in anger!

WHOM THE LORD LOVES

“For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.” What a comforting word is this! The language is strong, but so is the blessing. The word ***“scourge”*** speaks of flogging. Coming from **mastigoi** (mas-tig-o'-o), it means *beat with a whip; discipline, punish severely*. This is a hard lesson for the people of God to learn, but it is a necessary one. A culture that disdains discipline, and looks upon the correction of children as abuse, knows little of the meaning of this word. Satan has robbed our society of an exceedingly precious truth.

Our very salvation is founded upon the chastening of the Lord! Christ's vicarious atonement is described as ***“The chastisement for our peace”*** (Isa 53:5). The Divine lash fell upon the Savior--not because of His own need for correction, but because of our need. We could not have borne the whip wielded against the Lord Jesus. That is why He bore it. It remains, however, for us to feel the stroke of Divine correction and rebuke in a lesser way. Such dealings are not to be viewed as Divine anger, but as Fatherly love. It might be well to say here that God's dealing with His people is the solitary point in reference.

If we do not recognize the scourging of life as the hand of a loving God, they will bring no profit to us. They **MUST** be so perceived! We must not allow the wicked one to cloud our vision on this matter. Carnal explanations for difficulties must be forthrightly rejected, for they are not true. It is God with Whom we have to do. As it is written, ***“Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do”*** (Heb 4:13). But it is not a harsh and indignant God to Whom we must give an account! It is One Who loves us, and corrects us with the intent of bringing us to glory! I do not mean to be morbid, but when sorrows befall us, and life becomes a burden, we must learn to look at it as God dealing with us. Satan does not have free access to us. His temptations must pass the Throne of the universe before they come to us (1 Cor 10:13). He cannot desire us without the Savior praying for us (Lk 22:32). The storm cannot rise on Jonah's sea without the Lord (Jonah 1:4), nor can Paul receive a thorn that is sent by God (2 Cor 12:7).

When Job was sorely tested, he knew God was dealing with him--he just did not know why (Job 1:21).

But it is not a harsh and indignant God to Whom we must give an account! It is One Who loves us, and corrects us with the intent of bringing us to glory! I do not mean to be morbid, but when sorrows befall us, and life becomes a burden, we must learn to look at it as God dealing with us.

When Shimei cursed David with provocative words, David knew God was dealing with him. “. . . *because the LORD hath said unto him, Curse David*” (2 Sam 16:10). When Eli received the message of judgment upon his house, he responded, *“It is the LORD: let Him do what seemeth him good”* (1 Sam 3:18). Paul knew he had been given a *“thorn in the flesh”* *“lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations”* (2 Cor 12:7). Others might have considered that *“thorn”* a curse, but not Paul. He learned at the feet of Jesus that the Lord *“scourges every son whom He receives.”*

The Holy Spirit directed some very sensitive words to the insensitive Corinthian church. Some of their number had become sick, while others had even died, under the mighty hand of God. Their thoughtless attendance at the Lord’s Table had not gone unnoticed by the Lord. Because they treated it with contempt, not wrapping their thoughts around their Savior, the hand of the Lord was raised against them. *“For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died”* (1 Cor 11:29-30). Although it is not fashionable to say so, I should not be surprised if this accounts for the condition of many churches in the land.

But this is not the end of the Spirit’s word. Although harsh judgment had been experienced, striking down some with sickness, and others with death, Divine intent is proclaimed. *“But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world”* (1 Cor 11:32). The hand of the Lord seeks to turn us from condemnation. If the spiritually indolent among God’s people begin to absorb the ways of the world, God will, through chastening, seek to divert them from their wayward course. He does this because He loves them, and desires their fellowship and presence with Him. Our text summons us to respond to these overtures.

IF YOU ENDURE CHASTENING

“If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?” The question is not whether or not you will be chastened, but if you will endure it— if you will come out of it having made some progress to glory. The chastening will yield no benefit if you do not bear up under it! Although *“tribulation”* is not confined to the matter of chastisement, there is a connection between the two. Chastening is an appointed means of purging us from spiritually inhibiting manners. It is no wonder believers are told, *“We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God”* (Acts 14:22). Let us learn to interpret the hardships and tests of life correctly!

God deals with us as with sons IF we *“endure chastening.”* This means IF we remain on the Lord’s side, refusing to ourselves become spiritually unstable because life seems to have lost its stability. To “endure” means *to stay under, remain . . . have fortitude, persevere, abide, endure, take patiently, suffer, tarry behind.* Chastening, in this case, is viewed as a mighty wave that washes over

the soul of the believer. The wave is large and intimidating, with enough force to dislodge one from the moorings of the soul. But after the wave has passed, the believer who remains has *“endured.”* Such an one can rejoice after the night of weeping. This is the very point made by David in the thirtieth Psalm. *“For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for life; Weeping may endure for a night, But joy comes in the morning”* (Psa 30:5). **THAT IS ENDURING!** It is to sing at midnight, after being flogged during the day (Acts 16:25). **THAT IS ENDURING!** It is to come back to Jesus after denying Him three times (Lk 22:34; Mark 16:7). **THAT IS ENDURING!**

Israel did NOT endure chastening. Rather than standing firm, they murmured against their God, supposing He had led them into a trial from which they could not recover. How grievous the words of the Lord about their lack of endurance. *“Also in Horeb you provoked the LORD to wrath, so that the LORD was angry enough with you to have destroyed you”* (Deut 9:8). *“Also at Taberah and Massah and Kibroth Hattaavah you provoked the LORD to wrath”*

Their sin was that they folded under pressure! They did not respond to correction. They were not sensitive to the working of the Lord. He meant to bless them, but they interpreted His work as a curse. God could not overlook their lack of endurance!

(Deut 9:22) . *“They forsook the LORD God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the LORD to anger”* (Judges 2:12). Their sin was that they folded under pressure! They did not respond to correction. They were not sensitive to the working of the Lord. He meant to bless them, but they interpreted His work as a curse. God could not overlook their lack of endurance!

Do you wonder at the severity of God’s reaction to a lack of endurance? Hear the Word of the Lord, and determine to ENDURE the chastening of the Lord. *“He also gave His people over to the sword, And was furious with His inheritance. The fire consumed their young men, And their maidens were not given in marriage”* (Psa 78:62-63). Hear it again! *“Therefore the wrath of the LORD was kindled against His people, So that He abhorred His own inheritance. And He gave them into the hand of the Gentiles, And those who hated them ruled over them”* (Psa 106:40-41). Lest some imagine this has no relevance to those in Christ Jesus, the Spirit solemnly reminds us of God’s dealings with Israel. *“ Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall”* (1 Cor 10:6-12). Such solemn words are designed to provoke in us a determination to ENDURE the chastening the Lord, not fainting when we feel the scourge.

If we do NOT endure chastening, recoiling when the hand of the Lord is upon us, we must not assume ourselves to be sons. One mark of a *“son of God”* is their

ability and determination to ***“endure the chastening of the Lord.”*** This is the possession of the spirit of Job. ***“Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him. Even so, I will defend my own ways before Him”*** (Job 13:15). Perhaps a New Covenant perspective of this truth will kindle a spark of hope within those who are under the scourge. ***“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord ”*** (Rom 8:35-39).

When we ***“endure the chastening of the Lord,”*** the perception of this truth confirms our sonship--TO US! We realize by faith that God is dealing with us ***“as with sons.”*** That is, this is how God treats His children--this is His manner. It is not a crude or thoughtless one, but one of purpose and objective. How gracious the Lord is!

IF YOU ARE WITHOUT CHASTENING

“But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.” Here is a hard saying for the flesh--in fact, flesh cannot receive it. This contradicts the notion that everything is always ideal and without difficulty for the believer. Those who teach such things are in sharp conflict with God and His truth. The text presupposes an assumed identity with God. This is not speaking about those who claim no association with the Lord, but of those who do. Notice the firmness of the statement. ***“But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.”*** Other versions, though etymologically correct, soften the word ***“bastards”*** with ***“illegitimate.”***

The implications of this are arresting! There is such a thing as illegitimate children of God. Such claim relation to God, but really have none. They profess they are born of God, but are not. The Law developed

The implications of this are arresting! There is such a thing as illegitimate children of God. Such claim relation to God, but really have none. They profess they are born of God, but are not. The Law developed this concept for us.

this concept for us. ***“A bastard shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to his tenth generation shall he not enter into the congregation of the LORD”*** (Deut 23:2). God spoke to some of Israel with tones most harsh--tones that declared their illegitimacy. ***“But come here, You sons of the sorceress, You offspring of the adulterer and the harlot!”*** (Isa 57:3). Jesus spoke to the religious elite of His day, charging them with being children of the devil. ***“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do”*** (John 8:44). Their claim to Divine acceptance was false. They were ***“bastards!”*** Such are those who will stand before the Lord in that great day, professing ***“Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?”*** They were in the “right” group, and worked with diligence in the name of the Lord. But Jesus will not recognize them. He

will say, *“I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!”* (Matt 7:22-23). They were illegitimate sons!

There are several tests, as it were, of sonship in God’s Word. One is loving the brethren (1 John 3:14). Another is keeping *“His commandments,”* retaining them in our hearts and joyfully obeying them (1 John 2:3). Another is holding *“fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end”* (Heb 3:6). Jesus spoke of enduring *“unto the end”* (Matt 10:22), and John of being cognizant of the indwelling Spirit (1 John 3:24). In our text, however, we have a most unique indication of sonship: CHASTISEMENT! What pilgrim is there who cannot derive comfort from this? Those straits through which you have passed were God dealing with you as with sons! If God dealt with Joseph in the pit, Potiphar’s house, and Pharaoh’s prison, think it not strange that he is dealing with you!

SUBJECTION TO THE FATHER OF SPIRITS

We have a perfectly logical situation before us--logical in the Spirit. There is no reason for any of us to miss it. Even in this world, fathers correct their children! Those of sound mind do not despise them for their correction. Does it not make good sense to subject ourselves to the very Father of our spirits in order to live?

“Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.” We have a perfectly logical situation before us--logical in the Spirit. There is no reason for any of us to miss it. Even in this world, fathers correct their children! Those of sound mind do not despise them for their correction. Does it not make good sense to subject ourselves to the very Father of our spirits in order to live?

He now refers to the ideal earthly fatherhood. Conduct which deviates from this is abnormal, and invalid before God. Our fathers chastened us *“after their own pleasure.”* This does not mean they delighted in chastening us, but *“time as seemed best to them”* (NASB), or *“as they thought best”* (NIV). They chastened us in a quest for our welfare, and to avert our propensity to foolishness. They sought to turn us from danger, and culture us for benefit. They did the best they could, and we gave them reverence and respect for it. They did not always make us feel good, but they did seek our good. If we went astray, it was not owing to their negligence!

If our earthly fathers sought our welfare, will any imagine that our heavenly Father will not do so? If the rod of our parents did not offend us, will we allow the chastening of God to do so? Some might suppose that because chastening applies only when we are children, that in Christ we will soon outgrow a need for chastening. But this is not so. The saints of God, as long as they are in the world, are *“little children,”* being cultured for a world to come (Gal 4:19; 1 John 2:1; 3:7,18). We are *“children”* in comparison to what we shall be. This is the condition to which Paul referred when he wrote, *“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to*

have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead” (Phil 2:12-13).

Note the glorious objective of chastisement: *“that we might be partakers of his holiness.”* The chastening itself does not make us holy, but enables us to *“perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord”* (2 Cor 7:1-2). It helps to clear our vision, that we may enter more fully into the works God has before ordained, *“that we should walk in them”* (Eph 2:10). This is another view of becoming *“participators in the Divine nature.”* Peter relates that to the embrace of God’s *“exceeding great and precious promises”* (2 Pet 1:4). There is no conflict between that expression and our text. When we perceive the chastening hand of God, the promises become more precious to us. Promised recovery is sought with zeal, and the vain promises of the devil one become repugnant to us.

Here is a most wonderful truth to see. When sin is removed from us, holiness will come to us. This is not holiness in the imputed sense, but in the practical sense. When we believe God, righteousness is imputed to us so that God and Christ may dwell within and fellowship with us. The rest of our lives we *“are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit”* (2 Cor 3:18, RSV). The chastening of the Lord plays a key role in this marvelous transformation.

We are in a state of spiritual development, being *“conformed to the Image of His Son”* (Rom 8:29-30). That condition requires chastening and correction. Because waywardness is so deeply ingrained in our fleshly nature, chastening often takes a painful form. That chastening, however, is more proof of the love of God for us, than of our personal propensity to iniquity. It is God’s dealing with us as with sons that must capture our attention. Chastening is not intended to thrust us from the presence of the Lord, but to push us out of the path of destruction.

NEVERTHELESS, AFTERWARD!

When we experience the chastening of the Lord (which we surely will), we are not to judge it by the feeling of our flesh. Grief is not the yardstick by which the chastening of the Lord is measured. It is the yield of chastisement that gives it worth! We must fix our eyes on the end, or objective, of the chastening. *“To those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness”*

“Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.” There are times when smiling is the last thing on the mind of God’s people. The surface religion that promotes much smiling is not as wise as it seems. There are times when the heart is heavy, and the tongue is thick under the chastening hand of God. We may not always be pleasant to be around, although that is not our desire. To be sure, we should bear up under the mighty hand of God in a way that glorifies God. Nevertheless, *“all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant”* (RSV). Such discipline is not always punishment. Sometimes it is the discipline of training--of preparing us for hardship and rigorous kingdom activity. The spiritual sweat and pain related to such training does not, at the time, joyous.

The people of God do not live for the NOW. Faith does not find its objective in

“this present evil world.” The realm of time only yields introductory benefits. That is why we experience things from God that are ***“grievous.”*** When we experience the chastening of the Lord (which we surely will), we are not to judge it by the feeling of our flesh. Grief is not the yardstick by which the chastening of the Lord is measured. It is the yield of chastisement that gives it worth! We must fix our eyes on the end, or objective, of the chastening. ***“To those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness”*** (NASB).

Only those ***“trained by”*** chastening, or ***“exercised thereby,”*** will receive the fruit. Being unresponsive to Divine dealings is possible. Jesus upbraided the cities where He did most of His mighty works because they ***“repented not”*** (Matt 11:20). They did not respond to great advantage. The false prophetess of Thyatira was granted ***“space to repent”*** by the Lord of glory, but did not respond to His longsuffering. She ***“repented not”*** (Rev 2:21). But God’s Word also speaks of those upon whom great judgments were poured--judgments designed to induce repentance and an abandonment of sin. Those experiencing such awful judgments ***“did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons”*** (Rev 9:20). Others, “scorched” with the great heat of Divine judgment ***“did not repent and give Him glory”*** (Rev 16:8). Rather, ***“They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds”*** (Rev 16:11). Those assuming great judgment necessarily induces a return to God are wrong in their assessment. Were that the case, the words of our text would be useless.

While the chastening produced grief at one time, peacefulness is in its wake. The soul becomes quiet, and the soft winds of contentment and joy sweep over the human spirit. By ***“fruit”*** the unwavering effects of chastening are intended. What is described will be found in those responding in faith to the ***“hand of the Lord.”*** Just as a tree given due care yields fruit, so a person cultured by chastening produces fruits suitable for Divine recognition.

Those ***“who are exercised thereby”*** are individuals who learn from and respond to the chastening of the Lord. They confess with the Psalmist, ***“Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word”*** (Psa 119:67). Again, ***“Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word”*** (Psa 119:71). Such have been ***“exercised”*** by chastening--made stronger and more willing in the day of His power. They will surely profit from the very chastening that is not pleasant, for the moment, but grievous.

What will their chastening yield? What will be the harvest reaped by those who endure the discipline of the Lord? It will surely yield ***“peaceable fruit of righteousness!”*** By ***“peaceable,”*** the Spirit describes the state of the soul. While the chastening produced grief at one time, peacefulness is in its wake. The soul becomes quiet, and the soft winds of contentment and joy sweep over the human spirit. By ***“fruit”*** the unwavering effects of chastening are intended. What is described will be found in those responding in faith to the ***“hand of the Lord.”*** Just as a tree given due care yields fruit, so a person cultured by chastening produces fruits suitable for Divine recognition.

After the hot wind of chastening blows across the desert of trial, the ***“fruit of righteousness”*** is found in those ***“exercised thereby.”*** From one point of view, this is a more thorough acquaintance with the ways and purpose of the Lord. The Psalmist expressed it this way. ***“Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law; That thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit be digged for the wicked”*** (Psa 94:12-13). But there is more to the fruit than this. The believer harvests a righteous character ***“afterward.”*** Our hatred for sin is more intense. Our longing for glory is more dominant. Our strangership in this world is more evident. Our hunger and thirst for righteousness are more acute. Our involvement in the ***“good and acceptable and perfect will of God”*** is more consistent. Those receiving discipline through chastening

do not talk of righteousness as much as they do it. For them, the world has been pushed further from them, and heaven has been brought nearer. They have learned more of their God, and more of themselves as well. The glory of salvation has been accentuated, and the malignity of sin has been seen more clearly. Thus they grip the plow with more firmness, run with more certitude, and fight with more assurance. How glorious is *“the peaceable fruit of righteousness!”*

This *“fruit”* flourishes in the courts of the Lord, where the individual has peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 5:1). It stands the test of Divine scrutiny, brings glory to the Lord Jesus, and displays before angelic hosts the manifold wisdom of God. It is a sure harvest, and will invariably be found in those who keep the faith, even when they are chastened of the Lord. How blessed to experience something that yields consistent results!

MAKE CORRECTIONS

“Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.” And what are they to do, for whom nothing seems to be going right? What of those who are “appointed to death,” as it were, made a *“spectacle to angels,”* and *“made as the filth the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day”* (1 Cor 4:9,13)? What of those who are *“accounted as sheep for the slaughter”* (Rom 8:36), against whom both man and circumstance seem to be aligned? Many of them have grown weary, and have become spiritually feeble under the stress of life in this world. What is to be their reaction to these things?

The chastened ones are to view their circumstance as God dealing with them! They are to remember they are yet in this world, where imperfection has not yet been eliminated, and perfection is being accomplished--in them! The hands that *“hang down”* in fatigue and discouragement are to be lifted up! There are believers who are weary and fatigued with weights and burdens of sins and afflictions. They are faint, fearful, and timorous, because they see no good ahead. Their persecutions have wore them out, and caused their hands to hang down. They see only approaching dangers, and have become weak and emaciated. If you are not presently in the situation, there will come a time when you will be. It is then that you must remember this text, and consider that, through this circumstance, God is bringing you to perfection. Here is how Peter put it. *“But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you”* (1 Pet 5:10). You are not the victim of circumstance. You do not stand powerless before the adversary of your soul, who may work his will with you.

There are believers who are weary and fatigued with weights and burdens of sins and afflictions. They are faint, fearful, and timorous, because they see no good ahead. Their persecutions have wore them out, and caused their hands to hang down.

They see only approaching dangers, and have become weak and emaciated. If you are not presently in the situation, there will come a time when you will be.

Lift up those hanging hands and the feeble knees! For you, this will be as difficult as a lame man taking up his bed and walking (John 5:5-9). It will be as difficult as a blind man making his way, at

the command of the King, to the pool of Siloam to wash that he might see (John 9:9-10). It may make no more sense to you that Naaman dipping seven times in the River Jordan to be released from leprosy (2 Kgs 5:10-14). But you must do it! You must take courage, lift up your hands, heart, countenance, and soul. Christ is at the helm of your life, and will not allow you to be snatched from His omnipotent hand! Lift up those hands in trust! Lift them up in praise! Be courageous!

Feeble knees are knees of fear, like those possessed by Belshazzar at his ungodly feast (Dan 5:6). They come when we are intimidated by the difficulties of life--when we suppose all is hopeless, and we are wearied with the footmen of human experience. This is “*being weary and fainting in your mind*” (Heb 12:3). Such people have “*forgotten the exhortation,*” having been overcome by their trials.

The condition of those with hands that hang down and feeble knees, appears to belie any attempt at recovery. Discouragement grips the heart and fear mocks the mind. But all of this is a gross misrepresentation of the case. The word is simply, yet profound. “**LIFT YOUR DROOPING HANDS AND STRENGTHEN YOUR WEAK KNEES**” (RSV). It is the peculiar prerogative of faith to enable you to do the impossible. Our believing effort to recover will be matched by omnipotence.

“**And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.**” Strength is for recovery from waywardness. It is not an end of itself. Fellowship with Christ can never be realized on the broad road that leads to destruction--and there is no eternal life apart from that vital communion. Making straight paths for our feet involves choosing the high road, preferring things that are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God. It demands the elimination of anything and everything in our lives that is unacceptable to our Lord. When we are chastened of the Lord, if our faith remains strong, we will become more aware of these things. Difficulties in the body can clarify our spiritual vision. Many a soul has been brought to see and think more clearly in the crucible of chastening.

Making straight paths for our feet involves resolution--a determination to rid ourselves of impeding weights and sins. This is the experience expressed by the Psalmist in Psalm 119:67. “*Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word.*” Again, “*It is good for me that I have been afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes*” (119:71). “*I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are right, And that in faithfulness You have afflicted me. Let, I pray, Your merciful kindness be for my comfort,*

Some may imagine they can limp haltingly all the way to heaven. But if we do not make straight paths for our feet, zealously avoiding the ensnarements of the devil, our lameness will cause us to waver, and eventually wander from the path. The path to glory is too strenuous for lame feet.

According to Your word to Your servant. Let Your tender mercies come to me, that I may live; For Your law is my delight” (119:75-77). This is the spirit expressed through the prophet Hosea. “**Come, and let us return to the LORD; For He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up**” (Hos 6:1).

“Lest that which is lame be turned out of the way.” Some may imagine they can limp haltingly all the way to heaven. But if we do not make straight paths for our feet, zealously avoiding the ensnarements of the devil, our lameness will cause us to waver, and eventually wander from the path. The path to glory is too strenuous for lame feet. Alternate translations say, ***“so that what is lame may not be dislocated”*** (NKJV). ***“So that the lame may not be disabled”*** (NIV). ***“So that what is lame may not be put out of joint”*** (RSV). Here, lameness is descriptive of a halting mind—one that lingers in unbelief, and is not consistently stayed upon the Lord. Those dreaded inconsistency is common in institutional religion, but it is most dangerous. Those who fluctuate in their faith will eventually go astray. They must become stable, or ***“make straight paths for their feet.”***

When the sinews do not hold the joints together properly, eventually they separate and become dysfunctional. So it is with the individual that is sporadic in their commitment to Christ. Eventually, they become incapable of spiritual stability, and their foolish mind is darkened. I am persuaded that many professed *Christians* do not believe this. They play with their soul as though they had the control of it, and could instantly recover from any setback. This is an imagination that will, if not repudiated, result in being thrust from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power.

The best course of action is to ***“make straight paths for our feet”*** BEFORE we are chastened of the Lord. It is not necessary to wait until the hand of chastening strikes us. Hear the word of the Lord. ***“For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world”*** (1 Cor 11:31-32). Given the alternative, thank God for His faithful chastening! It is our obligation to pay attention when we are chastening!

CONCLUSION

The chastening of the Lord is integral to spiritual life. It is an expression of Divine love, designed to bring us to higher spiritual levels, and make us ***“partakers of His holiness.”*** In order to accomplish this, our affection for this world must be uprooted. Chastening, whatever form it takes, can accomplish this. It can show us how futile life in the flesh really is. It is only life in Christ that is worthy of our total effort. Only a heavenly country and knowing Christ are valuable enough to forgo the loss of all things. Chastening, when we are exercised by it, confirms this to be true. Now, lift those hands and knees, and be strong in faith!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

Commentary on the book of Hebrews

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #23

DO NOT REFUSE GOD!

“Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears ”

(Hebrews 12:14-17, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

This is the practical section of the book of Hebrews — the part that unveils the connection of truth with practical living. The power of the truth is found in its integration with the life of faith. Until that blending takes place, the truth has no immediate and profitable impact upon the individual. Much of the contemporary representations of Scripture is merely theoretical, and is used to develop positions designed to promote religious organizations. This is an abuse of the truth of God. Jesus said, “*And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*” (John 8:32). This knowledge is existential in nature. Mind you, the truth is not established by experience, as the existentialist affirms. Rather, it is confirmed and implemented in experience. No person is spiritually free who has not **experienced** the truth. This occurs when the individual, by faith, moves out upon the truth of God, acting upon a personal persuasion of it. As Jesus said elsewhere, “*If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine . . .*” (John 7:17, NKJV).

The book of Hebrews has effectively announced and expounded the preeminence of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. God now speaks to us

through the Son. He is the Administration of God's great salvation, both authoring and finishing our faith (Heb 12:2). Marshaling angelic hosts as our enthroned King, He mediates the new covenant to those who have believed on Him (Heb 1:13-14; 9:15). The benefits of this covenant may only be experienced from the position of closeness. Those who draw back, choosing to live at a distance from the Savior, displease the Lord (Heb 10:39). All heavenly citizens are urged to "*draw near,*" and to run with endurance the race set before them while fastening their eyes upon Jesus (Heb 10:22; 12:1-2).

As I have emphasized before, no aspect of salvation occurs automatically. Divine means are employed in every facet of redemption. The benefits of the covenant, for example, are ministered through a Mediator, and appropriated by faith. Christ dwells in our heart "*by faith*" as we are strengthened in the inward man by the Holy Spirit (Eph 3:16). Too, we live "*by every Word of God*" (Luke 4:4). That is, spiritual life is maintained by exposing our hearts and minds to, and believing, Scripture. There is not a single dimension of salvation that excludes the LORD Jesus Christ or the participation of the saved ones. No covenantal blessing is brought to us independently of our faith, or without our desire for the same. It is not possible to live in the dark and experience the blessing of the light; to live according to the flesh and have spiritual blessings. As obvious as that may appear, it is staggering how much of contemporary religion supposes otherwise.

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This section of Scripture calls us into involvement. It summons us to participate in this salvation with all of our heart. Aggressive words and concepts are used to show us the nature of the Kingdom. The Holy Spirit will not allow us to be passive without issuing a stirring challenge. He will confirm that just as Israel had to possess Canaan, so you must possess the blessing. When

our heart. Aggressive words and concepts are used to show us the nature of the Kingdom. The Holy Spirit will not allow us to be passive without issuing a stirring challenge. He will confirm that just as Israel had to possess Canaan, so you must possess the blessing. When the ancient people arrived at the promised land, it was inhabited by other peoples--nations that had to be forcefully expelled. Moses told the Israelites of their responsibility before his death. "*But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall be that those whom you let remain shall be irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall harass you in the land where you dwell*" (Num 33:55, NKJV). Joshua, inspired by God, told the people of the liabilities associated with failing to drive the current dwellers from the land. "*Or else, if indeed you do go back, and cling to the remnant of these nations; these that remain among you; and make marriages with them, and go in to them and they to you, know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations from before you. But they shall be snares and traps to you, and scourges on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land which the LORD your*

God has given you” (Josh 23:12-13). Alas, Israel did not do as they were commanded, and thus fell into a most grievous snare.

In spiritual life, there are things to be opposed and things to be earnestly sought. Remnants of the old nature remain in us that must be refused dominance. Our responsibility is lay hold on eternal life at all cost (1 Tim 6:12). Aspects of our lives that inhibit this quest are to be suppressed. If these hindrances are not thrust violently from our lives, they will eventually cause our exclusion from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power. Passivity and indifference, therefore, are thieves that rob us of the blessing of God.

PURSUING PEACE

This is not ***“the peace of God which passes all understanding.”*** That is granted to us through our faith. As it is written, ***“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”*** (Phil 4:6-7, NKJV). Being justified by faith, we presently ***“have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”*** (Rom 5:1). A good fight of faith will maintain our grasp on that peace.

The peace of reference in this text is ***“with all men.”*** That requires an aggressive effort because we have not been reconciled to all men, as we have to God. Our reconciliation to God, in fact, has separated us from the course of this world, thus alienating us from those who are not in Christ Jesus. However distasteful it may appear, it is still true: ***“If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you”*** (John 15:19). Thus it is written, ***“Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you”*** (1 John 3:13). It is true of those who have believed on Christ through the Apostolic word, just as surely as it was true of the Apostles: ***“I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world”*** (John 17:12). Yet, we are admonished to ***“pursue peace with all men!”***

A Needful Exhortation

This is a needful exhortation because of the enmity that is produced by our faith. Salvation is experienced in the presence of our enemies--in a hostile and cursed world. We pursue peace with all men like Abraham pursued it with the herdsmen of Lot. ***“Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdsmen and thy headmen; for we be brethren”*** (Gen 13:8). In this

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Just as it is difficult to navigate the sea in a storm, so negotiating the sea of life in an unpeaceful environment is hard. A little personal reflection will confirm this to be the case .

case, separation was necessary. Yet, Abraham pursued peace, making every effort to have no part with friction and enmity. The peace may not be able to be made and kept by you, but you can seek it fervently, as did the Psalmist. *“My soul has dwelt too long With one who hates peace. I am for peace; But when I speak, they are for war”* (Psa 120:6-7).

Pursuing peace often involves a soft word, which *“turns away wrath”* (Prov 15:1). The servant of God is to avoid things that make for fleshly strife and agitation (2 Tim 2:23-24). It also requires pleasing the Lord, who can make our enemies be at peace with us (Prov 16:7). Remember, our Lord Jesus said, *“Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God”* (Matt 5:9, NKJV).

Why Pursue Peace?

The New Covenant is one of peace

Why should we pursue peace with all men? How does this exhortation fit into the high emphasis of this book? The New Covenant, as administered by the Lord Jesus Christ, is the major theme of this book. In a very real sense, the New Covenant is *“a covenant of peace.”* Ezekiel spoke of this covenant. *“Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore”* (Ezek 37:26). This covenant is characterized by *“peace with God”* (Rom 5:1). The variance between God and man is brought to a grinding halt in Christ Jesus. This peace also exists among the members of Christ, who are charged with keeping *“the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”* (Eph 4:3). They start out in harmony with their brothers and sisters. Their job is to maintain that unity.

Peace is to the spiritual life like a calm sea is the sailor. It enables the child of God to make progress in the new life. Just as it is difficult to navigate the sea in a storm, so negotiating the sea of life in an unpeaceful environment is hard. A little personal reflection will confirm this to be the case. Particularly in the New Covenant, *“the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace”* (James 3:18). The nature of this covenant demands that we energetically pursue *“peace with all men.”* It is within the framework of peace and tranquility that we will enjoy the fulness of God’s blessing.

Our primary interest is not the political arena, but advancement in the Spirit. There are enough difficulties associated with spiritual growth without having needless agitation all about us. If we do not zealously seek peace with all men, we will be hindered by the lack of that blessed condition.

This is why we pray for kings and those in authority. *“Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence”* (1 Tim 2:1-2). Our primary interest is not the political arena, but advancement in the Spirit. There are enough difficulties associated with spiritual growth without having needless agitation all about us. If we do not zealously seek peace with all men, we will be hindered by the lack of that blessed

condition. How fervently we should pray for such an environment. It is a better course of action than political activism. God has an interest in His people. He is more apt to hear prayers offered for their maturity than for the recovery of a nation, however noble that may appear.

Because of our lower nature

There is a propensity in the natural man to actually shun peace. The fallen nature seeks selfish interests, with no desire to adapt to the needs of others. Every day a thousand reasons will seem to justify discord. The *“flesh,”* or sinful nature, is inclined to *“hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, and heresies”* (Gal 5:20). The fallen nature is assertive, refusing to remain idle. It must be crucified and subordinated with zeal. Particularly among brethren, it is imperative that peace be maintained. *“Be at peace among yourselves,”* the Spirit exhorts (1 Thess 5:13).

In seeking peace with all men, considerable effort will be expended in the subduing of our *“flesh.”* As it is written, *“you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice . . . ”* (Col 3:8), and *“laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking . . . ”* (1 Pet 2:1). These are all fleshly expressions that disrupt peace. Our effort to maintain *“peace with all men”* is made in the acute awareness of the liability of our own *“flesh.”* Well did James say, *“Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?”* (James 4:1). A state of agitation is fraught with danger!

Because of our adversary

Satan is ever seeking to cause disruptions among the redeemed. If we do not *“pursue peace with all men,”* we will fall prey to his snares. Once he caused disruption in heavenly realms. As it is written, *“And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought”* (Rev 12:7). We should not be surprised that he is aggressive to produce such conflict in the world. If we are not alert, he will cause brethren to fight among themselves, thus creating an arena in which the forces of darkness can freely work.

As much as possible

Peace with all men is not a mandate, but it is a pursuit. It is not a commandment, but a preference. As it is written, *“If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men”* (Rom 12:18). Peace is not to be sought at the expense of holiness. As the righteous woman said to Joab, let each of us say, *“I am among the peaceable and faithful in Israel”* (2 Sam 20:19). As the Psalmist said, *“I am for peace”* (Psa 120:7). As we appropriate the wisdom that is *“from above,”* we ourselves will become *“peaceable”* (James 3:17). At every point the peace depends upon us, it will come to pass. *“If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.”* All the while, we remember the words of our Lord Jesus. *“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God”* (Matt 5:9). Your own experience will confirm to you that perceiving the Lord is more difficult in times of agitation and turmoil. A peaceful surrounding is to be preferred by all believers.

PURSUING HOLINESS

“Pursue . . . holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.” Here is a subject rarely emphasized in many religious circles. The contemporary church spends more time trying to explain the lack of holiness than in the pursuit of the same. It has developed purported *experts* who deal with the effects of unholiness, or a lack of holiness. No such emphasis is found in Scripture. The New Covenant does

not allow for an unholy state. This is a covenant that results in holiness--a holiness so effective that sins and iniquities are remembered *"no more"* (Heb 8:12; 10:17). It is founded upon the removal of sin (Heb 9:26), and provides for cleansing from *"all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9). Sin is repulsive to God (Heb 1:9), and participation in the New Covenant makes it repulsive to us also.

Holiness consists of two things: a response to righteousness, and one to iniquity. It is said of Jesus, *"Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows"* (Heb 1:9). The response of the Father to these traits of His only begotten Son tell the story: *"therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows."* No person is holy that does possess a fundamental love and preference for righteousness. By this, I mean that competing interests are

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viewed as an intrusion. Likewise, holiness cannot be attained apart from a hatred of iniquity. If our spirit is not repulsed by sin, we are unholy! If we do not have a basic hunger and thirst for righteousness, we are unholy.

Unfortunately, unholy responses are resident in our *"flesh,"* and seek to assert themselves. There are unchangeable tendencies in our *"members"* that must be *"mortified,"* or put to death. These are *"things"* which will cause *"the wrath of God"* to come upon men (Col 3:5-6). We do not need professed experts to consume our time explaining why these tendencies are there. They are resident in us because *"all have sinned and come sort of the glory of God"* (Rom 3:23). We are members of a fallen race, from which salvation is extricating us.

There is a sense in which Divine acceptance depends upon our holiness. After we have heard and embraced the blessedness of *imputed righteousness* (Rom 4:22-24), and *acceptance in the Beloved* (Eph 1:6), we are to engage in a fervent pursuit of holiness! *Holiness*, in this case, is the effect of imputed righteousness. It results when we appropriate grace to help in the time of need, and fight the good fight of faith. There are realities that may not be possessed without consistent effort on your part--holiness is one of them. The redemption that is in Christ Jesus enables us to *"serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life"* (Luke 1:74-75). Jesus was raised from the dead *"according to the Spirit of holiness"* (Rom 1:4). The same thing occurred in you when you were baptized into Christ.

Unholy people will not inherit God or be joint heirs with Christ! The unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God! Those who choose to live in sin, relinquish the privilege of Divine fellowship and blessing!

The Holy Spirit reasons with us on this matter. *"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life . . . Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the*

body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin . . . Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God . . . Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? . . . I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness . . . But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life” (Rom 6:4-22).

Holiness, in this context, is death to sin, and life [or response] toward God. We are stewards of our “*members*” --every aspect of our persons that is capable of expression. Inwardly, it is our soul, our affection, and our will. Outwardly, it includes our eyes, mouth, ears, hands, and feet. **No part of our persons is to be allowed to express itself in unholy ways.** You will not live long in Jesus until you will find this is a gigantic assignment! **Involuntary eruptions of the sinful nature are a grief to the children of God.** They occur frequently enough to provoke this response, “*But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members*” (Rom 7:23). For those living by faith, these eruptions are not voluntary. They are intrusions that offend us. As it is written, “*For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I*” (Rom 7:15).

Not to drift from our subject, this condition requires that we “*pursue holiness,*” striving to have it in perfection. The word “*holiness*” comes from **agiasmon** (ag-i-as-mon), which means *consecration, dedication, sanctification, or holiness*. It does involve a moral condition, but extends beyond that definition. It involves consecration to God. Dedication is related to a willing committal of the life to the Lord. Sanctification is being set apart from the normal for Divine use and fellowship. So far as we are concerned, **we are only available to do the will of God .** We acknowledge that we have not “*already attained, or are already perfected; but we press on, that we may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of us . . . we do not count ourselves to have apprehended; but one thing we do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, we press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*” (Phil 3:12-14). That is the pursuit of holiness! Heaven will not be gained without it!

While God can use people who do not seek to be used by Him (Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Darius), such usage is not for their personal benefit. Sanctification, or holiness, includes **partnership** with God. It is more than mere employment, or being a servant. Salvation brings the individual into close relation with the Lord--a relationship that extends beyond that of a servant. As Jesus said, “*No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you*” (John 15:15). In Christ, we become “*workers together with God*” (1 Cor 3:9), and in “*fellowship with His Son*” (1 Cor 1:9), we are “*heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ*” (Rom 8:17). Such glorious benefits cannot be enjoyed while sin clings to us! When temptation assaults us, we must resist the devil, and deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. Unholy people will not inherit God or be joint heirs with Christ! The unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God! Those who choose to live in sin, relinquish the privilege of Divine fellowship and blessing!

When the Spirit says “*pursue holiness,*” He is summoning us to intimacy with God. He is

calling us away from the allurements of *“this present evil world,”* into a life of harmony with a Savior Who is *“holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens”* (Heb 7:26). We thus relinquish the right to direct our own steps, and joyfully yield to His direction. We refuse to devote ourselves to sin, or even to mundane matters that do not appear immoral. Whatever separates us from God or neutralizes our efforts for Him must be placed behind us if we are to *“pursue holiness.”* This is a state of detachment from the world, and is imperative for every believer!

Without which no man will see the Lord

Without question, this is one of the most solemn statements of Scripture. It is brief and to the point, yet powerful enough to reach into the inmost part of us. *“Pursue . . . holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.”* This word will not be

When temptation assaults us, we must resist the devil, and deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. Unholy people will not inherit God or be joint heirs with Christ! The unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God! Those who choose to live in sin, relinquish the privilege of Divine fellowship and blessing!

retracted for any reason. There is no circumstance of life that can diminish its power or bring into question this affirmation. God has spoken, and will not repent. *“No man”* will see the Lord without holiness-- **NO MAN !**

There is a *sense in which “every eye shall see Him” (Rev 1:7).* There will be kindreds of the earth that will *“wail because of Him,”* together with those who *“pierced Him”* (Rev 1:7b). These will see Him, but not as the redeemed behold Him. They will not see Christ as *“Savior,” “Captain,”* or *“Finisher.”* They will not behold Him coming *“without sin unto salvation”* (Heb 9:28). What they will see is *“the Lion of the Tribe of Judah”* (Rev 5:5), coming to *“execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him”* (Jude 15). For the ungodly, or unholy, Jesus will appear to punish them *“with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power”* (2 Thess 1:9). The sight of the coming King will constrain the unholy to cry *“to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”* (Rev 6:16). How tragic that day will be for them. They will join with the amalgamation of the lost in the doleful song of the damned, *“The harvest is past, The summer is ended, And we are not saved!”* (Jer 8:20). Everyone lacking holiness will be in this category, lamenting the very day they were born. Indeed, we are dealing with a most serious matter!

In this case *“see”* means see Him *“as He is,”* or in His fulness (1 John 3:2). This is the type of sight to which Jesus referred, when He said, *“Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God”* (Matt 5:8). In the Hebrew phrase, seeing God means **enjoying Him** . It goes further than mere vision. It is what the patriarch Job longed for: *“And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!”* (Job 19:27). The vision shall prompt a

joyful response from the holy ones. *“Behold, this is our God; We have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the LORD; We have waited for Him; We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation”* (Isa 25:9). No unholy person will participate in this vision.

When Jesus appears, every spirit that is out of harmony with Him will shrink back to perdition. His glorious appearing will reveal the variance that exists between their persons and Himself. Those who are not oriented for heaven will not dwell there. The soul that did not walk with Jesus here, will not reign with Him there.

Without holiness these responses will be impossible. When Jesus appears, every spirit that is out of harmony with Him will shrink back to perdition. His glorious appearing will reveal the variance that exists between their persons and Himself. Those who are not oriented for heaven will not dwell there. The soul that did not walk with Jesus here, will not reign with Him there. See, when our Lord returns in resplendent glory, no ones’ basic nature will be changed! The only thing that will be transformed is the body. The spirit that is defiled will remain defiled, and the one that is holy will remain holy (Rev 22:11). **Now is the time, and here is the place, to become holy.** Now is time to *“pursue holiness”* earnestly and relentlessly.

The fact that we are exhorted to *“pursue holiness”* confirms **it is within our reach** . We can advance in this noble pursuit. If the woman with the issue of blood could reach the hem of Christ’s garment, you can touch the border of holiness! Christ will intercede for you in this quest. The Holy Spirit will strengthen you within, even making intercession for you in groans that cannot be uttered. The angels will minister to you as you progress to the goal. The Father’s eye will be upon you, and His ear will be open to your cry! This is not a vain endeavor. All of heaven is behind you! Pursue holiness! Pursue it aggressively! Pursue it consistently! Pursue it in faith! Pursue it with anticipation. If you will not see God without it, you will surely see Him with it! Wage war against competing pursuits. Put to death any tendency in you leading away from this quest! You must have holiness if you are to see the Lord! Sanctification must be yours if you are to dwell in the house of the Lord forever! The New Covenant provides for the realization of this condition in this world.

LOOKING CAREFULLY

“ . . . looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God . . . ” Here is another weighty word! It postulates a fierce enemy, evil surroundings, and an adverse climate. You are presently in the realm of danger. There are pits all around you into which you can fall. Salvation, however, has brought resources that make you equal to the situation--but you must use them. You can successfully

“resist the devil,” but you cannot be *“ignorant of his devices”* (1 Pet 5:8; 2 Cor 2:11). Deliberation, vigilance, and consistency are all required in this activity.

To believers

We are not only exhorted to *“Look,”* but to *“Look carefully”* or *“diligently”* (KJV). The thing we are seeking to avoid is failing of the grace of God, or falling short of it (NKJV). The NIV reads, *“See to it that no one misses the grace of God.”* The RSV reads, *“See to it that no one fail to obtain the grace of God.”* This is not written to alien sinners, but to those who are in Christ. The people to whom this is addressed *“were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become*

Sin arises too easily in it. It is simply too easy for leaders to fall away, and teachers to succumb to temptation. There is not enough *“diligently looking.”* Too many are caught unawares, snared because of spiritual simplicity and slothfulness.

partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come” (Heb 6:4-5). There was a time when they *“joyfully accepted the plundering of their goods, knowing that they had a better and an enduring possession for themselves in heaven”* (Heb 10:34). Already they had *“come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel”* (Heb 12:22-24). But they were not in heaven yet! They remained in *“the land of the enemy,”* and needed to be diligent in their avoidance of sin and appropriation of holiness.

A timely word

If ever there was an appropriate word for our generation, it is this one! I do not find much *“diligent looking”* in the professed church. Sin arises too easily in it. It is simply too easy for leaders to fall away, and teachers to succumb to temptation. There is not enough *“diligently looking.”* Too many are caught unawares, snared because of spiritual simplicity and slothfulness. One writer has said this involves *Looking about, over, and upon; being constantly on your guard* . 1

Vigilance, or *“looking diligently,”* is required because of our present situation! *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Pet 5:8). In a moment, he can bring a person down! Think of Eve, deceived by him (2 Cor 11:3)! Think of Achan, succumbing to covetousness (Josh 7:1-20). Think of Ananias and Sapphira, at the very threshold of the church, lying to God (Acts 5:4). Ponder David on the rooftop (2 Sam 11). If you imagine you do not have to look diligently, consider Israel murmuring three days after their deliverance (Ex 15:24). Consider Moses smiting the rock when provoked to anger (Psa 106:33), or Aaron constructing a golden calf (Ex 32:4), or Peter denying Jesus (Matt 26:70-74). Unbelief crept up to blameless Zacharias (Luke 1:18-20), Peter sank in the very waters upon which he was walking (Matt 14:30). Though once involved in the work of the Lord, Demas forsook Paul, *“having loved this present world”* (Col 4:14; 2 Tim 4:10). Let there be no *sleeping one* among us! This is the time to be alert, awake, vigilant, and diligent! As it is written, *“knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed”* (Rom 13:11).

Missing the grace of God

Let no one take the notion into their mind that there is such a thing as “*irresistible grace!*” Do not think that God’s grace works upon those who do not look for it! The grace of God can be “missed,” even though it is brought very near to us. This is revealed in Christ Jesus coming to His own people, the Jews. It is written, “*He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him*” (John 1:11). Jesus brought words from heaven, and faithfully declared them to those for whom they were intended. Yet, He said, “*And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony*” (John 3:32). Our Savior’s lament over Jerusalem rushes over my soul like a mighty torrent. “*If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation*” (Luke 19:42-44).

When Jesus came, He was filled “*with grace and truth,*” yet His generation fell short of it--and it was for them to possess! He brought benefits that **belonged** to Israel. He brought it in a day when they **could** be possessed, and when peace with God **could** have been realized. But they fell short of that grace, because they were not aware they were being visited by “*Dayspring from on high*” (Luke 1:78). There is simply too much in God’s Word about this for any person to adopt a theological position that denies one can fail to appropriate the grace of God AFTER having tasted of the Lord.

Everything is moving toward an appointed end or objective. Therefore, grace is not static, remaining, as it were, in one place. Everything is moving toward “*our salvation,*” and that time is “*nearer than when we first believed*” (Rom 13:11). Grace has been provided for spiritual progress! It is granted “*in the time of need*” so that melioration may be realized.

When, then, do men “*fail*” or “*fall short of the grace of God?*” When does grace become inaccessible to them? It is a frightening thought, is it not, that such a condition is possible? It is when they are not vigilant--when they are lulled to sleep by the devices of the wicked one. Mind you, no man can be saved without the grace of God, and yet there is a spiritual condition in which the individual becomes oblivious to that grace. **Spiritual stupor is the blight of the Western church!** It has become complacent and sluggardly

Grace will not sustain us in sin! It will not strengthen the alienated! Grace orients us for and gets us into glory. It has no personal utility if these objectives are not ours. When our eyes are set on this world, we cannot reach the grace of God. When men have an appetite for sin, they are NOT mindful of God’s grace.

because of its seeming success. Its lack of vigilance has made it the laughing stock of its enemies! Contemporary theology has bent low to put its ear to the ground. Its direction is determined by the fickle will and temporal needs of the masses. The grace of God, however, prepares men for another world, orienting them for eternity in the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power. As men become earth-centric, grace loses its relevance, and extends beyond their preference and reach. That is why they fail to obtain it.

The Holy Spirit states this same case in another place, and with other words. “*We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain*” (2 Cor 6:1). What a dreadful thought--receiving the grace of God in vain! Being rescued, but returning to bondage! Getting out of Egypt, and yet never entering into Canaan! **It is possible to**

receive the grace of God, and yet not ultimately benefit from it! To “*fail of the grace of God,*” or “*fall from the grace of God*” is to have received it, yet to have fallen from it. It is to start the race, but be unable to finish it.

Now, this is a liability for us all. Not a single believer “*in the body*” (Heb 13:3) has advanced beyond the realm of danger. Let all be assured, we are not speaking of weaving in and out of the Kingdom like a weaver’s shuttle. What is being said is this: once we are in Christ Jesus, the grace of God is available for advancement in the faith and the subduing of the sin that is in our members (Col 3:5). If, however, we choose to be distracted, ceasing to advance, while becoming enamored of the pleasures of sin for a season, **we enter an area where grace is not operative .**

Grace will not sustain us in sin! It will not strengthen the alienated! Grace orients us for and gets us into glory. It has no personal utility if these objectives are not ours. **When our eyes are set on this world, we cannot reach the grace of God.** When men have an appetite for sin, they are **NOT** mindful of God’s grace. Our preferences will determine the accessibility of the grace mentioned in this text. If we are alert and watchful,

Let us look at it another way. How shall we fare if God be against us? How could anyone hope to enjoy the Lord forever who was His enemy here? Yet, Satan has deceived some into thinking God’s grace may be accessed while one occupies a place that is loathsome to God.

and desiring to dwell in the house of the Lord forever, we will find God’s grace abundant and sufficient. If, however, we choose to live at a distance from God, it will not be long until the grace of God passes from our consideration, thereby becoming inaccessible to us.

Let us look at it another way. How shall we fare if God be against us? How could anyone hope to enjoy the Lord forever who was His enemy here? Yet, Satan has deceived some into thinking God’s grace may be accessed while one occupies a place that is loathsome to God. We have already been apprized, “*Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him*” (Heb 10:38). The Psalmist said, “*For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness, Nor shall evil dwell with You* ” (Psa 5:4). There was a time when God said to His own people, “*I have no pleasure in you, Says the LORD of hosts, Nor will I accept an offering from your hands*” (Mal 1:10).

It is written, “*If God is for us, who can be against us?*” (Rom 8:39). But what if He is NOT for us? What if God Himself is against us? Do not think this an impossibility for those who have named the name of Christ, yet live at a distance from Him. Jesus told His followers to “*abide*” in Him (John 15:4). He warned of those who did NOT abide in Him, becoming fruitless (John 15:6). He spoke of abiding in His “*love*” (John 15:10). John admonished us to “*abide in Him*” (1 John 2:28). Jude exhorted, “*Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life*” (Jude 21). John admonished, “*Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen*” (1 John 5:21). Why were these words spoken? Because we are in a war zone! We are wrestling against foes that are not intimidated by academics, life disciplines, language expertise, or organizational excellence. Only the grace of God can help us in this zone! Be sure you do not fall from it!

The church is reminded of Israel, once the favored of all peoples in the world.

“But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness” (1 Cor 10:5). If the warning has no relevance for believers, it would not have been written. We are told God was ***“grieved”*** with that generation (Heb 3:17), and that He ***“destroyed”*** the very people He had ***“saved”*** (Jude 5). Contradicting theologies notwithstanding, we have before us a statement requiring our attention. We are to make sure we do not fall from the grace of God, or come into a position where it cannot be appropriated. Were there no danger of this occurring, it would be the height of absurdity to speak in this manner.

THE ROOT OF BITTERNESS

“ . . . lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled . . . ”
Here is a matter of critical importance. Doubtless, reference is being made to words spoken through Moses. ***“Therefore keep the words of this covenant, and do them, that you may prosper in all that you do. All of you stand today before the LORD your God: your leaders and your tribes and your elders and your officers, all the men of Israel, your little ones and your wives; also the stranger who is in your camp, from the one who cuts your wood to the one who draws your water; that you may enter into covenant with the LORD your God . . . so that there may not be among you man or woman or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations, and that there may not be among you a root bearing bitterness or wormwood ; and so it may not happen, when he hears the words of this curse, that he blesses himself in his heart, saying, 'I shall have peace, even though I follow the dictates of my heart'; as though the drunkard could be included with the sober”*** (Deut 29:9-19).

Let it be remembered, that a single person can trouble many people . We have Achan as an example. One man and one sin--yet it brought a curse upon the entire nation. It is written, ***“But the children of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed things, for Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed things; so the anger of the LORD burned against the children of Israel”*** (Josh 7:1). Divine disapproval was made known when a few men from Ai soundly defeated the army of Israel. When praying before the Lord about this illogical defeat, the Lord told Joshua, ***“Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. For they have even taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived; and they have also put it among their own stuff. Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because***

Let us look at it another way. How shall we fare if God be against us? How could anyone hope to enjoy the Lord forever who was His enemy here? Yet, Satan has deceived some into thinking God’s grace may be accessed while one occupies a place that is loathsome to God.

they have become doomed to destruction. Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you” (Josh 7:11-12). When confronting Achan, Joshua queried, ***“Why have you troubled us?”*** (Josh 7:25). Achan was a root of bitterness that troubled the camp! The presence of such individuals is paralleled to ***“the vine of Sodom and the field of Gomorrah”*** which yielded ***“grapes of gall”*** (Deut 32:32).

The Spirit admonishes us to be alert. Let us look at it another way. How shall

we fare if God be against us? How could anyone hope to enjoy the Lord forever who was His enemy here? Yet, Satan has deceived some into thinking God's grace may be accessed while one occupies a place that is loathsome to God. With spiritual aggression we are admonished, ***“Let all bitterness , wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice”*** (Eph 4:31). If such a quality is found in those professing faith in Christ, they are lying against the truth by professing identity with Jesus. That is why James wrote, ***“But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth”*** (James 3:14).

The defiling effects of bitterness are arresting. It never stays with the person possessing it. ***“Thereby,”*** or by that very ***“root,”*** we are told, ***“many are defiled”*** or corrupted. These things exclude people from the grace of God and cause the wrath of God to remain over the offender. Such ***“roots”*** have sprung up because of a lack of grace, and have thrust people even further from that needed grace. Each of us is like a garden, in which pleasant spices or noxious and poisonous weeds may grow. We want to be a ***“garden enclosed”*** for our Lord, out of which ***“pleasant fruits”*** and ***“fragrance”*** may rise to our Lord, giving advantage to our brothers and sisters (Song of Sol 4:12-14).

Where ***“bitterness”*** exists, we do not need an arbiter, or someone to survey its various causes. It is to be torn out by the roots, thrust from the people of God. In this case, the preservation of ***“the body”*** takes precedence over the individual, even as it did at Corinth (1 Cor 5:7-8). If you see ***“bitterness”*** beginning to sprout in your heart, pluck it up immediately. Refuse to let it grow by bathing yourself in the grace of God. Flee quickly to Jesus for refuge, and ask Him to cleanse you from all unrighteousness. The head of the ***“old serpent”*** is found in every ***“root of bitterness.”*** Who can calculate the damage caused by bitterness among professed believers. All about us lies spiritual carnage in staggering amounts. It is there because of wars, fights, and bitterness among *church members* . Declare war on bitterness. Watch for it! Remove it!

DON'T MISS THE BLESSING!

The Spirit brings a Scriptural case before us. It is one which some may imagine inappropriate. He summons us to a consideration of Esau, twin brother of Jacob, and also a son of Isaac. He had the right father and mother, and was born at the right time. He certainly was in the right family, and raised in the right house!

“ . . . lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.” The Spirit brings a Scriptural case before us. It is one which some may imagine inappropriate. He summons us to a consideration of Esau, twin brother of Jacob, and also a son of Isaac. He had the right father and mother, and was born at the right time. He certainly was in the right family, and raised in the right house! Unimaginable advantages belonged to him, but he did not have a heart for them. He was a ***“profane person”*** --conducting himself like a heathen, even though in the chosen family.

The case of Esau is nothing less than an exposition of a ***“profane man.”*** This man,

with remarkable advantages, had contempt for his birthright--the ultimate of all blessings for him. He did not relinquish his birthright for a land, or for a kingdom. He did not do it for a large sum of money, or for a position of prominence. He bartered it off for a single **“morsel of food.”** And, it was not even superior food! He gave up his birthright for **“bread and stew of lentils.”** His god was his belly, and he had no regard for the blessing! The Genesis record of this event states, **“Thus Esau despised his birthright”** (Gen 25:34). God’s view of Esau is recorded by Malachi and quoted by Paul. **“I have loved you, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the LORD: yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness”** (Mal 1:2-3; Rom 9:13). God did not hate Esau because of his vigorous works (Rom 9:11-13), but because he despised the birthright. The blessing meant nothing to him.

For one morsel of meat, Esau did not offer prey gained in his cunning hunting (Gen 25:27). At the very first suggestion, he sold his birthright--at the first pangs of hunger. To his brother’s suggestion he said, **“Look, I am about to die; so what is this birthright to me?”** (Gen 25:30). While many criticize Jacob, God hated Esau and loved Jacob! We do well to view both Jacob and Esau as our Father in heaven did!

Is it possible for such despite to arise among the people of God? Can those who have **“known the way of righteousness . . . turn from the holy commandment delivered to them,”** choosing to dwell again in darkness? Indeed they can, as Peter affirms (2 Pet 2:20-22). And how does such a tragedy occur? It is through slothfulness and a refusal to stay close to the Lord, drawing near with a true heart and in full assurance (Heb 10:22). The admonition to **“run with endurance”** is not simply rhetoric. It is a clarion call from the Throne to the ONLY acceptable spiritual posture!

Not a one of us can think ourselves exempt from this exhortation. It makes no difference how long you may have been in Christ, or how advanced you may imagine yourself to be. If you do not avail yourself of the advantages of salvation, they will drift away from you, and you from them.

The gravity of the theme is nailed down by a consideration of Esau’s attempt to regain the blessing he once despised. **“For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears”** (verse 17). Such words should move us to fear and trembling! The man who once had the blessing was himself rejected. His heart was so hard, he could not repent of his wicked deed; i.e., **“he found no place for repentance.”** His heart was so filled with bitterness and self-regard, there was no place left for repentance and recovery! He wept, and bitterly so. Scripture states, **“he cried with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, “Bless me; me also, O my father!”** (Gen 27:34). After being denied the blessing he had sold, **“Esau lifted up his voice and wept”** (Gen 27:38). But he did not regain the blessing! He could not move Isaac to change his mind, tears notwithstanding. Nor, indeed, could he find a place for repentance within himself.

The Spirit admonishes us not to allow such a person to rise among us. With sorrow I must acknowledge I have seen people sell their right to glory for a moment in the flesh. Their hearts grew adamant as the flinty stone, and they found no place for repentance, even though they sought favored status with much tears.

Not a one of us can think ourselves exempt from this exhortation. It makes no difference how long you may have been in Christ, or how advanced you may imagine yourself to be. If you do not avail yourself of the advantages of salvation, they will drift away from you, and you from them. **At the point salvation appears secondary, and we give place to lower impulses and desires, we are in danger of being rejected.** Do not allow it to happen! Every temptation has a way of escape (1 Cor 10:13), and it is your business to find it and take it. God's grace will keep you, strengthen you, and make you equal to every challenge. However, at the point you consider grace unworthy of your greatest effort, it moves beyond your reach.

CONCLUSION

It is our business to see and prefer what God has offered us in Christ! Through His grace, He has provided justification *“from all things”* (Acts 13:39). We can be cleansed from *“all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9), obtain grace to help *“in the time of need”* (Heb 4:15), and *“draw near”* to God Himself with a true heart (Heb 10:22). We can *“resist the devil”* (1 Pet 5:8), cast *“all our care”* upon the Lord, knowing He cares for us (1 Pet 5:7), and *“stand in the evil day”* (Eph 6:13). Our Father has provided an Intercessor Who *“ever lives to make intercession”* for us (Heb 7:25). He has given us His own *“Holy Spirit”* to strengthen us within (Eph 3:16), and provided *“exceeding great and precious promises,”* through which we can *“participate in the Divine nature”* (2 Pet 1:4). How will those who neglect *“so great salvation”* hope to escape??

Every temptation that comes to you is monitored from above, and comes *“with a way of escape”* (1 Cor 10:13). Your Savior has already *“destroyed”* the devil, rendering him impotent in heavenly places (Heb 9:14). The principalities and powers that once captivated the world have been plundered by Jesus through the cross (Col 2:15). The *“handwriting of ordinances”* that was against us, and contrary to us, has been taken *“out of the way,”* being *“nailed to His cross”* (Col 2:14). The way to God has been opened and sanctified for our travel (Isa 35:8; Heb 10:20), and God has issued the call, *“Whosoever will may come and drink of the water of life freely”* (Rev 22:17). Even the holy angels, innumerable in quantity, and excelling in wisdom and power, have been assigned as our ministers (Heb 1:13-14). The well of salvation can now be placed within the believer, springing up to life everlasting (John 4:14). From Satan's domain, we have been *“called into the fellowship of God's dear Son”* (1 Cor 1:9), Who has been made to us *“wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption”* (1 Cor 1:30). Everything belongs to us (1 Cor 3:20-22), and we can *“do all things through Christ”* which strengthens us (Phil 4:13).

As great as all of this is, it can all be forfeited by simply preferring other things. Esau preferred a *“morsel”* of food to his birthright. He received that *“morsel,”* but lost his birthright. Demas loved the world he could see more than the one that is unseen. After spending three years in close proximity to Jesus, hearing His gracious words and seeing His wonderful works, Judas chose a few pieces of silver instead of reconciliation. Now God summons you to the consideration of His Son, His salvation, and your inheritance. It is worthy of your most arduous effort. Give yourself wholly to the obtaining of the prize, and allow no thief to take it from you. Our Lord has supplied everything required to give you the advantage. Keep close to Him!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated
Presents

Commentary on the book of Hebrews

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #24

CONTRASTING MOUNTAINS

“For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. (For they could not endure what was commanded: "And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow." And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, 'I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.') But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel. See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, ‘Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.’ Now this, ‘Yet once more,’ indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:17-29, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

Throughout this series of lessons, we have seen the preeminence of Jesus and superiority of the New Covenant. They are dominant themes in this marvelous book. We can trace the reason for this emphasis to man’s propensity for Law, and Satan’s aggressiveness to turn us from the truth of the Gospel. Because of competing influences within and without, in our members and in our environment, a deficient understanding of the New Covenant and its Mediator is a liability of unspeakable magnitude. Satan, in all of his subtlety and craftiness, is aggressive to distort our understanding of Christ and His accomplishments. In so doing, He knows our view of the New Covenant will be so affected as to render it powerless in our lives.

As exalted as the Son of God is, and as glorious as the New Covenant is, if they are not comprehended to some degree, they will bring no benefit to the individual. The Kingdom of God is one of understanding, comprehension, and persuasion. Its effectiveness is realized in the experience of Divine fellowship .

As exalted as the Son of God is, and as glorious as the New Covenant is, if they are not comprehended to some degree, they will bring no benefit to the individual. The Kingdom of God is one of understanding, comprehension, and persuasion. **Its effectiveness is realized in the experience of Divine fellowship.** Here is a Kingdom that consists of **“righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”** (Rom 14:17). We realize all these within the circumference of circumspection. They involve the heart, soul, mind, and strength--the whole person. Though unseen, this is not a mystical kingdom, or one not obvious to the intellect. Although a considerable amount of Christianity, both historic and contemporary, has been associated with the mysterious and incomprehensible, the Word of God does not support such a view. With no desire to be offensive, I must say that such a celebration is more related to the occult than to the truth of God. Allow me to elaborate on this point briefly.

The Centrality of Understanding

FAITH is the means through which the things of God are apprehended. It is the primary activity of those in Christ. Faith is a gift from God (Phil 1:29; Rom 12:3; 2 Pet 1:1; Rom 10:17). Its obtainment brings clarity to the understanding; i.e., **“By faith we understand . . .”** (Heb 11:3). Faith is related to persuasion and conviction, involving the intellect, and the emotion and will as well. In **“the kingdom of Christ and God”** (Eph 5:5), power is found in realization, participation, and comprehension (2 Cor 13:5 (NIV); 2 Pet 1:4; Eph 3:18). Knowledge, understanding, and discernment are the means through which Divine fellowship is realized (1 Cor 1:5; Eph 1:17,18; Col 1:9; 1 John 5:20; Heb 5:14). Those lacking these attributes are consistently represented as being in danger. Often such a condition is equated with being lost and alienated from God (Rom 1:31; Eph 4:18; 1 Thess 4:5; 2 Thess 1:8).

The Word of God is addressed to the understanding, and is the means through which spiritual life is maintained (Matt 4:4). The Scriptures are provided for our “learning” (Rom 15:4). They **“make known”** the redemptive mystery of God, kept secret from the foundation of the world (Rom 16:26). The promises of God are there (Rom 1:2), and they make us **“wise unto salvation”** (2 Tim 3:15).

God has extended Himself to become comprehensible to us. That is why the Law was given. It is involved in the Son of God coming into the world. He sent prophets and Apostles to clarify Himself and His purpose to mankind. The **“knowledge of God”** thus becomes the means through which salvation in all of its aspects is realized. Jesus comes to **“give us an understanding, that we might know Him”** (1 John 5:20). Seeing this, Paul abandoned all competing pursuits so he might **“know Him”** (Phil 3:10). The “knowledge of God” is the means by which we **“have escaped the pollutions of the world”** (2 Pet 2:20). God has provided **“all things that pertain to life and godliness.”** However, they are appropriated **“through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue”** (2 Pet 1:3). **“Grace and peace”** are **“multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord”** (2 Pet 1:2). Apostolic efforts were directed toward us **“increasing in the knowledge of God”** (Col 1:10).

I want you to see that a religion of ignorance is not from God. One that is based upon the emotion and shrouded by mystery is false and debilitating. If men are not being brought to the peak of their potential as the **“offspring of God”** they are not living within the circumference of Divine influence. Jesus, the Divine pattern for us all, **“increased in . . . wisdom, and in favor with God and man”** (Luke 2:52). If corresponding increases is not found in us, we have missed the blessing, and our religion is in vain. Our spiritual advance includes growth in the **“knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”** (2 Pet 3:18).

The Thrust of This Book

He is God's exclusive Spokesman to us (Heb 1:2). The greatest honor and glory have been placed upon Him (Heb 3:3). As the Son, He is transcendent to angels, and His Word is the preeminent one (Heb 1:5,13). He came into the world to taste death for every man (Heb 2:9). He walked among us so that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest (Heb 2:17). He effectively dealt with sin and the devil (Heb 2:14). Through His blood, provision is made for the cleansing of the conscience (Heb 9:14). He has been exalted and

Hebrews is a strong appeal to our understanding. First, the Spirit labors to strengthen our cognition of the Person of Christ . . . Second, the New Covenant is not like the Old one. It is a better covenant, established upon better promises.

enthroned to bring many sons to glory (Heb 2:10), and ever lives to make intercession for the sons of God (Heb 7:25). He will come again, bringing the fulness of our salvation (Heb 9:28). **This book helps us understand Christ Jesus, the Son of God!**

Second, the New Covenant is not like the Old one. It is a better covenant, established upon better promises (Heb 8:6). It provides for the cleansing of the conscience, or the perfection of the believer (Heb 7:19). It provides access to a satisfied God through One Mediator (Heb 10:19-22). The Law of God becomes a part of the individual in this covenant (Heb 8:10; 10:16). It is no longer against us, and Divine requirements are not longer abrasive to us. In this covenant, we can *"obtain mercy, and find grace to help in the time of need"* (Heb 4:16). All of the constituents of the Covenant *"know God,"* from *"the least unto the greatest"* (Heb 8:11). **The book helps us to understand the New Covenant!**

The passage before us is a Divine initiative to increase our understanding of the New Covenant. Knowing that the **minds** of the Hebrews had been diverted, the Holy Spirit aggressively undertakes to bring them to their right mind--to see the New Covenant in light of Divine purpose. Their **view** of Christ and the Covenant had robbed them, causing them to *"draw back."* Rather than going on to perfection, they had ceased to grow, and needed have the basics made firm to their understanding once again (Heb 5:12). They were in a seriously flawed spiritual condition! We must view these admonitions as relevant to our time. We have not yet passed into the ultimate safety zone! What we have now possessed by faith.

WE HAVE, AND WE HAVE NOT

"For you have not come to the mountain . . . But you have come to Mount Zion. . ." True spiritual perspective includes what has NOT occurred in Christ Jesus, and what has been accomplished. This is a form of reasoning that is particularly productive. It is found throughout the writings of the New Covenant.

Think of some key expressions of Scripture. *" . . . for ye are not under the law, but under grace"* (Rom 6:14). *"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit . . ."* (Rom 8:9). *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves . . ."* (Eph 2:8). *"Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness"* (1 Thess

5:4). *“Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness”* (1 Thess 5:5). *“ . . . that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter . . . ”* (Rom 7:6). *“ . . . who walk not after the flesh, but*

There are two contrasting worlds . One is seen, and one is unseen. One is temporal, and one is eternal. One is dominated by sin, the other by righteousness. One is defiled, the other is pure. One can be shaken, the other cannot. The thrust of Jesus’ ministry is to deliver us in every possible aspect from the seen and temporal world, and bring us into accord with the unseen and eternal one.

after the Spirit” (Rom 8:1). *“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God . . . ”* (1 Cor 2:12). *“While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal”* (2 Cor 4:18). *“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God . . . ”* (2 Cor 10:4). *“But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law”* (Gal 5:18). *“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin”* (Heb 4:15). *“For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself . . . ”* (Heb 9:24). *“Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy”* (1 Pet 2:10).

There are two contrasting worlds . One is seen, and one is unseen. One is temporal, and one is eternal. One is dominated by sin, the other by righteousness. One is defiled, the other is pure. One can be shaken, the other cannot. The thrust of Jesus’ ministry is to deliver us in every possible aspect from the seen and temporal world, and bring us into accord with the unseen and eternal one. The New Covenant provides for the accomplishment of this objective.

In the passage before us, the Holy Spirit contrasts Divine association in the temporal realm with Divine fellowship in the eternal realm. He draws a comparison between what the Divine economy accomplished in the earth, with what was accomplished in heaven. A comparison is made between religious activities in the flesh and those in the Spirit. He takes the greatest revelation in earth and compares it with insight in the heavenlies. In these comparisons the superiority of Christ and the New Covenant will be clarified. The benefits realized in Christ Jesus will be thereby perceived as superior in every way. In addition, we will see the reason for the nullification of the Old Covenant. The absurdity of attempting to serve God on the basis of Law will become apparent to our hearts. Until this comparison is comprehended, men will not worship the Lord *“in Spirit and in truth”* (John 4:23-24).

THE TOUCHABLE MOUNTAIN

Israel’s experience at Mount Sinai is one of the most awesome events in human history. Nothing on this scale had occurred since the creation of *“the worlds.”* Here was the most extensive revelation of God since the foundation of the world. More of the nature of God was revealed than at previous times. More of His mind was unveiled than in prior periods. So

far as sensible evidence is concerned, more of God was revealed here than at any former time. This was truly an awesome occasion. Yet, with all of its spectacular occurrences, it was vastly inferior to what has been revealed in Christ Jesus. It pales in insignificance in the glory of the New Covenant.

“For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched . . .” There, at Sinai, was a mountain that could be seen with the eye and touched with the hand. This mountain was accessible to human senses. Fleshly experience attested it. There is something of an anomaly here. The mountain was touchable by possibility, but untouchable by law. It was there, but was rendered inaccessible by Divine pronouncement. The people could come near to the mountain, but could not touch it. Hear the Word of the Lord. *“You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, 'Take heed to yourselves that you do not go up to the mountain or touch its base. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. 'Not a hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot with an arrow; whether man or beast , he shall not live.' When the trumpet sounds long, they shall come near the mountain”* (Ex 19:12-13). By saying *“Not a hand shall be laid upon him,”* a most arresting thing can be perceived. The person who dared to touch this mountain could not himself be touched. He was to be slain at a distance, i.e., *“stoned or shot with an arrow.”* Our text reminds us, *“And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow”* (Heb 12:20).

What we have come to is **not** perceived with the senses. **The strength of our religion is not found in sight or touch.** It is transcendent to the natural order. A theology that emphasizes what we can see and touch is off-center, at the very best. It is incorrectly focused, and will ultimately fail to uphold those who embrace it. **If God has not brought us to a mountain that can be touched, we cannot emphasize things in that category .** If our religion is brought to its apex in this world, it is in vain. It makes little difference what sections of Scripture may be cited in support of such an approach, that is not where we have been brought!

Fire, Darkness and Tempest

Do men seek a sign? Something they can see? Something they can touch? How about Sinai!! Here was a mountain that could be touched, yet men were forbidden to do so! Indeed, once the event was under way, no man wanted to touch it! It induced fear and trembling!

“For you have not come . . . to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet . . .” Sinai was intimidating and fearful. The description of Sinai at the giving of the Law is most vivid. *“Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings , and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud , so that all the people who were in the camp trembled”* (Ex 19:16) . *“And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder . . .”* (Ex 19:19). *“Now all the people witnessed the thunderings , the lightning flashes , the sound of the trumpet , and the mountain smoking . . .”* (Ex 20:18). *“The sight of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain in the eyes of the children of Israel”* (Ex 25:17). *“ . . . the mountain burned with fire to the midst of heaven , with darkness , cloud, and thick darkness ”* (Deut 4:11).

The Psalmist referred to this awesome event. *“The earth shook ; The heavens also dropped rain at the presence of God; Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel”* (Psa 68:8). Even Habakkuk referred to the mountain that could be touched. *“God came from Teman, The Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah His glory covered the heavens, And the earth was full of His praise. His brightness was like the light; He had rays flashing from His hand , And there His power was hidden. Before Him went pestilence , And fever followed at His feet. He stood and measured the earth; He looked and startled the nations. And the everlasting mountains were scattered , The perpetual hills bowed. His ways are everlasting”* (Hab 3:3-6). Do men seek a sign? Something they can see? Something they can touch? How about Sinai!! Here was

a mountain that could be touched, yet men were forbidden to do so! Indeed, once the event was under way, no man wanted to touch it! It induced fear and trembling! **WE HAVE NOT COME TO A MOUNTAIN LIKE THIS!**

God spoke to the people out of this fear-producing environment. *“And the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire ”* (Deut 4:12). *“These words the LORD spoke to all your assembly, in the mountain from the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a loud voice . . . ”* (Deut 5:22). The people *“heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire . . . ”* (Deut 5:26). There was not the slightest indication of Divine meekness or condescension at the mount that could be touched. People did not conclude their God had a heart for the people. Grace and mercy were not the dominant perceptions then. Human senses dictated how people thought. **Mark it well, when what is seen dominates, what cannot be seen recedes into the background!** If Divine utterance in the tangible surroundings is superior, this mountain is to be preferred. However, there is not a single soul present at Sinai that would prefer this kind of communication. If you want God to draw near to you in a manner perceptible to the flesh, here is what you can expect.

There was a *“tempest”* of great magnitude at Sinai—a mighty storm. It was as though nature convulsed at the presence of the Lord. The occasion was, in the words of Isaiah 28:2. *“Like a tempest of hail and a destroying storm.”* Doubtless, it was a time like that spoken by the prophet, *“thunder and earthquake and great noise, With storm and tempest And the flame of devouring fire”* (Isa 29:6). Here was a revelation most awesome revelation. In the words of Isaiah, it was a time of *“the descent of His arm, with . . . the flame of a devouring fire, with scattering, tempest, and hailstones”* (Isa 30:30).

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It may be countered that Jesus did, in fact, appear to us in a visible and apparent way (John 1:14). This is true, but He was NOT perceived. As it is written, *“He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him”* (John 1:11). The people — even His own disciples — did not perceive His Person. When the demons recognized Him, even they trembled, crying out, *“What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?”* (Matt 8:29). The real revelation of Christ is through faith, not through the eyes or ears—even when He *“dwelt among us”*! **We have NOT come to a mountain that can be touched — to an economy of sight and touch!**

No More! No More!

“For you have not come to . . . the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. For they could not endure what was commanded . . . ” God DID speak at Sinai! The surroundings, however, were so awesome and fear-inducing the people pled for a cessation of Divine utterance. In fear the people cried out to Moses, *“You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die”* (Ex 20:19). Before departing from this world, Moses reminded the people of their request. *“ . . . you desired of the LORD your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die’ ”* (Deut 18:16).

Our text declares, *“they could not endure what was commanded.”* It was contrary to them, abrasive to their natures. God appeared and spoke to them in an external manner, but they could not bear the vision of His words. The people could not endure the revelation of the One from whose glory they had fallen. **We have NOT**

come to such a situation! God does not speak to us as fallen creatures, but as those who have been reconciled through the death of His Son. He does not invade the course of nature, as at Sinai, to make Himself known to us.

Do Not Come Near!

“And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow. And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, ‘I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.’” Here we come to grips with the chief weakness of the Old Covenant. **It did NOT allow the individual to come near to God!** The one man who was invited to approach the Living God was filled with fear and trembling. The sight was so awesome, he nearly died in the wake of Divine revelation. Moses, with whom God spoke *“face to face, even plainly, and not in dark sayings”* (Num 12:8), was not at all comfortable with the occasion. He could well have responded in the words of the Psalmist, *“My flesh trembles for fear of You, And I am afraid of Your judgments”* (Psa 119:120). How appropriate would be the words of Isaiah during such an occasion. *“Woe is me, for I am undone!”* (Isa 6:5).

The people were prohibited from drawing near! Indeed, if they were tempted to come close before the revelation of God took place, the very notion fled from them when *“the earth shook”* and *“the heavens also dropped rain at the presence of God”* (Psa 68:8). **There was a moral gulf between God and the people.** They had fallen from His glory, and lost a desire and capacity to interface with Him. The Law did not provide for the people to approach God. Not only could they NOT touch the mountain from which the Law was given, the ceremonial Law did not allow their approach either. Even if some would dare to desire such a thing, their defiled conscience would not allow them to come near to the Almighty God (Heb 10:10-3). **We have not come to such a place — where God cannot be approached!** Blessed be the name of the Lord!

WE ARE THERE NOW!

The advantage of believers is found in **knowing where they have come**. The only way Israel could identify the presence of God was through their fleshly senses. That awareness actually drove them away because it was in sharp conflict with their natures. It is not so with those in Christ Jesus. A transformation has taken place within them that enables them to enter *“heavenly places”* (Eph 2:6). They can enter into fellowship with God’s own Son (1 Cor 1:9), and draw near to the throne of grace (Heb 4:16). That ability, however, cannot be put into use apart from an awareness of where we are. If I do not know where grace has brought me, I will not avail myself of its privileges. Therefore, the Spirit now reasons with us concerning the effectiveness of God’s *“great salvation.”* The design of this section is to provoke us to avail ourselves of covenantal benefits. The necessity for this passage is simply this: **our participation in the blessing depends upon us availing ourselves of Divine provision**. The New Covenant is one of closeness. In it, provision is made to draw near to God. The appropriation of *“grace to help in the time of need”* can only take place when we are near to our Redeemer. The outer court will yield no eternal benefits! Now, the Spirit announces where salvation has placed us.

This is where we ARE in Christ Jesus. Mind you, it is not where we HAVE come, nor where we OUGHT to come, but where we *“ARE COME.”* This is not a historical occurrence, but a present reality. It is not an occasion we look back to, but one which we presently enjoy. We will not take advantage of this blessed place, however, until our hearts are convinced of its reality.

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“But you have come to Mount Zion . . .” Thank God, we have NOT come to Sinai! Rather, we have to a spiritual mountain, for which redemption has suited us. ***“Mount Zion”*** is identified with the Lord’s dwelling place, while Sinai was an earthly location. Scripture often speaks of ***“Mount Zion,”*** developing associations in our minds that are requisite to finishing the race. This is a place of spiritual elevation that, in contrast to Sinai, is “beautiful.” As it is written, ***“Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion . . .”*** (Psa 48:2). Here is a realm ***“Which cannot be moved, but abides forever”*** (Psa 125:1). It is the place where God dwells, and where provision is made for the dwelling of His people (Isa 4:5; 8:18). Here is the place of blessing, where God ***“commanded the blessing; Life forevermore”*** (Psa 133:3). How glorious the ***“situation”*** in which the redeemed find themselves (Psa 48:2). It is a place of advantage, blessing, and benefit. Here Divine fellowship is experienced within the environment of peace and joy.

Keep in mind, the Spirit is here contrasting where we have come with where Israel came. He is drawing a comparison between the realm we occupy and the one inhabited by Israel at their peak. The superiority of our environment is here declared.

The City of the Living God

“But you have come to . . . the city of the living God.” This is the ***“city”*** God has prepared for His people -- a municipality that will never end or be relocated (Heb13:14). It is, as David put it, ***“the city of the Great King”*** (Psa 48:2). Here God resides, and here the Divine repository of all blessing and eternal benefit is found. Those who are aware of its glories have joined the chorus of the centuries, ***“Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God!”*** (Psa 87:3).

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The preeminent awareness of this ***“city”*** is God Himself. Those who dwell within its realms are not distracted by the affairs of this world. It is not their city, but it is God’s city-- ***“the city of the Living God.”*** Sinai was called ***“the mount of God”*** (Ex 4:27; 18:5; 24:13; 1 Kgs 19:8). It was a place of restricted, limited revelation, tumult, and fear. But it is not so with ***“the city of the Living God.”*** What we possess in Christ is as superior to the Law as a city is to a mountain! It is a place of heavenly commerce, teeming activity, safety, and provision.

At Sinai, only Moses spoke ***“face to face”*** with God (Ex 33:4; Deut 34:10). He was a solitary figure in a restricted place, bounded by a fence and Divine prohibition. But it is not so in the ***“city of the Living God.”*** Here is a dwelling place for multitudes, with abundant provision and access to the King. Sinai was in the wilderness, solitary and desolate. But the ***“city of the Living God”*** is in the midst of abundance, with the glory of God filling it. The people are not gathered around it, but within it. The saved do not journey to this city seasonally (Deut 16:16), but remain within it’s blessed environ.

At Sinai, God came down to the earth in covering of for, smoke, tempest, and earthquake. It is not so where we have come. Rather than God coming to us,

invading the temporal environment with awesome disruption, we have been *“raised up together, and made”* to *“sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus”* (Eph 2:6). Sinai is where God came. **“The city of the Living God” is where we have come!**

The Heavenly Jerusalem

“But you have come to . . . the heavenly Jerusalem . . .” This glorious *“city”* was typified by earthly Jerusalem, where God placed His name (1 Kgs 11:36; Jer 3:17). That city was also called *“the city of God”* (Psa 46:4). It was where God “placed: His name--the city with which He identified Himself, and with which the people identified with Him (1 Kgs 8:29; Neh 1:9; 1 Kgs 11:36). The temple of God was here (2 Kgs 23:4; Mark 11:11).

However, *“the heavenly Jerusalem”* is vastly superior to earthly Jerusalem. That city was destroyed by its enemies, according to the word of Christ (Matt 23:37-38). In olden times, it was besieged by Pekon (2 Kgs 16:5), the Philistines (2 Chron 21:16-17), Sennacherib (2 Kgs 18:13), and Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kgs 24:10). God judged this city, sparing only those who feared Him and sighed because of the abominations found in it (Ezek 9:1-11).

Such sieglements have never taken place against *“the city of the Living God.”* This city is not accessible to our enemies. The devil, with his motley band of angels, has been cast from this city, and cannot enter its realms in any sense or at any time (Rev 12:9; Luke 10:18). This is *“the Jerusalem which is above,”* and is the *“mother of us all”* (Gal 4:26). Freedom is experienced here, and there is no form of bondage to the lower elements (Gal 4:26).

This is a place of spiritual commerce, where *“the things of the Spirit of God”* (Rom 8:5; 1 Cor 2:14) are dispensed and enjoyed. The qualification for citizenry in this city is not to be found in the flesh, but in approximation to the Son of God. This is the location of *“all spiritual blessings,”* made accessible to all of its inhabitants (Eph 1:6). No dweller in this city is alone. There are no juniper trees under which discouraged men weep (1 Kgs 19:4). There are no

Mind you, we are in the company of these angels, though we cannot see them. They are behind the scenes, inaccessible to human senses, “sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation” (Heb 1:14). They are our friends, not our foes. They are for us, not against us.

agonizing Gethsemanes, from which *“strong cryings and tears”* may be heard (Mark 14:32-34; Heb 5:7). In a typical way, it was true of earthly Jerusalem, but much more of the *“heavenly Jerusalem,”* *“this the city that men call The perfection of beauty”* (Lam 2:15). **Here is where we HAVE come!**

An innumerable

company of angels

“But you have come to . . . to an innumerable company of angels . . .” Angels were present at Mount Sinai. It is written of God’s descent to that holy mount, *“The LORD came from Sinai, And dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, And He came with ten thousands of saints . . .”* (Deut 33:2). Again, catch the magnitude of that occasion, when a fiery law went forth to Israel. *“The chariots of God are twenty thousand, Even thousands of thousands; The Lord is*

among them as in Sinai, in the Holy Place” (Psa 68:17). Stephen affirmed that ancient Israel had *“received the law by the direction of angels”* (Acts 7:53). But that awesome assembly of lofty beings is not to be compared with the blessed place where *“we are come.”*

At Sinai the angels were countable. Where we are come, they are *“innumerable.”* At Sinai, the angels spoke the Law, and the people were frightened (Heb 2:2). These angels are joyful because of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. They have witnessed the reconciling of the world to God (2 Cor 5:18-21). At Sinai, there were fear and dread in the presence of the holy angels. But now, where we have come, *“there is joy in the presence of the angels of God”* (Luke 15:10). Some versions, accentuating this reality, translate this verse as follows. *“But you have come to . . . innumerable angels in festal gathering”* (RSV), and *“You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly”* (NIV).

Mind you, we are in the company of these angels, though we cannot see them. They are behind the scenes, inaccessible to human senses, *“sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation”* (Heb 1:14). They are our friends, not our foes. They are for us, not against us. The Gospel we preach intrigues them (1 Pet 1:12), and they saw Christ Jesus for Who He was, when the world knew Him not (1 Tim 3:16). These are *“elect angels”* before whom we live and are summoned into Kingdom activities (1 Tim 5:21). **Let your mind ponder where you are come in Christ Jesus!**

Spiritual Babylon (Rev 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2-21) has taught believers to think in terms of a sect or denomination. We are asked, “What church do you belong to?”, or a similar question.

The Lord, however, does not encourage us to think with such a limited perspective.

To the General Assembly and Church of the Firstborn Who Are Registered in Heaven

“But you have come to . . . to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven . . .” Spiritual Babylon (Rev 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2-21) has taught believers to think in terms of a sect or denomination. We are asked, *“What church do you belong to?”*, or a similar question. The Lord, however, does not encourage us to think with such a limited perspective. God is *“great”* (Job 26:26), and His salvation is also *“great”* (Heb 2:3). We have NOT been called into an earthly society, but a heavenly one. There are no sects or divisions in heaven, but perfect unity. What is more, **the only valid registry of God-approved people is in heaven.**

When we come into Christ, we become identified with every individual recognized and approved by God. We also become part of the gathering, or household, over which Jesus Christ, the *“Firstborn,”* presides, and to which He ministers. The term *“Firstborn”* does not insinuate that our Savior is a created being, as some sophists affirm. It is rather a spiritual perspective. He is the *“Firstborn from the dead,”* or the First to be raised from the dead as Conqueror and exalted One (Rev 1:6). He is the example of what we shall be--the *“Firstborn.”* He is also the *“Firstborn”* in the sense of being the First of a new order--a new family, as it were. Scripture puts it this way, He is *“the firstborn among many brethren”* (Rom 8:29). By this, the Spirit means the exalted Christ is the One to Whom the saved are being conformed; the example of what they shall be in character. As it is written, *“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.”*

The society to which we *“are come”* are those being conformed to the image of God’s Son. These are *“the elect”* (Col 3:12) whom heaven has recognized. The grand amalgamation of personalities is a family *“in heaven and earth”* which is named after Christ (Eph 3:15). These are

the ones God has received, those to whom Jesus ministers, and who are at home in the presence of the Lord. It is recognition enough to be identified with this **“general assembly.”** By saying **“general,”** the universality of this gathering is accentuated. Blessed is the person who finds satisfaction in being identified with this assembly. They can **“rejoice in this . . . because your names are written in heaven”** (Luke 10:20). They are no less than heavenly alumni!

God the Judge of All

“But you have come to . . . to God the Judge of all . . . ” Herein is a marvelous thing, underscoring the magnitude of our salvation. Note that it does not say we have come to God in the capacity of a Savior, as in 1 Timothy 1:1. Nor, indeed, have we come to Him as our Redeemer, as in Psalm 78:35. Those, and other, expressions are precisely true, but they are not the point of this text. **Our salvation is so thorough and extensive in Christ that it holds up under Divine scrutiny.**

Christ’s appointed role is to **“bring us to God”** (1 Pet 3:18). He will not bring us defiled and trembling before **“the Judge of all the earth”** (Gen 18:25). His ministry is not to set us before God as Israel stood before Him at Sinai! In the ultimate sense, He will **“present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy”** (Jude 24-25). The final presentation will find us rejoicing with **“exceeding joy,”** not trembling with exceeding greatness as did Moses (1 Pet 4:13).

Even now, we **“are come”** to God in the capacity of **“Judge of all.”** And what are we to expect from this confrontation? It will build our confidence if we can see this truth. Take, for example, the testimony of John. **“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”** (1 John 1:9). Whenever we sin, we come before the Lord in confession. We face Him as a Judge. What does He do as we stand before Him, acknowledging our transgression without reservation? He passes judgment, but not to condemnation. **“He is faithful and just to forgive us.”** That is an act of judgment! Because we are **“in the Son,”** and are availing ourselves of the grace that is in Him, He judges us forgiven and cleansed! Praise His holy name! We do not shrink back from His judgment, but seek it because of Christ’s vicarious atonement.

The Spirits of Just Men Made Perfect

“But you have come to . . . the spirits of just men made perfect . . . ” The greater part of Christ’s family is **“in heaven,”** as opposed to **“earth”** (Eph 3:15). While we are surely identified with all the saints in earth, as our **“your brethren that are in the world”** (1 Pet 5:9), our fellowship is not confined to them. We identify with our suffering brethren as ourselves **“in the body also”** (Heb 13:3). But we must not forget those who have finished their race.

Notice that we “are come” to “the spirits of just men made perfect.” These are the most noble of our race, from righteous Abel to the last to have completed the course set before them! These are in an eternal state presently, awaiting the final gathering together of all things, “not only which are in heaven, but also which are on earth”

Notice that we **“are come”** to **“the spirits of just men made perfect.”** These are the most noble of our race, from righteous Abel to the last to have completed the course set before them! These are in an eternal state presently, awaiting the final gathering together of all things, **“not only which are in heaven, but also which are on earth”** (Eph 1:10). These are not **“in the body,”** but are **“spirits.”** They are among that **“great cloud of witnesses”** that surround us, attesting to the faithfulness of God and the effectiveness of faith (Heb 12:1). These are all who have fought a **“good fight,”** finished their **“course,”** and **“kept the faith”** (2 Tim 4:7). A voice from heaven told John of this glorious community. **“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them’”** (Rev

14:13). While some are overly concerned about organizational identity, let the saints of God rejoice in being identified with those who have departed the arena of warfare. How good to be perceived as members of that group!

Some have interpreted this to mean all of the saved, but this is not at all the case. These *“spirits”* have been perfected, a condition we enjoy in this world only by imputation. The best of those in the world confesses, *“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended . . .”* (Phil 3:12-13). The word *“spirits,”* whether used of angels (Heb 1:14), evil personalities (Matt 8:16; Acts 19:12), or those who have died (1 Pet 3:19) generally refers to those having no visible, or corporeal, body. The only exceptions to this accentuate the personality of humanity, as distinguished from their bodily frame (1 Cor 14:32; Heb 12:9).

To what extent this fellowship is realized is not known. It is a spiritual brotherhood, as opposed to a cognitive one--yet it is very real. If the rich man knew of the activities of earth from hell (Luke 16:28), it is inconceivable that similar knowledge is not experienced by the godly in some way. In fact, from paradise, Abraham was also aware of the affairs of earth (Acts 16:29). The *“souls under the altar,”* martyred because of their testimony, were also conscious to some extent of the happenings of earth (Rev 6:9-10). The Lord Jesus, while yet in the world, enjoyed fellowship from two representatives of this number (Luke 9:30-31). When Jesus died, *“many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many”* (Matt 27:52-53). Let no one, therefore, doubt the existence these spirits, or their capacity to have some form of fellowship with us. Only glory will tell the extent of this mysterious fellowship to which we *“are come.”* It would be well for us to consider these perfected *“spirits”* in our speech and conduct.

Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant

“But you have come to . . . Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant . . .” In the incarnation, Jesus came to us (John 1:14). In salvation, we come to Him! We do not come to Him as mere spectators, or as ones engaged in a formality, like that experienced under the Law. We *“are come”* to Him in the capacity of *“Mediator of the New Covenant.”* The *“better promises”* of that *“better covenant”* (Heb 8:6) are ministered to us by this *“One Mediator”* (1 Tim 2:5). He presently is *“bringing many sons to glory”* (Heb 2:10) by means of His mediatorial ministry. We come to Him as those requiring and desiring the provisions He is ministering.

When Jesus cried, “It is finished,” He did not mean His work was completed, but that the vicarious atonement was completed. The Savior had concluded the work He had been given to complete in a “prepared” body (Heb 10:5-10). But there was more to do if we were to be glorified!

But Jesus is also bringing God to us, as it were. *“For through Him we both (Jew and Gentile) have access by one Spirit unto the Father”* (Eph 2:18). Our salvation was not completed at the cross, as common as that perception may be. When Jesus cried, *“It is finished,”* He did not mean His work was completed, but that the vicarious atonement was completed. The Savior had concluded the work He had been given to complete in a “prepared” body (Heb 10:5-10). But there was more to do if we were to be glorified!

He had to take His life back again, according to the commandment given to Him by the Father (John 10:17-18). He still had to present *“Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the*

things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). He still had to commission His disciples, and charge them to wait for the promise of the Father (Acts 1:4). It was necessary for Him to be **"received up into heaven, and sit down at the right hand of God"** (Mark 16:19). His intercessory work must be aggressively waged, lest we could not be saved **"to the uttermost"** (Heb 7:25).

Simplistic views of salvation are damaging to man's spirit. They inhibit, if not stop altogether, spiritual growth. The phrase *"finished work of Christ"* is not in the Bible--in any version. It is true, Jesus affirmed, **"I have finished the work which You have given Me to do"** (John 17:4)--but that was said BEFORE He died. Although it may be said that Jesus said this in anticipation of His death, that does not appear to be the meaning of His words. In the next verse Jesus addresses the matter of His death, asking the Father to glorify His name. He states **"the work"** that He had **"finished"** in these words. Although it is a lengthy passage, it will do us well to consider it. **"I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. For I have given to them the words which You have given Me ; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me. I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name . Those whom You gave Me I have kept ; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them Your word ; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world . And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth"** (John 17:6-19)

As Jesus prepared Himself to lay down His life, He gave the disciples, as it were, back to the Father. He no concentrated upon His substitutionary death. He had lived a spotless life, thereby finishing His work. He had resisted all attacks of the devil, thereby finishing His work. He had kept the disciples, thereby finishing His work. He had communicated to them the Word given to Him, thereby finishing His work. He had completed the EARTHLY work given to Him, and now prepared to offer the only sacrifice for sin God would ever accept.

When Jesus cried, "It is finished," He did not mean His work was completed, but that the vicarious atonement was completed. The Savior had concluded the work He had been given to complete in a "prepared" body (Heb 10:5-10). But there was more to do if we were to be glorified!

When Jesus cried, **"It is finished,"** He did not mean His work was completed, but that the vicarious atonement was completed. The Savior had concluded the work He had been given to complete in a "prepared" body (Heb 10:5-10). But there was more to do if we were to be glorified! We have come to Him as beneficiaries of those indispensable blessings. He has charge of the law being written upon our hearts (Heb 8:10; 10:16). He is in charge of the peace of God keeping our hearts and minds (Phil 4:7), and supplying all of our **"need according to His riches in glory"** (Phil 4:19). Until **"the day of God"** (2 Pet 3:12), the saints of God need to be perfected, established,

strengthened, and settled (1 Pet 5:10). This is accomplished through *“the Mediator of the New Covenant,”* to Whom we *“are come.”*

The Blood of Sprinkling That Speaks Better Things Than That of Abel

“But you have come to . . . the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.” Christ’s blood is not the only speaking blood! Abel’s blood spoke with a shout, as it were, to God. God said to Abel’s murderer, Cain, *“The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground. So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand”* (Gen 4:10-11). Abel’s blood cried condemnation, bringing a curse upon the head of Cain. It stirred the indignation of God, so that Cain was rejected. Hidden from the face of God, Cain became a *“fugitive and a vagabond”* (Gen 4:14). That is what speaking blood can do!

Unbelief tramples Jesus underfoot and despises the blood of the covenant.

The blood of Christ spoke condemnation to Judas who betrayed him (Matt 27:4), and to the Jews who rejected and crucified Him (Matt 27:25). It also will bring a curse upon the individual *“who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he*

Faith obtains what God has provided. We can realize forgiveness, redemption, peace, and justification, i.e., we can know the reality of them. We can do more than talk about cleansing, we can appropriate it--we “are come” to the “blood of sprinkling” that sanctifies is, making us useable to God!

was sanctified a common thing” (Heb 10:29). Those who treat this blood of the covenant casually, partaking of the cup of the Lord unworthily and with due remembrance, **“will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord”** (1 Cor 11:27). Make no mistake about this, the blood of Christ does not speak *“better things”* for everyone!

For those within the covenant, however, whose lives are *“hid with Christ in God”* (Col 3:3), the blood of Christ speaks *“better things.”* To them it speaks forgiveness (Eph 1:7), redemption (Rev 5:9), peace (Col 1:20), and justification (Rom 5:9). Here the saints find a thorough cleansing from *“all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:7). It speaks to God in their behalf, making them acceptable. Through this blood, we have boldness to *“enter the Holiest,”* the very presence of God (Heb 10:19). The *“blood of Christ”* has brought us nigh, who once were *“far off”* (Eph 2:13). This blood is the appointed means of purging *“the conscience from dead works to serve the Living God”* (Heb 9:14). The propitiation, or covering of our sins, is appropriated through *“faith in His blood”* (Rom 3:25). This is blood we can *“drink,”* ingesting it into our spirits, and thereby obtaining eternal life (John 6:54).

By saying we *“are come”* to this blood, its accessibility is declared. These benefits are all within our reach! **Faith obtains what God has provided.** We can realize forgiveness, redemption, peace, and justification, i.e., we can know the reality of them. We can do more than talk about cleansing, we can appropriate it--we *“are come”* to the *“blood of sprinkling”* that sanctifies is, making us useable to God! If we *“are come”* to this blood, we can *“enter”* confidently into the very sanctuary of heaven! Everything accomplished by this blood is therefore on our behalf! Praise the Lord!

THE SPIRITUAL CONCLUSION

The Holy Spirit now pleads with us to act upon the knowledge we have received. If, by faith, we do not act upon the truth, it will bring no benefit to us.

The idea that we can realize the benefits of Christ's work and the privileges of the New Covenant independently of effort is an imagination.

Do Not Refuse Him

“See that you do not refuse Him who speaks.” This is our personal responsibility. While it is *“hard to kick against the goads”* of the Holy Spirit, it is also true that He *“will not always strive with man”* (Acts 9:5; Gen 6:3). Notice, it is *“Him”* (the enthroned Son and Mediator) that is refused, not merely His word. An example of spurning the Lord is found in the parable of the great supper. Hear the parable. *“A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, ‘Come, for all things are now ready. But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.’ Still another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come’”* (Luke 14:16-20). Each of *“those who were invited”* refused the man who *gave a great supper and invited many*. It certainly was no fault of the one giving the supper. The invitation was clear, honest, and personal. No further preparations were required--everything was ready. **It was provided at no cost for all who were invited.** The invited ones were *“with one accord”* in their responses. The KJV says they began to make excuse *“with one consent.”* The RSV and NIV says they made excuse *“all alike.”* Their excuses were not the same, but their attitude was identical. The truth of the matter was, they did not want what the *“man”* had prepared. They did not perceive his *“great supper”* as important or a blessed event.

So it is with those who *“refuse Him”* who *“speaks from heaven.”* The Son of God, risen *“with healing in His wings”* (Mal 4:2) has prepared a *“great supper.”* It has been supplied at great cost, and is replete with things essential for Divine acceptance and blessing. The supper itself has been adapted to the ones invited to attend it. It is what they need, and will be delightful to them. It is satisfying, invigorating, and strengthening. The prophet Isaiah spoke of this great supper of salvation. *“And in this mountain The LORD of hosts will make for all people A feast of choice pieces, A feast of wines on the lees, Of fat things full of marrow, Of well-refined wines on the lees”* (Isa 25:6). Isaiah also spoke of the Divine invitation to this great feast. *“Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price”* (Isa 55:1). These are prophecies of the *“great salvation”* that is now offered to the world. In the words of Scripture, *“And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely”* (Rev 22:17). The invitation is an honest one, and everyone willing to come will be seated at the Master's table.

Partaking of this feast

The King does not call us to the adoption of a theological stance or organizational affiliation.

Rather, He calls us to enjoy the provisions His atonement has obtained for us. There is “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.” He offers intimacy with Himself, access to God, and the comfort of the Holy Spirit

involves living in the Spirit, ingesting the Word of God, and setting your affection on things above, and not on things on the earth. Energetic efforts are demanded in a good fight of faith and laying hold on eternal life. The King does not call us to the adoption of a theological stance or organizational affiliation. Rather, He calls us to enjoy the provisions His atonement has obtained for us. There is *“righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit”* (Rom 15:17). He offers intimacy

with Himself, access to God, and the comfort of the Holy Spirit (1 John 5:20; Eph 2:18; Acts 9:31). The Father and the Son will dwell in those who take advantage of this “*great supper*,” and the Spirit will strengthen them within the inner man (John 14:21,23; Eph 3:16). The names of those accepting this invitation will be “*written in heaven*,” and an inheritance will be reserved there for them (Luke 10:20; Heb 12:23; 1 Pet 1:4a). They themselves will be “*kept by the power of God*” (1 Pet 1:4b). This is a “*great salvation*,” indeed!

Refusing Him that speaks is offering an excuse for NOT partaking of His bountiful feast of salvation. It is preferring the world, self-interests, and “*other things*” (Mark 4:19). Coming to the King’s feast involves the abandonment of all competing interests. It requires self denial, the bearing of the cross daily, and the crucifixion of the flesh. Those refusing to do this “*with one accord begin to make excuse*.” Such people are willing to settle for something less than a spiritual feast. They imagine that some snacks may be forwarded to their homes, so to speak, without them having to personally sit at the Master’s table--but they are wrong, seriously wrong. **There is no salvation without the unreserved acceptance of what has been prepared in Christ Jesus!** Some have chosen a career over the “*great supper*” of salvation. Others have chosen pleasure, and some have even preferred domestic satisfaction to reconciliation to God. Some have elected to simply delay, not realizing the door to the supper will be closed at an undisclosed time. Those who delay to respond to the Lord’s wooing do so to their own harm. Salvation makes no provision for slothfulness or disinterest--or delay!

The Spirit reasons with us on this matter. “*For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven . . .*” In the beginning of this book, the Spirit reasoned similarly. “*For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation*” (Heb 2:2-3). Think! When Israel came to the border of the Canaan, they were offered the land. God promised to drive out the inhabitants through their efforts, even giving them cities they did not build, and vineyards they did not plant. But Israel refused to enter in! They rejected the Divine invitation! They did not escape! Shall it go differently with those who refuse to enter into the courts of the Lord now? If Jesus has provided us access to God, will He accept any excuse for not taking advantage of it? Provision has been made for the forgiveness of sin and cleansing from all unrighteousness. Will those who refuse to appropriate these benefits be excused? Indeed not!

All about us are churches, religious leaders, elders, deacons, and *church members* who are spurning the Divine invitation. They are not feasting on the riches of God’s grace, but attempting to live on meager spiritual rations. They will not be excused. Christ has made no provision for small appetites, minuscule efforts, and half-hearted service. Those things are like the field, oxen, and wife that were offered as excuses to the man preparing the “*great supper*.” I am alarmed that indifference is so

The effort to mingle flesh and Spirit is altogether too common. Such things are all excuses for not participating in the Divine nature, a feast that Christ has prepared for all who will partake of it

common in our churches, that disinterest is so pervasive. The mediocre are too acceptable. The effort to mingle flesh and Spirit is altogether too common. Such things are all excuses for not participating in the Divine nature, a feast that Christ has prepared for all who will partake of it (2 Pet 1:4).

He has promised

“ . . . whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, *“Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.”* If the greatness of the provision will not convince us to live in the Spirit, a solemn warning is sounded from heaven. All of the things men choose in preference to this *“great salvation”* are going to pass away. Christ is offering eternal life to us while we are in a temporal realm. He has been gracious enough to tell us plainly what is really apparent all about us. **All of nature is in a state of demise!** It makes little difference what segment of it you prefer, or how valuable it may appear, it is all going to pass away. Once God shook the Sinaitic peninsula at the giving of the Law. As it is written, “Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly” (Ex 19:18). Indeed, as the Psalmist declared, *“Ye mountains, that ye skipped like rams; and ye little hills, like lambs? Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob”* (Psa 114:6). Of that time, Habakkuk said, *“The mountains saw You and trembled . . . ”* (Hab 3:10). The occasion was so awesome that even Moses said, *“I am exceedingly afraid and trembling”* (Heb 12:21). That was but a mild introduction to what is coming!

The one speaking from heaven says, *“Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven”* (Heb 12:26b). This is everything created--everything that had a beginning, or genesis. As Isaiah said, *“Therefore I will shake the heavens, And the earth will move out of her place, In the wrath of the LORD of hosts And in the day of His fierce anger”* (Isa 13:13). Joel also prophesied of this time. *“The heavens and earth will shake”* (Joel 3:16).

Haggai provides the specific prophecy referenced by our text. *“For thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land’”* (Hag 2:6). In the context of Haggai, this prophecy had to do with the Word becoming flesh and accomplishing His death. *“and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,” says the LORD of hosts*” (Hag 2:7). The Messiah would bring what honest and good hearts longed for. The temple He would build would be filled with the Lord’s glory; i.e., the church, or body of the redeemed, would become the temple of God Himself--His dwelling place. That is what Habbakuk foretold. But in our text, the Spirit rises even higher, setting the prophesy in the context of *“eternal purpose.”*

“Now this, ‘Yet once more,’ indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain” (verse 27). Note, the things to be shaken are things that were *“created”* or made. Only eternal things, or *“the things which cannot be shaken,”* will remain. The entirety of creation is like scaffolding that obscures the eternal kingdom. It has captured the attention of those who live in the flesh. They cannot see it is shakeable, and therefore embrace it as though it could not be moved. Those who refuse the Master’s invitation attempt to stabilize what is passing away. They pour their hearts and souls into what cannot last. The tragedy is they are doing so at the expense of their soul. As the Lord Jesus said, *“For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”* (Matt 16:26). Those arresting words were spoken in precisely the same state of affairs as our text. The very next words read, *“For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works”* (Matt 16:27).

The Messiah would bring what honest and good hearts longed for. The temple He would build would be filled with the Lord’s glory; i.e., the church, or body of the redeemed, would become the temple of God Himself--His dwelling place.

Peter informs us this will occur when the Lord returns as a thief, to rob sinners of all their possessions. *“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up”* (2 Pet 3:10). This is nothing less than the removal of *“things that are made.”* Everything people have chosen over salvation will be *“removed!”* Mind you, *“salvation”* is not limited to the remission of your sins and a new birth. Those are circumstances that BEGIN an association with the Almighty. In our text, *“salvation”* refers to *“going on to perfection”* (Heb 6:1), appropriating the provisions Jesus is presently ministering from the right hand of God. Those failing to do this, despite their profession, are refusing Him that speaks from heaven! They have refused Him because they preferred the realm that can, and will, be shaken.

Let Us Have Grace

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.” There are some significant differences in various versions of this text. I prefer this one. The RSV, NASB, and NIV translate *“let us have grace”* as *“let us be grateful,” “let us show gratitude,”* and *“let us be thankful.”* Robertson offers a technical definition which may be offered in justification for such a weak rendering of the text. *“Let us have grace (ecwmen carin). Present active volitive subjunctive of ecw , “Let us keep on having grace” as in 4:16, though it can mean “Let us keep on having gratitude” as in Lu 17:9.”* ¹ The passage, however, is too weighty for this to be the meaning of the text, i.e., that we are to be *“grateful”* or *“thankful.”* While thankfulness is imperative [and unthankfulness is a cause for cursing (Rom 1:21)], it is never represented as imparting power to *“serve God acceptably.”* The grace which we here receive, however, enables the believer to *“serve God”* in a way that is satisfactory to God Himself. It also induces *“reverence and godly fear,”* or awe. That can, in my opinion, only be attributed to the grace of God, extended to us through the Lord Jesus Christ. How often this grace has been mentioned in Hebrews. Jesus, by *“the grace of God,”* tasted death for every man (2:9). We are invited to come to the *“throne of all grace”* to *“obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need”* (4:16). Because of His role in salvation, the Holy Spirit is called *“the Spirit of grace”* (10:29). We are admonished to look diligently *“lest any man fail of the grace of God”* (12:15). The heart is said to be established *“by grace”* (13:9). The book concludes with *“Grace be with you all. Amen.”* (13:25). The word *“thanks”* in any form is found but once in this book. *“Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name”* (13:15). This is a response to God, and not a resource for believers.

To *“have grace”* is to appropriate or *“obtain”* it, coming to the Throne where it is dispensed. It involves not insulting the *“Spirit of grace”* by hardening your heart against Him. It is not failing, or falling beyond, the reach of that grace.

Do not fail to see the reason for *having grace* . It is that *“we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.”* This is a most sobering declaration. It means that no service, regardless of frequency,

If the individual does not come to the “throne of all grace,” all work for God is rendered unacceptable! If the wooing of the Spirit, His direction, and what He is saying, is despised by the professed believer, his service is rejected! To put it more plainly, those who live at a distance from God will not be received by Him.

fervency, or location, is acceptable to God if grace has not been obtained. If the individual does not come to the **“throne of all grace,”** all work for God is rendered unacceptable! If the wooing of the Spirit, His direction, and what He is saying, is despised by the professed believer, his service is rejected! To put it more plainly, those who live at a distance from God will not be received by Him. To reject what He has provided is to place the stamp of *disapproval* on all of our works. This has startling ramifications. It explains why Christ will reject the exceptional works of some in **“that day.”** As it is written, **“Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'”** (Matt 7:22-23). And what made their impressive works **“lawlessness”** or **“iniquity”** (KJV)? They had not **“obtained grace”** to serve God **“acceptably with reverence and godly fear.”** They had sought to serve God in the energy of the flesh, without Jesus, without the Spirit, and without grace. How lamentable that there is so much activity in this category in the professed church!

A Consuming Fire

“For our God is a consuming fire.” Finally, the Spirit brings to our remembrance the time when God will be revealed. His nature is such that He devours everything and anyone unlike Himself. This is the Divine characteristic that required the Word become flesh, and lay down His life **“a ransom for many.”** In His mercy, God has created a buffer zone in Christ Jesus, where present safety, strength, and acceptance may be realized. But ultimately, He will be revealed in **“fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries”** (Heb 10:27). Salvation prepares us for that day, making us, so to speak, non-combustible. By conforming us to **“the image of His Son,”** God is preparing us to gloriously survive that day.

On Sinai, in consideration of the people, God forbade them to come close. He descended **“like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel”** (Ex 24:17). In that case, their distance preserved them, for, He said, **“You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live”** (Ex 33:20). However, when the Lord comes again, **“every eye shall see Him”** (Rev 1:7). Then, the unsaved will seek to be at a distance from the Lord, but will not be able to hide (Rev 6:16). You see, we are now being prepared for that day. For those availing themselves of this **“great salvation,”** that will be a time of blessing, glory, and exceeding joy. Then, their service for the Lord will be honored, and they will be rewarded. There, they will **“dwell in the house of the Lord”** forever, to **“behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple”** (Psa 27:4). For those who know their God, the future is bright with hope. We even now enjoy **“everlasting consolation and good hope through grace.”**

CONCLUSION

The intent of our text, however, is to persuade us that all of this means nothing if we do not appropriate what God has provided. If we choose to ignore these things, placing them in the back of our minds and hearts, they will soon “slip from us.” Now, see to it that you do not come short of this grace.

We have dealt with a very glorious passage. The absolute superiority of the New Covenant over the Old Covenant has been declared. The First Covenant began with a regional shaking. The New Covenant will conclude with the shaking of all things. The Old Covenant produced and withdrawal from the presence of the Lord. The New Covenant brings perfect love which casts out fear, and ushers us into the most holy place. At the inauguration of the Old Covenant, 3,000 died (Ex 32:28). The commencement of the New Covenant was attended by 3,000 being brought to life in Christ (Acts 2:41). When the Old Covenant was given, the people asked that God speak to them no longer. The New Covenant brings a desire for God to speak: **“Lord, evermore give us this bread”** (John

6:34), *“Then they that gladly received his word . . .”* (Acts 2:41). WHEN THE Old Covenant was given, a consuming fire came upon Sinai (Ex 19:18). The announcement of the New Covenant was attended by fire that sanctified, and did not harm (Acts 2:3). At Sinai there was a frightening “tempest” (Heb 12:18). At Pentecost there was a *“rushing mighty wind”* that filled the house, but did not destroy it (Acts 2:2).

We now have a *“better”* Savior (Heb 1:4), a *“better hope”* (Heb 7:19), and a *“better covenant”* (Heb 7:22; 8:6). The sacrifice of purification is *“better,”* having cleansed defiled humanity and readied heaven for us (Heb 9:23). Even now, those who embrace the New Covenant *“have in heaven a better and an enduring substance”* (Heb 10:34). We have a *“better country”* (Heb 11:16), look forward to a *“better resurrection”* (Heb 11:35), and have a *“better thing”* provided for us by God Himself (Heb 11:40). The *“blood of sprinkling”* to which we have come by grace, *“speaketh better things than that of Abel”* (Heb 12:24). **How glorious is the New Covenant!**

The intent of our text, however, is to persuade us that all of this means nothing if we do not appropriate what God has provided. If we choose to ignore these things, placing them in the back of our minds and hearts, they will soon *“slip from us”* (Heb 2:1). Now, see to it that you do not come short of this grace. Flee to Christ for refuge, and come to the throne of all grace. Everything has been provided for your safe arrival in heaven. A Mediator is at God’s right hand to ensure you can obtain these provisions. The Holy Spirit has been given to strengthen, encourage, and illuminate you. A great cloud of witnesses surrounds you, attesting to the effectiveness of faith and the surety of Divine commitment. You have *“come to”* an amalgamation of spiritual benefits so great it staggers your imagination, yet so near they can have them for the asking. Run the race! Run it with endurance! Do not come short of the Grace of God. It will not be long, and we will be home!

Now, bring the text to your mind again. It is a glorious one, conducive to productive spiritual contemplation. Here it is from Darby’s translation. *“For ye have not come to {the mount} that might be touched and was all on fire, and to obscurity, and darkness, and tempest, 19 and trumpet’s sound, and voice of words; which they that heard, excusing themselves, declined {the} word being addressed to them any more: 20 (for they were not able to bear what was enjoined: And if a beast should touch the mountain, it shall be stoned; 21 and, so fearful was the sight, Moses said, I am exceedingly afraid and full of trembling;) 22 but ye have come to mount Zion; and to {the} city of {the} living God, heavenly Jerusalem; and to myriads of angels, 23 the universal gathering; and to {the} assembly of the firstborn {who are} registered in heaven; and to God, judge of all; and to {the} spirits of just {men} made perfect; 24 and to Jesus, mediator of a new covenant; and to {the} blood of sprinkling, speaking better than Abel. 25 See that ye refuse not him that speaks. For if those did not escape who had refused him who uttered the oracles on earth, much more we who turn away from him {who does so} from heaven: 26 whose voice then shook the earth; but now he has promised, saying, Yet once will *I* shake not only the earth, but also the heaven. 27 But this Yet once, signifies the removing of what is shaken, as being made, that what is not shaken may remain. 28 Wherefore let us, receiving a kingdom not to be shaken, have grace, by which let us serve God acceptably with reverence and fear. 29 For also our God {is} a consuming fire.”*

And now, may the Lord give you grace to apprehend the blessings on and benefits of Mount Zion, the city of the Living God!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

Commentary on the book of Hebrews

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #25

THE GRAND SUMMATION

“Let brotherly love continue. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels. Remember the prisoners as if chained with them; those who are mistreated; since you yourselves are in the body also. Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge. Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: ‘The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’ Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them. We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably. But I especially urge you to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner. Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words. Know that our brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly. Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you. Grace be with you all. Amen.” (Hebrews 13:1-25, NKJV).

INTRODUCTION

The book of Hebrews provides a spiritual perspective — a persuasion that is essential to living by faith. This perspective has been founded upon two great pillars of truth: (1) The Person of Jesus Christ, and (2) The superiority of the New Covenant. These two mainstreams of revelation are woven throughout the book. In their light, every affirmation can be perceived. As the glory of Christ and the

New Covenant illuminate the exhortations of this book, they make perfect sense to us. Remove these pillars of truth (Christ and the Covenant), and the structure of Scripture falls to the ground.

Godliness makes no sense without these foundations (the *better* High Priest and the *better* Covenant). The promises become void of power if we have not seen them within the light of the Son of God and the new and living way. As a mere manual of conduct, or a road map to heaven, the Bible exerts no moral power over those subjected to it. The landscape of religion is cluttered with the spiritual carcasses of people who approached the Word of God as though it were only a book of rules, a historical document, or an empty creedal statement. Such approaches have produced legalism and institutionalism, impotent twins.

Because God is a “*Living God*” (Matt 16:16; 2 Cor 3:3; 1 Tim 3:15), our approach to and fellowship with Him must be living. Vitality, response, and progress must characterize them. Spiritually dead people

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cannot meet together with God! A lifeless religion cannot be the means of enjoying Divine fellowship! We cannot employ a dead means to reach a Living God. These are spiritual principles that CANNOT be effectively contradicted. The tragedy of the situation is that such attempts are regularly made in the nominal church. This book expounds the reality of a Living Savior (Heb 7:8,25), and a covenant that is a “*new and living way*” (Heb 10:20). They are the means to “the Living God” (3:12; 9:14; 10:31; 12:22).

Apart from fellowship with God’s Son (1 Cor 1:9) and identity with the New Covenant (Heb 9:8-12), all religious activities are “*dead works*” (Heb 6:1; 9:14). Such works are NOT acceptable to the Living God and an Intercessor that “*ever lives.*” It makes not difference how consistently they are performed or how fervently they are pursued. **Our fellowship with the Father is through the Son or not at all!** When the rain of God’s grace falls upon us, a good crop is expected, or that very grace is received in vain. If men do not “*go on to perfection,*” growing in their involvement with God, they will fall back into sin and condemnation (6:1-8). This book has alerted us to this reality. The possibility and existence of spiritual slothfulness and indolence required that these words be written.

Now we come to the conclusion — the **grand summation** of the Divine message. The Spirit will associate human conduct with the message. He will show the relevancy and necessity of embodying the life of God in every aspect of life. At no point can men live in disregard of Jesus Christ and the “*better covenant*” provided for them. Spiritual life is applicable at every level of our existence. Every expression, every attitude, and every initiative can be impregnated with the life of God. We are now urged to thorough participation in the “*great salvation*” provided for us by God, in Christ Jesus, and through the Holy Spirit. We must be immersed in the will of God. No other posture is acceptable!

IMPLICATIONS FOR LIVING IN THE WORLD

The word “*implications*” is not intended to be a weak word. By it, I mean the “*essence*,” or “*gist*” of the message for saints in the world. This is the practical heart of the message--how it is translated into life. As far as what we are to DO is concerned, the following things are the crux of the matter. They are the embodiments of application. I summon you to behold the absence of details. These are broad kingdom generalities, to be developed by faith, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. They are more than mere suggestions, and, strictly speaking, are not commandments.

These are exhortations--a Divine summons to avail ourselves of the grace provided in Christ Jesus and the New Covenant He is mediating. To put it another way, the grace of God and the power of the Spirit find expression in these activities. These are the sanctified outlets for Divine power!

Brotherly Love

“*Let brotherly love continue*” (Verse 1). Brotherly love is a deep affection for the people of God. It is a appreciation and preference for those who are “*in Christ Jesus*” (2 Cor 5:17). As the old song “*Take Time To Be Holy*” says, “**make friends of God’s children.**” These are the people God prefers. They are the people He hears, blesses, and directs. Jesus Christ is interceding for them, and the angels of God are ministering to them (11:16; 7:25; 1:13-14).

Notice, the Spirit does not say “*START loving the brethren,*” but “**LET brotherly love continue.**” The wording of this verse sounds peculiar in English. The phrase “*Let brother love*” is translated from **H filadelfia** (ha fil-ad-el-fee'ah). The first word (“*Let*”) is a definite article, sometimes translated *the, this, or that* . In this context, however, it means *in order that, so that, or with the result that* . 1 The idea is this: In view of the foregoing affirmations, this is what will occur if we embrace what has been said, and the One who has said it. The Spirit has declared where we

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have come (12:22-24). We have been admonished not to resist the One speaking from heaven (12:25). The end of the natural order has been asserted (12:26-27), and the availability of grace to serve God acceptable (12:28). We have also been apprized that “**God is a consuming fire,**” and will not allow for conduct incompatible with His own holiness (12:29).

If our hearts are tender to these things, the grace of God will erupt in the love of Christ’s brethren (2:10-11). Nevertheless, we must allow it to happen by not refusing the One speaking from heaven! Our advantage is that **the new birth is attended by a preference for the Lord’s people, and a desire to bless them** . It is written,

“Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him” (1 John 5:1). As surely as it is not possible to be born again without loving God, so it is unthinkable that we could love God without loving others begotten of Him. This is another view of the *“unity of the Spirit,”* which conjoins the redeemed together. It is something we are given, and which is to be kept *“in the bond of peace”* (Eph 4:1).

This admonition is necessary because of our current situation. We are in a cursed realm (1 John 2:17), inhabiting a body that *“is dead because of sin”* (Rom 8:10), and hounded by a fierce adversary (1 Pet 5:8). We are NOT in a moral vacuum or a spiritual void. Satan, as the *“accuser of the brethren”* (Rev 12:10) seeks to disrupt the spiritual coalition created in Christ Jesus. He makes every attempt to cause us to have contempt for the people of God. One of his master strategies is found in sectarianism, sometimes called denominationalism. In this spiritual monster the devil has created a means whereby *“brotherly love”* can be discontinued. He shrinks the circumference of brotherhood, thereby excluding vast numbers of God’s children--even causing hatred of the same. Hurling the *“fiery darts”* or *“flaming arrows”* of *“imagination,”* *“high things”* (pretensions) and *“thought”* (2 Cor 10:5), he seeks to disrupt *“brotherly love.”* He aggressively promotes selfish interests over Kingdom advantage, and worldly recognition over concourse in heavenly places. He is tireless and consistent in these efforts, as every sensitive soul can attest.

And what is the response of faith to these conditions? How will those who hears the One speaking from heaven react to this Satanic initiative? What will the Holy Spirit enable people to do? How will the intercession of Jesus become effective in the people of God? What will the New Covenant enable us to do? *“LET BROTHERLY LOVE CONTINUE.”* The Word from heaven admonishes us to allow *“brotherly love”* to go on. To put it another way, we are not to permit anything to disrupt that love, that preference, that desire to *“do good . . . especially to the household of faith”* (Gal 6:10). The intercession of Jesus, ministry of angels, empowerment of the Holy Spirit, and effectiveness of the New Covenant enable this to be accomplished!

Hospitality

“Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels” (Verse 2). Here is an admonition that sharply conflicts with the philosophy of a selfish age! This is **hospitality** , which all believers are to practice (Rom 12:13). No person lacking this quality is to be allowed a position of leadership among God’s people (1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:8). It is also to be practiced without *“grudging”* or *“without grumbling”* (1 Pet 4:9).

Here is a Kingdom perspective that is exceedingly rare in our time--at least in the Western world. There are countless examples of hospitality in Scripture. A table is providing listing some of them.

When it came to the support of widows by the church, several requirements were given. Pertinent to this discussion, some of them were *“if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted”* (1 Tim 5:10). It ought to be clear that God does not

ACCOUNTS OF HOSPITALITY

Pharaoh to Abraham - *Genesis 12:16*

Melchizedek to Abraham - *Genesis 14:18*

Abraham to angels - *Genesis 18:1-8*

Lot to angels - *Genesis 19:1-11*

Abimelech to Abraham - *Genesis 10:14-15*

Sons of Heth to Abraham - *Genesis 23:6,11*

Laban to Abraham's servant - *Genesis 24:31*

Laban to Jacob - *Genesis 29:13-14*

Isaac to Abimelech - *Genesis 26:30*

Joseph to his brethren - *Genesis 43:31-34*

Pharaoh to Jacob - *Genesis 45:16-20; 47:7-12*

Jethro to Moses - *Exodus 2:20*

Rahab to the spies - *Joshua 2:1-16*

Man of Gibeah to the Levite - *Judges 19:16-21*

Pharaoh to Hadad - *1 Kings 11:7,22*

David to Mephibosheth - *2 Samuel 9:7-13*

Widow of Zarephath to Elijah - *1 Kings 17:10-24*

The Shunnamite to Elisha - *2 Kings 4:8*

Elisha to Syrian spies - *2 Kings 6:22*

Job to strangers - *Job 31:32*

Martha to Jesus - *Luke 10:38; John 12:1-2*

Pharisee to Jesus - *Luke 11:37-38*

Zaccheus to Jesus - *Luke 19:1-10*

Simon the tanner to Peter - *Acts 10:6,23*

Lydia to Paul and Silas - *Acts 16:15*

Publius to Paul - *Acts 28:2,7*

Phebe to Paul - *Romans 16:2*

Onesiphorus to Paul - *2 Timothy 1:16*

Gaius to brethren - *3 John 5-8*

take the matter of hospitality lightly. Here is a ministry that has sustained prophets and refreshed Apostles. During an occasion of hospitality, Zaccheus experienced salvation coming to his house (Luke 19). A Gentile widow, because of her hospitable attitude toward a prophet of God, received her son back from the dead (1 Kgs 17:20-23). The door of faith was opened to the Gentiles while Simon the tanner was hospitable to Peter (Acts 10:8-23). An island of barbarous people experienced a wave of healing and a three-month visit of Gospel influence when they were hospitable (Acts 28:2-11). Do not doubt the effectiveness of hospitality.

Our text says, *“Do not forget to entertain strangers”* — people you do not know, and are not members of your family or circle of friends. Do not allow the business of life and the demand of earthly responsibilities to push hospitality from your consideration. And why not? Because the Kingdom of God relies upon this expression to carry the work of God forward. Much of Paul’s effectiveness was owing to the hospitality of the brethren (Acts 18:2,15; 28:2-11; Rom 16:2; 2 Tim 1:18). **The current ministry of Jesus and the effectiveness of the New Covenant are realized in this activity.**

To stimulate our involvement, the Spirit adds, *“for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.”* Both Abraham and Lot experienced such visitations (Gen 18:2-10; 19:1-3). Samson’s parents, Menoah and his wife, also entertained an angel *“unawares”* (Judges 13:15-25). The modern church does not even think of the possibility of such things. Some would dare to scoff at the likelihood of such a visit — but the Spirit has spoken! The redeemed, if they will allow it, can have transcendent involvements in the Kingdom of God. **In such an apparently small thing as hospitality, the course of history has been affected.** The ministry of Jesus and participation in the New Covenant are realized in this unselfish activity.

Remember Suffering Believers

“Remember the prisoners as if chained with them; those who are mistreated; since you yourselves are in the body also” (Verse 3). Just as the Lord Jesus did not think only of Himself, so the lives of those in Him do not center in themselves. **We have been called into heavenly interactions!** Some of our brothers and sisters are suffering extraordinary opposition. Some are incarcerated, restricted with chains, and experiencing incomprehensible maltreatment and cruelty. Throughout history, portions of the holy remnant have been asked to pass through uncommon suffering and trial. History is choked with the blood of God’s people. Their abuse and persecution are some of the blotches upon the pages of human chronology.

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It is true that God is with chained and battered saints, and that grace is being given to them. But that is not the end of the matter. As members of Christ’s body, **we have been called into participation in the government of the Kingdom.** We have been constituted *“kings and priests unto God”* through the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 1:5-6). There is an interdependency in this Kingdom that requires our interaction. God sustains His people, among other things, through the prayers and intercessions of the saints (1 Tim 2:1). The unity of God’s people is so intimate that we can, in a

sense, participate with our brethren in their sufferings. Hear this remarkable word, ***“Remember the prisoners as if chained with them.”*** The High Priesthood of Christ and the nature of the New Covenant provides for such involvements.

I have personally experienced a measure of this participation. In 1996, one of my daughters (Leah Ann Oney) was called to glory. She passed from this world with Lou Gherig’s disease, in a state of physical debilitation. Her faith grew during this time, but not without difficulty. She experienced claustrophobia during this time, a dreadful feeling of confinement that is highly distracting. During the latter part of her illness, I was called to fellowship with my daughter in this trial. This phobia so gripped my soul that I thought I would die. For a short season, I did not understand what was happening. Then, by the grace of God, I realized I was experiencing the same feelings as my daughter. Although nearly unbearable to me, I only experienced a fraction of what she was enduring. I knew this was an occasion to pray for God to sustain and strengthen my daughter. I thus recalled, and prayed for, my daughter ***“as if chained with”*** her.

It is possible to live close enough to the Lord to be drawn into situations requiring an abundance of grace. We must not shrink back from such things. This is one of the appointed means whereby Christ’s intercession and participation in the benefits of the New Covenant are realized.

Our recollection of, and interest in, this group of sufferers is within the framework of holy consideration: ***“since you yourselves are in the body also.”*** This reference is not to the mystical body of Christ, the church, but to the vessel of clay we presently inhabit. This is another way of saying we are still in the world. Those in harsh tribulation and those in relatively peaceful climes are in a cursed realm--a cosmos of conflict. Although we may dwell in peaceful realms now, it may not always be so. If we remember our suffering brethren, we ourselves will be remembered if summoned into the arena of suffering. Our Savior and the Covenant He mediates are adapted for such participation.

The Honorableness Of Marriage

“Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Verse 4). It may appear strange for such a statement to be found in this context. Remember, the Holy Spirit is showing the practicality of the Reigning Savior and the New Covenant. Both have immediate relevance to us. At no point of time, nor in any occasion of life, are the Savior or the Covenant to be ignored. Both are suited for every aspect of life. To put it another way, **there is no point in time or condition of life where we may step outside of a consciousness of the Lord Jesus and the provisions of the New Covenant** . A particular point is now made of the involvements of man and woman.

The point of this statement is twofold. First, the blessing of God has been placed upon ***“marriage.”*** Second, the judgment of God is pledged against all intimacy of men and women outside of the bond of marriage. To put it another way, the current ministry of Jesus and the provisions of the New Covenant become resources to those who are joined together. Also, neither King Jesus nor the benefits of the covenant are available to fornicators. The blessing of God is for

those who live within Divine provisions. No blessing is available for those choosing to live outside the circumference of Divine will.

The word from which “*marriage*” is translated is **gamoj** (gam-os). It refers to the married state, **chosen in preference to immorality**. It is noble to believe and conform to the words of the Lord Jesus. “*For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder*” (Matt 19:5-6). That is an honorable state, the wisdom of the world notwithstanding. Duly embraced, it will forbid fornication, adultery, sodomy, and divorce. By saying “*God hath joined together,*” the honorableness of marriage is underscored. It is not honorable because of men, but because of God. Every other form of physiological intimacy is sinful, and will be judged by God. By saying “*among all,*” God has allowed marriage in a universal sense. This is a general mercy permitted for all people.

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Within the framework of marriage, the ministry of Jesus and the benefits of the Covenant may be realized. That is how gloriously practical salvation is! Of marriage Peter said, “*You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered*” (1 Pet 3:7). Notice, the wife is a “*fellow heir of the grace of life.*” Also, prayers can be hindered by inappropriate consideration of the wife. This is another way of saying the intercession of Jesus and the benefits of the Covenant can be appropriated within the framework of marriage. They cannot be obtained in a state of moral defilement.

An Explanation

A brief explanation of the phrase “*weaker vessel*” is in order. Often this is viewed as a derogatory expression, as though the wife were simplistic and inferior. However, this is not the case at all. If she is a “*fellow heir*” and her husband's attitude toward her can help or hinder prayer, she is certainly not inferior. The word “*weaker*” comes from **asqenesterw** | (as-then-ace-te-row). It is a general word, with a variety of uses. It is translated “sick” (Matt 25:39), “*weak*” (“*the flesh is weak,*” Matt 26:41), “*impotent*” (Acts 4:9), “*without strength*” (Rom 5:6), and “*feeble*” (“*those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary,*” 1 Cor 12:22). In this context it means *delicate, sensitive, or vulnerable*. On this verse, Adam Clarke makes an excellent observation. “*Being more delicately, and consequently more slenderly, constructed. Roughness and strength go hand in hand; so likewise do beauty and frailty. The female has what the man wants-beauty and delicacy. The male has what the female wants-courage and strength. The one is as good in its place as the other: and by these things God has made an equality between the man and the woman, so that there is properly very little superiority on either side.*” 2

In man and woman, we have a revelation of the nature of God. Together, they

comprise the Divine image. As it is written, *“This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day when God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and He blessed them and named them Man in the day when they were created”* (Gen 5:2). Together, therefore, they were called *“Man.”* As personalities, they were *“twain”* or *“two”* (Matt 19:5). In essence, or substance, they were *“one flesh,”* or *“Man”* (Gen 2:24; 5:2). Together, they provide an index to the Divine Nature: beautiful, yet courageous; strong, yet able to be effected by our condition and need. Let every man who thinks it proper to lord over his wife take due note of this aspect of the Kingdom. Just as Jesus does not lord it over the church, and shepherds are forbidden to lord it over the Lord’s flock, so the husband is not permitted to conduct himself as a tyrant over his wife. Such comportment will hinder his prayers, remove the honorableness of marriage, and incur the judgment of God. Jesus will not support such manners, and the New Covenant has no provisions for such an inconsideration.

Little wonder, therefore, that God pronounces marriage *“honorable among all.”* Therein is a revelation of His Person, made visible to the sons of men. Too, a glorious picture of the union between Christ and His church is seen (Eph 5:22-29). For this reason, the present ministry of Christ Jesus and the benefits of the Covenant can be realized within the framework of marriage.

Salvation involves extrication from the environment of sin as well as from sin itself. It equips us to live in a cursed realm, but also prepares us for deliverance from it. Those who live by faith are being sustained by their High Priest. They are enjoying the benefits of a *“better covenant, established upon better promises”*

Contentment

“Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: ‘The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’” (Verses 5-6). Salvation involves extrication from the environment of sin as well as from sin itself. It equips us to live in a cursed realm, but also prepares us for deliverance from it. Those who live by faith are being sustained by their High Priest. They are enjoying the benefits of a *“better covenant, established upon better promises”* (Heb 8:6). As such, they are being weaned from the world and its desires. Jesus is mediating the New Covenant from heaven, for which the covenant is preparing us. He summons us to hear the One speaking from heaven (Heb 12:25), to seek things that are in heaven (Col 3:1-3), and to lay up treasures there (Matt 6:19-20). Our manner of life, or citizenship, is *“from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ”* (Phil 3:20). Faith confirms to our heart that we *“in heaven a better and an enduring substance”* (Heb 10:34).

“Covetousness,” in this case, is the desire for things disassociated from heaven. It is the strong desire for things belonging to the temporal order — things that are seen, which last only *“for a season.”* The word *“covetousness”* is a strong one, denoting preference and primary thrust. It dominates the heart that dares to welcome it. It drives the stakes of preference into the world, and lives as though permanency was beneath the heavens. Covetousness results from a lack of consideration of our condition in Christ Jesus. When we cannot comprehend the things provided for us in Christ Jesus, we will desire the passing fancies of this *“present evil world”* (Gal 1:4).

Note the strength of the statement. *“Let your conduct be without covetousness.”* The Lord makes absolutely no allowance for the domination of earthly appetites--particularly **greediness for money**, which is the particular emphasis here. They must be subordinated. Those who choose to be ruled by them forfeit the ministry of Jesus and the benefits of the New Covenant. The reign of grace cannot be implemented in the heart ruled by worldly desires! Were this single truth to be heartily embraced by every professing believer, the walls of spiritual Babylon would crumble to the ground. Religious careers and superficiality would be exposed for what they are. False and fruitless religion thrives on covetousness!

What is the antidote for covetousness? What posture of life will loose the blessings of the Covenant for us, and ensure the effective ministry of Jesus in our behalf? It is *“being content with what you have.”* This is contentment coupled with godliness. As it is written, *“But godliness with contentment is great gain”* (1 Tim 6:6). This is a condition that is *“learned”* — it is not an arbitrary gift. That is why Paul said, *“I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content”* (Phil 4:11).

This *learning* comes from a due consideration of the affirmation of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. *“I will never fail you nor forsake you”* (Verse 5). How frequently the Lord has spoken in this refreshing manner. God told Isaac, *“I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee . . .”* (Gen 26:24).

To Jacob, He said, *“Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you”* (Gen 28:15), and *“I will be with thee”* (31:3). Moses said, *“Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake*

This is how God desires to be known. He is a God that will not forsake His own. He will uphold them, strengthen them, and guide them. All others may forsake the trusting ones, but God will not! This is a resounding emphasis in Scripture! However, it is never more precisely and thoroughly declared than in the Person of Jesus Christ and the nature of the New Covenant!

thee,” and *“And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed”* (Deut 31:6,8). The Lord promised Joshua, *“as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee”* (Josh 1:5). Samuel, knowing the nature of God, said, *“For the LORD will not forsake his people for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the LORD to make you his people”* (1 Sam 12:22). David said to Solomon, *“fear not, nor be dismayed: for the LORD God, even my God, will be with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee”* (1 Chron 28:20). David affirmed, *“For the LORD loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints”* (Psa 37:28). The Lord speaks comfortably to the righteous: *“Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness”* (Isa 41:10).

This is how God desires to be known. **He is a God that will not forsake His own**. He will uphold them, strengthen them, and guide them. All others may forsake the trusting ones, but God will not! This is a resounding emphasis in Scripture! However, it is never more precisely and thoroughly declared than in the Person of Jesus Christ and the nature of the New Covenant! Those who perceive and embrace the Christ, and who avail themselves of the *“better promises”* upon which the New Covenant is founded, will obtain power to abstain from covetousness.

Inordinate appetites are not compatible with life in Christ. They are inhibitive, and have the capacity to separate us eternally from God. Let us therefore *“be content with such things”* as we possess, knowing they have been given to us by our Father. He will never leave nor forsake us, and everything belongs to Him. We are in safe and caring hands! The Presence of the Lord gives us the advantage, not the possession of earthly things.

Those Over Us in the Lord

“Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Verses 7-8). Here is a word concerning spiritual leaders. This text has been used to justify political-type authority in the body of Christ. Such an application, however, is a flagrant abuse of this text. There is no provision in the Kingdom of God for lording it over the people of God. Jesus has spoken plainly on this subject. *“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many”* (Matt 20:25-28, NASB). Forever purge from your mind the notion that the church has earthly *“bosses.”* It does not. There are those with *“rule,”* but it is not after the carnal order.

The remembered ones did not rule by personal authority over the individuals, but by the Word of God. The ability of these rulers to bring the Word of God to bear upon the conscience of men is what made them “rulers.” They were spiritual leaders who walked close enough to God, and were exposed to God’s Word to such a degree, they had “the mind of Christ” on the matters of which they spoke.

Our text says to *“REMEMBER those who rule over you.”* This is an act of recollection. Think upon them. Ponder them. Recall them. The exhortation assumes a spiritual maturity in *“those who rule over you”* that is stimulating and brings profit when remembered. This word (*Mnhmoneu,ete*, mnay-mon-yoo'-et-ee) is used throughout Scripture. It always denotes pondering, thinking upon the implications, and dwelling upon a thought. The idea of frequency and regularity is in the word; i.e., *keep in mind, speak of, and make mention of.* 3 *“Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand”* (Matt 16:9). *“ . . . do ye not remember ?”* (Mark 8:18). *“ Remember Lot's wife”* (Luke 17:32). *“ Remember the word that I said unto you”* (John 15:20). *“Wherefore remember , that ye being in time past Gentiles . . . ”* (Eph 2:11). *“ Remember my bonds”* (Col 4:18). *“For ye remember , brethren, our labor and travail”* (1 Thess 2:9).

“Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?” (2 Thess 2:5). The use of this word postulates profitable results. It is as though the Spirit said, *“You will find profit for your souls in recalling those who have the rule over you.”*

He further identifies who these rulers are. They are not duly elected officials, but those *“who have spoken the word of God to you.”* These were primarily departed leaders, who had gone on to their reward, although the reference is not limited to them. Here the **MEANS** through which the rule is accomplished is identified. **Their power was in their ministry, not their office!** -- *“who have spoken the word of God to you.”* The remembered ones did not rule by personal authority over the individuals, but by the Word of God. The ability of these rulers to bring the Word of God to bear upon the conscience of men is what made them *“rulers.”* They were spiritual leaders who walked close enough to God, and were exposed to God’s Word to such a degree, they had *“the mind of Christ”* on the matters of which they spoke. In the Kingdom of God, no person is a ruler in any sense who is not so characterized. It is not possible to rule or lead the people of God in a state of aloofness from the Living God. This is in sharp conflict with the government of most churches with which I am familiar.

The word *“ruler,”* as has been pointed out, does not refer to an authoritarian in the earthly sense of the word. The term, taken from **hgoumenwn** (hayg-eh'-om-ev-on) means leader. It is used to describe the *“chief speaker”* in Acts 14:12. *“And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.”* The *“ruler”* is the one who *“leads out,”* entering into the New Covenant as a spiritual pioneer. He leads the people where they have not gone before, showing, through the Word of God, spiritual territory that can be occupied by the grace of God. This is not a person who decides what people can do, but who shows people the path that has been sanctified for them. A person incapable of doing this is not a ruler in the house of God, regardless of the authority supposedly delegated to him. The New Covenant does not provide for formal leaders lacking acquaintance with God and His Word. The structure of the body of Christ does not allow for people living at a distance from God to exercise any form of authority or leadership over the people of God. The *“rulers”* of reference are members of the body *“among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood”* (Acts 20:28). They *“shepherd”* by speaking the Word of God.

The Fundamental Activity

When it comes to leading the flock of God, the superior activity is speaking the Word of God. The adage *“I’d rather see a sermon than hear one any time”* is an *“old wives fable.”* Faith comes *“by hearing,”* not by seeing (Rom 10:17). Spiritual life is sustained by *“every word of God”* (Luke 4:4). That is a matter of revelation that cannot be successfully contradicted by human folklore. When Jesus sent a message to *“the seven churches which are in Asia”* (Rev 1:4), He did not send it to the church board, or even the duly elected elders. Rather, He sent it to *“the angel”* of each church (Rev 2:1,8,12,18, 3:1,7,13). The word used here (**aggelwl** , ang'-el-o) means *“messenger,”* or *“one sent with a message.”* It is used of human messengers, sent by Jesus to prepare the way for Him, in Luke 9:52. It is also used of John the Baptist, the messenger sent to prepare the way for Messiah (Matt 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27). Paul commended the Galatians for receiving him as *“an angel [or messenger] of God”* (Gal 4:14).

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leaders lacking acquaintance with God and His Word. The structure of the body of Christ does not allow for people living at a distance from God to exercise any form of authority or leadership over the people of God.

of the nineteenth century, said: *“The main function of the ministry is to preach the Gospel, and to teach Christian truth. The Gospel is a definite ‘word;’ and it is enshrined in a Book which is called ‘The Word.’ The preacher’s text-book is not the newspaper, or the current literature of the day, but ‘the oracles of God.’ The great design of the Christian pulpit is to promote the intellectual and experimental knowledge of the Bible. And no minister shall have lived in vain if it can be written over his grave, ‘He made the people understand the Scriptures.’”*

It is tragic beyond description that entertainment and *“serving tables”* has now taken the precedence over declaring the Word of the Lord. Such things ought not to be. We have the Apostles as examples of speaking the Word of God, and of the preeminence of this activity. When, at the first, they were confronted with difficulties in administration, they backed away from involvement in the same. Their response is poignant, and worthy of extended consideration. *“It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word”* (Acts 6:2-4). Contrary to the suspected response of religious institutions today, that saying *“pleased the whole multitude”* Verse 5). They sensed the priority of speaking the Word of God. O, that such an attitude were more prevalent in our time!

But these men are not merely formal speakers. Their speaking comes from the wellspring of personal faith. We are admonished, *“whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.”* Because they have availed themselves of the ministry of Jesus and the benefits of the Covenant, they can be followed. The word *“follow”* means *“imitate.”* Such men are examples for us, because of their spirituality and focus. *“Consider,”* we are exhorted, the *“end,”* or outcome of their faith. This refers to a consistent life of faith, persistence unto the end. Some of these *“rulers”* had no doubt been martyred for their faith, keeping it to the *“end.”* Leaders who have passed on does seem to be the focus of this verse. But whether martyred or not, these *“rulers”* were noted for their spiritual consistency and constancy. They did not vacillate, but held on to the Lord *“with purpose of heart”* (Acts 11:23). In the hour of crisis, they consistently sided with the Lord. When a word was needed from the Lord, they knew how to give it. They personally triumphed over the devil in both life and doctrine. Such men, elected or not, are *“rulers,”* or *“leaders”* in the body of Christ. They have been *“placed”* in the body by God (1 Cor 12:18), given to the church by Jesus (Eph 4:11), and made rulers by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28). Remember them, and consider the outcome of their faith.

This activity is perfectly harmonious with New Covenant life. The intercession of Christ will bring grace and power to those following this exhortation. The benefits of the New Covenant will be realized in our reception of this word from God.

Verse Eight

Verse eight may appear strange in this context. *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”* Here is the essence of sound doctrine, the focus of the believer, and the emphasis of the those who have the rule over us. The Kingdom of God is Christocentric--Christ centered! Every Word of God is clarified in the Son of God. The fullest meaning of the Word is found in Him. When we are urged to remember those who have the rule over us, it is assumed their words have brought a Christ-centered focus to us. God uses teachers to point us in the right direction, and enable us to lay hold on eternal life.

The nature of focus demands

Like the High Priest of old, His intercession will end when He leaves the holiest place to gather His people unto Himself. Once they are with Him, there will be no further need for intercession as we now know it. The meaning of the text is this. Although leaders come and go, Jesus Christ does not. Generations of those having the rule over us change, but the Lord does not.

that the object upon which we focus is constant. It cannot be a variable or fluctuating target. Such is the case with the Lord Jesus Christ. He is *“the same yesterday, today, and forever.”* He Himself is unchanged. His character remains the same. Like the Father, He is one in *“whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning”* (James 1:17). This verse has been used to emphasize that Christ’s works remain the same today as they were *“yesterday.”* While there is an element of truth to this, it is not altogether true, nor is it the meaning of this text. Jesus intercedes today, He will not do so *“forever.”* Like the High Priest of old, His intercession will end when He leaves the holiest place to gather His people unto Himself. Once they are with Him, there will be no further need for intercession as we now know it. The meaning of the text is this. **Although leaders come and go, Jesus Christ does not. Generations of those having the rule over us change, but the Lord does not.**

Good rulers point us to the unchanging One. Their word anchors us to the Christ Who remains the same. Their ministry does not tie us to themselves, but to the Lord Who gave them to us. When the Word of the Lord is spoken faithfully to us, the Son of God will be seen as preeminent, and the New Covenant as superior. As our lives are integrated with His, we ourselves will become spiritually consistent, to the glory of God.

Doctrinal Purity

“Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them” (Verse 9). The Person of Christ and the nature of the New Covenant forbid the embrace of things not true. In Christ and through the New Covenant we are brought to *“the God of truth”* (Deut 32:4; Psa 31:5). He is *“abundant in . . . truth”* (Ex 34:6). Lies, error, and erroneous emphases can have no part with Him. Yet, Satan is aggressive to perpetrate doctrines that are both *“various”* and *“strange.”* They do not blend with the truth, but oppose and contradict it. These doctrines have the ability to carry men away from Christ and the blessings of the Covenant, as a strong gale move people

from a location. We are strictly charged to see to it we are not drawn away from the Savior by novel and peculiar teachings. These are teachings that do not center in

The heart can truly be established, or strengthened, only by the grace of God. Divine favor, not liturgical routine, makes us spiritually stable. The secret to a godly life is not a discipline or routine, but affiliation with the Living God. Jesus did not die so we could have a proper diet or observe external routines. The Spirit has shown us in this book that those who so served the Lord gained no eternal profit from such an approach.

Christ. They encourage people to adopt a position that does not require a Living God, and moves them away from the benefits of the New Covenant. They are “*strange*” to the Kingdom as dirt is to drinking water. They contaminate those who embrace them. They distort spiritual vision, harden the heart, and make us dull of hearing. Such doctrines move us from the center to the periphery of the Kingdom, and eventually into spiritual darkness itself.

The heart can truly be established, or strengthened, only by the grace of God. Divine favor, not liturgical routine, makes us spiritually stable. The secret to a godly life is **NOT** a discipline or routine, but affiliation with the Living God. Jesus did not die so we could have a proper diet or observe external routines. The Spirit has shown us in this book that those who so served the Lord gained no eternal profit from such an approach. Even the appointed sacrifices for sin left those approaching God with a defiled and condemning conscience (Heb 10:1-4). With great strength, the Spirit witnesses to us of the Old Covenant, and the lack of spiritual benefit realized by those within it. “*It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience; concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation*” (Heb 9:9-10).

With great solemnity, our text warns us not to return to the old order. Too, we are not to adopt a form a godliness that denies the power thereof — a religion of externals. And why are we to avoid such things? Why avoid doctrines that conflict with Christ and the New Covenant? Why abstain from a religion of empty form? **Because God has made no provision for the embrace of such vanities!** They exercise an alienating influence upon the individual, and disqualify the soul for the blessing of the Lord. The Intercession of Christ will not allow such things! The New Covenant has no place for such diversions. Either we come through Christ and by means of the New Covenant, or we cannot come. There simply is no other way. What is more, this solitary way has been sanctified for our use, as a highway raised in the desert for our travel (Isa 35:8).

SOUND REASONING

Having alerted us to the danger of being “*tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive*” (Eph 4:14), the Spirit now shows the reasonableness of the exhortation. Some would have us believe our standing with God is based what we eat or drink in the flesh. However, we are apprized, “*the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*” (Rom 14:17). There is a higher form of diet by which the life of the believer is sustained. It is made

accessible to us through the High Priestly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ and the New Covenant, *“through which we draw near to God”* (Heb 7:19).

We Have An Altar

“We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate” (Verses 10-12).

“We have an altar.” The clear

In Jesus Christ and the New Covenant, we come to a better altar, upon which was offered a better sacrifice. As under the Law, the priests partake, or eat, the sacrifice. Here is a spiritual feast that is unparalleled. In the Spirit we “eat”

Christ’s flesh and “drink” His blood. This is of critical importance.

allusion is to the eating of the sacrifices offered under the Law. The priests ate portions of the sacrifice offered upon the altar (Lev 6:18,26-29; 7:6; 10:12-14). The Spirit refers to this ordained practice in 1 Corinthians 10:18. *“Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?”* Other references to this exercise include 1 Corinthians 9:13; 1 Samuel 2:13-14; and 9:12-13). **What was offered to God was eaten by the priests!** There was, however, a single exception to this practice. **The sin offering could NOT be eaten.** That was expressly forbidden! As it is written, *“But no sin offering from which any of the blood is brought into the tabernacle of meeting, to make atonement in the holy place, shall be eaten. It shall be burned in the fire”* (Lev 6:30).

In Jesus Christ and the New Covenant, we come to a better altar, upon which was offered a better sacrifice. As under the Law, the priests partake, or eat, the sacrifice. Here is a spiritual feast that is unparalleled. In the Spirit we “eat” Christ’s flesh and “drink” His blood. This is of critical importance. Our Savior said, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven; not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever”* (John 6:53-58). This is not an option, but a necessity. Those refusing to eat at this altar *“have no life.”* They are not recognized by God, and their names are not written in the Lamb’s book of life. Those, however, who avail themselves of this sacrifice have *“eternal life,”* and will be raised *“up at the last day”* by the Lord Jesus Himself.

Here is a sacrifice made for consumption: *“My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.”* If, however, it is not eaten, there is no hope--no vital connection with Deity! *“He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.”* This sacrifice, the Lord Jesus Christ, is God’s provision for life. The individual who “feeds upon” Jesus *“will live because”* of Jesus! The vicarious atonement of Christ accomplishes two requirements for our salvation. First, it satisfied God, taking away the sin of the world. Second, it made Jesus accessible to our spirits. Our salvation not

only depends upon the satisfaction of God the Father, but upon us availing ourselves of the accessibility of the sacrifice. There is no salvation without the ingestion of the Son of God. As simplistic as that may appear, this is not commonly known in the Christian community. Myriads of people suppose themselves to be saved who are not eating at the altar provided by God. They are in a state of delusion. There is no salvation apart from eating the sacrificed Lamb of God!

This is partaking of the Divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). It is being made “*partakers of Christ*” (Heb 3:14). Subjectively, it is being “*conformed to the image of His Son*” (Rom 8:29), and being changed “*from glory unto glory*” (2 Cor 3:18). Put another way, it is “*putting on the Lord Jesus Christ, and making no provision for the flesh*” (Rom 13:14). Here is a condition that finds Divine qualities, called “*the fruit of the Spirit,*” within the believer (Gal 5:22-23). Where Divine life is not found, there is no salvation, no remission, no cleansed conscience, and no living hope!

Note, those “*who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat*” from the redemptive altar. It is not possible to be saved by grace [and there is no other way to be saved] under a system of Law! Nor, indeed, can one partake of Christ while living under an Old Covenant economy. Those who serve only outwardly cannot sit at the table of redemption! Their souls cannot be sustained by the life of Christ, and they cannot be conformed to the Divine image. The alarming thing about this observation is the dominance of merely external religion in our day.

The reason for is given, and it is arresting. “*For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.*” Here is an allusion to the sin offering on the day of atonement--the bullock for the high priest, and the goat for the people. We have already mentioned that men were forbidden to eat the sin offering. “*But any sin offering whose blood is brought into the Tent of Meeting to make atonement in the Holy Place must not be eaten; it must be burned*” (Lev 6:30, NIV). This is the point referenced by this text. The sin offering was burned without the perimeter of the camp--away from the people. The clear allusion is this: under the Law, sins were not removed, and thus the sacrifice could not be eaten by the priests. However, Jesus did remove the sins, and therefore His body and blood can be eaten spiritually.

Jesus suffered outside the Jerusalem gate. To put it another way, His death was “*accomplished*” (Luke 9:31) entirely apart from the Law. He was not sacrificed according to the Law, but according to a Divine purpose conceived before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4; 1 Pet 1:20; Rev 13:8). Isolated from the people and from the ceremonies of the Law, the Lord Jesus laid down His life “*a ransom for all, to be testified in due time*” (1 Tim 2:6). He did not accomplish His sacrifice within a religious system, but within the “*determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*”

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(Acts 2:23).

This being the case, it does not make sense to attempt to serve God within the framework of a law, or a written code. If the means of reconciliation was achieved apart from the Law, the experience of that reconciliation cannot be realized by Law. Jesus *“suffered outside the gate”* in order *“that He might sanctify the people with His own blood.”* *“The people”* refers to those receiving the atonement, or reconciliation (Rom 5:11). They were *“sanctified”* by being set apart to and for God--dedicated to Him. God could not receive *“the people”* as He desired under a system of Law. The means through which their acceptance was accomplished was entirely apart from the Law. The *“Law was weak through the flesh,”* being impotent to accomplish reconciliation (Rom 8:3). Appropriately, Christ’s blood is called, *“the blood of the covenant by which we are sanctified”* (Heb 10:29). For man to be blessed, Christ had to be cursed (Gal 3:13). For man to be made the *“righteousness of God,”* God had to make Jesus *“to be sin for us”* (2 Cor 5:21). The humiliation and death of Christ, epitomized in His blood, is the exclusive means of our reconciliation. The forfeiture of His life was necessary for our obtainment of eternal life.

IMPLICATIONS FOR LIVING GODWARD

More is involved in this treatise than a doctrinal statement. The formation of sound theology IS essential, for we are NOT to be carried about with *“strange doctrines.”* Spiritual life, however, goes far beyond that. **The proper statement of the case is necessary for the proper embracement of the “great salvation.”** We have seen in the prior section the implications of salvation as regards interpersonal relationships. Now we see the essence of the doctrine regarding our relationship to the Lord. Once again, these are not options, but absolute requirements.

Let Us Go To Him

“Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come” (Verses 13-14). This is an aggressive requirement, yet is scarcely recognized among professed believers. It is not only necessary to come away from fruitless forms of religion. We must also *“go forth to Him ,”* coming as close to the Savior as the Covenant allows. He came to us in His humiliation--when *“the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us”* (John 1:14). **Now, it is our business to go to Him!** Everything about salvation is conducive to this activity. Drawing near to Him is imperative! The grace of God cannot be received from a distance, so to speak.

Do not miss the nature of this approach to Jesus. We go to Him *“ outside the camp, bearing His reproach.”* There are earthly repercussions when we *go forth to Him* . Institutional devotees will not applaud your action, because you must leave them to come to Christ. You simply cannot linger in the presence of those who have no right to the altar, and partake of it yourself. Let us put it in the words of Scripture. *“ . . . lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away !”* (2 Tim 3:4-5). A religion of form, whatever its make-up, that lacks Divine power must be abandoned in order to fellowship with Christ. This will be occasion of reproach, like it was for the Lord Jesus. While He

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attended the synagogues, went into the Temple, and honored the Jewish feasts, there was a sense in which He was not part of them, and the people sensed it (John 7:15,46) . In the fullest and more precise sense of the Word, He was “*separate from sinners*” (Heb 7:26). Sometimes that required cleansing the Temple of moneychangers and religious businessmen (John 2:13-17), rebuking religious leaders (Matt 23), and sending multitudes away (Matt 15:39). Other times, it meant refusing to go to his mother and brothers in preference of those hearing His word (Matt 12:46-50). Finally, in His vicarious death, He went “*without the gate,*” to the “*Place of a Skull*” (John 19:17).

To go to “*Him,*” we must leave the world in general, and the corrupt church in particular. We must leave the encampments of the pleasures of diversion and the defilement of lifeless religion. Although many do not take this matter seriously, neither Christ Jesus in all of His saving efficacy, nor the New Covenant with all of its better things, can be obtained if we do not “go to” the Son. Remember, Jesus is not in this world. As it is written, “*He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God*” (Mark 16:19). We go to Him by setting our “*mind on things above, not on things on the earth*” (Col 3:1). Essentially, we become *other-worldly* in our perspective and preference. By so doing, we incur “*His reproach*” from the world. As it is written, “*If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you*” (John 15:18-19).

Paul evinced the way in which we go to Christ without the camp. I never tire of the passage because the preciseness of its expression and the clarity of its message. “*But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*” (Phil 3:7-14).

It may be that some consider this an unusual frame of spirit, only possessed by a relatively few in the heavenly kingdom. That it is unusual to see such aggression in the professed church cannot be denied. However, this is the standard mode of living in Christ Jesus. Clarifying this very point, Paul continues, “*Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you*” (verse 15). There will be varying levels of this attitude. However, those that are spiritually mature are to have “*this mind.*” If there be some who cannot see this, “*God will reveal even this to you.*” Maintaining a good conscience before God will eventually bring the awareness of these things to the heart. It is the manner of the Kingdom.

No one should balk at *“bearing His reproach.”* This is the ordinary manner of the Kingdom. As it is written, *“Yes, and all who desire*

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to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Tim 3:12). As with Noah, the activity that identifies us with God *“condemns the world”* (Heb 11:7). The repercussions of commitment to God are very personal, and are called our *“cross.”* Spiritual life requires self denial--refusing to take the easy and accommodating road. Hear the Master speak to this issue. *“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels”* (Luke 9:23-24). Discipleship is seriousness business, indeed! We dare not approach it casually.

You may be sure, if you will bear your cross for Him, Jesus will bear you, fulfilling the word of the Prophet. *“Even to your old age, I am He, And even to gray hairs I will carry you! I have made, and I will bear; Even I will carry, and will deliver you”* (Isa 46:4). Take the word of the Lord seriously, and He will take you seriously. Our great High Priest and the New Covenant are designed to support and strengthen such individuals.

Continual Praise

“Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name” (Verse 15). Under the Law, there were periodic sacrifices and seasonal times of focused commitment. While the fire upon the altar was never to go out (Lev 6:12-13), there was not always a sacrifice upon that altar--to wit, when it was in transit (Ex 27:7; 38:7). But it is not so with the New Covenant.

The effectiveness of Christ's atonement, and the thoroughness of the New Covenant provide for us to

“continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God.” This parallels the *“thank offerings”* instituted under the Old Covenant (Lev 7:12). For believers in Christ, they are offered by those who have perceived the *“the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory”* (2 Tim 2:10). These people trace God's acceptance of their sacrifices to Christ's atonement and intercession, both of which are required for our salvation. The sacrifices are *“continual”* because our participation is *“continual.”* Our High Priest's ministry is *“continual.”* Our access to the throne of all grace is *“continual.”*

Notice the nature of our sacrifice. It is *“the fruit of our lips.”* What a transformation this reveals! Of those outside of Christ--natural men--it is said, *“Their throat is an open tomb; With their*

tongues they have practiced deceit; The poison of asps is under their lips; Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness” (Rom 3:13-14). As with Moses, so it was with us. We were a people *“of uncircumcised lips”* (Ex 6:12). Now, thanks be unto God, those same *“lips”* become a fountain of praise to God. Thanksgiving comes from the well from whence cursing once flowed. Those in the New Covenant fulfill the words of Hosea, *“so will we render the calves of our lips”* (Hosea 14:2). Other versions render the latter phrase of this verse, *“sacrifices of our lips”* (NKJV), *“fruit of our lips”* (RSV, NRSV, NRSV, NIV). In strict keeping with the meaning of the word, the ASV translates it, *“so will we render as bullocks the offering of our lips.”* Webster’s and Darby’s translations also render it *“calves of our lips.”* The point is this: your sacrifice is yourself, not an impersonal offering of an animal. **The fruit comes from us because the life has been given to us.** The sacrifice is offered by us because we ourselves have been delivered, and we know it.

The *“sacrifice of praise”* includes open confession of our identity with and appreciation of the Lord (Rom 10:9-10). When grace takes root in the hearts of men, it will bear fruit through the lips. Insightful

This is intelligent praise, requiring the involvement of heart, soul, mind, and strength. No gathering of saints should be without it. No believer should spend a day without bringing this fruit to God. The sacrifice and intercession of Christ, when comprehended to some degree, will produce such fruitage. The New Covenant is also conducive to such sacrifices.

expression in words brings glory to God, honor to Jesus, and edification to saints. This is intelligent praise, requiring the involvement of heart, soul, mind, and strength. No gathering of saints should be without it. No believer should spend a day without bringing this fruit to God. The sacrifice and intercession of Christ, when comprehended to some degree, will produce such fruitage. The New Covenant is also conducive to such sacrifices.

Observe that *“giving thanks to His name”* is specified. The salvation in which we have participated is so *“great”* it must never be forgotten or placed into the background of our thinking. This is insightful thanksgiving, proceeding from the illumination of the magnitude of redemption. It is not a mere formality, but the lively response of a tender heart. Thanksgiving is to praise what salt was to the meal offerings of old. As it is written, *“And every offering of your grain offering you shall season with salt; you shall not allow the salt of the covenant of your God to be lacking from your grain offering. With all your offerings you shall offer salt”* (Lev 2:13). Thanksgiving is to be continual, lest we become deceived by sin (Eph 5:20; Col 1:12; 3:17). It is to be mingled with every *“request”* we make known to God (Phil 4:6-7). If we cannot come to the conclusion that this is requisite, we have not seen Jesus or the New Covenant in the proper light.

Sacrificial Living

“But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Verse 16). The ministering Jesus and the New Covenant are exceedingly practical. They touch every aspect of our lives. We not only sacrifice directly to God, we also sacrifice by meeting the needs of our brethren. Here are two things that can, in the bustle of life, be forgotten: **doing good and sharing ! Neither the interceding Christ nor the nature of the New Covenant will allow us to live only for**

ourselves! David once said, *“Trust in the LORD, and do good; so you will dwell in the land, and enjoy security”* (Psa 37:3, RSV). Our blessed Lord said, *“But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil”* (Luke 6:35). It was said of Dorcas, who was raised from the dead, *“This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did”* (Acts 9:36). Do not forget that is said of our Savior, He *“went about doing good”* (Acts 10:38).

The scope of our goodness is to include *“all men”* (Gal 6:10). Rather than being noted for rendering evil and causing trouble, believers are to *“ever follow that which is good”* (1 Thess 5:15). Lest we suppose such activity is profitless, and that it is not appreciated by men, we are admonished, *“But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good”* (2 Thess 3:13). In a most poignant statement, the Spirit declared, *“He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God”* (3 John 11). The point to be seen here is that Christ’s sacrifice and intercession, together with the New Covenant, are conducive to doing good. Divine strength is imparted for this most practical activity. We are here enjoined to avail ourselves of the extent of God’s grace, not limiting ourselves by self-imposed delusions.

Not forgetting to *“communicate”* (*“share,”* NKJV, NAS, NIV) has to do with sharing our goods. The word used here is **koinwniaj** (koy-nohn-ee'-as), and means *partnership, participation, communion, distribution, or fellowship*. This is more than simply giving an offering of money--although that is involved. It is sharing from the heart--giving out of a sense of involvement with the Lord and His work. It is an expression of brotherhood and recognition of membership in the body of Christ. The same word is used for an offering taken for poor saints (Rom 15:26; 2

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Cor 9:13). It is also used for *“the right hand of fellowship”* in Galatians 2:9. Paul admonished the people of God, *“Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches”* (Gal 6:9). The people of God are not to be known for inconsideration toward the needy or those who instruct them in the Lord. They are part of a covenant that encourages and strengthens for godly consideration and sharing. The reigning Christ also provides for such expressions of kindness.

Obeying Those Who Watch For Our Souls

“Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you” (Verse 17). The Word of God encourages a high regard for those who have brought the Word of God to us. God has graciously provided every one of us with *“ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one”* (1 Cor 3:5). They are not to be worshiped, as though we were under their feet, but honored as gifts of God, provided to orient us for glory. Their feet are *“beautiful”* because of the conciliatory message which they have brought (Isa 52:7; Rom 10:15).

These are the leaders who have *“spoken the word of God to you,”* and whose faith can be followed (13:7). They are not authoritarians, charged with providing us with details about daily living. They have not been appointed to tell us who we should marry, where we should work, and where we should live. Those are all matters addressed by the indwelling Spirit, who *“teaches is all things,”* adapting the truth to our personal lives. In such matters, we *“do not need that anyone teach”* us. It is the Spirit Himself Who instructs us on abiding in Christ (1 John 2:20,27). This text is not teaching a hierarchy in the body of Christ as exists in the governments of this world.

Those who have the *“rule over”* us have been appointed by God for our edification (2 Cor 13:10; Eph 4:11-12). Their exclusive ministry deals with readying us for glory. Their solitary source of authority is the Word of God. Such leaders are to be *“obeyed”* because of the Word, not because of their authority. They have been provided by the King *“for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”* (Eph 4:12-13). That is the reason we submit to them! If they bring no word from God, we will not submit! Their only power is their acquaintance with our Lord, and the ability to bring us His Word and perspective of things. As you may know, this is not a commonly known truth among us. Just as godly leaders, possessed of strong faith, direct us into the ways of the Lord, so ungodly and unlearned ones bring about confusion and every evil work.

Note the reason for our submission to God-appointed leaders. *“ . . . for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account.”* If they do not watch for our souls, they have not been sent by God. Such unsent men are imposters, imposing their wills upon the saints of the Most High God. God gives no honor to such, and neither can we! There are, however, faithful men who *“watch out for”* the souls of men. They are not content to see people wander in the darkness, or remain deficient in spiritual awareness. Such men are cognizant of their accountability to God. They **WILL** give an account for the flock of God, over which *“the Holy Spirit has made them overseers”* (Acts 20:28). These are under-shepherds, functioning under the *“Great Shepherd of the sheep”* (Heb 13:20). They are charged with the responsibility of bringing spiritual advantage to the people of God. There is no other reason for their existence or work. They will be called to account for how the flock fared under their *“rule.”* In my opinion, were this single aspect of spiritual life to be known more fully in our churches, there would be a mass resignation of *“elders.”* The *“office of a bishop”* (1 Tim 3:1), as I see it, is not generally perceived in the light of this perspective.

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The thought of someone *“watching”* for our souls is refreshing. This is the New Covenant equivalent some aspects of the prophetic office of old. Those who have oversight over the flock of God are *“watchmen.”* As it is written, *“Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel . . .”* (Ezek 3:17; 33:2). The role of these leaders in the body of Christ prompted the Apostle

to say to a group of them from Ephesus; *“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood”* (Acts 20:28). No person of sound spiritual thought will object to submitting to such thoughtful shepherds.

The attitude of the flock has a direct bearing upon those leading them. *“Obey those who rule over you . . . Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”* The greatest handicap to a spiritual leader is recalcitrance among those he is leading. One of the great advantages for the leader is receptivity among the saints. Either joy or grief can be produced in the person speaking the Word by those to whom he speaks. Jesus wept over Jerusalem, yet rejoiced over the receptivity of the seventy He sent out with power (Luke 19:41; Luke 10:21). Paul wanted to come *“with joy”* to the believers (Rom 15:32). The submissiveness of the Philippians caused him to seek their fellowship *“with joy”* (Phil 1:4). The spirituality of Timothy caused Paul to rejoice at the prospect of being with him (2 Tim 1:4). Ah, but for the Jews who rejected his teaching, Paul had *“great heaviness and continual sorrow”* (Rom 9:2).

On one occasion, Paul wrote to the Corinthians of their impact upon his spirit. *“I wrote as I did so that when I came I should not be distressed by those who ought to make me rejoice. I had confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy. For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you”* (2 Cor 2:3-4). Earlier, he had revealed the impact of their waywardness upon his spirit, and the effect it would have upon them. *“What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a whip, or in love and with a gentle spirit?”* (1 Cor 4:21). Let us prefer to be an encouragement to those delivering the Word to us. Let us be such as will encourage them to deliver their message, and give an account to God, with great joy. That will bring great advantage to us.

It is important to see the nature of Christ’s intercession and the New Covenant in this regard. **Both are most effective in a spiritually responsive environment.** Where a joyful proclamation of the truth is matched by a glad reception of and obedience to the Word, the blessing of God will be realized. This can be seen in the events of the day of Pentecost. When the people *“gladly received the Word”* (Acts 2:41), steadfast continuance in the Apostles’ teaching was realized. One of the greatest contributions a flock can give to those who proclaim God’s Word is to be receptive of and obedient to the message. Both Christ and the New Covenant will enable such a response.

Praying For God’s Messengers

“Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably. But I especially urge you to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner” (Verse 18). Spiritual life involves the interdependence of God’s people. Not only do the teachers provide needed resources to the people, they also provide for them. **The prayers of the saints are indispensable to the spread of the Gospel!** It is true of teachers, as surely as it is of those who are taught. *“For none of us lives*

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to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord” (Rom 14:7-8). The servant of God must realize he is not isolated. He needs, and can have, the prayers of the saints. The New Covenant postulates this interdependence, and our Great High Priest will dispense grace to that end.

The real nature of spiritual life is unveiled in this text. The Apostle affirms his conscience is pure, and that he is *“in all things desiring to live honorably.”* For some, that would be sufficient. Thinking themselves to be more capable than they really are, they would launch out in self-energy to do the work of the Lord. But it was not so with the man of God. He realized *“God sets the solitary in families”* (Psa 68:6). Leaders, and those who are led, alike *“have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God . . . to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven . . .”* (Heb 12:22-23). The informed ones rely upon this affiliation, counting on the inter-involvements of the body of Christ. Those within the New Covenant have been brought into accord with the Living God, and become *“laborers together”* with Him in various aspects of His purpose (1 Cor 3:9).

Having been *“joined to the Lord”* (1 Cor 6:17), they participate in His work. Their prayers play a role in the government of the world, the edification of the saints, and the upholding of spiritual leaders. Intercessions rising from the household of faith produces a fragrance in heavenly places, appealing to the good will of the Lord they serve. As it is written, *“Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand”* (Rev 8:3-4). Again, in a depiction of the government of Jesus as revealed in Divine judgment, the prayers of the saints play a vital role. *“Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints”* (Rev 5:8). This is the manner of the Kingdom! The government of God, placed upon the shoulder of Jesus Christ, is carried out within influence of godly prayers, raised by faith into the very throne room of God!

The Apostle, knowing the manner of the Kingdom, relied on the prayers of the saints (Rom 15:29-31; Eph 6:18-20; Phil 1:19; Col 4:3-4; 1 Thess 5:25; Philemon 22). Again, Christ's present ministry and the nature of the New Covenant are made effective in this activity. There was even a note of unusual practicality in the request: i.e., *“But I especially urge you to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner .”* Here as an opportunity for people who had actually been shrinking back to press in to the throne of grace. The man of God was not ashamed to implore them to do so. He knew the manner of the Covenant. He knew the purpose of God. He knew the nature of Christ's atonement and intercession. He therefore summoned people into holy involvements, willing to subject his own ministry to their activities. That, dear brethren, declares a Savior and a Covenant worthy of the most hearty embrace. You glorify Christ by receiving them.

DIVINE DESIRES FOR US

His “great salvation” will not produce spiritual inferiority, withdrawal from God, or insensitivity to Divine provision. If these things exist (and tragically they do), it is NOT because of the nature of salvation. The intercession of Christ does not produce slothful and unresponsive spirits. Where these despicable qualities are found, the Spirit has been grieved and quenched.

Apostolic benedictions are a special source of strength and encouragement for believers. They set before us “the manner of the Kingdom” (1 Sam 10:25). They unveil the magnitude of Divine consideration, the extent of the love of God, and the availability of

grace to every believer. They are more than mere desires. These supplications are revelations of the heart of God, the ministry of Jesus, and the provisions of the covenant. They are uttered from heavenly places, where saints have been seated together with Christ (Eph 2:6). These are not mere laws, or things we are obligated to pursue. They represent Divine provision, accessible in Christ Jesus, and provided in the New Covenant (Rom 15:13; 16:24; 1 Cor 16:23; 12 Cor 13:11; Phil 4:23; 1 Thess 3:12-13; 5:28; 2 Thess 1:11-12; 3:16,18; 2 Tim 4:22; 1 Pet 5:14; John 3; Jude 24-25).

That We Might Be Made Perfect

“Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete . . .” (Verses 20-21). Why is such a strong desire expressed-- *“make you complete* (perfect)”? It is because that is the objective of God. His *“great salvation”* will **not** produce spiritual inferiority, withdrawal from God, or insensitivity to Divine provision. If these things exist (and tragically they do), it is **NOT** because of the nature of salvation. The intercession of Christ does not produce slothful and unresponsive spirits. Where these despicable qualities are found, the Spirit has been grieved and quenched. Also, men must be torn away from the notion they can make themselves suitable to dwell with the Lord. If they are to become spiritually mature, God will have to do it in them. However, our Father will not accomplish this work without our consent. If we do not submit ourselves to God, the work will not be accomplished within us. Thus, the man of God had first shown us the nature of salvation, and the provision of grace. Now he fastens it with nails, so to speak (Isa 41:7), by showing us the outcome we are to seek.

God loves us, as demonstrated in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 John 3:16). But when He works in us, it will be because of His love for the Son of God. That will be the preeminent motivation. He will do so as *“The God of peace,”* whose wrath has been assuaged by the atoning work of His Son. This is an appellation often ascribed to God-- *“The God of peace”* (Rom 15:33; 16:20; 1 Cor 14:33; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 4:9; 1 Thess 5:23; 2 Thess 3:16). He will not perfect us because of our achievements in the flesh, but because of Christ’s glorious accomplishments. He will not perfect us in order to be at peace with us, but because, through faith, we now have peace with Him (Rom 5:1).

Divine Working Within

Precisely how will our Lord make us *“perfect”*? Herein is a herculean objective, utterly impossible apart from Divine activity. *“Now may the God of peace . . . make you complete [perfect, KJV] in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen”* (Verses 20-21). Both the aim and the means to its realization are stated. First, the intercession of Christ and the New Covenant are thorough, having to do with *“every good work.”* No partial solution here! The Lord desires that every expression of the redeemed be characterized by *“perfection”* or *“completeness.”* What is the meaning of this phrase?

The locution *“make you perfect,”* or *“make you complete,”* comes from a single Greek word: **katartisai** (kat-ar-tis-ai). In this precise form, the word is used only one other place. Its usage there clarifies the meaning here. *“Night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face, and may perfect that which is lacking in your faith”* (1 Thess 3:10). The word used in our text, and this passage, means *thoroughly prepare something to meet demands; (1) put in order, restore to a former*

condition, mend, repair (MT 4.21; GA 6.1); (2) prepare, make ready, complete (Heb 13.21); (3) create, arrange, prepare (Heb 11.3); (4) as thoroughly equipping and adjusting Christian character perfect, fully qualify, make fully adequate” 4

Those who revert to the flesh once again become contaminated. Their works become faulty, their hearts defiled, and the minds clouded. While drawing back from God, not availing ourselves of Divine provisions through Christ and within the New Covenant, Divine displeasure is inculcated. This was happening to the Hebrew believers! By reverting to Law for justification, and resting in lifeless procedures, they now stood in eternal jeopardy.

Here, a most glorious picture is provided for our consideration. Sin is seen as having ravished our race. It has diminished our abilities, clouded our minds, and contaminated our consciences. It has rendered us impotent in the realm of God’s good pleasure. Under its dominion, we were without God and without hope in the world (Eph 2:12). Salvation rescued us from that dilemma, praise the Lord! But there is something more to this matter. Those who revert to the flesh once again become contaminated. Their works become faulty, their hearts defiled, and the minds clouded. While drawing back from God, not availing ourselves of Divine provisions through Christ and within the New Covenant, Divine displeasure is inculcated. This was happening to the Hebrew believers! By reverting to Law for justification, and resting in lifeless procedures, they now stood in eternal jeopardy. Solemnly, they were told of the possibility of drifting away from the things they had heard (2:1). With trumpet sound, the impossibility of escaping the wrath of God while neglecting His great salvation was affirmed (2:3). The Spirit advised them it was possible they might **“come short”** of the promise of entering God’s rest (4:1). They were therefore warned of a condition from which repentance was not possible (6:4-6). Hear the Spirit as He says, **“For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries”** (10:26-27).

The point of our text is that God was capable of restoring the work! Although, like the church at Sardius, their works were not **“perfect before God”** (Rev 3:2). But it did not have to remain this way. Their works could be **“made perfect,”** brought to a point that God would again take delight in them. There is, after all, a **“Potter’s house”** where marred vessels can be made whole again. On one occasion, the Lord revealed this Aspect of His nature to the weeping prophet, Jeremiah. What was shown to that man of God is the condition for which the Spirit seeks in our text. **“Arise and go down to the potter’s house, and there I will cause you to hear My words. Then I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make”** (Jer 18:2-4). Here, the nature of the Almighty was revealed. He desires to remake flawed vessels, re-strengthen weakened works, and rekindle dying embers!

There is no satisfactory reason for any of God’s people to remain deficient in their persons. There is no justification for remaining in a fallen state! God has provided for full recovery and perfect works through the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the end to which the ministry of Jesus and the effectiveness of the New Covenant are devoted.

That is the meaning of our text! The prayer was for the recovery of the Hebrews--that they might return to their *“first love,”* and *“do the first works”* (Rev 2:4-5). The New Covenant has been provided as an arena in which this can be accomplished. The High Priest has been provided as the just and pleasing means through which full recovery can be realized. There is no satisfactory reason for any of God’s people to remain deficient in their persons. There is no justification for remaining in a fallen state! God has provided for full recovery and perfect works through the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the end to which the ministry of Jesus and the effectiveness of the New Covenant are devoted.

Notice the precision of the statement: *“ . . . working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”* If ever our works are to be acceptable, God Himself must work within us. Apart from the Lord Jesus, this is an impossibility. With the Lord Jesus, there is good ground for joyful expectation! It is, after all, *“God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure”* (Phil 2:13). Do not doubt it, child of God. Do not doubt it! God is *“able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us”* (Eph 3:20). The effectiveness of Christ’s death has freed God to put the power in us. His continuous intercession enables the power to always be active. The New Covenant provides a framework within which the power will work.

This powerful working, however, requires our consent. If we are looking toward the earth, God will not employ the power. If our hearts are not focused heavenward, we at once become unsuitable for Divine working, without which we cannot be saved! This is why considerable doctrine and exhortation has preceded this notable prayer.

CONCLUSION

We have heard preaching, and been subjected to teaching. Strong warnings have been issued, and glorious promises have been affirmed. The nature of God has been declared, together with the effective ministry of the Son of God, and the superiority of the New Covenant. We have heard God’s desire for us, and the possibility of its realization. Christ has been lifted above every spokesman ever employed by the Almighty! We have been apprized of the voice of the Spirit, speaking to those who have ears to hear. The Father in heaven has been seen as thoroughly satisfied with the accomplishment of Christ’s death and His present intercession. What must our response be to these things?

“And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation . . .” (Verse 22). Do not put the book aside? Dwell upon what has been said, and take it into your spirit. As Jesus said elsewhere, *“Let these words sink down into your ears”* (Luke 9:44). Literally, the word means *“put into your ears.”* It is a phrase denoting deliberate and prolonged thought: contemplation, meditation, or cogitation. The reasoning is thus: **This is your work, to consider what I have said. If you will do so, God will do His indispensable work !** The message is called “a word of exhortation” because it is designed to stir us up. He urges us to take hold of what God holds out to us. *“Bear with the word of exhortation.”* If it seems hard to you, bear long with the word. It is for your salvation. Do not see sternness in the message, but the heart of the Almighty! See what

marvelous provisions He has made for your salvation, and throw yourself into appropriating them. God will honor your effort!

As lengthy as this letter may have appeared, it is called a message “*written to you in few words.*” Compared to the “*treasures of wisdom and knowledge*” hidden in Christ, this has been “*few words*” (Col 2:3). Were we to lay along side this book the “*abundance of grace*” provided through Christ Jesus, it would seem but a “*few words*” (Rom 5:17). A due consideration of “*the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him*” (1 Cor 2:9) will make these words seem “*few.*”

The demands are small in comparison to the benefits. The commands are small when laid along side the exceeding great and precious promises (2 Pet 1:4). The glory that awaits us far outshines the difficulties with which we now grapple. No! These are but a few words, infinitely disproportionate to the greatness of the amalgamation of heavenly personalities and benefits to which we “*are come*” (Heb 12:22-24). O, do not refuse Him Who is speaking from heaven. **Give Him your ear and your heart, and He will give you a place in His throne!**