

## Hebrews Commentaries

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The Epistle to the Hebrews  
Introductory Lectures On The Epistles Of Paul  
by William Kelly

### Introduction

The epistle to the Hebrews differs in some important respects from all those which have been before us; so much so that many have questioned whether it be the writing of the apostle Paul, of Apollos, of Barnabas, etc. Of this my mind has no doubt. I believe that Paul, and no other, was the author, and that it bears the strongest intrinsic traits of his doctrine. The style is different, and so is the manner of handling the truth; but the line of truth, though it be affected by the object that he had in view, is that which savours of Paul beyond all: not of Peter, or John, or James, or Jude, but of Paul alone.

One good and plain reason which has graven a difference of character on the epistle is the fact, that it goes outside his allotted province. Paul was the apostle of the uncircumcision. If writing for the instruction of Jews, as here he clearly was, to believers or Christians that had once been of that nation, he was evidently outside the ordinary function of his apostolic work.

There is another reason also why the epistle to the Hebrews diverges very sensibly and materially from the rest of the writings of St. Paul, that it is not, strictly speaking, an exercise of apostleship at all, but of the writer (apostle though he were) as a teacher, and here a teacher clearly not of Gentiles, as he says elsewhere, but of Jews. Now it is plain, if he that was an apostle and preacher and teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth was led by the Holy Spirit to address the saints that were of the old Jewish fold, there must have been a marked departure from his usual methods in the manner of using and presenting the truth of God to these. But we have this blessed result of his acting outside his own ordinary sphere, that it is the finest and indeed the only specimen of teaching properly so called in the New Testament. It is not a revelation given by prophetic or apostolic authority; and for this reason, I presume, he does not introduce himself at all. It is always a failure when the teacher as such is prominent. The point for such an one is, that the reaching (not himself) should arrest and instruct. But in revealing truth the person whom God employs in that work is naturally brought before those addressed; and hence the apostle took particular care, even if he did not write an epistle, to put his name to it, introducing himself at the beginning through the amanuensis that he employed, and with scrupulous care adding his own name at the end of each epistle.

In writing to the Hebrew believers it is not so. Here the apostle is what indeed he was. Besides being apostle of the uncircumcision, he was a teacher; and God took

care that, although expressly said to be a teacher of Gentiles, his should be the word to teach the Christian Jews too; and, in fact, we may be assured that he taught them as they never were taught before. He opened the scriptures as none but Paul could, according to the gospel of the glory of Christ. He taught them the value of the living oracles that God had given them; for this is the beautiful characteristic here. Indeed the epistle to the Hebrews stands unique. By it the believing Jew was led into a divine application of that which was in the Old Testament - that which they had habitually read in the law, Psalms, and prophets, from their cradle we may say, but which they had never seen in such a light before. That mighty, logical, penetrating, richly stored mind! that heart with such affections large and deep, as scarce ever were concentrated in another bosom! that soul of experience wonderfully varied and profound! - he was the one whom God was now leading in a somewhat unworked path, no doubt, but in a path which, when once taken, at once approves itself by divine wisdom to every heart purified by faith.

For if Peter, as is known, were the apostle of the circumcision pre-eminently, it was through him that God first of all opened the door of the kingdom of heaven to the Gentiles; and if the apostle Paul, with the concurrence of the heads of the work among the circumcision, had gone to the Gentiles, none the less did the Spirit of God (it may be without asking those who seemed to be somewhat at Jerusalem) employ Paul to write to the believers of the circumcision the most consummate treatise on the bearing of Christ and Christianity upon the law and the prophets, and as practically dealing with their wants, dangers, and blessing. Thus did God most carefully guard in every form from the technical drawing of lines of rigid demarcation to which even Christians are so prone, the love of settling things in precise routine, the desire that each should have his own place, not only as the proper sphere of his work, but to the exclusion of every other. With admirable wisdom indeed the Lord directs the work and the workmen, but never exclusively; and the apostle Paul is here, as just shown, the proof of it on one side as Peter is on the other.

What is the consequence under the blessed guidance of the Spirit? As the great teacher of the believers from among the Jews, we have, after all, not Paul, but through him God Himself left to address His own, in the words, facts, ceremonies, offices, persons so long familiar to the chosen people. Paul does not appear. This could hardly have been by any other arrangement, at any rate not so naturally. "God," says he, "having in many measures and in many manners spoken in time past to the fathers in the prophets, at the last of these days spoke to us in his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds." Paul, would show them thus the infinite dignity of the Messiah whom they had received. Never would Paul weaken the personal rights or the official place of the Anointed of Jehovah. Contrariwise, he would lead them on to find what they had never yet

seen in their Messiah, and, wonderful to say, he founds his proofs, not on new revelations, but on those very words of God which they had read so superficially, the depths of which they had never approached, nor had they so much as suspected. The facts of Christianity they knew; the linking of all scripture with Christ's person, and work, and glory they had yet to discover.

But mark the manner of the writer. He is careful to establish the thread of connection with God's word and ways of old; and yet there is not a single epistle which more elaborately throughout its entire course sets the believer in present relationship to Christ in heaven; I think one might be bold to say, none so much. From the very starting point we see Christ, not merely dead and risen, but glorified in heaven. There is no doubt that the writer meant his readers to hold fast, that He who suffered all things on earth is the same Jesus who is now at the right hand of God; but the first place in which we hear of Him is as Son of God on high according to Hebrews 1, and there it is we see Him as Son of man according to Hebrews 2. It was there, in fact, that Paul had himself first seen the Lord. Who then was so suitable to introduce Jesus, the rejected Messiah, at the right hand of God, as Saul of Tarsus? On the way to Damascus that staunchest of Jews had his eyes first opened - blinded naturally, but enabled by grace so much the more to see by the power of the Holy Spirit the glorified Christ,

It is to Christ in heaven, then, that Paul, writing to the Christian Jews, first directs their attention. But he does it in a manner which shows the singularly delicate tact given him. True affection is prudent for its object when peril is nigh, and delights to help effectively, instead of being indifferent whether the way of it wounds those whose good is sought. In no way are the former messages of God forgotten in the days of their fathers. Nor would one gather from this epistle that its writer laboured among the Gentiles, nor even that there was a calling of Gentile believers in the Lord Jesus. The epistle to the Hebrews never speaks of either. We can understand, therefore, how active minded men, who occupied themselves with the surface - the method, the style, the unusual absence of the writer's name, and other peculiarities in the phenomena of this epistle, too readily hesitated to attribute it to Paul. They might not attach much moment to the general tradition which ascribed it to him. But they ought to have looked more steadily into its depths, and the motives for obvious points of difference, even were it written by Paul.

Granted that there is a striking absence of allusion to the one body here. But there was one nearer and dearer to Paul than even the church. There was one truth that Paul laboured yet more to hold up than that one body, wherein is neither Jew nor Greek - the glory of Him who is the head of it. Christ Himself was what made the assembly of God precious to him. Christ Himself was infinitely more precious than even the church which He had loved so well, and for which He gave Himself.

Of Christ, then, he would deliver his last message to his brethren after the flesh as well as Spirit; and as he began preaching in the synagogues that He is the Son of God, (Acts 9) so here he begins his epistle to the Hebrews. He would lead them on, and this with gentle but firm and witting hand. He would deepen their knowledge lovingly and wisely. He would not share their unbelief, their love of ease, their value for outward show, their dread of suffering; but he would reserve each folly for the most fitting moment. He would lay a vigorous hand on that which threatened their departure from the faith, but he would smooth lightly lesser difficulties out of their way. But when he gained their ear, and they were enabled to see the bright lights and perfections of the great High Priest, there is no warning more energetic than this epistle affords against the imminent and remediless danger of those who abandon Christ, whether for religious form, or to indulge in sin. All is carried on in the full power of the Spirit of God, but with the nicest consideration of Jewish prejudices, and the most scrupulous care to bring every warrant for his doctrine from their own ancient yet little understood testimonies.

#### Hebrews 1

It is evident, however, even from the opening of the epistle, that though he does not slight but uphold the Old Testament scriptures, yet he will not let the Jews pervert them to dishonour the Lord Jesus. How had God spoken to the fathers? In many measures and in many manners. So had He spoken in the prophets. It was fragmentary and various, not a full and final manifestation of Himself. Mark the skill! He thereby cuts off, by the unquestionable facts of the Old Testament, that overweening self-complacency of the Jew, which would set Moses and Elias against hearing the Son of God. Had God spoken to the fathers, in the prophets? Unquestionably. Paul, who loved Israel and estimated their privileges more highly than themselves, (Rom. 9) was the last man to deny or enfeeble it. But how had God spoken then? Had He formerly brought out the fulness of His mind? Not so. The early communications were but refracted rays, not the light unbroken and complete. Who could deny that such was the character of all the Old Testament? Yet so cautiously does he insinuate the obviously and necessarily practical character of that which was revealed of old, that at a first reading, nay, however often read perfunctorily, they might have no more perceived it than, I suppose, most of us must confess as to ourselves. But there it is; and when we begin to prove the divine certainty of every word, we weigh and weigh again its value.

As then it is pointed out that there were formerly many portions, so also were there many modes in the prophetic communications of God. This was, beyond doubt, the way in which His revelations had been gradually vouchsafed to His people. But for this very reason, it was not complete. God was giving piecemeal His various words, "here a little, and there a little." Such was the character of His

ways with Israel. They could not - man could not - hear more till redemption was accomplished, after the Son of God Himself was come, and His glory fully revealed. Now when promises were given to the fathers, they did not go beyond the earthly glory of Christ; but known to Him were all things from the beginning, yet He did not outrun the course of His dealings with His people. But as they manifested themselves in relation to Himself, and alas! their own weakness and ruin, higher glories began to dawn, and were needful as a support to the people. Hence, invariably, you will find these two things correlative. Reduce the glory of Christ, and you equally lower your judgment of the state of man. See the total absolute ruin of the creature; and none but the Son in all His glory is felt to be a sufficient Saviour for such.

The apostle was now being led by the Holy Ghost to wean these believers from their poor, meagre, earthly thoughts of Christ - from that so common tendency to take the least portion of the blessing, contenting ourselves with that which we think we need, and which we feel to be desirable for us, and there sitting down. God, on the contrary, while He does adapt Himself to the earliest wants of souls, and the feeblest answer to Christ by the Spirit of God working within us, nevertheless has in His heart for us what suits His own glory, and this He will accomplish; for faithful is He who hath promised, and He will do it. He means to have all that love the Saviour like Him; and all that He purposes to do for the Saviour's honour, He has perfectly unfolded to us. No doubt, this supposes the resurrection state, and it never can be till then; but He graciously works now, that we may learn by degrees that only such a Saviour and Lord - the effulgence of His glory, and full expression of His substance, the Son of God Himself - could suit either God or us.

Accordingly, while he intimates thus that all was but partial, being piecemeal and multiform, in the revelations from God to the fathers, he lets them know, in the next verse, that the same God had, in the last of these days, "spoken unto us in his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds." If such and so great were His glory, what must not be the word of such a Son? What the fulness of the truth that God was now making known to His people by Him? Was this to slight the glory of the Messiah? Let them rather take heed that there be no oversight of Him on their part; none could justly put it to the account of God. For who was He, this Messiah, that they would fain occupy themselves with as a king, and would have confirmed, had it 'been possible, to aggrandize themselves - the ancient people of God? The brightness of God's glory, the express image of His substance; the upholder, not of Israel or their land only, but of all things "by the word of his power." But hearken - "when he had by himself purged our sins," was not the whole Jewish system blotted out by such a truth? - "when he had by himself purged our sins." It is to the exclusion of every other instrument. Help there was not; means there could not be. He Himself undertook

and achieved the task alone; and, when He had thus done it, "sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high; being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they."

This furnishes the first part of the doctrine on which the apostle insists. If any beings had special account or stood highly exalted in a Jew's eye, the holy angels were they; and no wonder. It was in this form that Jehovah ordinarily appeared, whenever He visited the fathers or the sons of Israel. There were exceptions; but, as a rule, He who made known the will and manifested the power of Jehovah in these early days to the fathers is spoken of habitually as the angel of Jehovah. It is thus He was represented. He had not yet taken manhood, or made it part of His person. I do not deny that there was sometimes the appearance of man. An angel might appear in whatever guise it pleased God; but, appear as He might, He was the representative of Jehovah. Accordingly, the Jews always associated angels with the highest idea of beings, next to Jehovah Himself, the chosen messengers of the divine will for any passing vision among men. But now appeared One who completely surpassed the angels. Who was He? The Son of God. It ought to have filled them with joy.

We may easily understand that every soul truly born of God would and must break forth into thanksgiving to hear of a deeper glory than he had first perceived in Christ, We must not look on the Lord according to our experience, if there has been simplicity in the way God has brought us to the perception of His glory; we must endeavour to put ourselves back, and consider the prejudices and difficulties of the Jew. They had their own peculiar hindrances; and one of their greatest was the idea of a divine person becoming a man; for a man, to a Jew, was far below an angel. Are there not many now, even professing Christians (to their shame be it spoken) who think somewhat similarly? Not every Christian knows that a mere angel, as such, is but a servant; not every Christian understands that man was made to rule. No doubt he is a servant, but not merely one so accomplishing orders, but having a given sphere, in which he was to rule as the image and glory of God: a thing never true of an angel - never was, and never can be. The Jews had not entered into this; no man ever did receive such a thought. The great mass of Christians now are totally ignorant of it. The time, the manner, and the only way in which such a truth could be known, was in the person of Christ; for He became not an angel but a man.

But the very thing that to us is so simple, when we have laid hold of the astonishing place of man in the person of Christ - this was to them the difficulty. His being a man, they imagined, must lower Him necessarily below an angel. The apostle, therefore, has to prove that which to us is an evident matter of truth - of revelation from God - without argument at all. And this he proves from their own scriptures. "For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son,

this day have I begotten thee?" Now it is true that angels are sometimes called "sons of God," but God never singles out one and says, "Thou art my Son." In a vague general way, He speaks of all men as being His sons. He speaks of the angels in a similar way, as being His sons. Adam was a son of God - apart, I mean, from the grace of God - as a mere creature of God into whose nostrils He breathed the breath of life. Adam was a son of God, angels were sons of God; but to which of the angels did God ever speak in such language as this? No, it was to a man; for He was thus speaking of the Lord as Messiah here below; and this is what gives the emphasis of the passage. It is not predicated of the Son as eternally such; there would be no wonder in this. None could be surprised, assuredly, that the Son of God, viewed in His own eternal being, should be greater than an angel. But that He, an infant on earth, looked at as the son of the Virgin, that He should be above all the angels in heaven - this was a wonder to the Jewish mind; and yet what had in their scriptures a plainer proof? It was not to an angel in heaven, but to the Babe at Bethlehem, that God had said, "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee;" and, again, "I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son" - words said historically of David's son; but, as usual, looking onward to a greater than David, or his wise son, who immediately succeeded him. Christ is the true and continual object of the inspiring Spirit.

But next follows a still more powerful proof of His glory: "And again, when he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him." So far from any angel approaching the glory of the Lord Jesus, it is God Himself who commands that all the angels shall worship Him. "And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire." They are but servants, whatever their might, function, or sphere. They may have a singular place as servants, and a spiritual nature accomplishing the pleasure of the Lord; but they are only servants. They never rule. "But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." Not a word is said about His fellows until God Himself addresses Him as God. The angels worshipped Him: God now salutes Him as God; for such He was, counting it no robbery to be on equality with God, one with the Father.

But this is far from all. The chain of scriptural testimony is carried out and confirmed with another and even more wondrous citation. "God" may be used in a subordinate sense. Elohim has His representatives, who are, therefore, called gods. Magistrates and kings are so named in scripture. So are they styled, as the Lord told the Jews. The word of God came and commissioned them to govern in earthly things; for it might be no more than in judicial matters. Still, there they were, in their own sphere, representing God's authority, and are called gods, though clearly with a very subordinate force. But there is another name which

never is employed in any sense save that which is supreme. The dread and incommunicable name is "Jehovah." Is, then, the Messiah ever called Jehovah? Certainly He is. And under what circumstances? In His deepest shame. I do not speak now of God's forsaking Christ as the point of view in which He is looked at, though at the same general time.

We that believe can all understand that solemn judgment of our sins on the part of God, when Jesus was accomplishing atonement on the cross. But there was more in the cross than this, which is not the subject of Psalm 102, but rather the Messiah utterly put to shame by man and the people; nevertheless taking it all - for this was His perfection in it - from the hand of Jehovah. It is under such circumstances He pours out His plaint. Jehovah raised Him up, and Jehovah cast Him down. Had atonement, as such, been in view here as in Psalm 22, would it not be put as casting Him down, and then raising Him up? This is the way in which we Christians naturally think of Christ in that which is nearest to the sinner's need and God's answer of grace. But here Jehovah raised Him up, and Jehovah cast Him down, which evidently refers to His Messianic place, not to His position as the suffering and afterwards glorified Christ, the Head of the church. He was raised up as the true Messiah by Jehovah on earth, and He was cast down by Jehovah on earth. No doubt man was the instrument of it. The world which He had made did not know Him; His own people received Him not, neither would have Him. Jewish unbelief hated Him: the more they knew Him, the less could they endure Him. The goodness, the love, the glory of His person only drew out the deadly enmity of man, and specially of Israel; for they were worse than the Romans: and all this He, in the perfectness of His dependence, takes from Jehovah. For Himself, He came to suffer and die by wicked hands, but it was in the accomplishment of the will and purpose of God His Father. He knew full well that all the power of man or Satan would not have availed one instant before Jehovah permitted it. Hence all is taken meekly, but with none the less agony, from Jehovah's hand; and less or other than this had not been perfection. In the midst of Messiah's profound sense and expression of His humiliation to the lowest point thus accepted from Jehovah, He contrasts His own estate, wasted, prostrate, and coming to nothing. He contrasts it with two things. First, the certainty of every promise being accomplished for Israel and Zion He unhesitatingly anticipates; whilst He, the Messiah, submits to be given up to every possible abasement. He then contrasts Himself with the great commanding truth of Jehovah's own permanence. And what is the answer from on high to the holy sufferer? Jehovah from above answers Jehovah below; He owns that the smitten Messiah is Jehovah - of stability and unchangeableness equal with His own.

Hebrews 2

What need of further proof after this? Nothing could be asked or conceived more conclusive, as far as concerned His divine glory. And all that the apostle thinks it necessary to cite after this is the connecting link of His present place on the throne of Jehovah in heaven with all these ascending evidences of His divine glory, beginning with His being Son as begotten in time and in the world; then His emphatic relationship to God as of the lineage of David - not Solomon, save typically, but the Christ really and ultimately; then worshipped by the angels of God; next, owned by God as God, and, finally, as Jehovah by Jehovah. All is closed by the citation of Psalm 110: 1, which declares that God bids Him sit as man at His right hand on high till the hour of judgment on His foes. It is one of the most interesting psalms in the whole collection, and of the deepest possible moment as preparatory both to what is now brought in for the Christian (which, however, is hidden here) and to what it declares shall be by  $\square$  and  $\square$  by for Israel. Thus it is a sort of bridge between old and new, as it is more frequently quoted in the New Testament than any other Old Testament scripture. "Therefore" (as should be the conclusion, though commencing the next chapter) "we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels" - clearly he is still summing up the matter - "was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward: how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard?" It is striking to see how the apostle takes the place of such as simply had the message, like other Jews, from those who personally heard Him: so completely was he writing, not as the apostle of the Gentiles magnifying his office, but as one of Israel, who were addressed by those who companied with Messiah on earth. It was confirmed "unto us," says he, putting himself along with his nation, instead of conveying his heavenly revelations as one taken out from the people, and the Gentiles, to which last he was sent. He looks at what was their proper testimony, not at that to which he had been separated extraordinarily. He is dealing with them as much as possible on their own ground, though, of course, without compromise of his own. He does not overlook the testimony to the Jews as such: "God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and distributions of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will."

Now he enters on another and very distinct portion of the glory of Christ. He is not only the Son of God, but Son of man; and they are both, I will not say equally necessary, but, without doubt, both absolutely necessary, whether for God's glory or for His salvation to whomsoever it may be applied. Touch Christ on either side, and all is gone. Touch Him on the human side, it is hardly less fatal than on the divine. I admit that His divine glory has a place which humanity could not possess; but His human perfection is no less necessary to found the blessing for us on redemption, glorifying God in His righteousness and love. This accordingly the apostle now traces. Jesus was God as truly as man, and in both above the

angels. His superiority as Son of God had been proved in the most masterly manner from their own scriptures in the first chapter. He had drawn his conclusions, urging the all-importance of giving heed, and the danger of letting slip such a testimony. The law, as he had said elsewhere, was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. He had just said, if it was firm, and every transgression and disobedience received just recompence of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation? Outward infraction and inner rebellion met their retribution. The sanction of the gospel would be commensurate with its grace, and God would avenge the slights of a testimony begun by the Lord, farther carried on and confirmed by the Holy Spirit with signs, wonders, powers, and distributions according to His will.

Now he takes the other side, saying, "Unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come." Whatever may have been God's employment of angels about the law, the world to come was never destined to be subjected to them. It is the good pleasure of God to use an angel where it is a question of providence, or law, or power; but where it comes to be the manifestation of His glory in Christ, He must have other instruments more suitable for His nature, and according to His affections. "For one has somewhere testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands."

Thus we see the first question raised is one as to the littleness of man in comparison with that which God has made; but the question is no sooner raised than answered, and this by one who looks at the Second Man and not at the first. Behold then man in Christ, and then talk, if you can, about His littleness. Behold man in Christ, and then be amazed at the wonders of the heavens. Let creation be as great as it may be, He that made all things is above them. The Son of man has a glory that completely eclipses the brightness of the highest objects. But also He shows that the humiliation of the Saviour, in which He was made a little lower than the angels, was for an end that led up to this heavenly glory. Grant that He was made a little lower, than the angels, what was it for? "We see not yet all things put under him. But we behold Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; so that by the grace of God he should taste death for everything." Nor was this the only object; He was "crowned with glory and honour" as fruit of His sufferings unto death; but it had a gracious object as well as a glorious end; "so that by the grace of God he should taste death for everything;" for thus was the only door of deliverance for what was ruined by the fall, and this because it was the only means of morally vindicating God, who yearned in love over every work of His hands. There can be otherwise no efficacious because no righteous deliverance. It may be infinitely more, but righteous footing it must have; and this the death of Christ has given.

Flowing from God's grace, Christ's death is the ground of reconciliation for the universe. It has also made it a part of His righteousness to bring man thus out of that ruin, misery, and subjection to death in which he lay. It has put into the hands of God that infinite fund of blessing in which He now loves to admit us reconciled to Himself.

The apostle does not yet draw all the consequences; but he lays down in these two chapters the twofold glory of Christ - Son of God, Son of man; and following up the latter, he approaches that which fitted Him, on the score of sympathy, for the priesthood. I do not mean that Jesus could have been High Priest according to God because He was man. Not His manhood but His Godhead is the ground of His glory; nevertheless, if He had not been man as well as Son of God, He could not have been priest. As for atonement so for priesthood, that ground was essential. But it was for man, and therefore He too must be man. So it is here shown that it "became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one." Remark, it is not "all one." We never reach that height in the epistle to the Hebrews; never have we the body here, any more than unity. For the body we must search into some other epistles of Paul, though unity we may see in another shape in John. But the epistle to the Hebrews never goes so far as either. It does what was even more important for those whom it concerned, and, I add, what is of the deepest possible moment for us. For those who think that they can live according to God on the truth of either Ephesians or of the epistles of St. John, without the doctrine of the epistle to the Hebrews, have made a miserable mistake.

Say what men will, we have our wants, as traversing this wilderness; and although we might like to soar, it cannot long, if at all, prosper. We have, therefore, the adaptation of Christ as priest to the infirmities that we feel, and so much the more because of an exercised conscience towards God, and a realizing of the desert sin has made - this defiled scene of our actual pilgrimage.

Accordingly, in the latter part of the chapter, the apostle begins to introduce the great truths which form so large a part of the epistle to the Hebrews. He speaks of Christ, the Sanctifier: "He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one." He means one and the same condition, without entering into particulars. "For which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren." There is a common relationship which the Sanctifier and the sanctified possess. It might be supposed, because He is the Sanctifier and they are the sanctified, that there could be no such communion. But there is: "for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren." He never called them so, till He became a man; nor did He so fully then, till He was man risen from the dead. The apostle here most fittingly introduces Psalm 22, etc.: "Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in

the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee. And again, I will put my trust in him." He is proving the reality of this common relationship of the Sanctifier and the sanctified. He, like themselves, can say, and He alone could say as they never did, "I will put my trust in him." Indeed Psalm 16 was the expression of all His course as man - trust in life, trust in death, trust in resurrection. As in everything else, so in this, He has the pre-eminence; but it is a pre-eminence founded on a common ground. It could not have been true of Him, had He not been a man; had He been simply God, to talk of trusting in God would have been altogether unnatural impossible. As for Him then, though the Sanctifier, He and they were all of one. And so further: "Behold! and the children which God hath given me." Here is again a different but equally good proof of mutual relationship.

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels." This last should be, that He does not take up angels; He does not help them. They are not the objects of His concern in the work here described; "but he takes up the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest" - here you have the object of all the proof of His being man - "in things pertaining to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people." I use the word "atonement, or expiation, as being decidedly preferable to reconciliation." You cannot talk of reconciling sins. It is not a question of making sins right. They are atoned for; people are reconciled. Those who have been sinners are reconciled to God; but as to sins they do not admit of being reconciled at all (which is a mistake). There is need of a propitiation, or expiation, for the sins of His people. "For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." Temptation to Him was nothing but suffering: He suffered, being tempted, because there was that intrinsic holiness which repelled, but, at the same time, most acutely felt the temptation.

Thus the apostle enters on the vast field that will come before us a little while longer tonight. He has laid the basis for the high-priesthood of Christ. He could not have been such a High Priest, had He not been both divine and human; and he has proved both, in the fullest manner, from their own scriptures.

But before he enters upon the unfolding of His high-priesthood, there is a digression (the two chapters that follow, I apprehend, linking themselves with the two we have considered). Thus, "Christ as Son over his own house" answers pretty much to the first chapter, as the rest of God by and by answers to the second chapter; for I hope to prove it is to be in the scene of future glory. In

writings so profound as the apostle's, one generally hails the least help towards appreciating the structure of an epistle: let the reader consider it.

### Hebrews 3

We need not dwell long on these intervening chapters. It is evident that he opens with our Lord as "apostle and high-priest of our confession," in contrast with the apostle and high priest of the Jews. Moses was the revealer of the mind of God of old, as Aaron had the title and privilege of access then into the sanctuary of God for the people. Jesus unites both in His own person. He came from God, and went to God. The holy brethren, then, partakers of a heavenly calling (not earthly like Israel's), are told to consider the Apostles and High Priest of our confession, even Jesus, who is faithful to Him that appointed Him, as also Moses in all his house. Moses, "as a servant," he takes care particularly to say, in everything shows the superiority of the Messiah. "For he was counted worthy of greater glory than Moses, by how much he that built it hath more honour than the house." He becomes bold now. He can venture, after having brought out such glory to Christ, to use plainness of speech; and they could hear it, if they believed their own scriptures. If they honoured the man who was God's servant in founding and directing the tabernacle (or house of God in its rudimentary state), how much more did the ancient oracles call attention to a greater than Moses - to Jehovah - Messiah, even Jesus. How plainly this chapter pre-supposes the proofs of the divine glory of Christ! We shall see also His Sonship presently. "And Moses was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of the things to be spoken after; but Christ, as Son over his house, whose house are we." Christ, being divine, built the house; Christ built all things. Moses ministered as servant, and was faithful in God's house; Christ as Son is over the house; "whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end."

There were great difficulties, circumstances calculated especially to affect the Jew, who, after receiving the truth with joy, might be exposed to great trial, and so in danger of giving up his hope. It was, besides, particularly hard for a Jew at first to put these two facts together: a Messiah come, and entered into glory; and the people who belonged to the Messiah left in sorrow, and shame, and suffering here below. In fact, no person from the Old Testament could, at first sight at least, have combined these two elements. We can understand it now in Christianity. It is partly, indeed, to the shame of Gentiles, that they do not even see the difficulty for a Jew. It shows how naturally, so to speak, they have forgotten the Jew as having a special place in the word and purposes of God. They consequently cannot enter into the feelings of the Jew; and by such the authority and use of this epistle was grievously slighted. It is the self-conceit of the Gentile, (Rom. 11) not their faith, that makes the Jewish difficulty to be so little felt. Faith enables us to look at all difficulties, on the one hand measuring them, on the other raising us

above them. This is not at all the case with ordinary Gentile thought. Unbelief, indifferent and unfeeling, does not even see, still less appreciate, the trials of the weak.

The apostle here enters into everything of value for the way. Although it is perfectly true that the Son is in this place of universal glory, and in relation to us, Son over His house (God's house having an all-comprehending sense and a narrower one), he explains how it is that His people are in actual weakness, trial, exposure, danger and sorrow here below. The people are still travelling through the wilderness, not yet in the land. He immediately appeals to the voice of the Spirit in the Psalms: "Wherefore - (as the Holy Ghost saith, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do always err in heart; and they have not known my ways. So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.) - take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end; while it is said, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses."

What is pressed here is this: that the people of God are still in the path of faith, just like their fathers of old before they crossed the Jordan; that now there is that which puts our patience to the proof; that the grand thing for such is to hold fast the beginning of the assurance firm unto the end. They were tempted to stumble at the truth of Christ, because of the bitter experiences of the way through which they were going onward. To turn back is but the evil heart of unbelief; to abandon Jesus is to turn away from the living God. To be fellows or companions of the Messiah (Psalm 45) depends on holding fast the beginning of the assurance to the end; for, remember, we are in the wilderness. Following Christ, as of old Moses, we are not arrived at the rest of God. "But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief."

This leads us to the very important, but often misunderstood, Hebrews 4. What is the meaning of the "rest of God"? Not rest of soul, nor rest of conscience, any more than of heart. It is none of these things, but simply what the apostle says, God's rest. His rest is not merely your rest. It is not our faith seizing the rest that Christ gives to him that trusts Himself, as when He says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He did not say, "I will

give you God's rest." It was not the time, nor is it of that nature. God's rest is the rest of His own satisfaction. His rest is a change of all, the present scene of trial and toil, the consequences of sin. Of course the people of God must be formed for the scene, as well as it for them. They are incomparably more to God than that which they are going to fill. But the scene has its importance too. It would not suit God, if it would suit us, to be ever so blessed in such a world as this. He means to have a rest as worthy of Himself as the righteousness we are made in Christ is worthy of Himself now. As it is His righteousness, so will it be His rest. Therefore it is not merely, as Gentiles are apt to suppose, the bringing of comfort into the heart, and the spirit filled with the consciousness of blessings from God and of His grace to us. The Jew, too, had, in another direction, a miserably inadequate conception of it; for it was earthly, if not sensual. Still, what a Jewish believer often staggered at, what he felt to be a serious riddle for his mind, was the contrast between the circumstances through which he was passing, and the Christ of which the prophets had spoken to him. Now the apostle does not in any way make light of the grief by the way, nor forget that the pilgrimage in the desert is the type of our earthly circumstances. He takes the scriptures that speak of Israel journeying toward, but not yet in, the pleasant land, applying them to the present facts, and at the same time he sets before them in hope the rest of God.

#### Hebrews 4

"Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us were glad tidings preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. For we who have believed do enter into rest." That is, we are on the road. He does not say that we have entered, nor does he mean anything of the sort, which is clean contrary to the argument and aim. It is altogether a mistake, therefore, so to interpret the passage. The very reverse is meant, namely, that we have not entered into the rest, but, as the hymn says, we are on our way, I will not say to God, but assuredly to His rest. We are entering into the rest, having got it before us, and on to that rest we move; but we are not yet there. "We which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest." It is quite true that it is the Holy Ghost's object to bring the rest close to us, so as to make us always conscious of the little interval that separates us from the rest of God; but still, let the interval be ever so short, we are not there yet, we are only going towards it. For the present, our place, beyond controversy, is viewed as in fact in the wilderness. According to the doctrine of this epistle (as of the Romans, the Corinthians, and the Philippians) to present us as in heavenly places would be altogether out of place and season. To the Ephesians he does develop our blessing as in and with Christ in the heavenlies. There it was exactly consonant to the character of the truth; for it is truth, and of the highest order. But as far as the Epistle to the Hebrews goes,



we should never have learnt this side of the truth of God, or its appropriation to us; for we are only regarded in our actual place, that is, marching through the desert.

Here objections, which might be founded on the scriptures of the Old Testament, are met. There were two, and only two, occasions of old whence it might be argued that there had been an entrance into God's rest.

The first was when God made the creation; but was there any entering of man into that rest? God, doubtless, rested from His works; but even God is never said then to have rested in His works. Was there anything that satisfied God or blessed man permanently? All was good, yea, very good; but could God rest in His love? Surely not, till all could be founded on the basis of redemption. Before all worlds God meant to have this. Nothing but redemption could bring into His own rest. Consequently, a rest capable of being spoilt, and all requiring to be begun over again in a new and more blessed way, never could meet the heart or mind of God. This, accordingly, is not His rest; it served as a sign and witness of it, but nothing more.

Then we come down lower to the second instance of deep and special interest to Israel. When Joshua brought the people triumphantly into the possession of Canaan, was this the rest of God? Not so. How is it disproved? By the self-same Psalm - "If they shall enter into my rest," written afterwards. So wrote David, "Today, after so long a time." Not only after the creation, but after Joshua had planted the people in the land, a certain day is determined in the future. For if Jesus [i.e., Joshua] had brought them into rest, he would not have spoken afterwards about another day. They had not entered into it yet.

The "rest" was still beyond. Is it not future still? What has there been to bring people into the rest of God since then? What is there to be compared with creation, or with His people settled in Canaan by the destruction of their foes? That which Gentile theology has brought into the matter, namely, the work of the Lord on the cross, or the application of it to meet the needs of the soul - precious as it was to the apostle, as it must be to faith - has no place whatever in the apostle's argument. If so, where does he bring it into the context? The idea that this is the point debated is so perfectly foreign and futile, that to my mind it demonstrates exceeding prepossession, if not looseness, of mind, as well as a lack of subjection to scripture, in those who allow their theories to override the plain word of God, which is here conspicuous for the absence of that infinite truth.

The apostle, therefore, at once draws the conclusion, that neither at creation, nor in Canaan, was the rest of God really come. The latter part of the Old Testament shows us how Israel got unsettled, and finally driven from their land; though it also predicts their future ingathering. The New Testament shows us the rejection

of the Messiah, the ruin of Israel, the salvation of believers, the church formed of such in one body, (whether Jews or Gentiles,) but in the stronger contrast with the rest of God. Consequently, the rest is but coming, not come; it is future. This is the application: "There remaineth therefore a rest" (or sabbatism) "to the people of God. For he that hath entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his works, as God did from his own." I must ask you thus to alter the passage, the authorised version giving it wrongly. The emphasis is taken out of one place, and put into another, without the slightest reason.

What he deduces is, "Let us use diligence therefore to enter into that rest." The meaning is, you cannot be labouring and resting in the same sense and time. All must confess that when you rest, you cease from labour. His statement is that now is the time not for rest, but for diligence; and the moral reason why we labour is, that love - whether looked at in God Himself, in His Son, or in His children - love never can rest, where there is either sin or wretchedness. In the world there is both. No doubt for the believer, his sins are blotted out and forgiven, and hope anticipates with joy the final deliverance of the Lord. But as to the course of this age and all things here below, it is impossible to think or speak of rest as these are, not even for our bodies, as part of the fallen creation. There ought not to be rest, therefore, beyond what we have by faith in our souls. It would be mere sentimentalising; it is not the truth of God. I ought to feel the misery and the estrangement of the earth from God; I ought to go - however joyful in the Lord - with a heart sad, and knowing how to weep, in a world where there is so much sin, and suffering, and sorrow. But the time is coming when God will wipe away tears from all eyes, yea, every tear; and this will be the rest of God. To this rest we are journeying, but we are only journeying. At the same time we should labour: love cannot but toil in such a world as this. If there be the spirit that feels the pressure of sin, there is the love that rises up in the power of God's grace, bringing in that which lifts out of sin. and delivers from it. So he says, "Let us be diligent therefore to enter into that rest."

Allow me to say a word to any person here who may be a little confused by old thoughts on this subject. Look again a little more exactly into the two chief calls of the chapter (verses 1 and 11), and let me ask you if it be safe and sound to apply them to rest for the conscience now? Are souls who have never yet tasted that the Lord is gracious to be summoned to fear? And how does the call to labour or diligence square with the apostle's word in Romans 4: 4, 5, where justification by faith, apart from works, is beyond cavil the point of teaching? What can be the effect of such prejudices of interpretation (no matter who may have endorsed them) but to muddle the gospel of God's grace? Thus it seems to me clearly and certainly such a notion is proved to be false. The test of a wrong notion is that it always dislocates the truth of God; often, indeed, like this, running counter to the plainest and most elementary forms of the gospel itself. Thus, take the text

already referred to - "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly" - the popular misinterpretation sets people working to enter into rest for their conscience. But the doctrine is as false as the written word is true; and the meaning of that which is before us is, not rest now for the soul by faith, but the rest of God, when He has made a scene in the day of glory as worthy of Himself as it will be suited for those whom He loves.

Accordingly, we are next shown the provision of grace, not for the rest of glory, but for those who are only journeying on towards it here below. And what is that provision? The word of God, which comes and searches, tries and deals with us, judging the thoughts and intents of the heart; and the priesthood of Christ, which converts and strengthens, and applies all that is needed here - the grace and mercy of our God. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

#### Hebrews 5

And now we enter upon the priesthood; for it is a priest that we want who stand already accepted by sacrifice. Not a priest, but a sacrifice, is the foundation of all relationship with God; but we need, along the way a living person, who can deal both with God for us and for God with us. Such a great High Priest who passed through the heavens, yet able to sympathize with our infirmities, we have in Jesus the Son of God. How little these Jews, even when saints, knew the treasure of grace that God had given in Him whom the nation abhorred! As previously, the apostle takes the proofs from their own oracles. It is not a question of revealing, but of rightly applying, by the Holy Ghost, the word they had in their hand.

"For every high priest taken from among men is established for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins." It might seem scarcely credible that these words could be applied to Christ. But there is nothing too bad for the heart of man; and these are mistakes of the heart. They do not arise from intellectual feebleness. It would be folly so to judge of Grotius, for instance. They spring from unbelief. Call it ignorance of Christ and of the scriptures, if you will, but it is not found only with the ignorant, as men would speak. I am sure we ought to have great compassion for the honest ignorance of simple-minded men. But, as in other sad cases, the error is often combined with ample learning of the schools, though with lamentable lack of divine teaching even in foundation truth. I do not deny that God may deign to use anything in His service; but these men confide in their learning and their powers generally, instead of becoming fools that they may become wise, which is the truest learning according to God, if one may speak of "learning" in respect of that wisdom which comes down from the Father of lights.

Thus men, confident in their own resources, have dared to apply this description of priesthood to Christ. They have failed to see that it is a distinct contrast with Christ, and not at all a picture of His priesthood. It is evidently general, and sets before us a human priest, not Jesus - God's High Priest. If there be analogy, there is certainly the strongest contrast here. An ordinary priest is able to exercise forbearance toward the ignorant and erring, since he himself also is compassed with infirmity. "And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins." Did Christ need to offer for Himself, yea, for sins? This blasphemy would follow, if the foregoing words applied to Christ. "And no one taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, even as Aaron. So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest." Now he teaches a point of contact, as the other was of contrast. All you can procure from among men is one that can feel, as being a man, for men after a human sort. Such is not the priest that God has given us, but one who, though man, feels for us after a divine sort. And so, we are told, that Christ, while He was and is this glorious person in His nature and right, nevertheless as man did not glorify Himself to be made an high priest; "but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, today have I begotten thee; as he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec."

The same God who owned Him as His Son, born of the Virgin, owned Him also as Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. And in this order too: first, Son (on earth);\* next, the true Melchisedec (in heaven, as we shall find). Albeit true God and Son of God, in everything He displays perfect lowliness among men, and absolute dependence on God: such also was His moral fitness for each office and function which God gave Him to discharge. Mark, again, the skill with which all is gradually approached - how the inspired writer saps and mines their exorbitant (yet after all only earthly) pretensions, founded on the Aaronic priesthood. Such was the great boast of the Jews. And here we learn out of their own scriptures another order of priesthood reserved for the Messiah, which he knew right well could not but put the Aaronic priesthood completely in the shade. "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec."

\*I see no ground whatever for applying the citation from Psalm 2 to the resurrection of Christ. Acts 13, which is usually quoted to prove it, really distinguishes the raising up of Jesus as Messiah, the Son of God here below, from His resurrection which is made to rest on Isaiah 55 and Psalm 16. Neither does Psalm 2 set forth His eternal Sonship, all-important a truth as it is, and clearly taught by John above all.

At the same time, it is plain that there is no forgetfulness of the suffering obedience of Christ's place here below; but He is presented in this glory before we are given to hear of the path of shame which ushered it in. "Who in the days of

his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him, called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec. The apostle had much to say, but hard to be interpreted, because they were become dull of hearing. It is not that the word of God in itself is obscure, but that men bring in their difficulties. Nor does His word, as is often thought, want light to be thrown on it; rather is it light itself. By the Spirit's power it dispels the darkness of nature. Many obstacles there are to the entrance of light through the word, but there is none more decided than the force of religious prejudice; and this would naturally operate most among the Hebrew saints. They clung too much to old things; they could not take in the new. We may see a similar hindrance every day. What Paul had to say of the Melchisedec priesthood was hard to explain to them, not because the things were in themselves unintelligible, but they were dull in hearing. "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye again have need that one teach you the elements of the beginning of the oracles of God."

There is nothing, I repeat, which tends to make dulness in spiritual things so much as religious tradition. The next to it in dead weight, and in other respects more daringly dangerous, will be found to be philosophy. At any rate, it is remarkable that these are the two occasions of this reproach from the apostle. So he wrote to the Corinthians, who generally admired rhetoric, and had no small confidence, like other Greeks, in their own wisdom. They did not consider Paul, either in style or topics, at all up to the requirements of the age - at least in their midst. How cutting to hear themselves counted babes, and incapable of meat for grown men, so that, being carnal, they must have milk administered to them! The apostle had to put them down, and tell them, with all their high-flown wisdom, they were such that he could not discourse to them about the deep things of God. This, no doubt, was a painful surprise for them. So here the same apostle writing to the Hebrew believers treats them as babes, though from a different source. Thus we see two errors totally opposed in appearance, but leading to the same conclusion. Both unfit the soul for going on with God; and the reason why they so hinder is because they are precisely the things in which man lives. Whether it be the mind of man or his natural religiousness, either idolizes its own object; and consequently blindness ensues to the glory of Christ.

Hence the apostle could not but feel himself arrested by their state. He shows also that this very state was not merely one of weakness, but exposed them to the greatest danger; and this is pursued not on the philosophical side so much as on that of religious forms. We have already seen both at work in Colosse, as I have just pointed out the snare that the wisdom of the world was to the Corinthians.

But on the Hebrews he presses their excessive danger of abandoning Christ for religious traditions. First of all these hinder progress; finally they draw the soul aside from grace and truth; and if the mighty power of God does not interfere, they ruin. This had been the course of some: they had better be watchful that it be not their own case. He begins gently with their state of infantine feebleness; and then in the beginning of the following chapter he sets before them the awful picture of apostasy. "For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

#### Hebrews 6

"Therefore," adds he, "leaving the word of the beginning of Christ, let us go on to perfection." He proves that we cannot safely linger among the Jewish elements when we have heard and received Christian truth; that not merely blessing, not simply power and enjoyment, but the only place even of safety is in going on to this full growth. To stop short for them was to go back. Let those that had heard of Christ return to the forms of Judaism, and what would become of them?

Then he speaks of the various constituents that make up the word of the beginning of Christ (i.e., Christ known short of death, resurrection, and ascension). He would have them advance, "not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and faith in God, of a teaching of washings and imposition of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment." Not that these were not true and important in their place: no one disputed them; but they were in no way the power, nor even characteristic, of Christianity. They go in pairs; and a mere Jew would hardly object; but what is all this for the Christian? Why live on such points? "And this" (i.e. going on to full growth) "will we do if God permit. For it is impossible [as to] those once enlightened, and that tasted the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and that tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come, and fell away, to renew [them] again to repentance, seeing they crucify for themselves and expose the Son of God."

It is a question of persons drawn into apostasy after having enjoyed every privilege and power of the gospel, short of a new nature and that indwelling of the Spirit which seals renewed souls till the day of redemption. For them rejecting the Messiah on earth under Judaism God gave repentance and remission of sins; but if they gave up the risen and glorified Christ, there was no provision of grace, no third estate of Christ to meet the case. It is not the case of a person surprised into sin; nay, not even the very awful case of one who may go on in sin, sorrowful to think that it may be so with one of whom we had hoped better things. But here there is another evil altogether. They were those who might be ever so correct,

moral, religious, but who, having confessed Jesus as the Christ after the outpouring of the Spirit, had lapsed back into Jewish elements, counting it perhaps a wise and wholesome cheek on a too rapid advance, instead of seeing that in principle it was an abandonment of Christ altogether. The full case here supposed is a thorough renunciation of Christian truth.

The apostle describes a confessor with all the crowning evidences of the gospel, but not a converted man, Not a word implies this either here or in 2 Peter. Short of this he uses uncommonly strong expressions, and purposely so: he sets forth the possession of the highest possible external privileges, and this in that abundant form and measure which God gave on the ascension of the Lord. He says it all, no doubt, about the baptized; but there is nothing about baptism as the ancients would have it, any more than, with some moderns, the progressive steps of the spiritual life. There is knowledge, joy, privilege, and power, but no spiritual life. Enlightenment is in no sense the new birth, nor does baptism in scripture ever mean illumination. It is the effect of the gospel on the dark soul - the shining on the mind of Him who is the only true light. But light is not life; and life is not predicated here.

Further, they had "tasted of the heavenly gift." It is not the Messiah as He was preached when the disciples went about here below, but Christ after He went on high; not Christ after the flesh, but Christ risen and glorified above.

But, again, they were "made partakers of the Holy Ghost." Of Him every one became a partaker, who confessed the Lord and entered into the house of God. There the Holy Ghost dwelt; and all who were there became partakers after an outward sort (not koinwnoi;, but mevtocoi) of Him who constituted the assembly of God's habitation and temple. He pervaded, as it were, the whole atmosphere of the house of God. It is not in the least a question of a person individually born of God, and so sealed by the Holy Spirit. There is not an allusion to either in this case, but to their taking a share in this immense privilege, the word not being that which speaks of a joint known portion, but only of getting a share.

Moreover, they "tasted the good word of God." Even an unconverted man might feel strong emotions, and enjoy to a certain extent, more particularly those that had lain in Judaism, that dreary valley of dry bones. What fare was the gospel of grace! Certainly nothing could be more miserable than the scraps which the scribes and Pharisees put before the sheep of the house of Israel. There is nothing to forbid the natural mind from being attracted by the delightful sweetness of the glad tidings which Christianity proclaims.

Lastly, we hear of "the powers of the age to come." This seems more than a general share in the presence of the Holy Ghost, who inhabited the house of God.

They were positively endued with miraculous energies - samples of that which will characterize the reign of the Messiah. Thus we may fairly give the fullest force to every one of these expressions. Yet write them out ever so largely, they fall short both of the new birth and of sealing with the Holy Ghost. There is everything one may say, save inward spiritual life in Christ, or the indwelling seal of it. That is to say, one may have the very highest endowments and privileges, in the way both of meeting the mind, and also of exterior power; and yet all may be given up, and the man become so much the keener enemy of Christ. Indeed such is the natural result. It had been the mournful fact as to some. They had fallen away. Hence renewal to repentance is an impossibility, seeing they crucify for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame.

Why impossible? The case supposed is of persons, after the richest proof and privilege, turning aside apostates from Christ, in order to take up Judaism once more. As long as that course is pursued, repentance there cannot be. Supposing a man had been the adversary of Messiah here below, there was still the opening for him of grace from on high. It was possible that the very man that had slighted Christ here below might have his eyes opened to see and receive Christ above; but, this abandoned, there is no fresh condition in which He can be presented to men. Those who rejected Christ in all the fulness of His grace, and in the height of glory in which God had set Him as man before them, - those that rejected Him not merely on earth, but in heaven, what was there to fall back on? what possible means to bring them to a repentance after that? There is none. What is there but Christ coming in judgment? Now apostasy, sooner or later, must fall under that judgment. Such is the force of the comparison. "For land which hath drunk in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is for burning."

"But we are persuaded better things of you, beloved." There might seem too much ground for fear, but of the two ends he was persuaded respecting them the better things, and akin to salvation, if even he thus spoke; for God was not unrighteous, and the apostle too remembered traits of love and devotedness which gave him this confidence about them. But, says he, "We earnestly desire that each of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end that ye be not slothful, but followers of those who through faith and long suffering inherit the promises." Here is given a remarkable instance of the true character of the epistle; namely, the combination of two features peculiar to the Hebrews. On the one hand are the promises, the oath of God, taking up His ways with Abraham; and, on the other hand, the hope set before us, that enters into what is within the veil. We may account for the former, because the writer was not confining himself to that which fell within the proper sphere of his apostleship. But, again, had he been writing according to his ordinary place, nothing was more strictly his line of

testimony than to have dwelt on our hope that enters within the veil. The peculiarity of the epistle to the Hebrews lies in combining the promises with Christ's heavenly glory. None but Paul, I believe, would have been suited to bring in the heavenly portion. At the same time, only in writing to the Hebrews could Paul have brought in the Old Testament hopes as he has done.

Another point of interest which may be remarked here is the intimation at the end compared with the beginning of the chapter. We have seen the highest external privileges - not only the mind of man, as far as it could, enjoying the truth, but the power of the Holy Ghost making the man, at any rate, an instrument of power, even though it be to his own shame and deeper condemnation afterwards. In short, man may have the utmost conceivable advantage, and the greatest external power even of the Spirit of God Himself; and yet all comes to nothing. But the very same chapter, which affirms and warns of the possible failure of every advantage, shows us the weakest faith that the whole New Testament describes coming into the secure possession of the best blessings of grace. Who but God could have dictated that this same chapter (Heb. 6) should depict the weakest faith that the New Testament ever acknowledges? What can look feebler, what more desperately pressed, than a man fleeing for refuge? It is not a soul as coming to Jesus; it is not as one whom the Lord meets and blesses on the spot; but here is a man hard pushed, fleeing for very life (evidently a figure drawn from the blood-stained fleeing from the avenger of blood), yet eternally saved and blessed according to the acceptance of Christ on high.

There was no reality found to be in those so highly favoured of the early verses; and therefore it was (as there was no conscience before God, no sense of sin, no cleaving to Christ) that everything came to nought; but here, there is the fruit of faith, feeble indeed and sorely tried, but in the light that appreciates the judgment of God against sin. Hence, although it be only fleeing in an agony of soul to refuge, what is it that God gives to one in such a state? Strong consolation, and that which enters within the veil. Impossible that the Son should be shaken from His place on the throne of God: so is it that the least believer should come to any hurt whatever. The weakest of saints more than conqueror is; and therefore the apostle, having brought us to this glorious point of conclusion, as well as shown us the awful danger of men giving up such a Christ as that which we have presented to us in this epistle, now finds himself free to unfold the character of His priesthood, as well as the resulting position of the Christian. But on these I hope to enter, if the Lord will, on another occasion.

## HEBREWS 7

The apostle now resumes his great theme, Christ called a Priest of God for ever after the order of Melchisedec. He alludes, in the beginning of our chapter, to the

historical facts of Genesis. We must bear in mind that Melchisedec was a man like any other. There, is no ground, in my judgment, for the thought of anything mysterious in the facts as to his person. The manner in which scripture introduces him is such as to furnish a very striking type of Christ. There is no necessity for considering anything else, but that the Spirit of God, forecasting the future, was pleased to conceal the line of Melchisedec's parentage, or descendants if any, of their birth or death. He is suddenly ushered upon the scene. He has not been of by the reader before; he is never heard of again in history. Thus the only time when he comes into notice he is acting in the double capacity here spoken of: King of righteousness as to his name, King of Salem as to his place, blessing Abraham on his return from the victory over the kings of the Gentiles in the name of the Most High God, and blessing the Most High God the possessor of heaven earth in the name of Abraham.

The apostle does not dwell on the detailed application of His Melchisedec priesthood, as to the object and character of its exercise. He does not draw attention here to the account, that there was only blessing from man to God, and from God to man. He does not reason from the singular circumstance that there was no incense, any more than sacrifice. He alludes to several facts, but leaves them. The point to which he directs the reader is the evident and surpassing dignity of the case - the unity too of the Priest and the priesthood; and this for an obvious reason.

The time for the proper exercise of the Melchisedec priesthood of Christ is not yet arrived. The millennial day will see this. The battle which Abraham fought, the first recorded one in scripture, is the type of the last battle of this age. It is the conflict which introduces the reign of peace founded on righteousness, when God will manifest Himself as the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth. This is, as is well known, the special characteristic of the millennium. Heaven and earth have not been united, nor have they been in fact possessed for the blessing of man by the power of God, since sin severed between the earth and that which is above it, and the prince of the power of the air perverted all, so that what should have been, according to God's nature and counsels, the source of every blessing, became rather the point from which the guilty conscience of man cannot but look for judgment. Heaven, therefore, by man's own conviction, must be arrayed in justice against earth because of sin, But the day is coming when Israel shall be no more rebellious, and the nations shall be no longer deceived, and Satan shall be dethroned from his bad eminence, and all idols shall flee apace, and God shall be left the undisputed and evidently Most High, the possessor of heaven and earth. In that day it will be the joy of Him who is the true Melchisedec, to bring out not the mere signs, but the reality of all that can be the stay and comfort of man, and all that sustains and cheers, the patent proof of the beneficent might of God, when "no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."

But meanwhile, confessedly, the Spirit of God directs attention, not to the exercise, but to the order of the Melchisedec Priest. If we have to wait for the exercise at a future day, the order is as true and plain now as it ever can be. Indeed, at no time will its order be more apparent than at present; for I think there can be little doubt to any unbiassed Christian who enters with intelligence into the Old Testament prophecies, that there is yet to be an earthly sanctuary, and, consequently, earthly priests and sacrifices for Israel in their own land; that the sons of Zadok, as Ezekiel lets us know, will perpetuate the line at the time when the Lord shall be owned to be there, in the person of the true David their King, blessing His people long distressed but now joyful on earth. But this time is not yet come. There is nothing to divert the heart from Christ, the great High Priest in the heavens. No doubt all will be good and right in its due season then. Meanwhile Christianity gives the utmost force to every type and truth of God. The undivided place of Christ is more fully witnessed now, when there are no others to occupy the thought or to distract the heart from Him as seen by faith in glory on high.

Hence the apostle applies the type distinctly now, as far as the "order" of the priesthood goes. We hear first of Melchisedec (King of righteousness), next of Salem or peace; without father, without mother, without genealogy. Unlike others in Genesis, neither parents are recorded, nor is there any hint of descent from him. In short, there is no mention of family or ancestors, "having neither beginning of days, nor end of life" - neither is recorded in scripture; - "but made like unto the Son of God, abideth a priest continually."

The next point proved is the indisputable superiority of the Melchisedec priesthood to that of Aaron, of which the Jews naturally boasted. After all, the telling fact was before them that, whoever wrote the epistle to the Hebrews, it was not a Christian who wrote the book of Genesis, but Moses; and Moses bears witness to the homage which Abram rendered to Melchisedec by the payment of tithes. On the other hand, the priests, Aaron's family, among the sons of Levi, "have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham." Thus Melchisedec, "whose descent is not of Aaron nor of Levi," like Jesus, "received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises!" "And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better." No argument could be more distinct or conclusive. The other descendants of Abraham honoured the house of Aaron as Levitical priests; but Abraham himself, and so Levi himself, and of course Aaron, in his loins honoured Melchisedec. Thus another and a higher priesthood was incontestably acknowledged by the father of the faithful. "And, as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, paid tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him."

This leads to another point; for the change of the priesthood imports a change of the law. "If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron?" This change was clearly taught in the book of Psalms. It was not only that there had been at the beginning such a priest, but that fact became the form of a glorious anticipation which the Holy Ghost holds out for the latter day. Psalm 110, which, as all the Jews owned, spoke, throughout its greater part at least, of the Messiah and His times, shows us Jehovah Himself - by an oath, which is afterwards reasoned on - signifying that another priest should arise after a different order from that of Aaron. "The priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest." Thus the Pentateuch and the Psalms bore their double testimony to a Priest superior to the Aaronic.

Further, that this Priest was to be a living one, in some most singular manner to be an undying Priest, was made evident beyond question, because in that Psalm it is said, "He testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec." This was also a grand point of distinction. Where could they find such a Priest? where one competent to take up that word "for ever"? Such was the Priest of whom God spoke. "For," says he, "there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof (for the law made nothing perfect)." He uses in the most skilful manner the change of the priest, in order to bring along with it a change of the law, the whole Levitical system passing away - "but [there is] the bringing in of a better hope." Such is the true sense of the passage. "For the law made nothing perfect" is a parenthesis. By that hope, then, "we draw nigh unto God."

But again the solemn notice of Jehovah's oath is enlarged on. "Inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest: (for those priests were made without an oath) - no oath ushers in the sons of Aaron - "but he with an oath by him that said as to him, The Lord sware and will - not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:) by so much was Jesus made a surety of a better covenant."

And, finally, he sums up the superiority of Christ in this, that "they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: but he, because of his continuing for ever, hath the priesthood intransmissible." There was but one such Priest.

In every point of view, therefore, the superiority of the Melchisedec priest was demonstrated over the line of Aaron. The fulfilment of the Melchisedec Order is found in Christ, and in Him alone. The Jews themselves acknowledge that Psalm 110 must be fulfilled in Christ, in His quality of Messiah. Nothing but stupid, obstinate, unbelieving prejudice, after the appearance of the Lord Jesus, could have suggested any other application of the Psalm. Before Jesus came, there was no question of it among the Jews. So little was it a question, that our Lord could appeal to its acknowledged meaning, and press the difficulty His person created for unbelief. By their own confession the application of that Psalm was to the Messiah, and the very point that Jesus urged upon the Jews of His day was this - how, if He were David's Son, as they agreed, could He be his Lord, as the Psalmist David confesses? This shows that, beyond question, among the Jews of that day, Psalm 110 was understood to refer to the Christ alone. But if so, He was the Priest after the order of Melchisedec, as well as seated at Jehovah's right hand - a cardinal truth of Christianity, the import of which the Jews did not receive in their conception of the Messiah. Hence throughout this epistle the utmost stress is laid on His being exalted in heaven - Yet there was no excuse for a difficulty on this score. Their own Psalm, in its grand prophetic sweep, and looking back on the law, pointed to the place in which Christ is now seated above; and where it is of necessity He should be, in order to give Christianity its heavenly character.

The doctrine follows: "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost." He does not mean by this the worst of sinners, but saving believers to the uttermost, bringing through every difficulty those "that come unto God by him." A priest is always in connection with the people of God, never as such with those that are outside, but a positive known relation with God - "seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens." This statement is so much the more remarkable, because in the beginning of this epistle he had pointed out what became God. It became Him that Christ should suffer. It became us to have a Priest, "holy, harmless, undefiled, made higher than the heavens."

What infinite thoughts are those that God's word gives; as glorifying for Himself as elevating for our souls! Yet who beforehand would have anticipated either? It became God that Christ should go down to the uttermost; it became us that He should be exalted to the highest. And why? Because Christians are a heavenly people, and none but a heavenly Priest would suit them. It became God to give Him to die; for such was our estate by sin that nothing short of His atoning death could deliver us; but, having delivered us, God would make us to be heavenly. None but a heavenly Priest would suffice for the counsels He has in hand. "Who needeth not daily," therefore says He, "as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's." He always keeps up the evidence

of the utter inferiority of the Jewish priest, as well as of the accompanying state of things, to that of Christianity. "For this he did once, when he offered up himself. For the law maketh men priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath which was since the law, a Son perfected (or consecrated) for ever." This was the very difficulty that the Jew pleaded; but now, in point of fact, it was only what the Psalm of Messiah insisted on, the law itself bearing witness of a priest superior to any under the law. Holy Scripture then demanded that a man should sit down at the right hand of God. It was accomplished in Christ, exalted as the great Melchisedec in heaven. If they were Abraham's children, and not his seed only, surely they would honour Him.

#### Hebrews 8

Hence, in Hebrews 8, the apostle draws his conclusion. "Now of the things that are being spoken of this is a summary: We have such an high priest, who is set down on [the] right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a minister of the holies, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man." In Hebrews 1 it is written, that "having by himself made purification of our sins, he sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." The point there is personal glory. No other seat was suitable to such a One. He sat down there as of His own right and title, but nevertheless making a part of His divine glory to be witnessed in, as indeed His person was necessary to make His blood efficacious to the purging of our sins. But in chapter 8. He sits there not merely as the proof of the perfectness with which He has purged our sins by Himself alone, but as the Priest; and accordingly it is not merely said "on high," but "in the heavens." Such is the emphasis. Accordingly observe the change of expression. He has been proved to be a divine person, and the true royal priest of whom not Aaron only but Melchisedec was the type. Hence the right hand of the throne is introduced, but, besides, "of the Majesty in the heavens." So that, let the Jews say what they might, there was only found what answered to their own scriptures, and what proved the incontestable superiority of the great Priest whom Melchisedec shadowed out, and of whom it was now for the Christian justly to boast. He is "minister of the holies and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not of man." Now the tone becomes bolder with them, and shows clearly that the Jew had but an empty form, a foreshadow of value once, but now superseded by the true antitype in the heavens.

Here, too, he begins to introduce what a priest does, that is, the exercise of his functions. "For every high priest is constituted to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer. For if he were on earth, he should not even be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law: who serve the representation and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was oracularly told when about to make the tabernacle:

for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern that was shown to thee in the mountain. But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant." Thus, before he enters on the subject of the sacrifices at length, he takes notice of the covenants, and thence he draws a conclusion from the well-known prophecy in Jeremiah, where God declares that the days were coming when He would make a new covenant. What is the inference from that? He presses the fact of a new principle, as well as an institution established on better promises, upon the Jews. For why should there be a new covenant, unless because the first was faulty or ineffectual! What was the necessity for a new covenant if the old one would do as well? According, to the Jews it was quite impossible, if God had once established a covenant, He could ever change; but the apostle replies that their own prophet is against their theory. Jeremiah positively declares that God will make a new covenant. He argues that the word "new" puts the other out of date, and this to make room for a better. A new covenant shows that the other must have thereby become old, and therefore is decaying and ready to vanish away.

All this is a gradual undermining the wall until the whole structure is overthrown. He is labouring for this, and with divine skill accomplishes it, by the testimonies of their own law and prophets. He does not require to add more to the person and facts of Christ than the Old Testament furnishes, to prove the certainty of Christianity and all its characteristic truths with which he occupies himself in this epistle. I say not absolutely all its great truths. Were it a question of the mystery of Christ the Head, and of the church His body, this would not be proved from the Old Testament, which does not reveal it at all. It was hid in God from ages and generations. There are types that suit the mystery when it is revealed, but of themselves they never could make it known, though illustrating particular parts when it is. But whether we look at the heavenly supremacy of Christ over the universe, which is the highest part of the mystery, or at the church associated with Him as His body, composed of both Jew and Gentile, where all distinction is gone, no wit of man ever did or could possibly draw this beforehand from the Old Testament. Indeed, not being revealed of old, according to the apostle, it is altogether a mistake to go to the Old Testament for that truth.

Hence in Hebrews we never find the body of Christ as such referred to. We have the church, but even when the expression "church" occurs, it is the church altogether vaguely, as in Hebrews 2: 12, or viewed in the units that compose it - not at all in its unity. It is the assembly composed of certain individuals that make it up, regarded either as brethren, as in the second chapter ("In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee"), or as the church of the first-born ones, as in Hebrews 12, persons who drew their title from Christ the first-born Heir. There we have those that compose the church, in allusion to Christ, contrasted with the

position of Israel as a nation, because of the nearness which they possess by the grace of Christ known on high.

It may be observed, too, that the Holy Ghost appears but little in this epistle. Not of course that one denies that He has His own proper place, for all is perfect as to each person of the Trinity and all else, but never to this end. For a similar reason we never find life treated in the epistle, nor righteousness. It is not a question of justification here. We hear of sanctification often, but even what is thus spoken of throughout is rather in connection with separation to God and the work of Christ, than the continuous energy of the Holy Ghost, except, as far as I remember, in one practical passage - "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." In other cases the epistle to the Hebrews speaks of sanctification by God's call, and Christ's blood. I refer to the fact just to exemplify on the one hand the true bearing of the epistle, and what I believe will be discovered in it, and on the other hand to guard against the mistake of importing into it, or trying to extract from it, what is not there.

#### Hebrews 9

Hebrews 9 brings us into the types of the Levitical ritual, priesthood and sacrifice. Before developing these, the apostle refers to the tabernacle itself in which these sacrifices were offered. "There was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the showbread; which is called holy. And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called holy of holies; which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold." Carefully observe that it is the tabernacle, never the temple. The latter is not referred to, because it represents the millennial glory; the former is, because it finds its proper fulfilment in that which is made good in the Christian scheme now. This supposes the people of God not actually settled in the land, but still pilgrims and strangers on the earth; and the epistle to the Hebrews, we have already seen, looks emphatically and exclusively at the people of God as not yet passed out of the wilderness; never as brought into the land, though it might be on the verge; just entering, but not actually entered. There remains, therefore, a sabbath-keeping for the people of God. Thither they are to be brought, and there are means for the road to keep us moving onward. But meanwhile we have not yet entered on the rest of God. It remains. Such is a main point, not of Hebrews 4 only, but of the epistle. It was the more urgent to insist on it, because the Jews, like others, would like to have been settled in rest here and now. This is natural and pleasant to the flesh, no doubt; but it is precisely what opposes the whole object of God in Christianity, since Christ went on high till He come again, and therefore the path of faith to which the children of God are called.



Accordingly, then, as suiting this pilgrim□path of the Christian, the tabernacle is referred to, and not the temple. And this is the more remarkable, because his language is essentially of the actual state of what was going on in the temple; but he always calls it the tabernacle. In truth, the substratum was the same, and therefore it was not only quite lawful so to call it, but if he had not, the design would have been marred. But this shows the main object of the Spirit of God in directing us for the type that applies to the believer now to an unsettled pilgrim□condition, not to Israel established in the land of promise.

To what, then, is the allusion to the sanctuary applied? To mark that as yet the veil was unrent. "Into the second [goes] the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people: the Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way of the holies was not yet made manifest, while as yet the first tabernacle was standing: which is a figure for the present time according to which are offered both gifts and sacrifices that could not, as pertaining to the conscience, make him that did the religious service perfect; which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation." With all this Christianity is contrasted. "But Christ being come a high priest of good things to come, by the better and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is, not of this creation, nor by blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood entered in once into the holies, having obtained eternal redemption." Here the words "for us" had better be left out. They really mar the sense, because they draw attention not to the truth in itself so much as its application to us, which is not the point in Hebrews 9, but rather of Hebrews 10. Here it is the grand truth itself in its own character. What is the value, the import., of the sacrifice of Christ viewed according to God, and as bearing on His ways? This is the fact. Christ has gone into the presence of God," having obtained eternal redemption." For whom it may be is another thing, of which he will speak by□and□by. Meanwhile we are told that He has obtained (not a temporary, but) "eternal redemption." It is that which infinitely exceeds the deliverance out of Egypt, or any ceremonial atonement ever wrought by a high priest for Israel. Christ has obtained redemption, and this is witnessed by the token of the veil rent from top to bottom. The unrent veil bore evidence on its front that man could not yet draw near into the holiest - that he had no access into the presence of God. This is of the deepest importance. It did not matter whether it was a priest or an Israelite. A priest, as such, could no more draw near into the presence of God in the holiest than any of the common people. Christianity is stamped by this, that, in virtue of the blood of Christ, once for all for every believer the way is made manifest into the holiest of all. The veil is rent: the believer can draw near, as is shown in the next chapter; but meanwhile it is merely pointed out that there is no veil now, eternal redemption being obtained.

Thus does the apostle reason on it: "For if the blood of bulls and goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh" (which the Jew would not contest): "how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to do religious service to the living God? And for this cause he is mediator of the new covenant, that by means of death, for redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, the called might receive the promise of the eternal inheritance." Thus the power of what Christ had wrought was now brought in for future ends; it was not merely retrospective, but above all in present efficacy while the Jews refuse Christ.

The allusion in the last clause to the eternal inheritance (for everything is eternal in the Hebrews, standing in decided contrast with Jewish things which were but for a season) leads the Holy Spirit to take up the other meaning of the same word, which was and is rightly enough translated covenant. At first sight every one may have been surprised, especially those that read the New Testament in the language in which God wrote it, at the double meaning of the word which is here translated "covenant." It (διαθηκη) means "testament" as well as "covenant." In point of fact the English translators did not know what to make of the matter; for they give sometimes one, sometimes the other, without any apparent reason for it, except to vary the phrase. In my judgment it is correct to translate it both ways, never arbitrarily, but according to context. There is nothing capricious about the usage. There are certain surroundings which indicate to the competent eye when the word "covenant" is right and when the word "testament" is better.

It may then be stated summarily, in few words, unless I am greatly mistaken, that the word should always be translated "covenant" in every part of the New Testament, except in these two verses; namely, Hebrews 9: 16, 17. If, therefore, when you find the word "testament" anywhere else in the authorized version, you turn it into "covenant" in my opinion you will not do amiss. If in these two verses we bear in mind that it really means "testament," growing out of the previous mention of the "inheritance," I am persuaded that you will have better understanding of the argument. In short, the word in itself may mean either; but this is no proof that it may indifferently or without adequate reason be translated both ways. The fact is, that love of uniformity may mislead some, as love of variety misled our English translators too often. It is hard to keep clear of both. Every one can understand, when once we find that the word means almost always covenant," how great the temptation is to translate it so in but two other occurrences, especially as before and after it means "covenant" in the same passage. But why should it be "testament" in these two verses alone, and "covenant" in all other places? The answer is, that the language is peculiar and precise in these same two verses, requiring not a covenant but a testament, and

therefore the sense of testament here is the preferable one, and not covenant. The reasons will be given in a moment.

First of all, as has been hinted, that which suggests "testament" is the end of verse 15 - "They which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance." How is it that anybody ordinarily gets an inheritance? By a testament, to be sure, as every one knows. Such has been the usual form in all countries not savage, and in all ages. No figure therefore would be more natural than that, if God intended certain persons called to have an inheritance, there should be a testament about the matter. Accordingly advantage is taken of an unquestionable meaning of the word for this added illustration, which is based on the death of Christ, "Where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator." That the word (diagevmeno") in this connection means "testator" appears to me beyond just question. I am not aware that it is, nor do I believe that it could be, ever used in such a sense as "covenanting victim," for which some contend. It often means one who arranged or disposed of property, or anything else, such as a treaty or covenant.

Let us next apply the word "covenant" here, and you will soon see the insuperable difficulties into which you are plunged. If you say, "For where a covenant is, there must also of necessity be the death of the covenanter" - the person. Now is it an axiom, that a covenant-maker must die to give it force? It is quite evident, on the contrary, that this is not only not the truth which all recognize when stated, but altogether inconsistent with the Bible, with all books, and with all experience. In all the covenants of scripture the man that makes it has never to die for any such end. Indeed both should die; for it usually consists of two parties who are thus bound, and therefore, were the maxim true, both ought to die, which is an evident absurdity.

The consequence is, that many have tried (and I remember making efforts of that kind myself, until convinced that it could not succeed) to give oJ diagevmono", in the English Bible rightly rendered "the testator," the force of the covenanting victim. But the answer to this is, that there is not a single writer in the language, not sacred only but profane, who employs it in such a sense. Those therefore that so translate our two verses have invented a meaning for the phrase, instead of accepting its legitimate sense as attested by all the monuments of the Greek tongue; whereas the moment that we give it the meaning assigned here rightly by the better translators, that is, the sense of "testator" and "testament," all runs with perfect smoothness, and with striking aptitude.

He is showing us the efficacy of Christ's death. He demonstrates its vicarious nature and value from the sacrifices so familiar to all then, and to the Jew particularly, in connection with the covenant that required them Now his rapid

mind seizes, under the Spirit's guidance, the other well-known sense of the word, namely, as a testamentary disposition, and shows the necessity of Christ's death to bring it into force. It is true that victims were sometimes slain in ratifying a covenant, and thus were the seal of that covenant; but, first, they were not essential; and, secondly and chiefly, oJ diaqvmeno", the covenanting or contracting party had in no case to die in order to make the contract valid. On the other hand it is notoriously true, that in no case can a testament come into execution without the testator's death - a figure that every man at once discerns. There must be the death of him who so disposes of his property in order that the heir should take it under his testament. Which of these two most commends itself as the unforced meaning of the passage it is for the reader to judge. And observe that it is assumed to be so common and obvious a maxim that it could not be questioned. "For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator." The addition of this last clause as a necessary condition confirms the sense assigned. Had he merely referred to the covenant (i.e. the sense of the word which had been used before), what would be the aim of the "also?" It is just what he had been speaking of throughout, if covenant were still meant. Apply it to Christ's death as the testator, and nothing can be plainer or more forcible. The death of Christ, both in the sense of a victim sacrificed, and of a testator, though a double figure, is evident to all, and tends to the self-same point. "For a testament is of force after men are dead (or, in case of dead men, ejpi; nekroi"): since it is never of force when the testator liveth."

But now, returning from this striking instance of Paul's habit of going off at a word (diaqvkh), let us resume the regular course of the apostle's argument. "Whereupon neither the first [covenant] was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and 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 hath enjoined unto you. And he sprinkled likewise with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. And almost all things are according to the law purged with blood; and without shedding, of blood is no remission. It was therefore necessary that the representations of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ is not entered into holies made with hands, figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear before the face of God for us."

Thus distinctly have we set before us the general doctrine of the chapter, - that Christ has suffered but once, and has been offered but once; that the offering cannot be severed from the suffering. If He is to be often offered, He must also often suffer. The truth on the contrary is, that there was but one offering and but one suffering of Christ, once for all; in witness of the perfection of which He is

gone into the presence of God, there to appear for us. Thus it will be observed, at the end of all the moral and experimental dealings with the first man (manifested in Israel), we come to a deeply momentous point, as in God's ways, so in the apostle's reasoning. Up to this time man was the object of those ways; it was simply, and rightly of course, a probation. Man was tried by all sorts of tests from time to time God knew perfectly well, and even declared here and there, the end from the beginning; but He would make it manifest to every conscience, that all He got from man in these His varied dealings was sin. Then comes a total change: God takes up the matter Himself, acting in view of man's sin; but in Jesus, in the very Messiah for whom the Jews were waiting, he has put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, and has accomplished this mighty work, as admirably befitting the goodness of God, as it alone descends low enough to reach the vilest man, and yet deliver him with a salvation which only the more humbles man and glorifies God. For now God came out, so to speak, in His own power and grace, and, in the person of Christ on the cross, put away sin - abolished it from before His face, and set the believer absolutely free from it as regards judgment.

"But now once in the consummation of the ages," - this is the meaning of "the end of the world;" it is the consummation of those dispensations for bringing out what man was. Man's worst sin culminated in the death of Christ who knew no sin; but in that very death He put away sin. Christ, therefore, goes into heaven, and will come again apart from sin. He has nothing more to do with sin; He will judge man who rejects Himself and slights sin. as He will appear to the salvation of His own people. "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation."

It is perfectly true that, if we think of Christ, He was here below absolutely without sin; but He who was without sin in His person, and all His life, had everything to do with sin on the cross, when God made Him to be sin for us. The atonement was at least as real as our sin; and God Himself dealt with Christ as laying sin upon Him, and treating Him, the Great Substitute, as sin before Himself, that at one blow it might be all put away from before His face. This He has done, and done with. Now accordingly, by virtue of His death which rent the veil, God and man stand face to face. What, then, is man's actual estate? "As it is appointed unto men once to die," - wages of sin, though not all, - "but after this the judgment," or the full wages of sin, - "so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many;" - this He has finished; - "and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation." He will have nothing more to do with sin. He has so absolutely swept it away for those who believe on Him, that when He comes again, there will be no question of judgment, as far as they are concerned, but only of salvation, in the sense of their being cleared from the last relic or result of sin, even for the body. Indeed it is only the body that is here

spoken of. As far as the soul is concerned, Christ would not go up to heaven until sin was abrogated before God. Christ is doing nothing there to take away sin; nor when He comes again will He touch the question of sin, because it is a finished work. Christ Himself could not add to the perfectness of that sacrifice by which He has put away sin. Consequently, when He comes again to them that look for Him, it is simply to bring them into all the eternal results of that great salvation.

#### Hebrews 10

In Hebrews 10 he applies the matter to the present state of the believer. He had shown the work of Christ and His coming again in glory. What comes in between the two? Christianity. And here we learn the direct application. The Christian stands between the cross and the glory of the Lord Jesus. He rests confidently on the cross, that only valid moral basis before God; at the same time he is waiting for the glory that is to be revealed. "For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins." No Jew could or ought to pretend to such purgation as its result.

I should like to ask whether (or how far) all the believers here assembled can take this as their place with simplicity. You, as a Christian, ought to have the calm settled consciousness that God, looking on you, discerns not one spot or stain, but only the blood of Jesus Christ His Son that cleanses from all sin. You ought to have the consciousness that there is no judgment for you with God by  and  by, however truly He, as a Father, judges you now on earth. How can such a consciousness as this be the portion of the Christian? Because the Holy Ghost bears this witness, and nothing less, to the perfectness of the work of Christ. If God's word be true, and to this the Spirit adheres, the blood of Christ has thus perfectly washed away the sins of the believer. I mean his sins now; not sin as a principle, but in fact, though it be only for faith. "The worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins." It is not implied that they may not sin, or that they have no consciousness of their failure, either past or present. "Conscience of sins" means a dread of God's judging one because of his sins. For this, knowing His grace in the work of Christ for them, they do not look; on the contrary, they rest in the assurance of the perfection with which their sins are effaced by the precious blood of Christ.

This epistle insists on the blood of Christ, making all to turn on that efficacious work for us. It was not so of old, when the Israelite brought his goat or calf. "In those sacrifices," referring to the law to which some Hebrew Christians were in danger of going back, "there is a remembrance made again of sins every year. For

it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins." Therefore all such recurring sacrifices only call sins to remembrance; but what the blood of Christ has done is so completely to blot them out, that God Himself says, "I will remember them no more.

Accordingly he now turns to set forth the contrast between the weakness and the unavailingness of the Jewish sacrifices, which, in point of fact, only and always brought up sins again, instead of putting them away as does the sacrifice of Christ. In the most admirable manner he proves that this was what God was all along waiting for. First of all, "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not, but a body hast thou prepared me: in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God." There we find these two facts. First, in God's counsels it was always before Him to have One more than man though a man to deal with this greatest of all transactions. There was but One that could do God's will in that which concerned man's deepest wants. Who was this One? Jesus alone. As for the first Adam and all his race, their portion was only death and judgment, because he was a sinner. But here is One who proffers Himself to come, and does come. "In the volume of the book it is written of me" - a book which none ever saw but God and His Son. There it was written, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God." Redemption was the first thought of God - a counsel of His previous to the dealings with man which made the necessity of redemption felt. God meant to have His will done, and thereby a people for Himself capable of enjoying His presence and His nature, where no question of sin or fall could ever enter.

First, He makes a scene where sin enters at once. Because His people had no heart for His promises, He imposed a system of law and ordinances that was unjudged in them, which provoked the sin. and made it still more manifest and heinous. Then comes forth the wondrous counsel that was settled before either the sin of man, or the promises to the fathers, or the law which subsequently put man to the test. And this blessed person, single-handed but according to the will of God, accomplishes that will in offering Himself on the cross.

So it is said here, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first" (that is, the law), "that he may establish the second" (that is, God's will, often unintelligently confounded by men with the law, which is here set in the most manifest contradistinction). Next the apostle, with increasing boldness, comes to the proof from the Old Testament that the legal institution as a whole was to be set aside. "He taketh away the first." Was this Paul's doctrine? There it was in the Psalms. They could not deny it to be written in the fortieth psalm. "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not, but a body hast thou prepared me: in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do, thy will, O God." All he does is to

interpret that will, and to apply it to what was wrought on the cross. "By the which will" (not man's, which is sin, but God's) "we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

This leads to a further contrast with the action of the Aaronic priest. "Every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: but this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God." Jesus sits down in perpetuity. This is the meaning of the phrase, not that He will sit there throughout all eternity. Eij" to; dihnekev" does not express eternity (which would be eij" to;n aijw'na, or some such form of words) but "for continuance." He sits there continually, in contrast with the Jewish priest, who was always rising up in order to do fresh work, because there was fresh sin; for their sacrifices never could absolutely put away sin. The fact was plain that the priest was always doing and doing, his work being never done; whereas now there is manifested, in the glorious facts of Christianity, a Priest sat down at God's right hand, a Priest that has taken His place there expressly because our sins are blotted out by His sacrifice. If there was any place for the priest, one might have supposed, to be active in his functions, it would be in the presence of God, unless the sins were completely gone. But they are completely gone; and therefore at God's right-hand sits down He who is its witness.

How could this be disputed by one who simply believed Psalm 110? For there is seen not only the proof that the Messiah is the One whom God pronounced by an oath "a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec," but the glorious seat He has taken at the right-hand of God is now worked into this magnificent pleading. Christianity turns everything to account. The Jew never understood his law until the light of Christ on the cross and in glory shone upon it. So here the Psalms acquire a meaning self-evidently true, the moment Christ is brought in, who is the truth, and nothing less. Accordingly we have the third use of the seat Christ has taken. In the first chapter we saw the seat of personal glory connected with atonement; in the eighth chapter it is the witness of His priesthood, and where it is. Here it is the proof of the perpetual efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ. We shall find another use before we have done, which I hope to notice in its place.

But the Holy Ghost's testimony is not forgotten. As it was God's will and the work of Christ, so the Holy Ghost is He who witnesses to the perfectness of it. It is also founded on one of their own prophets. "This is the covenant," says he, "that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin."

Then we hear of the practical use of all. "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holies by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our hope [for so it should be] without wavering (for he is faithful that promised); and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." But the higher the privilege, the greater the danger of either despising or perverting it.

In Hebrews 6, we saw that the Spirit of God brings in a most solemn warning for those who turn their back on the power and presence of the Holy Ghost, as bearing witness of Christianity. Here the apostle warns those that turn their back on Christ's one sacrifice. It is evident that in these we have the two main parts of Christianity. The foundation is sacrifice; the Power is of the Holy Ghost. The truth is, that the Holy Ghost is come down for the purpose of bearing His witness; and he that deserts this for Judaism, or anything else, is an apostate and lost man. And is he better or safer that slights the sacrifice of the Son of God, and goes back either to earthly sacrifices or to lusts of flesh, giving a loose rein to sin, which is expressly what the Son of God shed His blood to put away? He who, having professed to value the blessing of God abandons it, and rushes here below into the sins of the flesh knowingly and deliberately, is evidently no Christian at all. Accordingly it is shown that such an one becomes an adversary of the Lord, and God will deal with him as such. As in chapter 6 he declares that he is persuaded better things of them, than that they would abandon the Holy Ghost; so here he expected better things than that they would thus dishonour the sacrifice of Christ. In that case, he says, God was not unrighteous to forget their work and labour of love; in this case, he lets them know that he had not forgotten the way in which they had suffered for Christ. There it was more particularly the activity of faith; here it is the suffering of faith.

#### Hebrews 11

This leads into the life of faith, which was a great stumbling block to some of these Christian Jews. They could not understand how it was they should come into greater trouble than before. They had never known so great and frequent and constant trial. It seemed as if everything went against them. They had looked for advance and triumph and peace and prosperity everywhere; on the contrary, they had come into reproach and shame, partly in their own persons, partly as becoming the companions of others who so suffered. But the apostle takes all this difficulty by the horns, as good as telling them, that their having suffered all this

was simply because it is the right road. These two things, the cross on earth and glory on high, are correlative. As they are companions, so do they test a walk with God; one is faith, the other is suffering. This, he maintains, has always been so; it is no novelty he is preaching. Accordingly the epistle to the Hebrews, while it does put the believer in association with Christ, does not, for all this, dissociate him from whatever is good in the saints of God in every age. Hence the apostle takes care to keep up the real link with the past witnesses for God in faith and suffering, not in ordinances.

In the beginning of Hebrews 11 we are told what faith is. It is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." It is no definition of what it is to believe, but a description of the qualities of faith. "For by it the elders obtained a good report." How could any believers put a slight upon it? "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God;" - a simple but a most sublime truth, and one that man never really found out - that we are entirely dependent on faith for after all. The wise men of the present day are fast giving up the truth of creation. They do not believe that God called all things into being. The greater number of them may use the word "creation," but it must never be assumed that they mean what they say. It is wise and necessary to examine closely what they mean. Never was there a time when men used terms with a more equivocal design than at the present moment. Hence they apply some terms to the work of God in nature similar to what they apply to His work in grace. The favourite thought is "development;" and so they hold a development or genesis of matter, not a creation: matter continually progressing, in various forms, until at last it has progressed into these wise men of our day. This is precisely what modern research amounts to. It is the setting aside of God, and the setting up of man; it is the precursor of the apostasy that is coming, which again will issue in man taking the place of God, and becoming the object of worship, instead of the true Creator. Nor is it that redemption only is denied, but creation also; so that there is very great importance in maintaining the rights and the truth of God in creation.

Therefore it is well to stand clear of all men's schemes and thoughts, ever rising up more and more presumptuously, because they mainly consist of some slight in one way or another on the word of God. A simple word of scripture settles a thousand questions. What the wise men of antiquity, the Platos and Aristotles, never knew - what the modern sages blunder about, without the slightest reason, after all - the word of God has made the possession of every child of His. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

There is no indulgence of human curiosity. We do not know the steps of His work, until we come to the preparation of an abode for man. Nothing can be more admirable than this reserve of God. We are not told the details of what preceded

the great week when God made the man and the woman. I am not going to enter into any statement of facts as to this now, but there is no truth in its own place more important than that with which the apostle commences in this chapter, namely, that "through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God." It is not only that we believe it, but we understand it thereby. There is nothing more simple; at the same time it is just one of those questions that God has answered, and this so as to settle the mind perfectly, and fill the heart with praise. Man never did nor could settle it without the word of God. There is nothing here below so difficult for the natural mind; and for the simple reason that man can never rise above that which is caused. The reason is obvious - because he is caused himself. Therefore is it that men so naturally slip into, or rest on, second causes. He is only one of a series of existing objects, and consequently never can rise above that in his own nature. He may infer that there must be; but he never can say that there is. Reason is ever drawing conclusions; God is, and reveals what is. I may, of course, see what is before my eyes, and may so far have sensible evidence of what exists now; but it is only God who can tell me that He in the beginning caused to be that which now is. God alone who spake it into being can pronounce upon it. This is just what the believer receives, feeds on, and lives accordingly.

Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God." It is possible that the word "worlds," which is a Hebraistic word, belonging to the Alexandrian Jews particularly, may embrace dispensations; but undoubtedly the material world is included in it. It may mean the worlds governed by dispensations; but still that the idea of the whole universe is in it cannot be fairly contested by competent minds. "The worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen" - which would not be the case if it was only a dispensation - "were not made of things which do appear."

Having laid this as the first application of faith, the next question is - when man fell, how was he to approach God? The answer is, by sacrifice. This then is brought before us. "By faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain."

The third point is how to walk with God, and this again is by faith. Thus in every case it is faith. It owns the creation; it recognizes sacrifice as the only righteous means of being accepted with God - the only means of approaching Him worthily. Faith, again, is the only principle of walk with God; as it is, again, the only means of realizing the judgment of God coming on all around us.

Here, it is plain, we have the chief lineaments of revealed truth. That is to say, God is owned in His glory, as Creator of all by His word. Then, consequent on the fall, comes the ground of the believer's acceptance; then his walk with God,

and deliverance from His judgment of the whole scene, in the midst of which we actually are. Faith brings God into everything. (Verses 1-7.)

But then comes far more definite instruction, and, beginning with Abraham, the details of faith. The father of the faithful was the one first called out by promise. At first it was (ver. 8) but the promise of a land; but when in the land he received the promise of a better country, that is, a heavenly, which raised his eyes to the city on high, in express contrast with the earthly land. When he dwelt in Mesopotamia, he had a promise to bring him into Canaan; and when he got there, he had a promise of what was higher to lead his heart above. At the end of his course there was a still heavier tax on him. Would he give up the one that was the type of the true Seed, the progenitor, and the channel of the promised blessing, yea, of the Blessor? He knew that in Isaac his seed was to be called. Would he give up Isaac? A most searching and practical question, the very unseen hinge in God Himself on which not Christianity only, but all blessing, turns for heaven and earth, at least as far as the fallen creation is concerned. For what did the Jews wait in hope? For Christ, on whom the promises depend. And of what did Christianity speak? Of Christ who was given up to death, who is risen and gone above, in whom we find all the blessing promised, and after a better sort. Thus it is evident that the introduction of the last trial of Abraham was of all possible moment to every one that stood in the place of a son of Abraham. The severest and final trial of Abraham's faith was giving up the son, in whom all the promises were infolded, to receive him back on a resurrection ground in figure. It was, parabolically, like that of Christ himself. The Jews would not have Him living. The Christians gained Him in a far more excellent way after the pattern of resurrection, as Abraham at the close received Isaac as it were from the dead.

Then we have the other patriarchs introduced, yet chiefly as regards earthly hopes, but not apart from resurrection, and its connection with the people of God here below. On these things I need not now dwell farther than to characterize all, from Abraham inclusively, as the patience of faith. (Verses 8-22.)

Then, having finished this part of the subject, the apostle turns to another characteristic in believers - the mighty power of faith which knows how to draw on God, and breaks through all difficulties. It is not merely that which goes on quietly waiting for the accomplishment of the counsels of God. This it was of all consequence to have stated first. And for this simple reason: no place is given herein to man's importance. Had the energetic activity of faith been first noticed, it would have made more of man; but when the heart had been disciplined in quiet endurance, and lowly expectancy from God, then he could be clothed with the energy of the Spirit. Both are true; and Moses is the type of the latter, as Abraham of the former. Accordingly we find everything about Moses, as well as done by him, extraordinary. His deliverance was strange; still more his decision and its

results. He goes out, deliberately and knowingly, just at the time of life when a man is most sensitive to the value of a grand sphere of influence, as well as exercise of his powers, wherein, too, he could have ordinarily exerted all in favour of his people. Not so Moses. He acted in faith, not policy. He made nothing of himself, because he knew they were God's people. Accordingly he became just the more the vessel of divine power to the glory of God. He chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward." And what then? "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king." This was in the ways of God the necessary moral consequence of his self-abnegation.

"Through faith he instituted the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them. By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned." These two last verses bear witness to the grace of God in redemption. In the blood of the Lamb, sprinkled on the door-posts of Israel, we see the type of God's judgment of their sins; next, in the passage of the Red sea, the exhibition of His power, which, in the most conspicuous way, saved them, and destroyed for ever their enemies. But whether the one or the other, all was by faith.

But mark another striking and instructive feature of this chapter. No attention is paid here to the march through the wilderness, any more than to the establishment in the land, still less to the kingdom. We have just the fact of their passing through the Red sea, and no more; as we have the fall of Jericho, and no more. The intention here was not to dwell either on the scene in which their waiting was put to the test, the wilderness, or on anything that could insinuate the settled position of Israel in the land. As to the pathway through the wilderness, it had been disposed of in Hebrews 4. The grounds why Canaan could not consistently be made prominent in this epistle as a present thing, but only as a hope, we have already seen.

This deeply interesting chapter closes with the reason why those who had thus not only lived but died in faith did not get the promise: "God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect." What was this "better thing"? Can there be a doubt that Christianity is meant? that good portion which shall not be taken away from those who cleave to the Crucified, who is now exalted in heaven? One can well understand that the apostle would leave his readers to gather thus generally what it must have been. God then has provided some better thing for us. He has brought in redemption in present accomplishment, and at the same time He has given scope for a brighter hope, founded on His mighty work on the cross, measured by Christ's glory as its present answer at the right hand of God. Hence He crowns the noble army of

witnesses with Christ Himself. "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, laying aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking off unto Jesus the captain and completer of faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

This is a different way of looking at His session there. In all the other passages of the epistle the meaning of the word is, that He took His seat, or simply sat down there. It is the fact that there He sat down; but in this place it will be observed that His taking His seat there is the reward of the life of faith. As the result of enduring the cross, having despised the shame, the word for sitting down here has a remarkably beautiful shade of meaning different from what is given in all the other occurrences. Its force implies that it is not merely what He did once, but what He is also doing still. Attention is drawn to the permanence of His position at the right hand of God. Of course it is true that Jesus took His seat there, but more is conveyed in the true form of the text (kekavqiken) here.

This, however, only by the way. Beyond question the Lord is regarded as the completer of the whole walk of faith in its deepest and, morally, most glorious form. Instead of having one person illustrating one thing, another person another, the Lord Jesus sums up the perfection of all trial in His own pathway, not as Saviour only, but in the point of view of bearing witness in His ways for God here below. Who ever walked in faith as He? For indeed He was a man as really as any other, though infinitely above man.

From this practical lessons of great value are drawn. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children." Thus the first part of the chapter shows us simply what God holds out to the new man; but the epistle to the Hebrews never looks at the Christian simply in the new man, but rather as a concrete person. From the beginning to the end of it the Christian in Hebrews is not thus dealt with apart from the old nature, as we may see him regarded in the ordinary epistles of Paul, where the old and the new man are most carefully separated. It is not the case in the epistles of James and Peter, with which so far the epistle to the Hebrews agrees. The reason I take to be, that the apostle meets the Jewish believer where he is, as much as possible giving credit for what was really true in the Old Testament saints, and so in the Jewish mind. Now it is evident that in the Old Testament the distinction was not made between flesh and spirit in the way in which we have it brought out in the general doctrine of Christianity.

## Hebrews 12

The apostle is dealing with the saints as to their walk; and as he had shown how Christ alone had purged the sins of the believer, and how He is on high, as the Priest in the presence of God, to intercede for them in their weakness and dangers; so now, when he is come to the question of the walk of faith, Christ is the leader of that, walk.

Accordingly, this is an appeal to the hearts, which cleave to Christ the rejected King, and Holy Sufferer, who is now in glory above. He necessarily completes all as the pattern for the Christian. But then there are impediments as well as sin, by which the enemy would keep us from the race set before us; whilst God carries on His discipline in our favour. And the apostle shows that we need not only a perfect pattern in the walk of faith, but chastenings by the way. This, he says, must be from a father who loves his true and faulty children: others enjoy no such care. First of all, it is love that calls us to the path that Christ trod; next, it is love that chastens us. Christ never needed this, but we do. He reasons that, while our parents only chastise us the best way they can (for after all their judgment might not be perfect), the Father of spirits never fails. He has but one settled purpose of goodness about us; He watches and judges for our good, and nothing but our good. He has set His mind upon making us, patterns of His holiness. It is what He carries on now. Fully does He allow, as connected with this, that the chastening seems not joyous but grievous. We begin with His love, and shall end in it without end. He only removes obstructions, and maintains our communion with Himself; surely this ought to settle every question for the believer. If we know His perfect love and the wisdom of it, we have the best answer to silence every murmuring thought or wish of the heart.

There is nothing more serious than to set grace against holiness. Nowhere does the apostle give the smallest occasion for such a thought. So here he tells them to "follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: looking diligently lest any man lack the grace of God." It is not a question of the law, which a Jew might naturally conceive to be the standard of the will of God now as of old for Israel. How easily we even forget that we are not Jews but Christians! Reason can appreciate not grace but law; and so people are apt, when things go wrong, to bring in the law. It is quite legitimate to employ it in an à fortiori way, as the apostle does in Ephesians 6. For assuredly if Jewish children honoured their father and mother on legal grounds, much more ought Christian children on grounds of grace.

Another great call was, to beware "lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright." Thus you see, either

corrupt passion on the one hand or profanity on the other, are unsparingly condemned by the grace of God. If the law could show little mercy in such a case, the grace of God views all sin as intolerable.

This leads him, from speaking of Esau's case, to add as a known fact, that afterward, when he desired to have inherited the blessing he was rejected (for he found no place of repentance), though he sought it carefully with tears. That is, he sought carefully with tears the blessing given to Jacob; but there was no room left for repentance, simply in the sense of change of mind; for, I suppose, the word here has that sense, which sometimes, no doubt, it has. In its ordinary usage, it has a much deeper force. Every change of mind is far from being repentance, which doctrinally means that special and profound revolution in the soul when we take God's part against ourselves, judging our past ways, yea, what we are in His sight. This Esau never sought; and there never was one who did seek and failed to find it. Esau would have liked well to have got or regained the blessing; but this was given of God otherwise, and he had forfeited it himself. Arranged all beforehand, neither Isaac's partiality nor Jacob's deceit was able to divert the channel. His purpose utterly failed to secure the blessing for his profane but favourite son. He saw his error at last, and put his seal on God's original appointment of the matter.

And here we are favoured with a magnificent picture of Christianity in contrast with Judaism. We are not come to Sinai, the mountain that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and a voice more terrible than that of the elements. To what then are we come? To mount Zion. And what is its distinctive character as here introduced? If we examine the historical facts as found in the Old Testament story, what is it rises up before all eyes as to Zion? When does it first appear? After the people had been tried and found wanting; after the priests had wrought, if possible, greater corruption; after the king of Israel's choice had reduced them to the lowest degradation. 'It was therefore a crisis after the most painful accumulation of evils that weighed on the heart of Israel. But if people and priest and king were proved thus vain, God was there, and His grace could not fail. Their abject ruin placed them just in the circumstances that suited the God of all grace. At that very moment therefore the tide begins to turn. God brings forward His choice, David, when the miserable end of Saul and Jonathan saw the Philistines triumphant, and Israel disheartened as they had scarce been beyond that moment. The hill of Zion up to this time had been the constant menace of the enemy against the people of the Lord; but in due time, when David reigned, it was wrested out of the hands of the Jebusites, and became the stronghold of Jerusalem, the city of the king. Thenceforward how it figures in the Psalms and prophets! This then is the monument for such as we are. Let blinded Jews turn their sightless eyeballs to the mountain of Sinai. Let men who can see only look there, and what will be found? Condemnation, darkness,



death. But what at Zion? The mighty intervention of God in grace - yea, more than that, forgiveness, deliverance, victory, glory, for the people of God.

For not merely did David receive from Jehovah that throne, but never were the people of God lifted out of such a state of distress and desolation, and placed on such a height of firm and stable triumph as under that one man's reign. He had beyond all mere men known sorrow and rejection in Israel; yet he himself not only mounted the throne of Jehovah, but raised up His people to such power and prosperity as, was never reached again. For although outwardly, no doubt, the prosperity lasted in the time of Solomon, it was mainly the fruit of David's suffering, and power, and glory. God honoured the son for the father's sake. It remained for a brief season; but even then it soon began to show rents down to the foundations, which became apparent too, too quickly in Solomon's son. With Zion then the apostle justly begins. Where is the mountain that could stand out so well against Sinai? What mountain in the Old Testament so much speaks of grace, of God's merciful interference for His people when all was lost?

Rightly then we begin with Zion, and thence may we trace the path of glory up to God Himself, and down to the kingdom here below. Impossible to rise higher than the Highest, whence therefore the apostle descends, to consequences. Indeed we may say that the whole epistle to the Hebrews is just this: we start from the foundation of grace up to God Himself in the heavens; and thence springs the certainty that the stream of grace is not exhausted, and that undoubtedly it will issue in unceasing blessing by  $\square$  and  $\square$  by for the earth, and for the people of Israel above all, in the day of Jehovah.

Accordingly we have a remarkable line of blessing pursued for our instruction here. "Ye are come unto mount Zion," which was the highest Old Testament point of grace on earth. Others doubtless could speak of their Ararat, their Olympus, their Etna; but which boasted of the true God that loved His people in the way that Zion could? But would a Jew infer hence that it was only the city of David he was speaking of? Let him learn his error. "And unto the city of the living God, (not of dying David,) the heavenly Jerusalem" (not the earthly capital of Palestine). This I take to be a general description of the scene of glory for which Abraham looked. He could know nothing of the mystery of the church, Christ's body, nor of her bridal hopes; but he did look for what is called here the "heavenly Jerusalem," that city "whose maker and builder is God." In this phrase there is no allusion whatever to the church; nor indeed anywhere in the Hebrews is there any reference to its distinctive portion in union with its Head. When it says that Abraham looked for the city, it means a blessed and ordered scene of glory on high, which eclipsed the Holy Land before his eyes. This, however, does not mean the church, but rather the future seat of general heavenly bliss for the glorified saints.

Then he adds: "And to myriads of angels, the general assembly" - for such is the true way to divide the verse - "and to the church of the firstborn," etc. This proves that the city of the heavenly Jerusalem does not mean the church, because here they are certainly distinguished from each other, which therefore completely settles all the argument that is often founded on Abraham's looking for a heavenly city. It was not the church, I repeat, but what God prepares above for those who love Him. True, the apostle John uses this very city as the figure of the bride. But this essential difference separates between the city for which Abraham looked and the bride so symbolised in the Apocalypse. When the apostle Paul, speaks of "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem," he means the scene of future heavenly blessedness; whereas when John speaks of the new Jerusalem descending out of heaven from God, he means, not where but what we are to be. The difference is very great. The epistle sets before us the seat of glory prepared on high; the Revelation speaks of the bride represented as a glorious golden city with figures beyond nature. The one is what may be called the objective glory; the other is the subjective condition of those that compose the bride, the Lamb's wife.

Having brought it to see the "church of the firstborn which are written in heaven," the apostle next can only speak of "God the Judge of all." He describes Him thus in His judicial character. The reason appears to be, because he is going to tell us of the Old Testament saints. They had known God in His providence and dealings on the earth, though looking for a Messiah and His day. Hence, therefore, he now introduces us "to the spirits of just men made perfect." These evidently are the elders of olden times. None but the Old Testament saints, as a class, can all be in the separate state: not the church, or New Testament saints, for we shall not all sleep; nor the millennial saints, for none of them will die. The reference is therefore plain and sure.

Then we hear of "Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant" - the pledge of Israel's full and changeless blessing. Lastly, he points "to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better than Abel:" the assurance that the earth shall be delivered from its long sorrow and slavery.

Thus the chain of blessedness is complete. He has shown its the symbolic mount Of grace in Zion, contrasted with Sinai the mountain of law. If the one figured the imposed measure of man's responsibility, which can only but most justly condemn him, in the other we behold the mountain of God's grace after all was lost. Then follows the heavenly glory, to which grace naturally leads; then the natural inhabitants of the heavenly land, namely, the angels - "and to myriads of angels, the general assembly." Then he shows us others higher than these, by a divine call - "and to the church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven." They do not belong to heaven like the angels; but God had an eternal purpose,

which brought them by an extraordinary favour there. And then, in the centre of all, we have God Himself. But having looked up to Him who is above all, he speaks of the highest group next to God in His judicial character, namely, the Old Testament saints. Then he descends to a new or fresh covenant (not kainh", as elsewhere, but neva"), the recently inaugurated covenant for the two houses of the ancient people. Although the blood on which that covenant was founded may be now long shed, when the covenant comes into force for them will it not be as fresh as the day the precious Victim died and shed His blood? The reference here I cannot but regard as exclusively to the two houses of Israel. And as thus were shown the people immutably blessed (for salt shall not be wanting to that covenant) in the scene that will soon come, we finally hear of the earth itself joyful in the curse removed for ever. It is "the blood that speaketh better than Abel." For the martyred saint's blood the earth cried to God for vengeance; but Christ's blood proclaims mercy from God, and the millennial day will be the glorious witness of its depth, and extent, and stability, before the universe.

The rest of the chapter brings in, accordingly, the closing scene, when the Lord comes to shake everything, and establish that blessed day. But although it will be the shaking of all things, not of earth only but also heaven, yet, marvellous to say, such confidence of heart does grace give, that this, which may be regarded as the most awful threat, turns into a blessed promise. Think of the shaking of heaven and earth being a promise! Nothing but absolute establishment of heart in God's grace could have gazed on a destroyed universe, and yet call it a "promise." But it is the language for us to learn and speak, as we are called to rest on God and not on the creature.

### Hebrews 13

The last chapter follows this up with some practical exhortations as to brotherly love continuing; then as to kindness to strangers, or hospitality; finally, as to pity for those in bonds. "Be mindful of those in bonds, as bound with them; and of those which suffer adversity." Again he insists upon the honour and purity of the marriage tie, and the abhorrence that God has for those that despise and corrupt it, and the sure judgment which will come upon them. He presses a conversation without covetousness, and a spirit of content, founded on our confidence in the Lord's care.

At the same time he exhorts the believers as to their chiefs, that is, those who guided them spiritually. It is likely that the Hebrew believers were somewhat unruly. And their relation to their leaders he puts forward in various forms. First, they were to remember those that once ruled them. Those were now gone from the scene of their trials and labours, of "whom, considering the issue of their conversation, imitate the faith."

This naturally leads the apostle to bring before them One that never ends - "Jesus Christ [is] the same yesterday, and today, and for ever." Why should His saints be carried away with questions about meats and drinks? He is the same unchangingly and evermore, as He has ever been. "Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established in grace." See how this word, this thought, always predominates in the epistle. Why turn back to "meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein?"

Had they been taunted with having no altar, possessing nothing so holy and so glorious in its associations? It was only owing to the blindness of Israel. For, says he, "we have an altar," yea, more than that, an altar, "whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle." You that go after the tabernacle (as he persists in calling it, even though now the temple) have no title to our altar, with its exhaustless supplies. To us Christ is all.

But this becomes the occasion of a remarkable allusion, on which I must for a moment dwell. He draws attention to the well-known rites of the atonement day; at any rate, if not of that day exclusively, wherever there was a beast the body of which was burnt without the camp, and the blood carried within the veil. Do you not discern in this striking combination the distinctive features of Christianity? Alas! it is not the dulness of Jewish prejudice only, but exactly what is denied by every system of which men boast in Christendom. For these very features did Judaism despise the gospel. But let not the Gentile boast, no less unbelieving no less arrogant, against true Christianity. Christendom pre-cisely takes the middle ground of Judaism between these two extremes. The mean looks and sounds well, but is utterly false for the Christian. The two extremes, offensive to every lover of the *viâ media* of religious rationalism, must be combined in Christianity and the Christian man, if he is to maintain it unimpaired and pure. The first is, that in spirit the Christian is now brought by redemption, without spot or guilt, into the presence of God. If you believe in Christ at all, such is your portion - nothing less. If I know what Christ's redemption has accomplished for all who believe, I must know that God has given me this. He honours the work of Christ, according to His estimate of its efficacy, as it is only according to His counsels about us for Christ's glory. Of this we saw somewhat in Hebrews 10. And what is the effect of it? As a Christian I am now free, by God's will, to go in peace and assurance of His love into the holiest of all - yes, now. I speak, of course, of our entrance there only in spirit.

As to the outer man also, we must learn to what we are called now. The apostle argues that, just as the blood of the beast was brought into the holiest of all, while the body of the same animal was taken outside the camp and burnt, so this too must be made good in our portion. If I have an indisputable present title of access

into the holiest of all, I must not shrink from the place of ashes outside the camp. He that possesses the one must not eschew the other. In these consists our double present association by faith, while on the earth. The apostle earnestly insists on them both. We belong to the holiest of all, and we act upon it, if we act rightly, when we worship God; nay, when we draw near to God in prayer at all times. Brought nigh to God by the blood of Jesus, we have perfect access, so that there is nothing between God and us; for Christ suffered once to bring us to God, as He intercedes that we may have communion. with Him in this place of nearness. Our being brought to God supposes, and is founded on the fact, that our sins are gone perfectly by His one offering; otherwise no madness is greater than indulging such a thought. If it be not the truth, it would be the height of presumption indeed. But far from this, it is the simple fact Of the gospel. "He suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust," says another apostle, "that he might bring us" - not to pardon, nor to peace, nor to heaven, but - "to God." Compare also Eph. 2. We are brought, then, washed from our sins, to God, and, according to this epistle, into the holiest of all, where He displays Himself. The real presumption, therefore, is to pretend to be a Christian, and yet to doubt the primary fundamental truth of Christianity as to this.

But the bodies of those beasts were burnt without the camp: my place, so far as I in the body am concerned, is one of shame and suffering in this world.

Are those two things true of you? If you have and prize one alone, you have only got the half of Christianity - yea, of its foundations. Are they both true of you? Then you may bless God that He has so blessed you, and given you to know as true of yourself that which, if not so known, effectually prevents one from having the full joy and bearing the due witness as an unworldly and simple-hearted servant of Christ here below. It is true, He does not always call at once into the place of reproach and suffering. He first brings us into the joy and nearness of His presence. He satisfies us with the perfectness with which Christ has washed us from our sins in His blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father. But having done this, He points us to the place of Christ without the camp. "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the. camp, bearing his reproach." This was the very thing that these Jewish Christians were shrinking, from, if not rebelling against. They had not made up their minds to suffer: to be despised was odious in their eyes. Nor is it pleasant to nature. But the apostle lets them know that if they understood their true blessing, this was the very part of it that was inseparably bound up with their present nearness to God, as set forth typically by the central and most important rite of the Jewish system. This is the meaning of the blood carried within, and of the body burnt without.

Let us then seek to combine these two things perfect nearness to God, and the place of utter scorn in the presence of man. Christendom prefers the middle

course; it will have neither the conscious nearness, to God, nor the place of Christ's reproach among men. All the effort of Christendom is first to deny the one, and then to escape from the other. I ask my brethren here if they are looking to God strenuously, earnestly, for themselves and for their children, not to allow but to oppose as their adversary every thing that tends to weaken either of these truths, which are our highest privilege and our truest glory as Christians here below. What a surprise to the Hebrew believers to find such truths as these so strikingly shown out in type even in the Jewish system!

But the apostle goes farther, as indeed was due to truth. These characteristics he proves to be really found in Christ Himself. He is evidently gone into the holiest of all in His own person. But how? What had immediately preceded this, The cross. Thus the cross and heavenly glory must go together. The gracious Lord gives and designs that we should take His own place both in heaven and here. "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp." This is just the closing practical word of the epistle to the Hebrews. God was going openly to set aside the Jewish system, as it had already been judged morally in the cross of Christ. When the Messiah was crucified, Juda-ism was in principle a dead thing: if it was in any sense kept up, it was no more than a decent time before its burial. But now God sends His final summons, founded on their own ritual, to His people who were hankering after the dead, instead of seeing the Living One on He as it were repeats, "Let the dead bury the dead." The Romans will do the last sad offices. But as for you who believe in Jesus, wait not for the Romans; let Judaism be nothing but a corpse, which does not concern you. "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach."

This was a final call; and how gracious! If God had reserved the epistle to the Hebrews until after He sent forth His armies and burned up their city, destroying their polity root and branch, it might have been retorted that the Christians valued the Jewish ritual as loner as it was available, and only gave it up when earthly temple and sacrifice and priest were gone. But God took care to summon His children outside - to abandon the whole system before it was destroyed. They were to leave the dead to bury their dead; and they did so. But Christendom has wholly failed to profit by the call, and is doomed to perish by a judgment yet more solemn and wide-spread than that which swept away the ancient temple.

Another point follows, connected with what we have had before us, and demanding our attention. Instead of pining after that which is about to be destroyed, or repining at the call to go out to the place of Christ's shame on earth, Christianity, which replaces Judaism now, may well cause us to offer "the sacrifice of praise to God continually." There are two kinds of sacrifice to which we are now called. "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, confessing his name. But to do good and

to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." That may have a higher character, these a lower; but even the highest is never to supersede or make us forgetful of the lowest.

Then comes a second exhortation as to their guides, or leading men among the brethren. (Compare Acts 15: 22.) Obey your leaders, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as those that shall give account." There is no sanction here, of course, of the vulgar and outrageous error that pastors give an account of the souls of their flock. It is an idea that superstition hatched, for the purpose of spuriously exalting a clerical order. The meaning is, that spiritual guides shall give an account of their own behaviour in watching over other souls; for it is a work that calls for much jealousy over self, patience with others, painstaking labour, lowliness of mind, and that hearty love which can bear all, endure all, believe all. There is then the solemn admonition of the account they are to render by and by. They watch as those that shall give an account. Now is the time for self-denying labour, and endurance in grace; by and by the account must be given to the Lord that appointed them. And the apostle would that their work of watching might be done with joy, and not groaning for this would be unprofitable for the saints.

But even the apostle felt his own need of the prayers of the faithful, not because he had gone wrong, but because he was conscious of no hindrance to his work from a bad conscience. "Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience; in all things willing to live honestly. But I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner."

Then he commends the saints to God. "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, in virtue of the blood of the everlasting covenant, perfect you in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight "through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for the ages of the ages."

Finally, he beseeches his brethren to hear the word of exhortation. Such is pre-eminently the bearing of this epistle to those who had no such frequent opportunities of profiting by his teaching as the Gentile churches. We can understand, therefore, both the delicacy that thus entreated them, and the meaning of the added words, "for also in few words I have written to you." Nor does it seem so natural for any as the great apostle to inform them of his child and fellow-labourer: "Know that the brother Timothy is set at liberty; with whom, if he come pretty soon, I will see you. Salute all your leaders, and all the saints. They from Italy salute you. Grace be with you all. Amen."

Thus the apostle closes this most striking and precious epistle, brimful to overflowing with that which had an especial and very touching interest to a Jew, but nevertheless needed as certainly by us, and as rich in instruction for us in this day as for those at any time that has passed away. For let me say this as a parting word, and I say it advisedly, because of circumstances that might well be before our hearts, - no deliverance, however enjoyed, no place of death to law, world, or sin, no privilege of union with Christ, will enable a soul to dispense with the truths contained in this epistle to the Hebrews. We are still walking here below; we are in the place therefore where infirmity is felt, where Satan tempts, where we may fail through unwatchfulness. The greater part of the affections of the Christian are drawn out toward our Saviour by all this scene of sin and sorrow through which we are passing on to heaven. If we formed our Christian character practically on such epistles as those to the Ephesians and Colossians alone, depend on it there may not be the hard lines of the law, but there will be very far from the fervent affections which become him who feels the grace of Christ. Be assured it is of the deepest possible moment to cherish the activity of Christ's present love and care for us, the activity of that priesthood which is the subject of this epistle. Holding fast the permanence of the blotting out of our guilt, may we nevertheless and besides own the need of such an One as Christ to intercede for us, and deal in grace with all our feebleness or faults. The Lord forbid that anything should enfeeble our sense of the value and necessity of such daily grace. There may be that which calls for confusion of face in us, but there is unceasing ground also for thanksgiving and praise, however much we have to humble ourselves in the sight of God.

W Kelly

## Comments on the Epistle to the Hebrews by L M Grant

### Foreword

Compared with the subject matter, the question of who wrote this epistle is of little importance; for it deals with the revelation of God's glory in the Person of Christ, and the far-reaching value and significance of His mighty work of redemption. Yet it seems beyond doubt that Paul was the writer, for it is written from Italy, and Timothy, a close companion of Paul, mentioned as expected to travel with the writer (Ch. 13:23, 24). The style and matter of the epistle too can point to no other known writer than the apostle to the gentiles. That he should so write to Hebrews need be no surprise to us either, for despite his special mission, it was his habit in every city he visited, to offer the Gospel to Jews first. Moreover, the object of the epistle is to separate Jewish believers to the Lord Jesus, from the system of Judaism. Peter also speaks of Paul's having written to Jewish believers (2 Peter 3: 15, 16), and no other epistle than this could fit his description.

The profound logic and orderly, discerning arguments of the epistle find a similarity only in the book of Romans; both books similarly also quoting copiously from the Old Testament, in adducing proofs of the truth of Christianity. But Hebrews, in contrast to Romans, comments extensively upon the priesthood and tabernacle service in Israel, specially dwelling upon the spiritual significance of the great day of atonement. This of course would be of vital consequence to Hebrews. not so to Gentile Romans.

Appropriately, the title, "Hebrews" is used rather than "Jews." The former word means "passengers," and denotes pilgrim character. Should Hebrews then object to passing onward from one dispensation of God to another, when the evidence is clear that this great change of dispensation is wrought by the eternal God, who first instituted Judaism?

If justification before God is the great theme of Romans, sanctification is characteristically that of Hebrews. The former delivers fully from the bondage, guilt, and stigma of our former condition, and provides a position of righteous dignity before the throne of God. The latter dwells upon the value of the great atonement by which conscience is purged and the soul set apart from a former vain existence, and brought into the immediate presence of God, there to worship in holy boldness.

It may be remarked that quotations, which differ from the authorized version, are usually taken from the New Translation.

### Chapter 1

In the first verse is compressed admirably the one most vital truth as to the history of man in all past ages; to which Jews would fully agree. God is, without

preliminary, presented as having "in many parts and in many ways" spoken "in time past unto the fathers by the prophets." This was certainly revelation, yet gradually added to, and therefore only partial, not in any sense a complete revelation of God. Let us note too that He was not limited as to the ways in which He saw fit to communicate. Israel well knew this, and should have expected, in the advent of their Messiah, a revelation no less distinctive and worthy of so great a God. But they were determined to circumscribe the action of God by their pre-conceived assumptions, and bind Him by human tradition.

Thus, through the perversity of man's heart, the former partial revelations of God's glory have been used as a basis and excuse for rejecting the full revelation of Himself in Christ Jesus, rather than (as Divinely intended) to prepare hearts for the greater glory of this manifestation. Indeed, the entire value of the Old Testament lies in its anticipation of something infinitely better than could then be brought to man. Nothing but the blindness of willful unbelief can deny so evident witness.

Assuredly, Israel did look for something, but every prophecy she regarded from a viewpoint of mere self-interest, looking for glory to invest the nation itself, rather than expecting the glory of God to be revealed in a marvelous and blessed manner.

But verses 2 and 3 proceed immediately to summarize this present-day transcendent manifestation of the glory of God in the Person of His Son. It is not simply that God is seen thus speaking in the words spoken by the Lord Jesus, but that in Him personally God has spoken; for the words are literally, "hath in these last days spoken unto us in Son." This may not be correct English, but exactly expresses the mind of God, which is the important thing. Prophets had but borne audible witness to God's glory: the Son has Personally manifested that glory.

But let us examine now the seven-fold description of this glory. First, "Whom He hath appointed Heir of all things." This appointment is consistent with the official capacity of the promised Messiah. The public assuming of such an office is future, of course; but the Old Testament had prophesied of One to occupy this place (Ps. 89:27-29).

This one must of course fulfill every qualification, and (secondly) "by Whom also He made the worlds." He must therefore have creatorial power. The Old Testament too declares this. Psalm 102:25-29 is explicitly said to be the words of God to the Son (Cf. Heb. 1:10).

Thirdly, "Who being the brightness of His glory" involves His Personal revealing of the light of the glory of God. This is not reflection of the light, but "effulgence," - the light itself, - just as the light from the sun reveals the glory of

the sun, which in itself is too bright to behold. Isaiah 9:6 strongly presents in prophecy this glorious representation of the glory of God: "His Name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Father of Eternity, the Prince of Peace."

This prophecy too intimates the fourth glory declared in Hebrews 1: "the expression of His substance." So fully is this true that He Himself is called "the Mighty God, the Father of Eternity." Certainly none could express the very substance of God save God Himself. Nor is it simply that He expresses the substance of God, but is Himself the expression. He is Himself the perfect imprint of the substance of God. It is therefore impossible to ascribe to Him too high a place.

This too is evident in the fifth glory mentioned: "upholding all things by the word of His power." If He is the original Creator, He must be also the eternal Sustainer of all things. Nothing can subsist except by the Word of His power, which maintains all things in existence. This is indicated remarkably in Isaiah 40, the first part being the witness of John the Baptist to Christ, and verses 9 to 11 declaring His coming: "Behold, the Lord God will come," and the remainder of the chapter occupied with the greatness of this One, Who measures the waters, the heavens, the dust of the earth, and maintains the order of the heavenly orbs, so that "not one faileth." Only blindness could ignore this magnificent prophetic reference to the promised Messiah.

The sixth glory is that acquired in His advent in the world, "having made (by Himself) the purification of sins." The unique greatness of this work, consistent with the greatness of His Person, is here insisted upon. Many are the prophecies of this marvelous sacrifice of Himself, notably Isaiah 53, Psalm 22 and Psalm 69.

Finally, in the seventh place, "sat down on the right hand of the majesty on High." Such exaltation is impossible for any mere creature, but testifies rather to the august dignity of His Person and His work. Psalm 110:1 had prophesied of this in clearest terms: "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit on My right hand until I make thine enemies Thy footstool." This is not only the due recompense of His mighty work, but rightful public recognition of the glory of His Person.

Verse 4 involves these two aspects of His glory. Having humbled Himself to a place lower than angels, He is now, as Man, exalted by God, "taking a place by so much better than the angels" (New Trans.). Thus His work of self-humiliation has earned Him a place of highest majesty. But this was only consistent with the fact that "He inherits a Name more excellent than they." Because He is the Son of the Father, He is Heir of all things. "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand" (John 3:35).

How fully and wonderfully does this blessed One fulfill every detail of the minute qualifications laid down in the Old Testament. The heart can only marvel at so full a summation of His glories in so brief a compass. How worthy of God, Who, in the revelation of His Son, has revealed His own full identification with His Son.

But a second section in the chapter (beginning with verse 5) now develops further His glory in contrast to angels, noted in verse 4. He must not in any way be confounded with the greatest of created beings, for he is infinitely above them all. Though angels "excel in strength," (Ps. 103:20) they are but creatures, and worshippers, not objects of worship. This section quotes seven times from the Old Testament.

First, "For unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee?" The importance of this public announcement at the time of His birth must not be underestimated. False Christ's have arisen, and after foisting themselves upon the public, have dared to claim to have been miraculously born of a virgin: but in no such case would a public announcement have been made at the time of birth. To attempt such an imposture by some such declaration at the time of birth of a child would of course be too hazardous: the child would not likely turn out in the mold desired by its wicked promoters. But Luke 2:3 gives us historically the public announcement of the birth of the Lord Jesus: "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour which is Christ the Lord" (vs. 10). This is confirmed also independently by the wise men, who had seen His star in the east (Matt. 2:1, 2). Let us weigh well then the force and power of this first quotation.

"And again, I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son." This second quotation (from 2 Sam. 7:14) again presses the relationship of Christ to the Father. This was most needful to be established beyond question. If in the first case, this is publicly announced, in the second it is the consistent testimony of His entire life on earth. The Father owned Him fully, bearing witness to His words and walk, with signs and wonders, which in not one instance failed Him. He proved to be Son of the Father in practical character, in every detail of life. Twice also from Heaven the Father announced His delight in Him: "This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased."

But then is more: "Again, when He bringeth in the firstborn into the world, He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him" (Psa. 97:7). The Psalm speaks of "the presence of the Lord of the whole earth," therefore the advent of Messiah, and calls upon the highest created intelligences to "worship Him." When thus He "was manifest in flesh, seen of angels," there is no question but what He was rightly the Object of their adoring worship. (Cf. Luke 2:13, 14).

"And of the angels He saith, Who maketh His angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire." This fourth quotation insists that angels are simply creatures, made by the hand of God, however awesome their power. Him whom they worship is infinitely greater than they.

The fifth quotation now rises to the blessed climax of the truth concerning this glorious Person: "But unto the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows." It has been evident that all that has gone before must involve the fact that He is God. Hence, this is now asserted in plainest terms, when God addresses the Son as "God," whose throne is for ever and ever. Psalms 45 is quoted, where the King, the Messiah of Israel, is thus addressed by God.

The eternity of His nature assures the eternity of His throne, in contrast to all mere human thrones. In further contrast is His sceptre of righteousness; for history has proven this woefully lacking in every other kingdom.

Yet if verse 8 declares His glory as God, verse 9 no less beautifully indicates His true Humanity. In lowly experience on earth He is proven in perfection to love righteousness and to hate iniquity. This glory in Humanity is also in contrast to all others. Therefore God, His God, has anointed Him with the oil of the Holy Spirit, as above all others with whom He has condescended to link His Name in fellowship. If in grace He has "fellows," yet He is above them. This anointing as One unique and apart from all others is seen when He was baptized by John, and the Spirit, like a dove, abode upon Him. The actual assuming of the throne is still future, of course, but the anointing is already His, as typified in David's anointing long before he was exalted to the throne of Israel. Yet, at this very occasion (the baptism of John) He linked Himself in grace with repentant Israelites. How beautifully is His solitary glory and dignity maintained while He finds delight in identifying Himself with His "fellows."

Verses 10 to 12 add the sixth quotation (from Psa. 102:25-27). Here His eternal glory is seen in the visible creation, and also in contrast to it. He who is addressed as "God" is now addressed as "Lord," the former denoting His supremacy, the latter His authority. He has founded the earth and formed the heavens, and they therefore declare His glory (Psa. 19:1). But "they shall perish." In their present form He has decreed they shall not continue, and their very destruction serves to emphasize that He is the eternal One: "Thou remainest."

Creation is but as a temporary garment with which He has clothed Himself in partial display of His glory: it will be folded and changed. "But Thou art the Same,

and Thy years shall not fail." This grand title of our Lord is often used, and Ch. 13:8 briefly states its eternal significance: "Jesus Christ the Same yesterday, and today, and forever." In eternity past, in present manifestation to faith, in future, visible glory, His very Name is "The Same." His "years shall not fail." The decline of age that so affects creation has no bearing upon His blessed Person. These verses quoted from Psalm 102 are words addressed to Him by God, just as is true in verse 8.

The seventh quotation completes this series: "Sit on My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool." He thus occupies this place of present, highest exaltation, in contrast to angels. This is His position upon the Father's throne, which could be given to no created being, for it is the throne of Deity. In the Millennium He will take His own throne as Son of Man, but prior to this His title to such a throne is abundantly proven by His present exaltation to the highest throne of all. And here in calm patience He waits for the subjugation of His enemies, - not that there is the slightest doubt as to this, for this present throne involves His own sovereign control of all things, His wise and timely disposal of every issue according to Divine counsels. Blessed, holy dignity!

It may be remarked that His literal coming for His saints at the rapture does not in any sense interrupt this session on the Father's right hand, for this exaltation does not mean a confining to a strict location, no more than we should expect a sovereign on the throne to be always literally seated. But He remains infinitely exalted, although not yet publicly so, as will be the case when all enemies are put under His feet and He sits upon the throne of His glory (Matt. 25:31).

He therefore is in the place of absolute authority, but angels are "all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." Theirs is the place of servants simply, their place infinitely lower than His, just as in person they are as much lower. But it is nevertheless a blessed place they occupy, in being delegated to minister in temporal protection, comfort, sustenance, to those destined to eternal glory. Doubtless we owe to angelic ministry far more than we discern in matters of physical strength and wellbeing, yet as spirit beings their ministry is completely veiled, and they are content to remain unknown to us, that glory for this may be given only to God. Blessed service indeed! Compare their ministry to the Lord Jesus in Mark 1:13, and an angel strengthening Him (physically of course) in Luke 22:43.

## Chapter 2

The first four verses of this chapter now press upon us the appropriate conclusions that must be drawn from so transcendent a revelation of the glory of God. "For this reason we should give heed more abundantly to the things we have heard, lest in any way we should slip away" (N. Trans.).

The truth has been given by report, and absolutely authenticated by God's authority. How worthy of the complete concentration of our minds and hearts! Is it possible the intelligence can become so deadened as to ignore facts so demonstrated? Yes. Pressure of personal circumstances among Hebrews who had professed Christianity had induced some to renounce what they had at first acknowledged, and to return to the dead forms of Judaism. The seed of the Word of God had sprung up, but without roots, it withered quickly away. These were not born again, as was proven by their "slipping away" from the very profession of Christ. This was not simply conduct unbecoming to a Christian, but turning wilfully away from Christ Himself, in cold unbelief. Similar cases are contemplated in Ch. 6:4-6 and Ch. 10:26-29.

The warning is fearfully solemn: "For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him?" The law, "ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator," or as Stephen said, "received... by the disposition of angels," demanded sternest measures of judgment for every infraction of it. Jews knew this. But since this was true, and now in these last days God has provided so great a salvation for the guilty, what possible hope can there be of escape, if this great salvation is ignored? How avoid the just retribution of God's anger if this marvelous revelation - infinitely greater than law - should be despised?

Nor was the message communicated by angels, but by the Lord Himself, borne witness to by many who heard Him, and further witnessed by God's accrediting these messengers by granting "both signs and wonders, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will." Here was threefold competent witness; for the character of these "signs, wonders and miracles," was not questionable, as is the case with modern imitations. Indeed so indisputable were the facts that the most bitter enemies of Christ would attempt no denial, though set in opposition to the plainest testimony. Compare Acts 4: 15-18, and 5:16-24. No shadow of doubt was allowed to remain as to God's full approval of the establishment of Christianity publicly. Only unreasoning prejudice on the part of Jews could reject it. How can such folly hope to escape the dire consequences?

As examples of "signs," speaking in tongues is significant of an understanding established between those formerly at odds (e.g. Jews and Gentiles), an understanding found only in the mutual knowledge of Christ; and healings were significant of the more vital healing of the soul by the knowledge of Christ. As to wonders, it is clear from Acts 3:9-11 that a sign may also be a wonder. All three elements (signs, wonders, miracles) may be evident in one case, though some may more emphasize one than another. Signs intimate a spiritual teaching;

wonders, the startling effect on man; miracles the fact of natural law being (not suspended, but) transcended by a higher power.

Gifts of the Holy Spirit were remarkably evident in power in the beginning of the book of Acts. The boldness and power of Peter and John in proclaiming the Word of God greatly impressed the Jewish council (Acts 4:13). Compare also Stephen in Ch. 6 and 7, Philip in Ch. 8. These are but samples of the many marked gifts of the Spirit which bore overwhelming testimony to the truths of the doctrine of Christ. Nor was God a respecter of persons, for He thus gifted unlearned men, "according to His own will," and those of every walk of life were chosen, a procedure contrary to that which human energy would have attempted.

Verse 5 now introduces a second division of the book, beginning with sound, admirable deductions based upon the truths already asserted, and upon further quotations from the Old Testament.

If angels have been superseded by the witness of the Lord Jesus and of His disciples, was this itself consistent with Old Testament prophecy? The answer is most plain: "Unto the angels hath He not put in subjection the world (or age) to come, whereof we speak." Though angels had a prominent place in the dispensation of law, it was prophesied otherwise as to the coming millennial kingdom, the age to come.

Verses 6 to 8 are quoted from Psalm 8: "What is man that Thou art mindful of Him, or the son of man, that Thou visitest Him? Thou madest Him a little lower than the angels; Thou crownest Him with glory and honour, and hast set Him over the works of Thine hands. Thou hast put all things in subjection under His feet." No doubt in a prime sense this was true of man as originally created of God. But man had completely forfeited this place even of dominion over the earth, through his miserable disobedience to God; and at the time the Psalm was written, it could have reference to no one but a Man of a different stamp than Adam, One whose perfection could delight the heart of God. Moreover the prophecy states that God has put all things in subjection under His feet,-not only things on earth. Let us remark too that He is referred to, not only as man, but "the Son of Man," which was not true of Adam.

But the Psalmist might well express wonder at the consideration of man's being so exalted, for the form of man's being is decidedly that of weakness and limitation, in contrast to angels. Verse 7 refers to this, that man has been made a little lower than the angels. And such was the condition in which the blessed Lord of Glory was pleased to tread this earth. Yet now all things are put under His feet, which includes angels too, "for He left nothing that is not put under Him." If we do not



as yet see this in public display, it is vitally true, and will yet be displayed in the coming kingdom.

"But we see Jesus." This is faith's language: we see with the eyes of a believing heart,-the Object the Person of the Son of Man at the right hand of God. Since it is truth, then truth in the heart responds to it. He who was made (voluntarily) a little lower than angels, though in nature infinitely higher than they, is now crowned with glory and honor.

But our verse explains the expression "made lower." This was an absolute necessity "for the suffering of death." Angels cannot die, for they are spirits, their form of being therefore higher than that of man. They "excel in strength." Man, by reason of his bodily condition on earth, is characterized by weakness and many limitations, and is capable of dying-nay, subject to death because of his sin. Death being God's sentence against sin, no redemption was possible except as the blessed Son of God in grace became truly "Man," lower than angels, to suffer death for all. Such is the immeasurable grace of God! Rightly therefore, as Man, He is now crowned with glory and honor, exalted above angels. If in Manhood He has become lower than angels, this was but for the suffering of death: now in Him we contemplate Manhood as exalted above angels. It is this Man who will rule over the earth in the age to come.

From verse 12 to 18 this Man's perfection as a Saviour is beautifully shown. For this He must be a sufferer: "For it became Him, for Whom are all things, and by Whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." It was morally consistent with God's nature that, in order to bring many sons to the bliss of His presence, He should lead His own Son through the sufferings and death of the cross, to make Him, in resurrection, the "perfect" originator of salvation. Notice that it is not man's blessing that is most important here, but what is becoming to God, that is, His own glory.

In the performance of this work, the Lord Jesus is seen as sanctifying (or setting apart) every believer to God. But this too involves His own voluntary unity with them: "For both He that sanctifieth, and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren." They are of one Father, - He by very nature and title, we by His infinite grace. By nature, it is impossible that He should call us brethren, but through virtue of His perfect salvation, He is not ashamed to do so. But let us repeat, this He does in grace: for us to call Him "Brother" would be unbecoming abuse of grace.

Verse 12 quotes from Psalm 22 words of the Lord Jesus spoken in resurrection: "I will declare Thy Name unto My brethren; in the midst of the assembly will I sing

Thy praises" (N. Trans.). How beautifully linked to this is His message to Mary Magdalene, "Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father and your Father; and to My God, and your God" (John 20:17). He does not say, "Our Father," for there remains an infinite distinction between the Master and His brethren by grace; but there is yet an established and blessed unity. Primarily it is He Himself who sings praises to God, in the vibrant, joyous delight of an accomplished redemption; but it is the sacred privilege of His redeemed to join with Him in this triumphant song.

He Himself is 'in the midst of the assembly,' not simply for our blessing, but for the glory of God. This unfeigned, joyous ascription of praise to God is the prime reason for the gathering of the church, the assembly of the living God. Let us zealously guard against its degeneration into anything less than this. Indeed this spirit of praise should be evident even when gathered for prayer in seeking the gracious blessing of God, or in the ministry of the Word of God to the saints. But the remembrance of the Lord Jesus in the breaking of bread,-the central expression of the fellowship of the body of Christ, -is intended exclusively for the bringing of praise, thanksgiving, adoration to our God and Father through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Verse 13 quotes first from 2 Samuel 22:3, to stress the dependence of His perfect Manhood: "I will put My trust in Him." This too is beautifully seen in Psalm 16, which begins, "Preserve Me, O God, for in Thee do I put My trust." As such too, however, His delights are with the sons of men, and it is His joy to say, as in Isaiah 8:18, "Behold I, and the children which God hath given Me." Let us observe again that His own unique distinction is first noted, and this enhances the wonder and beauty of His grace in so uniting with His saints. He receives these children as a gift from God. It may be remarked that a similar expression is used when, speaking as the Divine Son of God, He says, "I have manifested Thy Name unto the men which Thou gavest Me out of the world" (John 17:6). In the former case they are a gift from God in virtue of His sufferings and death: in the latter they are a gift from the Father to His Son because of the eternal worth of His Person.

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy (or annul) him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." To be thus identified with them, it was imperative that He should first take part in the same bodily condition as they, flesh and blood, in order that His blood might be shed in sacrifice, that by means of death He might cancel the dread power of Satan over men. Nothing but this could righteously meet the case. Nor could anything but love have energized a sacrifice like this. Let us note that here we have a second reason for the

sufferings of Christ. In verse 10 the glory of God is in view: in verse 14 the destruction of Satan.

This involves deliverance then for those who were "all their lifetime subject to bondage," that is, the bondage of sin, by which Satan had wielded his power over mankind. "The sting of death is sin," and so long as this question remained unsettled, "the fear of death" held souls in bondage. He is speaking here of believers of course, for unbelievers know nothing of present deliverance from this fear and bondage, as do all whose trust is in the precious blood of Christ. Observe too that this bondage is during "lifetime," not after death. Even the unsaved are not in such bondage after death. Satan can exert no more authority over them: they are rather imprisoned in bondage to the exclusive authority of God.

But previous to the death of Christ even believers were held in a distinct measure of bondage through fear of death. There are some brightly shining exceptions, in cases where various saints exercised a faith that carried them far beyond the limits of the partial revelation they had received; and Jacob for instance shows thorough tranquillity in the face of death. This was not the common state, nevertheless, of which the godly Hezekiah is an example, weeping in bitterness when told to put his house in order in view of his death (Isaiah 38:1-3; 17).

"For He does not indeed take hold of angels, but He takes hold of the seed of Abraham" (N. Trans.). In grace He has seen fit to identify Himself, not with angelic beings, but a class lower in creative order,-mankind,-yet that class of mankind characterized by faith, the "seed of Abraham," a family in which the heart of God the Father finds pleasure.

"Wherefore it behoved Him in all things to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things relating to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (N. Trans.). The full and blessed reality of our Lord's humanity is thus strongly emphasized for us. This is of course humanity in untainted perfection and purity, in which the foreign element of sin could have no place; yet nevertheless true humanity, as to spirit and soul and body. Only thus could He be a High Priest, a Mediator between God and men. Entering into their physical condition of weakness and dependence, He is thoroughly qualified by experience to have merciful consideration for their need, and to act faithfully for them in consistency with such a relationship. But this must of necessity first require that the question of His people's sins should be faced, and as true Man and true Priest He had made "propitiation for the sins of the people." Indeed, in reference to this great work, He is both Priest, Sacrifice and Altar. Propitiation is a third reason here noted for the death of Christ,-first God's glory, secondly Satan's destruction, thirdly, propitiation, which last denotes the satisfying of the claims of God's throne in regard to man's sin.

This verse is clear to the effect that He must be a Priest in order to sacrifice Himself. Chapter 8:4 is no contradiction to this: "If He were on earth He should not be a priest, seeing there are priests that offer gifts and sacrifices according to the law." In this latter case the apostle speaks of an official position, which on earth was given to the sons of Aaron, but now in resurrection given to the Lord Jesus in Glory,-"saluted of God all High Priest after the order of Melchisedek." This is an office only assumed in Glory.

But in Person, if not in office, His character of Priest manifested in all His life of ministry to mankind, and in His voluntary sacrifice of Himself. For His own sacrifice was not an official act, but one purely voluntary, prompted by the perfect love and grace of His heart,-not in any sense required of Him, except by the very goodness of His own nature. Thus in our present verses, His moral nature and character are emphasized; so that when later He is seen in resurrection to be given official glory from God as High Priest, it has been fully established that He is worthy to be utterly trusted to fulfill that office in perfection. Blessed, holy, gracious Lord!

For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted. He is able to help those that are tempted." Having proven Himself in lowly experience, - suffering rather than yielding to temptation, - He is Himself a strength to His suffering people, able to give grace that they should bear rather than succumb to temptation. Having such an High Priest, what a shame that we should ever give way when tempted. But here we have a fourth reason for His sufferings, - that He might have perfect sympathy with His suffering saints. How full and orderly is the precious Word of God!

### Chapter 3

"Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling." Let us keep in mind that this is addressed to Jewish believers. How great a contrast to that which their own religion had taught them! Earthly hopes now they must leave behind, and as "holy brethren," set apart by virtue of identification with the blessed Person of the Lord Jesus, were to recognize themselves as partakers of the heavenly calling. Israel in rejecting their Messiah had forfeited all title to their longed-for earthly inheritance; but God had in grace provided a transcendently greater blessing for those who in their hearts received His beloved Son.

Now, in properly considering Him - the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, - the significance of this is more clearly seen. It will be observed that both the Deity and the Manhood of the Lord Jesus are vitally involved in what is now presented to us. Also, both Moses and Aaron are seen to be types of this blessed One: hence there are comparisons, while yet, these being noted, there is greater

emphasis upon the contrasts in this great Person to the lesser glories of Moses and Aaron. Indeed angels have before been set aside in His favor, and certainly men ought to be.

"Consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Jesus" (N. Trans.). The official title "Christ" evidently had no place here in the original, for the insistence here is upon His Personal Name of moral grace and beauty, in both the lowliness and dignity of true Manhood. But as the Apostle, He is One sent of God, to maintain the sovereign rights of God in reference to the people. As the High Priest He is One come in grace to maintain the cause of the people in reference to God. In these Moses typifies the first, Aaron the second.

"Who is faithful to Him that appointed Him, as also Moses was faithful in all His house." This faithfulness to God is true of Him both as Apostle and High Priest, but He is compared here first to Moses, as He is later to Aaron (Ch. 5:4). Doubtless the house here referred to is the tabernacle, in which was represented God's relationship with the people, and in which Moses was careful to conform to the pattern given him of God.

But if verse 2 is comparison, verse 3 is contrast. Moses had been faithful in God's house; but Christ is the Builder of the house, worthy of greater honor than the house itself, and therefore than any servant in the house. "For every house is builded by some man; but He that built all things is God" The force of the passage is simply that a house testifies to the fact that someone must have built it. Creation testifies also that it has a Builder greater than itself. "He that built all things is God." Note that this again proves the Deity of the Lord Jesus, Whom verse 3 declares the Builder. It is not that all creation is the object in view in what is said here, but rather that, if He built all things, then He certainly built that of which the tabernacle is a type, "the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."

Beautiful it is however to consider the faithful devotion of Moses as a servant in God's house, a servant obeying the word of his Master, in order that the house (the tabernacle) should rightly represent the God who in grace dwelt there. The reader may profitably consider Exodus 39 and 40 as to this matter, where it is evident that Moses was extremely diligent to see that every detail conformed to the commandment of the Lord. "According to all that the Lord commanded Moses, so the children of Israel made all the work. And Moses did look upon all the work, and behold they had done it as the Lord had commanded, even so had they done it: and Moses blessed them" (Ex. 39:42, 43). Eight times in Ch. 40 the expression is repeated, "As the Lord commanded Moses."

Moreover, our verse 5 continues, "for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after." The tabernacle was a type of that which was to be revealed afterward (and has now been revealed). Thus the servant Moses has borne testimony to the truth of God even in that which was but a type of the church. And if so, does our God expect any less faithfulness to His Word in the church itself? Indeed, how diligent ought every servant of the Lord be that the Word of our God be faithfully followed in its entirety. Let the faithful testimony of Moses be taken to heart, and bear its proper fruit in encouraging the saints of God today.

"But Christ as a Son over His house." The word "own" is not correctly inserted here, for he is speaking all through of God's house, though of course that house has different character today, for it is the antitype rather than the type. But here is One who, because of equal dignity with the Father, is to be trusted utterly to order the house in perfect wisdom and truth. "The Father loveth the Son, and hath committed all things into His hand." This is far above Moses, or any other servant.

"Whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." The apostle here is certainly not seeking to unsettle faith, but to encourage it. But he would definitely unsettle anyone who rested upon anything but Christ. All false confidences would eventually leave souls bereft and hopeless. Profession must necessarily be tested, and its reality is proven only by continuance. Some of the Hebrews who had publicly embraced Christianity were giving it up, and returning to Judaism. Did they actually then have part in the house of God? No: their giving up proved they had never really been brought in faith to the Lord Jesus. Faith is not a mere cloak one may put on and later put off again. It is rather the vital gift of God (Eph. 2:8, 9), which purifies the heart, remaining as the settled attitude of its possessor; and it is proven only by holding fast the confidence and rejoicing of hope firm unto the end.

"Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith,) Today, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation in the wilderness." One who has merely made a profession without reality may easily harden his heart. The wilderness history of Israel served to bring out what was actually in their hearts. Just so, if one is a mere rocky ground hearer, the seed might spring up quickly, then when persecution or tribulation arises because of the Word, the truth of the Word is as quickly renounced, the heart hardened against what the conscience had previously approved. Christ is given up because He was not actually in the heart.

"The day of provocation" refers to man's provoking God to anger. Their rebellion was occasioned by their circumstances of trial, but this was only the occasion, not the reason. If man excuses himself by protesting that he was provoked to rebel, let him think again that such rebellion is a reason for God's being rightly provoked to judge him. They tempted God: He bore long with them. They proved Him: times

unnumbered He proved faith-ful and gracious in spite of their selfwill. They saw His works of grace and power forty years. But all this, to-gether with His patient forbearance they treated with contempt, and time thus proved their hearts false and ignorant of God's ways.

This was the general condition of the people. They were all surrounded by and partook of the benefits of God's goodness in publicly blessing the nation; yet proved themselves cold in heart toward the God Who fed them. Doubtless there were individuals who differed but he speaks generally. God was grieved with that generation.

"So I swear in My wrath, If they shall enter into My rest." Both in the Psalm quoted (95) and here the verse is translated, "They shall not" etc., but the actual form is a question. Is the lesson not simply this, that since man dares to question the truth and faithfulness of God, by his proud rebellion, then does not God have a right to question man's title to blessing? In other words, profession must be questioned, or tested, to ascertain its reality.

Such being the case, how urgent is the warning of verse 12: "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God," (or "in falling away from the living God"). He is not speaking of weakness of faith or of failure in details of conduct, but of an evil heart of unbelief, faith not being present at all. This is the cause of falling away, a fall into a state of cold rejection of One previously acknowledged as the Son of God. Only faith can maintain this position of firm confidence in the blessed Son of God; so that a mere lip profession that lacks this vital root of the matter, may very soon give place to a callous reaction of deliberate apostasy, from which there is no recovery: the living God is rejected, and the only alternative is the cold, cheerless state of death.

"But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." If in the case of those truly born again, this exhortation would stimulate and encourage their faith, it might also, in the case of any who lacked faith, be the means of awakening and bringing them in reality to the Lord Himself, and thus prevent so dreadful a fall. For sin will harden, however innocent its face may at first appear; and those deceived by it will choose eventually to mock at faith. The expression "while it is called today" insists that the present is the time of testing, which may abruptly end at any moment.

"For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end." Similarly to verse 6, the emphasis is on continuance as the proof of whether one has actually in his first profession been made a partaker of

Christ. If an engrafted branch has really "struck" into a stock so as to partake of the sap of the tree, it will continue as a live, flourishing branch. If the "beginning" was not however a vital, real connection, the branch will wither and die.

Verse 15 refers again to "the provocation" in the wil-derness, the limited time of testing; and the urgent entreaty here is evident: in the brief moment men are given to be proven, a false step may be eternally fatal. But if none in the wilderness had been exceptions to the general state of provocative unbelief, it might be cause for de-spair; but "not all that came out of Egypt with Moses" were guilty of this. "Some, when they heard, did pro-voke." The Word of God was despised: how solemn a sign!

"But with whom was He grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness?" Patience bore long during this testing time, but because they had despised the land of promise, they died in the wilderness. Solemn consideration for those who today lightly esteem the heavenly glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the heavenly calling of His saints. It is important to make clear however that the issue in the wilderness was that merely of an earthly inheritance and temporal blessings, not the heavenly inheritance and eternal blessings. Falling away from Christ today is im-measurably more dreadful evil than Israel's despising the pleasant land: Israel's rebellion called for temporal judg-ment; but rebellion against Christ eternal judgment.

Verses 18 and 19 expose to our view the root of this rebellion on the part of Israel: it was not mere passive lack of faith, but active unbelief. The testimony of God had been declared: they had heard it, and had seen pub-lic evidences of its trustworthiness; but through fear of present discomfort and opposition of the Canaanites, they chose to disbelieve God. He told them to enter the land: they refused: only unbelief kept them out.

#### Chapter 4

"Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." This admonition is a continuation of Ch. 3. The promise has been left us, but the promise is to faith: any who come short of it do so only through unbelief. Let us take solemnly to heart the significance of these lessons.

"For unto us was the Gospel preached, as well as unto them." Indeed, to us it has been preached in fulness: to them only "in part:" we therefore stand in a place fully as responsible as they - and more so. "But the Word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it" That Word is itself invincible, eternal, entirely unaffected by the kind of reception it receives; but he who will not receive it cannot receive profit from it.

"For we which have believed do enter into rest, as He said. As I have sworn in My wrath. If they shall enter into My rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world." Let its notice as to "we which have believed" there is absolute affirmation, for the promise is absolute. Yet this is followed by an "if," a question, -even though in the counsels of God the basis of rest had long been established. The true believer rests upon this basis; but the question is raised with those who have dared to raise a question as regards the truth of God's promise, that is, the unbeliever. The believer's position therefore is absolutely secure, dependent on the truth of God's Word; but the unbeliever has the oath of God to the contrary) The blessing is dependent upon God's work, the value of which is available to everyone, by faith; but unbelief is a base refusal of the blessing, because it refuses God's Word.

Verses 4 to 10 must be considered together, to be properly understood. "For He spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all His works. And in this place again, If they shall enter into My rest. Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief; Again, He limiteth a certain day, saying in David, Today, after so long a time; as it is said, Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts. For if Jesus (Joshua) had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into His rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from His."

Verse 4 illustrates the fact of how full of deeper meaning may be a brief Scriptural statement of a historical fact. God's rest intimates that He had in mind an eternal rest pursuant to all His working with this present creation. Verse 5 then quoting Psalm 95:11 indicates that some would not enter into His rest. Verse 6 therefore concludes that "some must enter therein." God's rest was not merely for His own enjoyment, but He had decreed that this was to be shared with others. The latter part of the verse shows that those who had first opportunity did not enter in. Doubtless this has direct reference to the unbelieving generation in the wilderness, but may be rightly applied to Israel the nation when the Gospel was preached "to the Jew first," and hence be a solemn warning to present day Hebrews.

However, verse 7 goes further than verse 6, and quotes from David, "after so long a time." Even those who did enter into the land and had been so long in it, had not really entered God's rest, for there they were admonished not to harden their hearts. It was Joshua who had brought them into the land (Jesus is the Greek form of the same name), but he had not given them this rest, for after their advent there, another day is spoken of. The rest therefore, as verse 9 shows, is still future.

Verse 10 explains this. In the fullest sense, it is only in the eternal state that we shall rest from our own works. All things there will be entirely of God, with no admixture of man's works. Toil will have no place, for toil is the result of the marring of creation. "His servants shall serve Him" infers not toil, but perfect tranquility in service. There is another sense of course in which the believer has entered into rest; that is, so far as conscience is concerned, and the guilt of his sins, faith in Christ has already given him rest, and he has in this regard ceased from his own works: he no longer depends on his own works to procure blessing from God. But fulness of rest is future.

"Let us therefore use diligence to enter into that rest, that no one may fall after the same example of not hearkening to the Word" (N. Trans.). The matter is of vital consequence, and well worth applying ourselves in serious earnestness. A negative attitude is fatal, for it ignores the clearly spoken Word of God. If there were any indifferences to the glory of the revelation of God in the Person of Christ, the testing of tribulation or persecution would expose it: that person would fall. The only protection for the soul is a positive, real faith in the blessed Son of God, an ear opened to receive the Word of God as living truth. Who can dare claim the knowledge of God if he refuses Scripture as the revelation of God? There is certainly none other, and it remains the one solid foundation for faith.

"For the Word of God is living and operative, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and penetrating to the division of soul and spirit, both of joints and marrow', and a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (N. Trans.). How this transcends all human writings. which become mere stagnant pools in contrast to the constantly flowing freshness of this river of the water of life. Its every part is full of fresh vitality, ready to meet every demand of faith upon it, for if we fail to find fresh blessing, wisdom, encouragement, from any part, this is our own failure, for the living truth is there. Moreover, it is pregnant with energy that begets active response and results where there is faith: it is operative.

More than this, however, it cuts: it is no respecter of persons. A two-edged sword cuts both ways. If one would use it, he must be prepared for its cutting in regard to his own conduct and doctrine just as to that of others. It pierces and divides, that is, penetrating beneath the surface of things, it distinguishes in finest precision between things that differ. Soul and spirit could never be distinguished by mere observation or human wisdom. Yet the Word of God clearly discerns between the two, attributing to the former all that expresses feeling, emotion, passion; and to the latter intellect, reasoning, understanding, conscience. These two entities in man are entirely above natural science, though natural science actually bears witness to the necessity of their existence. But joints and marrow are more naturally understandable, and the scientist knows the distinction, the one being external, the other the necessary internal ingredient by which the joints

operate effectually. This is but one sym-bolic illustration then of the Word's character of dividing in any realm between outward form and inward operation. How we need this for the guidance of our own souls!

But more: it discerns the very thoughts and intents of the heart. In these things we are all too likely to be self-deceived, and in order to maintain self-respect will seek to persuade ourselves that our motives are actually better than they are; or to hide our actual intentions or desires under a plausible cover of avowing that we want the leading of the Lord! But let us honestly read the Word of God, and it will expose to us these secret work-ings, and make manifest the counsels of the heart. This is strikingly seen in Jeremiah 42, where Johanan and the remnant of Israel required of Jeremiah as to the will of God, declaring their absolute intention of obeying God's Word. But the Word given them also discerned the actual dissembling of their hearts, (vs. 20, 21), and Jeremiah told them they would not obey the Word of God, but do their own will. Then their brazen actions proved the Word of the Lord to be right, but they excused themselves by denying it to be the Word of God! How little does man suspect the actual deceit of his own heart! May God give us to judge ourselves by His Word, the only trustworthy standard. It can be a grievous snare to us to assume that our preferences are consistent with the Word of God, then when the Word is given us to the contrary, to object that it must be a wrong translation or wrong interpretation, and thus dismiss it without honest inquiry.

But verse 13 follows on to say, "neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do." While he is speaking of the Word of God, yet he says, "His sight," not "its sight." Does this not emphasize the fact that God's Word is virtually Himself. It expresses Him as nothing else on earth can do. "Thou hast magnified Thy Word above all Thy Name" (Psa. 138:2). This does not of course mean the physical Bible, but God's mind and will revealed in the Bible. If men profess to honor the Name of God, then His Word must be given supreme place in their lives. Indeed, it is our one means of knowing God. And it brings us under the light of His own countenance, fully exposed by infin-ite light and wisdom. This can be welcome only to faith: unbelief is terrified of such eyes of perfect penetration: and seeks to avoid God's eyes by closing its own eyes!

The last expression of the verse is however inescap-able, "the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do." To close the eyes or the ears now will not affect our having to do with Him. He will not retire from the scene, to indulge man's love for darkness. How indescribably better to welcome those eyes now than to have them expose all the hidden things of darkness at the Great White Throne; and the end eternal remorse!

Verse 14 begins a distinct division in the book, in which the Heavenly Priesthood of Christ is dwelt upon, and His eternally finished work of propitiation, in contrast with the Aaronic priesthood on earth, the work of which was never finished. This subject continues to the end of Ch. 10.

"Having therefore a Great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast the confession" (N. Trans.). The fact of His High Priesthood has been briefly mentioned at the end of Ch. 2, and in Ch. 3:1: now the subject is to be fully devel-oped. As Aaron on the day of atonement passed through all the tabernacle, so the Lord Jesus has passed through the heavens, to the very throne of God, the ultimate in exaltation. This is our Great High Priest upon Whom faith depends for the establishing of an eternal relationship with God: He cannot fail; therefore what folly it would be to give up the confession of His Name. So firm, so unshakeable a foundation calls for the utmost holding fast of our confession.

"For we have not an High Priest not able to sympa-thize with our infirmities, but tempted in all things in like manner, sin apart" (N. Trans.). Though now exalted (and what joy to know Him as in the Glory!), yet He has previously passed through the circumstances of earth's sorrow, trial, distress, and in fullest measure, so that He understands through experience all the sorrows and trials of His saints, -"in all points tempted," not from within, but from without. For He was without sin, and certainly the corrupting influences of evil had no place in His holy body, - no sickness, disease or malady of any kind. But he has moved amid such circumstances, has felt the sorrows, has borne the sicknesses, in the sense of feeling in deepest sympathy for those so afflicted. Blessed compassion indeed! And His heart remains as tender and sympathetic as in all that wondrous path of grace. In Him too we know there was perfect, pure re-sistance of every temptation that might tend to over-whelm faith. And the secret of our own resistance is communion with Himself.

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." This is no mere self-confidence, which would be "strange fire" (Lev. 10: 1, 2), but firmest con-fidence in the Lord Jesus, - no trepidation or cringing apprehension, but a calm (though reverential) sense of being heartily welcome. For we find the majestic throne of God to be in truth a "throne of grace." While His great glory is maintained, yet His grace is there dispensed in fullest measure. The blessed sacrifice of the Lord Jesus is the basis of this character of grace attaching to the throne of God.

There is a distinction here drawn between obtaining mercy and finding grace to help in time of need. Mercy is that heartfelt compassion that comes into the circum-stances of sorrow or trial; it regards one as in such cir-cumstances;

whereas grace is active favor, a power that lifts one above his circumstances. Note Ephesians 2:46 in this regard. Man's condition of misery is seen in verse 3, then mercy and love in verse 4, and the active work of grace in verses 5 and 6, raising up and seating together all saints in the heavenlies, in Christ. Blessed communication of Divine favor. And such grace is constantly available in practical life below. What real, encouraging incentive to constant, effectual prayer!

## Chapter 5

"For every High Priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins." The apostle of course refers to the priesthood of Aaron and his sons, which is typical of the priesthood of the Lord Jesus, and first noted are some definite comparisons. Being ordained for men in things pertaining to God indicates a provision from God's hand to care for man's interests as regards his relationship with God. The offering of gifts and sacrifices for sins was the chief work of the high priest. These things are preeminently true of Christ. But comparison ends here, for Aaron's priesthood was for earth alone and the offering of his sacrifices only of a temporary formal value; while in contrast Christ's priesthood is eternal, and the value of His work eternal.

"Who can have compassion on the ignorant and on them that are out of the way." is we know blessedly true of our Lord, and infinitely more so than any earthly priest. But here again comparison ends, for of Aaron and his family it is said: "he himself also is compassed with infirmity. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins." Aaron was to sympathize with the people because his nature was the same, and his offerings were as necessary for himself as for them. The sympathy of our Lord is rather the result of His omniscient wisdom and of His lowly humiliation in voluntary suffering and death, - entering into our circumstances in pure grace. Wondrous contrast indeed! And His sympathy is more full and pure than could be that of the most tenderhearted son of Aaron.

"And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron" It is God exclusively who decides who is fitted for this place of holy mediation between God and man. Man has not an iota of choice in this appointment. In human affairs, it is common that both sides in reference to any discussion, must agree as to a mediator, but in this matter God alone can be trusted to make the proper appointment, and He reserves this to Himself.

"So also Christ glorified not Himself to be made an high priest; but He that said unto Him, Thou art My Son, today have I begotten Thee." This appointment too is fully of God, but it is not mere external appointment. The very announcement by

God at His birth, declaring the proper Personal glory of His Son, implies that in Person He is essentially God's High Priest. There is nothing similar to this in Aaron. No personal attributes had the slightest bearing on his priesthood, which was continued by mere natural succession.

Here however we must distinguish between official appointments and that which our Lord is by nature. Some have insisted that Christ was not an high priest on earth, assuming this from Ch. 8:4. But there he speaks of official priesthood, which on earth was confined to the sons of Aaron. In this the Lord Jesus could have no part. Yet our present verse is plain to the effect that in Person He was priest by the very fact of His incarnation. When God announced Him as His Son, this was actually glorifying Him as High Priest. But it was not yet official appointment, which must be necessarily of a character far higher than Aaronic priesthood, - not earthly, but heavenly.

This is now referred to in verse 6, which is the actual official announcement of His High Priesthood: "Thou art a Priest forever after the order of Melchisedec." This is a quotation from Psalm 110:4, which must have awakened the wonder of any godly Jew who read it. For Melchisedec was a priest long before Aaron, and though only briefly mentioned in history (Gen. 14), yet the evident approval of God was upon that history: he was "priest of the Most High God." Here was an order independent of Aaron, and previous to Aaron, yet an order that had no place in the nation Israel on earth. Wonderful indeed is the reason for this, for this man was typical of, not an earthly, but a heavenly priesthood, which is fully entered into by our Lord only in His resurrection.

For verses 8 and 9 most beautifully show that in His earthly path He assumed no official place whatever, but rather a place of lowliest humiliation: "Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him Who was able to save Him from (or 'out of') death, and was heard in that He feared. Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered."

All of this is the blessed moral proof of His Person as One fully qualified for an eternal Priesthood. The verses are transcendently lovely in showing that He was really (if not officially) the High Priest of God, for He offered up prayers and supplications, - a true priestly work. Indeed, Heb. 7:27 also speaks of His sacrifice on Calvary as a Priestly work: "He offered up Himself," - not a work required because of official position, but the willing outflow of His own nature of pure love and grace.

But further, was not all His earthly path one of godly preparation and proof as regards His qualifications for an eternal priesthood? His ability to take the lowest place in suffering, in faithful dependence upon the living God, even unto death, has marvelously proven Him worthy of the highest exaltation, worthy to receive, beyond the reach of death, an unchangeable priesthood.

Thus, He was saved "out of death," not saved from dying, but in resurrection saved out of that state to which His unselfish devotion had willingly descended. His prayers were heard because of His unswerving piety and devotion to God, and He was raised from the dead in righteousness. None other could fulfill such blessed qualifications: this is the Priest we need, Him whose intercession with God can never fail, He who has learned in experience what obedience really means, - learned this by the things which He suffered. "Though He were a Son," and therefore in a place of dignity and glory, accustomed to command, yet He has taken the place of Servant, learning experimentally the true character of obedience, in suffering; and moreover an obedience exquisitely perfect. Wonderful grace! wonderful condescension on the part of the Lord of Glory!

And having been perfected, became to all that obey Him Author of eternal salvation; addressed by God as High Priest according to the order of Melchisedec." This will be seen to compare with Ch. 2:10: "perfected through sufferings" This experience in suffering was necessary to qualify Him perfectly as the Author of eternal salvation; and in resurrection this preparatory rigorous experience is seen to have been perfectly completed in every respect. His accomplishing of eternal salvation too is on behalf of "all that obey Him" His obedience is the pattern of theirs. This includes all believers. It does not mean that they obey Him in every detail, but rather that, in submission of heart they yield to Him "the obedience of faith:" it is in other words the proper character of every believer to obey. Certainly a believer ought to be true to character in everything; but this is his character.

Verse 10 therefore is the definite salutation of God in appointing Him to His present exalted place of High Priest, an eternal appointment according to the order of Melchisedec. Here is an office unchangeable, not passing to another, never to be shared with another, and hence in infinite contrast to the office of Aaron.

"Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing." The very brevity of Melchisedec's history (in Gen. 14) and the lone comment of Psalm 110:4 ("Thou art a Priest forever after the order of Melchisedec") should surely have stirred the exercise of every godly Jew with desire to know the reason for this. And ought not every Scripture stir our own hearts with longing to know the mind of God in it? But just as it was hard to

interpret these things to the Hebrews, so often we find interpretation too difficult. And why? Simply because of dullness of hearing.

The apostle will go on to speak of Melchisedec in ch. 7; but first he must deal with this affliction that so prevents our glad reception of the precious truth of God. "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat" (or solid food). Among many of the Gentiles to whom Paul preached there had been far more healthy response and growth than among Jewish believers in their own land. Earthly aspirations and national pride were no small hindrance to spiritual growth: the mind set in the wrong direction will have its dulling effect upon sight and hearing. At least they ought to have been able to teach fundamental principles of the grace of God, but had relapsed to a point of needing such teaching themselves. Let saints of God take this to heart today, and be prepared for the "solid food" of the Word of God.

"For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness; for he is a babe. But solid food belongeth to them who are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." It should be only briefly that we are confined to elementary principles, as a babe must be for a time confined to milk. Not that we should ever lose our taste for "the sincere milk of the Word" (1 Pet. 2:2), for even the simplest things require constant exercise and spiritual digestion; but there must be the addition of good solid food to produce proper growth and strength. This calls for skill in the use of the Word of God, and healthy exercise of the senses in discerning between principles of good and evil. It is no mere mental stimulus or progress, but a moral and spiritual condition that is not dormant, but subject to the stirring of soul-exercise.

## Chapter 6

Verse 1 of this chapter is not properly translated in the Authorized Version, and it should be evident that we must never leave "the principles of the doctrine of Christ." Divine principles and sound doctrine must be unalterably the vital basis of all Christianity. But the New Translation reads rightly, "Wherefore, leaving the word of the beginning of the Christ, let us go on (to what belongs) to full growth, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and faith in God, of the doctrine of washings, and of imposition of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment; and this will we do if God permit."

Though Christ had come, and the glory of God had been so revealed in Him, yet Jewish believers, being zealous for the law, were as yet babes occupied with those things that formerly pointed to Christ, - the sign-posts of Old Testament doctrines, - rather than with Christ Himself. This could give no perfection, or mature growth.



Let us not turn back to engage our attention with the signposts but go on to where the sign-posts direct us, the full knowledge of Him in Whom all perfection is found. The teaching of the Old Testament is a foundation for the more vital teaching of Christianity. The law itself called for "repentance from dead works," by the very fact of its condemnation of evil. It called for "faith toward God," but it did not reveal "the glow of God in the face of Jesus Christ." It had its ceremonial "baptisms and laying on of hands," - formal cleansings indicating the need of moral cleansing; formal identification with the offering of animals, etc. (Cf. Lev. 1:4), typical of a vital identification with Christ in His great work of atonement. "The resurrection of the dead" was a well-known doctrine. Law itself demanded such a doctrine, for its claims of justice and equity were not met in the brief span of man's earthly existence: there was an accounting yet to be made. (There was however no teaching nor understanding of a "resurrection from among the dead," that is, of the distinct resurrection of saints at the coming of the Lord.) "Eternal judgment" too is a doctrine that law required and bore witness to, for if the authority of God is despised, His wrath against such rebellion must be consistent with His very nature; it must be eternal. These then are elementary principles preparatory to the revelation of the Person of Christ.

But the apostle adds a most serious condition as to "going on to perfection," - "this will we do, if God permit." Faith has in it a maturing energy and will go on to full growth. But there are other conditions in which God will not permit this "going on to perfection." This is elucidated in verses 4 to 8, where the case is plainly one of mere profession without actual faith, a profession deliberately abandoned in defiance of every clearly witnessed truth which had once been outwardly embraced. In so solemn a case, God will judicially harden, and allow no recovery and therefore no progress.

"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again to repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame." Let us note this well, that here is a class of persons whom "it is impossible to renew again to repentance." These are not merely ignorant souls who have been linked with some denomination, then lost interest in it. Nor are they true believers who have become lax in their ways and have "left their first love," needing to be restored to the joy of their salvation. But they are those once privileged with all the outward blessings of a Christianity that at that time was pure, fresh and vigorous, and have known its precious truths; then have callously, deliberately refused it.

First, "they were once enlightened," but though mentally enlightened, the light had not penetrated the heart. Secondly, they had "tasted of the heavenly gift." But

in tasting they had not eaten; and having tasted they knew what they were refusing. Thirdly, "were made partakers of the Holy Ghost." The word for "partakers" may be rightly rendered "companions," and implies that they had intimate association with the manifest power of the Spirit in the early church; but in spite of so great witness, had not "received the love of the truth," so that Romans 5:5 was never true of them: "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us." They were partakers in an outward sense merely, never had the Spirit of God indwell them. Fourthly, "and have tasted the good Word of God." Here again, tasting was not receiving, no actual assimilation of it, no "drinking in" (Cf. vs. 7). The fifth of these privileges which gave them such responsibilities is that they had tasted "the powers of the world to come." Miraculous powers had accompanied the institution of Christianity particularly in Jerusalem, - powers that have their place properly in the Millennial age: they had witnessed these, so that any desertion of Christianity in this case could only be deeply culpable guilt.

Their "falling away" therefore in verse 6 is their turning deliberately against the marvelous and clearly attested truths they had once professed to embrace. This is apostasy. There remains no possibility that such souls as this will be "renewed again to repentance:" so rebellious a stand against known truth incurs the judicial blinding of God. We must not however infer that this is true of every case of profession of Christianity, which may be given up. For today there are no such marked public evidences of the truth of Christianity as in those early days. Present-day Christendom has compromised its purity: its freshness and vigor have gone. Its corruption and division are in great contrast to its inception in the blessed power and liberty of the Spirit of God. Yet there is still solemn warning in these verses. If one has actually known the truth of Christianity and the reality of its being of God, then deliberately to turn against the Lord Jesus is to seal his own doom. This is, in personal attitude, to "crucify the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame," - to willingly give approval to His crucifixion and rejection by the world. This would compare with the "sin against the Holy Ghost," which is never forgiven.

"For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but that which beareth thorns and briars is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned." As these two types of earth differ fundamentally, so is the line drawn between true believer and false professor. To "drink in the rain," the earth must be pliable and porous. Where the plow has done its cultivating work, the implanted seed will respond to the gentle rains and bear fruit. So the stirring work of the Spirit of God prepares by true repentance that which is then called "good ground," and the fresh water of the Word of God is taken into the soul, bearing fruit and receiving blessing from God.

But where the rain from heaven is not drunk in, the arid ground produces thorns and briars, - only abortive attempts at fruitfulness. So a heart untouched by the blessed work of repentance, not drinking in the pure Word of God, may make some show of Christianity for a time, but will in the end bring forth what is harmful rather than good. The thorns will be burnt, for they will not be allowed to remain to cause hurt and damage. But the person who produces them, actually choosing them in preference to the good he has known, must suffer the same dread judgment of God.

But if the first 8 verses are a solemn test of profession, and warning against a mere outward adherence to Christianity without reality, the remaining verses of the chapter are of the utmost, sweetest assurance and encouragement to the true believer. "But beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak." How beautifully calculated is such a verse to appeal to all in whom faith is a reality. Faith will produce better things, things consistent with salvation. For those things produced by an apostate can never accompany salvation, proving that he never had known salvation.

"For God is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward His Name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." The very nature and character of God is such that it is impossible for Him to overlook the evidences of true faith. On the one hand He is perfectly righteous to reject a profession that shows no faith, but on the other hand His very righteousness requires that He fully recognize every "work and labor of love" shown "toward His Name." Such motives of love can be the result only of faith in Him Personally: and the eternal assurance of the believer is vitally bound up with God's perfect righteousness. He can forget nothing that is the actual fruit of "love toward His Name." This was publicly seen in one's treatment of the saints of God. Persecution and reproach was at the time rigorous, and those who would persist in ministering to the welfare of the saints would expose themselves to the enemy's hatred. Thus faith was a necessity for continuance.

"And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end." Diligence was there, but he desired it on the part of every individual among them: only such endurance would evidence "the full assurance of hope;" for if one would apostatize from Christ, he would prove himself utterly devoid of any assurance of the hope of Christianity. "The hope" is of course anticipation of the future, but with "full assurance,"-no element of uncertainty.

"That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." Lax indifference to the glory of God's revelation in the Person of His Son is inexcusable. Others had avoided slothfulness, and had

maintained faith and endurance; both New Testament saints (such as leaders mentioned in Ch. 13:7) and the grand examples of faith in the Old Testament, as seen in Ch. 11. Such faith is worth our wholehearted following; for the promises were given only to faith, and faith alone will inherit them.

"For when God made promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself, saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise." This quotation comes from Gen. 22:15-18. How manifestly it is intended to contrast with Hebrews 4:3: "As I have sworn in My wrath, if they shall enter into My rest." In this latter case the oath of God raises a solemn question as to those who in unbelief have questioned God's faithfulness. But here in Ch. 6 how strong an oath from the mouth of God assures Abraham of His unconditional blessing, because Abraham believed God. God swore by Himself. The entire glory of God then is involved in this great oath. Wonderful, unchangeable, absolute certainty! And if the fulfillment of the promise was long delayed, yet this waiting time would but prove the reality of the faith that believed God: "he patiently endured."

"For men verily swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife." Far more importance thus is attached to an oath than to merely the word of man. Thus, grace on the part of God deigns to make this solemn oath, to give us unshaken assurance of His blessing. Indeed, His word is fully as certain as His oath, but the very fact of His oath is condescension of tender compassion toward man, in desire for our fullest certainty. How marvelously gracious He is!

"Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." Let us note first that His counsel is immutable: there is absolute impossibility of change. The oath actually adds nothing to the Word, but only confirms it. But this beautifully displays the abundant goodness and willingness of God's heart to give every encouraging assurance to the heirs of promise. His Word is immutable, and of course His oath also is immutable: it is impossible for Him to lie. But this faithful consideration is for the "strong consolation" of the believer, who in dire need has "fled for refuge" to Him in whom alone is hope.

"The hope set before us" is heavenly in contrast to Jewish earthly hopes, - "an anchor of the soul both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil." Let us observe that this hope allows no element of doubt, but involves rather the utmost certainty of anticipation. What an anchor of the soul! Stability,

consistency, steadfastness will be ours in proportion as our souls lay hold upon the blessed reality of such hope.

A striking illustration of this verse was known in the days of sailing vessels. Particularly when the harbor entrance was narrow, a little boat called "the forerunner" would carry the anchor of the larger vessel into the harbor, and cast the anchor there. Then winding in the anchor cable, the vessel was drawn on a straight course into the harbor.

"Whither the Forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an High Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec." If the veil involves some measure of obscurity, yet we know the blessed One who has entered there, and this assures our being drawn unerringly there, the wind and the waves of circumstance being of little consequence in this regard. This One who in lowly Manhood on earth has proven unchangeable, faithful, stable, - Jesus - (Name of unspeakable sweetness!) is rewarded in Glory with the dignity of an official, unchangeable Priesthood, "after the order of Melchisedec." Thus, both in perfect grace and perfect faithfulness the interests of His saints are presently and eternally cared for.

It will be noted that the necessary digression of the apostle begun at Ch. 5:11 is now concluded, and he returns to the precious consideration of the Melchisedec Priesthood of the Lord Jesus.

## Chapter 7

"For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him: to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all: first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem which is, King of peace: without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually." The brief record of Melchisedec found in Genesis 14 is as a shining light appearing momentarily and vanishing. But only thus is God's purpose served As typical of Christ's present official Priesthood in resurrection, this record is exquisitely beautiful. First, Melchisedec means "King of righteousness," and secondly, "King of Salem" means "King of peace." Being the one perfect upholder of righteousness, Christ is also the one true Source of peace. The two cannot be divorced. And He is the one Mediator between God and men, the High Priest upon the throne of God. As Melchisedec blessed Abraham, bringing forth bread and wine for his refreshment after the stress of his contest with the kings, so the Lord Jesus, in the present day of grace, ministers to His saints the memorials of His wondrous death. for sustenance in an evil world, and for protection against

the world's seductions, as instanced in the offer of the king of Sodom to Abraham (Gen. 15: 21, 22). Abraham, in response to Melchisedec's grace, rendered him a tenth of all the spoils, not as a legal requirement, but in willing-hearted recognition of his superior position. We cannot fail to see a typical character in this.

Verse 3 does not imply that Melchisedec personally had no parentage, no beginning or end, but that the record has designedly omitted any reference to these things, in order that he might be a striking type of Christ. He is not (as some have imagined) the Lord Himself, "but made like unto the Son of God." Since there is no record of his death, this implies that the Melchisedec priesthood is perpetual. How good to observe that this perpetual priesthood is so shown to have been in God's thoughts long before the introduction of the temporary priesthood of Aaron and his sons in Judaism. But only by means of these many omissions as to Melchisedec's history could this man serve as a type of Christ as Son of God. How intricately beautiful is the Word of God in its wisdom and precision!

"Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils." What profound significance this should have for an Israelite! Abraham, the highest, most honored of all Israel's progenitors, had himself fully acknowledged another as greater than himself!

"And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham." While Abraham had given tithes, yet the Levites, who came out of the loins of Abraham, were commanded to take tithes of their Hebrew brethren. In Abraham they were subordinate to Melchisedec: under law their brethren were subordinate to them. How clearly this shows that law was an inferior thing to the Melchisedec priesthood, and therefore only temporary in character.

'But he whose descent is not counted from them, received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises. And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better. And here men that die receive tithes; hut there he receiveth them, of whom it is witnessed that he liveth. And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes paved tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him." Thus Melchisedec, long prior in time to Levi, received tithes from Levi's great father, and conferred blessing on him, as one himself greater. Lovely picture of the blessing of the Lord Jesus Christ bestowed on the man of faith!

The Levites also received tithes until they died, at which time this dignity ceased. This order of things was continually interrupted by death: how then could the

order itself be permanent? But now, the true Receiver of tithes, the true Blessor, is the One of whom it is truly witnessed that He liveth. Melchisedec is a type of this only in the fact that Scripture gives no record of his death. Christ's Priesthood is permanent, because he lives.

Moreover, inasmuch as Levi's progenitor, Abraham, payed tithes to Melchisedec, then we conclude that Levi did so, for he was at that time "yet in the loins of his father." The entire legal system is therefore seen to be inferior to the blessed Person whom Melchisedec typifies, the Lord Jesus Christ.

"If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priest-hood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron?" Here the apostle adds another strong and conclusive proof from the Old Testament that a change of the priesthood and of the law was imperative. "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law." Perfection is a vital subject in Hebrews, and one which the Jew must fully approve. But was it found in the law? Impossible! for if so why did the law bear witness that another priest should rise of an order not known under the law? Law in fact excluded all others from the priesthood except the line of Aaron; but it prophesied of a different order entirely. Moreover, if the priesthood were to change to a completely different order, then the law must change: God's methods of dealing would certainly conform to the character of the priesthood He instituted.

"For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood." Indeed, King Uzziah, of the tribe of Judah, for his daring to enter the temple in a priestly capacity, was immediately smitten of God with leprosy (2 Chron. 26:16-21). And the Lord Jesus while on earth sought no place whatever in the official priesthood; made no suggestion of assuming the place or duties of a priest in the temple.

Nevertheless, Scripture had established the fact that Israel's Messiah must be of the tribe of Judah; that the Son of David would sit upon David's throne in perpetuity (Isa. 9:6, 7). And more than this, Zechariah 6:12, 13 boldly says of this same blessed Person, "He shall be a priest upon His throne."

"And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest, who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. For He testifieth, Thou art a Priest forever after the order of Melchisedec." The type is the more complete when we consider that Melchisedec was both king and priest. The Aaronic priesthood could never

fill the former qualification, for the king could not rise out of Levi; but this lone, striking statement in Psalm 110:4 opens out wonderfully the truth of the necessary change in the order of priesthood.

This new priest must be constituted so, not by the law of a carnal commandment, - that is, a law governing the flesh in its condition subject to decay and death, - "but after the power of an endless life." He must be One Personally superior to death, though indeed He has in voluntary grace passed through it for our sakes, triumphed over it in the power of an endless life, which law could never have, nor give.

"For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof. For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God." In one respect therefore the dispensation of law was weak and unprofitable. While it was perfectly just and holy, hard and inflexible, yet it had no strength to introduce righteousness among men. True, it condemned unrighteousness, but was utterly weak as regards providing any remedy: it could expose the terrible loss that man had incurred by sin, but could provide no semblance of profit. It could change nothing: it made nothing perfect, but rather confirmed the hopelessness of the actual condition that existed. Therefore, how infinitely greater is the "better hope" which brings perfection with it. Of course, this perfection is in the living Person of the blessed Son of God, Him whose endless life is the very essence of power and profit, Who in pure grace communicates life and eternal blessing to those once under sin and the sentence of death. And thus indeed "we draw nigh unto God," in contrast to the rigid distance that law had maintained.

But another great contrast in these two orders of priesthood must be noted. "And inasmuch as not without an oath He was made priest: (For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by Him that said unto Him, The Lord swear and will not repent, Thou art a Priest forever after the order of Melchisedec) by so much was Jesus made a surety of a better covenant." An oath involves what is binding and unalterable; hence no oath was made at all in reference to the induction of priests of Aaron's line; but it has been made in reference to Christ. Such an unchangeable oath then means that He is the surety of a better covenant, a covenant sure and unalterable.

And to this another contrast is added: "And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: but this Man, because He continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood." Law required many priests, that is, High Priests: the new covenant allows but One. This was impossible under law, of course, for death intervened. But how blessed to contemplate this Priest, who "continueth ever," and His priesthood therefore unchangeable. All of these

details are perfectly interwoven in marvelous consistency, bearing witness to the minute accuracy of the Old Testament as well as the New.

"Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come 'unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them." We may observe here how vitally the perpetuity of our salvation is bound together with the perpetuity of His Priesthood. This is salvation in its fullest and all-inclusive character, not simply the initial salvation of the soul, nor present salvation from the evils and pitfalls that beset the Christian path; but both of these, beside future salvation out of this world and for eternal glory. Blessed fulness indeed, and dependent utterly upon Him who "ever liveth to make intercession." Does this mean eternally dependent? Indeed so: and we should not want it to be otherwise, for it is dependence upon One eternally dependable.

"For such an High Priest became us, Who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens." Aaron and his sons were not at all suited to meet our actual need. The High Priest fully becoming to us must have infinitely higher characteristics. First, in character He must be holy, having unvarying love of good and hatred of evil. Secondly, in conduct He must be harmless, having no element of disregard for the need or welfare of others. Thirdly, in contact He must be undefiled, not in any measure contaminated by circumstances of corruption. Fourthly, His communion must be "separate from sinners," His path one that drew a clear line of demarcation between Himself and those in a course of sin. All these are seen beautifully in our blessed Lord in His entire path on earth, and of course in no other. But fifthly, He must be "made higher than the heavens." A mere earthly level of priesthood would not do. He must be given a position higher than all others, everything being subordinate to His authority, that He might use all things for the welfare of those for whose blessing He is appointed.

"Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people, for this He did once, when He offered up Himself." One who must sacrifice daily could never actually meet the need of our souls, for the daily repetition only hears witness that the need has not been met. The first part of the verse then speaks strictly of the Aaronic priesthood, under which order the priest must offer both "for his own sins, and then for the people's." The concluding phrase is the blessed contrast seen in the Lord Jesus. His sacrifice is perfectly completed: "this He did once when He offered up Himself." The eternity of His Person gives eternal value to His blessed work. In this the believer has rest. "For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated (or perfected) for evermore." Here is an added testimony as to the weakness of law: it appointed men who have infirmity as high priests. A system

in the hands of failing creatures must be a failing system. But "the Son" is again seen in beautiful contrast: in resurrection, having accomplished propitiation, He is perfected forever. Indeed, in life on earth, He has proven Himself without infirmity, and now in resurrection as superior to death, - perfect in every respect as High Priest forever.

## Chapter 8

"Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: we have such an High Priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens: a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man." Another contrast now appears in ch. 8 between Aaron and Christ: not only is the Priest Himself of a higher and perfect character, but the ministry He introduces is "more excellent" than that of Aaron (see verse 6). But the first verse would focus our attention upon "such an High Priest," exalted to the highest possible place of glory. For if He is indeed "a minister," He is more than that - the Object of fullest worship and adoration. But being "a minister of the sanctuary (or of the holy places) and of the true tabernacle," His ministry is of universal character, eternal, purely and fully of God. The earthly tabernacle was but a faint picture of this, for though God's pattern was followed with utmost care, it was yet actually the work of men's hands, its ministry therefore temporary. For the tabernacle is symbolic of the universe. The inner sanctuary typifies Heaven itself, the ark therein a type of the throne of God. The outer sanctuary would indicate Israel, the priestly nation, as in the millennium, in closest outward relationship to God. The court would speak of the rest of creation. Actually, in the coming day, all of creation will be affected by the High Priestly work of the Lord Jesus, but its character is Heavenly, for He Himself has entered the "Holiest of all," now in the presence of God for us. This is a great, universal ministry, therefore, and not one confined to one nation under heaven.

But in verse 3, a comparison is again noted: "For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this Man have somewhat also to offer." Since this is the necessary character of a priest, then certainly this High Priest must have an offering to present to God. In this case, the apostle does not speak of His offering Himself up in death, but of a present offering. "For if He were on earth, He should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law." Here again is contrast. He could not be an official priest of an earthly sanctuary, for this was confined to the line of Aaron. His official priesthood now is far above this. Note that the verse does not say that He was not a priest on earth; "but if He were on earth He should not be a priest." His present priesthood has no place now on earth, for He is officially High Priest now. As we have seen, in moral character He always was a Priest, but not officially on earth at all. Similarly, even on earth He was actually King of

Israel; but He will not officially take His throne as such until a yet future day. These distinctions ought to give no difficulty.

Priests on earth however, who are linked with Israel's legal system, "serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith He, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount." The word "example" here may be rightly translated "representation." Moses was given no light or indifferent task. He was not allowed in one iota to change the pattern God gave him, however the children of Israel might have felt about it or considered that some things might be improved upon in their eyes. This was to represent heavenly things, and only God could be depended on to give instructions. How solemn a word for the church today also, as regards true order according to God. Sad indeed that in too many cases man's thoughts have been allowed to qualify and alter the truth of God concerning the order of the church. This is a gross insult to God, and a false representation of His mind and will.

But besides representation the legal system was a "shadow." There was no solid substance in it: this is found only in Christ. The actual substance is heavenly, and the shadow of this was cast on earth, in anticipation of the substance.

"But now hath He obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also He is the Mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises." His ministry is superior because He is the Mediator of a superior covenant, which is founded upon superior promises. Indeed, the promise to Abraham was long before the law. Moreover, it was an unconditional promise as to Abraham and his seed, while the promise given to Moses was conditional upon the obedience of the people. How vastly inferior this was, for it could introduce no blessing at all. But the new covenant is the actual fulfilment of the magnificent promise to Abraham, which really manifests the heart of God, and the sufficiency of God, - He Himself accomplishing all blessing, with nothing dependent upon the energy or virtue of man. How much sweeter therefore, how much stronger, how much more full of blessing is the ministry of our Lord, the great Mediator of the new covenant.

Not that the new covenant is addressed to Christians, no more than was the Old. Both are definitely Jewish. This is seen clearly in verses 7 to 10. Nevertheless, though we are not therefore under a covenant in any respect, yet the blessings of the new covenant are ministered to Christians by pure grace, through Him Who is Mediator of the new covenant. This is grace, the branches of blessing spreading out over the wall of Jewish separation, and reaching Gentiles, who were not the subjects of promise, nor ever in any covenant relationship with God.

"For if the first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, He saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in My covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord." The first covenant was not faultless, because it could procure no blessing for those who broke it; and of course those to whom it was given proved themselves far from faultless. Consequently, there was ample room for, and necessity of a new covenant. Observe that verse 8 says, "finding fault with them," not with the covenant.

The apostle quotes from Jeremiah 31, and of course it is plain that the new covenant was there promised exclusively to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Both are mentioned because of the division of the ten tribes from the two in Rehoboam's time. No tribe will be excluded from the new covenant: in that order of things the division will be Divinely healed. And the terms of the covenant must be in contrast to the terms of the former one, given when God led them out of Egypt. Note the reference here to God's compassionate mercy in liberating them from Egypt, a work altogether of sovereign power and grace, in the face of which Israel yet had the ignorant boldness to choose a covenant of law! They required more than this experience to convince them that the mercy of God was their only source of blessing; and the nation has not learned it yet. But they certainly "continued not" in the first covenant, and God has "regarded them not." This will be so until they cease "going about to establish their own righteousness," and abandon themselves to the mercy of God.

"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put My laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people: and they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." How vastly different are the terms of this covenant from those of the old. There is no condition whatever here, that is, nothing based upon the fulfilment of human responsibility. No requirement is stipulated at all as regards Israel: it is entirely a matter of God alone fulfilling the terms. Israel has proven that she is utterly without ability to present to God anything that could possibly deserve His favor; and therefore if she is to be favored, it must be entirely on the ground of God's work. Of course, it is necessary that she be brought down to first acknowledge her utter destitution and helplessness before she will submit to this great and sovereign grace: only thus will she be in a state to give the entire glory to God.

Putting His laws into their minds and writing them in their hearts is a miracle of mercy. Does it not plainly speak of the new birth, a complete changing of the heart in true repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? Nothing short of this will do for Israel. and it is just as necessary for every soul of man today. "Except a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God" (John 3:3). It is the goodness of God that leads to repentance (Rom. 2:4), and it is by the Word of God that new life is given (1 Pet. 1:23).

This will be true of "all Israel" in the millennial age. The Gospel will not be preached among them, for all shall know the Lord. How mighty a work of Divine grace in that stubborn nation, so long dealt with in chastisement and affliction before being broken and blessed. Isaiah 66:8 prophesies of the wonder of this great work: "Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? or shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children." Such is the blessed work of God within the soul. Verse 10 however also speaks of the actual outward acts of disobedience, and shows that Divine mercy would be required to dismiss these. "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." How God could righteously show this mercy is not here mentioned, but chapters 9 and 10 dwell upon the greatness of the public work that must be done for this, - that is, the wondrous sacrifice of Christ.

"In that He saith, A new covenant, He hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away." The legal covenant, not having in it the capacity to endure the stress of man's condition, must be replaced by that which endures. The new covenant necessarily renders the first old, and it will never be revived. The new is not merely a method of patching the old: the old must be entirely discarded. And the new will give place to nothing else: it is perpetually new.

## Chapter 9

Chapters 9 and 10 form a wonderful climax in the orderly presentation of the truth in this epistle: If according to the new covenant, a man must be morally fitted for the presence of God by means of the new birth, as we have seen, yet the way into Gods presence, the holiest of all, must also be clearly made manifest. These chapters admirably and fully deal with this grand subject.

And first, from verse 1 to 10, the service of the tabernacle is summarized for us, for its typical significance is of deepest importance in this matter. A study of the details of these things in Exodus and Leviticus would greatly repay the godly reader. "Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of Divine service, and

a worldly sanctuary. For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread: which is called the sanctuary. And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the holiest of all: which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; and over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercy seat; of which we cannot now speak particularly."

The details are not to be dwelt upon here, but we are intended to closely observe the distinction between the two holy places, the sanctuary and the holiest of all. Indeed, emphasis is put strikingly upon the holiest of all; for in the outer sanctuary the candlestick was of pure gold, the table of shewbread was overlaid with gold, yet the gold is not mentioned in connection with these, while it is mentioned three times in verse 4, in connection with the holiest. Moreover, the incense altar, which was in the outer sanctuary, is not mentioned at all. It was also overlaid with gold. Perhaps the reason for this is that under law there had been no true, real worship, of which the incense altar would speak. Gold is typical of the glory of God, and though this was involved in Judaism, yet His glory could not in any full measure be revealed under law and its shadows. Thus the Spirit of God would direct our attention to the greater revelation connected with the holiest. This is typical of Heaven itself, while the outer sanctuary is typical of the sphere of Judaism and the earthly priesthood.

This is intimated in the following verses: "Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service. But into the second went the High Priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people: the Holy Ghost this signifying that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing." Judaistic priests had access at all times into the first sanctuary: it was the sphere of their common service as the sons of Aaron. But none of the common priests were allowed at any time in the holiest of all.

The High Priest alone on the great day of atonement each year was allowed in, in order to sprinkle the blood of the sin offering before and on the mercy - seat. The veil remained always between the two sanctuaries, keeping the holiest of all in constant darkness.

What a lesson for Israel! Here was continual testimony to the fact that there was a sphere into which Judaism could give no free access. God Himself remained in the thick darkness. Yet the entrance of the High Priest each year was an indication that God had not precluded the possibility of man's entrance there; while at the same time the High Priest is a striking type of the Lord Jesus - the Man Christ

Jesus, Mediator between God and men. But the way into the holiest could not be made manifest in connection with the first tabernacle, that is, under the legal system: the system itself pointed to something beyond itself. It was "a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience, which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation."

Such gifts and sacrifices left the conscience still unpurged. Their actual value lay only in the fact that they typified a better sacrifice than these. Meats and drinks too were but typical of the food and refreshment of the sacrifice of Christ - both for God and for the believer. Divers washings and carnal ordinances were typical of the application of the truth of Christ to the soul, in cleansing and sustaining power. Such things, being typical, were of course temporary, - imposed only until the time of reformation, when God would set things in proper relationship and perspective, introducing a change to end all changes.

"But Christ being come an High Priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building: neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." Blessed fulfilment of all these types! Christ is come, "an High Priest of good things to come." These good things have of course not yet been secured by the nation Israel, as they will be; though the church is infinitely blessed in anticipation of that day, by her reception of Christ, with all the blessings His Priesthood brings. The greater and more perfect tabernacle is that which is eternal in contrast to the earthly system of Judaism committed to men's hands: it would speak of the universe as in the counsels of God, - God's eternal building.

Verse 12 speaks of the eternal character of His work, in contrast to the repeated sacrifices of the old testament. By the blood of goats and calves the high priest in Israel had title to enter into the holiest on the great day of atonement; but this gave no title to remain in, and the same sacrifice must be repeated each year. But Christ, by His own blood, because of its eternal value, had title to enter into Heaven "once," having obtained eternal redemption for us." The work of the priest in Israel was always unfinished: that of Christ was perfect and complete in every respect, and God has received Him in perpetuity in His own holy presence, the holiest of all.

In the type, the high priest brought with him the blood of the sin offering into the holiest, and sprinkled it before the mercy - seat, and upon it. This was necessary, in order to illustrate the fact that it was "by blood" that he had title there. It is of course evident that the actual material blood of Christ was not brought by Him

into Heaven. Not "with blood;" but "by His own blood He entered in." That is, the eternal value of His sacrifice gave title to His entering Heaven as Redeemer and High Priest of His people.

"For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" These formal ordinances accomplished a formal result. "The purifying of the flesh" was merely an outward, public setting apart from the sin for which the sacrifice was offered. The very fact of the sacrifice was a public condemnation of the sin; and the offerer thereby linked himself with the repudiation of the sin, publicly. But there was no vital, eternal value in it.

But a sacrifice of such vital, eternal character as that of the Lord of Glory, must necessarily have vital, eternal results. This is involved strikingly in the expression, "by the eternal Spirit." His was not a sacrifice by formal appointment, but by the voluntary, Divine energy of the Spirit of God. Nor are we to narrow our thoughts so as to think of "the blood of Christ" as merely the material blood which was shed, but rather to consider its deep, precious significance. For it is the sign of His life given up in sacrifice, - offered to God, whose heart takes unutterable delight in the infinite value of this. Well may Peter speak of "the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:19).

Another matter of consequence is to be observed here. The actual offering of Christ through the eternal Spirit to God is seen in His baptism by John the Baptist, when the Spirit descended upon Him, and the Father's voice bore witness to His pleasure in Him. His baptism was the very figure of the death to which He pledged Himself. But offering Himself then to God, His utter devotion eventually culminated in His being "offered up" at Calvary, His blood shed for us. How fully and blessedly such a sacrifice purges the conscience from dead works (an effect vital and permanent), to energize the soul to serve the living God!

"And for this cause He is the Mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance." Having offered a sacrifice of eternal value, He is therefore necessarily the Mediator of the covenant that displaces the temporary one. Moreover, His death fulfils that which the old covenant demanded: it has satisfied the judgment of God against those sins which the old covenant brought to light. His death therefore is in a very real sense the end of the old covenant. Nothing in the old covenant could possibly provide redemption in regard to the sins it exposed; but it demanded death. Its claims have been met in the death of Christ, and its authority set aside by this



great Mediator. He has triumphed in resurrection - a new and eternal condition, which involves a new covenant and introduces the "promise of eternal inheritance."

How much greater is this than anything that Israel has as yet inherited? Again and again has God demonstrated to them that their possession of the land of Israel is far from permanent. Law could not secure it to them. Nor, now that many of them have returned there, will all their political diplomacy and military prowess be sufficient to hold what they have gained. They will yet be more violently oppressed than ever before, their land torn from their hands. But God has decreed that under the new covenant Israel will dwell in peace, in full possession of their inheritance, given them by God's sovereign intervention in power and grace. Above this however, the church has her eternal inheritance "in Christ" and "in the heavenlies," and this perfectly secure now. This is consistent with the New covenant, but not actually a part of it, for we are not in any sense under a covenant, however rightly and greatly we may enjoy the benefits of it.

It is to be remarked also that "covenant" and "testament" are actually the same Greek word, translated in either way. This will give more clear understanding as regards what follows: "For where a testament is, there must be also the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth. Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, and water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you. Moreover, he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. And almost all things are by the law purged with blood: and without the shedding of blood is no remission."

How perfectly this illustrates the fact of God's foreknowledge that blessing for Israel under the law was impossible, that is blessing promised by the testament of law. The blood, shed at that time, and sprinkled so profusely, really only insisted upon the necessity of death; and being a conditional testament, that is, its blessings conditional upon the obedience of the people to law, then blessing under it was hopeless. Indeed, disobedience demanded the shedding of blood, but blood was shed in the very giving of the law and its ordinances, before ever it brought guilt to light. And every service of the sanctuary was a continual reminder that blood must be shed: there could be no remission without it. Even formal remission, applicable to a public, temporary system of things, demanded the blood of an animal. What then must eternal remission require? The old testament required death, and so must the new. And the new is entirely a testament of

Divine character, expressing the will of God. How admirable the truth here: in order to come into force, the death of the testator must take place.

But while law could demand death, it could not provide the death of the great Testator: indeed it only affirmed Him to be the living God, and man rightly under the sentence of death. All was hopeless under this testament. But how marvelous therefore is the new testament, full of unconditional blessing for confessed sinners, because it provides in pure grace the amazing incarnation and matchless death of the Testator Himself, on their behalf. This is what gives it eternal force and value. Only by the great mystery of incarnation - God's being made manifest in flesh - could this wonderful death have taken place, opening the floodgates of Heaven's blessing to unworthy sinners. The New Testament has fullest force on this grand basis of Divine grace. Sad to say, of course, Israel has today refused such grace, and there can be no application of this to that nation until they bow their hearts to acknowledge this blessed Testator who died for them. Meanwhile others, who have received Him, reap the benefits of this testament which was not actually made for them at all, - and thus grace is magnified.

"It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these." Such purification was strictly formal, that is the patterns were purified: all was external. The pattern itself accomplished no actual result, no more than a dress pattern could substitute for the dress itself. But the pattern must illustrate in its measure the form the dress is to take. So the heavenly things must be purified with a sacrifice of vital character, not formal.

"For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into Heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." He is not a formal priest of the line of Aaron performing the daily ritual of an earthly tabernacle, but infinitely above this. He has entered into Heaven itself, the true "Holy of holies," in gracious mediation on behalf of His redeemed people.

"Nor yet that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year, with the blood of others; for then must He often have suffered since the foundation of the world; but now once in the end of the age hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." Even a casual reader of Hebrews ought not to fail to observe the apostle's insistence upon the fact of Christ's being sufficient and final, in contrast to the repeated offerings of the Old Testament, specifically the sin offering on the great day of atonement. If His sacrifice were comparable to these, then He must offer Himself repeatedly, and with no hope of cessation? But as Hebrew's has so fully illustrated, since He is in Person infinite, therefore His one sacrifice has infinite value, not limited by

the greatness of man's sin, nor by the element of time, - that is by the question of whether sins were committed before or after the offering of Himself: its value is all-sufficient. It is the perfect basis for the complete putting away of sin from under Heaven, as will be known in the eternal state; and by it the sins of believers are now put away, through faith in this blessed sacrifice: faith in this way anticipates eternity.

Another expression here must be noticed: "once in the end of the age hath He appeared." The age here is of course the probationary age of Judaism, which made nothing perfect. When all else was proven hopeless, the Great Creator Himself became Saviour, in one great work of infinite perfection and completeness. Blessed Redeemer indeed! Blessed grace that offered no less than Himself!

"And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment, so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation." Here is another viewpoint also involved, that since man is appointed to die only once, on account of sin, after which he has an appointment to give an account of his sins, therefore Christ died once, offering Himself for sins, that judgment might be averted for "many," that is believers, for He Himself has borne this judgment fully for them. If it is true that He died for all, yet to "bear the sins of many" is limited to those who in faith receive Him. "As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His Name" (John 1:12). Thus such grace is available to "all," but applicable only to "many."

The many are of course "them that look for Him." Every true child of God looks for the Lord Jesus to eventually take His rightful place of authority and glory in the universe. All may not have clear thoughts as regards the truth of the coming of the Lord, but all "look for Him." To these He shall appear the second time, apart entirely from any raising of the question of sin. This has been settled long before, and cannot be raised again. Judgment is past, and therefore His coming will be "unto salvation," that is, complete salvation bodily, the believer delivered entirely from the very presence of sin. Wonderful prospect indeed! This is the first part of the second coming, for here He appears only to believers, while later "every eye shall see Him," when He must mete out judgment to those who have refused His blessed mercy.

## Chapter 10

The attentive reader cannot but notice the thoroughness with which this subject is treated in these chapters. It is a matter of profound importance, basic as regards any true knowledge of God, and as to approaching the presence of God. Law

could not give any such revelation. "For the law, having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually, make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? Because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins." A shadow is simply an evidence of something substantial. Verse 34 of our chapter speaks of the "better and enduring substance." This of course is what the law foreshadowed: the two were certainly not one and the same, nor is the shadow of any strength whatever to the substance. The sacrifices provided under law were but part of the shadow: they could never accomplish the redemption of which they were typical; and those who approached on that basis could find no real purging of conscience, no standing in perfection before God. For it should be evident that the sacrifice must be perfection itself if it is to bring perfection of blessing. And if it has done so, then the recipients of it "have no more conscience of sins:" a perfect sacrifice is complete in reference to accomplishing the purging of guilt, and it makes perfect those who approach God on this basis.

"But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins." The repetition of the offering only proved that the question of sins was not yet settled. Like a great debt owed, it was never reduced by the paying of the interest year by year. Each year thus only brought to remembrance the fact that sins had not yet actually been taken away. The blood of animals could not possibly accomplish such a result.

"Wherefore when He cometh into the world, He saith, Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, but a body hast Thou prepared Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I am come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do Thy will, O God." This quotation is from Psalm 40, rightly called "the burnt offering Psalm." The Old Testament itself bore clearest witness to the fact that animal sacrifices were of no real value in the eyes of God, and this Psalm is as the light breaking through the mist to declare that at least Someone would take the place of all such offerings. "A body hast Thou prepared Me" is the way in which the Spirit of God interprets His own expression in the Psalm, "ears hast Thou digged for Me." Does this not rightly imply that He would take the lowly place of the Servant, utterly obedient to the Father's will, ears opened to hear His Word? The same is implied in His body prepared for Him. Rather than in the form of God commanding and ordering all things according to His own will, He takes the form of a Servant, assuming the limitation of a human body, in complete subjection to the will of God. On earth, where not one had actually done the will of God, here was One Who came for that purpose, to accomplish that will in perfection. Blessed, wondrous sight! No doubt the "body prepared" is also an advance upon the thought of "ears digged,"

showing that the Psalmist's expression could be fulfilled only by means of incarnation.

But the apostle in verses 8 and 9 repeats this quotation with the object of showing that "the first" must be taken away, in order that "the second" be established. The law itself bore witness to the fact that its own terms were unsatisfactory, and therefore that it must be set aside in favor of One who would do the will of God.

"By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." Sacrifices under law sanctified momentarily, that is outwardly; but of permanent value it gave none. The will of God accomplished by the offering of the Lord Jesus, brings with it a permanent sanctification, a setting apart to God of every redeemed soul, for eternity. This sanctification is positional, that is it sets the believer in a separated position, as having recognized that great public sacrifice which separates between believers and unbelievers publicly. "The sanctification of the Spirit" applies of course to all believers also, but this involves the Spirit's inward work in souls as separating them from those who have not the Spirit. This is internal, the former external.

"And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: but this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins, forever sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool. For by one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified." The fact that the priests in Israel stood continually in performing an unending round of service, indicated that their work was never done. The tabernacle had no seat, except the mercyseat in the holiest of all, which could never be approached except by the high priest once each year, to sprinkle blood upon it. Is all this ritual not a designed lesson to mankind that the most unwearying labor could never accomplish the least iota of eternal blessing.

But the entire question is answered in marvelous fulness and perfection by the one sacrifice of our holy Lord, God's great High Priest. Having accomplished expiation for sins in this one great work, He sits down in perpetuity on the right hand of God, in the holiest of all, upon the very throne which He had propitiated, having perfectly done the will of God.

The perfection in verse 14 is explained for us clearly. It is certainly not perfection in a man's moral character of which the apostle speaks, but perfection of blessing accomplished on behalf of those who are sanctified, that is, every believer. The sacrifice being perfect, has perfect results, giving a position of perfection to the believer. The same work that sanctifies or sets apart, is the work that provides perfection for all who are sanctified.

"Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us, for after that He had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin." We have first seen the will of God, followed by the work of the Son, and now in close connection is the witness of the Spirit. Let us observe however that it is not the witness within the believer that is here spoken of. 1 John 5:10 does speak of the Spirit of God within the believer witnessing to his possession of eternal life. But here in Hebrews 10 the witness of the Spirit is rather the Old Testament Scripture (Jeremiah 31) which had been long before dictated by the Spirit of God and therefore of course a conclusive witness to the Jew. Under the terms of this covenant, the Spirit of God had pledged all inward work in men's hearts and minds (that of the new birth), but also a complete remission of sins. This being so, then the Old Testament itself indicated that offerings for sin would cease. This is inescapable. Had the Jews even considered so evident a fact laid down in their own Scriptures?

It may be remarked also that God in Divine government put an end to Israel's offerings perforce, following the sacrifice of Christ; for the Jews lost their city in A.D. 70, and have never had possession of the temple area of Jerusalem until very recently (June, 1967). They well know that this is the only place in which their sacrifices are allowed to be offered; and we may well wonder how soon the intensity of their desire to restore their worship of old will overcome their fear of Arab and world pressures, to such an extent as to replace the present "Dome of the Rock" with a Jewish temple. But such an attempt will be of short-lived duration: for idolatry will supplant the worship of Jehovah, and the Great tribulation fall in dreadful ferocity upon the unhappy nation. Later on, when they are restored to blessing in the millennium, through the gracious intervention of their own Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, God will order again the sacrificing of animals, as Ezekiel shows us, but not "for sins." They will be rather a remembrance of the perfect sacrifice of Christ, and of sins fully put away (Ez. 40:39.43; 43:18-27).

The question of sin now settled, verse 19 proceeds to encourage the believer in those privileges proper to him. "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; and having an High Priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." How infinitely marvelous a contrast to Judaism! For law sternly forbade entry into the holiest. God dwelt in thick darkness, and none dare approach. But the saint of God today is called to do so with calm, holy

boldness, having fullest confidence in the blood of Jesus, which gives perfect title there, in the immediate presence of God.

The way into the holiest is both "new," accomplished by the death of Christ, and "living," that is not in any sense formal, but vital and eternal. Moreover, He has consecrated it: no service of consecration is left to man at all. The veil, separating between the two holy places is here interpreted for us, "that is to say, His flesh." His perfect Manhood was actually an absolute barrier to man's entrance into God's presence, for in that blessed Manhood of Christ God had demonstrated that only perfection was satisfactory to Him. But the death of Christ - the rending of the veil from the top to bottom - is the wondrous work that opens the way into God's presence for sinners.

But He is also a High Priest over the house of God, One Whose mediation is perfection itself, and because of Whom the believer is gladly welcomed. Thus we observe a threefold cord of assured blessing to the believer, all centered in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus, - the blood, the rent veil, and the High Priest. We have before seen too that not only does He have authority over God's house: He is Son over His house.

Such being the case, it is but right that we should draw near, but certainly with a true heart. How could we dare stoop to deceit in connection with those things in which God's perfect truth and love have been so clearly manifested for our sake? "Full assurance of faith" too is to be our attitude in drawing near, - no unholy familiarity or unseemly forwardness, yet no terror or shrinking; rather a calm, holy decision of faith. The "heart sprinkled from an evil conscience" would speak of the Word of God having application to the heart and conscience by the new birth. It is the sprinkling spoken of in Ezekiel 36:25. "Our bodies washed with pure water" on the other hand would speak of the effects of that new birth in the outward character of the believer. The one therefore is the internal change, the other external, but by the power of the same water, the Word of God. This latter is the "bath" that every believer receives at new birth. Compare John 13:10. "He that is bathed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit." This washing must be distinguished from cleansing by blood, which is cleansing from the guilt of sins; for the washing of water is cleansing morally from the power of sin, that is, the effect upon the soul, both internal and external.

The first (and most important) exhortation therefore is to draw near to God. But there is more to follow: "Let us hold fast the confession of our faith (or hope) without wavering: (for He is faithful that promised)." If we have been given a solid basis for drawing near to God, to give up such a position would be impossible. Hebrew professors of Christianity were however exposed to particularly serious tests of their reality, and if the false turned back, this could

but be expected; but such exhortations as this verse would strengthen those who were true in heart yet possibly shaken on account of the apostasy of some. "For He is faithful that promised." Blessed rock of certainty for the believer!

But verse 24 proceeds to more positive, active goodness. "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works." Passive submission is one thing, and needful too, but we must not content ourselves with this. True, proper activity should stem from this, a genuine concern for the blessing of others with whom God has put us in contact. Such consideration for one another is the normal fruit of Christianity. Provoking unto love and good works is done by showing such character cheerfully in our own lives, and encouraging others in such things. But let us notice that good works are not considered until after the great work of the Lord Jesus is seen to be the only resting place of the soul, the only real foundation of blessing. Thereafter, good works have their true, real value, as a proper result of the knowledge of eternal salvation.

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another; and so much the more as ye see the Day approaching." If there is decline in the fresh, honest energy of drawing near to God, a corresponding laxity will soon appear in the desire for the gathering together of the saints. How sad that this is such a tendency in a world that supplies every inducement to forget God. One may feel himself strong enough spiritually without the need of constant gathering in fellowship with the people of God: but this very feeling is a sad sign of spiritual weakness, for which he deeply needs such assembling to the Name of the Lord. Indeed, if he is strong, he should use his strength for the encouragement of others. Or if one should give in to his own feelings of discouragement because of lack of outward public blessing, he is only encouraging the discontent and selfishness of his own heart and of others. The Lord preserve us in His mercy, to hold fast that which He has given us, and not to give up because of the trial of faith. Indeed, let us go further, and diligently exhort one another in this regard, and more urgently as we see the Day approaching. How should we feel if the Lord should come immediately after we had decided to give up a wholehearted walk with Him in fellowship with saints?

The apostle here puts diligent faithfulness in contrast to apostasy. For verse 26 is the willful rejection of the Christ who was once acknowledged. "For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins. But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses. Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden underfoot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"

This is no case of a weak believer giving way to sinful conduct, for in such a case there is a restoring remedy. Compare James 5:19, 20; Galatians 6:1; 1 John 2:1. But here there is no remedy. The greatness of the Person of Christ and the perfection of His sacrifices have been here discussed in wonderful fulness. The willful sin of verse 26 is therefore the cold, deliberate rejection of this marvelous revelation of God, in the very face of having been intellectually enlightened. Notice, it is after receiving the knowledge of the truth, - not receiving the truth itself, or "the love of the truth." as is expressed in 2 Thessalonians 2. Some Jews who had professed Christianity were already revolting against it. In acknowledging it, they were admitting the necessity for a sacrifice to take away sins. Now in refusing it, they were choosing a position where there was no sacrifice for sins whatever. How dreadfully hopeless! Positive, certain judgment was the only alternative, fiery indignation, which should devour the adversaries. For in such a stand they became the callous adversaries of the God of Israel.

Moses' law, with which the Jews were familiar, sternly demanded death in the case of any who rebelled against it, when the case was established by competent witness. But the revelation of God's glory in the Person of His Son infinitely transcends God's speaking by the law of Moses. If the judgment under law is so severe, then the far greater enormity of the crime against the Son of God demands a far greater judgment. Three solemn charges are brought against the apostate; first, his treading underfoot the Son of God. This is similar to Ch. 6:6. It is cold contempt for the truth that the Lord Jesus Christ is God manifest in flesh. How dreadful an insult to the Eternal God! Secondly, the blood of Christ he treats as unholy, despite the fact that God's covenants with Israel demanded shedding of blood. Thus if the Son of God Personally is cast aside, so is His great work of redemption. Such a man plainly has never been born again, yet is said to have been "sanctified" by the blood of the covenant. Taking a public stand with Christians, he had been publicly set apart by the acknowledgment of the virtue of the blood of Christ. But his heart had not actually been reached: all was merely on the surface.

Thirdly, "the Spirit of grace" is despised. The Spirit of God revealing the marvelous grace of God in the present dispensation, attending this with clearest demonstration for Israel, with miracles and signs, has been deliberately insulted with haughty contempt. This compares with the sin against the Holy Ghost, which shall never be forgiven (Mark 3:28-30).

In every nation under heaven, brazen contempt for a dignity is counted a grossly criminal offence, and the higher the dignity, the more grave the crime. Certainly then such daring insolence against the eternal God will reap a terrible punishment. "For we know Him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto Me, I will

recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge His people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

But because God is patient, and no dire consequences of such evil are immediately seen, men are emboldened in rebellion. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Eccl. 8:11). Thus the test is complete. The patience of God allows time to prove fully the utter absence of faith in such painful cases; and when the judgment does at last come, it will be clearly seen to be absolutely and unquestionably just. Moreover, these things are so intensely serious that the judgment is not to be entrusted to human hands, nor even to angels: it is vengeance directly from the hand of the allwise and righteous God. Fearful indeed His vengeance at last manifested after years of patient grace so despised by man's proud unbelief!

"But call to remembrance the former days, in which after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions: partly whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used." This exhortation would have true effect upon those souls who were real: they could not lightly overthrow the reality of what they had suffered for the Lord's sake in their first stand for Him, and for identifying themselves with the saints who were suffering. Only a callous, untrue heart could renounce all this.

For verse 33 we quote a more exact translation: "For ye sympathized with those in bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing that ye have for yourselves a better and an enduring substance" (Numerical Bible ). Such an attitude was fully true of those who had truly received Christ. It was no small matter to have linked themselves with prisoners who suffered for Christ, exposed to the ungodly persecutor who considered himself justified in plundering their possessions because they were commonly held in contempt. But faith could rise above grieving as to temporal loss: they had what was their own, a better and enduring substance. This had given them steadfast firmness, and certainly it was no less real now.

"Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise." If confidence in the living God is cast away, then its character is proven to be extremely deficient, for God Himself has not changed. Persecution tests it, no doubt, and the apostle would strengthen souls to stand by true, living faith. Patient endurance would gain its recompense, for the will of God in reference to any believer is that he should prove through hard experience that his trust is actually in the living God.

"For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." Time may drag heavily and seem long when affliction and adversity try the soul, yet it is a mere moment in comparison to eternity; and the coming of the Lord is put before the soul as a constant source of encouragement, comfort, and confidence. Let the saints of God more wholeheartedly expect this and encourage one another in such blessed expectation.

"Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw hack unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul." The quotation "the just shall live by faith" is from Habakkuk 2:4, quoted also in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11. It is most interesting to observe the differences of emphasis in each case, however, as illustrating the blessed fact that Scripture indulges in no mere repetition. Romans dwells upon the truth of justification, and hence emphasizes "the just." Galatians deals with the subject of living a Christian life, not by works of law, but by faith, and therefore emphasizes "shall live." Now Hebrews emphasizes the means, - "by faith" and in ch. 11 illustrates this beautifully.

But if one should "draw back," that is, if he abandons faith. God can have no pleasure in him. How could God be pleased with one who refuses to trust Him, - a God of perfect truth and goodness.' But there is no possibility of this on the part of any true believer. Some drew back unto perdition, "but we are not of them," says the apostle. Believing to the saving of the soul is in fullest contrast to that type of belief that is merely an outward assent to the truth of Christianity.

## Chapter 11

This chapter in itself forms a complete division of the book of Hebrews. If previously the doctrine has been thoroughly laid down that faith is the principle of all actual relationship with God, now Ch. 11 provides from the Old Testament itself numerous examples of positive proof that faith is the one principle that produces real results for God in all ages. It is the experimental proof. And these examples of faith are the more remarkable when we consider that the dispensation of law did not in any way emphasize faith, as does our present dispensation of grace, which indeed may be termed "a dispensation for faith." But though not publicly taught in the Old Testament, yet faith is seen to be the only actual energizing power by which anything for God was accomplished. The Psalms actually are full of declarations of the blessedness of faith, but the law did not declare it as a necessary doctrine. However, there is a power in faith that could not but manifest itself in spite of the legal system.

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." This is not a definition, but shows us something of what faith does. It is that which, to the individual, gives solid substance to things hoped for. It is no mere

fanciful imagination, but an honest trust in the living God, by which the things of God are made a definite, clear reality to the heart, and are thus recognized to be more truly substantial than all material substance-for the latter will pass away. Also it has that peculiar power of evidencing to us "things not seen." Faith in the living God is not blind, but the actual opening of the eyes, accepting unquestionable evidence of the reality of unseen, spiritual things.

"For by it the elders obtained a good report." Did legal-minded Jews consider this? It was not rigid law-keeping that clothed with such illustrious beauty the lives or works of the most outstanding Old Testament saints, but a genuine active faith in God. This we shall see in our chapter.

"Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." It is no problem to the believer to understand creation. Faith, crediting God, sees nothing too hard for Him. Some so-called scientists, who admittedly find no other alternative but evolution, will reject creation on the ground of its seeming to be "incredible," and with amazing credulity follow the theory that the universe has by the merest chance gradually taken shape out of some original, undefined, hazy nothingness! And thus, life, order, growth, instinct, feeling, sound, hearing, sight, odor, smelling, taste, memory, intellect, reason, energy, movement, personality, conscience, motives, spiritual conceptions, besides an infinite variety of material forms, and also of immaterial characteristics, seen in great variety even within one material species, - all this is claimed to proceed out of a nebulous mass of lifeless nonentity! Where in the universe, have they observed one sample of such a principle in operation? Such reasoning is of course grossly unreasonable.

But in the Word of God is majestic power, and this has framed the universe. The details of this God has not told us, nor does Scripture indicate at what time the original creation came into being. The six days of Genesis 1, in which the remodeling of the earth for man is described, reveal what is comparatively recent in earth's history. God has made visible things from things invisible. The atom, from which all matter is formed, (and which He created, Col. 1:16,) is invisible; and the atom itself is formed of smaller, invisible parts. Scientists wonder if even these are again formed by infinitesimal particles, and are dubious if they will ever discover the smallest basic building blocks of matter. At least, the lesson is inescapable, that what is unseen and spiritual is the basis of what is material, and therefore far more important. Faith apprehends this with not the least difficulty.

Verse 3 then connects faith with understanding or wisdom, and in relation to creation. But let us go further: "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and by it he being dead yet speaketh." Observe that this

verse connects faith with worship, related to the great truth of redemption. Sin had marred that which God had created without fault. Therefore creation was no basis of worship whatever. Cain ignored the fall, and dared to offer the fruits of the cursed creation. Abel offered a lamb by the shedding of its blood, a striking type of the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, in which the just penalty of sin is faced, and borne. Faith recognizes that this is the only ground of approach to God. Apart from the cross, no worship can be acceptable to Him. How brilliantly is this faith exemplified for us in the case of Abel, and so early in history.

By his sacrifice he obtained witness that he was righteous. His faith acted upon God's revealed will in the matter. Cain, even when reasoned with by God, stubbornly refused any offering but the fruits that witnessed the work of his own hands, and his pride was his own condemnation. But God testified to the value of Abel's gifts: He had respect to that which spoke of the offering of His own Son. Abel therefore, though murdered by Cain, continues to speak throughout all history: and doubtless multitudes have been awakened of God, through this record, to trust God's one sacrifice.

"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death: and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God." Here faith is connected with a godly walk in separation from an ungodly world, and therefore related to "translation" into the sphere of new creation. Genesis tells us that "Enoch walked with God." Jude further speaks of his faithful prophesying of the Lord's coming and the judgment of the ungodly (Jude 14, 15). He is a striking type of the church of God, which in her proper condition walks in devoted separation to God, bearing faithful witness to the coming of the Lord, and will be suddenly caught up to meet the Lord in the air, not actually seeing death. God confirms His approval of her moral separation by physically separating her from the world before judgment falls. No doubt the witness of Enoch was deeply resented, and it has been suggested that the expression, "was not found" implies that he was sought, possibly with the object of putting him to death. But God intervened: he did not see death at all! Wonderful indeed the testimony of Scripture as regards him: "he pleased God." Who can estimate the marvelous value of this? But let its remark that all of this is the fruit of simple, honest faith.

"But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." If one does not honestly believe that "God is," then his apparent religious approach to God is thorough hypocrisy. Faith is simply a true recognition of God, and certainly nothing less than this can please God. This is the elementary essential, while the last part of the verse shows the active working of faith, that is, diligently

seeking God, which is certainly to be rewarded, in accordance with the faithful nature of God.

"By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." In this case faith is connected with work as related to judgment. Noah worked because he believed God. The dreadful reality of God's judgment had stirring effect upon his soul. His labor in building the ark, his preaching while doing so, was not prompted by light motives, but by "godly fear." God had spoken, and God would make good His word. Only Noah's house was saved: others despised both the long preaching of Noah and his amazing labors in building the ark. But the weight of popular opinion was only folly in this case: all was swept away in the flood. Note too that by the very building of the ark Noah condemned the world. Its existence was the witness of the flood to come. Just so, the preaching of the Gospel of eternal salvation through the death of Christ, is clearest witness of the condemnation of the world. If there were no judgment, then salvation would be meaningless. The very fact of the Gospel of God's grace is proof that the world is under judgment, from which only individual faith will deliver individuals. The world chooses to ignore both the warnings of judgment and God's gracious provision for escape; but faith is that principle which, believing God, recognizes that God does as He says, and will tolerate no rebellion. If God says He will judge the world, He will do so. If He provides a way of escape for whosoever will receive it, then it is a perfect provision, and absolutely secures the soul from judgment. Thus Noah became "heir of the righteousness which is by faith." His works did not provide him with this righteousness, but his works were the result of faith in the living God, a faith which was counted to him as righteousness.

But it is well that we notice in the first seven verses of our chapter that faith connects itself with four basic and mighty works of God, as God has revealed them. First, in verse 3, Creation; secondly, in verse 4, Redemp-tion; thirdly, in verse 5, Translation, or new creation; and fourthly, in verse 7, Judgment, God's "strange work." Thus faith exalts the works of God, and has no confidence in what is merely man's work.

Verse 8 begins now a second section, in which Abraham and his family are the examples of faith. "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out. not knowing whither he went." We shall see faith here, not only as related to the basic works of God, but to the personal experiences of life. God called Abraham out from a land of idol worshippers, from his own near relatives. It was no light step to take. He was a man of means, and no doubt of prominence; but when God called, it was a voice that could not be ignored: he obeyed. We are not told here with what hesitation he at first acted, for he went only as far as Haran, his father

accompanying him, and did not go on until his father died. Such weaknesses of the flesh are necessarily passed over in a chapter that deals with faith. But faith did lead Abraham on, and though not knowing where God was leading him, he went. This is faith in personal life. Can God be fully trusted, or not? Is this not a simple matter for faith to decide? If so, let faith act. If the Word of God tells me the path to take, then let me take it without question. Whatever the difficulties of it. God is more than sufficient for these. If only mere religious feeling prompts me, this is a useless substitute for the clearly declared Word of God. All personal preferences and feelings must utterly give way before this tribunal of absolute truth and authority. Faith therefore in this case connects with obedience. If I have no honest spirit of obedience to the Word of God, then it is mere hypocrisy to boast of having faith in God. When God speaks, faith obeys. For faith is that which trusts God absolutely in preference to every other confidence, and it trusts His Word as showing the only true and safe course for the believer. We shall obey in proportion, as we actually trust the Word of God. Faith does not fearfully inquire first as to what may result from taking a step of obedience: the results may be safely left with God. Abraham did not investigate first to find out all about the land God was sending him to: he obeyed!

"By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise." If faith first obeys, faith also continues. Here is the sted-fast, plodding life of faith, not a settling down amid earthly comforts, but a pilgrim path, as Abraham's tent bore witness. Mere material, present advantage, is no object whatever for faith. God's promise of better things had laid hold of Abraham's soul, and Isaac and Jacob after him took the same pilgrim character (though indeed Jacob in particular was painfully inconsistent in it until his later years). Though Abraham sojourned in the land of promise, yet the promise of the land was to his earthly seed, and he knew that personally he would not take possession of it (Compare Gen. 15:13-15).

"For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God." This goes beyond any Old Testament record of Abraham's expectations, and shows that faith looked further than the limits of what God had publicly revealed at the time. The heavenly city had never been mentioned then, but faith could easily recognize that the incorruptible God would provide that which was incorruptible, above all that man observes by his senses, subject as this is to the early corruption and dissolution. Faith then desires nothing less than what is entirely the workmanship of God. It will not be disappointed.

"Through faith Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged Him faithful Who had promised." Faith here connects with the receiving of strength. For while a step of obedience to God is admirable, and a life of stedfast continuance more admirable

still, yet without the supply of God's power, these are impossible. Faith finds this too; and this completes a series of seven beautiful products of faith, basic in all godly character: 1. Wisdom (vs. 3); 2. Worship (vs. 4); 3. Walk (vs. 5); 4. Work (vs. 7); 5. Obedience (vs. 8); 6. Continuance (vs. 9); 7. Strength (vs. 11).

No comment is here made on the fact of Sara's weakness of faith when first God made the announcement that she should have a son (Gen. 18:9-15). But God had the last word, and Sara then believed it. And this simple trust in the truth of God's word produced the strength that was normally impossible. At ninety years of age she gave birth to Isaac. When God has spoken, do we not judge Him faithful, and expect Him to fully carry out what He has promised? Will He not also give the necessary strength for whatever purpose He may see fit to use us? Consider the results of Sara's eventual quiet submission of faith: "Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the seashore innumerable." Here is fruit beyond calculation, and certainly beyond the limits of Sara's own hopes. Mere natural hope was dead, so that long before this she had given up any such expectation. Thus God teaches that He alone is the true Resource of His saints; and the fruit of faith's submission is greater far than appears at the time, or possibly for years after. Only eternity will actually reveal it. Faith does not ask to see results, nor depend upon results, but it will eventually produce them, however long the time may seem. It is the principle of life out of death-resurrection.

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." Faith sees death to be but a necessary step toward the fulfilment of the promise, hence the quiet calmness of the patriarchs in the face of death. First in our verse we see faith's long sight; secondly, its firm, unshaken persuasion, thirdly, its embracing with the entire soul the preciousness of the truth of God; and fourthly, its unhesitating confession before the world that earth is but a foreign land of pilgrimage. How full, and real, and precious such character! Who would exchange it for all the wealth, pleasure, power and popularity the world may offer for a brief span of years? For the latter is but a bubble of air, bursting and gone, in comparison to eternal, solid substantial reality.

"For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city" The very actions of such examples of faith are a plain declaration that they seek something beyond and unseen, that is substantial and permanent. If Abraham had decided after coming to Canaan, that his previous



home in Mesopotamia (where he had served idols) was preferable to a path of faith in the living God, then the way was open for him to return; but he had no such inclination. Just so, one who professes faith in Christ, if he prefers his former sins to a path of faith and the truth of God's Word, may return to his folly again; but this would only prove that he had never in actual faith embraced the promises of God. Abraham desired a better country, which could only be heavenly. however meagre was the knowledge of Abraham as to its character. He could trust Cod without being told everything. Much more has been revealed to us: how much more responsible this therefore renders us! And where this lowly, self-denying pilgrim character is in evidence. God is not ashamed to link His Name with it. Blessed if it can be said of ourselves that He is not ashamed to be called our God! He has prepared for us a city. Loneliness and deprivation now will give place to fullest fellowship and fullest provision there. For this, faith waits with patience.

From verse 17 to 22 there are now four grand examples of faith's triumph in the very face of death, and this concludes the record from the book of Genesis. Observe in this that the greater part of this chapter of the examples of faith is taken from a history previous to the existence of Israel as a nation.

"By faith Abraham when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed he called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure." This history found in Genesis 22 is sublimely beautiful, both in the deliberate, unhesitating obedience of Abraham, and in the calm submission of Isaac. Abraham's love for his son was unquestioned, yet at the Word of God he was willing to sacrifice him. It was a striking trial of his faith, for God had before told him, "In Isaac shall they seed be called," and as yet Isaac was a lad. When God had so spoken, Abraham reasoned that if Isaac should die, God would raise him up again, in order to fulfill His promise that Abraham would have descendants through Isaac. Faith thus reckons God's word as paramount and unbreakable, and can willingly give up the most cherished possession on earth for the sake of obedience to that Word. Blessed privilege indeed! Nothing was lost by such faith. Isaac was received back again as though from the dead, - that is in figure, for of course God would not actually suffer the father's hand to kill the child. And this too becomes a most precious type of the great sacrifice of our God and Father in giving His Son to redeem guilty sinners, by the death of the cross.

"By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come." The history here is really no credit to the strength of Isaac's faith, for he intended to favor Esau rather than Jacob, no doubt because Esau was the elder; but God had said. "The elder shall serve the younger." However, the fact of Isaac so blessing his

sons, as he himself was approaching death, is a simple witness to his faith in the living God, faith that death was no deterrent to the fulfilment of God's promise.

"By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff." In this case the same faith is evident, but more intelligent than in Isaac's case, for his right hand he placed on Ephraim's head, who was the younger, for he discerned the mind of God. And on the very verge of death the heart of the aged patriarch expands in unfeigned worship of God. Blessed confidence in the unfailing promise of God!

"By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones." Genesis 50:24, 25 gives us this simple history. Joseph believed the promises given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Perhaps too he was acquainted with the word of God to Abraham that his seed would be a stranger in a strange land, afflicted for four hundred years before they would be brought back to the land of Canaan (Gen. 15:13, 14). But whatever the time, his bones were to be buried in Canaan, as indeed was the case. Even death, and long intervening years, was no barrier whatever, so far as faith was concerned, for it waits simply upon God.

Verse 23 now introduces 7 further distinct accomplishments of faith in connection with Israel's history from Egypt to Canaan, and this is followed by a more general list that covers the entire Old Testament. But it will have been noted in the first part of the chapter that Abraham is outstanding as an example of faith; in the latter part that Moses is outstanding. The former, being called to a path of godly separation, shows us the calm, steady endurance of faith. The latter, called to a rigorous service for God, illustrates the energy of faith.

"By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw the child was beautiful; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment" (Numerical Bible). The faith here was that of Moses' parents, - his mother in this case evidently taking the lead, according to the history. The beauty of the child was doubtless used to impress on them the glory of the Creator, who could be depended upon to honor their simple act of faith in Him. Their hiding the child no doubt endangered their own lives, but God's honor was more important than the king's commandment. Doubtless too the mother's afterward placing the child in the ark at the river's brink, was an act of faith which was used of God in a virtually miraculous way. Did she not actually give him up into the hand of God, and in an unexpected way receive him back again? Thus faith never loses by its relinquishing anything into God's hand. May we learn such lessons well, in regard to our children, or any other possession with which we may be entrusted.

"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward." Forty years elapsed in Moses' life before this definite act of faith. Doubtless his soul was deeply torn and tested as he viewed the affliction of his own people at the hand of the very nation in which he himself was exalted. He had become great, but the people of God were, suffering. Could he then take pleasure in being heir to the throne of Egypt? Eventually he was compelled to face the issue. Faith could not countenance the cruel assault of an Egyptian against an Israelite, and Moses killed the former. It does not follow that Moses acted in faith in the killing and hiding of the body in the sand. Faith might have found more honorable and wise methods of dealing; so that while his actions were prompted by faith in God, yet they also give evidence of the weakness of his faith. It was certainly not as bold as on a later occasion. Nevertheless there was decision here, a real relinquishing of his regal honors, refusing the glories the world had given him.

But lest any should suggest that he ought to have remained in office in Egypt and use his influence in governmentally patronizing and improving the conditions of Israel, we answer that this would not be faith at all, but mere human sagacity. Verse 25 is the ringing answer to all this. Faith must identify itself with God's people, and suffer with them. A man may be a public champion, with motives of utter selfishness: if he really has a heart for the suffering saints of God, he will take his place with them in suffering. Wonderful choice indeed on the part of Moses, and put in contrast to "enjoying the pleasures of sin for a season." Whatever pleasure is found in sin, it is only momentary, and leaves a bitter emptiness in the end. A word in each of the three verses here has much to tell us as regards the decision of faith, -vs. 24, "refused"; vs. 25, "choosing"; vs. 26, "esteeming." This last is a sober, judicious estimate of things. How much better the reproach of Christ than all of Egypt's treasures! For though Christ had not yet been manifested, this faith was the anticipation of Himself as the suffering One on earth. Whether pleasure or treasure, things counted so high in the world's esteem, they were nothing compared to the joy of a path of suffering for Christ's sake. Moreover, faith has long vision. "The recompense of the reward" was a real consideration to Moses. How trivial the few fleeting years of this life in comparison to eternity! But let us pay closest attention to this first act of faith: "he refused." It takes resolute decision to say "No" to the world's offers of finest advantage and distinction, but this is faith's blessed privilege.

Another forty years intervenes between verses 26 and 27, during which Moses had learned in solitary experience, in "the backside of the desert," that all the

wisdom of Egypt was nothing to God. Then God called him to return to Egypt and lead the children of Israel out of it.

"By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible." After repeated interviews with Pharaoh, and manifestations of God's heavy hand in plagues upon the nation, Moses is persuaded that Pharaoh has exceeded in defying the patience of God; and when Pharaoh angrily threatens Moses with death, the man of God boldly, solemnly tells the monarch, "Thou hast spoken well, I will see thy face again no more" (Ex. 10:28, 29). Here is his deliberate forsaking of Egypt: no longer will he labor with it in patience: he gives it up to the judgment of God. Pharaoh and his hosts were shortly drowned in the Red Sea. If in verses 24 to 26 we see decision, in verse 27 it is separation. And today the world is no longer under probation, as though God were laboring with it to change its attitude: it is rather under definite sentence of judgment which nothing can avert. Therefore faith forsakes the world, -gives it up to the judgment merited by its rebellion against God. Neither is there suggestion of fear or of cringing on the part of Moses: the king's power is far overshadowed for him by the presence of God, as plainly as though he could see his invisible Creator at his side. Blessed reality of faith! A path of faith is that of deliberate, real separation from the world.

"Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest He that destroyed the firstborn should touch them." Separation from the world must be attended by devotion to God. For if the world is under judgment because of sin, God must also judge sin in His own people. How can this be done without the judgment falling on their own heads? The passover gives the answer. The blood of sacrifice must shelter the soul. Indeed, the blood on the doorposts and lintel was the sign that judgment had already fallen, though upon an innocent victim, - the lamb, - the punishment therefore borne by another. Blessed type of the great sacrifice of Christ, who has fully borne the judgment of every soul who in faith receives Him as Saviour. Judgment is past, and safety is assured. God had made the provision, and Moses by faith accepted it: the lamb was killed, and its blood sprinkled in simple obedience of faith. Thus Moses, by this act of unquestioning faith, would by means of the shedding of blood devote the children of Israel to God, as His own possession.

"By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned." No longer do we see only the personal faith of Moses here: all Israel is linked with him. The Passover has been the basis of this link just as the cross of Christ is the basis of the unity of the church of God, the one body (Eph. 2:16). Now Moses' faith is seen bearing its fruit in Israel. But here faith hears the humiliation of going down to the bottom of the Red Sea, type of death itself, yet being protected from death's overwhelming power. Confidence in

God can afford to take the lowliest place, for exaltation follows: they pass through. The Egyptians seek to imitate this, but without faith, without the least humiliation of heart, and they find that unbelief is swallowed up where faith can safely pass.

After verse 29 the third 40 years of Moses' life intervenes; and it is both significant and humbling that all the 10 years' history of the wilderness is left silent in this record of faith in Hebrews 11. It was too largely a history of lack of faith as regards the nation itself, though individuals no doubt shine out on certain occasions (as Joshua and Caleb.) Moses dies before the event now recorded in verse 30: "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.' How strange to the inhabitants of Jericho it must have appeared, to see Israel march in calm, orderly procession around the city once each day for six days,-then seven times on the seventh day. Can we doubt that in the city there was anxious apprehension as to the significance of all this? Some may have scoffed, but not without at least vague tremors of fear. Thus to the world today the Gospel of God is sounded in patient continuance, and it is itself a warning of judgment to come. The world entrenches itself against it, hoping it is secure; but it takes only the intervention of God to suddenly crumple all their defenses: the walls fall down flat, and Israel is victorious. When God gave the order to Joshua, faith simply obeyed. Here is subjugation of enemies; and the believer who has learned the previous lessons, - seclusion, decision, separation, devotion, will also learn the triumphant language of 1 Corinthians 15:57: "Thanks be to God Who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ", a victory not over mere natural enemies, but over "spiritual hosts of wickedness" who threaten damage to all spiritual prosperity.

But there is a lovely conclusion to this sevenfold history of faith: "By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace." Thus victory has not issued merely in destruction, but in this case, salvation. If there is victory in judging evil, how much more precious the victory in the deliverance of a soul from evil! How many were with her in the house we are not told, but all were preserved. The Spirit of God had wrought true conviction in her heart, which judged both the wretchedness of her own previous life and the stubborn rebellion of the city in which she dwelt. There can be no doubt that faith produced a mighty change in this poor, sinful woman. The messengers of God she received with peace, and confessed the true condition of Jericho. Wonderful the grace of God which "brings salvation," and teaches us "that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world" (Titus 2:11, 12). Wonderful too that these seven steps in the history of Moses and of Israel end in salvation for others outside Israel! Good for us to apply these things to our personal lives.

"And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." This general list of names and of those unnamed, together with the long list of conflicts and conquests of faith, is not intended to awaken our admiration of the people involved, but of the God who sustained and enabled them. Indeed, if we read the history of the first four named, we cannot but be impressed with their weakness of faith in many respects, yet in certain definite cases, they did act for God, and faith was in evidence. In other cases they broke down, and did not act by faith at all. We know the same of David also, a man beloved of God, yet falling into grievous sin, for which later he was broken down in deepest contrition before God. Samuel no doubt evidenced a much more steady and godly balance throughout his long life; and we ought all to be encouraged to exercise real, honest faith in every step of our experience, rather than on special occasions merely. It is the one principle that pleases God, and begets true happiness in the soul.

"Subduing kingdoms" would have a parallel in the New Testament in "the casting down of imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). As to "wrought righteousness," here is "the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left" (2 Cor. 6:7), righteousness acted on firmly in the face of wrongdoing. "Obtained promises" is a positive result of pleasing God, God revealing Himself in grace to the soul: "He that willeth to do God's will shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God" (John 7:17 ). "Stopped the mouths of lions" is answered in 1 Peter 5:8: "Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour." Sober vigilance and steadfast faith are the preservatives. As to "the violence of fire," consider James 3:5.6; "escaping the edge of the sword." Matthew 26:52; "out of weakness were made strong." 2 Corinthians 12:9, 10; "waxed valiant in fight." Acts 14:45, 46: "turned to flight the armies of the aliens," 1 John 5:4.

"Women received their dead raised to life again." 2 Corinthians 2:8-10 is a similar New Testament experience along this line.

"Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection." Blessed faith indeed, and seen beautifully in Paul himself, who said, "I endure all things for the elect's sake" (2 Tim. 2:10), and "I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the Name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13).

"And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy). They wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." If the Old Testament does not give us the details of such history, at least in many of these cases, yet doubtless they were not few; and the annals of subsequent Church history record a multitude of cases of the godly suffering these very things, and tortures even more cruel, for Christ's sake. How pregnant and precious that word, "of whom the world was not worthy."

But the summing up here is of very real interest: "And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect," Though the promise of God in Christ Jesus was not fulfilled to them before their death, however ardently they may have looked for the Messiah of Israel, yet faith was maintained unto death. God had longer vision, having included present day saints in His counsels of grace. Christ came at the precisely right time, and has fulfilled the promise of God, and we on earth today enjoy this, while waiting for the day when both we and they shall be perfected. They too will yet receive the full blessing of the promise, in a higher way than will the earthly nation Israel. The better thing God has provided for us is the present knowledge on earth of the Son of God having come to fulfill the promise of God. It is thorough, untarnished grace, which should bow our hearts with adoring thanksgiving. Why indeed should we be its subjects rather than they, - who had so suffered for their faith? At least all of this serves to humble our hearts in thankfulness to the allwise and gracious God of glory.

## Chapter 12

How rightly now Chapter 12 admonishes the saints of God to act by faith; for where faith is in godly exercise, every honorable and true responsibility will be willingly assumed, with the confidence of Divine help to enable its faithful discharge. "Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of faith; Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." This "great cloud of witnesses" are those of whom we have read in Ch. 11. Our advantage is how much greater than theirs; for they were not provided with such a host of examples of faith as we are. But faith in Christ has put us on the racecourse, where endurance is so necessary an asset. Indeed, are the features of the race not seen beautifully in Ch. 11, a host pressing on toward brighter things

than the entire world could offer? A racer must lay aside every weight, not because weights are contrary to the rules of the race, but because by these he will hinder his own progress. Hence weights are not sins, but the cares of this world, occupation with things merely material, which so engage the time that the exercise of faith is hindered. But if weights are assumed, sin will more easily beset us, for the energy of faith is not present to outdistance sin's temptations. Some Christians may be content to take a very slow pace Heavenward, weighted down by present desire for some earthly advantage or comfort; and like Peter "following afar off" find themselves suddenly caught in sin's cunning trap. F. W. Grant points out that if we thought of sin as a pack of wolves at our heels, we should certainly not choose to carry heavy weights with us.

Verse 2 speaks of Jesus as "the Leader and Completer of faith" as it may be translated. Such is the blessed Object or Goal of the saint, - "looking unto Jesus." Many others have been witnesses: He is the one Leader, the perfect exemplification of faith in all His path on earth; the Completer, He Who Himself will culminate every path of faith in blessed fulfilment of all the promises of God. In Him faith will have its complete answer and reward. Indeed, this wonderful conclusion of God's counsels in infinite blessing, with its future joy unspeakable, was a wonderful incentive to the Lord Jesus Himself, to endure the cross, the awful judgment of God for our sins; "despising the shame," that is, thinking lightly of the contempt and persecution of men, considering it nothing in comparison to the glory that would later be revealed. How blessed an Object for our own faith! And now He sits at God's right hand, His own sufferings over, but waiting yet the fulfilment of the fruits of His great work. Is it a great thing therefore for us to patiently endure? The end in view is no less certain for us, with its indescribable joy.

"For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin." Here is the blessed antidote to all discouragement, simply the honest consideration of the Lord Jesus. The Master had been persecuted: what else could His disciples expect? Moreover, the Master had resisted unto death all the efforts of sinful men to influence Him to surrender to sin's mastery. The Hebrews had not yet been called to go this far: would they give up for the sake of clinging to a few moments of earthly comfort? "Striving against sin" here is not the personal struggle of Romans 7, the individual fighting to free himself from sinful thoughts and feelings. In this case he must learn not to fight, but submit to the power and grace of the Lord Jesus, applying the cross of Christ to all that he is in the flesh. Nor is it here the conflict of Ephesians 6, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places. For that conflict is in reference to gaining and holding the truth of God in its purity and uncorruptness, against which Satan so cunningly fights. But here rather it is standing with firmness against men's

persecuting efforts to entangle our souls in the same sin they prefer to serve. It is a battle, but faith is the principle that overcomes.

But another aspect of suffering is considered from verse 5 to verse 11: "And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him: For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." If they suffered persecution from sinners, yet it was God who was allowing this means by which to train His own to conform to His own thoughts: this was "the chastening of the Lord." Blessed is that faith that looks far deeper than the surface of things, to see that every bit of trial and affliction, though it may be occasioned by the grossest wickedness of men, is under the perfect control of our God and Father, being the very thing our own souls need to form them in the pattern God has planned. A child may little understand the reasons for his father's dealings, but if the father has proven himself perfectly kind and trustworthy toward his child, then the child may have fullest confidence that those dealings are to be trusted.

Yet, let us note that this is to be with no spirit of mere lightness or unconcern: we are not to "despise the chastening of the Lord," because it is for a purpose. Nor are we, on the other hand, to "faint," that is, to become discouraged and give in to a spirit of complaint. It is God's love that is responsible for these afflictions, and every son He receives must have his share in this.

"If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers. then are ye bastards, and not sons." Enduring here is therefore neither despising nor rebelling, but taking it as from the hand of God. In this spirit alone can we enjoy the proper privileges of our relationship as sons of our God and Father, and reap the benefits of His dealings with us. It will be observed too in verse 11 that this "enduring" involves exercise of soul, in godly concern as to God's dealings. But if one were to find no testings of faith after professing to be a believer, it would indicate he was not a son of God at all.

"Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us as seemed good to them (margin); but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness." God has Himself designed this human relationship as a type of that which is much higher, and spiritual. Correction of a child is absolutely essential for the good of the child, though this depends on the attitude of the father: whatever seems suitable to him will govern his training of the child. However, God's training is perfection itself: its object is the pure profit of the child, and no detail of it can be

a mistake. Blessed indeed to be in such a hand! Only thus we learn to conform to God's own character of holiness, to honestly love what is good, and to hate evil.

"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." The chastening, as we have seen, refers to those outward circumstances of sorrow, trial, persecution, every element that is allowed to give distress or pain to the soul. These will grieve the heart rather than cause joy, though faith is able to triumph even while the trial is present, when the eye is simply upon Christ. Indeed, in the face of persecution we are told to "rejoice and be exceeding glad" (Matt. 5:11, 12). At least, where godly exercise has wrought its work in recognizing the hand of God in these things, the blessed result will be "the peaceable fruit of righteousness." The storm will give place to the quiet calm of solid, true blessing. God's hand must be recognized in the trial, and the soul be drawn to seek His mind concerning it, or we can expect no blessing as a result of it: we should be guilty of resisting God's goodness in designing such things in view of our greatest blessing.

"Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed." In the knowledge of God there is no room for discouragement: hands are for active work: our knees should have strength to enable us to stand with firm decision: our feet are for walking, and should have "straight paths" in order that there be no mere aimless wandering, but definite purpose. Moreover, an uneven, tortuous path would itself discourage "that which was lame." We may be guilty of discouraging others by our failure to hold fast to the straight paths of the Word of God. Certainly the straight path itself is never responsible for discouragement: it would tend rather to heal; and our walking in such paths will tend to restore and heal those who falter.

"Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." Peace and holiness are normal fruits of Christianity: if they are entirely absent, one has not known the Lord, nor will he stand in His presence. But let the believer follow these things in wholehearted devotion. Too often also souls may divorce these things, and insist on peace while ignoring holiness, or insist on holiness while ignoring peace. The former involves a friendly tolerance of sin, the latter a contentious spirit of legality. Our preservation lies in godly concern to follow both peace and holiness.

"Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the

blessing, he was re-jected; (for he found no place of repentance), though he sought it carefully with tears." Godly watchfulness is only becoming to the people of God, for the enemy is ever active in seeking to tear down from inside. One may "fail of the grace of God," that is, though he has known that grace in theory, yet his heart has not embraced it: he is outwardly a disciple, but not so in heart. In such soil, "a root of bitterness" may easily spring up, a revul-sion against the pure, precious Word of God and against the holy Person of the Lord Jesus. If such should occur among Christians. how easily others may be defiled, - not perhaps going to the same lengths as the bitter offender, yet badly affected by his unholy ways. The person spoken of as "a fornicator or profane person, as Esau" is of course not a believer at all, though he may have passed as one, and for this reason can be dangerous.

The test manifested Esau as an unbeliever: he sold his birthright to fill his stomach. That which God had given him he regarded with indifference, if not contempt: he despised the grace of God. Yet he afterward desired to inherit the blessing, and evidently expected to do so in spite of his having willingly forfeited it. Such is the perversity of the flesh. He shed tears of anguish in desire for the blessing, but he found no place of repentance. Not that he sought repentance: it was the blessing he sought, but did not care to repent of his proud contempt of the grace of God, which indeed is the only ground upon which God will allow the blessing.

"For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more. (For they could not endure that which was commanded. And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart; and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake.") Esau sought the blessing on the ground of mere human rights, with no repentance: this would be in principle coming to Mount Sinai, where one must expect to meet with the most forbidding, repelling anger of God. Merely touching the mount meant death. Fire signified the burning holiness of God in judgment. Blackness and darkness denotes the utter absence of light in any mere legal position as before God: while the tempest indicates a state of troubled unrest. The sound of the trumpet and the voice of words is the ringing declaration of truth without mercy, which implanted awful fear in the hearts of the hearers. They could not endure what was com-manded. Note too that even a beast, which is not a morally evil creature, could not approach the mount: indeed no creature, even unfallen (as the angels of God) can approach the holy presence of God on the basis of creature merit: how much less man, who is sinful! Even Moses, the mediator, type of Christ, was filled with quaking fear. In all of this too it is most striking that no form is seen, and no face: God is hidden. This is the

mount to which Israel came, where they received the law, under which they remained responsible until such time as God would in grace reveal Himself in the Person of His Son.

"But ye have come to Mount Sion; and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem; and to myr-iads of angels, the universal gathering; and to the as-sembly of the firstborn who are enregistered in Heaven; and to God, Judge of all: and to the spirits of just men made perfect; and to Jesus, Mediator of the new cove-nant; and to the blood of sprinkling, speaking better than Abel" (N. Trans.). The eternal value and blessed-ness of these eight subjects is in wonderful contrast to what goes before, in which no ray of actual, true bless-ing to mankind could penetrate the gloom: indeed nothing but the curse could actually accompany pure law. But pure Divine grace manifests both the marvelous counsels of God, the great blessings of God, and the glory of His Person. And to this believers have come. First, Mount Sion (meaning 'sunny' rather than dark) is the earthly center of blessing in Jerusalem promised of God for the coming day of Israel's glory, a state of settled blessing for the nation. Faith even now, believing in the unshakeable character of the counsels of God, rests in anticipation of this. Not that our place will be in the earthly city, but both Jewish and Gentile believers today have title to rejoice in the certainty of God's counsels of grace concerning the eventual blessing of earth. Secondly however, "the city of the living God, the heav-enly Jerusalem," gives us the certainty of future heavenly blessing for all those for whom God has prepared that city. For though no doubt it is the Bridal city, named for the Bride, the church, yet it includes all saints of past ages, and martyrs also of the tribulation period. Thirdly, "myriads of angels, the universal gathering," would widen our vision further, to see greater multitudes still rejoicing in unity of worship and adoration, the fruit of God's counsels of grace. Let us notice again, all of this involves the precious anticipation of faith.

Fourthly, "the church of the firstborn, enregistered in Heaven," involves the actual blessing enjoyed now by grace, by the church, whose blessings are on a heavenly level. Fifthly, "to God the Judge of all." Not only are we blessed in being linked with the marvelous administra-tion of God's counsels of grace, but we are brought without fear to the Great Judge, the Administrator Himself. The thick darkness no longer hides Him: He is "in the light." Sixthly, "to the spirits of just men made perfect." This expression can refer only to Old Testament saints, as a class, who have waited in disembodied form all through the dispensation of grace, for the future day of resurrection, when they will be made perfect. Without them God's counsels of grace would be incomplete, and we rejoice in prospect of their blessing too.

Seventhly, "to Jesus the Mediator of the new cove-nant" This precious Name of moral grace and beauty emphasizes the reality of His Manhood, as the one

Mediator between God and men. For if we see revealed in His Person, on the one hand, the perfect light of the knowledge of the glory of God - that is, eternal Deity, - yet on the other hand is the wonder of His human per-fection as the only possible Mediator acceptable with God. To Him we are brought in righteousness and peace, with no cloud to intervene. In the eighth place (number of new creation) is "the blood of sprinkling, speaking better than Abel." Here is the precious witness of an accomplished work, the necessary basis upon which every blessing in grace becomes effective, - blood that maintains an eternal value, and for which our hearts shall be filled with unceasing thanksgiving to God for eternity! Marvelous, infinite completeness of blessing!

"See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from Heaven. Whose voice then shook the earth: but now He hath promised saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also Heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things that cannot be shaken may remain." The exhortation here is most solemn. When God had spoken on earth, that is, in the giving of the law, with all the awesome accompaniments that inspired terror in the children of Israel, and in such a manifestation of His power and holiness, refusal meant stern judgment; then how much more so now that God has spoken from Heav-en, His own great glory revealed in the Person of His Son. His nature of infinite love displayed in the blessed sacrifice of that Son. Blessed, Heavenly revelation! How dreadfully culpable then the guilt of turning away from such matchless, infinite grace.

For grace is no indulgent toleration of rebellion. God will maintain His rights as Sovereign Judge and Creator. If His voice shook the earth at Sinai, it will yet shake more than the earth. "The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Pet. 2:10). Reaching for the moon or the planets will be no escape from this dire judgment: man's only hope is in Him who is "made higher than the heavens," the Lord Jesus Christ.

The quotation from Haggai 2:6, "Yet once more" is shown to indicate that this will mean the removal of all that is temporary, that only what is eternal may remain. For it is only "once" then the results can be nothing but eternal. We have seen the word used before in Hebrews in the same final, absolute way.

"Wherefore, we receiving a kingdom that cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire" Blessed such a kingdom of eternal character, but received now by faith. "My kingdom is not of this world," the King Himself has

declared (John 18:36), for "the world passeth away, and the lust thereof" (1 John 2:17). Since this kingdom cannot be moved, let us not be moved either, but draw from God the grace to serve Him acceptably, that is, in a manner acceptable to Him, consistent with His eternal nature and counsels. And a becoming reverence is to be accompanied by godly fear, a wholesome, serious regard for the awful majesty of God. For He is a consuming fire, fearful in holiness, consuming all that will not stand the test of eternity. The display of His grace by no means involves the slightest giving up of His holiness.

### Chapter 13

The first six verses of this chapter have a striking moral relationship to what has gone before. We have seen that though God's dispensational ways have undergone a mighty change in the advent of His beloved Son, yet His nature and character remain unchangeable. Now these verses show that moral responsibilities are not abolished either. "Let brotherly love continue." Dispensational change was not to change this at all: It is a character applicable to all ages. "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." Abraham's hospitality (Gen. 18) is a lovely example, not only for his earthly seed, Israel, but for ourselves. This is a general rule, though 2 John 8-11 is an important exception: one who comes propagating a doctrine that dishonors the Person of Christ, must be refused all hospitality, and not even accorded the cour-tesy of a common greeting.

"Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body." Thus, our present dispensation, though Heavenly and spiritual, does not relieve us from having to face the groans of creation: just as godly Israelites suffered for their faith in the Old Testament, so Christians also endured persecution and imprisonment for Christ's sake; and compassionate sympathy for such is but normal and proper Christianity.

"Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge." Here again Christianity in no wise annuls the sanctity of re-lationships established in creation. Some have dared to teach this; but this involves the wicked denial of moral principles that remain unchanged through all dispensa-tions. Indeed, even the law allowed inconsistencies because of the hardness of men's hearts-not because God approved, - but Christianity reaffirms God's creatorial rights in this regard (Matt. 19:39). But the law de-manded death for an adulterer. Such evil is no less ser-ious today than then, but judgment for it is in God's hands, not in ours. Of course, in the assembly of God, such abuse would require the firm discipline of the as-sembly as such, and putting away from fellowship, (1 Cor. 5) but the actual judgment for such guilt God reserves for Himself, rather than now appointing His peo-ple to execute capital punishment.

"Let your conversation be without covetousness: and be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my Helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." Personal godly conduct and character was not to be changed because of a changed dispensation, though "Thou shalt not covet" is replaced by the more gentle, persuasive language of grace. Two quotations are found in these verses from the Old Testament, first the blessed promise of God to Josh-ua, a man of faith, and seen here to be applicable to every child of faith, in every age. Secondly, there is the bold response of faith to such language of the Psalmist (Psa. 118:6), which every believer may adopt at all times, regardless of dispensation; and certainly ourselves, whose lot is fallen in a dispensation which is preeminently addressed to faith.

But if the first six verses have dealt with that which continues in spite of dispensational change, what follows now is characteristic of the new dispensation, to which no addition can be allowed, nor is advance possible. Let us consider this most thoroughly and digest well its implications.

"Remember your leaders who have spoken to you the Word of God; and considering the issue of their conversation, imitate their faith: Jesus Christ is the Same yesterday, and today, and to the ages (to come)" (N. Trans.). In verse 17 we shall find that leaders are to be obeyed, but in verse 7 it is evident that deceased leaders are referred to, and to be remembered. Some had doubtless suffered martyrdom for Christ: their faith had stood fast even unto death. Blessed example! Their faith was worth following. This is no mere imitation of their methods, but acting upon the vital principle of faith, as they did. Let us remember today not to dismiss from our minds the godly example and faith of men of God who are now with the Lord. Leaders of this kind are those who have sought no following for themselves, but have directed souls to the Lord, -guided them in the paths of the pure Word of God. Their conversation, that is, their entire manner of life and conduct, had a definite end in view: it was no mere haphazard conglomeration of motives that moved them: there was a vital issue above all else that influenced their actions. This we are bidden to consider. What was the secret of their stability? Their faith was in "Jesus Christ, the Same yesterday, and today, and forever." Why ought a believer to change when he has a Master who does not? "Yesterday" would refer to the blessed manifestation in flesh of the Son of God, His entire earthly path of infinite grace and truth. "Today" at the right hand of God He is the Same. Of course, having died and risen again, He is changed in bodily condition, but in Person, in nature, in moral character, He remains unchangeable. Blessed, faithful Lord. "And forever!" No possible circumstance can ever alter this holy, gracious lord of glory. What an Object for faith! What a consideration for our souls! How comforting, refreshing, encouraging, strengthening, stabilizing! May we unceasingly adore His precious Name.

"Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein" The revelation of God in Christ is certainly infinitely better than the forms and laws of Judaism; but after such revelation, advance or improvement is impossible. Men may introduce new and diverse doctrines, but they are an insult to the blessed Person of Christ, and strange in the sense of being foreign to God's revelation. Unstable souls may be beguiled by them, but as we have seen, stability is found in the Person of Christ. The heart must be established with grace. May we know more fully and purely the sweet significance of that grace which has met the claims of a broken law, delivered us from bondage, and provided a liberty wherewith to serve God with wholehearted, voluntary devotion. How much more than conscientiousness is this! Not indeed that conscience is ignored, but rather that, being exercised by the Word of God, the soul gladly acquiesces in that which conscience approves. Thankful affection for the Lord thus becomes the motive, not a mere sense of duty. The legal principle is banished, as are its forms and ceremonies. "Not with meats" is a word added here to insist that mere temporal instances of selfdenial must be no object in a believer's life. They are good indeed if practiced honestly for the Lord's sake, with no thought of spiritual merit in them; but refraining from certain meats will make a soul no better or no worse. "Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats, but the Lord shall destroy both it and them" (1 Cor. 6:13). A believer ought to be able to give up his rights easily, whether eating of meat or anything else, without attaching any sanctimonious virtue to it, or considering it a legal imposition. Let grace reign in it, and it is very simple and honorable, as well as profitable. But those who occupy themselves with those things rather than with the grace of God, do not find profit for their own souls.

"We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle." The Person of the Lord Jesus is the altar that sanctifies the gift, that is, which gives value to His work of sacrifice. The believer partakes of this altar, as the offerer was privileged in Israel to eat of the peace offerings. But one who serves the tabernacle, that is, clings to Judaism (which was but a temporary order of things), by that very fact ignores the glory of the Person of Christ and the efficacy of His sacrifice.

What right then could he possibly have in the fellowship of Christianity? There was the clearest line of demarcation between the two.

"For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come." Here another comparison with



Judaism serves to strongly illustrate the great contrast between this and Christianity. On the great day of atonement, once each year, the high priest must take the blood of the sin offering into the holy place, sprinkling it before and on the mercy-seat (Lev. 16:11-19). But the body of the sin-offering, whether bull or goat, was to be taken outside the camp and burned (Lev. 16:27). None of this was to be eaten at all, but outside the camp all was to ascend in smoke, as it were, to God.

How strikingly beautiful is such a type as this. The blessed Lord of Glory, in order to fulfill the type perfectly, was rejected by His own earthly people, led outside the city of Jerusalem, and crucified. That which was solidly established as God's testimony on earth, having received the oracles of God, having the promise of the Great King, for Whom they professed to look with fervent anticipation, has yet been guilty of completely refusing this holy, gracious Messiah, who came with every possible proof of His glory, in fulfilment of the Scriptures they revered. Totally rejected by Israel, He "suffered without the gate."

Is this not a clearest indication of the fact that both the world in general, and mere formal religion in particular, will allow no place for the blessed Son of God?

But in so suffering outside the gate, He sanctifies the people with His own blood. Indeed, His blood speaks inside the holiest of all, in such manner as to eternally satisfy and glorify God, and this is sanctification to God. Yet sanctification to God must also involve sanctification from the world, a setting apart in a very real and holy manner. He Himself was forced apart from all that was considered dignified and honorable on earth, and His people must expect to share with Him the same rejection, if they would follow Him. Yet such a path will be actually sweet to the soul, in just such proportion as we appreciate and enter into the sorrows of our Lord as the One "despised and rejected of men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." May we deeply meditate upon Him and upon the holy reality of His sufferings, both from man's hand of hatred and contempt, and from God's hand of perfect justice on account of our sins. How truly this will temper the trials of our own path, and give us actual joy in "bearing all things."

What then does it require but simple, decided energy of faith to heed the exhortation, "Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach"? For a Jew to leave the camp of Judaism was no light matter: he could expect the same reproach that Israel meted out to his Master. But it is well to insist that our going forth is to be "unto Him." There is no real comfort, no shelter, no strength at all for a path of reproach such as this, unless these are found in the very real presence of the Lord. His blessed Person is the only sufficiency for this, and thank God a perfect sufficiency. Do we love Him? Do we trust Him? Then let us gladly bear His reproach. If it pains us, let us rather think of His greater pain. If

it incurs men's contempt or mockery, let us think of His patiently bearing that which was far worse.

The camp of Judaism was what had been previously established by God, but had degenerated into a mere formal religion, leaving no room for the gracious authority of the Lord Jesus. How similar to Exodus 33, where, on account of the sin of the golden calf, Moses pitched the tabernacle afar off from the camp, and everyone who sought the Lord went out to Moses. It was a case clearly demonstrated, of the Lord's authority being refused: then the believer must go to where the Lord's authority actually is.

The same principle must apply at all times. If, for instance, Christian testimony should degenerate to such a state as to be comparable to formal Judaism, where religious ritual is observed, but the Name and authority of the Lord Jesus ignored, then it has become the mere "camp," degraded to an earthly basis, marked by worldly principles. The believer is called to go forth unto Him, from all such hollow profession. He may be reproached for it, he may be made to feel the loneliness of such a path, but if it is truly "unto Him," the recompense is infinitely sweet. His own presence will more than compensate for every present loss.

For, after all, our time on earth is exceedingly brief at the most: "here we have no continuing city," no place of settled fellowship, for all here is both greatly impaired, and rapidly passing away. "But we seek one to come." What a prospect of unspeakable joy!-a fellowship of perfect purity and blessedness, where the Person and authority of the Lord Jesus is the very basis of its holy unity and sweetness for eternity. In view of so marvelous an end, how small indeed in comparison is whatever reproach and suffering we may bear in the present time, for Christ's sake. We shall welcome this in just such measure as our minds are set on things above.

"By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His Name. But to do good and communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." A proper stand for the truth of the Word of God will not tend to make us critical or bitter toward others, nor haughty and self-satisfied, but to rather fill our hearts with the lowly spirit of praise to God continually. This is said also to be a sacrifice, for is it not the willing giving up of confidence in the flesh, the refusal of personal honor in order that true honor and glory be given to the eternal God? If such praise and thanksgiving is our delight "continually," there will of course be no place whatever for complaint or cold criticism. But another sacrifice is closely linked with this, that is the active energy of goodness toward others, the willing sharing of our earthly goods with those who are in need. Blessed to have the assurance in

this that "God is well pleased." Is it not the most blessed occupation on earth to please Him?

This will of course also be conducive to orderly conduct. "Obey your leaders, and be submissive; for they watch for your souls as those that shall give account; that they may do this with joy, and not groaning, for this would be unprofitable for you." These of course are living leaders, in contrast to verse 7; but the verse supposes a normal Christian character of godly concern for souls. If leaders depart from the faith, they must not be followed, but if seeking to walk with God and to watch for souls, it is a serious responsibility to obey them. A truly worshipping heart will find no difficulty in honest submission in matters of order and government. For let us remember that leaders must give account to the God whom they are responsible to serve. It would seem that this refers, not to the future judgment seat of Christ, but to a present accounting before God of the state and well-fare of the assembly, - which may be with "anguish of heart," in which exercise before God the apostle wrote to Corinth, (2 Cor. 2:4); or with profound joy, as in the case of the Thessalonians: "For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before God" (1 Thess. 3:9). But though a leader may have to give account with groaning, let us mark that this is not said to be unprofitable for the leader, but "for you." It is the insubject heart that suffers loss, while godly leaders may be deeply pained for the sake of that precious soul, and pour out their hearts in humiliation and prayer before God. Indeed, this very exercise will prove spiritually profitable for the leader, but the disobedient child of God will lose.

"Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly. But I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner." The lowliness of the apostle is a lovely example for us. He solicits the prayers of which he feels the need, but it is no request to be lightly made: the request ought to be backed up by an honest willingness to live rightly before God. To ask prayer while desiring a self-willed, self-pleasing course, is an effort to enlist God's help in wrongdoing. As to verse 19, it does not appear that he means release from prison, for it seems he was not in prison at the time; but evidently he had a longing to return to Judea, and sought their prayers to this end. Compare vs. 23.

"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that Great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ: to Whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." How full and appropriate this lovely closing prayer! For troubled Hebrews there was a God of peace, Who had laid the firm basis of peace in raising from among the dead Him whose heart was that of a faithful Shepherd, -

great indeed also in the power of resurrection life. And this resurrection was consistent with the preciousness of His death: the value of the blood of the eternal covenant was such that resurrection was the righteous result. Again, let us mark, here is eternal virtue in contrast to all that was temporal in Judaism: the covenant is eternal because the value of the blood is eternal; and the blessed Shepherd lives in the power of an endless life. Wonderful fulness, and perfection of blessing for His sheep! With such a provision, how can our hearts fail to respond with real desire to be made perfect or mature in every good work to do His will? Yet again, the working of this must be on the part of God. Our resources are all in Him, through Jesus Christ; and practical results in our lives must be the result of submission to the working of His hand. Then we shall seek no credit for ourselves, but heartily ascribe to Him "glory for ever and ever."

"And I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation: for I have written a letter unto you in few words." It is a tender appeal to his own nation, or at least to those in the nation who professed Christianity. Certainly any reasonable and thoughtful mind cannot but be amazed at the few words with which so great and wonderful a subject is expounded. The inspiration of God is the only answer.

"Know ye that our brother Timothy is set at liberty: with whom, if he come shortly, I will see you." The apostle counts upon their affection for Timothy, and thankfulness for his liberty. Is there not a designed analogy here? For the object of the entire epistle is surely to set at complete liberty from Judaism these Hebrew believers. And Timothy's name (means "honoring God") bears its bright witness to the fruits of true Christian liberty.

"Salute all your leaders, and all the saints. They from Italy salute you. Grace be with you all. Amen." For the third time in the chapter leaders are spoken of, and as worthy of respect. For though the epistle sets aside mere officialism and ritualism, yet it would carefully guard against any ignoring of proper godly authority in the hands of those whom God has given to care for the sheep. But all the saints are to be shown kindly respect. And the saints of Italy too witness their unity with the Hebrew saints. Blessed the workings of the matchless grace of God! May it be with us all.

Leslie M Grant

## INTRODUCTION

A FEW PRELIMINARY words may be useful, before we consider the chapter in its details.

Although in our Bibles the title of this wonderful treatise always appears as, "The Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews," yet the author of it was led by the inspiring Spirit to suppress both his own name and the name of those to whom he wrote it. Almost every line of it however bears witness that it was addressed to Hebrew believers, and there are in it a number of small allusions which make it pretty certain that it was written by Paul. If so, we have in it that epistle to Jewish believers which Peter, in his second epistle, mentions as having been written by "our beloved brother Paul" (2 Pet. 3: 15).

As we go through it we shall see that the occasion of it was that a certain weariness had come over these saints, their hands were drooping and their knees feeble in the Christian race, and these disquieting symptoms raised fears lest this backsliding tendency might mean some of them falling into open apostasy.

We shall also see that the main burden of it is the immeasurable superiority of Christianity to Judaism, although the latter appealed to sight and the former to faith only. Incidentally also it called upon them to cut their last links with the worn out Jewish system, to which they had such a tendency to cling, as the Acts of the Apostles shows us. It must have been written only a few years before the imposing ritual of Judaism ceased in the destruction of Jerusalem.

The importance of this epistle for the present hour cannot be exaggerated. Multitudes of believers today, though Gentiles and hence in no way connected with Judaism, are yet entangled in perverted forms of Christianity, which consist very largely in forms and ceremonies and ritual, which in their turn are largely an imitation of that Jewish ritual, once ordained of God to fill up the time until Christ came. It may be that most of our readers are, through God's mercy, free of these systems today, yet most of us have had something to do with them, and almost insensibly the influence of them clings to us.

If our faith is stirred up as we read it; if our spiritual eyes get a fresh sight of the immeasurable glories of Christ, and of the reality of all those spiritual verities which are established in Him, we shall find ourselves thoroughly braced up to "run with patience the race that is set before us."

Hebrews 1

THE EPISTLE OPENS in the most majestic manner. Hebrews is the only book in the Bible which begins with the word, GOD. We are at once brought face to face with the tremendous fact that God, who had spoken to the fathers of Israel by prophets in former days, had now spoken in divine fulness and with finality in His Son. Just notice in passing that this first verse witnesses that the epistle is to the Hebrews, for the expression, "the fathers," would have no meaning for a Gentile.

God being the living God, it is only to be expected that He would speak. Before sin came in He spoke freely to Adam, and face to face; afterwards He only addressed Himself to chosen men, who became thereby His mouthpieces. The prophets had to speak just what He gave them, and often they uttered words, the full meaning of which was hidden from them, as we are told in 1 Peter 1: 10-12. When the Lord Jesus came to accomplish redemption God told out all His mind. He spoke not merely by Him as His mouthpiece, but in Him. The distinction, is not made in our Authorized version, but it should be, for the preposition in verse 2 is not "by" but "in." It is an important distinction, for it at once preserves the unique character of our Lord. When the Son spoke it was God speaking, for the simple reason that the Son was God.

Having mentioned the Son, the Holy Spirit proceeds to unfold His glory, not only that glory which is His essentially as God and Creator, but also that which is His by reason of His redemption work. This leads to a long but very necessary digression, which lasts until the end of the chapter; so much so that all these verses might be placed within brackets. We should then read straight from the word "Son" to the beginning of chapter 2 and find the sense complete. "God . . . hath . . . spoken unto us in His Son . . . therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed." Indeed it is not until we arrive at verse 3 of chapter 2 that we discover what is the main drift and theme of this Divine speaking. It was "so great salvation which first began to be spoken by the Lord." When God formulated His demands upon men it was sufficient that angels should serve Him, and that a man such as Moses should be His mouthpiece. Now that His great salvation' is the theme the Son Himself comes forth and speaks.

However the immediate theme before us in chapter 1 is the unique glory of the Son. Immediately He is mentioned our thoughts are swept forward to the moment when His glory shall be fully manifested, and then back to the moment when first it appeared, as far as all created beings are concerned. On the one hand He is the Heir not merely to David's throne but of "all things," and this expression covers things in the heavens and not only things on earth. On the other hand when the worlds were made He was the Maker of them. God created indeed, as we are told in Genesis 1: 1, but when the Persons are distinguished, as in this Scripture, creation is attributed not to the Father but to the Son. The Son-whom we know as

our blessed Lord Jesus-was the mighty Actor in those creatorial scenes of inconceivable splendour.

Verse 3 brings before us three great things concerning Him. First, we have what He is, as the outshining of the glory of God and the exact expression of all that God is. Secondly, we are told what He has done. By Himself He has done the work which purges sins away. How He did it we are not told for the moment, but we know it was by the death of the cross. Thirdly, where He is comes before us. He has taken His seat at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens; that is, He sits in the place of supreme power, from whence everything shall in due season be administrated. How wonderfully these three things go together! The efficacy of the work that He did was dependent upon the fact of who and what He was; whilst the proof and demonstration of the efficacy of His work is found in where He is, in the fact that He is seated in the place of supreme power. If any believer in Jesus is still plagued with doubts and misgivings as to whether his sins are really and effectively purged away, let him look by faith to that seat on high where Jesus sits, and doubt no more!

In verse 3 we also find the wonderful fact that the Son is the Upholder of all things. The previous verse has set Him before us as the Creator of all, and as the One who shall inherit all things, now we discover that all things are upheld and hang together by the word of His power. We may talk sometimes about the laws of the universe. We may observe the working of the law of gravitation, though the real why and wherefore of it is unknown to us. We may even, before we are much older, have to listen to fickle "science" altering or overturning all that she had previously asserted as to these laws. Well, so be it! We know that THE LAW of the universe is the word of His power, and this is all that really matters. Any laws which we may observe, or think we observe, are very secondary, and should the leaders of scientific speculation suddenly reverse their pronouncements we shall not turn a hair.

Let us put this together then in brief fashion. The Son is the Creator, the Upholder and the Heir of all things. He is moreover the exact Expression of all that God is, being God Himself, and being that exact Expression He has come forth to be the Divine Spokesman on the one hand, and the Redeemer on the other. Had He spoken only we should all have been terrified; but as He has made purification for sins as well as speaking, we can receive with joy the revelation which He has made.

In verse 4 He is contrasted with angles, and this contrast is not merely mentioned and then dismissed; the theme is elaborated at considerable length, and continues to the end of the chapter. It is very definitely CONTRAST. In saying this we are pointing out one of the characteristic features of this epistle. As we proceed we

shall find continued references to the old order of things, established when the law was given by Moses. These old and material things bore a certain resemblance to the new and spiritual things established and introduced by the Lord Jesus, and hence they were designed to act as patterns or types. Yet when these types are put alongside the realities which they typified an immense contrast is seen. As the heavens are high above the earth so the antitype exceeds the type. In our epistle the resemblance is taken for granted, and it is the contrast which is stressed.

It may be asked however, Why is the contrast with angels so elaborated and even carried on into the next chapter? What is the point of it? Well every Jew knew that angels played a very large part in connection with the giving of the law by Moses, though but little is said of them in Exodus. The words of Stephen, recorded in Acts. 7: 53 show this, as also the second verse of our second chapter. This display of angelic might gave a very powerful sanction to Moses and the law he brought them, in the minds of the people. And now there appears amongst men the Divine Spokesman, yet to them He is but Jesus of Nazareth, a humble and despised Man. There is no beauty about Him that they should desire Him or His words nor is there any display of angels to accredit Him. It became therefore of the utmost importance to insist on the true glory of His person as being immeasurably above all angels. Had He been visibly attended by ten thousand times ten thousand, it would have added nothing to Him!

Two things are said in verse 4. First, He has a more excellent name than angels by inheritance; second, He has been made better than they. The words, "Being made," may also be translated, "Having become," or, "Taking a place." The first refers to His superiority by reason of His Godhead glory; the second to the place He now occupies in Manhood, as the Accomplisher of redemption. And notice that His superiority is equally pronounced in both, as evidenced by these little words in the sentence, "SO . . . AS." Read the verse again for yourself, and see.

These facts, as stated in verse 4, are supported and proved by a remarkable series of quotations from the Old Testament, extending from verse 5 to the end of the chapter. Let us just notice how the argument runs.

Verses 5 and 6 contain three quotations giving the pronouncements of God when introducing the Lord Jesus to men. They very definitely support what is said in verse 4, especially the statement as to His being better than angels by inheritance.

In verse 7 we have a quotation which plainly states the nature of angels and the reason why they exist. They are spirits in their nature and they exist as ministers to serve the Divine will. This is in contrast to what goes before and also to that which follows.

In verses 8 to 12 we get two quotations giving us utterances of God to Christ, in both of which He is addressed as Man and yet He is saluted as God and as the Creator.

In verse 13 comes the quotation giving the decree which has exalted Him to the right hand of the Majesty on high, and this, we are assured, is something which never was said to angels. They are but spirits who are glad to serve, according to the Divine will, such humble creatures as those who once were fallen sinners, but who shall be heirs of salvation. All this, and particularly verses 9 and 13, show us that He is better than angels, inasmuch as He has taken a place which is so much higher than theirs.

There are seven quotations in all from the Old Testament in these verses: one in regard to angels and six in regard to Christ. These latter come from Ps. 2: 7, 2 Samuel 7: 14; Ps. 97: 7; Ps. 45: 6, 7; Ps. 102: 25-27; Ps. 110: 1., and each deserves to be separately studied.

The first is deeply interesting for it shows that even as a Man born in time He is the Son of God. These words from Psalm 2 anticipate the virgin birth, and their fulfilment is announced in Luke 1: 35. We may say they give us God's utterance to Christ at His incarnation.

The second is remarkable as showing how the Holy Ghost always has Christ in view. Reading Samuel we might think that the words only referred to Solomon. Immediately, Solomon was in view, as the words following those quoted show; but ultimately, Christ was in view.

The third gives us the decree concerning Christ at the moment of His reintroduction into the world in power and glory; not His first coming, but His second. We read the Psalm and the "Him" is clearly Jehovah. We read Hebrews and the "Him" is clearly Christ. What does that teach us? Notice also that the term "gods" may be used of any who represent God, whether angels as here, or men as in Psalm 82: 6,-the passage which the Lord Jesus quoted in John 10: 34.

The fourth is what is said to the Son by God at the opening of the Millennial kingdom. He is a Man, for God is His God, yet He is addressed as God. As Man He has His fellows, or companions, yet He possesses a gladness which is above them-and how glad we are that He does!

The fifth gives us the divine word addressed to Him in the moments of His deepest humiliation and sorrow-we might almost say, in the garden of Gethsemane. He who is being cut off in the midst of His days is declared to be the

mighty Creator, who shall ultimately consume or change all in creation which needs changing, and yet Himself remain eternally the same.

The sixth turns our thoughts to Christ as the risen One and gives us God's utterance to Him as He ascended into the heavens. Thus we are conducted to the place where Christ is; and we are prepared to see Him there and to learn the meaning of His session in glory when we come to Hebrews 2.

All this wonderful unfolding of the excellence of our blessed Saviour is in order that we may be impressed with the greatness of the One in whom God has spoken to us. He is, as Hebrews 3: 1 puts it, "the Apostle . . . of our profession." An apostle is a "sent one," one who comes forth from God to us, bringing the divine message. Our Lord Jesus has thus come forth, bringing us the complete divine revelation; only He is Himself God. This fact at once lifts all that He has said to us on to a plane far above all that went before. The prophets of old were fully inspired of God, and consequently all that they said was reliable and comes to pass, but they could never convey to us the revelation which we have in Christ.

Into the marvellous light of that revelation the Hebrews had been brought. And so have we, thanks be to God!

#### Hebrews 2

SEEING THAT GOD has addressed Himself to us in Christ, who is far superior, not only to Moses but also to those angels through whose hands Moses received the law, we ought to give more abundant heed to all that has been said. With this the second chapter opens, and it is impossible to evade the solemn force of it. God's word spoken by angels was by no means to be trifled with, as Israel discovered before they had gone very far on their wilderness journey; what then shall be said as to the word that has now reached us in and through the Son of God?

A better rendering of the first verse is perhaps, "lest at any time we should slip away." To let slip the things heard would mean forgetfulness, but to slip away oneself from them might even mean apostasy. So also in verse 3 the word "neglect" carries the thought of not caring for God's great salvation when they were inside the Christian company as having professed faith, and not merely neglecting the Gospel when it was preached to them. In these words then we have the first of the solemn warnings against apostasy that we find repeated through the epistle; but this being so, the common use of these words in connection with the Gospel is fully justified. If the professor of Christianity who neglects the great salvation will by no means escape, even less will they escape who pay no attention to it when they hear it.

However the point in verses 2 and 3 is that it is more serious to trifle with God's salvation than to transgress His law, for there is no greater sin than that of despising the grace of God. Of old Moses had been the sent one, and had been commissioned to announce salvation out of Egypt to their fathers, and then through Moses that salvation had duly been carried out. The greatness of our salvation may be seen in the fact that He who has announced it is the Lord, whose glory has been set before us in Hebrews 1, and from the fact that the apostles, who confirmed His message after His exaltation into the heavens, were themselves accredited by ample displays of divine power in the energy of the Holy Spirit who had been given to them. Further on we shall find that not only did the Lord Jesus act as the Apostle in announcing the great salvation, but that all is carried out through Him as Surety, Mediator and Sacrifice.

In our chapter we shall find that it is His priesthood that is emphasized. Presently a new order of things is to be established, spoken of in verse 5 as "the world to come." Every Jew expected that new order to be introduced by the advent of the Messiah. Now in that world to come angels will not be the supreme authority, though they will have certain services to render in it, as other scriptures show. It is in its entirety subject to Christ as the Son of Man, as the eighth Psalm had predicted, and when the Lord takes up His great authority "He shall be a Priest upon His throne" (Zech. 6: 13).

The quotation from the Psalm 8 covers not only verse 7 but also the first sentence of verse 8. In the rest of verse 8 and in verse 9 we have an inspired explanation of how the Psalm applies at the present moment. The quotation begins at the point where David, having surveyed the wonders of the universe, asks what man is worth. He used a Hebrew word which has the sense of "frail man" or "mortal man." Well, what is he worth? Evidently he is worth nothing. What then shall be said of the Son of Man? Ah! now we have a very different story. Even in the psalm David changed the word for man, and wrote "the Son of Adam"; and this we know our Lord was, as seen in Luke 3: 38. He is worth everything. Though once made a little lower than the angels He is to be crowned with splendour and be set in absolute dominion, with all things under His feet.

It is very noticeable that the quotation stops just at the point where, in the psalm, words are added which seem to confine the "all things" set under His feet to all things on earth and in the sea. The Old Testament view of things did not for the moment go beyond that. In our chapter however the moment we turn from the quotation to the explanation a far larger range of things comes before us. We are assured that the little word "all" is to be given its full value, without the least shadow of qualification. Search through the universe and there is to be found nothing which is not put under Him. In that world to come man, in the person of the Son of Man, is to be absolutely supreme.

This is a most wonderful and glorious fact, and it illustrates for us how God always sees the end from the beginning, and is never defeated nor turned aside from His purpose in anything to which He sets His hand. God never made angels to rule: He made them to serve. The only creature, of which we have any knowledge, that was made to rule was man. Only of man was it said, "Let us make . . . and let them have dominion; . . . So God created man" (Gen. 1: 26, 27). Man fell: he ceased to rule the lower creation in any proper sense; he ceased indeed to properly rule himself. What then? Has God's purpose failed? Not only has it not failed but, when the SON OF MAN comes forth in His glory, the Divine purpose will be seen established with an extended fulness and glory undreamed of when Adam was created, by any save God Himself. Instead of failing God has triumphed most gloriously.

Some may say to themselves-That may be, but there are no very obvious signs of it in the world at the present moment. That is so. We do not yet see all things put under Christ. Even those who profess to be His followers show very little sign of being really subject to Him. The fact is that we are living in a time during which there is very little to see except we possess that kind of telescopic sight that faith gives.

Faith it is that sees. This we shall find elaborated when we come to Hebrews 11, especially verses 8 to 22, and verse 27. These great men of old penetrated by faith into the unseen world, yet they never saw the sight that shines before us-if we really possess faith's keen vision. We see the once humbled Jesus crowned with glory and honour in the highest heaven. Did the Hebrews possess faith's telescopic powers of sight, penetrating to the glory-crowned Jesus, and to the things which are above the sun? Do we? If we do we shall not be neglecting the great salvation; we shall not be letting go nor slipping into apostasy. Looking unto Jesus we shall be running the Christian race with energy divinely given.

But what means this statement in Psalm 8, that the Son of Man is made "a little lower than the angels"? Have we not read in Hebrews 1 that He is "made so much better than the angels"? There is an apparent contradiction here!

These passages where verbal contradictions appear upon the surface do us a good service if they cause us to pause, and think. Viewing them in their context and meditating upon them, we discover harmonies and teaching which otherwise we had passed over. See how it is in the case before us. In chapter 1 the Deity of our Lord is the great point, connected with His Apostleship. Yet He has become a Man, so that God is His God. Seeing however that it is GOD who has become Man, He is of necessity "made so much better than the angels."

In chapter 2 the emphasis lies upon the Manhood of the Lord Jesus. He became a Man with a view to the suffering of death. Man was so created- spirit, soul and body-that he could die, by the spiritual part of him being separated from the body. In this respect man was made a little lower than the angels. Now the Son of God has become the Son of Man in so real a sense that as a Man He has taken up the death penalty and died for men. From this standpoint He has been made a little lower than the angels, for angels never die.

In these wonderful verses one expression is repeated six times: thrice in verse 8, once in verse 9 and twice in verse 10. It is the word for all or all things, and only at the end of verse 9 is it otherwise translated. The Lord Jesus has tasted death for "all" and not merely for the Jew. At the present moment "all" is made subject to Him, and in the age to come we shall see it to be so.

In verse 10 we find a second object that was in view in the sufferings and death of Christ. Not only did He accomplish propitiation for all, but He thereby qualified Himself-if we may so put it-for the position He was to take up according to the purpose of God. God has instituted a new pilgrimage. Of old He used Moses and Joshua to bring a nation from Egypt to Canaan. Now He has set His hand to the mighty task of bringing many sons, gathered out from all the nations, to glory. He will not fail in this glorious enterprise for, firstly, He who has initiated it has all things at His disposal, and secondly, the One to whom it is entrusted as Leader is the risen Christ. He went through all possible sufferings here in order that He might have full experimental knowledge of all the sorrows under which lay those who are now the sons on the way to glory.

Is it not a wonderful thing that the Lord Jesus should have condescended to become the Leader of our salvation? Wonderful as it is, it is a fact. Having died and risen again, He has placed Himself at the head of the great redeemed family that is being gathered out of the nations and led to glory. They are the sanctified ones of whom verse 11 speaks-that is, those set apart for God-but He is the Sanctifier. They are set apart for God by virtue of their connection with Him.

Our connection with Him is of a very close and intimate order, so much so that it can be said of Sanctifier and sanctified that they are "all of one." Of one what?-we may ask. Well, we are not told. But inasmuch as it goes on to say, "for this cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren," it would seem that the thought must be that He and they are of one lineage, of one life and nature. The day is now arrived in which we know, according to the Lord's own words in John 14: 20, that He is in the Father, that we are in Him, and He in us; as also the day in which, according to John 17: 19, He has set Himself apart in heaven in order that we may be set apart through the truth.

Three Old Testament Scriptures are quoted in verses 12 and 13 in order to show how thoroughly we are identified with Him and He with us, and also that this immense privilege was foreseen, though not realized, in the days before His advent. The first of the three is especially remarkable. It comes from the latter part of Psalm 22, just at that point where the prophecy passes from His death to His resurrection, and the word "congregation" is translated into "church." The church (that is, the ecclesia, the called out ones) is that to which we all belong, and here it is quite definitely identified with the "many sons" and the "sanctified" of the earlier verses.

But if we were in this marvellous way to be identified with Him, it was necessary first that He should in His grace identify Himself with us in our need, and this He did in everything, apart from sin. He did not come to save angels but men. Consequently He did not take on Him the nature of angels but of men; and in particular of the seed of Abraham, for, as we know, our Lord sprang out of Judah. The word used here means, "to take hold of," and it has been stated that, "it is constantly used for 'taking up a person to help him,' though in other senses as well." Amazing grace this, when we see that it involved His taking a part in flesh and blood, which is the common lot of mankind; and that this He took in order that He might die.

Verse 14 is as clear on this as verse 9 had been before. Only death could meet the tragic situation in which we were found. Death is possible for man since he is a partaker of flesh and blood. His blood may be shed, his flesh go to corruption, his spirit depart to God who gave it-and all this is impossible to angels. Death is actually passed as the Divine sentence upon all men because of sin, and Satan who at the outset manoeuvred man into disobedience, now wields the power of death in the consciences of men, making them afraid and thereby holding them in bondage. What could destroy (that is, annul or bring to nothing, make of no effect) the devil and the power he wields? One thing only. Nothing but DEATH could annul death. And it must be the death of a MAN to annul death for men. All this was fulfilled. The Captain of our salvation, by taking part in flesh and blood, became a true Man, and for us He died.

Flesh and blood is a term which describes the state and condition of manhood, without reference to the question of sin. When Adam came forth fresh from God's creating hands he was a partaker of flesh and blood, but his humanity was innocent. He fell, and he and his posterity remained partakers of flesh and blood, but theirs is a fallen humanity. Our blessed Lord Jesus took part in flesh and blood and His humanity is the very essence of holiness.

Yet in all things it befitted Him to be made like to those whose cause He had taken up, as verse 17 declares. A very strong statement this, and the reality that it

presents will be a theme of wonder and worship to us throughout eternity. Just think of how it might have pleased Him to stoop and rescue His sinful and degraded creatures without being made like them at all. That however would not have fitted His love, even if it could have been done in conformity with His righteousness. Having taken part in flesh and blood He would be made like them in all things. He would be tempted and suffer, as verse 18 says, and thus enter into all their experiences save those that involved sin; and this in view of becoming the High Priest of His people.

All through the latter part of this chapter the Lord is presented in the same light. Whether as Captain of our salvation, or Sanctifier, or High Priest, He is seen as standing on our behalf before God, and not as standing on God's behalf before us; as He is when His Apostleship is in question. As High Priest He acts in things relating to God, as also He is able to succour us in our temptations. Towards us He is ever merciful, while always maintaining the purposes and glory of God with the utmost faithfulness. But while this is so His personal glory and pre-eminence is fully established. He is not ashamed to call us brethren, but nowhere are we encouraged to turn round and use that same term towards Him, as sometimes is done.

Before we leave the chapter notice how everything is cast in a mould suited to Jewish minds. Each point is supported by quotations from the Old Testament, showing how that which is now established in Christ had been foreseen and indicated. This might mean nothing to a Gentile, but it would be very significant to a Jew. Moreover the truth is stated in terms which would instantly remind them of the way in which their ancient religion had foreshadowed these good things to come. The end of verse 17 is an illustration of what we mean, where the work of the Lord Jesus is spoken of as making "reconciliation" (or "propitiation," as it really is) "for the sins of the people." Why put it thus? Why not say, "for our sins," or, "for the sins of men"? Because then the truth would not have been nearly so striking to Jewish minds. As it stands it would at once turn their thoughts to the well known work of Aaron, and their subsequent high priests, on the great day of atonement; of which we read in Leviticus 16, and which was a striking type of the work of Christ.

No new Testament book throws greater light on the Old Testament than Hebrews; and none shows more clearly how needful it is for us to read and understand the Old Testament. If we read Hebrews apart from this it is very easy to run away with mistaken notions.

Hebrews 3

THE FIRST CHAPTER has presented to us the Lord Jesus as the Apostle, that is, as the Sent One, who came forth from God to us, bringing us the Divine

revelation. The second set Him before us as the High Priest, who has gone in from us to God, representing us and maintaining our cause in His presence. Now we are bidden to consider Him very thoroughly in both these characters. We are to set our minds to it as those who aim at discovering all that is involved.

These Hebrews had taken up a new profession, or, we had better say, they had entered upon the confession of the name of Jesus, who had been rejected by their nation. The national attitude towards Him was summed up in these words, "We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not from whence He is" (John 9: 29). The more these converted Hebrews considered JESUS and studied Him the more certainly would they know from whence He was: they would perceive that truly "He was come from God, and went to God" (John 13: 3).

The Jews made their boast in Moses and in Aaron. God had indeed spoken to the one and made him His spokesman, and He had established the other in the priestly office; nevertheless both were dead. The Christian, and the Christian alone, has an Apostle and High Priest who lives, to be known and contemplated and loved: One who is God and yet Man endowed with all the attributes and glory enumerated in Hebrews 1 and Hebrews 2.

He is worthy of our eternal study. Let us consider Him well, for as we do so we shall the more clearly see how rich is the place we have as set in relation to Him, and how high is the calling in which we partake. Both these things are mentioned in the first verse. Do not pass them over lightly. They are worthy of serious attention.

We are addressed as "holy brethren." This is tremendously significant. It does not merely mean that all Christians are brethren and all set apart for God. The expression must be understood in relation to its context, that is, in relation to what has gone before, and particularly to verses 10 and 11 of Hebrews 2. In the latter of these two verses we have "sanctifieth" and "sanctified," and in our verse "holy." These are all different forms of the same word. We are holy inasmuch as we have come into the wonderful sanctification of being "all of one" with the great Captain of our salvation. For the same reason are we "brethren," since He is not ashamed to call us that. In addressing us as "holy brethren" the Spirit of God is reminding us of the place of extraordinary nearness and honour in which we are set.

As holy brethren we partake in the heavenly calling. We all know how God called Israel out of Egypt and into the land which He had purposed for them. Theirs was an earthly calling, though by no means to be despised. We are not called to any particular place on the earth, but to a place in the heavens.



In the gospels we see how the Lord was preparing the minds of His disciples for this immense change. At one point in the midst of His ministry He bade them not rejoice so much in the possession of miraculous powers: "but rather rejoice," He said, "because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10: 20). Our names are inscribed in the records of the cities to which we belong, and in these words the Lord indicated that they were entering upon a heavenly citizenship. Later, in His farewell discourse, He spoke to them of His Father's true house which is in the heavens—that house of which the earthly temple was only the pattern and shadow—and He said, "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14: 2). Our place is there. Our calling is heavenly in its character and it has heaven as its end.

If these early Hebrew converts really took in these mighty facts by faith, they would without doubt have realized how greatly they had been elevated. It was truly no mean thing to have been the people of Abraham and Moses, called to a land flowing with milk and honey; but all that shrinks into comparative insignificance besides such things as being among the "many sons" who are being brought to glory, owned as "holy brethren" by the Lord Jesus, and thus called to heaven. But again, if so great an elevation for them how much greater an elevation for us, who with neither part nor lot in Israel's privileges were just sinners of the Gentiles? Only let us take time to ponder the matter and we shall find abundant cause to bend our hearts in worship of Him from whose heart of love such designs have proceeded.

Holiness and heavenliness characterize our calling, but the great thing for us is that we turn the eyes of our mind upon Jesus and earnestly consider Him. He is both Apostle and High Priest and in His greatness we may read the greatness of our calling. Verses 2 to 6 give us a glimpse of His greatness as contrasted with Moses. When, as recorded in Numbers 12, Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses, they said, "Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? hath He not spoken also by us?" That is, they questioned his office as the prophet, or apostle, of that day. Then the Lord bore of him this remarkable testimony, "My servant Moses . . . is faithful in all Mine house." In this he was a type of Christ, who is faithful to Him that appointed Him in a supreme degree.

Yet even so we find that the relation here between type and Antitype is contrast rather than comparison. First, Moses was faithful in God's house as being part of the house himself; whereas Christ is the builder of the house. Second, the house in which Moses ministered was just Israel; he bore the burden of that nation but of that nation alone. The Lord Jesus acts on behalf of "all things." He that built all things is God, and the Lord Jesus is He by whom God built them. Third, in the small and restricted sphere of Israel Moses ministered as a faithful servant; but in

the vast sphere of all things Christ ministers to the glory of God. Let us meditate on these points and we shall begin to have large thoughts of Christ.

Still we must not lose ourselves in the immensity of God's mighty universe, so we find that Christ has His own house over which He is Son, and we, the believers of today, are that house. We are His building, and He faithfully administers all that concerns us to God's glory, as Apostle and High Priest.

But, as it says here, we are His house, "IF . . ." That if mightily disturbs a good many people. It is intended to disturb, not the true believer, but the mere professor of the Christian religion. And here let us draw an important distinction. When in Scripture we are viewed as those born of God, or indeed viewed in any way as the subjects of God's work by His Spirit, then no if is introduced. How can there be?—for perfection marks all God's work. On the other hand when we are viewed from the human standpoint as those who have taken upon us the profession of Christianity, then an if may be introduced—indeed it must be.

Here are some who professed conversion years ago, yet today they are far from being Christian in their behaviour. What can we say as to them? Well, we aim at being charitable in our thoughts, so we give them the benefit of the doubt and accept them as believers, until conclusively proved not to be so. Still there is a doubt: an if comes in. The Hebrews, to whom our epistle was written, were many as to numbers and very varied as to their spiritual state. Some of them made the writer of the epistle feel very anxious. The mass doubtless were really converted people of whom it could be said, "But beloved we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation" (Hebrews 6: 9). Still in writing to them all indiscriminately what could be said except that all Christian privileges were theirs, if indeed they were real in their profession.

Now it is just this that the second part of verse 6 says, for it is time that tests reality. There is no more certain guarantee of reality than continuance. The false sooner or later let things slip, and turn away; the true hold fast to the finish. But then if any do let slip and turn away the real root of the trouble with them is, in one word, unbelief.

You notice of course that a parenthesis stretches from the second word of verse 7 to the end of verse 11. To get the sense we read, "Wherefore take heed, brethren, etc." It is an evil heart of unbelief, and not of coldness or indifference or worldliness, that we are warned against; bad as these things are for the spiritual health of believers. It was just unbelief that was the root of all the troubles of Israel in their wilderness journey, as the last verse of our chapter says. So the Israel of the days of Moses was in this a beacon of warning to the Hebrews of the Apostolic age.

In the parenthesis we have a quotation from Psalm 95. It is introduced to our notice not as a saying of David but as a saying of the Holy Ghost, who inspired David in his utterance. In the last five verses of our chapter we have the Spirit's comment upon His earlier utterance in the Psalm, and here we have made abundantly plain what we have just stated above. Caleb and Joshua entered the land of promise because they believed; the rest did not because they did not believe. Their carcasses fell in the wilderness.

A further word of explanation is necessary at this point lest we become confused in our thoughts. The history of Israel may be looked at in two ways: firstly from a national standpoint, then from a standpoint more personal and individual. It has a typical value for us whichever way we look at it.

If we take the first standpoint then we consider them as nationally a redeemed people, and that nationally they entered into the land God purposed for them, with the exception of the two and a half tribes, who became typical of earthly-minded believers, who fail to enter into that which is God's purposed blessing for them. From that point of view we do not concern ourselves with the fact that the individuals who actually entered into the land were, with two exceptions, entirely different from those that came out of Egypt. From the second standpoint we do concern ourselves with the actual state of the people and of individuals amongst them. Only two of those who left Egypt so believed as to actually enter Canaan. This latter point of view is the one taken in Hebrews, as also in 1 Corinthians 10: 1-13, where we are told that they are also in all this types or ensamples to us. They warn us very clearly of the awful end that awaits those who, though by profession and to all outward appearance the people of God, are really without that true and vital faith which is the mainspring of all godliness.

We are warned therefore against an evil heart of unbelief which departs from the living God, and bidden to exhort one another daily for sin is very deceitful. If believers are to exhort one another daily it means that daily they seek one another's company. This verse then takes for granted that, like the Apostles who, "being let go . . . went to their own company" (Acts 4: 23), we also find our society and companionships amongst the people of God. It also infers that we watch for one another's souls and care for one another's spiritual prosperity. But is this true of us all? The general spiritual health of Christians would be much better if it were. We are far more influenced by the company that we keep than many of us like to admit.

If however, any of us have professed the name of Christ without reality, then there is still in us the evil heart of unbelief, whatever we may have said with our lips; and the downward course that lies before us, except we be awakened to

realities, is plainly set before us. The evil heart of unbelief is easily deceived by sin; and sin itself by reason of its deceitfulness hardens us, so that we become impervious to reproof. Then instead of holding "the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end," we let go and give up. But only the real, who do remain stedfast unto the end, are made partakers, or companions of Christ.

#### Hebrews 4

NO WONDER THEN that chapter 4 opens with the words, "Let us therefore fear." This does not for one moment mean that we should always be filled with slavish dread, always doubting whether, enduring to the end, we shall be saved. It does mean that we should accept the warning which Israel's history affords, that we should remember the deceitfulness of sin and the weakness of our own hearts, and have a wholesome fear of in any way following in their steps.

The beginning of the second verse might more accurately be translated, "For indeed we have had glad tidings presented to us, even as they also." It is not "the gospel" as though both Israel of old and ourselves today had had exactly the same message presented to us. The glad tidings of deliverance from Egypt and entrance into Canaan was preached to them: the glad tidings of deliverance from sin and entrance into heavenly blessing has been preached to us. But in both cases the word preached does not profit apart from its being received in faith. The gospel is wonderful medicine for the broken heart, but it comes to us in a bottle bearing these directions-To be mixed with faith in those that hear. If those directions be not observed no cure is effected, and the rest of God is not reached.

The believer, and the believer only, enters into the rest of God. This is true whether we think of the typical rest of God in Canaan, which only Caleb and Joshua entered, or whether of the true rest of God which will be reached in a future day; and this is the simple meaning of the opening words of the third verse. The point is not that we, believers, are now entering into rest, are now in the enjoyment of peace with God-though that of course is delightfully true, and emphasized elsewhere in Scripture- but that it is believers, always and only believers, who enter into the rest of God; that rest which was purposed from the time of creation, but which has yet to be realized.

Verses 4 to 9 are occupied with an argument designed to prove that in no sense had the promise of God's rest been realized in connection with Israel's entrance into Canaan under Joshua. (The Jesus of verse 8 means Joshua, as the margin of a reference Bible. shows). This argument was necessary for Hebrew readers since they might readily have taken it for granted that everything in connection with the rest had been realized in connection with their forefathers and that there was nothing more to come.

The argument might be summarized as follows:-

1. There is to be a rest, as indicated when God ceased from His works at creation.
2. Israel did not enter into the rest under Joshua, as proved by the fact that God had said, "If they shall enter into My rest" (which is a Hebrew idiom meaning, "They shall not enter"); and also by the fact that so long after Joshua as the time of David an offer was again made then; as to entering. Such an offer would not have been made subsequently, if all had been settled under Joshua.
3. But God's promise is not going to fail of its effect; consequently a rest for the people of God-i.e., for believers-is still awaiting them.

The word used for "rest" in verse 9 means "a keeping of a sabbath." This connects the thought with what we have earlier in the chapter as to God's rest in creation, and also with what we have in verse 10. We shall only enter into the rest of God when our days of work and labour here are over for ever.

The early part of chapter 4 has established the fact that God's rest lies at the end of the believer's pathway. At the present time we are in the position of pilgrims on our way to that rest, just as formerly Israel were pilgrims on their way to the land of promise. When the rest is reached we shall cease our working, but on the way there we should "labour" or rather "be diligent" to enter in, taking warning by the fate which of old overtook so many unbelieving Israelites.

The latter part of the chapter sets before us three great sources of help and guidance which are available for us on our pilgrim way. They are first, the word of God; second, the priesthood of Christ; third, the throne of grace.

The features of the Word of God are brought before us in verses 12 and 13. It is quick (i.e., living) and powerful. Like all living things it possesses amazing energy. Further it has extraordinary powers of penetration, for it can pierce its way between things most intimately connected-whether in things spiritual or things material-in a way impossible to the sharpest two-edged sword. Again, it is a discerner of the deepest thoughts and motives of men.

It is a remarkable fact that the word translated discerner is the one from which we get our word critic. Multitudes there are today who pose as critics of the Word of God, and their foolish criticism only betrays the fact that far from being living they are in spiritual death; that far from being powerful they are very weak, and that their supposed powers of penetration are practically non-existent. They have no real understanding of the Word which they criticise, and the phantom

"authors" and "editors" etc., which they conjure up are the result, not of their powers of penetration but of a very undiscerning and disorderly imagination.

It is not man's business to criticise the Word of God, but to let the Word criticise him. Nothing tests us more than criticism. If we are proud and self-sufficient we bitterly resent it. Only if humble and walking in the fear of the Lord do we welcome the penetrating criticisms of the Word, and they are of the greatest possible help to us in pursuing our pilgrim way. Thereby we are enabled to see ourselves and scrutinize our own motives, and thus avoid a thousand snares.

The Word of God reaches us in the Holy Scriptures. Should someone ask us why we accept the Bible as the Word of God, we might well reply: Is not that word, which lives and is powerful, which penetrates and discerns the hidden and secret things, the Word of God? It is indeed. Is not the Bible marked by exactly those features? Without any question it is. Then what further need of proof have we, that the Bible is the Word of God?

Notice too how almost insensibly we pass from the Word of God in verse 12 to God Himself in verse 13. All is manifest in HIS sight. It is an all-seeing God with whom we have to do.

If the Word of God has full play in our understandings and consciences we shall become very conscious of our own insufficiency, and our weakness in the pilgrim way. How delightful then to turn to the second thing brought before us here-the priesthood of Christ.

In verse 14 we have the greatness of our High Priest emphasized, both as to His position and His Person. He has passed into (or, more accurately, through) the heavens. He did not stop in the first heaven nor in the second heaven when on His upward way, but into the third and highest heaven He went. Indeed, as another Scripture puts it, He "ascended up far above all heavens" (Eph. 4: 10). Still, the position of our High Priest is expressed here in this way so that Jewish readers might be reminded of Aaron going into the holiest of all. In the tabernacle the court, in which stood the altar of burnt sacrifice, was typical of the first heaven. The holy place typified the second heaven, and the holiest the third heaven in which God dwells. In entering the holiest Aaron passed through the heavens as far as the type was concerned. Our blessed Saviour and High Priest has passed through the heavens, not in type but in glorious reality. He is now in a place of infinite greatness and glory.

As to His Person our great High Priest is no less than the Son of God. This great fact settles everything in the most decisive way. There is no room for failure here. A mere man like Aaron might fail. He did as a matter of fact fail immediately,

and the whole system of things which depended upon him failed likewise. Our High Priest will never fail, and all that hangs upon Him will stand for ever. We shall certainly "hold fast our profession" if we really believe this.

Then in verse 15 the graciousness of our High Priest is set before us. Having become truly Man, He passed through all human experiences and temptations, apart from sin. The rendering of our Authorized Version, "without sin." might mislead us by making us think it merely means that He went through all temptations without sinning. It means more than this. He faced all human temptations "apart from sin." He was perfectly and intrinsically holy. "In Him is no sin" (1 John 3: 5), and hence temptations proceeding from the flesh within were necessarily unknown to Him. He had no flesh within. "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed" (Jas. 1: 14). But this could not be said of Him.

Hence while He is said to be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, He is not said to be touched with the feeling of our sins. Infirmities are not sins but rather those weaknesses which are connected with human condition. In us they may of course lead to sin; in fact they will almost inevitably do so except we seek and obtain help from on high—the help of which verse 16 speaks.

But do not let us leave verse 15 until we have extracted therefrom the sweetness contained in two words. First, that word touched. A man of power and wealth may hand out much help and succour to needy folk, and yet never have time nor inclination to so enter into their sorrowful experiences as to have his heart really touched by them. We in our weakness and need may look to our High Priest in His glory and be sure that His heart is touched on our behalf. Then again that word, feeling. The wealthy man of many charities might go as far as being touched with the knowledge of the needs of the people he helps, but if he has no experimental understanding of their infirmities and struggles he cannot be touched with the feeling of their needs. Now the Lord Jesus has so qualified Himself by all He has passed through that He actually feels. He entered so truly into human life and human conditions, apart from sin, that He now knows from the human standpoint what He always knew from the divine standpoint. He possessed Himself of human feelings about human needs and human sorrows, and though now glorified on high He is still Man in heaven with all the feelings of a Man on behalf of men.

Oh, then, let us come boldly to the throne of grace! That throne is the third of the great helps which our chapter mentions. It is a "throne of grace" because graced by our great High Priest being seated there. Thence is dispensed mercy and grace for seasonable or opportune help, only we must come to the throne in order that we may get it.

What Israelite of old dared approach with any boldness the awful throne of the Almighty God? What Israelite indeed dared approach at all? When Ezekiel saw it in vision there was "the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it" (Ezek. 1: 26), yet he had no boldness but rather fell upon his face. At the best his vision only pointed on to that which was to be realized in our day. Thank God it is now realized, but do we realize it? The Son of God sits on the throne, but it is the Son of God in true and tender and sympathetic Manhood. Realizing this all fear vanishes and we draw near with boldness.

The whole period of our lives down here is the time of need to us, and coming boldly all opportune mercy and grace is ours. We have but to approach in prayer and supplication. It is guaranteed to us by the character of the One to whom we come—His greatness on the one hand and His grace on the other. How rarely do we find these two things united amongst men. Here, for instance, is a very great man, with much power and ability to help others. But he cannot afford to adopt a very kindly attitude and make himself easily accessible lest he be overwhelmed by applicants. So he hedges himself about with secretaries and porters and other officials. He could do much for you if only you could approach him, but you cannot get at him. Here is another, and a kindlier, more accessible, more sympathetic person it would be impossible to imagine, but when you get at him he has no power to do anything for you. Thus it generally is amongst men; but thus it is not with our Lord. Both power and grace are combined in Him.

#### Hebrews 5

THE EARLY PART of chapter 5 continues this subject. The high priests of old represented men and acted for them in things relating to God. But then acting for men they had to be compassionate and sympathetic towards men. Hence they were taken from amongst men, being of the family of Aaron. Had God instituted an holy angel to act as high priest on Israel's behalf there might have been great gain Godward, as regards the accuracy and fidelity with which all priestly functions were carried out; but there would have been great loss manward, as regards such a matter as compassion on the ignorant. He who acts for men must understand mankind in an experimental way; and this is a thing pre-eminently true of Christ as we have just seen.

In Aaron's case he had, "as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins." In this we again find contrast and not comparison. Christ is indeed an offering priest, for it says later on, "it is of necessity that this Man have somewhat also to offer" (Hebrews 8: 3). But when we read on yet further in the Epistle we shall discover that Christ, "through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God" (Hebrews 9: 14). There is all the difference in the world between Aaron offering FOR himself and Christ offering HIMSELF.

Aaron was also typical of Christ in the fact that he was called into the priestly office by God. Yet though Christ was called of God like Aaron He has not been called after the order of Aaron, but after the order of Melchizedec. He who said in Psalm 2, "Thou art My Son, today have I begotten Thee" (and this was quoted in Hebrews 1: 5), said also in Psalm 110, "Thou art a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedec." If at this point you refer to the psalm you will see that this was said in connection with Christ coming forth from death in resurrection, and being exalted to the right hand of God.

In verses 7 to 9 however we go back to "the days of His flesh"; that is, the days when He was upon earth before He died. Then was the great moment in the garden of Gethsemane, when He came face to face with the sorrows of death, and His cries were heard. He was heard "in that He feared," or, "for His piety." His personal perfections as Man demanded that He be heard. His cry was that He should be saved out of death-for the force of the word here is "out of" rather than "from." He was not saved from death but He was heard and saved out of it by resurrection and by Jehovah saying to Him, "Sit on My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool."

Going into death and being saved out of it, two great things were achieved, as presented to us in verses 8 and 9. First, He learned obedience. Let us understand what this means. Far be the thought that there was ever the smallest taint of disobedience with Him. The fact is, that previous to His incarnation He had ever been in the place of supreme glory, where it was His to command. Having become Man He experienced what it was to obey. We believe we are right in saying that King George VI. was in early life a sailor. Going through that naval training, he learned the obedience which is necessary for the smooth running of the whole naval machine.

When we speak of King George learning naval obedience we do not for one moment mean to infer that he started with an insubordinate and disobedient spirit, when as a young prince he became a midshipman. We mean rather to emphasize that he has acquired his naval knowledge not by the study of books but by actual experience. In just that way the Lord Jesus, though the Son of God, has learned obedience by human suffering.

The second thing achieved was on our behalf. His time of suffering and testing came to its close. He was obedient even to death-the death of the cross. Death was the supreme test and there He was perfected: that is, being ever perfect Himself, there His course of obedience came to its glorious finish and climax. But then it was exactly at that point that He effected propitiation, and thereby became the Author of eternal salvation. Not now a deliverance such as that of Israel out of

Egypt, which though very wonderful was only for a time but a deliverance for eternity.

And that eternal salvation is received by those that obey Him. The value of faith was so strongly stressed in Hebrews 3, and the beginning of Hebrews 4, that we might have supposed that it would have read, "them that believe." Why does it say, "them that obey Him"? The obedience is of course the obedience of faith, but the point is that we should realize that the One who asks obedience from us is the One who has learned obedience Himself. In obedience the Son of God worked out eternal salvation, and that salvation is ours when we come under obedience to Him. Can we not see how divinely fitting this is? He only asks from us that obedience which He has perfectly rendered Himself.

In verse 10 we revert to the great fact established in verse 6. The verses that come between are evidently intended to impress us with the qualifications of our High Priest. Melchizedec is a mysterious personage who appears for one moment in Genesis 14 and then vanishes. Yet he was priest of the Most High God. The One whom he typified is infinitely greater than he-the Son of God, who assumed Manhood, endured suffering, learned obedience, and by death itself became the Author of an eternal salvation to all that obey Him. To ALL that obey HIM-notice! If you obey Him and I obey Him, then we are included. Salvation is ours!

At this point the writer calls a halt to his flow of thought, and a lengthy digression ensues. Melchizedec was so important a type of Christ that there were many things to be said on the subject, and the theme was not an easy one. It required some depth of spiritual understanding if it was to be intelligently received. The thought of this fact very definitely raised the question of the spiritual state of these Hebrew believers, and of ourselves.

In the closing verses of our chapter the writer gently yet firmly upbraids his Hebrew readers because they were still but babes as to their understandings when they ought to have been like full-grown men. If we make spiritual growth our spiritual senses are exercised, we acquire spiritual habits, and we become able to assimilate the "strong meat," or, "solid food," of the truth in its wider and deeper aspects. If we do not grow, though we may have received "the word of righteousness" yet we become unskilled in it. We may even slip so far back that we need to be taught over again the simplest elements concerning foundation truth.

Thus it was with these early Hebrew believers. They doubtless were hindered by their old Jewish associations. Their tendency was to cling to the weak and beggarly elements of Judaism, and this made it very difficult for them to enter upon the simplest elements of the gospel. This may not be exactly our trouble, but

we are very likely to be hindered by the elements of the world, and more particularly by the elements of that particular form of **WORLDLY RELIGION** in which we may have been brought up. Let us search and see if this be so; for if it is we too shall be like stunted trees in the garden of the Lord.

Let us also accept the warning of these verses to the effect that if we do not go on, the tendency for us is to go back. If we are not on the up grade, we shall get on the down grade. If we do not advance, we shall decline. We are in a scene of motion, and we shall not succeed in standing still.

#### Hebrews 6

"LET US GO ON," is the opening exhortation of our chapter. Movement in the right direction is to mark us. We are to leave "the word of the beginning of Christ," as the marginal reading is, and go on unto "perfection." If we glance back over the last four verses of Hebrews 5 we shall see that the point here is that we ought to grow in our understanding of the faith of Christ. We ought not to be like children staying year after year in the kindergarten, but advance until we assimilate the instruction provided for the scholars in the sixth form.

John the Baptist had brought "the word of the beginning of Christ." He laid the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God." He put baptism in the forefront of His preaching, and spoke plainly as to eternal judgement. But things had moved on since his day. Great light shone when Jesus came forth in His ministry; and then, just as His earthly service closed, in His discourse in the upper chamber He promised the gift of the Holy Spirit. He told His disciples that He had "yet many things to say" unto them, but that they could not bear them then. He added, "Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth." (John 16: 13). By the time the Epistle to the Hebrews was written ALL truth had been revealed, for it was given to Paul by his ministry to "fulfil the Word of God." (Col. 1: 25). To "fulfil" in that verse means to "fill out full," or to "complete."

The whole circle of revealed truth then had been completed. Yet here were these Hebrews still inclined to dwell in their minds amongst these preliminary things, quite ignoring the fuller light which was now shining. Are we at all like them in this? In their case it is not difficult to see where the trouble lay. The special place of privilege, which belonged to the Jew nationally under the Old Covenant, had disappeared under the New. True, it only disappeared because a higher order of blessing had been introduced, so that, when converted, both Jew and Gentile are brought into privileges quite unknown before. Yet their hearts clung to the old and exclusive national position, and consequently they became dull of hearing as regards the fuller truth of Christianity. In our case we have no national position to maintain, but there is many a thing which we naturally love and cling to, which is

dispossessed by the light of full and proper Christianity; and there is very real danger that we may close our eyes against that light in order to retain the things we love.

Oh, then may we heed this exhortation! May we allow it to repeat itself over and over again in our hearts-Let us go on! Let us go on! **LET US GO ON!** And then let us join the writer of the Epistle in saying, "This will we do, if God permit."

After this very encouraging word in verse 3, we drop abruptly into a very dark passage extending from verse 4 to verse 8. Though the transition is very abrupt it is not without very good reason. If Christians do not go on they invariably go back; and if it almost seems as though they will not go on, grave fears are aroused lest their unwillingness springs from the unreality of their profession; in which case their going back might proceed to the length of open apostasy. In the case of a Jew it would do so without fail.

It is apostasy that is contemplated in these verses, not just ordinary back-sliding-not the true believer growing cold and falling into sin; not persons, who have once professed conversion without reality, dropping their false profession and going back into the world-but that total falling away from, and repudiation of Christianity root and branch, which is **APOSTASY**.

No true child of God ever apostatizes, though not a few professors of the Christian religion have done so. If an Hebrew threw up his Christian profession and wished to get reinstated in the synagogue and amongst his own people, what would happen? He would find that as the price of re-admission he would have to call down a curse upon Jesus as an impostor. He would have in effect to crucify to himself "the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame." Now to go to such lengths as that is to bring oneself under the governmental judgment of God, just as Pharaoh did in the days of old when God hardened his heart, so that it is impossible to be renewed unto repentance.

In verses 4 and 5 it is contemplated that those liable to fall away may have shared in privileges common to believers in those times, and that in no less than five ways. We may well ask if it is possible for anyone to share in this way without being truly converted; and this question may well be specially urgent as regards the third of the five. Can it be possible to be a partaker of the Holy Ghost" without being born again?

The answer to that question is, that it is quite possible. Only a true believer can be indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but all within the circle of Christian profession, whether truly converted or not, partake or share in the benefits of the presence of the Spirit. A man may be enlightened without being saved. He may taste the

heavenly gift without receiving it. He may taste the good word of God without digesting it in his inward parts. He may share in "the powers of the world to come." (i.e. miraculous powers) without experiencing the real power of the world to come.

The terrible case of Judas Iscariot furnishes us with an illustration of this very thing. He walked for over three years in the company of the Son of God. What floods of light fell upon his path! What tastes he had of the heavenly gift and of the good Word of God! It could not be said of course that he was a partaker of the Holy Ghost, but he was a partaker of the benefits of the presence of Christ upon earth; and he shared, in common with the other apostles, in those miraculous powers which are here called "the powers of the world to come." He was one of the twelve to whom the Lord gave power over unclean spirits, and of whom it is said, "They cast out many devils and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them." (Mark 6: 13). Yet the miracle-working Judas was all the while a "son of perdition" and not a saved man at all. He fell away and it proved impossible to renew him unto repentance.

You will notice that the word here, is "impossible" and not "improbable." This one word is quite sufficient to show that there is no support in this scripture for the idea of a true believer falling away and being lost for ever. ALL those who "fall away" in the sense spoken of in this passage are for ever lost. It is not that they may be, but that they must be; and there would not be a single ray of hope for any back-slider, did it refer to such.

It refers then to the sin of apostasy—a sin to which the Jew, who embraced the Christian religion without being really converted, was peculiarly liable. By turning back to his ancient and worn out religion, thereby utterly condemning and disowning the Lord Jesus, he proved himself to be utterly bad and worthless ground. The contrast in verses 7 and 8 is not, you notice, between ground which this season is fruitful and the same ground which another season is unfruitful, but between ground which is essentially good and another piece which is essentially bad. The very form of this illustration supports the explanation just given of verses 4 to 6. Judas enjoyed "the rain that cometh oft," yet he only brought forth thorns and briars and was rejected.

In verse 9 the writer hastens to assure the Hebrews, to whom he wrote, that in saying these things he was not throwing doubt upon the reality of all them, nor even upon the most of them. The opposite to this was the fact. He stood in doubt of a minority evidently, but he was assured of the reality of the mass. He discerned in them features which gave him this assurance. He calls them "things which accompany salvation."

There are then certain things which act as a kind of hallmark upon our Christianity. The hallmark upon a silver article does not make it silver, but it gives us an official guarantee that it is silver. It assures us of its genuineness. What then are these things which assure us of the genuineness of Christians—things which so definitely accompany salvation that if they be present we know that salvation also is present? This question is answered in verse 10. And the answer is—they are many little acts which reveal genuine love for the saints.

Some of us may feel inclined to exclaim:—"How extraordinary! I should have thought that great acts of faith, great exploits of devotion to God would better have revealed reality than that." In so saying, or thinking we should be wrong. Under stress of emotion or sudden enthusiasm great acts are sometimes accomplished which are no true index to the heart. It is in these little things that we reveal our true selves far more truly. Ministering to the saints, who are the people of God, they showed their love toward God Himself.

It is one thing to minister to a saint because I happen to like him or her, and quite another to minister to a saint just as a saint; and it is this latter which is spoken about here. The former is a thing which might be done by an unconverted person; the latter is only possible to one who possesses the divine nature. Now this is just the point here. The things that accompany salvation are the things which manifest the divine nature; and things which therefore prove the reality of faith, in a way that the possession of miraculous powers or the outward privileges of Christianity never can.

Being thus assured of the salvation of the mass of those to whom he wrote, there is but one word of exhortation at this point. The writer urges them to go on doing as they had done—to continue diligently in this good way to the end, in the full assurance that their hope was not misplaced.

Hope has a very large place in connection with the faith of Christ, just as it had in the bygone dispensation. Then, whether patriarchs or prophets or just the people of God, they all had their eyes directed forward to the good things to come at the advent of the Messiah. Now the good things have been manifested in Christ—full atonement has been made, our consciences have been purged, we have received the gift of the Spirit. Yet even so we are not in the full enjoyment of the good things. For that we await the second coming of the Lord. What we actually have at the present moment we have in faith, and we enjoy by the power of the Spirit, for He is the Earnest of all we shall inherit. We are saved, in hope of all that is to come.

It is very important for us to be clear as to this, and even more important it was for these converted Hebrews to be clear as to it. How often did they get

reproached by their unconverted relations! How often taunted with their folly in giving up all the outward glories of the Mosaic system with its temple, its altar, its sacrifices, its priesthood-and for what? For a Master whom they could not see, for He had left them, and for a whole range of things as invisible as He! What fools they appeared to be! But were they really fools?

They were not. And if instructed in that which our chapter says they would be able to give very good reason for what they had done. They would be able to say, "It is really we and not you who are following in the footsteps of our father Abraham. Promises were made to him and you seem to have forgotten them, settling down as though contented with the shadow system of the law, which was given through Moses as a provisional thing. We have received Christ, and in Him we have the pledge of the fulfilment of every promise which ever was given, and we have fresh, and even brighter promises besides."

We need to have a hope which is resting upon a very well established basis if we are to hold it with full assurance. It is this thought which leads to verses 13-18. Abraham stands before us as a great example not only of faith but of hope also. It was when he had offered up Isaac, as recorded in Genesis 22, that the promise of blessing was given, which culminated in "the Seed," which is Christ, according to Galatians 3: 16. That great promise had behind it not only the authority which always accompanies the bare Word of God, but also the added sanction of His solemn Oath.

How beautiful is this glimpse which we have of God, stooping to consider the feebleness and infirmities which mark even the best of His creatures! Here are Abraham and the later heirs of the promises. How easily their faith may waver! How full of uncertainties is the world in which they find themselves! Then God will condescend to their weakness and reinforce His Word by His Oath, saying, "By Myself have I sworn, saith the LORD."

His Word and His Oath. These are two immutable things-things that never change, never shift, never shake. They establish for us the immutability of His counsel. Never, never, NEVER, will He fail in any promise He has given, in anything which He has said that He will do.

And all this, you notice, is valid for us today. Verse 18 makes this very clear. What God was for Abraham He is for us. This is the beauty of these Old Testament unfoldings of God. What He is, He is in all times and places, and to all. The strong consolation flowing from these two immutable things is to be enjoyed by us who have embraced the Christian hope.

The Hebrews are said to have "fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope." Why put it thus? Because it would at once carry their minds back to the regulations given concerning the cities of refuge, in Numbers 35.

Those regulations had a typical significance which was exactly fulfilled in the case of the converted Jew. He was just like the manslayer who had fled to the nearest city of refuge.

Had Israel's national sin, in crucifying their Messiah, been reckoned as murder by God there would have been absolutely no hope. All must have fallen before the avenger of blood. The prayer of Jesus on the cross was however, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." That was just as if He had said, "Father, account this sin of theirs to be manslaughter and not murder." God heard that prayer, so there was hope even for those who encompassed His death. Consequently on the Day of Pentecost Peter preached forgiveness for those who would turn in faith to the risen and exalted Jesus. That day the heavenly city of refuge was opened and there fled to it three thousand souls.

Multitudes of course did not believe, and consequently did not flee for safety, and they fell before the avenging Romans when Jerusalem was destroyed. Their unbelieving descendants in a future day have to face the great tribulation, and the judgment of God. But those who have entered the city of refuge have a hope set before them. It is connected with the moment when Jesus shall come in His glory; when He will cease to exercise His priestly functions after the pattern of Aaron and do so after the pattern of Melchizedec. Thus will be fulfilled the type as to the change of the priest (See Numbers 35: 25). When that takes place our hopes will be realized with Him in glory, and on earth it will be the time of jubilee, when every man will go back to his own proper inheritance.

The Christian's hope is heavenly; therefore it is said to enter into "that within the veil." Within the veil was the holiest of all, typical of the third heaven; that is, the immediate presence of God. That within the veil was the ark of the covenant, typical of Christ. Now Christ is entered into the immediate presence of God, and that on our behalf. He is entered as Forerunner and as High Priest. Our hope being centred in Him acts as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast. Our hope has anchored itself already in the glorified Lord Jesus. We are already anchored to the Person and the place, to whom and to which we are going. It is as though an outgoing Atlantic liner found herself securely attached to New York by an anchor pitched in New York harbour, before ever she had got clear of the English Channel!

The fact that Christ has become our Forerunner guarantees that we who are the after-runners shall reach the place where He is. And as High Priest He ever lives



to carry us through. That He should be our Forerunner is amazing grace; for in the East where these customs prevail the forerunner is a person of no consequence who clears the way for the important personage who follows after. Think of the Lord Jesus taking a place like that on our account!

#### Hebrews 7

IN THE LAST verse of chapter 6 the Lord Jesus has been presented to us in two characters. First, as the Forerunner; His arrival in heaven being the preliminary to the arrival there of the children whom God has given Him. Second, as an High Priest after Melchizedec's order, whose ministry ensures the safe arrival of the children, and the fulness of their blessing. This last verse also has completed the digression which began with Hebrews 5: 11, and has brought us back to the exact point we had reached in Hebrews 5: 10.

Consequently in the first verse of chapter 7 we resume the interrupted flow of thought, and the whole chapter is occupied with the contrast between the Priesthood of Christ and that of Aaron. We are made to see the immeasurable superiority of Christ as a Priest of Melchizedec's order; and we hear at least of some of those things, which were hard to be uttered to a people who were dull of hearing. We, being Gentiles, may not have our minds so filled with the faded glories of the Aaronic priesthood, and hence we may not find the theme so difficult.

In the first three verses of our chapter we are given a most graphic summary of all that is recorded of Melchizedec in the latter part of Genesis 14. We learn that he is introduced there with the design of furnishing us with a type of the Son of God. His very name had a meaning, as is so often the case with Biblical names, and interpreted, it means, King of righteousness. He is presented as King of Salem, which interpreted means peace. In the coming millennial age the Lord Jesus will be manifested in just that double character.

Moreover, in the Old Testament story Melchizedec is introduced abruptly; no genealogy is given, no mention is made of his birth, his death, nor of the number of his years, no hint is given of another arising to succeed him in his priestly office. This is the more remarkable inasmuch as Genesis is exactly the book which does furnish us with just those details in regard to the other striking characters that pass across its pages. Why then were these details omitted as regards Melchizedec? Just that he might be a more accurate type of the Son of God. We believe this to be the meaning of the third verse, and not, as some have imagined, that he was some kind of supernatural personage.

Having then this condensed summary in our minds we are bidden in verse 4 to consider in detail his greatness as contrasted with Aaron or even Abraham; and that firstly, as shown in connection with the law as to tithes. This occupies verses 4 to 10.

Aaron and his descendants, who came out of the tribe of Levi, were supported by the tithes which they received from the rest of the children of Israel. Yet the patriarch Abraham, out of whom came Levi and Aaron and all his descendants, paid tithes to Melchizedec. Hence it is argued, Levi and Aaron, who were in this way acknowledged as superiors by the rest of Israel, themselves acknowledged Melchizedec as their superior, by Abraham their father.

And further, Abraham, who paid tithes to Melchizedec, also received blessing from him; and it is said, "without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better." So in this way also the superiority of Melchizedec to Abraham and his descendants is established. The point here, be it remembered, is not that Melchizedec was a greater man than Abraham as to his character, or that he knew more of God-as to that we have no information, one way or the other-but simply that he must be acknowledged as holding from God a higher position; and in that higher position or order he was typical of Christ.

Verses 11 to 14 are occupied with another point of the argument, based upon the fact that our Lord sprang out of Juda, and hence had no link with the priests of Aaron's order. He was an altogether different priest and of a different order. What did this show? It showed that perfection had not been reached by the Levitical order of things, and it indicated that a change had come in as regards the whole law-system of which the Levitical priesthood was a part. We shall find rather more detail as to that change when we read the next chapter.

In verses 14 to 19 the argument is enforced by another consideration. Aaron's priesthood was instituted in connection with the law. Christ's priesthood is sustained in the power of endless life. The law is here spoken of as, "the law of a carnal commandment," inasmuch as its commands were all aimed either at curbing and suppressing the evil tendencies of the flesh, or at bringing out of it the good that pleases God. But then, as we are told in the epistle to the Romans, the flesh is not subject to the law of God, and in it no good dwells.

Hence the commandment going before Christ has been set aside, as verse 18 informs us. Though in itself holy and just and good, it was rendered weak and unprofitable by reason of the bad and impossible nature of the flesh with which it had to deal. Verse 18 does not for one moment mean that the holy demands of God have been abated, or that they have been set aside so that now men may just

act as they please. But it does mean that the whole law system has been set aside in favour of something much higher and better.

In order that this may be plainly seen we quote the passage as rendered in the New Translation by J. N. Darby, "For there is a setting aside of the commandment going before for its weakness and unprofitableness, (for the law perfected nothing,) and the introduction of a better hope by which we draw nigh to God." As in Hebrews 6, so here, Christianity is described as "a hope." Only it is "a better hope." When Israel entered the land of promise, they took it as a foretaste of better and larger things to come with the advent of their Messiah. We Christians have entered into good things of a spiritual sort. We have the forgiveness of sins, eternal life and the gift of the Spirit; yet they are but foretastes of the fulness of heavenly blessing which is to come. A better hope has been introduced, and by that hope—since it centres in Christ, who as High Priest has gone for us within the veil—we draw nigh to God, instead of being kept at a distance as was the case with the most eminent saint under the law. This thought we shall find greatly amplified when we come to chapter 10.

The law, as we are reminded here, made nothing perfect. God was not perfectly made known in connection with it, nor was redemption perfectly accomplished, nor were believers perfected as regards their consciences. It came in by the way as a provisional measure, filling up the time until Christ came. Now, Christ being come, it is superseded by something which goes far beyond it, both in the standard it sets, and in what it gives and accomplishes.

In verses 20 to 22 we go a step further. Our attention is drawn to the fact that the Lord Jesus was instituted as Priest for ever by the oath of God. There was no such impressive and solemn word when Aaron was instituted in the priest's office. This indicates that there is a better testament, or covenant, connected with Jesus. Moreover He stands related to that covenant in a way that neither Moses nor Aaron ever were to the old covenant. He has become the Surety of it, that is, He has accepted full responsibility in regard to it, has become bail for it, so that should anything go wrong the cost of it would fall upon Him. This is of course full guarantee that nothing will go wrong with it to all eternity. All that is established in connection with the new covenant will abide.

Another contrast is brought before us in verses 23 and 24. Aaron and his descendants exercised their office one after the other and died. The Lord Jesus abides for ever and consequently His priesthood is unchangeable, that is, it never has to be transmitted to another. The happy result which flows from this is stated in verse 25. Those that avail themselves of His priestly services, coming to God by Him, are saved "to the uttermost," or, "completely," because He always lives to make intercession for them. The salvation here spoken of is that daily,

momentary salvation from every adverse power, which every believer needs all the way home to glory.

This verse is often quoted to show that the Lord is able to save the worst of sinners. That is most happily true, and the verse that states it is 1 Timothy 1: 15. Had that been the point here our verse would doubtless have ended, "seeing He died for them and rose again." But the word is, "seeing He ever liveth." The salvation therefore is that which flows to us by His life of unbroken priestly intercession.

Suppose a distressed Jew had applied to the high priest of his day for that compassion and help which he should be ready to give him, according to Hebrews 5: 2. He finds him perhaps a most kindly and helpful man. But on going a little later, just when the crisis of his case has arrived, he learns that he has that very day died! You can easily imagine the Jew's distress. Another man who knows nothing of his case, and possibly of an entirely different disposition, becomes high priest. There was no salvation to the uttermost for him in the former high priest, and if he now gets any salvation at all he can only get it by beginning all over again with the new man. Thanks be to God, no experience at all akin to this can ever befall us. Our High Priest lives eternally.

Let us not leave verse 25 without noticing that in it believers are described as those "that come unto God by Him." It is a very prominent thought in this epistle that the Christian has boldness and liberty to come to God, whereas in the former dispensation all true access to God was forbidden. These words also indicate that the great objective in all Christ's priestly service is to bring us to God, and to maintain us there. On the one hand there is no access to God save BY HIM. On the other, all His compassionate service on our behalf, sympathizing, succouring, saving, is a means to an end. The end being this, that thereby lifted above the things that otherwise would overwhelm us, we might be maintained in the presence of God.

The last three verses of our chapter seem to clinch the whole argument and to sum up the situation, and we find that everything hinges upon the greatness of the ONE who is our High Priest.

What an extraordinary statement is made in verse 26! We should certainly have reversed it, and stated that seeing our High Priest was so wonderful a rather remarkable people were suited to Him. But no, the statement here is, that an High Priest of this remarkable character was suited to us! As the Holy Ghost views things, the many sons being led to glory, the Christian company, bear such a character that no less an High Priest becomes them.

The character of our High Priest is presented to us in a seven-fold way; and each item gives us a point of contrast with the priests of old. The first three items, holy, harmless, undefiled, present no difficulty. It is obvious that none of these three things characterized in an absolute way any priest of Aaron's race.

The fourth is, "separate from sinners," or, more accurately, "separated from sinners." It refers not only to the fact that He was ever wholly separate to God in His spirit and ways, even while eating and drinking with publicans and sinners, but to the fact that now in resurrection He is apart altogether from the whole scene where sinners move. "In that He died, He died unto sin once: but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God" (Rom. 6: 10). We may quote also the Lord's own words in John 17: 19, "For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth." The root meaning of "sanctify" is to set apart, and the Lord was alluding to the place He was about to take up in resurrection and in glory. In our verse, the thought of His glory comes in the fifth item which closes it, "Made higher than the heavens." Our High Priest is not merely a risen Man, but exalted above all. The heavens and all that they contain are beneath His feet. If we consider these five items alone, we can see that no high priest constituted under the law is worthy of mention beside Him.

But there is more. A sixth contrast fills verse 27. They offered up daily sacrifices, not only for the sins of the people but for their own sins as well. He offered one sacrifice, and He offered it once for all. It was for the people truly, but it was not for Himself. It was "HIMSELF," instead of being for Himself. He was the Sacrifice as well as the Offerer! Here we have the great truth alluded to, which we shall find expanded in all its glorious details when we come to Hebrews 9 and Hebrews 10.

Seventhly, and lastly, there comes the contrast between the persons who held priestly office under the law, and the Person who is our High Priest today. They were just men, with the usual infirmities of men. He is the Son Himself. This of course is the bed-rock fact upon which all stands. WHO HE IS, settles everything. It carries with it all the contrasts which have been dwelt upon in the chapter. Let us dwell upon it-He is the Son, who is consecrated for ever more.

The word "consecrated" is really "perfected," as the margin of a reference Bible will show. Here we get that word, perfect again, which we had in Hebrews 5: 9. There it was stated that His whole course of testing and obedience on earth having been brought to completion in death and resurrection, He became the Author of eternal salvation. Here we find that in the same way He became High Priest. The Son was eternally with the Father. He was Creator and Sustainer of all things. But it was not then that He assumed this office. It was when He had become Man, tasted all possible sorrows, endured all possible testings, suffered death and

reached perfection in His risen glory, that He was constituted High Priest by the oath of God.

Now let us just meditate upon these things, giving them time to sink into mind and heart, and surely we shall be filled with confidence in His ability to save to the uttermost, and have our hearts filled with praise and thanksgiving to God.

## Hebrews 8

CHAPTER 7 HAVING set before us in full detail the contrast between the temporary priesthood of Aaron and the abiding priesthood of Christ, chapter 8 opens with a summary of the whole matter. In this summary, occupying verses 1 and 2 there are four things which we shall do well to note.

Firstly, the Lord Jesus is "such an High Priest," that is such an One as chapter 7 has shown Him to be. We need therefore to refresh our minds as to all those points of contrast which show forth the infinite superiority of Christ, as expounded in that chapter.

Secondly, being such He has taken His seat at the highest point of glory. The supreme Majesty has His throne in the heavens, and on the right hand of that throne He is seated-that is, in the place which signifies that all its executive functions are vested in Him. There is no weakness, no infirmity, in Him. The place He fills indicates that He wields all power. We learned that this exalted place is His when we had only read so far as Hebrews 1: 3; but there we saw Him seated in glory as the answer to His finished work in the purging of sins. Here it is as the Priest that He is crowned with glory.

Thirdly, His priestly ministry concerns itself, not with the holy places on earth, constructed and pitched by Moses, which were the scenes of Aaron's ministry, but with that real sanctuary and tabernacle which came from the hand of God. The real sanctuary is the heaven of God's immediate presence: the true tabernacle is that mighty universe of created things, wherein the third heaven of God's presence lies. Christ's priestly service has to do with God and His presence as its centre; whilst within its circumference it embraces the whole creation of God. What a stupendous thought is this! How paltry do Aaron's glories look beside it!

Fourthly, such an High Priest as this is ours. "WE have such an High Priest"; while Israel had priests of Aaron's order. This one fact, apart from all other considerations, indicates how far in advance of Judaism is Christianity. These Hebrews, as we have seen, were inclined to slackness; some of them showed signs of going back. Let them lay hold of this, and how it would encourage them

to hold fast, and keep on in the path of faith. Let us lay hold of it and we too shall feel its encouraging power.

Our thoughts turn from the High Priest Himself to His service and ministry when we read verses 3 to 6. It is helpful to notice that verse 5 is really a parenthesis; the whole verse might well be printed within brackets. The sense follows straight on from verse 4 to verse 6.

Though the Lord Jesus is not a priest of Aaron's order yet in many a way He exercises His ministry after the pattern set forth in Aaron. So it is necessary that He should have something to offer in the presence of God; and that something cannot be a gift of the kind that was customary in connection with the law, for had He been on earth He would have been no priest at all, for He did not spring out of Levi or Aaron. His priesthood is of an heavenly order. Only as risen and glorified has He formally assumed His priestly office.

What the Lord has to offer in His priestly capacity we are not told at this point; but we believe that the reference is, not to the fact that He offered up Himself, as stated in verse 27 of the previous chapter, but to what we find when we reach Hebrews 13: 15. It is "by Him" that we offer the praise of our lips to God. He it is, who offers up to God as the great High Priest all the praises springing from those who have been constituted priests by the grace of God. What we are told is that His ministry is more excellent than any that was entrusted to Aaron; and that its superiority is exactly proportioned to the superiority of the promises and the covenant of which He is the Mediator.

Before considering this, however, let us make note of two things. First, that the last clause of verse 4 shows us that this epistle was penned before Jerusalem was destroyed, when the Jewish offerings ceased. "There are priests," it says, not, "there used to be." This same fact confronts us when we come to the last chapter; and the importance of it is made manifest there.

In the second place notice that in the parenthesis (verse 5) it is made quite plain that the tabernacle and all its appointments were only a shadowy representation of heavenly things; and not the things themselves. This no doubt was a hard saying to a Jew, for he was very apt to think of these visible things in which he boasted as though they were the great end, beyond which nothing was needed. He should not have thought of them in this way, for from the outset they were declared to be but a representation of the things God had before Him. Moses was not to deviate one hair's breadth from the pattern shown to him in the mount. Had he deviated he would have misrepresented instead of representing the great realities which had to be shadowed forth.

This fact being digested we at once see that the Old Testament types, connected with tabernacle and offerings, are worthy of our earnest consideration. The study of them is not, as some may think, an intellectual pastime giving scope to a lively imagination, but a pursuit in which there is much instruction and profit. They must be interpreted of course in the light of the heavenly things themselves, which are revealed in the New Testament.

The ministry of Christ as Priest, the new covenant, of which He is the Mediator, and the promises on which that covenant is founded, are all brought together in verse 6.

It could hardly be said that the old covenant of law was established upon promises at all, though there were certain promises connected with it. It was established rather upon a bargain, in which Israel undertook in all things to obey, and God guaranteed certain blessings conditional upon their obedience. The bargain was hardly concluded before it was broken by Israel making the golden calf. The fact that the new covenant is established upon promises, that those promises are God's, and that they are better than anything proposed under the law, at once differentiates it sharply from the old. To gain some idea of these better promises you must read the latter part of our chapter, which is quoted from the passage in Jeremiah 31-where the new covenant itself is promised-verses 31 to 34. God's "I will," is the characteristic feature of it. All is a question of what God is going to do, and of what consequently Israel is going to be and have.

Now of this better covenant Christ is the Mediator. We might well ask, On what ground can God thus scatter blessings upon unworthy men without infringing the claims of righteousness? The only possible answer to this is found in the mediatorial work of Christ. As Mediator He has given Himself "a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2: 6). As Mediator too He administers the covenant which has been established in His blood.

The Lord Jesus is presented to us in this epistle in a variety of characters. We sometimes sing,

"How rich the character He bears,

And all the form of love He wears,

Exalted on the throne.

but do we stop sufficiently to consider the richness of His character in all its variety? We have already had Him brought before us as Apostle, High Priest, Forerunner, Surety, Victim, and now as Mediator. All these offices He holds in

connection with the new covenant and those who come into new covenant blessing. As Apostle He announces it. As Surety He assumes full responsibility for it. As Victim He shed the blood that ratifies it. As High Priest He sustains it. As Mediator He administers it. As Forerunner He guarantees the arrival in glory of all those blessed under it in the present dispensation.

What flaw can be discovered in this? None whatever! Where is the loophole through which evil or failure may creep? No such loophole exists! All new covenant blessing is rooted and grounded in the mighty Son of God and is as flawless and perfect as He. Is not this magnificent? Does it not fill our souls with assurance and triumph?

The first covenant of law was not faultless as verse 7 indicates. There was no fault in the law, but the covenant was faulty inasmuch as all was conditioned upon faulty man. Hence it is set aside in favour of the second, which is based upon God's purpose and God's work. As the last verse of the chapter puts it, the very fact that He speaks of a new covenant shows that the first has grown old and is ready to disappear.

Jeremiah's prophecy, which is quoted here, shows us that the new covenant is to be formally established with the house of Israel and the house of Judah; that is, with restored and reunited Israel. Under it they will enter upon the blessings of the millennial reign. By the new birth the law will be written on their hearts, so that it will be as natural to them to fulfil it as now it is natural to them to infringe it. Moreover their sins will be forgiven; they will have the knowledge of God, and be His people. But the gospel today brings us just these blessings upon an exactly similar basis.

The fact is that everyone converted today, no matter from what nation they come, is blessed upon new covenant principles, though as yet the new covenant is not formally established at all; and when it is established it will be with Israel, and not with the nations, nor even with the church. We have it, in the spirit of it, and thus we anticipate what is to come. At the same time we must carefully note that Christian blessings are by no means confined to those promised to Israel under the new covenant. On the contrary we enjoy blessings which go far beyond them. Such, for instance, are the blessings spoken of in the epistle to the Ephesians.

#### Hebrews 9

Chapter 8 ends with the ominous words, "ready to vanish away." Thus it was that the Holy Spirit, who inspired these words, prepared the minds of the Jewish disciples for the disappearance of their venerated religious system, which came to pass within a very few years by the destruction of Jerusalem. The temple being destroyed, the priesthood slain, the sacrifices stopped, Judaism has become but

the pale and bloodless shadow of its former self. And in itself, and at its best, it was only a shadow of good things to come.

Yet we must not underestimate the value of the shadows connected with the law. They had very great value until the moment came in which the realities typified were revealed; just as the moon is of much value until the sun rises. At the heart of this typical system lay the tabernacle and its furniture, and the first five verses of chapter 9 summarize the details connected with this. It was the sanctuary, where God placed the cloud which signifies His presence, but it was a worldly one. So also were all the ordinances of the divine service connected with it. Hence it was not the object of the writer to speak particularly of these details.

His object was rather to point out that the tabernacle was in two parts, the holy place, and then the holiest of all, and that while the priests of Aaron's line had full liberty to enter the former the latter was forbidden to them; into it they had no admittance at all. When once the divine glory had taken possession of the holiest no human foot trod there, with one exception. One man alone might enter, and he only once every year, and that under one stringent condition; he must approach, "not without blood." If we turn to Leviticus 16 and read it, we shall get all the details of that solemn occasion.

What did it all mean? It doubtless foreshadowed the fact that the blood of Christ is the only ground of approach to God, yet what the Holy Ghost was really saying in the whole arrangement was that in the old dispensation there was no real approach to God at all. The way in was not yet made manifest. We shall find the wonderful contrast to this when we reach the nineteenth verse of chapter 10. But as long as the first tabernacle had a standing before God the rule was no admittance.

We might say then that the law instituted the religion of the holy place, whereas the holiest of all characterizes Christianity. It was not that all Israelites had access to the holy place. We know they did not, as the sad case of Uzziah, king of Judah, recorded in 2 Chronicles 26, shows. But the priests, who were the representatives of all Israel, had free access there. Still, even so, the real value of the whole thing lay in its typical significance, as we have seen.

This fact is again emphasized in verses 9 and 10, where the tabernacle is "a figure for the time then present," and the gifts and sacrifices are but meats and drinks and divers washings; all of which were but ordinances of a fleshly type as opposed to anything of a spiritual nature. Out of this there flow, as a result, two things.

The first thing is, that these sacrifices could not make perfect the one who approached by their means. Here again we meet with that word perfect ; and this time not referring to Christ but to ourselves. The Jewish sacrifices, by reason of their very nature, could not make us perfect; and this fact we shall find repeated in the first verse of chapter 10. Then passing on to the fourteenth verse of that chapter we find stated, by way of contrast, the glorious fact that, "by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." The law not merely did not accomplish it, but could not ; whereas Christ has done it.

But what is this perfection which has to do with ourselves? That question is answered for us here. It is a remarkable fact that the first time the word is used in this connection it is carefully defined for us by the Holy Spirit. The perfection has to do with our consciences. As we read on into chapter 10 we shall see more clearly what this signifies. It means having the whole weight of sin as an accusing load completely lifted off, so that the conscience is perfectly cleared in the presence of God.

Now this was something quite unknown under the law. If a Jew sinned it was his duty to bring to the tabernacle the appropriate sacrifice; and having done so he was clearly entitled to enjoy the relief afforded by the words, "it shall be forgiven him" (Lev.4:31). That one particular sin was forgiven when once the prescribed sacrifice was offered; but that was all. If he sinned again, again he had to bring a sacrifice: and so on and on, all through life. There was no such thought as a sacrifice being offered which could settle once and forever the, whole question of sin, and so perfect the sinner's conscience.

The second thing is that the law with all its ordinances was only im-posed upon Israel "until the time of reformation," that is, until the time of "setting things right." The law was after all a provisional measure. It proved beyond dispute that things needed setting right, by proving how wrong they were; but it did not put them right. When presently God blesses Israel under the new covenant the time of setting things right will have arrived. Meanwhile, as we have just seen, we have been blessed upon new covenant principles, as the result of the sacrifice of Christ; and there is no setting things right upon any other basis than that.

Verses 11 to 14 furnish us with the contrast to that which we have in verses 6 to 10. If we analyze the verses with a little care we shall see how complete and far-reaching the contrast is.

In the first place CHRIST is set before us, in contrast to the high priest of Aaron's order.

Then, the Aaronic priest just had to administer the things that existed under his hand. Christ is an High Priest of good things to come.

Christ has entered into the true holiest in the heavens, a greater and more perfect tabernacle than that made with hands in the wilderness; and He entered in once, instead of every year, as with the high priest of old.

Not by the blood of goats and calves, which can never really put away sins, did He enter; but by His own blood which obtains redemption.

The blood of the sacrificial animals did sanctify to the purifying of the flesh: the blood of Christ alone can purify the conscience.

The purifying of the flesh which was accomplished by the Jewish sacrifices was but temporal: the redemption obtained by Christ is eternal.

Notice, moreover, the majesty which characterizes the one offering of Christ. All three Persons of the Godhead stand related to it. The spotless Son of God offered Himself. It was to God that He offered Himself; and it was by the eternal Spirit He did it. No wonder that all sin comes within its scope, and that its results abide for eternity.

The immediate effect of it, as far as we are concerned, is the "purging" or "cleansing" of our consciences. By that cleansing they are perfected and we turn from the dead works of law - dead, because done with the object of getting life - to serve the living God. If our consciences need cleansing from dead works, how much more do they need cleansing from wicked works!

The argument of the opening verses of chapter 9 reaches a climax in verse 14, but the Spirit of God does not immediately carry us on to the results which flow from it. Instead of that He elaborates with great wealth of detail the point He had just been making; so that when we reach chapter 10:14, we find that we are back again at the point we had started from in 9:14 . And only then do we proceed to the consideration of its results.

From this we may learn the very great importance that attaches to the truth concerning the sacrifice of Christ. It lies at the foundation of every-thing, and until it is thoroughly apprehended by us we are not able to appreciate what follows from it. Let us pray for the understanding heart as we consider these verses, in which the main point of the Holy Spirit is so fully developed and supported.

The main point, then, is that the blood of Christ completely purges the believer's conscience so that he is enabled to serve and worship the living God. Now this was an end utterly unattainable under the old covenant; hence it follows, as verse 15 tells us, that the Lord Jesus became the Mediator not of the old but of the new. And hence, too, His death had a twofold bearing: bringing in redemption as regards the transgressions under the old covenant, and becoming the basis whereon is fulfilled the promise connected with the new. Something had to be done for the removing of the mighty mountain of transgressions which had accumulated under the law: and equally something was needed if God was to call people with an eternal inheritance in view. Both these great ends are reached "by means of death," and that the death of Christ.

Verses 16 and 17 are a parenthesis. The word translated testament here, and covenant in chapter 8, has both those meanings. Used in relation to God it is "a disposition which He has made, on the ground of which man is to be in relationship with Him." In this short parenthesis the writer uses the word in the sense of a testament or will, which only is of force when the testator is dead. If viewed in this way, again we see the absolute necessity of the death of Christ.

There was no "death of the testator" under the old covenant, yet the necessity for death to take place was acknowledged in a typical way. If we turn to Exodus 24:7-8, we shall find the incident referred to in verses 19 and 20, and we may note a remarkable fact. Exodus records only the sprinkling of the people with blood; Hebrews adds that the book of the law was also sprinkled.

The significance of the sprinkling of the people would seem to be that they were thereby reminded that death was the penalty of disobedience. Any breach of its demands meant the death penalty on them. The significance of the sprinkling of the book would indicate, on the other hand, that death was necessary as the basis of everything. Hence even the law system was not dedicated without blood; and this fact is added here by the inspired writer since it is just the point of the argument in this epistle.

Moreover at different times in connection with the sacrifices the tabernacle vessels, and indeed "almost all things," were purged with blood; and all this was intended to drive home into men's hearts the all-important lesson, that, "Without shedding of blood is no remission."

In our twentieth century we might almost call this great statement - the most hated fact of Holy Scripture. Nothing so moves to wrath and contempt and ridicule the soul of the "modern" theologian as this. And why? Not because his delicate sensibilities are shocked by the idea of blood being shed, for the average modernist enjoys his slice of roast beef as much as other average people. But

because he knows what this fact really signifies. It means that the death-sentence lies on mankind as creatures hopelessly lost; and that only death can lift this death-sentence so that remission can reach the fallen creature. The solemn witness borne to the modernist, that as a sinful creature he is under the death-sentence before God, is what his soul loathes with an intensity that amounts to hate. The prouder he is the more he hates it.

Do we not all understand this quite well? Did we not all share those feelings until grace subdued our pride and brought us into an honest frame of mind before God? The modernist, of course, deludes himself into thinking that his aversion to this truth arises from his superior aesthetic or moral sense, and we may never have victimized ourselves with that particular little piece of vain conceit. If so, we may well thank God! The moment we were brought to honesty and humility of mind we grasped the absolute necessity of the death of Christ.

Of that necessity verse 23 speaks. The blood of goats and calves sufficed to purify the tabernacle and its furniture, which were but patterns; the heavenly things themselves needed a better sacrifice. We might be surprised that heavenly things should need a sacrifice at all, did we not remember that Satan and the fallen angels have had their seat in the heavens, and have introduced the taint of sin there; and also that we, who are sinners and had our seat here, are destined as the fruit of redemption to take our seat in the heavens. As the fruit of the work of Christ not only shall there be purification wrought on earth but in the heavens also.

Consequently, in verses 24 to 26 we are introduced to the work of Christ from a most exalted view-point. He appeared once at the consummation of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, and now, in virtue of His blood shed, has gone into the very heaven of God's presence on our behalf. Let us mark that word, "to put away sin." How comprehensive it is! The expiation of our sins is of course included, but it is not limited to that. The judgment of sin is included, but it is not limited to that. It includes sin in all its ramifications and bearings. Sin, the root, and all the sins which are the fruit; sin as it has affected man and the earth, and sin as it has affected the heavens; sin, in its totality; all put away by His sacrifice. And His sacrifice was the sacrifice of Himself!

In these verses again, the work of Christ comes before us as contrasted with the service of the high priest of old, and this it is which accounts for the way things are put in the last verse of our chapter. When the Jewish high priest had entered the holy place made with hands on the yearly day of atonement, carrying the blood of the goat, the people stood outside waiting for his reappearance. Very possibly they waited with a certain amount of trepidation for they knew that to enter wrongfully into the presence of God meant death. For him they were waiting, and they hailed his appearance with a sigh of relief. Now we, Christians -

and this specially applies to the converted remnant of Jews, who were addressed in this epistle - are waiting for the re-appearance of our great High Priest. We "look for" or "await" Him, and when He comes it will be "without sin" or "apart from sin." He so effectually dealt with sin at His first coming that He will have no need to touch that question at His second coming. He will appear unto the salvation of His people, and the deliverance of a groaning creation.

Thus we can see what a striking analogy exists between the actions of Aaron on the day of atonement and the great work of Christ; only with this complete contrast, that whereas Aaron's actions were typical and confined to the patterns of heavenly things, and oft repeated, Christ has to do with the heavenly realities and His work in offering for sin has been accomplished once and for ever. It is the lot of sinful men once to die, and then to face the judgment of God. In keeping with that, Christ has once been offered to bear the sins of many, and therefore those that await Him look forward not to judgment but to salvation.

You notice that here it speaks of Christ bearing the sins of many, not of all. It is true that He died for all, as far as the scope and intention of His work is concerned. When however the actual effect of His work is in question, then He bore the sins of many, that is, of those who believe. You will notice also that the words, "look for Him," have not really got the meaning so often imported into them, by which they are made to support the idea that only certain believers who are watchful are going to find salvation when the Lord comes again. The force of the whole passage the rather is, that sin has been so perfectly put away, and believers so perfectly cleared as to their consciences, and as to all liability to judgment, that they are left awaiting the coming forth of their High Priest from the heavenly sanctuary to their salvation from every adverse power.

With this thought before us, the opening words of chapter 10 carry us back to the days of the law, that once more we may realize the glory of the gospel as contrasted with it. Twice already that contrast has been laid open before us; first in verses 6 to 14 of chapter 9, and then again in verses 23 to 28. In the earlier of these two passages the great point of the contrast seems to be as regards the nature and character of the law sacrifices contrasted with the sacrifice of Christ. In the later passage the contrast seems more to lie in the absolute sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice, which is therefore one, and not a repeated thing like the sacrifices of old.

#### Hebrews 10

In the passage now before us both these contrasts reappear, but coupled with them is a third - the supreme glory of Him who became the sacrifice, as contrasted with both priests and offerings of old. We see Him stepping out of eternity that He might accomplish the will of God in the work that He did. The passage starts

with the reminder that the law with its shadow sacrifices could NEVER make the worshippers perfect. It ends with the glorious statement that the offering of Christ has perfected them FOR EVER.

It is not that the law sacrifices did not perfect anyone as to the conscience, but that they could not. Their very repetition showed this. Could they have availed to cleanse the conscience, so that the offerer got complete relief as to the whole question of sin, they would have ceased to be offered; inasmuch as we never go on doing what is done. In point of fact their effect was in just the opposite direction. Instead of removing sins from the conscience as no longer to be remembered, they were formally brought to remembrance at least once every year. The blood of sacrificial animals had no efficacy to take away sins. The thing was impossible, as verse 4 says.

The statement of that verse is clear enough. Some of us, however, remembering what is said as to the forgiveness of various sins, or as to cleansing from sin, in Leviticus 4, 5 and 6 may feel that there is apparently a contradiction, and that a further word of explanation is needed. The solution of the difficulty is not far to seek, and we may reply by way of an illustration.

Here is a trader hard pressed by a creditor. He is short of cash in these hard times, though he knows well that in three months' time he will have ample funds. What does he do? He offers his creditor a three months' promissory note for £500, and his creditor well satisfied with his integrity, gladly accepts it. Now our question is this - What really has the creditor got?

That question may with equal truth be answered in two ways, apparently contradictory. Thinking of it as regards its intrinsic value, we should reply: - He has got a small piece of paper, whereon certain words are traced in ink, and in the corner of which is embossed a red government stamp, and the total value of the whole thing would be less than a penny. Thinking of it in its relative value - that is, of what it will be worth at its due date in view of the character of the man who drew it, we should be quite right in replying, Five hundred pounds.

The sacrifices of old were like that promissory note. They had value, but it lay in that to which they pointed. They were but paper; the sacrifice of Christ alone is like fine gold. In Leviticus their relative value is pointed out. In Hebrews we find that their value is only relative and not intrinsic. They can never take away sins. Hence in them God had no pleasure, and the coming of Christ was a necessity.

Hence in verses 5 to 9 we have the quotation from Psalm 40 and its application. It is quoted as the very voice of the Son of God, as He enters into the world. The Psalm mentions, "Sacrifice and offering . burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin;"



that is, offerings of four kinds, just as there are four kinds of offerings mentioned in the early chapters of Leviticus. There was no pleasure for God in any of them, and when the Son of God came forth to do the will of God they were supplanted and taken away. In the body He took, the whole will of God was done, and by the offering of it up in sacrifice we have been set apart for God once for all.

The thing being accomplished what further need is there of the ineffectual shadows? The fine gold having appeared what use have we for the scrap of paper? That great word, "He taketh away the first, that He may establish the second," might almost be taken as the whole drift of the epistle to the Hebrews, stated in few words - put into a nutshell, as we speak.

Once more are we brought face to face with the contrast in verses 11 to 14. On the one hand, there are all the priests of Aaron's race. On the other, "this Man" in His solitary dignity as the Son of God. There, the daily ministering, and the constant offering of the ineffectual sacrifices that can never take away sins. Here, the one perfect offering, which is perfectly efficacious, and the Offerer seated at the right hand of God. There, the priests were always standing. No chair or seat of any kind was provided amongst the furniture of the tabernacle. It was not needed for their work was never done. Here, the Offerer has by His one offering perfected for ever the sanctified ones, and consequently He has taken His seat for ever at God's right hand.

The words, "for ever," occur in verses 12 and 14. In both cases they have the significance of, "as a perpetual thing," or, more briefly, "in perpetuity." Those set apart for God having been perfected as to their consciences in perpetuity, He has taken His seat at God's right hand in perpetuity. For one thing only is He waiting, and that is for His enemies to be made His footstool.

We would like to think that all our readers have entered into the tremendous significance of all this. Oh, the blessing and establishment of soul that comes when we really lay hold of it! Its surpassing importance may be seen in the way that the Spirit of God dwells upon the subject, and elaborates it in its details. Note too, how again and again it is stated that the sacrifice of Christ is one, and offered once and for ever. Six times over is this fact brought before us, in the passage beginning with 9:12, and ending with 10:14. Search that passage and see for yourselves.

And then may the truth contained in that passage enter all our hearts in its soul-subduing, conscience-cleansing power!

It has often been pointed out that in the early part of Hebrews 10 we have mention of, firstly, the will of God; secondly the work of Christ; thirdly, the witness of the

Holy Ghost. The work of Christ for us has laid the basis for the accomplishment of the will of God about us, and in order that we may have the assurance of both there is the witness of the Spirit to us. In verse 15 of our chapter this last is brought before us.

How may we know that, as believers who have been set apart for God, we have been perfected in perpetuity? Only by relying upon an unimpeachable witness. And where is such a witness to be found? Suppose we put our feelings in the witness box, and subject them to a little cross-examination on the point. Can we arrive at anything like assurance? By no means, for they hardly tell the same story twice running. If on certain occasions they would seem to testify to our being right with God, on other occasions their witness would be in exactly the opposite direction. We must dismiss them from the witness box as utterly unreliable.

But the Holy Spirit condescends to take the place of Witness, and He is utterly reliable. It is not here His witness in us as in Romans 8:16. In our passage He is viewed as testifying from without to us, and we are immediately referred to that which is written in Jeremiah 31. The words of Jeremiah were the words of the Spirit; his writings the writings of the Spirit. The witness of the Spirit to us is found in the written Word of God. The burden of His witness in favour of the believer is, "Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more."

Is there some reader of these lines who lacks assurance? Are you a prey to doubts and fears as to your salvation? What you need is to receive the witness of the Spirit in "full assurance of faith," as verse 22 puts it. Could more reliable witness be presented to you than that of God, the Holy Ghost? No! Could His witness be presented to you in a more stable or more satisfactory form than in the Scriptures of truth, which He has inspired? We venture to say, it could not.

Supposing God dispatched an angel to you with tidings of your forgiveness. Would that settle everything? For a short time perhaps. Angels however appear for a moment and then they are gone, and you see them no more. The memory of his visit would soon grow faint, and doubt enter your mind as to what exactly he did say. If you were granted a wonderful inrush of joyful feeling, would that do? It would soon pass and be succeeded by a corresponding depression, for when waves run high you cannot always ride upon their crests. Bring forward any alternative you please, and our reply will be, that though more spectacular than the Scriptures they cannot be compared with them for reliability. If you cannot or will not receive the witness of the Holy Ghost in that form, you would not receive it in any form whatsoever.

The witness of the Spirit to us is, then, that our sins are completely remitted, and being forgiven there is no more offering for sin. In verse 2 the question was asked,

"Would they not have ceased to be offered?" - that is, had the Jewish sacrifices been able to make the worshippers perfect. In verse 18 we learn that Christ's one sacrifice having perfected us, and the Holy Spirit bearing witness to it, there is no further offering for sin. When these words were penned Jewish sacrifices were still proceeding at Jerusalem but they were valueless as offerings for sin, and very shortly they were all swept away. The Roman armies under Titus, who destroyed Jerusalem and utterly scattered the Jews, were really God's armies (see, Matt.22:7) used by Him in judgment to make their sacrifices impossible any longer. And yet a very large part of Christendom is continually bowing down before what they call, "the sacrifice of the mass." How great the sin of this! Worse really than the sin of perpetuating the Jewish sacrifices, had that been possible.

Verse 19 brings before us the great result that follows from the one perfect sacrifice of Christ. We have "boldness to enter into the holiest." No Jew, not even the high priest, had boldness to enter the holiest made with hands: we have boldness to enter the holiest not made with hands; in spirit now, and in actual presence when the Lord comes. The converted Hebrew reading this would at once say to himself - This must mean that we are constituted priests in a far higher sense than ever Aaron's family were priests of old. He would be right! Though in this epistle we are not told that we are priests in so many words, the truth enunciated plainly infers it. In the first epistle of Peter, chapter 2, the truth of Christian priesthood is plainly stated, and that epistle is also addressed to converted Hebrews.

Our boldness is based upon the blood of Jesus, since through His flesh, by means of death, He has opened up for us a new and living way into God's presence; but then we also have Himself as High Priest living in the presence of God. Verse 21 mentions this, but He is there really called, not an High Priest, but a "Great Priest over the house of God." Earlier in the epistle we read of Him as both Priest and Son, and then it added, "Whose house are we" (3:6). We are God's house, God's priestly family, and over us is this Great Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, and we have full access to God. Verse 22 exhorts us to avail ourselves of our great privilege and draw near.

We are to draw near, "with a true heart in full assurance of faith." These two things are what we may call the necessary moral qualifications which we ought to have. Converted we may be, but if there be not that simplicity of faith in the work of Christ, and in the witness of the Holy Ghost as to the complete settlement of the question of our sins, which produces full assurance in our minds, we cannot enjoy the presence of God. Nor can we, except our hearts be true; that is, marked by sincerity under the influence of the truth, and without guile.

The latter part of verse 22 reverts again to that which we have as the fruit of the grace of God - and not to that which we ought to have. We have boldness by the blood of Jesus: we have a Great Priest over the house of God: we have hearts sprinkled and bodies washed, as verse 22 says.

These two things may present a little difficulty to our minds, but doubt-less to the original Hebrew readers the allusions would have been quite clear. Aaron and his sons had their bodies completely washed with pure water, and they were also sprinkled with blood before they took up their priestly office and duties. Now we have the realities which were typified in this way. The truth of the death of Christ has been applied to our hearts, giving us a purged conscience, which is the opposite of an evil conscience. Also we have come under the cleansing action of the Word of God, which has renewed us in the deepest springs of our being. It was to this that the Lord Jesus alluded just before He instituted His supper in the upper chamber, when He said, "He that is washed (bathed) needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit." The word He used signifies to bathe all over, as the priests were bathed at their consecration. But even so they needed to wash hands and feet every time they entered the sanctuary.

We, thank God, have received that new birth which corresponds to the bathing with pure water. The "true heart" spoken of earlier in the verse would correspond pretty closely with the washing of hands and feet which was needed every time the priest entered the holy place.

But, having all, let us draw near. Let us take up and use and enjoy our great privilege of access to God. It is the great feature that should characterize us. We are people put into this nearness, having unrestricted liberty in approach to God, and that at all times; though doubtless there are occasions when we may specially enjoy the privilege, as for instance, when we gather in assembly for the Lord's supper or for worship. Still it is by no means restricted to such occasions, as is plain when we remember that this epistle is silent as to the assembly and its functions; to find instruction as to that we must turn to the first epistle to the Corinthians.

The presence of God should really be the home of our hearts, the place to which in spirit we continually resort. The point here is not that we resort there with our needs and present our prayers; that came before us at the end of chapter 4. It is rather that we draw near in the enjoyment of all that God is, as revealed to us in Jesus, in communion with Him, and in the spirit of worship. We draw near not to get any benefit out of Him, but because we find attraction in Himself.

The three exhortations of verses 22-25, are very closely connected. We are to hold fast the profession of our faith, (or, our hope, as it really is), without

wavering, since it hangs upon One who is wholly faithful. We shall most certainly do this if we enter into our privilege and draw near. We shall also find there is much practical help in the companionship of our fellow-Christians, and in the exhortation and encouragement they give. When believers begin to waver and draw back, their failure is so frequently connected with these two things. They neglect the twofold privilege of drawing near to God on the one hand, and of drawing near to their fellow-believers on the other.

It is a sad fact that today there are thousands of dear Christian folk attached to denominations in which the great truths we have been considering are very little mentioned. How could they be when things are so organized as to altogether obscure the truth in question? Services are so conducted that the individual saint is put at a distance, and he can only think of drawing near by proxy, as though he were a Jewish worshipper. Or perhaps the case is that he finds all the service conducted for him by a minister, and this of necessity tends to divert his thoughts from the supreme importance of his drawing near for himself, in the secret of his own soul.

Others of us have the inestimable privilege of gathering together according to the Scriptural form prescribed in 1 Corinthians 11-14. This is indeed calculated to impress us with the necessity of drawing near to God in our hearts. But let us watch lest we lose our spiritual exercises and lapse into a frame of mind which would take us listlessly to the meetings, expecting to have everything done for us by "ministering brothers." And perhaps we get quite annoyed with them because they do not perform their part as well as we think they ought to do! Then it is that, instead of holding fast, we begin to let go; the first symptom of it being very probably, that we begin to forsake the meetings and the society of our fellow-believers generally. We become very critical of both meetings and people, and consider we have very good grounds for our criticism!

If instead of holding fast we begin to let go, who can tell whereunto our drawing back will take us? Who indeed, but God Himself! He alone knows the heart. All too often this drawing back, which commenced, as far as human eye can see, with forsaking Christian company, never stops until utter apostasy is reached. This terrible sin was much before the mind of the writer of this epistle, as we saw when considering chapters 3 and 4. He greatly feared that some of the Hebrews to whom he wrote might fall into it. Hence he again refers to it here. The rest of our chapter is taken up with it. In verse 26 he speaks of sinning "wilfully." In the last verse he speaks of drawing back "unto perdition."

To "sin wilfully" is evidently to forsake the faith of Christ, with one's eyes open. No true believer does this, but a professed believer may do so, and it is just this fact, that we have reached perfection and finality in Christ, which makes it so

serious. There is no more sacrifice for sins. This fact which seemed so unspeakably blessed in verse 18, is seen in the light of verse 26, to have a side to it which is unspeakably serious. There is beyond nothing but judgment. And that judgment will be of a very fearful character, hot with indignation.

Some of us might feel inclined to remark, that such judgment seems to be rather inconsistent with the fact that we live in a day when the glad tidings of the grace of God is being preached. So we do, but it is just that fact that increases the severity of the judgment. Verses 28 to 31 emphasize this. Grace makes known to us things of such infinite magnitude that to despise them is a sin of infinite magnitude, a sin far graver than that of despising the law of Moses with its holy demands.

In the gospel there is presented to us, first, the Son of God; second, His precious blood, as the blood of the new covenant; third, the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of grace. Now what is it that the apostate does - especially the Jew, who having professed Christianity, abandons it, and reverts to Judaism. He treads under foot the first. The second he counts an unholy thing. The third he utterly despises. He treats with the utmost scorn and contempt the very things that bring salvation. There is nothing beyond them, nothing but judgment. He will deserve every bit of judgment he gets. All this, be it noted, is a vastly different thing from a true believer growing cold and unwatchful and consequently falling into sin.

In verse 32, we again see that, though for the sake of some these warn-ings were uttered, yet the writer had every confidence that the mass of those to whom he wrote were true believers. He remembered, and he called on them to remember, the earlier days when they suffered much persecution for their faith, and he appealed to them not to cast away their confidence at this late hour in their history. An abundant recompense was coming for any loss they had suffered here.

One thing only was necessary, that they should continue with endurance doing the will of God. Then without fail all that had been promised would be fulfilled to them. Their very position was that they had "fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us," ( 6:18 ). That hope was abundantly sure, but its fulfilment can only be at the coming of the Lord, as is indicated in verse 37.

For the third time in the New Testament that striking word from Habakkuk 2 is quoted. That "the just shall live by faith," is quoted both in Romans 1 and in Galatians 3. But only here is the preceding verse quoted. Take note of the alteration in the words made by the Spirit of God. In Habakkuk we read, "IT will surely come IT will not tarry;" the "it" referring to the vision. But in our days things have become far clearer, and we have the definite knowledge of the Person

to whom the indefinite vision pointed. Hence here it is, "HE that shall come will come, and will not tarry."

It is a striking fact that the word faith only occurs twice in the Old Testament. Once in Deuteronomy Moses uses the word negatively, complaining of the people that they were "children in whom is no faith." In Habakkuk alone does the word occur, used in a positive way. It is equally striking that the New Testament seizes upon that one positive use of the word, and quotes it no less than three times. How this emphasizes the fact that we have now left behind the system of sight for the system of faith. Judaism is supplanted by Christianity.

The point of the quotation here is, however, not that we are justified by faith, but that by faith we LIVE. Faith is, as we may say, the motive force for Christian living. We either go on to the glorious recompense or we draw back to perdition. No middle ground is contemplated.

Do not miss the contrast presented in the last verse of our chapter. It lies between drawing back to perdition and believing to soul-salvation. This furnishes additional proof, were it needed, that the contrast in Hebrews is not between believers who do well and believers who do ill, and who consequently (as is supposed) may perish; but between those who really do believe unto salvation, and those, who being mere professors, draw back to their eternal ruin.

Thanks be to God for that living faith which carries the soul forward with patience to the glorious recompense which awaits us!

#### Hebrews 11

We now arrive at the passage which is pre-eminently the faith chapter of the Bible, and it is easy to see how thoroughly it fits into its place in the whole scheme of this Epistle. Judaism as a religious system largely appealed to sight, whereas the great realities of Christianity are unseen and only appeal to faith. The object of the Epistle being to deliver the converted Hebrews from the grave-clothes of Judaism which clung to them, and to establish them in the liberty of Christianity, the Holy Spirit naturally dwells long upon faith.

How fitting all this is! We do well to dwell long upon it, that the wonder of Divine inspiration may more and more appear to us. We may notice also how the great love chapter of the Bible is 1 Corinthians 13, and the great hope passage is 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11. Now 1 Corinthians is as we may term it, the Epistle of the local assembly, and it is just in the local assembly that all the friction is created amongst believers, and the trying disagreements and disagreeables take place, and consequently love is so much needed. So also 1 Thessalonians is the

Epistle where the saints are seen suffering at the hands of the world, and in these circumstances nothing sustains the heart more than hope.

The whole of our chapter is like a commentary on that little sentence from Habakkuk - "The just shall live by faith." We are shown that from the very outset of the world's history that which pleased God in His people was the outcome of faith. This may seem very obvious to us, but it doubtless was a rather revolutionary idea to the average Jew, for he had accustomed himself to consider that what pleased God was the ceremonials and sacrifices of Judaism, and the works of the law connected therewith. But here the Spirit of God goes behind the activities of these Old Testament believers to bring to light the faith that moved and inspired them. Their works were not the works of the law, but the works of faith. In this connection you might do well to refresh your memories as to the contents of Romans 4 and James 2, noticing well how Paul excludes the works of the law from our justification, and how James insists on the works of faith as evidencing the vitality of the faith we profess.

The first verse defines, not what faith is in the abstract, but what it does in practice. It is "the substantiating of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." The New Translation gives this rendering together with a footnote saying that the words "assurance," or "firm conviction" might be substituted for "substantiating." Faith then is the telescope that brings into our view the unseen verities of which God speaks; making them real to us, giving us assurance of them, and turning them into solid substance in our hearts.

Before however we are led to review how faith wrought in "the elders," we find one word is to ourselves. Verse 3 begins, "Through faith WE understand." and the things seen in creation are brought before us. This is a very significant statement! In apostolic days it was evidently the common faith of Christians that "the worlds were framed by the Word of God." Is it the faith of all Christians today? We have just seen that faith is "the conviction of things not seen." We now discover that only faith can give us a proper understanding of the things that we do see. Nineteen centuries ago the philosophic world was full of weird theories as to the origin of creation. Equally weird theories fill philosophic minds today. All these theories, both ancient and modern, take it for granted that things that are seen were made of things that do appear; and the process, by which they think they were made, has received the name of evolution. The philosophers are very clever men, and they have provided themselves -- especially in these modern days - with a really wonderful equipment for their researches. They only lack one thing. But that one thing is the only thing that counts! They lack the faith that enables anyone to understand. Through faith we understand the origin of creation. Without faith we do not understand it at all.

All the readers of this little paper have, we trust, the faith that understands creation, and so we are prepared to understand the faith which actuated the elders, the recital of which begins with verse 4.

The story seems naturally to fall into three parts. First, we have in verses 4 to 7 the three great worthies of the antediluvian world, and in them faith is seen as that which sets in right relation with God, and consequently saves. Second, we have the patriarchs of the postdiluvian world before the law was given. They illustrate faith as that which brings into view unseen things - the faith that sees. Third, beginning with Moses, the law-giver, we find the faith that gives energy in spite of all obstacles - the faith that is prepared to suffer. In so saying we merely allude to that which seems to be the prominent thought of the Spirit in each section, for of course no one can have faith at all without its effects being known in all three ways.

Abel's faith led to the "more excellent sacrifice" and to the knowledge that he was righteous before God; which knowledge he got by faith in God's testimony. He offered his sacrifice, not by chance nor by some happy inspiration, but by faith. Faith in what? we may ask. Doubtless in that which God had already shown as to the value of the death of a sacrifice by the coats of skins, about which we read in Genesis 3:21. God testified to the value of his gift by accepting his sacrifice; and Abel knew that in accepting his sacrifice God declared him righteous. Many a professing Christian today is saying that it is impossible in this life to have the knowledge of sins forgiven; but lo! here is a man living some four thousand years before Christ, and he possessed this very thing. And may not we possess it who live nearly two thousand years after the great atoning work has been done?

Abel died; but in the case of Enoch, the next on the list, translation took place and he never saw death. And further he had the testimony, not merely of being right with God, but of pleasing God. In this connection we are reminded that without faith we cannot please God at all. Faith is the root out of which spring all those fruits that delight Him: just as in 1 Timothy 6:10, by way of contrast, money is said to be a root out of which every kind of evil springs.

In the case of Noah we see faith which saved from judgment and condemned the world. When warned of coming judgment he took God at His word. When instructed to build the ark he yielded the obedience of faith. Thereby he was separated from the world. He received righteousness and reached God through sacrifice in the renewed earth, while the world was cut off in judgment.

The case of Abraham occupies verses 8 to 19, with the exception of one verse which is occupied with Sarah, for had she not been a woman of faith Isaac, the promised seed, had never been born. Abraham's faith was so exceptional that the

Apostle Paul speaks of him as "the father of all them that believe" (Rom.4:11); so it is not surprising that in this chapter more is said as to him than of any other individual. What is said seems to fall under three heads. First, the faith that led him to respond to the call of God at the outset. He started forth from a city of civilization and culture without knowing where he was going. When he did know it proved to be a land of less culture than the one he had left. Yet all this mattered not. Canaan was the inheritance God had chosen for him, and he moved at the call of God. GOD was before his soul. That is faith!

Second, when in the land of promise he had no actual possession therein. He sojourned there as a stranger and pilgrim, content to dwell in tents. Finally he died in the faith of the promises without ever receiving them. His course was indeed a most remarkable one; and what accounted for it? Faith - the faith that endows a man with spiritual eyesight. He not only desired a better and heavenly country, but he "looked for" a heavenly city far more enduring than Ur of the Chaldees. Verse 13 tells us that he saw the promises, though they were far off as we count time.

Third, his faith seemed to reach a climax and express itself most fully when he "offered up his only begotten son." Isaac was a child of resurrection even as to his natural birth: he became doubly so after this event. Yet the faith was the faith of Abraham, who reasoned that the God who could bring into the world a living child from parents who were physically dead, could and would raise him from the dead. When Abraham believed in the Lord and He counted it to him as righteousness, as Genesis 15:6 tells us, he believed in a God who could raise the dead, as the end of Romans 4 shows. The offering up of Isaac demonstrated this faith of his in the clearest fashion. It was the special work in which his faith wrought, as the latter part of James 2 declares.

After Abraham we find Isaac, Jacob and Joseph mentioned. In each case of the three only one detail in their lives is mentioned, and in two cases out of the three that detail is the closing one. Reading Genesis we should hardly recognize any faith at all in the blessing that Isaac bestowed upon his sons, and we might not see much in the way Jacob blessed his grandsons; yet the keen eye of the Spirit of God discerned it, and He notes it for our encouragement. If He had not a keen eye like this, would He discern faith in the details of our lives? We may well ask ourselves this.

The case of Joseph is more distinct. Egypt was the land of his glory, but he knew by faith that Canaan was to be the land of Messiah's glory, so he commanded that ultimately his bones were to rest not in Egypt but in Canaan.

Verse 23 speaks of the faith of Moses' parents rather than of Moses himself. The faith of Moses occupies verses 24 to 28. The first great display of it was when he refused to continue any longer in the splendid circumstances into which the providence of God had brought him. Faced with the alternative of suffering along with the people of God or enjoying the temporary pleasures of sin, he deliberately chose the former. He cast in his lot with the people of God, though he knew that, being at that moment just down-trodden slaves, it meant reproach for him. Indeed he esteemed that reproach as treasure, even greater than the treasures of Egypt, and how great those treasures were recent discoveries have reminded us. The reproach Moses endured was in character the reproach of Christ, inasmuch as it was a faint foreshadowing of the infinitely greater stoop of Christ when He came down from heaven and identified Himself with a poor and repentant people on earth, as we see for instance in Matthew 3:13-27.

We saw that in the case of Abraham, faith acted like a telescope, bringing into his view things that otherwise he had never seen. We now discover that in the case of Moses it acted like an X-ray apparatus, bringing to light things that lay beneath the surface and enabling him to see through the tinsel glory of Egypt. In this way he got down to the real root of things, and he found that "the recompense of the reward" was the only thing worth considering. It was evidently this that governed him in the whole of his remarkable career.

Having a view of the divine recompense he was able to form a correct estimate of Egypt's treasures and he ranked them far below the reproach of Christ. If Egypt's glory is not to be compared to the reproach of Christ, how will it look in comparison with the glory of Christ? Faith's penetrating sight led to faith's estimation, and this in its turn led to faith's choice and faith's refusal.

From Moses we pass on to the people of Israel in verse 29 and to Joshua - though he is not named - in verse 30, and we reach Rahab, a Gentile, one of an accursed race, in verse 31. Had it not been for this verse we might never have discerned that faith was the root of her actions and words. Reading Joshua 2 we might have supposed that she was a woman of poor morals and no principle, who was anxious to escape her doom. But the fact was that her eyes had been opened to see God. The Canaanites merely saw Israel. "Your terror is fallen upon us," said she, "all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you" (Josh.2:9). Her attitude however was this: - "I know that the Lord hath given you the land." This was faith; and her actions expressed the fact that she dared to side with the God of Israel. This courageous faith did not mean suffering for her since God was at once intervening in power.

Usually, however, God does not intervene at once and then suffering is entailed. So after the mention of Rahab we have a list of names in verse 32 and a further

recital of the triumphs of faith and then especially of the sufferings of faith. Multitudes of saints, of whom the world was not worthy, have been through every conceivable form of persecution and suffering. They endured, not accepting deliverance which might have reached them had they recanted or compromised. Faith suffered, but it carried them through.

Verse 39 brings us back to the point from which in verse 2 we started. They obtained a good report when their "term time" was over. They emerged "the finished article," from God's school. An intimation of the recompense that awaits them in the great "prize-giving day" is furnished by the statement that although they suffered at the world's hands, the world was not worthy of them. They were infinitely its superior.

And yet they, one and all, did not receive the things promised. In due time, according to God's wise plan, another company was to be gathered and constituted, spoken of as "us" in the last verse of our chapter. Note the contrast between the "they" and the "us" - between Old Testament and New Testament saints. The saints of old days had much, but "some better thing" is provided for Christians, and we shall all reach final perfection in glory together. The perfecting in glory of Old Testament believers waits for the completion of the church and the coming of the Lord.

This verse makes it abundantly plain that God's people are found in more families than one. The saints of Old Testament times form one family; Christians form another. Saints of the coming age, when the church has been removed, will form a third. We find different companies distinguished in such passages as Revelation 4:4; 7:3-8; 7:9-17; 14:1-5; 19:7,9. Much depends upon the revelation of God, in the light of which we live, and upon the purpose of God in regard to us, according to which is the calling wherewith we are called. Here however, the contrast is between that which God purposed for the saints who lived before Christ came, and for those whose great privilege is it to live after.

In Christianity the "better thing" has come to light. Indeed the word "better" is characteristic of this epistle, since, as we have seen, the great point of it is to show that proper Christianity wholly transcends Judaism. Already we have had before us, a BETTER Apostle, Priest, hope, covenant, promises, sacrifice, substance, country and resurrection. Run over the chapters and note these things for yourselves.

## Hebrews 12

The opening words of chapter 12 bring us face to face with the application to ourselves of all that has preceded in chapter 11. All these Old Testament heroes

of faith are so many witnesses to us of its virtue and energy. They urge us on that we may run the race of faith in our day, even as they did in days before ours.

In 1 Corinthians 9 Christian service is spoken of under the figure of a race; here Christian life is the point in question. It is a figure very much to the point since a race requires energy, concentration, endurance. So here the exhortation is, "let us run with patience," and patience has the sense of endurance. The normal Christian life is not like a brief sprint of 100 yards, but rather like a long distance race in which endurance is the decisive factor.

In this matter of endurance there were disquieting symptoms manifested amongst these Hebrew believers, as the latter part of chapter 10 has shown us. Verse 36 of that chapter begins, "For ye have need of patience." Then faith is mentioned as the energizing principle of Christian life, and this is followed by the long dissertation on faith in chapter 11. Thus chapter 11 is a kind of parenthesis, and in the words we are considering in the first verse of chapter 12 we are back again on what we may call the main line of the exhortation.

We can only run the race with patience if we lay aside every weight and the sin which entangles. Sin is a very effectual hindrance. It is likened to an obstacle which entangles our feet so that we fall. In the first place however weights are mentioned, as though they were after all the greater hindrance. Many things which could by no means be classified as sins prove themselves to be weights to an earnest Christian; just as there are many things quite right, and allowable to the ordinary individual, which are wholly discarded by the athlete. He strips himself of everything which would impede his progress to the goal. And every Christian should consider himself a spiritual athlete, as 2 Timothy 2:5 also shows.

We have heard chapter 11 spoken of as "the picture gallery of faith," and the opening words of the second verse of our chapter as setting before us "the great Master-piece which we find at the end of it." As we walk down the gallery we can well admire the portraits that we see, but the Master-piece puts all the others into the background. No other than JESUS is the Author - i.e., the beginner, originator, leader - and Finisher of faith. The others displayed certain features of faith; flashes of it were seen at different points of their career. In Him a full-orbed faith was seen, and seen all the time from start to finish. The little word "our" in the AV is in italics you notice, since there is no such word in the original, and here it only obscures the sense.

The One who was the perfect exemplification of faith is set before us as our goal, and as the Object commanding our faith. In this we have an immense advantage over all the worthies mentioned in chapter 11, for they lived in a day when no such Object could be known. We have noticed that faith is the eye, or the

telescope, of the soul; that it is faith that sees. Well, here faith looks to Jesus. If He fills the vision of our souls we shall find in Him the motive energy that we need for the running of the race.

Moreover He is our Example. Every kind of obstacle confronted Him when He trod on earth the path of faith. There was not only the contra-diction of sinners to be faced but also the cross, with all the shame that it entailed. The shame of the cross was a small thing to Him: He despised it. But who shall tell what was involved in the cross itself? Some of us used to sing,

The depth of all Thy suffering  
No heart could e'er conceive,  
The cup of wrath o'erflowing  
For us thou didst receive;  
And oh! of God forsaken  
On the accursed tree:  
With grateful hearts, Lord Jesus,  
We now remember Thee.

Yet though we cannot conceive all that the cross meant to Him, this we know, that He endured it.

In the enduring of these sufferings for sin the Lord Jesus stands absolutely alone, and it is impossible to speak of Him as an Example. In the lesser sufferings which came upon Him through men He is an Example to us, for in one way or another we suffer as following Him. He went to the extreme limit, resisting unto blood rather than turning aside from the will of God. The Hebrews had not been called to martyrdom up to the time of the writing of this epistle, nor have we been up to today; still we need to consider Him.

In this connection another thing has to be taken into account. We are so apt to consider suffering as something in the nature of a very awkward liability - as being all loss. But it is not this. It may rather be written down on the profit side of the account, since God takes it up and weaves it into His scheme of things, using it for our training. This thought fills verses 5 to 11 of our chapter.

Three words are used in this passage: - chastening, rebuking, scourging. The last does of course mean a whipping, and the second means a reproof. But the first, though it may sometimes be used for a beating, primarily means discipline in the sense of child-training; and it is worthy of note that, whereas each of the other two words is used but once in these verses, this one is used no less than eight times. This then is the predominant thought of the passage. We ARE children of

God and hence we come under His training, and must not forget the exhortation addressed to us in that capacity.

The exhortation quoted comes from the third chapter of Proverbs. Turn up the passage and you will see how Solomon addresses the reader as, "my son." Here however it is assumed to be the voice of God Himself addressing us, just as again and again in the first chapter of our epistle we had the words, "He saith," introducing a quotation of Old Testament Scripture. We might say perhaps that it is the voice of the Spirit of God, for later in the Epistle we have had such expressions as, "The Holy Ghost saith," "The Holy Ghost this signifying," "The Holy Ghost is a Witness to us." The point however is this, that what looks like being but the advice of a Solomon to his son is assumed by the New Testament to be the Word of God to us .

We are then to take this chastening from the hand of God as being the normal thing. It is a proof to us that we are His children. Hence when we come under His chastening we are neither to despise it nor to faint under it, but to be exercised by it, as verse 11 tells us. If we are naturally light-hearted and optimistic, our tendency will be to disregard the troubles, through which God may see fit to pass us. We put a bold face on and laugh things off, and do not recognize the hand of God in them at all. In so doing we despise His chastening. If, on the other hand, we are naturally pessimistic and easily depressed, our spirits faint under quite small troubles and our faith seems to fail us. This is going to the opposite extreme, but equally with the other it means the losing of all the profit, into which our troubles were designed to lead us.

The great thing is to be exercised by our troubles. Chastening means trouble, for we are plainly told that "no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous." And exercise means that we turn our troubles into a sort of spiritual gymnasium; for the Greek word used here is the one from which we have derived our English word, gymnasium. Gymnastics for the body have in them some profit, as 1 Timothy 4:8 tells us. Gymnastics for our spirits have in them great spiritual profit in the direction of both holiness and righteousness. By them we become partakers of the very holiness of God Himself; and we are led into paths of righteousness. Righteousness itself bears fruit which is peaceable, even though the disciplinary process, through which we passed in order to reach it, was of a stormy nature.

The tendency with the Hebrews evidently was to faint under their troubles, hence in verse 12 comes the exhortation, in the light of these facts about God's chastening, to renewed energy in the race. Observe those runners at the start of a Marathon race. Their arms are firmly lifted by their sides: their step is elastic, and their knees strong. Now look at them as they approach the finish an hour or two

later. Most of them have run themselves out. Their hands hang down and their knees tremble, as doggedly they stumble on.

" Wherefore lift up ." We are to renew our energies just because we know what God's discipline is designed to effect. We might have imagined that to talk to a poor feeble stumbling believer about God's chastening would be just the thing to cast him down, whereas it is just the thing, if rightly understood, to lift him up. What can be more encouraging than to discover that all God's dealings have as their object the promotion of holiness and righteousness, and also our being preserved from the sin and the weights which would impede our progress in the race?

Moreover we are to consider the welfare of others and not merely our own. Verses 13 to 17 turn our thoughts in this direction; and two classes are spoken of - the lame and the profane. By the former we understand believers who are weak in faith; and by the latter those who may have made a profession and come amongst Christians, but all the while they really prefer the world. Verses 16 and 17, in fact, contemplate just that class that already has been alluded to in this Epistle - chapters 6 and 10 - who cannot be renewed to repentance, and who have nothing but judgment in prospect. Esau is the great Old Testament example of such, and Judas Iscariot is the example in the New.

We need to watch against those profane people lest they damage others beside themselves, by becoming roots of bitterness. If we read John 12:1-8, we may see how very easily Judas might have become a root of bitter-ness, had not the Lord at once intervened. Those who are spoken of as lame need however very different treatment. We should aim at the healing of such and take every care that straight paths are set before them. We all need these straight paths, and we are to make them. There are some, alas! who seem to find a joy in making things as difficult and complicated as possible, whereas the path of righteousness and holiness is ever a very straight and simple one. And all this we are to do because we are come, not to the order of things connected with the law, but to that connected with grace.

The two systems are summed up for us in verses 18 to 24 - Sinai on the one hand and Sion on the other. Now the forefathers of these Hebrews had come to Sinai, and the Hebrews themselves, before their conversion, had come to it in this sense; that it was to God, known according to the display of Himself at Sinai, that they came, when they drew near to Him, as far as they might do so in those days.

But now all was changed, and in drawing near to God in the wonder-fully intimate way which the Gospel permits, they came upon another ground, and in connection with another order of things entirely. Mount Sion had become



symbolic of grace just as Sinai had become symbolic of law; so that believing the Gospel, and standing in the grace of God, we may be said to have come to Sion.

It is not easy to see the connection between all the things mentioned in verses 22 to 24, but it may help us to notice that the little word "and" divides the different items the one from the other. Hence for instance, it is the innumerable company of angels which is spoken of as "the general assembly," and not the church which is mentioned immediately following.

We are regarded here as being under the new covenant, and hence as having come to all that which is clearly revealed in connection with it. Eight things are mentioned, and each is stated in a way calculated to bring home their superiority, as compared with the things which the Hebrews knew in connection with the law.

The Jew could boast in the earthly Jerusalem, which was intended to be the centre of Divine rule on the earth: but we have come to the heavenly city whence God's rule will extend over heaven as well as earth. The Jew knew that angels had served in the giving of the law: but we have come to the universal gathering of the angels in their myriads, all of them the servants of God and of His saints. Israel was God's assembly in the wilderness and in the land: but we belong to His assembly of firstborn ones whose names are written in heaven. A heavenly citizenship is ours.

So too, Moses had told Israel that, "The Lord shall judge His people" (Deut.32:36): but we have come to God as the Judge of all - a vastly greater thing. The old order dealt with just men living on the earth: we have come to the same, but as made perfect in glory. Lastly, for us it is not Moses the mediator of the law covenant, and the blood of bulls and of goats, but Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and His precious blood of infinite value.

To all this have we come in faith, and we await the hour of manifestation which is surely drawing nigh. Israel came to Sinai in a visible way and were greatly affrighted. Our coming in faith to Sion, and all connected therewith, is no less real, and in coming we are greatly comforted and established.

Yet there is a serious side to this matter, inasmuch as it adds great emphasis and solemnity to all that God says to us today. He spoke in time past to the fathers through Moses and the prophets, but now He has spoken from heaven. The fact that He has now spoken in His Son, making known to us His grace, does not lessen the solemnity of His utterance but rather increases it, as we saw when reading the second and third verses of chapter 2.

If we turn away from His heavenly voice we certainly shall not escape. At Sinai He spoke, formulating His demands upon men, and then His voice shook the earth. Now He has spoken in the riches of His mercy. But in the days between these two occasions He spoke through Haggai the prophet, announcing His determination to shake not only the earth but the heavens also. He will in fact so shake that everything that can be shaken will be shaken. Only the unshakeable things will remain. Our God - the Christian's God - is a consuming fire, and everything that is un-suited to Him will be devoured in His judgment.

Can we contemplate that day with calmness of spirit? Indeed we can. The feeblest believer is entitled to do so, for we receive, one and all, a kingdom which cannot be shaken. And just because we have an immovable kingdom we are to have grace to serve God with reverence and true piety. Let us all take it to heart that reverence becomes us in our attitude towards God, even though He has brought us into such nearness to Himself. Indeed it becomes us because we are brought into such nearness.

Also let us take note that we are exhorted to serve God acceptably, not in order to have the kingdom made sure to us, but because we have received it, and it never can be moved. The very certainty of it, far from making us careless, only incites us to serve.

### Hebrews 13

The first verse of our chapter is very short but very important. The word continue is virtually the same as the word remain, which closes verse 27 of the previous chapter. Only the things which cannot be shaken are going to remain when the great day of shaking arrives; then, let brotherly love remain amongst the saints of God today. It is one of the things which will remain unshaken in eternity.

Let us recall that in the early part of the epistle believers are spoken of as the "many sons" being brought "unto glory." Christ was seen to be "the Captain of their salvation," who is "not ashamed to call them brethren." Hence most evidently Christians are brethren, and the love existing between them, the fruit of the new nature divinely implanted, is to be cultivated. In fostering it we shall not be like children building a sand-castle to be washed away by the next tide, but like those who build for eternity.

Verses 2 and 3 indicate two directions in which brotherly love is to express itself. First, in hospitality; that is, in the love of strangers. The world is usually prepared to receive those they esteem as important or influential, and thus to do honour to the distinguished guest. We are bidden to rise above merely worldly motives and to receive brethren unknown to us simply because they are brethren. This is true brotherly love in manifestation: a manifestation all too often but very little seen in

our land. Second, it is to come out in the remembrance of brethren in adversity, particularly of those suffering imprisonment.

The word, remember, means to recollect in an active way; not merely to call to mind, but to do so with active sympathy. If one member suffer all the members suffer with it, we are told elsewhere; and what we find here is in keeping with that fact. True brotherly love would lead us so to remember all such sufferers as to sympathetically support and succour them, as far as we are able.

In verse 4 natural love is in question, and that in the world has been sadly perverted and marred. By Christians it is to be preserved intact as a sanctified thing, which originated in God. In verse 5 another "love" comes before us - the love of money. The Christian's manner of life is to be characterized as being without this altogether, since this is a love which never originated in God at all. Only when man had become a fallen creature did he lose all love for God and enthrone in his heart earthly objects, and more particularly the money which enabled him to pursue them.

The word for us is, be content with "such things as ye have," or, "your present circumstances." A very searching word it is too! The world is filled with covetousness as much as ever, perhaps more than ever. God is not in all its thoughts, which are concentrated upon material gain. Out of this spring all the strifes. Envy, jealousies, heartburnings, quarrellings are everywhere! Oh, let us so live as to present a very definite contrast to all this! May it be manifest to all that we are actuated by another love than the love of money!

"But," it may be said, "in these days of competition we must bend all our energies to the making of money, else we shall not long retain such things as we have, but shall sink into poverty." The answer to this thought is however immediately anticipated in these verses. We have the definite promise of His unfailing presence and support; consequently we may boldly count upon the Lord for all our needs, and have no fear of man.

There are two points of great interest about verses 5 and 6. The first concerns the way in which the Old Testament Scripture is quoted. It was to Joshua that the Lord said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." We might very properly say to ourselves, "But I am no Joshua. He was a very eminent man of faith, and I am a very insignificant and often a very feeble believer. Would it not be a rather forward and impertinent thing for me to calmly assume that a promise made to him is equally valid for me?" It is delightful to discover from these verses that such an application of this ancient promise is not the boldness of presumption but the boldness of faith. The fact is, of course, that what God is, He is towards His people in all time and circumstances. There is no variableness nor shadow of

turning with Him. He will not be less towards His people in this dispensation than He was in a past dispensation. We may wholly count upon Him.

The Christian poetess has said,

"They that trust Him wholly,  
Find Him wholly true."

This of course is so, but it is well when quoting these happy words to lay the stress on the word, find; since it is equally a fact that He is wholly true to those who do not trust Him wholly. Their defective faith will never provoke Him to defective faithfulness. No! But their defective faith will obscure their view of His faithfulness, and possibly they may never FIND Him wholly true, - never really wake up to it, as a realized and enjoyed thing - until they discover it in glory.

The second point of interest is not so much the application of this Old Testament text but rather the reasoning which is based upon it. The skeleton outline of the reasoning runs thus, "He hath said ... so that we may boldly say ." If God speaks we may accept what He says with all confidence. More than this, we may assert what He asserts with all boldness. And we may do even more than this. For if He asserts things concerning Himself in regard to His people, we may, since we are of His people, assert these things boldly as applying to ourselves. Indeed we may take it home with all confidence as applying to each individually; even as here we read, "The Lord is MY Helper, I will not fear." In our reading of Scripture let us form the happy habit of thus applying the words of God to ourselves.

Before leaving the first six verses let us notice the simplicity which is here enjoined upon believers; a simplicity all too much lost in these days of civilized artificiality. How striking a testimony would be rendered if we were marked by that brotherly love which expresses itself in hospitality and practical sympathy, by natural love preserved in undefiled honour, and by a holy contentment, the fruit of the realized presence of God, and the very opposite of the mad covetousness and discontent of the world.

The seventh verse bids us remember those who are guides or leaders, having ministered the word of God. To be a leader one needs not only to minister the word but to practise it. When this is the case faith is made evident and the "end" or "issue" of their conduct can be seen, and we can safely be exhorted to imitate their faith. Their faith, be it observed. It is all too easy to start imitating the speech and ways and idiosyncrasies of those we look up to. But if we imitate anything let it be the faith which underlies and inspires all else about them.

In verse 8 also our thoughts are carried back to the things with which we started in chapter 1. There we discovered that the words occurring in Psalm 102, "Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail," were not addressed to God in a general way, but specifically to the One whom we know as our Lord Jesus Christ. This thought is amplified in the great statement that He is "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever." Of whom could such a statement be made but of One who was and is God?

Now just because the One in whom our faith centres is the same: there must be a certain kind of sameness in all the truth that also centres in Him. He can never be the Centre and Theme of doctrines which are various and strange. There is no place for that unsatisfied restlessness of the human mind that is forever running after notions, however contradictory they may be. Now the real knowledge of Jesus establishes the heart with grace, and mere variety and novelty cease to attract. The danger immediately threatening the Hebrews was the importation of strange doctrines from their own former religion, as is indicated by the allusion to "meats."

A certain proportion of the meats consumed by the Jews reached them through their sacrifices. Leviticus 7 shows us that not only the priests, but also in some cases those who offered were privileged to eat parts of the things offered: that is, they ate of the altar. How often must unbelieving Jews have flung the taunt at their believing brethren that they now had no altar in which to claim their share! But the fact is, "We have an altar"! And of the Christian's altar the proud orthodox Jew had no right to eat, having shut himself out by his own unbelief.

What is the Christian altar, and where is it to be found? "Come to us," say the Romanists, "and in our high altars, ornamented with crucifix and candles, where mass is daily said, you will find it." And so also, though with slight variations, say Greek and Anglo-Catholics. But what says the Scripture? It says, "We have an altar, ... for ... Jesus also, ... suffered without the gate." Patriarchal and Jewish altars - the only altars made by hands that ever were sanctioned by God - were just types of the death of Christ. We eat of that Altar, inasmuch as every bit of spiritual blessing that we are able to appropriate comes to us from thence. We eat His flesh and drink His blood, according to our Lord's own words in John 6; and in this there is no allusion to the Lord's supper, but rather to a spiritual appropriation of His death. Just as Baptism sets forth in figure our burial with Christ, so the Lord's supper sets forth in figure this spiritual appropriation: that is all.

In the death of Christ, then, we have our Altar; but in His death we have also the antitype of the sin offering. According to Leviticus 4, if the sin in question was of such a nature as to involve the whole congregation, then the blood of the offering

had to be carried into the holy place and sprinkled before the veil, and the carcass of the animal had to be burned without the camp. Our Lord Jesus has taken up the whole question of sin in all its gravity. His blood has spoken in the fulness of its virtue in the immediate presence of God, and, true to the type, He died as the rejected One outside the gate of that very city which was the crown and glory of man's religion. We are glad to be identified with the virtue of His blood before God; are we as glad to be identified with Him in His place of rejection without the camp? Except we have come powerfully under the attraction of His love, we are not!

Verse 11 gives us the type. Verse 12 gives us the fulfilment of the type, in Jesus suffering without the gate of Jerusalem. Verse 13 gives us the exhortation based upon it, but using again the language of the type. We are not exhorted to go without the city, for here we have no continuing city as verse 14 reminds us, but to go without the camp. To the believer the world has become a wilderness.

Moreover, had the exhortation been, "Go forth ... without the city," the words might have had a merely political significance to these early Hebrews. As a matter of fact, when a few years later Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, the Christians had almost to a man fled the city; but that was not the point here. The camp was Israel viewed religiously, Israel grouped around the Tabernacle according to the divine order. The call to these Hebrews was to go outside the religious system of Judaism, and thus to take up the reproach of Christ. Only one thing could induce them to obey this call, and that the love of Him. "Let us go forth therefore UNTO HIM."

If we attentively read the Acts we become aware that the mass of believing Jews by no means broke their links with Judaism. They thought now to proceed with Christ AND Judaism. With many indeed it was a case of Judaism and Christ; for the outstanding feature with them was, "they are all zealous of the law," rather than zealous for Christ. When this epistle was penned the hour had struck for a decisive move. It could no longer be Christ and Judaism. It had to be Christ OR Judaism. If they wanted CHRIST, then outside the camp to HIM they must go.

A few years passed and in the fall of Jerusalem the very heart of Judaism disappeared. Temple, altars, sacrifices, priests, all were swept away. The camp strictly speaking had gone. Are we to suppose that therefore this exhortation had lost all its force? By no means, for the Jews carried on some resemblance of their religion by means of Synagogues and Rabbis, and have done so to this day. They still have a camp of a sort, though not the camp as originally instituted of God. When a Jew is con-verted today, this exhortation without a question calls him out of his Judaism unto the rejected Christ as effectively as ever.

And what of that sad travesty of primitive Christianity which today is called Christendom? It has almost entirely organized itself after the pat-tern of the Jewish camp. It boasts its priests, its worldly sanctuaries and often its sacrifices. It rests upon a worldly basis and frequently encourages alliance with the world. Has this exhortation no voice to us in connection with this? Is it likely that God would begin by calling His people out of a religious system that He had originated Himself, and then end by expecting them to remain within religious systems which He never instituted, but which were created through long ages of unfaithfulness and decay? What a reviving we should see if every Christian really heard the cry, "Unto HIM without the camp," and obeyed it !

Doubtless there are a thousand reasons against our obeying it. Here is one, "We should be isolating ourselves. It would be a dull and miserable business." Would it? Why then does verse 15 go on to speak of praise and thanksgiving? Those who have gone forth to Christ without the camp are filled with praise and thanksgiving! They offer it by Him, for He is their High Priest, and they are exhorted to offer it continually. The Jewish camp had the silver trumpets and the high sounding cymbals without a doubt. But what were they worth? Christendom's camp has, without a question, magnificent organs and orchestras and lovely choirs. But what about, "the fruit of lips, confessing His name"? That is another matter, and that is the thing that counts!

Here is another objection, "We should be sacrificing all our oppor-tunities of doing good." Should we? Why then does verse 16 speak of our doing good? The fact is that unlimited opportunities for doing real GOOD lie before those who are obedient, and instead of sacrificing their opportunities, they offer real sacrifice in doing good.

Again it may be said, "If you go outside the camp it will be all disorder and confusion." What then about verse 17? These Hebrews, though coming outside the camp, would have leaders or guides, raised up of God, who would watch over them for their souls good. To such it would be a pleasure to submit. This does not look like disorder but rather the reverse.

Yet once more, it may be said, "But we need the outward framework of organization that the camp supplies. Without hurdles the sheep will always be straying." But look at verses 20 and 21. Long before this, as recorded in John 10, the Lord Jesus had spoken of Himself as the Shepherd who had entered the Jewish fold in order that He might call His own sheep by name and lead them out. Now he is presented to us as the great Shep-herd of the sheep, raised again from the dead by the God of peace. In going forth unto Him they were but leaving the fold finally and forever, in order to come altogether under His authority and His

shepherd care. They were coming to Him by whom they could be made perfect in every good work to do the will of God.

All this stands as true for us today as for the Hebrew believers of the first century. If we have gone forth to Him, who is our risen Shepherd, we have come to a place where Psalm 23 applies, with a fulness of meaning that David himself could never have known. Instead of knowing want we shall be like sheep who lie down in green pastures, because abundantly satisfied.

On this note the Epistle ends. The writer speaks of it as "a word of exhortation," and such indeed it is. It is also "a letter ... in few words." Though only two epistles exceed it in length yet it is indeed "in a few words" if we consider the magnitude and scope of its contents. If we have really taken in these "few words" we shall have received some knowledge of things which are so great that all eternity will not exhaust them

## Studies in Hebrews

This earlier series on Hebrews by Ray Stedman contained startling and new insights when preached in 1965 were later put into paperback book form. His later series, below is an entirely different series---both are outstanding. "Hebrews is all about Christ. The introduction declares that Christ is God's final word to man. There is nothing more to be said, there is nothing that can be added after what Jesus Christ has said and done. And it is utterly foolish to ignore it, the writer says, because we cannot exist without Christ. It is basic dishonesty to pretend we can. We are not independent of God, as we sometimes foolishly imagine. We are not even independent of each other. We need one another and we need God, desperately, every moment of life. Therefore, if Christ be God, as this letter so dearly claims, he is the inevitable One, and it is foolish to ignore him."

The Final Word	Heb 1:1 - 2:4
The True Man	Heb 2:5-18
Living out of Rest	Heb 3:1- 4:13
Strength at Wits End	Heb 4:14 - 5:10
Let's Get On with It	Heb 5:11 - 6:12
Dealing with Doubt	Heb 6:13 - 7:26
The New Constitution	Heb 7:27 - 8:13
A Clear Conscience	Heb 9:1-23
The Unfolding Pattern	Hebrews 9:24 - 10:18
Triumph or Tragedy	Heb 10:19-39
What Faith Is	Heb 11:1-7
How Faith Works	Heb 11:8 - 12:2
Never Give Up	Heb 12:3-29
The Intended Life	Heb 13:1-21

The other night some of us were gathered in a home discussing the state of affairs of the world. We commented on the fears, the tensions, the sense of futility that prevails in so many circles these days. Earlier someone had read the eighth chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans, where he speaks of the whole creation groaning and travailing in bondage, and futility stamped upon all things. In our discussion the question arose: "What can we do about this?" As Christians, we knew the answer to the world's problems, but the problem was: "How to make the world believe the answer?" Among us was a young Christian who seemed considerably troubled by our discussion. With a deeply concerned look on his face, he said, "Why is this? Why doesn't the world believe what we have to say?" Then he added, "I think it's because so many Christians don't act like they believe it themselves." Then he asked the logical, but thorny, question: "How can we make Christians believe what they believe?"

That is the very theme of the book of Hebrews: How to make Christians believe, how to make Christians act like Christians. This is what the world is waiting to see and what the epistle was written to effect. It is addressed to a group of Jewish Christians who had begun to drift, to lose their faith. They had lost all awareness of the relevancy of their faith to the daily affairs of life. They had begun to drift into outward formal religious performance, but to lose the inner reality. Doubts were creeping into their hearts from some of the humanistic philosophies that abounded in the world of their day, as they abound in the world of our day. Some of them were about to abandon their faith in Christ, not because they were attracted again by Jewish ritual and ceremony, but because of persecution and pressure. They felt it was not worthwhile; they were losing too much, and that it was possible, just possible, that they had been deceived and the message of Christ was not true after all.

No one knows exactly where these Christians lived. Some feel this letter was written to Hebrew Christians living in the city of Rome. Others believe it was written to the most Jewish city on earth in that day, Jerusalem. That is my own personal conviction. If anyone wished to influence the world of Jewish Christians, surely that would be the place to start.

No one knows for certain who wrote the letter, either. In the King James version it says, "The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews." It was a favorite jest in seminary to ask, "Who wrote the Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews?" No one knows for sure. If you read this letter in English you are almost sure that Paul wrote it, since so many of the thoughts are obviously Pauline. But if you read it in Greek

you are equally certain that Paul did not write it, for the language used is far different than in the other letters from the hand of Paul. There have been a great many guesses throughout the centuries, including Luke, Silas, Peter, Apollos (the silver-tongued orator of the first century), Barnabas, and even Aquila and Priscilla. Some have felt that Priscilla wrote it; if so, this would be the first letter of the New Testament written by a woman. It is my own conviction (and I trust this will settle the problem) that the Apostle Paul wrote it in Hebrew while he was in prison in those two years in Caesarea after his visit to Jerusalem, and that it was translated by Luke into Greek and this is the copy that has come down to us today.

Whoever the writer was he sees one thing very clearly, that Jesus Christ is the total answer to every human need. No book of the New Testament focuses upon Christ like the book of Hebrews. It is the clearest and most systematic presentation of the availability and adequacy of Jesus Christ in the whole of the Bible. It presents Christianity as the perfect and final religion, simply because the incomparable person and work of Jesus Christ permits men free and unrestricted access to God. In every age that is man's desperate need. There is no hunger like God-hunger.

We shall ignore chapter divisions as we go through this book for, on the best tradition, those were put in by a drunken man riding on horseback. The first section covers all of Chapter 1 and the first four verses of Chapter 2. We shall move quite rapidly through this epistle for this is one letter in which it is easy to become bogged down and to miss much of the thrust of the wonderful argument. We must move fast enough to see where the writer is going.

The argument of this first section is very simple. Somewhat bluntly and immediately the writer declares that God has spoken to man in Jesus Christ. This is the theme of the epistle. The very nature of that word indicates that: Christ is a stronger word than came through the prophets; He also has a greater name than that of the angels; and He himself is a surer word to man than the Law.

With that as our program, let us look at the epistle.

In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. {Heb 1:1-3a RSV}

In those three short verses we have four amazing themes:

First, that the word which now comes to us in Jesus Christ, both by what he said and what he was, is a stronger and more inclusive word than God ever spoke through the prophets.

When you read the Old Testament you are reading the Word of God. The voice of God is heard through various forms and circumstances. Open the book of Genesis and read the simple, majestic tale of creation and the flood. Then follows the straightforward narrative of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; then the thunderings of the Law, the sweet singing of the Psalmist, the exalted beauty of the prophets, the homespun wisdom of the Proverbs, the delicate tenderness of the Song of Solomon, and the marvelous mysteries of the prophetic writings, as Ezekiel and Daniel. All of it is of God, but all of it is incomplete. It never brings us to ultimates and absolutes.

But when you open the pages of the New Testament and read the four-fold picture of Jesus Christ, you find that all the Old merges into one voice, the voice of the Son. The syllables and phrases by which God spoke in the Old Testament are merged into one complete discourse in Jesus Christ. Therefore, God's word to man has been fully uttered in the Son. There is nothing more to be said. Jesus Christ is God's final word to man.

Therefore, the word through the Son is greater than that through the prophets because it includes and surpasses theirs. It is also greater because the Son forms the boundaries of history. The writer says, "Whom he has appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world." In that phrase, "the heir of all things," he is looking on into the future as far as the eye of man can see.

This last week a teenaged boy sat in my study with a very worried expression on his face. We talked about various things in his life, but finally he said, "I want to ask you a question." I said, "Go ahead." He said, "Where is it all coming to, anyway? What is happening in the world? Where is all this tremendous stirring and tumult going to end?" I told him it would end exactly as the Bible predicted it would end.

The prophetic pattern woven into the revelation of God has already been fulfilled to the very letter, as far as we have gone in history. Jesus himself, in Matthew 24, Luke 21, and Mark 13, those great prophetic passages, indicates plainly what the end would be. He himself is the terminating point of history. All things will end with him. This is Paul's argument in the letter to the Ephesians, that all the events of the ages shall find their fulfillment and meaning in Jesus Christ.

He stands at the end of the future as he is also at the beginning of the past, for he is the creator of the worlds. All things come from his hands, he is the originator of all the processes of life, nothing began or exists but what began or existed in him. Jesus makes this claim himself to the astonishment of the Jews. He said, "Before Abraham was, I am," {John 8:58b}.

Further, his word has greater power than the prophets' because he sustains the matter of the universe. We read, "He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power." In the hills behind Stanford University they are building a new linear accelerator, some two miles long, a gigantic instrument. What is it for? Scientists hope it will prove to be a great lever by which they can pry the lid off the secrets that lie behind matter. They are trying to find what makes the universe 'tick,' what holds it together. And as man probes deeper into the secrets of the universe around him he discovers more and more that he is confronting the mystery of an untouchable, unweighable, unscalable force; that he stands face to face with pure force. What is that force? Scientists never name it, in fact they cannot name it, but the Scripture does. The Scripture says that force is Jesus Christ, that he holds everything in place, whether it be large or small. The reason we can sit here comfortably in these seats, though our earth is whirling at a furious rate, and not be hurled off into space, is simply because he sustains the universe. He is the secret behind everything that exists.

More than that, in the final statement here, his word comes with superior force because he redeems man and nature.

When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, {Heb 1:3b RSV}

I stated earlier that we all feel the futility which is stamped on everything today. Why is it that nothing ever completely satisfies? If we can but get certain things we think we will be happy, but once we get them we soon lose all interest. Why is this?

We do not believe that the world was intended to be this way, and the Scriptures confirm this. They reveal the fact that the world in which we live is a world in desperate need of redemption. It needs to be brought back out of uselessness and restored to its proper relation where it was originally intended to be. All this is included in the great statement, "When he had made purification for sins." When he had come to grips with the thing that is destroying human life and making this universe such an unpleasant place in which to live, when he had dealt with it fully,

he took his place beside the Majesty on high. That is why his word is greater than the prophets.

In the next section the writer moves on immediately to compare Jesus with the angels.

The ancient world made a great deal of angels. They worshipped them in many of the ancient religious rites. Angels are the demigods of the Roman and Greek pantheon. Therefore, this letter was written to people who particularly had an interest in angels. The writer deals with this very rapidly, but very thoroughly. This subject may not interest us as much today as it did then, but it is still a tremendous revelation of the person of Christ.

The Lord Jesus, says the writer, has a greater name than the angels, first because of his relationship.

...having become as much superior to angels as the name he has obtained is more excellent than theirs.

For to what angel did God ever say,  
"Thou art my Son,  
today I have begotten thee"? {Heb 1:4-5a RSV}

The contrast is between a Son and a servant. Angels are servants, but Christ is the Son.

I once visited a ranch as the guest of the hired man on that ranch. When we came onto the property we had to drive around the big house and go to the bunkhouse in the rear. I stayed with him there in the bunkhouse and never once got into the big house with him. There were some beautiful sorrel horses in the pasture and I suggested we take a ride. He said, "Oh, no, I'm not permitted to ride those horses." So we had to ride some mangy fleabags out to the pasture.

A few weeks later I became acquainted with the son of the household, and he invited me out to the ranch. When I went out with him, it was entirely different. We went right into the big house and he took over as all teenagers do. After a sumptuous meal we went out and rode the sorrel horses all over the range. What a wonderful time we had.

That is the difference between a son and a servant, and that is the difference between Christ and any angel. He is greater because of his relationship, the fact that he is a Son. Blood is always thicker than water.

As C. S. Lewis points out, what we make with our hands is always something different than we are, but what we beget with our bodies is always the dearest thing in the world to us because it is part of us. Thus, the angels were made; the Son was begotten. What we beget has the same nature we have; what we make is always different. The angels, being made, cannot have the same relationship as the Son, who was begotten.

Here is the final answer to the cults. Both Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses teach that Jesus Christ was nothing more than an angel, the highest created angel. They identify him with Michael, the Archangel. But this passage in Hebrews utterly demolishes that theory, for Christ is a Son, and not angel. To what angel did God ever say, "Thou art my Son."

Second, Christ is greater than the angels by the demonstration of worship.

And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says,  
"Let all God's angels worship him." {Heb 1:6 RSV}

We only worship that which is superior to us. The worship of the angels at Bethlehem is testimony to the deity of the babe in the manger. John Bunyan said, "If Jesus Christ be not God, then heaven will be filled with idolators." For in Revelation and Daniel, those books that give us a glimpse into the heavenly realms, we see ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of angels engaged in worshipping the Son. So he is seen to be greater than angels by the demonstration of worship.

Third, his superiority is evidenced by the demonstration of authority. This section begins and ends with a word about the angels, while in between is the contrast of the position of the Son.

Of the angels he says,  
"Who makes his angels winds,  
and his servants flames of fire." {Heb 1:7 RSV}

What are angels? Servants and ministers, depicted by wind and fire. In our daily life wind and fire are two elements which are more than man can handle for they frequently get out of bounds, yet they are made to be servants of men. These symbolize the angels, superior in being to men, yet servants of men. The quotation concerning angels is from Psalm 104.



Then he moves to contrast the Son, quoting from Psalm 45.

But of the Son he says,

"Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever,  
the righteous scepter is the scepter of thy kingdom.  
Thou hast loved righteousness and hated lawlessness;  
therefore God, thy God, has anointed thee  
with the oil of gladness beyond thy comrades." {Heb 1:8-9 RSV}

The Son is the originator of all things. Behind all material things lies the thought and intent of the heart, and he says of the Son, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever... Thou hast loved... and hated." What God loves and hates is the motivation for what takes place within the universe. No angel can make this claim.

Again he moves to another quotation, this time from Psalm 102:

And,

"Thou, Lord, didst found the earth in the beginning,  
and the heavens are the work of thy hands;  
they will perish, but thou remainest;  
they will all grow old like a garment,  
like a mantle thou wilt roll them up,  
and they will be changed.  
But thou art the same, and thy years will never end." {Heb 1:10-12 RSV}

Christ is not only the originator, but the sustainer of the universe, the one behind all things, eternally keeping it going until at last it runs down.

Notice a very interesting thing here, you scientists among us. There is here described very plainly what has been called The Second Law of Thermodynamics, the degenerative faculty in the universe. All things will grow old like a garment, but not the one who made them and keeps them, i.e., the Son.

His third argument in this contrast with the angels is taken from Psalm 110:

But to what angel has he ever said,

"Sit at my right hand,  
till I make thy enemies a stool for thy feet?" {Heb 1:13 RSV}

Again, here is the One who waits at the end of history, the termination point of all events, the One for whom all things exist, and toward whom all things are moving, the heir of all things. All things find their purpose and meaning only as they relate to him.

Now he comes back to the angels again in Verse 14:

Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation? {Heb 1:14 RSV}

Again, what are angels? Servants! But the Son is God!

Christ is not only a stronger word than the prophets, and has a higher name than the angels, but, in these next four verses, the writer comes to a third conclusion: He is a surer word than the Law.

Therefore we must pay the closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For if the message declared by angels was valid and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his own will. {Heb 2:1-4 RSV}

What is his conclusion? We need to pay attention!

This convinces me that the writer of this letter, whoever he was, was a preacher. There is nothing more heartbreaking than preaching to people week after week and to see certain ones constantly exposed to truth that you know could change their lives, set them free, transform their very existence and bring them out into a realm of experience they hardly believe existed; you know this, and yet nothing is more heartbreaking than to see them, week after week, lose the whole effect of this, simply because they do not pay attention. This is why Jesus said again and again to the people of his day, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear," {cf, Matt 11:15, 13:9, 13:43, etc.}. It is not too often we are able to hear truths like these, truths that go to the heart of life. But he that has ears to hear, let him hear.

I am aware that, even as I speak, some of your minds may be drifting away to golf, or some problem you are concerned with. You are held captive by some trivial matter, and these things that strike so deeply and can mean such transforming release go right over your heads. There will be some who will go out from here

and not understand this message because they are drifting. So the warning is: let us pay attention, lest we drift.

There are two reasons why this message is particularly valid:

First, it is valid by comparison with the Law. If the word spoken by angels, that is, the Law of Moses, had validity and those to whom it was given found that it was absolutely true in experience, then this message also is true. If angels could give a word like that, how much more the word that comes by the Son? That is his argument.

The confirmation of this was the testimony of Israel's history. Here is a race of people, the Jews, to whom the Law was particularly given. They were told that if they would obey it they would be blessed; if they disregarded it, they would be cursed. There is no people on the face of the earth who show a more consistent pattern of cause and effect than this people. Wherever they have gone, in obedience there has been blessing; in disobedience there has been cursing. If the Law had that effect, a Law spoken by angels, how much more shall the words spoken by the Son have effect?

The second confirmation is, this message is valid in view of the form of its communication to us. It was spoken, first of all, by the Lord! That is a most impressive argument. What Jesus Christ has to say is the most authoritative word the world has ever heard. This message did not originate with the apostles, it did not come to us by means of prophets, it came through the Lord himself; he spoke it.

Second, it was confirmed by eye witnesses. This is an unimpeachable argument. Any court in the land will accept evidence if it is confirmed by enough eye witnesses. Here is the evidence of Christianity confirmed to us by numerous eye witnesses who were there and wrote what they saw and heard and did.

Third, it was attested by signs sent from God himself, by wonders and miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to his own will. It still is attested this way. How can we explain the gifts that develop among Christian people, the ability to do certain things, except as we recognize the Spirit of God at work in our midst? What an impelling argument this is!

It all focuses down to one question which the writer leaves hanging in the air: How shall we escape if we neglect such great salvation? That is not a threat, it is simply a question. It is addressed both to the Christian and to the non-Christian:

To the non-Christian it says: Where are you going to go? How will you get out of God's universe? How can you escape the inevitable? Indeed, why seek to avoid that which is unavoidable -- a confrontation with the One who is behind all things? How can you escape, and why attempt to do so? Especially when his purpose is not to curse but to bless? How can you find deliverance by any other route, by any other path, or by any other channel, since it does not involve the One who is behind all things?

To the Christian the writer is saying, it is not enough that we know Jesus Christ: We must use him. We can lose so much, even knowing him, unless there is a day-by-day walk with him. We lose peace and freedom and joy and achievement. We are subjected to temptation, frustration, bewilderment, bafflement and barrenness without him. And if we do not go on as Christians, if we do not grow, a serious question is raised: Have we ever really begun the Christian life? Or is this but a self-deceptive fraud, attempted in order to meet outward standards but without any inward change in the heart?

He leaves the question hanging in the air, haunting, unavoidable. And that is where we shall leave it. How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?

Answer that in the loneliness of your own hearts.

Prayer:

Our Father, the truth you have set before us is not one to trifle with. We are dealing with the very secrets of life, the very basis of the universe. The claims of the Lord Jesus are incomparable, they can never be surpassed. We pray, therefore, that we may face up to this, and realize that there is no way of working out the problems of human life except as we work them out in fellowship with him. As we go on in this letter, we ask to see this even more clearly, and may hearts right now open their doors to thee. Lord Jesus, you are the One who is the secret of human life and behind all the mysteries of the universe. May you enter our lives in grace and begin to reign. We pray in thy name, Amen.

THE TRUE MAN

Hebrews is all about Christ. The introduction declares that Christ is God's final word to man. There is nothing more to be said, there is nothing that can be added after what Jesus Christ has said and done. And it is utterly foolish to ignore it, the writer says, because we cannot exist without Christ. It is basic dishonesty to pretend we can. We are not independent of God, as we sometimes foolishly

imagine. We are not even independent of each other. We need one another and we need God, desperately, every moment of life. Therefore, if Christ be God, as this letter so dearly claims, he is the inevitable One, and it is foolish to ignore him.

Now we look at a section where Christ in his humanity is set before us as our mediator before God. When man is in trouble he craves a mediator.

A number of weeks ago I was involved in a rather minor automobile accident. In my view it was entirely the other driver's fault, but apparently he does not feel the same way, because this week I was served papers which informed me that I was being sued for damages. This is the first time I have ever been sued, and, I confess, I was a bit bothered by it. I still am unhappy over the circumstance, in that I do not like to have anyone angry at me, but I was comforted by the thought that this damage suit does not constitute any real threat since I have a mediator -- the insurance company! I can turn it all over to them, and they will handle the matter.

Thus, when we feel that God wants to say something to us, we look around for a mediator to stand in between. The ancient world looked to angels for this service. Angels were the demigods of the Roman and Greek pantheon. But the writer of Hebrews will argue that angels will never do as mediators. The reason is simple: No angel has ever been a man; no angel has ever stood where we stand. But Jesus, the Son, has! Just how fully he has become man, we shall see in this passage. All the value of his life arises out of what we may call the identification of incarnation.

There is an intriguing pattern developed in Hebrews 2:5-18 that I should like to indicate. Four times in this passage we are led along the course of our Lord's earthly ministry, viewing it from four different points of view. At the end of each trip we come up against the bloody cross. God has planted the cross in this passage four different times to indicate that whatever value there may be in the life of our Lord Jesus, it is made available to us by means of his death. He came to live in order that he might die. In the holy orgasm of anguish that is the cross, he poured forth his life in order that we may have it. The four insights of this passage accord very remarkably with the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Here are the gospels in miniature. They are not in the same order as the Gospels and it may add interest to this message for you to seek to identify which Gospel is indicated.

Now let us look at the first of four mighty reasons why Jesus Christ became a man:

For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. It has been testified somewhere,

"What is man that thou art mindful of him,  
or the son of man, that thou carest for him?  
Thou didst make him for a little while lower than the angels,  
thou hast crowned him with glory and honor,  
putting everything in subjection under his feet."

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one. {Heb 2:5-9 RSV}

This section declares that Jesus Christ became a man in order to recapture our lost destiny. No angel could take Christ's place for God had never given the right to govern the universe to angels, but to men. The writer substantiates that with a quotation from the well-known Eighth Psalm, where David cries, "What is man that thou art mindful of him...?" He is out beneath the stars on some soft oriental night, looking up into the majesty of the heavens and feeling his own significance. He asks, "Where is man's place in this universe?" and by the Spirit he answers his own question. "Thou didst make him for a little while lower than the angels, thou hast crowned him with glory and honor, putting all things under his feet."

The writer insists that when David says "all things," he means all things, everything. For he adds, "Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control." Here is man's intended destiny, his authorized dominion. Man was made to be king over all God's universe. Surely this passage includes far more than the earth. It envisions the created universe of God as far as man has ever been able to discover it in all the illimitable reaches of space and whatever lies beyond that. All this is to be put under man's dominion. It is a vast and tremendous vision, is it not?

But man's authority was derived authority. Man himself was to be subject to the God who indwelt him. He was to be the means by which the invisible God became visible to his creatures. He was to be the manifestation of God's own life which dwelt in the royal residence of his human spirit. As long as man was subject to the dominion of God within him, he would be able to exercise dominion over all the universe around. Only when man accepted dominion could he exercise dominion.

The writer further points out that man was made lower than the angels for a limited time to learn what the exercise of that dominion meant. He was given a limited domain: this earth, this tiny planet whirling its way through the great

galaxy to which we belong, amid all the billions of galaxies of space! And he was also given a limited physical body that within that limited area man should learn the principles by which his dominion could be exercised throughout the universe. This limitation is described as being "lower than the angels."

But the passage goes on to describe man's present state of futility. "As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him." There is the whole story of human history in a nutshell. How visibly true this is: We do not yet see everything in subjection to him. Man attempts to exercise his dominion, but he no longer can do so adequately. He has never forgotten the position God gave him, for, throughout the history of the race, there is a continual restatement of the dreams of man for dominion over the earth and the universe. This is why we cannot keep off the highest mountain. We have got to get up there, though we have not lost a thing up there, and know, when we get there, we will only see what the bear saw, the other side of the mountain. But we have got to be there. We have got to explore the depths of the sea. We have to get out into space. Why? Because it is there.

Man consistently manifests a remarkable racial memory, a vestigial recollection of what God told him to do. The trouble is that, when he tries to accomplish this now, he creates a highly explosive and dangerous situation, for his ability to exercise dominion is no longer there. Things get out of balance. This is why we are confronted with an increasingly serious situation in our day when our attempt to control insects by pesticides and other poisons creates an imbalance that threatens serious results. The history of man is one of continually precipitating a crisis by attempts to exercise dominion.

Go back into recorded history to the earliest writings of men, the most ancient of history, and the amazing thing is that men were wrestling with the same moral problems then that we are wrestling with today. We have made wonderful advance in the technological application of certain physical forces to life, but have made absolutely zero progress when it comes to moral relationships. Somewhere, man has lost his relationship with God. The Fall of man is the only adequate explanation of this. Since then the universe is stamped with futility. Everything man does is a dead end street, he is utterly unable to carry things through to a successful conclusion.

Even in the individual life this is true. How many have realized the dreams and ideals you began with? Who can say, "I have done all that I wanted to do; I have been all that I wanted to be." Paul in Romans puts it, "the creation was subjected to futility," {Rom 8:20 RSV}.

"But," the writer says, "we see Jesus!" This is man's one hope. With the eye of faith, we see Jesus already crowned and reigning over the universe, the man,

Jesus, fulfilling man's lost destiny. In the last book of the Bible there is a scene where John beholds the One seated upon the throne of the universe while ten thousand times ten thousands and thousands of angels are crying out in unending, undying worship before the throne. The call goes out to find one who is able to open the little book with seven seals which is the title deed to earth, the right to run the earth. A search is made through the length and breadth of human history for someone wise enough, strong enough, and compassionate enough to open the seals, but no one can be found. John says, "I wept much that no one was found worthy to open the scroll," {Rev 5:4a RSV}. But the angel says, "Do not weep for the Lion of the tribe of Judah has conquered and he can open the seals," {cf, Rev 5:5 RSV}. And when John turned to see the Lion, to his amazement he saw a Lamb, a Lamb with blood staining its neck, a Lamb that had been slain. As he watched the Lamb stepped up to the throne and took the little book and all heaven broke into acclaim for here at last was found One wise enough, strong enough, and compassionate enough to solve the problems of man, and to own the title deed of earth.

This is what the writer sees here. We see Jesus, who alone has broken through the barrier that keeps man from his heritage. What is that barrier? Have you ever analyzed that? What is it that keeps you from being what you want to be? What is it that keeps man from realizing his dreams of dominion? It is put in one grim word: Death!

Death, in this passage as in many other places of Scripture, does not simply mean a funeral; it includes more than the ending of life. Death, basically, means uselessness; it means waste, futility. Death, in that sense, pervades all of life. You can see the signs of it all along.

What is death? Boredom is death, and barrenness is death, as well as frustration and depression of spirit, anxiety, worry, fear, despair and defeat, along with all disease: All these are incipient death. The funeral is but the final straw. The closing of the casket is the ringing down of the curtain on a life of futility, of emptiness. The show is over!

As Shakespeare put it,

"Life's but...  
a tale told by an idiot,  
Full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing."

The argument of Hebrews is that life apart from Jesus Christ is simply that. At the end of our life God may say, "It is a most remarkable performance, but the trouble is you missed the point. It signifies nothing."

But Jesus fulfilled the qualifications to realize man's heritage. He became lower than the angels, he took on flesh and blood, he entered into the human race to become part of it, he experienced death. Not only the death of the cross, but also that incipient death that marks the way of man through all his days. Thus, "He tasted death for every man," and in doing so he took our place. He thus made it possible for those who throw in their lot with him to find that he has removed the thing that gives death its sting.

We shall see more of this in a moment, but, for now, it is enough to see that in Jesus Christ man has but one ray of hope left to realize the destiny God had provided for him. Christ has come to begin a new race of men. That race includes himself and all those who are his, and to that race the promise is that they shall enter into all the fullness God ever intended man to have.

Listen to the way Paul puts it to the Colossians, in Phillip's glowing translation.

They are those to whom God has planned to give a vision of the full wonder and splendor of his secret plan for the nations. And the secret is simply this: Christ in you! Yes, Christ in you, bringing with him the hope of all the glorious things to come. {Col 1:27 J. B. Phillips}

That is the first reason Christ became man: To recapture man's lost inheritance. Which Gospel does that agree to? The Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of the Great King.

The second reason why Christ became man is to recover our lost unity.

For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying,

"I will proclaim thy name to my brethren,  
in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee."

And again,

"I will put my trust in him."

And again,

"Here am I, and the children God has given me." {Heb 2:10-13 RSV}

The earthly life of Jesus is referred to in one phrase, "perfect through suffering." Was he not perfect when he came? When Jesus was a babe in Bethlehem's manger, was he not perfect even then? When he was tempted in the desert and Satan tried to turn him from the cross, was he not already perfect? When he was feeding the five thousand, in compassionate ministry to the hungry multitudes, was he not perfect? Why then does it say he must be perfected by suffering?

There are, of course, two perfections involved. He was perfect in his person all along. The Scriptures make this abundantly clear. But he was not yet perfect in his work. Some of you young people may be perfect in health, perfect in body, perfect in strength, perfect in soundness of your humanity, but you are not yet perfect in this work you are called to do. Suppose Jesus Christ had come full-grown into the world a week before he died. Suppose he had never been born as a baby and grew up into adult life, but stepped into the earth full-grown as a man. Suppose he had uttered in one week's time the Sermon on the Mount, the Olivet Discourse, the Upper Room Discourse and all the teachings that we have from his lips recorded in Scripture. Imagine that he came on Monday and on Friday they took him out and crucified him, hanging him on the cross, and that he died, just as it is recorded in the Scriptures, bearing the sins of the world. Would he still have been a perfect Savior?

Certainly he would have been perfect as far as bearing our guilt is concerned -- that only required a sinless Savior. But he would not have been perfect as far as bearing our infirmities, our weaknesses, is concerned. He would have been able to fit us for heaven some day, but never able to make us ready for earth right now. In such a case, we could always say (as too often we do say, anyway), "How can God expect me to live a perfect life in my situation? After all, I'm only human (or Irish!) Christ has never been where I am. What does he know of my pressures, what does he know of what I'm up against?" But he was made perfect through his suffering. He does know, he does know!

There was handed me last week a characterization of Jesus taken from the cover of a book recently published. These words were written concerning him:

A man who was often afraid, at a loss to know what was expected of him; a man who searched desperately for his own fulfillment and who, through his own strength and faith in divine guidance, conquered all human failings to set mankind an example it has never forgotten.

What is your reaction to that? Did you feel, as I felt when I first read that, "This is but another example of liberal impertinence concerning Christ?" But, when I read it through again, I began to think about it and soon found that I had only to change two words and I could accept it fully. I would have to take out the word

"desperately" -- "a man who searched desperately for his own fulfillment" -- for I do not believe the Lord Jesus was ever desperate. And I would have to change the word "strength" to "weakness" -- "who, through his own strength (weakness) and faith in divine guidance, conquered all human failings." But with those changes that is a perfectly accurate description of Jesus in his earthly life.

He was a man who was often afraid, he was a man who was uncertain at times, he was a man who searched for fulfillment in his life. If we deny him this, we deny him his identification with us as human beings. These were the temptations he faced, the pressures he withstood. Every fear is temptation, every sense of uncertainty is temptation, and he was tempted, "like as we are." Of course he never acted out of uncertainty, he never spoke out of fear, because he knew a secret, the secret he came to teach us -- that man is intended to be indwelt by God and to be continually dependent upon that God within him to give him everything he needs for every situation.

The moment Jesus felt fear gripping his heart, immediately he leaned back upon the full-flowing life of the indwelling Father and that fear was met by faith. The moment he felt uncertain, did not know which way to turn, he rested back upon the indwelling wisdom of God and was immediately given a word that was the right word for the situation. Because he fully entered into our fears and pressures he is fully one with us. That is why it can be recorded here,

For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all of one origin [or, are all one body, all one lump together]. {Heb 2:11a RSV}

The writer quotes from the Old Testament to illustrate this, showing that the attitude and the relationship he had is the same we have.

"I will proclaim thy name to my brethren,  
in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee." [Rejoicing in all things, that is to be our attitude.]

And again,

"I will put my trust in him." [Trust is the secret of life.]

And again,

"Here am I, and the children God has given me." [All one, together.] {Heb 2:12-13 RSV}

Christ has become so utterly one with us, and we with him, that all causes of division are removed, all ground of enmity is taken away, all disagreement is answered. Thus this passage links up with the Gospel of John, the Gospel of the one body, where Jesus prays, "that they may be one, Father, even as we are one,"

{cf, John 17:22}. Thus to make a new, wholly undivided body is the second reason Jesus Christ became man.

The third reason is to release us from our present bondage.

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage. {Heb 2:14-15 RSV}

Is the devil destroyed? Do you think he has quit working? If we mean by this eliminated, obviously the answer is "No."

Bishop Pike recently said about the devil, "If there be such, he is still doing very well, as anyone reading the daily papers can know." Thus he disposes of the victory of Jesus Christ.

But the word destroy here does not mean "eliminate." The word means "to render impotent; to nullify; to render inoperative, inconsequential." That is the idea. The devil has not been eliminated, but the devil has been rendered impotent. Not to everyone! Not to everyone! Only under certain conditions is this true, but those conditions are available to all men in Jesus Christ. That is what he is saying. When we enter into the conditions, we discover that what he says is thrillingly true: There is a freeing from lifelong bondage.

The devil does not have the power of death in the sense of determining who dies and when life shall end, only God has that power. But the phrase, "the power of death" means the grip of death, its fearsomeness, its terrible quality. Bondage therefore is that of the reign of sin, the flesh. This is what Paul means in Romans 8 when he says, "the mind of the flesh is death," {cf, Rom 8:6 RSV}. Death is the absence of life. Death is not something in itself, it is simply the absence of something.

Someone gets hit by a car, the crowd gathers around and wonders if there is any life left. A doctor may come and examine the body. What does he look for? Evidences of death? No, he looks for evidences of life. If he can find no evidence of life as he searches the body of that person, he finally looks up, and says, "I'm sorry; he's dead." Death, in all its forms, is absence of life. That is what boredom is, that is what distress is, that is what fear is, that is what anxiety is. These are forms of death because they are the absence of the life of the Lord Jesus.

It is this death that Christ sets us free from. The fear of this death is the devil's whip, the writer says, by which he keeps us in slavery and bondage all our life.

Non-Christians, of course, have no escape from this, but even Christians, because they do not understand the kind of freedom that Christ brings, frequently experience death: defeat, waste, limitation, despair.

Let me give two examples: The first is taken from current life, the realm of fact. It is the present student unrest on the campus at Berkeley and other universities. What is behind this? Why are students so restless these days? The issue, as it is being publicized in the papers, is the matter of freedom of speech, and, in a sense, this is accurate. Students are desirous of experiencing life, they want to live life to the full. Who does not? They want to experience life in the totality intended for man, and they equate such living with freedom. To a degree, this, too, is right, but the concepts of freedom may be wrong. I am not attempting to judge the situation. There is obviously right and wrong on both sides. But in analyzing this, I see beneath the restlessness a constant hunger for life. But to so hunger after life exposes us also to the devil's lie, that freedom is self-expression: It is having what I want; It is doing what I like; It is going where I want to go, and acting as I please.

It is the fear that we are going to miss out on life (the fear of death mentioned here), that is the devil's whip to drive us into activity on a principle that leads us into more and greater death. To gain such freedom only means greater boredom; to be denied it means hate or despair, all forms of death.

Example #2: This comes from the realm of fantasy, although it is often true. Here is a man who believes that money brings happiness, that if he can just get certain things in his life he will be content. Since he wants to be happy, he devotes all his time to the unending contest to amass a fortune. As a result, life begins to pass him by more and more. The real things of life he does not have time for. In his grubby search for money, and the things that money can buy, he may awaken to find that the years have flown by and he has not yet begun to live. Because he is afraid that he will lose out on life he keeps this up, and the result is, in the end he loses out entirely. That is the devil's whip. These words are highly accurate, precisely stating the situation as it is being lived out day after day.

How does Christ deliver us from this? The glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that the cross reverses our values. In its light, we are able to strip away the devil's lie, and to act upon a totally different principle of life. That principle is this:

Freedom is not having what I want; it is doing what God wants.

It is the man who gives up who gains; it is the man who flings away his life in abandonment to what God wants, who finally learns to live. It is the one who tries to keep his life who loses it. Is that not what Jesus said?

The man or woman who steps out upon this principle will discover that, for him, the devil is impotent. That man is set free to live the kind of life God intended him to live. He may not have some of the things others may have, for things do not produce happiness, but he has what God wants him to have: Life lived to the fullest degree possible.

That is the third reason Jesus Christ became man: to release us from the present bondage.

The last reason is to restore us in times of failure.

For surely it is not with angels that he is concerned but with the descendants of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted. {Heb 2:16-18 RSV}

There is the cross again, "expiation for the sins of the people." It comes at the end of a life in which the Lord Jesus learned to become a merciful and faithful high priest. The cross here is seen in its character as the basis for daily cleansing and forgiveness for the people of God. This has in view the ministry of First John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." He is able to do this because during his life he learned how to be merciful, that is, compassionate, and faithful. That gracious compassion is now made available to us in his death. Christ's present attitude is summed up for us in Chapter 5, Verse 2: "He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness." If we come defending our sins, defiant, excusing ourselves, we can find no help at all. But if we come, as David comes in the 51st Psalm, confessing, pouring it all out, admiring everything, saying it is wrong, and casting it all upon him, we find there is an immediate flowing out of strength and healing, restoring grace.

In the last issue of His Magazine is an editorial in which the editor, Paul Frohmer, tells of a personal incident in his own experience. Recently he found himself bitter and resentful over a situation that had occurred in his work. As he thought over the hurtful attitudes others had shown toward him, a verse from the 91st Psalm flashed across his mind:

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High,  
who abides in the shadow of the Almighty,  
will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress;  
my God, in whom I trust." {Psa 91:1-2 RSV}

He said it suddenly occurred to him that the verse was saying that Christ was not merely able to become a refuge and a fortress; he is that. As he went on, he said he thought of the Lord as across the room from him, a refuge, a fortress. But here he was on this side and the problem was how to close the gap, how to get into the fortress, the place of refuge. As he thought further about his problem and what Christ could be to him, the thought came to him, "Why not itemize your problem? You are dwelling on it in such a hazy, vague fashion. You must get it down to specifics. Now itemize it." So he did that and found that he had six grievances rather than one, as he thought when he started. Then he went through these six and, one by one, as he thought on each one, he felt the Lord imparting to him a different point of view. He began to look at each from the point of view of those who had caused his problem, and each time he saw there was some basis for their accusation. He was then able to forgive and forget each grievance. Eventually, as he went down this list, one by one, he found every one of them was settled. When he reached the end he found that all the resentment had ebbed away, and in its place was a sense of peace and quietness of heart that made him able to go back to his work without strain, fret, or distress. He realized then that Christ in his high priestly ministry had closed the gap and had made him discover that "He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty," {Psa 91:1 RSV}.

If you learn the reality of this, you will not need to go to a psychiatrist, or buy a book on peace of mind by Rabbi Vincent Sheen. If you know Jesus Christ you can come directly to him, at any time, any place, and find that his ministry is to bring you under the shadow of the Almighty.

The writer of this letter is deeply concerned that Christians enter into this. And my question to you in this 20th century hour is: "How much have you discovered this total ministry of Christ in your own life?"

He became a man not only to recapture our lost destiny, but also to heal the disagreements among us, and bring us into the unity of one life in him, to release us from daily, lifelong bondage to the fear of losing out on life, and to bring us that sweet, healing ministry which, in time of failure, restores us to fellowship without condemnation.

Prayer:

Lord, teach us to be more than perfunctory about our prayers. Grant us depth, honesty, and earnestness that we may believe this marvelous ministry made available to us by our Lord Jesus. That here in this 20th century hour there may arise such a tremendous demonstration of what human life was intended to be that

everywhere around men and women will be talking about it and saying, "What do these people have?" We ask it in Christ's name, Amen.



## LIVING OUT OF REST

Some time ago a group of tourists were visiting in the city of Rome, and came to an enclosure where a number of chickens were penned. The guide who was taking them through the city said, "These are very unusual and distinctive chickens. They happen to be descendants of the rooster that crowed on the night in which Peter denied the Lord." The tourists were very much impressed. One Englishman among them peered at the chickens and said, "My word! What a remarkable pedigree!" An American immediately reached for his checkbook and said, "How much do they cost?" But an Irishman there turned to the guide, and said, "Do they lay any eggs?" He was not interested in apostolic succession, but in apostolic success!

This is the attitude many have toward the Christian faith, and properly so. Can it do anything for me right now? Does the good news of the gospel have anything really helpful to say about the problem of nervous tension, for instance? Can it aid me in the matter of an inferiority complex? Will it do anything for my terrible habit of anxiety and worry when things do not go right? These are the problems that more desperately affect our lives than any other. We may be concerned about atomic bombs and nuclear warfare but the problems of nervous tension and inferiority, perhaps resentment or bitterness are the ones which take their bitter toll of us each day.

In our last study in Hebrews, Chapter 2 closed on that practical note. The Lord Jesus, in his coming to earth, became a man for four mighty reasons. Among them, and the one last stated, was that he might be a compassionate and merciful High Priest in order that he might help those that are tempted, in the midst of their temptation. Chapter 3 picks up that theme and develops it, asking us to consider the astonishing solution that is offered by Jesus Christ to this plaguing, nagging problem of frustration, hypertension, anxiety, and all the neuroses and psychoses that are so familiar today.

Therefore, holy brethren, who share in a heavenly call, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession. He was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in God's house. Yet Jesus has been counted worthy of as much more glory than Moses as the builder of a 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 God's house as a servant, to testify to all the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ was faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if we hold fast our confidence and pride in our hope. {Heb 3:1-6 RSV}

Six times in that short section the word house appears, "the house of God."

There is a very common misunderstanding abroad in our day, especially among Christians, which uses the term, "the house of God" to mean a church building. In my opinion there is nothing more destructive of the greatest message of the New Testament than that belief! A building is never truly called the house of God, either in the New Testament or the Old Testament, in the present or in the past. Certainly no church building, since the days of the early church, could ever properly be called "the house of God." The early church never referred to any building in that way. As a matter of fact, the early church had no buildings for two or three hundred years. When they referred to the house of God they meant the people. A church is not a building, it is people!

Even the temple or the tabernacle of old was not really God's house. Let someone point out the fact that no building today can properly be called the house of God, and some Bible-instructed Christian nearby wisely nods his head and says, "Yes, you're right. The only building that could properly be called 'the house of God' was the temple or the tabernacle." It is true that these buildings were termed that in Scripture -- I recognize that -- but it is meant only in figure, only as a picture. They were never actually meant to be the place where God dwelled.

In the sixty-sixth chapter of his magnificent prophecy, Isaiah records the words of the Lord, saying, "Heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool -- where is the house which you would build for me? ... All these things my hand has made," {cf, Isa 66:1-2 KJV}. Paul, in preaching to the Athenians, reminded them that "God does not dwell in temples made by hands," {cf, Acts 17:24 KJV}. Even as he said those words the temple was still standing in Jerusalem. No, God does not dwell in buildings.

Then what is the house of God that is mentioned here? The answer is very clearly stated in Verse 6. "We are his house." We people. God never intended to dwell in any building; he dwells in people, in men and women, in boys and girls. That is the divine intention in making men, that they may be the tabernacle of his indwelling.

In that beautiful scene recorded in the 21st chapter of Revelation, the next to last chapter of the Bible, the mighty vision of the prophets is fulfilled, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men," {Rev 21:3b RSV}. Paul refers to this in First Corinthians, "Know you not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit within you which you have of God?" {cf, 1 Cor 6:19a}. This is the focus toward which all Scripture is directed. God's purpose is to inhabit your body and to make you to be the manifestation of his life, the dwelling place of all that he is; so that, as Paul prays in Ephesians 3, "you may be a body wholly filled and flooded with God himself," {cf, Eph 3:19}. The great message of the gospel is that it takes God to

be a man. You cannot be a man without God. It takes Christ to be a Christian, and, when you put Christ into the Christian, you put God back into the man. That is the good news, that is the gospel.

Now in this house of God which is ever people, Moses ministered as a servant, but Christ as a Son. Therefore, the Son is much more to be obeyed, much more to be listened to, much more to be honored and heeded, than the servant. Moses served faithfully as a servant. What is the ministry of a servant? A servant is always preparing things. He must prepare meals, he must prepare rooms, he must prepare the yard. He is always working in the anticipation of something yet to come. His work is in view of that which is yet future. So, "Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later (yet to come), but Christ ... as a Son."

What is the role of a son in a house? To take over everything, to possess it, to use whatever he likes. The house was made for him. So Christ has come to inhabit us, as Paul again prays in Ephesians, "that Christ may make his home in your hearts by faith," {cf, Eph 3:17}.

Now, the writer declares, "We are that house -- if." At this point he interjects the little word, if: "And we are his house if we hold fast our confidence and.. our hope." And again in Verse 14: "For we share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end." Now a cloud passes over the sun. The possibility is raised of being self-deceived in this matter of belonging to Christ, of being his house. It all hangs upon that word of uncertainty, if.

What does this mean? Well, there are two possible views of this that are usually taken by the Christian world:

There is that view which says, we can enter the house of God and become part of it, that Christ can come to dwell in our hearts and we can be the tabernacle of the Most High, and then, later on, because we fail to lay hold of all that God gives us and we sin, we lose all we have gained, Christ leaves us and we lose our salvation. This is the view that is called Arminianism (not Armenianism) after a man named Arminius, a theologian in the Middle Ages. This view suggests that it is possible to lose our faith after we have once become the habitation of the Most High.

But, if we take that view, we are immediately in direct contradiction with some very clear and precise statements elsewhere that declare exactly the opposite. There is no possible way to hold that view without putting Scripture into contradiction with Scripture.

For instance, in John 10:28, Jesus said: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish." Why? "Because no one is able to take them out of my Father's hand," he says. "My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand," {John 10:29 RSV}.

Romans 8, Verse 35, asks, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Paul goes on to list all the possibilities, then he declares, "No in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us," {Rom 8:37 RSV}. It is impossible, you see, to take that view of it.

Then what is the correct view? There is another possible meaning here which suggests that, once having professed to receive the Lord Jesus, once having him come in, if then we do not manifest signs of new life, if nothing happens to our behavior as a result of this, we have simply been self-deceived. We never had faith despite the external appearance, the religious observances that we have gone through. This is the danger this whole book faces. We will return to it again and again. The book of Hebrews is addressed to a body of people among whom were certainly some whose Christian life was highly in doubt because they were not growing, they were not going on, they were not entering in to what God had provided for them.

This was not mere hypocrisy. The writer is not speaking of one who deliberately tries to pass himself off as a Christian, knowing in himself he is not. There are those who join a church because they think it is good for business, or it helps their status or prestige in the community, but they know they are not Christians. They do not believe what they hear, they do not have any interest in what is said. Such people stick out like sore thumbs among the saints. They deceive no one but themselves.

But he is talking here about some who have fallen into a self-confident delusion and who feel themselves to be Christians. They have gone through every possible prescribed ritual to identify themselves with Christianity. Because of this they feel they are Christians. They believe the right things, they hold the right creed, they have orthodoxy in every bone of their body. They are rigid about the proclamation of the truth and conform to doctrine in every degree. But they are self-deceived, for as they are unable to manifest what God has come into human hearts to produce, they reveal that there never was faith in the beginning. So, in Hebrews, continuance is the ultimate proof of reality.

The illustration he gives confirms this very clearly. If it is properly understood, it is designed to shake us to our eyeteeth. It is the story of the rebellion of Israel in the wilderness:

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,  
"Today, when you hear his voice,  
do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,  
on the day of testing in the wilderness,  
where your fathers put me to the test  
and saw my works for forty years.  
Therefore I was provoked with that generation,  
and said, 'They always go astray in their hearts;  
they have not known my ways.'  
As I swore in my wrath,  
'They shall never enter my rest.'" {Heb 3:7-13 RSV}

Further, in Verse 16:

Who were they that heard and yet were rebellious? Was it not all those who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses? And with whom was he provoked forty years? What it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they should never enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief. {Heb 3:16-19 RSV}

The writer points out this people comprised almost the whole number of those who left Egypt under Moses. They had fulfilled every prescribed symbol of deliverance, but they were not delivered. While they were in Egypt they had killed the Passover lamb, and had sprinkled the blood of it over the doorposts. On the terrible night when the angel of death passed through the land and took the life of every first-born son in every household, they were safe. They had followed Moses as they left Egypt and had come to the borders of the Red Sea. As the waters flowed before them and the armies of the Egyptians were fast approaching from the rear, Moses lifted up his rod and the waters parted and they all passed through the sea as well. As Paul says in First Corinthians, they were "baptized unto Moses in the sea" {cf, 1 Cor 10:2}, they were united unto him.

Many of us, perhaps, have likewise looked to the cross of Christ and in some degree counted his death as valid for us, as the blood of our Passover lamb. We have gone through the waters of baptism, testifying by that we believe we have been baptized by the Spirit of God into the body of Christ, made to be part of him.

These people, as they wandered through the wilderness on the way from Egypt to Canaan, had enjoyed the protection and guidance of the pillar of fire by night and the cloud by day, speaking of the protection, guidance, and fatherly care of God. They had even been fed every day by the manna as it came from the skies, fresh every morning. Centuries later, when the Jews of our Lord Jesus' day heard him refer to them as children of the devil they said to him, "We are not children of the devil, we are children of Abraham. Don't you know what happened to our fathers? Talk about people of God! We are the true people of God. Our fathers ate bread in the wilderness for forty years; if that is not a sign that we are the people of God, I don't know what could be!" {cf, John 6:30-66}. But the writer says, "With whom was he provoked forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness."

When the test finally came and they stood on the borders of the promised land, they were given the word of the Lord through Moses to advance and take the land. But they held back because they were afraid of the giants that inhabited the cities of that land. When they were asked to face the giants and, by the principle of faith, overcome them and enter into the rest of the land, they refused to do so. They turned back and for forty years wandered in the wilderness. The test came when for the first time they were asked to come to grips with the thing that could destroy their life in the land, the giants, and their failure to do so revealed the bitter truth that they never had any faith. They had never really believed God. They were only acting as they did to escape the damage, death, and danger of Egypt. But they had no intention of coming into conflict with the giants in the land.

The Word of God is pointing out to us that we may profess the Lord Jesus, we may take our stand in some outward way at least upon the cross of Christ and claim his death for us, we can profess to have been baptized into his body and say so by passing through the waters of baptism ourselves, we can enjoy the fatherly care and providence of God and see him working miracles of supply in our life, and even find in the Scripture much which sustains the heart, at least for awhile. Yet, when it comes to the test, when God asks us to lay hold of the giants in our life which are destroying us, those giants of anxiety, fear, bitterness, jealousy, envy, and impatience and all the other things that keep us in turmoil and fret and make us to be a constant trouble to our neighbors and friends -- when we are asked to lay hold of these by the principle of faith, and we refuse to do so, the writer says we are in danger of remaining in the wilderness and never entered the promised rest.

Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of

sin. For we share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end. {Heb 3:12-14 RSV}

We share in Christ if that faith which began continues to produce in us that which faith alone can produce, the fruit of the Spirit. This is the second warning of this book. The first one was against drifting, the danger of paying no attention, of sitting in a meeting and letting the words flow by while our minds are occupied elsewhere. The peril of letting these magnificent truths which alone have power to set men free, to drift by, unheeded, unheard.

But this second warning is against the danger of hardening -- of hearing the words and believing them, understanding what they mean, but of taking no action upon them. The peril of holding truth in the head, but never letting it get into the heart. But truth known never does anything; it is truth done which sets us free. Truth known simply puffs us up in pride of knowledge. We can quote the Scriptures by the yard, can memorize it, can know the message of every book and know the whole book from cover to cover, but truth known will never do anything for us. It is truth done, truth acted upon, that moves and delivers and changes.

The terrible danger which the writer is pointing out is that truth that is known but not acted on has an awful effect of hardening the heart so that it is no longer able to act -- and we lose the ability to believe. This is what the Lord Jesus meant when he said to his disciples, "If they believe not Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe though one should rise from the dead," {cf, Luke 16:31}.

A man said to me not long ago, "If we only had the ability to do miracles like the early church did, then we could really make this Christian cause go. If we could perform these things again, and had faith enough to do miracles, we could make people believe." But I had to tell him that after thirty years of observing this scene, and studying the Scriptures, I am absolutely convinced that if God granted us this power, as he is perfectly able to do, so that miracles were being demonstrated on every hand, there would not be one further Christian added to the cause of Christ than there is right now!

At the close of Jesus' own ministry, after that remarkable demonstration of the power of God in the midst of people, how many stood with him at the foot of the cross? A tiny band of women and one man, and they had been won, not by his miracles, but by his words.

This is why God says, "I swore in my wrath, 'They shall never enter my rest.'" That is not petulance. That does not mean God is upset because he has offered something and they will not take it. That is simply a revelation of the nature of the case. When truth is known and not acted upon, it always, on every level of life, in

any area of human knowledge, has this peculiar quality: It hardens, so the heart is not able to believe what it refuses to act on.

Now we come to the sign of reality. What is it that unmistakably marks the one who has genuinely become part of God's house? What is the rest of God, the mark of reality?

Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest remains, let us fear lest any of you be judged to have failed to reach it. For good news came to us just as to them; but the message which they heard did not benefit them, because it did not meet with faith in the hearers. {Heb 4:1-2 RSV}

That does not mean the message did not meet with belief. When the Israelites stood at the borders of the land they had no doubts at all that the land was there, they believed in it. Nor was it that they did not believe there was honey and milk in the land, the fullness of supply awaiting them; they believed it. There was a species of belief, but there was no faith, for faith is more than belief. Faith is activity upon that belief! There was belief, there was even strong desire to enter the land, but they did not enter because there was no faith. They would not act upon that which had been given.

The writer says the same gospel was given to us as to them; we have the same good news, the same possibility of entering into a life of rest.

These words must be taken seriously. The Word of God knows nothing of the easy believism that is so widely manifest in our own day. We think we can receive Jesus as Savior, raise our hand to accept Christ, and that settles the matter. We will go to heaven and there can never be any doubt about it from then on, though there is no change in our life. But the promise of Christ is that when he comes into the human heart there is a radical change of government which must inevitably, in the course of its working, result in a revolutionary change in behavior. Unless that takes place, there has been no reality to our conversion. The goal of his working in us is rest. Now what is this rest?

In Verse 3 we learn it is pictured for us by the Sabbath:

For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said,  
"As I swore in my wrath,  
"They shall never enter my rest,"  
although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. {Heb 4:3 RSV}

Here is a rest that has been available to man ever since man first appeared on earth. It was available from the foundation of the world.

For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way, "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works." And again in this place he said, "They shall never enter my rest." {Heb 4:4-5 RSV}

You know the story of creation. On the seventh day God ceased from his labors, he rested on the seventh day, intending that to be a picture of what the rest of faith is. It has been available to man since the beginning of the world. The Seventh Day Adventists and other legalistic groups have focused upon the shadow instead of the substance and have insisted that we must observe the Sabbath Day much as it was given to Israel; that this is what pleases God. But God is never pleased by the perfunctory observance of shadows, of figures.

Here is one of the great problems of Christian faith. We are constantly mistaking shadows for substance, pictures for reality.

A teenaged girl told me recently, in an anguish of repentance, that she had gotten up from a communion service, and gone out to engage in some very wrong activities. When I said to her, "How could you do this? How could you leave a communion service to do this?" She replied, defensively, "Well, I didn't partake of communion." And I said, "What difference does that make?" That was a mere shadow. Communion pictures the sharing of the life of the Lord Jesus, and if we deny that in our activity but are scrupulous about its observance in the shadow, in the mere picture, it is an insult to God.

This rest was figured in the Sabbath and anyone who learns to live out of rest is keeping the Sabbath as God meant it to be kept.

It was also prefigured in the land of Canaan, yet in Verse 8, it says,

...if Joshua had given them rest, God would not speak later of another day. {Heb 4:8 RSV}

If the figure had been enough God would not, later on in the Scriptures, have recorded the words,

...there remains a sabbath rest for the people of God. {Heb 4:9 RSV}

Obviously, Canaan, too, was nothing but a figure, nothing but a picture, a shadow. Then what is the real rest?

We come to it in Verse 10; it is most clearly stated:

...for whoever enters God's rest also ceases from his labors as God did from his. {Heb 4:10 RSV}

Here is a revolutionary new principle of human behavior, on which God intends man to operate, and it was his intention from the beginning. It is from this that man fell, and it is to this, now, in Jesus Christ, he is to be restored. Unless this principle is operative in our life, we can have no assurance that we belong to the body of Christ. This is the clear declaration of this writer throughout the whole of the book.

We all have been brainwashed since birth with a false concept of the basis of human activity. We have been sold on the satanic lie that we have in ourselves what it takes to be what we want to be, to be a man, a woman, to achieve whatever we desire to be. We are sure we have what it takes, or, if we do not have it now, we know where we can get it. We can educate ourselves, we can acquire more information, we can develop new skills, and when we get this done we shall have what it takes to be what we want to be.

For three and a half years, the Apostle Peter tried his level best to please the Lord Jesus by dedicated, earnest, sincere efforts to serve him out of his own will, and he failed dismally because he could not be convinced that he did not have what it takes. When the Lord Jesus told him, "You will never have what it takes until the cross comes into your life," he would not receive it. He said, "Lord, don't talk to me about a cross. I don't want to hear anything about that." And the Lord Jesus said, "Get behind me Satan, you are an offense unto me. You do not understand the things of God, but only the things of men," {cf, Mat 16:21-23}. And it was not until that wonderful day, the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit opened his eyes to the full meaning of the cross, and all the Lord Jesus had made available to him by his indwelling life became part of Peter's experience, that he realized what the Lord had meant. Not till then did he realize what it took to be a Christian.

We repeat: It takes Christ to be a Christian, and it takes God to be a man. When you put Christ back in the Christian, you put God back in the man. This is God's design for living, this is the new principle of human activity -- to stop our own efforts.

We do not have what it takes, and we never did have. The only one who can live the Christian life is Jesus Christ. He proposes to reproduce his life in us. Our part is to expose every situation to his life in us, and, by that means, depending upon

him and not upon us, we are to meet every situation, enter into every circumstance, and perform every activity. We cease from our own labors.

This is the way you began the Christian life, if you are a Christian.

You came to the place where you stopped trying to save yourself, did you not?

You quit trying to be good enough to get into heaven.

You said, "I'll never make it, I'll never make it."

You looked to the Lord Jesus, and said, "If he has taken my place, then that is all I need."

Thus, receiving him, and resting on that fact by faith, you stopped your own efforts, you ceased from your own work, and rested on his.

Now, Paul says in Colossians, "As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in him," {Col 2:6 RSV}. As ... so -- in the same way. As you have received him, so live in dependence upon him to do all things through you. Step out upon that, and what is the result? Rest! Wonderful rest! Relief, release, no longer worrying, fretting, straining, for you are resting upon One who is wholly adequate to do through you everything that needs to be done. He does not make automatons of us, he does not turn us into robots. He works through our thinking, our feeling and our reasoning, but our dependence must be upon him.

Notice the word that is stressed throughout this whole section, today. This is God's design for living today. It is not inactivity, but it is freedom from strain. It is the principle upon which he expects everything to be done: your work, your schooling, your studies, your play, your responsibilities in the home, at the shop, wherever you are. All are to be fulfilled out of reliance upon this new principle of human behavior. "Whatever you do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of [by the authority and ability of] the Lord Jesus," {Col 3:17}.

Now one final word on how.

If you have never yet entered into this principle in any degree and yet have been truly born of God by the Holy Spirit, this study will find you asking the question, "Lord, show me how. I want to enter into this rest, I want to know what this is." Then look at the instrument by which we enter in, the Word of God.

Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, that no one fall by the same sort of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. {Heb 4:11-12 RSV}

In order to enter into this new principle we must repudiate the old. But the problem is, the old basis of activity is so ingrained in our thinking that we

automatically respond to old thought patterns, along old lines of reaction. Thus, though the new life of the Lord Jesus may be in us, we find ourselves repudiating it and responding along old lines, reacting in bitterness, impatience, anger, frustration, anxiety, worry, fear, trepidation, uncertainty and inferiority. We do not know how to recognize the old in its practical appearance. What will help us? The word of God! This living, marvelous word becomes an instrument in the hands of the Holy Spirit with a two-edged action. It strips off the false. If we seek to obey it, as we read it we shall discover that it exposes the entrenched power of the flesh in our life, and strips off all pretense. It is not only the Bible which is meant by the phrase "the word of God." It is the truth of God, whether it comes by sermon, by Scripture, or by some confirmation of life. It is the truth that strips off the false. It can be utterly ruthless, moving in on us, backing us into a corner, taking down all our fences and facades, worming its way right into the heart of our nature, discerning even between the soul and the spirit.

I watched this week the book of Esther in the hands of the Holy Spirit take a group of people and strip off their pretenses and expose them to themselves. For the first time they saw, with horror, that they really were under the domination of this sin principle, the flesh.

But the Word has a two-fold action. It not only strips off the false, but it unveils the true. When we come to the place where, like Jacob, we are ready to take a good look at ourselves, then there comes the marvelous, healing, wholesome, comforting, sweet, delivering word that sets us on our feet again, and shows us, in Christ, every provision for every need. We need no longer to go on doggedly, wearily, fighting a battle that is already lost, but we can step out each fresh, new day into the glorious experience of a victory that is already won.

And what is the final outcome? Look at Verse 13:

And before him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do. {Heb 4:13 RSV}

We come at last to the God of reality.

Remember when Adam sinned, that he hid from God. He hid because he realized he was naked and he was ashamed and clothed himself.

When all pretense is stripped off, and we see ourselves for what we are, and by faith have appropriated what Christ is;

When we believe that he not only died for us, but rose again to live in us;

When we realize that we not only need him for what he did, but also for what he is;

Then we can stand again before God exactly as we are, naked without need of facades, masks, or pretenses.

We are exactly what we are, that is all, just men, just women, just sinners saved by grace, with nothing to defend, nothing that need be hidden, nothing that cannot be fully exposed to everyone. We discover a wonderful lifting of burdens, a wonderful freedom, a wonderful release -- we have entered into rest. The fences come down between us and our friends and neighbors, we do not try to hide anything any more. Because we are what we are before God, we can be exactly what we are before men.

Perhaps some of you have been in the wilderness a long, long time -- too long. Normally, as this book will make clear as we go on, it is expected that a Christian who comes to know the Lord Jesus will be led into the experience of rest within a few years after his conversion. It may take no longer than a few months. But even if you have been living in the wilderness of self effort for many years it is yet possible to die to your unbelief, as that old generation died, and to leave the carcass of unbelieving self-sufficiency behind, and like the new generation born in the wilderness, follow your heavenly Joshua into the land.

You cannot crucify the flesh; that God has already done, but you can agree to it. And when you do, you will discover this priceless gift of peace -- of rest. But if you refuse, knowing what to do but not willing to do it, the living death that marks your fruitless, crabbed, self-centered, so-called "Christian" life, will be the tombstone of a phony faith, a faith that never really was, a house built upon the sand, which, when the floods and storms of life strike it, is swept to destruction.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, how this word has searched our hearts. We have found it to be exactly what you have declared it to be, that which can pierce even the joints and the marrow, discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart. Thank you for this wonderful surgery that sets us free. We rejoice that there is a rest remaining into which we can enter. Grant us that we shall. In Thy name. Amen.

## STRENGTH AT WIT'S END

In our last study we learned of a new and radical principle of human behavior which every true Christian will learn and practice in this present life, or the absence of it will prove he has never had a real conversion and has no right to call himself a Christian. This principle, then, is not an option. It is not something we can choose to accept or ignore. It is the whole goal of God's work in human hearts. This principle is called in Hebrews "the rest of God," it is activity out of rest. It is to cease from our self-directed activities, the principle upon which we have lived our human lives ever since we were babies, convinced that we had what it takes to do what we wanted to do, or, at least, could get what it takes from some human source. But this new principle, made available to us only in Jesus Christ, means to cease our self-directed activities and trust in the ability of a second Person to work through us.

That is exactly what faith is. Every one of you has been exercising faith ever since you came into this auditorium; you have been trusting in the work of another person. Though I watched carefully, I did not see a single one of you pick up one of these chairs and examine it to see whether or not it would support you if you sat on it. You took it by faith, you exercised trust in the maker of the chair. Though you do not have the least idea who he is, whether he is a rascal or trustworthy, you have simply taken it for granted and have been exercising a faith which has been supporting you all along. We make faith so difficult, but it is simply trusting in the work of another.

And that is what the life of rest is, trusting in the Lord Jesus who has come to indwell our hearts, to do through us all that we do, using the functions of our human personality to do so. That is rest. It takes away from us our favorite excuse for failure. It demands we stop justifying our failure by saying, "Well, after all, I'm only human." For this principle proposes to meet every situation, not with human wisdom, but with divine; not with human strength, but with God's strength; not by the exercise of sheer will power, but by the exercise of absolute trust.

The previous section in Hebrews closed with Verse 13:

And before him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do. {Heb 4:13 RSV}

This "one with whom we have to do," Jesus Christ, knows us thoroughly, sees everything about us. Nothing is hidden from his gaze, we are absolutely open and naked before him. He knows our weaknesses. He knows that when temptation is heavy upon us, when we are being harassed and irritated by the children or the boss or our mother-in-law, and are about to explode, he knows we shall be

strongly tempted to give way, to fight back, to lose our temper and say things we ought not. The Lord knows that when we are treated unfairly, perhaps have done the right thing but are blamed for it, even insulted over it, there is a strong, almost overpowering urge to strike back, to get even, to do something to even the score. He knows that there is in the human heart a great hunger for acceptance by those around us, that we are very uncomfortable when we are in a crowd of people and feel we must act differently than they. He knows how we want to be accepted by those around us. He knows, too, that under those circumstances of pressure we will tend to excuse our failure by saying, "Well, I know I should lean on the Lord, but the provocation here is too great. I can take it up to a point, but if it gets too strong, I know I will give in."

Because of this tendency to excuse ourselves when the pressure gets too great, the writer now says in effect, "I want you to take a closer look at the great High Priest who is our strength, our refuge, our fortress, our enabler."

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. {Heb 4:14-16 RSV}

Four words in that brief passage sum up all it has to say, "the throne of grace." It is fashionable in some circles these days to view the Protestant Reformation as a great mistake, something that we should feel ashamed of and work to heal by the Ecumenical Movement of our day. But it is interesting to note that wherever there has been genuine renewal in the Catholic Church (or the Protestant Church), it has been a return to the great principles of the Reformation reflected in this passage. The reformers, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin and others, nailed to the masthead of their movement three great principles taken from the Scriptures:

No sacrifice but Calvary;

No priest but Christ;

No confessional but the throne of grace!

With these three mighty principles they turned Europe upside down during the Middle Ages. The Christian finds power only as there is a return to these great things declared here.

Here is the throne of grace. A throne speaks of authority and power, while grace conveys the idea of sympathy and understanding. These two thoughts are combined in Jesus Christ. He is a man of infinite power, yet in complete and utter sympathy with us. He said himself, after his resurrection, "All power is given

unto me, in heaven and in earth," {Matt 28:18 KJV}. His title here is, "Jesus, the Son of God" possessing the fullness of deity. But more than that, he is the one who has "passed through the heavens." In this space age, this phrase should catch our eye. Jesus not only passed into the heavens but through the heavens. This is the point the writer is making.

When we put a couple of men into a rocket and hurl them into space from Cape Kennedy, we are throwing them into the heavens. They are still within this space-time continuum. Even if they landed on the moon this would be true; or to the nearest planets or the outermost reaches of our solar system. Could they reach the farthest star we know anything about, which seems utterly impossible now, men would still be in the heavens. But the claim made for Jesus is that he has passed through the heavens, he has passed outside the limits of time and space. He is no longer contained within, limited by, those boundaries that hold us within physical limits. He is outside, above, beyond, over all, therefore there are no limits to his power.

It is wrong to think of this relationship in terms of space. Growing up as children there is a tendency to think of heaven as "out there" in space somewhere, on one of the stars, perhaps, some great distance removed from earth. Because of the figurative language employed in Scripture we think of going "up" to heaven and "down" to hell. It was this that Bishop Robinson seized upon in his book, *Honest to God* and pushed to unwarrantable extremes. But surely the idea that is conveyed to us by the figurative language of the Scriptures is that heaven is outside time and space, therefore it can be within us as well as around us, above us, and beyond us. The throne of grace is not in remote space; it is right in the heart of a believer in whom Jesus Christ dwells. To come to the throne of grace does not mean to go into a prayer closet and shut the door and address an appeal across the reaches of space to some distant point in heaven. It means to reckon upon the One who indwells us. The throne of grace is that close to us, that available to us.

The writer also makes clear that though the Lord Jesus has passed into the place of supreme power, and has absolutely no limits upon his ability to work, he also is tremendously concerned with our problems. He says, "we have not a high priest who cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities." It is almost an indignant retort to some sly accusation, "We do not have," he says, "a priest who is remote from us, who is isolated from us, who does not understand what we are going through." Previously in this letter Jesus has been called "the pioneer of our salvation," {cf, Heb 2:10}. This is the thought of the phrase here. He has already gone the whole course before us. He has felt every pressure, he has known every pull, he has been drawn by every allurements we face, he has been frightened by every fear, beset by every anxiety, depressed by every worry. Yet he did it



without failure, without sinning. Never once did he fall. "Therefore," the writer says, "let us draw near with boldness, with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help every time we need it." That is, all the time. Every help you need, every time you need it!

Now it is right at this point that the tempter pulls the neatest trick of the year. He suggests to us Christians that we file this verse away in our conscious mind as a creed to which we pay lip service. We say to each other, "Yes, it is true, Jesus has been tempted in every point as we have, yet without sin." We take that out and quote it any time we are exposed to doctrinal questioning. We love to quote it to others, especially. But the tempter, at the same time, jams into our subconscious mind a very slimy doubt. He suggests to us a limitation which we hardly let ourselves think about; that there is one area in which Jesus did not undergo the same temptation we have. "Of course Jesus never failed," the devil suggests, "because he had one great advantage over you, he had no sin nature."

It is true that Jesus was not beset by the devilish pull of sin in the flesh, such as we experience. His virgin birth protected him from that. Therefore, deep in our subconscious, hardly allowing it to come to the surface, we feel there is pressure we can undergo that he has never felt, there is power exerted upon us that he does not understand. That doubt pops out in times of pressure, and says to us, "Go on, give in! You can't fight this to the end. You're weak in this area. You haven't the strength to stand. The Lord will forgive you, for, after all, that's his job, so go ahead and give in. You are too weak, too human to resist."

To answer that subtle argument fully, the writer brings before us the qualifications of a high priest. These are now briefly set before us.

For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. Because of this he is bound to offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. And one does not take the honor upon himself, but he is called by God, just as Aaron was. {Heb 5:1-4 RSV }

We can dispose of this rather briefly. The writer is not speaking of Jesus Christ, he is listing the regulations, the qualifications, the requisites to be a priest in Israel. Here we learn what a priest really is. Perhaps you think of a priest as a man wearing a long, black robe, with his collar turned backwards, but that has nothing to do with priesthood. Perhaps you think the purpose of a priest is to baptize, marry, and bury, or, as someone has put it, "to hatch, match, and dispatch." But that is not the task of a priest. The qualifications for a priest are right here:

A priest must first be a man, in order to represent men. To this end the Lord Jesus laid aside his glory as God, though he was equal with God, as Paul tells us, and humbled himself and became a man. He entered the human race as a babe in Bethlehem.

Second, a priest must offer sacrifices, that is, he must deal with the problem that separates man from God. He must come to grips with the awful universal problem of guilt, for this is the cloud over our lives that haunts us, stays with us, dogs our footsteps, and brings us into bondage every way we turn. It is universal among men. No man has ever been known that does not have and suffer from a sense of guilt. The answer to guilt is life sacrificed and a priest must therefore offer sacrifice. The Lord Jesus eminently and adequately fulfilled this in his cross when he himself became not only the priest but the Victim. He offered himself, through the eternal Spirit of God, as a sacrifice for the guilt of men.

The third qualification of a priest is that he must himself be beset with weakness and sin in order that he might understand the problems of others. Here is the problem, is it not? How could Jesus Christ fulfill this and still be sinless? How could he live as a man and never sin, and yet understand how we feel when we sin? This is the area the enemy seizes upon to dislodge our faith when we come into times of intense pressure and trial. We will return to this in a moment, for this is the whole point of the passage.

The fourth qualification of a priest is that he must be appointed by God. "One does not take the honor upon himself, but is called by God just as Aaron was." No man can ordain priests, only God can. The purpose of a priest, then, is to cleanse and strengthen, to make us fit for life. If a priest does not do that, he is worthless. He must make men fit for life.

The last section, Verses 5-10, reveals the credentials of Jesus, the way he fully and adequately met every requirement of priesthood.

So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him,  
"Thou art my Son,  
today I have begotten thee";  
as he says also in another place,  
"Thou art a priest for ever,  
after the order of Melchizedek." {Heb 5:5-6 RSV }

Those two quotations answer Points 1 and 4 of the qualifications we have listed. Begotten as a babe in the womb of Mary and born in Bethlehem, Jesus became a man, fully one with us in the essential humanity of our life. At the age of thirty he entered upon the priesthood; not the priesthood of Aaron but a new order, called Melchizedek, of which we will learn much more as we go on in Hebrews. This priesthood was predicted in the Scriptures and fulfilled when Jesus entered into his ministry and set about to do his Father's will. He was appointed by God unto this work.

Verses 7-8 take up the crucial matter. How could he never sin, yet fully sympathize with sinners?

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. {Heb 5:7-10 RSV}

How can he sympathize, how does he understand our pressures, if he has never sinned? The answer to that leads us into the dark shadows of Gethsemane. There is no other incident in the gospels that fits the description of this passage where, with prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, he cried unto him who was able to save him from death. As the Lord and his disciples left the Upper Room they passed through the dark valley of the Kidron, up unto the side of the Mount of Olives to the olive tree grove where it was his custom to go. Separating three of the more sensitive of the disciples, Peter, James and John, he withdrew with them into the deeper shadows of the garden. There followed a protracted period of excruciating torment of spirit that found expression in loud, involuntary cries, streaming tears, and ending in a terrible bloody sweat.

Here we come face to face with mystery:

There is, first, the total unexpectedness of this to the Lord. He had gone to the garden as was his custom, but there he suddenly began to be greatly distressed and troubled. Nothing like this is recorded of him before. In his anticipation of what he would be going through and his explanations of it to the disciples, he had never once mentioned Gethsemane. Furthermore, there is no prediction of this in the Old Testament. There is much that predicts what he would go through on the cross; there is not one word of what he endured in the garden.

In the midst of his bafflement, puzzlement, deep unrest of heart, and distress of soul, he does an unusual and amazing thing. For the first time in his ministry he appealed to his own disciples for help. He said to them, "Watch with me, pray with me." He asked them to bear him up in prayer as he went further into the shadows, falling first to his knees and then to his face, crying out before the Father. There he prayed three separate times and each prayer is a questioning of the necessity of this experience. "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." He was beseeching the Father to make clear to him whether this was a necessary activity, so unexpected was this, so suddenly had it come upon him, baffling him, confusing him, bewildering him, just as sudden experiences and catastrophes come bewilderingly to us.

To deepen the mystery of this, there is the awful intensity of this struggle. This passage in Hebrews clearly implies that the Lord Jesus is here facing the full misery which sin produces in the heart of the sinner while he is yet alive, what we call "the sense of sin." I think we can even analyze this further. The three-fold period of wrestling in the garden suggests that he was here being exposed to the full intensity of what makes sin in our lives so defeating, so unshakable, that which makes up a sense of sin: shame, guilt, and despair.

What is shame? Who of us has not felt it? Shame is a sense of my own defilement. It is an awareness of my unfitness. It is self-contempt, a loathing of myself. It is not being able to look myself in the face because I have been false to my standards, my ideals. As the Lord Jesus went into the darkness of the garden and fell upon his face, suddenly, for the first time in his experience, he began to feel ashamed. All the naked filth of human depravity forced itself upon him and he felt the burning, searing shame of our misdeeds as though they were his. No wonder he trembled in agony and amazement and sought to flee. He cried to the Father, "Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless," he adds, "not my will, but thine, be done," {cf, Luke 22:42}.

Remember that he came then to the disciples and woke them with an almost piteous plea to watch with him. "Could you not watch with me one hour?" he said {cf, Matt 26:40}.

Returning again to the shadows, a greater inward horror came upon him. He began to feel a sense of guilt. What is guilt? Guilt is the sense of injury done to someone else. Guilt is the awareness of damage that I have caused to the innocent or the undeserving. The Lord Jesus was borne to the ground by an overwhelming sense of dark and awful guilt. He felt himself a culprit before God. He felt himself a child of wrath, eminently deserving judgment. He writhed in silent torment among the olives, and Mark tells us he began to pray more earnestly than ever

before, "Father, since this cup cannot pass from me, then thy will be done," {cf, Matt 26:42}.

Once again he came to his disciples and finding them sleeping he went back. He did not awaken them but let them sleep on.

The third experience of agony was the worst of all. Before it began the Father sent an angel to strengthen him. This is what is meant by the words here, "He was heard for his godly fear." Crying out to the Father in his deep and desperate need, the Father answered and strengthened him through an angel. When the angel had finished ministering to him, the third and most terrible experience began. Our Lord began to know despair. The iron bands of sin's enslaving power were fully felt. He was crushed under a sense of hopelessness, of helpless discouragement, of utter defeat. His eyes filled with tears, his mouth was opened in involuntary, agonized cries, his heart was crushed as in a wine press, so that the blood was literally forced from his veins and his sweat fell to the ground in great, bloody drops. This explains the strange words, "Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered."

He learned what it means to obey God when every cell in his body wanted to disobey, when everything within him cried out to flee this experience. Yet, knowing this to be the will of God, he obeyed, trusting God to see him through. He learned what it feels like to hang on when failure makes us want to throw the whole thing over, when we are so defeated, so utterly despairing, so angry with ourselves, so filled with shame, self-loathing and guilt that we want to forget the whole thing. He knows what this is like, he went the whole way, he took the full brunt of it. You and I will never pass through a Gethsemane like he went through. He went the whole distance.

Verse 9 carries us on the cross. "Being made perfect" -- having entered into all that any sinner in all his weakness ever knows -- "being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him." That is the language of discipleship. When we obey him, as he obeyed the Father, then all that God is, is made available to us, just as in the hour of his anguish, all that God is was made available to him on this principle of trust.

How did he win? On the same principle that is set before us. He absolutely refused to question the Father's wisdom. He refused to strike back at God, to blame him, to say this was unfair. He took no refuge in unbelief even though this came suddenly and unexpectedly upon him. Instead, he cast himself upon the Father's loving, tender care and looked to him to sustain him. When he did, he was brought safely through and was thus perfected for priesthood. So we read,

"Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." No matter how deep, how serious that need may be, he can fully meet it, though we may be at wit's end.

In Psalm 107 there is a wonderful verse, "At their wit's end they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out ..." Based on that verse a wonderful poem has been written:

Are you standing at Wit's End Corner,  
Christian, with troubled brow?  
Are you thinking of what is before you  
And all you are bearing now?  
Does all the world seem against you  
And you in the battle alone?  
Remember -- at Wit's End Corner  
Is just where God's power is shown.

Are you standing at Wit's End Corner,  
Your work before you spread  
All lying begun, unfinished  
And pressing on heart and head  
Longing for strength to do it,  
Stretching out trembling hands?  
Remember -- at Wit's End Corner  
The Burden-Bearer stands.

Are you standing at Wit's End Corner?  
Then you're just in the very spot  
To learn the wondrous resources  
Of him who faileth not;  
No doubt to a brighter pathway  
Your footsteps will soon be moved  
But only at Wit's End Corner  
Is the "God who is able" proved.

It is at Wit's End Corner, driven by the Spirit into the place where the pressure is so great that we have no other recourse but to cry out to God for help, that at last we begin to learn. It breaks upon our dull, slow minds that this help is not something intended for emergency situations only. This dependence on him is the principle upon which God expects us to meet every circumstance. It is thus we enter into rest.

Prayer:

Our Father, thank you that the Garden of Gethsemane was not mere play acting upon a stage. The Lord Jesus did not come into the world to perform a role, he fully entered into life. He went the whole way, he bore the full brunt. Help us, then, to obey these simple words of admonition: To come with confidence, with boldness, to the throne of grace that is within us from which all help comes, all light is streaming, all hope is flaming. Make these words real in our experience. In Christ's name, Amen.

## LET'S GET ON WITH IT

The passage before us is so important and so provocative that I will waste no time in introduction. I shall follow the suggestion of our title and "get on with it." The section from 5:11 to 6:12 gathers around four figures, or pictures, though one is implied rather than stated. We shall call these four figures the milk drinkers, the meat eaters, the stillborn, and the fruit growers.

This first section describes milk drinkers:

About this [i.e., Christ being a high priest after the order of Melchizedek] we have much to say which is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of God's word. You need milk, not solid food; for every one who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil. {Heb 5:11-14 RSV }

Obviously, here is a case of arrested development. Here are people who have been professing Christians for many years. By this time they ought to have been teachers, but they need yet to have someone teach them the very ABC's of the gospel, the word of Christ. It is a case of retarded maturity.

We have at our home a three-year-old daughter. It is the undivided opinion of our family that she is the smartest, brightest, and cutest little girl that ever lived. And she says very clever things. We all take great delight in her. But if, at this stage of her life, something should happen and her body kept growing but her mind stopped, and she went on saying the same clever things she is saying now all the while her body matured and grew into full womanhood, we would no longer find delight in what she says. Our joy would be turned to sorrow; we would feel great grief at the sight of our dear one suffering from arrested development.

That is what this author feels as he writes to these Hebrews. There is a cloud of threat hanging over these people due to their immaturity. The writer makes three very important and insightful observations about this problem.

First, there is the clear suggestion that age alone does not produce maturity. It is amazing how many of us think it does. We love this thought of inevitable growth. How often we say, "Just give us time. We have only been Christians for fifteen or twenty years. Perhaps we will yet grow out of these hot tempers, catty tongues and jealous spirits. Just give us time." But time never brings maturity.

I read recently of a principal in a high school who had an administrative post to fill. He promoted one of his teachers with ten years of teaching experience to the job. When the announcement was made, another teacher in this school came to him terribly upset. She said, "Why did you put that teacher in this position? He has only had ten years of experience, and I've had twenty-five years, yet you passed me over in favor of him." And the principal said, "I'm sorry, you're wrong. You haven't had twenty-five years of experience. You have had one year's experience twenty-five times."

That is exactly the situation with these Hebrew Christians. They had been going through the same experience again and again all the years of their Christian life, but had never grown. Instead of marching forward, they were simply marking time.

It is the problem with so many of us, is it not? Someone told me the other day that he had analyzed his difficulty and had decided he was suffering from prolonged adolescence, merging into premature senility! It is this process that produces the frequent phenomenon of Christians who come to sit, and soak, and sour. But the writer here makes very clear that age will never cure immaturity.

The second observation he makes is that immaturity is self-identifying. It has certain clear marks which provide a simple test that anyone can take to determine whether he belongs in this classification or not:

The first mark is an inability to instruct others. Though these have been Christians for years they still cannot help anyone else. They have nothing to say to help another who may be struggling with problems. They cannot even point someone to Christ. There is no ability to help or instruct another. In fact, they themselves can only understand the very simplest doctrinal treatment. They need milk, the writer says, instead of strong meat. They do not understand the "word of unrighteousness," i.e., the divine program which results in right conduct, because they are themselves children and want only milk. That is the first mark of immaturity, an inability to instruct others.

The second mark is an inability to discern good from evil. It is such people who constitute what we may call consecrated blunderers, evangelical crabs, the ones who mean right and think they are doing right but are continually doing the wrong thing, creating problem situations, and difficulties with others.

They include the doctrinally undiscerning, i.e., those who are blown about with every wind of doctrine, who give themselves to the theological fads which come in repetitive cycles. Anyone who has observed the Christian scene for any period of time recognizes there are certain fads which repeat themselves in cycles of interest, such as faith-healing, tongues, and legalistic practices. These are the doctrinally undiscerning; they go along with every movement that comes.

It includes also the emotionally gullible, i.e., those who are moved by some emotional appeal. This is especially true, perhaps, in the realm of missionary appeal. There are those who are affected easily by stories of starving babies, disfigured lepers, and naked savages; who respond to purely emotional stimulation and give their funds only to those organizations or mission boards that make their appeal along these lines. They are uncritical in their evaluation of a work. If it has this emotional content, that is all they look for.

Included in this class are those who are frightened by what we might call "religious bogey men" -- certain names or personalities that are used as scarecrows because the very use of their name frightens people off from having any part in certain activity. These are the emotionally gullible.

Then, this group includes those who are personality followers, those who make much of men, who fasten themselves to one particular, outstanding, sparkling personality and read only his books and play his tapes exclusively. I am not speaking against reading books and playing tapes, but I am talking about fastening on to one individual in this respect to the exclusion of others. Those who do this are children, immature, unable to distinguish the activity of the flesh, with its exhibitionism and egotism, from the manifestation of the Spirit. They applaud what God condemns; they resent what God approves.

The third observation the author makes is that arrested development is a very costly thing. "About this," he says, "we have much to say which is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing." There is so much of the riches of the Melchizedek priesthood of Christ which I want to tell you," he says, "which would make your starved humanity burst into bloom like buds in the spring if you could but grasp it, but you would not get it because you are so dull of hearing." The immature lose so much, and they risk even more. There is a very grave danger threatening these who continue in this condition of prolonged immaturity. He will describe it fully in this next section.

But first we have a brief view of the other side of the picture, the meat eaters, the mature:

Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrines of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, with instruction about ablutions, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits. {Heb 6:1-3 RSV}

It is from this section that our title comes, "Let's get on with it." He is urging these people to graduate from milk to meat, from immature diet to solid food, for, he says, it is this that is the mark of maturity. "Solid food is for the mature."

In the Authorized Version the word for mature is perfection: "Let us go on to perfection." I hasten immediately to add, this does not mean sinless perfection. John makes that clear in his first letter, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves [we do not fool anyone else, especially our wives, but we deceive ourselves], and the truth is not in us," {1 Jn 1:8 RSV}. No, it is not sinless perfection he is talking about. Paul could write to the Philippians and say, "Let those of us who are mature [perfect] be thus minded," {Phil 3:15a RSV}. Yet just three verses before he says, "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect;" {Phil 3:12a RSV}. Notice, there is a maturity, a perfection, which he disowns. That is yet ahead. "I have not reached ultimate perfection, I am not claiming to be sinlessly perfect, I have not yet reached the place where there is nothing at all wrong with me -- that lies beyond the resurrection, that is ahead," {cf, Phil 3:12b-14}. But there is also a maturity which he claims. It is that which in Hebrews has already been called "the rest of God," a moment by moment exercise of faith, a perfect understanding of God's principle of activity, a coming of age, an entering into spiritual manhood.

This is what the writer means here. It is produced not by age, as we have already seen, nor by food, for milk will not effect it either, but it is produced by practice. "Those who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil." It is produced by acting on what you believe, stepping out upon it, putting it into practice. That is what brings about maturity.

To reach this requires leaving behind the principles of the gospel, the ABC's, the elementary truths, the familiar ground by which we came into Christian faith. "Not laying again this foundation." Here is another figure of arrested development. A foundation is laid but nothing is built on it. Instead of building on the foundation, the owner tears it up and lays it again. Then he goes back and lays it yet again. There is nothing but a repetitive laying again and again of the same foundation; it is arrested development.

Major Ian Thomas once said to me, "You know, I have discovered an interesting thing about American Christians. They do not usually come to church to learn anything. Whatever they do not yet know themselves they think is heresy. What they want to hear is the same old stuff so they can say, 'Amen, brother, Amen!'"

That is laying the same foundation over and over again.

The foundation is called "the elementary doctrines of Christ," or, in Chapter 5, "the first principles of God's word." The elements of it are listed for us, and they fall into three very interesting groups:

There are those doctrinal truths concerning conversion; Then teaching concerning church ordinances, and doctrine concerning prophetic matters.

This is milk! This is proper for babies, but is very inadequate for anyone who wishes to go on to maturity, to full growth in the Christian life. He does not mean when he says "leave these" that they are to be forgotten, or denied, or neglected, but they are no longer to be the chief center of attention. That is the point he is making.

Is it not rather startling that these are often the sole topics on which many ministers dwell? They preach them over and over, and call them the simple gospel. Because this simple gospel is preached unendingly in our churches, we have Christians who are weak, childish and immature. I have long been convinced that the greatest cause of the weak state of evangelical Christendom today is preachers who never realize that, in preaching what they call the simple gospel, they are feeding their people upon milk. They never get beyond the foundation.

Let's take a closer look at it. The introductory matters concern "repentance from dead works, and faith toward God." Now those are great themes. They are absolutely essential to the Christian life. But the point the writer makes is, they are only "A" in the alphabet of faith. The teaching about ordinances includes "baptism, and the laying on of hands." These are but figures of reality, they are not the reality itself. They are very blessed figures and can be very meaningful, but to get concerned over these shadows, these figures, these pictures; to fight over the mode of baptism or the procedure of ordination, is infantile. Dear old Dr. A. T. Pierson used to go about and speak at many churches. When he was in a church that was arguing over the mode of baptism or some such thing, he would say to them, "Quit your baby-talk!" He was quite right. It is an overemphasis on these things which leads to the Mickey Mouse regulations that are imposed so frequently in many churches.

The last two items, "resurrection and eternal judgment," obviously have to do with the themes of prophecy, eschatology. This would include the time of the rapture, the question of who the man of sin is, where the church will be during the tribulation, etc. All these are important truths, the writer does not deny that, but they are so inclined to puff people up with knowledge instead of to edify in love. "It is time," he says, "to leave these things. You know them, you have been talking about them for too long, now go on, go on, there is much more ahead. This," he says, "we will do if God permits."

With those three little words he introduces the knottiest problem-passage in Hebrews, if not the whole Bible; a passage which has been a battleground of varying convictions for ages. He changes his figure now, and, beginning with Verse 4, he brings before us a picture of what I shall call "the stillborn."

For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt. For land which has drunk the rain that often falls upon it, and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it was cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed; its end is to be burned. {Heb 6:4-8 RSV}

What a sobering passage!

There is, first, the elaboration of an awful possibility. It is impossible to restore again to repentance these who experience certain Spirit-given blessings, if they shall fall away. The problem of the passage is: How can anyone experience all of this and not be Christian? And, if he is Christian, how can he fall away, without any hope of restoration? It is over these issues that the battle has waged hot throughout the Christian ages.

It is important to see that all of this passage hangs upon the three words, if God permits: "This we will do, if God permits." Here is the danger of prolonged immaturity, of remaining in one place all your Christian life. It suggests that you may be one of those whom God will not allow to go further; we have already seen in Chapter 3 that God has said of certain ones, "I swear in my wrath, they shall never enter my rest."

Can we take these expressions here as describing anything other than Spirit-produced, authentic Christian life? Look at them again:

"Those who have once been enlightened." That means, to have their eyes opened to their own desperate personal need, to realize they are in a lost world and need a Savior. That is being enlightened.

"And have tasted the heavenly gift." What is the heavenly gift? Obviously, it is the gift God gave from heaven. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." These are those who have known a personal encounter with Christ, they have "tasted of the heavenly gift."

"Become partakers of the Holy Spirit." That is more than to be influenced by the Holy Spirit, it is to become companions of him, fellow travelers.

"They have tasted the goodness of the word of God." That means to enter into the joy of the promises of God.

"And the powers of the age to come," i.e., they have already experienced the miracle of release and deliverance in their life.

Yet the sentence stands, "when they commit apostasy" (not if, there is no if in the original Greek) it is impossible to restore them. Their case is hopeless!

The immediate question here is not, "Why can they not come back? We will look at that in a moment, but first we must ask, How can they fall away after such a God-honored start as this?"

I should like to propose an explanation of this which has long haunted me. I would like to raise a question for you to wrestle with which more and more suggests, at least to me, the correct explanation of this phenomenon. We have already noted that Scripture frequently uses the analogy of human birth and growth to explain spiritual birth and growth. We have that even here. The use of milk by children is an analogy drawn from the physical life. Here is the question I would like to ask: Is it not possible that we frequently confuse conception with birth?

If the spiritual life follows the same pattern as the physical life, we all know that physical life does not begin with birth. It begins with conception. Have we not, perhaps, mistaken conception for birth, and, therefore, have been very confused when certain ones, who seemingly started well, have ended up stillborn? Is there in the spiritual life, as in the natural life, a gestation period before birth when true Spirit-imparted life can fail and result in a stillbirth?

Is there not a time when new Christians are more like embryos, forming little by little in the womb, fed by the faith and vitality of others? Perhaps this is what the Apostle Paul means when he writes to the Galatians, "My little children, I stand in doubt of you. I am travailing in birth again until Christ be formed in you," {cf, Gal 4:19}.

If this be the case, then the critical moment is not when the Word first meets with faith, that is conception; that is when the possibility of new life arises. But the critical moment is when the individual is asked to obey the Lord at cost to himself, contrary to his own will and desire. When, in other words, the Lordship of Christ makes demand upon him and it comes into conflict with his own desire and purposes, his own plans and program. To put it in terms of what is used of the Lord Jesus in Chapter 5, we are called upon to learn obedience at the price of suffering. That is the true moment of birth. "If any man will come after me," said Jesus, "let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me," {Matt 16:24}. In grace, the Lord may make this appeal over the course of a number of years. But if it is ultimately refused, this is a stillbirth. The months, and even years, that may be spent in the enjoyment of conversion joy was simply Christian life in embryo. The new birth occurs, if at all, when we first cease from our own works, and rest in Jesus Christ. That is when the life of faith begins.

If this step is refused and the decision is made to reject the claims of Christ to Lordship and control, there follows, as Hebrews points out, a hardening, blinding process which, if allowed to continue, may lead such a one to drop out of church, and in effect, to renounce his Christian faith. Though only God knows the true condition of the heart, if that occurs, the case, he says, is hopeless.

Is this not what the Lord Jesus describes in that parable of the sower in Matthew 13? "Some seed," he says, "fell on rocky ground" {cf, Matt 13:20} (not gravelly ground, but ground where there was an underlying layer of rock). These are those who receive the word with joy and endure for awhile, but when persecution or tribulation arises, immediately they fall away.

This brings us to the explanation for this hopelessness, this impossibility of return. "It is impossible to restore them if they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt." Why is it that God will not permit them to go on in understanding more truth? It is simply because, as far as they are concerned, they are re-crucifying Christ. They are repudiating the principle of the cross. They become, as Paul terms it in Philippians, "enemies of the cross of Christ," {Phil 3:18}. From that point on their lives deteriorate and they shame the profession they once made.

Years ago, at the close of World War II, I frequently attended Saturday night meetings in the Church of the Open Door in Los Angeles, sponsored by Youth For Christ. A brilliant young man was the leader of the meetings and a frequent speaker at them. His name was Chuck Templeton. He had a gift for articulation and I heard him give several wonderful messages, simple, clear expositions of the meaning of the cross of Christ, and the offer of life in Christ Jesus. Saturday after Saturday I saw young people come down the aisles to receive Christ in those meetings. But some time after that Chuck Templeton entered a seminary, where he began to drift from his faith. He served for awhile as a national evangelist for his denomination. Finally, he quit the ministry entirely, and later openly and publicly renounced all faith in Jesus Christ, and went back into secular work. I do not know where he is now, but he no longer makes any Christian profession.

Is he a case like this? Only God knows the answer, but he could be. John tells us there are certain ones "who went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out, that it might be plain that they all are not of us," {cf, 1 Jn 2:19}. There is a conversion of the head that never reaches the heart.

This is Palm Sunday. This is the day we celebrate the Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. I doubt if he would ever have called it a triumphal entry. He probably would have referred to it as a Day of Sorrows. That was the day when he left the donkey's back to go into the temple and, for the second time in his ministry, clean out the money-changers and the filth that had accumulated in his Father's house. It was then that he stopped the offerings of Israel and would not permit any man to offer sacrifice in the temple. Then he went up on the Mount of Olives and, looking out over the city, his heart broke in yearning over that wretched city, and he cried out those unforgettable words, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you would not!" {Luke 13:34 RSV}. The tears coursing down his face, he wept for the city. One week later he was nailed to a cross outside that very city's gates. Where was the multitude that greeted him when he came on the triumphal entry? Oh, they were there, but they were the ones who were now crying out, "Crucify him, crucify him! He said he was the Son of God, let him save himself!" {cf, Luke 23:35}

We have another picture of this apostasy in the case of Judas who for three years accompanied the Lord in his ministry, was sent out with the Twelve, and given power to heal, to cast out demons, to preach the gospel. But at the end, despite the manifestations of Spirit-given power, there was no faith and he turned and went out into the dark night of betrayal.



The last word on this is the illustration of its reality, the account of the two plots of land which have drunk in the rain. It is a very simple illustration, and it parallels the parable of the sower that our Lord told. There were two plots of ground, side by side, both containing good seed. The rain falls on each. One brings forth fruit but on the other the good seed sprouts but because it has no root, some of it dies and the thorns and thistles take over and choke out the rest. The rain pictures the Spirit-given blessings of Verses 4 and 5. What good does more rain do on ground like that? It can only mean more thorns and thistles. This is why God will not permit someone to go on in truth until he ceases his own works and depends on his. It is the principle of faith that alone will receive anything from God. The whole of Scripture testifies to it. For those who refuse to act on that, the end is to be burned.

Now the final figure and we are through, the fruit growers:

Though we speak thus, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things that belong to salvation. For God is not so unjust as to overlook your work and the love which you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do. And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness in realizing the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. {Heb 6:9-12 RSV }

There were certain evidences that convinced the writer of this letter that the case was not one of embryo Christians being threatened with stillbirth. There had been a true birth, he thinks, for he has seen unmistakable evidence of love and concern for others, expressed in deeds of compassion. Not simply words but deeds, ministry, help to others. This is the test the Lord has said he will look for. "Inasmuch as you did it unto the least of these my brethren [unconsciously, unknowingly, out of a heart filled with concern for me] you have done it unto me," {cf, Matt 25:40}.

But as the writer thinks of these dear Hebrew Christians he says, "Your life is so weak and struggling. I am so anxious that you manifest an earnest, whole-souled, fervent hunger to learn and to act and to stay with it!" That is the proven pattern of victory. That is what those in the past have done, those who "by faith and patience inherit the promises." The result will be the full assurance of hope. That is his theme for the next section.

Do you live in uncertainty about your Christian faith? Are you constantly aware of a vague sense of guilt and questioning? Do you have times of real, troubling doubt? Are you still talking baby talk and drinking the milk of elementary things?

The word of the Holy Spirit from this great passage is, "Wake up! Get serious! Give full attention to this. Nothing will ever be more important. Begin to practice what you know, put it to work. And, as you do, you will discover that full assurance of hope that makes others stop and look. Our age, our poor, restless, troubled, bedeviled age, is hungering for the manifestation, the visible evidence, of the sons of God.

Prayer:

As before, Lord, these words have searched us, have found us out, have made us to see ourselves. We thank you for that. We do not want to live behind unreal facades, we do not want to be self-deceived. We thank you for telling us the truth even though it may hurt, for we know that it is always to the end that we may be healed. Grant that this may be true in the individual ministry of the Spirit to each life. In Christ's name, Amen.

## DEALING WITH DOUBT

Our last study in Hebrews 6 revealed a very sobering possibility. We may look back upon a conversion experience accompanied by joy, release, and forgiveness -- it may have been twenty or thirty years ago. But the opening verses of Chapter 6 make very clear that, if there is no permanent change in our life today as a result of that conversion experience, then we have only been kidding ourselves: We are not Christians. Despite the religious activities we may have faithfully performed in the intervening years, if we are still the same persons in our dispositions and attitudes, our reactions to other people, then we are not Christians. We are still without life -- dead!

The unmistakable sign of true Christian life is the existence of a love that desires to help others, that seeks to minister to others at cost to self. If that love is present, even in some small degree, it is proof that we are truly Christians. But we can have even that without any sense of assurance, of security in this relationship. It is very possible, therefore, to be a Christian and still be troubled with doubts, fears, anxieties, and uncertainties about our relationship to Christ. That is where we shall begin today.

Last week I received a letter from a Christian boy in the service who is tormented with doubts about his faith. He expressed his concern very openly. He said, in part,

"I think I've lost my faith in the power of prayer. It seems like I have asked so many things in Christ's name that weren't answered. I get the skeptical feeling that it would have happened one way or the other whether I asked or not. If it comes out the way you ask, then you say, 'My prayer was answered'; if it doesn't, you say, 'God chose not to answer it this way' or 'He'll answer it later if I keep praying, etc.' I haven't by any means rejected Christianity but I can't, no matter how much I want to, give myself wholeheartedly to a way of life I am so uncertain about. But it's really rough, riding on the fence."

I appreciate the honesty of that letter. There may be many of us who feel the same way who are not honest enough to say so. I would like to let this climate of doubt, expressed by that letter so simply and forthrightly, be the launching pad for the rocket of faith (always the answer to doubt), which this passage will bring before us. The writer cites the example of Abraham, one of the great rocket launchers of all history, the man called in the New Testament "the father of the faithful," {cf, Rom 4:16-18}. To exercise the kind of faith Abraham exercised is to become children of Abraham, and heirs of his promises.

This incident from the life of Abraham will show us what makes faith strong. Here we learn the reason for faith, the ground of our hope.

For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one better by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you." And thus Abraham, having patiently endured, obtained the promise. Men indeed swear by a greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he interposed with an oath, so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God should prove false, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to seize the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. {Heb 6:13-20 RSV}

Genesis records that God appeared to Abraham and made him a promise: "Through your seed shall all peoples of the earth be blessed," {Gen 15:13, 22:17-18}. The immediate seed was Isaac, born of Abraham's old age; but the ultimate Seed is Christ. It is through faith in Jesus Christ that this promise is fulfilled, and all the peoples of the earth are blessed in Abraham. This promise was later confirmed by an oath, God swearing by himself that he would fulfill what he had said. The writer is simply pointing out that Abraham believed God's promise and his oath.

Why did he believe it? Not because he immediately saw it fulfilled! There were twenty-five long, weary years before Isaac was born, and in the meantime, Abraham and his wife, Sarah, were growing older and had passed the time of life when it was possible to have children. Still the promise was unfulfilled. Abraham did not believe it because he saw immediate results. Nor did he believe because he was doing his best to accomplish it. There was one occasion when he began to waver in faith and thought he had to help God out. He concocted an ingenious scheme to fulfill the promise of God, and the result was the birth of Ishmael who became a thorn in the side of Israel from that day to this.

Then why did Abraham believe God's promise? Let me read from Paul's letter to the Romans in Chapter 4, where he writes of Abraham.

He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead because he was about a hundred years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. {Rom 4:19-21 RSV}

"God was able." Abraham's faith rested on the character of God. That is always where faith must rest. As the writer points out, this is also true among men. A man's word is no better than his character. Even if you get a man to sign a contract or agreement, that agreement is no more than a scrap of paper if the man who signed it does not intend to fulfill it. It is no better than the man who makes it. Even in our courts of law and affairs of business this is true. All faith ultimately rests on character.

Abraham believed that God told the truth about himself, and God was true to his own character which he had expressed in two separate ways:

First, the promise, and second, the oath by which he swore to fulfill that promise.

Without seeing any results for twenty-five years, Abraham hung on to the character of God. He never said to himself during that time, "I've tried it and it doesn't work," or "I've got to convince myself that this is true, even though I secretly believe that it is not." He said, "The God I know exists is the kind of a God who will do what he says he'll do." For twenty-five years Abraham hung on to that promise. And he won!

Now I come back for a moment to my service-friend's letter. He raises a question about prayer. He says, "I've tried prayer but it doesn't seem to work." It seems to me that is putting things the wrong way. That is really repeating the common myth of our day, "seeing is believing." Have you ever said that? "If I see it, then I'll believe it." No greater lie was ever foisted upon the human race by the father of lies than this, that seeing is believing. We are utterly convinced that is the way to come to the knowledge of truth, but the man who sees no longer needs to believe. Faith is not sight, nor sight faith.

You ask me why I believe in prayer? Well, not because I have tried it and it has worked. I believe in prayer because Jesus Christ says that prayer is the secret of life and I believe him. Jesus Christ says that man must either pray or faint, one or the other, that he either finds the keystone to life in prayer or, lacking it, life begins to come apart at the seams. Because it is Jesus Christ who says this, I believe him, and, therefore, I pray and find it works -- for it is the secret, he has been telling the truth. The proof of prayer does not come from my experience; that is simply the demonstration of what I have already believed, and I believe it because of who said it. Believing, therefore, is seeing. That is the true statement.

This is true on many levels of life. Albert Einstein did not come to the knowledge of relativity by performing a series of experiments which ultimately convinced him that relativity was true. He gradually saw the concept of relativity, and,

convinced in his own mind that this was the secret of the physical universe, he performed experiments that he might demonstrate it to others. This is the way of truth. Believing is seeing.

This, therefore, is the secret of faith; it rests on the character of Jesus Christ. Either he is telling us the truth, and we can trust what this One who is like no one else who ever appeared in human history says to us, or we must reject him and repudiate him as a self-deceived impostor who attempted to foist some crude and foolish ideas upon the human race. That is where faith rests. From that ground everything else must follow.

"We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as our forerunner." It is in the person of Christ that all Christian faith rests at last. He is our forerunner. Not only has he made promises but he has himself demonstrated them. What has happened to him is what will happen to us. Now, if this be true, then our faith will be strengthened as we see more clearly the character of the One with whom we have to deal. This is why the author moves immediately to the matter of the high priesthood of Melchizedek.

Again and again in this letter he has used this phrase, "a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." The sheer repetition of it indicates there is something very vital hidden here. Now we shall see what that is.

In this next section from Chapter 7, Verses 1 through 26, we have a portrait of our helper. The incident upon which it is based comes again from Abraham's life, recorded in the fourteenth chapter of Genesis, the story of Abraham and Melchizedek. As Abraham was returning from battle with the five kings, a stranger met him and blessed him, and Abraham gave tithes to this man. Melchizedek steps suddenly out of the shadows of history, to appear on the stage of Scripture. Perhaps we shall be greatly helped to understand if we view this incident as a movie depicting the life of Christ.

For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham, returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him; and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. He is without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever. {Heb 7:1-3 RSV}

This is like a motion picture in which a well-known star plays the part of a historical character, as, a few years ago, Raymond Massey played the part of

Abraham Lincoln. Throughout that movie you did not see Raymond Massey, but you saw Abraham Lincoln, for, within the scope of a movie, the star is no longer himself, but is for all practical purposes the very character whose role he is interpreting. This account in Genesis is that kind of a scene.

Here is an ordinary man named Melchizedek, a priest of the true God, who lived in the village of Salem (later known as Jerusalem) and who met Abraham returning from battle. For the moment, he is fulfilling a role which beautifully pictures the ministry of Jesus Christ to us today.

In passing let me add this, Hollywood could never duplicate this, for in their movies they must of necessity have the star play the part of a man of the past, but when God directs a movie, he has his man play the part of the Man of the future!

Now let us look more carefully at this passage to see the meaning of this ministry of Christ's, first by comparison with Melchizedek:

There is a word of reciprocity in these first two verses:

Melchizedek met Abraham and gave to him bread and wine which are the symbols of life and strength, the very things that we partake of when we come to the Lord's table. Abraham, in turn, gave tithes of everything he possessed to Melchizedek. Now, the tithe, or tenth, is always the mark of ownership. To pay a tenth is to indicate that God owns the whole. In symbol, therefore, Abraham was saying to Melchizedek, "The One whom you depict has the right of ownership over everything in my life." And in this movie of the ministry of Jesus Christ we see enacted a very important principle: Abraham and Melchizedek become available to each other. The provision of strength from Melchizedek exactly equaled the degree of commitment on the part of Abraham.

This is what the New Testament says to us. You may exercise dominion to the same degree you are prepared to submit to the dominion of Jesus Christ in your own heart. You can fulfill your God-given right as man to be king over all you survey, to the same degree you are prepared to recognize the Kingship of Jesus Christ in your own life. You can have as much of Christ as, in turn, you are ready to permit him to have of you.

Then there is a word of authority here: "He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace." What is it that Jesus Christ can give you today? What does his present ministry make possible in your life right now? He can give you only what he is, that is all. It takes Christ to be a Christian! We need what he is in order to be what he was,

and what he is is revealed in his names. He is first of all, "king of righteousness," i.e., he is the one who has the secret of right conduct, the principle, the divine program which results in proper behavior. He is the king of that, he controls it. He is also the king of peace. May I use the equivalent modern term for that phrase? Mental health! He is the king of mental health, the king of peace. He holds in his hand the secret of rest, of inner calm, of that adequacy within which gives poise, power and purpose to human life. This is so desperately being sought today.

Then there is a word of continuity here: "He is without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days or end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever." In the movie of Melchizedek that we are looking at here, all this verse means is that there is no mention made of Melchizedek's ancestry, his pedigree or any record of his birth or death. He was a perfectly normal man, all these things were true of him, but the silence of the record is taken as an illustration of the eternal, changeless, unending priesthood of Jesus Christ. This means he is available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, fifty-two weeks a year, throughout every year of a whole lifetime.

Someone said to me the other day, "How much time do you spend with the Lord each day?" I looked at him, and said, "Twenty-four hours. How much time do you?" And he said, "Oh, no, what I mean is, how much time do you have for your quiet time every morning, your time with the Lord?" "Well," I said, "I do try to have a quiet time every morning. Sometimes I miss, but that doesn't mean I haven't had time with the Lord. I have discovered from the New Testament that I have time with him twenty-four hours a day. I am never out of his presence, I am never shut off from his resources, I am never separated from his wisdom, or his peace, or his truth." That is what the Melchizedek priesthood means, and what the world is so mightily hungering after today.

Now let us take another look at this from the negative point of view. In the next section we see the ministry of Jesus by contrast with the Levitical priesthood. Here is indicated the incompleteness and weakness of every source of help outside of Christ. As we sing in the old hymn, "All other ground is sinking sand."

First, it is evident that Christ is superior to the Jewish priesthood. We shall move quickly here for it is not necessary to spend much time in exposition.

See how great he is! Abraham the patriarch gave him a tithe of the spoils. And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brethren, though these

also are descended from Abraham. But this man who has not their genealogy received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. Here [i.e., in the Levitical priesthood] tithes are received by mortal men; there [in the Melchizedek priesthood], by one of whom it is testified that he lives. One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him. {Heb 7:4-10 RSV}

We have already seen in this letter that the job of a priest is to make one fit for life, able to cope.

May I again substitute a modern term for the word priest, one which perhaps we will understand a bit better? The modern equivalent of the priest is the psychiatrist! That is his job, is it not, to make you fit for living? Not only fit to live, but fit to be lived with! The Levitical priests of the old order were an ancient type of psychiatrists. They offered help to men and women in the problems of living. Read the Old Testament insightfully and you will see that is exactly the function they fulfilled. They were there to help others with the problems of guilt, stress, confusion and uncertainty.

Now the argument of the writer here is very simple: He points out that these Levitical priests derived their authority by descent from Abraham. Therefore they could never acknowledge any greater help than Abraham could have offered. But Abraham acknowledged the supremacy of Melchizedek by paying tithes to him. Therefore, the help available in the Levitical priests was, by comparison, incomplete, secondary, limited and temporary. These priests were limited by the humanity of Abraham, just as any psychiatrist or psychologist today is limited by his own humanity. He can only go so far. The help he gives may be very real. Let us not confuse the issue or refuse to face facts. Psychiatrists and psychologists can often give much real help but only to a degree, only within a limit, only so far. That is the argument of the writer here.

Just how far is revealed in this next division where we learn that the ministry of Jesus Christ supersedes the Law:

Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. For the one of whom these things are spoken (i.e., Christ) belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in

connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become a priest, not according to a legal requirement concerning bodily descent but by the power of an indestructible life. For it is witnessed of him,

"Thou art a priest forever,  
after the order of Melchizedek."

On the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness (for the law made nothing perfect); on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God. {Heb 7:11-19 RSV}

One thing clearly marked the fact that the old priesthood was no longer acceptable as help for men. It was the appearance of a new priest with a different address and a different ancestry. And if the old priesthood went, the Law had to go too. That is the argument here. This new priest had a quite different address; he came from the tribe of Judah instead of the tribe of Levi. Judah was not a priestly tribe at all, but a kingly tribe. The new priest was a king. Obviously, some change has been made. If God recognizes Christ as a priest, then there has been a change made, the Law which was part of the old priesthood has been set aside.

Also, the new priest has a different ancestry. It was not necessary for him to trace his genealogy back to Abraham. No, as a priest he has no genealogy, he ministers in the power of an endless life. He had no beginning, no ending, but continues forever. Therefore the Law, which is only temporary, must go. It had an inherent weakness in that it could not supply what the flesh in its frailty lacked. Every priest, every psychiatrist, every counselor, every behavior-consultant, whether he realizes it or not, is continually working with the Law. How? By seeking to relate people to reality. That is basically what the Law is, the revelation of reality. It is the way things are. Any knowledgeable psychologist or psychiatrist tries to help the people who come to see things as they are. That is their entire ministry. There is nothing else they can do. But even that is sometimes a very difficult help to render.

Recently Dr. Henry Brandt, the well-known Christian psychologist, was speaking to a number of us in a private meeting. He referred to James, Chapter 3, Verse 14: "But if you have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth." Dr. Brandt said this is very illuminating, for it reveals what we usually do when we have strife, envy, bitter jealousy or selfish ambition in our hearts. We cover it over and glory, actually boast, in our ability to pretend that we do not have it there. Thus we lie against the truth.

Have you ever said to someone, "You know, I felt like telling that fellow off, but I didn't say a word. I smiled sweetly and didn't say a word. But it burns me up to have him do a thing like that." Do you know what is the worst thing about that?

We think it is Christian! We think we have done the Christian thing because we have covered up our enmity and hidden it away, play-acting and pretending it was not there. But James goes on to point out that it comes from a low source, "the wisdom which is not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish," {Jas 3:15 RSV}. That, we think, is spiritual.

Dr. Brandt says that "sensual" means "pleasurable." The problem we discover when someone tries to help us is that we like to be bitter. It is pleasurable to feel this way toward somebody. We like to be angry and mull things over in our minds, to bear a grudge and nurse a spirit of hatred against someone. We like it, we do not want to give it up, it is pleasurable. The job of any psychiatrist or psychologist, Christian or otherwise, is simply to help us to see that we are hiding the truth from ourselves, deceiving ourselves. But that is as far as they can go.

Once self-discovery comes, then what? Well, under the old order, a man would take a sacrifice to the priest and the priest would offer it, thus for the moment at least, removing the guilt of the act. Though the problem remained, the guilt from it was removed. That is what the modern priest does. A psychiatrist attempts to dispel guilt by helping his client see his problem in a different light. Or, if he is a Christian psychologist or psychiatrist, to help him to see that God has already forgiven him in Christ and thus to remove guilt. But the basic problem essentially remains, if resolving guilt is all that is done. The psychiatrist may rearrange the problem so it does not grate so strongly upon others, but basically the problem remains. As C. S. Lewis puts it, "No clever arrangement of bad eggs will ever make a good omelet."

Self-discovery is the end of the line as far as the human psychiatrist, counselor, priest, or what-have-you can go. But what lies beyond that? Well, if you do not go any further, eventually, despair! This is what Paul reflects in Romans 7, "O, wretched man that I am! The good that I would do, I do not and the very things that I hate I catch myself doing. O, wretched man that I am. Who can set me free from this body of death?" {cf, Rom 7:24}. Well, that is where this word of Hebrews comes in. There is a Priest who can go further. There is a wisdom, James says, which is from above, to be received as a gift, which is pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, without partiality, without hypocrisy, waiting to be received. "What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, judged sin in the flesh, that the righteousness that the law demanded might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit," {cf, Rom 8:3-4}. That which is worthless, weak, and useless, has been set aside and a new hope introduced which brings us near to God.

Now return to the text for one more contrast: Not only is the ministry of Jesus superior in greatness to the priesthood of old, and superseding the incompleteness, the temporariness of the Law, but, in his person, he himself surpasses all that any human priest can do.

And it was not without an oath [i.e., the Melchizedek priesthood]. Those who formerly became priests took their office without an oath, but this one was addressed with an oath, "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, Thou art a priest forever." This makes Jesus the surety of a better covenant. The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office; but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens. {Heb 7:20-26 RSV}

Note quickly the argument. In the old order the priest never took an oath because the Law was a temporary measure. It was never the ultimate divine intention for the control of men. Never. It was necessary, but it was never the permanent divine intention. But in Christ the permanent program has come, therefore his ministry was confirmed with an oath. God says thereby, "I will never change my mind. You will never be able to find any other program that works. Never. You will not find in all the writings of men, in all the thinking of the world, another way of achieving proper human behavior. I will never change my mind." Because this is permanent, there is no shut-down!

Further, the old priests inevitably died and the help they offered could therefore suddenly terminate.

A lady said to me some time ago, "I don't know what I'm going to do. My psychiatrist is moving away and I'm simply lost without him."

But here is a psychiatrist who never dies, who never moves away, who is never off duty. Therefore, with him there is no breakdown! He can save to the uttermost. Is that not good news? As someone has well put it, "From the guttermost to the uttermost." No wonder then the writer says in Verse 26, "It is fitting that we should have this kind of a priest." Very fitting, is it not? He is just made for us in our pressure-filled, hectic, highly mobile, tension-torn days.

Someone has put it in a beautiful acrostic with the name of Jesus: J-E-S-U-S, "Just Exactly Suits Us Sinners."

Now what is the key that releases this ministry to us? It is written all through Hebrews -- faith. Not belief! I did not say belief, we all believe this, but only a few are acting upon it, exercising faith.

The other night at a meeting of our Board of Directors, three men shared together with us their experiences in witnessing. They told of the delight and surprise that was theirs, the joy that was in their heart, as they actually found that people all around them were eager to talk about the things of Christ. After they had finished, two other men spoke up on their own and told about their failures. They confessed that they wanted to do this but they simply had not -- could not, they thought! Now, if you had given an examination to all the men of that Board on the doctrine of witnessing, they would have all passed. There was not a man there who did not believe that the Holy Spirit is at work awakening hunger in hearts, that God is able to save, that there are those ready to be talked to, and that there is joy in witnessing. All would have passed. But there were only three who had exercised faith! For faith is a venture, faith is putting your foot out on a principle, faith is attempting it, trying it. Those three men could say that every word they had believed was true.

So, unless we make continual demands upon Christ's love and power, how else will we ever learn that we can never touch bottom?

Prayer:

We remember, Lord Jesus, how many times you said to your disciples, "O ye of little faith." We hear these words again in our own hearts, Lord. Grant to us that we may have the courage to believe and to step out upon what we believe. Stir us up, Lord. Grant to us this ability to act on what we know. In Thy name, Amen.

## THE NEW CONSTITUTION

A little boy came home from Sunday school and his mother said, "How was the Sunday School class?" He said, "Oh, we had a new teacher, and guess who it was." His mother said, "Who was it?" and he said, "It was Jesus' grandmother!" She said, "Why, what made you think that?" He answered, "Well, all she did was show us pictures of Jesus and tell us stories about him."

There is something of that flavor about the book of Hebrews. The author of Hebrews simply cannot take his eyes off Christ. He is writing to buffeted, often baffled, confused, harassed and persecuted Christians of that 1st century who were tempted to coldness and dullness because of the glamour of the false all around them. We heard him say in our last study together in the seventh chapter: "It was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens," {Heb 7:26 RSV}. Christ was just what they needed! And because this is Scripture, and is thus written for all people of God in all ages, it is also true that he is just exactly what we need in these baffling, pressure-filled, bewildering days of the 20th century.

Now, between Verses 26 and 27 of Chapter 7 there is a major division in the letter. I have a continual quarrel with whomever put the chapter divisions in our Bible. They are seldom in the right place, from my point of view. They miss it by two verses this time. Between these two verses the writer turns from his discussion of the person of Jesus Christ, to that which occupies the next chapters, his work, his sacrifice. The next three chapters focus on the great altar of the cross and the bleeding sacrifice that hung there. You will never understand Jesus Christ except in connection with his cross, and you will never understand the cross apart from the person of Christ. These are indivisibly united.

In Chapter 8 we shall see that this transforming event opened up for Christ a new dimension of ministry, and results for us in a new arrangement for living. What do I mean when I say "a new dimension of ministry"? The answer is found in the last two verses of Chapter 7, and the first five verses of Chapter 8.

There is, first, a perfect sacrifice:

He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people; he did this once for all when he offered up himself. Indeed, the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever. {Heb 7:27-28 RSV}

Join two phrases of that passage together to get the main thought: "he offered up himself" and, he "was made perfect." As a priest, Jesus Christ could find no unblemished sacrifice that he could offer except himself, so he offered himself. As a sacrifice, there was found no other priest worthy of offering such a sacrifice, so Christ became both Priest and Victim.

On Good Friday many of us gathered to listen to the words of Christ from the cross. In uttering the first three words from the cross, Jesus is a priest:

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," {Luke 23:34}. He is interceding for the bloody murderers who have nailed him to the tree. Then he turns to the thief at his side and says, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise," {Luke 23:43 KJV}. He is ministering grace to this red-handed revolutionary who readily admitted his need. Then to his mother and the disciple John who were standing at the foot of the cross, he said, "Woman, behold, your son!" "Behold, your mother!" {John 19:26-27 RSV}. He is still a priest, ministering comfort to their hearts, giving one to the other to meet the need of life. But at this moment a change occurred. The sun was hidden and a strange, unaccountable darkness fell across the face of the land for three hours.

The first word from the cross out of the midst of that darkness is the terrible cry of dereliction -- Immanuel's orphaned cry -- "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" {Matt 27:46, Mark 15:34}. Now he is no longer a priest; he is the victim, offered as a sacrifice on the altar of the cross. Then from the midst of that hot hell of pain, and even more excruciating anguish of spirit, come the words, "I thirst," {John 19:28}.

This is followed by the last two cries from the cross when with a loud voice at the end of the three hours, he shouted, "It is finished" {John 19:30}; and then, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!" {Luke 23:46 RSV}. Immediately, he gave up the ghost. In those last words he is still a sacrifice, having completed the work that the Father gave him to do.

If you will join two more phrases of this passage together you will get the complete thought of the writer here. Not only did Christ offer up himself as the perfect sacrifice, but he did it "once for all" -- forever. That means the cross is a timeless event. It is not simply an historic occurrence that we may look back upon and study as we would the Battle of Waterloo or Gettysburg. It is an intrusion of eternity into time. It is timeless. It is as though it is going on forever and had been going on since the foundation of the world. It is therefore eternally contemporary.

Christians are quite accurate when they speak of a cross as "a contemporary experience."

Every age can know for itself the meaning of this cross. It reaches back to cover all history so that it can be said that Jesus is "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," {Rev 13:8 KJV}. Thus all those of the Old Testament who had not yet known of the historic presentation of Christ could be saved, just as we are saved today, for the cross reached backward into time as well as forward. The cross of Jesus Christ, from God's point of view, is the central act of history, everything flows from that. From that great event all hope is flowing, all light is flaming, it is to it that all events must look for meaning.

This is what I mean when I say that Christ ministers in a new dimension, an eternal dimension, performing a contemporary act that is always meaningful. This gives point to what the author says next: The results of this perfect sacrifice are being continually ministered to us in the proper sanctuary.

Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the sanctuary and the true tent which is set up not by man but by the Lord. For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; hence it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary; for when Moses was about to erect the tent [the tabernacle], he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain." {Heb 8:1-5 RSV}

As the writer says, the point of emphasis in what he has been saying is not duration but location! The question is: Where is this kind of ministry of Jesus Christ available? Where do you find it? He answers that it comes from the risen Christ who is at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister of the true sanctuary which God made and not man.

Now if the picture you get from that is that we are poor struggling mortals left here on planet Earth, and Christ is somewhere out in space in heaven, "out there," then you miss the entire point of the argument of the writer here. I confess that for many years this was the concept I held, and, therefore, I greatly missed the whole point and blessing of what the writer says.

It is true, of course, that Jesus Christ is in heaven, but where is heaven? Well, heaven is not "out there" somewhere, remote in space. It is not some spatial location which can be pinpointed on some other planet in some distant galaxy in



the great reaches of space. Heaven is within. Heaven is this new dimension which is as present on earth as it is anywhere else. "The kingdom of heaven," Jesus said, "is within you," {cf, Luke 17:21}. It will help us to understand this if we look at what he says about the pattern, for the tabernacle was a pattern of this.

We are told that Moses built the tabernacle according to a pattern which was shown him when he ascended Mount Sinai to receive the Law from the hands of God. He was given specific instructions, "See that you make everything according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain," {cf, Exod 25:9}. When the tabernacle took form and shape under the direction of Moses it was a copy of something else that Moses had already seen.

A copy of what? The tabernacle, you remember, was built in three parts. There was a great outer court into which the people could come, but no Gentiles. There was a structure in the center of this court divided into two sections. One part was called the Holy Place where were located certain articles of furniture; into that Holy Place only the priests and the Levites could enter. The third part of the tabernacle was the rear section of this structure, called the Holy of Holies, containing in it nothing but the Ark of the Covenant of God, where dwelt the Shekinah glory, the glowing light that indicated the presence of God. Into that Holy of Holies, hidden behind the veil, entrance was prohibited to all upon pain of death, with the exception of the high priest who could enter once a year and then only under the most rigid requirements involving the shedding of a sacrifice and the bearing in of a basin of blood.

All this was but a pattern, a shadow, it was a copy of the truth. The fascinating thing is that this is exactly the structure of the universe! We live in a universe made on three levels. There is, first of all, the world of matter, the world of things, material or physical structure that we can touch, sense, see, taste, and smell. There is a great and varied area for discovery and exploration in this world. Science works in this field. Then, there is the world of mind, the world of ideas, of emotions, of the arts, of knowledge, and the interchange of human thought. It, too, is a rich world, inviting voyages of discovery. Beyond this is the world of spirit, a world of vast mystery to us. It is a world in which are hidden the secrets of life and light and love; the keys to living are all in that world of the spirit. But into that world we cannot enter -- no man can. It is a world separated from us, shut away from us, we have no way of access in ourselves.

Now Moses was shown all this. He saw the invisible realities of the nature of God, the structure of the universe, and the need for man for a Mediator, a way of access, a way of entrance into this world where all the secrets of life are hidden. Man, in the uniqueness of his nature and structure, is designed to live in all three of these worlds, ultimately. It is God's intention that he should have access to the inner

world. We have no difficulty now with the worlds of mind and matter. We find our bodies to be keenly and wonderfully adapted to the world of matter. We can touch this world, taste it, sense it, feel it, examine it, explore it, analyze it, take it apart and put it together again, rearrange it. We are also adapted to enter the world of mind. We can explore it, we can weigh ideas, we can analyze them, we can entertain the various thoughts of men and we find wonderful delight in doing this. We can enjoy music and beauty of structure and form. But into the world of spirit we cannot enter. There is only One who can enter that realm -- the Holy of Holies -- the High Priest!

By means of a cross, our High Priest, the only High Priest man will ever have, entered into the Holy of Holies. He broke through into the realm of the spirit so that he is able to set man free in the area where he has been held in greatest bondage. Through him we can enter into this wonderful realm where the secrets of life are held. The cross of Jesus is the gateway into the realm of the spirit, and we penetrate into this secret place of our own being only as we do so through Jesus Christ. The cross is made for the whole man, therefore the cross can be understood on three levels of life: There is the understanding of the cross on the physical level, its pain, its anguish, the awful thirst of it. There is an understanding of the cross on the emotional level. It is a moving experience to contemplate what occurs in the minds and hearts of those connected with the cross, and especially in the Savior's mind. But the real meaning of the cross never comes to us except as we move into the realm of the spirit, where we are entirely shut up to revelation. Our minds or emotions are incapable of explaining it on this level, we are shut up to what God says it means. But, on that level, we discover there is marvelous meaning and insight on life granted to us in the cross, and in the next section the writer begins to unfold to us the results of this sacrifice. The first part reveals the provision, in the cross, of a new arrangement for living.

If there is a new arrangement, that suggests of course that there must have been an old arrangement. For a brief instant we must look at the predicted failure of the Law, the old arrangement.

But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry which is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion for a second.

For he finds fault with them when he says:

"The days will come, says the Lord,  
when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel  
and with the house of Judah;  
not like the covenant that I made with their fathers

on the day when I took them by the hand  
to lead them out of the land of Egypt;  
for they did not continue in my covenant,  
and so I paid no heed to them, says the Lord." {Heb 8:6-9 RSV}

The Law of Moses was the first covenant, the Ten Commandments. Now there was nothing wrong with the Ten Commandments and there is still nothing wrong with them. The fault was with the people. God did not find fault with the Law, but Verse 8 says, "he finds fault with them," with the people, for they misunderstood the purpose of the Law, as men and women all over the world today misunderstand the purpose of the Ten Commandments.

The people of that day thought God wanted them to keep these Ten Commandments as the only way they could please him. They felt he demanded a rigid, careful, scrupulous observance of the Ten Commandments. But what they did not understand, though God pointed this out to them many times, was that God never expected them to keep it. He knew they could not. He did not give it to them to be kept, for he knew they could not keep it. He gave it to them to show them they could not keep it so they would then be ready to receive a Savior. But with presumptuous confidence they tried to keep it and when they could not, as of course God knew they could not, they pretended to keep it, just as we do today. We set up a standard for ourselves, or accept the standard of others around us, and we honestly try to keep it, but we cannot, for fallen man simply cannot keep moral law. But rather than admit it, we begin to cover up. We lower the requirements, or excuse our failure, by saying, "Well, everybody does it." Or perhaps we argue that it is the intent to keep it that ought to be accepted, or we promise to try harder, and so on the excuses go. This is what happened with Israel.

They pretended to keep the Law and deceived themselves and so they sank lower and lower in the moral strata. At the moment of lowest ebb, when they had so sunk into the darkness of pagan ignorance around them that they were worshipping the filthy abominations of the heathen and were ready to be carried captive into Babylon, God sent a prophet to them, named Jeremiah.

Through Jeremiah he informed them of a permanent program that was yet to come. This program had always been available to them by faith but one day, God said, would be made evident to the nation by sight. It is that program we look at now.

"This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel  
after those days, says the Lord:  
I will put my laws into their minds,  
and write them on their hearts,

and I will be their God,  
and they shall be my people.  
And they shall not teach every one his fellow  
or every one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,'  
for all shall know me,  
from the least of them to the greatest.  
For I will be merciful toward their iniquities,  
and I will remember their sins no more."

In speaking of a new covenant he treats the first as obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. {Heb 8:10-13 RSV}

In a few minutes, as a congregation, we shall gather about the Table of the Lord. During the course of this, the leader will take the bread and break it and distribute it among us. Then will follow the cup, and, using the words Jesus used as he instituted this supper, the leader will say, "This cup is the new covenant made in my blood." Jesus speaks of this as the new arrangement, the new agreement, the new constitution, from which the life of all who know him will be lived. This is what we mean when we repeat those pregnant words.

This is a covenant or agreement made between the Father and the Son. It is not made between us and God, nor between Israel and God; it is wholly between the Father and the Son. But if any man be "in Christ," everything in this covenant is available to him. Some day Israel, as a nation, will be "in Christ." When they are, these words will be fulfilled for Israel, as Jeremiah predicted. But right now, to Jew and Gentile alike, to any individual on the face of the earth who is willing to be "in Christ," to let Christ live in him, this agreement is valid.

Notice there are four provisions of the new constitution:

God says, "I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts." Right there is the answer to the problem of human motivation. Have you discovered that the problem in your life is not uncertainty as to what is right; you have known that a long time. The problem is not wanting to do it! It is a problem of motivation. Someone has well said, "Our difficulty today is not that we are over-strained; we are simply under-motivated."

So the new arrangement, this new constitution, makes provision for that. We are to look to Christ when we are confronted with the thing we do not want to do. When we need a shove, an impetus, we are to say, "Lord Jesus, you have promised to write your laws in my mind and on my heart, that I may will to do what you want me to do." Then for his dear sake, we do it. Those who have tried it have discovered this works! There is a new motive, a motor (these come from the same word), a new power to do what ought to be done.

Then he says, "I will be their God, and they shall be my people." What an answer to the search for identification, to the hunger to belong to someone. Here is the answer to the aching question of the human heart: Who am I, anyway? What can I identify with? God says, "You will be identified with me, forever. I will be your God, and you will be my people."

Then there is the promise, "They shall not teach everyone his fellow or everyone his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest." Here is the answer to the sigh of humanity for a hero. This is what explains this strange phenomenon we have seen so recently called "Beatlemania," when a few mop-headed youngsters from England coming over here are met with swarms of screaming, fainting teenagers. It is rather harmless, if ridiculous, but what is back of it?

There is in the human heart a desperate hunger for a hero. We want to look up to someone, we want to know some great one personally. God says, "I will satisfy that in your life. You shall know me!" Do you know the one thing that one true Christian can never say to another Christian, anywhere in the world is, "Know the Lord," for this is the one thing that is always true of even the youngest Christian - he knows the Lord. That is where we start in Christian living. It is the least common denominator.

Then the last thing, "For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more." This is the answer to the universal sense of condemnation. At a Men's Conference recently one of the men said, "You know, I have a most difficult boss. I never know where I stand with him."

Do we not often feel that way about God? We say, "I never know where I stand with God." But God says if you are looking to the great high priest who is ministering to you all the effects of his sacrifice, this is never a problem. For he has written it down in no uncertain words, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus," {cf, Rom 8:1}. None! He says he is always for you, he is never against you. It does not mean he ignores iniquity but he says, "I will be merciful toward it." When you acknowledge it there is no reproach -- and no rehash! He never gets historical, dredging up the past. God never does this!

Now, all of this is continuously available. That is the joy of it -- always available from within, ministered to us constantly, if we will have it.

Someone said at the close of our Men's Conference that he was going back home to help a group there that needed a shot in the arm. I understood what he meant, but I must confess to you, I am awfully weary of shots in the arm! What a hideous figure that is of Christian inspiration! Are we some kind of religious dope addicts with nothing to show for thirty years of Christian life but an armful of needle marks?

I much prefer the Scriptural figure, "rivers of living water," from which I can drink and in which I can bathe any time I need it. Listen to the way Horatius Bonar puts it:

I heard the voice of Jesus say,  
"Behold, I freely give  
The living water; thirsty one,  
Stoop down and drink, and live."

I came to Jesus, and I drank  
Of that life-giving stream;  
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,  
And now I live in Him.

Prayer:

Our Father, thank you for this look at the ministry of our great High Priest, a ministry that so many times we have simply ignored, never taken at face value, never taken seriously, but rather looked about in all the broken cisterns of earth to try to find something as a substitute. God forgive us, and help us to claim our heritage in him, this new agreement for living. We pray in His name, Amen.

## A CLEAR CONSCIENCE

The ninth chapter of Hebrews may seem to many to be involved and even confusing, but it was perfectly clear to the Hebrew readers to whom this letter was first written. It describes, in rather close detail, the tabernacle in the wilderness with its sacrifices and regulations of food, drink, and clothing, and therefore seems difficult to us and even a little dull. But it will help greatly to see what the author is driving at. If we start there we shall have everything in perspective. That point is made clear in Verses 13 and 14:

For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh [in the tabernacle of old], how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God. {Heb 9:13-14 RSV}

The practical effect of Christ's ministry to us is given in these words, "to purify your conscience from dead works." The problem that is faced in this passage, therefore, is how to handle a nagging conscience.

We each have a conscience. We may not be able to analyze it, and we certainly cannot control it, but we know we all possess one. Conscience has been defined as "that still, small voice that makes you feel smaller still," or, as one little boy put it, "It is that which feels bad when everything else feels good." Conscience is that internal voice that sits in judgment over our will. There is a very common myth abroad that says that conscience is the means by which we tell what is right and what is wrong. But conscience is never that. It is training that tells us what is right or wrong. But when we know what is right or wrong, it is our conscience that insists that we do what we think is right and avoid what we think is wrong. That distinction is very important and needs to be made clear.

Conscience can be very mistaken; it is not a safe guide by itself. It accuses us when we violate whatever moral standard we may have, but that moral standard may be quite wrong when viewed in the light of God's revelation. But conscience also gives approval whenever we fulfill whatever standard we have, though that standard is right or wrong. And conscience, we have all discovered, acts both before and after the fact -- it can either prod or punish.

In the case of these Hebrews, the problem is not over wrongdoing, it is not a conscience troubled over evil deeds, but "dead works." We must remember that the readers of this letter are Christians who already know how to handle the problem of sins. When they become aware that they have deliberately disobeyed what they knew to be right, they know the only way they can quiet an avenging

conscience is to confess the sin before God, and deal with the problem immediately. That aspect of a troubled conscience can easily be taken care of by Christians as they accept the forgiving grace of God. But the problem here is a conscience plagued with guilt over good left undone -- not sins of commission, but sins of omission.

These people try to put their conscience to rest by religious activity; they are goaded by an uneasy conscience into a high gear program in order to please God. Here are people who are intent on doing what is right, and thus pleasing God, and they have therefore launched upon an intensive program of religious activity which may range all the way from bead-counting and candle-burning to serving on committees, passing out tracts, and teaching Sunday school classes. What perceptible difference in motive is there between a poor, blinded pagan who, in his misconception of truth, crawls endlessly down a road to placate God, and an American Christian who busies himself in a continual round of activity to try to win a sense of acceptance before God? None whatsoever!

A woman said to me recently, "I don't know what is the matter with me. I do all I can to serve the Lord but I still feel guilty, and then I feel guilty about feeling guilty!"

Precisely! It is rather discouraging, is it not, to see that all this laudable effort on our part is dismissed here as "dead works." It is disconcerting to see that such effort is not acceptably serving God. God is not impressed by our feverish effort. What do you do when this is your problem? Certainly not try harder; that is the worst thing you could do.

Perhaps now we are ready to listen to what the writer says about the poverty of activity. Let us start at the first of the chapter. The problem, he points out, is not the nature of what we do, it is not activity itself for there was, in the Old Testament, a God-authorized place of activity:

Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly sanctuary. For a tent was prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence; it is called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain stood a tent called the Holy of Holies, having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, which contained a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail. {Heb 9:1-5 RSV}

And neither can we!

The point he makes is, there was nothing wrong with the activity of worship in the tabernacle; it was God-authorized, and perfectly proper. Also, there were God-authorized regulations:

These preparations having thus been made, the priests go continually into the outer tent, performing their ritual duties; but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood which he offers for himself and for the errors of the people. By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the sanctuary is not yet opened as long as the outer tent is still standing (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper, but deal only with food and drink and various ablutions, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation. {Heb 9:6-10 RSV}

All of these activities had to do with the Old Testament, the worship in the tabernacle, and the regulations connected with it. But the writer is simply pointing out there were three drastic limitations to these:

First, if these Old Testament worshippers saw no deeper than the ordinance they were performing, the only benefit would be to the body. The writer says, "According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot perfect the conscience...but deal only with food and drink and various ablutions, regulations for the body." Because these affected only the outer man, there was no change in the inner man. The performance of a service, a ritual, a sacrifice, or an ordinance, does not do anything to the performer, it only affects the part of the body involved in the performance.

In baptism the whole body is cleansed; if it is kneeling or bowing then only the part of the body involved is affected. This is his argument: no ritual or ordinance has value in itself. This needs to be declared again and again in the hearing of men. We are so convinced that God places value in ordinances. No, the writer says that even in this God-authorized system there was no value in what was done. He makes that very clear. The conscience was not touched and therefore gave the worshipper no rest, continually hounding him, making him feel guilty, dragging him back to perform the same thing over and over again in a restless search for peace.

It was like a man who goes down and buys a new suit every time he needs a bath. His solution never touches the real problem, but keeps covering it over. Eventually that kind of a person becomes very difficult to live with, as are also those who place value on ordinances.

The second point he makes is, these ordinances were intended to have a deeper message. They are symbolic, he says, for the present age. No ritual had meaning in itself, it had meaning in what it stood for, that is the point. It was intended to convey a deeper message. The tabernacle worship, with all these strange provisions -- the bread, the incense, the offerings, the ornate building itself with its altars -- all was a kind of religious play enacted to teach the people what was going on in their inner life. They were not to place importance upon the outward drama -- that was only a play -- it was what it stood for that was important. But they completely missed the point and thought God was interested in the ritual. In Chapter 10, the author of Hebrews will say very plainly, "in burnt offerings and sin offerings thou hast taken no pleasure," {Heb 10:6 RSV}. God was never interested in ritual. It meant nothing to him.

The third point he makes is that these things will never touch the conscience, reach the inner man, or do anything effective until men accept this fact that religious activity, i.e., ritual, is only a picture and has no value in itself at all. As he says, "The Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the sanctuary [the real inner man] was not yet opened as long as the outer tent [the tabernacle] is still standing." "Is still standing" is a mistranslation; it should be "still has any standing." That is the proper idea, "still has any value in their sight." In other words, they could never see what God was driving at as long as they had their attention focused on the ritual. They could never realize the value intended until they saw behind the ritual to what God was saying. Until they saw the total worthlessness of outward things to do anything for them, they could never begin to appropriate the real message.

There are some in the Old Testament who did see this. You cannot read David's experience recorded in the 51st Psalm without seeing that he understood this. That psalm was written after the terrible twin failure of adultery and murder into which he fell. And he was the king! In the Psalm he confesses that God brought conviction to his heart, yet he says,

For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. {Psa 51:16-17 KJV}

David understood the worthlessness of mere ritual. That is why he is called "a man after God's own heart," {cf, Acts 13:22}. But the rest of the people, by and large, missed the point. So they were goaded by their conscience into an endless routine of religious activity, until they came near despair.

In contrast to this, the writer sets before us the power of reality:

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? {Heb 9:11-14 RSV}

Do you see the argument? He is saying the first arrangement, depending upon the activity of the worshipper (that is the point) affected only the body. If there is something you are trying to do for God, it is your activity on his behalf, all it ever affects is the outer man, the body. It never quiets the conscience. It cannot, for it does not get below the surface; it does not touch that area. But the second arrangement, the new constitution by which Christians are to live, depends not on the work of the worshipper but on the activity of Christ in our place! Therefore it moves through the man. When the conscience, in there, is confronted with the value of Christ's blood, it has nothing to say! Do you see the point?

He is declaring that our activity adds nothing to our acceptance before God. God does not like us better because we serve him. Oh, to get this point across! Our service, our faithful work on his behalf, our labors, our diligent efforts to do something for God, never make him think one bit better or worse of us. God does not love you because you serve him; God loves you because he is love! He accepts you because you believe in Christ. That is the only reason. Therefore, serving is no more a duty, but if we see it in that light it becomes delight.

Listen to these helpful words from a recent article in the Sunday School Times, entitled "The Great Saboteur", detailing the work of Satan as the great accuser of the brethren, the one who stimulates the conscience to nag, drive, goad and prod us, and to keep us feeling a vague sense of hazy, undefined guilt before God. That is the work of the accuser, the saboteur. Concerning that there come these revealing sentences:

Scripture recognizes, as the Accuser also does, that nothing so impedes your access to God as a guilty conscience. You can't draw near boldly unless your heart is "sprinkled from an evil conscience." Therefore, if you want to overcome Satan at this point, don't just talk to him about the blood of Christ.

Instead, accept the fact that the blood of Christ completely satisfies God about you. Remind yourself that God welcomes you into his presence not on the grounds of your Christian progress, the depth of your knowledge, or even the degree of victory you have found, but on the grounds of the blood of the Lamb.

The discovery of this glorious secret has enabled saints down the ages to overcome the Accuser, "they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb." They did not remind him of the blood of Christ, they reminded themselves. They refused to wilt before his accusations and were, therefore, able to enjoy free access to the throne of grace and full liberty in their service.

That is helpful, is it not? These overcomers did not keep looking always at their inner condition, they looked rather to the solution that God had given to the problem.

Right at this point any thoughtful person will raise a question which frequently nags Christians, and is often voiced by the enemies of Christian faith. Someone may well ask, "Why does this have to be by blood? Why is a death necessary?" The Christian gospel rests upon the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and this fact has been a source of much criticism, and a stumbling block to many people. Christianity has been sneeringly referred to as "the religion of the slaughterhouse," and the gospel has been called "the gospel of gore" because of this continual emphasis upon the need for blood, for death. It is this mark of finality which the writer now examines.

Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred which redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant. For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive. Hence even the first covenant was not ratified without blood. For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and 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 with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. {Heb 9:15-23 RSV}

Without a death, he argues, it is not possible to receive the benefits of the covenant God makes. For, he points out, no will that is written can bestow any benefits until after the death of the maker.

I recently met with a group of men and women to whom the Director of a Christian Conference Center was explaining certain of the procedures involved in securing additional property for the expansion of the ministry. He described one case where a deed had been executed by the owner of the property, a widow. He explained that she was to be paid an annuity until her death, and on her death the property would become the property of the Conference Association. Someone immediately raised his hand and facetiously asked, "How healthy is she?" The question was not in good taste, but it illustrates the point. Wills are of no value to the beneficiaries until the death of the testator, the will maker. This is what the writer here argues.

You cannot avail yourself of all that Jesus Christ provides for you in terms of release from a guilty conscience, unless there is a death. The will is useless without it. In fact, he says, death is so important that even the shadow, the picture in the Old Testament, required blood. Not, of course, the blood of Jesus Christ, but the blood of bulls and goats. Blood is inescapable.

Now that brings us to the point: Why? We shall never come to the answer till we squarely face the implications of the substitutionary character of the death of Jesus Christ. His death was not for his own sake, it was for ours. He was our representative. It was not so much his blood that was shed, but ours. This is what God is so desperately trying to convey to us.

The cross is God's way of saying there is nothing in us worth saving at all, apart from Christ -- no salvageable content whatsoever. He takes us as we are, men and women apart from Christ, and he says, "There is nothing you can do for me, not one thing." For when Christ became what we are, when he was "made sin for us" {cf, 2 Cor 5:21}, God passed sentence upon him, and put him to death. This is God's eloquent way of saying to us, "There is nothing to please me in yourself; there is not a thing you can do by your own effort that is worth a thing." All that we can ever be, without Christ, is totally set aside. Death eliminates us, wipes us out.

That is why our activity does not improve our relationship with him in the least degree. It does not make us any more acceptable, even though it is activity for him. See what this does to our human pride. It cuts the ground right out from under us.

Who has not heard Christians talking in such a way as to give the impression that the greatest thing that ever happened to God was the day he found them. But we are not indispensable to him; he is indispensable to us. And the great truth to which this brings us is: If we become bankrupt to do anything for God, we are then able to receive everything from him. That is what he wants us to see.

That is why Verse 14 closes with this wonderful sentence, "the blood of Christ ... purifies our conscience to serve the living God." The gospel is that he has made himself available to us, to do everything in us, as a living God. "Faithful is he who calls you, who also will do it," {cf, 1 Th 5:24}. The one who calls you to do something is the one who intends to do it, through you. Therefore, let us stop thinking we have to depend on our intellect, our ability, our gifts, our talents, or our anything, and start reckoning on his ability to supply what we lack to do what he asks. We can say with Paul, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me," {cf, Phil 4:13}. Do you understand that? What a relief that is!

But the point of the whole passage is: If we refuse to reckon this way, to count this to be true, if we refuse this, then there are no benefits of the new covenant available to us.

A covenant is not in effect until there is the death of the testator, the death of the will maker. It is we, through Christ our representative, who died that death. But if we will not accept it, if we will not agree to this and accept God's sentence of death upon all that we are, then we cannot have the benefits.

That is what he is saying. If we fight this sentence of death, for the rest of our Christian lives we shall be troubled with a guilty conscience. We will never rest in any final acceptance before God. We shall always be wrestling with the problem of whether we have done enough and have been pleasing to God by our activity. But if we accept this, the effect is to render service pure delight.

A mission leader and I were recently discussing a young man whose very obvious, evident, earnest desire is to be used of God. This young man desperately hopes to be used, he wants to be in a place of leadership, he wants to exercise power in his ministry. But every time he is given the opportunity to try, somehow something about the way he does it, and the attitude he displays in it, immediately begins to create personality problems. Every effort he makes along this line comes to nothing. Eventually, he himself is overwhelmed with a sense of frustration and utter defeat. The reason he experiences this over and over is simply because he will not accept the fact that is proclaimed here -- that God has ruled him out, that there are no talents he has that he can employ in any service, any worthwhile, acceptable service to God. As long as he is still struggling to use his abilities to do something for God it will never be acceptable -- and neither will yours, nor mine!

By contrast, I sat yesterday and listened to another young man and his wife tell about how God had brought them through various struggles and trials until they had come to the place where, as he said, "Three months ago God broke through and I learned something that I have known all my life but I didn't understand up till this point. I have learned what is the meaning of that verse, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself.' I always thought that meant self-denial, that meant giving up certain things or places or position for Christ, but I never learned until now that it means I must deny my self, that I have no right to my self, that I have no abilities in my self, but that I can have everything in Christ. My life from that moment on has been a totally different thing." His wife, sitting by his side, kept nodding her head and smiling, which is the greatest testimony of all that this works.

Look on to the end of the book, in Chapter 13, that well-known doxology we quote so frequently:

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working you [there is the secret] that which is pleasing in his sight. {Heb 13:20-22 RSV }

That is the secret of a clear conscience.

Prayer:

Our Father, open our eyes to this new principle of human behavior. Teach us to grasp this, Lord, and to accept thy sentence of death upon everything in us that is not of Christ, and to recognize that in him, by him, through him we can do everything that needs to be done by us -- through him who loved us and who strengthens us. In his name, Amen.

## THE UNFOLDING PATTERN

Hebrews is the book that distinguishes clearly between the shell of Christianity and the real meat of it. It helps us to see the difference between shadow and substance, the picture and reality. A man would be a fool who would prefer reading a cookbook to eating a good meal when he is hungry -- not that there is anything wrong with reading a cookbook, it can be very enlightening, but it is not very nourishing. Yet many a Christian concerns himself with the externals of Christian faith and misses completely the dynamic, radical, revolutionary concepts of it. Jesus did not say, "You shall know the rules and be bound by them." What he said was, "You shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free," {cf, John 8:32 RSV }.

The author of Hebrews declares that Christianity is not a mere set of rules. Christianity is not something you do for your country, your city, your home, yourself, or your God. Christianity is what God does in you and for you. Hebrews contrasts the new arrangement for living with the old basis of trying to keep the rules.

We lean very strongly toward rule-keeping. Someone has likened humanity to a man who fell down a well. When he cried out for help a passer-by, hearing his cries, leaned over the well and asked him what he wanted. The man said he wanted to get out. The fellow thought for a moment, and finally took out a piece of paper, and wrote something on it, and dropped it down into the well. When the man picked it up, he read: "Ten Rules on How to Keep Out of Wells." It has been suggested that this is what the Law has been to us; a set of rules on how to keep out of wells after we have fallen in. In many ways this is accurate. But the real problem is that man does not know that he has fallen down a well. He thinks he was made to live in wells, and therefore he cannot understand why he is so unhappy in the well. The coming of the Law, the Ten Commandments, has made him realize his plight but it still cannot help him out. This is what the author of Hebrews is telling us. He is saying that Jesus Christ is a rope dropped into the well, and, more than that, he is a winch to pull man out, and a guide to keep him from falling in any more wells after he gets out.

In some wonderful way, the tabernacle in the wilderness, with its regulations and sacrifices, was a very marvelous picture of the work of Jesus Christ, and the new arrangement for living which would be available to men in Christ. But only up to a point. It was both a comparison and a contrast, both like it and unlike it, as any picture always must be.

I carry a picture of my wife in my wallet and when I am away from home I find it comforting to look at it, but it is very inadequate, it is not my wife. I can look at



the picture, but I cannot have a conversation with it, I cannot laugh together with it, I cannot kiss it, or, if I did, it is not very satisfying, and I cannot persuade it to cook any meals. Though it is an accurate representation of the real thing, it is a far cry from it.

That is what Hebrews stresses. In the section before us the author concludes his explanation of the new arrangement for living in Jesus Christ by listing for us the advantages in contrast to the picture of the tabernacle.

For Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the Holy Place yearly with blood not his own; for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. {Heb 9:24-28 RSV}

The old system, with its regulations, rituals and sacrifices, was limited to one particular place, the tabernacle, including the sanctuary made by hands, i.e., the Holy of Holies.

But, the writer says, in Christ a new arrangement has come in which is beyond space. It is not limited to space, it is heaven. We have already suggested in this series that heaven is the realm of the spirit. It is a new dimension of life. It is the inner man.

Some have been troubled by this and have wondered if I no longer believe that heaven is a place. Yes, heaven is a place, for spirit can be related to a place. Our spirits dwell in bodies and by such they are limited constantly to place. But the idea of heaven in the Scriptures is not primarily that of place. We distort it when we limit it to place, as in the concept, "Heaven is off in space somewhere and we die and go to heaven by being transported across the reaches of space." But Scripture reveals here that when Jesus Christ makes the spirit alive within, he thus brings heaven into the soul, into the heart. There is an old hymn we sing which catches the idea exactly.

Since Christ my soul from sin set free,  
This world has been a heaven to me;  
And mid earth's sorrows and its woes,  
'Tis heaven my Jesus here to know.

This new dimension of living is heaven here on earth. It is this that makes it possible for the Apostle Paul to write to the Ephesians and say, "Ye are now seated with Christ in the heavenlies," {cf, Eph 2:6 KJV}. Heaven is in our heart because Christ is there. It is God who makes heaven "heaven." Heaven is the new dimension of life in the spirit. When I die and "go to heaven" I simply enter into this relationship in a new and greater way than I have experienced in the body. It will certainly involve the concept of place, for since we will have resurrection bodies, there must be some place for them to operate and wherever that place is, is heaven.

If you grasp this concept you will see that the writer is indicating here that Christ's work for me is never hindered because of where I am, for he is within me. Therefore, he appears before the presence of God on my behalf within me. That work is going on all the time, unceasingly, unendingly for me, within me, therefore wherever I am it is available to me. This is the point he is making.

I know not where God's islands lift  
Their fronded palms in air.  
I only know I cannot drift  
Beyond his love and care.

Then, he points out that the old system required endless repetition of sacrifice. The effect of these sacrifices never lasted very long. A man had to bring a fresh sacrifice every time he sinned, and once a year the whole nation had to offer the same sacrifice, year after year. The old arrangement required repetition. But the new arrangement is beyond time, as well as beyond space. The cross of Christ is a contemporary sacrifice, it was offered at one point in history, but the effect of it, the results and blessings of it, are available at any time, forward or backward from that point of history. Thus the Old Testament saints could have as much of Christ as we can, for all that he was in his sacrifice was as fully available to them by faith as it is to us by faith, who live on this side of the cross. This means the cross works as well in this 20th century as it did in the 1st century, and that it judges my pride and evil as relentlessly after I have been a Christian for thirty years as it does when I first come to Christ. It is a contemporary event and therefore no penance or remorse on my part can ever add anything to it. It is always effective for it is timeless. What a great advantage this is over the old system!

Then, third, the new arrangement is beyond judgment as well as beyond time and space. In the tabernacle the high priest went into the Holy of Holies once a year, bearing with him the blood of a lamb. Before he entered, on that day only, he stripped off his garments of beauty and glory and clothed himself in a simple white robe. He took the blood of a lamb in a basin and went into the Holy of

Holies while the people waited with trepidation and fear outside, wondering if the sacrifice would be acceptable before God. If it was not, the whole nation would be wiped out for when the high priest went in he was facing the judgment of God.

By this eloquent way, God was saying to those people that judgment awaits a man when he dies. As the writer points out here, "it is appointed once for men to die, and after that comes judgment." But when the high priest came out again, he did not appear in his white robe. Before he came again to the people he dressed himself in his robes of beauty and glory once again, and came out to meet with rejoicing and thanksgiving on the part of the people. That was a picture, the writer says, of what is true in the reality that Christ represents. Christ has entered by death into the realm of our spirit, into the human heart, into the inner life of man, and therefore he is now invisible to the world -- they do not see him. But when he appears visibly again it will not be to judge the world -- the cross has already done that -- but it will be to establish a time of peace and of glory upon the earth, which we call "the Golden Age," the Millennium. But for the Christian, this judgment is already past, and, in the spirit, he lives already in the age of peace. The judgment that a man must face when he dies has already been faced when we died in Christ. The judgment has been poured out upon him.

I was born on the wind-swept plains of North Dakota. I remember as a boy sometimes seeing at night the flames of a prairie fire lighting the horizon, sweeping across the grass of those prairies. Such prairie fires were terrible threats to the pioneers who crossed the plains in their covered wagons. Oftentimes these fires would burn for miles and miles, threatening everything in their path. When they would see such a fire coming toward them, driven before the wind, they had a device they would use to protect themselves. They would simply light another fire and the wind would catch it up and drive it on beyond them, and then they would get in the burned-over place, and when the fire coming toward them reached it, it found nothing to burn and went out.

God is saying, most plainly, that the cross of Jesus Christ is such a burned-over place. Those who trust in it, and rest in the judgment that has already been visited upon it, have no other judgment to face. That is why Paul can write with such triumph in Romans 8: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus," {Rom 8:1 KJV}. In the realm of the spirit we have already entered into triumph and glory, we have already been forgiven everything. We need now only to acknowledge wrong, confess it, and, the moment we do, forgiveness is already ours. We need only to say, "Thank you" for it, and take it.

Have you found this? What a release from the nagging pressure and distress that is caused by a guilty conscience.

Now the question comes: Has this kind of life been demonstrated? The next section sets before us the demonstration of this new arrangement in Christ. It can be seen both in shadowy outline in the tabernacle, and in the reality of Jesus Christ himself. In the tabernacle you can see the divine design:

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices which are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered? If the worshippers had once been cleansed, they would no longer have any consciousness of sin. But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin year after year. For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins. {Heb 10:1-4 RSV }

There is limitation evident all through. There is much these things could not portray because they are not reality, they are merely pictures, shadows of reality. The blood of bulls and goats is not the blood of Christ, therefore it cannot take away sin. But through this limitation there is one unchanging message being pounded out. Every sacrifice of old declared it, every offering told the same story, it was burned in blood and smoke into every listening heart. That message was that the essential quality in a God-approved life is that one be willing to lay that life down. Every sacrifice was a life laid down, and by it God is saying, this is the quality of life that pleases him, a life laid down, self-giving, not self-loving.

There is a twisted form of Christianity abroad today that says, in effect,

"I believe that Jesus died on the cross in order that I might be free to live for myself, that he bore all the pain and suffering, therefore there is nothing like that for me to bear at all. If I am asked to endure pain or difficulty or heartache, something is wrong because Christ bore all that for me."

That is a distorted form of Christian faith. The truth is that Jesus died in order that I might be free to die with him, and he rose again in order that I might be privileged to rise with him. This is a timeless thing, it goes on all the time, we must forever be doing this. You will never know the rising without the dying -- that is the secret of Christian faith. Unless we are willing to lay down our lives we can never have them back again. Is that not what Jesus said? "He that saveth his life shall lose it, but he that loseth his life for my sake shall save it," {cf, Matt 10:39}. We can never save our life until we are willing to lay it down.

But the wonderful thing is, if we are continually dying with him, we shall also be continually rising with him. If, in our hearts, there is a readiness to give ourselves on his behalf in the service of others, we shall find, in that dying, that we are also

rising, living again, life takes on new dimension. That is the great secret. The Old Testament sacrifices taught that there had to be a death, but that was the teaching of the shadow.

Now see it in the living substance of the flesh of Christ himself. The Old Testament revealed the divine design, but in Christ we advance to see the divine desire:

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,  
"Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired,  
but a body hast thou prepared for me;  
in burnt offerings and sin offerings thou hast taken no pleasure.  
Then I said, 'Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God,'  
as it is written of me in the roll of the book."

When he said above, "Thou hast neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), then he added, "Lo, I have come to do thy will." He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. {Heb 10:5-10 RSV}

Here is what God really wanted. God never cared a snap of his fingers for all the rivers of blood that flowed on Jewish altars.

Not all the blood of beasts  
on Jewish altars slain  
Could give the guilty conscience rest  
or wash away one stain.

He did not delight in these, he had no interest in them except as they taught something. Well then, what was he after? -- What these sacrifices pointed to: A human body in which there was a human will which continually chose to depend upon an indwelling God to obey a written word! That was what he was after, that was what God wanted. When Christ came he paused on the threshold of heaven, and said, "A body hast thou prepared for me." There in the womb of the virgin a human body was being formed, a body with nerve and muscle and sinew and hair and eyes and feet, growing through all the stages that the normal human embryo goes through. Within that body was a human soul with the capacity to reason, to feel and to choose -- a will, in other words.

That will, in that human body, never once acted on its own, never once took any step apart from dependence upon the Father who dwelt within. Jesus declared this over and over again, "The things that I do, I do not do of myself, but the Father who dwells in me, he does them. The words that I speak are not my words, it is

the Father who is speaking through me, he is saying them to you," {cf, John 14:10}. There was a will which continually chose to rely upon the Father to guide that life step by step in every experience, and to meet everything that came with the strength of an indwelling life. Now that is the principle that God has been after all along; that is what he wants.

He has no interest in ritual, in candles, in prayer books, in beads, in chanting, in any ceremony. Ceremonies mean nothing to God. What he wants is a heart that is his, a life that is his, and a body that is available to him. That is why Paul, in Romans 12, says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service [i.e., your expected task, what you were designed to do]," {cf, Rom 12:1 KJV}.

When our Lord Jesus acted on that principle, he allowed the direction of his life to come from the Word of God. "Then I said, 'Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God,' as it is written of me in the book." Every temptation he entered into, every problem that came his way, he referred back to what God had said, "It is written," "It is written," "It is written..." That program took him to the cross, calling on him to lay down his life. And by means of that sacrifice, we are free now to join him on this program that is God's original intention for man.

You see this in Verse 10: "And by that will we [believers] have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

This word sanctified is widely misunderstood. It is usually looked upon as some kind of religious sheep-dip that people pass through, and they come out holier and purer on the other side. But it is not that. The word sanctified simply means "to put to the proper, intended use." That is all it means.

You are sanctifying those chairs that you are seated on right now, and I am sure you are beginning to think it is about time to end that sanctification. I am sanctifying this pulpit. I am using it for what it was intended for. You sanctify your comb when you comb your hair. Sanctification simply means "to put to the intended purpose."

Now this verse is simply declaring that when we adopt the same outlook as Jesus Christ, when, in dependence on him, we are ready to obey the Word of God, and thus fulfill the will of God, we fulfill our humanity. We are being used in the way God intended us to be used.

There is one simple mark of that which is unmistakable: We become content to lay down our life in order that the will of God be done! I do not mean we rush out to die. Laying down a life does not always mean dying:

It means giving of yourself, giving up for the moment something that you might desire to do. It means that we become content to lose standing, if necessary in the eyes of the world. We no longer regard that as important in our life. It means we give up material comfort or gain if this will advance the cause of Christ:

We live in a simpler home in order that we might invest money in his enterprises. We are willing to be ignored, or slighted, or treated unfairly, if, in the doing of it, God's cause will get ahead. We are willing to feel inadequate in ourselves in order that we might always be adequate in him.

Do you see what I am talking about? That sounds hard and demanding, perhaps, but it is not. It is joyful, it is glorious. His yoke is easy and his burden is light {cf, Matt 11:30}.

We just finished a week of witnessing in Newport Beach. Ten men went down at their own expense, some of them taking their vacations, using time that they would otherwise like to have for themselves, working from six o'clock in the morning till midnight all through the week, in the most demanding type of work, exposing themselves in situations that oftentimes could have been highly embarrassing. And why? Because they were yielding their bodies unto God to advance his work. Without exception, every one of those men said that this was one of the greatest weeks of their lives, a most thrilling time. They learned one thing above all else; that this business of being available to God to use in any situation is what we used to call in the Navy "SOP" -- Standard Operating Procedure! There is nothing new about it, nothing unusual, it is the standard thing. This is what God wants, this is what he is after. Not great cathedrals and beautiful buildings and ornate ritual and ceremony, God does not care for these. God wants lives, bodies, hearts that are his, available to him to work in the shop and the office and the street and the schools and everywhere man is, that his life may be made visible in terms of that person, in that place. That is Christianity.

Notice, in the closing section, the new arrangement and its sufficiency:

And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, then to wait

until his enemies should be made a stool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying,

"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord:

I will put my laws on their hearts,  
and write them on their minds,"

then he adds,

"I will remember their sins and their misdeeds no more."

Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin. {Heb 10:11-18 RSV}

One peculiarity of the old tabernacle was that it had no chairs. There was never a place for the priest to sit down for they had continually to be ministering. But when Christ offered himself as a single sacrifice he sat down, the writer says, "to wait until his enemies should be made his footstool." Why? Because the principle that he demonstrated is all that it takes to get the job done. It does not need anything more, he has done all that is needed. Once this principle has begun in human history it will never stop until it wins what God is after, until all the enemies of Christ become his footstool and it is time to return again to establish his kingdom. There is a power in this principle that is quiet and yet obstinate, relentless, irresistible. Where men and women are willing to lay down their lives, nothing can hinder them, nothing can arrest this principle, nothing can stop it. It is bound to win.

One of the men who went down with us last week was a prominent scientist-engineer. One day at a breakfast he stood up before some fifty or sixty men to speak to them about his faith in Christ, and he told in rather dramatic detail of the feeling he had when he pushed the plunger that detonated the first hydrogen bomb at Bikini Atoll. He knew he would release the awesome power of a bomb that would literally obliterate the island upon which the test occurred, and no man really knew for sure what else would happen. But he said, "I want you men to know that I am more scared right now than I was then." There was, of course, the fear of standing before a group of strangers to talk to them about faith, but he was also aware that he was now releasing a power that was far greater than the H-bomb. Through the channel of his life and testimony, he was being used as an instrument of God to release a power that would not destroy, blast, and ruin, but was the only power that man has ever known that restores and brings together, heals and makes life whole.

That is why Jesus sat down. What else was there to do? It is all finished, it is sufficient, it is adequate. It will win the prize, it will do the job.

When you have rested upon all Jesus Christ has done for you, you have entered into a place of provision of power. "I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds." You can know in any situation what God wants done, and expect him to do it through you. More than that, you enter into perfect peace of heart. There is no quarrel between you and God any longer, you are accepted in the Beloved. "I will remember their sins and their misdeeds no more."

Now, the writer says, when you come to this place, what more do you need? Where there is forgiveness for these, there is no more offering for sins needed. Of course not. Man has drawn near to God, the relationship is complete.

Prayer:

Our Father, though it may take us many years of struggle and effort to learn this principle of ceasing from our own efforts and resting quietly upon your ability to work in us, nevertheless, Lord, when we learn it, what release, what relief there is, what a joy to stop our straining, fretful, petulant efforts to please you and do something for you and simply to rest upon your willingness to do everything in and through us. What grace, Lord, to make this known to us. We pray that we may learn to rest upon this new arrangement and thus be equipped to enter into every situation, face any circumstance or any problem with the adequacy which is yours, available to us. In Christ's name, Amen.

## TRIUMPH OR TRAGEDY

Most of the arguments that are launched against the Christian faith today are based on a caricature, a distorted view of Christianity. When the world once sees the real thing, it has little to say in opposition. It is this true faith which the book of Hebrews so masterfully sets forth before us. It reveals clearly the difference between the false and the true. The false way of living as a Christian is to believe and try harder. That is the Avis Car Rental motto, "We Try Harder," and it appears in the common attitude, "I'll do my best, and God will do the rest." That sounds deceptively pious, even sanctimonious and very Christian, but it is utterly false! As we have been seeing in Hebrews, the true way is to believe and fully trust, for God is in you both to will and to work his good pleasure. Your willing is therefore his willing, unless he shows you differently; your working is his working, unless he shows you otherwise.

The last half of Chapter 10 sums it all up. The writer of this letter is drawing his presentation of the teaching of this passage to a conclusion. He strikes again the three dominant notes of the letter -- teaching, warning, and encouragement. More precisely, Verses 19 through 39 reveal:

A provision which creates privilege, a presumption which invites punishment, and a fortitude which reveals faith. That is our program. In a nutshell, the secret of Christian living is described in this first section, the provision which creates privilege:

Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with 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 stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. {Heb 10:19-25 RSV}

Looking carefully at that passage you note twice the phrase, "we have." And following these there is repeated three times the phrase, "let us." "We have" marks provision, "let us" is privilege.

What do we have? "We have confidence," he says, "we have boldness to enter into the sanctuary."

That is not a church building! I have a continuing quarrel against the practice of calling church buildings sanctuaries. I understand what people mean by this, but I regard it as a very insidious concept, for, as I have pointed out before, there is no building on the face of the earth today that is properly called the house of God. If we call a building the house of God we miss the true message of the New Testament which is that the house of God is actually the bodies of men and women, boys and girls. That is where God dwells today.

The true sanctuary, therefore, is the realm of the spirit in man. It is pictured in the tabernacle: We have the outer court in the body, the holy place in the soul, and the Holy of Holies is the spirit of man. It was this into which we were forbidden to enter as long as we did not know Jesus Christ. We could not move into the realm of the spirit. Our spirits, the Bible says, were "dead in trespasses and sins," {Eph 2:1 KJV}. But, through the blood of Christ, a way has been opened into this area. When we became a Christian, for the first time we were able to operate on a spiritual level. Our spirits began to function. We became, for the first time, complete human beings, operating as God intended man to operate.

It is this inner man that the writer is referring to as the sanctuary. We now come with boldness, he says, into the inner man, into the realm of the spirit, where we meet face to face with God. The spirit is the only part of man that can meet God. Unfortunately, there is a religion of the soul which is concerned primarily with beauty and esthetics, as beauty of form in architecture and music, etc. It is very popular but it is a religion of the soul, concerned primarily with the emotions. But the Lord Jesus once said to the woman at the well of Samaria, "The hour is coming, and now is, when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such to worship him," {John 4:23 RSV}. And the only acceptable worship to God today has nothing at all to do with buildings, organs, vestments, choirs, candles and all the rest. These things may mean something to us, but not to God. The only acceptable worship to God is that worship which takes place in the spirit, the inner shrine, the inner man.

We enter this, the writer says, by the blood of Jesus. It is the only way in. It is important to remember what he has already taught us in this letter about the blood of Jesus. The blood of Jesus refers not merely to the blood of the man, Jesus, but in a very real sense, as we have already learned, it represents also our blood. Jesus was our representative, he died in our place, he was "made sin for us" {cf, Gal 5:21}, so that what happened to him is what God sees as happening to us. This phrase, "the blood of Jesus" is a symbolic way of saying that we must be willing to accept the sentence of death on the natural man, that we must die to our own

ability to do anything for God of ourselves. That is what he is talking about. The only way into the realm of the spirit where God can be enjoyed face to face is by accepting that sentence of death upon the natural man. There is nothing that man, in himself, can offer to God, nothing that he can contribute, nothing that God finds pleasurable or favorable. To accept that is to enter into the value of the blood of Jesus. The only thing we can contribute to God is what he has first given us. And if we think otherwise we can never enter into this realm. Our worship will only be on the level of the soul and, as such, is unacceptable. But we have a way into the sanctuary. Our death, in Jesus, has opened that way. In his dying on the cross, the Lord Jesus has rent the veil, i.e., the flesh, so that the way into the inner shrine of man is wide open and we can freely enter. That is the first provision.

The second one is: "we have a great priest over the house of God."

Remember what we have learned already in this letter as to what that house is. As the writer says distinctly in Chapter 3, "whose house we are," {Heb 3:6 KJV}. He is describing, then, the indwelling of Christ by the Spirit, the recognition of an indwelling Christ who offers to clothe himself with our personality and is prepared to live his life over again in our circumstances, right where we are. This is the greatest truth of Christian faith. Christianity is not some feeble effort on our part to live a shabby imitation of Jesus Christ. Christianity is Jesus Christ living his life again through us right where we are, in our circumstances. We have a completely available and thoroughly able priest in control over the house of God, whose house we are.

In Paul's letter to the Philippians, he says exactly the same thing. Writing to his dear friends in Philippi, he says, "We are the true circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, who glory in Christ Jesus [he is the one we count on], and who have no confidence in the flesh" [we have accepted God's sentence of death against the natural man] {Phil 3:3 RSV}.

There is our complete provision: an awakened spirit and an adequate mediator.

Now, on that basis and that basis alone, the writer goes on to urge three things that we can do: Draw near, speak out, and stir up!

Take the first, "Draw near with a true heart." If I may put that in more modern terms, he is saying that we are to live continually in unfeigned dependence upon an indwelling Christ. "Draw near" means continually to walk in the presence of God. You do not draw near to God when you come to church. You are no nearer to him here than you are at work, at play, or wherever you are. If you have not learned how to draw near to him in everyday life, you will never learn how to

draw near to him here. You draw near to God when you live in the recognition of his presence in your life all the time. That is what he asks us to do.

When we draw near on that basis these are the wonderful results:

First, "full assurance of faith." That means living out of adequacy; that means to discover a source of supply which never runs dry. Your dependence is no longer upon the weak abilities you may have as a natural man: your talents, your gifts, your training, your education. Your dependence now is upon the flowing power of the Spirit of the living God who dwells in you, a river of living water, a supply that never runs dry. That is living out of adequacy. You are prepared to meet any circumstance, not in trepidation or trembling, but in the quiet confidence that he who is in you is able to do everything that needs to be done. That is full assurance, is it not? Full assurance of faith.

The second result of drawing near is "a heart sprinkled clean from an evil conscience." There is freedom from guilt. How did you sleep last night? Were you restless, did you twist and turn? Were you troubled by an evil or guilty conscience, perhaps a feeling of not having done the things you ought to have done?

Psychologists tell us the whole race of man is suffering from a guilty conscience. This is the basic human problem, but Jesus Christ has come to meet that problem. The heart that comes before God on the terms outlined here experiences a complete freedom from the sense of nagging guilt. It is true peace. You are "accepted in the Beloved," {Eph 1:6 KJV}. God has no issue with you that he will not make explicitly clear so that you may know it as well as he does, therefore you can be free from any undefined, nagging sense of guilt.

The third result is, "our bodies washed with pure water." I can hear the Baptists saying "Amen" already, but unfortunately that phrase does not refer to baptism. There are some people who can find water baptism in every other verse of the Bible. But although it does mention water here, I am sure this is not a reference to water baptism primarily because it makes particular reference to "pure water" and it is very difficult to get pure water for water baptism. I have baptized individuals in some very muddy streams which would make the rite invalid if this phrase referred to baptism.

But this is, again, symbolic language, as is the rest of the verse. It refers to an outward life which has been cleansed, rearranged, changed by the new life in Christ. It means that thieves stop stealing, alcoholics stop drinking, liars stop

lying, and sex sins come to an end. The whole life is changed because we have drawn near to God.

These are the things that are possible only as we approach on the basis outlined before: We come, accepting the sentence of death to all that is natural in us and depending on an indwelling Christ who is prepared to do through us everything that needs to be done. But even this is but step number one in the possibilities of a Christian life.

The second step to which we are urged is: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful." That is, we are not only to draw near, but to speak out, to share the great secret. You can be confident that as you talk about what has happened to you, those who hear, acting upon the same basis as you acted, will experience the same results, for God is faithful. The One who has declared this is no respecter of persons. He will do as much for the man next door as he has done for you; he will do as much for the boss at the top of the heap as he does for the man at the bottom. It makes no difference; he is faithful. Therefore you can rely upon the fact, in sharing what God has done in you, that he will do it also in someone else. Speak out, then. Hold fast the confession of your hope without wavering!

The third privilege is, "let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

How do you stir someone up to love and good works? These two things are always the mark of true Christianity. Christians are never judged by the confessions they make, or the creed they recite; it is always by their deeds. How much practical love have you manifested? How far have you responded to the cry for help from someone near you, someone who is destitute or disappointed, who needs an encouraging word or a helping hand or a generous check? This is the ultimate test.

How do you achieve this? He suggests two ways:

First, by not neglecting to meet together, that is very important: "Not neglecting to meet together, but encouraging one another." That suggests the character of the meetings. They are not to be discouraging meetings, they are to be encouraging meetings. They are to be meetings where you can hear again the tremendous, radical principles of Christian faith and to see again in human lives the mighty power of the One whom we worship and serve; and where you can understand

how God works through human society, how he is transforming and changing men everywhere. To thus meet together is to encourage one another in these things. That is what Christian services ought to be like: To hear the Word of God so that it comes home with power to the heart, and to share with one another the results.

If our services were more like this, we would not have trouble in getting people to come out. Too often church services are the kind pictured in the story of the father who was showing his son through a church building. They came to a plaque on the wall and the little boy asked, "Daddy, what's that for?" His father said, "Oh, that's a memorial to those who died in the service." The little boy said, "Which service, Daddy, the morning service or the evening service?" But meetings of Christians are to be essentially encouraging things, and this is one way we stir up one another to love and good works.

The second way is a watchful awareness of the time. "All the more as you see the Day drawing near." "The Day" is the certain return of Jesus Christ. As evil becomes more subtle, as it becomes more and more difficult to tell the difference between truth and error, good and bad, right and wrong; as the clamant voices of our age pour out deceitful lies, and we find the whole of society permeated and infiltrated with false concepts that deny the truth of the Word of God, we need all the more to gather together and encourage one another by sharing the secrets of life in Christ Jesus.

You have the privilege of all three of these: Draw near, speak out, stir up! That is the whole Christian life in a nutshell. This is a privilege open to everyone, if you come on the proper basis. The only reason they escape you is because you have not come by the way outlined at the beginning of this passage. And be very careful!

Do not take this lightly, for, in the next section, the writer flashes a red light of warning. He goes on to speak of a presumption which invites punishment:

For if we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire which will consume the adversaries. A man who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy at the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the man who has spurned the Son of God, and profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and outraged 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 fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. {Heb 10:26-31 RSV}

What a somber passage! What is this willful, deliberate sin that has such terrible results? The tense of the word indicates immediately that this is not a single act of folly or weakness. This is not something one can stumble into suddenly. It is not the normal falterings of a Christian who is still learning how to walk in the Spirit. None of these is in view at all. The continuous present tense of this word, "sin deliberately," marks a long-continued attitude of resistance. It is, of course, the sin the writer has warned against all along in Hebrews. It is the sin of knowing the principle of the denial of self in following Christ, and a consistent refusal to do so. I ran across a startling phrase that beautifully expresses this. It is "the leukemia of noncommitment." It is refusing to cease from our own works and enter into God's rest, refusing the cross in our life. It is choosing to live for self behind a Christian veneer, refusing the claims of the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

This is not possible when this new arrangement for living is not yet clearly understood. I want that to be clear. This willful sin is never the sin of ignorance. It is a presumptuous choice of self living when we know perfectly well, from the Word of God, what the results of that choice will be. What the writer is saying here is that once that choice has been fully made (and by the grace of God this may take years), then there is no way back. It is exactly the same situation faced in Hebrews 6. There is certain judgment ahead, the writer says, "a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire which will consume the adversaries." He argues from the less to the greater here. If this were true even under the shadows of the Law, if, when a man violated even these pictures of Christ and his work, he suffered death at the mouth of two or three witnesses, how much more shall he be culpable if he violates knowingly and deliberately the reality which is Jesus Christ?

This kind of sin, he goes on to point out, always involves three things:

There is, first, a spurning of the Son of God. He deliberately chooses a title for Jesus which emphasizes his right to be lord over life, "the Son of God." There is a consistent spurning of that, a refusal to buckle under, to acknowledge Christ's right to govern the life.

And there is also a profaning of the blood of Christ. That means a rejection of the principle referred to earlier, a refusal of the sentence of death that God has pronounced upon the natural life. It is presuming to approve what God condemns. It is to insist that our efforts to serve God ought to be accepted by him, even though he has said they are not acceptable. It is to insist that our religious activities ought to be enough, when God has said these things have all been set aside in the death of Christ. That is profaning the blood by which we are sanctified.



Then the third thing, the most serious of all, the outraging of the Spirit of grace. This is to treat with indifference (and indifference is always the cruelest form of hate) the pleadings, wooings, and leadings of the Spirit of God. It is to insult the Holy Spirit. This, then, is the dread "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit," for which Jesus said there is no forgiveness, neither in this age nor in the world to come.

I am often asked, "Can Christians commit the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit?" The answer is both "Yes" and "No." Christians who have declared that, come hell or high water, sink or swim, live or die, their only hope is the promise of Christ, who, when they find themselves sinning and failing, own up, and return to Christ, and trust him again, that kind of Christian can never commit the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. He is "born of God" and can never do this. But Christians who sin and do nothing about it, who resent the Lordship of Jesus Christ, who resist his authority, and do as they please regardless of what the Word of God says, that kind of Christian is in grave danger of this very thing. That is why this letter was written. Such prove themselves to be embryo Christians, as we saw in Hebrews 6, never born of God. They have entered into the initiatory relationship of the Christian life by the Holy Spirit, but never pass on to that taking of the yoke of Christ upon them that means a new birth. That kind can drift into this.

To put yourself into the hands of the living Christ is to trust him, and obey him; to believe that he is the truth, and you mean therefore to follow him, and do what he says, that is a glorious thing.

The hands of Christ are very frail  
For they were broken with a nail  
But only those reach Heaven at last  
Whom those frail, broken hands hold fast.

It is one thing to put yourself into the hands of the living Christ; but to fall into the hands of the living God, when you have professed one thing but have consistently, deliberately refused to obey it, that is quite another thing. The writer says, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

We greatly need these words of warning. There is a cursed, superficial concept of God abroad today that is doing great damage to many. It is the idea of a palsy-walsy God who slaps you on the back and says, "Everything is fine, don't worry about a thing, I'm with you to the end no matter what you do."

God has never revealed himself like that. His self-revelation is continually other than this. The God whom we worship can be to us the very dearest person in the universe. He offers to be dearer and closer and more wonderful than any earthly friend can possibly be, but only on terms which, in his wisdom and grace, he has seen are absolutely necessary to make that relationship a permanent one. On any other terms he is not available.

There is not one of us who would dare defy the laws of chance by endlessly playing Russian roulette. We would know that sooner or later the laws of chance would catch up with us and we would be gone. If we were killed, it would be our own fault. Well, then, shall we defy the living God and think we can escape? This is what the author asks.

Yesterday on the front page of the local paper there was a picture of a man with a revolver in his hand standing over the crumpled body of a Vietnamese soldier. Underneath was the title, "The Price of Defection." The soldier was a traitor.

This is what the writer describes here, traitors to the cause they espouse, saying they are obeying Christ but consistently refusing to walk in his steps.

I know the question that is on your heart. It is, "How can I know whether I am one of these?" And the answer is in this last section. There is here described a fortitude which reveals faith:

But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on the prisoners, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that you may do the will of God and receive what is promised.

"For yet a little while, and the coming one shall come and shall not tarry;  
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 and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and keep their souls. {Heb 10:32-39 RSV }

In these words, the author recognizes that most of these to whom he writes had already given proof of true faith and genuine birth. Their early Christian years were marked by love and joy and hope, despite hardships and persecution. They had followed Christ at cost to themselves. They had submitted themselves to the

Lordship of Christ, even when their own will would have been different. That is the mark of reality, the proof of faith. They cheerfully and compassionately accepted the persecutions, deprivations, and hardships that came their way. They took Christ's yoke upon them, obeyed his Lordship, and manifested it by love and good works. They were living by faith.

You can do these things only when you live by faith. When you have accepted God's word and recognized that Christ is who he says he is, that the history of the world is going to turn out as he says it is, and that the values of life are what he says they are, then, and then only, can you do this kind of thing.

Now they need to do only one more thing -- keep on! That is all. They are doing the right thing, just keep on doing it. The road will end at the dawning of a new day and the coming of the living God.

Does your way sometimes seem hard and difficult? Is it, perhaps, often lonely and exposed to the reproach of others?

Well, do not despair, do not give up. That pattern has been predicted. That is part of Christian living today, as it has always been. For:

If you live by faith; if you accept what this word says as true, and you see that it is working out in history exactly as God said it would; if you are counting on his strength to bring about all that he promises; if you thus live by faith, then, though it be through scourgings and mockings, through perils and dangers, you will arrive for "the just shall live by faith," {Rom 1:17 KJV}.

That is the great sentence that burned in the heart of Martin Luther and lit the fires of the Reformation: "The just shall live by faith." Not by circumstances, not by outward appearances, but by faith in what the Word of God has declared. You need only to continue to reach the goal, to endure. It could well be translated, in modern parlance, by the word "toughness."

In Chapter 11, we shall see some illustrations of men and women who have lived by faith. These are the tough people of history. They have endured, they have toughed it out, they have stuck it out. They faced all the pressures, all the problems, all the confusing duplicity of life, but, because they had their eye fixed on One who never changes, they were tough; nothing could move them aside or divert them. Now, that is what the apostle is calling for, that inner toughness which meets life steadfastly, unmovably, unshakably, is never driven off its position of faith. It constantly meets every encounter, every challenge by resting upon the Word of God, relying upon what God said would take place.

God grant that we may find that toughness in these terrible and glorious days.

Prayer:

Our Father, this has been a solemn passage we have looked at together, but we thank you for the truth which dares to speak even though it offends. We thank you, Lord, for the love which tells us the truth though it hurts. Keep us from the utter folly of taking these words and rationalizing them in some foolish manipulation that destroys their meaning. Give us the grace to be honest with thee, to look at ourselves earnestly and honestly, and to ask ourselves where we stand, and by thy grace, Lord, to lay hold of this marvelous way of deliverance, to yield the total man into the control of the total Lordship of Jesus Christ. We pray in his name, Amen.

## WHAT FAITH IS

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews is one of the best known of the great chapters of the Bible. It has been called the Westminster Abbey of Scripture because the heroes of faith are enshrined here. Perhaps that is a misnomer, for I have been in Westminster Abbey and it gave me the sense of being in a tomb. There are a lot of dead people there, but there are no dead people in this chapter. These are all living saints, triumphant men and women who have lived life and gone on into a new relationship. I prefer, then, to call this The Parade of the Heroes of Faith.

In Hebrews there is an element which is regarded as absolutely essential to the development of the Christian life, and that is the quality of faith. It is what makes the Christian different from the non-Christian. That rather eccentric philosopher and nature lover of New England in the last century, Henry David Thoreau, once said, "If I seem to walk out of step with others, it is because I am listening to another drum beat." That is an exact description of faith: Christians walk as though listening to another drum beat.

This chapter centers on, and focuses upon, what faith is. There is need for clarity on this. I find this word, faith, is greatly misunderstood and there are many peculiar ideas of what it is. It might help to show, first of all, what faith is not:

Faith, for instance, is not positive thinking; that is something quite different. Faith is not a hunch that is followed. Faith is not hoping for the best, hoping that everything will turn out all right. Faith is not a feeling of optimism. Faith is none of these things, though all of them have been identified as faith.

Well, what is faith then? The first seven verses of this wonderful chapter answer that question, and the rest of the chapter tells us how it works. We will limit our thought to these first seven verses now. The author is not discussing faith in general, but faith in God. If this is important, then it is essential that we know what it is. In these seven verses:

There is a definition in which we see the ingredients of faith. This, by the way, is the only definition of faith in the Bible. The definition is followed by a deduction, in which we have revealed the significance, the implications, of faith. Then there is a demonstration, in which we see illustrations of faith.

The first and second verses and the sixth verse, taken together, help define faith for us. Here we see the ingredients of faith:

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old received divine approval. {Heb 11:1-2 RSV}

And without faith it is impossible to please God. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. {Heb 11:6 RSV}

Note how those verses indicate that faith begins with hope. Faith commences with "things hoped for," that is, it starts with a sense of discontent. You can never have much faith unless you are dissatisfied with the way you are now, and are longing for something better. That is its first note. If you do not feel dissatisfied with the way you are, it will be impossible for you to exercise any faith. That is why, all through the Bible, the great enemy of faith is a complacent spirit, an attitude of self-satisfaction with the status quo. But if you are dissatisfied, if you are looking for something better, if you are not content to be merely a cultured animal living out a life of eating, sleeping, and amusing yourself, and eventually dying, then you are in a position to exercise faith. Someone has described that kind of life this way:

Into this world to eat and to sleep  
And to know no reason why he was born  
Save to consume the corn  
Devour the cattle, flock and fish  
And leave behind an empty dish.

Perhaps there are many who would like to have faith, but are never ready for it, because they are not dissatisfied. They must demand of life more than the mere mechanics of living. You want more, do you not? You are looking for something better. Then that is the first note of faith. Verse 6 puts it, "he who would draw near to God." That is looking for more of life than is visible on the surface. Such a one is not satisfied to have life all surface, all length and breadth, but no depth. He wants to find something to deepen life, and that is the first note of faith.

Then comes "the conviction of things not seen" -- not only a desire for something better, but an awareness of something else: That is faith. It means we become aware that we are surrounded by an invisible spirit kingdom, that which is seen is not the whole explanation of life, that there are realities which cannot be seen, weighed, measured, analyzed, or touched, and yet which are as real and as vital as anything we can see. In fact they are more real because they are the explanation of the things which can be seen. We must understand there is a spiritual kingdom that exists.

This is so beautifully seen in the words and teachings of our Lord Jesus. He speaks of God the Father as though he were standing right there, invisible and yet present. He speaks of the world as a great family home in which there is a Father

with a Father's heart welcoming us. He does not see the universe as an impersonal machine, grinding and clanking along, as science so frequently does, but he sees it as an invisible, but very real, spiritual kingdom.

Again Verse 6 says the same: "He that comes to God must believe that he is, that God exists." There are some who say, "That's the hard part, that's what is difficult." No, it is not. The easiest thing in the world to do is to believe that God exists. It requires effort to disbelieve; it requires no effort to believe. The interesting thing is that everyone in the world, without exception, starts out believing God exists. It is only when they are carefully trained to disbelieve that any come to the place of declaring God does not exist. Light from God is streaming in on every side and all we need to do is open our eyes to see it and know that God is there. That is why children have no problem with this. The concept of God ought to be one of the most difficult ideas for children to grasp, since God cannot be seen. But the amazing thing is, children have no difficulty at all in believing that God exists.

It requires long and careful effort to train the mind to reject this evidence and explain it on other terms. This last week I skimmed through Julian Huxley's book, *Religion Without Revelation* and was amazed again to see the tremendous effort he makes to explain away the evidence for the existence of God, and to find other explanations for it. It is only those minds, therefore, that have deliberately trained themselves that can claim to be atheistic. Even then, if they are not careful, they may suddenly refer to a belief in God, as the man who on one occasion exclaimed, "I'm an atheist, thank God!"

There is also a third ingredient of faith, "the assurance of things hoped for." Faith is the assurance that the things hoped for, the things you are longing to have, the better man or woman you would like to be, will be achieved by acting on the revelation of the things unseen.

Let us put it all together now. It begins with a longing to be something better, and an awareness that within the universe there is something else, and that something or Someone else has revealed itself. As we act on that revelation we shall achieve the things hoped for, the something better. That is the story of the whole eleventh chapter of Hebrews, it is the story of faith. It will work for anyone at any level.

Here, by the way, is the answer to that persistent question we so frequently face, "What about the heathen who never hear the gospel?" They have the opportunity to exercise faith, for faith at its simplest level is, "he that comes to God must believe that God exists and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Any man who wants to be better, who believes that God exists and who will obey the revelation that he has, no matter at whatever level he finds it, expecting God

to give him more as he goes along, will come to the place where he wins divine approval, the place of knowing Jesus Christ. Without that faith it is impossible to please God.

Verse 3 introduces us to a very amazing deduction which reveals something of the significance of faith, the implications of it:

By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear. {Heb 11:3 RSV}

That statement, remember, was made in the 1st century when the best scientific minds of the time felt that the ultimate breakdown of matter was fourfold: fire, water, soil and air. That was the explanation of all matter. Yet here in the 20th century, after two thousand years of human endeavor in exploring the secrets of the origin of matter, we cannot improve on this statement. This verse says that we can never explain the things which are seen till we come to grips with the things that are unseen. We must recognize the existence of things unseen.

I should like to place beside this verse a quotation I was given last week from the former president of the Stanford Research Institute. In a message on another subject he said,

Through the years I have struggled to gain a greater understanding of electricity and magnetism in order to help harness those forces for man's use. Even so, I cannot now give a lucid definition of electricity or magnetism, except to say that they are invisible forces which have real manifestations.

Is it not amazing that the man of faith arrived at exactly the same conclusion as the man of science, only two thousand years earlier? It has taken science that long to catch up!

That brings us to a very important deduction about faith -- that faith puts us immediately in touch with reality. That is the genius of faith, that is the glory of it, the value of it. Faith is a way by which we may overleap the tortuous windings of reason, the need to grope by trial and error, and lay hold of the basic facts of life immediately. Faith is a way of piercing the illusion that tends to distract us and lead us into chasing rabbits of thought all over the pasture, and bring us right to the point, to show us things as they really are. Do not laugh at faith. Faith is dealing with facts. Faith grounds one immediately on reality.

Science, for instance, cannot tell me how human history is going to end, but by faith I know. Science cannot tell me what is wrong with human life, what is the reason why I act the way I do, and you act the way you do (especially the latter),

but by faith I know. Science cannot tell me what lies beyond the door of death. Even to the scientists it is an enigma, a mystery, but by faith I know what lies beyond. Science cannot explain the mysteries of my own makeup, and tell me how to fulfill my manhood, how to realize my dreams, but faith can. I have tried it and it works!

Someday, perhaps after painful centuries, when man's reason has slowly and tortuously worked out some of these answers and raveled it all out, mankind will find that it has been brought then to the very same place that faith could have many thousands of years before. This is why faith always pleases God, because it comes to grips with reality and God is the Ultimate Realist. God is never impressed with the phony. He has no time or patience for the false; God deals only with truth. He says that to trust his word as a plain statement of truth, ignoring all the mocking taunts of those who think they know better, will not be an easy path but it will be an absolutely sure one. That is what Hebrews 11 says to us.

Now let us look at the three demonstrations the author gives here to illustrate faith. There are more than three in this chapter, of course, but these first three illustrate what faith is, the rest reveal how faith works. I want to spend a brief moment with these three men who lived by faith and who chose to believe God when the world around believed something else. The result was that each one found reality, each solved the main problem of his life, each realized his deepest desire and gained the gift of righteousness, i.e., the approval of God.

The first is Abel:

By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he received approval as righteous, God bearing witness by accepting his gifts; he died, but through his faith he is still speaking. {Heb 11:4 RSV}

Here are the world's first brothers, Abel and Cain, sons of Adam and Eve. They lived when the world was young, when everything was much different than it is today. It was before the days of income tax, and smog, and clogged highways, and the terrible problems that we struggle with. Yet, despite the fact that they enjoyed what we call "the simple life," they longed for something better, they hungered after God. For no matter how good life is, it is never good enough if you do not have God. Man is never satisfied without him, and these boys hungered for God. Both had been told the way by which they could come to him, this is implied in the account.

But Cain chose to believe a lie, the lie that is still very evident today, that "one way is as good as another." He took the way that was easiest for him to work out and the result was, he was rejected, for, of course, it is always a lie that one way is as good as another. That never works in anything -- nature, life, or with God.

But Abel believed God and came the way God had outlined. When he believed God he discovered a great truth, the truth that man cannot have God's ability until he is prepared to recognize the poverty of his own. That is what a blood sacrifice teaches. There must be a life laid down before one can have the life of God, that is the point. You cannot have his ability for your problems until you are first ready to lay aside any dependence upon your own. That is the greatest truth that man can ever learn. If we learn that here, as some of us are learning it, what a difference it makes in life! Because Abel was the first man to learn that truth, the writer says he is still speaking to us -- and we still need to listen!

Then there is Enoch. Enoch was the seventh man from Adam.

By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was attested as having pleased God. {Heb 11:5 RSV}

In the book of Genesis we are told that for 65 years this man lived like anyone else in his day, no different from the rest of his age. But at the age of 65, something happened. It was not that he got his Social Security, he found a deeper security than that. The record says he began to walk with God, i.e., he began for the first time to enjoy the continuous presence of an unseen Person, and he related his life daily to that unseen Person who was with him. When he did that he discovered a great reality, just as you will, if you try it. He found a fellowship that death could not interrupt. According to the record, he never died. He was one of two men in the Scriptures of whom it is recorded that they never died. He was "not found," that is all. God took him, the record says, without death.

I love the way the little Sunday School girl tells it. She said, "Enoch was a man who learned to walk with God, and they used to take long walks together. One day they walked so far that God said, 'Look, Enoch, it's too far for you to go back; just come on home with me.' So he walked on home with God." He became forever a picture of what death is to the Christian -- only an incident, hardly worth mentioning. That is the reality that Enoch discovered by faith.

Then there is Noah. Noah believed God in a unique way.

By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, took heed and constructed an ark for the saving of his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness which comes by faith. {Heb 11:7 RSV}

Noah believed that God was in control of history. All the things these men believed, we are asked to believe today; there is no difference. Noah believed that God was in charge of history. He believed when God told him there was coming a great flood. When Noah told this around everyone began to laugh, and say how foolish he was. But Noah went right ahead and built a boat. Now that is not unusual in these days, but he built it five hundred miles from the nearest ocean, a thousand times too big for his own family, and when he got it finished he filled it with animals! I am sure I know what they called Noah in those days: "Nutty Noah." But he anticipated history and thus showed how short-sighted the world is when it walks in the light of its own reason, alone. He was led on by his faith to become, as this text says, "the heir of the righteousness which comes by faith," i.e., in Christ Jesus, and he became part of the divine family.

That is what faith is:

Faith is believing there is another dimension to life other than those which can be touched, tasted, seen or felt. There is more to life than that. There is also the realm of the spirit, the invisible spiritual kingdom of God. All the ultimate answers of life lie in that kingdom.

Faith believes that God, in his grace, has stepped over the boundary into human history and told us some great and very valuable facts.

Faith believes them and adjusts its life to those facts and walks on that basis.

The world does not understand and oftentimes uses derogatory terms for those who walk by faith. Certainly they are not oddballs in every way, although in some way every Christian is, but, though the world does not understand why, the man who walks by faith wins the day because he has come in touch with things as they really are. That is the glory of faith.

Now, do you have faith? Are you a man or woman, boy or girl of faith? Is there a hunger for something better in your life? Is there a conviction that God is ready to answer your cry? In fact, he has already answered it, in Christ. Are you ready then to commit yourself to obey what he says, to accept his verdict, his viewpoint, as the true one despite the clamant cries that will pour into your ear from every side, saying this is wrong?

That is what faith is, and if you are that kind of a man or woman you can join this parade of faith in this unfinished chapter.

I read this last week an account of a dear Christian woman in Africa who died, and the village gathered to pay its respects at the funeral. There were many kind things said about her, but one of the most revealing was the comment, "If the Bible is going to be rewritten in heaven, this woman ought to be in it."

Now, the Bible is not going to be rewritten in heaven; it never needs to be rewritten for it is truth, and truth never needs to change. But one thing will happen to it. There are certain sections of it that will be extended because they are unfinished -- the book of Acts, for instance, and the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. We are still following the same program. God is still calling men and women to live by faith. And if, by faith in what God has said, we conduct our life according to this revelation, we too shall someday have our names added to this parade of the heroes of faith, the men and women who have done the only great things the world has ever really known.

Prayer:

Our Father, thank you for this glimpse into the life of the past and this revelation of what faith is today. How we feel the need of it in this hour, as we live in the midst of a confused and bewildered society, a world that is troubled, uncertain, unstable, in the grip of lies that it thinks are truths, and rejecting truths that it regards as lies. God grant us the simple faith of a child by which we can trust thy love, trust thy word, and believe you have told us the truth. Teach us to live according to it, coming to know Jesus Christ our living Lord, by whom life can be changed and all that we hope for may be realized. Though it be through difficulties, through trials, through heartache and tears, yet we shall win the day, we shall arrive at the goal, we shall be what we long to be, in him. For his sake, Amen.

## HOW FAITH WORKS

This past week I attended two graduation exercises for local schools. At each, able young orators with admirable self-assurance told us what was wrong with the world and what improvements we can expect when their generation takes control. Behind all the truly fine words there was evident one philosophy. It was that the human mind, educated to a high degree, was, in its collective manifestation, a completely adequate instrument with which to solve human problems. Now, the writer of Hebrews challenges that philosophy head-on. He says that man's reason, operating alone, invariably misinterprets the evidence, and that it was never intended so to operate; that reason is a beautiful instrument designed of God and excellently suited for the realm in which it was intended to operate, but that man's reason, as it exists now, is deprived of an essential dimension of life. That missing dimension is an absolutely necessary ingredient if we ever expect to solve our problems.

The writer goes on to point out, as we have been seeing all along, that God has spoken to man and has revealed basic truths about life. That revelation is quite different than what man's unaided reason feels is the explanation of secrets of living. If we accept the revelation and act on these truths (that is what faith is, accepting and acting on them) reason then will find its proper place and life will make sense as God intended it to do. But without faith we only struggle on in a confused cycle of bewilderment, boredom and frustration.

The writer has made clear that the revelation of God all centers in Jesus Christ; therefore the life of faith begins by an acceptance of him. Faith, as we have already seen, is a desire for something better. It starts with hope. Then it is an awareness of Someone else in life, an Unseen Someone who is nevertheless very real. Then faith involves an assurance resulting from this that obedience to that Someone will bring us to the something better. Faith, therefore, is a very practical thing, is it not? The writer is well aware that a living illustration always helps, hence this mighty eleventh chapter which is filled with the simple stories of men and women of like passion with ourselves, living in the kind of a world in which we live, confronted with the same kind of problems, who mastered their problems and overcame the obstacles and won their way to tremendous fulfillment by faith. This chapter hardly needs exposition as these accounts are self-explanatory but perhaps it may be helpful to point out five outstanding characteristics of faith manifest in this eleventh chapter. You can test your own faith by these, for here are the distinguishing marks of genuine faith:

Perhaps the most characteristic thing is that faith always anticipates, i.e., it moves toward a clearly expected event in the future. It was Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher, who said, "Life can only be understood backwards, but it

must be lived forward." With that fact none can quarrel. But without faith, life must therefore be a blind march into mystery: We can not know where we are going; we do not know what is coming, we do not see what lies ahead. The future is an imponderable enigma to those without faith; anything can happen. Therefore there is always a sense of anxiety in trying to look ahead.

But faith believes that God has revealed something about the future; not everything, but something. And what he has revealed is quite enough for us to know. Faith seizes upon a revealed event and begins to live in anticipation of it. Therefore, faith gives life goal, purpose and destination. It is a look into the future.

See this in Abraham. We are told in Verse 9,

By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, {Heb 11:9a RSV}

He dwelt there, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob who were heirs with him of the promises, because

...he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. {Heb 11:10 RSV}

Here is an illustration of the meaninglessness of time in the life of faith. It is amazing how far Abraham saw. As best we can tell, Abraham lived about two thousand years before Christ. We live about two thousand years after him. Yet Abraham, looking forward by faith, believing what God had said would take place, looked across these forty centuries of time and beyond to the day when God would bring to pass on earth a city with eternal foundations, i.e., life on earth would be lived after God's order. Abraham saw what John sees in the book of Revelation, a city coming down out of heaven onto earth. I think that is a symbol (perhaps it is a literal city, but I think it is symbolic) of that for which we pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," {cf, Matt 6:10}. That is what Abraham longed for, an earth run after God's order, where men would dwell together in peace, harmony, blessing, beauty and fulfillment. Because of that he was content to dwell in tents, looking for that coming.

You can see this quality of anticipation also in Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Isaac and Jacob both knew that God intended to make nations from their sons, and their final prayers were based upon that fact. They prayed in anticipation of what God had said would come, and blessed their children on that basis. Joseph, when he was dying, saw two hundred years ahead to the coming exodus from Egypt, and he made arrangements by faith for a funeral service in the promised land. He did not want to be buried in Egypt. Thus he symbolized his conviction that God was

going to do exactly what he had said. And in the course of time it happened exactly that way.

You can see how faith anticipates in the case of Moses' parents who, when he was born, saw that he was a beautiful child, a goodly child, and they decided to save him from the edict of the king that all male children should be slain, {cf, Heb 11:23}. This was more than the natural desire of parents to preserve their children (even an especially handsome child like Moses) from death. But these parents knew there was a promise of deliverance from Egypt for their people, and they knew that the time was near. God had foretold how long it would be. They were given assurance that this boy was to be the deliverer. They believed that promise and, acting on that, they defied the king and hid the child for three months.

Related to this quality of faith which accepts as certain a promise of the future is a second quality, that faith always acts. There is today a very common misconception that thinks of men and women of faith as so occupied with the future that they sit around, twiddling their thumbs, doing nothing now. There is a very trite saying concerning those who are "so heavenly-minded that they are of no earthly use." That, unfortunately, is the common concept of faith. But that is not faith; that is fatalism! Faith works! Faith is doing something now, in view of the future. If you are folding your hands and waiting for the Second Coming you are not living the life of faith. The life of faith is that which "occupies till I come" {cf, Luke 19:13}, as Jesus said. It acts now in view of that coming event.

Take each example in this chapter and you will see that it is one of action. Without exception these men and women were set to work by their faith. Their faith made them act in the present. Therefore, faith is not passive, it is dynamic, forceful. Listen to the magnificent summary here of the actions of faith.

And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets -- who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life. {Heb 11:32-35 RSV}

That is not poetry; that is history -- faith at work. The activities of faith have changed the course of history. Yet faith does not act blindly either, it is not just doing anything. It is made very clear in this chapter that faith evaluates, it weighs the possibilities, the alternatives. Perhaps we could just as accurately put it, faith risks! One characteristic of faith is, it gladly sacrifices present advantage in order to gain the future. It does not try to have its cake and eat it too. Therefore, it

dashes head-on with the common philosophy of our day, "Get it now or you may never have another chance."

Recently in the Stanford Daily there appeared an ad in response to some of the advertisements put in by a fine group called Contemporary Christians on Campus. This ad originated with a group who signed themselves Contemporary Atheists On Campus. It said in flaming letters, "Deny God now; tomorrow may be too late!" There is an ironic truth about that, but the message they intended to convey was that it was necessary to lay hold of the present now because, at the end of life one may find there is no God and no afterlife and thus lose all opportunity to invest oneself in worthwhile enterprises now. That was their argument. But do you see how faith contravenes that? Faith says exactly the opposite.

These heroes of faith say to us, "Live now in view of the future, and you will gain both the future and the present!" Fling away the temporary now and you will gain both the future and, to your own amazement, find that the present has taken on fullness of meaning. It is given back to you, again and again.

You can see this in Abraham. We read,

"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go," {Heb 11:8 RSV}.

That is rather unusual. Here is a man who left home and went abroad without making any reservations. He went out on a march without a map, leaving his friends and his influence behind. There must have been many who said to him, "What an absurd thing to do, to go out not knowing where you are going. What is your destination?" And Abraham said, "I don't know." He did not know where he was going, but he knew whom he was going with, and what a difference that makes. Because he obeyed, the land became his and his children's. Even to this 20th century hour we have ample evidence in the existence of the nation Israel in that self-same land that the promise God made to Abraham is valid, forty centuries later.

You can see how faith weighs and evaluates in the example of Moses. We are told that,

Moses, when he was grown up refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeing pleasures of sin," {Heb 11:24-25 RSV}.



He weighed the wealth of Egypt and the prestige of royalty against the satisfaction of being an instrument of the living God, and an heir of the promises of God. He unhesitatingly chose because, we are told, he saw the unseen; he looked beyond the visible and saw the invisible, and he believed in him. He saw God at work and, because of that, Moses became the man, more than any other man in recorded history, who saw God doing things and learned to know God intimately.

You can see faith evaluating in the case of Rahab, the prostitute. She risked her life and forsook her pagan religion. Why? Because she believed in God and thus saved her life, her family's {cf, Heb 11:31}, and she gained God, as well. Faith is never something merely for the future, but faith says that if we invest in that future which God offers us, we shall gain both the future and the present.

There is another summary in Verse 36:

Others suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated, of whom the world was not worthy, wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. {Heb 11:36-38 RSV}

But perhaps the most striking quality of all is that faith dares. When God has spoken, faith ignores the contrary evidence even though it seems to be absolutely impossible. Look at Abraham and Sarah in Verses 11 and 12:

By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore. {Heb 11:11-12 RSV}

Here were two people, a man and his wife, whose bodies were impotent. They had long since passed the age of childbearing. He was a hundred, she was ninety; there is not a gynecologist alive who would give them a chance to have a child -- but they went ahead, anyway. And the result was one little boy from whom came two lines of descendants, the writer tells us, a heavenly seed and an earthly seed. The earthly seed, the physical seed of Abraham, is the nation of Israel and the nations of the Semitic branches, including the Arabs. The heavenly seed are those who show the same kind of faith that Abraham did and win the gift of righteousness by faith, as Paul says in Romans 4. That heavenly seed includes many who are present in this congregation this morning, who have found Jesus Christ, the Seed of Abraham, and thus have become children of Abraham.

You can see it in Abraham again when he offered up Isaac. Think of that! His reason could see no solution to his problem. God had said to him, "Through this boy Isaac your descendants will be named." And now God was telling him to take the boy out and put him to death. Reason could never figure that out, but Abraham was not walking by reason but by faith. He believed that God had a solution to that problem, though man could not solve it. He believed God would raise the boy from the dead, if need be, to fulfill his promise, so thoroughly did Abraham believe that God meant what he said. As a result we have this amazing account of how Abraham, as it were, received the boy back from the dead, for in Abraham's mind he was as good as dead. But his faith triumphed and God gave him back the boy.

You can see the daring of faith in the people of Israel at the Red Sea and before the walls of Jericho. Here were two impossibilities. The waters were flowing before them and God said to go down and walk through it. They obeyed, not knowing what God would do. It was impossible from an earthly standpoint, but as they went forward God moved the waters back by a great wind and they went through on dry land. The Egyptians, trying to do it without faith, drowned. When the great walls of Jericho stood before them, 85 feet thick and over 100 feet high, impassable, impossible, they had only feeble instruments of warfare but in obedience to God they marched around the city seven times and the walls fell down. Faith dares. It pays no attention to impossibilities. As someone has put it,

Faith, mighty faith  
The promise sees  
And looks to God alone,  
Laughs at impossibilities  
And cries, "It shall be done."

That brings us to the least spectacular but the most important aspect of faith. Faith persists, faith perseveres. Perhaps the most amazing statement in this amazing chapter is twice given. Though these people by faith obtained much from God, yet they all died without obtaining the promise they looked for.

These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone 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 for them a city. {Heb 11:13-16}

They were looking for more than their own personal satisfaction. They were longing to see God's purposes fulfilled on earth. They were not just hoping to go to heaven when they died. These men and women of faith were looking for heaven to come to earth. They were looking to God to bring to pass his will among men but they died without seeing it come to pass. There was a special reason for this:

And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect. {Heb 11:39-40 RSV}

Think back for a moment over the names in this chapter and what the world owes to these men and women: Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and the prophets. Our laws, our governments, our institutions, our ideals, our standards we owe to these men and women. They persisted in faith till the whole world was blessed. Had they given up, we would never have heard of them. But still they did not see the greatest thing of all and the reason was that God had arranged it that we, living in this 20th century, might share this race and have a part in the great prize for which they were looking. We are called to run the same race. We are called to judge the present by the future, to weigh the permanent against the temporary, the ephemeral. To dare to do the impossible against all the silken arguments of the world around about us and to keep on day after day after day, whether we are recognized or not.

Now the whole great argument of this chapter is lost if we do not read the first verses of Chapter 12:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. {Heb 12:1-2 RSV}

We are "surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses," he says. Now that does not refer to people who have died and gone on to heaven and are looking down on us from above. I know that is a favorite interpretation of this figure here, but I do not think that is what it means. It means that these people are saying something to us, they are testifying to us, they are witnesses in that sense. Their lives are saying that we ought to lay aside every weight, i.e., whatever hinders faith. You never say "Yes" to Christ without saying "No" to something else!

"And the sin which clings so closely." What is that? That is unbelief. That is the failure to take revelation seriously. That is the sin which is mentioned all through Hebrews. And then, what? "Run with patience," with perseverance, with persistence, keeping on no matter what happens. How? By "looking unto Jesus," that is the answer. The others we read of here can inspire us, challenge us, and some of the men and women of faith who have lived since these days can do the same.

I read the life of Martin Luther, and what a challenge he is; and of John Wesley, and D. L. Moody, and of some of the recent martyrs of faith, Jim Elliot and others. How they have challenged my life and inspired me to make a fresh start; to determine anew to walk with God, and to follow their example. They challenge us to mobilize our resources, clench our fists, set our jaws and determine that we shall be men and women of faith in this 20th century. But if that is our motivation we shall find that we soon run out of gas. It all begins to fade and after a few weeks we are right back in the same old rut.

The secret of persistence is in this phrase, "looking unto Jesus." The word means "looking away unto Jesus." Look at these men and women of faith, yes, but then look away unto Jesus. Why? Because he is the author and finisher of our faith. He can begin it and he can end it, complete it. He is the pioneer, he has gone on ahead. He is also the perfecter of faith. He himself ran the race. He laid aside every weight, every tie of family and friends. Every restraining hand he brushed aside that he might resolutely walk with God. He set his face against the popular sin of unbelief and walked on in patient perseverance, trusting the Father to work everything out for him. He set the example.

But there is more than example in this phrase; there is empowerment. That is what I want you to see. We are to look away unto Jesus because he can do what these others cannot do. They can inspire us, but he empowers us. Moment by moment, day by day, week by week, year by year, if we learn to look to him we find strength imparted to us. That is the secret.

You can find strength to begin in Jesus, you can venture out and start this life of faith today in him. You also discover strength to continue. He is not "up there" somewhere. As this book has made clear, he is within us, by faith. If we have received Jesus Christ, he dwells within. He has entered into the sanctuary, into the inner man, into the place where we need strength, and is available every moment for me. Therefore, in Christ, I have all that it takes to meet life.

As Paul says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," {cf, Phil 4:13}.

Prayer:

Our Father, thank you for a living Lord Jesus who, unlike these men and women of faith, is no distant person, one that we cannot know and talk to, and draw strength from, and fellowship with, and lean upon. But he is our Lord, our living Lord, granted to the heart that is ready to receive him by a simple invitation and who is ready to trust him through life to make available to us all that we need in every hour, whether of pressure or not. We thank thee for this great truth. Teach us to live by it. In Christ's name, Amen.

## NEVER GIVE UP

We are drawing now to a close in these studies in this great epistle of Christian life and liberty. The author of this letter has reviewed the exciting facts about Christian faith, and now, in this twelfth chapter, he comes to the practical exhortations that follow the presentation he has made. What he has to say is, "Never give up!" "You have started right," he says, "now hang on, never give up." It is all summarized in one verse. He says to these Christians then, and to us now,

Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. {Heb 12:3 RSV }

That is the problem, is it not? Our tendency is to grow weary and to be fainthearted and slack off. To get disinterested and live from day to day without much concern whether we are running the race of faith well or not. This is the problem they had, and it is the problem we face.

This chapter stresses one great fact: The Christian life was never intended to be a picnic. It is bound to be rough, he says, for it was rough for the Lord Jesus. "Consider him," he says, "who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself." If you think it is hard living with the neighbors you live with, or working for the boss you work for, or living with the mother-in-law you have to put up with, I suggest you review again the conditions our Lord faced in his earthly ministry. He had constantly to endure the stubbornness of men, the recalcitrant, obdurate attitude with which they refused to believe what he said. It was true even of his own disciples. How many times he had to rebuke them for being small in faith and even for putting stumbling blocks in the path of those who tried to come to him. Again and again he endured the contradiction of sinners against himself.

Now that is what the Christian life will be like, and we need to face it. Our Lord had to endure it clear to the end. It was he who reminded us that the servant is not greater than his master. If the world persecuted him, it will persecute us, and if it kept his word, it will keep our word as well. As Frances Ridley Havergal has reminded us,

God has not promised  
Skies always blue,  
Flower-strewn pathways  
All our life through.

The rest of the chapter enlarges upon this fact that the Christian life will include times of hardship and trials.

In this chapter there are three reasons why these difficulties, disappointments and heartbreaks must come to us: First, trials manifest to us the discipline of love. Second, they allow opportunity for the demonstration of adequacy. Third, they expose to us the demarcation of truth.

First there is a passage on the discipline of love:

In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation which addresses you as sons? --

"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,  
nor lose courage when you are punished by him.

For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves,  
and chastises every son whom he receives."

It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. {Heb 12:4-8 RSV}

To these harassed, persecuted Christians, tempted as we often are with discouragement, the writer says, "Do not look at the dark side, look at the bright side; there is something good about discipline."

First of all, it could be worse! That is always encouraging, is it not? He reminds them, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood; God has spared you what others have had to face. You should be grateful for that for even the Son of God was not spared this. Romans 8:32 reminds us, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?" Though we may have it rough, it has not been as rough as it could have been. The future may yet call for more strength on our part.

When Jeremiah began to complain to the Lord about his problems, the Lord said to him, "If you have been running with the footmen and you find it difficult, what are you going to do when you compete with horses? And if you fall down when you are in a safe land, what will you do in the day of the swelling of Jordan?" {cf, Jer 12:5}. So God reminds us that even though trials come, they could be worse.

Second, hardships prove our sonship. Every boy knows that his father does not discipline the neighbor children, he disciplines you! The reason is because you are his son. God does not discipline the children of darkness either, he disciplines

his own. Therefore, if we have discipline, if we are going through struggles and problems, then thank God. Even with our earthly fathers, he points out, we gave them respect during times of discipline.

Besides this, we have had earthly fathers to discipline us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time at their pleasure, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. {Heb 12:9-10 RSV}

"At their pleasure" does not mean that fathers whip their children in order to amuse themselves, it means they did what they thought was right, though sometimes they were wrong. Every young person can say "Amen" to that! But God is never wrong. What he does is right. What he sends is exactly what we need, he is never wrong. God loves us and he sends exactly what we need, that is the argument here.

We have often reminded you of this definition of a Christian: one who is completely fearless, continually cheerful, and constantly in trouble.

This is exactly what this passage describes. God does not ask us to rejoice in the trouble, but in what the trouble does for us. He is not expecting us to screw a smile on our face and go around saying, "Hallelujah, it hurts!" No, as the writer says, "for the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant." But God is asking us to rejoice, nevertheless, not saying, "Hallelujah, it hurts," but "Hallelujah, it helps!" For, he points out, "later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

Notice that last part. It is possible to go through trials and never have them do a thing for you because you complain all the time. Trials never do anything for you if you are always grouching and griping.

Surely it is difficult to believe that God sends these things, yet the whole of Scripture is to this point. Perhaps you say Satan sends them. No, God sends them, using Satan, perhaps, but you have never looked far enough if you look only at the immediate instrument. You must lift your eyes to the One behind it all and see that God sends these things. Therefore they come for our blessing and we are to rejoice in that.

Once in a while in my reading I run across a passage that is so well put, so beautifully expressed, that it defies assimilation and I simply must quote it. I ran across such a passage in Decision Magazine. It was an editorial entitled, "Hang

Tough." It so captures the thought of this passage we are studying that I share it with you.

So! Things are becoming a little rough and you want to quit. The pressure is too great, you say. No one appreciates your effort to spread the Gospel. The government has closed down your missionary bookstore, your hospital. Some religious bigot is inciting people to try to break up your meetings. People in the office are complaining about your Christian witness; they say your "halo fits too tight." Neighbors are beginning to look upon you as a nuisance. Someone wrote a letter in which he implied that your ideas were fanatical. Your family says you are old-fashioned and should stop "forever going to that church."

So now you are ready to pull out, to cave in, to switch to something else. Enough is enough, you say.

We, of course, do not know your circumstances, but we are going to throw away all the psychology books and offer a suggestion anyway. It is a rather crude Western expression: hang tough -- like a ranch hand riding a steer. In the common coinage: don't give up!

Things are going to be better for you. We know they will! Not because "tomorrow is another day" or anything like that, but because God has promised it to his children. Read the promise in Isaiah 54:7-8. It may seem that it was written just for you. God never promised his children that dark days would not come; he promised that fulfillment would follow. Just as the angels came and ministered to our Lord after the temptation, so God will send his blessings to you. He will give you -- himself.

Someday we believe you will see that the things you are now going through were necessary, in God's wisdom, to prepare you for what he has in store for you. You thought it was an attack on your integrity; God will give you a meaningful growth experience out of it. You do not have to try to make sense of life every minute, for God has already made sense of it.

How foolish, then, to "throw in the towel" right now. Did you imagine that the Christian life was to be all "golden slippers in the golden streets"? What do you imagine the Bible is talking about when it speaks of "overcomers"? You say you want "out" -- why? No courage? Are you afraid to face life?

It may be that you will have to look squarely at certain things. As a parent, as a young person, as a church worker, as a human being, you have deliberately avoided a certain matter, taking the easy way out. All right, then, gird up your loins and go after it. The way to face the music is to face it! Don't stand there

wilting and telling people you "can't take the pressure." Let God take it for you! That is why he is God. He is our strength and shield, the Bible says -- a very present help in trouble.

Remember, there is no such thing as weak-kneed Christianity. Christ builds strong knees -- through prayer. You say you have had to take one setback after another; that at times it seems hidden forces are ranged against you; that life has played you a "dirty trick." But why should any of these things keep you from bobbing back? Look who is in front of you! "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him" (Isaiah 59:19).

The Gospel has other words for other days, but the word today is, stay in there. Persevere. Show your mettle. "Hang tough." Strike a blow for Jesus Christ in spite of everything. For if you give in now, you may lose far more than you realize. But if you stick with it -- and with God -- there is everything to gain.

Now let us look at the second reason why trials come. They provide an opportunity to demonstrate our adequacy in Christ:

Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fail to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" spring up and cause trouble, and by it the many become defiled; that no one be immoral or irreligious like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears. {Heb 12:12-17 RSV}

Here the writer summarizes the practical results of trials in our life: They make possible the demonstration of a new kind of living, which is what the world is looking for. The world is not at all impressed with Christians who stop doing something the world is doing. But they are tremendously impressed with Christians who have started living the kind of a life the worldling cannot live. That stops them! And that is the life he is setting before us here.

First it starts with correction. "Lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet." That is, if you keep on going the way you are going it will only get worse -- that which is lame will be put out of joint. But stop it, he says, strengthen these things. Stop being so weak, stop being so anxious, so worried. How will the world get the impression that Christ is victor if they look at you and you are always in defeat? Strengthen these things, he says, and learn how to live in peace with your neighbor, "strive for peace with all men."

And above all, "follow after or seek after that holiness without which no one will see the Lord."

There is a verse that has bothered many. What does it mean? Do not forget that holiness is the exact Greek word that is also translated in this letter sanctification. We saw before that sanctify means "to put to its proper use." When a man or a woman is believing that Christ indwells him and gives him everything he needs for every minute, he is being "put to the proper use," the use for which God intended man. This is holiness, this sense of dependence and availability to God. This is what makes the world sit up and take notice as they see Christian men and women living the kind of life that is always adequate for every circumstance. That is the holiness without which no man can see the Lord.

The second phrase has to do with our concern for others: "See to it that no one fail to obtain the grace of God." We are not to live our lives to ourselves. Others are looking to us and we have a responsibility to them. He points out the two things that will stop the grace of God in any man's life -- bitterness and flippancy.

"Do not let a root of bitterness spring up and cause trouble." Bitterness is always wrong. No matter how justified the cause of bitterness may be, to have a bitter attitude as a Christian is always wrong, for resentment, envy, and bitterness are always of the flesh. The trouble is, they are highly contagious diseases. If one person is bitter and continues in an unforgiving, bitter spirit, others are infected by this and it spreads and defiles many. This is the problem in many a church today. So, if you see someone around you that has this problem, help him to see that this is a terrible thing that will wreck his life and destroy the grace of God, thus making it impossible to grow as a Christian.

The other thing that will arrest grace is flippancy, taking the things of the Spirit lightly as Esau did. He is the great example of this. Remember how Esau sold his birthright for a mess of pottage? He came in from the field hungry and saw Jacob cooking a mess of red lentils. When Esau saw the red lentils in the pot, he said to Jacob, "Give that red to this red" (pointing to his own red beard). That is one of the few puns recorded in Scripture. By that act he lost his birthright, not because he was an atrocious punster, but because he took the things of the Spirit lightly. The birthright had to do with the promise given to Abraham concerning the coming of a Seed that would set men free from self. To despise it, as Esau did, is to say that the things that God offers to do for man are of no importance at all.

There is many a Christian, many a young person, who is in danger of despising his birthright, as Esau did, by saying "I haven't time for these things, I'm too busy. I haven't time to concern myself with studying the Scriptures, or walking with God." Unfortunately this causes a terrible reaction. As in the case of Esau, a

hardness of heart sets in and when the moment of truth dawns it may be too late. When it says here, "he desired to inherit the blessing later but was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears," please do not misunderstand that. That does not mean that he tried to repent in his own heart but could not. The repentance he sought was not his own, but his father's. Repentance means a change of mind. When he came back to his father later and said, "Now, Father, I'd like to have my birthright," his father said, "It's too late, son. You sold it for a mess of pottage and it belongs to your brother." Esau wept bitterly and tried to change his father's mind, but his father could not change his mind; it was too late.

Here, then, is the ministry we are to have: To have a life in ourselves that is characterized by a display of that holiness, that sanctification, that proper use of our humanity that makes God visible in us, and to manifest it in a deep concern for the welfare of others, that no one else miss the grace of God. That is the ministry, but what is the motive? For that we must look at the next passage:

For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers entreat that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear." But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel. {Heb 12:18-24 RSV}

There is the motive. How can we carry on a ministry like this that has just been described? Not by being driven by fear. Not by the Law with its demands upon us, "Do this, or else." Not by self-effort, not by the gritted teeth and the clenched fist and a determination that we are going to serve God. That will never do it, we have seen that throughout this letter. If we serve because we are afraid we will lose something from God, that frightens us as the Law frightened Israel in the terrible scene on Mt. Sinai. But it is not fear that is our motive; it is fullness, it is what God has given us.

You have come, he says, not to this Mount Sinai, but to Mount Zion, the place of grace; "and to the new Jerusalem, the city of the living God." This is another term for the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven. You have come under a new government, under new management. "And to angels." In the first of this letter we are told that angels are ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to those who are

to be the heirs of salvation, i.e., Christians. Angels are here to help us when we need it. They are part of our resource. "And to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven." This is the Church, those who are born in Christ, part of the Firstborn of God, sharing his life with our names written in heaven, i.e., the heavenly calling. "And to the universal judge, to God who is judge of all men," whether they are Christians or not. All men are on the same basis because they stand alike before God.

"And to the spirits of just men made perfect." Who are these? They are the Old Testament saints we read about in Chapter 11, men and women of God who lived in the days when the promise was given before the cross, who looked forward by faith and who are waiting now for us. And to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, the new arrangement for living. A mediator is not someone up in heaven somewhere, in some distant reach of space; he is an indwelling Christ. That is the point this letter makes. He is available to us. He is right here to be our strength, our righteousness, our wisdom, whatever we need. "And to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel." When Abel's blood was shed it cried out for vengeance, as the book of Genesis tells us, but Jesus' blood did not speak of vengeance -- it speaks of access, of vindication, of the fact there is no problem between man and God that is not settled by his blood. There is no longer any question of guilt. We can come completely accepted in the Beloved.

Thus, with all this on our side there is no need to fail, is there? That is the point he is making. Certainly it gets rough, certainly it gets discouraging, surely there are times when the pressures are intense, but have you reckoned on your resources? Have you forgotten them?

I shall never forget a story of a Navajo Indian who periodically came off the reservation to see his banker. He was a rich old man, having made a lot of money in oil and it was all in the bank. But he would come to his banker, and say, "Money all gone. Sheep all dead. Cattle all stolen. Fences all down. Everything bad." His banker knew exactly what to do. He would go into the vault, put a lot of money into some bags and set it down in front of the old man. He would count the money, and his eyes would begin to gleam. Then he would come to the banker again and say, "Sheep all well. Cattle all back. Fences all up. Everything good." And out he would go. He was reckoning on his resources.

Now what he was counting on was a very flimsy security indeed, but the principle upon which he operated was right: He counted on that which was available to him. With the resources available to us, there is no reason to fail. With all this working for us, who can be against us?

Finally, these trials come to us to mark out truth, the demarcation of truth:

See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less shall we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. His voice then shook the earth; but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven." This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of what is shaken, as of what has been made, in order that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire. {Heb 12:25-29 RSV}

This is the fifth and last great warning passage in this book, and it reminds us that these difficult times that we go through have a special purpose. Paul said in his letter to Timothy, "Perilous times will come in which men will be lovers of self, hateful, trucebreakers," {cf, 2 Tim 3:1ff} -- and a long list of ugly things. These "perilous times" come in cycles throughout history, and they have a designed purpose. They are God's way of showing man what is passing and what is permanent. God is shaking the earth and the heaven. This is not the final great tribulation he is referring to, it is something going on right now. God is now shaking the earth and the heaven.

Have you noticed that the concepts on which man builds for security are being tested today as never before, and exposed as either true or false? Think of some of the things that men trust in:

The security of number: We think if we can get enough people to join our club we will have strength. Today, alliances like that are collapsing on every side, agreements are merely scraps of paper, and no one can trust his associates very far.

Then there is our trust in the power of organization itself. We think if we can get things systematically organized we can take care of all our problems. But now we are faced with the Frankensteinian monster of Big Government which is moving in to dominate more and more of life. It is well organized, but organization has run away with us and we are afraid of it now, with world government looming on the horizon. It frightens us, but it is simply a revelation of the weakness of our trust in the power of organization.

Take the common idea today of "the goodness of man." That was once heard on every side, but you do not hear it much any more. More and more, as men are

being shaken by what God is doing in the world today we see violence increasing, and the indifference of man to his neighbor's need is demonstrated even here in the United States where we thought we were so civilized and cultured.

There is our trust in the omnipotence of money. The older we grow the more we are sure that if we could get enough money things would be all right. We are being taught today to pray, "Our Father which art in Washington..." The result is that we are seeing more emptiness and meaninglessness and vacuity in life than we have ever seen before. Money, as our Lord reminded us, is never enough. This idea is being shaken so man can see what will remain.

Our trust in the wisdom of science is threatening now the very destruction of the world in which we live, the whole human race. Not only from the atom and hydrogen bombs, but from such things as pesticides and other ways we influence nature. We are not smart enough to run our lives. That is what this passage makes clear. Is it not rather revealing today that the most widespread description of our common reaction to life is, "We're all shook up?" God is shaking the things that can be shaken in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain.

The word to the Christian is, "let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken. For our God is a consuming fire." God is light and God is love, and when you put those two together you get fire. Fire is both light and warmth. As someone has well pointed out, fire will destroy what it cannot purify, but it purifies what it cannot destroy. That is the whole explanation of life in this present hour. We are passing through the fire which is designed either to destroy that which can be destroyed, or to purify that which can never be destroyed.

God is leading us through these trials and through the difficulties of our day, in order that we may learn to cry with old Job, back there in the oldest book of the Bible, "He knoweth the way that I take, when he has tried me I shall come forth as gold," {Job 23:10 KJV}.

James Russell Lowell reminds us of the same truth in these words:

Though the cause of evil prosper,  
Yet the truth alone is strong.  
Truth forever on the scaffold  
Wrong forever on the throne.

Yet that scaffold sways the future  
And behind the dim unknown

Standeth God behind the shadows  
Keeping watch above his own.

Prayer:

Our Gracious Father, what a mighty revelation this is of the uncertainty of man's reasonings and man's abilities, but the sureness, the security that we have when we rest in that which can never be shaken. We are so grateful today, Lord, that by grace you have led us to this. We have tested it, we know it works. Now help us to stand strong, and "hang tough" and to be yours in every circumstance of life. We pray in thy name, Amen.



## THE INTENDED LIFE

The closing word of this letter is highly practical, crowded with many helpful things. This unknown writer (whom I strongly suspect to be the Apostle Paul) felt very much like the sentiment of a limerick I often quote,

There was a young poet in Japan  
Whose poetry no one could scan.  
When told it was so,  
He replied, "Yes, I know,  
But I try to get as many words in the last line as I can."

In this last chapter the writer has tried to squeeze in every bit he can in the way of practical application.

In this chapter, as throughout this whole letter, it is evident that God is not interested in religion. This may come as a surprise to many, but God is not primarily interested in religion, but in life. He recognizes that life is lived in segments, like an orange, or in layers, like an onion. An individual has a social life, a business life, a sex life, a school life, etc. The Christian finds that, for him, life falls into two main categories: his contacts with the world, and his contacts with the body of Christ, the Church. His life, therefore, is divided between the world and the church. I do not mean by that a division in time, as Monday through Saturday for the world, and Sunday, alone, for the Lord. I am talking about the relationship Christians must have with two kinds of people -- the worldling and the believer. This letter closes with very helpful words about both:

There is a section on life in the world, then one on life in the body, and then two magnificent verses on life lived at the center.

Now let us take the first section on life in the world:

Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them; and those who are ill-treated, since you also are in the body. Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for God will judge the immoral and adulterous. Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, "I will never fail you nor forsake you." Hence we can confidently say,

"The Lord is my helper,  
I will not be afraid;  
what can man do to me?" {Heb 13:1-6 RSV}

Here is a very striking commentary on Romans 12:2. "Be not conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind," {Rom 12:2a RSV}. That is the Christian's calling -- not to be conformed to the world but to be transformed in the midst of it. The Christian must live his life in touch with the world. There is a very dangerous and terrible philosophy which has been widespread among Christians (fortunately it is beginning to fade), that Christians were intended to isolate themselves from the world, to draw lines of demarcation, huddle behind high, towering walls that would exclude them from the activities, the thoughts, and the attitudes of the world. It is common today to meet Christians who have raised their children in a Christian atmosphere from the womb to the tomb, sending them to Christian schools, insisting they get a job in a Christian company, and thus living a secluded life for all their earthly career.

Now this is wrong. The New Testament clearly declares it is wrong. It is anti-Christian, and anti-Scriptural, for it is against the command of God. The Lord Jesus has told us to be in the world, and has sent us forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. Though we may be in a hostile environment, Christians are still expected to live in touch with the world. But they themselves are to be different. That is the point, that is the separation the Bible speaks of, "come out from among them and be ye separate," {2 Cor 6:17 KJV}. It does not mean physical isolation, but it means Christian attitudes in the midst of the world are to be different.

Now, in this passage you have this difference outlined in a rather outstanding way:

First of all, Christians are to have an open house to strangers. This is something the world knows little of. The worldling is content only to entertain his friends, perhaps a very limited circle. Christians are to entertain other Christians (that is part of what it means, "let brotherly love continue"), but do not stop at this. "Do not neglect also to show hospitality to strangers." A Christian home is to be a center of hospitality to which strangers and worldlings are to have access.

Obviously this calls for initiative on the part of Christians. Strangers do not come around knocking at your door asking for an invitation to a meal. We must assume the initiative. The film ministry we are to have in homes this summer provides a marvelous opportunity for this kind of initiative to be shown. It is a way to bring into your home those who have not yet heard the tremendous, revolutionary themes of Christian faith, and give them opportunity to hear them and understand them.

And this type of ministry has a special beneficiary effect upon the host as well, for the writer reminds us that "thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

Perhaps he is referring to the experience of Abraham when three guests came to his home and he found that they were the Lord and two accompanying angels. At any rate he is indicating that there can be surprising blessing come from the entertainment of strangers in your home. Frequently you will find yourself more than amply rewarded by the initiative you have shown in this direction.

This is so practical I would like to pinpoint it with a question: How many of you have had a non-Christian into your home this past year? How many have taken this admonition practically and seriously and done this? -- For these things were intended to be practical means by which we can put into practice the tremendous themes we have been learning in the book of Hebrews. Well, that is the first thing, an open house to strangers.

The second relationship with the world must be an open heart to the oppressed. "Remember those who are in prison as though in prison with them; and those who are ill-treated, since you also are in the body." This means the Christian must not shut his eyes and ears to the needy around him. We must not be like the Levite and the Pharisee in the parable of the Good Samaritan who, out of a sense of religious concern, shut their eyes to the need of the stranger and walked by on the other side, and thus earned the scathing rebuke implied by the Lord Jesus. Christians are to have eyes and ears and hearts open to those who are in need around them, whether in or otherwise oppressed or mistreated, and to do something about it. Here is a call to the ministry of compassion.

I will never forget the shock that came to me while visiting in a home one day, to have a Christian woman tell me of an incident that had occurred the night before. Her neighbor had come to her in great distress of heart and asked for help in some temporary crisis that had struck her home. As this Christian woman told me about it, she said, "I don't know what I'm going to do. I moved here to get away from this kind of people, and if this woman keeps coming over to my house, I'll just have to find another home." My heart sank within me at that attitude. How totally unchristian!

Certainly this touches the delicate question today of civil rights. What about the Negro people, and the oppression under which many of them are undoubtedly living, not only in the South but in the North as well? This verse should make very clear that it is wrong for Christians to ignore this kind of a question. We cannot defend all that is being done in this direction today, and perhaps some of the efforts to help are quite mistaken, but as individuals we must be responsive to the need.

Here is a point I would like to make crystal clear. I do not believe the New Testament gives the Church warrant to issue proclamations on political problems the nation may be facing, or social issues. As a body, the Church has no message to the world except the message of the gospel, to declare the good news in Jesus Christ. But as individuals the writer correctly points out that we cannot be rightly related to the God who loves all men everywhere and not show this in some definite, practical, helpful way. There must be deep concern about those who are oppressed, troubled, and underprivileged, and a readiness to involve ourselves in some kind of help.

Perhaps we need to open our eyes a good deal wider to these opportunities in our own community, and to see that there are those around us that need much help. A number of years ago I read an article by Averill Harriman. He was about to depart for France as the Ambassador from the United States when someone said to him, "How is your French?" He said, "Oh, my French is excellent; all except the verbs!" Perhaps that is true of many Christians. We have such wonderful nouns: Lord, Friend, Brother. And such inspiring adjectives: Noble, Sacred, and Divine. But sometimes our verbs are very weak -- we have little action.

But we are called to a readiness to apply in specific terms the love of God by deeds of kindness and help to those who are oppressed around us. The Christian must have an open heart to the oppressed. Then, third, he must have open eyes to the dangers of life:

Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for God will judge the immoral and adulterous. Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have; {Heb 13:4-5a RSV}

Nonconformity to the world must certainly involve these areas. The loose sexual standards of our generation and the intense materialistic spirit of this age constitute a constant peril to our hearts, and we must beware of them. We must realize that God has undertaken to sustain the sacredness of marriage and that he unceasingly, unrelentingly judges violations of it. Therefore, we dare not heed the fine sounding declarations being made today about a "new morality," as though we had passed beyond the ancient standards and they no longer had significance.

As this writer reminds us, God judges the immoral and adulterous. He does not mean that God looses lightning bolts from heaven against them, or that he causes terrible diseases to come upon them; these are not the forms of judgment. But we can see the judgment of God in the terrible tempest of mental pressures and crackups which sweep like a plague across this land. They are due to the breakdown of moral standards. The certain deterioration of life is the judgment of

God when sex standards are violated. It is the brutalization of humanity, so men become like animals and live on the level of animals. This is so apparent in our day.

Then there is the danger of materialism: "keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have." This means we must swim against the strong currents of a luxury loving age. We must not give in to the pressures to "keep up with the Joneses," the mad rush to have all that the worldlings around us have. The weakness of the Church is due in large part to the failure of Christians to be content with what God gives them.

This does not mean that all Christians should take a vow of poverty. There is nothing like that in the New Testament, for it is evident that God allows certain standards of living, certain levels of prosperity differing one from another. The point the writer makes is not that there is anything wrong in riches, but that we must learn to be content with what God has given. Contentment is not having what you want; it is wanting only what you have.

It is difficult to know where to draw the line between a proper increase in the standard of living, and needless luxury which is really waste, but the secret is given in the latter part of the verse: "For he has said, 'I will never fail you nor forsake you.'" That is the promise of God. He is our great and unending resource and will never fail us. Here is the strongest negative in the New Testament. The original carries the thought, "I will never, never, under any circumstances, ever leave you or forsake you." It is a mighty declaration and on the basis of it the writer says we should declare, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid (of loss or poverty or anything else). What can man do to me?" If I have God, what can man do to me? The point is that we must be content to take only what God gives us.

There is that wonderful story in Genesis concerning Abraham as he returned from battle with the five kings, having recovered the wealth of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah which had been taken by the invading armies. Abraham brought this wealth back to the king of Sodom, who offered him a great reward. But Abraham said, "I have determined in my heart that the king of Sodom shall not be able to say, 'I have made Abraham rich,'" {cf, Gen 14:23}. Abraham was saying in effect, "I will only take what God is content to give me. I don't want riches from any other source." If the Christian assumes that attitude, he reasons, "If God grants me increase, fine; I'll take it. But I am not going to struggle after it. This is not my goal. I will not make the increase of money my purpose for living, for I am content with what I have." This kind of contentment permits us to be natural, uncritical. We do not go around judging those who have more than we have. We

are quite content to let God deal with them, for we are content to have God deal with us. Now, that is the Christian in relationship to the world.

Let us now look at life in the Body. Here is life as a Christian must live it out in terms of his relationship to the body of Christ, the Church. Every Christian soon discovers that he is part of a new community -- the community of the redeemed. It is a kind of secret society, the members of which are everywhere. Whenever you meet one, you discover you share a relationship with him that is often closer than flesh and blood. You discover in experience the truth we sing of in the hymn:

Like a mighty army  
Moves the Church of God  
Brothers, we are treading  
Where the saints have trod;  
We are not divided,  
All one body we,  
One in hope and doctrine  
One in charity.

That is true, even though there are some who have suggested that, by all appearances, it should be revised to be sung something like this:

Like a mighty turtle  
Moves the Church of God;  
Brothers, we are treading  
Where we've always trod;  
We are much divided,  
Many bodies we,  
Strong in hope and doctrine,  
Weak in charity.

It is true there are many divisions outwardly in the body of Christ today, but there is also discoverable an inward relationship which links all true believers, who are born again and indwelt of the Holy Spirit, with one another. This is the life the writer now describes, life in that kind of a body.

The first thing we discover is that there is a structure of leadership within this body.

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. {Heb 13:7-8 RSV}

And then in Verse 17,

Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls as men who will have to give account. Let them do this joyfully, and not sadly for that would be of no advantage to you. {Heb 13:17 RSV}

The first injunction seems to look back to the heritage of the past, to those men and women who have died and left their testimony behind. Perhaps it refers to those who led them to Christ, whom they knew personally and who spoke to them the Word of God. He says of them, "Notice the way they ended their lives and imitate their faith," and links with this the great declaration, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." What he was to the men and women of the past, he can be, and is, to us today, absolutely changeless. It is this changeless Christ which is the great refuge of the Christian in a changing world. Therefore as we look back to the men and women of the past, the Luthers, the Wesleys, the Moodys, or perhaps some godly Sunday school teacher or parent who has led us to Christ and established us in Christ, we are to imitate their faith which was fixed upon a changeless Christ.

This verse, by the way, is often misused today. There are those who say because Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever, he must inevitably do the same in every age that he has done in the past. There are those who use this to defend tongues, faith-healing, etc. Because Christ healed all those who came to him, they insist all who come today must inevitably be healed. But remember this verse does not say Jesus Christ does the same, he is the same. His doing may change according to the times, but his character never changes, it is always the same.

Life in the body of Christ also involves a simplicity of belief.

Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings; for it is well that the heart be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited their adherents. We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. {Heb 13:9-12 RSV}

Here he warns against diverse and strange teachings which are linked, evidently, with food restrictions and external religious demands. These are the food faddists of the first century. It refers to those who insisted on Judaistic restrictions of diet

as having spiritual value. This is seen in our own day in such practices as giving up meat for Lent, burning candles for certain observances, counting beads, or any form or ceremony upon which some religious value is placed.

Now let us be very frank and open about this. All through this letter the writer has told us again and again that such observances are simply empty shadows; they are pointing toward something, but the something they point toward is the real value, not the shadows. As he says here, "We have an altar from which those who serve the tent [i.e., who indulge in shadow-acting] have no right to eat." You cannot have both the shadow and the substance; it is either one or the other. You cannot feed on the reality if you place value on the mere picture. You cannot have both.

There is a very sly thrust here in these words, "which have not benefited their adherents." He says, look at these people who have been so concerned about form, these lean, hungry, long-faced, haunted souls who want you to get involved in restrictions of diet, etc. Look at them! They have not even been helped by their own programs, they are no better off for all their restrictions. Food does not strengthen the heart, he says, but grace does. Grace truly strengthens and if you try to feed your heart on empty religious ordinances then you cannot feed yourself upon the strength of God's grace! That is the whole thing. If you put value in the external, then the real can have no meaning to you.

This is illustrated in the tabernacle, for back in the days when the sin offerings were brought into the tabernacle the priests were forbidden to eat of them but the bodies of the sin offerings were taken outside the camp and burned there. The priest could eat of the meat of the burnt offerings, and the other offerings, but not the sin offering. Those bodies were cast outside the gate and there burned. Thus it was with the Lord Jesus when he came. They took him outside the city of Jerusalem and put him to death on a cross outside the gate. Thus the religion of the world, with its emphasis upon the external, is ignored by God. Man fulfills his proper function only by receiving what God has done in Christ, without any need for observances or candles or form or ceremony, but by a quiet act of faith. That is the simplicity of belief in Jesus Christ. It is so uncomplicated, so simple, so available to all.

There is also in the life in the body a sacrifice of service.

Therefore let us go forth to him outside the camp, bearing abuse for him. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek 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 acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. {Heb 13:13-16 RSV}

And Verse 18,

Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner. {Heb 13:18-19 RSV}

There, again, is the practical side to this sacrifice of service which involves meekness. Let us go outside the camp, like Christ, and, like him, put up with misunderstanding and abuse and persecution from those who cannot see what we see in him. Let us remember that meekness is the ability to take praise without conceit, and blame without resentment. This is the curriculum of grace, "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart," {cf, Matt 11:29}. Therefore let us go forth unto him outside the camp, for here we have no lasting city, that is, nothing permanent.

Then there is a sacrifice of praise, "let us continually offer praise to God." As Paul says to the Thessalonians, "In everything give thanks," {1 Th 5:18}. I have learned to gauge the spiritual life of a Christian by noting the absence or presence of a complaining spirit. When Christians complain they have obviously failed to grasp the great truth that everything has been sent for a purpose. Therefore, "in everything give thanks." If all we can do is gripe, grumble, groan, moan and complain it shows that we have failed to believe what God says is true.

The third aspect of this is sharing all things in common. "Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have." The word is communicate, or "to hold all things in common." That is not Communism. Communism says, "What's yours is mine." But Christianity says, "What's mine is God's; therefore it's yours." There is the difference -- a readiness to hold all things in common for the Lord's sake.

Finally, there is a note on prayer. "Pray for us," the apostle can say, "pray for us." Every Christian needs enlightenment and empowerment. Life is too big for us to handle alone, too complicated, too highly structured. There are too many deceitful things about it. We are so confused, so easily bewildered. But prayer can cut through these illusions and bring us understanding and perspective. That is why the apostle continually asked, "Pray for us," and the writer here says, "I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you."

The final section is on life lived at the center:

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in you that which is pleasing

in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.  
{Heb 13:20-21 RSV}

Man now possesses great nuclear submarines by which the oceans can be traversed without ever coming to the surface. The secret of their tremendous power lies in a nuclear reactor hidden away in the depths of the submarine. That strange, remarkable force does not need any refueling but is constantly giving off energy, so the submarine never needs to go into port for refueling. So it is in the life of a Christian. In these two verses is revealed the nuclear reactor intended for every Christian.

Look at the elements of this: "Now may the God of peace." In this letter we have seen what peace is. The nearest modern equivalent is "mental health." That is what you are after, is it not? In Christ we are in touch with the God of mental health, the God who intends life to be lived on a peaceful level. With him is linked the Lord Jesus, the Great Shepherd of the sheep. I like that phrase, "the Great Shepherd of the sheep."

I came from Monta-a-aa-na and know a good deal about sheep. If you are from the city you have probably learned about sheep from "Mary had a Little Lamb" and "Little Bo Peep." You think, therefore, that their fleece is as white as snow, and that if you leave them alone they'll come home, wagging their tails behind them. But I can assure you it is all a lie; it is not true! Sheep are the most helpless of creatures. There are two outstanding characteristics of sheep: They have no wisdom, and they have no weapons. They are forever running off and getting lost and unable to find their way back, and if anything attacks them they are utterly helpless to defend themselves. That is why they need a shepherd.

And that is why we need a shepherd, and why the Bible likens us to sheep. We have a Great Shepherd of the sheep. He is our resource, our provision -- a God who is concerned about mental health, and a Great Shepherd who is there to watch us -- because we have no wisdom and we have no weapons for our defense.

Linked with them is this great process that is spoken of here, "who brought again from the dead ... by the blood of the eternal covenant." There you have the cross and the resurrection, and what these mean has been spelled out for us in this letter. The cross means the end of the old life of self-reliance, and the resurrection sets forth the power of the new life, that marvelous inner force which is greater than any other force that the earth has known anything about. The mightiest demonstration of power the world has ever seen was not the hydrogen bomb, but the resurrection of Jesus Christ! The hydrogen bomb can do nothing but destroy. The only power that earth knows anything about that can take life and put it together again is the resurrection power of a risen Christ. That is the power that is

released within the Christian by the indwelling Christ within him. We talk about the conquest of outer space but the greatest conquest ever made was when the Lord Jesus conquered inner space by moving into the heart of man, to plant within us the greatest power by which life can be lived -- a power that heals and makes whole.

The result of all this is that God will equip you with everything good that you may do his will. This is the secret of effective service. You do not have to ask God to do this, he is there to do it, to equip you with everything good that you may do his will. There is no excuse for failure, is there? There is a full supply here and full ability, working in you. God is going to work through you, not apart from your will, but right along with it. You choose, you start out, but he is there to carry it through.

Then there is full acceptance, even before it happens. "Working in you that which is pleasing in his sight." You know you are going to please God, you know that you cannot help but please him when you walk in this way and live on this basis. As Major Ian Thomas so accurately put it, "You are fighting a battle already won." But if we try to live in the self-effort of the flesh, we are fighting a battle already lost.

Now notice this whole thing is wrapped around with the most dynamic, most revolutionary, most life-changing phrase ever uttered by man, "through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." "Through Jesus Christ" -- that is the secret of life, that is the way God intended man to live -- through Jesus Christ. Paul can say in Philippians, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," {cf, Phil 4:13}. What an adequate program! What a mighty gospel! What good news for this present life!

God intended it for you, that you might live in your present circumstances, wherever you are.

The letter closes now with some personal greetings that are self-explanatory. We will not take time to comment on them since they explain themselves.

Let us join together in prayer.

Prayer

Our dear Father, thank you for this mighty letter coming to us across twenty centuries of time, reflecting the great truths that are still available, still demonstrable in our very midst. Help us to grasp and understand these, but more than that, give us the courage to step out upon them, to live life on this basis, that

we might enter into the glorious liberty of the children of God, for we pray in thy name, Amen.