

"LET US HOLD FAST"

By

Ronald Christian

An In-Depth Devotional Study
Of The Book Of Hebrews

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"LET US HOLD FAST
THE CONFESSION OF OUR
HOPE WITHOUT WAVERING,
FOR HE WHO PROMISED IS
FAITHFUL."

(Hebrews 10:23)

Dedicated To

My two daughters, Darlene and Rhonda,
In hopes that this book will help them to
remain steadfast in the Christian Faith
throughout their entire lives.

PREFACE

The Letter to the Hebrews is without doubt one of the most profound letters ever written to Christian believers. Its themes are deeply theological and yet extremely practical. It has been one of the greatest challenges and delights in my preaching ministry to ponder the message of this provocative letter over a period of several months. These messages were first preached to "my flock" at the Free Methodist Church at Fort Collins, Colorado. At the beginning of each chapter appears a concise outline of the portion of Scripture under consideration. The homiletical method of study hopefully will facilitate learning. The layout of the book is designed in such a way that it can easily be used for small adult "Growth Groups" or Sunday School Classes. There are thought-provoking questions listed at the end of each chapter, to provide class participants an opportunity to review and to discuss the main content of each chapter.

I am deeply indebted to Shirley Ruiz, a personal friend and willing servant of our Lord, who has volunteered her time and talent to do all of the typing for this book. Her joyful spirit has been a great encouragement to me.

INTRODUCTION

"LET US HOLD FAST"

(Understanding The Theme Of Hebrews)

Notes William Barclay, "When we sum it all up, we can say that Hebrews is a letter written by a great teacher, written by a man whom we would call a professor, to a little group or college of Christians in Rome. He was their teacher; at the moment he was separated from them; he was afraid that they were drifting away from the faith; and so he wrote this letter to them."

Notes Robert Shank, in his helpful book "Life In The Son". "Those who contend that the writer to the Hebrews views his readers as men who have halted short of saving faith in Christ, rather than as true believers, do so out of regard for the necessities of their theology. The evidence of the epistle is against them."

"Others agree that the Epistle to the Hebrews obviously is addressed to true believers, but contend that the writer's purpose is not to sound a warning against apostasy, but to share with his readers the secret of spiritual progress. His call to them, as they contend, is not Don't turn back! - but Let us go on! Again, such opinion is dictated by the necessities of their theology, rather than by the contents of the epistle."

"The phrase 'let us go on' appears but once (6:1). 'Let us go on,' he writes, 'unto perfection'. The writer may have reference to his intention to proceed to the advanced development of 'the doctrine of Christ' to which he proposes to lead them in the course of his letter. Or, it may be a call to his readers to advance from spiritual infancy in which he found them (5:11-13) toward the maturity (v.14) which is possible for all who will grasp it. Actually, both things are within the writer's purpose. Certainly it is his intention to proceed toward the fuller development of his Christology, which is the grand theme of the didactic portions of his letter. But the presentation of his Christology is not an end in itself; it is offered for the profit of his readers. The didactic portions of his letter are but the base from which he launches his frequent exhortations, the principal burden of which is not 'let us go on', but 'let us hold fast'.

"Certainly he is concerned that his readers go on unto perfection. But his first concern is that they hold fast the confession of hope without wavering. If they do, they will go on toward perfection. The Christian life, a living relationship proceeding upon a living faith in a living Savior, is never static. 'Jesus said unto them, *Take heed what ye hear: for with what measure ye mete, it shall be*

measured unto you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath' (Mark 4:24,25). Robertson's comment is worth pondering: 'The man who does not acquire soon loses what he thinks that he has. This is one of the paradoxes of Jesus that repay thought and practice'. Growth in grace, or spiritual decline, may be hardly perceptible in many instances; nevertheless, it remains true that a Christian either grows or degenerates. The Christian life is never static. The congregation to whom the Epistle to the Hebrews was written had not merely failed to grow in their Christian lives; they had degenerated to the point of becoming spiritual infants again (5:11,12). 'They had become with the years less quick in understanding, and not more quick according to a natural and healthy development....The Hebrews had through their own neglect become young children again....As yet however this dulness had not extended to action, though such an issue was not far off (comp. 2 Pet. 11,20)'. " (Westcott)

"Their peril of finally apostatizing increased in proportion as they declined spiritually." The writer's concern for them is reflected in his frequent and urgent exhortations.

"In contrast with the exhortation 'let us go on unto perfection,' which occurs but once, the exhortation 'let us hold fast our confession' occurs twice (4:14; 10:23) and the epistle abounds with cognate exhortations: 'if we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end' (3:6); 'if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end' (3:14); 'lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God' (3:12); 'lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin' (3:13); 'lest at any time we should slip away' (2:1); 'if we neglect so great salvation' (2:3); 'harden not your hearts' (3:8,15); 'lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief' (4:11); show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end' (6:11); 'let us keep on drawing near with a true heart in full assurance of faith' (10:22); 'cast not away therefore your confidence' (10:35); 'for ye have need of patience, that...ye might receive the promise' (10:36); 'the just shall live by faith: but if he draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him' (10:38); 'lest ye be wearied and faint' (12:3); 'despise not the chastening of the Lord nor faint when thou art rebuked of him' (12:5); 'be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live' (12:9); 'lest that which is lame be turned out of the way' (12:13); 'lest any man fail of the grace of God' (12:15); 'lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who sold his birthright' (12:16); 'if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven' (12:25); 'be not carried away with divers and strange doctrines' (13:9); 'let us keep going forth unto

Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach' (13:13). Any emphasis in the Epistle to the Hebrews on going on toward spiritual maturity is secondary. The burden of the writer's 'word of exhortation,' is that his readers 'hold fast the confession of their hope' in Jesus Christ as the only Savior and 'the Source of eternal salvation unto all who obey Him.'" (Life In The Son, Pages 231-234, Robert Shank)

The great James Denney in his book 'The Death of Christ' also believed the main thrust of the book of Hebrews was conservation of the Faith. "The Epistle to the Hebrews does not make as clear to us as the Pauline epistles how it is that Christ's death becomes effective for men. The author was not an evangelist so much as a pastor, and it is not the initiation of Christianity, but its conservation, with which he deals throughout."

After one makes a careful study of the book of Hebrews, one is impressed with a pattern in the book. Three basic components emerge: (1) Promises and Provisions, (2) Conditions and Exhortations, (3) Warnings and Perils.

A contextual study of Hebrews involves appreciating the promises and provisions of God as they are couched in the broader conditions and the warnings as expounded in the total passage under consideration. A proof-texting method of Bible Study is always dangerous and is a direct violation of the principles of hermeneutics.

If conservation of the faith is the main concern of the author of Hebrews, then the didactic portions of the Book are the 'launching pads' for the frequent exhortations to maintain the faith. Again, (to quote Robert Shank): "The didactic portions of his letter are but the base from which he launches his frequent exhortations, the principal burden of which is not 'let us go on,' but 'let us hold fast.'" (Life In The Son; page 232)

The Christology of Hebrews is rich and beautiful and is worthy of a study within itself. But the didactic portions are only secondary. The hortatory sections, in which the author's main trust is "Let us hold fast," are primary.

Why was Hebrews written? Because the author "was afraid that they (the believers) were drifting away from the faith." (William Barclay). The key emphasis in the Book is, "Let us hold fast!" Why this emphasis?

- (1) Because there was a real possibility that these believers could go back to the Jewish religion which would mean a repudiation of the way of grace through Jesus and the New Covenant.
- (2) Because of the

possibility of falling away from grace (becoming faithless) under the severe attacks of persecutors (10:32-34; 13:3). (3) Because of the possibility (and reality) of failing to grow spiritually and instead degenerating to the point of becoming spiritual infants again (5:11,12). "Their peril of finally apostatizing increased in proportion as they declined spiritually. The writer's concern for them is reflected in his frequent and urgent exhortations." (Life In The Son; Robert Shank; page 233). (4) Because of the possibility of believers becoming discouraged and embittered when God wielded the chastening rod (Hebrews 12).

CHAPTER 1

THE SUPREMACY OF JESUS

HEBREWS 1:1-4

HEBREWS

THE SUPREMACY OF JESUS

O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 1:1-4

INTRODUCTION: Jesus is not only the greatest of the great men and the holy angels, but Jesus is altogether unique as no one less than the very divine Son of God -- Creator and Sustainer of the universe, as Divine Redeemer, as the perfect expression of the invisible God, as the exalted Mediator who sits beside the Father's throne to make intercession for mankind, as the King of kings and Lord of lords whose reign is both righteous and eternal!

PROPOSITION: Jesus is supreme and incomparable, in a unique relationship to the Father. He is the eternal Son of the Living God!

- I. The Supremacy Of The Son Over The Prophets (verses 1-3)
 - A. God's Partial Revelation Through The Prophets (verse 1)
 - B. God's Perfect Revelation Through The Son (verses 2-3)

- II. The Supremacy Of The Son Over The Angels (verses 4-14)
 - A. The Angels' Subordinate Position and Ministry (verses 5-7, 13-14)
 - B. The Son's Supreme Person and Work (verses 8-12)

CONCLUSION: Jesus is the perfect reflection of the glory of God, the perfect expression of the invisible God, the creator and sustainer of the universe, the atoning sacrifice for sins, the divine Intercessor for mankind, who reigns eternally and righteously as the Changeless One.

HEBREWS

THE SUPREMACY OF JESUS

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 1:1-14

INTRODUCTION: Who is Jesus? One of the most important questions a person will ever ask!

"One day as he (Jesus) was alone, praying, with his disciples nearby, he came over and asked them, 'Who are the people saying I am?' 'John the Baptist', they told him, 'or perhaps Elijah or one of the other ancient prophets risen from the dead.' Then he asked them, 'Who do you think I am?' Peter replied, 'The Messiah-the Christ of God!'" (Luke 9:18-20; Living Bible)

Who you believe Jesus is, will determine what your conception of reality is! There are those who believe Jesus was a great prophet - perhaps even the greatest prophet in a long succession of prophets. There are those who believe that Jesus was the greatest teacher or the greatest moral example the world has ever known. There are others who believe that Jesus was a self-deceived egomaniac, making claims about himself that were extravagant and wild!

Jesus made amazing claims regarding His person and mission. He accepted the praise and homage of people. He claimed to be the eternal - "I AM" - the timeless divine Son of God! He claimed the right to forgive sins, and He exercised authority over both physical and demonic powers. He claimed to be the Judge of all mankind, and said that one's personal response to Him determined one's personal eternal destiny! He said that those who refuse to follow Him, are walking in moral darkness which would ultimately lead to eternal death!

The uniqueness of Jesus as the eternal Son of God is taught clearly in the Gospels. It is faith in Jesus as the only Savior and the Source of eternal salvation unto all who obey - it is the 'faith', both as a verbal affirmation and as a personal experience, which the author of the Book of Hebrews declares must be maintained. Why was the Book of Hebrews written? Because the author "was afraid that the believers were drifting away from the faith." (William Barclay) To drift away from the faith would mean to deny the uniqueness of Jesus as the only Savior, and would mean to revert back to Judaism and legalism, i.e. belief that keeping the Old Testament Law would bring eternal salvation and acceptance by God.

The supremacy of Jesus over the greatness of the prophets and over the special place and function of the angels -- this is the theme of the first chapter of Hebrews. Jesus is supreme. He is unique. He is greater far than the Old Testament prophets and superior even to angels, who, in the minds of the Jewish people, held a position of great power. Jesus is not only the greatest of the great men and the holy angels, but Jesus is altogether unique as no one less than the very divine Son of God -- as Creator and Sustainer of the universe, as divine Redeemer, as the perfect expression of the invisible God, as the exalted Mediator who sits beside the Father's throne to make intercession for mankind, as the King of kings and Lord of lords whose reign is both righteous and eternal!

PROPOSITION: Jesus is supreme and incomparable, in a unique relationship to the Father. He is the eternal Son of the Living God!

I. THE SUPREMACY OF THE SON OVER THE PROPHETS (Verses 1-3)

Hebrews 1:1-2a says, *"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son."* (NIV) Phillips translates these verses in this way; *"God, who gave to our forefathers many different glimpse of the truth in the words of the prophets, has now, at the end of the present age, given us the truth in the Son."* The Living Bible paraphrase is interesting: *"Long ago God spoke in many ways to our fathers through the prophets (in visions, dreams, and even face to face), telling them little by little about his plans. But now in these days he has spoken to us through his Son to whom he has given everything."*

The New English Bible is one of the clearest translations: *"When in former times God spoke to our forefathers, he spoke in fragmentary and varied fashion through the prophets. But in this the final age he has spoken to us in the Son whom he has made heir to the whole universe."*

A. GOD'S PARTIAL REVELATION THROUGH THE PROPHETS (Verse 1)

The Supremacy of God's revelation through the Son (Jesus) is the theme of the first chapter of Hebrews. God has never been silent, but has spoken in various ways throughout history. However, God's supreme and complete revelation of Himself to mankind was found in Jesus Christ. All other previous revelations were partial and incomplete and fragmentary. John, the beloved disciple of Jesus, wrote, *"The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world."* (John 1:9)

Jesus is the true or complete light (or revelation) in contrast to other lesser and incomplete lights previously given to mankind before Jesus' coming. These other lights were imperfect, incomplete, and transitory. Jesus is the perfect revelation of God, because Jesus is God's complete and eternal light. Jesus is like the noonday sun in contrast to the reflected light of the midnight moon.

Reflected lights from God shone upon the earth to mankind before the coming of Jesus. These reflected lights revealed the reality of God imperfectly. The reflected lights cast shadows upon the nature and person of God, even though it is true they did partially and imperfectly reflect something of the truth of God's nature.

What were some of these imperfect and partial "lights"? The light of God is revealed in Nature. The light of God as revealed in the Old Testament Mosaic Law. The light of God as revealed in His providential guidance of His Israelite people through historical events. The light of God, as revealed through the great writings of the Hebrew prophets. Yes, God has not been silent! He has revealed Himself. But all of His revelations of Himself, previous to the coming of Jesus, were partial and incomplete and fragmentary revelations.

Throughout the ages - at various times in past history - God spoke through prophets. Each prophet spoke to the particular age in which he lived, communicating that facet of God's truth which was most relevant for that particular set of circumstances. Isaiah focused on the truth of God's holiness amidst an age of moral pollution. His message centered on the redemptive grace of God's salvation. Jeremiah, the so-called 'weeping prophet', prophesied during the dark days of Judah, just a few years before Judah's Babylonian captivity. Jeremiah focused on the truth of God's sovereign power over the nations. Jeremiah warned God's chosen people that violation of God's laws and the worship of false gods were sure to bring God's ultimate judgment. Amos prophesied during a time when the powerful oppressed the weak and when injustice in the marketplace was rampant. His message was a cry for social justice. Hosea, whose own heart broke because of domestic problems, taught lessons concerning the forgiving love of God. "Each prophet, out of his own experience of life, and out of the experience of Israel, had grasped and expressed a fragment, a part of the truth of God. No prophet had grasped the whole round orb of truth; but with Jesus it was different. Jesus was not a part of the truth; He was the whole truth. He was not a fragmentary revelation of God; He was the full revelation of God." (Barclay's Hebrews, page 4)

B. GOD'S PERFECT REVELATION THROUGH THE SON (Verses 2-3)

The greatest writings of the greatest prophets were only preparatory revelations of the greatest revelation of all - the revelation of God through His Son -- Jesus Christ!

1. The Glory of the Son (verse 3a)

"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being." (verse 3a)

The glory and majesty and beauty of God is accurately reflected in the face of Jesus Christ. "Jesus is the exact image and expression of God, that just as if you look at the impression, you see exactly what the seal which made it is like, so if you look at Jesus you see exactly what God is like." (Barclay's Hebrews page 5)

Jesus is the flawless expression of God's Nature. He who has seen Jesus, has seen the Father! All that Jesus was while a man, God has always been eternally. Jesus was love incarnate; God has always been love and has never done anything that was loveless. Jesus is the "face" of God on earth.

2. The Work of the Son (verses 2b, 3b)

a. Jesus is the appointed heir of all things.

Though wrong oftentimes seems so strong, Jesus will ultimately triumph. The future belongs to Christ, not to Satan; the kingdoms of this world will fall and the kingdom of Christ will be ushered in! Every tongue shall confess that Jesus is Lord, and every earthly and demonic power shall be subdued before Christ. This is my Father's universe, and the Father wills that everything shall be given to His Son!

b. Jesus is the One through whom God created the Universe. Jesus is the Agent of Creation. Nothing came into existence without the Son. John declared this same truth when he wrote about Jesus: *"He created everything there is - nothing exists that he didn't make."* (John 1:3) Paul offered the same fact: *"Christ himself is the Creator who made everything in heaven and earth, the things we can see and the things we can't;*

the spirit world with its kings and kingdoms, its rulers and authorities; all were made Christ for His own use and glory."
(Colossians 1:16; Living Bible)

c. Jesus is the One who sustains the Universe.

That is to say, Jesus not only created the universe, but He moment by moment maintains the universe. It is His power that holds everything together, the power that keeps the planets and stars and galaxies in their appointed places, the power that brings continuity and order and predictability to the created universe, the power that orders the seasons and that constantly renews all things. He is intimately involved in that which He has created. Nothing is out of His control. Not only is He involved in the universe of matter, but He is personally involved in the personal lives of each of His human creatures. Nothing happens to people without His permission. In Christ we live and move and have our very being.

Without His sustaining presence, all of the created universe would immediately collapse!

d. Jesus provided purification for the sins of mankind. Mankind is polluted with sin and is helpless and hopeless without the all-holy and sinless Son of God, whose blood alone provides cleansing from the taints of moral pollution.

e. Jesus is exalted to the right hand of authority beside Almighty God. Because He sacrificed all for a sinful race of person, Jesus is now exalted to the very throne of the Heavenly Father, where He makes intercession for the human race. Jesus is there with the Father, not to bring accusations against the human race, but as a lawyer to plead the cause of those who truly repent of their sins. How comforting to know that repentant ones at the end of life, go not to a condemning Judge but to a forgiving Father who, because of Christ's redemptive work, is reconciled to sinners!

II. THE SUPREMACY OF THE SON OVER THE ANGELS (Verses 4-14)

Even though the prophets of God were taken into God's personal counsel and confidence, and even though they were the recipients of God's great revelations of truth regarding God's will and nature, no prophet could begin to compare with Jesus in glory or in work. The glory of God shone on the

faces of the prophets, for they walked close to God, but the glory of Jesus was the perfect reflection of the glory of Almighty God. The work of the prophets was great -- to declare a specific message to a specific group of people at a specific time in history -- but the work of Jesus is infinitely greater than the work of all the prophets. Jesus was the Creator and the Sustainer of the Universe, the Redeemer and the Mediator, the King to whom the Father has given all things!

The writer to the Hebrew believers was concerned, not only to show Jesus' superiority over the prophets, but also to show Jesus' superiority over the angels.

In the minds of the Jewish people to whom the author of Hebrews is writing, God was so high and holy and transcendent and far removed from mankind, that the angels became the intermediaries between God and man. They were seen as 'go-betweens' as 'liaison officers' between God and men. Thus, angels were very exalted beings, close to God and personal ministers of God. "These Jewish people believed that God spoke to man through the angels, and that a part of the duty of the angels was to carry the prayers of men into the presence of God." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 8)

A. THE ANGELS' SUBORDINATE POSITION AND MINISTRY (Verses 5-7, 13-14)

The angels may have a place that is close to God and enjoy a relationship of intimacy with the Father that is most unique, but there is none who is closer to the Father than Jesus, for Jesus is declared as the very Son of God! "Then he (Jesus) became far greater than the angels, as proved by the fact that his name 'Son of God', which was passed on to him from his Father, is far greater than the names and titles of the angels. For God never said to any angel, 'You are my Son, and today I have given you the honor that goes with that name.' But God said it about Jesus. Another time he said, 'I am his Father and he is my Son.'" (Hebrews 1:4-5; Living Bible)

If Jesus is the Son of God, holding an altogether unique position with Almighty God, much closer to God than even the angels, then the greatness of Jesus can never be questioned. Far from being only a man, or the greatest of the angels, He is the Son of God. As such, He is not only worthy of respect, but He is worthy of worship!

Because who Jesus inherently is -- i.e., the Son of God -- and because of Jesus' creation power, and because of Jesus' atoning death followed by His glorious resurrection and

mediatorial place beside the Father's throne -- for these reasons alone, Jesus deserves the worship of all beings -- including all angels! The angels are mere messengers of God, sent out to help and to care for those who are to receive the very salvation which Jesus alone could make possible for sinful mankind through His atoning sacrifice on the cross.

B. THE SON'S SUPREME PERSON AND WORK (Verses 8-12)

The angels were placed on 'pedestals' of importance, and were seen as intermediaries between God and men. "It was necessary to show that the Son was greater far than they, that he who knew the Son needed no angel to be his intermediary between himself and God." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 11) The person and work of Jesus stands out uniquely, far above the person and work of any angel or group of angels.

1. Jesus' Everlasting Reign of Righteousness.

"Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom." (verse 8; Living Bible)

In contrast to the angels who are created beings, Jesus is eternal and uncreated. Jesus is divine, as seen in the title given to Him -- "O God" -- whereas angels are a part of the created order of which Jesus is the Agent of creation. So, far from the angels being superior to Jesus, they are greatly inferior, for the angels themselves were created by Jesus Christ! Not only are the angels inferior to Jesus, in the way the creation is inferior to the Creator, but the angels are inferior to Jesus in terms of moral and spiritual excellence. Jesus is altogether righteous, beyond the possibility of sinning, in His exalted place beside His Father's throne. His Kingly reign is not based upon the power of evil forces, but his kingly reign is based upon the power of righteousness. He wielded His power, as exemplified by the scepter of His kingdom, not with malicious motives but with pure and holy motives. *"You (Jesus) love right and hate wrong; so God, even your God, has poured out more gladness upon you than on anyone else."* (verse 9; Living Bible)

2. Jesus' Creative Power.

"God also called him 'Lord' when he said, 'Lord', in the beginning you made the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands." (verse 10; Living Bible) Jesus is superior to the angels, for no angel has the ability to create something out of nothing!

3. Jesus' Everlasting Person. *"They (the heavens and the earth) will disappear into nothingness, but you will remain forever."* (verse 11; Living Bible)

Jesus the Creator will outlast the works of His hands -- the created order! Jesus existed before creation and He will continue in His eternal and personal existence after the present created order will disappear into nothingness.

4. Jesus' Changelessness (Immutability) *"They (the heavens and the earth) will become worn out like old clothes, and some day you will fold them up and replace them. But you yourself will never change, and your years will never end."* (verse 12; Living Bible) In contrast to man who has to die, and in contrast to angels some of whom fell from righteousness into sin, and in contrast to the created universe which must grow old, Jesus is the changeless One! "There is in the Divine duration no circle to be run, no space to be measured, no time to be reckoned. All is eternity -- infinite -- and onward." (Adam Clarke)
"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." (Hebrews 13:8)

"Change and decay, all around I see; Thou God who changest not, abide with me." Jesus does not change like shifting shadows (James 1:17), but He remains steadfast in His works, and untiring in His mercies, and predictable in His character. There is no variableness, neither shadow of turning in Jesus. He abides forever the same, forever faithful!

5. Jesus' Victorious Kingly Reign. Jesus is superior to the angels, as demonstrated in many ways! Jesus is infinite in His purity and His righteousness, He is the sole agent of creation of the physical universe, He is the changeless and everlasting King before whom all visible and invisible creatures will bow in total submission!

"Did God ever say to an angel, as he does to his Son, 'Sit here beside me in honor until I crush all your enemies beneath your feet'?" (verse 13; Living Bible) To Christ alone belongs all rule and authority and power and dominion! All

enemies will be subdued and Christ will eternally reign. All victory and honor ultimately belong alone to Jesus Christ!

All the visible kingdoms of earth and all the evil invisible kingdoms of Satan will be subjected to Christ. Christ's enemies will be vanquished! "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgementsHallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride had made herself ready.....He (Christ) is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. 'He will rule them with an iron scepter.' He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: King of kings and Lord of lords.'" (Revelation 19:1,6,7,13-16)

Jesus is the supreme Sovereign, the eternal Son of God, whereas angels are merely the messengers of Christ, and they are servants even to Christ's servants, i.e. to mankind. "Surely the angels are no more than spirits in the service of God, commissioned to serve the heirs of God's salvation" (i.e. mankind). (Hebrews 1:13 Phillips translation)

CONCLUSION: The Supremacy of Jesus is well documented in this chapter. In light of who Jesus is, what then, as humans, are we to be or what should we be?

Jesus is the perfect reflection of the glory of God. We are the fallen creatures of sin from whom the glory of God's original righteousness at creation has sadly faded.

Jesus is the perfect expression of the invisible God, demonstrating conclusively in His life and in His message that God is perfect love. We are, at best, imperfect men who declare only a fragment of God's truth. Christ is the perfect embodiment of truth, whereas believers are the imperfect communicators of only part of the truth.

Jesus is the Creator and the Sustainer of the Universe, whereas we are merely the creatures who are totally dependent upon our Creator for life and breath. In Christ we live and move and have our very being!

Jesus is the great atoning sacrifice for sins, providing the basis for complete forgiveness of all sins and for reconciliation with the Heavenly Father. Through the cross, Jesus has purchased the gift of eternal life. He has taken the initiative to objectively provide the gift of salvation. It is now each person's responsibility individually and subjectively to appropriate the divinely-offered gift of life.

Jesus is the exalted Savior who sits at the right hand of authority beside the Father to make intercession for mankind. As believers, it is our responsibility to plead the blood of Jesus Christ for daily forgiveness and cleansing, to commit our case to our Divine Attorney whose defense before the Father is altogether effective.

Jesus, as Son of God, is closer by far to God the Father, than the greatest of God's great angels. Because of Jesus' unique relationship to the Father, far superior to the relationship of the angels with the Father, Jesus is worthy not only of our great respect but of our wholehearted devotion and worship.

Jesus' kingly reign is both eternal and righteous. As believers, we are to humble ourselves before Christ the King, and we are to be clothed with the garments of Christ's righteousness, as we put off our own garments of wickedness and self-righteousness.

Jesus is the Changeless (immutable) One, the same yesterday, today and forever. As humans, we are temporal and changeable. Amidst all the changes and chances of life, we must learn to put our trust in the One with whom there is no variability or shadow of turning, in the One who said He is unfailing in His mercy and everlasting in His love.

HEBREWS

THE SUPREMACY OF JESUS (Hebrews 1:1-14)

Q U E S T I O N S

1. Give your interpretation of the following statement:
"Who you believe Jesus is, will determine what your conception of reality is." How would you respond to those persons who believe that Jesus is only a great man -- a great teacher, or a great moral example, or a great prophet? What were some of the unique claims which Jesus made regarding himself?
2. In general terms, why was the Book of Hebrews written?
3. Considering the fact that God has never been silent but that He has spoken in various ways throughout history, describe how the following revelations of God were partial and incomplete and fragmentary:
 - a. The light of God revealed in Nature.
 - b. The light of God revealed in the Old Testament Mosaic Law.
 - c. The light of God revealed in His providential guidance of His Israelite people through historical events.
 - d. The light of God as revealed through the great writings of the Hebrew prophets.
4. Even though it is true that each Old Testament prophet spoke to the particular age in which he lived, communicating that facet of God's truth which was most relevant for that particular set of circumstances, it is also true that the message of each prophet has application for contemporary society. As you consider that 'key message' of each of the following four prophets, in what ways do you believe their respective messages have relevance to modern-day America?
 - a. Isaiah -- focused on God's holiness.
 - b. Jeremiah -- focused on God's sovereign power over the nations of the world.
 - c. Amos -- focused on God's cry for social justice.
 - d. Hosea -- focused on lessons concerning the forgiving love of God.

5. Carefully read the following Scriptures:

- a. John 1:14
- b. Colossians 1:15,19
- c. Hebrews 1:3

Based on an examination of these Scriptures, do you believe that the following statements accurately describe the uniqueness of Jesus' revelation of the Father? --
"Jesus is the flawless expression of God's Nature. He who has seen Jesus, has seen the Father. All that Jesus was while a man, God has always been eternally. Jesus was love incarnate; God has always been love and has never done anything that was loveless. Jesus is the 'face' of God on earth."

6. Of the following truths which describe the "work" of the Son, which of these truths do you believe need a greater emphasis in our preaching and in our teaching, in the context of modern America?

- a. Jesus is the appointed heir of all things.
- b. Jesus is the One through whom God created the Universe.
- c. Jesus is the One who sustains the Universe.
- d. Jesus provided purification for the sins of mankind.
- e. Jesus is presently with the Father, not to bring accusations against the human race, but as a lawyer to plead the cause of those who truly repent of their sins.

7. At the time the Book of Hebrews was written what attitude did the Jewish believers have regarding the place and functions of angels?

8. How does the author of Hebrews (in Hebrews 1:5-7, 13-14) argue for the superiority of Jesus over the mighty angels?

9. Which of the following descriptions of the person and work of Jesus do you believe needs special emphasis in contemporary America (and tell why)?

- a. Jesus is the uncreated, divine Son of God who was God's Agent in creating all things, including the mighty angels.

- _____ b. Jesus was the sinless Son of God on earth, and in His present exalted place beside the Father's throne. He wields His power, not with malicious motives but with pure and holy motives.
- _____ c. Jesus existed before creation and He will continue in His eternal and personal existence after the present created order will disappear into nothingness.
- _____ d. In contrast to man who has to die, and in contrast to angels some of whom fell from righteousness into sin, and in contrast to the created universe which must grow old, Jesus is the Changeless One.
- _____ e. Because all victory and honor ultimately belong alone to Jesus Christ, all visible and invisible creatures and forces will be subdued, and Christ, with His saints, will reign eternally.

10. After making a serious observation of the following chart, ask yourself this question: 'In light of who Jesus is, am I what I ought to be in terms of proper actions or reactions or attitudes?'

JESUS CHRIST

HUMAN BEING

- 1. Perfect reflection of the glory of God.
- 2. Perfect expression of the invisible God of Love.
- 3. Creator and Sustainer of the Universe.
- 4. Great atoning sacrifice for all sins, providing the basis for forgiveness and reconciliation with the Father.

- 1. Fallen creatures of sin from whom the glory of God's original righteousness has sadly faded.
- 2. Imperfect communicators of only part of God's total truth.
- 3. Creatures who are totally dependent upon our Creator for life and breath.
- 4. Responsible creatures of choice, spiritually helpless to save ourselves, responsible individually and subjectively to appropriate the divinely-offered gift of eternal life.

5. Exalted Savior who sits at the right hand of authority beside the Father, to make intercession for mankind.

6. Unique relationship to the Father, far superior to the relationship of the angels with the Father.

7. His kingly reign is both eternal and righteous.

8. He is the changeless (immutable) One, the same yesterday, today and forever.

5. Responsible to plead the blood of Jesus Christ for daily forgiveness and cleansing, and to commit our case to our Divine Attorney whose defense before the Father is altogether effective.

6. Because of who Jesus is, we are to give Jesus not only our greatest respect, but also our wholehearted devotions and worship.

7. We are to submit to Jesus' lordship, and we are to be "clothed" with the garments of Christ's righteousness, as we put off our own garments of wickedness and self-righteousness.

8. We are temporal and changeable, but amidst all the changes and chances of life, we must learn to put our trust in the One who said He is unfailing in His mercy and everlasting in His love.

CHAPTER 2

THE PERILS OF THE DRIFTING LIFE!

HEBREWS 2:1-4

HEBREWS

THE PERILS OF THE DRIFTING LIFE!

O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: Hebrew 2: 1-4

INTRODUCTION: There is no such thing as automatic security in the Christian life. There are "currents" in life - both externally in society and internally in man's soul - that oppose the progress of the Christian traveller, and which have the capability of causing spiritual shipwreck.

PROPOSITION: The Causes of spiritual drifting must be recognized, and the Consequences of spiritual drifting must be seen as most serious. Most importantly, the Cure for spiritual drifting must be accepted and personally appropriated.

I. The Causes of Spiritual Drifting

- A. Procrastination Because of Busyness
- B. Ignoring Message Because of Disobedience
- C. Spiritual Drowsiness Because of A Lack of Alertness and Zeal
- D. Infatuation With Material Pursuits Because of A Lack of Spiritual Perspective
- E. Neglect of "Means of Grace" Because of A Lack of Discipline

II. The Consequences of Spiritual Drifting

III. The Cure for Spiritual Drifting

- A. Pay Attention to the Possibility of Drifting
- B. Pay Attention to the True Message of Christ
- C. Pay Attention to the Spiritual "Means of Grace"

CONCLUSION: "Do the things of God and heaven loom more clearly on your vision? If so, rejoice! But remember that only DIVINE strength can suffice to maintain the conflict, and keep the boat's head against the stream." (F.B. Meyer)

HEBREWS

THE PERILS OF THE DRIFTING LIFE!

SCRIPTURE: Hebrew 2: 1-4

INTRODUCTION: Someone well said, "For everyone that definitely turns his back on Christ, there are hundreds who drift from Him. Life's ocean is full of currents, anyone of which will sweep us past the harbor - mostly even when we seem nearest to it, and carry us far out to sea." (The Way Into The Holiest; F. B. Meyers; page 24)

Taking into consideration the original Greek language of Hebrews 2:1, here is an accurate translation: "Therefore, we must the more eagerly anchor our lives to the things that we have been taught, lest the ship of life drift past the harbor and be wrecked." (Barclay's Translation; Hebrews; page 13)

This portion of scripture (Hebrews 2:1) definitely teaches that there is no such thing as automatic security in the Christian life. There are "currents" in life - both externally in society and internally in man's soul - that oppose the progress of the Christian traveler, and which have the capability of causing spiritual shipwreck. In his letter to Timothy, Paul referred to two persons - one time believers - who had failed to hold on to their faith in Christ and who had rejected the dictates of their conscience. These two persons - Hymenaeus and Alexander - had made "shipwreck" of their faith (I Timothy 1:19-20).

PROPOSITION: The Causes of spiritual drifting must be recognized, and the Consequences of spiritual drifting must be seen as most serious. Most importantly, the Cure for spiritual drifting must be accepted and personally appropriated.

I. The Causes of Spiritual Drifting

Although the Scriptural portion which we are considering today does not itemize the various causes for spiritual drifting, we must scan the Scriptures and try to identify some of the main causes for such a dreadful reality.

A. Procrastination Because of Busyness

There are many in life who have never even initially accepted Christ as their Savior, who are drifting farther and farther away from God and from realizing personal salvation. They may even have good intentions, but they are so busy and so preoccupied with other concerns in life, that they are putting off making a decision for Christ.

In one of his many books, William Barclay recounts the fable which tells of three apprentice devils who were going to this earth to finish their apprenticeship. They were talking to Satan, the chief of the devils, about their plans to tempt and to ruin men. The first said, "I will tell them that there is no God". Satan said, "That will not delude many, for they know that there is a God". The second said, "I will tell men that there is no hell". Satan answered, "You will deceive no one that way; men know even now that there is a hell for sin". The third said, "I will tell men that there is no hurry". "Go", said Satan, "and you will ruin men by the thousands". Barclay then asserts that the most dangerous of all delusions is that there is plenty of time. He notes that the most dangerous day in man's life is when he learns that there is such a word as tomorrow.

The Bible's exhortation is wise: *"For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?"* (Hebrews 2:2-3a NASB).

Today is the acceptable time to receive Christ. Now is the day of salvation. Tomorrow may be too late--eternally too late! Someone appropriately said: "The road to hell is paved with good intentions".

'Procrastination' is doubtless one of Satan's most powerful tools.

"Busyness" is not only the tool which Satan uses to distract unbelievers from making a decision to follow Christ, but "Busyness" can also cause believers to drift away from Christ and His salvation. The daily cares and anxieties and duties and pleasures of life can so easily absorb our interest and our attention and effort, resulting in our withdrawing ourselves from "the truths which we have heard."

How easy it is to become preoccupied with the concerns and the interests of time - family and friends and job and recreation - and soon lose our spiritual focus and begin to drift away from Christ and our relationship with Him!

In His parable of the Four Soils, Jesus described each soil. *"The thorny ground represents the hearts of people who listen to the Good News and receive it, but all too quickly the attractions of this world and the delights of wealth, and the search for success and lure of nice things come in and crowd out God's message from their hearts, so that no crop is produced."* (Mark 4:18-19; Living Bible)

How easy it is, even for Christian workers, to allow the good things of life to crowd out the best things of life. Like

Martha, we can be so concerned to do a good job of serving others, that we don't take enough time to sit at the feet of Jesus to meditate and to review and to deepen our communion with our Lord. On one occasion, Jesus said to His busy and over-worked disciples, "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place and rest awhile." Even active church members who are rightly committed to being busy for their Lord in Christian service, must take time for regular contemplation and solitude and prayer and personal spiritual revival. Someone said, "If your outgo exceeds your intake, then your downfall will be your upkeep."

Being too busy in one's daily life or even in one's Christian service, will cause one to drift away from the heart of God!

B. Ignoring Message Because of Disobedience

Whenever a believer fails to obey a command of God, his conscience becomes less sensitive and his spiritual ears less attuned to hear the voice of God. Such disobedience leads to an attitude of indifference to the Christian message. It is no wonder that disobedience, which is not openly confessed to God, leads to drifting away from God and His wonderful salvation. Wrote Paul to Timothy, "*Cling tightly to your faith in Christ and always keep your conscience clear, doing what you know is right. For some people have disobeyed their conscience and have deliberately done what they knew was wrong. It isn't surprising that soon they lost their faith in Christ after defying God like that.*" (I Timothy 1:19; Living Bible)

The author of Hebrews later warns believers against the danger of disobedience. "*Although God's promise still stands - his promise that all may enter his place of rest - we ought to tremble with fear because some of you may be on the verge of failing to get there after all. For this wonderful news - the message that God wants to save us - has been given to us just as it was to those who lived in the time of Moses. But it didn't do them any good because they didn't believe it. They didn't mix it with faith.....let us do our best to go into that place of rest, too, being careful not to disobey God as the children of Israel did, thus failing to get in.*" (Hebrews 4:1,2,11)

"Ye call me Master and obey Me not,
Ye call Me Light and see Me not,
Ye call Me Way and walk not,
Ye call Me Life and desire Me not,
Ye call Me wise and follow Me not,
Ye call Me fair and love Me not,
Ye call Me rich and ask Me not,
Ye call Me eternal and seek Me not,

Ye call Me gracious and trust Me not,
Ye call Me noble and serve Me not,
Ye call Me Might and honor Me not,
If I condemn you, blame Me not."

-Anonymous-

C. Spiritual Drowsiness Because of A Lack of Alertness and Zeal

We have all heard the common declaration: "Vigilance is the price of freedom!" Staying alert and active and zealous is the price of spiritual vitality! How easy it is to be lulled asleep by the routine activities of life, and find that we no longer have the mental alertness and the spiritual zeal that we one time experienced. We take "for granted" the old-fashioned truths that are so familiar to us, and we no longer give heed to the warnings, and no longer give counsel to the exhortations, and no longer take daily delight in the promises of that ancient and one-time cherished message which we have long known! We are no longer alert to God's will and zealous for His ways! We have allowed ourselves to drift! "It is a sad illustration of the weakness of human nature that we all tend to think that the familiar is commonplace, and that it is almost impossible for us, without a very specific and continuous effort, to keep up as fresh and deep an interest in a truth that we have believed all our days as in one that comes to us with the attraction of novelty." (Hebrews; Maclaren; page 206)

Tragically, with the passing of years, there is the fading of zeal and enthusiasm and freshness in the lives of some believers. Seeking to live on the "spiritual capital" of the past, there is seldom any new discoveries of truth and seldom any new growth in the Christian life. Drifting can be so gradual and so slow, but it can become so destructive in the spiritual life. Like Peter, it is easy for us too to fall asleep when we should be praying. Said Jesus, "*Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation. The spirit (of man) indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*"

As believers, we must not allow ourselves to drift away from the truth which we have received, because of what we consider to be over-familiarity with the message over a long period of time. We must not become lukewarm in our devotion to the Lord. We dare not lose our "first love" for the Lord and for the truth of His blessed Word. We must be "unflagging in zeal", serving the Lord enthusiastically, keeping our spiritual fervor, with a heart full of devotion for the Kingdom business. We must "keep on fire" for Christ, never allowing the flames of spiritual fervor to burn out!

The author of Hebrews later wrote: *"We are anxious that you keep right on loving others as long as life lasts, so that you will get your full reward. Then, knowing what lies ahead for you, you won't become bored with being a Christian, nor become spiritually dull and indifferent, but you will be anxious to follow the example of those who receive all that God has promised them because of their strong faith and patience."* (Hebrews 6:11-12: Living Bible)

D. Infatuation With Material Pursuits Because of A Lack of Spiritual Perspective.

Why do some believers drift away from Christ and His wonderful salvation? Because of their lust for material wealth and "creature comforts." Paul warned against this trap! *"For the love of money is the first step toward all kinds of sin. Some people have even turned away from God because of their love for it, and as a result have pierced themselves with many sorrows."* (I Timothy 6:10; Living Bible.)

One young Christian, immediately following his dramatic conversion, was "on fire" for God, attending church regularly and witnessing boldly to his unsaved friends, and spending as much as 2 or 3 hours daily in prayer and meditation and Bible Study. Then a financial crisis hit him. Not knowing how he could possibly fulfill his pressing financial obligation, he accepted a 2nd job. This job involved him in driving a tourist van as many as a thousand miles each weekend. Of course, this second job, involving long hours of driving, not only wore him out physically, but it kept him away from his wife and absent from Sunday morning and evening worship services. At his own admission, he drifted away from his original life of spiritual zeal and active involvement in church and private devotions. Only after a dangerous year away from the Christian fellowship, did he finally "wake up" and repent and restore himself to a close relationship with Christ. Obviously he dropped the second job and he now has the "fire of holy enthusiasm" once again burning upon the "altar of his heart." He is regularly attending church services.

Preoccupation with meeting a legitimate financial obligation caused this young Christian gradually but dangerously, to drift away from God and the church and daily devotions.

E. Neglect of "Means of Grace" Because of A Lack of Discipline

"It is so easy - and much more pleasant, to drift. Just to lie back, and renounce effort, and let yourself go whither the waters will, as they break musically on the sides of the

rocking boat. But, ah, how ineffable the remorse, how disastrous the result!" (The Way Into The Holiest; F. B. Meyers; page 25)

Someone half jokingly said, "I am as lazy as I dare to be!" A lack of discipline, taking the "path of least resistance," giving counsel to one's fears and giving in to one's flesh - these are the ways that many drift perilously to their destruction in the spiritual life!

Using analogies from the life of the athlete, Paul teaches the importance of rugged personal discipline and self-control. *"I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step. I fight to win. I'm not just shadow boxing or playing around. Like an athlete I punish my body, treating it roughly, training it to do what it should, not what it wants to. Otherwise I fear that after enlisting others for the race, I myself might be declared unfit and ordered to stand aside."* (I Corinthians 9:26-27; Living Bible)

It is not easy to discipline ourselves to wait upon God and to submit our own wills to the will of God. It is much easier to be self-indulgent rather than self-disciplined. *"To win the contest you must deny yourselves many things that would keep you from doing your best."* (I Corinthians 9:25; Living Bible)

II. The Consequences of Spiritual Drifting

It was serious enough and the consequences were great enough when one neglected to obey God's revelation, as expressed in the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament, but how much more severe will be the judgment for the one who neglects to obey the New Testament message of grace which finds its origin in the very Son of God!

The salvation through Christ is much greater than the salvation which was granted to the Jews of the Old Testament. The Mosaic Law was given to the Jews only; the message of grace and forgiveness was given by Christ to all mankind.

Severe punishment awaits the person who refuses to listen to the message of Christ - the message of salvation through grace. *"For since the messages from angels have always proved true and people have always been punished for disobeying them, what makes us think that we can escape if we are indifferent to this great salvation announced by the Lord Jesus himself, and passed on to us by those who heard him speak?"* (Hebrews 2:2-3; Living Bible)

"It will be great in its penalties. The tendency of our age is to minimize God's righteous judgment on sin. It seems to be prevalently thought that, because our dispensation is one

of love and mercy, therefore there is the less need to dread the results of sin. But the inspired writer here argues in a precisely contrary sense. Just because this age is one of such tender mercy, therefore sins against its King are more deadly, and the penalties heavier. In the old days no transgression, positive, and no disobedience, negative, escaped its just recompense of reward; and in these days there is even less likelihood of their doing so. The word spoken by the Son is even more steadfast (i.e., effective to secure the infliction of the punishment it announces) than the word of angels. My readers, beware! 'He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God!' (10:28,29)." (The Way Into The Holiest; By F.B. Meyer; page 24)

III. The Cure For Spiritual Drifting

A. Pay Attention To The Possibility of Drifting

If spiritual drifting is a real possibility, and if the consequences of spiritual drifting are so serious, then what precautions can a serious-minded believer take against such drifting?

The most obvious and basic step that one can take to guard himself against such dreadful drifting, is to honestly recognize that such a possibility exists and to face the fact that the consequences of such drifting can be most terrible. As someone concisely and wisely said: "If we know the danger we have gone a long way to escape it." (Hebrews; Alexander Maclaren; page 209)

If a believer thinks that he is unconditionally secure in Christ, i.e., if he believes that he could never drift away from Christ and ultimately be lost eternally, then he will not have the kind of wholesome fear that is necessary as a wise deterrent against backsliding and spiritual apostacy. In response to those who believe that it is impossible for true believers to apostacize and to eventually be eternally lost, Robert Shank makes the following observations: "Completely absurd is the assumption that men are to be sincerely persuaded that apostasy is impossible and, at the same time, sincerely alarmed by the warnings.....The warnings were given.....because of the existence of a real and deadly peril with which we must reckon." (Life in The Son; page 172,173)

The Bible says that the "*fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*" It is a wise thing to reverence the Lord, to recognize the weakness of one's flesh, to be aware of the subtle tactics of Satan, and to understand the need for constant spiritual vigilance. Peter learned the hard way that

it is foolish to be over-confident in the spiritual realm. He fell far, but he wept bitterly, and he repented deeply, and he was restored wonderfully. Much later in life he wrote, "Be careful - watch out for attacks from Satan, your great enemy. He prowls around like a hungry, roaring lion, looking for some victim to tear apart." (I Peter 5:8; Living Bible)

How can a believer guard himself against the ever-present possibility of spiritual drifting? The author of Hebrews writes: "We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away." (Hebrews 2:1, NIV)

B. Pay Attention To The True Message Of Christ

Pay attention to Christ and His Word, not to the false claims of cultism, or to the rigid claims of legalism, or to the self-indulgent claims of antinomianism. "What gets your attention, will get you!" So, let Christ have your full attention. "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, and look full into his wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of his glory and grace."

The great danger, against which the author is warning the Jewish Christians, is the danger of drifting back to the religious system of Judaism, from which they had been delivered. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul is warning believers against the same possibility. Note the great warning in Paul's voice, as he writes to believers who are in serious danger of drifting away from the basic truth of Christianity - the truth that there is salvation in Christ alone, not in the legalistic observance of Old Testament laws. Writes Paul, "I am amazed that you are turning away so soon from God who, in his love and mercy, invited you to share the eternal life he gives through Christ; you are already following a different 'way to heaven', which really doesn't go to heaven at all. For there is no other way than the one we showed you; you are being fooled by those who twist and change the truth concerning Christ. Let God's curses fall on anyone, including myself, who preaches any other way to be saved than the one we told you about." (Galatians 1:6-7; Living Bible) To avoid drifting, we are to give very earnest attention to the message which we have heard. What is that message? That we are saved from our sins by placing our faith alone in Jesus Christ, whose shed blood alone can atone for our sins. "We are saved by grace, through faith, for good works". (Ephesians 2:8-10) As in the case of the Hebrew believers, we are to guard against drifting into some false religion or into some erroneous philosophy. "There is a way that seems right unto men, but the end thereof is the way of death." (Proverbs 14:12) Wrote Paul to the Colossian believers, "Let your roots grow down into him and draw up nourishment from him. See that

you go on growing in the Lord, and become strong and vigorous in the truth you were taught. Let your lives overflow with joy and thanksgiving for all he has done. Don't let others spoil your faith and joy with their philosophies, their wrong and shallow answers built on men's thoughts and ideas, instead of on what Christ has said." (Colossians 2:7-8; Living Bible)

C. Pay Attention To The Spiritual "Means of Grace"

To what "message" should we give the most earnest heed (Hebrews 2:1)? First, to the declaration of warnings in God's word, for to be forewarned is to be forearmed, and to know of the reality of the danger and the real possibility of drifting, is to go a long way to escape that possibility. Second, we are to give the most earnest heed to the message regarding the uniqueness of Jesus' person and work and death and resurrection, and cling to the old rugged cross as God's sole method to bring salvation to lost mankind. One of the chief themes of the book of Hebrews is the theme of atonement. The message which this book teaches is the very message that we are to give most earnest attention to - namely, the message that declares "Without the shedding of Jesus' blood, there is no remission for sins."

The third thing to which we ought to give the most earnest heed is this: Let us not neglect the spiritual "means of grace" which God uses to impart renewed life to the souls of believers.

Because Christ is the way by which we initially receive God's wonderful salvation, we are urged to grow in grace and in the knowledge of God. We are to focus on spiritual growth, to concentrate on what it means to become mature believers. The author of this book later gives this strong exhortation: "Let us stop going over the same old ground again and again, always teaching those first lessons about Christ. Let us go on instead to other things and become mature in our understanding, as strong Christians ought to be." (Hebrews 6:1; Living Bible) Growing Christians focus on deeper truths in Bible Study. To guard against drifting, give time to serious study of God's Word. The Psalmist said, "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee." He who meditates on God's Word, day and night, will surely guard himself against the peril of spiritual drifting. Notes Alexander Maclaren, "The great thing wanted in our present average Christian character....is the honest occupation of mind and heart with the truths of the gospel. We read newspapers, books and magazines of all sorts, and we do not read our Bibles.....There are many professing Christian people who do not make the Word of God familiar by daily and prayerful perusal; and there are many who do not understand much more about the whole majestic orb of divine truth than

the one bit of it that they beheld at first, when they turned from darkness to light." (Hebrews; Maclaren; page 209-210)

Admittedly, "the Bible isn't all easy to understand. Picking bits at random can be dangerous. Only serious, reverent and prayerful study secures its treasures. This takes time - and we have crowded our lives with other things. So let us resolve to know this book better, to learn to live in it, to give time to it daily, to wait on the Holy Spirit before we turn a page, to let God apply it to our soul." (Daily Readings, Sangster; page 52)

THE 23rd CHANNEL

The T.V. set is my shepherd. My spiritual growth shall want.

It maketh me to sit down and do nothing for His Name's sake, because it requireth all my spare time. It keepeth me from doing my duty as a Christian, because it presenteth so many good shows that I must see.

It restoreth my knowledge of the things of the world, and keepeth me from the study of God's Word. It leadeth me in the paths of failing to attend the evening worship services, and doing nothing in the Kingdom of God.

Yea, though I live to be a hundred, I shall keep on viewing my T.V. as long as it will work, for it is my closest companion. Its sounds and its picture, they comfort me.

It presenteth entertainment before me, and keepeth me from doing important things with my family. It fills my head with ideas which differ from those set forth in the Word of God.

Surely, no good things will come of my life, because my T.V. offereth me no good time to do the will of God; thus I will dwell in spiritual poverty all the days of my life.

Not only is the Bible one of the "means of grace" by which serious Christians grow in their relationship with God and avoid spiritual drifting, but regular communion with God in

Prayer is another "means of grace." Exhorts the author of Hebrews; *"Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith."* (Hebrews 10:22; NIV) *"Let us come boldly to the very throne of God and stay there to receive his mercy and to find grace to help us in our times of need."* (Hebrews 4:16; Living Bible) He who regularly draws near to God in daily prayer, cannot at the same time be spiritually drifting away. However, just as Bible study is a discipline which is not always easy to begin or to maintain in one's Christian life, so maintaining regular periods of prayer is not always easy. Notes William Sangster, "When we pray not feeling like it, we bring God not only the content of our prayer, but a disciplined spirit. We have kept our appointment with Him against inclination. We have displeased ourselves in order to please Him, and His pleasure is real indeed....Feelings are too unsubstantial and too variable to be the guide to our praying. Feeling fluctuates with our health, our temperaments, the weather, the news; it fluctuates also with what we eat and whom we met last! Our commerce with Heaven cannot depend upon things so fortuitous as that." (Daily Readings; Sangster; page 33)

Regular Bible study and a disciplined prayer life will surely keep the soul safe and secure, and will guard the soul against the all-to-easy tendency to drift away from God.

A third means of grace is Christian fellowship. Exhorts the author of Hebrews; *"Let us not neglect our church meetings, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near."* (Hebrews 10:25; Living Bible) He who neglects Church Services, is he who will surely begin to drift away from God. It is difficult, if not impossible, to stay close to God and at the same time be apart for long periods of time from God's people. One good way to help guard yourself against the peril of the drifting life, is to remain in warm fellowship with God's people - on Sunday Morning and Sunday Evening and during the week in a small prayer group.

There are other "Means of Grace" - such as witnessing, and tithing, and participation in the Lord's Supper, all of which will help the trusting soul to guard against the peril of the drifting life.

One last thing needs to be said. The greatest safeguard against spiritual drifting is the surrendered heart which is open constantly to the cleansing blood of Jesus. The writer to the Hebrews talks about the cleansing blood of Jesus: *"Since we have a great High Priest set over the household of God, let us draw near with true hearts and fullest confidence, knowing that our inmost souls have been purified by the sprinkling of his blood....In this confidence let us hold on*

to the hope that we profess without the slightest hesitation."
(Hebrews 10:21,22,23; Phillips)

There are far too many Christians who find themselves struggling in the cellar of their lives with a deep and terrible "something" - described differently by different people, but all referring to the same essential problem - a divided heart, a double-mindedness, a worldly affection. Wesley talked about the proneness to wander, the tendency to leave the "God I Love," the need for the heart to be "sealed." Can you say: "Here's my heart, O God, take and seal it with the powerful blood of Jesus which alone can keep me from wandering away from you!"

CONCLUSION: "Are you drifting? You can easily tell. Are you conscious of effort, of daily, hourly resistance to the stream around you, and within? Do the things of God and heaven loom more clearly on your vision? Do the waters foam angrily at your prow as you force your way through them? If so, rejoice! but remember that only Divine strength can suffice to maintain the conflict, and keep the boat's head against the stream. If not, you are drifting. Hail the strong Son of God! Ask Him to come on board, and stay you, and bring you into port."
(The Way Into The Holiest; By F. B. Meyer; page 25)

HEBREWS

THE PERIL OF THE DRIFTING LIFE (Hebrews 2:1-4)

Q U E S T I O N S

1. Give your personal reaction or response to the following quotation: "For every one that definitely turns his back on Christ, there are hundreds who drift from Him. Life's ocean is full of currents, anyone of which will sweep us past the harbor-mouth even when we seem nearest to it, and carry us far out to sea."
2. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The most dangerous day in a man's life is when he learns that there is such a word as 'tomorrow'. (Note Hebrews 2:3, Luke 14:18, Acts 24:25, Hebrews 12:25 and Hebrews 3:8)"
3. From your own personal experience or from your observation of others, share an example that documents the truth of the following statement: "How easy it is to become preoccupied with the concerns and the interests of time -- family and friends and job and recreation -- and soon lose our spiritual focus and begin to drift away from Christ and our relationship with Him!" (Note Mark 4:18-19)"
4. Give a concrete example that illustrates the truth of the following statement, especially as it relates to the life of a "Christian Worker": "If your outgo exceeds your intake, then your downfall will be your upkeep."
5. Tell with what degree of conviction you agree with the following statement: "Whenever a believer fails to obey a command of God, his conscience becomes less sensitive and his spiritual ears less attuned to hear the voice of God." (Read I Timothy 1:19 and Hebrews 4:1,2,11)"
6. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "It is almost impossible for us, without a very specific and continuous effort, to keep up as fresh and deep an interest in a truth that we have believed all our days, as in one that comes to us with the attraction of novelty."

Tell personally how you have managed to keep a fresh and renewed interest in the old-fashioned and familiar truths of God's Word. (Read Ephesians 4:14-16 and Hebrews 6:11-12 in the Living Bible)

7. What, according to I Timothy 6:10, causes some people to turn away from God?
8. From your own personal experience, tell to what extent you have found that the following statement realistically describes the "peril of drifting": "It is so easy -- and so much more pleasant, to drift. Just to lie back, and renounce effort, and let yourself go whither the waters will, as they break musically on the sides of the rocking boat."

In maintaining the Christian life, how important is "human effort"? (Note I Corinthians 9:26-27)

9. After considering the following list, with which one of the stated reasons for drifting do you believe most Christians have most challenges?
 - a. Procrastination because of busyness.
 - b. Ignoring message because of disobedience.
 - c. Spiritual drowsiness because of a lack of alertness and zeal.
 - d. Infatuation with material possessions because of a lack of spiritual perspective.
 - e. Neglect of "means of Grace" because of a lack of discipline.
10. From your personal contacts and conversations with unbelievers, why do you think that people believe they can escape God's judgment, if they are indifferent to the salvation which Christ alone can provide through the costly shedding of His own blood? (Note Hebrews 2:3)
11. If, as many Christian leaders teach, it is impossible for a believer ever to apostatize and finally to be lost eternally, then why are there so many warnings addressed to Christians within the Holy Scriptures? Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The warnings were given because of the existence of a real and deadly peril with which we must reckon." According to Ezekiel 3:17-21, is it possible for a one-time righteous man to backslide from God and, because he refuses to repent of his sins, to die in his sins and to eternally lost?
12. Why is spiritual vigilance and prayerfulness so very important? (Read Matthew 26:41, 69-75, I Peter 5:8 and I Corinthians 10:6-12)

13. What are some of the subtle false teachings, or false philosophies, or false religions that modern-day believers tend to drift into? (Read Galatians 1:6-7 and Colossians 2:7-8)
14. Why is it important for a person, not only to be "saved" by grace initially, but to daily grow in knowledge and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ? (Hebrews 6:1, I Corinthians 3:1-3 and II Peter 1:3-10)
15. Is it possible to become strong and mature Christians without serious study of the Bible? Why or why not? To what extent do you agree with the following quotation? -- "There are many professing christian people who do not make the Word of God familiar by daily and prayerful perusal; and there are many who do not understand much more about the whole majestic orb of divine truth than the one bit of it that they beheld at first when they turned from darkness to light."

The T.V. set is my shepherd. My spiritual growth shall want. It maketh me to sit down and do nothing for His Name's sake, because it requireth all my spare time. It keepeth me from doing my duty as a Christian, because it presenteth so many good shows that I must see.

It restoreth my knowledge of the things of the world, and keepeth me from the study of God's Word. It leadeth me in the paths of failing to attend the evening worship services, and doing nothing in the Kingdom of God.

Yea, though I live to be a hundred, I shall keep on viewing my T.V. as long as it will work, for it is my closest companion. Its sounds and its picture, they comfort me.

It presenteth entertainment before me, and keepeth me from doing important things with my family. It fills my head with ideas which differ from those set forth in the Word of God.

Surely, no good things will come of my life, because my T.V. offereth me no good time to do the will of God; thus I will dwell in spiritual poverty all the days of my life.

16. Should we pray only when we "feel" like it, or should we pray regularly, regardless if we "feel" like it or not? Why is the regular practice of prayer so difficult for most Christians to maintain? Tell why you agree with the following statement: "When it is hardest to pray, pray hardest. When we pray not feeling like it, we bring God not only the content of our prayer, but a disciplined spirit. We have kept our appointment with Him against inclinations."
17. Do you believe the following statement reflects a "legalistic" attitude, or do you believe it reflects "practical realism"? "He who neglects Church Services, is he who will surely begin to drift away from God." Is failure regularly to attend Church Services a direct disobedience of God's command to believers? (Read Hebrews 10:25)
18. Because it is true that a believer is more vulnerable to the "peril of drifting" when he has a "divided heart" and a "double-mindedness" and a "worldly affection", is there any "cure" for such a "low" spiritual condition? (Note Hebrews 10:21-23) Is there as much a tendency for a believer to drift away from God and His salvation, if that believer has experienced "Entire Sanctification"? (Read I Thessalonians 5:22-24)

CHAPTER 3

REGAINING MAN'S LOST GLORY

HEBREWS 2:5-11

HEBREWS

REGAINING MAN'S LOST GLORY

O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 2:5-11

INTRODUCTION: What is Man? There are two extremes, both of which are unbiblical and untrue to reality. One extreme is expressed by the statement "Man is a worm," and the other extreme is expressed by the statement "Man is a god." The Bible declares that man is neither the object of scorn nor the object of worship.

PROPOSITION: What is Man? Man is a unique creature, created in God's own image, and created for greatness and nobility. Man is a fallen creature, whose brokenness because of sin, has resulted in Man's failure to realize the purpose for which he was created. The glory of man's restored greatness will someday be complete because of man's eventual reunion with Christ in heaven.

I. Man In His Created Greatness

II. Man In His Fallen Brokenness

III. Man In His Restored Glory

CONCLUSION: Man, created for glory, now often wallows in sin and shame. But, man can regain his greatness through Christ, and, because of his reunion with Christ by faith, he can share the very glory of Christ eternally!

HEBREWS

REGAINING MAN'S LOST GLORY

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 2:5-11

INTRODUCTION: What is Man? This is a question, the answer to which reveals one's basic philosophy of life. Many are the secular answers to this vital question!

Some say man is a mere animal, the highest creature on the evolutionary scale, the product of chance.

Some believe that man is merely a machine, "programmed to make automatic responses to external stimuli." (The Cross of Christ; Stott; page 274)

One of the leading psychologists of the 20th century, B. F. Skinner, who died as an old man on August 19, 1990, believed that human behavior is predictable, just like a chemical reaction. He believed that man was not a free moral agent with free will, but that man's behavior was simply the product of external influences. People are simply run through their paces by their environment; a better world would be realized as human behavior was "engineered", i.e., controlled by the uses of positive and negative reinforcement.

There are many cynical philosophers whose horrible devaluation of mankind is most tragic. Said one such philosopher: Man is "a boisterous bit of organic scum on one small planet." (The Word of The Lord Came Unto Me Also; page 128)

In contrast to pessimistic views of man, there are views of man which declare man as intrinsically good, the result of which is self-deification. There are two extremes, both of which are unbiblical and untrue to reality. One extreme is expressed by the statement "Man is a Worm", and the other extreme is expressed by the statement "Man is a god." The Bible declares that man is neither the object of scorn nor the object of worship.

PROPOSITION: What is Man? Man is a unique creature, created in God's own image, and created for greatness and nobility. Man is a fallen creature, whose brokenness because of sin, has resulted in Man's failure to realize the purpose for which he was created. The glory of man's restored greatness will someday be complete because of man's eventual reunion with Christ in heaven.

I. Man In His Created Greatness

Quoting Psalms 8, the author of Hebrews declares the greatness and the glory of man's unique place in God's original creation. *"What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor and put everything under his feet."* (Hebrews 2:6-8)

The greatest creation of the personal God is the creation of Man. Man is not the strongest being nor the fastest creature nor the largest creature, but Man is the only creature who asks ultimate questions and who seeks ultimate meaning in life. He is a self-conscious, self-determinative creature, one who is made only a little lower than the angels. Man is the object of God's special love and attention, the creature to whom God gave total authority over all of creation.

Man is different from all other creatures because he is made in God's own image. *"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."* (Genesis 2:7) God is a Tri-Une Being; and Man is also a Tri-Une being as well. God is a Being of intelligence (Omniscience), and so man is created a rational being. God is a Being of temperament (love), and so man is created an emotional being. God is a Being of action (Omnipotence), and so man is created a volitional being with the capacity to act. God, whose dominance is supreme, has shared that dominance with mankind.

Notes F.B. Meyer, *"And God said, Have dominion. (Genesis 1:28) - There you have royal supremacy. Man was intended to be God's vice-regent and representative. King in a palace stored with all to please him: monarch and sovereign of all the lower orders of creation. The sun to labor for him as a very Hercules; the moon to light his nights, or lead the waters round the earth in tides, cleansing his coast; elements of nature to be his slaves and messengers; flowers to scent his path; fruits to please his taste; birds to sing for him; fish to feed him; beasts to toil for him and carry him. Not a cringing slave, but a king crowned with the glory of rule, and with the honor of universal supremacy. Only a little lower than angels; because they are not, like them, encumbered with flesh and blood. This is man as God made him to be."* (The Way Into The Holiest; page 29)

II. Man In His Fallen Brokenness

God created man for greatness, and God intended for all men to exercise total authority over all creation. The author of Hebrews declares, *"In putting everything under him (mankind), God left nothing that is not subject to him."* (Hebrews 2:8)

The author of Hebrews is a realist. He positively declares God's original intention in creating Man, namely, to have dominion over all of creation. But he also realistically acknowledges Man's present fallen condition and the results of that fall. He writes, "Yet, at present we do not see everything subject to him." (Hebrews 2:8)

Whatever else can be said about man, we can say this: "Man is not presently what God intended man to be."

God made Man to reign, but sin caused Man to be subservient. Man was made to rule God's creation like a king rules a kingdom, but sin caused Man to wallow in shame like a slave that is belittled and intimidated. "Man's crown is rolled in the dust, his honor tarnished and stained, His sovereignty is strongly disputed by the lower orders of creation. If trees nourish him, it is after strenuous care, and they often disappoint. If the earth supplies him with food, it is in tardy response to exhausting toil. If the beast serve him, it is because they have been laboriously tamed and trained....If he catches the fish of the sea, or the bird of the air, he must wait long in cunning concealment." (The Way Into The Holiest; F.B. Meyer; page 29)

Far from being inherently righteous, the Bible declares that the heart of man is "desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9). Far from everything being subject to man, man is too often a slave to many things. Man was created to "hold his head high" with dignity, but instead, man hangs his head low with shame! Far from feeling in control of his environment, man feels that his environment is ruling him, that he is a slave to "omnipotent matter as it rolls along on its relentless way."

Man was created for glory, but he most often feels shame. Man experiences terrible brokenness because of the fall in the Garden of Eden. Man fell from the height of splendor to the depth of despair, from the beauty of perfection to the vileness of distortion, from the joy of fellowship to the anguish of separation, from the freedom of innocence to the bondage of guilty, from the strength of health to the weakness of disease, from the glory of life to the corruption of death, from the richness of an heir to the poorness of an outcast, from the fullness of knowledge to the shamefulness of ignorance.

III. Man In His Restored Glory

What man lost in the fall, namely, the glory of intimate fellowship with the Father, man can regain through the atoning death and glorious resurrection of Jesus.

What is the means by which fallen man can be restored to true greatness? If Jesus had not become a human (verse 9), if he had not suffered a substitutionary death on a cross (verse 9), if he had not offered reconciliation for alienated man (verse 10), if He had not transformed man's nature from one of sinfulness to one of moral purity (verse 11) - if Jesus had not done these things, then Man would be helplessly lost in sin!

Man was created for greatness. Man lost his greatness because of sin. Man can regain his greatness because of Christ.

Yes, it is true that we see Man in all of his lostness - his moral impotence and his spiritual slavery - but, far more importantly, "We see Jesus" who is "now crowned with glory" who wishes to bring "many sons to glory." (Verses 9 -10)

Why is it important to gaze at Jesus Christ? The glory of Jesus, as it was demonstrated during his earthly ministry, is the glory of human dignity amidst a cruel environment. Jesus' noble life, lived in the midst of multiple indignities, demonstrates to us contemporary men that we too can "hold our heads high" with a dignity that is noble without that dignity becoming a pride that is repulsive. Jesus, as He lived His life on earth, becomes the example for converted men to follow. Jesus, with the glory that He experiences presently with the Father, in His exalted place beside the Father's throne, is the measure of the glory which all true believers will someday experience! "We look forward, and we see men sharing in Christ's glory, and gathered together round His throne. Christ is the measure of man's capacities. He is the true pattern of human nature. Christ is the prophecy and pledge of man's dominion." (Maclaren's Hebrews; page 224)

Converted souls on earth have a small foretaste of the glory which they shall fully experience in heaven!

Man - created in greatness; man - fallen in shame; man - restored to glory! This is the story of man!

Man was born for greatness! Man has lost his greatness, but he can never forget the destiny for which he was created! The God-shaped image upon man may be distorted, but it can never be totally destroyed! Man can never really forget that he was

made for godlikeness! A caged eagle wishes to be freed to soar in the heights. Man is made for the spiritual heights and will never be satisfied to remain in the cage of his sins.

It is possible to attain everything that life can physically offer, and yet to be deeply dissatisfied and disillusioned.

"The quest for spiritual renewal and personal fulfillment is rooted in the depths of human nature, and the motivation to be what a man ought to be spiritually springs from interior depths. Man feels unhappy when he looks at his soul, dwarfed by a secular spirit and blighted by sin. He feels restless in his estrangement from God. He then reaches toward God. 'Thou hast made us for thyself and our heart is restless until it reposes in thee.'" (Personal Renewal Through Christian Conversion; Mavis; page 12)

Fallen humanity is capable of experiencing God's love in a way that not even the unfallen angels can experience God's love. The race of beings which have fallen to the lowest depths are capable of experiencing God's love at the highest heights! God redeemed the Terrible - the Fall - into the Tremendous - experience of Calvary love! What was for humans the greatest tragedy - the Fall into sin - has become for the Divine the occasion for the greatest revelation - Redeeming Love!

He - Jesus - who suffered most intensely, now experiences the glory and honor of the Father most intensely. If a repentant sinner clings to the cross of Christ and is willing to identify with Christ's suffering, then the day will come when that humble person will be ushered into the very presence of Christ in heaven! The Bible tells us that "it has not even entered into the heart of man what God has prepared for those who love him." Such a person shall be clothed with the glory of the Father and shall bask eternally in the love of God.

What is the essence of glory for which the children of God long and wait? Notes C.S. Lewis, "Glory means good report with God, acceptance by God, response, acknowledgement, and welcome into the heart of things. The door on which we have been knocking all our lives will open at last....at present we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the splendors we see...Someday, God willing we shall get in....Nature is mortal; we shall outlive her. When all the suns and nebulae have passed away, each one of you will still be alive....We are summoned to pass in through nature, beyond her, into that splendor which she fitfully reflects. And in there, in beyond nature, we shall eat of the tree of life." (The Living Testament; page 360-361)

CONCLUSION: Man, created for glory, now often wallows in sin and shame. But, man can regain his greatness through Christ, and, because of his reunion with Christ by faith, he can share the very glory of Christ eternally!

"In the end that face which is the delight or the terror of

the universe must be turned upon each of us either with one expression or with the other, either conferring glory inexpressible or inflicting shame that can never be cured or disguised...It is written that we shall 'stand before' Him, shall appear, shall be inspected. The promise of glory is the promise, almost incredible and only possible by the work of Christ, that some of us, that any of us who really chooses, shall actually survive that examination, shall find approval, shall please God. To please God...to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness....to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son - it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is." (The Living Testament; Page 360)

HEBREWS

REGAINING MAN'S LOST GLORY

Q U E S T I O N S

1. If man is neither an object of scorn (a worm), nor an object of worship (a god), then, from a Biblical viewpoint, what is Man? (Note Genesis 2:7; Hebrews 2:6-8; Psalms 8)

2. Put a T for true and a F for false before each statement, to indicate the truth or falsehood of each description of Man.
 - _____ 1. The highest creature on the evolutionary scale.
 - _____ 2. A complex machine which is programmed to make automatic responses to external stimuli.
 - _____ 3. A boisterous bit of organic scum on one small planet.
 - _____ 4. A creature whose intrinsic "goodness" makes him one who is worthy of being worshipped.
 - _____ 5. A being with unlimited intellectual capabilities, able to control his own destiny.
 - _____ 6. A fallen creature whose moral depravity is total and complete, helplessly lost in sin, and totally worthless to God.
 - _____ 7. A fallen creature who is corrupted by sin, but one who retains, in his fallen state, the image of God, and capable of moral restoration and spiritual renewal.
 - _____ 8. A unique creature, created in God's own image, with the authority to rule the world, subject to no one except Almighty God.
 - _____ 9. A fallen creature, whose brokenness because of sin, has resulted in failure to realize the purpose for which he was created.
 - _____ 10. A creature whose greatness and glory is only a little less than the greatness and the glory of God's unfallen angels.
 - _____ 11. The only creature who asks ultimate questions and who seeks ultimate meaning in life.
 - _____ 12. A creature whose inherent goodness will be manifested in ever increasing measures, as his environment is improved, and as his education is perfected.
 - _____ 13. A 'god' whose authority over the earth is supreme, and whose accountability is to no one outside of his own human realm.

- _____14. A never-dying soul whose sin is great, and whose eternal destiny is hell, unless he turns to God in deep repentance, and surrenders to Christ in deep faith.
- _____15. The object of God's special love and attention, the creature who, because of sin, is totally unworthy, but the creature who, because of Christ's death on the cross, is of infinite value to God.
3. In what ways is Man, who is created in God's image, like God? In terms of intellect, emotions, and will, how is Man like God?
4. Because of the Fall of Mankind (Genesis 3), how has God's original intention for Man (Genesis 1:28), been frustrated? (Note Hebrews 2:8)
5. Do you believe the following statements reflect a realistic evaluation of modern man? Tell why or why not?
- _____1. Far from being inherently righteous, the nature of man is desperately wicked. (Jeremiah 17:9)
- _____2. Far from everything being subject to Man (Genesis 1:28), man is too often a slave to many things.
- _____3. Far from feeling in control of his environment, Man feels that his environment is ruling him, that he is a slave to "omnipotent matter as it rolls along on its relentless way."
6. What was it that Man lost, because of the terrible Fall (Genesis 3), that he can regain because of what Christ accomplished in His death and resurrection?
7. What, according to Hebrews 2:9-11, did Jesus do to make possible the restoration of fallen mankind to a position of glory?
8. Why is the focus of our "gaze" - either on "Man in his sin" or on "Jesus in his glory" - the determination of our evaluation of Mankind's potential? When "we see Jesus" who is "now crowned with glory" (Hebrews 2:9), what can we conclude about the potential destiny of Man (Hebrews 2:10)?

Tell with what degree of conviction you agree with the following statements: *"Jesus, with the glory that He presently experiences with the Father, in His exalted place beside the Father's throne, is the measure of the glory which all true believers will someday experience. Christ is the measure of man's capacities."*

9. What is the "Essence" of glory for which the children of God long and wait? Tell how the following quote from C.S. Lewis helps answer this question: *"Glory means good report with God, acceptance by God, response, acknowledgment, and welcome into the heart of things."*
10. Do you believe that the following quote from C.S. Lewis accurately reflects the awesomeness of each person's ultimate accountability, and the seriousness of each person's ultimate eternal destiny?

"In the end that face which is the delight or the terror of the universe must be turned upon each of us either with one expression or with the other, either conferring glory inexpressible or inflecting shame that can never be cured or disguised."

C H A P T E R 4

HOW MUCH DOES JESUS CARE?

HEBREWS 2:11-18

HEBREWS

HOW MUCH DOES JESUS CARE?

O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 2:11-18

INTRODUCTION: Many are the voices of people who cry out, "Does anyone understand, does anyone care?" "Does anyone care for you in this world of lonely people?" Yes, there is one who cares for you, more than you can imagine! His name is Jesus! No one ever cared for you like Jesus!

Proposition: Jesus cared enough for all of us humans that (1) He came to live with us (Hebrews 2:11-14a); (2) He came to die for us (Hebrews 2:14b-17); (3) He came to win in us (Hebrews 2:18).

I. He Came To Live With Us (Hebrews 2:11-14a)

II. He Came To Die For Us (2:14b-17)

III. He Came To Win In Us (2:18)

CONCLUSION: He will befriend you; He will forgive you; He will strengthen you! How much does Jesus care? He cares a lot for you!

HEBREWS

HOW MUCH DOES JESUS CARE?

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 2:11-18

INTRODUCTION: Many are the voices of people who cry out, "Does anyone understand, does anyone care?" "Does anyone care that I feel lonely in a big impersonal world?" "Does anyone care that I am burdened down with life's responsibilities, worry-worn and weary and discouraged?" "Does anyone care when I falter and fail, in the face of life's seeming inequities and mysteries and injustices?" "Does anyone care when my burdens press, and my cares distress, and the way grows weary and long, when my path is dark with a nameless dread and fear?" "Does anyone care when I've said 'good-bye' to the dearest on earth to me, when for my deep grief I find no relief, though my tears flow all the night long?" (See the Song, "Does Jesus Care?")

Have you ever felt like a small child who was lost at night in a big forrest, wishing you could put your small hand in the big hand of a loving guide who knew the way through the haunting forrest?

Does anyone care for you, in this world of lonely people? Yes, there is one who cares for you, more than you can imagine! His name is Jesus! No one ever cared for you like Jesus!

Proposition: Jesus cared enough for all of us humans that (1) He came to live with us (Hebrews 2:11-14a); (2) He came to die for us (Hebrews 2:14b-17); (3) He came to win in us (Hebrews 2:18).

I. He Came To Live With Us (Hebrews 2:11-14a)

"Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. He says, 'I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises.' And again, 'I will put my trust in him.' And again he says, 'Here am I, and the children God has given me.' Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity...." (Hebrews 2:11:14a)

Jesus was fully Man! Paul wrote that Jesus "took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man." (Philippians 2:7) The writer of the Hebrews vividly described the fact of Jesus' humanity. "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself took part of the same;.....For verily he took not on him the nature of

angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham....that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God." (See Hebrews 2:14-18)

Notes J. B. Phillips, "Now once you honestly reach this conclusion that Christ was God--God revealed as fully as is possible, in a human being--you certainly don't know all the answers, but you have a remarkable amount of light to live by. For one thing, it revolutionizes your conception of the character of God. You don't see him any longer as a remote and terrifying being insulated from human life. You see him as God who so loved Man that he became Man. It was not a put-up job. He did it properly, without supernatural advantages, and he lived and died in the sweat and pain of human life. This is not one of those pagan legends about one of the gods disguised as a human being: this is the real thing. And once you see what God really was and did and suffered, you begin to see what kind of a person he is, and you have a powerful clue to his long and patient purpose." (Good News; J. B; Phillips; page 72, 73)

The story is told of a naturalist who viewed a procession of ants carrying pebbles to build an ant hill. To the naturalist, the ants seemed to be moving to and fro in confusion, with little organization. With keen interest the observer watched and wished that he could communicate to the ants a more organized method to carry their heavy pebbles. Wishing that he could alleviate them of the confusion, the naturalist suddenly realized that he could communicate to the ants only if he himself would become an ant.

The naturalist who viewed the ants wished only to become an ant in order to help them. Christ only became a man in order to release man from his bondage of sin. But Christ "*came to his own home, and his own people received him not.*" (John 1:11)

The sorrows and sufferings of life are many and varied, but Jesus' life shows us that God is involved in all of them. Wrote Kagawa, the great Japanese missionary: "God dwells among the lowest of men. He sits on the dust heap among the prison convicts. He stands with the juvenile delinquents. He is there with the beggars. He is among the sick. He stands with the unemployed. Therefore let him who would meet God visit the prison cell before going to the temple. Before he goes to Church let him visit the hospital. Before he reads his Bible let him help the beggar." There is never a sorrow that He doth not share, nor a woe that He does not feel. He was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. Picture Jesus as He makes His way into the desert to contemplate, following the beheading of His cousin John. Follow Him to the graveside of His dear friend Lazarus, and listen to His deep

moans and sobbing in the midst of Lazarus' broken-hearted sisters, Mary and Martha. Go with Jesus to the Mount that overlooks Jerusalem; and witness Jesus' tear-soaked cheeks as he cries out, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not. Behold your house is left unto the desolate." (Matthew 23:37,38)

"The poor mother of Nain, crying as if her heart would break as she stumbled after the pathetic little procession going out to bury her only son--Christ could not bear it! The leper, the innocent, once gay young life struck down by that slow, dreadful living death--Christ could not bear it. 'I will, be thou clean.' The great mass of attractive, lovable men and women caught in the toils of sins that spoilt their lives, and temptations they could not break, and wild regrets that were a misery--Christ could not bear it. And so He died to free them. And so we can say today, in those most moving words of our hymn, 'Jesus, Thou art all compassion.'

'Jesus, Thou art all compassion,
Pure, unbounded love Thou art;
Visit us with Thy salvation,
Enter every trembling heart.'

But the greatest thing of all is this, that when you see this compassionate Christ, you are seeing God." (The Gates of New Life; Stewart; page 197)

II. He Came To Die For Us (Hebrews 2:14b-17)

"He too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death - that is, the devil - and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." (Hebrews 2:14b-17)

The Scriptures often speak of the suffering and sacrifice of the Savior. "For it became Him (Jesus), 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." (Hebrews 2:10)

"Under the system of Jewish laws the high priest brought the blood of the slain animals into the sanctuary as a sacrifice

for sin, and then the bodies of the animals were burned outside the city. That is why Jesus suffered and died outside the city, where His blood washed our sins away." (Hebrews 13:11,12)

"We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man." (Hebrews 2:9)

The writer of Hebrews wrote: "Keep your eyes on Jesus, our leader and instructor. He was willing to die a shameful death on the cross because of the joy He knew would be His afterwards; and now He sits in the place of honor by the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:2;) The substitutionary death of Jesus became the ransom price for mankind!

Greater love than this cannot be found, that God would shed His sinless blood for sinful man!

How is God's love best shown? God's love for helpless, hopeless, sinning humanity is shown best--not through Christ's great teachings concerning love, not through Christ's great miracles and healing works of compassion, not even through His sinless, loving actions and relationships among men. No, as great as the teachings, miracles, and life of Jesus were, it is not these that best demonstrate God's love for mankind. It is not these that save mankind.

There is no way that God could have saved sinning humanity--you and me--except through Christ's death! "*Christ died for the ungodly.*" (Romans 5:6) Christ came into the world, not just to give us powerful miracles, profound teachings, and a pure example to follow. Christ came into the world to provide a substitutionary death for every sinner. God's saving love for the sinner demands that Christ "*taste death for every man.*" (Hebrews 2:9)

The penalty of sin is death. The justice of God demands the death penalty for willful transgressions against the known laws of God. The only way for an unjust sinner to be justly spared sin's penalty, is for the righteous Savior to unsparingly take the sinner's death. The justice of God can only be maintained through the exercise of the love of God--love that must suffer a substitutionary death for the sinner. Only through the exercise of such dying love can God remain just in His character and at the same time the sinner become justified in his standing before God. Someone must die for the sinner, and God's love compelled the Son to die for the sinner. Thus, the only way the sinner can be saved is through

the cross of Christ. The cross is the meeting ground for the justice of God and the love of God. The cross satisfied God's justice and at the same time demonstrates God's love.

Common to the idea of redemption is freedom--the result of paying the ransom price. When a ransom was given for a slave, the slave was freed. The Bible defines man as a slave to sin, and it describes Christ's death as a death to ransom man, to free him from the bondage of sin.

Many passages from Paul speak of man's freedom from sin's bondage. *"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death."* (Romans 8:2) Paul wrote to Timothy that Christ *"hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."* (II Timothy 1:10) Paul said that *"our old self is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin."* (Romans 6:6) The Christian is serving a new Master.

It is the glorious message of the Bible that man can be freed from his sinful bondage! Christ gives liberty to man. If the Son makes you free, you are free indeed! This liberty, however, is not a selfish liberty, but it is a liberty to serve Christ, instead of self! The paradox of the Christian's redemption is that he is redeemed to become a slave! A slave, not of passion, but of love; a slave, not of self-will, but of Christ; a slave, not of sin, but of righteousness! *"But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life."* (Romans 6:22)

Liberty is not to be abused. Christian liberty is liberty to serve Christ, and the motivation for this service is love. Christ loved man so much that He bought man with the price of His own blood! *"For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit which are God's."* (I Corinthians 6:20)

How can God be glorified? By living a life of love and service to God and to our fellowmen.

Christ gives love for hate, a cool head for a hot temper, understanding for resentment, confidence for fear, relaxation for anxiety, peace for guilt, integration for divided loyalties, direction for confusion. Christ came to give the more 'abundant life.' The greatest freedom of all is the freedom from the tyranny of self. Self in the center of life, makes one's life off-center! Freedom from sin is freedom to serve the Savior. Bowing low before Christ, you stand tall before everything else! Glorious freedom!

"God, I realize that it is an inescapable fact of life that everyone is the servant of some master--either a servant of sin or a servant of righteousness! Satan gives bondage; Christ gives freedom. I choose Christ as my Master! Amen."

Why did Jesus choose to share our human nature? *"He did so that through his death he might destroy the Devil, who has the power over death, and so set free those who were slaves all their lives because of their fear of death."* (Hebrews 2:14-15 Today's English Version)

What Satan thought was his greatest triumph became in reality his greatest tragedy! Satan claimed victory when he saw Jesus hang His head in death on the cross. Satan was crushed three days later when he looked into an empty tomb and knew that Jesus was ascended to the right hand of His Father's kingly throne! The demons' cries of triumph on Calvary's Friday suddenly turned into cries of terror on Easter morning! Christ disarmed the power of Satan!

"Death cannot keep his prey,
Jesus, my Savior!
He tore the bars away,
Jesus, my Lord!

Up from the grave he arose,
With a mighty triumph o'er his foes;
He arose a victor from the dark domain,
And He lives forever with his saints to reign;
He arose! He arose! Hallelujah! Christ
arose!

The greatest weapon of Satan has always been death. When Christ arose from the dead, Jesus captured Satan's chief weapon!

"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (I Corinthians 15:55,56 NIV)

Because Christ died and arose from the dead, He has demonstrated His victory over death, and has taken the mystery and the terror out of death for those who place their faith in Jesus Christ, the deathless One! Notes F. B. Meyer:

Fear not the mystery of death!--Jesus has died, and shown us that it is the gateway into another life, more fair and blessed than this--a life in which human words are understood, and human faces smile, and human affections linger still. The forty days of His resurrection life have solved many of the

problems, and illumined most of the mystery. To die is to go at once to be with Him. No chasm, no interval, no weary delay in purgatory. Absent from the body, present with the Lord. One moment here in conditions of mortality; the next beyond the stars.

Fear not the loneliness of death!-The soul in the dark valley becomes aware of another at its side, "Thou art with me." Death cannot separate us, even for a moment, from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. In the hour of death Jesus fulfills His own promise, "I will come again and take you unto Myself." And on the other side we step into a vast circle of loving spirits, who welcome the new-comer with festal songs. (2 Peter 1:11).

Fear not the after-death!-The curse and penalty of sin have been borne by Him. Death, the supreme sentence on sinners, has been suffered for us by our Substitute. In Him we have indeed passed on to the other side of the doom, which is justly ours, as members of a sinful race. "Who is He that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again."

Death! How shall they die who have already died in Christ? That which others call death, we call sleep. We dread it no more than sleep. Our bodies lie down exhausted with the long working-day, to awake in the fresh energy of the eternal morning; but in the meanwhile the spirit is presented faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. (The Way Into The Holiest; F. B. Meyer; pages 39-40)

III. He Came To Win In Us (Hebrews 2:18)

"Because he (Jesus) himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." (Hebrews 2:18)

The Bible says, "He (God) hath visited and redeemed his people." (Luke 1:68) Says E. Stanley Jones: "The only way to redeem His people was to visit them. He couldn't sit on a cloud and utter commands or pick us up and take us to heaven with celestial tongs, not soiling His fingers with the messy business of human living. No, He dwelt among us--amid our poverty, amid our temptations, amid our problems and choices, amid our opposition and disappointments. He lived among us and showed us how to live by living." (Word Became Flesh; page 34)

God, in the person of Jesus, knew what it was to pass through childhood, adolescence, and manhood--with all of the temptations unique to each stage. Jesus, like us, felt the pull of materialism, the pull to popularity at any cost, the pull to accomplish the right ends with the wrong means. He was tempted in all points like as we are, but without sin.

Jesus understood what poverty was all about. After Jesus had entered into His public ministry, on one occasion He said, "*The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head.*" (Matthew 8:20)

Jesus understood the challenge of involvement with people, for he worked with all sorts of people--religious and profane, literate and illiterate, high and low, rich and poor, young and old, healthy and sick, Jew and Gentile, urban and rural. He understood the complexities of human relationships and the subtleties of human nature.

Jesus understood what it was to be misunderstood, rejected, and despised, and he also knew what it was to be hailed, praised, and followed. Jesus knew abounding times and abasing times, prosperity and poverty, apparent success and apparent failure, companionship and loneliness, joy and sorrow, acceptance and rejection. Through all the changes and chances, due to the ebb and flow of life, Jesus learned to be master of circumstances. As we would say today, Jesus learned to cope with life, to cope with the challenges and the responsibilities of life. Jesus' life demonstrates God's total identification and involvement with man's daily changing experiences. "The Captain of our salvation (Jesus) has gone through and shared all our hardships, and plodded with bleeding feet over every inch of the ground over which He would lead us." (Expositions of Holy Scriptures; volume 15; page 235, Alexander Maclaren)

If there is any one who understands the subtle forms of temptation which Satan uses to allure and to seduce mankind, it is Jesus who understands best of all. Jesus is not a casual observer or a disinterested bystander or a detached moral lecturer, when it comes to temptation. Jesus understands firsthand what it means to be tempted, so He can sympathize with persons when they are tempted. He knows from experience what the full force of Satan's attacks are like! He knows what it is like to "suffer being tempted."

"He knows our needs; He has met our sorrows; He has faced our temptations. And because of that He knows exactly what help we need and He can give it." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 21)

"Does Jesus care when I've tried and failed
To resist some temptation strong;
When for my deep grief I find no relief,
Tho' my tears flow all the night long?

O yes, He cares; I know He cares,
His heart is touched with my grief;
When the days are weary, the long nights dreary,
I know my Savior cares."

"There have always been some who in a mistaken reverence have held that there was no possibility of Jesus falling to temptation, that he was of such complete goodness and purity, that he was, so to speak, so much God that he could not possibly have fallen to temptation. To believe that is to make the temptation story quite unreal, and to reduce it to a kind of play-acting. We must have no doubt of the utter reality of the temptation of Jesus; and, when we realize this, the temptation story becomes one of the most dramatic stories in history, for in those days when Jesus was tempted and tested, the fate of God's plan of salvation was literally swinging in the balance. It is further true that Jesus was not tempted less but more than any other person. In the case of ordinary men like ourselves, the tempter never has to put out his full power; we fall long before that; but in the case of Jesus the tempter put forth every effort he could, and Jesus overcame them all. To Jesus there came a strength and violence of temptation which no one else has ever known—and he overcame." (The Mind of Jesus; William Barclay; page 34)

He understands when we are tempted; He restores us when we have fallen; He reinforces us constantly amidst the storms and pressures of life. He who is within us is greater than he (Satan) who is in the world. "O sufferers, tempted ones, desolate and not comforted, lean your heads against the breast of the God-man, whose feet have trodden each inch of your thorny path; and those experiences of the power of evil well qualify Him to strengthen you to stand, to lift you up if you have fallen, to speak such words as will heal the ache of the fleshly gaping wound. If He were impassive, and never wept or fought in the garden shadows, or cried out forsaken on the cross, we had not felt Him so near as we can do now in all hours of bitter grief." (The Way Into The Holiest; F. B. Meyer; page 45)

CONCLUSION: Do you feel lonely? Remember, Jesus has come and dwelt in our midst, a man among men. "Immanuel" means "God With Us." This is a "visited planet"! Jesus has come to dwell in our midst; full identification with mankind.

Do you feel guilt-ridden because of sin in your life?
Remember, Jesus died for sinners like you and me! Because Jesus, the Innocent One, died for guilty ones like you, God is able to remain both just in His character and merciful in His treatment of sinners, when He offers forgiveness and reconciliation. Jesus is a "merciful and faithful High Priest before God, a priest who would be both merciful to us and faithful to God in dealing with the sins of the people."
(Verse 17;, Living Bible)

As a believer, do you feel weak in the face of temptation?
Remember, that Jesus Himself suffered temptation, and suffered not less but more than any other person has ever suffered during severe temptations. Because He went through temptations successfully, He is able to help you endure temptations and to become stronger through your trials!

He will befriend you; He will forgive you; He will strengthen you! How much does Jesus care? He cares a lot for you!

HOW MUCH DOES JESUS CARE?

Q U E S T I O N S

1. Briefly share a personal experience of hardship when you felt like crying out: "Does anyone understand, does anyone care?" When facing a hardship tell how the three following facts about Jesus could help you to cope with your losses and loneliness and heartbreaks: (a) Jesus came to live with us; (b) Jesus came to die for us; (c) Jesus came to win in us.
2. Why, according to Hebrews 2:14-18, was it necessary for Jesus to take on himself the nature of Abraham rather than the nature of the angels?
3. When you honestly conclude that Jesus was God - God revealed as fully as is possible, in a human being - how does this conclusion revolutionize your conception of the character of God?
4. After studying the life of Jesus, to what extent can you conclude that God is involved in the sorrows and the sufferings of each human life? Give examples from the life of Jesus that demonstrate divine involvement in human suffering. (Note Matthew 14:6-13; John 11:32-36; Matthew 23:37-38; Luke 7:11-15)
5. After reading Hebrews 2:9,10; 12:2; 13:11,12, what significance did the author of Hebrews attach to the death of Jesus?
6. God's love for helpless, hopeless, sinning mankind is shown best, not through Christ's great teachings concerning love, not through Christ's great miracles and healing works of compassion, not even through His sinless, loving actions and relationships among men. How then is God's love best shown?
7. What is the only way an unjust sinner can be justly spared sin's penalty, without the justice in God's character being compromised? Explain the significance of the following statement: "The cross is the meeting ground for the justice of God and the love of God."
8. How would you describe the "freedom" which the sinner experiences because of the ransom price which Jesus the Redeemer paid when He died on the cross? (Note Romans 8:2; 2 Timothy 1:10 and Romans 6:6)

9. How would you describe the "Liberty" which Christ the Redeemer gives to those who are bound in the slavery of sin? (Note Romans 6:22) What is the difference between "Christian liberty" and "Selfish license"? (Note Romans 6:1,2 11-18) Give your response to the following statement: "The paradox of the Christian's redemption is that he is redeemed to become a slave - a slave not of passion, but of love; a slave, not of self-will, but of Christ; a slave, not of sin, but of righteousness." (Note I Corinthians 6:18-20)
10. Tell to what extent you agree with the following statements: "The greatest freedom of all is the freedom from the tyranny of self. Self in the center of life, makes one's life off-center. Freedom from sin is freedom to serve the Savior. Bowing low before Christ, you stand tall before everything else. Christ gives lasting freedom. He gives love for hate, a cool head for a hot temper, understanding for resentment, confidence for fear, relaxation for anxiety, peace for guilt, integration for divided loyalties, direction for confusion."
11. How was Christ, through His death, enabled to destroy the Devil, and to set free human beings who were slaves all their lives because of their fear of death? (Note Hebrews 2:14-15) (Note I Corinthians 15:55,56)
12. Why, according to Hebrews 2:18, can Jesus perfectly understand what you feel and experience when you undergo a severe trial or temptation? Share what your emotional and intellectual response is to the following quote: "The Captain of our salvation (Jesus) has gone through and shared all our hardships, and plodded with bleeding feet over every inch of the ground over which He would lead us." (Alexander Maclaren)
13. When Jesus was tempted, do you believe that it was possible for him to yield to the temptations and, thus, to sin? Why or why not? Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "To believe that it was impossible for Jesus to sin when He was tempted, is to make the temptation story quite unreal, is to reduce it to a kind of play-acting, and is to make Jesus' identification with the human race less than complete identification (Hebrews 2:18)."
14. Do you honestly believe that Jesus was tempted in all points as you are tempted, and yet without yielding to any of those temptations?

15. Do you believe that Jesus loves you less when you sin than when you obey His commandments? Tell how you would answer the following question:

"Does Jesus care when I've tried and failed
To resist some temptation strong;
When for my deep grief I find no relief,
Tho' my tears flow all the night long?"

16. Give your response to the following quotation: "Jesus was not tempted less but more than any other person. In the case of ordinary men like ourselves, the tempter never has to put out his full power; we fall long before that; but in the case of Jesus the tempter put forth every effort he could, and Jesus overcame them all. To Jesus came a strength and violence of temptation which no one else has ever known - and he overcame. Jesus is not a casual observer, or a disinterested bystander, or a detached moral lecturer, when it comes to temptation. He understands firsthand what it means to be tempted, so He can sympathize with persons when they are tempted."

CHAPTER 5

KEYS TO SPIRITUAL MAINTENANCE

HEBREWS 3:1-19

HEBREWS

KEYS TO SPIRITUAL MAINTENANCE

O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 3:1-19

INTRODUCTION: Just as there were perils in the desert for the children of Israel, so there are perils in the journey of life for the believer. It is easy to start a race, but difficult to finish a race. It is easy to start a journey, but it is not always easy to complete a journey.

PROPOSITION: The Christian life is fraught with perils. To maintain a vital Christian life, a believer must continually respond with obedience and trust in God.

I. THE CAUSES OF FORFEITING SPIRITUAL LIFE

- A. The Wandering Heart (hardened affections)
- B. The Rebellious Will (wrong decisions)
- C. The Untrusting Spirit (abandoned commitments)

II. THE CONDITIONS FOR MAINTAINING SPIRITUAL LIFE

- A. Realize The Superiority of Christ's Person (verses 1 - 6)
- B. Respond With A "Soft" Heart During Testing (verses 7 - 8)
- C. Recognize God's Miraculous Intervention In Your Life (verse 9)
- D. Resist The Personal Tendency Of Your Heart To Drift (verse 12)
- E. Receive Corrective Counsel From A Caring Group (verse 13)
- F. Reiterate Your Faith and Repentance To the End Of Life (verse 14)

CONCLUSION: *"He (God) is able to keep you from slipping and falling away, and to bring your sinless and perfect, into his glorious presence with mighty shouts of everlasting joy. Amen."* (Jude 25; Living Bible)

HEBREWS

KEYS TO SPIRITUAL MAINTENANCE

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 3:1-19

INTRODUCTION: There are various ways to picture the Christian life. You can think of the Christian life like a 'House'. A house has both a foundation and superstructure. How foolish it would be to build only a foundation and fail to complete the house by refusing to build the superstructure.

You can think of the Christian life like a marriage. It takes only a short time to exchange wedding vows, but it takes much effort throughout a lifetime to implement the vows in the marriage relationship. It takes only a short time to pray a prayer of confession and repentance - to become a Christian - but it takes much effort and cooperation with God to remain a Christian.

You can think of the Christian life like a marathon race. It is easy to begin a long race, but it is difficult to continue in the race and to complete the race. Wrote Paul, "*I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day - and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*" (2 Timothy 4:7-8)

The illustration which the writer of Hebrews uses to describe the Christian life is the story of the Israelites under Moses, travelling from the land of Egypt to the Promised Land of Canaan. Just as the Israelites were delivered from their bondage in Egypt, so sinners are delivered from the slavery of sin. It was God's intention, when delivering His people out of Egypt, to lead them to the place of "milk and honey" (the Promised Land of Canaan). So, likewise, when God through Christ delivers a person from the slavery of his sins (represented by Egypt), it is God's intention miraculously to intervene and to safely lead him eventually to the heavenly "Promised Land" (the eternal home where abundance - "milk & honey" - is enjoyed). However, as in the case of Israel, there is a journey through a desert, before a believer enters the Promised Land of Heaven.

Just as there were perils in the desert for the children of Israel, so there are perils in the journey of life for the believer. It is easy to start a race, but difficult to finish a race. It is easy to start a journey, but it is not always easy to complete a journey.

The faithfulness of God and the power of God to keep believers safe and secure - this is never in question. God's purposes are good, and His power is great, and His love is unceasing, and His longsuffering is evident, and His forgiving grace is lavish. But God's faithfulness cannot take the place of man's faithfulness. Throughout life, the believer is constantly subject to the tests of God, the trials of circumstances, and the temptations of Satan. Only after the believer reaches the Promised Land of Heaven, will he be finally and eternally secure.

It is not only the writer of Hebrews (in the 3rd chapter of Hebrews) who warns us of the perils on life's journey toward the Promised Land, but Paul the Apostle also warns us to beware of the multiple perils along life's way - idolatry, fleshly indulgence, pagan revelry, sexual immorality, grumbling. (Read I Corinthians 10:1-12)

"One of the great characteristics of this remarkable letter to Hebrew Christians is the frequency and earnestness of its warnings against apostasy. Over and over again we find these recurring, and in fact we may say that the whole letter is written in order to guard against that danger." (Maclaren's Hebrews; page 295)

PROPOSITION: The Christian life is fraught with perils. Because of the seductiveness (deceitfulness) of sin, there are one time believers whose hearts have become hardened, whose wills have become rebellious, and whose spirits have abandoned trust in God. As in the case of the unbelieving Israelites in the wilderness, those one-time believers who abandon their faith in God will incite the wrath of God (verse 10), and these unrepentant backsliders will be rejected from the Promised Land (verse 11) and will die in the 'wilderness' (verse 17). To maintain a vital Christian life, a believer must continually respond with obedience and trust in God.

I. THE CAUSES OF FORFEITING SPIRITUAL LIFE

There are many warnings in God's Word against the dangers of spiritual drifting and apostasy. There is great safety and security, as long as a believer maintains faith in the living God. But, while it is true that faith is a gift from God, given to believers, it is also a volitional response on the part of man. In other words, it is possible for a believer to abandon faith in God and to harden his heart against God.

According to this chapter (Hebrews 3) what causes believers to abandoned their faith in God and thus to forfeit their spiritual life?

A. The Wandering Heart (hardened affections)

What caused the ancient Israelites to fall in the desert, and what will forfeit the life of God in a believer today? A heart that wanders away from God! Quoting from an Old Testament portion, the writer of Hebrews warns the Jewish Christians: *"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert.....That is why I was angry with that generation and I said, 'Their hearts are always going astray.'" (Hebrews 3:7,8,10)*

Guard the affections of your heart, for your heart guides your life. Keep your affections fixed on God and His will, not on worldly pursuits and pleasures. Wrote John, *"Stop loving this evil world and all that it offers you, for when you love these things you show that you do not really love God; for all these worldly things, these evil desires - the craze for sex, the ambition to buy everything that appeals to you, and the pride that comes from wealth and importance - these are not from God. They are from this evil world itself."* (I John 2:15-16; Living Bible)

The Christian who daily renews his love for God and for God's Kingdom, need never fear that he will wander away from the faith. Such a person guards against worldly affections - the craze for sex, the love of money and material things which money can buy, and the love of worldly recognition and power and position.

Because of their love of money, there have been many one-time believers who have even turned away from God, and *"as a result have pierced themselves with many sorrows"*. (I Timothy 6:10; Living Bible)

"Lukewarmness" in our reaction to Christ spells eventual disaster. To the Laodicean Church, God said, *"I know you well - you are neither hot nor cold;....since you are merely lukewarm, I will spit you out of my mouth!"* (Revelation 3:15, Living Bible)

B. The Rebellious Will (wrong decisions)

Another cause of the Israelites' fall in the desert was their rebellious will. The wandering (indifferent and lukewarm) heart, is the heart that directs the will to rebel against God's ways. Given ever so much intellectual knowledge about the ways and the will and the Word of God, a person (like the Israelites) will nevertheless make the wrong decisions if the heart is not fixed on God! The will of man is "slave" to the affections of man. Actions are directed by Emotions. As a

man feels, so he will act. If his heart is wayward, his actions will be unrighteous. Out of the heart of man proceeds actions.

Because the hearts (affections and sentiments and desires) of the Israelites went astray, the result was that these Israelites did not know God's ways (verse 10). Disobedience regarding God's will, and a decision to take their own way rather than God's way, was the essence of their sins and the result was terrible! They "*left their bones in the desert*" (verse 17 Phillips) and never saw the Promised Land!

The Bible says, "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." "There is a way that seems right unto man, but the end thereof is the way of death!" Man's ways, independent of God's Wisdom, lead to death! God's ways, humbly accepted and followed, lead to life! Failing to keep a tender heart, and failing to obey God's laws, resulted in abandoning trust in God's provisions and person.

C. The Untrusting Spirit (abandoned commitments)

"To whom did God swear that they should never enter into his rest? Was it not these very men who refused to trust him? Yes, it is all too plain that it was refusal to trust God that prevented these men from entering his rest." (Hebrews 3:18-19 Phillips)

Because man is "incurably religious", the person who chooses to disbelieve God and His promises, is the person who turns to a false god in whom he places his trust. Idolatry - serving another god rather than the true and the living God - is an advanced and serious manifestation of apostasy. "*Then they (the children of Israel) despised the pleasant land; they did not believe his promise. They grumbled in their tents and did not obey the Lord. So he swore to them with uplifted hand that he would make them fall in the desert, make their descendants fall among the nations and scatter them throughout the lands. They yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor and ate sacrifices offered to lifeless gods.*" (Psalms 106:24-28)

Hardening their hearts against God's love, choosing disobediently to follow their own ways rather than God's ways, and disbelieving God's promises resulting in turning to false gods for their assurance and provisions - these were the sins which kept the Israelites out of the Promised Land of Canaan, and they are the same sins which will keep backslidden persons out of heaven!

To abandon God and His ways will result in God's anger being incited. Mercy spurned is judgment earned! Disobedience and unbelief forfeit God's promises! "*And to whom was God*

speaking when he swore with an oath that they could never go into the land he had promised his people? He was speaking to all those who disobeyed him. And why couldn't they go in? Because they didn't trust him." (Hebrews 2:18-19; Living Bible)

If there are warnings to be heeded, there are also conditions to be met - if we are to eventually enter the Promised Land of Heaven.

II. THE CONDITIONS FOR MAINTAINING SPIRITUAL LIFE

There is "eternal security" in the Christian life, but that security is not automatic or unconditional or irrevocable. It is conditional security - a security that depends upon one's relationship with God that is maintained through dynamic faith and obedience and trust. Through a careful observation of the Israelites in the wilderness, one can gain much wisdom, and one can be motivated to avoid the pitfalls which eventuated in their loss of physical and spiritual life.

A. Realize the Superiority of Christ's Person (verses 1-6)

The most important 'key' to maintaining a dynamic spiritual life is to focus on Christ and His person, to realize the true superiority of Christ over all other persons or things. Everyone has faith, but it is the 'object' of one's faith which determines the 'value' of one's faith. Putting faith in anyone other than in Christ will never suffice. Jesus is not one among many great leaders, but He is altogether unique - in a 'class' all to Himself.

What is the significance of Hebrews 3:1-6? "To the Jew it would have been impossible to conceive that anyone ever stood closer to God than Moses did, and yet that is precisely what the writer of the Hebrews set out to prove.....Jesus came from God, clothed with all the power of God. All God's grace and mercy and love and powers were in His ambassador, His apostle, Jesus Christ.... Jesus is the one person through whom man comes to God and God comes to man.....Moses was a created man and he worked in a created universe. He was part of the house, involved in the house. But Jesus is the creator of the house, and the creator of the house is bound to stand above the house itself.....Moses knew a little about God; Jesus was God. Therein lies the greatness of Jesus and the secret of His unique superiority." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 24,25)

The first and most important condition which you must meet, if you are to maintain a vital spiritual life, is to realize the altogether unique personhood of Jesus Christ and to fix your thoughts on him. (verse 1)

"Jesus! the very thought of Thee
With sweetness fills my breast;
But sweeter far Thy face to see,
And in Thy presence rest."

A passing glance at Jesus and His Word will never do! If we are to maintain vitality in our Christian life, we must learn to 'loaf' in His presence, to concentrate on His Word, to take time 'in the garden' alone with Jesus!

B. Respond With A "Soft" Heart During Testing (verses 7-8)

The time of testing in the wilderness was intended for the character development of the Israelite people. Instead of softening their hearts and submitting their wills, they hardened their hearts and disobeyed God's commands.

When you are being tested by God, humble yourself in His presence. Don't harden your heart. Keep it 'soft' and responsive to His correction.

Later in the letter to the Hebrews, the author wrote: *"Since we respect our fathers here on earth, though they punish us, should we not all the more cheerfully submit to God's training so that we can begin really to live?.....God said, 'My son, don't be angry when the Lord punishes you. Don't be discouraged when he has to show you where you are wrong....let God train you, for he is doing what any loving father does for his children."* (Hebrews 12:5,7,9)

C. Recognize God's Miraculous Intervention In Your Life (verse 9)

"But God was patient with them forty years, though they tried his patience sorely; he kept right on doing his mighty miracles for them to see." (verse 9; Living Bible)

The Israelites fell in the wilderness and died, because they failed to "count their blessings", because they refused to focus on the positive aspects of their lives and chose instead to murmur and to complain.

Closing your eyes to the smaller and the momentous miracles of God in your life will result in opening your mouth with complaints and murmuring. The greatest deterrent against a bitter spirit is a mouth that is open with praises to God for the countless benefits and provisions which the Creator lavishes upon unworthy subjects!

"Are you ever burdened with a load of care?
Does the cross seem heavy you are called to bear?
Count your many blessings, every doubt will fly,
And you will be singing as the days go by."

"Count your blessings, Name them one by one;
Count your blessings, See what God hath done;
Count your blessings, Name them one by one;
Count your many blessings, See what God hath done."

D. Resist the Personal Tendency of Your Heart To Drift (verse 12)

"Beware then of your own hearts, dear brothers, lest you find that they, too, are evil and unbelieving and are leading you away from the Living God." (verse 12; Living Bible)

To guard against spiritual drifting and ossification of the heart, here is a good prayer to pray:

"Search me O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (Psalms 139:23,24)

A daily examination of your heart will help you to confess fresh sins and to check the wanderings of your affections towards lesser objects of delight than the Lord God Almighty. Guard your heart, for your heart will guide your life. Keep your heart's affections fixed on God, for He alone is worthy of your love. Delight thyself in God alone, and He shall fulfill the desires of thy heart. Keep thy heart full of God, and there will be no room for lesser loves!

Beware of a divided heart - a heart which tries to divide its loyalty and its love between God and mammon (money). You cannot serve both God and mammon, so choose to serve God only. Love God supremely, and all other loves will be subordinate - the love of family and friends and job and possessions will be sanctified for God-honoring purposes.

Eternal vigilance - keeping guard over your own heart - this is the price you must pay in order to walk safely through the maze of life. "Above all else, guard your affections. For they influence everything else in your life." (Proverbs 4:23; Living Bible)

The hardening of your heart is far more serious than the hardening of your arteries! The latter may lead to physical death, but the former will surely lead to spiritual death! To maintain a close relationship with your God, you must constantly guard against heart hardening. "The hardest hearts

were soft once, and the softest may get hard....Judas Iscariot must have been once a tender and impressionable lad. But hearts harden gradually, like the freezing of a pond on a frosty night....We get hard through the steps of an unperceived process. The constant hearing the truth without obeying it. The knowing a better and doing the worse. The refusal to confess the wrong and to profess the right. All these things harden. Beware of the deceitfulness of sin! Take heed to yourselves!" (The Way Into The Holiest; F. B. Meyer; page 51-52)

E. Receive Corrective Counsel From A Caring Group
(verse 13)

"Speak to each other about these things every day while there is still time, so that none of you will become hardened against God, being blinded by the glamour of sin." (verse 13; Living Bible)

Satan is strong and temptation is sometimes subtle. The flesh is weak, and the possibility of being enamored by sin's allurements is always a possibility. Trying to 'solo' the Christian life is a sign of pride, and is the essence of folly. Every believer needs to be accountable to a caring and sharing group. If you wish to grow in the Christian life, maintain fellowship with God and be answerable and responsible to a small prayer cell. Meet weekly and help examine each other's soul. Never be judgmental, but always be your "brother's keeper." A common, but all-important, question to ask your fellow believer, within the intimacy of a 'Tender Loving Care Group' is this: "How is it with your soul, my dear brother?" Wrote James to fellow believers: *"You should get into the habit of admitting your sins to each other, and praying for each other so that you may be healed."* (James 5:16; Phillips)

Guarding each other's soul is part of the Christian responsibility. Wrote Paul, *"Dear brothers, if a Christian is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help him back onto the right path, remembering that next time it might be one of you who is in the wrong. Share each other's troubles and problems, and so obey our Lord's commands."* (Galatians 6:1-2; Living Bible)

"We should see not only to our own heart, but to the heart of our brethren, and exhort one another daily, watching over each other, and seeking to revive drooping piety and re-animate fainting hope." (The Way Into The Holiest; F. B. Meyer; page 52)

F. Reiterate Your Faith and Repentance To The End of Life
(verse 14)

"If we are faithful to the end, trusting God just as we did when we first became Christians, we will share in all that belongs to Christ." (verse 14; Living Bible)

It is not he who starts a race, but it is he who finishes a race that shall be crowned with the crown of life! It is not he who is fascinated with the foundation of the house, but it is he who builds the superstructure of the house who shall be honored! It is not he who merely leaves the "house of bondage" in Egypt, but it is he who (like Joshua and Caleb) obediently follows the commands of God and who maintains faith in the provisions of God and who rejoices in the gifts of God - it is to such a person that the land of "milk and honey" belongs! "Be Thou faithful unto death and I will give thee the crown of life." "We receive Jesus Christ and all that He has and all that He is on condition of faithfully holding fast by the beginning of our confidence.....We are all apt to drop into a complacent taking for granted that the old energy lasts; and that our religious life is bottomed on the old foundations, and that it yields to and is guided by the old motives, when all the while an entire change has come over the man, and what he used to do from fresh impulse he now does as a matter of routine There have been ships wrecked at the harbor-mouth and which have gone to pieces with the loss of all hands, on the bar. And as John Bunyan saw long ago, a door opens down to the depths, at the very gate of the Celestial City. So we can never relax our watchfulness nor our effort to retain what we had, and to continue to practice what we did, long ago." (Alexander Maclaren's Hebrews; page 299,300,302)

To whom are granted the privileges of sharing in Christ, or receiving abundant life from Him? It is to those who hold firmly till the end the initial confidence which they had in Christ when they were first converted. From whence did that initial confidence come? It came as a result of true repentance of sin and from genuine surrender to Jesus as Savior and Lord. What the author of Hebrews says is this: "Keep a firm grasp of the elementary initial truths which at first drew you to the Master.....any advance which is to be according to the true law of the Christian system must not be away from, but deeper into that which we apprehended at first." (Maclaren's Hebrews; page 297,298)

"Confidence is born of penitence and faith." (Ibid;297)
Repentance or confession of sin is not only a decisive past act by which we initially became Christians. Rather, repentance and confession are attitudes of the spirit which must be maintained throughout a lifetime. John wrote, "If we

continue to confess our sins, faithful is He and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from every unrighteousness." (I John 1:9 Wuest's Translation)

Believing in Christ as Savior is not only an initial act by which we transfer faith from our own selves to Christ alone as our only Savior, but faith in Christ is an ongoing, dynamic relationship in which we continuously surrender to Christ and by which we regularly draw new strength for daily living. "Just as the branch is unable to be bearing fruit from itself as a source unless it remains in a living union with the vine, so neither you, unless you maintain a living communion with me!" (John 15:4; Wuest's Translation)

It is he who continues to confess his sins, and who continues to believe in Jesus, that maintains a vital relationship with God. "Hold fast the beginning of your confidence', and ever reiterate the two initial acts (repentance and faith) from which it flowed." (Ibid; page 297)

'Reiterate' means to do something again and again, to repeat over and over. To maintain vitality in the Christian life, we need not confess old sins repeatedly to Christ in order to enjoy assurance of sins forgiven, but we must daily confess any new sins, and we must daily surrender new areas of our lives to Christ's lordship!

Listen to what God revealed to Ezekiel: "I have said the good man will live. But if he sins, expecting his past goodness to save him, then none of his good deeds will be remembered. I will destroy him for his sins." (Ezekiel 33:13; Living Bible)

How do you maintain spiritual life? By maintaining a close and obedient walk with God. Daily build yourself up in the most 'holy faith', and exhort each other to follow the Lord.

CONCLUSION: How can we remain faithful to our Lord, dynamic in our inner spiritual life, forward-moving in our desert pilgrimage towards The Promised Land? The writer to the Hebrews (in chapter 3) tells us how:

- (1) Realize the Superiority of Christ's Person (verses 1-6)
- (2) Respond with a 'Soft' Heart During Testing (verses 7-8)
- (3) Recognize God's Miraculous Intervention In Your Life (verse 9)
- (4) Resist the Personal Tendency of Your Heart To Drift (verse 12)
- (5) Receive Corrective Counsel From A Caring Group (verse 13)

(6) Reiterate Your Faith and Repentance To The End of
Life (verse 14)

Always Remember:

*"He is able to keep you from slipping and falling away,
and to bring you sinless and perfect, into his glorious
presence with mighty shouts of everlasting joy. Amen."
(Jude 25; Living Bible)*

HEBREWS

KEYS TO SPIRITUAL MAINTENANCE

Q U E S T I O N S

1. Share how the following analogies help describe the "Christian Life": (a) Building A House; (b) Experiencing a wedding and a marriage; (c) Running a Marathon race; (d) Taking a Long Journey.
2. What illustration does the writer of Hebrews (in Chapter 3) and Paul in I Corinthians 10:1-12 use to describe the "Christian Life"? What warnings are believers to heed as a result of a serious study of the ancient Israelites?
3. If it is true (as it is true) that God's purposes are good, God's power to keep believers is great, God's love is unconditional and unceasing, God's longsuffering is evident, and God's forgiving grace is lavish, then how can one believe with integrity that the believer's "eternal security" is conditional rather than unconditional, automatic, and irrevocable?
4. Point out those verses that specifically describe the following three causes for the fall of the ancient Israelites in the wilderness:
 - (a) The Wandering Heart (hardened affections)
 - (b) The Rebellious Will (wrong decisions)
 - (c) The Untrusting Spirit (abandoned commitments)
5. Tell to what degree you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Hardening their hearts against God's love, choosing disobediently to follow their own ways rather than God's ways, and disbelieving God's promises resulting in turning to false gods for their assurance and provisions - these were the sins which kept the Israelites out of the Promised Land of Canaan, and they are the same sins which will keep backslidden persons out of heaven." (Note Hebrews 3:18-19)
6. Tell, from your own personal experience, how you have found the conviction expressed in the following statements to be both true and practically important to you, as you have attempted to live a victorious Christian life:

"A passing glance at Jesus and His Word will never do! If we are to maintain vitality in our Christian life, we must learn to 'loaf' in His presence, to concentrate on His Word, to take time 'in the garden' alone with Jesus!"

7. When we as believers, like the ancient Israelites in the wilderness, are severely tested by God, what peril should we be careful to avoid? (Note Hebrews 3:7-8; 12:5-9)
8. Why, in spite of the many miracles which God performed before the eyes of the ancient Israelites, did the latter complain and grumble and become rebellious? (Note Hebrews 3:9) Is it possible for modern Christians to become negative and ungrateful grumblers, in spite of the fact that God graciously and regularly "showers" blessings upon them? Why? Tell to what extent you agree with the following statement: "The greatest deterrent against a bitter spirit is a mouth that is open with praises to God for the countless benefits and provisions which the Creator lavishes upon unworthy subjects!"
9. Why is the prayer, as recorded in Psalms 139:23,24, so important for believers daily to pray? (Note Hebrews 3:12)
10. Give your interpretation of the following statement: "Guard your heart, for your heart will guide your life." Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statements: "The will of man is 'slave' to the affections of man. Actions are directed by Emotions. As man feels, so he will act. If his heart is wayward, his actions will be unrighteous. Out of the heart of man proceeds actions." (Note Proverbs 4:23)
11. One perceptive person said, "We get hard through the steps of an unperceived process. The constant hearing the truth without obeying it. The knowing a better and doing the worse. The refusal to confess the wrong and to profess the right." Can you name any other causes of heart hardening?
12. According to Hebrews 3:13, do you believe the following statement accurately describes one of the reasons for a lack of spiritual vitality easily recognizable in the lives of many professing Christians? - "Trying to 'Solo' the Christian life is a sign of pride, and is the essence of folly." (Note Hebrews 10:25; James 5:16; Galatians 6:1-2)
13. What Scriptural support can you give to document the truth of the following statement: "It is not he who merely leaves the 'house of bondage' in Egypt, but it is he who (like Joshua and Caleb) obediently follows the commands of God and who maintains faith in the provisions of God and who rejoices in the gifts of God - it is to such a person that the land of "milk and honey" belongs!"

14. Are 'repentance' and 'faith' only initial decisive acts by which one becomes converted to Christ, or are these 'acts' continuing attitudes that must be reiterated often in the Christian life? (Note I John 1:9 and John 1:12) (Note John 15:4)
15. Give your comments on the following statement: "To maintain vitality in the Christian life, we need not confess old sins repeatedly to Christ in order to enjoy assurance of sins forgiven, but we must daily confess any new sins, and we must daily surrender new areas of our lives to Christ's lordship." Give your personal reaction to the following Scripture: Ezekiel 33:10-2

C H A P T E R 6

'REST' FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD!

HEBREWS 4:1-16

HEBREWS

'REST' FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD!

O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 4:1-16

INTRODUCTION: There is no perfect tranquility, this side of heaven, but there is nevertheless a heritage of peace and rest from God, ready for every trusting soul to claim as his very own heritage, while he travels life's pathways during his pilgrimage towards heaven.

PROPOSITION: There remains a rest for the people of God, and is available to all who choose to enter into it through trust and obedience. The God who promises rest to the soul is the God who sympathizes with man's weaknesses, and who allows man to approach His throne of grace to find grace to help him in his times of need.

I. God's Present Provision For Our Rest (verses 1-11)

- A. Availability of God's Rest For All
- B. Conditions For Finding God's Rest

II. God's Perfect Evaluation Of Our Responses (verses 12-13)

- A. Judgement Through God's Word
- B. Accountability Before God's Omniscience

III. God's Sympathetic Understanding of Our Weaknesses (verses 14-16)

- A. The Availability Of Divine Resources (Throne Of Grace)
- B. The Avenue To Divine Resources (Great High Priest)
- C. The Advance Towards Divine Resources (Let Us Come Boldly)
- D. The Avalanche From Divine Resources (Mercy and Grace To Help In Times Of Need)

CONCLUSION: The God who initiates - provides rest for the weary souls - is the God who evaluates - scrutinizes the responses of man to His offer - and is the God who sympathizes - enables the humble to be forgiven and the weak to be strengthened! What a God of grace, and justice, and mercy!

HEBREWS

'REST' FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD!

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 4:1-16

INTRODUCTION: Someone has called a Christian a "Positive Realist." That is to say, a Christian realistically acknowledges the fact of troubles and trials and sorrows and pains in this present 'veil of tears' on earth and, yet, at the same time, a Christian positively affirms the fact that there is peace and quiet and rest available for God's people, under the shadow of God's wings during life's turmoil.

There is no perfect tranquility, this side of heaven, but there is nevertheless a heritage of peace and rest from God, ready for every trusting soul to claim as his very own heritage, while he travels life's pathways during his pilgrimage towards heaven. There is no need for believers to be weighed down with life's burdens, anxiety-ridden, worry-worn, crushed with sorrows, insecure among people, terrorized by the fear of the unknown, frayed in nerves because of a lack of solitude, distracted in mind because of a lack of direction, disillusioned in spirit because of a lack of purpose! "On all hands we hear of strong and useful workers stricken down in early life by the exhausting effects of mental toil. The tender brain tissues were never made to sustain the tremendous wear and tear of our times. There is no machinery in human nature to repair swiftly enough the waste of nervous energy which is continually going on." (The Way Into The Holiest; F. B. Meyer; page 53)

PROPOSITION: The author of Hebrews declares with certainty that there remains a rest for the people of God (Verses 1-10). This 'rest' (or peace with God) is available to all who choose to enter into it through trust and obedience. God knows the heart of every person, whether it is a believing heart that claims the promise of rest, or whether it is an unbelieving heart that rejects God's promise of rest (Verses 11-13). The God who promises rest to the soul (Verse 1), is the God who sympathizes with man's weaknesses (Verse 15), and who allows man to approach His throne of grace to find grace to help him in his times of need (Verses 14-16).

Let us consider the REST which God has available for all men. From a study of Hebrews 4:1-16, let us consider: (1) God's Present Provision for Our Rest (Verses 1-11); (2) God's Perfect Evaluation of Our Response (Verses 12-13); (3) God's Sympathetic Understanding of Our Weaknesses (Verses 14-16).

I. God's Present Provision For Our Rest (Verses 1-11)

For the soul that is bowed down with a heavy load of sin, for the mind that is distracted with the many worries of life, for the heart that is restless because of its unfulfilled desires - for such a pathetic person there is God's promise of Rest for him to claim and to enjoy!

None need miss that Promised Rest, but all must be most careful not to fail to enter into that Rest. *"Although God's promise still stands - his promise that all may enter his place of rest - we ought to tremble with fear because some you may be on the verge of failing to get there after all."* (Hebrews 4:1; Living Bible)

A. Availability of God's Rest For All

The Rest of God, of which the author of Hebrews writes, is a spiritual peace which is presently available to every person. God loves all persons and His heart is grieved when He sees His 'crowning creation' - Man - torn asunder with life's worries and weighed down with sin's burdens.

The Rest which God promises is heavenly in nature and divine in source. It is the "soul rest" which is a gift from God Himself.

There is a parallel between the rest of the Father after the six days of Creation, and the rest of Jesus after His resurrection and ascension, and the rest of the believer after his deliverance from sin and his conversion to Christ.

God rested from all his work (Verse 4). Jesus "has gone through the heavens" in His ascension (Verse 14). "Anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work" (Verse 10).

The Promised Land of Canaan symbolized the eternal Rest of God. Just as it was God's will ultimately to take each one of the Israelites who left Egypt (the land of bondage) to the land of "milk and honey" (Canaan), so it is God's will to take everyone of His creatures to the heavenly Canaan - the place of lasting rest! The Rest which God will give to His people in Heaven is a perfect rest. The Rest God gives to believing people on earth is patterned after and is a foretaste of that ultimate rest in Heaven.

The rest which God gives to trusting souls is a rest from the burdens of sin, a rest from the vain striving of a divided heart, a rest from the anxiety of a guilty conscience, a rest from the distractions of a double-mindedness, a rest from the nagging fears of an unknown future, a rest from the tumults of unfulfilled desires, a rest from the loneliness of lost

friends, a rest from the futile striving of self-righteous attempts to please God, a rest from the despair of a purposeless philosophy of life and an endless search for truth! Rest, sweet rest in the bosom of God! The rest which essence can be described as reconciliation with God, love for man, and acceptance of self.

"I am resting tonight in this wonderful peace,
Resting sweetly in Jesus' control;
For I'm kept from all danger by night and by day,
And His glory is flooding my soul.

Peace! Peace! wonderful peace,
Coming down from the Father above;
Sweep over my spirit forever, I pray.
In fathomless billows of love."
(Wonderful Peace)

B. Conditions For Finding God's Rest

All who left Egypt were promised Canaan. God's promise cannot be fulfilled, however, without certain conditions being met. Why was God so adamant when he said, regarding the Israelite people, "They shall never enter my rest"? (Verse 5)

God's positive purposes for Israel and His perfect promises to Israel were frustrated because Israel failed to meet certain conditions.

It is God's perfect will that every person enjoy His gift of heavenly rest - both in heaven ultimately and on earth imperfectly.

It is true that man cannot earn or purchase or deserve God's gift of rest (peace); it is a gift from God. Nevertheless, it is also true that God never gives His rest indiscriminately or automatically to a person. There are certain conditions to be met, if God's promise of rest is to be fulfilled.

(1) Give Attention to God's Promise.

There are many whose lives could be described as a bobbing cork on a stormy sea. Like the wandering Israelites in the desert, retracing their steps, purposeless and restless, there are too many persons who are miserable in their existence, aimless in their direction, blinded in their vision, confused in their thinking, broken in their emotions, and oblivious to God's promises! If ever a person is to find peace - real rest for his weary soul - he must recognize the source of such peace. There is no peace outside of God, no rest for the guilt-ridden person away from God. The

first step in the process of finding peace and rest is to realize that "God's promise still stands" - the promise of rest is presently offered to us today! (Verse 1)

(2) Make Every Effort to Enter God's Rest

The rest of God is not given to the inattentive or to the slothful person! If one wants peace - the sweet rest which God offers to the weary soul - he must "make every effort to enter that rest" (Verse 11). He must exercise every ounce of strength he has, in a great effort not to miss out on the one thing - the peace of God - that is infinitely valuable. Like purchasing a pearl of great price, he must sacrifice everything else, that he might find the peace and rest of God! (Note Matthew 13:45-46)

Jesus is the peace and rest of God. Rest is not an abstract entity, but Rest is found in a concrete relationship with Christ! Said Jesus, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28) Aside from Jesus, there is no true rest to the soul. "*There is no peace, says the Lord, for the wicked.*" (Isaiah 48:22)

Making every effort to enter God's rest essentially means making Christ the object of one's search and the lover of one's soul! Said Jesus, "*Anyone who wants to be my follower must love me far more than he does his own father, mother, wife, children, brothers, or sisters - yes, more than his own life - otherwise he cannot be my disciple.*" (Luke 14:26; Living Bible)

(3) Rest From His Own Work

Wrote the author of Hebrews, "*There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work.*" (Hebrews 4:9-10)

Martin Luther, like so many in history, struggled so hard for so long to gain God's approval by his own works of righteousness. He worked hard to appease God's wrath. Fastings, prayers, self-tortures - none of these brought peace to his heart and rest to his mind.

We must make every effort to enter into God's rest, but the effort expended is not the effort of self-righteous acts. The Jews under the law of Moses tried hard to please God through rituals and ceremonies and animal sacrifices. Many since the days of the Old Testament have exerted every effort to make themselves acceptable to God. John Wesley, before his personal conversion, was

one of the most disciplined moralist in history. But he was restless in his soul and discouraged in his spirit - almost to the point of despair! Lacking personal assurance of sins forgiven, he continued to accumulate many good works! It was only when he finally "rested from his own works" and instead trusted in the grace of God for personal salvation, that he found his own heart "strangely warmed."

We must rest from seeking to work out a righteousness of our own, and surrender instead to Christ and allow Christ to clothe us with His own garments of righteousness.

"Not the labors of my hands,
Can fulfill Thy law's demands,
Thou must save, and Thou alone."

The Jewish believers to whom this author is writing, were tempted to abandon Christ and the way of grace, and to return to Moses and the way of law. He warns these Jewish believers that to return to Judaism is to return to a life of bondage, because by law-keeping can no one be justified in the eyes of God. There is no substitute for grace. No amount of good deeds can bring God's favor and forgiveness. He tells them that they no longer can depend on the observance of Mosaic rites and ceremonies for their justification and final happiness. They must rest from all their works of the law as fully as God has rested from his works of creation (Verse 10).

Wrote Paul, *"No one can ever be made right in God's sight by doing what the law commands. For the more we know of God's laws, the clearer it becomes that we aren't obeying them; his laws serve only to make us see that we are sinners."* (Romans 3:20; Living Bible)

It is not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by the sheer mercy and love of God, that we are saved! Wrote Paul, *"But when the time came for the kindness and love of God our Savior to appear, then he saved us - not because we were good enough to be saved, but because of his kindness and pity - by washing away our sins and giving us the new joy of the indwelling Holy Spirit whom he poured out upon us with wonderful fullness - and all because of what Jesus Christ did so that he could declare us good in God's eyes - all because of his great kindness; and now we can share in the wealth of the eternal life he gives us, and we are eagerly looking forward to receiving it."* (Titus 3:4-7; Living Bible)

(4) Personally Receive The Message By Faith

"For this wonderful news - the message that God wants to save us - has been given to us just as it was to those who lived in the time of Moses. But it didn't do them any good because they didn't believe it. They didn't mix it with faith." (verse 2; Living Bible)

It is possible to know about marriage, and yet not to be married. It is possible to read many books about the art of swimming, and never to get your body wet with water. It is possible to know a lot about God, and yet never to know God! It is possible, as in the case of the wandering Israelites, to hear the message of God and yet refuse to believe the message of God.

'Believing' God's message involves volitional commitment, not merely intellectual consent. There is a kind of listening that fails to bring about any moral changes. There is a shallow intellectual 'believing' that results in no spiritual transformation (note James 2:19). Listening to God's message with the ears, must change the attitudes of the mind, and must soften the affections of the heart, and must change the direction of the will. "The promises of God are not merely beautiful pieces of literature; they are not merely sweet sayings which mean nothing; they are promises on which a man is meant to stake his life and by which he is meant to dominate his action." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 33)

II. GOD'S PERFECT EVALUATION OF OUR RESPONSES (Verses 12-13)

"The promise of entering His rest still stands" (Verse 1). God wants to save all, Jesus has died for all, the Holy Spirit calls all, and the plan of salvation is offered to all. God's promise to enter the land of Canaan - the place of Israel's inheritance, the place of physical rest which symbolized God's eternal rest and peace - this promise was not fulfilled because of Israel's disobedience (Verse 6). That promise was renewed during the time of David (Verse 7). This same promise of soul-rest continues to be offered to all mankind. Anyone who is willing to abandon the way of self-righteousness (i.e., anyone who will "rest from his own works"), will come to enjoy the "rest of God."

What more could God do than what He has already done? Just as God has completed creation and is now at 'rest' on the "seventh day" (Verse 4), so Jesus has completed the work of redemption for lost humanity and "has gone through the heavens" (Verse 14) where he now sits before the Father's throne to make intercession for mankind. The plan of salvation has been accomplished, the work of atonement has

been completed, and the gift of life (rest and peace) continues to be offered to all mankind.

With every opportunity given, there is a corresponding accountability that is required! The God who is merciful in His lavish offer of grace, is the same God who is strict in His accountability, and who is accurate in His scrutiny of man's moral response to His Divine offers!

A. Judgment Through God's Word

"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow, it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12)

It was because of a hardened heart, a rebellious will, and an unbelieving spirit that the Children of Israel who left Egypt never entered the Promised Land of Canaan. It is the Word of God that penetrates deeply into the interior being of man. The Word of God offers to every man life or death. The Word of God penetrates deeply, dividing soul and spirit. That is to say, God's Word discerns man's physical life (soul life) with the passions of the body. If a person becomes, like the hedonistic Israelites ('lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God'), then the penetrating Word of God can easily diagnose that sensualism. Sensualism was one of the sins which brought death to many Israelites. In spite of all the miracles God did for them, these Israelites nevertheless followed the instincts of their bodies rather than cultivating the higher aspirations of their spirits. They became 'fleshly' rather than 'spiritual'. "From this lesson we are warned that we must not desire evil things as they did, nor worship idols as they did. (The Scriptures tell us, 'The people sat down to eat and drink and then got up to dance' in worship of the golden calf.) Another lesson for us is what happened when some of them sinned with other men's wives, and 23,000 fell dead in one day." (I Corinthians 10:6-8; Living Bible)

The Word of God penetrates to the division of soul and spirit, i.e., the Word of God tests a man's earthly life (body or soul life with its passions and instincts), and a man's spiritual life (i.e., the spirit of man which thinks and reasons and looks beyond the earthly life). The Word diagnoses not only man's body with its fleshly appetites, but the Word also diagnoses man's spirit with its strong faith in the unseen God or its cynical doubt which results in turning away from the true God to serve pagan idols.

Not only is the diagnosis of God's Word accurate in its evaluation of man's body with its desires, and in its evaluation of man's spirit with its object of worship, but the

diagnosis of God's Word is accurate in its scrutiny of man's emotional life and of man's intellectual life.

The Word of God comes to evaluate each of us.

Question One: "Is your body consecrated to God, with its instincts and passions under the control of the Holy Spirit, or is your body a tool for self-indulgence and destructive lust?"

Question Two: "Is your spirit committed to God, for the exercise of faith and trust in the character of the living God, or is your spirit battered with doubt and turned to the worship of other gods?"

Question Three: "Are your desires - the emotional and affectional part of your being - set on gratefully loving God, or have you turned ungratefully and bitterly away from God to murmur against Him and His dealings with you?" Wrote Paul about the judgment of God against the ungrateful

Israelites: *"And don't murmur against God and his dealings with you, as some of them did, for that is why God sent his Angel to destroy them."* (I Corinthians 10:10; Living Bible)

Question Four: "Intellectually, do you submit your thoughts to God, and do you seek to have the 'mind of Christ' within you, or have you become darkened in your understanding with thoughts that are vain and selfish?"

Remember, the Word exposes the quality of our fleshly appetites, the object of our spiritual worship, the gratitude or ingratitude of our affections, the intellectual patterns of our mind.

"The Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12; NIV)

B. Accountability Before God's Omniscience

God is omniscient - i.e. He is all-knowing. There is an "All-Seeing Eye" constantly watching you! "He knows about everyone, everywhere. Everything about us is bare and wide open to the all-seeing eyes of our living God; nothing can be hidden from him to whom we must explain all that we have done." (Verse 14; Living Bible)

One person, who knew the English language well, believed the most serious word of the English language is "Accountability."

Wrote the Psalmist, "I can never get away from my God! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the place of the dead, you are there.....If I try to hide in the darkness, the night becomes light around me. For even darkness cannot hide from God; to you the night shines as bright as day. Darkness and light are both alike to you." (Psalms 139:7-8, 10-12; Living Bible)

"God is the unseen guest at every table,
The silent listener to every conversation."

Every person is "naked and open" unto the eyes of Him to whom we all must give a final accountability. "As far as men are concerned we may be able to wear our outward trappings and our disguises; but in the presence of God these things are stripped away and we have to meet God as we are....We may escape God for long enough, but in the end God grips us in such a way that we cannot help meeting Him face to face. God is one issue that no man can finally evade....Men may judge us by our outer conduct and our outer appearance, but God sees into the very inmost secrets of our hearts. It is as if to say that the very inmost recesses of our emotional and intellectual being are open to His sight.....There comes a time to every man when he has to meet that God from whose eyes nothing is and nothing ever can be concealed." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 36,37)

III. GOD'S SYMPATHETIC UNDERSTANDING OF OUR WEAKNESSES (Verses 14-16)

The God, before whom nothing is concealed, is the God whose total knowledge of us humans is not for the purpose of destroying us, but for the purpose of helping us. He exercises not only justice in His righteous punishment of those who refuse to obey Him, but He also manifests mercy to those who, in spite of all their weaknesses and sins, are humble and contrite and broken in their hearts. This High Priest understands our human weaknesses and frailties. *"Notice how God is both kind and severe. He is very hard on those who disobey, but very good to you if you continue to love and trust him."* (Romans 11:22; Living Bible)

A. The Availability of Divine Resources (Throne of Grace)

"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence."
(Verse 16)

The throne of God is not a throne hidden in the clouds of unapproachable holiness, but it is a throne that is covered

with the sprinkled blood of Christ and which is accessible to repentant sinners and humble saints. He who requires so much of humans because He has provided so much for humans, is he who is so merciful to humans because He knows how very weak humans really are! "The ruling sovereign element in Deity is unmerited love and mercy and kindly regard to us poor, ignorant, sinful creatures, which keeps pouring itself out over all the world. God is King, and the kingly thing in God is infinite grace." (Maclaren's Hebrews; page 335)

B. The Avenue To Divine Resources (Great High Priest)

"Jesus the Son of God is our great High Priest who has gone to heaven itself to help us; therefore let us never stop trusting him" (Verse 14; Living Bible)

It is one thing to be knowledgeable of the availability of divine resources; it is quite another thing to know the avenue whereby those resources can be 'tapped' or appropriated. How can the vast separation between the Holy God and sinful man be bridged? Through what means can heaven's treasures be delivered to earth's paupers?

It is Jesus - the great High Priest - through whom God works to enable man to enjoy the benefits of His forgiving grace.

Jesus is the perfect "bridge-builder" between God and Man. Jesus is the One by whom God's love can flow to man, and by whom man's prayers can be heard by God.

Jesus is the One who opens the heart of God to man. Without Jesus - the perfect God-Man - there would be no access to the Holy Father.

Jesus, our great High Priest, is not only holy enough to approach the righteous Father in behalf of unholy man, but Jesus also was tempted enough as a true human to understand man fully. Our High Priest is not aloof from mankind, but instead, He is intimately involved with mankind. *"This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, since he had the same temptations we do, though he never once gave way to them and sinned."* (Verse 4:15; Living Bible)

"The fact that Jesus was without sin necessarily means that He knew depths and tensions and assaults of temptation which we never know and never can know. So far from His battle being easier it was immeasurably harder. Why? For this reason - we fall to temptation long before the tempter has put out the whole of his power. We are easily vanquished; we never know temptation at its fiercest and its most terrible, because we fall long before that stage is reached. But Jesus was tempted

as we are - and far beyond what we are. For in His case the tempter put everything he possessed into the assault, and Jesus withstood it." (Barclay's Hebrews;38)

There is no one who understands mankind as well or who is better qualified to approach the Father's Throne in behalf of mankind than Jesus Christ. In fact, it is because of what Jesus accomplished through His sacrificial life, His substitutionary death, and His glorious resurrection, that makes God's throne a "Throne of Mercy." It is because Jesus - the Innocent One - bore all the sins of all sinners in His body on the cross, that God is able, at one and the same time, to remain just in His character and to justify guilty sinners (i.e., to treat them as if they had never sinned). God can treat sinners with grace (unmerited favor) only because God (in the person of His Son) took the punishment of sin upon Himself.

If Christ had not been willing to die for guilty sinners, then God's throne would not be a "Throne of grace", but it would be a "throne of terrifying judgment" instead.

C. The Advance Towards Divine Resources ("Let us Come Boldly")

"So let us come boldly to the very throne of God - the throne of grace." (Verse 16)

Because of what Jesus has accomplished in His atoning sacrifice, every sinner has a basis for forgiveness, and every believer has a basis for confidence and boldness in his access to the Father. We humans have a right to pour out our needs to the Father, because Jesus, through His atoning death, has broken down the "dividing wall" of hostility between the Holy God and unholy man! We need not hang our heads in shame as we come into the Father's presence, and we need not be hesitant or halting in our approach to the Father. We can make our advance to the Father with confidence and with swiftness, knowing that we are totally forgiven and totally understood and totally accepted by the Father, because of the "finished work" of Jesus. Jesus has "passed into the heavens" (Verse 14) to take His place beside the Heavenly Father, where He now rests from all His redemptive works which he did on earth and where He now intercedes in behalf of mankind.

We can come boldly before the Father, not because of our achievements, but because of Jesus' righteousness. Because of our knowledge of God's unconditional love for poor sinners like us, we have courage to put our fears behind us and to advance with boldness into the Father's presence.

D. The Avalanche From Divine Resources (Mercy and Grace To Help In Times of Need)

For what reason do we come confidently into the Father's presence? Not to present the merits of our own good works, but to present the sins of our imperfect lives and to present the problems of our special circumstances. In light of our sins, it is mercy that we need, not strict justice. In light of our weaknesses, it is strength that we need, not intimidation because of our failures.

God can be merciful to us, because God took man's penalty for sin upon Himself when He became a man. God can sympathize with us in our weaknesses, because God, when He was a man, experienced every temptation that man will ever experience! He is the God of perfect understanding and the God of perfect adequacy. He gives forgiveness for our sins because He is a merciful God. He gives strength for our weaknesses because He is an understanding God whose power is available, not to destroy us, but to develop us!

At the right time, in the right way, and with the right measure, our merciful and understanding and lavish God gives us what we need. Forgiveness for our guilt, joy for our sorrow, encouragement for our despair, guidance for our confusion, friendship for our loneliness, healing for our hurts, strength for our weakness, plenty for our poverty! He bestows large and full gifts! He lavishes His gifts upon us. He opens the windows of heaven and pours us out a blessing that is so great that we are incapable of containing it! He giveth and giveth and giveth again! He is always on the "Giving End" and we are always on the "Receiving End." He hath given us all things richly to enjoy! He is able and eager to supply all of our needs, according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus! Wrote James, *"If any of you does not know how to meet any particular problem he has only to ask God - who gives generously to all men without making them feel guilty - and he may be quite sure that the necessary wisdom will be given him."* (James 1:5 Phillips' Translation)

Dwight L. Moody was a great success as an evangelist. He drew large crowds to his church, but he says that many of these early victories were accomplished "largely in the energy of the flesh." The change came when two humble Free Methodist women, Auntie Cook and Mrs. Snow, attended his meetings. They sat in the front row and prayed as he preached. Moody appreciated their intercession so much that he spoke to them about it.

"Yes " they said, "we have been praying for you."
"Why me?" the evangelist inquired, surprised.
"Why not the unsaved?" His pride was a bit hurt by

the implication that he personally needed prayer. "Because you need the power of the Spirit," was their answer.

Several weeks later, Moody invited the two ladies to his office to talk more about his need for power.

"You spoke of power for service. I thought I had it," Moody said. "I wish you would tell me what you mean."

Auntie Cook and Mrs Snow told him all they knew about the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Then they prayed with the pastor and left.

Moody said later, "From that moment, there came a great hunger in my soul. I really felt that I did not want to live if I could not have this power for service." He continued to pray for a special infilling of the Holy Spirit.

Then one day in 1871, the evangelist went to New York on a fundraising mission. As he walked the streets of New York, his soul became hungry for God. Suddenly the Spirit of God swept over him, and his companions could tell something was happening.

One inquired, "Are you sick, Mr. Moody? Shall I call a doctor?"

"No-No!" he replied. "Leave me alone."

"Well, what shall I do?" his friend persisted anxiously.

"Don't do anything. Leave me alone!"

"Get me in a room, and get everybody out and leave me by myself!"

Afterward, Moody said that waves of God's power poured over him until he cried out, "Lord, You will have to stop or I will die! I've got all I can hold! God, it is about to kill me!"

From that time on, Moody preached from the same sermon outlines and from the same passages from God's Word. But, instead of just a few responding to his invitation to accept Jesus Christ as Lord, hundreds came forward in every meeting. Moody's ministry was transformed by the Spirit of God.

Charles G. Finney, another of America's great preachers who led hundreds of thousands to Jesus Christ, had a life transforming infilling of the Holy Spirit. After spending time in earnest prayer, he says, "...it seemed as if I met the Lord Jesus Christ face to face. He said nothing but looked at me in such a manner as to break me right down to His feet. I wept aloud like a child and made such confessions as I could with my choked utterance. As I turned and was about to take a seat....I received a mighty baptism of the Holy Ghost. No words can express the wonderful love that was shed abroad in my heart. I wept with joy and love."

CONCLUSION: God perfectly provides for our rest (Verses 1-11). God perfectly evaluates our responses (Verses 11-13). God sympathetically understands our weaknesses (Verses 14-16).

God wants you to cast your cares upon Him, for He cares for you! He knows the thoughts and intentions and desires of your heart - whether your heart is tender to His correction, whether your mind is open to His thoughts, whether your will is yielded to His purposes, whether your spirit is believing in His promises! Nothing is concealed from His knowledge.

But His perfect knowledge of you is not a basis for your terror - unless you reject His love and unless you refuse to "rest" from all your own self-righteous works so that you may "rest" in His altogether adequate grace. He who knows you perfectly is the same one who loves you infinitely. Because of Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the cross, Jesus has "built a bridge" between unholy man and the Holy Father. Every sinner now has access through Jesus to the Father's "throne of grace," where he can confess his sins and receive mercy and forgiveness, and where he can commit his problems and receive wisdom and guidance, and where he can surrender his weaknesses and receive strength and endurance!

The God who initiates - provides rest for the weary soul - is the God who evaluates - scrutinizes the response of man to His offer - and is the God who sympathizes - enables the humble to be forgiven and the weak to be strengthened! He initiates, He evaluates, He enables! What a God of grace, and justice, and mercy!

"Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

Just as I am, Thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because Thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!"

HEBREWS

'REST' FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD!

QUESTIONS

1. In light of life's troubles and of God's promises, do you believe that a Christian could accurately be called a "Positive Realist"? Why or why not?
2. If God has promised "Soul-Rest" to believers (verse 1), then why are there so many believers today who seem to be "weighed down" with life's burdens, anxiety-ridden, worry-worn, crushed with sorrows, insecure among people, terrorized by the fear of the unknown, frayed in nerves, distracted in mind, disillusioned in spirit?
3. Even though the author of Hebrews affirmed the fact of God's present available 'rest' for all believers, what was his great concern and fear, as expressed in Hebrews 4:1?
4. Examine your own heart and check any one of the following which describes an area in your life where you need to find "Soul-Rest" from God:
 - _____ a. Rest from the burden of sin.
 - _____ b. Rest from the vain striving of a divided heart.
 - _____ c. Rest from the anxiety of a guilty conscience.
 - _____ d. Rest from the distractions of double-mindedness.
 - _____ e. Rest from the nagging fears of an unknown future.
 - _____ f. Rest from the tumults of unfulfilled desires.
 - _____ g. Rest from the loneliness of lost friends.
 - _____ h. Rest from the futile striving of self-righteous attempts to please God.
 - _____ i. Rest from the despair of a purposeless philosophy of life and an endless search for truth.
5. It is true that man cannot earn or purchase or deserve God's gift of rest (peace); it is a gift from God. Nevertheless, it is also true that God never gives His rest indiscriminately or automatically to a person. There are certain conditions to be met, if God's promise of rest is to be fulfilled. Give your explanation and description of each of the following conditions that one must meet, in order to enjoy the 'Rest' of God:

- _____ a. Give Attention To God's Promise (verse 1)
 - _____ b. Make Every Effort To Enter God's Rest (verse 11)
 - _____ c. Rest From His Own Work (verses 9,10)
 - _____ d. Personally Receive The Message By Faith (verse 2)
6. What is the difference between the legitimate effort (work) that one must exert as a necessary prerequisite to enter into God's Soul-Rest (verse 11), and the illegitimate and futile work from which one must 'rest' if he is to enjoy God's rest (verses 9-10)?
 7. Give your comments and explanation of the following statement: "We must rest from seeking to work out a righteousness of our own, and surrender instead to Christ and allow Christ to clothe us with His own garments of righteousness." (Note Hebrews 4:9-10; Romans 3:20; Titus 3:4-7)
 8. After observing the following simple chart, tell at what point a person becomes a true Christian believer, rather than simply a "nominal Christian":
 - a. To hear the message of God with the ears.
 - b. To believe the message of God with the mind.
 - c. To commit to the message of God with the will.
 - d. To follow the message of God with the life.
 9. From your observation of life in general or from your knowledge of the Scriptures in specific, give an example of a person or a group of persons that demonstrate the truth of the following statement: "Just as one can read about swimming and yet not swim, and just as one can know about marriage and yet not be married, so it is possible to know about God and yet not know God." (Note Hebrews 4:2; James 2:19)
 10. Share from your own personal experience how you came to a true conversion experience, as a result of the following conditions having been met in your life:

"Listening to God's message with the ears, must change the attitudes of the mind, and must soften the affections of the heart, and must change the direction of the will." To what extent must one's mind and heart and will be changed, before he has a legitimate basis to claim personal assurance of Christian Conversion?

11. If it was God's will that all Israelites who left Egypt, enter the Promised Land of Canaan, why in reality did nearly all the adult Israelites die in the wilderness? (Note Hebrews 4:6)

What is the difference between God's "Perfect Will" and God's "Permissive Will," and how does the exercise of man's "Free Will" influence "God's Will"? (Note 2 Peter 3:9) How can God be "Sovereign" and, at the same time, allow man the creature, to exercise "free will" and thus to determine his own "eternal destiny"?

12. Tell with what degree of conviction you believe the following statements:

"With every opportunity given, there is a corresponding accountability that is required! The God who is merciful in His lavish offer of grace, is the same God who is strict in His accountability, and who is accurate in His scrutiny of man's moral response to His divine offers."

13. With a consideration of Hebrews 4:12 in mind, give illustrations of the penetrating power of God's Word which is capable of:

(a) Discerning Man's physical life (soul life), with the passions of the body (I Corinthians 10:6-8).

(b) Discerning Man's spiritual life (spirit of man) with it's faith or lack of faith in the unseen God.

(c) Discerning Man's emotional life (affection of man) with it's gratitude or ingratitude for God's dealings in his life.

(d) Discerning Man's intellectual life (thoughts of man) with it's God-centered pattern of thinking or it's self-centered philosophy of secularism.

14. Is God's omniscience (i.e., His ability to know all and to see all things) a reason for a great terror or for great comfort to the follower of Christ? Why? (Note Hebrews 4:14) (Note Psalms 139:7-8, 10-12, 23-24)

15. When you consider the conditions of your "Home life", how do you personally respond (or react) to the following statement:

"God is the Unseen Guest at Every Table,
The Silent Listener to Every Conversation."

16. In light of the fact that there seems to be a natural tendency for humans to judge each other, does it give you great comfort to realize that God perfectly knows all of your thoughts and motives and intentions and desires and secret plans? (Note Hebrews 4:13 and Matthew 7:1-2 and I Samuel 16:7)
17. Tell to what extent you believe the following statement accurately states the truth regarding the treatment of God towards all persons: "God exercises not only justice in His righteous punishment of those who refuse to obey Him, but He also manifests mercy to those who, in spite of all their weaknesses and sins, are humble and contrite and broken in their hearts." Have you ever noticed how God is both very kind and very severe in His treatment of people? (Note Romans 11:22)
18. How does the fact that God's Throne is a "Throne of grace", affect your thinking and attitudes as you come to God in prayer? (Hebrews 4:16)
19. How can the vast separation between the Holy God and sinful man be bridged? Through what means can heaven's treasures be delivered to earth's paupers? (Note Hebrews 4:14)
20. Why is Jesus, our Great High Priest, unusually sympathetic towards weak and sinful humanity? (Note Hebrews 4:15)
21. So far from Jesus' spiritual battles with temptation being easier, His battles were immeasurably harder than man's battles. Why?
22. There is no one who understands mankind as well or who is better qualified to approach the Father's throne in behalf of mankind, than Jesus Christ. Why?
23. What did Jesus accomplish in His life, His death, and His resurrection that resulted in making God's Throne a "Throne of grace" rather than a "throne of terrifying judgment"?
24. Why is it not an act of human folly and presumption for believers to approach the Father's throne "Boldly"? (Hebrews 4:16)

25. Give an illustration from your own life which demonstrates the truth of the following statement: "At the right time, in the right way, and with the right measure, our merciful and understanding and lavish God gives us what we need." Check the following ones which especially apply to you:

- _____ (a) Forgiveness for our guilt,
- _____ (b) Joy for our sorrow,
- _____ (c) Encouragement for our despair,
- _____ (d) Guidance for our confusion,
- _____ (e) Friendship for our loneliness,
- _____ (f) Healing for our hurts,
- _____ (g) Strength for our weaknesses,
- _____ (h) Plenty for our poverty.

C H A P T E R 7

OUR PERFECT HIGH PRIEST

HEBREWS 5:1-10; 7:1-28

HEBREWS

OUR PERFECT HIGH PRIEST

O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 5:1-10; 7:1-28

INTRODUCTION: There is a gigantic gulf which separates man from God. Is there any 'bridge' available to span that gulf, to provide a way by which man can be reconciled to Almighty God? Yes! A resounding Yes! Jesus is that 'bridge' to span the gulf between unholy man and the Holy God!

PROPOSITION: Jesus is the Perfect High Priest! A priest is a "bridge-builder" - one who builds a 'bridge' to span the gulf which sin has caused! Hebrews 5 and Hebrews 7 describes the reasons why Jesus is the Perfect High Priest.

I. Chosen By God (5:1,4-6)

II. Compassionate Towards Men (5:2,7)

III. Obedience Through Suffering (5:8)

IV. Source Of Eternal Salvation (5:9;7:25)

V. Permanent In Office (5:6,10; 7:1-3, 20-24)

VI. Guarantee Of A Better Covenant (7:4-19,22)

VII. Blameless In Character (7:26-28)

CONCLUSION: Jesus is the Perfect High Priest - the altogether adequate 'bridge' to span the gap between you as a sinner and the Holy God!

HEBREWS

"OUR PERFECT HIGH PRIEST"

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 5:1-10; 7:1-28

INTRODUCTION: Recently I heard of an older person - a person in his middle 80's - who confessed to a friend who was seeking to lead him to Christ as Savior, that he felt he had done too many 'bad things' in his life for God ever to forgive him! The younger person who was witnessing to this older person tried to reassure him that God is willing to forgive anyone, because of what Jesus did on the cross.

Have you ever felt that the gulf between you and God was so great that there was not a long enough 'bridge' to span that gulf? Have you ever felt that your sins have separated you from God, that your sins have hidden God's face from you so that God would not hear you? (Note Isaiah 59:2)

Man seeks the presence of God, for man feels alienated from God. There is a gigantic gulf which separates man from God. Is there any 'bridge' available to span that gulf, to provide a way by which man can be reconciled to Almighty God? Yes! A resounding Yes! The writer of Hebrews declares that Jesus is that 'bridge' to span the gulf between unholy man and the Holy God!

PROPOSITION: Jesus is the Perfect High Priest! A priest is a "bridge-builder" - one who builds a 'bridge' to span the gulf which sin has caused!

Hebrews 5 and Hebrews 7 describe the reasons why Jesus is the Perfect High Priest.

1. CHOSEN BY GOD (Hebrews 5:1,4-6)

Hebrews 5:1 says, *"Every High Priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins."*

Just as the high priest of the Old Testament was selected, so Jesus was selected by God. Jesus was called by God, just as Aaron was selected by God (verse 4). Jesus alone is worthy of presenting Himself as a fit sacrifice, without blemish and without fault of any kind. *"So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father.'"* (verse 5)

The relationship between Jesus the Son and God the Father could not be closer. The will of the Father was the will of

the Son. Jesus did not come to the earth to become the High Priest for mankind, out of force or obligation. He came willingly, as a result of His love for His Father, motivated by His compassion for lost mankind.

2. COMPASSIONATE TOWARDS MEN (Hebrews 5:2,7)

The priests of the Old Testament had to be compassionate, if they were adequately to fulfill their duties as priests. That is to say, they had to understand their fellow human beings, in whose behalf they offered sacrifices. *"He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weaknesses."* (Verse 2)

In the case of the Old Testament priests, these religious leaders had to offer sacrifices in behalf of themselves, for they too, along with the people of Israel, were sinners. They identified not only with the weaknesses, but also with the sins of their fellow Israelites. They were no better morally and spiritually than the common lot of the people whom they served religiously. Separate in function because of their appointed priestly duties, they were not separate, but identical, in their spiritual needs. *"This is why he (the high priest) has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people."* (Verse 3)

In a far greater way than the Old Testament priests, Jesus identified with the weaknesses and sins of mankind. In contrast to the Old Testament priests, Jesus was holy, sinless and separate from sinners in terms of His unique personhood and His unique lifestyle (7:26).

But, even though Jesus never sinned, He knew what was involved in the experience of suffering severe temptation and extreme physical and spiritual privation. He is the sympathizing High Priest because of His experiences of suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane. *"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission."* (Hebrews 5:7)

Jesus had to drink the "bitter cup" - i.e., He had to be crucified - but, nevertheless, God heard Jesus' cries and answered His prayer! A `No' answer is just as much an answer from God as a `Yes' answer. God said "No, Jesus, I cannot remove the `bitter cup' of death by crucifixion from you, for if I did, the salvation of mankind would be impossible, but I will give you strength to endure and grace to die on a cross, so that the work of salvation for mankind can be accomplished!"

Jesus was given strength to submit to the Father rather than to rebel against the Father's call to suffer on a cruel cross. It was because of Jesus' "reverent submission" to the Father's will that He was able to go to the cross without bitterness. Jesus did not curse His enemies, nor did He reject His Father, while He was dying on the cross. Another reason why He is the Perfect High Priest!

What a Compassionate Priest - one who understands mankind, because He identifies with mankind at the deepest level. Jesus became the "Sin Bearer"!

3. OBEDIENCE THROUGH SUFFERING (Hebrews 5:8)

"Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered." (5:8)

It was through the death of Jesus that the purpose, for which Jesus came into the world, was accomplished and fulfilled. He was born to die, and when He died, He accomplished much. He appeased God's wrath against sin, He satisfied God's justice by taking the penalty of sin upon Himself, He demonstrated God's eternal love for unworthy sinners, He made it possible for lost mankind to be saved.

This statement in Hebrews 5:8 ("*He learned obedience from what he suffered*") does not mean that Jesus was disobedient and therefore had to learn to be obedient to the Father, through the Father's infliction of punishment on Jesus. No! Jesus was always obedient to the Father's will, but Jesus, through His suffering in Gethsemane and on the Cross, experienced the "highest cost" of obedience. Obedience is seldom, if ever, easy, but the obedience that Jesus had to exercise, by bearing the sins of the world in His sacrificial death, is the obedience that none can come even close to matching! His reverent submission to the Father's will and His extreme demonstration of obedience in drinking the "bitter cup" of Calvary's suffering - these are further reasons why Jesus is the Perfect High Priest!

4. SOURCE OF ETERNAL SALVATION (Hebrews 5:9; 7:25)

"And, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him." (Hebrews 5:9)

How was Jesus perfected? Was He not already perfect? Yes, in terms of His sinless character, Jesus was perfect throughout His lifetime. 'Perfection' in this context means "realize the purpose for which He came." In other words, after Jesus died on the cross to fulfill the redemptive mission for which He came to earth, Jesus was able to offer the forgiveness of sins to a lost race, to offer eternal salvation to all!

When Jesus forgives, He forgives everything, for time and for eternity! His salvation is "eternal salvation." Safety in time and in eternity! What a glorious promise and provision! "With Christ a man is safe for ever and for ever. There are no circumstances, conceivable or inconceivable, that can pluck a man from the hand of Christ." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 47)

Because of the "Finished Work" of Christ on the Cross, there is the gift of eternal life which is offered to every person! To whom is this gift of life and safety and eternal salvation given? Hebrews 5:9 tells us that this salvation is "*for all who obey him.*"

The gift of eternal salvation is for all, but it is not given indiscriminately or automatically to anyone! There is a contingency! Just as Jesus was approved of the Father because of His obedience in accepting the "bitter cup" of Calvary, so we must follow Christ obediently if we are to receive the gift of eternal life! There is no life in heaven for anyone, independent of Christ, for He is the Source of eternal life, based on the fact of His sacrificial death. Christ is the Source of eternal life, and obedient people are the Recipients of eternal life.

It is only those who choose to come to God through Jesus who will be "saved completely." Note Hebrews 7:25 - "*Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.*"

Why is Jesus the Perfect High Priest? Because He suffered most. Because He alone provided the basis for God to forgive sinful men through His atoning blood. Because He always lives to make intercession before the Holy Father for unworthy men!

5. PERMANENT IN OFFICE (Hebrews 5:6,10; 7:1-3, 20-24)

"And God says in another place, '*You are priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.*'" (Hebrews 5:6)

Jesus was "*designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek. This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, this name means 'king of righteousness'; then also, 'king of Salem' means 'king of peace.'* Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever." (Hebrews 5:10; 7:1-3)

The mystical and strange story of Melchizedek is recorded in Genesis 14:17-20

After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). Then Melchizedek, king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram saying, Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Genesis 14:17-20

This King of Salem suddenly appears "out of the blue" on the stage of history, and he leaves about as quickly! "We are told of no time when Melchizedek began his priesthood, and of no time when he ended it; we are told of no time when he was born and of no time when he died. Therefore it is to be deduced that Melchizedek had no beginning and has no end; and that his priesthood lasts for ever and ever." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 72)

"In these respects he was like to Jesus Christ, who, as to his Godhead, had neither father nor mother, beginning of time nor end of days; and has an everlasting priesthood." (Clark's Commentary on Hebrews; page 732)

Jesus is the Perfect High Priest, for His office as Priest is from generation to generation, through the ages. In fact, it is permanent, because Jesus is eternal! "*Now there were many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood." (Hebrews 7:23,24) Hebrews 7:20-21 tells us that Jesus became a priest as a result of an oath from God. "A thing which God confirms by an oath must be something so utterly unchangeable that it is woven into the very fibre of the universe and must remain for ever." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 85)*

6. GUARANTEE OF A BETTER COVENANT (Hebrews 7::4-19,22)

Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder! Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people - that is, their brothers - even though their brothers are descended from Abraham. This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater. In the one case, the tenth is collected by men who die; but in the other case, by him who is declared to be living. One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor.

If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come - one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law. He of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar. For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. For it declared: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God. Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant. Hebrews 7:4-19,22.

Another reason why Jesus is a Perfect High Priest is this: Jesus replaced the Old Covenant of Law with the New Covenant of Grace. This fact is explained in a unique and creative way. The preeminence of Melchizedek's priesthood over the Levitical priesthood is affirmed very strongly. Melchizedek represents Christ and the way of grace. Just as Melchizedek is the king of righteousness and peace, with no record of beginning or ending, and just as Melchizedek had a personal priesthood based on character and not based on genealogical inheritance, so Christ's priesthood is a priesthood of righteousness and peace, and is without end (eternal), based on the character of His person rather than on inheritance from the tribe of Levi.

Abraham, in whose body dwelt the very seed from which Levi would come, paid tithes to Melchizedek. Because the lesser always pays tithes to the greater, this principle means that Levi (representing all the Old Testament priesthood, including Aaron the High Priest who would come many years later) is subservient to and less than Melchizedek (who represents the Lord Jesus Christ and the New covenant of grace which Christ established). Thus, it is an amazing, even though strange, way of saying this: "Law submits to Grace, Levi submits to Melchizedek, the temporary priesthood of Aaron submits to the permanent priesthood of Christ, the lesser gives way to the greater, the priesthood which is based on genealogy is replaced by the priesthood which is based on character, the priesthood of the Old Testament which is based on the endless repetition of sacrifices is replaced by the one Great High Priest of the New Testament whose all-sufficient sacrifice of

Himself was given once-and-for-all, never to be repeated! It can further be said that the tribe of Judah produced a descendant, namely, Jesus Christ, the Great High Priest, who is much greater than the tribe of Levi which produced Aaron, the great high priest of the Old Testament. "The Old Testament law was definite that all priests must belong to the tribe of Levi; they must be descendants of Aaron; but Jesus belonged to the tribe of Judah. Therefore, the very fact that He is the supreme priest means that the law is canceled; it is wiped out....The whole paraphernalia of the sacrificial and ceremonial law is wiped out in the priesthood of Jesus." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 84)

Another way that the superiority of Jesus' New Covenant of Grace over the Old Covenant of Law is shown is found in Hebrews 7:6b-7; Melchizedek *"blessed him (Abraham) who had the promises, and without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater."* Abraham, in whose body was the seed of Levi and of Aaron and of all the Old Testament priests, represents the entire Old Testament's inadequate system of sacrifice, which is lesser than (inferior to) the all-together adequate way of grace, introduced by Christ who is represented by Melchizedek in the Old Testament.

Why is Jesus our Perfect High Priest? Because He alone could guarantee a better covenant, covenant of grace which replaced the covenant of law! *"Christ can guarantee forever the success of this new and better arrangement."* (Hebrews 7:22, Living Bible)

7. BLAMELESS IN CHARACTER (Hebrews 7:26-28)

Jesus' priesthood is based on the perfection of His holy character, not upon the genealogical inheritance of his office, as was the case in the Old Testament Levitical priesthood. Jesus is our Perfect High Priest because His character is righteous altogether. *"He is, therefore, exactly the kind of High Priest we need; for he is holy and blameless, unstrained by sin, undefiled by sinners, and to him has been given the place of honor in heaven. He never needs the daily blood of animal sacrifices, as other priests did, to cover over first their own sins and then the sins of the people; for he finished all sacrifices, once and for all, when he sacrificed himself on the cross. Under the old system, even the high priests were weak and sinful men who could not keep from doing wrong, but later God appointed by his oath his Son who is perfect forever."* (Hebrews 7:26-28, Living Bible)

Jesus, the Sinless High Priest, shed His own blood for sinful mankind. So the Priest became the Sacrifice! Because of His righteous character, His sacrifice became substitutionary. That is, He died in the place of sinful man. Therefore, God

accepts sinners, not on the basis of their own 'righteousness' (for man has no righteousness), but on the basis of Christ's righteousness! "The old covenant was based on man's achievement; the new covenant is based on God's love." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 86) It is Jesus' perfect, sinless character which makes Jesus' sacrifice of Himself meritorious and effective in the sight of God the Father.

Jesus is sinless in His character, effective in His atoning sacrifice of Himself for sinful mankind, and forever caring in His permanent ministry of intercession before the Father for weak mankind! His office as the Sinless High Priest abides eternally!

CONCLUSION: Jesus is our Perfect High Priest! None compares with Jesus, for none is capable of giving access to the Father's presence except Jesus.

Jesus is Perfect as a High Priest for several reasons: (1) He was chosen by God; (2) He was totally compassionate towards men; (3) He learned better than anyone else the true meaning of obedience - the obedience to the Father which cost Him the agonizing suffering of the Cross of Calvary; (4) He alone is the source of eternal salvation for lost mankind; (5) He alone is permanent (eternal) in His office as High Priest, not subject to death or to change; (6) He is the guarantee of a better covenant - the covenant of grace which replaces the covenant of law; (7) He alone is blameless in character, the only worthy and sinless sacrifice to present to the Holy God in behalf of sinful mankind.

Jesus is the Perfect High Priest - the altogether adequate 'bridge' to span the gap between you as a sinner and the Holy God!

HEBREWS

"OUR PERFECT HIGH PRIEST"

Q U E S T I O N S

1. Have you ever personally known anyone who felt that his sins were so great that God could not forgive him? If so, how would you counsel such a person? (Note I Timothy 2:3-6)
2. According to Hebrews 5:5, by what authority does Jesus exercise the office of Great High Priest?
3. If, according to Hebrews 7:26, Jesus was "separate from sinners" while He was on earth, how could Jesus be also closely identified with sinners and empathetic towards sinners as the Perfect High Priest? (Note Hebrews 5:1-7)
4. With what attitude did Jesus accept His difficult 'assignment' from the Father to go to the Cross? How can such an attitude help you to cope with your trials? (Note Hebrews 5:7)
5. If it is true (as it is true) that Jesus was never disobedient to the Father's will, tell what the following statement means regarding the obedience of Jesus - "Although he (Jesus) was a Son, he learned obedience from what he suffered" (Hebrews 5:8).
6. Could Jesus be the "Source of Eternal Salvation" for lost mankind if He had not been first "perfected" through His death on the Cross? Why or why not? (Note Hebrews 5:9)
7. If the "Finished Work" of Christ on the Cross resulted in the universal offer of the gift of eternal salvation to all mankind, then why can't all persons automatically receive that divine gift? (Note Hebrews 5:9) Who, according to Hebrews 7:25, will be "saved completely"?
8. According to Genesis 14:17-20, who was Melchizedek? In what ways was Melchizedek a symbol or type of Jesus Christ?
9. What significance is there in the fact that God confirmed with an "Oath" that Jesus should be the Great High Priest for mankind? (Note Hebrews 7:20-21)

10. Tell how the preeminence of Melchizedek's priesthood over the Levitical priesthood is demonstrated by the two following principles:

(a) The lesser pays honor to the greater when the former pays a tithe to the latter. (Note Hebrews 7:6)

(b) The lesser person is blessed by the greater person (Note Hebrews 7:7).

11. With a consideration of Hebrews 7:4-22 in your mind, do you believe the following statements accurately describe the preeminence of Melchizedek's priesthood over the priesthood of Levi? - *"Law submits to Grace, Levi submits to Melchizedek, the temporary priesthood of Aaron submits to the permanent priesthood of Christ, the lesser gives way to the greater, the priesthood which is based on genealogy is replaced by the priesthood which is based on character, the priesthood of the Old testament which is based on the endless repetition of sacrifices is replaced by the Great High Priest of the New Testament whose all-sufficient sacrifice of Himself was given once-and-for-all, the descendant of the tribe of Judah (Jesus Christ) is far greater than the descendants of the tribe of Levi (the Old Testament priests, including Aaron the High Priest)."*

12. Why, according to Hebrews 7:26-28, is the blamelessness (sinlessness) of Jesus the basis of Jesus' all-sufficient atonement for man's sins? Why was it necessary for Jesus to be truly Man (human) (Hebrews 5:7) and, at the same time, truly Divine (sinless) (Hebrews 7:26) in order to provide the perfect sacrifice for man's sins?

13. Of the following seven reasons which are given to prove that Jesus is the Perfect High Priest, check the reasons that are most significant to you:

- _____ (1) He was chosen by God (Hebrews 5:1,4,5)
- _____ (2) He was totally compassionate towards Men (Hebrews 5:2,7)
- _____ (3) He learned better than anyone else the true meaning of obedience - the obedience to the Father which cost Him the agonizing suffering of the Cross.
- _____ (4) He alone is the source of eternal salvation for lost mankind.
- _____ (5) He alone is permanent (eternal) in His office as High Priest, not subject to death or to change.

_____ (6) He is the guarantee of a better covenant -
the covenant of grace which replaces the
covenant of law.

_____ (7) He alone is blameless in character, the
only worthy and sinless sacrifice to
present to the Holy God in behalf of
sinful mankind.

14. Based on a serious study of Hebrews 5:1-10 and Hebrews
7:1-28, what response would you give to a person who
claims that there are "many ways to reach God", that
Jesus is only one of many alternative 'bridges' to God"?

C H A P T E R 8

THE CALL TO CHRISTIAN MATURITY

HEBREWS 5:11 - 6:3

HEBREWS

THE CALL TO CHRISTIAN MATURITY!

O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 5:11 - 6:3

INTRODUCTION: Progress demands that we leave behind the elementary teachings and go forward into more advanced teachings. To advance beyond the basics into the deeper levels of learning is never easy. But, in spite of the challenges that are always involved in progress, those challenges are worthwhile, for the tragedy of arrested growth is great indeed!

PROPOSITION: Every earnest believer must accept the call to continued progress in the Christian life. Maturity of thinking and maturity in living must be the goal of every sincere Christian!

I. THE CHALLENGE OF DEEPER LEARNING (5:11)

- A. Because Of The Breadth Of Knowledge In Christianity
- B. Because Of The Depth Of Knowledge In Christianity
- C. Because Of The Type Of Knowledge In Christianity
- D. Because Of The Indolence And Pride Of Man
- E. Because Of The Distractions Of Life

II. THE TRAGEDY OF ARRESTED GROWTH (5:12-14)

- A. Immature Students Rather Than Mature Teachers (verse 12)
- B. Rudimentary Knowledge Of Law Rather Than Deep Spiritual Experience Of Justifying Faith (verse 13)
- C. Childish Inexperience Rather Than Mature Moral Development (verse 14)

III. THE CALL TO CONTINUED PROGRESS (6:1-3)

- A. The Call To Advance (6:1-2)
- B. The Determination To Advance (verse 3)

CONCLUSION: He who calls you to maturity in thinking and in lifestyle, is he who will enable you to become, in reality, a mature follower of Christ. Lay aside your slothfulness and your fears and your pride and your distractions, and determine to "go on to maturity"!

HEBREWS

THE CALL TO CHRISTIAN MATURITY!

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 5:11-6:3

INTRODUCTION: Suppose you had a goal of building your own house, and suppose you had laid the foundation of the house and then came one morning with the full intention of starting to build the superstructure of the house.

How would you feel if you came to the job site, only to find out the foundation had been destroyed during the night, and that you had to start all over again to rebuild the foundation? After rebuilding the foundation, you came again and planned to start constructing the superstructure, only to find that again the foundation had been destroyed! Suppose this story was repeated, over and over again. Every time you came to the site with plans to build the superstructure, you found that the foundation had to be relaid! What frustration! A sense of futility would overtake you!

The author of Hebrews writes to the Jewish believers: *"So, then, let us leave elementary teaching about Christ behind us, and let us be borne onwards to full maturity; for we cannot go on laying the foundations all the time."* (Hebrews 6:1, Barclay's Translation)

"Progress would be impossible if we had to start all over again at the beginning every time." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 51)

What teacher would want to start at the beginning every time she came before her class? Progress demands that we leave behind the elementary teachings, and go forward into more advanced teachings.

PROPOSITION: To advance beyond the basics into the deeper levels of learning is never easy. But, in spite of the challenges that are always involved in progress, those challenges are worthwhile, for the tragedy of arrested growth is great indeed! Every earnest believer must accept the call to continued progress in the Christian life. Maturity in thinking and maturity in living must be the goal of every sincere Christian!

Let us look at (1) The Challenge of Deeper Learning (5:11); (2) The Tragedy of Arrested Growth (5:12-14); (3) The Call To Continued Progress (6:1-3).

I. THE CHALLENGE OF DEEPER LEARNING (5:11)

To go beyond the basics into the deeper truths of Christianity is never easy! There is so much to learn about God, and Christ, and Man, and the Ways and Word and Will of God!

After giving basic information about the person and the work of Jesus Christ, and about the preeminence of Christ over the angels and over the prophets and over Moses and over Abraham and over the old covenant, the writer to the Hebrews feels that he would like to say so much more to these believers. He wants them to "leave the shores" of basic Christian teaching and to "launch out into the deep waters" of more profound truth. However, he recognizes that the ones to whom he is writing have a serious problem. *"We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn."* (Verse 11, NIV). *"There is a great deal that we should like to say about this high priesthood, but it is not easy to explain to you since you seem so slow to grasp spiritual truth."* (Verse 11, Phillips)

Why do some Christians, who should be mature, remain immature in their understanding and infantile in their behavior? Why is truth - the deeper truths of God and Man and Salvation - so difficult to intellectually comprehend and to practically implement? Why is deeper learning such a challenge? For several reasons, some of which we can note.

A. Because of the Breadth of Knowledge in Christianity.

The scope of knowledge in Christianity is as broad as life itself, for there is no part of life that is not the concern of Christianity. Christianity has much to say about Man and his nature, about God and his character, about Sin and its consequences, about Christ and His sacrifice, about the World and its future, about Nature and its order, about Salvation and its conditions, about Death and its hereafter, about the Revelation of God and its content, about the Church and its mission, about Angels and their ministries, about Prayer and its power, about Society and its institutions. The challenge of Christianity and the difficulty of understanding the teachings of Christianity lies partly in the fact that the scope (or breadth) of Christianity is so great. Christianity has something important to say about every so-called 'branch' of learning: about Man in his relationship to others (Sociology), about Man in his relationship to himself (Psychology), about Man in his relationship to things and money (Economics), about Man in his relationship to his body (Physiology), about Man in his relationship to ruling authorities (Government), about Man in his relationship to the world of matter (Science), about Man in his search for ultimate meaning (Philosophy), about Man in his relationship

to the past (History), about Man in his search for standards (Religion).

The story of Christianity - its roots, its character, its destiny - this story is a long and rather complicated story which is all-inclusive in its scope.

B. Because of the Depth of Knowledge in Christianity

Not only is the story of Christianity long in its history and broad in its scope, but the story of Christianity is difficult to tell and difficult to grasp because of its profound depth.

Wrote Paul about the depth of God's truth: *"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?"* (Romans 11:33-34)

'God' by definition is the Supreme Being who cannot be fully grasped by a finite being. God says of Himself, *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."* (Isaiah 55:8-9)

Wrote David, *"How great are your works, O Lord, how profound your thoughts!"* (Psalms 92:5) *"Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom."* (Psalms 145:3)

"Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens - what can you do? They are deeper than the depths of the grave - what can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea." (Job 11:7-9) *"How great is God - beyond our understanding!"* (Job 36:26a)

"Though God has placed eternity in the hearts of men, even so, man cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end." (Ecclesiastes 3:11) *"God's ways are as mysterious as the pathway of the wind, and as the manner in which a human spirit is infused into the little body of a baby while it is yet in its mother's womb."* (Ecclesiastes 11:5, Living Bible)

C. Because of the Type of Knowledge in Christianity

Another reason why some are "dull of hearing" is that their ears are closed to the voice of God, their eyes are blinded to the beauty of God, and their minds are shut to the truth of God. The truths about God and Christ cannot be grasped as one would grasp intellectual information about science or math.

The knowledge of Christianity is a different type of knowledge than the knowledge of the world.

Wrote Paul about this special type of spiritual knowledge: *"The man who isn't a Christian can't accept these thoughts from God, which the Holy Spirit teaches us. They sound foolish to him, because only those who have the Holy Spirit within them can understand what the Holy Spirit means. Others just can't take it in. But the spiritual man has insights into everything, and that bothers and baffles the man of the world, who can't understand him at all. How could he? For certainly he has never been one to know the Lord's thoughts, or to discuss them with him."* (I Corinthians 2:14-16, Living Bible)

D. Because of the Indolence and Pride of Man

Why are so many "dull of hearing", shallow in understanding spiritual truths? Because so many lack either diligence or humility.

The slothful and the proud man will never know the depth of spiritual knowledge which belongs to God and which is the gift of God to only the earnest in effort and the teachable in spirit.

The man who refuses to think and who is too lazy to search, will never experience the joy of rich discoveries of God's deeper truths. Diligent searching is one condition for spiritual discoveries. Says the Lord, *"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."* (Jeremiah 29:13)

It is obedience from the heart that brings truth to the mind: "Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart." (Psalms 119:2)

Not only are an obedient will and a diligent mind conditions for receiving deep spiritual truth, but a humble spirit is also a condition. The proud and haughty are left in their ignorance. The humble and teachable are given the treasures of God's knowledge! Those who think they 'Know it all' really know very little! Receptiveness must be combined with diligence if one ever expects to receive the gift of God's wisdom. Just as a son carefully listens to his father's instructions, so a believer must humble himself before the Lord of Heaven if he wishes to know "God's secrets."

E. Because of the Distractions of Life

Not only is it necessary for diligence to replace indolence, and for humility to replace pride, but there is need for

solitude to replace distractions if one is to become the glad recipient of the deep mysteries of God's Word! Deep truths are usually learned in the places of quiet solitude and through the undisturbed concentration of serious meditation.

Why are too many professing believers, as in the case of the Hebrew believers, slow to grasp spiritual truths, dull in hearing? Not only because God's knowledge is profound in depth and broad in scope and spiritual in nature, but because so many are failing to be diligent in their search, and humbly receptive in their attitudes, and undisturbed in their solitude. In His parable of the Four Soils, Jesus said, "*The thorny ground represents the hearts of people who listen to the Good News and receive it, but all too quickly the attractions of this world and the delights of wealth, and the search for success and lure of nice things come in and crowd out God's message from their hearts, so that no crop is produced.*" (Mark 4:18-19, Living Bible)

How can any believer expect to discover the deeper truths of God's Word if he is not willing to spend much time alone in quiet solitude and in deep meditation and in earnest prayer? Can a person become an accomplished pianist by spending 5 minutes each day in practice? Can a runner become strong and fast by spending only a few minutes each day in practice? Can a believer become wise in the things of God if he has no time alone with God, free from the noise and distractions and attractions of the world?

Notes one person, "It is quite natural and inevitable that if we spend 16 hours daily of our waking life in thinking about the affairs of the world, and five minutes in thinking about God, this world will seem 200 times more real to us than God."

Why have the ears of some believers become dull to spiritual truths? Because they have allowed the attractions and distractions of the world to take their attention away from God. They no longer hear the "still, small voice" of God! The clamor of the world's noises has deafened them to the sound of God's voice! Says the Lord, "Be still and know that I am God." In the quietness of solitude and meditation, the seeking heart and the open mind will hear from God!

II. THE TRAGEDY OF ARRESTED GROWTH (5:12-14)

There is a "high cost" that one must pay if he, as a believer, is to become wise in his understanding, sensitive in his spirit, discerning in his judgment, mature in his Christian walk. Because God, by nature, is in many ways incomprehensible, and because Man, by nature, tends to be

materialistically-minded rather than spiritually-sensitive, it is most challenging to become a truly mature Christian, both in thinking and in behavior.

The writer to these Hebrew Christians bewailed the fact that they were far from being fully mature in their faith. He affirmed them for the limited progress that they had made in the Christian life, but he sadly noted that their spiritual growth had become arrested. They were still children (drinking milk) when they should presently be adults (eating meat). "It was to reclaim these Hebrews from backsliding, and preserve them from total apostasy, that this epistle was written." (Clarke's Commentary; Hebrews; page 721)

A. Immature Students Rather Than Mature Teachers (verse 12)

"Though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!" (5:12)

There is no judgment against young, new believers who, of course, are only able at first to digest milk instead of meat. But, if a person is 20 or 30 years old, and is unable to digest meat and must be only on a milk (liquid) diet, everyone knows that something is seriously wrong! "There are Christians in whose faith there has been no development for thirty or forty or fifty or sixty years....They are grown men and women and yet they insist on remaining content with the religious development of a child." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 49)

Such immature believers have little intellectual knowledge of God's Word; they are Biblically illiterate. They have little practical experience; they are living more like worldly people than like mature followers of Christ. They have heard the message often, but they have been dull in hearing; i.e., they have been witless, senseless, forgetful, imperceptive, lethargic. Ever hearing the Word, but failing to practice the truths of the Gospel! Thus, even though they have been professing Christians for many years, they are still at the elementary level of knowledge. Like beginning students, rather than like authoritative, experienced teachers!

B. Rudimentary Knowledge of Law Rather Than Deep Spiritual Experience of Justifying Faith (5:13)

"Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness." (Verse 13)

The Hebrew Christians, to whom this epistle was first written, were only partially acquainted with the ways of Christ, with the method of salvation which Christ made possible through His

death. They were apparently too law-oriented instead of grace-oriented. Converted in their souls from the bondage of sin, and partly aware of the meaning of righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ, they nevertheless were still unskilled in their experiential knowledge of the doctrine of justification. Very little knowledge and understanding of the deeper meaning of the sacrificial death of the promised Messiah. More knowledgeable of the doctrines of Old Testament Law, rather than full of wisdom because of long meditation upon the majesty and mysteries of New Testament Grace.

Conversion to Christ in the soul can take place quickly, but deep knowledge in the mind and mature wisdom in the inner spirit takes much time and thought and discussion and practical obedience. It is still possible for a believer to be more law-oriented than grace-oriented, more ritualistically-oriented than spiritually-oriented, more given to thoughtless routine in religious practice than given to delightful spontaneity in new spiritual adventures. There are still Old Testament type Christians, arrested in their growth, afraid to venture into new discoveries in the spirit, endlessly repeating the basic ideas of Christianity by rote memory rather than "launching out into the depths" of more profound theological ideas. Satisfied with endlessly repeating basic religious creeds, rather than exploring the deeper treasures of exciting concepts that are life-transforming! Arrested spiritual growth - how tragic! Baby Christians who have never grown up.

C. Childish Inexperience Rather Than Mature Moral Development (verse 14).

"But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil." (Verse 14; NIV)

"You will never be able to eat solid spiritual food and understand the deeper things of God's Word until you become better Christians and learn right from wrong by practicing doing right." (Verse 14; Living Bible)

The beginning piano student knows only a little about music, is able only to play simple tunes with a few notes. It is only the experienced, accomplished musician who has studied music theory and who has mastered the difficult Bach-type music that can sensitively discern the difference between notes which are very similar.

There is no substitute for practice and for experience. The more one studies a certain branch of learning, the more sensitive and discerning he is. The beginning photographer only sees a picture, but the experienced photographer can

carefully analyze a picture for all kinds of features in its composition and color and setting. The more one exercises his muscles, the stronger and more refined and toned his muscles become. The more one uses his spiritual senses of seeing, and hearing, and tasting, and smelling, and feeling, the more discerning he is of the meaning of right and wrong. Greater moral discernment! Deeper spiritual understanding! Broader practical applications!

What constitutes the "solid meat" of Christian teachings? "The high and sublime doctrines of Christianity; the atonement, justification by faith, the gift of the Holy Ghost, the fullness of Christ dwelling in the souls of men, triumph in and over death, the resurrection of the body, the glorification of both body and soul in the realms of blessedness, and an endless union with Christ in the throne of his glory. This is the strong food which the genuine Christian understands, receives, digests, and by which he grows." (Clarke's Commentary Hebrews; page 722)

III. THE CALL TO CONTINUED PROGRESS (6:1-3)

After confronting the Hebrew believers with the fact of their "dull hearing" (5:11) and the sad reality of their "arrested growth", he exhorts them to advance beyond their elementary stage of basic knowledge and immature living.

A. The Call To Advance (6:1-2)

"Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, and eternal judgment." (verse 1-2)

Basic Christian teaching - the 'Core' of orthodox beliefs regarding one's salvation - is foundational and vital. Without a foundation, there can be no superstructure in building a house. But who wishes to stop with only a foundation? The foundation is all-important, but it is nevertheless preliminary and preparatory for much more - the superstructure. None can get along without the basic teachings of Christianity, teachings regarding the nature of sin, the need for true repentance (a change of mind regarding sin from one of clinging to sin to one of forsaking sin), the necessity of having faith in Christ for salvation, the importance of giving an outward witness to others through water baptism, the significance of receiving a special call in life through the laying on of hands, the realization of eternal rewards for the righteous and eternal damnation for the wicked after death. How to become a Christian, how initially through baptism to witness to others of one's

experience of the new birth, and teachings regarding man's ultimate accountability before God after death - no one is to minimize the importance of knowing and teaching these basic truths.

But, as important as these truths are, they are, nevertheless, the basic truths which are foundation-stones upon which further and more complete truths are to be laid. "*Let us go forward, then, to mature teaching and leave behind us the first lessons of the Christian message.*" (Verse 1, Today's English Version)

This is not to say that we should ignore the basic truths of Christianity, or that we should refuse to teach non-Christians the simple plan of salvation which involves explanation of repentance, faith, baptism, spiritual gifts, eternal accountability and the final judgment. But, while we must never neglect giving adequate attention to the basics of the faith, we must never stop with the basics. We must make progress in our faith, for God expects growth in every way - in our intellectual understanding of deeper truths, and in our practical implementation of life-transforming truths. More mature thinking and more mature living!

What constitutes the "superstructure" of Christian teaching, which must be built on the "foundation" of basic Christian teaching? The writer to the Hebrew Christians discusses some of those deeper truths: The superiority of Christ over the prophets and over the angels and over Moses and Abraham (Hebrews 1-4); the deeper truths regarding the necessity and the nature of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, the perfect High Priest (Hebrews 5); the promises and conditions regarding God's eternal salvation (Hebrews 6); the superior qualities of the New Covenant of Grace in contrast to the Old Covenant of Law (Hebrews 7-10); the meaning and practice of faith as exemplified in the lives of the great saints of the past (Hebrews 11); the place and need for God's chastisement of His people, and the proper response on the part of believers to such correction (Hebrews 12); the importance of living a God-fearing life, giving heed to God's commands and walking obediently before God all the days of one's life (Hebrews 10:19-39; 12:14-29); the mystery of suffering by God's greatest saints (Hebrews 11:35-40); the importance of practical love and doctrinal integrity as these express themselves within the life of the home and the church and in the world (Hebrews 13).

B. The Determination To Advance (Verse 3)

"*And God permitting, we will do so.*" (Verse 3) Do what? Advance in the Christian life, meditate on the deeper truths,

implement the fuller doctrines of Christ in practical relationships in life.

"Let us go forward! And this is what we will do, if God allows." (Verse 3; Today's English Version)

A believer cannot advance in the Christian life at his own will, neither can he advance in the Christian life without his supreme effort and without the exercise of his positive volition. It is the combination of the believer's effort and God's enabling power which result in dynamic growth in the Christian life. "If God wills" speaks of God's part in the human-divine goals towards Christian maturity. "If God wills" - God's part! "We shall grow" - Man's part! If God wills your growth, and if you yourself strongly desires growth for yourself, what will happen? You will grow by leaps and bounds!

Do you will to grow? Are you determined to leave the basics, and the fundamentals, and the elementary teachings, and to "go on to maturity"?

"I'm pressing on the upward way,
New heights I'm gaining every day;
Still praying as I'm onward bound,
`Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.'"

"My heart has no desire to stay
Where doubts arise and fears dismay;
Tho' some may dwell where these abound,
My prayer, my aim, is higher ground."

"I want to live above the world,
Tho' Satan's darts at me are hurled;
For faith has caught the joyful sound,
The song of saints on higher ground."

"I want to scale the utmost heights,
And catch a gleam of glory bright;
But still I'll pray till Heaven I've found,
`Lord, lead me on to higher ground.'"

Chorus:

"Lord, lift me up and let me stand,
By faith, on Heaven's tableland,
A higher plane than I have found;
Lord, plant my feet on higher ground."

CONCLUSION: He who calls you to maturity in thinking and in lifestyle, is he who will enable you to become, in reality, a mature follower of Christ. Lay aside your slothfulness and your fears and your pride and your distractions, and determine to "go on to maturity"!

HEBREWS

THE CALL TO CHRISTIAN MATURITY

Q U E S T I O N S

1. Because progress demands that we leave behind the elementary teachings, and go forward into more advanced teachings, does this mean that a preacher should seldom preach a "basic sermon" on the plan of salvation from the pulpit? If a congregation mostly hears "elementary salvation sermons" from the pulpit, Sunday-after-Sunday, is it likely that that group of believers will be mature in their Biblical understanding and in their Christian living? Why or why not? (Note Hebrews 5:11-6:1 and II Peter 1:5-9)
2. Why do you believe that some believers are so slow to grasp spiritual truth? (Note Hebrews 5:11) In other words, why do some Christians, who should be mature, remain immature in their understanding and infantile in their behavior?
3. Tell very briefly what Christianity has to say about:
 - (1) Man in his relationship to others (Sociology).
 - (2) Man in his relationship to himself (Psychology).
 - (3) Man in his relationship to things and money (Economics).
 - (4) Man in his relationship to his body (Physiology).
 - (5) Man in his relationship to ruling authorities (Government).
 - (6) Man in his relationship to the world of matter (Science).
 - (7) Man in his search for ultimate meaning (Philosophy).
 - (8) Man in his relationship to the past (History).
 - (9) Man in his search for standards (Religion).

Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statements:

"The scope of knowledge in Christianity is as broad as life itself, for there is no part of life that is not the concern of Christianity. The challenge of Christianity and the difficulty of understanding the teachings of Christianity lies partly in the fact that the scope (or breadth) of Christianity is so great."

4. After reading the recorded verses, tell if you believe the following statement is accurate: "Not only is the story of Christianity long in its history, and broad in its scope, but the story of Christianity is difficult to tell and difficult to grasp because of its profound depth." (Read Romans 11:33-34; Isaiah 55:8-9; Psalms 92:5; 145:3; Job 11:7-9; 36:26; Ecclesiastes 3:11; 11:5)
5. Why cannot the truths regarding God and Christ and salvation be grasped as one would grasp information about science and math? (Note I Corinthians 2:14-16)
6. According to Jeremiah 29:13 and Psalms 119:2, what attitude must a person have, if he ever intends to "find God"?
7. To what degree do you agree with the following statement?
- "Humble receptivity must be combined with diligence if one ever expects to receive the gift of God's wisdom."
8. Why, according to Mark 4:18-19, are some believers so shallow in their thinking and so immature in their Christian lives? Tell with what degree of conviction you agree or disagree with the following statement: "It is quite natural and inevitable that if we spend 16 hours daily of our waking life in thinking about the affairs of the world, and five minutes in thinking about God, this world will seem 200 times more real to us than God."
9. Is it possible for a person who has been a Christian for many years to be still on a "milk diet" spiritually, to remain content with the religious development of a mere "child"? (Note Hebrews 5:12)
10. From your personal experience, and from your observation of others, tell if you believe the following statement reflects "reality": "Conversion to Christ in the soul can take place quickly, but deep knowledge in the mind and mature wisdom in the inner spirit take much time and thought and discussion and practical obedience."
11. How would you distinguish between the "Basic" Teachings of Christianity, and the more "Advanced" Teachings of Christianity? (Note Hebrews 6:1)
12. From your own Christian experience, illustrate the accuracy of the following statements: "A believer cannot advance in the Christian life at his own will, neither can he advance in the Christian life without his supreme effort and without the exercise of his positive volition. It is the combination of the believer's effort and God's enabling power which results in dynamic growth in the Christian life." (Note Hebrews 6:3)

13. Do you will to grow? Are you determined to leave the basics, and elementary teachings of Christianity, and to "go on to maturity"? If God wills your growth, and if you yourself will growth for yourself, what will happen?

"My heart has no desire to stay
Where doubts arise and fears dismay;
Tho' some may dwell where these abound,
My prayer, my aim, is higher ground."

CHAPTER 9

DREADFUL TRAGEDY OR DELIGHTFUL TRIUMPH

HEBREW 6:4-28

HEBREWS

DREADFUL TRAGEDY OR DELIGHTFUL TRIUMPH?

O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 6:4-20

INTRODUCTION: Anyone who reads the Bible knows that no one can save himself. But can a person be saved apart from himself? Any view that relieves the individual believer of responsibility for his relationship to God is definitely unbiblical.

PROPOSITION: The dreadful tragedy of apostasy is always to be avoided, and the delightful and ultimate triumph in Christ is to be always pursued.

I. THE DREADFUL TRUTH OF MAN'S FAILURE (Verses 4-8)

- A. The Terrible Possibility Of Apostasy
- B. The Tragic Consequences Of Apostasy
- C. The Difficult Remedy For Apostasy

II. THE DELIGHTFUL TRUTH OF MAN'S FAITHFULNESS (Verses 9-20)

- A. The Comfort Of Divine Remembrance
- B. The Challenge Of Final Perseverance
- C. The Model Of Perfected Saints

CONCLUSION: Though apostasy is an ever present possibility, *"we feel sure that you, whom we love, are capable of better things and will enjoy the full experience of salvation."* (verse 9; Phillips)

HEBREWS

DREADFUL TRAGEDY OF DELIGHTFUL TRIUMPH?

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 6:4-20

INTRODUCTION: Anyone who reads the Bible knows that no one can save himself. But can a person be saved apart from himself?

Someone once suggested that the Christian life can best be illustrated by a mother cat which carries its kitten by the mouth. If the kitten falls, it's the mother cat's fault.

But is not this cat illustration, which attempts to show the relationship between God and His children, really a violation of the Biblical view of salvation? Any view that relieves the individual believer of responsibility for his relationship to God is definitely unbiblical. It is never reasonable to blame God for our sins, apostasy, and neglect of Him. "We were created by God to be responsible and 'respond-able.'" (Security For Believers; Pamphlet by Lloyd Knox)

PROPOSITION: Apostasy is always a possibility. Christians are responsible to respond to God's grace, and to persevere to the end. The incentives for faithfulness are many, and the rewards for faithfulness are glorious! The dreadful tragedy of apostasy is always to be avoided, and the delightful and ultimate triumph in Christ is to be always pursued.

I. THE DREADFUL TRUTH OF MAN'S FAILURE (Verses 4-8)

The truth of God is both tremendous and terrible, comforting and disturbing, delightful and dreadful. This is true, partly because of the unique nature of man. God created man as a free moral agent, free to choose between moral alternatives, with positive results to be enjoyed or negative consequences to be endured. In every person lies the potential for glory beyond compare or for shame beyond description. Every person is a creature of destiny, one who will experience either the delights of heaven or the horrors of hell someday! Before every person lies two roads - the narrow road which leads to God's heaven or the broad road which leads to Satan's hell. Every person must choose life or death, heaven or hell, Christ or the devil. And the fact that every person on earth is presently in a state of probation or trial, logically means that every person - non-Christian and Christian alike - must make moral decisions as long as he is on the planet.

Just as there is a fearful possibility of a sinner rejecting the call of God to repentance and to initial salvation (conversion), so there is a fearful possibility of a present

believer (Christian) falling away from the grace of God! There is no ultimate or eternal security, short of life in heaven where saints no longer are tested to determine their obedience.

A. The Terrible Possibility of Apostasy (Verses 4-5)

There have been many who have denied that Hebrews 6:4-5 describes a true Christian, but the description is too vivid and complete to suggest that it is anyone other than a true, born-again Christian which is being described. Notes John Wesley about this scripture: "Must not every unprejudiced person see, the expressions here used are so strong and clear, that they cannot, without gross and palpable wresting, be understood of any but true believers." (Works; Volume 10; page 294)

(1) A Christian is one who has been enlightened. That is to say, he has received the knowledge that Jesus is God, that salvation is found alone in Christ who is the Light of the World. He is one who, like these Hebrew believers to whom this epistle is written, has forsaken the way of law-keeping as the means by which a right standing with God is found. The enlightened person is one who has received the truth as it is given alone in Jesus Christ - the truth that Jesus' blood alone can atone for sin. Such an enlightened person has not only received true intellectual knowledge regarding the uniqueness of Jesus' personhood and the sole method of salvation through faith in Christ rather than through observance of Old Testament rituals and ceremonies, but the enlightened person is one who has actually left the life of moral darkness and disobedience to enjoy the life of light and moral obedience. It is likely that the enlightened person, mentioned in Hebrews 6:4, has been baptized into the Christian faith. Sometimes in the Early Church the phrase "to be enlightened" was a synonym for "to be baptized."

(2) A Christian is one who has tasted the heavenly gift. The heavenly gift, of course, is God's gift of forgiveness. "Forgiveness is not something he can ever deserve or merit or win; it is a free gift. It is only when he comes up to the cross that his burden is rolled away. The Christian is a man who knows the immeasurable relief of experiencing the free gift of forgiveness of God. Something has been done for him that he could never have done for himself." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 56)

(3) A Christian is one who shares in the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who not only convicts the sinner of his sins and of his need for salvation, but it is the Holy Spirit who converts and who indwells the heart of the believing one. It is the blessed inward presence of the Holy Spirit who changes a sinner into a saint, who makes a bad man good, who transforms human nature. It is the blessed Holy Spirit who witnesses to the spirit of a person that he is forgiven of his sins, that he has been accepted by God, that he will be enabled to live righteously.

(4) A Christian is one who has tasted the goodness of the Word of God. That is to say, a Christian is one who has personally experienced how good God is, how wonderful is God's plan for life, how glorious is the truth of God's Word. Rather than following the opinions of men, and the false philosophies of the world, the Christian is one who is submitting his mind to the objective standards of God and who is delighting in the goodness of God's care.

(5) A Christian is one who has tasted the powers of the coming age. "The Christian is a man who here and now is tasting the joys, the blessedness, the peace, the power of the age which is God's. Even in time he has a foretaste of eternity." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 57)

"Heaven above is softer blue,
Earth around is sweeter green;
Something lives in every hue,
Christless eyes have never seen;
Birds with gladder songs o'erflow,
Flowers with deeper beauties shine,
Since I know, as now I know,
I am His, and He is mine."

There is no doubt that these five descriptions in Hebrews 6:4-5 are descriptions of a true believer. But the terrible possibility of such believers falling away from God is noted in Hebrews 6:6 - "if they fall away" (NIV), "if they commit apostasy" (RSV).

It may not be likely, but it is always possible, for a believer to fall away from the grace of God, and finally to be eternally lost! All persons, including believers, are free moral agents. Man does not surrender his freedom to choose after he is saved. Wrote Paul to believers, "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (I Corinthians 10:12) Notes Barclay, "Life is a chancy business; we must be ever on the watch." (Barclay's Corinthians; page 90)

B. The Tragic Consequences of Apostasy

The tragic consequences of apostasy are horrible to contemplate!

(1) Apostates are crucifying the Son of God all over again (verse 6). Notes Barclay, "In God's heart there is for ever and for ever, so long as there is sin, this agony of suffering and redeeming love. When we sin we crucify Christ again. Sin does not only break God's law; again and again it breaks God's heart." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 59)

(2) Apostates are subjecting Christ to public disgrace (verse 6). When those who were once dedicated to Christ and who allow sin to conquer them and to harden their hearts against Christ and the church, worldly people often jeer and make taunts and jibes on Christ. Worldly people laugh at the cross and laugh at Christians. They make a public spectacle of Christ. Apostates make a bad name for the cause of Christianity!

(3) Apostates are living a corrupted life of sin instead of a fruitful life of goodness. When a believer is ensnared in sin and when he leaves the path of righteousness to travel the path of wickedness, not only does he bring sorrow to Christ's heart and not only does he bring the taunts of evil men against the person of Christ and the cause of the Church, but he wastes his own God-given potential in a life of barrenness!

God intended for the life of the apostate to be filled with God's blessings and productive for God's purposes, but instead his life has become full of sin and worthless to all, including himself. What God intended for him to be, in contrast to what he in reality has become because of a life of rebellion and sin, is vividly described with a picture from the world of agriculture. "Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless." (Hebrews 6:7,8a)

The apostate not only hurts God and God's causes because he crucifies Christ anew and makes a shameful public spectacle of Christ, but the apostate also hurts himself and the world that he was meant lovingly and creatively to serve. His life was meant by God to be most fruitful - full of good works - like a field which has been cultivated and watered that is meant to bring forth a fruitful and good harvest. But, instead of his life producing a good and useful harvest, his life is

producing useless and destructive thorns and thistles! Meant by God to be a useful life, it has become a useless life! Meant to be an honor to God, his life has become a dishonor to God! God sends the rain - the blessings and opportunities for a productive life - but his life (like land that refuses to absorb the rain) fails to produce a good and useful crop (of righteousness and holiness and goodness)!

(4) Apostates are facing the danger of ultimate divine judgment. "Land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned." (Hebrews 6:8)

He who continues to spurn God's mercy will eventually reap God's judgment. Mercy spurned is judgment earned! Uselessness always invites disaster! If the apostate continues to reject the call to repentance, he shall surely have to accept the judgment of ultimate destruction! His useless life of "thorns and thistles" (i.e., his evil life of wicked deeds and godless influence) will be "cursed" (judged) and will be "burned" (destroyed)!

C. The Difficult Remedy For Apostasy

Is apostasy without remedy? Is such a backslider beyond the possibility of divine restoration?

This passage does not teach the total impossibility of an apostate to repent and to be restored to the saving grace of God. Notes one famous and widely respected Bible scholar (Westcott) regarding this passage: "The use of the active voice limits the strict application of the words ('it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance') to human agency. This is all that comes within the range of the writer's argument."

What this passage of Scripture in Hebrews 6 teaches is this : It is impossible for any human to be God's agent (or instrument) to bring such an apostate to a place of repentance and restoration. Normally God uses human agencies as His means by which He brings sinners to repentance (Note James 5:19-20; Jude 22,23; Galatians 6:1; II Timothy 2:25,26). "What is said by the writer to the Hebrews to be impossible for men is not impossible for God, with whom all things right and good are possible." (Life In The Son: Robert Shank)

Again, Westcott writes:

The present participles (contrast *parapesontas* of the definite past act of apostasy) bring out the

moral cause of the impossibility which has been affirmed. There is an active, continuous hostility to Christ in the souls of such men as have been imagined. (9)

The apostasy in view in Hebrews 6 takes its character, not merely from a past act, but also from a present deliberate hostility toward Christ. The impossibility of renewal to repentance and salvation rests, not on the mere fact of a past act, but on the fact of a present condition of opposition. The marginal reading to the American Standard Version is suggestive: "It is impossible to renew them again unto repentance, the while they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh and put him to an open shame." The present condition of deliberate, open hostility may conceivably be remedied and the persons renewed to repentance and salvation.

There is hope implied also in the verses which immediately follow: "For a piece of ground that drinks in the rains so frequently falling on it, and continues yielding vegetation useful to those for whose sakes it is cultivated, receives from God His blessings. But if it continues to yield thorns and thistles, it is considered worthless and in danger of being cursed, and its final fate is burning" (verse 7,8 Williams). The ground which has yielded only thorns and thistles has already been adjudged worthless, and is now rejected; but it is said to be only "near to a curse." It awaits eventual burning: but that fate as yet is only in prospect. Perhaps it may be averted.

II. THE DELIGHTFUL TRUTH OF MAN'S FAITHFULNESS (Verse 9-20)

After describing the terrible possibility of falling from grace, and the tragic consequences which come to the apostate, and the difficulty which is involved in renewing such a person to repentance, the writer looks on the brighter side of things. He writes, "Even though we speak like this. dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case - things that accompany salvation." (Verse 9)

A. The Comfort of Divine Remembrance (verse 10)

"God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them." (verse 10)

A life of practical love and compassionate deeds is a life that gives evidence that one's life is patterned after God. Such a life is like a well-cultivated field that eventually brings forth a harvest that is useful to those for whom it is farmed (verse 7). In other words, the person whose life is full of generous deeds is the person whose life is fulfilling the purpose for which it was created, and such a person will escape the judgment of God. His good life gives concrete evidence that he has not apostasized, that he has not gone away from God. His heart is still tender towards God, as proven by the fact that his hand is constantly outstretched to help God's people! He maintains a right standing with God - i.e., he remains justified in God's sight and free from sin - because he is living a servant life of practical love! A consistent life of loving deeds is the outward expression of an inward life of deepening devotion to God!

Others may overlook your good deeds and others may focus on your faults, but God will never forget the good life you are living. God is a God of justice and fairness. Not one good deed shall go without His reward! Said Jesus, "And if, as my representatives, you give even a cup of cold water to a little child, you will surely be rewarded." (Matthew 10:42, Living Bible)

Faithfulness to God and fruitfulness in good works will surely be recognized and rewarded! We live in a moral universe where ultimately all good will be rewarded and all evil will be punished. God is a just God who will not forget the good that any man did in the name of Jesus. The most obscure servant whose good deeds are most unrecognized, will someday be openly praised and abundantly rewarded. God is the eternal "Bookkeeper" whose accounts are accurate and whose prizes for faithfulness are most delightful!

B. The Challenge of Final Perseverance (verse 11)

God is great and God is good, His promises are sure and His rewards for faithfulness are abundant. It is God's will to open the doors of heaven to every person. It is not His will that anyone should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

The glories of heaven are wonderful, but the perils of life are real! As long as a person is in a state of probation on earth, he must guard against the perils and the pitfalls which can so easily ensnare him and deter him. It is only he that endures to the end who shall ultimately and finally be saved. "We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy." (verse 11,12a)

The hope of the Christian is only finally realized in heaven. Hope calls for a fulfillment, and that fulfillment is found at the end of this earthly pilgrimage. God promises: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." There is no such thing as an inevitable or automatic or unconditional perseverance, for man on this earth is always in a continuing state of probation or testing.

Perseverance or endurance or continuance in the Christian way depends upon the exercise of the will, upon the obedience of the heart. The writer to the Hebrews calls for diligence, earnestness, deep concern, eagerness.

There are at least two challenges that must be overcome, if the Christian is to be able to persevere to the end. One challenge is the external challenge of persecution. The writer to the Hebrews wants these believers to go on showing their earnestness, openly and boldly, in spite of opposition from their Jewish associates who are unbelievers. These believers are urged to exhibit their love for Christ and their love for Christ's people, without fear of men and regardless of the persecution of those who oppose Christ. To persevere to the end involves great courage, especially when believers must face the scorns of godless people who hate Christ. Daring to stand alone is not easy, but the rewards for perseverance are great. Said Jesus, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (Matthew 5:11,12)

Just as the Hebrew believers had to persevere under pressure and persecution, so modern believers too must endure amidst the fire of opposition. Paul reminded Timothy of the importance of remaining steadfast to the Lord, regardless of the persecution that he would have to face. Wrote Paul, "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it." (2 Timothy 3:12-14)

Why do some fail to persevere to the end in their Christian lives, and thus fail to enjoy the fulfillment of their hopes? It is because of the fear of men, because of the pressure of persecution. Notes Adam Clarke, "There might be reason to suspect that some, through fear of man, might not wish the good they did to be seen, lest they also should suffer persecution. This would not comport with the generous, noble spirit of the Gospel; the man who is afraid to let his decided

attachment to God be known, is not far from backsliding. He who is more afraid of man than he is of God Almighty, can have very little religion." (Clarke's Commentary on Hebrews; page 727) In addition to the first challenge of external persecution, there is a second challenge which the Christian must overcome, if he is to persevere to the end in his Christian life. The second challenge is an inward challenge. Wrote Paul, "We do not want you to become lazy." (Hebrews 6:12) Growing careless or lazy or sluggish or slack, or becoming spiritually dull and indifferent - these are inward enemies to perseverance in the Christian life. Keeping the fire of enthusiasm and zeal and contagion burning brightly is all important, if a believer is to maintain his faith until the end. Remain active in Christian service! Be unflagging in zeal, serving the Lord! Stay on the "cutting edge" of new growth! Keep the adventurous spirit! Take on new "love projects." Wrote Paul, "Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. (I Peter 1:13; NIV)

One of the chief enemies in the Christian life is not only external pressure and persecution, but internal slothfulness and indolence and sluggishness and laziness. It is far too easy to drift, to become passive and indifferent and complacent, to "take for granted" the things of God and to fail to exercise discipline and diligence. We must "Keep on keeping on" if we make it to the "finish line" of life, and if we finally enjoy the full realization of our Christian Hope in Heaven! Paul knew how important such self-discipline and self-control were in his life. Wrote Paul, "That is why I run straight for the finish line, that is why I am like a boxer, who does not waste his punches. I harden my body with blows and bring it under complete control, to keep from being rejected myself after having called others to the contest." (I Corinthians 9:26,27; Today's English Version)

C. The Model of Perfected Saints (verse 12-20)

These Jewish believers were far from a state of total maturity in their Christian lives, as recognized by the fact that they were still "drinking milk" instead of digesting more "solid food" (5:12). However, progress was being made (6:9) and apostasy was being avoided, in spite of the fact that there were the ever-present challenges of outward persecution and the tendency towards inward sluggishness (6:11,12a).

As an additional incentive for aggressive effort and increasing spiritual growth and perseverance amidst difficulty, the writer to these Hebrew Christians encourages them to model those strong and enduring believers who have travelled the pathway ahead of them.

"What he is saying to them is: `You are not the first to launch out on the glories and the perils of the Christian faith. Others braved the dangers and endured the tribulations before you and won through! He is telling them to go on in the realization that others have gone through their struggle and won the victory; that others have dared their voyage and come safe to harbor. The Christian is not treading an untrodden pathway. He is treading where the saints have trod." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 62)

Modeling the steadfast saints who have remained faithful is most helpful. "We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised." (Hebrews 6:12) Why were these saints, whose examples are worthy of modelling, so successful in living faithfully to the end? It was because these saints from the past believed in the trustworthiness of God, whose promises they took most seriously.

God can be trusted; He cannot lie. We can know without any doubt that God will give us the ultimate salvation in heaven that he has promised (6:18).

"For instance, there was God's promise to Abraham: God took an oath in his own name, since there was no one greater to swear by, that he would bless Abraham again and again, and give him a son and make him the father of a great nation of people. Then Abraham waited patiently until finally God gave him a son, Isaac, just as he had promised.

"When a man takes an oath, he is calling upon someone greater than himself to force him to do what he has promised, or to punish him if he later refuses to do it; the oath ends all argument about it. God also bound himself with an oath, so that those he promised to help would be perfectly sure and never need to wonder whether he might change his plans.

"He has given us both his promise and his oath, two things we can completely count on for it is impossible for God to tell a lie. Now all those who flee to him to save them can take new courage when they hear such assurances from God; now they can know without doubt that he will give them the salvation he has promised them.

"This certain hope of being saved is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls, connecting us with God himself behind the sacred curtains of heaven, where Christ has gone ahead to plead for us from his position as our High Priest, with the honor and rank of Melchizedek." (Hebrews 6:13-20; Living Bible)

Why were the saints so persevering in their faith? Because they were patient to wait upon God, until God's promises were fulfilled. Because God's promises are as trustworthy as His character is trustworthy, we too, like the saints of old, can keep our hope alive. A great incentive to persevere to the end, to maintain our faithfulness to our God!

CONCLUSION: Because every believer is in a state of probation, spiritual apostasy is always a possibility. The devil is strong, temptation is subtle, and man at best is vulnerable and weak. It is important to remain diligent in effort and vigilant at all times. Guard against "thorns and thistles" growing in your life. Cultivate the soil of your heart and be always open to the blessings of God which He desires to pour out into your life. Produce a "crop" of good fruits - a crop that is useful to God for whom your life is farmed (verse 7). Keep doing good works and showing love towards all of God's people (verse 10). Remain diligent to the end of life, and don't allow either outward persecution or inner sluggishness (verse 11) to render you fruitless and sterile. Persevere against all obstacles, and take the faithful saints of previous ages as your example to model (verse 12). Remember that God's promises are sure, and determine to fix your attention always upon Jesus Christ, your Great High Priest, whose "finished work" on the cross has forever opened the door of access to the Father, for all persons!

Though apostasy is an ever present possibility, "We feel sure that you, whom we love, are capable of better things and will enjoy the full experience of salvation." (Verse 9; Phillips).

DREADFUL TRAGEDY OR DELIGHTFUL TRIUMPH?

Q U E S T I O N S

1. Someone suggested that the Christian life can best be illustrated by a mother cat which carries its kittens by the mouth, and that if the kitten falls, it's the mother cat's fault. Do you believe that this view relieves the individual believer of his responsibility for his relation to God, and thus an unBiblical illustration of the dynamic relationship between God and the Believer? Why or why not?
2. Tell to what degree you agree or disagree with the following statement: "We were created by God to be responsible, and 'respond-able'."
3. After carefully reading Hebrews 6:4-12 (and also the following Scriptures - I Timothy 1:18-20; I Timothy 4:1; II Timothy 4:3-4; I Corinthians 10:12; Hebrews 3:12; II Peter 3:17), tell if you believe the following statements accurately reflect Biblical truth: "Just as there is a fearful possibility of a sinner rejecting the call of God to repentance and to initial salvation (conversion), so there is a fearful possibility of a present believer (Christian) falling away from the grace of God. There is no ultimate or eternal security, short of life in heaven where saints no longer are tested to determine their obedience."
4. What evidence is there, from a careful study of Hebrews 6:4-5, that the five following descriptions given are descriptions of a true believer:
 - (a) One who has been enlightened;
 - (b) One who has tasted the heavenly gift;
 - (c) One who shares in the Holy Spirit;
 - (d) One who has tasted the goodness of the word of God;
 - (e) One who has tasted the powers of the coming age.
5. Although all of the consequences listed are most tragic, share which one of the following consequences of apostasy seems to you to be the most tragic consequence: (Tell your reason for your choice)
 - (a) Apostates are crucifying the Son of God all over again (verse 6).
 - (b) Apostates are subjecting Christ to public disgrace (verse 6).

- (c) Apostates are living a corrupted life of sin instead of a fruitful life of goodness (verse 7,8).
- (d) Apostates are facing the danger of ultimate divine judgment (verse 8).
6. One of the most respected Bible Scholars in the world (B.F. Westcott) notes the following about Hebrews 6:4-6 - "The use of the active voice limits the strict application of the words ('it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance') to human agency. This is all that comes within the range of the writer's argument." What this passage of Scripture in Hebrews 6 teaches is this: It is impossible for any human to be God's agent (or instrument) to bring such an apostate to a place of repentance and restoration. Notice from a reading of the following Scriptures how God usually uses human agencies as His means by which He brings sinners to repentance - James 5:19-20; Jude 22,23; Galatians 6:1; II Timothy 2:25,26.
7. What, according to Hebrews 6:10, is one of the best evidences that a person is in a right relationship with God, and that he is avoiding the tragedy of spiritual apostasy? (Note Matthew 10:42)
8. Tell to what extent you agree with the following statements: "The hope of the Christian calls for a fulfillment, and that fulfillment is found at the end of this earthly pilgrimage. There is no such thing as an inevitable or automatic or unconditional perseverance, for man on this earth is always in a continuing state of probation or testing." (Note Hebrews 6:11,12a)
9. Of the two following challenges which every believer must overcome, if he is to persevere to the end in the Christian life, which to you personally presents the greatest obstacle?
- _____ (a) External challenge of the fear of men and the persecution from men. (Read Matthew 5:11,12; II Timothy 3:12-14)
- _____ (b) Internal sluggishness and laziness. (Read Hebrews 6:12a; I Peter 1:13; Romans 12:11; I Corinthians 9:26,27)
10. According to Hebrews 6:12, what is one of the strongest incentives to a believer to remain true and faithful to the Lord throughout his entire lifetime?

C H A P T E R 10

PROVISIONS OF THE NEW COVENANT

HEBREWS 8:1 - 10:18

HEBREWS

PROVISIONS OF THE NEW COVENANT

O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 8:1 - 10:18

INTRODUCTION: When we speak of the "Finished Work" of Christ on the Cross of Calvary, what do we mean? We mean that Christ did everything that was necessary to accomplish a total reconciliation between unholy man and the Holy God.

PROPOSITION: Jesus accomplished much for mankind, but those glorious accomplishments were most costly - nothing less than the cost of Jesus' shed blood!

I. What Did Jesus Accomplish For Mankind?

- A. He sits down at the place of authority in heaven (Glorious Reign).
- B. He serves in the heavenly sanctuary (Humble Service).
- C. He mediates between the Holy God and unholy Man (Reconciling Work).
- D. He establishes a New Covenant with Man (Transforming Power).
- E. He makes a holy people to serve Him (Progressive Character-Building).
- F. He promises eventual eternal rewards (Promised Rewards).

II. How Did Jesus Accomplish So Much For Mankind?

- A. What Jesus accomplished was once-for-all, never to be repeated.
- B. What Jesus accomplished was real.

CONCLUSION: Jesus is all that your soul ever needs - your mediator between you and Almighty God, your Savior to forgive, your Sanctifier to cleanse, your Redeemer to deliver, your Transformer to empower you for productive service, your Coming King to reward you for faithfulness!

HEBREWS

PROVISION OF THE NEW COVENANT

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 8:1 - 10:18

INTRODUCTION: When we speak of the "Finished Work" of Christ on the Cross of Calvary, what do we mean? We mean that Christ did everything that was necessary to accomplish a total reconciliation between unholy man and the Holy God.

When Jesus died on the cross, His shed blood provided atonement for man's sins. Man the sinner can become man the saint. Man the alienated can become man the reconciled. Man the guilty one can become man the forgiven one.

When Jesus died on the cross, His blood became the signature of the New Covenant of Grace which obliterated the Old Covenant of Law.

PROPOSITION: Jesus accomplished much for mankind, but those glorious accomplishments were most costly - nothing less than the cost of Jesus' shed blood!

I. What Did Jesus Accomplish For Mankind?

Because Jesus died and because He arose from the dead, what did Jesus accomplish for you and me - for all mankind?

A. He sits down at the place of authority in heaven. (Glorious Reign).

Jesus, whose priesthood is patterned after the order of Melchizedek, won the victory for mankind when He died for man's sins and when He arose for man's justification. "The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven." (8:1)

Because Jesus died, He now reigns. Because He went through the shame of an ignoble death, He now enjoys the glory of an eternal reign. Because He went to the depths of humiliation, He now deserves the highest praise and honor. Because He took the worst that Satan could inflict on Him, He now experiences the most wonderful rewards that the Father could heap upon Him!

Wrote Paul, "*Plainly seen as a human being, he humbled himself by living a life of utter obedience, to the point of death, and the death he died was the death of a common criminal. That is why God has now lifted him to the heights, and has given him the name beyond all names, so that at the name of*

Jesus 'every knee shall bow', whether in Heaven or earth or under the earth. And that is why 'every tongue shall confess' that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:7-11; Phillips)

B. He serves in the heavenly sanctuary (Humble Service).

He who reigns with the Father, exercising great power and authority as the victorious king, is He who also "serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man." (Verse 2)

He who served mankind on earth, continues to serve mankind in eternity! Jesus is not isolated from the presence of men or insulated from the hurts of men. Even in His ascended state, He is still identified with man. In His resurrected body, Jesus continues to show His five wounds, forever revealing the fact that He cares eternally for the welfare of earth's inhabitants!

Jesus is the eternal king whose heavenly occupation is not basking in the Father's glory, but instead it is involvement in the sinner's hurts and failures and sins. Far from clinging to His royal rights of kingly power, Jesus is involved in humble ministry to lost mankind. He intercedes constantly for mankind. "Jesus is the unique example of divine majesty and divine service combined. He had received glory to enable others to enter into glory. In Him the supreme majesty and the supreme service met." (Barclay's Hebrews; 94)

C. He mediates between the Holy God and unholy man (Reconciling Work).

As the mediator, Jesus stands in the middle between the sinner and the sinless God, to bring the two together in perfect fellowship.

"The ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises." (8:6)

"For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that these who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance - now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant." (9:15)

Notes Barclay about Jesus' work as mediator: "He stands between the unreality of this world and the reality of the real world; He stands between us and God. He opens the way to reality and to God. He is the only person who can effect this

union, this reconciliation between man and God, between the real and the unreal. That is, in effect, to say that Jesus is the only person who can bring us real life." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 97)

D. He establishes a New Covenant with Man (Transforming Power).

Jesus accomplished much for mankind when He, through His sacrificial death, established a new covenant of grace to replace the old covenant of law. "The covenant which Jesus brings is new in quality and it completely obliterates and cancels the old covenant." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 100) (Note Hebrews 8:13)

The New Covenant which Jeremiah prophesied would someday become a reality, has become a reality because of Jesus' death and resurrection. *"The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with the forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."* (Hebrews 8: 8-12; NIV)

This new covenant of grace has some very wonderful features. It is written on the 'tablet of man's fleshly heart', not on the 'tablets of hardened stones.' The moral laws of God are obeyed because the nature of man is changed, and the essence of the moral law is love. God changes the nature of man from a nature of rebellion to a nature of tender receptivity. Man delights to do the will of God, because the love of God has been shed abroad in the heart of man (Romans 5:5). A new internal motivation, because of God's transforming power, replaces the old external impositions and prohibitions, based on the law's strict requirements. Men under the new covenant obey God, not because of the terror of punishment, but because they love God in their hearts. It is not a matter of "Have To", but it is a matter of "Want To". "I delight to do thy will, O God, because You have changed my inner nature." The new covenant of grace is the "Expulsive power of a new affection" - the affection of God's newly imparted love!

The new covenant results in the forgiveness of sins (Hebrews 8:12; 9:15), inner cleansing from sin's pollution (9:14),

empowerment for loving service (8:10, 9:14b), and intimate relationship and fellowship with Christ (8:11).

All men - not Israelites alone - can enjoy the benefits of this new covenant. "All men would be under it. There would be no specially privileged class. All men, wise and simple, great and small, would know the Lord. The doors which had been shut were thrown wide open." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 101)

E. He makes a holy people to serve Him (Progressive Character - Building)

Christ's accomplishments for mankind, according to this portion of Scripture from the Book of Hebrews, is seen thus far in several ways: His glorious reign (8:1), His humble service (8:2), His reconciling work (8:6), His transforming power (8:10-12).

In addition to these four great accomplishments, Christ also is involved in the sanctification of believers. "And by that will (covenant) we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (10:10; RSV) "*Because Jesus Christ did what God wanted him to do, we are all made clean from sin by the offering that he made of his own body, once and for all.*" (10:10; Today's English Version)

"By virtue of that one single offering, he has achieved the eternal perfection of all whom he is sanctifying." (10:14; Jerusalem Bible) Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, He is able to bring sinners to heaven - where these transformed persons will enjoy eternal perfection, a heavenly life of sinlessness and total Christlikeness. This final perfection in heaven, where believers will be delivered from the very presence of sin, is the culmination of a process that begins on earth. Believers, upon whom the transforming grace of the covenant-keeping God has worked, are consecrated to God and are cleansed from the inner moral pollution of sin. Not yet perfect, they nevertheless are in the process of being perfected by God's Holy Spirit. It is God's purpose to raise up a holy people, separate from worldly practices and consecrated to holy purposes. They are in the process of being made holy, that is, increasingly being made more Christlike because of the transforming work of God (a provision of the New Covenant of Grace).

The life of holiness can be described not only in terms of inner cleansing, but also in terms of inner empowering that results in a life of practical service. "*The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer are sprinkled on those who have incurred defilement and they restore the holiness of their outward lives; how much more effectively the blood of*

Christ, who offered himself as the perfect sacrifice to God through the eternal Spirit, can purify our inner self from dead actions so that we do our service to the living God." (Hebrews 9:13-14; Jerusalem Bible)

The blood of Jesus, which is the sign and seal of the New Covenant of Grace, has great power! Power to reconcile alienated man to the Holy God (8:6). Power to forgive guilty man (8:12) and to cleanse believers from the inner pollution of sin's stains (9:14). Power also to empower weakened believers so that they may serve the living God (9:14). Holiness is not only the cleansing away of a negative pollution, but it is also the imparting of a positive power! Power to live for God, power to love the loveless, power to serve the needy! Not the mere avoidance of sin, but the positive and loving involvement with sinners! According to James, the hallmark of genuine religion (the religion of Christ) is not the mere avoidance of worldly pollution, but it is also the positive involvement in caring for needy persons. *"Pure, unspoiled religion, in the eyes of God our Father is this; coming to the help of orphans and widows when they need it, and keeping oneself uncontaminated by the world."* (James 1:27; Jerusalem Bible)

The holiness which the Spirit of God is progressively producing in the lives of believers, is the holiness which not only separates one from the contamination of the world, but it is also the holiness which separates one to do practical service for one's fellowmen.

F. He promises eventual eternal rewards (Promised Rewards)

"For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance - now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant." (9:15)

Those who are reconciled in time, will come into God's nearer presence in eternity. The person whose life on earth is characterized by inner purity and outer service, is the same person who will enjoy the glories of heaven, the same glory which Jesus presently enjoys and which He intends to share with His faithful followers.

Because they have been set free from their sins through the ransom price of Jesus' blood, these delivered people will enter heaven someday where they will never experience the temptations of sin's allurements. The blood of animals was never able to atone for the sins of anyone under the dispensation of Law, but the blood of Jesus is able to cleanse from all sins under the dispensation of Grace!

"Christ also was offered in sacrifice once to take away the sins of many. He will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are waiting for him." (9:28; Today's English Version)

Jesus came to earth the first time to die for sinners - to provide an atonement for sin and to make possible the reconciliation of unholy man to the Holy God. Jesus will come to earth the second time to reward the faithful and to give full salvation to those who are serving Him and who are waiting eagerly for Him. Believers are saved from sinning, and are saved for service. Someday they shall be saved ultimately in heaven where they will be perfected forever and where they will be rewarded fully!

II. How Did Jesus Accomplish So Much For Mankind?

Jesus' accomplishments are many: (1) He sits down at the place of authority beside His Father (Glorious Reign) - 8:1. (2) He serves in the heavenly sanctuary (Humble Service) - 8:2. (3) He mediates between the Holy God and unholy man (Reconciling Work) - 8:6. (4) He establishes a New Covenant of Grace with Mankind (Transforming Power) - 8:10-12. (5) He makes a holy people to serve Him (Progressive Character-Building) - 10:10,14. (6) He promises eventual eternal rewards (Promised Rewards) - 9:15,28.

On what basis was Jesus able to accomplish so much? The writer of the Hebrews makes it very clear that the basis of Jesus' great accomplishments is the once-and-for-all offering of Jesus' own body in death as a pleasing sacrifice to God.

Jesus established the New Covenant upon the foundation of His own shed blood. What Jesus accomplished was far greater than the greatest things which the Old Testament rituals and sacrifices accomplished.

A. What Jesus accomplished was once-and-for-all, never to be repeated.

(1) Jesus entered the Most Holy Place once-and-for-all. "He (Jesus) did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption." (9:12)

In contrast to Jesus, the regular priests of the Old Covenant entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry, and the high priest entered the inner room (Holy of Holies) once a year to make sacrifices for sins. (Note Hebrews 9: 6,7)

(2) Jesus offered Himself once to the Father as the atoning sacrifice for all sin. "Nor did he (Jesus) enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.....Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people." (Hebrews 9: 25, 26, 28a)

B. What Jesus accomplished was real.

All that was done by the priests under the Old Testament dispensation of law was only a shadowy outline of the heavenly order. "The earthly priesthood is unreal and cannot lead men into reality. But Jesus can lead men into reality. His is the real priesthood which alone can lead men out of this world of shadows into the real unseen world." (Barclay's Hebrews, page 95)

Jesus' gift of Himself as the sacrifice for sin is the only real sacrifice, in contrast to the inferior gifts of animals which the Old Testament priests had to offer to God, none of which could cleanse from sin. How unreal and inadequate were the sacrifices of the Old Testament! "The gifts and sacrifices being offered (in the times of the Old Covenant of Law) were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings - external regulations applying until the time of the new order.." (9: 9,10)

"The ancient sacrifices cleansed a man's body from ceremonial uncleanness; the sacrifice of Jesus cleansed men's souls." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 114) The sacrifice of Jesus alone is real, for it alone can accomplish God's will for mankind, namely the setting free of man's soul from the bondage of sin. The sacrifice of Jesus brought eternal redemption, whereas the sacrifices of the ancient Jewish world had no power to release man from the stronghold of sin's grip on his life. Under the old covenant, no amount of animal sacrifices had the ability to deliver man from the dominion of sin. Nothing other than the blood of Jesus could provide a purchase price to free man from the slavery of sin.

The sacrifice of Jesus was real because it alone was able to provide freedom from sin's dominion and forgiveness of sin's guilt and cleansing from sin's pollution.

Jesus' sacrifice was real for other reasons also: His sacrifice was voluntary (willingly given), rather than obligatory, as in the case of the animal sacrifices which had

to die. His sacrifice was spontaneous, the product of love, not the product of law. His sacrifice was rational, not an ignorant sacrifice "caught up in circumstances over which He had no control and did not understand.." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 116) "He (Jesus) died open-eyed and knowing whence He had come, whither He was going, and what He was doing." (Ibid; page 116) His sacrifice was moral, that is, it was given through the power which the eternal Spirit made available to Jesus as He was dying. The Spirit's enabling presence and Jesus' surrendered will combined to accomplish the work of the cross. "It was not legal mechanism that was working in the sacrifice of Jesus; it was the Spirit of God. This thing on Calvary was not done because of any prescribed ritual mechanically carried out." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 116)

The once-and-for-all sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was not an option, but a divine necessity - if man was to be reconciled, forgiven, cleansed, empowered for service, and ultimately granted a life of perfection in heaven. Not that Jesus had to die, in terms of an absolute necessity, for Jesus voluntarily came to earth to shed His blood for sinners. But, in terms of a redemptive necessity, Jesus had to die if mankind was to be saved from sin. Without the shedding of blood - the blood of Jesus, the Perfect Sacrifice - there is no forgiveness of sins and no access to God! (Note Hebrews 9:22)

"What can wash away my sin?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
What can make me whole again?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus."

"For my pardon this I see -
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
For my cleansing, this my plea -
Nothing but the blood of Jesus."

"Nothing can for sin atone -
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
Naught of good that I have done -
Nothing but the blood of Jesus."

"This is all my hope and peace -
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
This is all my righteousness -
Nothing but the blood of Jesus"

Chorus:

"Oh! precious is the flow
That makes me white as snow;
No other fount I know,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus."

(Song: Nothing But The Blood)

"There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains."

"And since, by faith, I saw the stream
Thy flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die."

(Song: There Is A Fountain)

Many years ago my grandmother, who at the time was washing clothes on an old-fashioned scrub board, was weeping and praying as she was washing the clothes. As a single parent trying to raise four small children, she was very poor and she was trying to make "ends meet" financially by washing clothes for other people. She was not only poor financially, but she was very spiritually burdened with a sense of her own sins and her own unworthiness. As she was washing the clothes that day, she was crying out to God for help. Suddenly she said that God revealed to her a most unusual sight - a vision of a river of blood. She knew what she saw was not gruesome, but unspeakably precious, for the river of blood was the blood of Jesus! She heard God speak personally to her: "Edna, plunge in and be made whole!"

CONCLUSION: Yes, Jesus is the perfect sacrifice for sin. He died that you might live. He is your Mediator, between you and Almighty God, to make a way of bold access to the Holy Father, to reconcile the alienated one. He is your Savior to forgive, your Sanctifier to cleanse, your Redeemer to deliver, your Transformer to change your nature, your Enabler to empower you for productive service, your coming King to reward you for faithfulness!

He is all that your soul ever needs - the Great High Priest whose "finished work" on the cross was accomplished for you!

HEBREWS

PROVISION OF THE NEW COVENANT

QUESTIONS

1. When we speak of the "Finished Work" of Christ on the Cross of Calvary, what do we mean?
2. Why, according to Philippians 2:7-11, does Jesus deserve to be highly exalted? (Note also Hebrews 8:1)
3. Is there evidence from Scripture to document the following statement? "Jesus is not isolated from the presence of men or insulated from the hurts of men. Even in His ascended state, He is still identified with Man." (Note Hebrews 8:2)
4. If Jesus, in His ascended state, refused to merely bask in the glory of God but instead serves mankind in eternity as well as on earth when He was a man, what attitude should a Christian have who is greatly honored by his fellowmen? (Note Philippians 2:1-11)
5. According to Hebrews 8:6 and Hebrews 9:15, what is one of Jesus' greatest ministries, in behalf of lost mankind?
6. Describe some of the wonderful features of the New Covenant of Grace, as described in Hebrews 8:8-12.
7. Cite Scriptural evidence to document the truth of the following statement: "The new covenant of grace is the 'expulsive power of a new affection' - the affection of God's newly imparted love!" (Note Romans 5:5)
8. Share from your own life how you have personally been changed in one or more of the following ways, as a result of accepting God's New Covenant of Grace:
 - (a) Forgiveness of sins, resulting in the resolution of guilt (Note Hebrews 8:12; 9:15).
 - (b) Inner cleansing from sin's pollution (Note Hebrews 9:14).
 - (c) Empowerment for loving service (Note Hebrews 8:10; 9:14b).
 - (d) Intimate Fellowship and relationship with Christ (Note Hebrews 8:11).
9. Because of the offering of Jesus' body in death, what is God able to provide for believers, according to Hebrews 10:10?

10. According to Hebrews 10:14, is sanctification a dramatic experience that is accomplished at a certain point in time, or is sanctification a gradual process in time which shall finally be consummated in eternity?
11. Cite Scriptural evidence to document the truth of the following statement: "The life of holiness can be described not only in terms of inner cleansing, but also in terms of inner empowering that results in a life of practical service." (Note Hebrews 9:13-14; James 1:27)
12. To those who are faithful to the Lord throughout their lifetimes, what has God promised, according to Hebrews 9:15 and II Timothy 4:7-8?
13. According to Hebrews 9:28, why did Jesus come the FIRST TIME and for what purpose will Jesus come the SECOND TIME?
14. In summary, consider the great accomplishments of Jesus, and point out which one of the following means the most to you personally:
 - (a) He sits down at the place of authority beside the Father (Glorious Reign) - Hebrews 8:1.
 - (b) He serves in the Heavenly Sanctuary (Humble Service) - Hebrews 8:2.
 - (c) He mediates between the Holy God and unholy man (Reconciling Work) - Hebrews 8:6.
 - (d) He establishes a New Covenant of Grace with Mankind (Transforming Power) - Hebrews 8:10-12.
 - (e) He makes a holy people to serve Him (Progressive Character - Building) - Hebrews 10:10,14.
 - (f) He promises eventual eternal rewards (Promised Rewards) - Hebrews 9:15,28.
15. According to Hebrews 9:12, 25, 26, 28, what did Jesus accomplish once-and-for-all?
16. What evidence is there that Jesus' accomplishments were Real, in contrast to the so-called accomplishments of the Old Testament sacrificial system? (Hebrews 9:9,10)
17. As you contemplate the following contrast between the sacrifice of Jesus and the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament, lift your heart in gratitude for the divine love which motivated Jesus to make such a costly sacrifice of Himself for lost mankind.

Jesus' Sacrifice	Animal Sacrifices
1. <u>Voluntarily-given</u>	1. <u>Given out of obligation</u>
2. Sacrifice was <u>spontaneous</u> , as a product of love.	2. Sacrifice was <u>mechanical</u> , as a product of law.
3. Sacrifice was <u>rational</u> , with Jesus having full knowledge of what he was doing.	3. Sacrifice was <u>ignorant</u> , with victim having no control over its fate.
4. Sacrifice was <u>moral</u> , given as a result of the Holy Spirit's enabling presence.	4. Sacrifice was <u>ritualistic</u> , given as a result of a legalistic requirement.

18. Did Jesus have to come to earth to die for mankind? Why or why not? Tell to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements: "Jesus did not have to die in terms of an absolute necessity, for Jesus voluntarily came to earth to shed His blood for sinners. But, in terms of a redemptive necessity, Jesus had to die if mankind was to be saved from sin."
19. What, according to Hebrews 9:22, was absolutely essential if mankind was to be redeemed from sin and forgiven of sin?
20. From your own personal Christian experience, share how Jesus has ministered to you in each of the following ways:
- (a) Mediator to make a way of bold access to the Father.
 - (b) Savior to forgive you of all your sins, and to resolve all of your guilt.
 - (c) Sanctifier to cleanse your heart from sin's pollution, resulting in uniting all your powers to serve Christ alone as Lord and Master.
 - (d) Redeemer to release you from the grip of sin's power in your life, resulting in deliverance from unholy habits.
 - (e) Transformer to change your nature, resulting in a new delight in God's laws.
 - (f) Enabler to impart power to you for productive service and good works.

C H A P T E R 11

THE HIGH CALL TO FAITHFULNESS

HEBREWS 10:19-39

HEBREWS

THE HIGH CALL TO FAITHFULNESS

O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 10:19-39

INTRODUCTION: The promises and provisions of the New Covenant of Grace are fulfilled in the lives of those persons who initially accept Christ by faith and who continue throughout life to remain faithful to Christ.

PROPOSITION: Based upon the fact of Christ's abundant provisions, a call to persevering faith is issued! This call to faithfulness is sounded forth in a variety of ways.

I. Closer Fellowship With God (Verses 19-22)

II. Stronger Determination In Hope (Verse 23)

III. Greater Performance Of Works (Verse 24)

IV. Consistent Attendance At Church (Verse 25)

V. Holy Life Of Righteousness (Verses 26-31)

VI. Maintained Confidence Amidst Persecution (Verses 32-39)

A. We Must Recognize The Great Cost In Being Faithful To Christ

B. We Must Realize The True Meaning In Being Faithful To Christ

C. We Must Respond To The Powerful Motivation in Being Faithful To Christ

CONCLUSION: The high call to faithfulness is multi-dimensional. Are you willing personally to accept that high call to faithfulness?

HEBREWS

THE HIGH CALL TO FAITHFULNESS

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 10:19-39

INTRODUCTION: The promises of God and the provisions of the New Covenant of Grace are great and wonderful! Because Christ reigns (8:1), the devil is dethroned and his day of final execution is assured. The Christ who reigns in power is the same Christ whose glory in heaven is expressed in His ministry of service in behalf of mankind on earth (8:2). In His heavenly state, Christ is not isolated from mankind nor insulated from the hurts and sins of lost humanity, but, instead, He sits at the right hand of the Father's throne where He constantly intercedes for you and for me! "In Him the supreme majesty and the supreme service met." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 94) As mediator, Christ stands between unholy man and the Holy God, to provide a "bridge" whereby man the sinner can become a friend of God the Master (8:6). Through the shed blood of Jesus, the New Covenant of Grace was signed into existence, and the transforming power of God to change human nature has been released into the lives of repentant sinners. Henceforth, since the establishment of the New Covenant of Grace obliterate the Old Covenant of Law, the laws of God are written, not externally on clay tablets, but internally on fleshly hearts (8:8-12)! Persons whose lives have been changed because of the transforming power of the covenant-keeping God, are persons who progressively are becoming more Christlike. The progressive and gradual perfecting of the character of these persons shall be made complete when these earthly saints shall be finally rewarded in heaven (10:14). Inward cleansing evidences itself in a life of outward power. Power to love the loveless, and to help the needy. Provision was made for inner purity in order that one may have power to do service to the living God (9:14). The person whose life on earth is characterized by inner purity and outer service, is the same person who will enjoy the glories of heaven, the same glory which Jesus presently enjoys and which He intends to share with His faithful followers. Someday Christ's followers will receive their promised eternal inheritance (9:15).

PROPOSITIONS: The promises and provisions of the New Covenant of Grace are fulfilled in the lives of those persons who initially accept Christ by faith and who continue throughout life to remain faithful to Christ. Based upon the fact of Christ's abundant provisions, a call to persevering faith is issued! This call to faithfulness is sounded forth in a variety of ways: (1) Faithfulness in drawing closer to God (verses 19-22); (2) Faithfulness in unswervingly holding on to our hope (verse 23); (3) Faithfulness in the performance

of good works and in stimulating fellow believers to do deeds of compassion (verse 24); (4) Faithfulness in consistent attendance at church services (verse 25); (5) Faithfulness in living a holy life of righteousness and avoiding an apostate life of wickedness (verses 26-31); (6) Faithfulness in maintaining confidence and courage amidst severe persecution and material and physical loss (verses 32-39).

I. CLOSER FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD (Verses 19-22)

"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water." (Hebrews 10:19-22)

Let us draw near to God, because Christ's blood assures cleansing from all sins, and personal access to the Father.

Why can believers draw closer to God? Because of what Jesus has accomplished when He died on the cross. "As the rending of the Tabernacle veil opened the way to the presence of God, so the rending of the flesh of Christ revealed the full greatness of the love of God." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 134). Jesus not only, through His death, became the rent veil to open the way to God's presence, but Jesus was the Great High Priest to build a bridge of access to God. "Jesus does not only show us the way that leads to God, He takes us, as High Priest, into the presence of God." (Ibid; page 134). Jesus shows us the way to God; Jesus actually takes us into the presence of God. Also, Jesus makes us fit morally and spiritually to be in God's holy presence. Through His blood, He cleanses the affections of our hearts and purifies the instincts of our bodies.

Because Jesus reveals the person of God, and because Jesus takes us to the presence of God, and because Jesus imparts to our nature the purity of God, we therefore have great confidence and powerful incentive to draw nearer to God in loving worship and adoration.

II. STRONGER DETERMINATION IN HOPE (Verse 23).

"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful." (Hebrews 10:23).

Let us hold unswervingly to our hope, because God's faithfulness assures fulfillment of His promises.

The hope of the Christian is not an illusion of the mind with

no substance. The hope of the Christian is based on the trustworthiness of God's person and the integrity of God's promises. God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). He says what He means, and He means what He says. The hope of seeing Jesus and the hope of experiencing eternal life in heaven, is not "wishful thinking" or a mere delusion of the mind.

As believers, we must hold unswervingly to our hope in Christ. We must not allow the perplexities of events or the inequities of life or the mysteries of unsolved problems to cause us to leave the pathway of righteousness. When wrong seems often so very strong, and when righteousness seems often to be unrecognized and unrewarded, it is so easy for a believer to be taken captive in "Doubting Castle."

We must remember that that which is unseen - our ultimate salvation in heaven - is that which is most certain.

III. GREATER PERFORMANCE OF WORKS (Verse 24)

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." (verse 24)

Let us perform good works, because the believer's influence motivates others to do compassionate deeds of love.

We are not saved by good works, but we are saved for good works. According to Ephesians 2:8-10, we are saved by grace, through faith, for good works. "*For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to devote ourselves to the good deeds for which God has designed us.*" (Ephesians 2:10, NEB)

Faith in God is concretely expressed by an outward life of good deeds. "*But someone may well argue, 'You say the way to God is by faith alone, plus nothing; well, I say that good works are important too, for without good works you can't prove whether you have faith or not; but anyone can see that I have faith by the way I act.'*" (James 2:18; Living Bible)

We are saved by faith, but a "saving faith" is a "working faith." "*Jesus Christ gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.*" (Titus 2:14; RSV) "*This is solid truth: I want you to speak about these matters with absolute certainty, so that those who have believed in God may concentrate upon a life of goodness. Good work is good in itself and is also useful to mankind.*" (Titus 3:8; Phillips Translation)

Jesus told His disciples to let their lights so shine before men that they may see their good works; good works glorify the Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:16). Notes Barclay, "Faith

and deeds are not opposite; they are, in fact, inseparable. No man will ever be moved to action without faith; and no man's faith is real until it moves him to action. Faith and deeds are opposite sides of a man's experience of God." (Barclay's James; page 92)

Of one godly woman in the Early Church, Dorcus, it is written that she "*was always doing good and helping the poor.*" (Acts 9:36) Is it any wonder that there was great sorrow when she died? "*All the widows stood around Peter, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcus had made while she was still with him.*" (Acts 9:39)

A life of good deeds is an exemplary life of godliness, and such a life helps motivate others to enter into the arena of practical love. Each Christian is not only to practice good works himself, but he is to spur other Christians to do good works as well.

IV. Consistent Attendance at Church (verse 25).

"Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching." (Verse 25)

Let us persist in regular church attendance, because fellow believers need encouragement in face of Christ's Second Coming and of God's Coming judgement.

There are Christians who neglect coming regularly to Church Services. They remain aloof and want to practice their Christian faith in solitude. It is both dangerous and selfish to be a "Lone Ranger Christian." Dangerous because individual believers are so much more vulnerable to Satanic attacks and so much more subject to doctrinal heresies when they are not a responsible member of a company of believers. Selfish because other believers need the encouragement which their presence would give if they were a regular part of a committed company of fellow believers. Christians are not meant to live in isolation, but rather they are meant to live in fellowship with fellow believers.

Good habits are as hard to break as Bad habits. Persons - even professing Christians - who are out of the 'habit' of regular church attendance, have a difficult time breaking that 'bad' habit. Christians who are in the 'habit' of regular church attendance are most fortunate, for such persons not only receive counsel and protection from their fellow Christians, but they also have the opportunity, by their positive influence and through the exercise of their spiritual gifts, to edify the entire congregation in the local church.

What is the reason for Christians coming regularly together at a public Church Service? Not to fulfill a 'religious duty', but to encourage and to build up fellow believers in the 'faith'. Among the several good objectives that can be fulfilled in a church service, one of the most important objectives is "Mutual Encouragement" among God's People.

I like the following which my wife, Venita Christian, wrote: "The analogy of the Church which I enjoy the most is that of a family. When we become a Child of God we become a member of God's family. We are blessed with many privileges. One of those is that of growing up in the loving, caring atmosphere of the Family.

"As a child the most special time in our day, after a big day of working in the field, was meal time. Our meals were served at regular times, the food was delicious, and the fellowship was great! We were all expected to pull up our chairs to the table to be together at a meal time. As a Christian, the special time with my brothers and sisters in Christ is at 'meal time'. It is at this time that I am strengthened by the Bread of Life and encouraged by the joy of the fellowship in order that I will be a better worker in the Harvest Field. In our local Family of God the meal is served regularly, several times during the week. Around the Family Table is a chair bearing the name of each of our family members. A meal is served at Sunday Morning Worship, Sunday School, Sunday Evening Celebration, Christian Growth Group, etc. When we fail to 'pull up our chair' when the meal is served, we most likely will become weak spiritually and will eventually become ill. Not only do we suffer, but also do our family members. No one can fill our chair but us. When we are not present at the 'meal', we are missed because we are loved. I think I understand more clearly now, having experienced the sorrow of some family members' chairs not being filled regularly, why my father insisted that we all be present at meal time. Our presence was a sign of health and our presence made the family complete. We needed each other after a long hard day of work. The laughter and the joy over the meal was so satisfying and drew us even closer together. Brothers and sisters in Christ, we need the nourishment served at 'meal time' and we need each other. When we are not present at 'meal time' we become weak, our chair is vacant, and other family members are concerned because they love us.

"As one who wants to be present at each meal served to our Church Family, I have noticed that one of the first signs of spiritual illness, is the lack of 'pulling up' to the table when the meals are served. Often we feel tired and weak after a day of working in the heat, battling the obstacles of life. The enemy of our souls, the author of spiritual illness, delights in seeing our absence at the table. Sometimes I

would tell my mother 'I'm too tired to eat.' She would respond with 'Come and join us, you'll feel better'. And I did! When you feel weak and tired, I urge you as a family member, to 'pull up your chair' to the table. You'll feel better. Family members, someday we will be invited to the table where the meal of meals will be served. The Bible tells us 'Blessed are those who are invited to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb' (Revelation 19:9). What a thrill to pull up our chair to the grandest meal of all with Christ and the Family of God! Somehow I believe our response to the regular meals with our Family here on earth will influence whether or not we will be blessed to receive that grand invitation to the Meal of meals. My prayer daily for all my brothers and sisters in Christ and for myself is that we will have a good hearty appetite for the Bread of Life and that we will want to pull up our chairs to the table when the meal is served! See you at 'meal time'!"

Are you committed to regular attendance in your local church? A vital relationship with God cannot long be maintained without regular attendance at the public worship services. I have noticed, after working with scores and scores of young believers during the last 25 years, that those young believers who become committed to regular church attendance are the same ones who generally grow into spiritual maturity. The opposite is also generally true: Those young believers (or, for that matter, older believers) who 'drop out' of regular church attendance also 'drop out' of a vital relationship with God. Such persons become luke-warm Christians and sometimes backslide completely. Church attendance alone is not sufficient to maintain a vital daily relationship with God, but it is almost impossible to enjoy a vital relationship with God without commitment to consistent church attendance. I have never yet met a mature Christian who does not habitually attend public church services.

V. Holy Life of Righteousness (verses 26-31).

"If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay.' and again, 'The Lord will judge his people.' It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Hebrews 10:26-31) Let us guard against spiritual apostasy, because it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Because God created each of us with a "Free Will" - i.e., with the ability to choose right and wrong - believers do not lose the capacity to respond negatively rather than positively after their point of initial spiritual conversion. Notes Lloyd Knox, "I believe in the security of the believer. But it is conditional rather than unconditional. I am secure while I keep on believing, trusting, responding. To be secure in any other fashion would violate all that is meant by personal relationship and covenant....At no point in our personal history does God intend to depersonalize us by destroying our will, our power to choose, our capability of responding positively or negatively to our relationship with God." (Pamphlet "Security For Believers" by Lloyd Knox)

"`Staying on track' with Jesus means being faithful in our `walk with Christ', obeying God's commands, confessing sin quickly, remaining sensitive to the Holy Spirit's wooing, recognizing the seriousness of sin and seeing that sin is not a mere violation of law but a breaking of a relationship of love, regarding the sacred nature of the sacrificial 'blood of Jesus', keeping a reverential fear of the Lord who is a just and averaging Judge of unrepentant sinners.

It may not be probable, but it is always possible to fall away from grace and to revert to a life of deliberate and habitual sinning. Wrote Peter about those who abandon the way of righteousness and fall back into a life of sinning. *"And when a person has escaped from the wicked ways of the world by learning about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and then gets tangled up with sin and becomes its slave again, he is worse off than he was before. It would be better if he had never known about Christ at all than to learn of him and then afterwards turn his back on the holy commandments that were given to him. There is an old saying that `A dog comes back to what he has vomited, and a pig is washed only to come back and wallow in the mud again.' That is the way it is with those who turn again to their sin."* (II Peter 2:20-22; Living Bible.)

Forgiveness is always extended to those whose hearts are broken and whose spirits are repentant. The case of Hebrews 10:26-31 is the case of a one-time believer who deliberately turns from Christ and who denies the Lord and the effectiveness of His atoning sacrifice altogether, and who chooses constantly to reject the wooing of the Holy Spirit. This apostate callously hardens his heart to God's overtures of love (trampling Christ under foot), callously profanes the sacred things of God (treating Jesus' blood of the new covenant as an unholy thing), and callously closes one's ears to the voice of the Holy Spirit (insulting the Spirit of grace).

Notes Adam Clarke, "Jesus being the only sacrifice which God will accept, those who reject him have none other sacrifice; therefore their case must be utterly without remedy. The case is that of a deliberate apostate - one who has utterly rejected Jesus Christ and his atonement, and renounced the whole Gospel system. It has nothing to do with backsliders in our common use of that term. A man may be overtaken in a fault, or he may deliberately go into sin, and yet neither renounce the Gospel, nor deny the Lord that bought him. His case is dreary and dangerous, but it is not hopeless; no case is hopeless but that of the deliberate apostate, who rejects the whole Gospel system, after having been saved by grace, or convinced of the truth of the Gospel. To him there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin; for there was but the ONE, Jesus, and this he has utterly rejected." (Clarke's Commentary on Hebrews; page 757)

This Scripture (Hebrews 10:26-31) does not teach that forgiveness and restoration of the backslider are impossible; it does teach that as long as a one-time believer continues in a state of willful apostasy - that is, habitual deliberate sinning - he puts himself beyond the possibility of forgiveness. There can only be forgiveness and spiritual restoration to God through repentance, and if one refuses to repent, then he forfeits any possibility of recovery!

Life is a fragile business, therefore we must handle it with prayer! Jesus said, *"Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."* Guard the affections of your heart, for your affections guide your life! Paul warned us against overconfidence in the Christian life; *"So let the man who feels sure of his standing today be careful that he does not fall tomorrow."* (I Corinthians 10:12; Phillips)

Daily examination of our own lives is vitally important, to guard ourselves against spiritual drifting, to check ourselves against both blatant and subtle sins. Wrote Paul, *"Examine yourselves to make sure you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you acknowledge that Jesus Christ is really in you? If not, you have failed the test."* (II Corinthians 13:5; Jerusalem Bible)

Wrote David, *"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."* (Psalms 139:23-24)

If punishment was severe for those who, in Old Testament days, refused to listen to Moses, how much greater will be the punishment of those who, during this present age of grace, refuse to respond to the offers of forgiveness which Christ

gives! For those who persist in their state of apostasy, there awaits a terrible punishment. *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."* (Hebrews 10:31)

What incentives in the Christian life are there for "keeping true to Jesus"? The incentive of love is the greatest incentive! How can a present believer look at the tender face of Jesus and the open arms of acceptance, and how can he think of the Lover of Men who suffered on a cruel cross, and then coldly walk away from Christ? The magnet of God's love, demonstrated conclusively on Mount Calvary, should be the greatest "staying power" to "keep one on track with Jesus." But another very powerful incentive for faithfulness is the just wrath of God which shall be poured out upon all hardened apostates. The wrath of God is just as terrible as the love of God is wonderful! As believers, let us always guard against spiritual apostasy, because it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!

IV. Maintained Confidence Amidst Persecution (verses 32-39)

Let us remember our previous times of courageous suffering, because previous perseverance in trial will motivate us to the final perseverance which gives great eternal rewards.

A. We must recognize the great Cost in being faithful to Christ.

Strange is the doctrine that is too often spread among Christians which declares that when a person becomes a believer he is delivered from his problems, that he becomes healthy, and that he becomes a recipient of material wealth. This so-called "Prosperity Gospel" is not true to the Scriptures. Not only in the Early Church, but throughout the last 20 centuries, there have been multitudes of believers who have suffered great persecution and who have lost their physical property and their personal freedoms because of their declared faith in Jesus Christ! Many to whom the book of Hebrews was written had suffered greatly - public exposure to insults and persecution, confiscation of property, imprisonment, and ridicule because of identification with fellow sufferers (Hebrews 10:32-34).

There is a high cost in serving Christ, in remaining faithful to Christ when it is not popular to be a Christian! At one time or another, it is inevitable that a believer will suffer some type of persecution as a result of faithfully following Christ! Paul wrote, *"Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived."* (II Timothy 3:12-13; NIV)

Imprisonment for Christ, confiscation of property, and martyrdom for Christ are not phenomena confined to the days of Early Christianity. More have died for their Christian faith in the twentieth century than in any one previous century since the time of Christ! Claims David Barrett of the World Evangelization Research Center, "In one part of the globe, over ten thousand Christians have been killed every year since 1950, due to clashes with anti-Christian mobs, infuriated relatives, state-organized death squads, and so on." (Quoted in "Christian History" Magazine; Issue 27, Volume IX, No. 3; page 37) David Barrett estimates that of the sixty million killed and sixty-six million imprisoned between 1917 and 1953 in the USSR, half were Christian!

One reliable source reports the following: "During China's Cultural revolution (1966-76), religious activity was forced underground, most Bibles were destroyed, believers' homes were looted, and many Christians were imprisoned or executed. In 1983 the government arrested hundreds of church leaders and cracked down on illegal house-church meetings. Beyond the Soviet Union and China, Christians have laid down their lives for their faith in some 180 countries." (Ibid; page 37)

Yes, those who follow Christ as Master must be prepared to endure persecution and suffering, for a disciple is not above his Master.

"Must Jesus bear the cross alone,
And all the world go free?
No; there's a cross for every one,
And there's a cross for me."
(Must Jesus Bear The Cross Alone?)

Jesus said, *"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."* (Luke 9:23)

B. We must realize the true meaning in being Faithful to Christ.

What does it mean to be faithful to Christ? It means that, in the midst of terrible persecution and great physical loss, we do not throw away our confidence. *"So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded."* (Hebrews 10:35). How easy it is to be intimidated in the face of persecutors, and to lose hope in the face of great losses. We must keep our confidence in God's goodness and our hope in God's promises. We must never forget that heaven is our true home, and that we are mere "pilgrims" passing through this earth. Amidst great persecution and loss, Martin Luther expressed his confidence in God's justice and power and ultimate rewards:

"Let goods and kindred go, This mortal life also -
The body they may kill; God's truth abideth still:
His kingdom is forever."

(A Mighty Fortress Is Our God)

What does it mean to be faithful to Christ? It means to maintain confidence amidst persecution. It also means to persevere in doing the will of God until the very end of life. "You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised." (Hebrews 10:36)

Ultimate rich rewards come to those who maintain confidence amidst persecution, and to those who maintain perseverance until the end of life. "Perseverance is one of the great unromantic virtues. Most people can start well; almost everyone can be fine in spasms. Most people have their good days. Most men have their great moments. To everyone it is sometimes given to mount up with wings as eagles; in the moment of the great effort everyone can run and not be weary; but the greatest gift of all is to walk and not to faint." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 143, 144)

Said Jesus, "All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved." (Matthew 10:22) Wrote James, "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him." (James 1:12)

C. We must respond to the powerful Motivations is being Faithful to Christ.

Maintaining confidence in the midst of persecution, and maintaining endurance throughout one's entire lifetime are not easy, but the motivations for doing so are very great indeed. The writer to the Hebrew Christians gives three main motivations for faithfulness in Hebrews 10:37-39.

(1) The fact of Christ's soon Second Coming is a strong motivation for faithfulness amidst persecution.

"For in just a very little while, 'He who is coming will come and will not delay'." (Hebrews 10:37)

Suffering Christians will not have to suffer forever. They will soon be rewarded - and rewarded richly (verse 35) - for their faithfulness. God's promises, given to persevering saints, will soon be fulfilled. *Even a cup of cold water, given in Jesus' name, will not go without its reward* (Matthew 10:42). He who suffers much for Christ now will be rewarded most greatly when Christ returns. He who bears humiliation now for the cause of the cross of Christ, will be crowned with glory in the Mansion above. Suffering temporarily, but glory

forever! Says the Lord in the Book of Revelation: "Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life." (Revelation 2:10; NIV)

The soon coming of Jesus should motivate us to be faithful, for Jesus will come to "balance the books", to reward the righteous and to punish the wicked. His Coming spells both justice and goodness - i.e., just punishment for unrepentant sinners and tender goodness to suffering saints. Wrote Paul, "God is just; He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed." (II Thessalonians 1:6-10; NIV)

Polycarp, the aged bishop of Smyrna, was born A.D. 70 and knew eyewitnesses of Jesus, possibly including the apostle John. When he was 86 years old, during a severe persecution of the Early Church by Roman pagans, Polycarp was told to curse Christ or be burned alive at the stake. Said the Roman proconsul, "I will make thee to be consumed by fire, if thou repent not." Polycarp answered, "Thou treatest the fire that burns for an hour and in a little while is quenched; for thou knowest not of the fire of the judgement to come, and the fire of the eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. But why delayest thou? Bring what thou wilt." (Quoted in "Christian History" Magazine; Issue 27; Volume IX, No. 3; page 15)

Faithfulness to Christ, even amidst suffering, is worthwhile, for Christ is coming again. There is a Judgement Day coming, when all evil doers will be punished and all the faithful shall be rewarded!

(2) Faith in God's Sovereign Power amidst injustice is a strong motivation for faithfulness.

Hebrews 10:38 is a quotation from Habakkuk 2:3 - "But my righteous one will live by faith." In Habakkuk, "the prophet tells his people that if they hold fast to their loyalty to God, God will see them through their present situation; but the victory comes only to the man who holds on." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 144)

The Old Testament prophet Habakkuk felt the unfairness of a situation at a time in history when it appeared that the wicked nation of Babylon was devouring God's chosen people. Boldly the prophet asked the Lord this question: *"Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?"* (Habakkuk 1:13b) When the wicked man prospers and the righteous man suffers loss, the godly man is tempted to question the justice of God. Doubt and confusion can give birth to anger or to depression. Then it is possible easily to fall into the trap of envy - envying the prosperity of the wicked. Getting one's focus off of God and onto others can cause one to lose his spiritual foothold. *"But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked."* (Psalms 73:2,3)

What should a believer do when righteousness goes unrewarded and when evil seems to be rampant, to go unchecked and unpunished? In the midst of a set of circumstances which seemed so unfair, and at a time when the prophet Habakkuk could have so easily succumbed to despair, or to anger, or to envy, he instead learned to flex his spiritual muscles and to put his full trust in his Sovereign God. The Lord instructed Habakkuk during this time of national crisis and moral turmoil: *"The righteous will live by his faith."* (Habakkuk 2:4b)

Habakkuk chose the way of faith in God instead of the pathways of despair or envy or bitterness. How do you exercise faith in God during a time when, morally-speaking, things are "topsy-turvy" - when the wicked are prospering and the righteous are suffering? Like the Psalmist in Psalms 73 and like the prophet in Habakkuk 3. Faith means you wait for God to vindicate the righteous and to punish the wicked. Said the Psalmist: *"As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O Lord, you will despise them (the wicked) as fantasies."* (Psalms 73:20) Said the prophet Habakkuk: *"Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the (wicked) nation invading us."* (Habakkuk 3:16b)

Faith, during a time of personal or national crisis, means that you continue to serve God faithfully regardless of the material or the visible benefits that you derive from serving God. To succumb to envying the wicked is to fall away from faith in God. Faith means trusting God, regardless of results, and in spite of the fact that the wicked appear to go unpunished and unchecked in their wickedness. Said the prophet Habakkuk: *"Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in God my*

Savior. *The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights.*" (Habakkuk 3:17-19; NIV)

(3) Contemplating the serious consequences of unfaithfulness to Christ is a strong motivation to remain faithful to the end of life.

"And if he shrink back, I (God) will not be pleased with him." (Hebrews 10:38)

Not only does the apostate displease God, but the apostate - i.e., the one who leaves Christ and His Gospel system (Hebrews 10:26-31) - brings eternal destruction to his soul! According to Hebrews 10:39, those who shrink back from following Christ are those who are destroyed! There are only two ways in life - the way of faith (belief) which brings ultimate salvation in heaven, and the way of faithlessness (disbelief and apostasy) which brings eternal destruction in hell. Rejecting Christ and being destroyed was certainly a possibility, in the case of the Hebrew Christians (or why all the warnings against such a dreadful possibility?), but the writer to these believers is confident of much better things in their case (Hebrews 6:9) and in his own case (as the writer). *"But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved."* (Hebrews 10:39)

Belief in the goodness of God, expressed in the rewards He shall grant His people when Christ returns the Second time (10:37), is a great motivation for faithfulness. Belief in the justice of God, eventually to be manifested in the midst of unfair circumstances, is another great motivation for faithfulness (10:38a). Belief in the wrath of God, finally to be poured out upon those who shrink back from following Christ (unrepentant apostates), is a third motivation for faithfulness and perseverance (10:38b-39).

It is possible, out of fear or cowardice, to shrink back from following Christ and to abandon the way of righteousness. There is no such thing as unconditional or inevitable perseverance. Every believer is a person of choosing, and every believer must continue to choose to follow Christ, through "thick and thin" and in spite of losses and persecution.

Knowing how severe is the punishment for cowards who turn back from following Christ, ought to be a strong deterrent against backsliding and apostasy. Wrote God through the apostle John in the book of Revelation: *"Everyone who conquers will inherit all these blessings, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But cowards who turn back from following me, and*

those who are unfaithful to me - their doom is in the Lake that burns with fire and sulphur. This is the Second Death." (Revelation 20:7-8:Living Bible)

Warned God, through His prophet Ezekiel, "The righteous man, if he sins, will not be allowed to live because of his former righteousness. If I tell the righteous man that he will surely live, but then he trusts in his righteousness and does evil, none of the righteous things he has done will be remembered; he will die for the evil he has done." (Ezekiel 33:12b-13; NIV)

The cost of faithfulness is great - suffering loss and enduring persecution (10:32-34). The rewards for faithfulness are great - receiving what God has promised (10:35-36). The motivations for faithfulness are great - the goodness of God (10:37), the justice of God (10:38a), the wrath of God (10:38b-39).

CONCLUSION: The high call to faithfulness is multi-dimensional. It is a call to a closer fellowship with God (10:19-22), a call to a stronger determination in hope (10:23), a call to a greater performance of good works (10:24), a call to a consistent attendance at church services (10:25), a call to live a holy life of righteousness rather than to live a wicked life of apostasy (10:26-31), a call to maintain confidence amidst persecution (10:32-39).

Are you willing personally to accept that high call to faithfulness?

THE HIGH CALL TO FAITHFULNESS

(Discussion Questions on Hebrews 10:19-39)

1. Based upon a close observation of Hebrews 10:19-22, point out those verses which indicate that Jesus is (a) the rent veil to open the way to God's presence, (b) the Great High Priest to build a "Bridge of access" to God, (c) the Cleanser to make us fit morally and spiritually to be in God's holy presence.
2. In light of the perplexities of events and the inequities of life and the mysteries of unsolved problems, what are Christians, who are tempted to despair, exhorted to do, according to Hebrews 10:23?
3. According to Hebrews 10:24, what "service" are believers exhorted to perform for each other? Tell to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements: "Faith and deeds are not opposite; they are in fact, inseparable. No man will ever be moved to action without faith; and no man's faith is real until it moves him to action. Faith and deeds are opposite sides of a man's experience of God." Read and briefly discuss what the following Scriptures say about the significance of "Good Works": Ephesians 2:10; James 1:27; James 2:18; Titus 2:14; Titus 3:8; Matthew 5:16; Matthew 25:31-40; II Corinthians 5:10; Acts 9:36. Do you believe the following statements reflect the Biblical understanding of the relationship between Faith and Good Works? - "Faith is the direct condition for salvation, and Good Works is the direct result of salvation. We are saved by grace, through faith, for good works (Ephesians 2:8-10). A 'saving faith' is always a 'working faith', for 'faith without works is dead.'"
4. Why is it both 'dangerous' and 'selfish' to be a 'Lone Ranger Christian', i.e., to remain aloof from other Christians? (Note Hebrews 10:25)
5. According to Hebrews 10:25, what is one of the main reasons that Christians meet together in corporate church services?
6. Tell with what degree of conviction you accept the concept of "Eternal Security" as described in the following statements: "I believe in the security of the believer. But it is conditional rather than unconditional. I am secure while I keep on believing, trusting, responding. To be secure in any other fashion would violate all that is meant by personal relationship

and covenant. At no point in our personal history does God intend to depersonalize us by destroying our will, our power to choose, our capacity of responding positively or negatively to our relationship with God." (Note II Peter 2:20-22)

7. Do you believe the following explanation (commentary) by the famous Adam Clarke (a contemporary of John Wesley) adequately 'explains' Hebrews 10:26-31? "Jesus being the only sacrifice which God will accept, those who reject him have none other sacrifice; therefore their case must be utterly without remedy. The case is that of a deliberate apostate - one who has utterly rejected Jesus Christ and his atonement, and renounced the whole Gospel system. It has nothing to do with backsliders in our common use of that term. A man may be overtaken in a fault, or he may deliberately go into sin, and yet neither renounce the Gospel, nor deny the Lord that bought him. His case is dreary and dangerous, but it is not hopeless; no case is hopeless but that of the deliberate apostate, who rejects the whole Gospel system, after having been saved by grace, or convinced of the truth of the Gospel. To him there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin; for there was but ONE, Jesus, and this he has utterly rejected."
8. What attitudes should a Christian maintain, as he faces the challenges of trials and the dangers of temptations? (Note I Corinthians 10:12; II Corinthians 13:5; Psalms 139:23-23).
9. Does the Bible teach that when a person becomes a Christian, he is delivered from all his problems, he becomes healthy physically, and he becomes a recipient of material wealth? (Note Hebrews 10:32-34; II Corinthians 4:7-12; James 5:10; I Peter 2:20; II Corinthians 12:7-10)
10. Tell to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement: "At one time or another, it is inevitable that a believer will suffer some type of persecution as a result of faithfully following Christ." (Note II Timothy 3:12-13).
11. What is your reaction or response to the following statement? "More have died for the Christian Faith in the twentieth century than in any one previous century, since the time of Christ."
12. In the midst of terrible persecution and great physical loss, according to Hebrews 10:35-36, how should a Christian respond?

13. According to Hebrews 10:36, to whom will God grant the fulfillment of His great promises? (Also Note Matthew 10:22 and James 1:12; Revelation 2:10)
14. Which one of the following three motivations for faithfulness to Christ, most "inspires" and "moves" you to be a loyal follower of Christ?
- _____ (1) The fact of Christ's soon Second Coming is a strong motivation for faithfulness amidst persecution (Note Hebrews 10:37). (Goodness of God)
- _____ (2) Faith in God's Sovereign Power amidst injustice is a strong motivation for faithfulness. (Note Hebrews 10:38a) (Justice of God)
- _____ (3) Contemplating the serious consequences of unfaithfulness to Christ is a strong motivation to remain faithful to the end of life. (Note Hebrews 10:38b-39) (Wrath of God)
15. Do you believe the following statements reflect the "Biblical Reality" regarding the nature of God and the nature of Man? - "It is possible, out of fear or cowardice, to shrink back from following Christ and to abandon the way of righteousness. There is no such thing as unconditional or inevitable perseverance. Every believer is a person of choosing, and every believer must continue to choose to follow Christ, through "thick and thin" and in spite of losses and persecution." (Note Revelation 20:7-8; Ezekiel 33:12-13).
16. Check those following statements which presently reflect your own personal positive responses to God's "High Call To Faithfulness":
- _____ (1) let us draw near to God, because Christ's blood assures cleansing from all sins, and personal access to the Father. (Hebrews 10:19-22)
- _____ (2) let us hold unswervingly to our hope, because God's faithfulness assures fulfillment of His promises. (Hebrews 10:23)
- _____ (3) let us perform good works, because the believer's influence motivates others to do compassionate deeds of love. (Hebrews 10:24)
- _____ (4) let us persist in regular church attendance, because fellow believers need encouragement in face of Christ's Second Coming and of God's Coming Judgment. (Hebrews 10:25)

- _____(5) let us guard against spiritual apostasy, because it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Hebrews 10:26-31)
- _____(6) let us remember our previous times of courageous suffering, because previous perseverance in trial will motivate us to the final perseverance which gives great eternal rewards. (Hebrews 10:32-39)

CHAPTER 12

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF FAITH

HEBREWS 11:1-6

HEBREWS

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF FAITH

O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 11:1-6

INTRODUCTION: The way of faith is the way to God, for Hebrews 11:6 says, *"And without faith it is impossible to please God."*

PROPOSITION: Faith is present-tense confidence in God, based upon God's sure promises of future blessings, issuing forth in confident action regardless of the present circumstances.

OUTLINE:

I. RESPONSE OF FAITH - Confident Action

II. RESISTANCE AGAINST FAITH - Doubt of Unbelievers

III. RELIABILITY OF FAITH - Promises of God

IV. RESULTS FROM FAITH - Knowledge of God

CONCLUSION: Faith responds to life and to life's unknown future with confidence. Confident present-tense faith action usually will soon meet certain resistances. Faith is realistic because faith is founded upon the promises of God, not on the unfounded promises of society or on the wishful thinking of mere dreamers. Faith involves anticipating positive results -assurance from God, access to God!

HEBREWS

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF FAITH

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 11:1-6

INTRODUCTION: The way of faith is the way to God, for Hebrews 11:6 says, *"And without faith it is impossible to please God." But what is faith? Hebrews 11:1,2 in the Living Bible reads, "Faith is the confident assurance that something we want is going to happen. It is the certainty that what we hope for is waiting for us, even though we cannot see it up ahead.*

PROPOSITION: Faith is present-tense confidence in God, based upon God's sure promises of future blessings, issuing forth in confident action regardless of the present circumstances.

In this definition of faith can be seen certain characteristics of faith.

"Present-tense confidence issuing forth in confident action" speaks of the RESPONSE of Faith.

"Regardless of the present circumstances" hints of the RESISTANCE against Faith.

"Based upon God's sure promises" speaks of the RELIABILITY of Faith.

"Future Blessings" speaks of the REWARDS of Faith.

In seeking better to understand this definition of faith, we must look at these four characteristics or features of faith: (1) Response of Faith - confident action; (2) Resistance against Faith - doubt of unbelievers; (3) Reliability of faith - promises of God; (4) Rewards of Faith - knowledge of God.

I. RESPONSE OF FAITH - Confident Action

"Now faith is" describes the present-tense aspect of faith. I either have faith in the present tense - now - or I don't have faith. I can't depend on the experience of faith of yesterday or the faith that I anticipate I will have tomorrow. Faith is a daily, moment-by-moment reality. I must believe God's promises today, in order to receive them tomorrow. I must have an active, present tense faith. A present-tense faith changes all things - now!

My faith today determines my motivation for what I will do tomorrow. We respond today according to what we think will happen tomorrow!

When Christians don't equip themselves today, it is a sign that they have no faith that God is going to do anything for them tomorrow.

A present-tense faith is what keeps us alert and alive for God. Faith is preparing today and acting today in such a way that indicates that we believe that God is going to do a great thing for us tomorrow. When a believer is no longer working today for the Lord, it is a sign that he does not believe that God is going to do anything for him tomorrow.

If Noah would have discontinued to build on the ark, it would have been an indication that he did not believe God was going to do something special for him in the future.

If Joshua would have discontinued to march around the walls of Jericho, it would have been an indication that he did not believe God was going to do something special for him and for Israel on the seventh day.

If Moses had not continued to march ahead into the wilderness and would have instead gone back to Egypt, it would have indicated that he did not believe God was going to do something special in the future, namely, to give the children of Israel the promised land of Canaan.

Our present-day actions indicate what we believe God is going to do for us in the future.

Faith is an active, present-tense trust in God, an indication that we believe God's promises which will be fulfilled in the future.

If I no longer daily read my Bible, this would be an indication of a loss of faith, an indication that I no longer believed that God was going to do something great for me in the future through the Word.

If I no longer sought to witness to my unsaved friends, it would be an indication that I had lost faith that God would reward my attempts at witnessing with the salvation of precious souls.

If I no longer tithed my money to my local church, it would indicate a loss of faith in my church's future. My present actions - positive or negative - indicate my faith or lack of faith in God's power to do miracles in the future.

I am making or unmaking my future, dependent upon my present actions.

"What is faith? It is the confident assurance that something we want is going to happen. It is the certainty that what we hope for is waiting for us, even though we cannot see it up ahead." (Hebrews 11:1,2; Living Bible)

The 'When' and the 'How' of what we want in the future is in God's hands. The promise may be granted soon or late, as God sees best. The method by which the promise is fulfilled is also in God's hands. The confidence that the promise will be fulfilled in God's own time and way is the essence of faith. Faith is present confidence that what God has promised, God will fulfill in His own time and way in the future. Present confidence is translated into present confident action.

Noah acted confidently in the present day-by-day building of the Ark, for he knew that God's promise to him would someday be fulfilled! Abraham acted confidently in his present day-by-day journeys into an unknown land, for he knew that God would someday fulfill His promise to him! Moses acted confidently in his present day-by-day leadership in the wilderness of a rebellious people, for he knew that God's promise to give Israel the land of Canaan would someday be fulfilled!

Faith is simply putting our trust in God's trustworthy character, believing that God will fulfill His promises to us in His own good time and way!

When I witness to Christ's person and power, I am putting trust in a God who promises to draw all men to Christ when Christ is lifted up.

When I spread the Word of God through Bible or tract distribution, I am putting my faith in a God who has promised that His Word will not return unto Him void, but that it will accomplish that for which it was sent forth, namely, the salvation of sinners and the encouragement of saints.

(Illustration of Hailey who travelled from South Africa to Central Africa to establish Free Methodist missions, even selling his insurance policies to get enough money for the project because it was a time when, during the depression, the denomination was not attempting new projects. His present-tense active faith, issuing forth in confident actions, was an indication that he believed that God would honor his faith, for today, some fifty years later, there are over 100,000 Black African Free Methodists in Central Africa!)

Faith is present-tense confidence in God, issuing forth in present, confident action - action that indicates that the man of faith believes God is going to do great things in the future for him.

When I tithe my income to my local church, I am engaging in a positive, confident, present-tense action of faith, indicating that I believe in God's promises to bless me personally and in God's promises to bless my church corporately!

Faith is putting your trust in a God whom you believe will fulfill His promises in the future, and confidently acting on that belief in the present-tense moment!

II. RESISTANCE AGAINST FAITH - Doubt of Unbelievers

Having present-tense confidence in God whom you believe will fulfill his promises in the future does not always mean that the present confident action (which is a result of present confident trust) will always be easy. Quite to the contrary many times!

Noah had day-by-day confidence in God's promises, demonstrated by his day-by-day confident actions in building the ark, but his confident actions were often threatened by the mockery and sneers of his surrounding neighbors who thought Noah was insane to build a huge boat on dry ground!

Abraham's confident actions of faith, demonstrated by his leaving his hometown to go to an unknown country, were challenged by his kinsfolk who thought him insane to leave the security of his hometown to follow his new God into an unknown country.

Moses' confident actions of faith, demonstrated by his leading the children of Israel across the wilderness for forty years in the Promised Land, were challenged severely when discontented Israelites turned in rebellion against Moses' leadership! Moses continued to demonstrate the confident action of faith even when circumstances in the wilderness were very adverse. Faith is continuing to act confidently even when circumstances are unfavorable. Faith is waiting patiently for God to act to fulfill His promises in His own good time and way - and while waiting patiently upon God, to continue to act positively and confidently in the present-tense moment!

III. RELIABILITY OF FAITH - Promises of God

The present-tense confidence of faith (issuing forth in confident action) is not an illusion. Our confidence has substance. In other words, the confidence of faith is different than the dreams of wishful thinking. Some have 'illusions of grandeur'- seeing themselves as becoming something great in the future. But such a vision does not have any substance or foundation; it is the mere product of

wishful thinking. Many a small boy talks about the day in the future when he will be the President of the United States, but such a vision is without substance.

What is the substance or foundation of faith which gives authenticity to the present-tense confidence? The substance of faith is the promise of God.

God's promises give us a firm footing to our lives. Faith in the faithfulness of God's trustworthy character gives us assurance and confidence, regardless of the darkness of present circumstances which would threaten our faith.

Because Noah and Abraham and Moses and others knew that God had spoken to them and had promised certain things to them, these men of faith could maintain their confidence and their confident actions even when circumstances were against them.

Present-tense confidence and confident actions are based on the conviction that there is an unseen God who stands behind the seen universe, and a God who both made the visible universe out of nothing and who controls the universe which He has made. *"By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible."* (Hebrews 11:3)

"If we can grip the fact that this is God's world, that God is responsible for it, then two things follow. First, we will use it as such. We will remember that everything in it is God's and we will try to use it as God would have us use it. Second, we will remember that, even when it does not look like it, somehow God is in control. If we believe that this is God's world then there comes the faith and the hope which enable us to do the most difficult thing in the world - to accept what we cannot understand. If we believe that this is God's world, then into life there comes a new sense of responsibility and into life there comes a new power of acceptance, for everything belongs to God, and all is in the hands of God." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 147,148)

IV. RESULTS FROM FAITH - Knowledge of God

What are the results of faith? Briefly stated, the results of faith are realized in the fulfilled promises of God. God always rewards faith - partially on earth and fully in heaven.

Noah's faith was rewarded - he and his household were saved from death by the terrible flood.

Abraham's faith was rewarded - he was given a promised son from whom an entire nation was born (the nation of Israel), and he became the father of the greatest Son of all - Jesus Christ!

Joseph's faith was honored eventually, as seen by the fact that God elevated him to great leadership in Egypt, second only to the Pharaoh in power, and used Joseph to save alive thousands of people during a terrible famine.

Moses' faith in leaving Egypt was honored in Moses becoming the great leader of Israel who received the Ten Commandments from God and in Moses leading the children of Israel to the promised land of Canaan.

Rahab's faith was demonstrated by her welcoming the Israelite spies, and her faith was rewarded when God spared her life and the lives of her family when the walls of Jericho fell.

Faith is always rewarded, partially on earth and completely in heaven. "And these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance... These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect." (Hebrews 11:13,39,40)

There are four results of faith given to us in Hebrews 11:2-5.

- (1) Faith gives us approval from God (Verse 2).
- (2) Faith gives us answers in God. (Verse 3)
- (3) Faith gives us assurance from God. (Verse 4)
- (4) Faith gives us access to God. (Verse 5)

CONCLUSION: What are the characteristics of faith?

(1) Faith involves right Responses to life. Faith responds to life and to life's unknown future with confidence. Faith is "the confident assurance that something we want is going to happen. It is the certainty that what we hope for is waiting for us, even though we cannot see it up ahead." (verse 1,2; Living Bible) A faith response to life is a confident response, issuing forth in confident present-tense actions.

(2) Faith involves facing certain Resistances. Confident present-tense faith action usually will soon meet certain resistances. The actions of the man of faith may be looked upon as actions of foolhardiness (as in Noah's case), or as actions of shortsightedness (as in Abraham's case), or as actions of presumptuous domineering leadership (as in the case of Moses). Doubt, and sometimes active persecution, challenge the life of faith. The positive man of faith is often encountered by the negative man of skepticism.

(3) Faith involves resting one's self upon the Reliable promises of God. Faith is realistic because faith is founded upon the promises of God, not on the unfounded promises of society or on the wishful thinking of mere dreamers. Faith is not taking a 'blind leap into the dark'. Faith has a reliable foundation or substance - the sure promises of God and the trustworthy character of the unseen God who created the universe and who maintains control of all things in His world. Thus, faith believes that God has all things in control, regardless of present circumstances which defy reason. The God who made all things (verse 3) is the God who controls all things, and to put faith in such a God is to put faith in one who is able positively to control ones personal destiny.

(4) Faith involves anticipating positive Results! What is the outcome of persevering faith - a faith that acts confidently in spite of various perplexities, problems, or persecutions? Faith gives approval from God (verse 2), answers in God (verse 3), assurance from God (verse 4), access to God (verse 5).

Taking the way of faith is taking the way to God!

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF FAITH

QUESTIONS

1. From a Biblical understanding of "faith", (note Hebrews 11:1), tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Faith is present-tense confidence in God, based upon God's sure promises of future blessings, issuing forth in confident action, regardless of the present circumstances."
2. Tell what is meant by the statement: "Faith is a daily, moment-by-moment reality". Do you agree with the following statement? "Faith is preparing today and acting today in such a way that indicates that we believe that God is going to do a great thing for us tomorrow."
3. From Scripture and from your own personal and devotional life, illustrate the truth of the following Scripture: "My present actions - positive or negative - indicate my faith or lack of faith in God's power to do miracles in the future."
4. From your personal life or from your observations of others or from the lives of Biblical characters, illustrate the truth of the following statement: "Faith is a present-tense confidence in God, issuing forth in present, confident actions - actions that indicate that the man of faith believes God is going to do great things in the future for him."
5. What factors in one's external environment constitute resistance or challenges to the sincere believer who is attempting to exercise true faith in God? Does the fact that there are strong adverse factors - resistances - in the believer's environment, give the believer opportunity to develop a stronger and more enduring faith? Can one have a "strong faith" in God without having, at the same time, strong perseverance in his character? Do you agree with the following statement: "Faith is continuing to act confidently even when circumstances are unfavorable."
6. What is the substance or the foundation of faith which gives authenticity to the believer's present-tense confidence? Do you agree with the following statement? "Faith in the faithfulness of God's trustworthy character gives us assurance and confidence, regardless of the darkness of present circumstances which would threaten our faith." Illustrate the truth of this statement from the lives of the following Biblical characters of faith: Noah, Abraham, Moses.

7. Why does believing that this present world is God's world result in enabling one to have "a new sense of responsibility" and "a new power of acceptance"?
8. In what ways is faith in God always rewarded, partially on earth and completely in heaven?
9. According to Hebrews 11:2-5, list four results of having faith in God.
10. Share from your own life some of the rich rewards that have come to you, as a result of your persevering faith in God.

CHAPTER 13

NOAH'S FAITH AND OURS

HEBREWS 11:7

HEBREWS

NOAH'S FAITH AND OURS

O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 11:7

INTRODUCTION: Noah's faith was a working way to live, a faith that was strong in the midst of a corrupt generation.

PROPOSITION: As Noah conquered through faith, so may we too conquer through faith. Why was Noah's faith a working way to live? Because his faith was fixed on God at a time when everyone around him had forgotten or denied God.

I. CARING FAITH (Not Indifferent To God's Instructions)

II. CAUTIOUS FAITH (Not Hardhearted To God's Warnings)

III. CONSTANT FAITH (Not Impatient To God's Timing)

IV. COURAGEOUS FAITH (Not Cowardly In God's Testings)

V. CONDEMNING FAITH (Not Neutral To God's Standards)

VI. CONQUERING FAITH (Not Fruitless Of God's Rewards)

CONCLUSION: The faith that conquers is the faith that is fixed on the living God. Such a faith is exemplified in the life of Noah who "found grace in the eyes of the Lord". Do you want to be, like Noah, a person who finds favor in the eyes of the Lord? Then give yourself daily, routinely, and persistently to the pursuit of God. *".....anyone who comes to him (God) must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."* (Hebrews 11:6b) Earnestly seek God through faith! Experience the Faith of Noah!

HEBREWS

NOAH'S FAITH AND OURS

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 11:7

INTRODUCTION: Noah's faith was a working way to live, a faith that was strong in the midst of a corrupt generation.

PROPOSITION: As Noah conquered through faith, so may we too conquer through faith. Why was Noah's faith a working way to live? Because his faith was fixed on God at a time when everyone around him had forgotten or denied God. Let us note the various features of Noah's faith and seek to practice the faith of Noah.

I. CARING FAITH (Not Indifferent To God's Instructions)

Hebrews 11:7 says that Noah built an ark *"to save his family."*

Noah's faith was a caring faith. He was not indifferent to God's specific instructions. *"So God said to Noah, 'I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. So make yourself an ark of cypress wood, make rooms in it and cast it with pitch inside and out. This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high. Make a roof for it and finish the ark to within 18 inches of the top. Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle and upper decks.'*" (Genesis 6:13-16; NIV) I admire Noah's faith and obedience. If I had been Noah, I probably would have questioned the Lord. I probably would not have been as quick to obey. While faith is not unreasonable, faith does go beyond reason, and, therefore, sometimes reason gets in the way of faith. I probably would have reasoned something like this: *"But God, it has never rained before. You are telling me to build an ark on dry ground, far from any large body of water? The earth and vegetation has been watered with streams up until this time (Genesis 2:6), and now you tell me that some day the entire earth will be covered with so much water that every living creature will die! Water out of the sky, Lord? EVERY living creature die, Lord? That seems impossible! By the time I get this hugh boat built (it will take over a hundred years to build it!), the people will repent of their sins and there will be no need for a flood and for a large boat. All my labor will be for naught! And, Lord, the ark has no mast, no rudder, no sail, no steering! How will it float? And because the boat is so hugh, where will it land safely after the flood is over? (the deck area of the ark was 20 times the size of a standard basketball court!) And, Lord, how can I collect so many animals, so many different species? And who*

will take care of so many animals, feeding them and cleaning up after them?" (Quotation from John Maxwell)

Noah's faith was a caring faith, for he knew that God was a caring God. Noah knew that God had waited patiently for mankind to repent of its wickedness, and that God was only sending judgment upon the world because the world of Noah's day had spurned the mercy of God. I Peter 3:20 says that *"God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built."*

God never sends judgment without first providing opportunity for mankind to repent of its wickedness. *"He is patient...not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."* (II Peter 3:9) *"God our Savior wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."* (I Timothy 2:3,4)

God is a caring God; therefore, like Noah, our faith must be a caring faith. We must exercise care to obey God's explicit instructions to us, as Noah was careful to obey God's explicit instructions regarding the building of the ark.

God instructed Noah to prepare an ark for the saving of Noah's household from the destruction of the flood. Noah was to persuade men to repent of their sins and to enter the ark, to be saved from death.

God, as it were, has built an ark for the saving of all mankind from the final destruction of the great judgment. That ark can be seen as God's great plan of salvation. It is the responsibility of believers to persuade sinners to enter into God's 'ark of safety', in order to be saved from the destruction of eternal death. We believers, like Noah the preacher of righteousness, are to witness with our lives and with our lips. We are to exercise caring faith. It is not only our own family but the entire family of mankind that we are to seek to save! We are to declare that there is no other way to be saved from the coming flood of judgment than the way of Christ. Christ and His salvation is the only 'ark of safety' against the storms of eternal death.

It is interesting that God told Noah to coat the ark with 'pitch' inside and out (Genesis 6:14). The 'pitch' sealed the ark, not allowing any water to seep into the ark. The word 'pitch' is the same Hebrew word for 'atonement' in the Old Testament. Just as 'pitch' was indispensable for the salvation of Noah's household in the ark, so the 'atoning blood' of Jesus Christ is indispensable for the salvation of mankind in God's 'ark of safety'. Our salvation is through the shed blood of Christ. "Without the shedding of the blood, there is no remission of sins."

Jesus shed his blood for the salvation of all mankind. His atonement is unlimited, available for everyone.

None need perish, for Jesus' blood, like the pitch on the ark, is the saving power of God to all who believe, i.e., to all who enter the 'ark of safety'.

The man of true faith responds obediently to God's instructions because, like Noah, he knows that God is a saving God who wishes to save all mankind in the 'ark of safety' (through Jesus Christ).

II. CAUTIOUS FAITH (Not Hardhearted To God's Warnings)

Noah's faith was a caring faith, for he knew God was a caring and a compassionate God. That is, Noah was not indifferent to God's instructions.

Noah's faith was also a cautious faith for he knew that God is not only a God of love who wishes to save sinners, but that God is also a God of wrath who must punish and destroy unrepentant sinners! That is, Noah was not hardhearted or unheeding regarding God's warnings of judgment!

"By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family." (Hebrews 11:7a)

Said God to Noah, *"I am going to bring flood waters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish."* (Genesis 6:17)

Why such unusual judgment? Because *"The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time."* (Genesis 6:5)

If God loves all sinners and waits patiently to save them, appealing to all sinners to repent (which is the basis for a 'caring faith'), then God also hates all sin and promises to punish all sinners who refuse to repent of their wicked ways (the basis for a 'cautious faith').

If God is a God of mercy and salvation, God is also a God of judgment and destruction! "So the Lord said, 'I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth - men and animals, and creatures that move along the grounds, and birds of the air - for I am grieved that I have made them.'" (Genesis 6:7)

It was not easy for Noah to preach and to live righteousness in the midst of a perverted and wicked generation. When men

around him were mocking Noah, Noah remained true to his call. When the hearts of men around him became calloused to the things of God, Noah's heart remained tender and responsive. When people around Noah closed their ears to the warnings of judgment, Noah kept his ears attuned to the voice of the living God. When others mocked the message of God, Noah heeded the message of God. When others made fun of God, Noah continued to fear his God. When others grew careless, Noah remained cautious.

The Bible says that the "fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom". A true faith is a faith characterized by holy reverence and godly fear. Noah took God's warnings seriously, and so will every man of true faith today.

Says the Scriptures, *"See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven?.....let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire."* (Hebrews 13:25,28,29)

Faith means believing that what God says, He means! God says that unrepentant sinners will suffer the destruction of eternal death. *"He (Jesus) will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marvelled at among all those who have believed."* (II Thessalonians 1:8-10)

Noah took God's warnings regarding judgment most seriously, and so will we if we are men of true faith. Noah did not succumb to the pressure of mocking people. He retained his fear of the Lord. And so must we - even in the midst of mockery and sneers. We must not allow our hearts to grow calloused and indifferent. We must personally heed God's warnings to flee the 'wrath to come', and we must warn sinners of the 'errors of their ways' and seek to turn sinners to the Savior! We must be cautious that we do not grow hardened in our hearts or unheeding to the warnings of Scriptures.

Every preacher of the Gospel and every Christian must guard himself against insensitivity to God's voice which warns against sin. Every person of faith must take great caution to remain tender in his heart, fervent in his spirit, and obedient in his will! Even the great apostle Paul feared that, after preaching the Gospel to others, he might become a castaway himself! Said Paul, *"For my part, I run with a clear goal before me; I am like a boxer who does not beat the air;*

I bruise my own body and make it know its master, for fear that after preaching to others I should find myself rejected."
(I Corinthians 9:26,27; NEB)

Noah did not become soft or indulgent or hardhearted; he remained sensitive, obedient, and disciplined, taking seriously God's warnings as seen in the fact that he continued faithfully to build the ark.

A cautious faith is a faith that exercises great caution to heed the warnings of God's Word!

III. CONSTANT FAITH (Not Impatient To God's Timing)

Noah was told to "build an ark". What an assignment! It took over 100 years to build that ark! Most of us would have become discouraged and given up the project! In fact, many Christians today lack 'staying power' in their faith. Recently, a friend said to me, "I have never understood why so many Christians have not been able to 'weather the storm'. Noah's faith stood the test of time and the test of persecution! His was a persevering faith! A strong faith is a constant faith, a faith that continues to work day after day, year after year, for the Lord - even when, as in the case of Noah, there is passive indifference or even active hostility to our message! What kept Noah working on the boat, year after year, even when many must have mocked him and called him a great fool? It was Noah's steadfast faith in God! What keeps some Christians today working year after year, faithfully and joyfully, in a local church - even when others 'jump ship'? It is their steadfast faith in God and their love of the brethren.

There is the faith that gives immediate and tangible results, and thank God for such a faith. But there is also the faith that endures year-in-and-year-out without results, and that is also a great faith (perhaps greater than the former faith)! It is the faith that works without immediate results, knowing that God will eventually and ultimately reward, if not on earth, then surely in heaven! It is the faith that witnesses to unbelievers, even when none respond to the Gospel! Think of how great Noah's faith had to be to keep working for a hundred years without it ever raining, and to keep preaching for decades without converts! Most preachers would have given up in despair!

Noah's faith was most mature because it was a constant faith. His faith was a tough, enduring type. Constant, enduring faith "is that determination, unhasting and unresting, unhurrying and yet undelaying, which goes steadily on, and which refuses to be deflected. Obstacles will not daunt it; delays will not depress it; discouragements will not take its

hope away. It will halt neither for discouragement from within nor for opposition from without. It is the steadfast endurance which will carry on until in the end it gets there." (Barclay's Hebrews; pages 196,197)

The Bible says, "*Don't grow weary in well-doing, for in due season ye shall reap if ye do not faint.*" (Galatians 6:9)

Noah's faith is remarkable because it was constant, enduring, steadfast. This is not to say that he never questioned, or never became discouraged or depressed. But it is to say that, regardless of his emotional ups and downs, he never gave up his work for God. He continued to build the ark until the day it was completed. He was not a 'Quitter'! He did not 'throw in the towel' when he got discouraged! He kept 'keeping on' until the task was finished. His internal convictions to be faithful in labor were stronger than the pressures of his external environment which told him to quit! He didn't succumb to the world's pressures to conform; rather he submitted his will to conform to God's will for his life!

It is hard to be constant in your faith when you don't see forthcoming results from your labors!

Men of truly great faith are those who are faithful to God and to their work for God, regardless of the results. There have been many missionaries who have labored many years without converts, but in God's sight they were nevertheless fruitful because of their obedience. In a result-oriented society, Noah would have been considered a failure, but in God's sight he was a great success. "*Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.*" (Genesis 6:8) And many modern-day Christians are finding favor with the Lord because of their faithfulness to God's call, even when obedience to that call has not resulted in invisible fruits.

God desires to give us visible results from our labors, but, regardless of people's response to our message, we are successful in God's sight if we have been, like Noah, obedient to our call. Remember, if we are communicating the Word of God in love, we can rest assured that God's Word will accomplish its purpose. God wishes to save all mankind through the instrumentality of His Word, but if the Word does not accomplish its saving purpose through positive response in its listeners, then the Word of God will affect its purpose of judgment in the lives of those listeners who reject its saving message. This was the case in Noah's listeners. They rejected the invitation to salvation, so they reaped the consequences of judgment in the flood. The Word is a comfort to those who accept it, and a condemnation to those who reject it!

IV. COURAGEOUS FAITH (Not Cowardly In God's Testings)

The faith of Noah was a courageous faith, and so is the faith of all mature believers. "In an age when men forgot and disregarded God, God for Noah was the supreme reality in the world. He was the one lonely man who stood for God in a day when all men were abandoning Him." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 161)

It takes a courageous faith to stand up for Jesus against the sneers of the cynical crowd. When I was a child, I was told to stand against the negative peer pressure around me. Said one to me, "Ron, any dead fish can float downstream, but it takes a live fish to swim upstream." "If God is for you, who can be against you!" It takes courage to go against the popular currents of worldliness - to say 'No thank you, I don't drink' when everyone else is drinking; to say 'I choose not to destroy my body with drugs' when teens around you think it is 'smart' to have a drug 'trip'; to be kind and loving when others around you are hateful; to remain pure in mind and body when others are playing around with sex; to be honest when others are using dishonest methods to advance their selfish causes; to give of your time in service to others when those around you are pursuing their own selfish interests; to be a positive person in the midst of a negative, critical, judgmental crowd.

'Dare to be a Daniel,
Dare to stand alone,
Dare to have a purpose firm,
Dare to make it known.'

Noah was not deterred by the mockery of those around him. He was a man of strong convictions, a man who did not compromise his standards of righteousness and holiness. He did not succumb to the worldly peer pressures all around him. Noah believed in the unseen world of spiritual reality more than in the seen world of physical reality. He set his hope on the future promises of God rather than on the present circumstances of his everyday life. He was willing to wait upon God for his rewards rather than to seek for immediate gratification from his environment. He was willing to work hard now (building the ark) and to wait to receive his rewards later. A courageous faith is a faith that is able to wait upon God, and, while waiting, to work hard for God. Deferred gratifications! Noah received his reward after waiting and working for decades. When the flood came, he enjoyed the fruits of his labors, while Noah's mockers, who lived their lives for immediate gratification, were pounding on the closed door of the ark!

Noah's faith was a courageous faith because he listened to the voice of God instead of to the voice of men. The counsel of men may have seemed more 'sensible' than the voice of God, while Noah was building a huge boat on dry ground, but listening to the voice of God proved to be the epitome of wisdom when Noah was resting secure in the floating ark while the world outside was drowning!

Noah's courageous faith enabled him to suffer persecution now and to wait for honor in the future. Noah was wise because, while others around him were carelessly indulging their flesh, Noah was carefully cultivating his spirit.

So, a courageous faith is a faith that is able, if necessary, to stand up alone for God in the midst of a crowd of worldly people.

Noah's faith was severely tested, but his faith was perfected through his courageous obedience. Our faith, too, will be often tested. Let us, like Noah, be courageous, not cowardly, during those tests.

V. CONDEMNING FAITH (Not Neutral To God's Standards)

"By his faith he (Noah) condemned the world." (Hebrews 11:7b)

Noah's purity amidst impurity, his honesty amidst dishonesty, his hard work amidst laziness, his discipline amidst indulgence, his godliness amidst wickedness - in short, Noah's righteous character in the midst of an unrighteous society stood as a continuous condemnation to those around him.

"Noah's faith was a judgment on others. That is why, at least in one sense, it is dangerous to be a Christian. It is not that the Christian is self-righteous; it is not that the Christian is censorious; it is not that the Christian goes about finding fault with other people; it is not that the Christian says: 'I told you so.' It often happens that the Christian simply by being himself is passing judgment on other people." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 160)

The Christlike character of the true believer often stands as a silent condemnation to unrepentant sinners.

VI. CONQUERING FAITH (Not Fruitless Of God's Rewards)

"By his faith he (Noah)...became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith." (Hebrews 11:7b)

Faith always conquers! Faith brings victory! Faith is never fruitless of God's rewards!

Faith saved Noah and his family from the destruction of the terrible flood. Noah was declared righteous in God's sight because of his faith. "Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord." (Genesis 6:8)

Without faith it is impossible to please God! Faith is the way to God, and to God's honors, and to God's heaven. Faith is the way to an abundant life. Faith saves one from a life of sterility and saves one for a life of creativity and productivity.

The way of faith is the way of holiness, and happiness, and health.

CONCLUSION: The faith that conquers is the faith that is fixed on the living God. Such a faith is exemplified in the life of Noah who "found grace in the eyes of the Lord". Do you want to be, like Noah, a person who finds favor in the eyes of the Lord? What are the characteristics of an Enduring Faith? (1) Caring Faith - (Not Indifferent To God's Instructions) - Obedience. (2) Cautious Faith - (Not hardhearted to God's Warnings) - Reverence. (3) Constant Faith - (Not impatient to God's Timing) - Perseverance. (4) Courageous Faith - (Not Cowardly in God's Testings) - Courageous. (5) Condemning Faith - (Not Neutral to God's Standards) - Exemplary Character. (6) Conquering Faith - (Not Fruitless of God's Rewards) - Victorious.

Do you want to be, like Noah, a person who finds favor in the eyes of the Lord? Then give yourself daily, routinely, and persistently to the pursuit of God.

NOAH'S FAITH AND OURS

QUESTIONS

1. Does "reason" sometimes stand in the way of a person exercising the obedience to God which faith demands? Do you think that, when God told Noah to build an ark, Noah initially had a difficult time accepting such "unreasonable" instructions from God? Do you agree with the following statement: "While faith is not unreasonable, faith does go beyond reason, and, therefore, sometimes reason gets in the way of faith"?
2. Give scriptural support to document the truth of the following statement: "God never sends judgment without first providing opportunity for mankind to repent of its wickedness."
3. How would you describe the "ark" which God has prepared for the saving of lost mankind, and what can sincere believers do to motivate persons who are facing impending judgment to enter God's "Ark"?
4. What, from a spiritual point of view, is the counterpart of the physical ingredient of "pitch" in God's spiritual "Ark of Safety"?
5. Why, according to Hebrews 11:7, was Noah not hardhearted or unheeding regarding God's command to build an ark? (Note Genesis 6:17) Why, according to Genesis 6:5, was God so severe in his judgement on ancient mankind? Do you agree with the following statement: "If unrepentant sinners continue to spurn God's mercy, they will surely and eventually reap God's judgment"! (Note Genesis 6:7 and II Peter 3:3-7)
6. Considering the life of Noah, tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "A true faith is a faith characterized by holy reverence and godly fear." (Note Hebrews 13:25,28,29)
7. Do you agree with the following statement? "Every person of faith must take caution to remain tender in his heart, fervent in his spirit, and obedient in his will". (According to I Corinthians 9:26,27, what was one of Paul's great concerns?)
8. What kept Noah working on the ark, year after year, even when many must have mocked him and called him a great fool? (What keeps some Christians today working year after year, faithfully and joyfully, in a local church -- even when others "jump ship"?)

9. Does great faith in God always produce immediate or visible results?
10. How would you define and describe a "constant, enduring faith", as exemplified in the life of Noah?
11. Give your interpretation of the following statement: "In a result-oriented society, Noah would have been considered a failure."
12. What is your response or reaction to the following statement: "God wishes to save all mankind through the instrumentality of His Word, but if the Word does not accomplish its saving purpose through positive response in its listeners, then the Word of God will affect its purpose of judgment in the lives of those listeners who reject its saving message."
13. How did Noah demonstrate courage in his faith, in the context of the ancient world? Give examples of ways in which a modern-day person of faith can demonstrate moral courage in the midst of a society where compromise is common. How does believing in the unseen world of spiritual reality help motivate a person of faith to maintain his strong convictions in the midst of strong negative peer pressure?
14. Explain what is meant by the following statement: "It often happens that the Christian simply by being himself is passing judgement on other people."
15. In what ways was Noah's faith in God and his faithfulness in obeying God's commands richly rewarded? Name ways in which your faith or the faith of those whom you personally know, has been richly rewarded.

CHAPTER 14

ABRAHAM'S OBEDIENT FAITH

HEBREWS 11:8 - 10

HEBREWS

ABRAHAM'S OBEDIENT FAITH

O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: HEBREWS 11:8-10

INTRODUCTION: What does it mean to be a man of faith? The faith of a true believer expresses itself in various ways. There is the faith which ventures, the faith which waits, and the faith which anticipates.

PROPOSITION: A true faith is a three dimensional faith. There are times when faith ventures, times when faith waits patiently, and times when faith anticipates and hopes. Faith appropriately responds to each unique set of circumstances.

I. ADVENTURESOME FAITH (Faith That Ventures) - Verse 8

II. PATIENT FAITH (Faith That Waits) - Verse 9

III. ANTICIPATORY FAITH (Faith That Hopes) - Verse 10

CONCLUSION: What is a three dimensional faith? It is a faith that can venture courageously, a faith that can wait patiently, and a faith that can hope expectantly. We must have all three aspects of faith - the faith that can take bold steps ahead for God, the faith that can wait on its knees for God to act, and the faith that can inspire hope as the saint awaits his final reward. Pray for a three dimensional faith - a faith that can venture, a faith that can wait, and a faith that can hope.

HEBREWS

ABRAHAM'S OBEDIENT FAITH

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 11:8-10

INTRODUCTION: What does it mean to be a man of faith? The faith of a true believer expresses itself in various ways. There is the faith which ventures, the faith which waits, and the faith which anticipates.

PROPOSITION: A true faith is a three dimensional faith. There are times when faith ventures, times when faith waits patiently, and times when faith anticipates and hopes. Faith appropriately responds to each unique set of circumstances.

I. ADVENTURESOME FAITH (Faith That Ventures) - Verse 8

"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." (Hebrews 11:8)

Abraham's faith enabled him to take bold and aggressive steps forward. "If faith can see every step of the way, it is not faith." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 163)

"In any local church, there are three kinds of leaders - risk-takers, caretakers, and undertakers. The risk-taker is not merely a gambler. He carefully assesses a situation, seeing the new possibilities within it. In a wholesome way, he is visionary. His risks are calculated, and he derives blessing from helping his followers to see and share the risks - for Christ's sake. The risks may have to do with new ministries, new approaches to evangelism, the planting of new churches, outreach into new communities, new ways of experiencing Christian fellowship, or new ways to make worship more meaningful to God's people. You'll see all these concerns reflected in the vibrant church of New Testament times."

"The caretaker-type leader is more interested in maintenance. He thinks in terms of leaving things no worse than he found them. He is the faithful sort but cautious and unvisionary. Caretaker leaders are not nearly so stimulating to be around as risk-takers."

"The problem so far as the church is concerned is that caretaker leaders too often pave the way for the undertaker. He, too, is a kind of leader, presiding with dignity over the affairs of death. Local churches too long on a caretaker regime will eventually be ready for the ministrations of the undertaker." (Donald Bastian; Adventures In Church Membership; page 203)

Faith is willing to venture for the Lord, not in some foolhardy way but in a wise and trusting and courageous way.

Abraham was willing to venture to an unknown land because God told him to leave the familiar and secure environment to go to an unknown land.

Faith will sometimes call us to leave the familiar and the secure environment to go into unknown lands (if not literal 'lands', then new areas of endeavor for the Lord).

(Illustration: God called me to leave the secure environment of my church office to go out into homes to hold Home Bible Studies; I went 'door to door' when I first became pastor; my wife had to give me a little push out the door to get me into new homes; God has blessed with the salvation of hundreds of people in their homes through the years; I challenge all to venture for the Lord - to do what God wants you to, even though it may mean venturing out into unfamiliar territory or into new areas of service for the Lord, like teaching a Sunday School class, or witnessing, or tithing, etc.)

Are you willing to take risks for God? Do you have the adventuresome spirit? Are you willing to leave the familiar and the secure environment to go into a new and different country for the Lord or into a new ministry for the Lord? Are you willing for God to tap your unknown resources and potential and gifts and abilities? Are you willing to obey God even though you don't know the specifics and the details of God's will for your life? Abraham committed himself to obey the Lord before he had the knowledge of God's will specifically. (Obedience comes before knowledge in Christianity, even though our society teaches that we are to get knowledge first and then decide whether or not we want to obey. The latter method does not work. God demands obedience to Him first, and then God will impart knowledge. A man commits himself to a woman in marriage before the knowledge of her is fully revealed to him. Commitment leads to knowledge. There is great faith involved in a man taking a woman as his wife for a lifetime, with little knowledge of the woman herself or of the future happenings with her).

II. PATIENT FAITH (Faith That Waits) - Verse 9

"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." (Hebrews 11:9)

"To Abraham God's promise never came fully true; and yet he never abandoned his faith." (Barclay's Hebrew; page 163)

There is the faith that ventures and there is also the faith that waits patiently.

"We must see that in the abundant life of Christ's indwelling fullness, through the Holy Spirit, there are two ranges of power. One is related to the ACTIVE side of the Christian's - or, if we may think collectively - of the Church's life. Here we achieve, venture, preach, sing, organize, administer. The other is related to the PASSIVE side of life. Here we submit, endure, suffer, wait. The history of Christian sanctify shows, I think, that not infrequently the critical test comes to us in this passive area of our experience. Here it is crucially revealed whether or not we are appropriating the full measure of strength offered us by our mighty Lord. Power to DO and to DARE? Wonderful! To BE and to BEAR? Perhaps even more wonderful!" (Prayer and Life's Highest; page 70; Rees)

It takes great faith to wait upon God, especially when, while waiting, nothing spectacular seems to be happening.

"To wait is even harder than to adventure. The hardest time of all is the time in between. At the moment of decision there is the excitement and the thrill; at the moment of achievement there is the glow and glory of satisfaction; but in the in-between time there is necessary the ability to plod and to wait and to work and to watch when nothing seems to be happening. It is then that we are so liable to give up our hopes and lower our ideals and sink into an apathy whose dreams are dead. The man of faith is the man whose hope is flaming bright, whose effort is intensely strenuous even in the grey days when there is nothing to do but to wait." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 163, 164)

If we need the faith that enables us courageously to venture and to dare for the Lord, we also need the faith that enables us patiently to wait upon the Lord for Him to work in His own time and in His own way.

We are often told in Scriptures that we are not to lose heart. *"Don't grow weary in well-doing, for in due season ye shall reap if ye do not faint."* (Galatians 6:9) *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."* (I Corinthians 15:58)

Life can be 'so daily' and so routine. We must realize that God is working at all times. Sometimes in the Christian life there seems to be fast and obvious progress. At other times in the Christian life there seems to be slow and halting progress. But the man of faith will always hold steady - in times of plenty and in times of poverty, in times of success

and in times of failures, in times of aggressive venturing and in times of passive waiting, in times of routine and in times of crisis, in times of praise and in times of persecution.

Wrote Paul, *"I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. I can do all things in him who strengthens me."* (Philippians 4:11-13)

Faith adjusts itself to the situation - sometimes venturing and sometimes waiting quietly upon the Lord.

A mother in the home with small children must daily exercise the faith that is able to wait. When a woman invests so much of herself in her children, she must wait sometimes for years to see the results of her investment - in the lives of dedicated children who take their mature place in the world, serving unselfishly in turn as their mother did before them. Faith, as in the case of Abraham, may mean that one will not even live long enough to see all of God's promises fulfilled. I repeat: *"To Abraham, God's promise never came fully true; and yet he never abandoned his faith."* Think of the mother who prays in great faith for the salvation of her family. She may wait for years for their salvation and she may not even live long enough to see the salvation of all of them.

When we see great and quick results from our faith, we should rejoice exceedingly, giving God all the glory for victory, but when we do not see quick or obvious results from our faith but instead have to wait patiently for answered prayer, we also should rejoice that God is working faithfully while we are waiting patiently upon Him. Obey God while you are waiting and allow God to work - either quickly or slowly.

III. ANTICIPATORY FAITH (Faith That Hopes) - Verse 10

"For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." (Hebrews 11:10)

Abraham was able to keep going in life because he had his eyes fixed on a goal. He had his eyes on the heavenly Jerusalem. All of earth's struggles were worthwhile because Abraham knew that God would someday grant him entry into the *"city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."* (Hebrews 11:10) *"The vision of the goal made him able to face the difficulties and discouragements of the way."* (Barclay's Hebrews; page 164)

The vision of heaven's future rewards makes the present toils of life endurable. If we suffer for Christ now, we shall reign with Him then. The sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall follow hereafter.

(`It Will Be Worth It All')

"Life's trials will seem so small,
When we see Jesus.
So bravely run the race
`Till we see Christ."

(`When We've Gone The Last Mile')

"When we've gone the last mile of the way,
We will Rest at the close of the day,
And I know there are joys that await me,
When we've gone the last mile of the way."

(When We All Get To Heaven)

"While we walk the pilgrim pathway,
Clouds will overspread the sky;
But when trav'ling days are over,
Not a shadow, not a sigh.

"Let us then be true and faithful,
Trusting, serving ev'ry day;
Just one glimpse of Him in glory
Will the toils of life repay.

Onward to the prize before us!
Soon His beauty we'll behold;
Soon the pearly gates will open,
We shall tread the streets of gold.

"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man, what God has prepared for those who love him."

When one loses sight of his goals, he loses hope, and when one loses hope, he loses purpose for living. Despair sets in and one flags in zeal and eventually abandons all his labors. Only as one keeps his visions clear and his goals concrete, can he meet the toils and troubles of life with fortitude and courage. The vision of heaven must be clear if the labors on earth are to be endured with courage.

Jesus said, *"Let not your hearts be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for*

you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:1-3)

Why was Abraham able to endure the hardships of his life and labors on earth while he long awaited the fulfillment of God's promises to him? Because *"he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God"* (Hebrews 11:10) Why are believers today able patiently to labor decade after decade for the Lord and to endure hardship as soldiers of the cross? Because they look to Jesus who, as the author and finisher of their faith, has promised to give them mansions in the sky by and by! *"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."* (Luke 12:32)

Wrote Paul, *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing."* (II Timothy 4:7,8). Why was Paul able to fight the good fight and to keep the faith? Because he never lost sight of his coming day of reward when God would crown him with the crown of righteousness in heaven! Paul could endure so much and labor so faithfully and wait so patiently because he kept his eye on heaven's rewards. To the degree that one's anticipation of heaven is great, to that same degree can one patiently wait. When one knows that the business of heaven is unalloyed joy, he can endure the pain and struggles of earth.

Heaven will be a place of indescribable beauty, a place of unalloyed joys, restful labors, creative pursuits, unblocked fellowship, total knowledge, intimate companionship, complete understanding, unlimited growth, and much more!!

Just as Abraham was able to persevere in faith because *"he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God"* (Hebrews 11:10), so believers today are able to persevere in faith because they see *"the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven."* (Revelations 21:2)

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed

away.' He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.'" (Revelations 1:1-5)

A goal-oriented life is a life that can endure much during the routine of daily living. One can wait patiently now if he knows he will be crowned then! It is when one loses the vision of the future crown that the sufferings of the present become unbearable. John the Baptist could wait patiently and suffer courageously while he was in prison, as long as he could be reassured that Jesus was indeed the true Messiah whose promises of future glory were all true!

As long as one can keep his vision intact he can keep his life intact. One's vision of the innumerable company of saints who will someday be gathered around the throne of God, enables one to keep his faith during life's pilgrimage which sometimes involves walking alone on the dusty roads of life. The saint on earth can patiently bear the changes and the chances of life, if he knows that he is headed for a glorious destiny where change and decay will be no more and where the changeless Christ will forever dwell with him!

When we get to heaven, faith will give way to sight. We shall know Him face to face, beholding His glorious beauty forever! Earth's experiences will then be seen as a preface to a book, a prelude to a song, a porch to a house, and a journey to a destination. In heaven the vision will become the reality, the aspiration will become the fulfillment, the shadow will become the substance, the sunset will become the sunrise!

CONCLUSION: What is a three dimensional faith? It is a faith that can venture courageously, a faith that can wait patiently, and a faith that can hope expectantly.

We must have all three aspects of faith - the faith that can take bold steps ahead for God, the faith that can wait on its knees for God to act, and the faith that can inspire hope as the saint awaits his final reward.

Pray for a three dimensional faith - a faith that can venture, a faith that can wait, and a faith that can hope.

ABRAHAM'S OBEDIENT FAITH

Q U E S T I O N S

1. Share your understanding of the difference between bold and aggressive steps of faith and presumptuous actions which are motivated by selfish ambition.
2. Give your interpretation of the following statement: "If faith can see every step of the way, it is not faith."
3. Define and describe the following three types of leaders in a local church: risk-takers, caretakers, undertakers.
4. Share experiences from your own life (or from the lives of personal friends) when God has called you (like as in the case of Abraham) to leave your familiar and secure environment to go into 'unknown' areas of ministries (or localities) for the Lord.
5. What are some of the factors that keep people from making 'faith ventures' for the Lord? Do some 'believers' expect God to reveal His specific will to them before they decide to make a commitment to follow God into 'unknown territory'? From a study of the life of Abraham, is it accurate to conclude that Abraham committed himself to obey the Lord before he had the knowledge of God's will specifically? Do you agree with the following statement: Obedience comes before knowledge in Christianity, even though our society teaches that we are to get knowledge first and then decide whether or not we want to obey?"
6. In order for the integrity of God's character to be maintained, is it necessary for God always to fulfill His promises to His people on this earth? Why or why not? Were all of God's promises to Abraham fulfilled during the lifetime of Abraham? Does it take more faith to trust God, in spite of the lack of fulfillment of God's promises, than it does to trust God because of His promises being fulfilled during one's 'earthly pilgrimage'?
7. Explain and describe the Active and the Passive sides of Christianity, as these dimensions of the Christian life relate to the life of Faith. Which dimension of the Christian life requires a greater exercise of faith? Why?

8. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "It takes great faith to wait upon God, especially when, while waiting, nothing spectacular seems to be happening." What is meant by the "in between" times of life?"
9. Why is it so important for the person of faith to 'hold steady' during the changes and the chances of life? (Note Galatians 6:9 and I Corinthians 15:58 and Philipians 4:11-13)
10. Do you agree with the following statement: "When we see great and quick results from our faith, we should rejoice exceedingly, giving God all the glory for victory, but when we do not see quick or obvious results from our faith but instead have to wait patiently for answered prayer, we also should rejoice that God is working faithfully while we are waiting patiently upon Him".
11. In light of the fact that God's promises to Abraham never came fully true, what kept Abraham from abandoning his faith and what kept Abraham's hope alive? (Note Hebrews 11:10) How does keeping a clear vision of one's spiritual goal help one to face life's difficulties and discouragements? (Note John 14:1-3; Luke 12:32; II Timothy 4:7,8)
12. According to your limited understanding of the Bible's teaching regarding 'Heaven' how would you describe the life and the conditions of 'Heaven'? (Note Revelation 21:1-5)
13. Do you agree with the following statement: "It is when one loses the vision of the future crown that the sufferings of the present become unbearable."
14. Give your comments on the following statements regarding heaven:

When we get to heaven, faith will give way to sight. We shall know Him face to face, beholding His glorious beauty forever! Earth's experiences will then be seen as a preface to a book, a prelude to a song, a porch to a house, and a journey to a destination. In heaven the vision will become the reality, the aspiration will become the fulfillment, the shadow will become the substance, the sunset will become the sunrise!
15. What are the characteristics of 'a three dimensional faith'?

C H A P T E R 15

MOSES' FAITH AND OURS

HEBREWS 11:23 - 29

HEBREWS

MOSES' FAITH AND OURS

O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 11:23-29

INTRODUCTION: From the birth to the death of Moses, Moses' life is seen as a series of dramatic episodes.

PROPOSITION: The faith of Moses is the same kind of faith that we need today - a faith that adapts itself to every changing situation of life.

I. DARING FAITH (Takes Risks For God) - No Intimidation
(Verse 23)

II. LOYAL FAITH (Maintains Loyalty To God) - No Compromise
(Verse 24)

III. SUFFERING FAITH (Identifies With People Of God) - No
Abandonment (Verses 25-26)

IV. BELIEVING FAITH (Confidence In the Promises Of God) - No
Distrust (Verses 27-28)

V. COURAGEOUS FAITH (Dependence Upon The Power Of God) - No
Cowardice (Verse 29)

CONCLUSION: Look again at the five-act drama of faith as seen in the life of Moses:

No intimidation, but instead courage to take risks for God!

No compromise, but instead steadfastness to maintain loyalty to God!

No abandonment, but instead identification with the people of God!

No distrust, but instead confidence to believe in the promises of God!

No cowardice, but instead courage to depend upon the power of God!

Faith meets the challenge of every situation of life! Be, like Moses, a man of Faith.

HEBREWS

MOSES - PERSEVERING FAITH

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 11:23-29

INTRODUCTION: Moses was a child of providence. To understand this, one must recognize the background of the Hebrews who had resided in Egypt for almost 400 years at the time of Moses' birth. Jacob's descendants grew and a nation of people resulted. Fear that the Israelites would overcome the Egyptians, caused the Pharaoh to take drastic steps to eliminate the Israelite children. A decree went out that all Hebrew boy babies were to be thrown into the Nile River. Such was the decree when Moses was born. But the God of providence arranged circumstances such that the Nile became, not the destruction of Israel, but the saving of Israel! How? Through a baby's cry - the cry of the baby Moses which touched and wooed the heart of Pharaoh's daughter, who was probably childless and desirous to have a boy baby.

From the birth to the death of Moses, Moses' life is seen as a series of dramatic episodes. Of course, much of Moses' life was lived rather routinely, especially as we view Moses herding sheep for 40 years during his middle life, following his early life in Egypt and before his dramatic leadership of the Israelites across the desert for 40 years. But even though Moses knew the every-dayness of living routinely, he also experienced many dramatic episodes in his life. The writer to the Hebrews, in writing about Moses (Hebrews 11:23-29), describes at least five main dramas of faith in Moses' life.

In looking at the life of Moses, we can see that faith meets the challenge of every changing circumstances of life. We may look at Moses' life as a "Five-Act Drama of Faith". Moses' faith was a 'tough' faith - a 'persevering faith'!

PROPOSITION: The faith of Moses is the same kind of faith that we need today - a faith that adapts itself to every changing situation of life.

There is a daring faith (verse 23), a loyal faith (verse 24), a suffering faith (verses 25,26), a believing faith (verses 27,28), a courageous faith (verse 29).

Let's look at the five-act drama of faith, as exemplified in the life of Moses.

I. DARING FAITH (Takes Risks For God) - No Intimidation
(verse 23)

"By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict." (Hebrews 11:23)

Here is a picture of daring faith on the part of Moses' parents. They feared and respected Almighty God more than they feared the Egyptian king. "They were not afraid of the king's edict."

Every Christian must respect man made laws if those laws are compatible with the laws of God. Romans 13 commands Christians to obey the laws of the land. *"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves."* (Romans 13:1,2)

However, there may be times, as in the case of Moses' parents, when believers must obey the laws of God rather than the laws of the land. The Egyptian king's edict was to kill all the male Israelite children. Moses was saved from such a cruel death because Moses' parents refused to be intimidated by the king's edict.

Intimidation! What is that? It is humiliation of a person or a group as a result of pressure or persecution by a real or imagined power. That power which seeks to intimidate is in the form of a powerful person or a powerful institution.

A man of faith refuses to be intimidated by the godless pressure or persecution of another.

While Christians are commanded in the Bible to obey civil authorities (Matthew 22:21; I Peter 2:13-15; Titus 3:1; Romans 13:1-7), believers are also expected to obey the laws of God instead of the laws of men if the latter are formed against the former. The Egyptian midwives who were commanded by the king to kill all Israelite male babies *"feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive."* (Exodus 1:17)

Daniel refused to obey the king's decree that none should pray to any God for thirty days except to the king. As a result of his deliberate disobedience, Daniel was cast into the lion's den. In the New Testament days, Peter and John were commanded by the civil authorities not "to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:18-20) They

disobeyed the civil authorities and continued to preach and teach about Jesus in the streets of Jerusalem. The civil authorities cast the apostles in jail because of their activities of witnessing, but the apostles refused to be silenced or intimidated. They continued to evangelize. They had a daring faith, a faith that was willing to take risks for God.

Martin Luther King Jr. said in his famous 'Letters from Birmingham Jail', "...there are two types of laws. One has not only legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that 'an unjust law is no law at all'. In no sense do I advocate evading or defying the law, as would the rabid segregationist. That would lead to anarchy. One who breaks an unjust law must do so openly, lovingly and with a willingness to accept the penalty. I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of his community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for law." (Facing the Issues; page 62)

What does a daring faith mean for us today? It probably will not mean that we will have to risk our life to be a Christian (although that is always a possibility, even in America). A daring faith means that we are willing, like Moses' parents, to take some kinds of risks for God without being intimidated by unbelievers or by an unbelieving society.

Humanism is a godless philosophy which permeates our society today. It is basically atheistic. It centers on man instead of on God. It denies everything that Christians hold dear. A Christian with a daring faith must be willing to stand up against the attacks of humanism and do so without intimidation.

Having a daring faith means that we will take our stand for God within a society that is often not sensitive to or obedient to the laws of God.

II. LOYAL FAITH (Maintains Loyalty for God) - No Compromise (Verse 24)

"By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter." (Hebrews 11:24)

Even though Moses was brought up in the palace of Egypt, and was considered by Egyptians to be the son of Pharaoh's daughter, Moses knew his true identity as a Hebrew and never forgot his early training at the feet of his own godly mother. In the disguise of a handmaiden, Moses' own mother was paid by

Pharaoh's daughter to raise Moses! Moses received not only physical bread but also spiritual instruction from his own mother who was viewed as a handmaiden by the Egyptians! Moses received a fine education in the best schools of Egypt, but knowledge of the living God which Moses received from his mother far outweighed the knowledge he received from Egyptian schools.

What a tribute to Moses' mother that she taught Moses so well about the true and living God that Moses forever identified with his own people and his people's God rather than with the Egyptian people and the Egyptian gods! Moses was trained in the ways of his God and he never departed from that training. He never compromised with sin, but remained true to his God.

In a secular, humanistic society today, true Christians must maintain loyalty to God and never succumb to the pressures of sin. The 'in' thing may not, and usually is not, the Christian thing to do. A believer must stand against the tide of popular ideas and be truly Christian in the way he thinks and feels and acts and reacts.

A loyal faith is a faith which refuses to compromise with sin. Jesus said, "Ye cannot serve God and money. Ye cannot serve two masters."

*"Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey - whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness."
(Romans 6:16-18.)*

"Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.' Therefore come out from them and be separate. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." (2 Corinthians 6:14-18.)

III. SUFFERING FAITH (Identifies With People of God) - No
Abandonment (Verses 25,26)

"He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time." (Hebrews 11:25)

There is pleasure in sin for a short time, but only for a short time. The temporary pleasures of sin are soon replaced by the permanent pains of sin. The temporary pains caused from serving God will soon be replaced by the pleasures of an abundant life with Christ on earth and the eternal life with Christ in heaven. To choose God may mean to choose pain and persecution for a short time, but the pain of the world's persecution and rejection is more than compensated for by Christ's comfort and companionship which are lasting.

Moses 'counted the cost' in serving the true God and, as a result, turned his back on Egypt and accepted the suffering which his identification with the people of God brought.

To be a Christian may mean rejection or persecution, as in the case of Moses. However, the Christian is wise, for the Christian is a person with a long view. He knows, as Moses knew, that to identify with God's people might bring the scorn of unbelievers, but he knows also that it will always bring the smile of God's approval upon his life. To walk alone in sweet communion with God is infinitely more wonderful than to walk in popularity with a crowd of unbelievers. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" It is important, as the woman who was voted Miss Texas and the runner-up for Miss America said, that every young girl should "do what is right and don't succumb to peer pressure. Remember, God and the individual who is doing right is always a majority!"

The believer with the long view knows that, whatever Christians have to suffer now for their faith, their future is bright. The way of the transgressor is hard. The way of the Christian is easy in comparison, for the Christian alone has peace of mind and the promise of eternal life with God in heaven.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a man of the twentieth century who, like Moses, closely identified with his fellow German Christians during World War II in Germany in spite of Hitler's strong opposition against Christians. Although a brilliant German scholar who taught at the University of Berlin, he left the university and worked

to help his fellow Germans who were oppressed by Hitler. "Forbidden by the Gestapo to preach or speak, he directed an illegal church training school in which he endeavored to have a community life embodying genuine Christian brotherhood. The school was closed by the Gestapo in 1940. For a short time, through the kindness of American friends, he was in the United States, but he felt constrained to return to Germany. Arrested by the Gestapo in 1943, he was in various prisons and concentration camps and was executed on April 9, 1945, shortly before the Allied victory would have brought him release. In the months of confinement he was a tower of strength to his fellow prisoners. Sustained by his faith and love of God, he had a poise and a radiance which brought solace to many." (The 20th Century In Europe; Volume IV; Kenneth Scott Latourette; page 268)

"There were three driving forces in his (Bonhoeffer's) life. There was the conviction of the right. 'If we claim to be Christians,' he said, 'there is no room for expediency.' There was the sense of destiny. He might well have stayed safe out of Germany; he went back. 'I know what I have chosen', he said. Supremely he was a man of faith. As he walked out to die on 9th April 1945, he whispered to a fellow prisoner: 'This is the end. But for me it is the beginning of life.'" (Men and Affairs; by William Barclay; page 39)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's faith was a suffering faith. He chose to suffer with his fellow German Christians rather than to abandon them or to compromise his Christian convictions. Of Bonhoeffer it could be said, as it was said of Moses in Hebrews 11:26, "He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward."

When our faith calls us to suffer for God, let us remember what Jesus said, "*Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*" (Matthew 5:11,12)

IV. BELIEVING FAITH (Confidence In the Promises of God) - No Distrust (Verses 27,28)

"By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel." (Hebrews 11:27,28)

Moses took God at His Word. Faith is believing that what God says, He means, and obeying God explicitly, knowing that God will fulfill His promises.

Doubt will sometimes assail the true believer. Circumstances will sometimes be adverse. But faith takes hold of God's Word and claims victory over adverse circumstances.

Faith means believing that God is trustworthy in His character, that His promises are reliable. Moses believed that God would rescue the Israelites out of the cruel hand of Egyptian bondage through a miraculous deliverance. To believe God's promises implicitly means to obey God's commands explicitly. Moses was given careful instructions regarding the Passover observance. If Moses and the Israelites would have failed to smear blood on the doorposts of their homes, the death angel would surely have struck down the firstborn children in the Israelite homes as he did in the homes of the Egyptians.

Believing faith is inseparably connected with obedient faith. There can be no real faith in God without obedience to God. Faith is not a mere assent of the mind to God, but faith is an active obedience of the human will to the revealed will of God. Faith involves decisive action on the part of man. A believing faith is a faith that knows God will act on man's behalf in a saving way because man acts in an obedient way towards God!

"Standing on the promises I cannot fall,
Listening every moment to the Spirit's call,
Resting in my Savior as my all in all,
Standing on the promises of God."

One will never fall, when he stands on God's promises, as long as one will remain obedient to the Spirit's call.

Faith is not some kind of 'deposit' that God gives to man once-and-for-all that guarantees automatic security to man. Rather, faith is a dynamic relationship of love between God and man which must always be maintained by man's obedient response to God's call. Moses obeyed God's call and, as a result, received God's promises - miraculous deliverance of the Israelites from the Egyptian slavery, as commemorated annually in the Passover celebration.

V. COURAGEOUS FAITH (Dependence Upon the Power of God)
- No Cowardice (Verse 29)

"By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned." (Hebrews 11:29)

"Here we have the faith of a leader and of a people who were prepared to attempt the impossible at the command of God, who realized that the greatest barrier in the world is no barrier if God be there to help us to overpass it." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 180)

"God specializes in things thought impossible,
He can do what no one else can do."

"Man's extremity is God's opportunity." Moses and the Israelites, with the pursuing hostile Egyptians on one side and the Red Sea on the other side, were totally dependent upon God at that moment. But it was Moses' strong faith in a powerful God that held steady the faltering and fearful Israelites.

As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!" Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still." Exodus 14:10-14.

But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. That day the Lord saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. And when the Israelites saw the great power the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant. Exodus 14:29-31.

CONCLUSION: Look again at the five-act Drama of Faith as seen in the life of Moses:

- (1) DARING FAITH (Takes Risks For God) - No Intimidation

- (2) LOYAL FAITH (Maintains Loyalty To God) - No Compromise
- (3) SUFFERING FAITH (Identifies With People Of God) - No Abandonment
- (4) BELIEVING FAITH (Confidence In the Promises Of God) - No Distrust
- (5) COURAGEOUS FAITH (Dependence Upon The Power Of God) - No Cowardice

No intimidation, but instead courage to take risks for God!

No compromise, but instead steadfastness to maintain loyalty to God!

No abandonment, but instead identification with the people of God!

No distrust, but instead confidence to believe in the promises of God!

No cowardice, but instead courage to depend upon the power of God!

Faith meets the challenge of every situation of life! Be, like Moses, a man of Faith!

MOSES' - FAITH AND OURS

Q U E S T I O N S

1. As a conscientious believer who seeks properly to respect man-made laws and to submit to God-ordained civil authorities (Roman 13), can you think of situations (as in the case of Moses' parents) when you (for conscience' sake) would have to obey 'God's higher laws' rather than conform to unjust laws of men? (Note Exodus 2:1-4; Hebrews 11:23; Acts 4:18-20)
2. How would you define 'intimidation' and why is 'intimidation' so hurtful to a believer's personal spiritual life and witness? (Note Romans 1:16 and Acts 4:5-30 and especially Acts 4:29)
3. Name as many examples, both from Bible times and from contemporary times, when God honored 'civil disobedience.' If a believer conscientiously disobeys a man-made law (or edict) which is unjust (evil), should the believer be expected to accept and to endure the consequences (such as imprisonment for such 'civil disobedience')? Do you agree with the following statement by Martin Luther King Jr; "One who breaks an unjust law must do so openly, lovingly and with a willingness to accept the penalty"?
4. What is your response to the following statement by Martin Luther King Jr. - a statement that expressed his 'daring faith' in the face of the widespread evil of racial discrimination: "I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of his community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for law"?
5. What does a 'daring faith' mean for a believer in our modern-world today? Can you share some specific illustrations?
6. Is it possible, as in the case of Moses, for parents to have a greater influence on their children than the godless influence of humanistic teachers in public schools? Is it not an unusual tribute to Moses' mother that she taught Moses so well about the true and the living God, that Moses forever identified with the people of God and with the truth of God rather than succumbing to the false teaching of Egyptian paganism to which Moses was exposed during his educational training in Egypt?

7. What kind of suffering can the person of faith expect, as he seeks to be loyal to God amidst a secular-oriented society? (Notes Hebrews 11:25-26) Do you agree with the following statement? "To choose God may mean to choose pain and persecution for a short time, but the pain of the world's persecution and rejection is more than compensated for by Christ's comfort and companionship which are lasting".
8. Considering the life of Moses, give your interpretation of the following statement: "The Christian is wise, for the Christian is a person with a long view."
9. Can you think of examples from the Bible or from modern history which illustrate the nobility of heroic Christians who were willing (in spite of great suffering) to identify with the people of God and with the truth of Christ rather than to succumb to the pressures of evil?
10. Give your interpretation of the following statement made by the Christian martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer: "If we claim to be Christians, there is no room for expediency."
11. Regarding those who suffer greatly for their faith in God and for their righteous stand against evil, what did Jesus say would be their future destiny? (Note Matthew 5:11,12)
12. Why is faith in God's promises always inseparably connected with careful obedience to God's command? (Note Hebrews 11:27,28). Is it not true to say that a believing faith is inseparably connected with an obedient faith? Do you agree with the following statement: "A believing faith is a faith that knows God will act on man's behalf in a saving way because man acts in an obedient way towards God"?
13. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Faith is not some kind of 'deposit' that God gives to man once-and-for-all that guarantees automatic security to man. Rather, faith is a dynamic relationship of love between God and man which must always be maintained by man's obedient response to God's call."
14. In light of the miracle at the Red Sea (Hebrews 11:29), what is your interpretation of the following statement: "Man's extremity is God's opportunity"?

15. Share an experience in your life when your faith in God's power resulted in a 'parting of the Red Sea' - in the accomplishment of a humanly-impossible feat! Do you firmly believe that:

"God specializes in things thought impossible,
He can do what no one else can do"?

C H A P T E R 16

UNDERSTANDING THE WAYS OF FAITH - BALANCED FAITH

HEBREWS 11:32 - 40

HEBREWS

UNDERSTANDING THE WAYS OF FAITH - BALANCED FAITH

O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 11:32-40

INTRODUCTION: Faith is one of the greatest themes of the New Testament. The word 'Faith' appears 234 times in the New Testament, and the word 'Believe' appears 251 times in the New Testament.

PROPOSITION: Faith sometimes removes the darkness, and at other times faith simply enables us to rejoice in the midst of the darkness. Sometimes Faith releases believers from death, and at other times faith releases one into heaven through death!

I. FAITH SOMETIMES CHANGES OUR CIRCUMSTANCES

II. FAITH SOMETIMES DOES NOT CHANGE OUR CIRCUMSTANCES

III. FAITH DOES NOT JUDGE GOD

IV. FAITH ALWAYS LEADS TO ULTIMATE VICTORY

CONCLUSION: Faith, in brief, is faithfulness to God, whether or not circumstances change and whether or not we can understand the present purposes in the present God-allowed circumstances. Faith does not judge God. Faith in God knows that God ultimately rewards all persons of faith - partially on earth and totally in heaven!

HEBREWS

UNDERSTANDING THE WAYS OF FAITH - BALANCED FAITH

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 11:32-40

INTRODUCTION: Faith is one of the greatest themes of the New Testament. The word 'Faith' appears 234 times in the New Testament, and the word 'Believe' appears 251 times in the New Testament. In other words, 'Faith' and 'Belief' together appear 485 times in the New Testament! Hebrews 11:6 says, "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."

'The Just shall live by faith' was the declaration of the prophet Habakkuk in the Old Testament. It was the same declaration made by Paul in the New Testament, and this was the resounding theme of the great Protestant Reformation, led by Martin Luther in the 16th century!

The book of Hebrews is the great book of faith, especially Hebrews 10:19-11:40.

How To Cultivate Your Faith: (Shared by John Maxwell)

- (1) Remember the times that God has honored your faith (Hebrews 10:32-34).
- (2) Look for opportunities to use your Faith (Hebrews 10:22-24).
- (3) Associate with people who will strengthen your faith (Hebrews 10:24-25).
- (4) Study the lives of Great Men of faith (Hebrews 11 is a documentary of great men of faith).
- (5) Understand the characteristics of faith (Hebrews 11:1-6).
- (6) Ask God to increase your faith (Note Mark 9:24 'Lord, help thou mine unbelief').

PROPOSITION: Faith always changes persons. Sometimes Faith directly changes our circumstances. Sometimes Faith changes only us. But Faith is the key to living successfully. Faith sometimes removes the difficulties. Faith can move mighty mountains or faith can enable us to climb over the mountain! Faith sometimes removes the darkness, and at other times faith simply enables us to rejoice in the midst of the darkness. Sometimes Faith releases believers from death, and at other times faith releases one into heaven through death!

I. FAITH SOMETIMES CHANGES OUR CIRCUMSTANCES

Hebrews 11:1-34a shows the power of faith to change circumstances.

And what more shall I say? Giden, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. (Hebrews 11:32-34)

Faith has the power to change everything around us - to level our mountains and to elevate our deep valleys. Faith in a Sovereign God is faith in one who has power to change the course of history and to turn bad circumstances into good circumstances. He has power to heal the sick, to give sight to the blind, and to give transformation to the fallen.

However, when God does change our circumstances, he first changes our attitudes, our very selves. He first changes believers before He changes the believers' circumstances. He changes doubt into faith, pride into humility, grumbling into gratitude.

After God changes us, then we are prepared to receive a miraculous change of circumstances, if such a change of circumstances is in God's will.

Also, being changed persons, we are now prepared to cooperate with God to change our circumstances if God wills for our external circumstances to change.

Many times God changes circumstances WITH us, not FOR us. While it is God's power alone that changes our circumstances, it is God's power that is coupled with man's obedience that produces miraculous changes in our circumstances. God's power coupled with Noah's obedience in building an ark, resulted in change of circumstances around Noah (i.e., destruction of evil inhabitants and a new beginning of the world through the flood). God's power was seen in sending the rain; Noah's obedience was seen in building the ark. Noah could not have sent the rain, and God chose not to build the ark. God and man worked together to produce the miracle!

II. FAITH SOMETIMES DOES NOT CHANGE OUR CIRCUMSTANCES

"Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging,

while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawn in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated - the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground." (Hebrews 11:35b-38)

Some men of great faith are delivered from the jaws of physical death; some other men of equally great faith are not delivered from death. Look at Acts 12:1-7. Both James and Peter were men of great faith, but James was killed for his faith at this time; Peter was miraculously delivered from prison.

The highest purpose of faith is not to change my circumstances (Although faith often does change my circumstances). The highest purpose of faith is to change me!

Paul was sent to prison in Rome because of his faith in Christ. His faith did not deliver him from prison, but Paul's faith enabled Paul to use his adverse circumstances in a most positive way. (Read Philippians 1:12-18)

Paul's difficult circumstances were not changed because of his faith. Rather, Paul's faith changed Paul into a most positive person, regardless of his circumstances. *"I want you to know, brethren, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the Gospel."* (Philippians 1:12) How did Paul's imprisonment enable Paul to advance the Gospel? (1) Roman pagans were converted, (2) Timid Christians were encouraged, (3) The Gospel message was spread. Paul got the best out of the worse, all because of the power of faith.

Look at Noah. The miracle of faith is first seen in the attitude of obedience demonstrated in Noah building an ark on dry ground before there had ever been a rain.

Look at Moses. The miracle of faith is seen in what faith did for Moses. The miracle was that Moses stuck out the rod, expecting the Red Sea to part! Before a miracle in circumstances took place (i.e. the parting of the Red Sea), there first had to be a miracle of changed attitudes in Moses. No longer was Moses the self-sufficient ruler as he was in his youth in Egypt. Now Moses was the mellowed and obedient servant of God who obeyed God when God told Moses simply to stick out his rod over the Red Sea and expect a miracle in changed circumstances!

Before circumstances changed because of faith, the person changed first. Faith changed Daniel before faith changed Daniel's circumstances, seen in the fact that Daniel could sleep in a lion's den. The three Hebrew children could

confidently go into the fiery furnace, not knowing when they entered whether or not they would live. The miracle is seen in the confidence of the men; later, the miracle of deliverance is realized. People themselves are changed before their circumstances, by faith, are changed.

Elijah, by faith, was a changed man before God sent fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice on the alter. Elijah's faith had changed him so much that he could saturate the sacrifices with water and stand confidently and boldly before the multitudes and declare that fire was soon coming from heaven to consume the sacrifices.

Faith changes the person before it changes the circumstances. If the circumstances change before I am changed, it is not faith. And even when faith is exercised, the circumstances do not always change. Faith always changes the person, and sometimes the person's circumstances.

Faith's primary goal is not to change circumstances. Faith's goal is to please God, regardless of the circumstances!

The greatest miracle of all is to endure hardship and to be faithful to God, regardless of circumstances. The proof of faith is not changed circumstances, but changed persons! Persons who learn to trust God, with or without changed circumstances, are persons of true faith. Being grateful to God and holding on to God, regardless of external results, is evidence of true faith.

Some mistakenly say that if one is not physically healed, it means that one does not have faith or that one has unconfessed sin in his life. Sometimes, however, the greatest men of faith have not been delivered from adverse circumstances.

Even those whose circumstances were amazingly changed because of their faith, were first changed personally before their circumstances were changed.

Job said, "Though he slay me, yet will I serve him." In other words, "Whether circumstances change or not, I will still serve God!"

"When Bunyan was due for trial he said: 'With God's comfort in my poor soul, before I went down to the justices, I begged of God that if I might do more good by being at liberty than in prison, that then I might be set at liberty. But if not, His will be done.'" (It was in prison that he wrote 'Pilgrim's Progress'!) (Barclay's Hebrews; page 146)

It is not wrong to pray for changed circumstances; what is wrong is to doubt God if, after praying for changed circumstances, the circumstances do not change!

Faith means trusting God regardless of whether or not our prayers to Him give us the results that we desire. Faith changes us first and oftentimes faith changes our bad circumstances into good circumstances. When that happens, let us rejoice exceedingly. When our circumstances are changed by faith, it is appropriate to rejoice exceedingly and give thanks to our God. When our circumstances are not changed, even though we have great faith, it is also appropriate to give thanks and praise to God, "In everything give thanks."

"No faith is mature if it thinks only of answers to prayer that come in the form of escape from loss and sorrow and pain. A London minister tells of a father whose son was fighting with the forces in France. 'At our prayer meetings,' said the pastor, 'he would earnestly pray that God would hide that soldier son beneath His wings. He once added with deep tenderness, "The bullet was never made that can pierce Thy wings." But the boy was killed all the same.'

"If this shakes us and threatens to turn confidence into cynicism, we should review the Bible's magnum opus on faith, the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. True, it tells of those who 'through faith escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens' (verse 34). But have you noticed the significance of a little phrase of two words that occurs twice - 'and others'? 'And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance. And others had trials of cruel mocking and scourging, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment; they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword.' (Verses 35-37)

"No wonder George Tyrell once set it down boldly: 'To believe that this terrible machine world is really from God, in God, and unto God and that through it and in spite of its blind fatality all works for good - that is faith in long trousers.'

"The faith that escapes trouble is often honored of God, but, equally, the faith that endures trouble." (Prayer and Life's Highest; page 96)

Perhaps the greatest man of faith in Christian history was the apostle Paul, and yet his faith did not deliver him from adverse circumstances. He writes. "*I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times*

I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea. I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from the rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches." (II Corinthians 11:23-28)

Suppose you have prayed and your adverse circumstances have not changed? What should you conclude? There are several possible answers to that question.

(1) It could mean that God is delaying His answer to change your circumstances, and while He is delaying, He is bringing about great and wonderful changes in YOU. Remember, the object of prayer is not primarily to give you something, but to make something out of you during the process of praying!

(2) It could mean that a lack of faith is hindering the answer. "But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does." (James 1:7,8)

(3) It could mean that you have unconfessed sin in your life. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." (Psalms 66:18)

(4) It could mean that God intends to change you - your attitudes toward God and life and others - instead of changing your difficult circumstances. (Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10) God did not remove the thorn in the flesh from the great man of faith - Paul. Why? Because God had higher purposes in mind than to simply heal Paul physically. Paul's character was perfected through his suffering. He was made more humble and more dependent upon God. Therefore, Paul's faith changed him even though it did not change his difficult circumstances. "Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me." (2 Corinthians 12:9)

One of the cruelest things you can say to a sincere believer, who is undergoing difficulty or sickness, is this: "You are not healed or delivered because you have lack of faith or you

have unconfessed sins in your life!" (This sounds like the advice and judgment that Job's 'friends' gave to Job when he was suffering adversity!)

(Illustration of a husband who said this to his dying Christian wife, who finally died, of cancer. She died without the comfort of her husband because her husband was wrongly taught that insufficient faith or unconfessed sins were the only two reasons why Christians are not healed! How sad and how unBiblical!)

III. FAITH DOES NOT JUDGE GOD

Decisions of faith that were made in Hebrews 11, were made in less than ideal situations. Decisions of faith were not made easily or during easy times.

Noah (verse 7). He prepared the ark, before he saw the results - before he experienced the reality of a rain storm, when people mocked him, before anyone wanted to get on the 'band wagon'.

Abraham (verse 8). He went out, not knowing where he was going. Decisions of faith are sometimes - if not most of the time - made during difficult times.

Moses (verses 24-27). He left Egypt when to leave meant leaving luxury and ease and popularity and security of home and the security of familiar surroundings. Moses left Egypt when he could have had everything in Egypt - wealth, comfort, popularity, advancement, etc. (Think of some who have been called to go to the mission fields when they were at the height of their careers.) Moses made a decision to give up comfort in Egypt to go to the wilderness to herd sheep. The decision of faith, made during a difficult time, eventually resulted in a great miracle - the crossing of the Red Sea! Many times in our lives, the 'Red Sea' miracles are the results of initial decisions of faith that were made, like in the case of Moses, during difficult times and after waiting long and patiently upon God, serving Him day-in and day-out (like Moses who herded sheep for forty years before the Red Sea experience)!

The decisions of faith are made on the basis of obedience to God, leaving the details and timing to God to work out. Problems come to the greatest of Christians. Don't ever conclude, if you are going through problems, that you don't have faith (and don't conclude this about some fellow believer who is experiencing adverse circumstances). And above all, don't judge God or become bitter towards God during difficult circumstances. Those in Hebrews 11:35-38 remained faithful to God, even unto death, without judging God or holding God

responsible for their difficulties. Remember, when faith and prayers do not remove the mountains, God intends to use the mountains to strengthen our spiritual 'muscles' while we are climbing over the mountains! The problems may cause many tears and bring many questions to mind. But remember, God never allows His children to shed 'needless tears'. God is a God of perfect love - He wants what is best for you.

If you are a person of faith, God may see that it is best to remove your mountain of difficulty quickly. He may see that it is best to remove your mountain of difficulty slowly. Or He may see that it is best not to remove the mountain of adverse circumstances at all, but instead to use the mountain of difficulty for your good and for God's glory.

Faith will always change you, but faith may or may not change your particular set of adverse circumstances. God knows best, therefore don't judge God for what He does with your circumstances.

When my brother lost his 15 year old daughter so tragically and suddenly, on August 14, 1981, he said, the very night of her death, "God makes no mistakes." His faith in God did not prevent his daughter's terrible death, but my brother did not judge his God. His faith enabled him to believe in a Good God, in spite of adverse circumstances. That is the greatest miracle of all! To believe, even when circumstances defy reason!

Faith enables us to accept difficult circumstances, as God's gymnasium for character development!

Faith keeps us true to God regardless of the circumstances, never judging God for our troubles and finding victory in spite of external adversities! "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?... Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:35-39)

IV. FAITH ALWAYS LEADS TO ULTIMATE VICTORY

If faith seems to go unrewarded on this planet and in this life, there will be an ultimate reward granted to the persons of faith after this life. *"And these men of faith, though they trusted God and won his approval, none of them received all that God had promised; for God wanted them to wait and share the even better rewards that were prepared for us."* (Hebrews 11:39,40; Living Bible)

Faith means being faithful to God and never judging God, regardless if the prayers of faith change the circumstances of the faithful one. The faithful one can be assured that faith will be ultimately rewarded in heaven and that God will be close to the faithful one during his pilgrimage on earth. "God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you..' So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?'" (Hebrews 13:5,6) Remember, this is God's promise to people of faith!

If you go through or are going through difficult times, keep your faith in God. He won't forsake you. He loves you. He is not removing your mountain of problems for a reason - a loving and redemptive reason. Don't fall from God. Don't start judging God or becoming bitter towards God. "So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, 'He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.' But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved." (Hebrews 10:35-39)

We too often, during adversity, as in the case of John the Baptist when he was in prison, become discouraged and need reassurance. (Note Matthew 11:2-6)

Jesus reassured John the Baptist and strengthened John's faith, by pointing John to Jesus' greatness and miracle power. He also encouraged John not to judge God because of his present difficult circumstances. "Blessed is he who takes no offense at Me, and finds no cause for stumbling in or through Me, and is not hindered from seeing the Truth." (Matthew 11:6 Amplified).

John the Baptist's faith resulted in John being beheaded by a wicked king! His faith did not deliver him from adversity, but his faith did keep him true rather than denying the Master, and his faith ushered him into heaven with all the rewards that heaven alone can give to the man of faith!

We too often see only today with today's problems, and fail to see the ultimate victory promised to persons of persevering faith. God's purpose may be to deliver His children from the fiery furnace, or it may be to allow His children to burn up in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:16-18).

Either way, the man of faith is victorious. Paul said, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." The man of faith can't lose!

It may be God's will to change our circumstances, or it may be God's will that we simply remain faithful to God in the midst of our difficult circumstances (Hebrews 11:1-34).

Perhaps the greatest heroes of faith are not those who saw mighty feats through their faith, but those who remained true to God even when their faith resulted in their persecution and eventual death (verses 35-38).

Whatever the immediate result of faith, the ultimate victory always belongs to God's people of faith!

CONCLUSION: Faith can move a mighty mountain or faith can enable us to climb over our mountains! Faith can remove the darkness, or faith can give us a song during our nights. Faith, in brief, is faithfulness to God, whether or not circumstances change and whether or not we can understand the present purposes in the present God-allowed circumstances. Faith does not judge God. Faith in God reassures one that God ultimately rewards all persons of faith - partially on earth and totally in heaven!

HEBREWS

UNDERSTANDING THE WAYS OF FAITH - BALANCED FAITH

1. As a counsellor of someone who is seeking to cultivate his faith in God, what advice and encouragement would you give?
2. Does Faith in God always change one's external circumstances? Why or why not? Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement:

"Faith sometimes removes the difficulties and sometimes faith enables us to live victoriously, in spite of the difficulties."
3. Give a personal illustration of the truth of the following statement: "When God does choose to change our circumstances, The first changes our attitudes, our very selves." Why is it important for the person himself to be changed before God miraculously changes circumstances in one's external environment? Is it true to say that often times God and Man work together to produce a miracle?
4. How do you explain the fact that some men of great faith are delivered from physical death and external adversities, while other men of equally great faith are not delivered from death, hardships, and physical infirmities? (Note Acts 12:1-7; Hebrews 11:32-40)
5. What was the miracle of changed attitudes that took place in the life of Moses, before Moses could enjoy a miracle of changed circumstances?
6. Cite several illustrations from the lives of Bible characters that demonstrate the truth of the following statement: "People themselves are changed before their circumstances, by faith, are changed."
7. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statements: "Faith's primary goal is not to change circumstances. Faith's goal is to please God, regardless of the circumstances. Persons who learn to trust God, with or without changed circumstances, are persons of true faith."
8. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Faith means trusting God regardless of whether or not our prayers to Him give us the results that we desire."

9. Tell what your response is to the following statement: "The faith that escapes trouble is often honored of God, but, equally, the faith that endures trouble."
10. Did the greatest man of faith in the history of the Church - the apostle Paul - always find deliverance from his adversities and infirmities? (Note II Corinthians 11:23-28; 12:7-10)
11. Suppose you have prayed and your adverse circumstances have not changed? What are some possible viable answers to this important question?
12. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The object of prayer is not primarily to give you something, but to make something out of you during the process of praying!"
13. What is one of the 'cruellest' things that one can say to a sincere believer who is undergoing difficulty or sickness?
14. From your own personal experience, or from your observation of others, tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Many times in our lives, the 'Red Sea' miracles are the results of initial decisions of faith that were made (like in the case of Moses) during difficult times and after waiting long and patiently upon God, serving Him day-in and day-out (like Moses who herded sheep for forty years before the Red Sea experience)!"
15. Does the following statement reflect an accurate understanding of faith as seen in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews: "When faith and prayers do not remove the 'mountains of difficulties', God intends to use the 'mountains' to strengthen our spiritual 'muscles' while we are climbing over the 'mountains'?"
16. How does contemplation upon God's love, wisdom, and power help you during your times of hardships and trials?
17. Illustrate the truth of the following statement: "Faith enables us to accept difficult circumstances as God's gymnasium for character development!"
18. How can you explain the fact that sometimes faith goes unrewarded in this earthly life? (Note Hebrews 11:39,40)

19. What are the greatest perils which the faithful face during times of great trials when prayers seem to go unanswered, and when promises seem to remain unfulfilled? (Note Hebrews 10:35-39) What is the result in the life of the person who 'shrinks back' and who abandons faith, according to Hebrews 10:39?
20. Do men of great faith sometimes become greatly discouraged? (Note Matthew 11:2-6) What ministry can you, as a sincere believer, have in the life of a fellow believer who has become discouraged, despondent, and doubtful? (Note Hebrews 10:24-25) Are believers, whose lives are full of difficulty, tempted to 'judge' God or to become bitter towards God? (Note Matthew 11:6)
21. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Perhaps the greatest heroes of faith are not those who saw mighty feats through their faith, but those who remained true to God even when their faith resulted in their persecution and eventual death."

C H A P T E R 17

RUNNING THE RACE OF LIFE!

HEBREWS 12:1 - 13

HEBREWS

RUNNING THE RACE OF LIFE!

O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 12:1-13

INTRODUCTION: The Christian Life is like a race - a long race! The 'starting line' is Christian Conversion. The 'finish line' is Death. Between the 'starting line' and the 'finish line' is the track of life where the Christian runs with endurance and perseverance.

PROPOSITION: Every Christian is in a race - a race, the outcome of which will determine the quality of his eternal rewards. Every Christian on the track of life is urged by his Divine Coach to "forge steadily onward."

I. The Goal of The Race

II. The Effort In The Race

III. The Obstacles In The Race

IV. The Encouragers During The Race

V. The Example For The Race

VI. The Enabler For The Race

VII. The Inspiration For The Race

VIII. The Discipline During The Race

CONCLUSION: Forging steadily onward in our race of life will finally bring us across the 'finish line' and into the arms of our loving God who Himself will award to us the 'crown of life'.

HEBREWS

RUNNING THE RACE OF LIFE!

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 12:1-13

INTRODUCTION: "Get on your mark, get set, Go!" Do these words sound familiar to you? Every child and teen who has ever run a race knows the meaning of these words. Every race has a 'starting line' and a 'finish line.' No race is easy, but for the winner there awaits some kind of award.

The Christian Life is like a race - a long race! The 'starting line' is Christian Conversion. The 'finish line' is Death. Between the 'starting line' and the 'finish line' is the track of life where the Christian runs with endurance and perseverance. How much effort is involved in 'running' for Christ? What are the obstacles which must be overcome if the spiritual runner is successfully to complete the race of life? Is there a cheering crowd in the grandstands to encourage the weary runner? Who is the best example of running the race, whose example ought to be modelled? From whence comes the energy and the power to run the race, and what motivates the runner to continue to run when he is weary or discouraged? For what purpose is the runner so strongly disciplined? These are the common and important questions that often are asked. To answer these questions is to understand the nature and the purpose of the spiritual race of life.

PROPOSITION: Every Christian is in a race - a race, the outcome of which will determine the quality of his eternal rewards. Every Christian on the track of life is urged by his Divine Coach to "forge steadily onward."

I. The Goal of The Race

The Goal of our spiritual race is nothing less than Christlikeness! "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith." (Hebrews 12:2a). We are to gaze at Jesus - His person and His purposes and His power to transform our human nature. Becoming Christlike in our responses and in our reactions, in the principles by which we live and in the priorities which we establish, in the words of our mouth and in the motives of our hearts, in the way we treat our neighbors and in the way we treat those who despise us - these indicate the degree of growth we have attained in our pursuit of a Christlike character. "The only aim that is worthy of a man to live for, as his supreme and dominant one, is that he shall be completely molded in character, disposition, nature, heart, and will into the likeness of Jesus Christ, who is the image of God." (Expositions of Holy Scriptures; Maclaren; Volume 16; page 179)

Christlike character is the pursuit of life, the goal of the spiritual race of life, the overriding objective never to be forgotten during the battles of life! The fruits of Christlike living are nine-fold: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. (Galatians 5:22,23)

II. The Effort In The Race

To reach such a worthy goal demands an all-out effort on the part of the earnest believer. Christlike character is both a gift and an achievement. No human can be Christlike unless God gives him a new heart - a gift of God's love. But, it is also true that no one can be Christlike without the exercise of supreme effort and faithful cooperation with the Living God!

As a runner taxes every muscle in his body and expands his lungs to the maximum in his strenuous effort to reach the 'finish line', so a sincere believer uses all the powers of his being to become a Christlike person. Great is his endurance, his persistence, his perseverance. But his effort is endurable and even pleasant, because he knows that God has assigned the duties to him personally. It is a God-appointed path that he is to run, and because God is never unreasonable, he knows that, even though the going may be rough at times, the goal is attainable and the finish line is reachable.

Notes Alexander Maclaren, "A great many Christian people seem to fancy that faith supersedes effort. Not so! It stimulates and strengthens effort. If I trust, I receive the power to run, but whether I shall really run or not depends on myself. God gives the ability in Jesus Christ, and then we have to use the ability, and to turn it into an actuality Unless we run we shall not advance, and unless we advance we shall not attain. Understand, then, that faith is the basis of effort, and effort is the crown of faith." (Expositions of Holy Scripture; Maclaren; Volume 16; page 185)

"Must I be carried to the skies
On flow'ry beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize,
And sailed thro' bloody seas?"

"Sure I must fight, if I would reign;
Increase my courage, Lord;
I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,
Supported by Thy word."
(Am I A Soldier of The Cross?)

It was John Wesley who declared that Methodists were people who were in "earnest to get to heaven." Is not

that an apt description of every true believer? Believers are those who have a concentration of purpose, a singleness in aim, and an intensity of effort. No slothfulness or self-indulgence, but a "determination which goes steadily on and which refuses to be deflected." (William Barclay)

III. The Obstacles In The Race

The goal of developing Christlike character makes the supreme efforts of the earnest believer all worthwhile. Putting forth supreme effort to live the Christlike life involves the putting off of all sins and all needless "weights" which hinder the runner in his race of life. *"Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles."* (Hebrews 12:1b)

Just as a runner runs best when he runs light, so a believer runs the spiritual race of life best when he is not incumbered with guilt. A clear conscience and a pure heart are great aids in living the Christian life! When King David failed to confess his sins, he found himself weighed down with an unbearable load of guilt. *"When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer."* (Psalms 32:3-4) The needed strength to run well is dissipated by the guilt of unconfessed sins. The believer is to throw off the obstacle through confession of his sins.

There are other obstacles which hinder one in his race besides the obstacle of outright sins. The believer is to lay aside every "weight" which slows down the Christian runner. "A 'weight' is that which, allowable in itself, legitimate, perhaps a blessing, the exercise of a power which God has given us - is, for some reason, a hindrance and impediment in our running the heavenly race...Sin is sin, whosoever does it; but weights may be weights to me, and not weights to you....The one is a legitimate thing turned to a false use; the other is always, and everywhere, and by whomsoever performed, a transgression of God's law." (Ibid; page 187)

"Weights" which must be thrown off are those legitimate desires and activities that have become an obsession for a believer, result of which is a loss of focus on Christ and a dissipation of spiritual energy, and a disinclination towards holy practices such as Scripture reading or prayer or regular church attendance. "There may be habits, there may be pleasures, there may be self-indulgences, there may be associations which hold us back

and hold us down. They have to be shed as the athlete sheds his outer cloak as he goes to the starting mark." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 96)

Getting sufficient sleep is legitimate, but sleeping late into the morning must be stopped if a lack of time for meaningful devotions is the result. Acquiring material possessions is legitimate, for God gave us a physical world in which to live and He has given us all things richly to enjoy, but if the acquiring of too many possessions is causing a depletion of monetary resources which should be used to meet basic family needs and spiritual needs within God's church, then a simpler lifestyle must be accepted. A desire for ease and relaxation is legitimate, but if pleasure has become too important, with the result of church and family duties being neglected, then a believer had better throw off some of his pleasure pursuits and accept a greater disciplined lifestyle. (I heard of one famous evangelist who became convicted because of the large amount of time he was spending playing golf. He felt that he had to give up this legitimate pursuit, to spend more time in spiritual ministry. There have been many believers who have gotten rid of their T.V. sets, for they found that they were spending far too much time seeking passively to be entertained by the T.V.).

"Seeing that we have a nature so weak and feeble, that temptations surround us so constantly, that so many things legitimate become to us harmful and sinful - the path of prudence, the safe path, is absolutely and utterly to put them away from us, and have nothing to do with them." (Alexander Maclaren; Ibid; 193)

IV. The Encouragers During The Race

During our Christian race of life, "we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses." (Hebrews 12:1)

Just as weary runners receive courage to continue to run because of the applause and cheers of the crowd in the grandstands, so spiritual runners on earth can gain great motivation to continue the race, because of the many heavenly witnesses in the grandstands, cheering them on!

Perhaps, although we cannot say with absolute certainty, the redeemed saints in heaven are looking down from their glorious abode, as spectators look down from a grandstand on the courageous runners on a track. William Barclay believes that such is the case: "It is of the very essence of life that life is lived in the gaze of the heroes of the faith who lived and suffered and died in

their day and generation. How can a man avoid the struggle for greatness with an audience like that looking down upon him?" (Barclay's Hebrews; page 196)

V. The Example For The Race

As spiritual runners on life's track, we are always to fix our gaze on Jesus whose example of courageous suffering and patient endurance is to be modelled. He *"endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God"*. (Hebrews 12:4)

When the going gets rough in the race of life, we must not forget that Jesus ran the race ahead of us, that He endured to the end, that eventually He was crowned with glory and honor in heaven! He is our perfect example. We must imitate Him. As beloved children of God, we are to imitate our Father.

Wrote Peter, *"To this you (Christians) were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly."* (I Peter 2:21-23)

Jesus was not only a perfect example in patient suffering at the hands of evil men, but Jesus was also the perfect example of humble servanthood. Said Jesus at the Last Supper with His disciples, just hours before His crucifixion, *"Now that I, your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."* (John 13:14-15)

Children learn by imitating their parents. Students learn by imitating their teachers. Beginning athletes learn by imitating mature and experienced athletes.

When do you learn how to run the spiritual race of life successfully? By looking at the perfect example of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospel accounts. 'What would Jesus do?' 'How would Jesus react?' 'How would Jesus think about this topic?' These are some of the questions which the believer asks, in his attempt to imitate the practical life of Jesus.

VI. The Enabler For The Race

For us who are runners in the spiritual race of life, Jesus is "the author and perfecter of our faith." (Hebrews 12:2a)

As weak humans, we need not only an example to imitate, but we need an inward enablement to give us the power to realize the high goals of Christlike living! "He is more than example. He gives us power to copy His fair pattern.....What we want is not the knowledge of what we ought to be, but the will and the power to be it. And that we get from Christ, and from Him alone. He stretches out His hand to hold us up in our poor struggles. His grace and His peace come into our hearts. Looking to Him, His Spirit enters our spirits, and we live, yet not we, but Christ liveth in us." (Alexander Maclaren; Ibid; page 175)

Someone wisely said, "It is not hard to live the Christian life, it is impossible if you try to live it by your own strength!" *It is Christ in us which is the hope of glory! It is the Holy Spirit who sheds abroad God's love in our hearts* (Romans 5:5). We fight with His strength; we make decisions with His wisdom; we love with His love; we witness with His boldness; we think with His thoughts. Wrote Paul, "*I have been crucified with Christ: the life I now live is not my life, but the life which Christ lives in me.*" (Galatians 2:20a; New English Bible)

Out of Christ's reservoir of glorious riches, He strengthens us with power through His Spirit in our inner being. (Note Ephesians 3:16). *He "is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us."* (Ephesians 3:20)

Christ will not run the race of life for us, but He will give us the needed energy and power, without which it would be impossible effectively to run the race of life. Jesus said, "Without me, ye can do nothing."

Christianity is not a mere system of theology or a code of ethics or a philosophy of life or a list of legalistic demands. Christianity is Christ indwelling the life and mind and will of the sincere believer. Christ living his life through a fully surrendered person - truly a supernatural life, a life lived in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus as an Example is wonderful. Jesus as an indwelling Enabler is even more wonderful! He shows us how to run the race, by running a perfect race ahead of us. He also energizes and empowers us, imparting to us the ability to live a Christlike life.

VII. The Inspiration For The Race

From whence do we as believers receive our inspiration and motivation for the race of life, in order that we may not grow weary and lose heart? *"Consider him (Christ) who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."* (Hebrews 12:3) Jesus left the glories of heaven to come to a sin-cursed earth. Jesus endured persecution, unjust treatment, a cruel death - all because he loved fallen creatures. He who was invested with the greatest honor that heaven could bestow, suffered the greatest humiliation that earth could give! Considering what Christ endured, no man on earth could come close to experiencing the depth of suffering that Christ went through!

"I gave My life for thee,
My precious blood I shed,
That thou might'st ransomed be,
And quickened from the dead;
I gave, I gave my life for thee,
What hast thou given to Me?"

"My Father's house of light.
My glory-circled throne
I left for earthly night,
For wanderings sad and lone;
I left, I left it all for thee,
Hast thou left aught for Me?"

"I suffered much for thee,
More than thy tongue can tell,
Of bitterest agony,
To rescue thee from hell;
I've borne, I've borne it all for thee,
What hast thou borne for Me?"

(I Gave My Life For Thee by
Frances Havergal)

The supreme suffering of Jesus is the greatest inspiration and motivation for us to endure hardships during our spiritual race of life. There is no way that we can adequately compare the limited sufferings that we endure to the supreme suffering that our Savior endured!

Also, the suffering we endure is not nearly as great as the suffering that some other believers have gone through. "In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood." (Hebrews 12:4) "Easy paths are appointed to us. We `have not yet resisted unto blood.' Let us run our smoother race with patience, as we think of those who ran theirs with bleeding feet." (Maclaren; Ibid; page 172) "They bare sword stabs; we have only to bear pin pricks. Stones were flung at them, as at Stephen outside the wall; handfuls of mud are all that we have to be afraid of." (Ibid; page 218)

VIII. The Discipline During The Race

In Hebrews 12:5-11. the analogy changes from a runner on the track of life, to a disciplined child in the care of a loving parent, but it will do no harm to continue to view the Christian as a runner (even as we look at the needed discipline that every child needs from the hand of a caring parent).

And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:5-11)

How can life, from a Biblical viewpoint, be described? It can be accurately described as a `training ground' a `discipline', a `school of learning', `a place for preparation'.

It must be assumed that man in his fallen and sinful state, needs forgiveness of his sins which only Christ can give, and that the converted man needs perfection of his character which, among other ways, is partly accomplished through the direct correction of the Lord and through the difficult

experiences of life's circumstances. This earthly life has been called a 'veil of tears', but, because God never allows His children to shed needless tears, this life is better described as a 'veil of character-making'. *"God disciplines us (Christians) for our good."* (Hebrews 12:10) God has high and noble purposes in mind for His children when He either directly sends affliction to them, or when He allows (as in the case of Job) Satan and Satan's agents to inflict pain on His children. *"The Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the first."* (Job 42:12)

It is love that motivates God in the discipline, correction, and instruction of His children. God has no evil purposes or motivations when He wields the rod of punishment or correction. Everything that befalls a believer is meant for loving education, cultivation of character, and ultimate preparation for heaven. Our Heavenly Father is preparing heaven for us, and He is preparing us for heaven. "If this life is education, as is obvious upon its very face, then there is a place where we shall exercise the faculties that we have acquired here, and manifest in loftier forms the characters which here we have made our own." (Maclaren; Ibid; page 222)

Wrote Paul, *"Moreover we know that to those who love God, who are called according to his plan, everything that happens fits into a pattern for good."* (Romans 8:28; Phillips) "If it be that all my life is paternal discipline, and that God makes no mistakes, then I can embrace whatever comes to me, and be sure that in it I shall find that which will be for my good." (Maclaren; Ibid; page 224)

SOME TIME WE'LL UNDERSTAND

Not now, but in the coming years,
It may be in the better land,
We'll read the meaning of our tears,
And there, some time, we'll understand.

We'll catch the broken thread again,
And finish what we here began;
Heav'n will the mysteries explain,
And then, ah, then, we'll understand.

We'll know why clouds instead of sun
Were over many a cherished plan;
Why song has ceased when scarce begun;
'Tis there, some time, we'll understand.

God knows the way, He holds the key,
He guides us with unerring hand;
Sometimes with tearless eyes we'll see;
Yes, there, up there, we'll understand.

Then trust in God through all thy days;
Fear not, for He doth hold thy hand.
Though dark thy way, still sing and praise,
Some time, some time, we'll understand.

Maxwell N. Cornelius

It is true that there is much about human suffering that we will never fully understand here on earth, but it is also true that we believers are always to remember that there is a redemptive purpose in all God-allowed suffering which Christians are called upon to endure. That redemptive purpose is described in these words from Hebrews: "that we (believers) may share in his (God's) holiness" (12:10). God commands: "Be ye holy, for I the Lord Thy God am holy." Heaven is a holy place, and God is raising up a holy people to someday dwell eternally in that holy place called heaven. To become pure in motives, undivided in the heart's affection, single-minded in the mind's thoughts, solidly committed in the will's decisions - all centered on Jesus Christ - this describes in brief the meaning of 'holiness'. A supreme preference for God, a wholehearted love for Christ, a life yielded totally to the Holy Spirit - this is the goal of life!

Of course, holiness realized in the lives of believers is not the result merely of external adversity rightly accepted, but it is the result first of the atoning work of Christ humbly accepted in the heart of the surrendered believer. But, while the cleansing blood of Jesus is the primary means by which holiness in the life of the sincere believer is realized, it is also true to say that the discipline of difficult circumstances and the chastening rod of the Lord's punishment are also effective means by which the Father of Love is able to accomplish His high goal of realized holiness in the lives of His growing children.

The affliction which God either directly sends or indirectly allows has redemptive benefits. Wrote David, "*Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word.*" (Psalms 119:67) Wrote Paul, "*These troubles and sufferings of ours are, after all, quite small and won't last very long. Yet this short time of distress will result in God's richest blessing upon us forever and ever!*" (II Corinthians 4:17; Living Bible)

"No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." (Hebrews 12:11; NIV)

Just as an athlete must undergo the discipline and rigors of hard training to prepare him for the difficult race, so the believer must submit himself to the Divine Coach whose purpose in rigorous training is good. Well do I recall my junior high school coach, whose training of us young teens the week before the state track meet, took on a rather strange form. He took us track boys out on a country road and put us in front of his old jeep and forced us to run several miles. His tooting horn did not allow us to slow down very often. This form of building physical endurance seemed harsh, but the result was a winning track team at the upcoming state track meet! Writes the author of Hebrews: *"Now obviously no 'chastening' seems pleasant at the time; it is in fact most unpleasant. Yet when it is all over we can see that it has quietly produced the fruit of real goodness in the characters of those who have accepted it in the right spirit."* (Hebrews 12:11; Phillips)

The wrong spirit, during times of discipline and correction and punishment, is rebellion and hardening of the heart. Affliction, rightly received in patience and humility, will result in greater love for God and a greater similitude to Jesus Christ's holy character. Depending upon the attitude with which we accept discipline, we will be either bitter or better, either more hardened or more tender, either more loving or more hateful, either sweeter in our temperament or more sour and resentful in our temperament, either more understanding and sympathetic towards others or more distant and estranged from our fellow men.

During the trials of life and the God-sent disciplines of life, some believers have loosened their grip and have tended to wander off the straight path, and have become limp in their feet and flagging in their zeal. To such weary Christians, whose response to discipline has been less than God intended, these words of exhortation are important: *"So tighten your loosening grip and steady your wavering hand. Don't wander away from the path but forge steadily onward. On the right path the limping foot recovers strength and does not collapse."* (Hebrews 12:12,13; Phillips)

The weary runner can be refreshed, the limping runner can be healed, the straying runner can be brought back to the course. Every runner on the track of life is called to "forge steadily onward."

CONCLUSION: To understand much about the spiritual race of life is to be better prepared to "forge steadily onward".

- (1) The Goal of the Race - Fixing our eyes on Jesus that we might become Christlike in character.
- (2) The Effort in the Race - Running with perseverance.

- (3) The Obstacles in the Race - Besetting sins and needless 'weights'.
- (4) The Encouragers during the Race - "A great cloud of witnesses" in the heavenly grandstands, cheering us on during our race.
- (5) The Example for the Race - Jesus, who "endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."
- (6) The Enabler for the Race - Jesus, who is "the author and perfecter of our faith."
- (7) The Inspiration for the Race - Jesus who endured the suffering of the cross, and former believers whose suffering for Jesus was great, as evidenced by their shed blood.
- (8) The Discipline during the Race - "God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness."

The only thing that remains to be said is this: There is a glorious reward awaiting those who run well and who cross the 'finish line' at the end of life's race. Wrote Paul at the conclusion of his life: "I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day - and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing." (2 Timothy 4:7-8)

Forging steadily onward in our race of life will finally bring us across the 'finish line' and into the arms of our loving God who Himself will award to us the 'crown of life'.

"Oh, that will be glory for me,
When I shall look upon His face!"

Wrote Paul, "*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*" (Romans 8:18; NIV)

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him." (I Corinthians 2:9; NIV)

Forge ahead, runner! Forge ahead in your race of life!

RUNNING THE RACE OF LIFE!

Q U E S T I O N S

1. According to Hebrews 12:2a, what is the goal of our spiritual race of life?
2. If we are saved by faith, why should a human effort be considered as an indispensable condition for successful Christian living? (Note Hebrews 12:1b) What is the relationship between faith and human effort, in living the Christian life? Tell to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements: "If I trust, I receive the power to run, but whether I shall really run or not depends on myself. God gives the ability in Jesus Christ, and then we have to use the ability, and to turn it into an actuality."
3. According to Hebrews 12:1b, in general terms, what are the two big obstacles which hinder the Christian in his spiritual race?
4. Share specifically one or more of the 'weights' which you had to "throw off" in order to run the race of life with greater freedom and less hindrance. Is it accurate to say that what is a 'weight' to one Christian may not be a 'weight' to another Christian? Why or why not?
5. Is there any evidence from Scripture that heavenly saints are spectators and encouragers of spiritual runners on the 'track of life'? (Note Hebrews 12:1)
6. What actions or reactions or attitudes of Jesus, while he lived on earth, provide a perfect example for present believers who are 'running hard' on the track of life? (Note Hebrews 12:4) (Note also I Peter 2:21-23 and John 13:14-15)
7. Tell to what extent you agree with the following statement: "As weak humans, we need not only an example to imitate, but we need an inward enablement to give us the power to realize the high goals of Christlike living!"
8. As the "author and perfecter" of your faith, share specific ways in which Jesus has enabled you to live an effective Christian life.

Give your comments (responses or reactions) to the following statements: "It is not hard to live the Christian life, it is impossible if you try to live it on your own strength. As Christians, we fight with His

strength, we make decisions with His wisdom, we love with His love, we witness with His boldness, we think with His thoughts. Christianity is not a mere system of theology or a code of ethics or a philosophy of life or a list of legalistic demands. Christianity is Christ indwelling the life and the mind and the will of the sincere believer." (Note Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 3:16,20; Romans 5:5)

9. From whence do we believers receive our inspiration and motivation for the race of life, in order that we may not grow weary and lose heart? (Note Hebrews 12:3-4)
10. How should the fact that former saints have suffered far more for Christ's sake than we have suffered for Him, help make our own spiritual race more endurable? (Hebrews 12:4)
11. Why, according to Hebrews 12:5-11, is this earthly life for the believer more a 'veil of character-making' than merely a 'veil of tears'? (Note Hebrews 12:10) Tell to what extent you agree with the following statement: "Everything that befalls a believer is meant for loving education, cultivation of character, and ultimate preparation for heaven." (Note Romans 8:28)
12. If cultivation of Christlike character ("sharing in God's holiness" - Hebrews 12:10) is the ultimate purpose of all God-given or God-allowed discipline of the believers, how concretely would you describe "a life of holiness"?
13. Tell to what extent you agree with the following description of the life of "holiness": "To become pure in motives, undivided in the heart's affection, single-minded in the mind's thoughts, solidly committed in the will's decisions - all centered on Jesus Christ - this describes in brief the meaning of 'holiness'. A supreme preference for God, a wholehearted love for Christ, a life totally yielded to the Holy Spirit - this is the goal of life!"
14. While it is true that the cleansing blood of Jesus is the primary means by which holiness in the life of the sincere believer is realized, to what extent do the disciplines of difficult circumstances and the chastening rod of the Lord's punishment help in the accomplishment of God's high goal of realized holiness in the lives of God's growing children? (Note Psalms 119:67; II Corinthians 4:17; Hebrews 12:11)

15. What peril must a believer avoid during those times when he is battered by the trials of difficult circumstances, or when he is chastened by the rod of God's direct punishment?

16. What command is given to believers who find themselves weakened during the hard "race of life"? (Hebrews 12:12-13)

17. From your own life or from your observation of others, give a specific illustration which demonstrates the truth of the following statements: "Affliction, rightly received in patience and humility, will result in greater love for God and a greater similitude to Jesus Christ's holy character. Depending upon the attitude with which we accept discipline, we will be either bitter or better, either more hardened or more tender, either more loving or more sour and resentful in our temperament, either more understanding and sympathetic towards others or more istant and estranged from our fellowmen."

C H A P T E R 18

CULTIVATING A CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER (PART I)

HEBREWS 12:14 - 17

HEBREWS

CULTIVATING A CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER (Part I)

O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 12:14-17

INTRODUCTION: Is the Christian life a gift from God, or is the Christian life an achievement of man? It is both a gift and an achievement! One cannot be Christlike without God's empowerment, but neither can one be Christlike without the exercise of great human effort and discipline!

PROPOSITION: There are certain commands and specific instructions given to the believer. Following these instructions carefully will result in the cultivation of Christlike character. Here are the six commands which every sincere believer must follow if he is to become a godly person:

- (1) Live at Peace with all persons (No Discord)
- (2) Strive for Holiness in all things (No Worldliness)
- (3) Respond to Grace at all times (No Drifting)
- (4) Commit to Compassion among all relationships (No Bitterness)
- (5) Guard against Impurity in all actions (No Lust)
- (6) Focus on Reverence in all attitudes (No Self-Centeredness)

CONCLUSION: Cultivation of a Christlike character is not easy, for at least two reasons. First, much time and patience is involved in this worthy pursuit. Second, there are many various character qualities which need great attention, if a balanced character is developed.

HEBREWS

CULTIVATING A CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER (Part I)

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 12:14-17

INTRODUCTION: Is the Christian life a gift from God, or is the Christian life an achievement of man? It is both a gift and an achievement! One cannot be Christlike without God's empowerment, but neither can one be Christlike without the exercise of great human effort and discipline! Both God and Man work together cooperatively to accomplish character development. God gives the power and man gives the willingness! God takes the initiative and man gives the response. God gives the commands and man gives the obedience. God gives the grace and man receives the gift of grace by faith!

PROPOSITION: There are certain commands and specific instructions given to the believer. Following these instructions carefully will result in the cultivation of Christlike character. Here are the six commands which every sincere believer must follow if he is to become a godly person:

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We shall look at the first three commands in this message, and the last three commands in following messages.

I. Live At Peace With All Persons (No Discord)

"Make every effort to live in peace with all men." (Hebrews 12:14a) Have you ever wished that every one could get along with one another? Why are there racial conflicts, and why is there a 'generation gap'? There are conflicts over styles, tastes, and outlooks and philosophies. Why can't Protestants and Catholics in Ireland get along, in spite of the various ideological differences? Why can't the various classes--rich and poor--accept each other instead of contemptuously and suspiciously looking down on each other? Why can't people whose temperaments and personalities are so different get along, accepting differences without allowing those differences to become barriers of misunderstanding?

These are the concerns which Paul dealt with in the Book of Ephesians. The gathering together of all things in Jesus Christ is the key theme of Ephesians. Unity, reconciliation, and peace are the key words of the Book. In Ephesians 2:14-18 we have a 'Profile of Peace'. The Profile of peace is shown in five ways: (1) Source of Peace--Christ; (2) Instrument of Peace--Blood of the Cross; (3) Purpose of Peace--Reconciliation; (4) Foundation of Peace--Love; (5) Meaning of Peace--Unity amidst Diversity.

Ephesians 2:14 says that Christ is our Peace. If Christ is the source of peace, it is the blood of the Cross which is the instrument of peace. There is no cheap peace, either between God and man or between man and man. Sin has destroyed the peaceful relationships between God and man and between man and man. It is through "*the blood of Christ*" (Ephesians 2:13), by the '*flesh*' of Christ (Ephesians 2:14), that the dividing walls of hostility can be destroyed and that peace can be established! There is no easy peace. Christ is the author of peace, but not even Christ could bring peace without the suffering and the blood of the Cross! It is "*through the Cross*" (Ephesians 2:16) that God is able to reconcile man to Himself and to reconcile man to his fellowman.

What a message to our world! Many there are who talk about peace today! But they don't know either the source of peace (Christ), nor the costly instrument of peace (the blood of Christ's cross). They don't discern the seriousness of man's problem of estrangement! They are like the false prophets of Israel: "*They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace', they say, when there is no peace.*" (Jeremiah 8:11)

Men look to other sources of peace outside of Christ--sources like peace treaties, councils, the United Nations, military armaments, education, etc. As earnest as man's attempts are to find peace, there is no peace outside of Christ! Christ alone is the Author of peace, and his Cross alone is the Instrument of peace between God and man and between man and man!

"O Father, I am restless until I rest in thee, and yet I cannot rest in you without coming to your Son, whose blood alone can affect a reconciliation between You and me. The blood of your Son is able to cleanse me at the deepest level of my sins, and to speak peace to my troubled soul. Hallelujah!"

It is true that Christ alone is the Source of true peace, but it is also true that believers must exercise great effort to bring peace to the world of men which too often is filled with strife and jealousy and hatred. Christians are called to the

ministry of reconciliation, to the task of breaking down artificial barriers which divide men from men, to the challenge of putting 'oil' on the 'troubled waters' of conflict between people of different races and cultures and religions and ideologies. Said Jesus, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." (Matthew 5:9). Helping to establish peace among divided people is doing a Godlike work!

When a person is wronged, the natural tendency is to "fight back", to render "evil for evil," to be vengeful and to try to "balance the books," to "take the law into his own hands." But what saith the Scriptures?

"Never pay back evil for evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honest clear through. Don't quarrel with anyone. Be at peace with everyone, just as much as possible. Dear friends, never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God, for he has said that he will repay those who deserve it. (Don't take the law into your own hands.) Instead, feed your enemy if he is hungry. If he is thirsty give him something to drink and you will be 'heaping coals of fire on his head.' In other words, he will feel ashamed of himself for what he has done to you. Don't let evil get the upper hand but conquer evil by doing good." (Romans 12:17-21, Living Bible)

Not only are Christians called to make peace with their "enemies," but they are also called to maintain peace among fellow believers. Maintaining unity and harmony and understanding among fellow believers within the context of the church, is one of the characteristics of a true believer. A mature Christian is not thinking about his own rights, and he is not defensive in his reactions or needlessly offensive in his relationship to fellow believers.

Concerning this attitude of humility, Paul wrote, "*Let us therefore stop turning critical eyes on one another. If we must be critical, let us be critical of our own conduct and see that we do nothing to make a brother stumble or fall.....You mustn't let something that is all right for you look like an evil practice to somebody else. After all, the kingdom of Heaven is not a matter of whether you get what you like to eat and drink, but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. If you put these things first in serving Christ you will please God and are not likely to offend men. So let us concentrate on the things which make for harmony, and on the growth of one another's character." (Romans 14:13-19, Phillips)*

The worldly wise man is a man who seeks his own good, i.e., he is self-centered. As a self-centered and proud man, he

exploits others for his own selfish advantage. He is competitive and contentious, and therefore he either becomes proud when he outdoes someone else or he becomes jealous when someone else overshadows him! Either way, there is no peace or harmony in human relationships. Notes James, the brother of Jesus:

Are there some wise and understanding men among you? Then your lives will be an example of the humility that is born of true wisdom. But if your heart is full of rivalry and bitter jealousy, then do not boast of your wisdom - don't deny the truth that you must recognize in your inmost heart. You may acquire a certain superficial wisdom, but it does not come from God - it comes from this world, from your own lower nature, even from the devil. For wherever you find jealousy and rivalry you also find disharmony and all other kinds of evil. The wisdom that comes from God is just, utterly pure, then peace-loving, gentle, approachable, full of tolerant thoughts and kindly actions, with no breath of favoritism or hint of hypocrisy. And the wise are peacemakers who go on quietly sowing for a harvest of righteousness - in other people and in themselves. James 3:13-18, Phillips

According to Galatians 5:22, Peace is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, and therefore the manifestation of peace in a man's life is evidence that he is a Spirit-led believer.

But, even though peace is a fruit of the Spirit, it is also the result of earnest effort on the part of the sincere believer. Many different Scriptures urge believers to cultivate peace, to pursue peace, to strive for peace. Hebrews 12:14 (which is our present focus in this message) says, *"Let it be your ambition to live at peace with all men."* (Phillips) *"Aim at peace with all men."* (NEB) *"Try to stay out of all quarrels."* (Living Bible) *"Always be wanting peace with all people."* (Jerusalem Bible)

He who is at peace with God, because of obedience to God's laws and submission to God's Son, is he who seeks to encourage peaceful relationships with all men. He seeks nothing but his neighbor's good; he forgives quickly and he reconciles totally; he seeks to bring the "unity of the faith in the bond of peace" to the entire Church of Christ. Although peace is a gift of God and a fruit of the Holy Spirit, peace is also "the product of effort and discipline and mental and spiritual toil and sweat." (Barclay's Hebrews page 206)

A true Christian guards against being highly opinionated, overly-sensitive, easily offended, argumentative, and generally quarrelsome. There are some people whose presence spells peace and harmony and good will. They are not

competitive or contentious or jealous. They are so easy to get along with, predictable in actions, and stable in emotions, and tolerant in attitudes. Not overbearing, and always ready to listen and open to reason and willing to change without compromising basic moral principles. Such persons are peace-lovers, sons and daughters of the living God! *"Happy are those who strive for peace - they shall be called the sons of God."* (Matthew 5:9, Living Bible)

In contrast to the godly person, the wicked person *"stirs up trouble everywhere."* (Proverbs 6:14, Living Bible) Of the seven things which God hates, one of them is *"sowing discord among brethren."* (Proverbs 6:19) True Christians are to *"make every effort to live at peace with all men."* (Hebrews 12:14a)

II. Strive For Holiness In All Things (No Worldliness)

"Make every effort...to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord." (Hebrews 12:14)

'Holiness' means basically two things: Separation and Purity. Because all humans are sinners, the first step towards becoming holy is the step of repentance. Repentance means a change of mind from an attitude of embracing sin to an attitude of forsaking sin. A sinner, through repentance, separates himself from an outward practice of willful transgression against the known laws of God. The Bible says, regarding separation from a practice of sin: *"Therefore come out from them and be separate. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."* (II Corinthians 6:17-18, NIV)

Holiness, as understood in the deeper sense of the term, is inward purity. Motives are purified from being self-centered to being Christ-centered. The will is fixed on pleasing Christ alone, not on the dictates of one's own selfish purposes. The affections are set on loving God supremely and one's neighbor as himself. The person who is seeking to be holy, is the one whose mind is filled with God's thoughts. He is not double-minded, for a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways (James 1:8). He is not carnally-minded, for a carnally-minded man thinks more like a man of the world than like a man of God (I Corinthians 3:1-4; Romans 12:1-2). He who is seeking holiness is he who is seeking to be like God in actions and in attitudes, for God commanded *"Be ye holy, for I the Lord thy God am holy"* (I Peter 1:16). *He who is pursuing God is he who is offering the parts of his body "in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness."* (Romans 6:20)

Not only does such a Christian separate himself from obvious worldly practices and attitudes, but he also consecrates himself to God and to God's purposes. Separation from the negative and separation to the positive. Wrote Paul, *"With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship, to give him your bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to him and acceptable by him. Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God remold your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves toward the goal of true maturity."* (Romans 12:1-2, Phillips)

Notes Bishop Bastian, "Holiness of heart suggests that, at the center of one's being, Jesus Christ rules in the power of the Holy Spirit. Holiness of life suggests that, as a consequence, one's daily walk increasingly reflects Christ's kind of concerns and conduct at the personal, family, and social levels." (Adventures In Church Membership; page 84)

Christians, whose pursuit in life is holiness, always carefully guard against falling into the traps of obvious worldly practices and worldly philosophies. The greatest battlefield today is the battlefield of ideas. Wrote Paul, *"See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ."* (Colossians 2:8)

'Sanctification' is another word for 'holiness'. Being "born of the Spirit" is a description of conversion or initial sanctification. Being "filled with the Spirit" is a description of full or entire sanctification. Learning to "walk in the Spirit" is a description of progressive sanctification. E. Stanley Jones gives a practical description of what it means to "walk in the Spirit", especially as this relates to daily surrender of our will to God's will. "You have said 'All' to Him and He has said 'All' to you. But there are a lot of little 'alls' under the big 'All'. They will come up day by day and little surrenders will have to be made, made about things and issues you did not realize would be involved. So the surrender is a blanket once-for-all surrender, but also an unfolding surrender. As you have given all you know and all you don't know, the 'don't know's' have to be dealt with as they arise. How? By a continual surrender. You do not fight or suppress the issue, you turn it over to Him and say: 'I am Yours and this thing concerns me, so this is Yours, too. I surrender it. Tell me what to do about it.' That keeps problems and issues from piling up and making you tense and burdened. It is a continual catharsis. You are saved from the tension that comes from suppressing things and driving them into the

subconscious sphere where they fester, and also from evading the issues in which case they nag us from the margin of consciousness. You are fulfilling that verse, *'But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin'*. (I John 1:7) By walking in the light, holding nothing back, you have a continuous fellowship with Christ and a continuous cleansing of your problems and sins. It is a working way to live." (Victory Through Surrender; E. S. Jones; page 10)

Holiness is both the work of God and the achievement of the earnest believer. The *'blood of Jesus'* alone can cleanse away sin from the human heart through the agency of the Holy Spirit, but this sanctifying work of God can only be accomplished in the hearts of willing and cooperative believers. Without the glad response of surrender, there will be no holiness wrought in the heart of the believer.

Jesus is the Vine and believers are the branches. Spiritual life comes from the Vine, and the life which the branch calls its own, is really the borrowed life of Christ. Abiding in the Vine is the secret to enjoying the life of the Vine. (John 15)

Notes Sangster, "Holiness is a moment-by-moment life.....Life in God is like breathing: drawing in the life-giving Breath of the Spirit and exhaling the breath devitalized by use....'Moment by moment I'm kept in His love....'" (William Sangster's Daily Readings)

What can you, as a sincere believer, do to show to yourself and to your God that you are making *"every effort to be holy"* (Hebrews 12:14)? (1) You can separate yourself from any known sin in your life, whether it is a sinful habit or sinful speech or sinful associations or sinful attitudes. (2) You can surrender your heart daily to the cleansing blood of Jesus, that Jesus may cleanse your heart by faith, and that Jesus may perfect your motives and center them on God's purposes; (3) You can take time to be alone with Jesus, to learn from His Word and to listen for His voice; (4) You can associate with holy people, either in person or by reading biographies of holy people. If you want to cultivate holiness in your life, here is some wise advice from William Sangster: "Let him (the sincere believer) examine the lives of the saints. Let him think on those obscure disciples he has met on the road of life who seemed always to have the breath of God about them. Let him be unhurried and teachable. And he will then find that, so far from holiness repelling him, it will fascinate and awe and subdue him. Adoration will stir in his soul. He will wonder at all God can do with human nature and sink to his knees in marvel and surprise. Unutterable

longings will awake in him and he will catch himself shaping the question 'Even me?'" (Daily Readings; Sangster; page 13)
(5) You can see yourself as the person God wants you to be - more and more Christlike, clothed with the garments of God's holiness. Notes Sangster, "Stand on His promise and believe that His grace is greater than your inbred sin. See yourself as He would make you....Say to yourself (as you forget yourself in the service of others) 'He intends this. It is His Will. Nothing can ultimately defeat the purpose of God. He will make me holy.'....At the beginning of each new day.....see yourself in Him. It is still you...but oh! how different: Christ formed afresh in you. Positively (in imagination) see it done. Hold it clear in your mind and warm in your heart, and say to yourself

'The most impossible of all
Is that I e'er from sin should cease.
Yet shall it be, I know it shall,
Jesus, look to thy faithfulness....

And He will look to it....It is the deep unbelief in God's power to change us which keeps us unchanged - negative, inferior, jealous, ill-tempered, sour and mean. Faith for the opposite would open our hearts to all the resources of heaven and we should witness the miracle of a personality truly changed. He is able. He is willing. Doubt no more." (Daily Readings, Sangster; page 131)

Hebrews 12:14 says, "Make every effort....to be holy." These are five ways to demonstrate your great effort to become holy. "Though holiness is the filling of man's spirit by the Spirit of God, yet there are certain very important conditions to be observed by us if we would secure and enjoy that blessed gift." (The Way Into The Holiest; F.B. Meyer; page 153)

"Take time to be holy, The world rushes on;
Spend much time in secret with Jesus alone;
By looking to Jesus, Like Him Thou shalt be;
Thy friends in they conduct His likeness shall see."

"Take time to be holy, Let Him be thy Guide,
And run not before Him, Whatever betide;
In joy or in sorrow, still follow thy Lord,
And, looking to Jesus, still trust in His Word."

"Take time to be holy, Be calm in thy soul;
Each thought and each motive beneath His control;
Thus led by His Spirit to fountains of love,
Thou soon shalt be fitted for service above."

(Take Time To Be Holy)

Hebrews 12:14 says, "Without holiness no one will see the Lord." It is only those who are pure in heart (i.e., who are holy) who shall see God (Note Matthew 5:8). This is true, both in time and in eternity. Only those who have pure hearts - hearts set on God - can see God in the commonplace events of life, in the workings of nature, in the faces of people, in the mysterious and providentially-guided events of history, in the unpredictable joys and sorrows of life's happenings, in the movements of men and nations. Only the man whose overriding quest in life is Christlikeness - i.e., the holiness of God - can make sense out of the "maze" of life on this earth, and can see "below the surface" and can "read between the lines" of life's events.

Also, it is only the pure in heart who can see God in heaven. Nothing impure will enter heaven, but only those whose "garments are washed in the blood of the Lamb." Only those whose hearts are pure on earth can meet a God of purity in heaven!

III. Respond To Grace At All Times (No Drifting)

"See to it that no one misses the grace of God." (Hebrews 12:15)

"Grace" can be defined as God's "unmerited favor." God favors the human race even though the human race deserves the death penalty. Through the life and ministry of Jesus, God's grace has appeared to mankind. God wills to save all, and through Christ's atoning blood, God has provided the means by which all can be saved.

The "grace of God" refers to the state of salvation made possible through the death of Christ. It means the Gospel system or Christianity. (Adam Clarke)

This is a warning against apostasy, i.e., leaving the secure position of salvation which one enjoys because of his dynamic and up-to-date relationship with Christ. To miss the grace of God is to miss the benefits of God's salvation - rescue from sin's bondage and guilt and final condemnation. The purpose for which the Hebrew epistle was written was to warn believers against the peril of spiritual apostasy, the tragedy of missing out on the enjoyment of God's saving grace.

Apostasy can be the result of many things, some of which we must look at presently. But the main warning is against becoming a laggard, a drifter. "The idea is borrowed from a party of travellers, some of whom lag behind." (F.B. Meyer)

Notes William Barclay, "It is easy to straggle away, to linger behind, to drift instead of to march, and so to miss the grace

of God. There is no opportunity in this life which cannot be missed." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 207)

There are many perils against which earnest believers must constantly guard throughout life. What causes some one-time believers to lag behind, to drift away, to leave the Christian fellowship? There are multiple reasons why one-time believers no longer find themselves responding to the grace initiative of God. Let us think of a few of those reasons.

Some believers fail to respond to the grace of God because of listlessness. The writer to the Hebrew believers earlier gave a warning against negligence in his letter: *"So we must listen very carefully to the truths we have heard, or we may drift away from them. For since the messages from angels have always proved true and people have always been punished for disobeying them, what makes us think that we can escape if we are indifferent to this great salvation announced by the Lord Jesus himself, and passed on to us by those who heard him speak?"* (Hebrews 2:1-3, Living Bible)

Some believers fail to respond to the grace of God because of lukewarmness. To the Laodicean believers came this warning: *"I know you well - you are neither hot nor cold; I wish you were one or the other! But since you are merely lukewarm, I will spit you out of my mouth!"* (Revelations 3:15-16, Living Bible)

Some believers fail to respond to the grace of God - i.e., to God's offer of present and ultimate salvation from sin - because of preoccupation with the cares of everyday living. In His parable of the Four Soils, Jesus describes the peril which everyone who is a Christian must face: *"And the seed sown among the thorns represents the people who hear the message and go on their way, and with the worries and riches and pleasures of living, the life is choked out of them, and in the end they produce nothing."* (Matthew 13:22)

Some believers fail to respond to the grace of God because of an unbelieving heart. If we are saved by placing our faith in God, it is also true to say that we continue to enjoy God's salvation because of maintaining our faith in God. It is he who continues to believe who continues to enjoy eternal life which is God's gift. Not momentary faith, but faith which is maintained and which grows. God says, *"Be faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."* A life of faithlessness forfeits eternal life! God's grace initiative must always be met with man's faith response. God's faithfulness in offering salvation is never in question; man's response of faith is always in question until the day that the believer's spirit leaves his physical frame!

"Beware then of your hearts, dear brothers, lest you find that they, too, are evil and unbelieving and are leading you away from the living God. Speak to each other about these things every day while there is still time, so that none of you will become hardened against God, being blinded by the glamour of sin. For if we are faithful to the end, trusting God just as we did when we first became Christians, we will share in all that belongs to Christ." (Hebrews 3:12-14, Living Bible)

Some believers fail to respond to the grace of God because of disobedience. "Although God's promise still stands - his promise that all may enter his place of rest - we ought to tremble with fear because some of you may be on the verge of failing to get there after all.....let us do our best to go into that place of rest, too, being careful not to disobey God as the children of Israel did, thus failing to get in." (Hebrews 4:1, 11, Living Bible)

Some believers fail to respond to the grace of God - i.e., to God's continuing offer of salvation from sin - because they become ensnared by false teachings which are spread by rebellious persons. It is most tragic that many present-day cultists were one-time evangelical believers! They allowed themselves to come under the influence of evil teachings, teachings which deny the grace of God! Peter warned believers to guard against the influence of evil persons. "I am warning you ahead of time, dear brothers, so that you can watch out and not be carried away by the mistakes of these wicked men, lest you yourselves become mixed up too. But grow in spiritual strength and become better acquainted with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be all glory and splendid honor, both now and forevermore." (II Peter 3:17-18, Living Bible)

It is one thing to know the causes for missing the grace of God - the reasons for apostasy - but it is another thing to take aggressive action to avoid apostasy. What can you do to assure yourself that you will always respond to God's grace?

(1) Open your ears and learn to listen carefully to the voice of God, as communicated to you through the words of the Bible, or through the lips of godly teachers and counsellors, or through the dictates of the Holy Spirit as He speaks to your sensitized conscience. This means that you must cut out needless distractions - the noise of the world which drowns out the voice of God. God says, "Be still and know that I am God." Do not be afraid of quietness and solitude, for these are the prerequisites for spiritual communication.

(2) Keep the "altar of your heart" aflame with the love of God, and keep aglow with the zeal of the Lord. Pray daily that you will remain "on fire" for the Lord. Wrote Paul to the Romans, *"Let us not allow slackness to spoil our work and let us keep the fires of the spirit burning, as we do our work for the Lord."* (Romans 12:11, Phillips). Daily stoke the coals on the "altar of your heart." *"Do not put out the Spirit's fire."* (I Thessalonians 5:19, NIV) Never allow yourself to become lukewarm or indifferent towards the work of God, the Church of Christ, or the servants of the Lord.

(3) Don't allow your mind to become worry-worn, distracted by the many cares and concerns of everyday living. Wrote Paul, *"Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything; tell God your needs and don't forget to thank him for his answers."* (Philippians 4:6, Living Bible)

Many have fallen out of grace because they have fallen into fear and worry and anxiety. *If God cares for the birds of the air, will He not much more care for you? Aren't you much more valuable to him than they are? Can any of you, however much he worries, make himself even a few inches taller?"* (Matthew 6:26-27, Phillips) Someone vividly said, "Worry is 'practical atheism', for worry fails to take God seriously."

(4) Be careful to keep money in its place - as your servant, not as your master. Jesus said, *"You cannot serve both God and money. You must serve one or the other."* Many have fallen out of grace because they have fallen into the trap of materialism. *"People who long to be rich soon begin to do all kinds of wrong things to get money, things that hurt them and make them evil-minded and finally send them to hell itself. For the love of money is the first step toward all kinds of sin. Some people have even turned away from God because of their love for it, and as a result have pierced themselves with many sorrows."* (I Timothy 6:9-10, Living Bible) There are two kinds of rich people in the world - those who have an abundance of possessions and those who have fewness of needs. *"Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."* (Colossians 3:2) Live a simple life-style. Use your money to do good. Be generous and non-calculating. Be rich in good works. Be ready to share with others whatever God has given to you. (Note I Timothy 6:17-19)

(5) Don't become pleasure-oriented, obsessed with the toys and joys of the world, self-indulgent, enamored by the glammers of sin. There are those whose god is

'Pleasure'. They are constantly seeking to titillate their senses and to satisfy their every sensual desire. These are persons whose stomach is their god! There are far too many who are "lovers of pleasure more than they are lovers of God." Never forget: "The joy of the Lord is our strength." "God has given us all things richly to enjoy." "There are pleasures - true pleasures - forevermore for those who serve the Lord." "It has not entered into the mind of man what God has prepared for those who love Him." Make God the delight of your soul! Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and, as a result, you will experience God's joy which is "unspeakable and full of glory." Let doing God's will be your "meat and drink," and God will add the "dessert of pleasure" to your spiritual menu.

Never allow the attractions of this world to draw you away from the work of God. This is what happened to Demas, Paul's companion. Wrote Paul, "*Demas has left me. He loved the good things of this life.*" (II Timothy 4:10, Living Bible)

(6) Some fall out of grace because they fall into unbelief. There is no sin in asking honest questions, or in entertaining sincere doubts. Honest intellectual doubting can lead you to the adequacy of the evidence which will result in the assurance of the heart. Honest doubts are compatible with an honest commitment to Christ, and in fact, the degree of commitment to Christ will be reflected in the degree of serious thinking one does in finding a satisfying answer to the difficult questions of life.

But, while honest doubting is not a sin, unbelief and distrust in God is always a sin. Doubting God's word led to disobedience against God's command in the life of Eve. No longer trusting God means that one refuses to believe in God's power and wisdom and love. In spite of the fact that tragic events defy one's reason and seek to challenge one's belief in a God of love, nevertheless, continue to believe in God. Continue to trust God's goodness, and continue to affirm the integrity of God's character!

(7) Some fall out of grace because they fall into disobedience. Learn to hear God's voice clearly and to obey God's command quickly! Remember, nothing will take the place of Obedience! Saul, the first king of Israel, fell from God's favor because of disobedience which he

sought to rationalize! To Saul God said, "Obedience is better than sacrifice!" No amount of religious sacrifice can take the place of explicit obedience to God's revealed will!

(8) Some fall out of grace because they fall into doctrinal error which leads to a lifestyle that lacks authenticity and truth. Always contend earnestly for the truth! *"Put up a real fight for the faith which has been once and for all handed on to those who are committed to God."* (Jude 3, Phillips) Wrote Paul to the Colossians: *"Don't let others spoil your faith and joy with their philosophies, their wrong and shallow answers built on men's thoughts and ideas, instead of on what Christ has said."* (Colossians 2:8, Living Bible)

CONCLUSION: How do you cultivate a Christlike character? In many ways! Hebrews 12:14-17 mentions six of those ways. Three of those six ways are as follows:

- (1) Live at Peace with all Persons (No Discord).
- (2) Strive for Holiness in all Things (No Worldliness).
- (3) Respond to Grace at all Times (No Drifting).

These we have carefully looked at in this message. In the future messages we will look at the last three ways to cultivate a Christlike character:

- (4) Commit to Compassion among all Relationships (No Bitterness).
- (5) Guard against Impurity in all Actions (No Lust).
- (6) Focus on Reverence in all Attitudes (No Self-centeredness).

To strive for Christlikeness is the greatest goal of life! To live a Christlike life is the greatest satisfaction in life!

CULTIVATING A CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER (Part I)

Q U E S T I O N S

1. Is the Christian life a gift from God, or is the Christian life an achievement of man, or is it both? Explain your answer.
2. Point out those specific verses (and phrases) in Ephesians 2:14-18 which describe the following "profile of peace": (1) Source of Peace - Christ, (2) Instrument of Peace - Blood of the Cross, (3) Purpose of Peace - Reconciliation, (4) Foundation of Peace - Love, (5) Meaning of Peace - Unity amidst Diversity.
3. Describe modern-day people who, like as during the time of Jeremiah, seek "Peace" without understanding either the true nature or the true basis of Peace. (Read Jeremiah 8:11)
4. Do you believe, according to Matthew 5:9, that when one helps to establish peace among divided people, he is doing a "Godlike work"? How, according to Romans 12:17-21, should one respond, when he is mistreated by another?
5. Tell to what extent you agree with the following statement: "Maintaining unity and harmony and understanding among fellow believers within the context of the local church, is one of the characteristics of a true believer." (Read Romans 14:13-19 and Mark 3:23-25)
6. Describe by way of contrast the difference between "worldly wisdom" and "godly wisdom", as recorded in James 3:13-18.
7. Is "Peace" a fruit of the Holy Spirit or is "Peace" the result of the earnest effort on the part of the sincere believer, or is it both? Explain your answer. (Read Galatians 5:22-23 and Hebrews 12:14)
8. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statements: "One cannot be truly at peace with God without seeking to be at peace with his fellowmen. A true Christian seeks nothing but his neighbor's good; he forgives quickly and he reconciles totally; he seeks to bring the 'unity of the faith in the bond of peace' to the entire church. A true Christian guards against being highly opinionated, overly-sensitive, easily offended, argumentative, generally quarrelsome. He is easy to get along with, predictable in actions, stable in emotions, tolerant in attitudes." (Read Romans 12:17 and I John 4:20-21)

9. According to II Corinthians 6:17-18 and Matthew 5:8, what is the meaning of "Holiness"?
10. Is "holiness" in the life of a believer the result of the work of God or is it the result of the effort and discipline of man, or is it the result of both? Explain your answer. (Note II Corinthians 6:17-18; I Peter 1:16; Romans 6:19; Leviticus 20:7-8; Romans 12:1-2; James 4:8; I Thessalonians 5:23; Acts 15:8-9)
11. What are some of the characteristics of a believer who is not truly "filled with the Holy Spirit"? (Read James 1:8; I Corinthians 3:1-4)
12. Name some of the specific worldly practices and worldly philosophies from which the earnest Christian separates himself, in his pursuit of "Holiness." (Note Colossians 2:8 and I John 2:15-17)
13. In terms of Christian Experience, briefly describe the difference between the following three phases: (1) "Born of the Spirit," (2) "Filled with the Spirit", (3) "Walking in the Spirit."
14. The following are some things which you, as a sincere believer, can do to show to yourself and to others that you are making "every effort to be holy" (Hebrews 12:14). Put a check mark by those statements which describe those activities that you wish in future weeks to "focus on" in your own personal life.
 - _____ (a) Separate myself from some known sin in my life (a sinful habit or a sinful speech or a sinful association or a sinful attitude.)
 - _____ (b) Surrender my heart daily to the cleansing blood of Jesus, in order that Jesus may daily correct and perfect my motives and center them on the purposes of God.
 - _____ (c) Take time daily to be alone with Jesus to learn from His Word and to listen for His voice.
 - _____ (d) Associate with holy people, both in person and by reading biographies of the saints, in order to model their holy lives.
 - _____ (e) Use my imagination to see myself as the person God wants me to become and as the Christlike person that God can make of me.
15. From your own personal experience and from your observation of others, tell to what extent you agree with the following statements: "It is only those who are pure in heart (i.e., who are holy) who shall see God (Matthew 5:8). Only those whose hearts are fixed on God can see

God in the commonplace events of life, in the workings of nature, in the faces of people, in the mysterious and providentially-guided events of history, in the unpredictable joys and sorrows of life's happenings, in the movements of men and nations. Only the man whose overriding quest in life is Christlikeness - i.e., the holiness of God - can make sense out of the 'maze' of life on this earth, and can see 'below the surface' and can 'read between the lines' of life's events."

16. Among the multiple reasons why one-time believers lag behind and drift away and finally leave the Christian life, are the following reasons. Carefully observe these reasons, and check those which reflect special perils against which you must especially guard in your own personal life.

- _____ (a) The peril of listlessness (Hebrews 2:1-3)
- _____ (b) The peril of lukewarmness (Revelations 3:15-16).
- _____ (c) The peril of preoccupation with the cares of everyday living, or of wealth, or of pleasures of living (Luke 8:14).
- _____ (d) The peril of an unbelieving heart (Hebrews 3:12-14).
- _____ (e) The peril of disobedience (Hebrews 4:1,11).
- _____ (f) The peril of ensnarement in false teachings (II Peter 3:17-18).

17. Listed below are several things which a believer can do to assure himself that he will always respond to God's grace (Note Hebrews 12:15). Check those which you believe you must more carefully "focus on" and more consistently "activate" in your personal spiritual life.

- _____ (a) Open my ears and learn to listen more carefully to the voice of God, as communicated to me through the words of the Bible or through the lips of godly teachers or through the dictates of the Holy Spirit as He speaks to my conscience.
- _____ (b) Pray daily that I will remain "on fire" for Jesus, and avoid an indifferent attitude towards holy things.
- _____ (c) Don't allow my mind to become worry-worn and distracted by the many cares and concerns of everyday living. Learn to turn my "worry energy" into "prayer energy." (Philippians 4:6)

- _____ (d) Be more careful that I do not develop a love for money and a love for what money can buy, and instead learn to appreciate a 'simple lifestyle'. (I Timothy 6:9-10)
- _____ (e) Refuse to become enamored by the pleasures of the world, and instead learn to serve the Lord as an end within itself, knowing that God legitimately gives to believers "all things richly to enjoy."
- _____ (f) Engage in honest doubt and in sincere questioning in order to develop a more mature walk with God, but refuse to show disbelief in God's sinless Son and in God's infallible Word (Bible) during my quest for truth.
- _____ (g) Learn to hear God's voice clearly and to obey God's commands quickly, and to always remember that "obedience is better than sacrifice" (I Samuel 15:22).
- _____ (h) Always earnestly contend for the orthodox faith of the Bible (Jude 3), and quickly identify false teachers who spread doctrinal error which leads to a lifestyle that lacks authenticity and truth.

18. From your personal perspective, which of the following six commands (as given in Hebrews 12:14-17) do you believe is least obeyed by most believers today in our modern world?

- _____ (a) Live at Peace with all persons (No Discord).
- _____ (b) Strive for Holiness in all things (No Worldliness).
- _____ (c) Respond to Grace at all times (No Drifting).
- _____ (d) Commit to Compassion among all relationships (No Bitterness).
- _____ (e) Guard against Impurity in all actions (No Lust).
- _____ (f) Focus on Reverence in all attitudes (No Self-Centeredness)

Never Forget:

- To strive for Christlikeness is the greatest goal of life!
- To live a Christlike life is the greatest satisfaction in life!

C H A P T E R 19

CULTIVATING A CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER (PART II)

HEBREWS 12:14 - 17

HEBREWS

CULTIVATING A CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER (Part II)

O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 12:14-17

INTRODUCTION: Is the Christian life a gift from God, or is the Christian life an achievement of man? It is both a gift and an achievement! One cannot be Christlike without God's empowerment, but neither can one be Christlike without the exercise of great human effort and discipline!

PROPOSITION: There are certain commands and specific instructions given to the believer. Following these instructions carefully will result in the cultivation of Christlike character. Here are the six commands which every sincere believer must follow if he is to become a godly person:

- (1) Live at Peace with all persons (No Discord)
- (2) Strive for Holiness in all things (No Worldliness)
- (3) Respond to Grace at all times (No Drifting)
- (4) Commit to Compassion among all relationships (No Bitterness)
- (5) Guard against Impurity in all actions (No Lust)
- (6) Focus on Reverence in all attitudes (No Self-Centeredness)

CONCLUSION: Cultivation of a Christlike character is not easy, for at least two reasons. First, much time and patience is involved in this worthy pursuit. Second, there are many various character qualities which need great attention, if a balanced character is developed.

HEBREWS

CULTIVATING A CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER (Part II)

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 12:14-17

IV. Commit To Compassion Among All Relationships (No Bitterness).

Cultivation of a Christlike character depends upon the maintenance of a tender heart and an open mind and a clear communication and a ready forgiveness. Cultivating the 'soil of compassion' and keeping the 'weeds of bitterness' out of the soil of one's life is altogether important if the life of Christ is to be manifest in one's own personal life. Wrote the writer of Hebrews: *"See to it that.....no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many."* (Hebrews 12:15)

Bitterness was an ever-present peril against which these Hebrew Christians were told to guard. These Jewish believers were the objects of scorn. The property of some had been confiscated. Some had faced great suffering because of their faith in Jesus Christ, and some had even been imprisoned for Christ. The writer to these suffering believers had earlier affirmed their strength amidst suffering: *"You stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering."* (Hebrews 11:32)

A. It is possible for one to become bitter towards the Lord.

Suffering will make one either better or bitter, either sweeter in spirit or more cynical in spirit, either more tender in heart or more tough and hardened in heart, either more submissive to God or more resistant in spirit, either more trusting or more skeptical in attitudes. A believer who experiences unexplained tragedy will either draw closer to the heart of God, or he will turn his back coldly and bitterly against God and forsake God. Again, let it be said: He will be either better or bitter as a result of his adversity. Job's wife turned away from God during her severe tests and she advised her husband Job to *"curse God and die."* (Job 2:9) No one can question the fact that Job was suffering greatly, that his series of tragedies were unexplainable, but Job never followed the evil counsel of his wife. To his wife, who was embittered because of suffering for which she held God responsible, Job said, *"You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"* (Job 2:10)

God intends to use trouble that comes to His people, not to mar them but to make them, not to destroy them but to perfect them. Wrote Peter, *"These trials are only to test your faith,*

to see whether or not it is strong and pure. It is being tested as fire tests gold and purifies it - and your faith is far more precious to God than mere gold; so if your faith remains strong after being tried in the test tube of fiery trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day of his return." (I Peter 1:7, Living Bible)

How should a believer respond to the fiery trials which come upon him? Wrote Peter, "Dear friends, don't be bewildered or surprised when you go through the fiery trials ahead, for this is no strange, unusual thing that is going to happen to you. Instead, be really glad - because these trials will make you partners with Christ in his suffering, and afterwards you will have the wonderful joy of sharing his glory in that coming day when it will be displayed." (I Peter 4:12-13, Living Bible)

"When thro' fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace all sufficient, shall be thy supply;
The flames shall not hurt thee, I only design
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine."
(How Firm A Foundation)

What is one source of bitterness? Disillusionment because of failure to understand the reason God allows or even causes things that happen for which there is no human explanation. Things like an unexpected death of a child. Things like financial reverses or unwanted divorces or loss of health. Praying earnestly for good things to happen, and those good things not happening! Suffering not always makes every believer better. Some become bitter instead. One such young theology student who wrote a book on Job, had a series of serious setbacks in his life, following his writing of the book - his parents got a divorce, his job opportunity fell through causing financial problems, he developed several physical problems, his fiancée jilted him. His fiery trials did not make him better; they made him bitter. His disillusionment and disappointment gave way to cynicism and outright anger and hostility against God. Here is what he finally did as he expressed to a friend his demonstration of rage and disappointment: "I picked up my Bible and a couple other Christian books and walked downstairs and out the back door. I shut the door softly behind me, so as not to wake anyone. In the backyard was a brick barbecue grill, and I piled the books on it, sprayed them with lighter fluid, and struck a match. It was a moonless night, and the flames danced high and bright. Bible verses and bits of theology curled, blackened, then broke off in tiny crumbs of ash and floated skyward. My faith was going up with them." (Disappointment With God by Philip Yancey, pages 32,33)

Jesus said, "Blessed is the man who is not offended by me." There are still those today who take offense at God, who hold God responsible for unexplained tragedy, who attempt to judge God! Notes C. S. Lewis, regarding the critical attitude which modern-day people have towards God: "A sense of sin is almost totally lacking....We address people who have been trained to believe that whatever goes wrong in the world is someone else's fault....They reproach God Himself as His judges. They want to know, not whether they can be acquitted for sin, but whether He (God) can be acquitted for creating such a world." (God In The Dock; page 95)

In the presence of unexplained suffering, there are many - even some professing Christians - who become bitter towards God.

Some believers, when they are chastened by God, become bitter against God. Instead of humbling themselves before God, they resist the correction of God. What attitude should a believer have during times of chastisement? "My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in." (Proverbs 3:11-12) "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." (Hebrews 12:11)

Discipline is meant to make a believer better, but discipline can make a believer bitter instead. The pain which is inherent in discipline is meant to make one more responsive to God, more tender towards people, more receptive to moral change, more eager for continuing spiritual growth. But that pain which is meant to drive one closer to God, can instead drive one away from God! Instead of accepting discipline, one can despise the Lord's discipline. Instead of accepting rebuke, one can resent the Lord's rebuke. Resentment of the Lord's discipline can so easily lead to bitterness towards the Lord, which in turn can result in eventual apostasy!

B. Not only can people - even believers - become bitter towards the Lord, but people can become bitter towards each other. Describing persons who are far from God, the Bible says of such people: "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." (Romans 3:14)

Have you ever felt like you took two steps forward and three steps backward, that the harder you tried to live a godly life the more adversities and reverses you seemed to experience? Have you ever felt a spirit of covetousness come over you when you observed the wicked in their prosperity in contrast to your hardships and obstacles and financial troubles? Have you ever wondered why God allows the wicked man to enjoy pleasures

and power and position and prestige, while God, at the same time, allows the righteous man to suffer hardships of all kinds - financial losses, physical infirmities, heart-breaking sorrows, spiritual depressions? Have you ever thought that health and wealth automatically belonged to you by virtue of your spiritual sonship in God's family, and that, when you weren't enjoying prosperity, God must be failing to keep His promises? Have you ever been tempted to demand an explanation of why some who are not as righteous as you are, seem to get ahead? If you believe that material prosperity is a sure sign of God's blessings, then you will be very confused, maybe even bitter, if you observe the wicked prospering while you are not prospering! Envy is the result of one person (in this case, a believer) making an unfavorable comparison with another (in this case, with a prosperous wicked man).

Competition can lead to envy, if you, as the competitor find yourself overshadowed or outdone by another. And envy can lead to bitterness. Wrote James, "*And by all means don't brag about being wise and good if you are bitter and jealous and selfish; that is the worst sort of lie.*" (James 3:14, Living Bible)

"The impulse towards comparison is strong in us all. Constantly comparing ourselves with other people can do great spiritual harm." (The Secret of Radiant Life; William Sangster; page 98) Do you ever find yourself, as a believer, comparing your talents, or your personality, or your achievements, or your possessions, or your hardships, or your lot in life, or your family with that of some other fellow believer, and as a result of your unfavorable comparisons, you begin to question the Lord, and you begin to have feelings of bitterness overtake you?

Bitterness is sometimes the product of misunderstanding between fellow believers. Believers ought to give each other the "benefit of the doubt", ought to believe only the best about each other, ought not to be overly-sensitive. When God's special kind of love is shed abroad in the heart of a believer (Romans 5:5), it is much easier to overlook the faults in others, and that kind of love enables one quickly to forgive actual offenses. "*Love does not demand its own way. It is not irritable or touchy. It does not hold grudges and will hardly even notice when others do it wrong.*" (I Corinthians 13:5, Living Bible)

Even though their motives may be pure, the actions of believers can at the same time be faulty and misunderstood. Becoming preoccupied with a fellow believer's imperfect actions and words, can cause misunderstanding which can lead to bitter feelings and alienation of human relationships. Wrote James (the brother of Jesus): "*We all make mistakes in*

all kinds of ways, but the man who can claim that he never says the wrong thing can consider himself perfect, for if he can control his tongue he can control every other part of his personality!" (James 3:2, Phillips)

Being critical of the actions and the words of an imperfect believer is one cause of misunderstanding which can lead to bitterness. The wide differences in temperaments and personalities can also lead to misunderstanding, and to consequent bitterness. Christians oftentimes differ in outlook, tastes, and opinions, and from this alone, misunderstandings can arise.

Because the body is weak, temptation is strong, and Satan is subtle, it is possible for a Christian to stumble into sin and, as a result, seriously to offend his brother. The Christian who falls into sin needs love, mercy, and forgiveness - not condemnation or criticism. *"Dear brothers, if a Christian is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help him back onto the right path, remembering that next time it might be one of you who is in the wrong. Share each other's troubles and problems, and so obey our Lord's command. If anyone thinks he is too great to stoop to this, he is fooling himself. He is really a nobody."* (Galatians 6:1-3, Living Bible)

Hebrews 12:15 tells us that, when a "bitter root grows up" in one's life, great harm can be done. Bitterness can "cause trouble and defile many". Bitterness not only destroys the one in whom this evil weed is growing, but bitterness alienates people. The noxious weed of bitterness can produce the fruit of hate which can lead to murder. Hate is the product of bitterness, and hate is most destructive! Notes E. Stanley Jones, "Hate is sand in the machinery of life; love is oil - and life works better with oil than with sand. The lovers love others - and themselves; the haters hate others - and themselves." (Abundant Living; page 56)

It is one thing to talk about the Causes and the Consequences of Bitterness? But what is the Cure for this destructive evil in one's life? Briefly stated, here are some steps to consider in dealing with bitterness.

(1) Refuse to compare yourself with anyone else. Comparison and competition is the breeding ground for bitter envy and jealousy. Accept yourself as one created in God's image and one redeemed by Christ's blood, and therefore as one who has great value to God and one whom God has chosen to serve His cause by loving people, not for competing with people. The great antidote for envy and bitter jealousy is humility. Wrote Paul, "Live together

in harmony, live together in love, as though you had only one mind and one spirit between you. Never act from motives of rivalry or personal vanity, but in humility think more of each other than you do of yourselves." (Philippians 2:2-3, Phillips)

(2) Always give others the "benefit of the doubt." Assume that the motives of others are good, even if their actions are far from perfect. Focus on the positive qualities in others, not on their negative traits. Be patient with others, be tolerant, be flexible, learn to appreciate others who are so different from you in their temperament and personality and preferences and opinions. Said Jesus, "Don't criticize people, and you will not be criticized. For you will be judged by the way you criticize others, and the measure you give will be the measure you receive." (Matthew 7:1-2, Phillips) Be quick to accept people, and slow to judge others.

(3) Don't allow yourself to become overly-sensitive. Sensitivity to other people - to their feelings - is good, but over-sensitivity is always bad. The overly-sensitive person easily takes offense, even when others around him have no intention to offend anyone. The overly-sensitive person imagines that others are talking about him, even when that is not the case at all. The overly-sensitive person often feels inferior, and a person with a low self-esteem often looks at others as threatening to him.

It is not long until the inferior person begins to grow resentful and bitter towards another person. Allow God's love to be "shed abroad" in your heart. The love-filled person focuses, not on competitors, but instead he focuses on God. He cares not who is "second", just as long as Jesus is always worshipped by all as "first." Thus the love-filled person is not in a "race" to outdo his competitors, and he is not trying to "keep up with the Jones" materially or professionally. All the love-filled person covets is the "smile of God's approval" on his life. Because his focus is on God instead of on others, such a love-filled person is not easily offended. He desires to have the approval of others, but such approval is no longer an obsession with him. In God's eyes, all are equally loved. The love-filled person is not looking for sleights and offenses, and therefore he seldom feels

offended or overlooked or rejected. He is not touchy and will hardly even notice when others do him wrong!

(4) Forgive quickly and don't hold grudges against anyone. Wrote Paul, *"Let there be no more bitter resentment or anger, no more shouting or slander, and let there be no bad feeling of any kind among you. Be kind to each other, be compassionate. Be as ready to forgive others as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you."* (Ephesians 4:31-32, Phillips) Said Jesus, *"If you forgive others the wrongs they have done you, your Father in heaven will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive the wrongs of others, then your Father in heaven will not forgive the wrongs you have done."* (Matthew 6:14-15, Today's English Version)

(5) Constantly affirm the fact that God is a good God and knows what is best for you. In the face of unexplainable suffering, the righteous person may be tempted to question God, and even to grow bitter towards God. As in the case of Job, God may allow a righteous man to suffer to prove his loyalty and to perfect his faith and to refine his character. When the righteous man is tempted to be bitter towards God because the wicked man prospers and the righteous man suffers loss, the righteous man must never forget that God is sovereign. God is a just God and He will ultimately "balance the books." No evil will go unpunished, and no good will go unrewarded. *"Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong; for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away."* (Psalms 37:1-2)

When the believer prays earnestly for change or for protection and his prayers don't seem to be heard, when he has more questions than answers in the face of life's perplexities and mysteries and inequities, how should the believer react? Not with bitterness, but with deep trust. He must affirm the fact that God is all-loving (i.e., He wants to give everyone what is best). He must affirm the fact that God is all-wise (i.e., He knows what is best for everyone). He must affirm the fact that God is all-powerful (i.e., He is able to do what is best for everyone).

These five steps briefly outline a guide for deliverance from bitterness. Keep the weeds of bitterness out of the soil of your heart. Cultivating a Christlike character throughout your lifetime demands that you always guard your soul against the encroachments of bitterness!

CULTIVATING A CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER (Part II)

Q U E S T I O N S

1. Why do you believe that bitterness was an ever-present peril against which the Hebrew Christians had especially to guard? (Note Hebrews 10:32-39)
2. Describe both the potential peril and the potential opportunity which a believer faces during a time when he experiences adversity and suffering. Contrast the attitude of Job with the attitude of Job's wife, during a time of unusual suffering. (Read Job 2:9-10)
3. Tell with what degree of conviction you agree with the following statement: "God intends to use trouble that comes to His people, not to mar them but to make them, not to destroy them but to perfect them." (Note I Peter 1:7; 4:12-13)

"When thro' fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace all sufficient, shall be thy supply!
The flames shall not hurt thee, I only design
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine."
4. During a time of unexplained suffering, how would you counsel a professing believer who is severely tempted to grow bitter towards God, who holds God responsible for the tragedy which he is enduring?
5. Instead of developing a bitter spirit, what spirit should a believer manifest during a time when he is being chastened by God? (Note Hebrews 12:5-12 and Proverbs 3:11-12)
6. Have you ever been tempted to become bitter as you questioned why God allowed the wicked man to enjoy pleasures and power and position and prestige, while God, at the same time, allowed you or some other believer to suffer hardships of all kinds - financial losses, physical infirmities, heart-breaking sorrows, spiritual depressions?
7. Do you believe that competition and comparison are "breeding grounds" for envy, which in turn can lead to bitterness? Fully acknowledging that the human impulse towards comparison is strong in all of us, what can you do to avoid "falling into the trap of peer comparison and competition"?

8. Acknowledging that Bitterness is sometimes the product of misunderstanding between fellow believers, what can you do to avoid misunderstanding and to maintain the "unity of the faith in the bond of peace"? (Note Ephesians 4:32 and I Corinthians 13:5 and James 3:2)
9. To avoid becoming bitter in your spirit, what response should you make to a fellow Christian (or to a non-Christian) who has sinned against you? (Note Galatians 6:1-3; Matthew 6:14-15; Matthew 18:15-17; Romans 12:17-21)
10. The following is a list of definite steps that need to be taken, if a believer is effectively to deal with Bitterness. After studying and discussing this list, check those steps which you feel you need most to focus on, as you personally attempt to cultivate a Christlike character.

- _____ (1) Refuse to compare yourself with anyone else.
- _____ (2) Always give others the "benefit of the doubt".
- _____ (3) Don't allow yourself to become overly - sensitive.
- _____ (4) Forgive quickly and don't hold grudges against anyone.
- _____ (5) Constantly affirm the fact that God is a good God and knows what is best for you.

C H A P T E R 20

CULTIVATING A CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER (PART III)

HEBREWS 12:14 - 17

HEBREWS

CULTIVATING A CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER (Part III)

O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 12:14-17

INTRODUCTION: Is the Christian life a gift from God, or is the Christian life an achievement of man? It is both a gift and an achievement! One cannot be Christlike without God's empowerment, but neither can one be Christlike without the exercise of great human effort and discipline!

PROPOSITION: There are certain commands and specific instructions given to the believer. Following these instructions carefully will result in the cultivation of Christlike character. Here are the six commands which every sincere believer must follow if he is to become a godly person:

- (1) Live at Peace with all persons (No Discord)
- (2) Strive for Holiness in all things (No Worldliness)
- (3) Respond to Grace at all times (No Drifting)
- (4) Commit to Compassion among all relationships (No Bitterness)
- (5) Guard against Impurity in all actions (No Lust)
- (6) Focus on Reverence in all attitudes (No Self-Centeredness)

CONCLUSION: Cultivation of a Christlike character is not easy, for at least two reasons. First, much time and patience is involved in this worthy pursuit. Second, there are many various character qualities which need great attention, if a balanced character is developed.

HEBREWS

CULTIVATING A CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER (Part III)

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 12:14-17

V. Guard Against Impurity In All Actions (No Lust)

A. Celebration of Sex Within Creation

The call to holiness and Christlikeness is the call to moral purity. *"See that no one is sexually immoral."* (Hebrews 12:16a) *"Lust is a distortion of sexuality.... lust is runaway, uncontrolled sexual passion."* (Money, Sex, and Power; Richard Foster; page 103)

Lust, then, is a perversion of a legitimate desire. What is the legitimate desire, of which lust is the perversion? Sexual desire! God created man and woman with certain drives and instincts, one of which is the sexual instinct.

Sex is a beautiful gift which is not to be despised, but rather to be cherished and carefully used for the glory of God. Sex is not a dirty or nasty thing, but a gift from the Creator who designed in His creation that man and woman would be different, yet complementary. Made for each other! "Our human sexuality, our maleness and femaleness, is not just an accidental arrangement of the human species, not just a convenient way to keep the human race going. No, it is at the center of our true humanity. We exist as male and female in relationship. Our sexualness, our capacity to love and be loved, is intimately related to our creation in the image of God. What a high view of human sexuality!" (Ibid; page 92)

Richard Foster notes four important facts about human sexuality as this is expressed beautifully in a Husband-Wife relationship. From a study of the Biblical book of Song of Solomon, four qualities in true love are noted. "The first is love's intensity.... 'I found him whom my soul loves. I held him, and would not let him go' (3:4), a beautiful opening onto love's intensity. It is, indeed, eros without shame. Alongside love's intensity we need to see love's restraint. There is no crude orgy here, no pawing and pounding, love is too high, sex is too deep, for such leering and lusting.... A third theme that weaves its way through the Song of Solomon is love's mutuality.... Both (man and woman) are intensely involved; both initiate; both receive.... love is reciprocal.... The final theme we should see is love's permanence - no promiscuity here, no running away when bills and boredom set in love's intensity, love's restraint, love's mutuality, love's permanence - all marvelous windows onto human sexuality." (Ibid; 95-98)

"What a beautiful window the Song of Solomon is into eros as it should be! There is sensuality without licentiousness, passion without promiscuity, love without lust." (Ibid; 95)

B. Condemnation of Lust Within Society

Warnings against lust are always appropriate, especially in the age in which we live. "Watch out that no one becomes involved in sexual sin." (Hebrews 12:16a, Living Bible) Tragically, in our society, there are far too many who ignore this serious Biblical command! It is reported by Josh McDowell that "by age twenty, 81 percent of today's unmarried males and 67 percent of today's unmarried females have had sexual intercourse." (Why Wait? by Josh McDowell; page 21) On the front page of our Coloradoan Newspaper, dated Sept. 23, 1988, appeared an article that reported widespread promiscuity. "A survey released Thursday shows as many as 700,000 American men have at least 10 sex partners a year, putting them at 'considerable risk' of sexually transmitted diseases including AIDS."

Warning after warning against adultery is given in Holy Scripture. "Young men, obey your father and your mother. Take to heart all of their advice; keep in mind everything they tell you....Their counsel will keep you far away from prostitutes with all their flatteries, and unfaithful wives of other men. Don't lust for their beauty. Don't let their coyness seduce you. For a prostitute will bring a man to poverty, and an adulteress may cost him his very life. Can a man hold fire against his chest and not be burned? Can he walk on hot coals and not blister his feet? So it is with the man who commits adultery with another's wife. He shall not go unpunished for this sin." (Proverbs 6:20, 24-29, Living Bible) Wrote Paul, "Away then with sinful, earthly things; deaden the evil desires lurking within you; have nothing to do with sexual sin, impurity, lust and shameful desires." (Colossians 3:5, Living Bible)

C. Control of Passion Within Marriage

In an age where immorality was rampant and where women were treated as things to own and as objects to enjoy sexually, Paul focused on the standards of moral purity as an essential characteristic of a holy life-style. Wrote Paul to the Thessalonians: "For God wants you to be holy and pure, and to keep clear of all sexual sin so that each of you will marry in holiness and honor - not in lustful passion as the heathen do, in their ignorance of God and his ways. And this also is God's will: that you never cheat in this matter by taking another man's wife, because the Lord will punish you terribly for this, as we have solemnly told you before. For God has not called us to be dirty-minded and full of lust, but to be

holy and clean. If anyone refuses to live by these rules he is not disobeying the rules of men but of God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you." (I Thessalonians 4:3-8, Living Bible)

A life of moral purity means that one is to avoid sexual immorality. (Note I Thessalonians 4:3) This means that sex is to be reserved for marriage, and for marriage only. There is to be no heterosexual sex before marriage or outside of marriage. There is, of course, to be no homosexual relationships at any time.

Says Millard Sall, Christian psychologist, "The modern 'free love' philosophy that states that 'any act is all right as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else' is false. Immoral acts always hurt someone else besides hurting the person who commits them, although he might not recognize it at the time. A perfect example is that of Sally and Mike:

'We love each other; we want to express that love sexually; nobody else is being hurt, so why shouldn't we go ahead?' said a young man of nineteen to his girl friend. A few months later Sally came to my office broken and confused. She said that Mike and she had engaged in sex relations and at the time she could not see how anybody could be hurt. She had thought that the idea had just been a carry-over from her Puritan past. 'Now' she said, 'I am beginning to see it differently. As soon as Mike got what he wanted, he no longer seemed to be interested in marrying me. I also began to become confused as to my feeling about him. Did I really love him for himself or were we just using each other? Another thing that bothers me now is whether I could trust Mike to be faithful to me after we were married. I never thought I would be guilty about this, but now that I have done it I can see I really am. I'm terribly upset.'

The effect of these acts may not show up immediately, but the disintegration of the person's self-image and character occur eventually." (Faith, Psychology and Christian Maturity; page 43)

God created sex to be enjoyed within the sacred confines of marriage, not to be abused outside of marriage. Sex is a mighty dynamo - either to create endlessly or to destroy totally. We must allow the Creator of our urges to control and to cleanse those drives.

A life of moral purity means that a husband controls his own body and that he honors the body of his wife - not as an object of lust but as an expression of her God-given self which is to be cherished, not exploited. Within the context

of marriage, the Christian husband is not to abuse his wife sexually. "Paul was suggesting that in marital cohabitation the husband must constantly woo his wife and in a manner which honors and does not treat her as the object of mere lust.." (Ronald Ward; page 96) The husband must think as much - if not more - about his wife's sexual needs as he does of his own needs. He must never forget that, just as he is to control his own body, so he is also, at the same time, to honor his wife by treating her tenderly and by recognizing that her body is a "vessel" which belongs first to God and only secondarily to him as the husband.

It is true, according to I Corinthians 7:3-5, that the Christian husband and wife each has mutual rights - sexually - but these rights must always be exercised with mutual respect for each other and with proper restraints. These "rights" must be exercised with the restraint which love at times requires, rather than with the uncontrolled compulsion which lust always demands!

A life of moral purity means that an individual maintains purity of mind and purity of relationships in regards to persons of the opposite sex. Adulterous relationships are strictly prohibited! Note I Thessalonians 4:6, Living Bible. "And this also is God's will: that you never cheat in this matter by taking another man's wife, because the Lord will punish you terribly for this, as we have solemnly told you before."

In an age that declares that the Ten Commandments are irrelevant and outdated, we need to hear again the message of God's Word, "Thou shalt not commit adultery!" Paul wrote in I Corinthians 6:18-20 - "Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."

How does the Lord punish the adulterer? In many ways! Sin pays its own wages, as evidenced, among other ways, by the devastating physical affects which a promiscuous life-style has on the human body. Notice the various ways in which the adulterer is punished, according to Proverbs 5. (Read this in the Living Bible.)

D. Conquest of Lust During Temptation

Notes E. Stanley Jones, "The Christian Way produces through Christ-control the self-controlled man. But note that self-control is not so much a means as an end. You do not gain Christ through self-control; you gain self-control through

Christ...If you begin with self-control, then you are the center, you are controlling yourself. And you will be anxious lest yourself slip out from beneath your control. But if you begin, as Paul does, with love, then the spring of action is love for a Person, someone outside yourself. You are released from yourself and from self-preoccupation...When you begin with love, you end in self-control...The emphasis of the New Testament is Christ-control through love for Christ. 'Love Christ and do as you like', for you'll like what He likes." (Growing Spiritually, page 197)

The word 'self-control' in the Greek language speaks of self-restraint, self-discipline, purity and chastity. It is the word that speaks of victory over evil desire. "It describes that strength of soul by which a man takes a hold of himself, so that he can restrain himself from every evil desire." (Flesh and Spirit, page 123; William Barclay) A man who is self-controlled is a man "who prevents desire from being the dictator of his actions and his life." (Ibid, page 126) The self-controlled man may have "strong desires which seek to lure and force him from the way of reason, but he has them under control". (Ibid, page 127)

Mastery over internal instincts and mastery over external allurements is greatly needed in our society. We are living in an hedonistic age. A hedonist is one who lives by his passions and who equates happiness with pleasure. The hedonist makes no attempt to curb the desires of his flesh.

Paul warned the early Christians against pleasure-obsessed people. "For there are many, of whom I have told you before and tell you again now, even with tears, whose lives make them the enemies of the cross of Christ. These men are heading for utter destruction--their god is their own appetite, they glory in their shame, and this world is the limit of their horizon." (Philippians 3:18-19, Phillips)

Too many today live by their appetites and desires--totally undisciplined, unrestrained, unchaste. "These men mock and curse at anything they do not understand, and, like animals, they do whatever they feel like, thereby ruining their souls." (Jude 10, Living Bible)

God's call is the call to self-control, resulting from Christ-control!

What is the secret of self-control in one's life? Cultivating the mind of Christ! Learning to think Christ's thoughts! Submitting to Christ's lordship!

Remember, whatever gets your attention, gets you! "Sow a thought, reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny!" It all starts with the way a person thinks!

As a man thinks, so is he! You are the product of your thoughts! What you imagine, you will become! "What you hold in the mind passes automatically into act, if you hold it there long enough... Your secret meditations become you, for good or ill." (Growing Spiritually, page 201; Stanley Jones)

A moral landslide is preceded by a mental landslide. What you focus your thoughts upon, you eventually become! "If therefore you dally with sex thoughts and imaginations, that dallying will become a doing. And that doing will become you." (Ibid., page 201)

"Fix your thoughts on what is true and good and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely, and dwell on the fine, good things in others. Think about all you can praise God for and be glad about." (Philippians 4:8, Living Bible) Meditate on God's laws day and night! If you do, you will be like a tree that is planted by the rivers of water which bringeth forth its fruit in its season. Its leaves also shall not wither and die! (See Psalms 1.) Why do people wither and die morally? Because they wither and die mentally! Ignoble thoughts lead to ignoble lives. Lustful thinking leads to lustful living! Dr. George A. Buttrick says, "We dramatize temptation in our secret thought, thus gathering gasoline for the devil's spark." Should we then wonder why we blow up?

When lust hath conceived it eventually bringeth forth death! (James 1:15) How is lust conceived? By failing to control the thought life! You cannot help it if birds fly above your head, but you are responsible if you allow birds to make nests in your hair! You cannot help it if Satan suggests evil thoughts to you, but you are responsible if you entertain evil thoughts, resulting in developing patterns of evil thinking! You are not responsible for having temptations, but you are responsible for yielding to temptations. You may not be responsible for the first look, but you are responsible for the second look! If you can go around temptation, you cannot expect God to take you through temptation. If you put yourself in the very trap of temptation, don't be surprised if you are trapped in sin!

Control your thoughts if you want a pure mind. Control your glances, lest you begin to gaze at sin. Learn to separate yourself from sinful places and things (see II Corinthians 6:17).

How do you win the sex battle in a world that is saturated with licentiousness? The victory is won in the mind. The secret to sex-control is mind-control, and the secret to mind-control is focusing one's mind on Christ! We are to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." (II Corinthians 10:5, NIV) We are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. (See Romans 12:1)

Do you make your thoughts obedient to Christ? If you struggle with evil or lustful thoughts, don't try to fight these thoughts! To fight such thoughts is to give more attention to these thoughts. Rather than fighting evil thoughts, replace evil thoughts with pure thoughts! Fill your mind with the Scriptures! (Remember, an idle mind is the devil's workshop!) Fill your eyes with the beauty of nature! Fill your time with love projects! Seek and find good companions! (Remember "evil company corrupts good manners".) Turn your back on evil companions!

Wrote Paul to young Timothy, "Flee youthful lusts". Keep away from lustful thoughts! Run from evil companions! "Run from anything that gives you the evil thoughts that young men often have, but stay close to anything that makes you want to do right." (II Timothy 2:22, Living Bible)

Christian young people (and adults, for that matter) have no business watching TV programs or movies which lead to lustful thinking! Christian young people have no business flirting with sin! Discipline of desires is the price of moral freedom!

Says William Graham Cole in one of his books, "Stolen goods can be returned, or compensated for, lies can be retracted and corrected, covetousness can be overcome. Even idolatry can be undone and forgiven. But the sex act once committed with another person cannot be undone. The interpersonal relationship has undergone a radical change, and the couple concerned can never return to where they were before. Something indelible has stamped them both." (See I Corinthians 6:18-20)

Mastery over lust--what is the secret? "You can expel one desire only by a higher desire. Let the love of Christ be the fire that eats up these lesser loves. All the prohibitions against the wrong use of the sex urge will not save you unless the love of Christ be at the center--then the sex urge becomes marginal and right." (Abundant Living, page 133; Jones)

"Father, let me never despise the sex urge, for this powerful creative urge is your beautiful gift to me. My beautiful Creator, I ask you to master this urge within me, lest it end

up mastering me. Help me never to abuse this sacred gift but to use it for your glory and for my good. In Jesus' precious name. Amen."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will enjoy sex intensely because I will use it at the right time, at the right place, with the right person--all in the context of my marriage.

It is important for believers to distinguish between sexual attraction and sexual lust. One is normal, and one is sinful. Appreciating the natural, God-endowed beauty in a person of the opposite sex is sacred. Desiring to commit the sex act with a beautiful person of the opposite sex is definitely sinful. In his helpful book entitled 'The Spirit of Holiness', Everett Lewis Cattell clearly explains the difference between natural attraction for the opposite sex and unwholesome lust for the opposite sex.

"The biological fact that male and female attract one another like the negative and positive poles of magnets is entirely holy. Without that attraction there would of course be no love, courtship or marriage. Nor can we suppose that either sanctification or marriage removes it. This is not eradicated. But when cleansed and hid with Christ in God, it can be effectively disciplined. The sanctified Apostle said, 'I maul and master my body' (I Corinthians 9:29, Moffatt). Before marriage this impulse in the sanctified will be disciplined so as to save them from improper liberties in courtship and from giving their affections to partners outside the Lord.

"Sexual attraction works pretty generally as a biological fact, and because this is true married couples who have plighted their troth must exercise discipline as well as the unmarried.

"We assume that here is a place where a man in Christ may see, admire, and feel pleasure in such a face, having the doors of his mind closed to further satisfactions of the sexual attraction which lies implicit in the experience.

"From the pretty face it is a short step to notice the beautiful form. To women this same element of sexual attraction is present but in altered form. A dashing personality may be just as devastating to a woman as a beautiful form to a man. Women may be in more danger because personality is so much more subtle than physical form. Now the important fact to bear in mind is that this attraction in itself is not sin; it is not carnal; it is definitely present

in the Spirit-filled. But while it is a thing of real beauty which puts zest in life without jeopardizing marital faithfulness or real holiness, yet sexual attraction is as dangerous as it is subtle, and calls for rigid discipline.

"The fact of attraction, appreciation and pleasure regarding a woman's beauty is not sin or carnal in itself. But it is extremely easy to cross the line where this legitimate exercise of God-given impulse becomes an occasion for self to slip out into independence again, and for the look to become carnal. Probably when one becomes aware of his look taking on aspects of improper desire he is crossing over and must exercise discipline. But this question of crossing the line, leaves us utterly dependent upon the still small voice of the Holy Spirit for its answer.

"Yet it is obvious that the devil's way into the hearts of many men and women is to begin to pull on this natural and legitimate element and to cause momentary enjoyment to grow into a pleasure demanding more and more satisfaction. If the heart is truly pure, there will be an instant willingness to apply discipline, to have done with the pleasure, putting it from one's self when the realization comes that it is becoming dangerous or unholy. But the very pleasure of free commingling will be used by the enemy to set up an insistent clamor for more and more satisfaction and if the self yields to this clamor and comes out of its hidden, surrendered place in God, it will become insistent on having a little more pleasure instead of obeying the checks, and thus it gives way to a carnal, selfish state again. It must be clear by now that the sanctified life is basically life lived utterly under the control, moment by moment, of the Holy Spirit." (pages 48-51) (Excerpts)

CULTIVATING A CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER (Part III)

Q U E S T I O N S

1. Why can it be said that "lust is a perversion of a legitimate desire"? Is the sexual drive a wholesome, God-created urge, or is this a basically sinful urge?
2. The following four qualities in true love are noted in the Song of Solomon (in the Bible): (1) Love's intensity, (2) Love's restraint, (3) Love's maturity, (4) Love's permanence. Give your comments and explanation of each of these.
3. From a brief study of the Bible, what can you conclude about the widespread practice of promiscuity in our modern society? (Note Hebrews 12:16a; Proverbs 6:20, 24-29; Colossians 3:5)
4. In an age of moral license, what command and warning must every believer seriously heed, according to I Thessalonians 4:3-8? How, according to this Scripture, should every Christian husband treat his wife, within the intimate sexual relationship of marriage?
5. According to I Corinthians 7:3-5, what mutual rights does a husband and a wife have within the marriage relationship? When these rights are denied, what peril does a married couple face?
6. After briefly scanning the 5th chapter of Proverbs, note the various ways in which the adulterer is punished.
7. After reading the following definitions of a hedonist, would you conclude that our contemporary society is basically an hedonistic society?

Definition of a hedonist: "A hedonist is one who lives by his passions and who equates happiness with pleasure. The hedonist makes no attempt to curb the desires of his flesh." (Note Philipians 3:18-19 and Jude 10)

8. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statements: "A moral landslide usually, if not always, is preceded by a mental landslide. What you focus your thoughts upon, you eventually become." What is the secret of self-control in one's life? (Note Philipians 4:8 and Psalms 1:2 and Psalms 119:11)

9. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "You cannot help it if Satan suggests evil thoughts to you, but you are responsible if you entertain evil thoughts, resulting in developing patterns of evil thinking."
10. Practically-speaking, what helpful steps can you take to win your battle over lust? (Note II Corinthians 10:5; Romans 12:1; II Timothy 2:22)
11. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement by William Cole: "The sex act once committed with another person cannot be undone. The interpersonal relationship has undergone a radical change, and the couple concerned can never return to where they were before. Something indelible has stamped them both." (Note I Corinthians 6:18-20)
12. Do you believe the following statement reflects a Biblically sane answer to the serious problem of lust? - "You can expel one desire only by a higher desire. Let the love of Christ be the fire that eats up these lesser loves. All the prohibitions against the wrong use of the sex urge will not save you unless the love of Christ be at the center - then the sex urge becomes marginal and right." (E. Stanley Jones)
13. How do you distinguish between wholesome sexual attraction and sinful sexual lust?
14. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statements: "The biological fact that male and female attract one another like the negative and positive poles of magnets is entirely holy....Sexual attraction works pretty generally as a biological fact, and because this is true married couples who have plighted their troth must exercise discipline as well as the unmarried."
15. Does the following description of how a legitimate and God-given pleasure can "get out of hand", explain why some Christians have fallen terribly into lust and even into physical adultery?

"The fact of attraction, appreciation and pleasure regarding a woman's beauty is not sin or carnal in itself....Probably when one becomes aware of his look taking on aspects of improper desire he is crossing over and must exercise discipline...It is obvious that the devil's way into the hearts of many men and women is to begin to pull on this natural and legitimate element and to cause momentary enjoyment to grow into a pleasure demanding more and more satisfaction." (Everett Cattell)

C H A P T E R 21

CULTIVATING A CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER (PART IV)

HEBREWS 12:14 - 17

HEBREWS

CULTIVATING A CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER (Part IV)

O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 12:14-17

INTRODUCTION: Is the Christian life a gift from God, or is the Christian life an achievement of man? It is both a gift and an achievement! One cannot be Christlike without God's empowerment, but neither can one be Christlike without the exercise of great human effort and discipline!

PROPOSITION: There are certain commands and specific instructions given to the believer. Following these instructions carefully will result in the cultivation of Christlike character. Here are the six commands which every sincere believer must follow if he is to become a godly person:

- (1) Live at Peace with all persons (No Discord)
- (2) Strive for Holiness in all things (No Worldliness)
- (3) Respond to Grace at all times (No Drifting)
- (4) Commit to Compassion among all relationships (No Bitterness)
- (5) Guard against Impurity in all actions (No Lust)
- (6) Focus on Reverence in all attitudes (No Self-Centeredness)

CONCLUSION: Cultivation of a Christlike character is not easy, for at least two reasons. First, much time and patience is involved in this worthy pursuit. Second, there are many various character qualities which need great attention, if a balanced character is developed.

HEBREWS

CULTIVATING A CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER (Part IV)

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 12:14-17

VI. Focus On Reverence In All Attitudes (No Self-Centeredness)

Cultivation of a Christlike character involves the cultivation of a reverent attitude. In an age of irreverence, where the sacred is ignored or ridiculed, it is of greatest importance that believers intentionally cultivate respect for God's ways and will and Word. Esau is considered the person who lived a life of godlessness and profaneness. A profane man is one whose life has never been consecrated to God, whose life is earthbound and sensual and selfish, whose awareness of God is totally lacking, whose goal in life is gratification of physical drives with no cultivation of the spirit. "See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears." (Hebrews 12:16-17, NIV)

The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was a quiet man, staying among the tents. Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob. Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!" (That is why he was also called Edom.) Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright." "Look, I am about to die." Esau said "What good is the birthright to me." But Jacob said, "Swear to me first," So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left. So Esau despised his birthright. Genesis 25:27-34

There are some rather noteworthy qualities in Esau. He was a strong athlete, a lover of nature, an exciting outdoorsman, an excellent hunter. He lived in nature by his physical courage as "he pitted himself against the wild beasts of his day when he was little better armed than the beasts themselves." (Chappell; page 218; "20 Centuries of Great Preaching; vol. 9)

Esau was generous-hearted by nature. He cared for his old father, so much so, that he regularly satisfied his father's taste with his well-prepared venison. It was not foxy Jacob nor conniving Rebekah who cared for the old and blind Isaac. It was Esau's thoughtfulness and generosity that satisfied the hunger of Isaac.

Esau respected his father Isaac enough that Esau withheld his hand of vengeance when Jacob betrayed Esau. For the sake of Isaac, Esau restrained himself from inflicting harm upon his deceptive brother, Jacob.

In spite of Esau's commendable qualities, Esau's telling weakness and final downfall was his light regard for his spiritual heritage. He traded his spiritual heritage for a cheap substitute. From a study of the life of Esau, we are warned against living for time rather than for eternity, for mere sensual happiness rather than for holiness, for immediate physical gratification rather than for future spiritual blessings.

Esau set his affections on things that are seen, rather than on things which are unseen. He had spiritual insensitivity. He was short-sighted, impulsive, seeking immediate gratification of his physical desires at the expense of his spiritual inheritance. His belly was his god. He attempted to live by "bread alone."

He had no appreciation for his spiritual heritage - for the covenant promises made to Abraham and to Isaac. He was shallow in his spiritual understanding and calloused in his spiritual nature.

He was impatient to wait for the fulfillment of any spiritual promises or blessings. "As for Esau, a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." (Whyte: page 100; Bible Characters)

Even though Esau was a strong, athletic, robust outdoorsman, probably a picture of perfect health, Esau nevertheless was pagan and profane - "all body and no soul".

Esau despised his spiritual heritage, as seen by his sale of his birthright for a pot of stew.

Esau's pagan nature is further reflected in his eventual marriage to two pagan Hittite women.

Notes Alexander Whyte, "A man's choice in his marriage, more than anything else in this life, makes it manifest what that man is, and where his heart is." (page 101)

Just as the growing insensitivity of Esau's pagan heart outwardly manifested itself by despising his birthright, and selling it for a pot of stew, so Esau's pagan friendship with the Hittites manifested itself ultimately by his pagan marriages to Hittite girls. These marriages deeply grieved and embittered the hearts of Esau's covenant-believing parents. (Genesis 26:35)

Just as Esau sold his birthright for a cheap price, it is possible for us to sell our birthrights today! What does our birthright consist of? Truth, honesty, honor, chastity.

There are still those today who are selling out their spiritual heritage for personal and materialistic gain. But Jesus said, "What shall it profit a man if he should gain the whole world, and yet lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Esau exchanged his spiritual heritage for a pot of stew!

There are some who exchange their souls for material wealth. *"But people who long to be rich soon begin to do all kinds of wrong things to get money, things that hurt them and make them evil-minded and finally send them to hell itself. For the love of money is the first step toward all kinds of sin. Some people have even turned away from God because of their love for it, and as a result have pierced themselves with many sorrows."* (I Timothy 6:9-10, Living Bible)

There are some who exchange their souls for sensual pleasures. They are hedonistic - that is, pleasure-oriented. Their philosophy is "whatever feels good is right". They have made sex their god! Of such persons, who trade their spiritual heritage for sensual pleasures, the apostle Jude wrote, *"They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord."* (Jude 4)

"Esau was a sensualist in that he lived in the realm of the senses. He was what we today would call a secularist. He had an eye for the seen and for the seen only." (Chappell; page 219; '20 Centuries of Great Preaching'; vol. 9)

W. Curry Mavis clearly defines the meaning of secularism. "Secularism means, most simply, a regard for the interests and affairs of this life to the neglect of matters pertaining to the future life. It represents the enthronement of personal interests and human sufficiency at the very center of life. Man takes a priority over God in the practical matters of life, and he maintains a nonchalant attitude toward Him...In Secularism, 'temporal values are seen as ends in themselves', and men devote their lives to them." (The Psychology of Christian Experience; page 107,108)

Esau is described in the New Testament as a "profane person" (Hebrews 12:16, KJV). "Profane here does not refer to careless or lewd speech. It means, quite literally, against the temple. The profane person is one who has no spiritual conception, whose life is that of pure materialism. The man who says, I do not want God; I am independent of God; that is pride of heart." The profane person is one who "says that life is sufficient in itself, without any relationship to God." (G. Campbell Morgan; page 16; 20 Centuries of Great Preaching; vol. 8)

Notes Clovis Chappell, "A profane man is one that has no fence around his life...Esau was profane. He let his fences fall down and there were no high spiritual values that he found it necessary to fence in and conserve. There were few glaring evils that he shut out. There are few tragedies worse than the tragedy of the unfenced life. He had much that was fine, but he had no holy place. There were no bracing convictions that said to the surrounding evils, 'You shall not pass.'" (Chappell; page 220; 20 Centuries of Great Preaching; vol. 9)

Esau failed to appreciate and to practice the covenant standards of his blessed spiritual heritage. He let down his standards, if he ever had any spiritual standards to begin with.

Contrast Esau, who lacked spiritual convictions, to Joseph when he was a slave in Egypt. "The wife of his master literally flings herself at him. But he keeps his head. He keeps his self-respect. He keeps himself where God can give him the best. This he does by keeping up his fences. In the face of his temptation he asks this question: 'Can I do this great evil and sin against God?' There were certain things that were for him impossible." (Chappell; page 220,221)

Or think of young Daniel who was advanced to the court of the pagan palace in Babylon. "He has a chance for a place in the palace of the king if he will only play his cards right. But when he is made to recline at his first meal, he sees before him dishes that he cannot eat with a clear conscience. 'So what? He refuses to be profane. 'Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself.'" (Chappell; page 22)

There is still a great need to keep up the God-honoring fences around our lives. In contrast to Esau, we need to fence out the world and to fence in God's presence in our lives.

Esau was worldly and insensitive to spiritual convictions and standards. He was controlled by sensual appetites. "Esau seems to have no sense of God at all. His fault is not so much that he is antagonistic to religion as that he has no interest in it. For him such values do not exist. The fact

that he has been born in a great tradition, the fact that he is a part of that family through which all the nations of the earth are to be blessed, means nothing to him at all. He is interested in the chase. He is interested in his dinner, in his woman, in the sureness of his aim. But in the matters that pertain to religion he simply has no interest. This is not to say that Esau is a man of vicious purpose. He is rather a man of no presiding purpose at all. He is like a river without banks. There are no mighty compulsions in his life. There are no compelling 'thou shalt's', no compelling 'thou shalt not's.'" (Meet These Men; page 51; Clovis Chappell)

Let it be repeated: Esau was a profane man, that is, he had no fence around his life, he had no great convictions by which to live, no mighty spiritual compulsions to guide his life, no strong convictions for which he is ready to die.

"Hebrew interpretation saw Esau as the man of the body, the sensual man, the man who saw no pleasures beyond the crude pleasures of this world." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 210)

As in the case of Esau, the secular life-style is always a failure. Secularism is a failure because it is preoccupied with the body and ignores the spirit. Why has secularism left its adherents dull, drab and unsatisfied? It is because secularism does not minister to the spirit of man, and man is basically a spiritual creature.

Notes Mavis, "Secularism, in inverting life's values, neglects the interests of the immortal spirit of man, assuming that this spirit can be satisfied with earthly things. It fails to see, with Hannah More, that, 'the soul on earth is an immortal guest, compelled to starve at an unreal feast; a pilgrim panting for the rest to come; an exile anxious for its native home.'" (The Psychology of Christian Experience; 114)

Says Clovis Chappell about Esau, "Not even a sensualist, not even a profane man, can keep that attitude always. There came a time when Esau's heart grew hungry. There came a time when he had hungers that beans could not satisfy." (Ibid; page 222)

It is indeed likely that in the life of every secularist there will come a time when bitter regret will be felt. Regret and remorse will overtake the secularist. The evil days will draw nigh when he shall say of his sins, "I have no pleasure in them."

We are instructed to learn from the life of Esau. "Watch out that no one becomes involved in sexual sin or becomes careless about God as Esau did: he traded his rights as the oldest son for a single meal. And afterwards, when he wanted those

rights back again, it was too late, even though he wept bitter tears of repentance. So remember, and be careful." (Hebrews 12:16,17, Living Bible)

The 'King James Translation' says that Esau "found no place for repentance." (Hebrews 12:17) This is not to say that God could not forgive Esau's sins. It is to say that even repentance cannot undo the past. "There are certain choices which cannot be unmade, and certain consequences which not even God can take away. To take a very simple example - if a young man loses his purity or a girl her virginity, nothing can ever bring it back. The choice was made and the choice stands. God can and will forgive, but God Himself cannot turn back the clock and unmake the choice or undo the consequences. We do well to remember that there is a certain finality in life. If, like Esau, we take the way of this world, if we make sensual, bodily things our final good, if we choose the pleasures of time in preference to the joys of eternity, God can and will still forgive, but something has happened that can never be undone." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 210)

Says Clovis Chappell, "Repentance will always bring salvation, but it will not undo the past. Therefore it is not enough to repent. The only wise course is to repent before you sin....There is a repentance that saves the soul and leaves the life in ruins. There is a far better repentance that saves both the soul and the life. That is the one to which God calls us in these words - 'Now is the accepted time. Now is the day of salvation.'" (20 Centuries of Great Preaching; page 222; vol. 9)

God is always willing and able to forgive any sin, at any time in a man's life, but not even God can remove all the natural consequences of past wrong decisions. For instance, God can forgive a person who has chosen to smoke cigarettes, but the forgiven person many times must nevertheless bear the consequence of premature physical illness or even death because of lung cancer caused by heavy smoking for years. God could forgive Esau for the sin of lightly and irreverently regarding his birthright, but God could not restore that birthright to Esau, even though Esau was filled with regrets and remorse and tears. "He found no field on which such repentance as he had could operate - so as to undo that which was past. His repentance did not altar the fixed destination of the blessing...His tears did not obliterate what was done. He wished that it had been otherwise, but his wishes were vain...There may come in your life a time when the scales will fall from your eyes, and you will see how insignificant and miserable are the present gratifications for which you have sold your birthright, and may wish the bargain undone which cannot be undone. You cannot wash out bitter memories, you cannot blot out habits by a wish. Tears will not altar the

irrevocable, you cannot avert consequences that fall upon a man, the consequences of a lifetime, by any weeping and wringing of your hands, and by any wish that they might disappear." (Exposition of Holy Scriptures; Maclaren; Vol 16; page 231, 232)

Esau lived irreverently, i.e., with no sense of the sacred and the spiritual, earthbound and insensitive to eternal values, self-centered and self-indulgent. We are warned not to live a godless life like he lived.

Like Esau, to live irreverently is to live for the moment rather than to live for the distant future. Living for time rather than living for eternity is the essence of Secularism. A secularist is one who believes "that human life can be lived and understood, in its own terms, without regard to any higher order of reality, that is, without regard to God." (Quoted in 'The Closing of the American Heart' by Ronald Nash; page 67)

The cultivation of Christlikeness involves focusing on heavenly values and refusing to set our affections on earthly pleasures and pursuits. Not avoiding earthly responsibilities, but at the same time never becoming attached to earthly loyalties and never becoming enamored by earthly pleasures. Noted Paul, *"If you are then raised up with Christ, reach out for the highest gifts of Heaven, where Christ reigns in power. Be concerned with the heavenly things, not with the passing things of earth. For, as far as this world is concerned, you are already dead, and your future life is a hidden one in God, through Christ. One day, Christ, who is your life, will show himself openly, and you will all share in that magnificent revelation."* (Colossians 3:1-4, Phillips)

A secularist is irreverent, for he lives only for this world, and he ignores eternity. He does not believe in the unseen realm of spiritual reality. He is time-conscious, not conscious of eternity, earth-bound instead of being heaven-bound. To be a man of reverence, one must be spiritually-sensitive and heavenly-minded. Wrote Paul, *"So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."* (II Corinthians 5:18)

Like Esau, to live irreverently is to live for the pleasures of the flesh rather than to live for the cultivation of the spirit. The pleasure-oriented person is a hedonist. A hedonist is one who desires always to feed his flesh rather than to feed his spirit, whose primary goal in life is to enjoy the so-called "good things of life." Paul described such people as "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God." Such persons make a god of their stomachs! The philosophy of

hedonists is this: "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die." Such pleasure-obsessed persons engage in endless attempts to gratify their lusts, only to find themselves forever frustrated and heaven-starved.

Cultivating Christlike Character involves putting moral duty ahead of physical pleasures and immediate gratifications. God has given His people all things richly to enjoy, and therefore believers are never to despise the physical world and the delights of legitimate pleasures. Christians, more than anyone else, ought to enjoy God's good gifts in God's good world, but Christians must always make Christ the chief delight of their hearts and must learn to delight in God's Word and will, day and night! In contrast to the fleeting pleasures of sin which lead to bitter disappointment, the joy of the Lord is lasting and truly satisfying!

CONCLUSION: Cultivation of a Christlike character is not easy, for at least two reasons. First, much time and patience is involved in this worthy pursuit. Second, there are many various character qualities which need great attention, if a balanced character is developed.

Hebrews 12:14-17 outlines six distinct areas which deserve our full attention and effort, in the cultivation of Christlike character. In the form of imperatives, we are given these instructions:

- (1) Live at Peace with all persons (No Discord).
- (2) Strive for Holiness in all things (No Worldliness).
- (3) Respond to Grace at all times (No Drifting).
- (4) Commit to Compassion among all relationships (No Bitterness).
- (5) Guard against Impurity in all actions (No Lust).
- (6) Focus on Reverence in all attitudes (No Self-Centeredness).

CULTIVATING CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER (Part IV)

Q U E S T I O N S

1. Why is Esau considered the person who lived a life of godlessness and profaneness? How would you define and describe a "profane person"?

Can you think of persons, like Esau, who possess many 'nice' qualities and who manifest some generosity in their nature, who nevertheless are basically godless and profane?

Would you say that anyone, like Esau, who has a light regard for his spiritual heritage, is a "profane" person?

2. How would you add to the following description of a "profane person"? - "A profane person is one who lives more for time than for eternity, who is more concerned for sensual happiness than for holy living, who seeks immediate physical gratification rather than waits for future spiritual blessings." "As for Esau, a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush."
3. From your own observation and experiences, share illustrations of those who have exchanged their souls for material wealth. (Read I Timothy 6:9-10; Luke 12:13-21; Mark 8:36) Share illustrations of those who have exchanged their souls for sensual pleasures. (Jude 4; Philippians 3:19)
4. Give your interpretation and application of the following statement: "There are few tragedies worse than the tragedy of the unfenced life." In what ways did Joseph and Daniel in the Old Testament keep their lives "fenced"?
5. Do you believe that the following statement accurately describes the majority of persons in our modern-day American society? - "A person with no fence around his life, with no great convictions by which to live, with no spiritual compulsions to guide his life, with no strong convictions for which he is willing to die."
6. Do you believe that disillusionment and bitter regrets are the ultimate and inevitable fate of the secularist? Do you believe the following statements describe the basic reasons for disillusionment in the life of a secularist? - "Secularism, in inverting life's values, neglects the interests of the immortal spirit of man, assuming that this spirit can be satisfied with earthly things. It fails to see that 'the soul on earth is an

immortal guest, compelled to starve at an unreal feast; a pilgrim panting for the rest to come; an exile anxious for its native home!" (Read Ecclesiastes 12:1) (Read Hebrews 12:17)

7. Is it accurate to say that, even though God can and will forgive the sins of one's past, repentance cannot undo the past and not even God can take away certain moral consequences as a result of one's past wrong decisions? Why or why not?
8. How can a believer, at one and the same time, be both a responsible citizen of earth whose enjoyment of earthly blessings is great, and be a spiritually-minded citizen of heaven whose priorities are God-centered? According to Colossians 3:1-4, what should be the Christian's attitude toward the passing things of earth? (Note II Corinthians 5:18)
9. Describe the philosophy and life style of a Hedonist? To what extent should Christians enjoy the "good things of this world"?
10. Because of the many different character qualities and because of the great time and patience which are involved in the cultivation of these character qualities, have you found that "becoming Christlike" is most challenging and difficult? If there is a "high price" involved in becoming a mature Christian, do you think that there is a "higher price" involved in becoming a godless person? Why or why not? Is the Christian life "hard" or "easy"? (Note Matthew 11:28-30) (Note Proverbs 12:15)

C H A P T E R 22

WONDERFUL REALITIES AND AWESOME RESPONSIBILITIES

HEBREWS 12:18 - 29

HEBREWS

WONDERFUL REALITIES AND AWESOME RESPONSIBILITIES

O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 12:18-29

SUBJECT: From the darkness of sin to the light of righteousness, from the terror of God's judgment to the joy of God's forgiveness, from the loneliness of alienation to the fellowship of peace with God and others - this is what causes transformed sinners to testify for their Lord!

PROPOSITION: Heavenly life, characterized by sweet communion with the Living God and by deep fellowship with fellow believers - this describes the experience of those who have been delivered from the bondage of the law to the freedom of Grace!

I. The Deliverance From Terrorizing Judgment (Verses 18-21)

II. The Reality Of Heavenly Living (Verses 22-24)

III. The Urgency Of Spiritual Obedience (Verse 25)

IV. The Certainty Of Divine Evaluation (Verses 26-27)

V. The Conditions For Eternal Security (Verses 28-29)

CONCLUSION: This portion of Scripture from Hebrews 12:18-29 answers some very important questions regarding the Christian Life: (1) Why do I need to become a Christian? (2) How do I become a Christian? (3) What happens when I become a Christian? (4) What must I do to maintain a dynamic and up-to-date saving relationship with God? (5) In light of my ultimate accountability before God at the Final Judgment, and in the light of life's constant changes and earth's falling kingdoms, how can I be secure for time and for eternity?

HEBREWS

WONDERFUL REALITIES AND AWESOME RESPONSIBILITIES

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 12:18-29

SUBJECT: At the county jail I , along with two of my friends from the church have heard several times at Saturday Morning Worship Services, many inmates lift their voices in praise to God. One of the choruses is as follows:

"I was lost in sin, but Jesus took me in.
And then a little light from heaven filled my soul.
It bathed my heart in love, and wrote my name
above. And just a little talk with Jesus made me
whole."

From the darkness of sin to the light of righteousness, from the terror of God's judgment to the joy of God's forgiveness, from the loneliness of alienation to the fellowship of peace with God and others - this is what causes some of these inmates to rejoice so much when they sing and testify during those Saturday Morning Services.

Just as these inmates, in spite of the fact that they are behind bars, rejoice because of newfound life in Christ, so the Hebrew Christians, in spite of the fact of great outward persecution, rejoiced because of their deliverance from the bondage of the Law! The Hebrew Christians would have been glad to have sung that same chorus which present-day inmates sing.

Proposition: Heavenly life, characterized by sweet communion with the Living God and by deep fellowship with fellow believers - this describes the experience of those who have been delivered from the bondage of the law to the freedom of Grace! Life in the Son is maintained by obedience, and by a life of service, and by a life of godly reverence and gratitude. Such a life, attached to God and His Kingdom, will endure the fires of the final judgment. He who does the will of the Father shall abide forever, and shall know the joy of eternal security in heaven.

I. The Deliverance From Terrorizing Judgment (Verses 18-21)

The writer to the Hebrew Christians would have the latter to rejoice that they are no longer living under the dispensation of Law, when God's voice of terror brought a sense of condemnation.

At the time the Ten Commandments were given to Moses, the Israelites experienced the terror of judgment and the fear of death.

In the Living Bible, this state of terror and judgment from which believers have been delivered, is described in this way: *"You have not had to stand face to face with terror, flaming fire, gloom, darkness and a terrible storm, as the Israelites did at Mount Sinai when God gave them his laws. For there was an awesome trumpet blast, and a voice with a message so terrible that the people begged God to stop speaking. They staggered back under God's command that if even an animal touched the mountain it must die. Moses himself was so frightened at the sight that he shook with terrible fear."* (Hebrews 12:18-21)

"In the giving of the law at Mount Sinai three things are stressed. (1) There is stressed the sheer majesty of God. The whole story stresses the shattering might of God, and in it there is no love at all. (11) There is stressed the absolute unapproachability of God. So far from the way being opened to God, it is barred; and he who tried to approach God met death. (111) There is stressed the sheer terror of God. Here there is nothing but the awe-stricken fear which is afraid to look and even afraid to listen." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 212)

II. The Reality of Heavenly Living (Verses 22-24)

In contrast to the strict justice and judgment of God which characterize this Old Covenant of Law, there is the tender mercy and loving forgiveness of God which characterize the New Covenant of Grace. In contrast to God's voice of terror which brought a sense of condemnation at Mount Sinai, there is now God's voice of invitation which brings a sense of communion and happiness. The New Covenant of Grace brings the joy of fellowship and the assurance of forgiveness through the atoning blood of Jesus.

Persons in the era of grace no longer need be terrorized and estranged from God because of their guilt, but they can enjoy intimacy with God because of full forgiveness and glorious reconciliation.

The glory of heavenly living, as a result of placing faith in Jesus' person and in His atoning sacrifice, is vividly described.

(1) "You have come right up into Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." (verse 22a; Living Bible)

In contrast to Mount Sinai which speaks of God's justice and judgment and holiness and condemnation of sin, believers who place their faith alone in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, come right up into Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. Mount Zion symbolizes gladness and joy and forgiveness and reconciliation and intimate fellowship and newness of life. There was great dread when the Israelites looked at the terrorizing majesty of God as displayed on Mount Sinai where Moses received the Commandments. Now, because of God's grace, there is no hesitation at all in coming right up into Mount Zion - the place of intimate communion with God! "Zion...suggests the thought that a true Christian life, based upon faith, has a communion with God which is darkened by no dread, nor disturbed by consciousness of unforgiven sin....There is no dread, though there is reverence, and no fear, though there is awe, in the approach of those who come through Jesus Christ, and live beneath the smile of their reconciled God and Father." (Expositions of Holy Scripture; vol. 16; pg. 240, 241; Alexander Maclaren)

(2) "You have come to the gathering of countless happy angels." (verse 22b, Living Bible)

In some wonderful and mysterious way, those persons who place their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, are those persons whose new found spiritual fellowship encompasses not only fellow visible believers, but also the invisible company of the angelic hosts! Believers on earth who worship the Father sense that their earthly praise is blended with the noble praise of the myriads of angels who surround the heavenly throne! "All the servants of the King are friends of one another." (Ibid; pg. 244). Becoming a friend of God on earth, places one in the company of fellowship with angels whose love for the same King of Heaven is very great!

(3) "You have come to the church, composed of all those registered in heaven." (verse 23a, Living Bible)

Faith in Christ results in the conversion of the soul and in the fellowship of the brethren. Those who are one with Christ in conversion, are those who are one in fellowship with all believers of all times and of all cultures and of all nationalities. All whose names are registered in God's Book of Life are brothers and sisters in God's universal family. This phrase speaks of the true Church (the so-called invisible church) of which

every true believer is a member. He who becomes a Christian becomes, not an isolated member of God's family, but a member of an innumerable company of fellow believers - past, present, future.

- (4) "You have come to God who is judge of all." (verse 23; Living Bible)

Becoming a believer through faith in Jesus Christ brings one face to face with God the Judge, whose judgment is not rendered with harshness and strict justice, but whose judgment is administered redemptively and compassionately. Intimate approach to God is permitted and encouraged, but never an approach of casualness. Deep love, but no mere sentimentality. While there need be no terror, there is always need for a believer to be filled with a profound sense of awe and reverence as he stands in the presence of God the Judge. He who knows God personally through faith in Jesus, is he who also is scrutinized constantly because God wishes to perfect and to cleanse the lives of His children. Great love involves great chastening when the presence of sin in the life of a believer threatens to mar the character of God's chosen ones!

- (5) "You have come to the spirits of the redeemed in heaven, already made perfect." (verse 23b; Living Bible)

Even though there may rarely be direct communication between earthly believers and heavenly saints, there is some kind of specially sensed general fellowship between the living believers on earth and the living dead in heaven. Earlier in the chapter there is a reference to the "great cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1) who apparently at times view the activities of the saints on earth, rather like a cheering crowd in the grandstands who cheer the running athletes on the racing track. Becoming a Christian gives one, not only a basis for deep communion with the multitudes of earthly saints in all nations on earth, but becoming a Christian gives one a sense of comradeship with the saints who have entered heaven ahead of him!

- (6) "You have come to Jesus himself, who has brought us his wonderful new agreement." (verse 24a; Living Bible)

Becoming a Christian results in God's laws being written on the tablets of one's fleshly heart, not written on the tablets of stones! God's laws become the believer's delight, and he seeks to mediate upon those laws day and

night! God's laws are not burdensome, but, because of his changed heart and transformed attitudes, God's laws become the "meat and the drink" of the Christian. It is no longer a matter of "Have To." It is now a matter of "Want To". He wants to please the Father. He wants to obey God's commands. He wants to reach out in love to his neighbor with compassion. He wants to serve unselfishly. He wants to share the good news of salvation with the lost ones. He wants to use his talents and gifts to edify the Church of Jesus. He has entered into a new agreement -- a covenant of love, not a covenant of law! A love relationship of self-giving, resulting in receptivity to truth and in humble confession of sin.

Christianity is not a matter of human performance and of accumulation of good works in an attempt to prove one's worth to God. Rather, Christianity is a matter of falling in love with Jesus!

"He speaks, and the sound of His voice
Is so sweet the birds hush their singing;
And the melody that He gave to me
Within my heart is ringing."

"And He walks with me, and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own;
And the joy we share as we tarry there
None other has ever known."

- (7) "You have come to the sprinkled blood which graciously forgives instead of crying out for vengeance as the blood of Abel did." (verse 24b; Living Bible)

When Abel was unjustly killed by his brother Cain, his shed blood cried out for just vengeance. When Jesus was unjustly killed by the Jews and Romans (who represented all of wicked mankind), His shed blood cried out to the Just Judge of the Universe, not to avenge Him but to forgive guilty sinners! The blood of the innocent One for the sins of the guilty! Without the shedding of Jesus' blood, there is no remission of sins.

"The blood, the blood, is all my plea,
Oh! Hallelujah! It cleanses me!"

"What can wash away my sin?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
What can make me whole again?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Oh! precious is the flow that makes me white as snow;
No other fount I know, Nothing but the blood of Jesus."

"There's a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel's veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains."

Jesus' blood is "sprinkled", i.e., Jesus' blood is spread out to atone for all the sins of all the people for all time! The unlimited atonement provided for the whole world! One privilege in being a Christian is the availability of Jesus' shed blood to atone for every new sin which might be committed. Repentance assures immediate forgiveness because of Jesus' cleansing blood. There is no need for any believer to go on a "guilt trip", to wallow in shame, to backslide from the faith, to be plagued with a troubled conscience. There is provision for constant forgiveness!

As a believer, plead the blood of Jesus all the days of your short life! The last words of my elderly grandmother were something like these: "I am depending on the blood of Jesus!"

III. The Urgency Of Spiritual Obedience (Verse 25)

Deliverance from the terror of the Law and acceptance of the offers of Grace results in great rejoicing. Such a life is characterized by communion with Jesus, communion with the saints on earth and in heaven, and communion with the angelic hosts around the throne in heaven. Forgiveness of sins and constant cleansing in the precious blood of Christ!

Deliverance from Law (12:18-21), Enjoyment of New Life in Christ (12:22-24), Maintenance of Dynamic Relationship (12:25) - this is the sequence of thought and truth.

After describing the deep communion of believers with the living God (v.22-24), the writer to these Hebrew believers strongly urges the latter to carefully guard against disobedience. *"So see to it that you obey him who is speaking to you. For if the people of Israel did not escape when they refused to listen to Moses, the earthly messenger, how terrible our danger if we refuse to listen to God who speaks to us from heaven!"* (Hebrews 12:25; Living Bible)

Notes Barclay, "If a man merits condemnation for neglecting the imperfect message of law, how much more does he merit condemnation if he neglects the perfect message of the gospel?" (Barclay's Hebrews: page 215)

One is saved by placing his faith in Jesus as his only Savior

and Lord. One stays saved by learning to listen to God's voice and by explicitly obeying God's instructions. Says Alexander Maclaren, "Keep yourselves out of the babble of the world's voices; and be accustomed to go by yourselves and let God speak....Go into the lone place of silent contemplation, and so get near God, and you will hear His voice." (Expositions of Holy Scripture; vol. 16; pg. 274)

The Bible nowhere teaches that a believer is automatically and unconditionally secure in his relationship with God. The person who no longer listens to God is the person who faces serious dangers! Notes Maclaren, "The man who stops his ears will very soon turn his back and be in flight, so far as he can, from the voice. Do not tamper with God's utterances. If you do, you have begun a course that ends in alienation from Him." (Ibid; pg. 275)

IV. The Certainty of Divine Evaluation (Verses 26-27)

The promise of new life through Christ is offered to all persons. None need any longer be guilt-ridden and terror-stricken. All may enjoy communion with the Heavenly Father and with the saints of all ages - both with those who are living on earth and with those who have gone before them into heaven. The life received from Christ is the life that can be maintained and enjoyed throughout all of one's earthly life. It is God's good and perfect will that all persons should appropriate by faith the offered life and should maintain by obedience the new life which is most glorious.

But to whom much is offered, much is required. With wonderful promises and privileges, there are great responsibilities and awesome accountability. God is not only the Living God whose gift of new life in Christ is offered to all, but God is the Great Evaluator and Judge who will test the quality of man's life, and who will reward or punish every man according to the type of response each person has given to God's offer of mercy and grace. "When he spoke from Mount Sinai his voice shook the earth, but 'Next time,' he says 'I will not only shake the earth, but the heavens too.' By this he means that he will sift out everything without solid foundations, so that only unshakable things will be left." (Hebrews 12:26-27; Living Bible) Only those persons whose lives have been built upon Christ as their foundation will be able to endure the final storms of eternal judgment and evaluation!

Said Jesus, "All who listen to my instructions and follow them are wise, like a man who builds his house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents, and the floods rise and the storm winds beat against his house, it won't collapse, for it is built on rock. But those who hear my instructions and ignore them are foolish, like a man who builds his house on

sand. For when the rains and floods come, and storm winds beat against his house, it will fall with a mighty crash." (Matthew 7:24-27; Living Bible)

At the end of life as we know it, there will be a Day of Judgment - Judgment which involves separation of the wicked from the righteous, separation of the 'sheep' from the 'goats', separation of the 'wheat' from the 'tares'.

Not only will there be a separation of the wicked and the righteous - the Judgment of Damnation -, but there will be a Final Judgment of Evaluation for the Righteous.

Every believer faces the Judgment of Evaluation at the end of time. The quality of a believer's life and work will be tested. Wrote Paul, "For we must all stand before Christ to be judged and have our lives laid bare - before him. Each of us will receive whatever he deserves for the good or bad things he has done in his earthly body. It is because of this solemn fear of the Lord, which is ever present in our minds, that we work so hard to win others. God knows our hearts, that they are pure in this matter, and I hope that, deep within, you really know it too." (II Corinthians 5:10-11; Living Bible) "And no one can ever lay any other real foundation than that one we already have - Jesus Christ. But there are various kinds of materials that can be used to build on that foundation. Some use gold and silver and jewels; and some build with sticks, and hay, or even straw! There is going to come a time of testing at Christ's Judgment Day to see what kind of material each builder has used. Everyone's work will be put through the fire so that all can see whether or not it keeps its value, and what was really accomplished. Then every workman who has built on the foundation with the right materials, and whose work still stands, will get his pay. But if the house he has built burns up, he will have a great loss. He himself will be saved, but like a man escaping through a wall of flames." (I Corinthians 3:11-15; Living Bible)

Only those who are attached by faith to Jesus Christ and who maintain that relationship through consistent obedience, will abide forever. Wrote John, "And this world is fading away, and these evil, forbidden things will go with it, but whoever keeps doing the will of God will live forever." (I John 2:17; Living Bible)

V. The Conditions For Eternal Security (Verses 28-29)

"Since we have a kingdom nothing can destroy, let us please God by serving him with thankful hearts, and with holy fear and awe. For our God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews 12:28-29; Living Bible)

God's Kingdom is eternal! Nothing can destroy that Kingdom! He who stays attached to Christ amidst the changes and the chances of earthly life, is he who will enjoy the unchanging glories of heaven's secure life. It is he who seeks to please God by serving Him faithfully with gratitude and with thanksgiving and holy reverence, who shall become a citizen of God's unshakable and eternal Kingdom. On the other hand, he who abandons the faith, he who becomes self-serving rather than self-giving, he who becomes bitter and complaining rather than tender and grateful, he who becomes irreverent rather than maintaining a holy fear - to such a person the consuming fire of God's judgment shall destroy him!

There is wonderful companionship for a Christian to enjoy here on earth, and there is ultimate and eternal security for a Christian to enjoy in heaven as a member of God's unshakable Kingdom, but communion here and eternal security hereafter are both dependent upon the maintenance of right attitudes and right actions - the maintenance of the life of God-honoring service and the maintenance of the attitudes of gratitude and reverence for holy things!

CONCLUSION: There is life in the Son of God, not outside of the Son. No life under the strict requirements of the Law which no human has the independent ability to obey, but life in the Son of God who is freely offered to every person. He who places his faith in Christ's saving work and in His cleansing blood, is he who enjoys sweet communion with the Father and dynamic fellowship with fellow believers. This new life, received initially by faith in Christ, is maintained by obedience to God's commands. He who does the will of God on earth becomes a member of God's eternal kingdom - a - kingdom which cannot be shaken! Obedience to God's will concretely means serving Him with a thankful heart, and with holy fear and awe. He who stays attached to Christ and His Kingdom will never be removed or shaken. All earthly kingdoms will crumble and all earthly things will pass away, but he who does the will of the Father shall abide forever! The obedient one, the serving one, the thankful one, the reverent one will abide forever.

Such a person will enjoy eternal security! He shall endure the scrutiny of the Final Judgment and shall enjoy heaven forevermore! This portion of Scripture from Hebrews 12:18-29 answers some very important questions regarding the Christian Life.

- (1) Why do I need to become a Christian? Because I face the wrath of God whose strict justice condemns me in my sins, and because I am estranged and lonely and terror-stricken as a lost and helpless sinner (verses 18-21).
- (2) How do I become a Christian? By allowing God to forgive my sins and to cleanse my heart because of Jesus' atoning blood, and by allowing God to transform my nature (actions and attitudes) through God writing His Laws upon the tablet of my human heart. (verse 24)
- (3) What happens when I become a Christian? I establish an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ my Savior and with God my loving Judge who regularly evaluates my life and who progressively perfects my behavior. I also become aware of fellowship with other believers, and become strangely and wonderfully aware that I have a comradeship with the heavenly hosts and with believers who have already died and are in heaven. (verses 22-24)
- (4) What must I do to maintain a dynamic and up-to-date saving relationship with God? I must learn to obey God's commands, realizing that relapsing into a lifestyle of disobedience and rebellion will result in serious spiritual harm and will eventually result in spiritual judgment, far worse than that judgment which was experienced by the apostate Old Testament Israelites (verse 25).
- (5) In light of my ultimate accountability before God at the Final Judgment, and in light of life's constant changes and earth's falling kingdoms, how can I be secure for time and for eternity? I must remain vitally attached to Christ and to His unshakable Kingdom, maintaining a life of unselfish service and an attitude that is characterized by reverence and gratitude, the result of which is eternal security and escape of the eventual fiery judgment of God. (verses 26-29)

WONDERFUL REALITIES AND AWESOME RESPONSIBILITIES

Q U E S T I O N S

1. In Hebrews 12:18-21, point out those Scriptures which describe each of the following attributes of God:
 - (a) The sheer majesty of God.
 - (b) The absolute unapproachability of God.
 - (c) The sheer terror of God.
2. In contrast to Mount Sinai which describes the strict justice and judgment and laws of God in the Old Testament, what does Mount Zion (v.22) symbolize?
3. In describing the Christian life, check those statements which reflect dimensions of the Christian Life that you have, in at least some measure, personally experienced:

_____ (1) "Come right up unto Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem" - as a believer, I have experienced gladness and joy and forgiveness and reconciliation and intimate fellowship and newness of life.

_____ (2) "Come to the gathering of countless happy angels" - as a believer who worships the Father, I have sensed that my earthly praise is blended with the noble praise of the myriad of angels who surround the heavenly throne.

_____ (3) "Come to the church, composed of all those registered in heaven" - as a believer, I have sensed that I am one in fellowship with all believers of all times and of all cultures and of all nationalities.

_____ (4) "Come to God who is Judge of all" - as a believer, I have sensed that, through conversion, I have come face to face with God the Judge, whose judgment is not rendered with harshness and strict justice, but administered redemptively and compassionately for the purpose of perfecting my character.

_____ (5) "Come to the spirits of the redeemed in heaven, already made perfect" - as a believer, I have sensed a certain closeness and comradeship with the saints who have already entered heaven ahead of me.

_____ (6) "Come to Jesus himself, who has brought us his wonderful new agreement" - as a believer, I have sensed that God's laws are written on the tablet of my fleshly heart, and I have experienced deep and personal communion with Jesus as my Friend.

- _____ (7) "Come to the sprinkled blood which graciously forgives instead of crying out for vengeance as the blood of Abel did" - as a believer, I have learned to plead the cleansing blood of Jesus for daily forgiveness of my sins and weaknesses and failures, thus maintaining a clear conscience and a pure heart.
4. Regarding the relationship between privileges and responsibilities, what logic does the writer to the Hebrew Christians use in Hebrews 12:25?
 5. Tell to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements: "One is saved by placing his faith in Jesus as his only Savior and Lord. One stays saved by learning to listen to God's voice and by explicitly obeying God's instructions. The Bible nowhere teaches that a believer is automatically and unconditionally secure in his relationship with God."
 6. Share Scriptural references which document the truth of the following statement: "God is not only the Living God whose gift of new life in Christ is offered to all, but God is the Great Evaluator and Judge who will test the quality of every man's life, and who will reward or punish every man according to the type of response each person has given to God's offer of mercy and grace." (Note Hebrews 12:26-27; Matthew 7:24-27; II Corinthians 5:10-11; I Corinthians 3:11-15) What is the difference between the Judgment of Damnation for Sinners (Revelation 20:11-15) and the Judgment of Evaluation for Christians (II Corinthians 5:10-11)?
 7. According to I John 2:15-17, who alone will abide forever?
 8. According to Hebrews 12:28-29, what attitudes and actions in the life of a Christian must be maintained, in order to assure him of escape of God's fiery judgment and of ultimate security in God's wonderful heaven?
 9. Name some of the 'Kingdoms' of this world which are 'shakeable' and 'temporary', in contrast to God's Kingdom which is 'unshakable' and 'eternal'. (Note Hebrews 12:28-29)
 10. In light of a careful study of Hebrews 12:18-29, how would you answer the following five basic questions regarding the Christian Life?
 - (1) Why do I need to become a Christian? (verses 18-21)

- (2) How do I become a Christian? (verse 24)
- (3) What happens when I become a Christian? (verses 22-24)
- (4) What must I do to maintain a dynamic and up-to-date saving relationships with God? (verse 25)
- (5) In light of my ultimate accountability before God at the Final Judgment, and in light of life's constant changes and earth's falling kingdoms, how can I be secure for time and eternity?

C H A P T E R 23

ATTRIBUTES OF A CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE

HEBREWS 13:1 - 10

HEBREWS

ATTRIBUTES OF A CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 13:1-10

INTRODUCTION: When someone asks you, "What is your lifestyle?", how do you respond? What constitutes one's lifestyle? Probably many things come to mind. How one lives economically - frugally or extravagantly. How one lives socially - as a so-called 'loner' who enjoys much solitude, or as a so-called 'socialite' who enjoys the company of people most of the time. How one lives morally - as a religious person who is concerned with standards and convictions, or as an irreligious person who profanes the sacred and who ridicules holy things.

How one lives, how one relates to others, what one thinks about ultimate values - these are some of the factors which are taken into consideration when one describes another person's "lifestyle."

PROPOSITION: The writer to the Hebrew believers is concerned to describe and to define a distinctive Christian lifestyle in Hebrews 13:1-10. There are certain attributes that are practiced by earnest Christians. What makes a Christian different from any other person? It is the fact that Christians act and react like Christ, that they value what Christ values.

I. Love For Fellow Believers (Verse 1)

"Keep loving each other as brothers." (verse 1)

The love which Christians are to have for each other is to be patterned after Jesus' love. That is to say, this love is to be an act of the will, as well as an emotion of the heart. Christians are to choose to love all other Christians, regardless of whether or not there is a natural affinity or natural attraction or similar background. A willingness to sacrifice personal comfort to help another is a characteristic of this kind of love. This love is to continue, to persist, to be steadfast. Focusing on the virtues in another Christian, not on his faults, is another characteristic of this love. Amidst an earnest pursuit of truth within the society of the church, it is important for fellow believers to maintain understanding and acceptance and warmth and love. Agreeing always to disagree agreeably, and to be adaptable and tolerant and forgiving are marks of a godly lifestyle.

"Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above."

"Before our Father's throne
We pour our ardent prayers;
Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,
Our comforts and our cares."

II. Hospitality Towards Strangers (Verse 2)

"Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it." (v.2)

How would you feel if you turned down Christian hospitality to a needy person, only to find out later that the person you turned away was an angel from God who was concealed as a human being? In Genesis 18, it is recorded that an angel came to visit Abraham and Sarah, to tell them that in their old age they would miraculously become the parents of a child.

Christians are to open their hearts and their homes to fellow Christians, to hurting people, to lonely folks. Notes Barclay, "Christianity was, and still should be, the religion of the open door." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 219) Wrote Peter to the Christians in his day, "*Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.*" (I Peter 4:9) Among the traits in the list of qualifying traits for Christian leaders in the local church is the trait of hospitality. (Note I Timothy 3:2; 5:10; Titus 1:8)

In our modern American society it is estimated that there are hundreds of thousands of persons who are homeless - not because of slothfulness but because of the hardship of circumstances. How thankful these persons, many of whom are Christians, would be to have a warm home occasionally to retreat to for a delicious meal and a joyful conversation.

Think also of the many new believers in our community who have no friends or relatives, who are lonely and in need of expressions of warm hospitality. My daughters who went to Greenville College, 1000 miles away from their home, enjoyed the warm hospitality of a Christian professor and his wife. On many occasions they were invited to their home for meals, and this professor travelled from Greenville to St. Louis several times to give them transportation from the airport back to their dorms. Unusual acts of hospitality!

In a world full of loneliness and financial deprivation, can there be any more important ministry than the ministry of hospitality? Think of how seldom some Christian families use their extra bedrooms for guests. Sharing a meal and a bed is doing what Mary and Martha and Lazarus did for Jesus. Jesus knew what it was to be homeless. On one occasion Jesus said, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." (Matthew 8:20)

III. Empathy For Suffering Believers (Verse 3)

"Remembering those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering." (verse 3)

It was a widespread practice for Christians in the Early Church to visit their fellow believers who were in prison because of their faith in Christ. Christians went to great sacrifices to help the suffering ones in prisons.

One trait of a believer is empathy for suffering fellow believers. Weeping with those who weep is a mark of true Christian compassion. Trying to understand the hurts of others, and giving a helping hand to the injured, and befriending the lonely ones - these are actions which result in bringing healing and encouragement.

A group of Christians are like a human body, with all believers mutually supporting each other. No competition, but genuine caring for each other! "This makes for happiness among the parts, so that the parts have the same care for each other that they do for themselves. If one part suffers, all parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad." (I Corinthians 12:25-26, Living Bible)

IV. Fidelity Towards Marriage Partner (Verse 4)

"Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral." (verse 4)

Marriage is a divine institution, not a man-made invention. In a society that lightly regards and even sneers at marriage, it is time for Christians to affirm this divine institution. Even before the Fall of Man, God ordained that Man and Woman should be one in physical union and one in spiritual communion. "The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man'. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." (Genesis 2:23-24)

Sexual fulfillment within the marriage context is honorable and pure and totally affirmed by God. Adulterous relationships will be judged by God. *"The Lord will punish men for all such sins."* (I Thessalonians 4:6)

A Christian who is married is to be committed to his spouse at all times, under all circumstances. There must be no hint of sexual immorality, but a commitment to total purity and absolute fidelity.

V. Contentment Through Divine Companionship (Verses 5-6)

"Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you'. So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?'" (verses 5-6)

To be greedy for personal gain or to be covetous of another person's possessions and wealth is to manifest an idolatrous spirit. Worshipping money or the things which money can buy reveals a false understanding of the meaning of contentment. God alone has bread for the soul, and no amount of money can buy food for the soul! God alone is the source of true contentment. Money cannot buy companionship, but God gives companionship. Money can easily "take wings" and be gone, but God will never leave you or forsake you. Money cannot guarantee protection against enemies, but God will always be your Savior, if not always to rescue you from physical harm, always to rescue you from ultimate spiritual destruction! Money does not have the ability to remove all fears from your heart, but the Lord always has the power to still your fears and to comfort your troubled heart.

The contentment which comes as a result of enjoying what God gives, without always desiring more and without laying envious eyes upon the possessions of others, is truly wonderful! Contentment is the product of resting secure in the presence of an all-sufficient God whose resources are exhaustless.

Living simply, giving generously, and serving others unselfishly will result in breaking the stranglehold of materialism in one's life. Money is a wonderful servant, but a terrible tyrant!

Focus your attention on pleasing God and on giving to others. Wrote Paul, "Tell those who are rich not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which will soon be gone, but their pride and trust should be in the living God who always richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and should give happily to those in need, always being ready to

share with others whatever God has given them. By doing this they will be storing up real treasure for themselves in heaven - it is the only safe investment for eternity! And they will be living a fruitful Christian life down here as well." (I Timothy 6:17-19; Living Bible)

VI. Modeling of Godly Leadership (Verse. 7)

"Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith." (verse 7)

Modeling godly leaders is important in the developmental process of becoming Christlike. We all learn through imitation. A small child imitates his father's actions and words. A student imitates his teacher, and a young Christian mentors an older believer.

The leaders whom we are to imitate are those who preach Christ to others, who are effective in soul-winning.

Paul believed so much in the importance of modelling, that he told younger Christians, "Follow me as I fellow Christ!" Jesus taught His disciples the meaning of the Kingdom of God, not only through His wise words of instruction, but also by His compassionate actions and reactions in the world of men.

Older men are to set a godly example for younger men, and older women are to teach younger women how to be good wives and godly mothers. Each of us needs someone whom we respect and to whom we can be directly accountable. Godly living is learned, not in an abstract vacuum or by simply reading books, but godly living is learned by modelling those leaders who "flesh out" godly character traits in their everyday lives.

Many have been the godly leaders in my life who have shown me how to live by living a godly life before me. Throughout my childhood and teen years, I observed these spiritual leaders very closely. I observed how they acted in public and in their private lives, how they responded to needy people, how they counselled confused people, how they responded to personal trials and adversities, how they spent their money, how consistently they lived their lives for Christ, how they explained the Scriptures, how they worked with sinners at an altar of prayer, how they trusted God while facing an unknown future, and how tolerant and loving they were towards people without compromising basic moral principles.

Even young men can be godly examples. Paul wrote to young Timothy, "*Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.*" (I Timothy 4:12, NIV)

One of the greatest privileges of my life and ministry has been to share many tributes for godly persons whose greatness is being recognized at funerals. In tribute after tribute, I have found myself sharing how the character of the particular person in mind has greatly influenced my own life. When sharing, I have a clear mental picture of the radiant face of the person, of the kind actions of the person, of the fervent prayers of the person, of the final perseverance of the person. Even though that person is physically dead, he or she still speaks to me and that person's influence continues to guide my life! Yes, modelling godly leaders is one of the important steps in the cultivation of a Christian lifestyle.

Not only is there to be imitation of the godly lifestyle of these spiritual leaders, but there is to be obedience to their instructions. *"Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be no advantage to you."* (Hebrews 13:17)

VII. Security In Christ' Changelessness (Verse 8)

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."
(verse 8)

As much as we should admire great leaders and seek to imitate their godly lifestyle, we know that, at best, they are still imperfect and, to some extent, changeable. All persons, including the great saints, whose examples are worth modelling, are subject to the changes of time, to the changes of moods, to the changes of circumstances. Great leaders are subject to temptation and are not always invincible to the attacks of the devil. Sad, but true, some leaders have fallen into sin, and have caused many followers to become disillusioned in their faith. And ultimately, the greatest of all godly leaders must finally die and leave this earthly stage of action and leave the company of their admiring followers.

So, in light of these obvious facts, where does one find his final security? The ultimate security of every believer is Jesus Christ. In Jesus there is no shadow of turning, no variability, no moral inconsistencies, no unpredictability.

"Change and decay all around I see,
Thou God who changes not, abide with me."

Human leaders come and go, but Jesus abides for ever. Human leaders rise and can fall, but Jesus is steadfast in His character and unfailing in His promises. Human leaders are subject to all kinds of changes - socially, physically,

mentally, morally - but "Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever." He is steadfast and unmoveable in His mercies, eternal in His character. He is never "out of character" as too often humans can be.

Note F.B. Meyer, in his book "The Way Into The Holiest" (pages 178-179):

Oh, do not read the Gospels as a record merely of the past, but as a transcript of what He is ever doing. Each miracle, and parable, and trait, is a specimen of eternal facts, which are taking place by myriads, at every moment of the day and night; the achievements of the ever-living, ever-working Lord. No lake without that figure treading its waters. No storm without that voice mightier than its roar. No meal without that face uplifted in blessing, or that hand engaged in breaking. No grace without that tender heart touched with sorrow. No burden without those willing shoulders to share the yoke.

Oh, take me not back through the long ages to a Christ that was! He is! He lives! He is here! I can never again be alone, never grope in the dark for a hand, never be forsaken, or forlorn. Never need a Guide, a Master, a Friend, or a Husband to my soul. I have Him, who suffices for uncounted myriads in the dateless noon of eternity. He who was everything in the yesterday of the past, and who will be everything in the to-morrow of the future, is mine to-day; and at each present moment of my existence - here, and in all worlds.

Time, circumstances, moods, and physical death bring countless changes and have the capability of creating an atmosphere of insecurity in our lives, but Jesus - the Changeless One - is the stabilizing center for our individual lives. "Turning from all these mortal companions, helpers, guides, he (the writer to the Hebrews) bids us think of Him who liveth for ever, and for ever is the teacher, the companion, the home of our hearts, and the goal of our love. All other ties - sweet, tender, infinitely precious, have been or will be broken for you and me....But there is one bond over which the skeleton fingers of Death have no power, and they fumble at that knot in vain. He (death) separates us from all others; blessed be God! he (death) cannot separate us from Christ. 'I shall not lose Thee though I die'; and Thou, Thou diest never." (Expositions of Holy Scriptures; Maclaren; pages 289-290.

VIII. Strength Through Grace Resources (Verses 9-10)

"Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them. We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat." (v.9-10)

From whence does one get his strength to live the Christian life? It is not through observation of Jewish laws and ceremonial regulations. It is not through mere human discipline or by obedience to rigid dietary rules. *"So do not be attracted by strange, new ideas. Your spiritual strength comes as a gift from God, not from ceremonial rules about eating certain foods - a method which, by the way, hasn't helped those who have tried it! We have an altar - the cross where Christ was sacrificed - where those who continue to seek salvation by obeying Jewish laws can never be helped."* (Hebrews 13:9-10; Living Bible)

"Not the labors of my hands
Can fulfill thy Law's Demands
Thou must save, and Thou alone."

"There is only one way by which we can be kept from being drifted away by the currents and blown away by the tempests that run and range through every life, and that is that we shall anchor ourselves on God. His grace, His love possessed, and the sufficing gifts for all our hungry desires which come through that love possessed, these, and these alone, are the conditions of human stability." (Expositions of Holy Scripture; vol. 16; pg. 298; Alexander Maclaren)

Someone said, "It is not hard, it is impossible to live the Christian life, if you attempt to live it by your own strength and power." The Christian life is a supernatural life, and it can only be lived when Christ indwells the human heart and when Christ lives His own life through the life of the believer.

The Christian life is an Exchanged Life. That is to say, we exchange our weakness for Christ's strength, our moral pollution for His moral purity, our ignorance for His wisdom, our guilt for His forgiveness, our humiliation and shame for His nobility and honor, our brokenness for His health. Grace - God's love for an undeserving fallen race of people - is the source for strength. It is the positive power of Jesus Christ that changes and transforms weak and sinful people, to become strong and beautiful people! It is not trying harder to be a better person; it is trusting Christ completely to become a

new and transformed person! "I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me." (Galatians 2:20; Jerusalem Bible)

CONCLUSION: According to Hebrews 13:1-10, what attributes must be evident in the lives of earnest Christians, Christians who are seeking to pattern their lives after the life of Christ?

- (1) Love for fellow believers (verse 1).
- (2) Hospitality towards strangers (verse 2).
- (3) Empathy for suffering believers (verse 3).
- (4) Fidelity towards marriage partner (verse 4).
- (5) Contentment through divine companionship (verses 5-6).
- (6) Modelling of godly leadership (verse 7).
- (7) Security in Christ's changelessness (verse 8).
- (8) Strength through grace resources (verses 9-10).

A saint has been defined as "a man in whom Christ lives again." (Barclay's Hebrews; pg. 222) Will you let Christ live in you, and love through you? Commit yourself to a Christian lifestyle, to a way of life that is fully pleasing to God!

ATTRIBUTES OF A CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE

Q U E S T I O N S

1. Is it possible for sincere-minded believers who are committed to the maintenance of doctrinal integrity, to fall into the 'trap' of a critical spirit, fault-finding and judgementalism, and thus to destroy 'brotherly love' within the church? Why or why not? What are some of the characteristics of 'brotherly love'? (verse 1)
2. Tell what is meant by the following phrase: "Christianity is the religion of the 'open door'." To what extent, and under what circumstances, are Christians to show hospitality to 'strangers'? (verse 2)
3. According to I Timothy 3:2 and I Timothy 5:10 and Titus 1:8, what is one of the distinguishing marks of a godly leader?
4. Share from your own personal experience when you were the recipient of kindness from a fellow believer during a time of personal suffering. (Note Hebrews 13:4 and I Corinthians 12:25-26).
5. According to Hebrews 13:4, how should a believer respond to persons who sneer at the institution of marriage and who openly practice immorality?
6. According to Hebrews 13:5-6, why should Christians look for contentment in something other than in material possessions?
7. From your own personal experience, tell to what extent you agree with the following statement: "Living simply, giving generously, and serving others unselfishly will result in breaking the stranglehold of materialism in one's life." (Note I Timothy 6:17-19)
8. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statements: "Each of us needs someone whom we respect and to whom we can be directly accountable. Godly living is learned, not in an abstract vacuum or by simply reading books, but godly living is learned by modelling those leaders who 'flesh out' godly character traits in their everyday lives." (Note I Timothy 4:12)

Share the benefits which you have derived, as a result of making yourself accountable to a godly person (counsellor or discipler) whom you admire and whose lifestyle you seek to imitate.

9. According to Hebrews 13:17, why is it so important for growing believers to submit to the authority of godly leaders?
10. As important as it is to imitate the lifestyle (verse 7) and to obey the instructions (verse 17) of godly leaders, why is Christ's changelessness (verse 8) our only basis for true and lasting security in time and in eternity?
11. According to Hebrews 13:9-10, what is one common and destructive teaching in all false doctrines? From whence does one get his strength to live the Christian life? (Note Galatians 2:20)
12. Can you think of a friend whose efforts to live a moral life have only resulted in bringing a sense of futility and despair to him, similar to the sense of despair which Martin Luther and John Wesley experienced before their conversions? Would the following description of the Christian life help your moralist friend become a true and humble believer? - "The Christian Life is an Exchanged Life. We exchange our weakness for Christ's strength, our moral pollution for His moral purity, our ignorance for His wisdom, our guilt for His forgiveness, our humiliation and shame for His nobility and honor, our brokenness for His health. It is the positive power of Jesus Christ that changes weak and sinful people, to become strong and beautiful people!"

APPENDIX A

ANALYTICAL OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

ANALYTICAL OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

Didactic (1:1-14)

Jesus is superior to all things and to all persons! Jesus is Creator and sustainer of the physical universe (1:1,2), the heir of God (1:1), the incarnate manifestation of God's glory (1:3), the atoning sacrifice for sin (1:3), the resurrected and exalted Son (1:3). Jesus is superior to the angels in every way (1:5-14), as demonstrated by his everlasting reign (1:8), by His creative power (1:10), by His everlasting person (1:11), by His immutability (1:12), by His victorious kingly reign (1:13). Angels are servants of the redeemed (1:14).

Hortatory (2:1-4)

Based on the superior revelation of God through Christ, believers are exhorted to pay closer attention to the message and to guard against drifting away from the truth. There is no escape from judgment for those who "neglect such a great salvation." (2:3)

Didactic (2:5 - 3:6)

Christ has universal dominion, Christ (not the angels) will control the future world (2:5); there is Scriptural precedent for Christ's universal rule (2:6-8). This universal dominion of Christ is based on His redemptive suffering (2:9-10), and based on His incarnate identification with mankind (2:11-18) through which Christ broke the power of Satan and gave spiritual victory to mankind.

Based on Christ's person ('Son of God') and based on Christ's work of redemption (Sacrificial death), God has made Christ the Head over His own house - the faithful (3:1-6).

Hortatory (3:6 - 4:16)

Since Christ is superior to the prophets (1:1-2), to the angels (1:4-14; 2:5), and to Moses (3:1-6), and since His creative power (1:2,3a,10,11) and redemptive work (1:3b;2:9,10) are mightily manifest, we believers (3:7) are warned against hardening our hearts against God's love and mercy as the unbelieving Israelites did in the desert when God tested them (3:7-10). Believers under trial are warned not to allow their hearts to become hardened, evil, and unbelieving (3:12,13,15), following the example of the Israelites who forfeited the promise

of God and reaped the wrath of God (3:11) because of unbelief. God's promises for salvation can only be fulfilled in the lives of those who are faithful to God to the end of life (3:14). Believers are to look at the example of the Israelite apostasy (3:16-19), as a warning against the perils of unbelief.

God's desire is universal salvation of mankind, but only those who experience salvation through persevering faith (4:1,2b,3,5,6) finally enter the eternal 'rest' of God (in heaven). "*There is a full complete rest still waiting for the people of God*" (Living Bible 4:9), but persistent disobedience makes it impossible finally to enter that rest (4:7-11).

The secret motives of our hearts (the true spiritual conditions) are fully known to God (4:12,13), but God has mercy upon us during our tests, if we continue to trust our Great High Priest who intercedes before the Father on our behalf. (4:14-16).

Didactic (5:1-10)

Christ, after the example of Aaron and the Aaronic priesthood, was called and chosen by God to be High Priest in behalf of sinning mankind. Through the humble obedience which Christ learned through suffering, He became the Giver of eternal life to all persons who obey Him.

Hortatory (5:11 - 6:20)

Obedience (described through the afore mentioned picture of Christ who suffered redemptively, (5:1-10) must be practiced in order to keep one from relapsing into spiritual infantilism, and to become mature in one's ability to understand the deep truths of God's Word, and in order for a believer to be mature in his ethical discernment (5:11-14).

Relapse into spiritual immaturity, as evidenced by failure to understand the deeper truths of God (6:1-3), can lead to a state of apostasy (6:4-6) and spiritual sterility (6:7-8); therefore, (negatively-speaking) because of the reality of this spiritual peril, and (positively-speaking) because of the trustworthiness of God's saving promise and oath (as exemplified in God's faithful promise to Abraham and Abraham's response of faith to that promise (6:13-20), believers are urged to persevere in a life of faith and practical love (6:13-20), believers are urged to persevere in a life of faith and practical love (6:9-12) and not to become "sluggish,

but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." (6:12;RSV)

Didactic (7:1-10:18)

The lesser (Abraham, representing Levi and the total Aaronic priesthood), paid tithes to the greater (to Melchizedek, representing Jesus Christ). This shows the mighty saving purposes and redemptive blessings of the priesthood of Christ which has come to replace the weak Aaronic priesthood (7:6).

The superior and eternal priesthood of Christ has replaced the inferior and transient Aaronic priesthood (as shown by the fact that, humanly-speaking, Christ was descended from the tribe of Judah, not the priest-tribe of Levi (7:12-28).

The New Covenant of Grace, based on Christ's superior Heavenly priesthood (8:1-6), (as foretold in Jeremiah 31:31-34), has replaced the Old Covenant of Law. The New Covenant results in the forgiveness of sins and in a change of the human heart that issues forth in willing obedience to God's commands (8:7-13).

The transforming blood of the New Covenant is the blood of Christ, which blood was shed once-and-for-all as the eternally effective atonement for sins, in contrast to the oft-repeated blood sacrifices of animals in the Old Testament ritualistic sacrificial system (which was only a shadow of the heavenly tabernacle). (Hebrews 9:1-10; 18)

Hortatory (10:19 - 12:29)

Believers are exhorted to appropriate the wonderful provisions for Christ's atonement (Hebrews 10:19-23), and to persevere in love (10:24), in responsible christian fellowship (10:25) and in faithful suffering for the Lord (10:32-34), in view of the terrible possibility of falling away from the Savior through deliberate sinning, thus incurring the terrible judgment of God (10:26-31). Perseverance in the faith (i.e., continuing to trust the Lord for everything throughout one's entire lifetime) is the condition for the fulfillment of God's promise of final salvation to believers (Hebrews 10:35-38), and is patterned for the present-day believers after the exemplary faith of Godly ancestors, some of whom exercised faith and thus enjoyed victory through deliverance from death (Hebrews 11:1-35a), and some of whom exercised faith and enjoyed victory in spite of death (Hebrews 11:35b-40).

Believers are exhorted to rid themselves of all known sin and to 'run with patience the race' that God has set before them, keeping encouraged as they look at the example of Jesus who suffered patiently at the hands of evil men (Hebrews 12:1-4).

Believers are exhorted to accept the corrective discipline of the Lord as remedial and redemptive and contributive to spiritual maturity, and not to become discouraged or rebellious when experiencing such discipline (12:1-11). Believers are exhorted to guard against various sins, (quarrelling, bitterness, immorality, spiritual indifference (12:14-17), and, in view of the holiness and justice of God (12:18-24), to maintain an unshakable faith and obedience (12:25-29).

Didactic (13:1-6)

Some practical aspects of Christian discipleship are briefly noted: The importance of maintaining brotherly love, the importance of hospitality to strangers, the importance of showing compassion to believers who are suffering for their faith, the importance of maintaining marital fidelity, the importance of being content rather than being greedy, the importance of affirming God's abiding presence which eliminates fear.

Hortatory (13:7-17)

Submission to the true spiritual leaders (verses 7,17), adherence to the true spiritual way (in contrast to the false way of legalism, verses 9-12), identification with Jesus' sufferings (verses 13-14), and the offering of praise and good works are all called for as appropriate human responses to the beautiful provisions and blessings of God's new covenant (described in the earlier portions of the Book).

Conclusion (13:18-25)

Personal appeal for the prayers of the Hebrew believers, and affirmation of God's power to the believers in the New and everlasting covenant, sealed with Christ's blood. Final appeal to heed the word of exhortation which has been the main purpose of the author in writing the Book of Hebrews. Closing benediction.

APPENDIX B

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF `PROMISES', `CONDITIONS', AND
`WARNINGS' IN THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

PROMISES & PROVISIONS	CONDITIONS & EXHORTATIONS	WARNINGS & PERILS
<p>Hebrews 1:1-14</p> <p>Jesus is creator and sustainer of universe (1:1,2), Heir of God (1:1) Incarnate manifestation of God's glory (1:3), atoning sacrifice for sin (1:3), resurrected and exalted Son (1:3).</p> <p>Jesus is superior to the angels in every way (1:5-14) (warranted by Scriptural support), as demonstrated by His everlasting reign (1:8), by His creative power (1:10), by His everlasting person (1:11), by His immutability (1:12), by His victorious kingly reign (1:13), angels are servants of the redeemed (1:14).</p>	<p>Hebrews 2:1-4</p> <p>"We must pay closer attention to what we have heard" (2:1)</p>	<p>possible to "drift away" from the message believers have heard.</p>
<p>Message was transmitted by angels (2:2)</p> <p>The message was "declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him." (2:3)</p>	<p>We (believers) must not neglect the great salvation of the Lord (2:3)</p>	<p>If believers neglect the great salvation of the Lord, they shall not escape! (2:3)</p>
<p>Jesus' incarnation and atoning death (2:8-9) is the basis of restoring man to a proper relationship with God by which man is enabled to resume his God-given role of</p>		

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Domination over the universe ("putting everything in subjection under his feet" (2:5-8), especially verse 8).

Jesus' identification with mankind through the incarnation and Jesus' atoning sacrifice for mankind, is the basis for the believers' victory over sin (2:15) and over temptation (2:18).

"Holy brethren, who share in a heavenly call" (3:1)

Jesus "was faithful to him who appointed him" (3:2)

Jesus as Son of God's House is superior to Moses as servant of God's House (3:3-6)

"Holy brethren, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession." (3:1)

"And we are his house if we hold fast our confidence and pride in our hope." (3:6)

"Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, etc." (3:7-11)

It is possible for believers, like as in the case of the Israelites in the wilderness, to succumb to sin and to harden their hearts (to go astray in their hearts verse 10). "Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God." (3:12)

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"Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today', that none of you maybe hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." (3:13)

"For we (believers) share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end." (3:14)

"let us fear lest any of you be judged to have failed to reach it" (4:1)

The good news of the message must "meet with faith in the hearers" (4:2)

"Let us therefore strive to enter that rest." (4:11)

Just as the unbelieving rebellious, disobedient Israelites (who broke the covenant obligations laid down in the Mosaic covenant) reaped the judgment of God, so believers, whose hearts have become hardened and disobedient, will also reap the judgment of God. Such apostates will never receive God's promised inheritance (in the heavenly 'promised land' of rest). (3:12-19)

It is possible (like as in the case of the unbelieving Israelites) for believers to receive the good news but subsequently to fail to enter God's eternal rest (heaven) because of falling into a state of persistent unbelief (and hardening of the heart), (4:5-7)

It is possible for believers to fall "by" the same sort of disobedience (4:11)

"The promise of entering his rest remains" (4:1)

"There remains a sabbath rest for the people of God" (4:9)

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"We have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens."
(4:14)

We (believers) have a sympathizing and merciful High Priest, (4:15) and, therefore, "we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."
(4:16)

"being made perfect (through suffering) he became the source of eternal salvation...being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek."
(5:9,10)

"...let us hold fast our profession."
(4:14)

"Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace."
(4:16)

Jesus, the Son, is the source of salvation "to all who obey him."
(4:9)

Believers' obedience (learned, as in the case of Jesus, through suffering, 5:7,8) must be practiced in order to keep them from relapsing into spiritual infantilism (5:12,13), and in order for them to become mature in their

The thoughts and intentions of the hearts of all men are exposed by God's powerful, penetrating Word; "all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do."
(4:12,13) (Implied: Disobedience (4:11) cannot be concealed, and a final accountability must motivate the believer to "strive to enter the rest" (4:11)

It is possible for one-time vital believers (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

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ability to understand the deep truths of God's word, and in order for them to be mature in their ethical discernment (5:14)

The land can receive a blessing from God (6:7)

"For land which has drunk the rain that often falls upon it, and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God." (6:7)

God will not overlook "your work and the love which you showed for his sake in serving the saints." (6:10)

"And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness in realizing the full assurance of hope until the end." (6:11)

the powers of the age to come." 6:4-6) to commit apostasy, (which is described as a condition of persistent (note the use of the Greek present participles) hostility to Christ, i.e. crucifying the Son of God by continuing 'to hold him up to contempt.' (6:6)

Note the marginal reading of the American Standard Version: "It is impossible to renew them again unto repentance, the while they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh and put him to an open shame." ("The present condition of deliberate, open hostility may conceivably be remedied and the persons renewed to repentance and salvation....The ground which has yielded only thorns and thistles has already been adjudged worthless (verse 8), and is now rejected; but it is said to be only 'near to a curse'. It awaits eventual burning; but that fate as yet is only in prospect. Perhaps it may be averted." (Life In The Son; Shank; pg. 318,319)

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"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 have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to seize the hope set before us." (6:17-18)

God's trustworthy character and promises and mediatorial provisions are the basis for the believer's steadfast hope ("sure and steadfast anchor of the soul" 6:19)

Believers are to be "imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." (6:12)

Just as Abraham "having patiently endured, obtained the promise", so believers are to follow his example. (The Abrahamic Covenant was conditional: Abraham had to patiently endure if the promise was to be fulfilled!)

(Quote from "Life In The Son' by Shank

"Patient, enduring faith, like that of Abraham, is presented (6:11 ff/) as the sole alternative of the apostasy cited in verses 4-8. Such apostasy, an everpresent peril for the writer and his readers, was a peril also for Abraham. If he and "Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise" (11:9), had grown weary of "looking for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (verse 10) and of counting themselves "strangers and pilgrims on earth" (verse 13) seeking "a better country, that is, an heavenly" (verses 14,16), they could have returned to

It is possible for believers to become spiritually sluggish. (6:12)

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The lesser (Abraham, representing Levi and the total Aaronic priesthood), paid tithes to the greater (to Melchizedek, representing Jesus Christ). This shows subordination and inferiority of the Aaronic priesthood to the priesthood of Christ, as symbolized by Abraham's ancient actions toward Melchizedek (7:9-11). The greater (Melchizedek, representing Christ) blessed the lesser (Abraham, representing the O.T. priesthood with its human weaknesses and sins). This shows the mighty saving purposes and redemptive blessings of the priesthood of Christ which has come to replace the weak Aaronic priesthood (7:6).

"that country from whence they came out" (verse 15). Growing weary of setting their affection on things above, they could have returned to both the literal and the spiritual Ur of the Chaldees, dismissing the anticipation of "an heavenly country" and a "city which hath foundations" as of no practical consequence for the present."

"Consequently (because of the superior priesthood of Christ) 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." (7:25)

PROMISES & PROVISIONS	CONDITIONS & EXHORTATIONS	WARNINGS & PERILS
<p>The superior and eternal priesthood of Christ has replaced the inferior and transient Aaronic priesthood (as shown by the fact that, humanly-speaking, Christ was descended from the tribe of Judah, not the priest-tribe of Levi) (7:12-28). The New covenant of Grace, based on Christ's superior Heavenly priesthood (8:1-6), (as foretold in Jeremiah 31:31-34) has replaced the Old Covenant of Law. The New Covenant results in the forgiveness of sins and in a change of the human heart that issues forth in willing obedience to God's commands (8:7-13)</p> <p>The transforming blood of the New Covenant is the blood of Christ, which blood was shed once-and-for-all as the eternally efficacious atonement for sins, in contrast to the oft-repeated blood sacrifices of animals in the O.T. ritualistic sacrificial system (which was only a shadow of the heavenly tabernacle). (Hebrews 9:1-10;18)</p> <p>We have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way</p>	<p>"...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 <u>to serve the living God.</u>" (9:14)</p>	

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which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God... (10:19-21)

"he who promised is faithful." (10:23)

...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." (10:22)

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering...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." (10:23-25)

"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." (Hebrews 10:27)
(Note: "The word 'sin' is in the present participles which denotes not a single act of unbelief, but a state or condition of unbelief. Those

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described are those who...turn away from Christ and continue...to turn away...just as long as we continue in this state of willful apostasy we put ourselves beyond the possibility of forgiveness."

(Studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews by Daniel Shepherdson, page 457 - 461)

It is possible for one-time believer to succumb to sin and to "spurn the Son of God and profane the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and outrage the Spirit of grace," and as a result reap the terrible judgment of God. (10:29) (It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (10:31)

"But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, etc." (20:32,33)

"You knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one." (10:34)

"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

PROMISES & PROVISIONS	CONDITIONS & EXHORTATIONS	WARNINGS & PERILS
<p>"For yet a little while, and the coming one shall come and shall not tarry (10:37)</p>	<p>promised." (10:35-36)</p> <p>...but my righteous one shall live by faith (10:38)</p>	<p>...and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him." (10:38)</p>
<p>"But we are not of those who ^{shrink} back" (10:39)</p>	<p>Believers must "have faith and keep their souls." (10:39)</p> <p>"For by it (faith) men of old received divine approval." (11:2)</p> <p>"through (faith) he (Abel) received approval as righteous, God bearing witness by accepting his gifts." (11:4)</p> <p>"By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death." (11:5) Enoch pleased God through his faith (11:5).</p>	<p>Those who shrink back are destroyed (10:39). Perseverance in the faith (i.e., continuing to trust the Lord for everything throughout one's entire lifetime) is the condition for the fulfillment of God's promise of final salvation to believers (10:35-39) and is patterned for present-day believers after the exemplary faith of godly ancestors, some of whom, as a result of their faith, enjoyed victory through deliverance from death (11:1-35a), and some of whom, as a result of their faith enjoyed ultimate victory in spite of physical death (11:35b-40).</p>
<p>The promises and blessings afforded to the faithful are multiple (as related in Hebrews 11):</p> <p>Divine approval (verse 2), approved by God as righteous (verse 4), escape from death (special case of</p>	<p>"And without faith it is impossible to please him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." (11:6)</p>	

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<p>Enoch, verse 5), pleasing God (verse 5), becoming an heir of God's righteousness (verse 7) a God prepared city (heaven) (verse 16), etc., etc.</p>	<p>By faith, Noah saved his household from death (in the flood) and become an heir of the righteousness which comes by faith." (11:7)</p>	
	<p>The success of the life of Abraham and Sarah was because of the exercise of their faith in God (obedience to God) (11:8-12, 17-19)</p>	
	<p>The roll call of faith continues throughout the entire eleventh chapter of Hebrews.</p>	
<p>"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses..... ..</p>	<p>...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....."(12:2)</p>	
<p>"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" (12:2)</p>	<p>"Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or faint-hearted." (12:3)</p>	
	<p>"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor lose courage when you are punished by him." (12:5)</p>	
<p>"he (God) disciplines us for our good, that we may share his</p>	<p>"Lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and</p>	

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holiness" (12:10)

It is possible for a "root of bitterness" to spring up and cause trouble in a believer's life, resulting in the many becoming defiled." (12:15)

"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." (12:22-24)

"Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken.....

make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed." (12:12,13) "Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord." (12:14) "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." (12:15,16)

"See that you do not refuse him who is speaking." (12:25)

....and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and

"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." (12:25)

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...for our God is a
consuming fire."
(12:29)

awe:.....

"Let brotherly love
continue." (13:1)

"Do not neglect to
show hospitality to
strangers." (13:2)

"Remember those who
are in prison...and
those who are ill-
treated." (13:3)

"Let marriage be held
in honor among all,
and let the marriage
bed be undefiled
(13:4).....

...for God will judge
the immoral and
adulterous." (13:4)

"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?" (13:6)

"Keep your life free
from the love of
money, and be content
with what you have."
(13:5)

"Remember your
leaders, those who
spoke to you the word
of God; consider the
outcome of their life,
and imitate their
faith." (13:7)

"Jesus Christ is the
same yesterday and
today and for ever."
(13:18)

"Do not be led away by
diverse and strange
teachings; for it is
well that the heart be
strengthened by
grace." (13:9)

"Jesus also suffered
outside the gate in
order to sanctify the
people through his own
blood." (13:12)

PROMISES & PROVISIONS

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"Therefore let us go forth to him outside the camp, bearing abuse for him."
(13:13)

"Through him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name."
(13:15)

"Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God."
(13:16)

"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."
(13:17)

"Pray for us...I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner."
(13:18,19)

"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

"I appeal to you, brethren, bear with my word of exhortation."
(13:22)

PROMISES & PROVISIONS

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his sight, through
Jesus Christ; to whom
be glory for ever and
ever." (13:20-21)

"Grace be with all of
you." (13:25)