

# Lessons on Hebrews

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*Dedication*

To our friends from the Becoming Closer class, for their constant encouragement and support.

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## In These Last Days - Hebrews 1

There is, in my time, a great decline in the sense of awe with which Christians approach God. The hymns of old often declared the majesty of God in a majestic way. Contemporary music is not capable of majesty. I see it in the youth, who run through the halls of the church karate kicking each other. Had I done such in my youth, my father would have let out with, "Young man, this is a church, not a gymnasium." Now there is no sense of reverence in the church.

It is a pity. I miss the awesome, sovereign God of my youth. That God had real power; when he granted prayer, it was indeed a privilege. You knew that you had best be careful in asking, for he is capable of delivering. Perhaps this loss of reverence is the source of our weakness in prayer.

Whatever it is, it was certainly not shared by the ancient Christians. See the tone with which the author of Hebrews approaches the subject.

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. For to which of the angels did He ever say, "YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU"? And again, "I WILL BE A FATHER TO HIM AND HE SHALL BE A SON TO ME"? And when He again brings the firstborn 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*, "YOUR THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER, AND THE RIGHTEOUS SCEPTER IS THE SCEPTER OF HIS KINGDOM. "YOU HAVE LOVED RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HATED LAWLESSNESS; THEREFORE GOD, YOUR GOD, HAS ANOINTED YOU WITH THE OIL OF GLADNESS ABOVE YOUR COMPANIONS." And, "YOU, LORD, IN THE BEGINNING LAID THE FOUNDATION OF THE EARTH, AND THE HEAVENS ARE THE WORKS OF YOUR HANDS; THEY WILL PERISH, BUT YOU REMAIN; AND THEY ALL WILL BECOME OLD LIKE A GARMENT, AND LIKE A MANTLE YOU WILL ROLL THEM UP; LIKE A GARMENT THEY WILL ALSO BE CHANGED. BUT YOU ARE THE SAME, AND YOUR 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 YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET"? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?

[\(Heb 1:1-14 NASB\)](#)

The problem of the Jewish Christian

In its earliest days, the church faced a serious difficulty: just how much of the Jewish Law was to be imposed upon the Gentile converts? This difficulty conceals within another difficulty: how does the Jewish Christian reconcile his knowledge of the Old Testament with his knowing of the Savior? To understand this book, we must first examine this problem.

## Requirements

The Jewish Christian might have summarized the problem this way. Many things he could change – but the core of what he knew from Moses must still be true with Christ. Three things stand out:

- ✚ He must be faithful to the Law, and hence faithful to God. Ceremony might be trifled with, but not the commandments.
- ✚ He must also keep himself pure. This no longer would mean no contact with the Gentiles – but surely purity itself would not cease.
- ✚ Above all else, the Lord your God is One.

## Violation

It appears, at first glance, that Christianity violates these requirements. Christ explicitly tells us that He is superior to the Law. Healing on the Sabbath, for example, can be seen as a violation of the Law of Moses. Worse, the church is told by the Holy Spirit to associate with Gentiles. What of purity now?

But most of all, God now appears to be three, not one. It appears very much like the church has added two gods to the list – and there's only room for one.

What to do with such a problem?

## The “book of transition”

That's why the book of Hebrews was written. It is to assure the Jewish Christian that his understanding of the Law is not in vain, but rather has been completed. In this book, and in particular in this chapter, we shall see these things:

- ✚ The connection between the Old Testament and the New Testament. We shall see how the New Testament completes the Old Testament.
- ✚ In so doing, we shall see the superiority of Christ over the prophets and angels. In the process, we shall learn much about Christ as divine.
- ✚ While this is going on, the book also speaks to modern Christians – for if you will not know the power of God (and thus revere Him) then how can you expect to become his child?

## Continuity of Christ

The author of the book is unknown to us, though the early church assumed that Paul wrote it. It is clearly addressed to Hebrew Christians, meant to solve their difficulties. It is fitting, therefore, that the author begins by stressing the continuity of God's message to man.

## Continuity of prophecy

There are prophets in plenty in the Old Testament. The New Testament mentions (in Acts) some as well, but the bulk of our attention is focused on the Christ – who is prophet, priest and king. See the continuity:

- ✚ The coming of Christ was foretold by many of the prophets. In that sense, he is the culmination of prophecy.
- ✚ Christ himself is a prophet, often speaking of the end times; also, he speaks of the fate of Jerusalem.

✚ Most of all, notice the sanctity which Jesus himself gives to the Scripture. As the old King James put it:

**For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.**

(Mat 5:18 KJV)

#### Theme: purification of sins

Both the old and the new seem to spend amount of time with the problem of sin. In particular, both show us that sin must be atoned for. In the Old Testament, this was done with animal sacrifices. In the New Testament, Christ is our Passover lamb.

This becomes extremely important to the Jewish Christian when, in AD 70, the temple in Jerusalem is sacked and destroyed. Animal sacrifices for sin ceased.

#### God the source of all things

In both revelations, God is shown to be the source of all things. Since God is eternal, his word takes on that same everlasting character. Indeed, his Word – Jesus – also has that attribute. So it is that from the same source flows the same living water. This, then, must have been great comfort to the Jews.

#### Supremacy of Christ

We have examined the continuity, let us examine the supremacy. Christ is supreme over all – including the prophets of the Old Testament. We see this here in four ways.

#### The Son

We see Him proclaimed to be the Son of God. What does that mean?

- ✚ First, it means that he is not just another human being (like the prophets were) nor is he an angel. He was made like us to walk among us – but that is a great humbling for him.
- ✚ Understand that He is God's only *begotten* Son. To understand the difference, remember that we make toys but we beget children. The toys reflect our creating nature; the children reflect who we really are.
- ✚ He carries the Father's authority. If He forgives you, you are indeed forgiven. If He says He doesn't know you, then you can never meet Him.
- ✚ He is said here to be the heir of all things – meaning, that all the universe will be under his rule.

#### Creation

His mighty power is shown by his relationship to all creation:

- ✚ He is the agent of creation – the “by whom” God created all things. He is, if you will, the pen with which God wrote the universe according to his word.
- ✚ He is also the sustainer of all things. He is the answer to the question, “why do things work today the same way they did yesterday?” His almighty power sustains all things.

#### The image of God

This passage is difficult to translate – because the concept behind it is difficult to grasp. There are two ideas:

- ✦ That Christ is the “radiance” of God’s glory. Other translations say words like “effulgence,” “reflection,” “brightness,” “perfectly mirrors.” God the Father is the source of glory; Christ is the “going out” of it. To use a poor analogy, if God be compared to the sun, then Christ is the light from it. What we can see of God is best shown in Christ.
- ✦ That Christ is the “exact representation” of God. If you’ve seen Jesus, you know what God the Father is like. Other translations say he is the “very image,” “expression (of his substance),” “exact likeness,” “express image (of his person),” “stamped with God’s nature,” “exact imprint of God’s being,” and “impress of his subsistence.”

Perhaps the translators find it so difficult because the concept is beyond our minds. But we can put it simply: He who has seen Jesus, has seen the Father.

### **True Purification**

Christ provided purification for our sins – but he did so in accordance with the law given in the Old Testament. He dies just like the Passover lamb does. The Old Testament foreshadowed this.

How then, should we live?

This lesson began with the concept of reverence for God. If we are to revere him, we should do so for good reason. I submit to you that the good reasons are shown here. Christ is the one spoken of by the prophets – and is prophet himself. He is the one who transforms animal sacrifices into purification for our sins. He is the agent of creation, the image of the Father, the only begotten Son of God. If that is not reason for reverence, then the word has no meaning.



## Pay Attention - Hebrews 2

If you will open your eyes to it, you will not be long in seeing it. Any pastor or Bible teacher knows it well. It is the saddest of fates for those who know Christ: to slip away, quietly, gradually, under the weight of the cares of this world. So often people assume that a good beginning is sufficient. It is necessary, but not sufficient. Evidently the difference is no longer taught in high school geometry, but the distinction still is with us.

The author of Hebrews cautions us against just such a thing in today's passage:

For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away *from it*. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will. For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking. But one has testified somewhere, saying, "WHAT IS MAN, THAT YOU REMEMBER HIM? OR THE SON OF MAN, THAT YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT HIM? "YOU HAVE MADE HIM FOR A LITTLE WHILE LOWER THAN THE ANGELS; YOU HAVE CROWNED HIM WITH GLORY AND HONOR, AND HAVE APPOINTED HIM OVER THE WORKS OF YOUR HANDS; YOU HAVE PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET." For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him. But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, *namely*, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one *Father*; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, "I WILL PROCLAIM YOUR NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE." And again, "I WILL PUT MY TRUST IN HIM." And again, "BEHOLD, I AND THE CHILDREN WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN ME." Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so 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 since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

(Heb 2:1-18 NASB)

The duty of knowledge

Our writer here speaks to one who is a Christian. The entire passage is written to one who is not only a Christian, but one who has grown up in a devout Jewish family. As such, he is reminding his reader much more than teaching him.

The responsibility of knowledge

Perhaps the argument can best be seen step by step:

- ✦ The greater your knowledge, the greater your responsibility to handle that knowledge correctly. I expect my attorney to think of all the “whereas” clauses.
- ✦ The greater your responsibility, the greater care that is required in performing your duties. I do not expect of the babysitter that which is expected of the father.
- ✦ The greater the care that is required, the greater the punishment for failure. But likewise, the greater reward for success.

#### Example: Law and Gospel

With that bit of logic in mind, let us compare the Law and the Gospel. We will do this (as our writer does) by examining three points:

- ✦ What evidence exists for each
- ✦ The stature of the messenger (s)
- ✦ The penalty for ignoring each.

Proceeding to specifics, we see that the Law:

- ✦ Was introduced to the people of Israel by powerful signs and miracles. It is interesting to note that the author of the first five books of the Bible (Moses) never thought a whit about proving the existence of God. Having met him personally and experienced his power, it would seem foolish to do so.
- ✦ Was carried by messengers of great importance. Some were prophets; others kings (David); and indeed some were angels.
- ✦ Prescribed penalties for disobedience, up to and including death.

By comparison, the Gospel:

- ✦ Was introduced to us with even greater signs and miracles. For if parting the Red Sea was miraculous, surely walking on water is more so. Nothing in the Law matches the Incarnation and the Resurrection.
- ✦ Was carried to us by none other than the Son of God Himself, who now sits at the right hand of God the Father.
- ✦ Clearly teaches us that the penalty for disobedience is a form of eternal death – hell itself.

We must therefore conclude that we, as Christians, have the greater knowledge – and thus the greater responsibility. With the greater responsibility comes, as argued, greater care or greater penalties. So what should we do?

#### Pay attention

The writer tells us that we must not “drift away.” The word in the Greek is used of a pot with a small leak – one which gradually drains the contents. See the subtlety of the threat! Satan’s attack is in the things of this world – he knows better than to attack directly. It is much easier to have you drift away from God than to tear you away by attack. It is also much more likely to succeed.

So what should we do? The answer is found in our Lord. Accept the Lord’s discipline, make it your own, and discipline your heart, mind, soul and strength to follow him. In doing this, you imitate your Lord – who was made perfect through suffering.

## Jesus, Made Perfect Through Suffering

There is a bit of difficulty in the translation here. Some have argued, falsely, that the phrase “made perfect” implies that Jesus was not sinless, but was somehow transformed. It is a difficulty until you realize that the concept of “made perfect” means “made perfect for a task.” There may be nothing wrong with the piece of steel, but you still forge it into a particular shape to use it as a hammer.

### The Supreme Miracle

C. S. Lewis referred to the Incarnation as “the supreme miracle.” The reason is simple: all else about Christ flows from this. See how great a miracle this is:

- ✚ First, it implies the humbling of Christ. He, equal with God, now becomes lower than the angels who served him.
- ✚ He is born as we are born – which implies he will die, just as we do.
- ✚ But in that death, we shall find life. How?

### The principle of identification

Throughout the Scripture there is the principle of identification. We do something “like God does” to become more like God – even if the something is purely symbolic. This same principle works in reverse – Christ became like us, so that we (by identification) might become like him. For example:

- ✚ In baptism it is said we are buried with him and raised with him – so that on the last day we will rise at his command.
- ✚ As His spirit is that of God, so we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit.
- ✚ And we are promised that if we suffer with him, we shall reign with him.

But identification only works if the one with whom you identify has the power to make it so. So we are taught the supremacy of Christ.

### The supremacy of Christ

- ✚ He is the Son of God, seated at the right hand of the Father. By his divine nature, he is supreme.
- ✚ He is the Son of Man – he can say of our lives, “been there, done that – and did it perfectly.” He is therefore supreme among us *as man*.
- ✚ Because of that, God has crowned him with glory. His death becomes his crown – which will be shown to all some day.

All of this is said to be from the grace of God. It is God’s justice satisfied, God’s love perfectly expressed – to those who did not deserve it. We are the great beneficiaries of his love.

### The results for us

All this would be abstract reasoning if there were no results for us. But results we have, and in plenty.

### Our High Priest

A priest serves as the bridge between God and man. As bridge, he must be one with us, and one with God – and only Christ fits that.

- ✚ He suffered, as we suffer. Therefore he understands our pain and suffering. Thus he can be our comfort, guide and strength in suffering.

- ✦ He was tempted, just as we are tempted – and so he understands our temptation. Thus he can be our rock of resistance.
- ✦ He is holy – and therefore can make us holy.  
There is much more to say about our High Priest – but that’s another lesson.

### Destruction of Death

You would not know it from Christians today – but the defeat of death and its overlord, Satan, is an accomplished fact. Consider the implications of that:

- ✦ Satan, the father of lies and the evil one who is our accuser, is defeated. He cannot triumph. I’ve read the back of the book; I know how things turn out. God wins.
- ✦ More than that, I know the resurrection of the dead. Why, then, should I fear death?
- ✦ And if I do not fear death, then death no longer holds my mind in slavery; rather, I am liberated beyond all others.

### Brothers with Christ

Those two would be sufficient cause for joy – but consider now that I am a brother of Christ. Indeed, this brotherhood is so close that Jesus, the perfect one, is not ashamed to call me “brother.” He was made like us to be our atonement – so our sins are covered. He also rose from the dead – and is the first born of the resurrection to come. We are called to be his brothers; justified by his atonement, and will be glorified at his return.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, if we are his brothers, then is it not the case that we are brothers to each other as well? What does that say about our relationship with each other?

But – one may ask – how can I be sure that I really am his brother? Jesus, in the Gospels, gives us three tests:

- ✦ Do you do the will of his Father?<sup>2</sup>
- ✦ Do you care for the least of his brothers?<sup>3</sup>
- ✦ Are you unashamed to call him Lord?<sup>4</sup>

It seems to me that these three form a short checklist on your brotherhood with Christ. You have been given greater knowledge; thus greater responsibility. If you do his will, you will receive the greater reward. Take care, then, that you do not drift away in the cares of this world; rather, pay close attention to the things you know. Don’t just hear the Word – do it

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 8:29

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 12:48-50

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 25:40

<sup>4</sup> Luke 9:26

## Looking Forward - Hebrews 3

Our author continues his warnings. In this section, he compares the past – in the example of the people of Israel in the time of Moses – with our future. The first word tells you that this is an example of the last argument: the more you know, the higher the standard to which God will hold you.

The subject is hope

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.

(Heb 3:1-6 NASB)

Perhaps we might begin by noting to whom this passage is addressed:

- ✚ *Holy brothers.* This is written to those who are holy – set apart for God. So this is not an exhortation to salvation; rather, it presumes that you are already set apart for God.
- ✚ *Who share in the heavenly calling.* Not only are you set apart, but God has called you to some specific task. You are “under orders” from heaven itself, and heaven’s monarch, God the Father.
- ✚ *“Whom we confess”.* This is no secret calling. Rather, you are the ones who confess the name of Jesus, stating publicly that you believe.

This, then, defines the minimum qualification for what now is said.

Having made it clear that he is talking to Christians, he introduces Christ as High Priest – a thought on which he will elaborate in future lessons. But he sets before us two characteristics of Christ. Note these two:

- ✚ He is faithful – and as such, is example to us.
- ✚ He is worthy of honor. Not only should we honor him in our speech and in our conduct, we should know that God rewards those who are faithful with honor. The objective of this lesson is to make sure that you are included among those so honored.

### Son versus servant

Perhaps this idea would be made clear by an example. In my daydreams I have often wanted to be the owner (and patriarch) of a grand hacienda. It would be a place of hospitality and good times. Such a place needs many workers – household servants, if you will. But when I die, no servant will be promoted to the head of the house; rather, my son will inherit it.

Now, the house of God referred to in this passage is the church. It is no secret that some will fall away from the church – abandoning the hope of the Resurrection. It is said that we are saved by hope<sup>5</sup>. But so often we find that our hopes are rather disappointed; we see the wicked prosper and despair –

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<sup>5</sup> Romans 8:24

or begin to chase the same things they long after. So it is that our author sticks in an “if.” We shall be saved IF:

- ✚ We hold on to our hope – always looking forward to the coming of our Lord and the resurrection of the dead.
- ✚ We also hold on to our courage – for courage is the foundation on which all virtues rest.

### Example of Israel

Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME, AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS, WHERE YOUR FATHERS TRIED *Me* BY TESTING *Me*, AND SAW MY WORKS FOR FORTY YEARS. "THEREFORE I WAS ANGRY WITH THIS GENERATION, AND SAID, 'THEY ALWAYS GO ASTRAY IN THEIR HEART, AND THEY DID NOT KNOW MY WAYS'; AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, 'THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.'"

(Heb 3:7-11 NASB)

### Of faith and evidence

One of the common mistakes of new Christians is that they feel weak in the faith – and long for a miracle or two to strengthen that faith. But consider ancient Israel – miracles enough to overwhelm anyone. But what was their reaction?

No faith. Faith looks forward – but it should also look backwards and see what God has done. It's easy to say we would have believed had we seen all that they had seen. So why didn't they believe?

The answer, simply, is hardness of heart. Faith is a relationship of trust between two persons, one of whom is God. To have faith is to risk being hurt – to be tender hearted, in other words. It is only the tender heart that can have faith.

### Symptoms

So how, then, can one detect the signs of a heart that is hardened? If this is so serious a problem (and it is), we need to know the early warning signs. We are given them here:

- ✚ *Testing God.* The Christian who is constantly demanding that God perform to his own timetable; the Christian who is constantly putting his relationship with God to a test of his own making – these are the ones who suffer hardness.
- ✚ *The heart astray.* Here we see a clear indication: it is when God is no longer first in your heart. That which takes his place is often a good thing; it is never the best thing.
- ✚ *"Not known my ways."* Perhaps the simplest of the warning signs: you no longer take the time to discover what God desires. Prayer is short and formal; Scripture reading is done only in Bible class; warnings of your brothers and sisters ignored. (I told you this passage is addressed to real Christians).

### God's Reaction

The “happy old grandfather” view of God is not espoused here (or anywhere else in the Bible). Rather, see God's reaction to what amounts to betrayal by those who call him Lord:

- ✚ *Anger.* This seems rather a petty thing at first – but shouldn't God have a problem with those who claim his name but do not follow his teaching? The strongest wrath of God is reserved for those who do this. There is such a thing as righteous anger.
- ✚ *"On oath."* So that you might know that he means it, that it certainly will come to pass, God takes a solemn oath. He who cannot lie wants you to see with certainty the danger of sliding away from him.
- ✚ *Never enter his rest.* Are you always busy, always worried? Do you live your life from crisis to crisis? Is there no peace in your heart? The Israelites had the same problem, arising from the same sins. He will not give peace to those who claim his name unworthily.

What should we do?

OK, that's what happens to those who get it wrong. But what should we do to prevent this from happening to us?

Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end, while it is said, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS, AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME." 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 would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? *So* we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

(Heb 3:12-19 NASB)

"See to it..."

Kindly note the phrase. Our writer is talking to us as brothers, giving us stern advice in a gentle manner.

- ✚ Do not have a sinful heart. Don't allow yourself to fall into the trap of desiring that which you should not have. Whether it is coveting, lust or pride, keep your heart from it.
- ✚ Do not have an unbelieving heart. Make the leap of faith wholeheartedly.
- ✚ Beware of the effect sin has on the heart: it produces unbelief. (I recall Granoff's Law: "I want to sleep with my girlfriend, therefore there is no God.")

Rather

When teaching, it's usually wise to follow "thou shalt not" with "thou shalt."

- ✚ Encourage *one another*. Do it on a daily basis. Christianity is not a solo flight, but a team effort. Each of us has the ability to encourage another – so none of us is without excuse.
- ✚ Stay in right relationship with the authority God has set up in the church – do not rebel. In our time, rebelliousness is colored as a virtue, but it is not so.
- ✚ Hold on firmly to the end. Marathon runners will often tell you they have only one goal in running: to finish the race, to make it all the way to the finish line. So it is with us – we must hold on to the end.

### Success – sharing in Christ.

The reward glitters at the end of the race. We shall become joint heirs of the kingdom with Jesus. It is beyond imagination what God will do at the return of Christ. But again, there is the “if”:

- ✚ *If we hold on firmly.* This is no half-hearted effort. It will require all that you have and all that you are.
- ✚ *If we hold on to the end.* If you make it half way through life, and then quit – you didn’t finish the race. The trophy will not be yours.
- ✚ *If we hold on with the same confidence.* This is not to be done with timidity. It is to be done boldly. Having trouble with boldness? Remember that you are a child of the King of Kings – and this is how you stay that way.



## Two Edged Sword - Hebrews 4

One of the common metaphors for the word of God (in either sense) is that of a sword. In the time this was written, all would know that the Romans conquered the known world with discipline, patience – and a sharp short sword. Even today we are familiar with the weapon, if only from the movies. We meet this concept again in today's lesson.

### God's Rest

In the passage that follows, you should know that there are two Greek words which are translated rest. They have specific meanings, and the use of these two words to portray the same concept is a deliberate one on the part of the author. By using two words, he ties them together to give you a more complete understanding.

✚ *Katapausis* means something like “to be settled down.” The Hebrew equivalent is familiar to us: “Noah.” Think of the Ark coming to rest on the mountains. In this sense, it means to cease wandering around and settle down in a good place. This word is found in verse 1.

✚ *Sabbatismus* means a Sabbath day rest, such as the Jew of that time would perform on Saturday. This word is found in verse 9.

Combining these two words, we have the concept of “rest” meaning both settled down and ceasing from labor at God's command.

(You should also know that the word “Joshua” in verse 8 can also be translated “Jesus” – they are the same in the Greek.)

Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, "AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST," although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh *day*: "AND GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORKS"; and again in this *passage*, "THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST." Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS." For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through *following* the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.  
(Heb 4:1-12 NASB)

### Promised Rest

One of the difficulties in reading the Bible in English is the constant use of the present tense to describe the future. For God, who is eternal, this is not a problem. All times are “today” to him. But for those of us who occupy space and time, it can be a puzzle. Does he mean “today” or in the future? Or both?

Compounding the problem is this: much of what God wants to tell us must be told in pictures. The concept of “rest” – when our Lord returns – is pictured in the Old Testament in a number of ways, but primarily these two:

- ✚ It is pictured in the Creation as the seventh day – which is later applied to the seventh day of the week. Does the Sabbath day rest really make a difference? Seen as a picture of the rest to come, it is a weekly reminder to the Jew: God will provide rest for the faithful
- ✚ It is also pictured in the history of Moses and the people of Israel – especially in that the Promised Land is pictured as the place of rest.

It is a consistent theme of the Scriptures: there will come a glorious time when death shall be no more, all labors cease, and God will be in close companionship with man. But note the conditions: this is promised only to the faithful. Note the word faithful – those who *continue* in obedience.

### Today

I do not own yesterday. No matter how bright or how terrifying my memories are, I cannot do anything yesterday. I do not own tomorrow. It slips constantly out of my reach, becoming today. Indeed, I do not know for certain that I will live one more day. The only time which is mine is “Today.” Right now. It is for this reason that Christ tells us that we should “take no thought for the morrow, for sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.” Today is the only time I have; Today is the only touch I have with eternity.

We have seen that we must continue in obedience all of our lives, to the very end. How can we do that? Do we have any idea what will come to us? No – nor do we need such a vision. The way we can remain obedient to the end is to be obedient Today – and every day. How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. How do you remain obedient all your life? One day at a time.

The temptation is to look ahead and say, “I just don’t see how I could do that.” That’s a sign of the hardened heart – for the hardened heart takes stock only of its own capability. The tender heart is open – and therefore can know the power of God, flowing through it.

### How to remain in the faith

Our writer gives us a positive and a negative example. It is well to remember that nothing is ever a total loss – it can always be used as a bad example. Consider the generation that came out of Egypt with Moses. All but two failed to make it to the Promised Land. After seeing so many miracles, they came up short in obedience. How? They tested God. After seeing their redemption, they demanded more. They spoke to Him as if he were a trained animal to jump at their command.

That’s the wrong attitude. What’s the right one? “Make every effort...” God knows that you are not perfect; he knows that you cannot do it by yourself. But if you are serious about pleasing him, you must do what you can. Be obedient. Today. Then be obedient for all the Todays he will give you in the future.

### Two Edged Sword

**For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts**

and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

(Heb 4:12-14 NASB)

Despite the Hollywood tradition that all swords are made for slashing, the metal version of this sword was primarily a stabbing weapon. It's hard to keep a weapon so sharp that it can deal with tanned leather, for example. But keeping the point sharp to penetrate is relatively easy. That's the word of God: penetrating. Here, from my experience, is how it seems to work:

- ✚ The Word goes right to the source of sin – no matter how deeply that is buried within me. This is not a cosmetic. The Spirit reaches the heart of the matter on the first stab.
- ✚ Often, I see this in the effect one passage has on me. My daily reading has in it a passage from Proverbs; it often stabs me. It lays me open to His reproach.
- ✚ Sometimes, the penetration is so deep that I did not know about the problem. Usually I noticed “something wrong” but didn't quite want to dig down that deep. The Spirit has no such limitation.
- ✚ The effect of all this? In a word, repentance. God is concerned with turning you around.

### Judgment

It is a well known principle that those who judge themselves in this life – and take action – head off judgment when our Lord returns. But because our civilization now has so much trouble in believing, I put the point this way:

- ✚ God is fair. He has established a standard of right and wrong which comes from his own character. This standard is not “everything's relative” or “if it feels right it can't be wrong.” It exists even if you think it doesn't.
- ✚ The best revelation of this standard is found in the Scriptures. As Paul tells us in Romans, we can observe God's righteousness in the world around us – but there are those of us who like to get our truth from the source.
- ✚ Since you know judgment is coming, and you are one who knows the Gospel, the warning must be made to you with more force and vigor – for you will be held to God's complete standard, His Word.

### Everything bare before God

Let me tell you about a young lady I once knew. Her name was Colleen. She was not given either a fantastic figure or a beautiful face. In fact, if she took no effort in clothes and cosmetics, you would describe her as rather plain. But I have never met another woman who took so little and, with careful makeup and an eye to her wardrobe, produced an image that was so attractive. (Charles Revson, the founder of Revlon, put it simply: “We don't sell cosmetics. We sell hope.”)

Many of us are like Colleen; we are trying to hide what we really look like. Most Christians will acknowledge that God knows and sees all – and then will act like they can hide things from him. Why do we act this way? Because we want to hide our faults, misfortunes and plainness from others. We value the good opinion that others have of us.

Isn't that rather short sighted? We know the judgment is coming. We know that God sees and knows all. We know we should repent Today. And still we spend our time, our effort and treasure “looking good.”

But all is not lost; we have help.

Our High Priest – an introduction

Therefore, since 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 do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are, yet* without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

**(Heb 4:14-16 NASB)**

Notice the first word: “therefore.” It is a key word telling us that here we have a logical argument. Because this is true, we therefore should do that. In this instance, the first item is that we have a great high priest – Jesus, the Son of God. The argument is rather like this:

- ✚ Christ has succeeded where Moses failed. Moses didn’t make it to the Promised Land (metaphorically, God’s “rest.”); Christ did. This implies his superiority over Moses – but it also means that the one who is like us has now ascended to the highest place.
- ✚ We have, in effect, one to plead our case. Because we now have standing in the court of God, we can now hope for grace and mercy.
- ✚ This is true *only* when we continue in the faith. Note the phrase “the faith we profess.” It is something we are to tell the world – and firmly.

**One like us**

One of the frequent questions about doctrine is “why?” Why would I study the Bible and learn the doctrines of Christ? Wouldn’t practical experience be much better?

Suppose you wanted to buy a sailboat and sail around the world. You would certainly need a lot of practical sailing experience. You would start with lessons and work your way up, taking longer and longer practice voyages. But when you started out on your trip around the world, wouldn’t you take along charts which showed the seas through which you sailed? Doctrine is the chart of the Christian’s journey home.

The doctrine here is this: that Jesus Christ is fully human, just as you and I are. What, then, is the practical use of this doctrine?

- ✚ Being both fully human and sinless, he has overcome all the temptations we face.
- ✚ Therefore, he’s in a position to help us do likewise.

Think of it this way: we have a great Friend in high places.

**Approach the throne boldly**

Have you ever written your Congressman? How much better it would be if you could walk into his office and be greeted as an old friend! Even better if you could walk into the White House and have the President greet you that way – right? But you know that he’s not a personal friend. Going up to him and asking a favor would take a lot of chutzpah.

So what would it take to approach the throne of the God who rules the universe; the one who spoke and the worlds began? If talking directly to a President is chutzpah, talking directly to God is an act of extreme daring.

But we can do it. Why? Because we have a friend in the highest place: Jesus, our Lord and Savior. We can be daring because we know him.

But do not come without thinking it through; you are still approaching the throne of God. You should know what to ask for. Our writer tells us here:

- ✚ *Grace*. From the Greek *charis*, meaning “gift.” We get our words “charisma” from this, as in gifts of the Holy Spirit. Grace is the free gift of God to all who will call on his Name.
- ✚ *Mercy*. The original meaning is that of compassion on those who are miserable. Mercy implies that justice is due – but that someone Else has paid the price.

My father told a story about the island on which I was born, Adak. There is no form of recreation on Adak; it is a rather boring place. My father roomed with two other officers, one a Catholic, the other a Jew. Having nothing better to do, all three went to each others’ religious services. His Jewish friend learned, therefore, about Jesus Christ. He put it this way: “You Christians have an advantage over us Jews. We have to come to God’s judgment and argue our own case. You have an Attorney to argue yours.”

We have a friend in the court from which there can be no appeal. By his work he has provided us grace; by his pleading we have mercy. All this is ours, if we continue in the faith.

## Royal Priesthood - Hebrews 5

It is unfortunate that the church decided (rather early) to create a class of individuals known as priests. It diminishes the grand doctrine of the royal priesthood of all believers. Such a priesthood, however, must have a high priest – Jesus.

For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men 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; and because of it he is obligated to offer *sacrifices* for sins, as for the people, so also for himself. And no one takes the honor to himself, but *receives it* when he is called by God, even as Aaron was. So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, "YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU"; just as He says also in another *passage*, "YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK." 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. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. Concerning him we have much to say, and *it is* hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. (Heb 5:1-14 NASB)

### The humanity of the priesthood

God, in his infinite wisdom, knows that we need someone to stand between us and his awesome righteousness. He appointed no angel to this task; rather, he has always chosen humans.

### The ability to sympathize

Some time ago the press chuckled deliciously at a second hand store. The reason was simple; the items in that store came from the CEO of Enron. His wife ran the store. For her, I suppose, it was a terrible change of position. But most of us cannot sympathize with her; we've never been millionaires.

That ability to sympathize – to say, "I know how you feel," is essential to a priest. It comes from "having been there." Paul teaches us here that it has two advantages:

- ✚ Such a priest can deal gently with ignorance. At one time or another, all of us have been ignorant. I know of no one, however, who likes to have that fact trumpeted about. So I wish to cure my ignorance in a way which does not crush me with humiliation. Therefore, I am more willing to listen to the one who enlightens me gently.
- ✚ Such a priest can deal gently with those who go astray. All of us are sinners; there are many temptations common to all of us. None of us like to hear hellfire and brimstone. None of us like to go to the dentist, either. But when we must, we prefer the dentist who uses the anesthetic.

### Priesthood given by God

It seems there is one qualification for priesthood: God selects you. He makes it clear in the Old Testament that priests had to come from the tribe of Levi. There is absolutely no question of “earning it.” He will have mercy upon whom he will have mercy.

Indeed, the only qualification seems to be humanity. Here we see God recognizing our needs. He says, in effect, that no one is worthy to be his priest. No one of us can stand between the wrath of God and poor mortals. Therefore, since none of us are qualified, he will select his priests in such manner as to show that fact – and thus we will know it is not our merit but his choice that makes us priests.

Did I say, “us?” Yes, us. The Scripture tells us that we are a royal priesthood. And like the ancient one, not one of us can deserve it.

### High Priest

Do you not see it? If Christ is High Priest, then those who follow him must be priests also. Christ is also King of Kings; therefore this priesthood is a royal priesthood. So what shall we do?

- ✚ Recognize that we are called to this priesthood. Know that we are the ones who go between God and man – for each other, and all those who do not yet know Christ.
- ✚ In so doing, we must “deal gently.” Remember that we are but sinners, and our condemnation is not good. The Spirit will convict of sin and judgment; we must hold out the hope of forgiveness and salvation.
- ✚ Remember, most of all, we did not earn this. He gave it to us by grace.

Does this seem strange to you? Remember that Jesus is our High Priest. As the children say, What Would Jesus Do? If he is High Priest, and we his imitation, then we are priests too.

### Suffering

Drive from your mind, if you will, the picture of priests in flowing robes. This priesthood is in imitation of our Lord, and it therefore is very different.

### Prayers, petitions and tears

Is your prayer life weak? Consider how our Lord prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. Do his prayers there sound like yours, or are yours rather weak and singsong instead? The phrasing in this passage gives you a clue to a more powerful prayer life.

- ✚ Begin with prayers – a solemn discussion of your heart’s desire before God.
- ✚ Intensify your call; turn from prayer to petition. Prayer seems to mean just once; a petition must be circulated. Ask others to pray with you; persist in prayer.
- ✚ Finally, throw your entire life into your prayers. He may have heard your prayers, even seen your petition – but has he felt your tears? Are you so intent that your heart aches for the object of your prayers?

Christ did that, and we are told his prayers were heard. But in the garden they were not granted. If you will pray as he did, you will be heard – but God’s purposes must prevail. It is wisdom and humility to acknowledge this – and to accept it.

Indeed, this passage assures us that Christ was not heard for his position but for his reverent submission. In those two words lie the secret to prayer:

- ✚ Reverent – meaning one who acknowledges the power and majesty of God Almighty, and knows prayer to be an act of daring.
- ✚ Submission – meaning one who accepts the complete authority of God – and lives his life that way.

#### Learning obedience through suffering

If you see only the divine side of Christ, you might ask, “What did he have to learn in the way of obedience?” It seems to contradict his sinless nature. But consider: if you are a football player, there are many books you can read which will help you with your skills. But if you read, but do not practice, you will not make the team. You must practice (to the Christian, be obedient) as you play.

- ✚ If you wish to remain in the coach’s good graces, practice. If you wish to remain in God’s love, be obedient.<sup>6</sup>
- ✚ Christ did this; at the very least we should see in this an example of the humility which befits his followers.
- ✚ Ultimately, suffering perfected Jesus for his task. This does not mean that he somehow “became” sinless; rather, he became prepared.

#### Being heard

We know that God hears the prayers of the righteous. In Christ’s example we can learn much about how to be heard:

- ✚ Are you serious about your prayers, or are they just motions, somehow required by God?
- ✚ Are your prayers flip and casual, or do you approach him in an attitude of reverent submission?
- ✚ Have you learned obedience? Are you willing to try?

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<sup>6</sup> John 15:10



### Slow to learn

Paul ends this little section with his frustration. Have you ever explained something to your children that which they should know by now? You can sympathize with Paul here; it's hard to explain things to the "slow to learn" crowd. Unfortunately, some of us are proud of our slowness. But consider:

- ✚ God often tests us to show us our own slowness.<sup>7</sup> When he does, we should listen and learn.
- ✚ Sometimes God does the opposite; he withholds things from us because we are not yet ready for them.<sup>8</sup> In this way he shows his mercy.
- ✚ Sometimes we hear what God says – and find it difficult. We then twist it into something we want to hear.<sup>9</sup>
- ✚ Most often, our "slow to learn" is simply the hardness of our hearts.<sup>10</sup>  
This is most injurious to us – but even more so to the church around us.

### Admonish and teach

The members of this class, like the Hebrews to whom this was written, should be ready to pass the faith along. In particular, we need to be those who admonish and teach each other – royal priests, interceding for each other.

- ✚ Do you complain that this is too hard to understand? Consider well that the word is revealed to little children, but not to the wise.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps our own wisdom stands in the way.
- ✚ If we are to teach each other, then surely we must have the word in our hearts first.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the reason you don't feel very priestly is that the word has fallen into rocky ground with you.
- ✚ We must also do this in the appropriate style. Remember, when you teach or admonish, you are to do it as if you were speaking the words of God.<sup>13</sup> In a very real sense, you are.

### The test of maturity

So, how do I know when I've reached this stage? See the three tests that Paul puts before us:

- ✚ We must be those who receive instruction and put it into "constant use." If we use this only on Sunday, we cannot please God.
- ✚ We must also be "trained." This implies formal instruction – so are you listening to the sermons, working in a small fellowship – and in general opening yourself up for instruction?
- ✚ All this is so that we can distinguish good from evil.  
Good from evil? Is that it? Surely that's not too difficult to do.

Consider, however, that this problem is as old as Adam – who flunked, by the way. It is difficult. Indeed, it might be completely beyond us, were it not for the work of the Holy Spirit within us.<sup>14</sup> By his power we can become mature.

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<sup>7</sup> John 6:16

<sup>8</sup> John 16:12

<sup>9</sup> 2 Peter 3:16

<sup>10</sup> Mark 8:17ff

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 11:25

<sup>12</sup> Colossians 3:16

<sup>13</sup> 1 Peter 4:11

I must close with a word of caution. In becoming mature, there is the temptation to become a Pharisee – one who piously condemns others. Listen to Paul's words to the Romans:

Now accept the one who is weak in faith, *but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions*. One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables *only*. The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One person regards one day above another, another regards every day *alike*. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.

**(Rom 14:1-5 NASB)**

Remember that the priesthood is composed of human beings – who therefore can be gentle with one another.

## Diligent to the End - Hebrews 6

“Dunk ‘em and drop ‘em.”

That’s the accusation often made against the churches of our brotherhood. We are very fond of making new disciples (as we should be), but perhaps not so fond of bringing them into maturity in Christ. Evangelism is great – but we need to remember that Christ’s command was not “Go and evangelize” but “Go and make disciples.” Baptism is not the end; it is the beginning. As Paul makes clear here, we must go on from the elementary beginnings into Christian maturity.

Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. And this we will do, if God permits. For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and *then* have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned. But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way. For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the 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 so, 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, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take 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.

[\(Heb 6:1-20 NASB\)](#)

### Amateurs

The word “amateur” used to have a definite meaning in sports. It used to mean one who was not paid to play. In our enlightened times, however, amateur has become a Red Queen’s word: it means exactly what we say it means. Noted “amateur” track stars are paid “appearance money.” “Amateur” basketball players (who eke out a poor existence in the NBA) play in the Olympics. The word has taken on different meanings.

One of those meanings is rather derogatory. It means someone who should know his job – and doesn’t. Paul gives us these tests of the Christian amateur:

✚ You hear things over and over again – at the same level of understanding.

- ✚ You only listen to a certain set of topics – those for beginners.
- ✚ When someone asks, you have no ready defense of the faith.  
If that sounds familiar, watch out!

#### The loss to the teacher

Since Paul brings it up, may your teacher share with you his troubles with amateurs in the room? This is, after all, not a class for beginners.

- ✚ Amateurs frequently find the lessons over their heads – and that quickly leads to a lack of attention.
- ✚ To get their attention, the teacher must “bring it down to their level” – which quickly bores the rest of the class.

But the teacher must persist (so give the man a little help, will ya?) He persists because the basics are still so important. Unless, of course, he’s looking for applause, in which case what are you doing in his class?

#### The loss to your classmates

I can put this in simple English: while your classmates know that the basics are valuable, do any of you remember being bored during our trial of Christianity 101? A lot of you complained of it!

#### What are the basics?

So just what does Paul consider “the basics?”

- ✚ *Repentance.* The point here is not that you never need repentance. You will need it. The point is that you don’t have to be taught how. By now you should have practiced it a bit.
- ✚ *Faith.* If you have a constant hunger for the miraculous, or the need to have your faith affirmed, you haven’t been growing in the faith.
- ✚ *Ritual.* You should by now have figured out things like baptism.
- ✚ *Hope.* By now, the hope of the Christian – which is the resurrection of the dead at the return of our Lord – should be firmly planted in your life. This I find is the most common failing.

#### Warning to the mature

This section of Scripture can be frightening to the amateur. It is sometimes interpreted to mean that “the first time you sin after you are baptized, you have no hope of forgiveness.” That is not what it means at all. This section is addressed to mature Christians. So first, we need to know what makes one a mature Christian, right?

#### The mark of the mature

Let’s see just who Paul is speaking of:

- ✚ *“tasted of the heavenly gift”* – He’s talking about grace, of course. If you ignore grace – or worse, go out on the theory that the more you sin, the more God’s grace abounds – you can see that you are rejecting the free gift of God.
- ✚ *“shared in the Holy Spirit”* – note the word “shared.” To reject the “seal” (the guaranty) of God, our comforter in troubles, and the one who makes the church one is rejection of God Himself.
- ✚ *“tasted the goodness of the word”* – suppose you spend much time in studying the Scriptures, and then, at the last, decide that you need them no more. Are you not rejecting the life found therein?

✦ “*powers of the coming age*” – the Christian knows the power of the Resurrection. It changes our attitude towards death. We see death as the door to eternal life, and freedom from mortal ills. If you have experienced this, and then rejected it, you have thrown your hope away.

Does this mean there is no repentance for the mature Christian? Of course not. What it does mean is that there is no chance to go through the initial stages of Christianity again. We are privileged to know God, to experience his baptism and know his saving grace only because of what Christ did on the Cross. If having become mature we fall away, how could we start again? Would not Christ have to die again for us? It is absurd to think of it.

So then, Christian, as you mature, remember: press on until the end of life. Not only did your Lord undergo death for you, He was *humiliated*<sup>15</sup> for you. Many of us would rather die than be humiliated; he accepted both for you. If you reject this – especially after having grown mature in this faith – how could you start over? Would you humiliate him a second time?

#### By their fruits

How do we know if we are mature Christians? “By their fruits you will know them.” This is a pass-fail exam, so to speak.

✦ You “pass” if you have the fruits of the Spirit in your life. This is because you “drink in the rain” – the shower of blessings that God gives you. When you do, you produce good fruit – both in your personal life and in those about you.

✦ You “fail” if you produce thorns – or sins. Note the progression: when God’s patience runs out, you will be cursed. If cursed, then burned – in the lake of fire.

#### Confident of Better Things

Our lesson does not end with such gloom, however. Paul tells these Hebrews that he is confident of better things in their case. Having seen the fate of those who fall away, let us look at the joys of those who persist until the end.

#### God is just

Sometimes we look around and see the rewards of the unjust in this life. We’re tempted to ask, “If that’s what the wicked get, and I get what the righteous get, maybe I’m on the wrong side here.” But remember: God is just. Because he is just, this is what He will do:

✦ He will not forget your hard work. No, you cannot work your way into heaven. But your Lord, who sees all things, sees your hard work too. He will reward it when he comes.

✦ Nor will he forget the love you have shown to his saints. Remember, a kindness to another Christian is a kindness to Christ himself. It makes sense: those who show love to my children show love to me.

✦ Finally, he will not forget your diligence. If you persist until the end, he will know, and he will reward. Keep on keeping on!

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<sup>15</sup> Crucifixion was a humiliating death; it was also a public spectacle. We no longer hang, draw and quarter criminals, but that process approximates the humiliation.

## Diligence

But how do I keep on keeping on? Paul tells us that too.

- ✚ First, you do it by faith. As your faith matures, God will stretch you more and more. Hang on to that faith; remember that when he stretches you, he is making you stronger for the next trial.
- ✚ Next, you do it by patience. This is not a passive thing. Rather, it is the patience which is ever ready to seize God's opportunity – but does not moan until the opportunity comes.
- ✚ Your major foe is laziness. Interestingly, the word can also be translated "dull." Don't coast downhill when God wants you to be climbing.

## Our confidence

Sometimes this looks rather difficult; we tend to see ahead and look only at the bumps in the road. How can we be sure?

- ✚ *It is impossible for God to lie.* By his very nature, he is truth. But just to make sure you got the message, he made his promises "on oath." We do that yet today; the oath (or at least the fear of trial for perjury) is supposed to give us confidence in what is said. In this we see the humility of God. There is no one greater than God; God is truth – but so that we might be certain of his promises, he added to them his sworn word.
- ✚ *Hope "as an anchor."* The metaphor is a deliberate one. He refers not to the rock as foundation, but an anchor. Those whose faith has been tried know what this means. They know what it is to be "at sea." When everything else is shaky, you pull on the anchor chain. When you do, you find it is stretched, but firm. Even more of a blessing is this: it's secure. It is stuck in the Rock of Ages; it will not move.
- ✚ *Our hope is the atonement.* How do we know this can be so? Because we remember what Jesus did for us in the Atonement. The picture would be clear to the ancient Jew. Jesus has gone into the Holy of Holies (remember the veil of the Temple torn from top to bottom?), just as the High Priest would. In there (in the days of its glory) would be the Ark of the Covenant. The cover of that ark is called the "mercy seat" or the "atonement cover." It is there that our Lord has presented himself as sacrifice, on our behalf. There is a reason we take communion each week – so that we might remember this.

"My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness." An old hymn, but a true one. Keep on keeping on!

## Consider How Great - Hebrews 7

We must not let the details of the argument in this passage obscure the great and central truth – the surpassing greatness of Jesus Christ. As you read through the passage, remember that theme.

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 remains 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. 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 attested *of Him*, "YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK." For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. And inasmuch as *it was* not without an oath (for they indeed became priests without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to Him, "THE LORD HAS SWORN AND WILL NOT CHANGE HIS MIND, 'YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER'"); so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant. The *former* priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the *sins* of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, *appoints* a Son, made perfect forever.

(Heb 7:1-28 NASB)

The argument sounds strange to the ears of a modern, evangelical Christian. Perhaps that is because we have discarded liturgy. At any rate, it is now sufficiently unknown that some words of explanation must come first.

## The Formal Argument

Let us begin by acknowledging the audience for whom this letter was written: the Jewish Christians of the first century. They are a people almost completely apart from us. But there is one fact we do need to recognize: they worshiped at the Temple. The Scripture tells us that Jerusalem is the place where God put his Name; that the original temple was confirmed by God to be that most specific place. If one bit of geography on earth could be said to be holiest, this is it.

Now we must remember that this Temple was a part of their ordinary experience. Though this letter will provide the basis on which we determine that Temple worship is no longer required, it was certainly their habit to go there. So Paul uses what they know to instruct them in what they should know.

### Step by step

Let us consider his argument step by step, seeing it as they would.

- ✚ They accepted as indisputable fact (which we deny) that the father is greater than the son. So, in their view, Abraham was greater than Levi.
- ✚ They also accept the fact that “the greater blesses the lesser.” Therefore this Melchizedek was greater than Abraham. This is also seen in the fact that Abraham tithes the spoils of war to this Melchizedek.
- ✚ Mathematically, if A is greater than B, and B is greater than C, then A is greater than C. So Melchizedek is greater than Levi.
- ✚ Levi is Aaron’s ancestor. So (by the same argument) Melchizedek is greater than Aaron.
- ✚ Both Aaron and Melchizedek are priests – but of different “orders.” They are not of the same priesthood. Melchizedek is greater than Aaron; but does that mean his priesthood is also greater?
- ✚ We can only determine the answer to that question in the information which God has chosen to give us. We know a lot about Aaron and his priesthood; what do we know about this Melchizedek?
- ✚ His name means “king of righteousness.” Interestingly, Aaron means “light bringer.” One brings the light; the other carries it intrinsically.
- ✚ He is also “king of peace” (a play on the word salem, which means peace, but also refers to Jerusalem). There is no royalty to Aaron.
- ✚ By a distinctively Jewish argument, we find that Melchizedek is eternal. How do we know? No genealogy; no parents. How could the Scriptures omit such detail for one so important, unless such details do not exist?
- ✚ The telling difference is this: Aaron’s priesthood is based upon God’s choice. God makes it clear that it is not Aaron’s worthiness; the argument indeed is that God will select someone like this as an indication that no one is worthy. But Melchizedek bases his priesthood on his indestructible life.
- ✚ Finally, Aaron’s priesthood had no oath; Melchizedek’s had an oath of God.

Confused? Welcome to the club. Commentators differ on whether or not Melchizedek is simply a type (a picture) of Christ, or was the pre-incarnate Son. It does not matter; the point is simply this. The priesthood of Christ is superior to the priesthood of Aaron – just as Christ is superior to Aaron.

### Consider How Great

I like the King James Version in verse 4: “Consider how great...” It is in the form of a command where the NIV carries the idea of a suggestion. Please humor me in this; for I believe you should consider how great Christ is.



### Why should we consider?

You may well ask, why should we do that?

- ✚ First, because it strengthens our hope. “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness,” as the old hymn goes. His greatness strengthens my hope of eternal life.
- ✚ Next, because it encourages our faith. We need to remember that Jesus cares for us – and has the power to change our lives. Our faith is not pie-in-the-sky, but rather the power of Christ in our lives.
- ✚ Of great importance is this: knowing his greatness helps keep us from sin. If we think of our Lord as only a good teacher, with no control over the universe, we miss the mark, badly. His power is available for his purposes, one of which is to keep us from sin.

One of the sad facts of the Reformation is that evangelical Christians are deprived of the discipline of devotional worship of Jesus. It seems so “Catholic.” But here we have it laid out for us.

### Consider his relationship

Sometimes greatness is in who you know:

- ✚ Consider his relationship to God. He is so much divine that we call him the Son of God. And such he is; he is “of the same essence” as God the Father, and therefore an equal before him.
- ✚ Consider his relationship to men. He is not “part God, part man” but completely God and completely man. He knows your pain; think of the humiliation he went through so that you might know God.
- ✚ Consider his relationship to the church. The most common figure used for the church is “the bride of Christ.” Anyone living in this time would have known (contrary to our modern thinking) that the bride is in submission to the groom. The church is (or perhaps was; I don’t know how far the rot extends) in submission to her Lord. God’s living body on earth, the church, is to be subject to Jesus. I do not know how to define greatness to any greater degree than that.

### Consider his history

It is not just who he is; consider also what he has done.

- ✚ Think of the humility of his birth. The one who created the universe descends to the point of becoming a human being. Even in doing that, his birth was to humble parents in the lowest of circumstances. This he did for us.
- ✚ The Holy Spirit saw to it that he was “born of woman.” Meaning, of course, the virgin birth, it also means he was without sin. If that isn’t greatness, the word has no meaning.
- ✚ Consider the life he lived. Thirty years in obscurity, then an itinerant preacher – and yet his words still guide men today. By his teaching he has shaped our civilization.
- ✚ Consider even more the death he died. He was not only killed to atone for us, it was done in humiliation. Greatness is shown in what it will endure.
- ✚ Consider his resurrection. He has done what no man could do: broken the power of death. Our return from the grave is sure, for his word proclaims it.
- ✚ Consider his ascension. Having endured all that, for us, he returned to his Father, going back to his place in eternity.

There is greatness in service, and there is no greater example than this.

Therefore ...

... is a dangerous word. The student should be wary in turning the “therefore” corner, for it usually precedes something of power.

### **Able to save completely**

By his greatness he is able to save “completely.”

- ✚ First, he is able to save ... us! No matter what we have done, no matter how vile we are, his grace is sufficient.
- ✚ Not only us, but those of whom we despair. We look at someone and say, “he will never come to Christ.” His power extends beyond their sins - and beyond our sight.
- ✚ Not only the vile, but also the unpleasant – those people we’d really rather not associate with. These, too, are within his sight.

### **Lives to intercede**

It is his purpose! He did not ascend to the Father simply to evade us on the planet. Rather, his purpose is to intercede for us, pleading with the Father in regard to our weakness.

Do you see what a model that is for us? If you walk away from this lesson with nothing else, walk away with this: “As Christ intercedes for you, so you should intercede for others.”

### **Meets our need**

I cannot say for your part, but for mine I would not want to meet God the Father face to face – without Jesus Christ. I am not fit even to be in his presence. How then can I be saved from the wrath of God? I need some help; I need someone to plead my case and beg my forgiveness. Jesus meets this need:

- ✚ He meets my need in purity. Where I am unclean in sin, he is perfect in his purity. He can take my case to the father.
- ✚ He meets my need in position. I have no intrinsic standing before God; I have no right to say anything to God. I’m the pot, he’s the potter, remember? But in Christ I have the standing to speak to the Almighty.
- ✚ He meets my need in power. Trying to live in imitation of him is not easy – but he has power to uphold me in the attempt.

Consider, then, how great Jesus truly is.

## Transitions - Hebrews 8

Paul, whether the Spirit had revealed it to him or not, is preparing the Jewish Christians for the fact that the Temple is about to be destroyed. The worship ceremonies with which they were so familiar would be gone. They themselves would be scattered over the earth. So that they might understand that they did not need the Temple any longer, Paul makes the argument we see today.

To us the Temple is an ancient landmark, no longer of great significance. But the kind of transition the Jewish Christians were about to make is still with us. Let us see if we can glean from this argument a few points which we can still use today.

Now the main point in what has been said *is this*: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; so it is necessary that this *high priest* also have something to offer. 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, just as Moses was warned *by God* when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, "SEE," He says, "THAT YOU MAKE all things ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN WHICH WAS SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN." But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. For finding fault with them, He says, "BEHOLD, DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL EFFECT A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH; NOT LIKE THE COVENANT WHICH 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 I DID NOT CARE FOR THEM, SAYS THE LORD. "FOR 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 I WILL WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS. AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. "AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERYONE HIS FELLOW CITIZEN, AND EVERYONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, 'KNOW THE LORD,' FOR ALL WILL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST OF THEM. "FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE." When He said, "A new *covenant*," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.

[\(Heb 8:1-13 NASB\)](#)

### Transitions

All of us at one time or another undergo major transitions in our lives. For example, my mother is contemplating moving into an assisted living apartment complex. That's a major transition after having lived the last forty years in her own house. Getting that house was a transition too, because for twenty years before that she traveled from place to place with my dad, a career soldier. So how do we go about making such a transition?

### Some things you want to keep

If my mother moves into such an apartment, it's likely that she will bring with her many of the items from her house. Some of this will be simply utilitarian: you need a coffee pot. But other items will serve a different purpose.

- ✦ She will bring with her good things with good memories. Pictures, souvenirs, even trivial items that remind her of good times. She will bring things that she hopes will help her in this new life.
- ✦ She will also bring a lifetime of lessons learned. Just because you're now in assisted living doesn't mean you forgot how to make coffee. She may throw away the skillet for the fried chicken, but she still knows what to do in a kitchen.
- ✦ Most of all she will keep with her the principles that have worked before. This transition does not change the good things about her; there is no need to change everything. She will keep the things that she considers good.

#### Some things you want to make better

Another great transition in life is getting married. I'm told that some people still get married in the old fashioned way: you remember, where sex is God's wedding gift? Instead of "we've been sleeping together for seven years, we finally decided to make it legal?" You make that transition because you believe that being married to that woman is better than being single.<sup>16</sup>

- ✦ Sometimes you make such a transition when all you want are superior results. You buy the new car to get better gas mileage or a faster run on the freeway. No great difference, just better in kind.
- ✦ More often, though, major transitions are made to bring you closer to some goal. You change jobs to move up in the world, for example.
- ✦ Sometimes you make such a major transition to solve a problem. My mother lives alone; she is frail; we are far away. So she might move to an apartment complex (people around); where help is quickly available and we are much closer.

#### The transition is costly

The important things in life usually have clear transitions. One reason for this is that such a transition points out the faults of the old way of doing things. Such a transition is called a "boundary layer" in physics. There is a curious phenomenon which is common to physics and to life: the price is paid at the boundary layer. The change from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant was at the price of the Cross. You leave things behind when you move out; you forsake all others when you get married. The price is paid at the edge.

#### The Great Transition

We may now apply this analysis to the great transition of the Bible: the change from the Old Testament (or covenant) to the New Testament.

#### Some things remain the same

God is eternal and unchanging; therefore, that which is a reflection of his character cannot change. Only the things resulting from his plan may change. What are some of these unchanging things?

- ✦ Right and wrong – that's one good example. Adultery did not transmute into a "romantic affair" because of this. It was wrong in the Old Testament, and Christ confirms that it's still wrong.

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<sup>16</sup> For the record: in my case, this is most certainly true.

- ✚ The very nature of God himself has not changed – and therefore the reflections of his character in the Old Testament have lost none of their validity. The Lord is still my shepherd; therefore I take comfort in the Psalms. This is true of many sections of the Old Testament.
- ✚ The great lessons of the Old Testament have lost none of their validity. Indeed, Jesus frequently quotes them. That shows us that these examples are still before us.
- ✚ There is much prophecy in the Old Testament which relates to the second coming of Christ, and is therefore unfulfilled. It is just as valid as it ever was.

#### Some things are better

- ✚ The tabernacle – the Old Testament predecessor of the Temple – was but a copy of the vision of the real thing Moses had seen in heaven. The Temple itself is now replaced by the real thing in heaven.
- ✚ We have a better covenant. In the old one, the law ruled over us, and every sin needed its atonement. In the new one, the blood of Christ covers all. Grace and mercy replace law and order.
- ✚ We have a greater promise in prophecy – since the first coming has been fulfilled, we now can be more sure of the rest. Indeed, our Lord adds such prophecy that gives us a glimpse of wonderful things to come.

#### The transition is costly

Costly? In the extreme:

- ✚ It cost Jesus the painful, humiliating death on the Cross. Is there a greater price that a human being could pay than such a death? Is there a greater price to God than the transition to being human?
- ✚ We too must pay the price. If we are to be his disciples, we are to deny ourselves and take up the Cross.

#### The Transition to Maturity in Christ

Remember what Paul is doing here. He is trying to get these Jewish Christians to move on to maturity in Christ. It would seem that we can apply the principles of transition in this instance too.

#### Keep the good things

As a beginner, you learned many good things which are still very useful:

- ✚ You learned ethics and morality. These still have their place in your life.
- ✚ You should have learned the defense of the faith – still useful.
- ✚ You should have learned the art of repentance – always needed.
- ✚ You should know the joy of the Lord – ever desired.

Keep the memories of your early days in Christ, remembering the joy. Keep the lessons of your early days, they never grow obsolete. Keep the principles you learned, they will serve you well.

#### Embrace the new things

How do you do that?

- ✚ Put the Word into your mind. Study the Scriptures! You will find that each time you do, the Spirit will bring to your attention those things which are profitable for you – now. But you must do the studying for this to happen.
- ✚ Put the Word into your heart. Train your emotions and feelings to God's will. Don't be callous and jaded; rather weep. Don't be flighty; rather, feel the surge of the Spirit in your heart.

- ✚ Put the church in your life. It is Christ's body on earth, and you need to be in close communion with him. The more you work in his body, the closer to him you will become.

Some of us grow because we see the goal – being mature in Christ. Some of us grow because we have a problem to solve. The important thing is to grow in Christ.

#### Pay the price

Even maturity has its boundary layer. Remember the rich young ruler? Remember the tax collector and the Pharisee at the Temple?

- ✚ Pay the price in your pride. Accept God's forgiveness for what you have done without grumbling. Do not justify your sins to him; rather, thank him for his mercy to you.
- ✚ Take up the Cross – and follow him. Put Jesus first in all things, whatever the price. You will then be on the right road, the narrow way.

The payment is at the boundary. He paid at the boundary between the old and new covenants – at the Cross. Follow his example, consider this the boundary between young and mature Christian – pay the price, take up the Cross, and follow Him.

## Earthly Shadows, Heavenly Light - Hebrews 9

It is necessary, given the poverty of education these days, to begin with an introduction on the subject of symbolic communication. For thousands of years even the most illiterate peasant was taught to interpret the meanings of various symbols. Even in our day things like flags carry a meaning far beyond their making. The subject is complex, but for our purposes we may note three things:

- ✚ First, the pictures tell a story. When a story is told with symbols, we are meant to assign an interpretation to those symbols.
- ✚ Second, one of the major uses of symbols is to make that story bite into your heart and mind. (How do you feel about flag burning?)
- ✚ Finally, as stated here, God uses this technique to show us the core of his message for us – as explained here by Paul.

It is amusing to note that some commentators can see this clearly in Hebrews – but not in Revelation. Others see it in Revelation, but not here. In simplicity of mind and heart, then, let us see what the Apostle has to say to us.

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. 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 so 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. 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? For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so 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 would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is 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, will appear a second time for salvation without *reference to sin*, to those who eagerly await Him.

(Heb 9:1-28 NASB)

### Earthly Shadows

We see here the ultimate picture. God has laid out for the Jews (and for us) the picture of the redemption. It was portrayed in the Tabernacle and Temple for us. We can but summarize its points, but (as we shall see) the story told in these pictures still has meaning for us today.

### Progressive constriction

Job in his passionate lament of ill fortune gives the desire of many of us: if only I could argue my case in front of God.<sup>17</sup> How can I do that? How can I ever approach the Lord of All? The Old Testament laid out a way – but at each step the way becomes progressively more constricted:

- ✚ First, no one but the people of God (the Jews) may even begin to approach him.
- ✚ Next, the great majority can only approach God to the first step. They did this by purifying themselves and bringing their sacrifices to the priests.
- ✚ Only the priests could go beyond the outer courtyard. If you were a priest, you could go into the Holy Place. There you would find two things: a lampstand, giving light, and the bread on the table.
- ✚ Finally, only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies, of which we will say more later.

Does this still apply today? It surely does. No one but the people of God can count on being heard. But we can take the next step, being of a royal priesthood – we can go into the Holy Place. There we will find light (the Word of God) and bread – his providence for us. But, as yet, we cannot enter the Holy of Holies – only Jesus does that.

### Journey to the center

This is also a picture of our becoming mature in Christ:

- ✚ First, as babes, we begin with repentance and confession, which with the cleansing of baptism (symbolism!) allows us to be named among the people of God.
- ✚ Next, so that we might mature, we take in the light of the word and the bread of his providential care. We are priests, so we do what priests do. We offer sacrifices (our good works) and prayers (as we intercede for others).

It is only when we bump up against the Holy of Holies that we are still forbidden. But there is meaning there too. Our High Priest, Jesus Christ, has gone in. And just as the high priest in the Old Testament went in once per year, Christ has gone in to present sacrifice only once – his blood, on the Cross. Just like those high priests, his sacrifice was indeed blood.

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<sup>17</sup> Job 13:3



### At the center, what do you find?

If you could look inside the Holy of Holies, what would you find?

- ✚ An “altar of incense.” Incense (symbolically) represents prayer. So this is the altar at which our prayers are presented.
- ✚ We also see the Ark of the Covenant.  
What about that ark? What does it mean to us?
- ✚ Inside the ark you would find three things: manna (which symbolizes God’s care for us), Aaron’s staff (which represents the miracles of God) and the stone tablets of the Law (which are there to remind us of our sin). These then are witnesses to us; hence it is often called the Ark of the Testimony.
- ✚ The cover of the ark has two names: “atonement cover” and “mercy seat.” Here we find that God covers over our sins, and thus we have mercy.
- ✚ Over that cover are the cherubim “of the Glory.” It is indeed the glory of God that we are in his care, kept by his power and reminded of our sins – so that we may obtain mercy and grace.

Note one thing: there is no lampstand. The glory of God is its light. Of this we shall speak more later.

### Heavenly Light

We can see many parallels to the New Covenant here as well. Indeed, symbolic language takes us deep in meaning.

### The New Covenant

Paul uses the term “covenant” in some verses; the same Greek word is translated “will” in other verses. It is the fact that the first covenant was implemented with blood (of animals); the new covenant was implemented with the blood of Christ.

- ✚ This covenant has a mediator. Now, it is clear that a mediator is one who goes between two others – in this case, between us and God. A mediator cannot be a mediator and at the same time one of the parties being mediated. But only one who was divine could possibly mediate with God. Do you not see that God (who is one) must have at least two persons? (The trinity is a great mystery).
- ✚ We see that this covenant is effective on death, as a will would be. But do you not also see that – like a will – it causes some to inherit and some to be cut off? Those who genuinely believe in Him will inherit. Those who do not – the terms of the will are quite clear on this – are cut off.
- ✚ Note, please, that Christ did not “become” the High Priest – he *came* as the High Priest. This was God’s plan from the very beginning of time.

### Our journey

The steps to the Holy of Holies also show us the path to Christian maturity.

- ✚ We begin in the outer court. How? By repentance and confession (the acts of purification) and baptism (the rite of purification) we present ourselves to the priests (the church).
- ✚ We continue into the Holy Place – but not with empty hands. We come in presenting our sacrifices (the good works) and incense (prayers)
- ✚ But – there is still one place we cannot go. The Holy of Holies is reserved for Christ. As yet.

### When He returns

I've often heard that the curtain of the Temple was ripped (top to bottom) so that we might go into the Holy of Holies. This is not so. It was ripped so that HE might go in. As yet we are not there. But the time is coming:

**I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp *is* the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed; and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.**

**(Rev 21:22-27 NASB)**

What will that day bring?

- ✚ There is no temple in that city – for there will be no need for it.
- ✚ The way to God will be completely open to us – as we will reign with Christ.
- ✚ Those who are in that city will be completely pure.

We have only the faintest glimpse of the glory to come – the glory God will show when all barriers between him and his children are taken away.

### Action Items

So what should we do about all this? May I suggest that we consider this in three steps: what we should do now; how we should look to his return, and the reward to come.

#### Royal Priesthood

We are indeed a royal priesthood; that carries its own implications.

- ✚ We must continue to “present sacrifices” – the good works which every Christian should find at hand to do.
- ✚ We must also “present incense” – our prayers to God, especially on behalf of others.

#### Watch for his imminent return

This is not a passive waiting for his arrival. The time God gives the church is running out; the Father alone knows when. But until then there is work to do:

- ✚ Knowing that his return is imminent, is there any excuse for our slack in seeking and saving the lost?
- ✚ His return might be this very day. Is your life in such order that you would welcome him – or beg a few days longer to make things right?
- ✚ And, as in all things, we should bathe these things in prayer. We should pray for the lost – and pray for our correction.

#### Ours the Cross, the grave, the skies

What, then, can we say to the lost? I would sum it up for you in three steps:

- ✚ “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” Ours is the Cross, on which our Savior and High Priest shed his blood, so that we (and they) might be forgiven.

✚ The New Covenant – the church – was instituted as a will is enforced: on the death of the one who wrote it. By his death he conquered death. The time of his return is – “soon.” It will be a glory to his saints and doom to those who refuse him.

The matter hangs together. From the beginning this was God’s plan; he portrayed it to the Jews of old. He has now committed it to us. Let us therefore do His will – until He comes.

## Confidence - Hebrews 10

Note: for reasons of space the first section of Hebrews 10 is omitted. It is essentially a continuation of the previous section, and the reader is referred to that lesson.

Paul now comes to the point of his lesson – and gives us an outline of what we should be doing.

Therefore, brethren, since 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, and since *we have* a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled *clean* 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 how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a 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 a lasting 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.  
(Heb 10:19-39 NASB)

### The Open Door

It is often said among Christians that “when God closes a door, he opens a window.” It is usually said when the opportunities in life seem to have vanished. It can also be said of this passage – except in this instance God has closed the window and thrown the door wide open.

### The Way is open

“I am the way, the truth, the life,” said Jesus. Paul portrays that idea here as he pictures Christ’s body as being a veil. Remember the Christmas carol words: “Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail the incarnate deity?” In that body was God veiled from us; by the sacrifice of that body the veil was split open – just as the symbolic version, the veil in the Temple, was split too. Such a split could only have been made (remember our symbolism from the last lesson) with the blood of the perfect sacrifice. It is therefore clear (I hope) how Jesus can say that unless you eat his body and drink his blood, you cannot

enter the kingdom of God. By this he refers to the Lord's Supper, of course. As the Old Testament had its symbolism, so does the New Testament.

Remember the old way: the High Priest alone goes behind that veil. But our High Priest goes through the veil, splitting it. We can now see what God had behind that veil. We see the mercy seat beneath the glory of God. Because we can see ahead, we have confidence to go ahead. (When lost in the wilderness it is extremely helpful to have a compass, a topographic map of the area and a pair of binoculars.)

This all sounds rather symbolic and fuzzy. Let me give you an example. Suppose you need a new car. You go down to the dealership, hesitant and worried about being cheated. How do you know if you got a good deal? Would the sales manager have signed on your first offer? It's a nervous thing, because of what you don't know.

But now suppose your rich uncle tells you, "Order whatever car you want. I'll pay for it." Now your fears subside! Christ has removed the uncertainty, the fear of what you don't know. So, then, what should we do about it?

#### Draw near to God

Have you ever wanted to get closer to God – and wondered why it isn't happening? Paul gives us four keys to drawing nearer to God:

- ✚ A sincere heart is first. If you are in church either to profit monetarily or to cover you bets in the world, God knows – and you will be far from him.
- ✚ True faith is next. We often say that we walk by faith – but do we? Do we stick our necks out and act like God will provide, or do we just wait until he does provide?
- ✚ Cleanliness – in the spiritual sense – is next. On the outside this is shown by baptism. On the inside, it's a clear conscience, purified by the forgiveness that only God can give.
- ✚ Finally, there is hope. Is life just a parade ending in a cemetery? Or is it a procession to heaven? Your attitude; your altitude.

#### Draw near to each other

As often as we stress time of prayer, time of being alone with God – the world hates the time we give to him in solitude – we must also stress the time with each other. Why does Paul tell us to do this?

- ✚ First, so we can spur each other on. See the inner and outer lives of Christians here. We are to spur each other on to love (inner) and then to good deeds (outer). Some think it begging when we ask the congregation to support some great project for Christ. Isn't it also encouraging us to do what we should be doing?
- ✚ To do this, we must meet together! Even in this electronic age, face to face is still the preference of real human beings.
- ✚ Finally, we must encourage each other. When times get tough, when things are sad, we need our Christian brothers and sisters with us.

## Serious Business

Does it sound strange that Paul next breaks into warning? It is not. There will always be those who decide that since grace covers sin it would be a good thing to have more sin in their lives. Here is a cogent answer to that argument.

### Greater knowledge, greater responsibility

Look at it this way. Suppose you are hired to look after a very sick, elderly lady. She cannot get out of bed; her eyes do not permit her to read the labels on the prescription bottles. The doctor leaves you with a bottle of pain killer for her. This particular day she is in a great deal of pain. You decide (without asking the doctor) to give her twice the usual dosage. Unfortunately, that kills her.

Here's the first question: did you just commit murder? Well, in some degree or other, you did. But the circumstances make it clear that this action, while you knew better, does not rise to first degree murder.

But suppose the doctor is there, and he gives her twice the dose. Now, do you suppose the legal system will charge him the same way? I think not. They would argue that his greater knowledge means that his act is much more heinous. This might indeed be first degree murder.

The same is true in our dealing with the new covenant. The argument goes something like this:

- ✚ Look, in the old covenant, if two or three people saw you do it, you got stoned to death.
- ✚ But now, with the coming of Christ, our knowledge of what God wants is greatly increased.
- ✚ Therefore, because of our greater knowledge, the punishment we deserve for *deliberately* flouting his word is all the greater.

Note the criterion given: "deliberately keeps on sinning."

### How God sees it

Sometimes it helps to know just what God might be upset about. We think of him so often as a cosmic grandfather who loves his grandchildren that we forget about the righteous Jehovah.

- ✚ It says those who do this trample the Son of God underfoot. The expression is an old one; it means to throw out something as junk, work it into the ground and walk on it. It means to treat the Cross as if it were nothing of importance.
- ✚ Also, these people treat the blood of Christ as unholy. The phrase means to treat Christ's blood as commonplace, of no more value than anything else around.
- ✚ Finally, they insult the Holy Spirit. If you disdain a gift, you insult the giver, don't you?

These are the ones who have taken the name of Christ, consider themselves saved, and then act as if nothing had changed. They deliberately continue to sin.

Let me give you an example. Suppose you are living with your girl friend, enjoying life. You become a Christian, but decide that God couldn't really mean anything by condemning fornication. You go on just as you did before. That's the kind of person we're talking about.<sup>18</sup>

#### God's response

OK, God doesn't like it. What's he going to do about it?

- ✚ Remember who you're dealing with. He is completely righteous, and therefore is able to judge with justice. You cannot plead with him (as you would with me) that he is a sinner too.
- ✚ Remember also that God judges his people first. Indeed, the Old Testament has a regulation that if your adult children blaspheme God by their conduct, you must bring them to justice – and have them stoned to death.
- ✚ Paul reminds us: God is merciful to those who are obedient – but you really don't want him angry at you.

#### What to do

Having told us of the greatness of the new way, and warned us about despising the sacrifice of Christ, Paul now tells us what we should do about it.

#### Remember

You did not get to your present state all in one day. Therefore, you have memories which may help:

- ✚ Remember that you have a lot invested in this – spiritually. It seemed good to you at the time; what's changed? Not God!
- ✚ Remember that you sympathized with others who are Christians. You've made it public – you believe, and you're willing to pay the price.
- ✚ Remember also that your faith cost you in material things – and that you gladly paid the price, for you thought it grand that you were considered worthy to suffer for the name.  
Let your memories refresh your thinking.

#### Persevere in confidence

Why?

- ✚ First, because God will reward your confidence in him. He is seeking people to trust him.
- ✚ This is an active perseverance, not a passive waiting. While you're here, do the work you are called to do. Let God worry about the results.
- ✚ If you do the will of God, you will receive what God has promised. No one else can deliver such great things.

#### The just shall live by faith

It is a phrase that Paul uses frequently. What does it mean?

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<sup>18</sup> Of course, in this day, how such a person would know that this was a sin is indeed problematic. The point is occasionally mentioned in youth groups, but I have not heard it from the pulpit in years. It would seem to me reasonable to assume that God would be a little more gracious to the ignorant in such a case.

- ✚ First, it means there is no sense trying to live by law – Old Testament or that of our own creation. That's not the way to life.
- ✚ Consider, too, that the law is a cold thing, full of if and but. Faith is a living thing, full of the Spirit.
- ✚ It is also Paul's way of bringing up his next topic – faith. Which we shall approach in the next lesson.



## Faith - Hebrews 11

This is one of the richest passages in all of Scripture. It is done in the "string of pearls" method, in which Paul gives us little, tantalizing reminders, with the assumption that the student will fill in the details. Perhaps he had better students; perhaps he was a better teacher.

Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible. 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. By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would 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. 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. By faith Noah, being warned *by God* about things not yet seen, in reverence 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. 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. 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. 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 there was born even 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*. 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. 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 *people* even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type. By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come. By faith Jacob, as 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 exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones. By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's edict. 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. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who destroyed the firstborn would not touch them. 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, so 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. 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 would not be made perfect. (Heb 11:1-40 NASB)

### Dictionary

In this passage Paul gives us many examples of faith. But he also includes some thoughts on just what constitutes faith. We shall examine these first, to lay the groundwork for things to come.

#### Verse 1: Faith is ...

It's almost a dictionary definition of faith. This is extremely useful, as we often think of faith as an intellectual endeavor – only. It is not. The intellect must be committed, but the entire human being must participate.

- ✚ *Sure of hope.* This is not an exercise in wishful thinking. Indeed, when exaggerated, this becomes a form of “name it and claim it” teaching. But in proportion we see it this way – that the Christian is given hope by the power of the Resurrection and the promise of the return of our Lord. The question is, do we act like we believe this? For example, do we keep ourselves set apart, knowing that the Day of Judgment is coming?
- ✚ *Certain of things unseen.* “Where is this God you keep talking about? I don't see him.” I've never seen a geometry teacher's point, either. You know, the one that has neither width, depth or breadth? But I believe in the concept; I'm certain it exists. Am I as certain of the righteousness of God?

#### Verse 6: Without faith...

Wisdom is often gained in the negative. If you burn your fingers, you learn. So Paul tells us here the consequence of a lack of faith. It is simply this: whatever you do, you cannot please God. Why?

Consider that Paul often uses the metaphor of a marriage relationship for the relationship of Christ and his church. What happens to that relationship when the wife stops trusting her husband? Soon there is quarreling and anger. But see what happens next: at some point the wife will decide to “smooth things over.” She puts on an attractive dress, does her hair nicely – in short, all those things that please the male eye. But what reaction does she get? “What did you do that for?” No trust, no relationship. It's a characteristic of all personal relationships – and the relationship with God (faith) is indeed personal.

It sounds obvious, therefore, that we must believe that God exists. Remember that in the Scripture “believe” must also mean “committed.” Does our belief that God exists make any difference in our daily lives? Or is God just a convenient fiction which makes you happy? “I'm glad that works for you” is the denial of the ultimate reality.

But there is more. Not only does he exist, we find here one of his basic character attributes: He rewards those who seek him. It could not be otherwise, for God is love. Consider it from a lower level: God is not the recluse who does not care for his people; he cares deeply. But like a parent who has a wayward adult child, he waits for us to seek him.

#### Verses 14-16: Looking for...

One of the things you must decide as a Christian is this: are you seeking a destination on earth, or are you on a pilgrimage through this life? The church has had many who have taught that we are looking for things in this life. These preach “name it and claim it” or “possibility thinking.” It is not new. But the clear teaching of the Scriptures is that this is the wrong objective.

We are, as this passage declares, “aliens and strangers” in this world. Did you ever feel that you just didn’t fit in with the “in” group? We’re just passing through – at least I am. How strange, then, that so much of our effort is spent in making the church look like just another social club. There’s a key thought there: this world will always present us with opportunities to go over to that view.

But see what that means: it says that we are ashamed to name God as our god – if it means not using my ski boat on the river during the summer weekends (see you in October, preacher). But if we are ashamed of him, what does he think of us? And if we are not?

#### Verses 39-40: Commended – but not received

We may pursue the things of God during this life – and often not see them come to fruition. It can be frustrating.

A story is told of D. L. Moody. He had a friend who was not a Christian. For thirty-five years, I’m told, Moody spoke to him about Christ. The man eventually accepted Christ – at Moody’s funeral. Sometimes our successes are like that. But despite the result, God still shows his approval of our efforts.

The Day is coming. Many of us will meet our reward there, for the first time. My father’s father knew me only as a little child. I have only one souvenir of his existence, an old and battered mug he gave me. But he was a devout Christian (and an excellent Sunday School teacher, I’m told) and I know he prayed for me. I hope I have provided a satisfactory answer to his prayers.

#### Faith in What?

We sometimes encounter those who have faith – but in who knows what. Often, it’s faith in having faith. This is not our Lord’s intention.

#### In what God has done

We note that Paul has included the understanding that we have faith that God created. It is an important point. Our faith should not be an abstract hope with no basis in fact. It’s like a marriage: I can’t prove my wife is faithful – but I trust her. I trust her because she’s proven to be trustworthy. There is evidence behind the faith.

In this faith, one of the great evidences is the awesome grandeur of the universe. The first thing revealed to us in Scripture is that God created the heavens and the earth. Such power is his; it is still his today – and we can count on Him.

Abraham is an example of such: he was going to sacrifice Isaac because he reasoned that God could raise him from the dead. That's faith in what God has done – and can do.

#### Faith in his righteousness

Tell me something: do you think Adolf Hitler got everything he deserved in this life? Or, for that matter, Mother Teresa? No? Then those of us with faith in God know that there will be a day of reckoning and reward. It's just that his books aren't closed yet.

Noah had that faith. He built the ark when all around him said God wasn't paying attention to mankind. Moses had the same faith too, in rejecting the pleasures of Pharaoh's court. Do we believe in his righteousness?

#### Faith in his promises

Abraham was told of the promised land; Joseph told that his body would wind up there. Both believed and obeyed, even though they would not see the results in this mortal life. They had faith in the promises of God, finding him to be trustworthy.

There are two ways in which we might view this. First, there is the trustworthiness of God for those things he has placed in Scripture. We read; we should believe (and act on it). For some, there may come a time when God will promise you something personally. He has done that for me; I have been waiting for it for over ten years, now. But he is faithful in his promises; even if I die first, he will deliver.

#### Faith in his command

Often in Scripture we see a man given a direct command – and then finding what he thinks is a better way. But Israel put the blood on the doorposts, and was saved. The walls of Jericho came down right on God's schedule.

With such examples, why is it that we persist in "adjusting" the Scriptures? You think we don't?

- ✚ The Scriptures actually do teach a wife's submission to her husband – but we don't.
- ✚ The Scriptures teach that divorce is reprehensible to God –but we don't.
- ✚ The Scriptures teach that envy (in the poor) and greed (in the rich) are sins – but have you heard anything of this lately?

What do you think our Lord would say to our excuses for not following his commands?

#### The Impact of Faith on Others

We often think of faith as "something you do in your solitude." (Do you really have that much solitude?) We need to recognize that our faith is visible, and influences others in many ways.

### Conviction of sin

Paul cites Noah here – he acted on God’s revelation against sin; others did not. We must do the same. Whether or not our actions embarrass someone or not, we must do what is right. If that convicts someone of sin, praise God.

Often, however, we find that our actions seem to influence no one. One very good reason for this is that the conviction of sin may take some time, and we may be just one link in the chain. Things may not happen immediately.

That’s all the more reason to remain faithful – even the smallest and least of Christians can do this, and the example observed may be the pivot point of another person’s life.

### Encouragement for others

Moses set a great example of encouragement; we often think it’s just for church leaders. But consider:

- ✚ Have you ever been in a hospital corridor with someone who was losing a loved one? Sometimes we need to borrow faith from those around us when the storm arrives. We should be there for the storm.
- ✚ Another way is in good deeds; we should encourage each other to do such things (example is a good method).
- ✚ Once in a while, however, we are in the “high visibility” situation – every one is watching us, wondering what we will do. Then comes the test of faith.

### Spreading the faith to others

It didn’t take Rahab too long to get the point. We can do this in a number of ways:

- ✚ We can pass the faith along to our children and grandchildren – by living it every day.
- ✚ When we see those who are righteous at cost to themselves, we can commend and encourage them.
- ✚ And in all occasions, we can put God first. “Love God – and do as you please.”

### The Test for Us

I suggest three tests of faith for you this day:

#### Longing for that country

If you don’t have the feeling that you don’t quite fit in this world, I would challenge you to ask, “why not?” We are aliens, strangers in this world. We should have a sense of community with the church – especially the church over all times – and a sense of sojourning in this world.

#### Do you see at a distance?

Do you take the long view, the eternal view of life? Here’s a little help in answering that question:

- ✚ Are your energies focused on the things of this world? Possessions? Promotion? Earlier retirement?
- ✚ What’s your attitude towards death? Yours? Your loved ones?

- ✚ Are you patient with God's justice, or do you feel the need to take vengeance yourself?

**Do you sacrifice for the Living God?**

Sacrifice? What could I give up for God?

- ✚ Do you sacrifice the pleasant things of life for God? Or do your possessions own you?
- ✚ Do you sacrifice your time to God? In particular, how do you feel when someone takes your time from you because they know you will treat them with love? More than that, do you give your time willingly to those in need?
- ✚ Do you sacrifice your own self for God? For example, can you share with others the depths of your sin which embarrass you so much?

You say you have faith. Don't show me; show God.

## Strengthen Yourselves - Hebrews 12

It is a curious thing. Many Christians seem to have the feeling that if they are true Christians, they would never suffer anything. This takes God much too lightly – for God has ordained that suffering be used as his method of discipline. In what follows, we must understand that our worship of, and service to God must be undertaken as serious matters.

### God's Discipline

We begin with a thought about earlier times.

#### *Why is "bastard" used as an insult?*

Think about it. Even in our day – when it is extremely common for a child to have no idea who his father might be – we still consider "bastard" an insult. It is still used as such, though it has long since lost its connection to illegitimate children. We might therefore ask why our ancestors *did* consider it such an insult.

The answer is relatively simple: if a child was a bastard child, his father would take no interest in him. Therefore, such a child was never disciplined by his father. Modern psychology and radical feminism hold that this would be an advantage. Our ancestors were not so gullible. They could actually see the difference between a man who had fatherly discipline and one who did not. A common theme of fiction in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the illegitimate child who learned discipline (for example, by going to sea) and profited from it.

Paul uses the same idea in this passage:

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on 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. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES." It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He *disciplines us* for *our* good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

(Heb 12:1-11 NASB)

### God's discipline

We do object to the word "discipline." It has become a synonym for "punishment" in our time. But recall that discipline and disciple have the same root. Indeed, we may not like discipline, but we praise a disciplined athlete.

The concept shown here is simply this: if God disciplines you, then you must be one of his children. The difference, of course, is that God is preparing you for greater things.

Paul here points out two things to the Hebrews which still apply to us today:

- ✚ Our discipline is *light* discipline. Have any of us ever been beaten to the point of bloodshed, just because we are Christians?
- ✚ The hard discipline comes when blood flows, or even when it is necessary to give your life for the church.

### Discipline and trouble

It's difficult to tell the difference sometimes. How do we know that our suffering is for our good? Sometimes, we cannot tell until the suffering is over.

- ✚ There is often a sense of relief when the suffering ends. (When the dentist finally says, "Sit up and rinse your mouth out with this.") When you get that feeling, chances are excellent you have just finished some of God's discipline.
- ✚ Always, though, there is profit to the suffering. I don't go to the dentist to suffer pain; I go to get my teeth fixed. I do it voluntarily. So it is that we should submit to the discipline of God.

### Strengthen Yourselves

Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that *the limb* which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; that *there be* no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a *single* meal. For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.

(Heb 12:12-17 NASB)

There is a curious thought here, for most of us. If we are told to strengthen ourselves physically, we think of exercise equipment. Paul uses a different metaphor here: removing obstacles. The picture is that of a man who is lame, walking down a path. Remove the obstacles in the path and the injury will heal. Leave them, and the injury will be renewed.

Surely you can see how this applies. What makes us weak, if not sin? So, therefore, we should make every effort to get rid of sin in our lives so that we may heal quickly. But how do we do that?

- ✚ *Live in peace.* Note that the phrasing is "make every effort." It takes two to live in peace. But at the very least we should see to it that we are the ones who wish to remain in peace.
- ✚ *Be holy.* It is an anathema to modern Americans, for it says, "be different." But different you must be. You must be one who is set apart for God.



- ✦ *Let no one miss the grace of God.* By word or by deed, do not let anyone of your acquaintance miss God's grace. Let your life so show his glory that the world wants to know why. Speak to those who do not know this grace. Try to reach all you can for Christ.
- ✦ *No bitter root.* The expression is a graphic one. The bitterness of quarreling and fighting is known to us all. To call it a root is to show how deeply such things are held in the human character. It is this, then, that not only causes trouble for us – we can easily see that – but also defiles many. How? Think about the last family argument you had. Things were said which can often poison a relationship for years. What does this do to your character?
- ✦ *Not sexually immoral.* It is sad to relate, but this point still needs to be made explicitly. The bulk of those who call themselves Christians consider fornication to be “natural” and therefore irresistible. Adultery is now “an affair” and greatly praised in our magazines and movies. It is impolite to suggest that this recent discovery of sex is anything other than liberation from Puritanism. I am impolite.
- ✦ *Godless.* The example given, Esau, makes it clear. It means one for whom the church, God Himself, are simply pawns on the chessboard of life, to be sacrificed for a momentary advantage. Such a cynic will be treated as he deserves.

Do not refuse him

For you have not come to *a mountain* that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which *sounded* *was such that* those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them. For they could not bear the command, "IF EVEN A BEAST TOUCHES THE MOUNTAIN, IT WILL BE STONED." And so terrible was the sight, *that* Moses said, "I AM FULL OF FEAR and trembling." But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of *the* righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than *the blood* of Abel. See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned *them* on earth, much less *will* we *escape* who turn away from Him who *warns* from heaven. And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "YET ONCE MORE I WILL SHAKE NOT ONLY THE EARTH, BUT ALSO THE HEAVEN." This *expression*, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.

(Heb 12:18-29 NASB)

Think: comparison

I'm not sure why, but the “comparison and contrast” method of exhortation has gone out of style lately. It bears examination as a technique, for its roots in logic are sound.

The syllogism is simple: If A is mild and B is strong, then the results expected from A should be seen in B – but much more so. Paul's comparison here is just such.

He first considers how the Law was given to the children of Israel. It was a frightening sight. It caused trembling and fear in the people. They were afraid to go near that mountain. When Moses came down, they would speak only to him – not to the awesome God he represented.

Now, the grace we have through Jesus Christ is much, much greater than the Law. Therefore – since the Law provoked fear and trembling – how much more awestruck should we be in our new covenant?

Logically, this is fine. But we need a practical way to implement it.

#### **Do not refuse him**

Paul now points out the obvious: if we really wish to lose in this, there is a sure method. Simply refuse to listen to what Christ says.

- ✚ As the blessings of the covenant are greater, so the penalties are greater for those who abandon it.
- ✚ The character of God has not changed; he is still “a consuming fire.” Are you jealous for your wife? How much more is God jealous for his people?
- ✚ Remember, the Day of Wrath is still coming. God has yet to close his books.

#### **The Eternal Kingdom**

Paul ends with the positive thought: though the punishment is far greater for failure, the rewards of success are also much greater. By the unshakeable purposes of God, we shall receive an unshakeable, eternal kingdom.

Considering all this, what should we do?

- ✚ First, be thankful. You are greatly blessed; give thanks for it.
- ✚ Worship reverently. Our God is an awesome God.

## Last Minute Reminders - Hebrews 13

As a father who has now seen three kids off to college, I always have something to say at the last minute. It's usually "don't forget to call your mother." It's usually ignored.

Paul has some last minute reminders here, also. It would be wise of us not to ignore these.

Let love of the brethren continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, *and* those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body. Marriage *is to be held* in honor among all, and the *marriage* bed *is to be* undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge. *Make sure that* your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU," so that we confidently say, "THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?" Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited. 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 holy place by the high priest *as an offering* for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking *the city* which is to come. Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things. And I urge *you* all the more to do this, so that I may be restored to you the sooner. 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. But I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you. Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you. Grace be with you all.

[\(Heb 13:1-25 NASB\)](#)

### Person to Person

It's interesting to note the progression here, as if Paul were telling us to extend our love into larger and larger circles. We'll begin at the center.

### Brotherly love

It is a most familiar commandment, to love one another. Often, however, it gets watered down to something like "smile at each other." There are many things that could be said of this; here are three:

- ✚ First, please note that Paul tells them to “keep on” loving one another. It is not a sometimes thing. God intends for us to do this continually. We should not need to be stirred by passionate appeal to love each other; we should know this as a first duty.
- ✚ Indeed, it is the mark of the disciple. Christ told us that the world will recognize Christians – real Christians, that is, not just Sunday morning admirers – by the fact that we love each other. Do they?
- ✚ On a personal note, it is greatly pleasing to a teacher to see his students doing this. It means he has succeeded in some small degree.

Let’s take time for a war story. One Sunday I came in to hear some of the ladies discussing an accident involving one of their four year olds. It seems he caught a twig in his eye while riding his tricycle. Off to the hospital! Some of the other ladies in the class went with the mother, to encourage and comfort her. Happily, it all turned out well.

I was a little upset about this. I make hospital calls. My students explained (rather heatedly): “It was Thursday night. That’s Betty’s night with you.” I realized that they had learned both lessons – take time for your wife, and love one another.

### Entertain strangers

The point about angels refers back to Abraham, who did so. But consider how like God it is to make a statement like this. Some of those strangers might just be visitors from God. He moves in mysterious ways. By this he hopes to encourage us to spread our love from within our circle of Christians out to those on the outside. Sometimes, such hospitality can result in salvation itself. Hospitality is a neglected virtue in our busy time.

### Prisoners

Paul here gives us a specific instance of the Golden Rule. We are to treat those in prison as if we were in prison too. Note that this applies not only to prisoners, but those who are mistreated outside, too. How can we do this? Prisons have visiting rooms; the mistreated need company.

- ✚ Remember this: you should not be ashamed of the prisoner’s chains. So many of us stay away from this because it’s likely that some people will think we should be behind bars too. (Some of those people who think so are prison guards, by the way). But what are we doing, thinking of men’s opinions, when we are doing God’s will?
- ✚ There is a pleasant surprise in store. Prisoners relish the time they have with visitors – and become quite fond of the only ray of sunshine in their lives.
- ✚ We need to remember prisoners as “the least of these, my brothers.” Then Christ will consider such work as blessing upon himself.

### Life in this World

Paul now turns to the things of daily life. Marriage and money afflict most of us at one time or another. Paul can’t resist the chance to put in the obvious. It must therefore be important.

### Marriage

Paul now gives two commands about marriage:

- ✚ First, he commands that marriage be respected by all. You might think this rather a minor thing. After all, the television shows we watch portray marriage as rather silly. We forget that the attitude

of those around us – especially those with the authority of the church – influences our attitude. The divorce rate in the church is slightly higher than in the world – perhaps this is one reason why. We don't take it seriously.

- ✚ Next, he commands that the marriage bed be undefiled. In other words, one partner only – your wife (or husband, as may be). So simple a statement; why is that Christians think adultery is OK as long as it is romantic?

The seriousness of the situation is shown in this: commands about money and marriage here are the ones he connects with the Day of Judgment.

### Money

Again, you must note the verb here: “Keep” our lives free of the love of money

- ✚ “Keep” – it's a continuous struggle.
- ✚ “free” – no halfway measures will do; it's love or not.
- ✚ “love” – here is the real problem – a love which interferes with all others.

### The Christian's Defense

Paul has just commanded two things, in marriage and in money, that most Christians today would look upon as impossible. But he points out the ready defense available to the Christian:

- ✚ God will be with you. What a blessing this is! In your marriage, remember that he is with you and want your marriage to be life long. Do it God's way; it works. In your money, remember who will provide for you.
- ✚ So why do we refuse? Is it not because we think God powerless to help? We are worried about what people will think, what we will do for the next rent check – and forget who is ruler of all. What can you fear with Him beside you?

### Your Leaders

It's a good place to start an argument. Just sit down and write out exactly how you expect the preacher (or the elders, or whoever) to behave. There is no sense of that here. Rather, Paul tells us how we should deal with those appointed over us in the church.

### To be imitated

If indeed such leaders are worthy, then they should be models to us. How would you know? Look at the results in their lives! You wouldn't think to much of the preaching of a man going through his fourth divorce. But if the life is good, then shouldn't you imitate it?

The reason is pretty simple. If you do things the same way – God's way – you will get the same results. Jesus is “the same yesterday, today and forever.” That's why the results are so consistent.

### So you will learn sound doctrine

Doctrine, you will recall, is the road map of life. Every one is looking for sound doctrine – but only if it is easy. What shall we do?

- ✚ First, don't run after the latest and greatest of teachers. There is always someone out there who will tell you what you want to hear. Don't ask, “Is it popular? Is it fashionable? Does it promise me something for nothing?” Ask instead, “Is it true?”

- ✚ Be prepared to make sacrifices for the truth. Paul gives two instances here: praising God (he means in public, in front of your friends, and so on) and good works.

#### To be obeyed in submission

Our first reaction to this is “Why?”

- ✚ First, because they are accountable to God. If you are a “team player,” you know that the person in charge carries a great responsibility. Your task is to make sure he carries it with no extra load from you.
- ✚ Indeed, we are to so submit to them that their work becomes a joy. (The same principle works in marriage.)

#### To be prayed for

That sounds rather obvious. Prayer, it seems, costs so little that it would be a reasonable thing to ask for. But there are two adverbs implied here:

- ✚ The first is “constantly.” Don’t do it just once in a while; do it every day.
- ✚ The second is “specifically.” Sometimes we don’t know the specifics. But when we do, then we should bring them to Almighty God and ask for his caring mercies.

#### Benediction

Paul closes his letter with a benediction. Normally, these are considered an afterthought, not worthy of attention. It is not so.

#### The character of God

Paul brings to our mind two of the great attributes of God: peace and sacrifice. Peace, that your lives may be bathed in his peace. Sacrifice, that you will remember the sacrifice of Calvary, made for you and me.

#### May God equip you

We go from adverbs to prepositions in this section. God is to equip us:

- ✚ “with” everything good. God does not arm his servants with the weapons of Satan – for to pick up Satan’s weapons is to become a servant of sin. Rather, he armors us with good.
- ✚ “for” doing his will. The object of this equipment is not so that we can sit back and relax, knowing that nothing can harm us. It is, rather, so that we can do what he commands. God’s supply for God’s purposes!

#### Work what is pleasing

More prepositions!

- ✚ “in” us. This is not something to be applied to the outside, like a straight jacket. It is something he works in us, so that we may become more like him.
- ✚ “to” Him. What we do should be pleasing to Him. We are not to pay attention to the opinions of this world. He is our guide and friend, and that forces a choice.
- ✚ “through” Jesus. Can we do this on our own? Not that I’ve noticed. We can, however, be pleasing to God through the power of Christ.

To whom be the glory

One last thing: we must never forget that our good works are not necessary to God – but they do bring him glory. When he returns, this is how he will know his own.