

*The Treatise*  
**THE PERFECT CHRIST**  
*of The Hebrews;*



*15th Annual*  
West Virginia  
School of Preaching  
Victory Lectures

October 25-29, 2009

*The Treatise to the Hebrews:  
The Perfect Christ*

15<sup>th</sup> Annual  
**West Virginia School of Preaching  
Victory Lectures**

*Hosted by:*  
Hillview Terrace  
Church of Christ  
Moundsville, West Virginia

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Elders, Hillview Terrace Church of Christ

## *Dedication*

It has been our tradition for several years to honor a faithful preacher of the Gospel and his wife by dedicating our lectureship book to them. This year we have chosen to honor Frank Higginbotham and his wife, Rose.

Frank was born in New Martinsville, WV, on February 21, 1933, to A. G. (Bus) and Garnet Higginbotham. He was graduated from Magnolia High School in New Martinsville. He received an Associate of Arts degree from Florida Christian College in Tampa, FL. Frank began his local work at Columbia Street in Fairmont, WV. He later moved to the 25<sup>th</sup> Street church in Wellsburg, WV, then on to West Street in Weirton, WV. For 45 years he has been the local preacher at Virginia Avenue Church of Christ, Chester, WV. The tenure of Frank in one congregation is probably the longest of any preacher now living.

In addition to his local work, Frank conducts from 6 to 10 Gospel meetings each year. He has appeared on several lecture programs and has spoken on television and radio. For the last 45 years he has been the speaker of a 15 minute program on WOHI in East Liverpool, OH.

The former Rose King is his faithful wife and they are the parents of two children. Janie Gallagher, whose husband Brent preaches for the Oakwood Road church in Fairmont, WV. Frank and Rose also have a son who preaches. Steve preaches for the South Green church in Glasgow, KY. A daughter, Donna, passed away in 1965. The Higginbotham's have seven grandchildren.

It is obvious that Frank has a passion for preaching Christ and Him crucified. He is a friend to all faithful preachers, and he and Rose are faithful in their support of West Virginia School of Preaching. It is such an honor to dedicate this book to him and Rose and to continue to enjoy their friendship in Christ. We pray that they both may have many more years to faithfully serve the Lord.

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## *Eldership Honored Virginia Avenue Church of Christ Chester, WV*

It has been our tradition for the past several years to pay special respect to men of various congregations who are now or have been serving faithfully as elders of various congregations of the Lord's people. The church at Chester for a great many years has been blessed with a strong eldership. Though in the late eighties the church lost three of its trusted and loved elders, they began to look for some good men to replace their loss. Those selected are as follows:

The first selected was Robert McMahan. He is the son of a former elder. He is married to Joyce and they are the parents of three children.

In 1991, Jim Hadley, also a son of a former elder, is married to Marilyn and they are the parents of two daughters.

The third of the present elders is Jim Beagle who comes from a family that has long been involved in the church and its activities and is married to Shirley. They are the parents of two boys and one girl.

These men have worked hard to maintain the doctrinal soundness and the spiritual atmosphere that is conducive to spiritual growth. They have helped to keep the church united through the years and were effective in leading the church through an extensive building program in 1996. The church has taken a leadership role in seeing to it that the television program *'In Search Of The Lord's Way'* is available to us in the area. The church is debt free and is always open to hearing of new opportunities to be of service to the Lord.

It is with a deep appreciation that we honor these godly and faithful men at this year's lectureship. The Chester church has been faithful in their support of West Virginia School of Preaching. The elders and their good wives have included us in their prayers and many kind acts since we began the school in 1994. The faculty, staff and students have been very special to them. At most of our elders/preacher meetings, several men from the Chester church have been present. We are so thankful to our Heavenly Father for

providing such great men and their wives in these troublesome times for the sacrifices they have made and interest they have shown by remaining loyal to God and His Word. We earnestly pray that they may be blessed with good health that they may continue their good work.

## *Introduction*

To say it is a formidable task to write an introduction to such a work as this is to make the understatement of the decade. The elegant *Treatise to the Hebrews* has been challenging the minds of Bible students, no doubt since the death of the last inspired writer of New Testament times. When it is thought that the depths have at last been plumbed, new concepts arise challenging former views. At the same time the *Treatise* is, in most regards, simple enough for any person who has a three R's education to gain the soul-enriching messages that are found therein. Even the first-time reader is left virtually breathless at the beauty, elegance and magnificence of what the writer called his "word of exhortation written . . . in a few words" (Heb. 13:22).

Adjectives, of sufficient number, do not exist in our tongue to extol the wondrous and beautiful gems of light found in this golden *Treatise*. The beauty in its revelations concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, alone, outshines the precious adornment of the Old Testament High Priest's breastplate worn to represent his service to all the tribes of Israel.

The book can hardly be thoroughly studied without a study of most of the Old Testament, especially those prophecies used by the author of this sublime work. That in itself is a great benefit of studying the work. Also a great deal of attention must be given to the historical milieu in which it is set, otherwise one will miss some of the great reasons why the Holy Spirit, in His perfect and divine wisdom, decided to have it delivered to the Earth. Thankfulness for His having done so cannot be over-expressed!

The Lectureship Committee made a great effort to cover as much of the information set forth in the book as possible. The assignments were made on the basis of obtaining as much information as possible on this work in a four day period of time. Those who have composed the lectures found herein have done an outstanding job in ferreting out the truth of the passages assigned, while remaining true to the text and the spirit of the book. Their work is commended to you without embarrassment. It is a superior work and commended to you knowing that it is a valuable addition to current literature on this great book. It is a kind of "selective

commentary” on the Book of Hebrews with information that will be found nowhere else in our brotherhood. We hope that it will become a valued tool in your study of the *Treatise to the Hebrews*.

We are very fortunate to have among our key-note speakers brother Martel Pace, the author of a commentary on the *Treatise to the Hebrews*. Brother Eddie Cloer, another key-note speaker, reported that brother Pace is known as “Mr. Hebrews” in areas of the South. He, along with all the other speakers, cannot be complimented too highly for their self-less efforts.

### Acknowledgements and Appreciation

It would be the height of ingratitude to fail to express sincere appreciation to the many who worked so hard to make this production a reality—most of whom were volunteer workers who showed unusual dedication in doing the best job possible. To our proof-readers, Betty Fogle, Lisa Games, Susan Kelch, Kelley Pettit, Christie Robison, Elizabeth Robison, Dana Simons and Shirley West we express deep gratitude. This work could not have been done without them. To my co-editor Charles Pugh and our formatter Lyn Miller, hearty thanks are expressed for all their hard work, done under a lot of stress and pressure due to the fact that theirs is a “last minute” work! However, it should be pointed out that there is no leisure time in such a production as this. So, it is hoped that these will accept the token of gratitude as freely as it is given. We also thank all those unknown, to us, “church Secretaries” who prepared manuscripts and saw that they were here on time. Their work is invaluable.

God bless you in the reading of this good work.

*D. Gene West*  
31 July 2009  
Moundsville, WV

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Dedication</b> .....	v
<b>Eldership Honored</b> .....	vi
<b>Introduction</b> .....	vii
<b>Christ Superior to the Prophets</b>	
<i>Martel Pace</i> .....	1
<b>Overview of Hebrews</b>	
<i>Martel Pace</i> .....	9
<b>The Folly of Unbelief</b>	
<i>Mark Mason</i> .....	19
<b>Christ-The Blood that Purifies</b>	
<i>W. Terry Varner</i> .....	31
<b>Christ and the Word of God</b>	
<i>Don Schuler</i> .....	45
<b>We See Jesus</b>	
<i>Charles C. Pugh III</i> .....	59
<b>The Anchor of the Soul</b>	
<i>Greg Tidwell</i> .....	71
<b>Christ Our High Priest</b>	
<i>Martel Pace</i> .....	81
<b>The Need for Spiritual Growth</b>	
<i>Terry G. Jones</i> .....	89

<b>No More Sacrifice for Sins</b>	
<i>Martel Pace</i> .....	101
<b>Faith Defined and Demanded</b>	
<i>Glenn Hawkins</i> .....	111
<b>Christ-Superior to the Angels</b>	
<i>Charles J. Aebi</i> .....	119
<b>Christ and the Better Covenant</b>	
<i>Joe Galloway</i> .....	135
<b>Christ and the Remaining Rest</b>	
<i>Bruce Daugherty</i> .....	145
<b>Christ-The Perfect Sacrifice</b>	
<i>Eddie Cloer</i> .....	155
<b>Christ and Our City</b>	
<i>Eddie Cloer</i> .....	163
<b>Keep On Keeping On</b>	
<i>Wirt Cook</i> .....	169
<b>Christ and the Silence of the Scriptures</b>	
<i>Steve Higginbotham</i> .....	183
<b>Christ and the Perfect Tabernacle</b>	
<i>Dan Kessinger</i> .....	193
<b>Christ – Superior to Moses</b>	
<i>Mark Tabata</i> .....	205
<b>Christ-Perfected through Suffering</b>	
<i>Eddie Cooper</i> .....	219

<b>The Great Salvation</b>	
<i>Denver E. Cooper</i> .....	229
<b>The Chastening of the Lord</b>	
<i>Steve Stevens</i> .....	241
<b>Christ-The Author and Finisher</b>	
<i>Brent Gallagher</i> .....	253
<b>Implications of the Cross</b>	
<i>Emanuel Daugherty</i> .....	263
<b>Refuse Not the Christ</b>	
<i>J. D. Conley</i> .....	273
<b>Christ-After the Order of Melchezedek</b>	
<i>D. Gene West</i> .....	285
<b>Christ and Practical Christianity</b>	
<i>Andrew J. Robison IV</i> .....	303
<b>Living by Faith</b>	
<i>Frank Higginbotham</i> .....	319
<b>Scripture Index</b> .....	331

# *Christ - Superior to the Prophets*

*Martel Pace*

There are several thoughts in Hebrews about the superior excellence of Jesus and His ministry compared to things the Jewish Christians considered hallowed and sacred. It seems evident that some things about the work of Jesus had not been fully revealed



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until Hebrews was written. Thoughtful Jewish Christians may have already inferred from His very nature as the Son of God at least some of the great teachings about Christ that are revealed and clarified in Hebrews. But God left it for Hebrews to provide a greater grasp and explanation of Jesus as our High Priest, the ever living Intercessor, that He was tempted in all points but without sin, is approachable while sitting at the throne of God, offering mercy and grace to us in any and every time of need. Nothing it presents is out of harmony with the other Scriptures, but this delightful volume adds immensely to our comprehension of what all Christ did and does for us now. I classify many of these things as “Serendipities in Hebrews.”

Little comment was needed to demonstrate Jesus far surpasses the prophets (1:1-3). This is true for several reasons. There are superb descriptions of the nature and power of Christ in John 1:1-5, 14 and Colossians 1:15-17, but nothing surpasses the honor and glory justifiably attributed to Him in Hebrews 1. The prophets had nothing to do with “making the worlds” (1:2), whereas Jesus was the instrument through whom God made all things. This harmonizes with John’s message that “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:1).



Athanasius correctly argued in the fourth century that if all things were made through Christ, He is therefore separate from all created things and is, by His very nature, in essence just as the Father, and co-eternal with Him (qtd. in Ferguson 199-206). Jehovah's Witnesses do not seem to realize how unbiblical their reasoning is when they argue that Jesus is only a "created being" and not the same essence of the Father, although they "elevate" Him to Super-Angel status. That doctrine was refuted long ago both by John and Athanasius' inference from John's statement. Their perversion of Scripture to teach otherwise is clear from additions they made to Colossians 1 in their translations of Colossians. They assert that "all other things" were created by Christ (Col. 1:15), suggesting that He was created first with "other things" afterward created through Him (*New World Translation* 1951). This first edition, published only in the New Testament, was later replaced with "other" in brackets owing to caustic and correct criticism of their first rendition. So, they removed it from their 1961 edition of the completed Bible. They improperly and deceptively added the term "other" four times in brackets, thus continuing to teach their damnable heresy. They simply assume that Jesus was the first created thing and that He participated in creating "all [other] things." I conclude that any cult which denigrates the majesty and character of Jesus deserves this description of its perfidy—heresy, for it is indeed a heretical cult. Their addition granted that it was not in the original text, but it had to be true anyway, based on their assumptions. So, without regard to the words of the original, thinking themselves above the Book of God, they added to the passage. By this bold action they mete out to themselves the damnation outlined in Galatians 1:6-9 and Revelation 22:18-19.

### **The Prophets and Angels Provided Piecemeal Revelation**

The superiority of Christ to the Prophets is evident in that His Word is the final revelation, surpassing what Moses received and all his later associates, whom God called "My Servants the Prophets" (2 Kings 9:7 et al.). As great as were the revelations given through the Old Testament prophets, nothing approached the final message given through Christ our Lord. Those prophetic messages were piecemeal, culminating in the fullness Jesus came to reveal (Kistemaker 25). The treatise begins "by asserting the

greatest single fact of the Christian revelation: God has spoken to man through His word in the Bible and through His Son, Jesus" (Brown 270). The author's magnification of Jesus makes the first chapter, and indeed the whole book, a monument to our Lord. He says explicitly that all the bits and pieces that came through the prophets, whose messages were also by the Spirit of Christ (1 Peter 1:10-12), culminated in Christ's final message.

The expression in the New American Standard Bible is "in many portions and in many ways;" the phrase can be rendered as "many fragments" which suggests an incompleteness (Heb. 1:1). Jesus did not claim new things pertaining to the Old Testament, but gave it the proper interpretation which the Pharisees had pitifully perverted. My early view that the Sermon on the Mount was giving entirely new doctrine had to be revised in the light of Jesus' own introduction (Matt. 5:17-20), which shows why Jesus said "You have heard that it was said, but I say..." rather than "Moses wrote" or "God said." He was renouncing the false interpretation of the Old Testament by Pharisaical scholars and showing the real truth taught in the Old Testament. Jesus did not say, "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is My completely new teaching," but "this is the Law and the Prophets."

The story of divine revelation progressed up to Christ, but there is no progression beyond Him. We now have all that pertains to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). It is "the faith" once and for all time revealed through and from the Son (Jude 3). It is the message of doctrine from which we must not deviate (Rom. 16:17; 1 Tim. 1:3). Hebrews admits of no additions to the silence of God as the hermeneutical principle of Hebrews 7:12-14 powerfully illustrates. There can be no more important subject for the Church to grasp than this.

However, more attention is given in Hebrews to the superiority of Jesus over angels in the first segment than to the prophets (1:4-2:18). The Hebrews must have understood angels were superior to human prophets and that all men are "a little lower than angels" (2:6-8). The Jews certainly revered angels but there is little or no positive evidence they worshiped them. It is clear that Jewish interpreters recognized the lofty position in bringing the Law and other acts for benefit or ill to the people of God.

Underlying the author's statements is the accepted thought, for which no argument was necessary, that angels assisted in giving the Law of Moses (Acts 7:38; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 1:4-2:4). Magnifying Jesus over angels should not have been startling to Hebrew Christians. Even Moses, who may be called the "greatest of the prophets," and was the great servant in his "house," pales into insignificance when compared to Jesus (3:1-4:13). Moses was God's servant sent to Israel, but our Lord is our Apostle and High Priest (3:1-6), sent to the whole world, and who provides a better rest than Moses dreamed of (3:7-4:13). The greatness of Jesus over all others leads Hebrews on to show the inadequacy of the Old Covenant provided by the great Law Giver in contrast with greatness of the New (8:6-13; 9) which Jesus brought by His blood (Matt. 26:29).

### **Does Jesus Still Reveal His Will Today?**

It saddens and dismays faithful preachers to hear of some who claim "God speaks to me even yet," "God said to me," "The Lord revealed this to me," or the slightly less audacious "I know the Lord has blessed me in this work." They are claiming latter day revelations whether they realize it or not. When a preacher declares, "God led me to this church!" he is saying nothing less than "God still reveals His will to spiritual people today." Further, there is not a dime's worth of difference between him and the young Mormon elder who says, "I prayed about it and God told me the Book of Mormon is true" (in obedience to Moroni 10:4-5).

### **The Message through the Apostles is God's Word**

Hebrews does not imply that the final words were all given directly by Christ and are found only in the Gospels of the New Testament. The author fully intended to say that revelations given to the apostles would provide many things from the Holy Spirit that came from Christ and the Father. The assurances in Matthew 10:19-20 proclaim the "Spirit of your Father" would continue to speak through them. The Holy Spirit did not come to glorify Himself, but Jesus, and to speak what Jesus wanted Him to say (John 16:14). Hebrews declares their message, heard at least in part from Christ personally, but supplemented when later revelations were confirmed as of the Word of God. They were confirmed to be

God's revelation through the apostles' performance of signs and wonders (Heb. 2:1-4). The "wonders" convincingly established their message as Divine. Those words coming through the apostles were truly words of the Holy Spirit spoken as God delivered them to them by and through Jesus Christ; in fact, the Spirit merely carried on for Jesus later giving many revelations to the apostles when they were better prepared to receive the deeper things (John 14:12-14): "He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you." Paul stipulated that he received an "abundance of revelations" (2 Cor. 12:7), probably beyond any other apostle.

No one today can properly say he has revelations such as these from the Savior or the Holy Spirit. When new revelation was to be given new miracles accompanied it. To claim miracles now implies that revelation is still being given, or to claim revelation now is to imply the miraculous is still with us.

The final message was for the "last days" (Heb. 1:2) which refers to our own time. We have been in the "Last Days" since the Pentecost of Acts 2. "Last" means "last"—there can be no millennial age to succeed this one with Christ reigning on Earth. He reigns in heaven now until He delivers the kingdom to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24).

### **Titles and Honor given to Christ Show His Superiority over Prophets and Angels**

First, the very term "Lord" is used of Christ in Hebrews 1:10; 2:3; 7:14. It is not clear that Jesus is called this again until 13:20. Possible exceptions are at 8:2 and 13:14. But the other occurrences in Hebrews in the intervening verses apply to the Father. That this term can be used interchangeably for the Father and Son points to the very deity of Jesus. The "one Lord" of Ephesians 4:5 and 1 Corinthians 8:6, attributes Lordship to the Savior in contrast with the Father, which contributes to a primary usage by us of "Lord" to the Son. One often hears in prayer the addressed One as "Lord," particularly in sectarian prayers, and either I or the one praying is confused as to whom he prays! Let us pray to the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ!

Hebrews 1 gives the most elevated view of Jesus Christ to be found anywhere in Scripture. Not only was the incomplete

revelation given through the prophets fulfilled in the message of Christ, the titles and ascriptions accorded Him demand our worship and profound respect. As often elsewhere, He is called the “Son” of God (Heb. 1:2) and that God has spoken through Him. He is also called the “Beloved Son” (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). His status is made clear by what God Himself said.

Incidentally, the text of the Old Testament quoted in Hebrews is normally the LXX (Septuagint) and its renderings are called “God speaking” to us (as in Ps. 2:7, quoted in Heb. 1:5; 2 Sam. 7:14 in Heb. 1:5b-12). We can therefore today quote a translation of the Hebrew and Greek texts and say, “God says this to you!” Psalm 45:6-7 is quoted in 1:8-9. Psalm 45 was widely recognized as having Messianic meaning in the first century among Jewish scholars (Guthrie 176).

It is God, therefore, who calls Jesus “God” in 1:8, and “Lord” in 1:10. Verses 8-9 are from Psalm 45:6-7 in which God the Father calls Jesus “God;” this translation brings the most complaint from modern heretics. If Jesus is appropriately referred to as “God” and I believe He is (see the reasons given in my commentary on Hebrews), then His heavenly Father spoke in the prophetic Psalm to Jesus as God! Then, as Deity (*theos*), Jesus is affirmed to be “God” which is to say that He is the controller and ruler of our lives. Hebrews understands that “Son of God” implies complete identity with the Father. He is the very image and in complete likeness to His Father in heaven (Heb. 1:3). What prophet would even begin to claim any comparison with Christ?

The debate to prove His deity was necessary in the fourth century because, to the patristic writers, misunderstanding the nature of Christ was, and is, to undermine the whole nature of the Gospel. To be wrong in our concept of Christ and count Him only as a manifestation of Deity and not the very essence of God betrays the foundation for our salvation and emasculates the Gospel. To call Jesus God does not mean He is the same identical person, as the Oneness Holiness Pentecostals believe, but that He is Deity. When Jesus prayed for all believers to be one, as He and the Father are one (John 17:20-21), it did not mean one person, for it is certain that all believers cannot be one person. But we can be one in purpose, life, action, faith and love. It must be achievable or Jesus prayed in vain. Let us still strive to that end.

## God’s Silence and How He Authorizes

If the New Testament contains God’s final will and testament, then it is obligatory for every Christian to know how God authorizes in our time. The principles of the Bible for determining authority are the same in both Testaments. God never spoke of angels as He did of His son: “For to which of the angels did He ever say, ‘YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU’? And again, ‘I WILL BE A FATHER TO HIM AND HE SHALL BE A SON TO ME?’” (Heb. 1:5, emp. added). That no angel is ever called “My Son” recognizes the silence of God must be respected. Hebrews emphatically implies that fact in several places, but most notably in Hebrews 7:12-14. We must learn this most important lesson and apply it today. Late in my writing on Hebrews, I began to evaluate the value of a commentary on whether it made any observation on this point in chapter 7—most did not!

Jesus is greater than all—prophets, angels, Moses—in providing a rest for us, in being our High Priest even beyond Melchizedek who was in the order of Christ, and in the glories of the New Covenant. We must never teach that at His return we will revert to the Old—which is undoubtedly the silliest consequence of Premillennialism to be found in all its atrocities of perverting Scripture. “Glory to God in the Highest” for Jesus Christ our Lord has come!

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## Biographical Sketch

Martel Pace was born in Grubbs, AR, and reared in Flint, MI. His early education was in the Michigan public school system, with his upper level work being done at Freed-Hardeman University, Harding University, Harding Graduate School of Religion, and Southern Christian University (now Amridge University). His degrees are: B.A. in History with a minor in Bible, M.A. and M. Div. with emphasis in New Testament Studies. He is an instructor at Faulkner University and previously taught at Southern Christian University (Amridge). Among the courses he has taught are: Hebrews, Mark, Acts, Prison Epistles, Biblical Archaeology, Christian Counseling, Early Church History, Hermeneutics, Expository Preaching, Great Bible Doctrines, Ecclesiology, Cults, Major Denominations, the Preacher and his Work, Christian Ethics and Worship of the Church.

He has been preaching the Gospel for more than fifty years, having begun when he was seventeen years old. He has served churches of Christ in Arkansas, Michigan, Missouri, and Alabama. He married the former Doris Grimes and they are the parents of three children and nine grandchildren.

He has authored three books for students: *A Commentary on the Gospel of Mark*; *A Commentary on Acts*; *Great Doctrines of the Bible* in addition to *Truth For Today Commentary on Hebrews*. He can be reached at: [martel.pace@charter.net](mailto:martel.pace@charter.net).

# Overview of Hebrews

*Martel Pace*

## Introduction

What may we call this “Epistle”? The Epistle to the Hebrews is called by this title because the contents deserve it and there is no Greek manuscript without the heading “To the Hebrews.” As we shall see, this heading is appropriate for its contents. It is a strange and unique volume because it begins like a treatise, continues as a sermon and concludes like an epistle. A writer does not say “Time would fail me” (11:32), but a preacher would, and the many admonitions make it into a sermon. It would be appropriate to say, “The preacher said,” in quoting Hebrews even though it is a sermon written.

## Chapter 13: A Peroration

Chapter 13 has several brief admonitions and mentions special requests in perfect harmony with an ancient peroration typical in a first century epistle. Timothy is the one living person mentioned in chapter 13, and an epistle would often present personal items at the end. Greetings were to be given by recipients to those who rule: “Greet all your leaders and all the saints” (13:24). A warm greeting was not merely to others in their special group, but they should greet some in a more friendly manner than in the past.

Its argumentation leaves nothing to be desired when one is dealing with a particular kind of Jewish Christian who is struggling to retain his newfound faith while being tempted to return to full-blown Judaism. My observation is that the readers have been still observing Judaism as an outward form, while knowing that Jesus provides all grace and truth that was only hinted at under the Old Covenant. It has been said that “No Jew, once converted to Christianity, who then studied carefully the book of Hebrews, ever reverted to Judaism.” Even though this anecdotal comment is not provable, it shows the great value of Hebrews in achieving the stated end. We do not put absolute confidence in such a report, but it is comforting to know what others have said about the effectiveness of this powerful treatise.

## Source of the Temptation to Return to Judaism

What caused the temptation of returning to Judaism? A prominent cause was the natural urge to loaf in one's Christian walk. We say as we separate, "Take it easy!" But Hebrews says, "Go to work, study harder to become a better Christian. Don't ever be content with your present spirituality." Many Hebrews had slipped from looking to the Master as the exemplary life, and neglected to press onward and upward to "the high calling of God."

Hebrews is designed to revive their drooping spirits and move them on to higher ground. The classic appeal was, "Don't be lazy!" (6:11-12, "sluggish" ASV, NASB, NRSV ESV, and NKJV).

In addition, there was the outward appeal of the glory and beauty of the Temple, which, with all its splendor, even the apostles considered to be a sure sign of God's glory (Luke 21:5); they must have felt it could not depart from Israel. Hebrews hints more than once of its coming destruction. When you hear my reasons for believing the "day approaching" (10:25) had reference to the end of Judaism with the fall of Jerusalem and the loss of the temple forevermore, you may understand what a blow this was to Jewish pride. The hint is found in "we have no continuing city" (13:14), perhaps even "And this we will do if God permits" (6:3) is an indication there may not be time enough to grow. Remember that Jesus suggested that the time of "not one stone left on another" (Matt. 24:2; Mark 13:2; Luke 19:44 and 21:6) would be in that generation.

## Who Were the Recipients?

Who were the recipients? The first readers were not just anyone anywhere in the church. The high sacerdotal tone of Hebrews requires that persons tied to the Priesthood of Levi and Aaron be both the recipients and writer. The one who delivered this sermon must have been one highly respected for his academic knowledge of all things Jewish to be accepted. Since the epistle (at least it ends like one) was not sent to a church, nor the leaders of a congregation, it must have been sent to a special group within the church. Who could that be?

We have only hints from the contents and certain admonitions given when the main argument is past. Hebrew 13:7 and 17

provide some light. The readers had not grown into fully didactic persons as they should have been in the length of time they had been Christians (5:12-14). Were they just lazy neophytes who had no learning in Scripture? Or were they persons of whom the writer/preacher would have every right to expect to know the deeper things of God? The almost insulting remarks of Hebrews would imply the latter: "You are babies when you ought to be teachers" (5:12).

Recall that the priests were to be teachers of the Law and often served in that capacity (2 Chron. 17:7-9; Neh. 8:9; Ezek. 44:23). Jesus first met some priests when nearly a teenager and how he impressed them (Luke 2:46-47)! It seems probable they learned at least as much, and probably more, from this Lad than they taught Him. They were amazed at His answers. One can wonder how advanced in His knowledge the Lad was at age twelve; was He a child prodigy in addition to being the Son of God? He loved being in the presence of God's teachers, for that was being "about my Father's business" (NKJV, or, "I had to be in my Father's house," NASB). Their knowledge of the Law and Prophets likely caused so many to obey the faith as much as the preaching and miracles of Peter and the other apostles (Acts 6:7).

The priestly convert, quite knowledgeable in the OT, might be inclined to think himself advanced in training and knowledge and not in need of much more instruction, particularly from men who were shortly before just fishermen or common laborers (recall that "not many mighty" were called, 1 Cor. 1:26). The believing priests may have frowned on such non-scholastics advising and even requiring certain things of them. They would have felt a little rebellious or superior to the elders and maybe even the apostles.

Therefore, they would need the admonition of 13:17 most acutely, "Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you." Other than a few rich folk, these priests would have been most susceptible to an undiscerning pride.

Those who watch for souls would naturally be the elders of the church, who could have held the same office while still a member of a converted synagogue. That possibility, with the blessing of spiritual gifts from the apostles, undoubtedly qualified the elders to

be their leaders. By having superiority in knowledge and the gift of “the word of wisdom” (1 Cor. 12:6), their qualifications were embellished more than what normally comes with age and experience.

It may well be that then, even as today, elders are often businessmen, men of the world, who have not been able to fully devote themselves to theological study, but who know the fundamentals well and what it takes to be doctrinally and spiritually pure. They were thereby qualified with wisdom and profound faith to be overseers and instructors even to priests of the Old Covenant.

Another influence may have been long-told reports to the now believing priests of an old priest from a generation before—Zacharias (Luke 1). Maybe they heard of the blessed son born to Zacharias and his wife Elisabeth. Surely they took some pride that John the Immerser was of the priestly clan. When they learned of that son’s prophetic attribution to Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), their journey to faith may have begun. Therefore, many of these men came to be believers in the One to whom that son pointed as the Messiah and were the obedient souls mentioned in Acts 6:7.

It was not the ordinary priests who rejected Jesus, but the “chief priests” (Matt. 16:21; 20:18; 21:15-16, 23, 41-45; 26:3-4, 47, 59; 27:1, 3, 12, 20, 41, 62-63; 28:11-13, all found in Matthew alone). There is nothing said, particularly in the latter part of the Gospels, of anything good concerning these Chiefs who were evil and prejudiced men.

However, we ask, “Would not these lower priests have given up their service in the Temple if they truly obeyed the faith?” Why would they? It was a task appointed by God and even though they perceived Jesus as the Savior by His most profound sacrifice, they need not desert the faith of Judaism in its outward form. If Paul could continue to follow the faith of Judaism, even paying for his cleansing and that of four young men, so that they were all suitable to worship in the temple (Acts 21:20-25), then surely it was not sinful for priests to continue to work there to assist Paul in his worship. Paul may have considered it merely a custom, but one he could easily worship the God of his fathers while still striving to be “as a Jew to the Jews” (1 Cor. 9:20). He obviously did it to show

he did not “forsake Moses” any more than Peter and John did when they went to the temple to pray perhaps on the very day the church began (Acts 3).

Paul certainly by this point had rejected any ceremonial defilement which came by association with Gentiles, but to worship once more in the Temple of God, probably for the last time, he needed purification to pacify the Jews before so he could be allowed to do that (Acts 21:26).

### **The Criticism these Priests would Receive**

For now we will assume that the disciples addressed in this letter are Levitical priests still working in the temple. What a merciless torrent of criticism could come from their unbelieving compatriots: “Who are you to claim that the lowly Nazarene, a poor carpenter, is the Jewish Messiah? Our High Priest and chief priests are not fools; they saw through His attempts at miracles and knew that He only achieved them by demonic power. They proved for themselves He is not divine. We know there is only one God—Yahweh, who has no Son. What blasphemy to say otherwise! The rabble mob that came from Galilee was easily confused because they have had no higher theological training such as we have, but we cannot be fooled. We are amazed that you have been!” (Stedman 12-13). These unbelieving priests may have continued to say, “We know our High Priest was ordained by God, that our sacrificial program was appointed through angels to Moses, that our sins were removed by the annual Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), that the inspired prophets declared our God is THE GOD, and there is no other.” Hebrews will swallow up all these arguments by the New Covenant and what it represents along with many more serendipital responses.

Under this torrent of arguments that only the strongest could withstand, for it was withering sarcasm, Christians would wilt. Many can stand up to logical reasoning, but falter under constant, almost irrational satire suggesting their ignorance or stupidity. After all, the Temple still stood when Jesus said it would be destroyed in that generation, and now over thirty years have passed. The older folks who said they saw His miracles were disappearing from the scene, including some of the many priests who obeyed early on (Acts 6:7). Some undoubtedly still lived to

proclaim their faith and to convert others, but with strength of mind and body waning. The younger ones were shaken. Those obedient priests in Acts 6 have probably mostly retired if still alive, and the faith of younger converts could be less solid.

### **What will it Take to Strengthen Their Faith?**

What will it take to strengthen their faith and make them eager to teach the Word and evangelize again? Hebrews supplies the answer. This book provides teaching to lift their tired spirits with other incentives to make them more eager to prepare for the eternal home, rather than the temporary city of Jerusalem.

### **Special Benefits Only in Christ**

He is as “our High Priest” (4:14; 7:26; 8:1; 9:11; 10:21), an item revealed in Scripture for the first time, who is “merciful and faithful” (2:17), who can “sympathize” with us (4:15). Greatest of all, He “ever lives” to make intercession for us (7:25). The Jews were well acquainted with their corrupt High Priests of recent vintage. Josephus pointed out the corruption of the High Priestly family of Annas, particularly in the matter of hoarding money. (424).

### **Who Wrote this Masterpiece?**

A person may have many interests with a unique vocabulary exclusive to him and limited to what he has spoken or written in the past. To limit a well-trained rabbi, like Paul, to write only of problems between Jewish and Gentile Christians with a limited number of words available, is to ignore his varied background both in Grecian Tarsus and Jewish Jerusalem.

Several commentaries emphasizing the elevated Greek style of Hebrews recount the many words in Hebrews of which none are used in the recognized Pauline epistles, and then conclude, “Paul had nothing to do with Hebrews.” Counting words in a few documents is a dubious system for determining certainty of authorship. The number of Pauline thoughts and words are considered proof that Paul could never have delivered such a sermon. The late W. B. West, Jr., then Dean of Harding Graduate School of Religion, pointed out to me that a book by a Roman Catholic scholar, William Leonard, had performed a valuable task

by noting many words in Hebrews that were not exactly the same as those in Paul elsewhere. Leonard replied that this general reasoning could not disprove all Pauline influence on Hebrews. He demonstrated that many of the unique words in Hebrews were cognate forms of words used in Paul’s recognized writings. He contended that many different forms in Hebrews were not beyond Paul’s capacity. Incidentally, in my study for the commentary on Hebrews, I found only one other author, F. F. Bruce, who even mentioned Leonard’s work of 1939, and he did so in a manner that showed no evidence he had read it. I imagine that he, like others, considered the Catholicism of Leonard to demand that he defend the Pauline authorship and, for this reason, gave him short shrift. Leonard maintained that the mind of Paul lay behind the epistle, and possibly Luke as the editor, redactor or writer. His work was done following a sermon such as is found mentioned in Acts 28, perhaps after the death of the great apostle, then penned anonymously, and sent on to Jerusalem by the hand of Timothy, who could tell the Judean Churches who was behind it, perhaps informing the priests only after it was read? Recipients of a letter would know better the author than those persons in the general area from whence it was sent; this might explain why the East regarded it as Pauline from the beginning while the West did not for some time. Others have commented on the Lukan qualities of Hebrews.

I like George Will, an outstanding national columnist who writes conservatively on politics and economics, but I like him even better when he writes on baseball. One could hardly classify his baseball vocabulary, which is vast, compared to that of his political and economic verbiage, as demonstrating he could either write on baseball or politics, but not the other. Why? Because his baseball books would have to use the same phraseology as his political writings?! Mr. Wills is not so limited, nor would I dare say the size of Paul’s lexicon was inferior to Will’s.

### **Reasons Why Hebrews had to be Written**

We must read between the lines to determine what demanded that an authoritative figure in the Church should write an epistle or give a sermon recorded and sent to drifting Hebrew Christians. Obviously, the “Hebrews” for whom the letter was meant, had

been drifting, being content with scant growth (5:12-14). They should have progressed by this time to become excellent teachers of the New Covenant, but they had not. Continuous appeals to grow up into maturity are found in Hebrews (2:1-4; 3:7-19; 4:1-13, 14-16; 6:1-3, 11-12). These and more are to be found, so that the entire book is an “Exhortation” (a sermon, 13:22; cf. Acts 13:15). They were actually in danger of falling away (3:12-13).

A forceful argument to persuade converted priests to desert the Christ is the fact that the temple was still standing. It was to every Jew the most glorious of all buildings (334).

To those who reject the pre-AD 70 date for Hebrews we remark that it is difficult to believe that the destruction of the Temple was not mentioned in the text if it had already happened at the time Hebrews was written. That would have been a supreme argument that the Law and worship system had been set aside. Hebrews does suggest that it was soon to be abolished forever (8:13). The author knew the prophecy by Jesus that was to occur in “this generation” (Matt. 23:36; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32). As time approached the forty-year mark since those words were uttered, it had to be fulfilled shortly.

The letter views the ritual of worship in Judaism as tied idealistically to the Tabernacle, but the Jewish people believed the Temple stood in its place. The date for writing therefore, must be located in the first century AD near the middle of the sixties.

### **A Most Significant Feature of Hebrews**

No book of the New Testament illustrates more clearly and precisely the way God authorizes actions He expects His people to follow. This is a principle that virtually all of our “Christian” denominations overlook when studying Hebrews that our brethren have depended on for years until recently; but, it needs to be stressed again.

### **Hebrews’ Respect for God’s Word**

(At this point I will give an abbreviated version of my power point lesson on “How God Approves and Disapproves” if there is time). For those who want to view it, I will gladly send it by e-mail to those who write [mpace@faulkner.edu](mailto:mpace@faulkner.edu) or [martel.pace@charter.net](mailto:martel.pace@charter.net) and request it. It is an analysis of

Hebrews 7:12-14 and how we should treat the silence of God on any pertinent religious matter.

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# *The Folly of Unbelief*

*Mark Mason*

## **Introduction**

*“The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God . . . ’”* (Ps. 14:1; 53:1, emp. added). The folly of unbelief has been proclaimed from ancient times in God’s Word, nowhere more impressively than in



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the opening verses of the twin Psalms, 14 and 53. However, there has always been a great danger that people might misunderstand and misapply this truth, assuming it speaks to some type of modern, philosophical atheism. More accurately, these verses should be understood to speak to an agnostic or even better a deistic perspective, that does not necessarily deny the existence of God, but deems Him irrelevant to life on Earth and uninvolved and unconcerned with people and how they conduct their lives. “God doesn’t really care,” the fool might say. “Who is God to command me?” he might assert.

Is this not the way many of our friends and neighbors and fellow citizens justify their lifestyles today? Indeed, is this not the way some even in our own congregations would explain their worldly conduct?

So we see that the folly of unbelief is not so much denial of the existence of God, but denial of His relevance in one’s life; indeed, denial of His authority to command and instruct. Refusal, in other words, to believe Him when He speaks.

## **Context of Hebrews 3:7-19**

The overarching theme of the letter to the Hebrews is the greatness of the Christ: Jesus above all else! Thus far in the letter,

we have read that He is superior to prophets (1:1-2) and to angels (1:4-14) and even to Moses (3:1-5). In our text, Hebrews 3:7-19, we find the writer beginning to issue a dire warning to his readers—a warning concerning the danger of falling away from Christ.

We moderns need to be reminded that this was written originally to Christians. To believers it is asserted that they are in danger of falling away from the living God. Such a warning must cause theological distress to all those who have embraced the major tenets of Calvinism, especially the unscriptural idea of Eternal Security. Oh the twists and turns the interpreter must take to get from Hebrews 3:12 (“Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.”) to “once-saved, always saved”! As sad as this situation is, we are perhaps consoled by the fact that such wiggling is not new, but was a first-century problem as well, according to Peter:

And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. (2 Peter 3:15-16)

We all would do well to heed the apostle’s next words in verse 17: “You, therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.” Peter certainly agrees with the Hebrews writer that a Christian, once true and faithful to God and His Word, can indeed lose his standing in Christ through error and unfaithfulness. Would that all who claim loyalty to Christ understand and agree!

### **The Ultimate Bad Example: Israel**

As with all Scripture, there are countless treasures of truth and application to be discovered in this section of Hebrews. Consider first of all that when the Hebrews writer wished to illustrate his important spiritual point concerning the danger of falling away, he

did so by turning to Scripture. He illustrates Scripture with Scripture!

In this case, he turns to Psalm 95. Notice who is declared the author of Psalm 95: the Holy Spirit – “*Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says*” (emp. added). This is in perfect accord with other New Testament citations of the Psalms, in which the book is closely associated with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Mark 12:36; Acts 1:16; 4:25). We are reminded of the divine authority which is expressed through all Scripture, both Old and New Testaments.

The author of Hebrews quotes verses 7-11 of Psalm 95. The minor differences in reading between the rendering in Hebrews and that in the English Old Testament are to be attributed to the Hebrews writer’s use of the Septuagint for his quotation. The Hebrew Old Testament text specifically names the sites of Israel’s rebellion (Meribah and Massah), while the Greek translation uses the words “provocation/rebellion” and “trial/testing” instead.

The 95<sup>th</sup> Psalm as a whole may be divided into two parts, which one might even parallel with the outline of the Hebrews letter up to this point in the text. Verses 1-7 of Psalm 95 entail a clear call to worship the Lord. The Psalmist exhorts the reader to sing, to make a joyful noise, to give thanks, and to praise (vv. 1-2). Why? It is because the Lord is a great God and a great King (v. 2). The Lord is also declared in control of His creation (vv. 4-5). Then once more, in verses 6-7a, the reader is called to the worship of this great God, the Shepherd of His people.

Consider how this resembles the material of Hebrews 1:1-3:6. First-century Christians here are exhorted to admire the greatness of the Christ above all else, and to praise God as a result. Jesus is without true rival and has no real competitor. Therefore, loyalty belongs to Him.

Then, beginning with the last phrase of verse 7, and continuing through the close of the Psalm, the Holy Spirit warns against the danger of falling away from the Lord. This, of course, is the section quoted in Hebrews 3:7-11, and also briefly in 3:15.

To understand the import of this illustration, one must consult the record of Moses in Exodus 17:1-7. Here we have the original story of the events at Rephidim in the wilderness, where Israel grumbled and complained and quarreled with Moses over lack of water. Indeed, Moses feared for his life as he approached the Lord for aid,

thinking the people were about to stone him. God responded by commanding Moses to strike the rock at Horeb with his staff, and when Moses obeyed, the need of the people was met. The place was henceforth named Massah (testing) and Meribah (quarreling) by Moses.

The end result of such exchanges between Israel and her God (and there were, of course, many) was that the first Exodus generation would die in the wilderness. They would be forced to wander for 40 years through this desolate region, until that full generation fell. Their children would indeed enter the Land of Promise, but not those whom the Lord had first saved out of Egypt. No, they had truly fallen—they had really missed out. They would not enter God’s rest.

Rest is a significant theme for God’s people throughout the books of Moses and even beyond. The promise was clear: God would grant His people rest from their enemies in the land of Canaan (Deut. 12:10; 25:19; Josh. 1:13, 15; 21:44; 22:4; 23:1; see also the rest promised to Moses in Ex. 33:14, and that exalted in by David in 1 Chron. 23:25).

For the first-century Christians who read the Hebrews letter, the rest they were in danger of abandoning was far greater and far more enduring—Heaven itself. However, the reason for the danger was very similar: the folly of unbelief.

### **Application to Spiritual Israel**

Turning now to the first-century brethren in verse 12 and following, the Hebrews writer drives home his point. In so doing, our author not only issues a dire warning, but he also describes how it is that one falls away, and how such a process of apostasy can be prevented in the first place.

Again, one of the first things to remember as we read the letter to the Hebrews is that it was written to Christians—First-century Christians. And so, when it warns and when it exhorts, it is warning and exhorting Christians. When we hear the words “*Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God . . .*” (emp. added) we ought to hear them as written and spoken to Christians, not to pagans, not to atheists, but to people like us.

Now we might think “Surely not I!” But we would do well to remember that Peter thought the same thing when Jesus informed him he would deny Him three times. In fact, did Peter not say, “Not I, Lord!”

The point is anyone can fall away. Now, we recognize that there is a big portion of the religious world that denies this proposition. Many of our neighbors have swallowed the error that once a person is saved from their sins, they can never fall away. That is demonstrably false, both in Scripture and in everyday life. One who was once enlightened, once fully and completely washed by the blood of Jesus and saved from his sins—indeed can fall away. The entire New Testament bears witness to this fact—nowhere more than in this letter to the Hebrews.

On the other hand, it is just as bad an error to live in constant fear and insecurity as a believer—to always be worried whether one is saved or not. That is surely not the way God wants His people to live at all. Such gives a bad name to God’s grace and calls into question the efficacy of the blood of Jesus. We should live with true security spiritually, but it ought to be a security based on the truths of God’s Word, not on a religious theology some man invented five hundred years ago.

So, when we read verse 12 of Hebrews 3, it might ruffle our feathers a little. It might shake us a bit to think it is addressed to people like us. How could any one of us, you see, be in any danger? Could we really fall away from God? Surely not us!

One of the messages of this passage from Hebrews 3 is that such is indeed possible—not probable, mind you. It does not have to happen. Indeed we do not expect it to happen—but it could happen, we could fall away. And this text tells us how—and how to avoid it.

One of the hardest lessons I have learned in my life is to never be shocked when and where unbelief arises, to never be incredulous at who turns out to be a fool. More than once, I have watched someone I respected, someone I looked up to in the Lord, someone I never would have imagined falling away from God, do just that. There is one in particular I think of when I consider such things. He was quite a bit older than me; he had served as a teacher and counselor at the church camp I grew up attending. When I was old enough, we served together at that camp. We spent time teaching

young people the Bible for several years, we shared things we were reading, we had great talks on spiritual matters. He was a person I not only liked, but I trusted in many ways. One day, to my utter shock, he walked away from his wife, and his family, and his ministry, and the church, and his God. I still find it hard to understand and even harder to believe. But it happened. As sure as I am standing here my friend fell away from God and he is out there now, somewhere, lost – 100%.

One of the things I learned from that was to never be shocked when unbelief arises. I guess the greatest example that teaches this principle is the one used by the Hebrews writer in this third chapter of the book. It is the example of Israel. If ever there were a people that you would not have expected to become unbelievers and to fall away – it was Israel. Israel was God’s special, chosen people. They were slaves in Egypt before God rescued them; they had been there for 400 years. Even before that, they were blessed with a great spiritual legacy to think about and rely upon: descended from Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. Joseph was a great ancestor.

Think about all that God had done for them: bringing them out of Egypt with great signs and wonders, destroying the army of Pharaoh in the wilderness, opening up the Sea so Israel could pass through to safety on dry ground, leading them and providing for them in the wilderness, making a covenant with them at Sinai. The list goes on and on.

Surely this people would not fall away! Israel could not become unbelievers, could they? Do not ever be shocked when unbelief arises!

Again, here we have the Hebrews writer warning his audience of Christians about the danger of falling away, but if you take the entire passage into consideration, there is as much positive here as there is negative. For sure, he gives them a strong warning. But he also offers them a plan of action that will prevent them from ever falling away. Both elements, of course, are important.

First, the warning in verses 12-13. Indeed, they could fall away. It was possible. But it is not the kind of thing that just happens suddenly for no cause and for no reason. It may appear so from the outside, but on the inside, there is a process that takes place. The process looks like this: it begins with sin. Sin is the start of it all. Notice, sin does not lead directly to the falling away—just because

a Christian sins does not mean at that moment he is lost. That would not be true to Scripture. Sin does not equal apostasy. But sin, not dealt with, ignored, unrepented of, starts a process. It is the first step away from God.

You see, what unforgiven, undealt-with sin does is that it hardens one’s heart. That is the next part of this process – the hardening of the heart. A person gradually becomes less sensitive to God and His Word, and less open to His Truth. In other words, their heart begins to harden.

The next step is that the harder one’s heart becomes, the less he believes God. Oh, he may fool himself by saying things like “I just don’t believe this particular preacher” or “I just don’t believe what this church says,” but really what is happening is his heart has become so hard that he no longer believes God when He speaks. Unbelief has arisen, you see. God has been shut out, and the Holy Spirit has been quenched.

When that happens, one has fallen away from God. It started with sin which led to hardening, it progressed to unbelief, then finally, to apostasy. That is the process we are being warned about by the Hebrews writer. The final result of that process for Israel was the fact that they were not allowed to enter God’s rest.

When the Hebrew writer warns us about failing to enter God’s rest, he is talking about Heaven. He is referring to a person’s eternal salvation and the danger of losing it. We all have a wonderful rest promised us in a beautiful place called Heaven. It is ours, guaranteed by God and being prepared by Jesus, as long as we stay faithful.

The second thing we are given in this passage is a plan to keep us faithful. How do we avoid this terrible sin process that we have taken some time to describe? We must first acknowledge that we do not do it by ourselves. In fact, trying to do it solo is really one way to begin that sin process. The Christian life was designed by God to be lived in the community of the church, with others, around others. Not alone.

Notice here two elements that are involved in staying faithful. Verse 12 begins “Take care.” That implies personal commitment and personal diligence. We have to be concerned about our own souls. We have to take this seriously. We are called to be vigilant, to be on guard against the Devil, and to keep our eyes open to

spiritual danger. Scripture also calls us to study God's Word, and of course to obey it as we learn more and more of God's truth. You see, the faith process has always involved hearing and obeying. True faith comes from hearing and obeying. What starts us down the wrong path is when we hear and do not obey. That is sin, and the more one hears and does not obey, the harder the heart becomes, and the farther one falls from God.

So, we need to have that personal commitment to take care. Then too, we need to be intimately involved in the faith community of the church. We need to mutually encourage one another in the right path of faith. "Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today'" (v. 13).

Brethren, we need each other to stay faithful, do we not? We are commanded here to encourage one another—how often? Daily. I wonder why it does not say monthly. Some of my brothers and sisters seem to think it does. Why not bi-annually, as is the habit of some? One would think God might know more on this topic of what it takes to be faithful than modern man. And yet, we all know people who take this command from God very lightly, do we not? People we rarely see who routinely forsake the assembly, people who will just not get involved with their brothers and sisters in any meaningful way. These are people who, according to this passage and many others we could reference, are in real spiritual danger.

I wonder why this passage did not say weekly. Exhort one another weekly? Instead, the writer said daily. He did not even say "on Sundays and Wednesdays," did he? He said daily. In fact, he commanded daily. "Exhort one another every day" is an imperative—a command – not a suggestion. So that means more than just when the church doors are open and the lights are on. That is truth, but I am afraid it is one of those truths we as Christians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century struggle most to apply.

We learn from this passage and others that true faith involves both hearing and obeying (James 1:22-25). The sin process with its resultant heart-hardening begins with hearing and not obeying. As this builds, an individual is driven further and further from his God, until he has fallen away. When a person falls away from the living God, he loses his opportunity to enter God's rest.

All this is caused by unbelief. For whatever reason, an individual refuses to believe God and His promises. Such is utter folly.

As our text closes in verses 15-19, the writer once more delineates physical Israel's failure. She rebelled (vv. 15-16). She sinned (v. 17). She disobeyed, or did not believe (v. 18). All these are different ways of describing the same degenerative process of unbelief. The end of the process is once again clear: failure to enter God's rest.

### **The Purpose of Hebrews 3:7-19**

What happened to ancient Israel, her fall in the wilderness before entering the rest of Canaan, was used by the inspired writer to warn spiritual Israel of the danger at hand in the first century. These spiritual ancestors of the church had been rescued from Egyptian slavery by the mighty hand of the Lord in the Exodus event. Israel had been tenderly cared and provided for in the wilderness. She had been given a covenant to guide and protect her at Sinai. All these blessings and privileges were provided and yet she had fallen away.

And now the New Israel teeters on the brink of apostasy. The New Testament describes the Gospel in terms of a "New Exodus." Jesus, on the Mount of Transfiguration, spoke of His coming "exodus" with Moses and Elijah (Luke 9:31). Christ is described by Paul as "our Passover" in 1 Corinthians 5:7. Perhaps the classic passage here would be Paul again in 1 Corinthians 10:1-14:

I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. **Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.** Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play. We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them

did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. **Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.** Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. (emp. added)

Surely the Hebrew writer is exhorting his readers, both 1<sup>st</sup> century and 21<sup>st</sup> century, to seek the way of escape from temptation always provided by a faithful God. He is warning them of the danger of sinful practice and hard hearts. He calls on them to not only hear, but also obey. To such people God offers the promise of entering His rest. What a tragedy it would be to reach the very borders of Canaan, and yet fail to enter because of unbelief—this would be the epitome of folly.

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Mark is married to the former Tracey Grove and they are the parents of three daughters, Madeline, Molly, and Maggie. He graduated GlenOak High School in Canton, OH, and Malone University with a B.A. in Biology. He teaches Hebrew at Ohio Valley University and has taught courses in Youth Ministry, Acts through Revelation, Minor Prophets, and Old Testament Wisdom Literature. He served as associate minister with the 36<sup>th</sup> Street Church of Christ in Vienna, WV, and is now the pulpit minister for that church. He was one of the founders of Mid-Ohio Valley Workcamp and served them from 1999 until 2006. He currently serves on the Advisory board of that organization. He has received honors for this work, including one from former Governor Cecil Underwood. He serves in Outreach Training Northeast as director and writes a monthly article for their ministry publication *The Lighthouse*.

# *Christ - The Blood that Purifies*

W. Terry Varner

Hebrews is the most “bloody book” in the New Testament. The word blood (*haima*) is used 99 times in 14 different books. The book of Hebrews uses the word blood (*haima*) 21 times which is more than any other book in the New Testament. It is used 11



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times in Hebrews 9 and used 10 times in our text, Hebrews 9:12-26. Revelation uses the word blood 19 times, making it the second book in which blood is used the most (Smith 7).

Our assignment is titled: *Christ—The Blood That Purifies* and our text is Hebrews 9:11-26, which outlines as follows:

- Christ’s blood *effected* a redemptive ministry (Heb. 9:11-14).
- Christ’s blood was a *costly* sacrifice (Heb. 9:15-22).
- Christ’s blood is both *sufficient* and *final* (Heb. 9:23-26).

The significance and necessity of the cross—death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and coronation—invariably required explanation wherever and whenever Christ was preached (Acts 2:22-40; et al.). As well as, why Jesus, as the Messiah, had to die (Acts 2:22-40; 4:8-12; 7:1-60; 10:34-48; 13:14-43; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; Heb. 2:5-9; et al.). This helps explain both the advent and establishment of the New Covenant.

### **Christ's Blood Effected a Redemptive Ministry (Heb. 9:12-14)**

Paul contrasts the two sanctuaries as temporal and eternal. He describes the sanctuary under the Mosaic Law as “earthly” (9:1)—temporal. The earthly sanctuary while, designed by God, was made by man’s hands; i.e. it was made of materials belonging to this world—gold, silver, bronze, jewels, wood, tapestry, etc. (Ex. 35:30-35). Therefore, the first sanctuary was subject to the ravages of time and can in no way be described as eternal.

In (9:11), Paul argues the second or “perfect” sanctuary was “*not made with hands*, that is, *not of this creation*” (emp. added) is eternal. The eternal sanctuary “is not a tent made by human skill; that is, it does not belong to the physical order of creation” (Lightfoot 169). Paul had earlier stated the same idea in Hebrews 8:2, “the true tabernacle [sanctuary] which the Lord erected, and not man.”

Hebrews 9:11 contains the implication that Christ was the promised Messiah as seen in the word *appeared*. Therefore, His first appearing was a grand event resulting in all kind of change. Christ brought “good things to come” (9:11). Christ as High Priest after the order of Melchizedek (Ps. 110:4; Heb. 7:17) rules from “the perfect tabernacle” (9:11); i.e. heaven, ministering to and blessing obedient man.

Hebrews 9:12-14 sets forth a contrast between “the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer” (9:13) with the blood of Christ (9:14). The first is under the Law of Moses; whereas, the latter is under the second or new covenant. This contrast shows an obvious difference between the blood of animals being sacrificed and the blood of Jesus who was sacrificed “without blemish” (9:14). The blood of Christ is set forth as the redemptive ministry for man—Christ “obtained eternal redemption for us” (9:12).

A second contrast sets forth the cleansing of man’s between the blood of animals and the blood of Christ. The blood of animals resulted in “the purifying of the flesh” (9:13); whereas, the blood of Christ resulted in the ability to “*cleanse your conscience* from dead works to serve the living God” (9:14, emp. added). This contrast shows the *effectiveness* of the blood of Christ.

Paul’s argument of the blood of goats, calves, and the ashes of a heifer (9:12-13) contrasted with Christ’s own blood (9:12, 14) forms a simple *if/then* argument from the lesser to the greater. ***If***

the blood of goats, calves, and the ashes of a heifer could work, under the first covenant (law), *only* to the “purifying of the flesh” (9:13), ***then*** how much greater is the blood of Christ to the cleansing of “your conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (9:13)? The contrast is between the purifying of the flesh and the cleansing of the conscience, with the latter cleansing of the inward guilt by the effecting forgiveness via His blood. The result is described as “eternal redemption” (9:12).

Under the first covenant (10:9) two types of cleansing are referenced—the blood of goats and calves and the ashes of a red heifer. The first dealt with the role of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:6-16); whereas, the second dealt with the cleansing of defiled persons by the ashes of a red heifer.

On the Day of Atonement the high priest would offer a blood atonement in the Most Holy Place twice that day. In his first entrance into the Most Holy Place, the high priest offered the blood from a bull for the atonement of his and his family’s sin (Lev. 16:6, 11, 14). In his second entrance into the Most Holy Place, the high priest offered the blood of a goat for the sins of the nation of Israel (Lev. 16:7-11, 15-16).

The reference to cleansing by the ashes of a red heifer without spot or blemish and which had never came under a yoke (Num. 19:2) was for the sins or uncleanness resulting from touching a corpse, by entering a house with a corpse in it, and/or by touching a bone or grave (Num. 19). This cleansing was effective in that it “restored to the unclean person his external purity [fleshly], thus enabling him to participate once again in the religious observances of the tabernacle” (Lightfoot 171).

Paul’s argument is simple. The blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a red heifer served *only* to the “purifying of the flesh” (9:13); therefore, this being the case how much more shall the blood of Christ cleanse man’s “conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (9:14)? Therefore, the blood of Christ applied shows its eternal significance; therefore, being superior.

In referencing the clause, “who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God” (9:14), Lightfoot (171) suggests three vital thoughts. First, *Christ* offered *Himself*—not the death of a reluctant animal (9:13; 10:4), but the deliberate act of the heart and will in obedience “to the point of death, even of the cross”



(Philip. 2:8). Animals do not willingly offer themselves in sacrifice and “when it was offered it did not know what was being done. . . . Those who shed Christ’s blood, they were the ones who knew not what was being done” (Lenski 298).

Second, Christ was made a *perfect* sacrifice “without blemish” to God; i.e. “He had no sin to stain His soul” (Pace 339). “Not only was the obedience and the satisfaction, viewed by themselves, complete, but He who yielded them was completely free from sin” (Brown 401).

Third, Christ offered Himself *through an eternal spirit*. The sacrifice was an “eternal sacrifice” which Lightfoot describes as, “beyond space and time. Although His death took place on earth, yet, in significance and value, it really took place in the eternal order” (172).

### **Christ’s Blood Was/Is a *Costly* Sacrifice (9:15-22)**

Hebrews 9:15-22 declares that the sacrifice of Jesus was/is a *costly sacrifice*. Christ’s sacrificial blood was/is essential in order for the obedient of all dispensations to “receive the promise of eternal inheritance” (9:15).

Paul begins Hebrews 9:15 by stating, “And for this reason” or as Buchanan translates, “Because of this” referring “to Christ’s effectiveness in offering sacrifice and cleansing from sin so that the believer might worship the living God (9:11-14)” (150).

Paul begins his argument of the *costly* sacrifice of Christ with His Mediatorship. The Mediatorship of Jesus is first introduced in Hebrews 8:16 in which it is stated that Jesus is “the Mediator of a better covenant.” This identical language is found describing His Mediatorial role in Hebrews 9:15 and 12:24. In the New Testament the word Mediator is applied four times to Jesus: 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 8:6; 9:15; and 12:24.

The Greek word for Mediator (*mesites*) means “arbitrator, go between” (Bruce 167). In the papyri, the term *mesites* was a term “common in connexion with legal transactions” (Moulton and Milligan 399). Westcott writes that “a covenant between God and man, requires a mediator, one who standing between the contracting parties shall bring them duly into fellowship. . . . [D]escribes the actions of Christ at the establishment of the New Covenant” describing “the position which He holds towards men

by assuring them of its validity” (218). Barclay (337-38) suggests three essential qualities any mediator must possess. Jesus possesses each.

- Christ as Mediator “must be able perfectly to represent both parties in the dispute. He must fully understand and sympathize with both. . . . Jesus is therefore the only possible Mediator between God and man, because [H]e is perfectly God and man. . . . There is no other person in the universe who can be the middleman between God and men” (cf. Heb. 2:17-18; 4:14-16).
- Christ as Mediator assumed the task or work “to bring men back to God by showing them the love of God in such a way that they would hate their sins and turn again to the God whose heart is ever yearning for them” (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18-21).
- Christ as Mediator established “between the two conflicting parties a new relationship [Christianity] in which suspicion has turned to trust, enmity to friendship, and hatred to love. There lies the heart of the matter. It was the essential task of the mediator to establish, not merely legal relationship, but a personal relationship in which love is the bond. . . . Jesus is the mediator, the middleman, who standing in the midst draws man and God together” (cf. Eph. 2:11-22).

In making application of Christ’s role as Mediator “between God and men” (1 Tim. 2:5-6), we ask the reader to consider the following. Man’s sins and iniquities brought him in conflict with God so that his sins and iniquities stand between God and him, resulting in separation or with God having “hidden His face . . . [and] will not hear” (Isa. 59:2). Man’s sins standing between himself and God *must* be removed. The removal of man’s guilt demands a sinless sacrifice in order to be acceptable to God. The Bible teaches that Christ Jesus is that “one Mediator between God and man . . . who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time” (1 Tim. 2:5-6). Christ was made “to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in

Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). That is, Christ became our sin-bearer for “without shedding of blood there is no remission” (Heb. 9:22).

The *effectiveness* of His ransom releasing man from his sins and iniquities that separate between God and man is described elsewhere as our being “justified by His blood” (Rom. 5:9). The *effectiveness* of the blood of Jesus shed for man’s sins in His death on Calvary (cf. Philip. 2:8) flows both ways—backwards and forwards. Christ’s blood flowed backwards providing what the first covenant could not provide; i.e. “eternal redemption” (9:12) or “the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant” (9:15). Those under the first covenant who faithfully kept God’s Word were able to “receive the promise of eternal inheritance” (9:15). Christ’s blood flows forward to those under the second covenant who faithfully keep God’s Word (1 John 1:7) to “receive the promise of eternal inheritance” (9:15) or “eternal redemption” (9:12).

In 9:15 we are introduced to the word *diatheke* which is translated in the New Testament by two words: *covenant* and *testament*. In 9:16-23 *diatheke* is translated covenant in 9:18 and 20 and testament in 9:16 and 17. Lightfoot writes:

[*Diatheke*] is a word that suggests that God lays down the conditions of the covenant. It is the ordinary word for ‘will’ or ‘testament,’ and, of course, a person who makes a will lays down the conditions of that will. . . . The New Testament concept; therefore, is always that of God making His covenant available by His gracious, saving activity. (181)

*Diatheke* occurs 33 times in the Greek New Testament. It is translated covenant 20 times and testament 13 times. The words covenant and testament occur 11 times in Hebrews, more than in any other New Testament book. Four times *diatheke* refers to the Old Covenant (Heb. 8:9 [twice], “ark of the covenant” once in 9:4; “the tables of the covenant” once in 9:4). Seven references are to the New Covenant (Heb. 8:6, 8, 10; 10:16, 29; 12:24; 13:20).

On the other hand *diatheke* is translated *testament* six times. Once it refers to the Old testament (9:15), three times it refers to some aspect of the New Covenant (7:22; 9:15, 20), twice in 9:16

and 17 it is used in a general legal sense and is applicable to Christ, the Testator, and His New Covenant or Will. In this latter sense, Behm writes that *diatheke* is the word “most commonly used for ‘last will and testament,’ a technical term in Greek jurisprudence in every age” (124, 129).

When speaking of God’s covenants, it is patently false to argue for an understanding of the word covenants to mean a mutual agreement between two parties; i.e. between God and man in which man also stipulates conditions to which God agrees. In any and all biblical covenants, God alone stipulates the conditions of His covenant with man. Man either acquiesces in humble obedience or rejects, at his own discretion, God’s benevolent grace. Parkhurst captures the meaning of the word *diatheke* by defining it as: “A disposition, dispensation, institutions, or appointment of God to man” (125). Parkhurst then replies to the above mentioned abuse of *diatheke* by writing:

I am well aware that . . . translators have rendered the word *diatheke* by covenant, and a very erroneous and dangerous opinion has been built on that exposition, as if *polluted, guilty* man could *covenant* or *contract* with God for [H]is salvation, or had any thing else to do in this matter, but humbly to *submit*, and *accept of* God’s *dispensation of purification* and salvation through the all-atoning sacrifice of the real *Purifier*, Christ Jesus. (126)

For an interesting delineation and brief study of the various biblical covenants found in the Old Testament, as well as, the New Covenant, we encourage a careful reading of Campbell (153-74).

The book of Hebrews abounds with a considerable wealth of information in reference to God’s covenants with His people, of which Jesus is Mediator (9:15; 1 Tim. 2:5-6) of the New Covenant. Hebrews shows the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old Covenant in many areas.

- Moses was mediator of the Old Covenant (9:15; cf. Gal. 3:19); whereas, Christ is vastly superior as Mediator of the New Covenant (8:6; 9:15; cf. 1 Tim. 2:5-6).

- The Old Covenant was a figure or shadow; whereas, Christ as the High Priest brings “good things to come” (9:8-10, 11).
- The Old Covenant was *exclusive* to all but “the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” (8:10; cf. Deut. 5:1ff.); whereas, the New Covenant is *inclusive* of all men after Christ’s resurrection (1:1-2a; 8:7-13; 7:25; 9:23-28).
- The Old Covenant was dedicated with “the blood of goats and calves . . . to the purifying of the flesh” (9:12-13, 19-22); whereas, the New Covenant is vastly superior being dedicated with “the blood of Christ. . . [O]nce at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (9:14, 24-28; 7:27) to purge man’s conscience (9:14).
- The blood of the animals under the Old Covenant was temporary and insufficient as the blood of bulls and goats could not remove sin (10:1, 4); whereas, the blood of Christ is all-sufficient bringing a “new covenant” (8:8), built on “better promises” (8:6). The new covenant had one sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins (8:8, 12; 9:12; 12:24) resulting in “eternal redemption for us” (9:12).
- With the Old Covenant being called the “first” (8:7; 9:1, 2, 15, 18), it projects both its temporary nature and removal (10:9); whereas, Christ instituted the “New” Covenant (8:8, 13; 9:15), the “second” (9), and is superior as well as irreplaceable. The New Covenant is an “everlasting covenant” (13:20) with Christ as the “author of eternal salvation” (5:8-9), “consecrated forevermore” (7:28), and promising “eternal inheritance” to the faithful under the Old Covenant (9:15), as well as to the devotees under the New Covenant.

Paul clinches his argument of Christ as Mediator of the New Covenant from the sense of it being a will or testament: “For where there is a testament [*diatheke*], there *must also of necessity* be the death of the testator. For a testament [*diatheke*] is in force after

men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives” (9:16-17, emp. added). This is a universally recognized argument as a will or testament cannot be effective until the death of the testator (will-maker). Moulton writes that in the New Testament times:

[T]he general principles of Roman law were well established and well known throughout the Empire. . . . [A]ll of St. Paul’s readers, as well as the readers of the Epistle to the Hebrews, whether these were Palestinian or Italian, knew the general customs with regard to will-making—customs which have lasted to our own day. (681)

Vos gives an extensive study of the word covenant (*diatheke*) (27-48) showing that it does not mean testament everywhere; however, in “9:16, 17 it is plainly given the meaning of *testament* referring to the death of the person who has made it” (28).

Blood and covenanting are conjoined in the Patriarchal, Mosaical, and Christian dispensations. They go with one another. The Old Covenant was dedicated with blood (9:18-22). So important is the conjoining of the two under the Old Covenant that inspiration refers to it as—“the blood of the covenant” (9:20, NKJVKV) or “the blood of the testament” (KJV). Not only is the Old Covenant dedicated by blood, but the tabernacle and all items within it were dedicated by blood (9:21-22) because “without the shedding of blood there is no remission” (9:22). Lightfoot gives the meaning as:

Here the author is stating an uncontested maxim, that sins can be forgiven only where there is the death of a victim. The rule appears as one of the many Levitical requirements and explanations (Lev. 7:11)—‘it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life’ An apparent exception to this is found in Leviticus 5:11-13, where the law provided that in a circumstance of poverty a bloodless sin offering, a tenth of an ephah (about two-thirds of a bushel) of fine flour could be presented for forgiveness. (175)

These Old Covenant sacrifices were repeated constantly, but as we will see in the next section, Paul argues that blood of Christ both sufficient and final (9:23-26).

### **Christ's Blood Is Both Sufficient and Final (9:23-26)**

The theme of 9:23-26 is both the *sufficiency* and the *finality* of the blood sacrifice of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The sufficiency of His blood sacrifice is seen in that He offered Himself once in contrast to the repeatedly yearly offering by the Levitical high priests. The finality of His blood sacrifice is seen in that He appears “in the presence of God for us. . . . [N]ow, once . . . He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (9:24, 26). The work of Christ is both sufficient and final; therefore, His sacrifice of Himself is superior to the often-repeated sacrifices of the Levitical high-priests who “enter the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another” (9:25).

While the following quote is lengthy, Lightfoot states with clarity the meaning of 9:23-26.

The remaining verses of the chapter magnify a theme already introduced, which the author now purposes to rivet the minds of his readers. The theme is, *Christ offered Himself once and once only* (cf. 7:27; 9:12). **Nor was it to offer [H]imself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the Holy Place yearly with blood not his own; for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world.** Two things are implied here: (1) that Christ has always existed, and (2) that Christ's sacrifice reaches backward and deal with the sins of past generations (v. 15). The offering made by Christ was distinctly unlike those of the Levitical high priests, for they, with the blood of fresh sacrifices, went in and out year and year. But Christ remains perpetually in the presence of God, neither coming nor going; otherwise He would have to suffer from the time of creation. That is, as sin entered into the world from the beginning, if Christ's sacrifice had not been entirely adequate, it would have been necessary for Him to die successively from the founding of the world. . . . Christ died but once, as the author goes on to say, just

as all men die once; and that in itself is a commentary on the effectiveness of His atonement. **But as it is, [H]e has appeared once for all at the end of the age. At the end of the age** is equivalent to the “last days” (1:2) or the final period of the world's history (cf. 1 Cor. 10:11; 1 Pet. 1:20). This is when Christ came, and when is instructive. He did not enter earth's early history and suffer repeatedly. He came “at the climax of history” (NEB), after many generations had passed away—another evidence that His offering was once for all. The purpose of His coming in human form was **to put away** (“cancel” or “abolish,” as in 7:18, where the same word is used of canceling the “former commandment”) **sin by the sacrifice of [H]imself.** (175-76)

While preparing this lecture, I attempted to document the often-heard claim that when the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies, a rope was attached to his leg in order that his body could be removed if he died while officiating in the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. This would have prevented someone from defiling the temple to retrieve his body. This often-taught “legend” is *not* found in the Bible! We searched in vain for its source and were unsuccessful in documentation.

Seeking help, I turned to a friend and professor for whom I have had great respect over the years, Dr. Jack P. Lewis. Dr. Lewis is Professor Emeritus at Harding Graduate School of Religion in Memphis. He holds two doctorates, a Ph.D. in New Testament from Harvard University, and a Ph.D. in Old Testament from Hebrew Union. Taking time from his busy schedule and with his permission, I quote his email:

You are right that there is nothing in the Bible about a rope being tied to the High Priest so that his body could be retrieved in case of an unexpected death without someone defiling the Most Holy Place. I also have some where heard that legend, but have no idea where it came from. The earliest rabbinic source we have after the temple was destroyed is the Mishna which dates about 200 A.D., long after the temple was destroyed and there was no temple to

be defiled. An English translation by H. Danby, and the section dealing with the day of atonement is name YOMA. The Tosephta in the Tractate YOMA is another place to look. I did not find the legend in it. . . . There is a seven volume set by Ginsburg named *Legends of the Jews*. I will look there when I can.

When asking for permission to quote his information in this lecture he added: “I still have not found anyone who knows about the rope.” With no biblical documentation nor Jewish tradition documenting this action, we will leave it as it is—a legend!

### Conclusion

Sufficient evidence has been set forth from Hebrews 9:11-26 that it is the case “The Blood of Christ Purifies.” We have argued the case from three succinct points: *First*, Christ’s blood *affected* a redemptive ministry (9:11-14). This is clearly seen when the blood of bulls, goats, and the ashes of a red heifer is contrasted with the blood of Christ. The Levitical offerings served only to “purifying the flesh” (9:12); whereas, Christ’s blood served to “cleanse the conscience” (9:14).

*Second*, Christ’s blood was a costly sacrifice (9:15-22). Whereas, the Levites offered animals, Christ offered the sacrifice of Himself (9:12, 14, 16, 23). Christ’s sacrifice enabled Him to become the Mediator of the New Covenant enabling the faithful of all dispensations to “receive the promise of eternal inheritance” (9:15).

*Third*, Christ’s blood is both a sufficient and final sacrifice (9:23-26). The Levitical High priest made the animal offerings repeatedly, year after year; whereas, Christ’s offering of Himself was a one time offering wherein He remained in God’s presence in Heaven (9:24-25).

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### Biographical Sketch

W. Terry Varner has been preaching for more than 55 years and has served congregations in Shadyside, OH; Dunbar, WV; North Canton, OH; and Harmar Hill, OH. He presently serves as an elder and evangelist with the congregation in West Union, WV.

He and his wife of over 50 years, Lillie, are the parents of four children: Steve, who is a Mortician at Master's Funeral Home, Mannington, OH; Scott, Administrator of Vocational Schools, Marshall County, Moundsville, WV, and is in his 19<sup>th</sup> year as WV Delegate.; Stuart, one of the Dean of Students, Harding University, Searcy, AR; and Sara, Second Grade Teacher, Fort Gibson, OK. The Varner's have 11 grandchildren and 4 great-grandchildren.

Terry is one of the four founders of West Virginia School of Preaching and presently teaches 3 classes. He also serves as Research Coordinator for Warren Christian Apologetics Center, Vienna, WV.

Terry enjoys hybridizing iris and presently has 30 iris on the international market. He also enjoys library research, building a library, gardening, hunting, and fishing.

## *Christ and the Word of God*

*Don Schuler*

### Introduction

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. (Heb. 4:12-13)



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The compelling message of this passage of Scripture is that God's written word must be heeded. It is not a dead letter. It cannot be trifled with. Moses, when speaking to all Israel, had this to say:

Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, which ye shall command your children to observe to do, all the words of this law. For it is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life: and through this thing ye shall prolong your days in the land, whither ye go over Jordon to possess it. (Deut. 32:46-47)

It has been said that the Bible is a letter from God with our personal address on it.

Our God is "the living God" (Heb. 3:12), and His Word is that "which liveth and abideth forever" (1 Peter 1:23). It is innately active and powerful, constantly accomplishing His will, never

returning to Him void (Isa. 55:11). It is just as pertinent today as when “holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:21). God’s Book is not a dull blade, but being two-edged, it cuts in every direction. No part of the human personality can escape its sharp edge. It reveals the secret places of men’s lives. It thoroughly sifts through the stored-up matters of the heart. “The Lord searcheth all hearts, and understand all the imaginations of the thoughts” (1 Chron. 28:9). What a wonderful, challenging book the Bible is. When we overlook or ignore it, we rob ourselves of a brilliant life-support.

### **Jesus and the New Testament**

The New Testament is a revelation of Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:3-6). God has revealed Himself through the person of His Only Begotten Son Jesus Christ. Jesus is the world’s most preeminent character. More books have been written about Jesus than any other historical character, but only one is definitive, His own last will and testament. The greatest event in the history of the world was when Jesus came “and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). The greatest words ever spoken are the words He spoke. The greatest deeds ever accomplished are the deeds His hands have done. The greatest gift ever offered is the sacrifice of His blood on Calvary’s cross. Jesus was and is the eternal God (Philip. 2:6), but He is also the incarnate Son, God manifest in a fleshly, human body. Born of a virgin, He became one of us (Philip. 2:7). As a human being, He grew (Luke 2:52), He became tired (John 4:6), He was hungry and thirsty (John 4:7-8), He was tempted (Matt. 4:1-10; Luke 4:1-12; Heb. 4:15), He grieved (John 11:35, 38). He expressed anger (Mark 3:5), sorrow (Matt. 26:37-38), joy (John 15:11; 17:13), and death (John 19:30). How sad it is that Jesus loves everyone so much that He “tasted death for every man” (Heb. 2:9), and yet so few respond to His love by loving Him in return (1 John 4:19).

One of the saddest laments in the Bible is found in Psalm 142, where the Psalmist declares, “I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul” (v. 4). But there is someone who cares—Jesus Christ the Savior. He cared enough to suffer and bleed and die at Calvary. In Luke 15 Jesus referred to Himself as “the Good Shepherd” who searched until the lost sheep was found.

Today He cares for the lost of humanity enough to urge all men to come to the fountain that flows with the healing stream of God’s eternal love. “Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17).

Jesus’ perfect example shows us how to live (1 Peter 2:21) and what to emphasize in our daily walk through this life. The Savior was willing to leave the beauty of heaven to come to this sinful world to show us the way to glory (John 14:6). What is truly heart-breaking is why so many remain lost in spite of our Redeemer’s great love.

In John 8:32 Jesus forcefully said to some Jews who believed on Him, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” Nothing short of the truth will give real freedom to our spiritual beings. Regardless of the price we might have to pay in turning our backs on sin, we must “buy the truth, and sell it not” (Prov. 23:23).

### **In this Life, Jesus Showed a Great Desire for the Word of God.**

Jesus had a truly amazing relationship to the Word of God. While in His fleshly body, He constantly impressed upon others what His first responsibility was. “My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work” (John 4:34). While teaching His disciples, He explained to them, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill” (Matt. 5:17). Let us examine what attributes Jesus possessed pertaining to the Word of God while He walked upon the face of the Earth.

In Luke chapter two we read of an incident that took place when Jesus was twelve years old, He went with His parents to Jerusalem to worship. When the days of the feast were complete, Mary, Joseph, their friends and relatives started for home. After traveling a day’s journey from Jerusalem, they discovered Jesus was missing. It took a day to return to the city and another day for them to find Him. During those days, Joseph and Mary had been “sorrowing” (Luke 2:48). This word means “greatly distressed.” Incidentally, this is the same word that the apostle Paul used in showing his concern for lost Israel in Romans 9:2. He labored in great detail to establish in the Roman brethren’s minds his deep

concern and the unceasing pain in his heart for those who were lost in their sins.

Did Jesus spend the entire three days in the temple? We do not know. If He did, it definitely would have been a safe place to be and God the Father was watching over Him. When Joseph and Mary found Him, they were surprised that He was “sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions” (Luke 2:46). Jewish scholars sat upon the ground at the feet of their teachers. Jesus took advantage of the opportunity to hear the great teachers in the schools. Why was He doing this? Could it possibly be that He was deeply interested in the Word of God?

I believe that Jesus, even at the age of twelve, had a great desire to know all that He could of God’s Word. He knew that if “the Law of His God is in His heart; none of His steps shall slide” (Ps. 37:31). As He would later teach His followers, Jesus was one who would “hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matt. 5:6).

When He was in the temple, “all that heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers” (Luke 2:47). What amazed them the most was how Jesus could bring things together; He had an unusual grasp on spiritual realities. How did He attain these high standards? No doubt by reading, studying, memorizing and contemplating on the Sacred Scriptures. He truly loved the Words of God recorded for us in the Old Testament.

Meditating on the Word of God is a lot like a cow chewing the cud. A cow eats and the food goes into its first stomach, and then it eats again as the food returns to its mouth. This is called “chewing the cud.” It allows the cow to get the most sweetness and nutritional value from her food. In the same manner, a person takes the Word of God into his mind and then “it is my meditation [ruminates on it] all the day” (Ps. 119:97). It supplies spiritual vitamins for the inner man. This must have been how Jesus handled the Word of God, because He knew that “through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way” (Ps. 119:104).

There is a cute little Peanuts cartoon that shows Charlie Brown, Lucy, and the other characters playing baseball. There is a pop fly hit to Lucy that she could easily catch, but she lets it fall at her

feet. Charlie Brown comes running out and screaming at her, “Why didn’t you catch the ball?” Lucy replied, “I was meditating.” In order to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18), we must meditate upon the Word of God. “Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them” (1 Tim. 4:15).

### **Jesus defined the Word of God**

When Jesus began His Galilean ministry He came to Nazareth, His hometown, and entered the synagogue on the Sabbath day. He was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the scroll and read from what is recorded for us in chapter sixty-one verses one and two. The Jewish rabbis interpreted this passage to refer to the Messiah. The people in the synagogue would have known this. How shocked they must have been when Jesus boldly proclaimed, “This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears” (Luke 4:21).

Jesus was saying that He had come to usher in the “acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:19). This refers to “the Year of Jubilee” described in the book of Leviticus chapter 25. Every seventh year was a “Sabbatical Year” for the nation, when the land was allowed to rest; and every fiftieth year was set apart as “the Year of Jubilee.” The main reason for this special year was for the balancing of the economic system. In this year slaves were set free and returned to their families, property that had been sold was reverted back to the original owners, and all debts were canceled. The land lay fallow as men and beasts rested and rejoiced in the Lord.

Jesus identified the essential qualities and meaning of God’s Word. He knew exactly what God had in mind when He spoke because, as He said, “I and My Father are one” (John 10:30). Jesus and God are one in interest, in purpose and in plan. Jesus’ actions were inseparable from the will and desires of God. “For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:9). He possesses every attribute belonging to the Godhead. Paul wrote the Galatians saying: “But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Gal. 4:4-5). Jesus heralded a time of great rejoicing. “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the



only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). He made known to all mankind God and His will for their lives. “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill!” He said (Matt. 5:17).

When questioned by the Pharisee Nicodemus, “Jesus answered and said unto him, ‘Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?’” (John 3:10). The Law of Moses, which the Jews revered highly, anticipated the kingdom and reign of the Messiah in the hearts of all men. Jesus associated Himself with all who will know and receive His teaching. That teaching was not His own, but it came from God; “For He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God” (John 3:34).

Throughout the course of His ministry, Jesus constantly identified the Father as the source of His teaching. In John 7:16, He declared, “My doctrine is not mine, but His that sent Me.” So close was His union with the Father that He never spoke independently of God. The action of the one was the action of the other. “The words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself: but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works” (John 14:10).

### **Jesus was Determined to Accomplish the Will of God**

One of the most fascinating stories to come out of World War II was the remarkable escape by a handful of American soldiers from a terrible concentration camp in Nazi Germany. They defied all odds with perseverance and dedication to break free. These brave men would not allow severe obstacles to confine them or conquer their zest for reunion with their loved ones thousands of miles away.

Jesus Christ would not allow anything to hinder Him from accomplishing the will of God as revealed for us in “the oracles of God” (Rom. 3:2). He knew the urgency of His mission; “I must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work” (John 9:4). The “works” to be done are not ours, but the Father’s.

In John chapter four, Jesus was doing some of His greatest “personal work.” “He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee. And He must needs go through Samaria” (John 4:3-4). It was of the utmost necessity that He go through Samaria. Why? Because these people needed to hear the Gospel. Oftentimes God sees

opportunities where we see obstacles. Jesus broke down all barriers to teach this Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well. Once Jesus tells her that He is the Messiah who has come to “tell them all things” (John 4:25), she becomes so excited she runs into the city to tell others of her great joy. Jesus had revealed to her a beautiful figure of the joy that is found in the Christ. It is “a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14).

Upon the departure of the woman, Jesus’ disciples return from the village where they had gone to get food to eat. They plead with Jesus saying, “Master, eat” (John 4:31). But Jesus explained to them that He had more important nourishment. “I have meat to eat that ye know not of” (John 4:32). Jesus’ purpose in life was not to fulfill physical or fleshly desires, but to do good (Acts 10:38), to provide spiritual nourishment for the lost and dying souls of the world (Luke 19:10), and to please His Father. The disciples were satisfied with bread; Jesus was satisfied with accomplishing the work of His Father. “I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart” (Ps. 40:8).

If we truly love the Lord, then the number one desire of our hearts should be a total commitment to His will. Jesus said, “If ye love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). And furthermore, “Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (John 15:14). Our attitudes should be that of Job; “I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food” (Job 23:12).

“Many of the Samaritans of the city believed on Him for the sayings of the woman” (John 4:39), “and many more believed because of His own word” (John 4:41). This great occasion took place because Jesus, unlike most Jews of His day, found it a necessity to travel through Samaria. “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:3-4).

In our day one of the best tools of Satan is the time consuming pace of a rushing society, overwhelmed in the pursuit of money, fame and possessions that forces out spiritual concern and growth. These mundane pleasures pale into nothingness when compared to a determined place in the divine realm. Jesus exhorts us to:

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doeth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Matt. 6:19-21)

### **Jesus Defended the Word of God**

In Mark 12:18-27, the Sadducees presented Jesus with a hypothetical question based on the law of marriage given in Deuteronomy 25:7-10. A woman had seven husbands in her lifetime, all of which were brothers, and all of whom had died. Their argument was: “If there is such a thing as a future resurrection, then she is going to spend eternity with seven husbands.”

The Sadducees were supposed to be authorities on God and His Word. Christ told them, in effect, “You are ignorant of both.” Jesus was a defender of the Truth and a man of stern rebuke when He had to be. Jesus answered them, “Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the Scriptures, neither the power of God?” (Mark 12:24). The Sadducees thought they were smart. Jesus revealed their ignorance.

The Sadducees were ignorant of God’s power. The Lord God who, “made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein” (Neh. 9:6), is He not able to give us the new bodies we will need for a new life in heaven?

Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. (1 Cor. 15:51-53)

The Sadducees were also ignorant of the Scriptures. They claimed Moses as their authority, but they failed to notice that Moses taught about life after death. Jesus took them back to the passage of Scripture concerning the burning bush in Exodus 3.

God did not tell Moses that He *was* the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He said, “I *am* the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Ex. 3:6, emp. added). The patriarchs were dead physically when God spoke these words, and yet God said they were still alive. Moses taught there is life after death.

Jesus was often opposed by the most popular group among the Jews of His day, the Pharisees. Jesus said of them, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat” (Matt. 23:2). They assumed an authority not their own. There is no record in Scripture that God assigned any authority to this group. Their only authority was to be the Word of God. Therefore, Jesus told His disciples, “For they say, and do not” (Matt. 23:3). In other words, “You can do what they tell you, but not what they do.” He denounced them for external religion without heart, compassion or concern for other people.

Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. (Matt. 23:27-28)

The Pharisees preached one thing and practiced another. Jesus made it very clear that hypocrisy and the Pharisees went hand in hand: “Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy” (Luke 12:1). What they believed sounded good, but their actions were detrimental and selfish.

God’s message through the prophet was, “And rend your heart, and not your garment, and turn unto the Lord your God” (Joel 2:13). For God “desirest truth in the inward parts” (Ps. 51:6). Jesus, when answering a lawyer tempting Him concerning the greatest commandment in the Law, had this to say, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment” (Matt. 22:37-38). If we fail, and our heart is not right with God, then we will be estranged from Him.

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. (Philip. 4:8)

Jesus was full of compassion (Matt. 9:36), yet He never overlooked or excused error. Like the beloved apostle Paul would at a later time be, Jesus was “set for the defense of the gospel” (Philip. 1:17). He was always prepared and had His armor on (Eph. 6:10-18). He rebuked error because error condemns souls which He came to save; “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15). If we would be followers of Jesus, we must show compassion to all and be willing to rebuke error so that the Lord’s truth will shine forth (Matt. 5:16).

### **Jesus was Devoted to the Word of God**

Spiritual maturity is achieved by discipline and devotion that stretches toward the highest ideal.

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witness, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb. 12:1-2)

Jesus is our leader. He was like a military commander, in that He went ahead of His men and blazed a trail for them to follow. “The captain of their salvation” (Heb. 2:10). In Him faith has its full expression. Jesus said, “The works that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me” (John 10:25). Then, the night on which He was betrayed, as He prayed to God the Father, Jesus proclaimed, “I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do” (John 17:4). Jesus was totally devoted to God and His Word.

When Jesus cried on the cross, “It is finished” (John 19:30), the Word of God’s earliest promise of redemption was realized. The seed of woman had bruised the serpent’s head (Gen. 3:15) and the Lamb of God had taken away the sins of the world (John 1:29).

Our Lord’s death on the cross was by far the most important event in the history of the world. That Jesus “bare our sins in His own body on the tree” (1 Peter 2:24) should thrill our souls. “And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philip. 2:8). Jesus taking our place should make Him very dear to us. The events at Calvary show us just how much heaven cares for us even though we have fallen so short of God’s glory. “For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17).

Can we be as devoted to God and His Word as Jesus was? It hinges upon what Jesus taught: “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33). Jesus is challenging us and gives us the best insurance policy ever issued. Sadly not very many people take the Lord seriously on that promise.

The apostle Paul had this to say to the church at Corinth, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58). He commended the church of the Thessalonians, “Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 1:3). Jesus encouraged His apostles to do even greater works than Him. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto My Father” (John 14:12).

Someone has wisely said, “Too many people make cemeteries of their lives by burying their talents.”

It is a challenge to live a life of purity and spiritual integrity, but we get plenty of help from Heaven. The Christians at Philippi were encouraged to, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Philip. 2:12-13). When we submit to God’s will, and determine to do His work, then He works in us to

accomplish His good pleasure. These words form a terrific reminder to all of us: “Failure should be our teacher, not our undertaker.”

### **Conclusion**

Jesus desired the Word of God, defined the Word of God, was determined to live the Word of God, defended the Word of God, and was devoted to the Word of God. Can the child of God today live up to this standard of godliness? No, we cannot do it by ourselves, nor by our own power. But with God’s help, we can live the life the Bible sets forth.

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the Great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. (Titus 2:11-14)

May we ever strive to live for Him and never turn back. For it should be our utmost goal to never disappoint our Father in heaven, but live in such a manner that He will be glorified. So that one day we might be in that number when the saints go marching in.

### **Biographical Sketch**

Don Schuler was born and raised in Wheeling, WV. He was baptized into Christ September 13, 1991, by brother Denver Cooper. He has a BS degree in Medical Technology from West Liberty State College (now University) and is a graduate of West Virginia School of Preaching class of 1995. He presently works for Canonsburg General Hospital in Canonsburg, PA, and Dr. Sushil Mehotra’s office in Wheeling, WV. He preaches for the Belmont, OH, Church of Christ and serves as a Deacon for the Hillview Terrace Church of Christ in Moundsville, WV. He is married to the former Patricia Ann Fecat of Moundsville. They are blessed with

five children: Jason, a graduate of Harding University and Central Michigan University; Kristin, a graduate of Harding University, who is married to Jeremy Antill, a graduate of West Virginia School of Preaching and a Gospel preacher; Denver, Erin and Linsey, who are all students at Wheeling Park High School.

# *We See Jesus*

Charles C. Pugh III

## **Introduction**

The basic theme of the Bible is Jesus Christ. He claimed, “. . . [T]he Scriptures . . . testify of Me” (John 5:39). Sydney Collett wrote, “. . . [T]here may be found on every page a portrait of



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Himself. . . . So that what we really see, as we open our Bible, is . . . ‘the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person’ (Hebrews 1:3). . . .” (189). “The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19:10). The revelation of the person and work of the greatest individual in human history (i.e. Jesus Christ), for the purpose of the salvation of humans, that is what the Bible is all about.

Perhaps there is no place in the Bible where this is seen to be the case more obviously than in *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. It is the revelation of ***The Perfect Christ***. It clearly is the case that the focus of Hebrews is Jesus Christ—who He is, and what He has done, is doing, and will yet do. The plea is “. . . [***C***onsider . . . ***Christ Jesus***” (Heb. 3:1, emp. added). The writer says, “Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have . . . [Jesus] who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (Heb. 8:1). The profound challenge of Hebrews is “. . . run with endurance . . . looking unto Jesus . . . ***consider Him*** . . .” (Heb. 12:1-3, emp. added). The verse from which the title for this lecture is taken implies what should be the result of a study of the Bible in general, and of Hebrews in particular—“But ***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, might taste death for everyone” (Heb. 2:9, emp. added).

The divine purpose of the salvation of humans through the person and work of Jesus Christ unfolds in the text of Hebrews 2:5-18 as well as the context of this great section of the Sacred Scriptures. This purpose unfolds as four basic needs of humans are implied throughout the text and context of the passage. These are universal spiritual needs humans possess and which Jesus Christ meets and fulfills through His person (who He is) and His work (what He has done and is doing). If it is the case that Jesus Christ meets and fulfills these needs then Jesus Christ is the exclusive Savior of humans to accomplish the divine plan for humanity. The affirmation of the writer of Hebrews is that Jesus does this. In the context of His declaration—“. . . *We See Jesus . . .*” (emp. added)—he implies Jesus is seen as 1) *the Prophet* who sufficiently reveals God, 2) *the Priest* who is able to represent man before God, 3) *the Propitiation* who is the sacrifice with which to approach God and, 4) *the Prince* who blazes the trail to the glory of God.

### **We See Jesus as *Prophet***

The needs exists for a prophet who is able to provide a revelation of God that is sufficient in its certainty and content. A good case can be made that there is a universal longing among humans to know God. Former atheist and distinguished scientist, Francis Collins, writes that humans are “. . . unique in ways that defy evolutionary explanation and point to man’s spiritual nature. This includes . . . the search for God that characterizes all human cultures throughout history” (200). Collins calls this a “God-shaped vacuum” in the human heart (38). The daughter of the atheistic philosopher Bertrand Russell said, “Somewhere at the back of my father’s mind, at the bottom of his heart, in the depths of his soul, there was an empty space that had once been filled by God, and he never found anything else to put in it. . . . [O]nce he said that human affection was to him ‘at bottom an attempt to escape from the vain search for God’. . . .” She continues, “. . . I picked up the yearning from him, together with . . . [the] feeling . . . of having no home in this world” (Tait 185). Legendary Oxford scholar C. S. Lewis observed:

Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. . . . If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is I was made for another world. (106).

There is an abiding human desire to know God but, as Job exclaimed, “Oh, that I knew where I might find Him . . . !” (Job 23:3). This cry of Job is “ultimately a revelation of the necessity for some special revelation of God” (Morgan 78). Man can find God through the general revelation He has given of Himself in the natural world (cf. Acts 17:26-28; Rom. 1:20). However, knowledge obtained from general revelation is insufficient. Therefore, the need exists for special revelation.

Swinburne has explained this need in the following:

We need more information about how it is good to live, and we need help to live in that way. We need more information about . . . God. . . . Even if humans easily recognized the force of arguments for the existence of God, it would help them (and especially the less sophisticated among them) if they were told that there is a God by an apparently reliable source of information. We need to know more about what God is like (for example, that he is a Trinity) and how he has acted towards us (for example, that he became incarnate to share our human condition), in order that we may worship him better for what he is and has done, and interact with him better. Although, I believe, my a priori arguments for the doctrines that if there is a God, God is a Trinity, and that God would become incarnate in order to share the human condition, are valid, not all humans may be fully convinced by them. And even if humans believe that God has become incarnate to provide atonement for our wrongdoing, they still need to know when and as which human he became incarnate and how they ought to appropriate that atonement for themselves (e.g. by seeking baptism); and no a priori argument can show all that. It is an obvious general fact

about humans that we would be ignorant of these things unless we were taught them by some person (perhaps by God Incarnate himself) who comes to us with credentials (public evidence) that he has been sent by God to teach us about these matters. This would provide a ‘propositional revelation’, a revelation from God that certain propositions (e.g. ‘God became incarnate in Jesus Christ’) are true. . . .

It follows . . . that if there is a God, we would find among us at some stage of history a prophet who lives a life in which there is much suffering, who would claim to be God incarnate, and would found a Church to continue to proclaim that message. It would also be quite probable that the prophet’s life would be a perfect life, he would claim to be making available atonement for our sins, and give us plausible teaching (as a revelation from God) about the nature of God, how we should live our lives, and God’s plan for our future. (61, 91)

The immediate context (Heb. 1:1-2:4) of the primary passage (Heb. 2:5-18) with which we are concerned in this lecture argues that Jesus is the one person in human history who fulfills the need for a prophet who sufficiently reveals God. Through Him God has spoken in a way that is unique because He (Jesus) is God (cf. 1:8). He is not merely *a* prophet. He is *the* Prophet (cf. Deut. 18:18-21). His revelation is “so great” (Heb. 2:3) in content and confirmation (Heb. 2:3-4). The challenge is “Hear Him!” (Matt. 17:5).

### **We See Jesus as *Priest***

The text before us explicitly identifies Jesus as “a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God” (Heb. 2:17). Bales set forth the implications of the doctrine of the priesthood and how such connects with the unfolding of the divine purpose (i.e. “bringing many sons [and daughters] to glory”-Heb. 2:10).

First, it [the priesthood] implies that God is and that man needs in some way to approach and worship God. Second, it implied that man needs someone as a mediator between him and God; someone to intercede [sic.] for him. Third, it implied that man is a religious being, with both the need

and the aspiration to worship. Fourth, the concept of priesthood in the Bible and in many pagan religions included the idea of the priest offering sacrifices. This indicated that man is a sinner, that atonement is made through a sacrifice of some kind. (49)

Job deeply felt the need for the priest who could represent him before God. He cried, “For He [God] is not a man as I am, that I may answer Him, and that we should go to court together. Nor is there any mediator between us, who may lay his hand on us both” (Job 9:32-33). Job needed a “daysman” (King James Version), “umpire” (American Standard Version), or “someone to arbitrate” (New International Version). The need is for a *mediator*. The Greek word for mediator is *mesites*. Barclay says it “closely connected with the word *mesos*, which means *in the middle*. The *mesites* is literally *a middleman*. . . . It is Job’s feeling that there is no one to bring him and God together . . .” (335). G. Campbell Morgan suggests the word is one of the law-court, and Job’s question is a forensic question that means “How can a man argue his case with God so as to justify himself?” (26). This cry for a mediator is “a cry of elemental human nature, and expresses an abiding need” (29), because man is unable to sufficiently reach God without help.

It is man’s sin that causes him to come short (cf. Rom. 3:23). In the unfolding of the biblical purpose (i.e. salvation) a crucial key is the reason for man’s inability to get to God. It is sin. Sin separates God and man (cf. Isa. 59:1-2). Therefore, the need exists for the perfect priest who can bridge the gap between God and man.

Hebrews argues that the Christian system, through the person and work of *Jesus Christ*, exclusively provides *the perfect priest* who can bring God to man and man to God. Jesus Christ can do this, because He is fully divine and fully human. He is the Son of God (Heb. 1:2, 5, 8). He is the son of man (Heb. 2:6). He is so much better than the angels (Heb. 1:4). He is a little lower than the angels (Heb. 2:7, 9). He is the express image of God (Heb. 1:3). He is flesh and blood as man (Heb. 2:14). He is one with God, and called God by God (Heb. 1:2, 8-9). He is one with humans and calls them His brothers [and sisters] (Heb. 2:11-12). As God, He is worshipped by the angels (Heb. 1:6). As man, He was tempted and

suffered for man (Heb. 2:9, 18). As God, He is unchanging, everlasting life (Heb. 1:11-12). As man, He died so that humans could overcome the power of death (Heb. 2:14-15).

### **We See Jesus as *Propitiation***

The text before us says, “. . . [I]n all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, *to make propitiation* for the sins of the people” (Heb. 2:17, emp. added). The words “in things pertaining to God” form an expression that “points to all man’s relations towards God” which includes that He propitiates (conciliates) for our sins (Rogers and Rogers 521). “To ‘propitiate’ somebody means to appease or pacify his anger” (Stott, *Cross* 169). There has been effort in recent biblical studies to argue that the meaning of the word (*hilaskomai*) translated “to propitiate” is better rendered “to expiate” (cf. RSV, NEB). F. F. Bruce has provided a significant list of much of the literature that discusses this issue as well as the excellent observation that “if sins require to be expiated [removed, covered, put away], it is because they are . . . committed against someone who ought to be propitiated” (41). Sin arouses the wrath of God.

This does not mean . . . that [H]e is likely to fly off the handle at the most trivial provocation, still less that [H]e loses [H]is temper for no apparent reason at all. For there is nothing capricious or arbitrary about the holy God. . . . The wrath of God . . . is [H]is steady, unrelenting, unremitting, uncompromising antagonism to evil in all its forms and manifestations. In short, God’s anger is poles apart from ours. What provokes our anger (injured vanity) never provokes [H]is; what provokes [H]is anger (evil) seldom provokes ours. (Stott, *Cross* 173).

In his book, *Knowing God*, J. I. Packer calls *propitiation* “The Heart of the Gospel” (161-80). This material has been included more recently in a 2007 volume co-authored by Packer and Mark Dever. This latter volume, in addition to Packer’s aforementioned chapter on propitiation, also includes chapters on “the Logic of Penal Substitution,” “Christ-Centered Means Cross-Centered,” and

“Books on the Cross of Christ” in addition to others. Packer’s work on “The Heart of the Gospel” is classic. He summarized the meaning of propitiation as follows:

. . . The basic description of the saving death of Christ in the Bible is as a *propitiation*, that is, as that which quenched God’s wrath against us by obliterating our sins from His sight. . . . Jesus Christ has shielded us from the nightmare prospect of retributive justice by becoming our representative substitute, in obedience to His Father’s will, and receiving the wages of our sin in our place. By this means justice has been done, for the sins of all that will ever be pardoned were judged and punished in the person of God the Son, and it is on this basis that pardon is now offered to us offenders. Redeeming love and retributive justice joined hands, so to speak, at Calvary, for there God showed Himself to be ‘just, and the justifier of them that have faith in Jesus’.

Do you understand this? If you do, you are now seeing to the very heart of the Christian gospel. (170)

### **We See Jesus as *Prince***

The writer of Hebrews in the text and context of his declaration, “We See Jesus,” implies that Jesus is to be seen as the Prince who blazes the trail to the glory of God. He says: “For it was fitting for Him for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Heb. 2:10).

The word *author* is *archegos*. It is a compound of *arche* (beginning) and *ago* (to lead). It refers to “one that takes the lead . . . and thus affords an example . . .” (Thayer 77). The word “portrays Jesus as the fulfillment of the Davidic [Messianic] hope” (Rogers and Rogers 235). In Greek writings it was used of “. . . a hero who founded a city, gave it his name, and became its guardian . . . a commander of an army who went ahead of his men and blazed the trail . . . a leader who opens up a new way” (520). Jesus Christ, the Prince of Life (Acts 3:12-26), opened up “a new and living way . . . through His flesh” (Heb. 10:28).



God's end for man is salvation that will ultimately result in man being led to a state of glory with God. The plan of God involved the creation of man, capable of having descendents like Himself, who also would be capable of fellowship with God, capable of becoming a son (or daughter) of God through freely believing God, loving Him and submitting to Him in obedience, and eventually glorified by God (cf. Warren 44). The environment of Earth is ideal for the accomplishment of this purpose. It is ideally "suited for the moral and spiritual *development of man* towards the perfect pattern which is Jesus Christ" (50). Life on Earth is like a "march under the guidance of a Leader to the promised land. . . . The sons of God are led to glory step by step" (A. B. Bruce 96, 97).

Jesus Christ is the perfect Leader of salvation. A. B. Bruce argued the apologetic for Christ as the superior Prince of salvation when he affirmed:

The supreme qualification for a leader of salvation is the possession and exercise of high heroic virtues. . . . But a moral hero means one whose life is hard, tragic. Heroes are produced by passing through a severe, protracted curriculum of trial. They are perfected by sufferings—sufferings of all sorts, the more numerous, varied, and severe the better; the more complete the training, the more perfect the result, when the discipline has been successfully passed through. Hence the fitness, nay the necessity, that one having Christ's vocation should live such a life as the Gospels depict and our Epistle hints at: full of temptations, privations, contradictions of unbelief, ending with death on the cross. . . . How can any son of God who is being led through fire and flood to his inheritance doubt the value of a Leader so trained and equipped? (102-03)

Jesus truly meets a supreme qualification for *the* leader of salvation (i.e. a life of profound, supreme hardship and trial). Oxford professor Richard Swinburne affirms, "The first requirement for Jesus to be God Incarnate is that the life of Jesus was a *perfect life which involved much suffering*" (100, emp. added). His life is the *one* perfect life in human history. His life was lived throughout on the raw edge of suffering, and culminated

with an immersion in suffering that is unique in human history (cf. Isa. 53:11; Matt. 27:46; Luke 22:41-44; Rom. 8:32). His life ended with the greatest crisis—the worst suffering—any human has ever experienced. It was painful; physically, emotionally, and spiritually to a degree beyond any.

. . . Christianity deliberately singles out the most unique, and the most undeserved, and the most terrible instance, not only of physical suffering, but also of mental, or moral and of spiritual anguish, all of which were suffered by an innocent Person on behalf of others, and, having singled out this unique case deliberately raises this greatest of all tragedies into bold relief and makes every effort to attract the attention of all humanity to it. Then, underneath this terrible picture of the greatest of all tragedies, Christianity writes with warm enthusiasm and with intense conviction:--  
"God so loved the world (that He gave His only begotten Son").

It is in the light of the Crucifixion that Christians contemplate lesser sufferings. Countless millions of people, of many different races and in many different centuries, looking upon that picture of Jesus Christ in Gethsemane and on Calvary, and accepting the Christian interpretation of the Great Tragedy, have gloried in pain and have rejoiced in anguish: they have thanked God for having counted them worthy to walk in the footsteps of the suffering Christ, and to suffer with Him. (Drawbridge 69)

## Conclusion

"But *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, might taste death for everyone" (Heb. 2:9, emp. added). Here is Bethlehem. Here is Calvary. Here is the Empty Tomb. Here is the Coronation that followed the Ascension. Here is hope. Here is the Perfect Christ. John Stott calls Him the incomparable Christ who has no peers, and he relates the following story that gives the angle from which He is truly seen as Heaven's revelation has made Him known:

There was a sculptor once, so they say, who sculpted a statue of our Lord. And people came from great distances to see it—Christ in all his strength and tenderness. They would walk all round the statue, trying to grasp its splendour, looking at it now from this angle, now from that. Yet still its grandeur eluded them, until they consulted the sculptor himself. He would invariably reply “There’s only one angle from which this statue can be truly seen. **You must kneel.**” (*Incomparable*, 235)

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#### Biographical Sketch

Charles C. Pugh III is in his 43<sup>rd</sup> year of preaching the Gospel of Christ. He is one of the founders of West Virginia School of Preaching where he serves as an instructor. He has studied and taught for more than 35 years in the field of Christian Apologetics and teaches three apologetics courses at WVSOP as well as other courses. He is director of the recently formed Warren Christian Apologetics Center, an informational theistic center that exists for the purpose of affirming and defending the Christian worldview while aiming to challenge the growing global influence of atheistic thought. The Warren Center is scheduled to open its new facility in 2010 which will be located in Vienna, WV.

Since 1999, due to a vocal fold disease, much of his work has been concentrated in the areas of writing and publishing. He is the author of several books and tracts and owner of Threefold Publications. He preaches several Gospel meetings yearly and appears on various lectureships. He and his wife Sharon live in Vienna, WV, and have two daughters, one son, a granddaughter, and grandson.

# *The Anchor of the Soul*

*Greg Tidwell*

Previously, in this chapter, the author of Hebrews provides dire warnings against apostasy and expresses the desire that his readers “shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end” (Heb. 6:11). Today, God’s people are challenged to combat



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false teaching that, once again, is threatening the church with apostasy. We must show “the same diligence” in upholding the truth in our age. The author of Hebrews provides an encouragement to us, as much as to his first readers, to remain true to the pattern of faith provided to the church through the work of Jesus Christ and through the Lord’s authoritative spokesmen, the apostles.

The book of Hebrews now continues to provide encouragement by explaining the doctrinal framework which assures the blessings God has planned for His people.

One of the great errors of contemporary religion is playing emotion against doctrine. The Social Gospel, the Community Church, and the Emerging Church movements are just a few of the heresies which play feelings against truth. This approach, however, is altogether wrongheaded. The Bible engages our hearts with truth, and we have assurance because God has spoken in truth. The author of Hebrews uses the example of Abraham to make this point:

For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself, Saying, “Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply

thee.” And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. (Heb. 6:13-16)

God spoke to Abraham, and God’s Word was true. Abraham could have assurance because of the credibility of the One who made the promise.

But why should Gentile Christians living in the twenty-first century concern ourselves with a Hebrew who lived four thousand years ago? The immediate answer, of course, is that Jesus and His apostles continually looked back to the text of the Old Testament to provide the context for the work they were doing. It is simply impossible to be a faithful New Testament Christian and not to study the Old Testament as well. Specifically, we find Abraham repeatedly used as an example for Christians to follow. While we are far removed from him in time, Abraham is joined to each one of us through a shared faith in the Lord.

Consider, the book of Genesis teaches that Abraham was to be a father of many nations. In Genesis 17:4, God says, “As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.” The word *nations* (*goy* in the Hebrew) is the same word which can be translated *Gentiles*. So from the beginning, in Genesis there was the concept of descendants of Abraham who were not Hebrews. This concept is amplified throughout the Old Testament, especially in the messianic prophecies of an eternal kingdom encompassing people from many nations. (This kingdom, of course, finds its full expression in the universal nature of the Lord’s church.)

Further, Hebrews 3:19 shows that many physical descendants are not in fact heirs of the promises made to Abraham and his descendants. It says that they “could not enter in because of unbelief.” Being a physical descendant does not guarantee anything if faith is missing. This suggests that what it takes to qualify as a descendant of Abraham and an heir of the promise is not the ethnicity of Abraham but the faith of Abraham. This truth is brought out by the narrative of Genesis 22 where the promise and the oath were made. They were made in direct response to Abraham’s obedience of faith in offering Isaac (Heb. 11:17). God

tells Abraham in Genesis 22:16 that the blessing was “because thou hast done this thing,” because, in faith, he had offered Isaac. In other words, the promise in Genesis 22:16-17 is not given by God to Abraham as a Hebrew, but is given by God to Abraham as a man of obedient faith.

We also receive the blessings of this promise as we walk in the same path of faith in which God blessed Abraham. Hebrews 6:17-18 connects our assurance with the promise received by Abraham:

Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set us.

God confirmed His promise to Abraham with an oath. Why did God do this? Why did He add an oath to a promise? He certainly did not have to in order to establish His word. Why, then? The answer is given in these verses. God did not provide this confirmation for the benefit of Abraham. God provided this confirmation to the heirs of promise, those “who have fled [to God] for refuge.” He provided this confirmation for us, not just for Abraham. He did it to show how much encouragement of hope He wants us to have. The Greek word used in this passage, *perissoteron*, means “in a more superabundant way.” The text is clear, the superlative proof of God’s faithfulness was not provided for Abraham’s benefit, but for ours as “heirs of promise.” The indelible faithfulness of God is the basis for our certitude of hope.

*Hope* is an interesting word as used in the Greek of the New Testament. In English, we use the term to express longing, but often longing tinged with doubt. I ask if your health will improve, and you respond: “I hope so.” Maybe you will be restored to health, and maybe not. The outcome is at best uncertain, and perhaps doubtful. In the New Testament, however, the word *hope* expresses a longing or an aspiration, but without the cloud of uncertainty. Our hope in Christ is sure and certain.

This certainty is based on the “immutability of His counsel,” which God abundantly demonstrated to us thorough the promise

He made to Abraham. While Abraham received the promise and believed, he never lived to see the promise fulfilled. God, however, was faithful, and after two thousand years, He kept the promise. God made Abraham, the man of faith, the father of many nations through the gospel of Jesus Christ. What Abraham was promised, we have experienced. We can have confidence. Our Lord keeps His word.

Hebrews 6:19-20 shows the confident assurance Christians enjoy through the work of Christ in providing our salvation: “Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.”

This hope is more than wishful thinking; it is sure and steadfast. It is an anchor of the soul, providing a strong consolation to all who are heirs of promise.

Hope provides this assurance because of the perfect work of Jesus Christ. We are not saved through the act of hoping, as if wishing for something would make it so. We are saved by the One in Whom we hope. Salvation is only found in Jesus Christ. Our hope in Christ grants us access into the Holy of Holies, “within the veil,” where Christ has gone to atone for our sins. This is the same work of salvation Paul describes in Romans 6:3-5:

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.

Jesus Christ died for our sins. It is our confidence in what Jesus has done, our hope in His salvation, that prompts us to take hold of these blessings by being baptized into Christ.

When you are united with Christ in baptism, the salvation that you were hoping for is absolutely sure. The anchor is sure, certain and safe. The anchor is steadfast, firm and reliable. The anchor is set within the veil. This veil hung across the inner sanctuary of the

Tabernacle and, in due course, of the Temple. The veil concealed the Ark of the Covenant where God in His glory met with the high priest once a year as he brought a blood sacrifice to atone for the sins of the people.

But Jesus entered into the Holy of Holies once for all with His own infinitely precious blood, and His own sinless life, so His atoning work for us is perfect and lasts forever. This is what verse 20 means when it says Jesus was “made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.” So our anchor—our promised future—is sure; it is steadfast; and it is the finished and purchased work of Jesus our High Priest.

The anchors of the ancient world were much like the modern ones with iron hooks to grapple the rocks and so hold on to prevent shipwreck. Spiritual shipwreck is an analogy the apostle Paul used in 1 Timothy 1:19 to describe the process of apostasy: “Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck.” Like a physical anchor that keeps a ship from drifting into disaster, Christian hope is an anchor that keeps the child of God from drifting into apostasy. A physical anchor drops into the unseen depths of the water, but holds because it reaches a secure underpinning. Our anchor of hope also reaches into an unseen realm “behind the veil,” but holds because of the sure and steadfast foundation provided in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

When the text says our hope in Christ is *sure*, the Greek word is *asphales*, derived as a negation of the word *sphales* which means “to fail.” The anchor of our hope will not fail to sustain us. The text also describes our hope in Christ as “steadfast,” *bebaios* in the Greek, derived from the concept of a base or foundation. The anchor of our hope provides a solid foundation, one that will hold firm. This passage depicts a concept of hope that is without equivocation or wavering. A certain conviction that the Savior can, without question, save.

Are we edging towards a Calvinistic teaching of “the perseverance of the saints,” or as the Southern Baptists are more prone to term it, “once saved, always saved?” How does the assurance taught in Hebrews 6:19 square with the warning just delivered in Hebrews 6:4-8?

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: But that which beareth thorns and briars is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.

How can the book of Hebrews contain such dire warnings in tandem with such categorical assurance within the same chapter?

We can only piece together the warning and the assurance, what Romans 11:22 calls “the goodness and the severity of God,” if we remember that the grace of God is conditional. Not everyone receives salvation. While the love of God is unconditional, God’s grace is restricted to those who are in Christ. Consider the way John 3:16 describes God’s universal love and God’s restrictive salvation: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

The universal love of God for the world caused Jesus to die “for the sins of the whole world.” (1 John 2:2) Calvinism is wrong in teaching a “limited atonement.” This universal love, however, does not lead to universal salvation. As Paul writes in Romans 10:16-21, salvation only comes to those who obey the Gospel:

But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world. But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to Jealously by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you. But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest

unto them that asked not after me. But to Israel he saith, all day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.

Obedient faith is essential for receiving the grace of God. God’s promise of salvation is always conditional, and this truth brings us back to the example of Abraham.

The offering of Isaac provides a template for all men and women of faith to receive the blessings of salvation. James 2:20-24 shows the importance of obedient faith in Abraham’s justification:

But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

Disobedience is always a result of disbelief. The faith that saves is the faith that obeys. Hebrews 6:15 describes the justification of Abraham simply, “And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.” As it was with Abraham, so it is with all men and women of faith.

The book of Hebrews can concurrently provide warning against apostasy and give promises of security because each is a side of the same coin. Those who are in Christ have a steadfast security which will never fail. Those who refuse to follow Christ are rejecting their only hope for salvation. It is Jesus Christ who provides the way of salvation for those who follow Him, and it is Jesus Christ who provides the standard of judgment which condemns those who reject Him. As the apostle Peter observed, quoting from the prophet Isaiah:

Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you

therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even unto them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. (1 Peter 2:6-8)

Notice the repeated connection in Scripture between obedience and faith. As we sing in the familiar hymn:

When we walk with the Lord, In the light of His word,  
What a glory He sheds on our way.  
While we do His good will, He abides with us still,  
And with all who will trust and obey. (Towner)

Trusting and obeying, believing and doing, accepting Jesus as Savior cannot be divorced from recognizing Him as Lord. Counting Jesus as precious will prevent Christians from stumbling into disobedience. Our faithfulness is guided by our faith in the perfect work of the Savior. Our assurance rests with Jesus Christ who is “an high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.”

The work of Christ, the Lord’s Anointed, is often divided into the three messianic offices: prophet, priest, and king. While many prophets were also priests, and some kings were also prophets, only one man in the Old Testament served both as a priest and a king:

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, “Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand.” And he gave him tithes of all. (Gen. 15:20)

Melchizedek serves as a foreshadowing of the work of Christ. He was the king of Salem, a city we would later know as Jerusalem. The name *Salem* in Hebrew means *peace*. Melchizedek was the King of Peace, even as our Lord is the Prince of Peace. Melchizedek reigned from the physical location of Mount Zion,

while our Lord reigns from the spiritual Zion where He sits on the throne of David.

Most important, Melchizedek foreshadows Christ through his work as a priest of the most high God. Through the age of the patriarchs, God had priests and prophets scattered among the various tribes. (Jethro, the father-in-law to Moses, was a priest, and Balaam of Pethor was a prophet. Neither of these men, however, were Hebrews.) While Jesus was born of the Hebrew race, He was not of the priestly tribe of Levi. Jesus, like Melchizedek, was chosen by God to serve as priest. He did not hold this office based on genealogy.

Melchizedek, however, served as priest in the days of Abraham. It is now four thousand years since he interceded for the faithful, offering prayers to God from on top of Mount Zion. Our Savior, Jesus Christ, however, is a “high priest forever.” As Hebrews 7:25 reminds us, “he ever liveth to make intercession for them.”

My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.  
In every high and stormy gale  
My anchor holds within the veil. (Bradbury)

These rousing words we sing remind us that our assurance is not based on wishful thinking, but on the completed, yet continual work of Jesus Christ. Our confidence in the Son of God tethers us to an eternal truth that cannot be moved.

We live in uncertain times. Politically and economically, the shift towards a secular and socialist future raises profound questions for the Lord’s church. More troublesome are the strange winds of doctrine blowing many Christians off course as they abandon New Testament truth for a religion that tickles their ears. We can, however, rest assured in the eternal power of the grace of God. Our text from the book of Hebrews reminds us that we have a hope, a confidence, which can never fail and which will not be moved by any force in Heaven or on Earth.

Our hope is in the perfect work of Jesus Christ. Following the example of Abraham, the man of faith, we believe the promises of God. In faith, we are moored to the eternal work of God’s

salvation. As long as we remain in that truth, we can proceed with the confident expectation of God's blessing and salvation.

### **Biographical Sketch**

Serving the congregation at Fishinger and Kenny Roads since 1984, Greg is also closely associated with the Gospel Advocate Company, serving as a staff writer. He and his wife, Peggy, have twin sons, David and Jordan. Greg is a board member of Fort Hill Christian Youth Camp and serves on the board of Members of Churches of Christ for Scouting. He previously served on the board of Potter's Children's Home. Receiving degrees from Lipscomb and Vanderbilt Universities, Greg has received further graduate training at several institutions.

## *Christ Our High Priest*

*Martel Pace*

### **Introduction**

Seldom do we have a New Testament Book say, "This is the main point!" But Hebrews does. It began at 2:17 and ends with 10:21. If this is the greatest point about the work of Jesus to our author, then it should be to us. The work of Jesus as intercessor, with a "High Priesthood," has only been implied earlier in Rom. 8:34, "Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us." Now it will be amplified and fully explained.

Romans 8:1 supplements the idea of full forgiveness through Christ. "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." This is but a precursor of the fuller revelation in Hebrews (7:25; 4:15-16), He ever lives as our intercessor and He always is ready to show mercy.

### **Overview of Hebrews Eight**

The word for "main point" in verse one is, *κεπηλαλιον* which can mean "sum," "summary" or "chief point." This last is preferable because this section presents the climax of the argument and is more than a summary. Our High Priest cannot serve in connection with an inferior covenant, so the New must be superior as well. The "main point" in what follows is that our High Priest has credentials that are immaculate. Jewish unbelievers felt themselves superior in having a designated appointee of God as their High Priest and that the Christian system was inferior because it lacked one. In the first century many among them had come to look on their High Priests with disdain. Josephus remarked that the "Ananias" responsible for killing James the Lord's brother was "a great hoarder up of money" (424). He was far from noble in character. Some, such as the Essenes—the term Josephus used for those who held that view and the likely name for the Qumran Community which produced the Dead Sea Scrolls—were among that number. They believed God had rejected their High Priest. This may have been true in some regard, but God still counted



Caiaphas as His representative, for the Spirit prophetically spoke through him on at least one occasion (John 11:47-53). That many Essenes lived on the Eastern shore of the Dead Sea was mentioned by Pliny the Elder, (*Natural History*, ii.73). Philo said they also lived in many cities (*Hypothetica* 745; *Every Good Man Is Free* 689; cf. Josephus 320).

### **To Jewish Priests, this Magnifies Jesus to the Highest Place**

No other letter focuses as fully on the present greatness of Christ as Hebrews, except for the book of Revelation. . . . [O]nly in Hebrews is this developed to contrast with the great human leaders of the past, such as Abraham, Moses, Aaron, and Joshua, as well as angelic authorities. . . . (Stedman 14)

The role of our High Priest brings “eternal redemption” which also refers to the superiority of Jesus. Hebrews 9:12, and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

Jesus as The High Priest brings “better” things—a key word in Hebrews; nothing could be better than full redemption or sins forever forgiven and no more remembered (1:4; 7:19, 22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35; 12:24).

This High Priest has accomplished several greater/better things than the Old one, which brings our author to deftly make a turn to what our High Priest has brought rather than being just our intercessor and pleader. The “better hope” (7:19) offers so much greater promise than the Old Covenant. For the Law made nothing perfect,” on the other hand there is a “bringing in of a better hope,” through which we draw near to God. This is the introduction to the New Covenant in Hebrews: 8:6, “But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises.”

It is because of this better possession that we have lasting forgiveness according to Hebrews 10:34, “For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.” In fact, what is better is clearly the *best* thing

ever offered. This High Priest performs the great work as our Messiah in procuring for us the full redemption of our souls, the remission of sins forever more.

### **The Promised New Contract Obtains This**

A “new covenant” was promised in Jeremiah (31:31-34); the idea is just hinted at in Ezekiel (16:60-62; 34:25-26). This amazing announcement from the prophet Jeremiah still astounds Judaism, and is really not accepted by the rabbis of today. It is the follow-up to the announcement of a change of Law-givers by Moses (Deut. 18:15-18, quoted in Acts 3:22-23). Our Preacher uses it to explain various changes in God’s dealings with His people under the New Covenant.

At the point of Hebrews 8, we have learned several things about our great High Priest:

1. He was called of God after the order of Melchizedek (5:10).
2. A divine oath put Christ in office (7:20-22).
3. His priesthood is permanent (7:23-24).
4. His work is fully effective (7:25).
5. His personal qualifications made Him completely capable of always serving as our High Priest (7:26-28).
6. He now serves in the Heavenly Sanctuary, not a pitiful earthly one (8:1-3).
7. He is involved in giving the New Covenant which offers total forgiveness of sins that will never be remembered again against us (8:6-13).

We can boast in this: “We have Him! He is real and He is ours!”

This final point is the one most vital to us and my assigned topic. Hebrews 8:4 is a great help in determining the date of Hebrews, “since there are those who offer gifts according to the Law.” This shows also that the church could not have been established until after Jesus returned to Heaven to fully redeem mankind—(another serendipity)—so He offered His blood in Heaven for our eternal forgiveness. The price was not fully repaid

until then (Eph. 5:25b; Heb. 9:12). The highest one making offerings for the people was the High Priest.

A switch in his work begins at 8:5—“Make all things according to the pattern.” Moses was “divinely commanded” (McCord’s Translation, now FHU) The pattern had to be in harmony with the form of the church, which is now our shadow of heavenly things (cf. Pace 302-03).

### **The First Covenant had a Fault 8:6**

That Covenant could not save nor completely forgive sins because of a weakness, but what was that? Paul explained in Romans 8:3-4 that the weakness is in us, not the Law. The weakness was in the High Priest who had to offer for himself as well (5:2-3). The Old Testament had much to say about sin, but it provided no full forgiveness. Much of the Old pertained to ritual cleansing, but the new to a true and full spiritual cleansing of guilt. Thus, the Old Testament High Priest had a very inferior role, yet it was magnified beyond imagination by the Jews of Jesus’ time.

The promises of the Old were for this world; those of the New are for eternity. The quote from Jeremiah 31:31-34 begins at 8:8-12 and at 10:15-17, repeating the text just as any good preacher would do. Three great thoughts are contained in this prophecy: 1) Write my laws on their hearts. 2) Not teach every man his fellow-citizen, and 3) God will remember our sins no more.

It is a NEW covenant, not a slightly adjusted one, as going to a Chiropractor for an adjustment vs. to a surgeon to have part of tailbone cut out! This cannot be the adjustment as many sectarians think, and as Jewish rabbis advocate; this is something new that the Old did not accomplish.

God’s people would be united in one great Israel of God (Gal. 6:16) who are spiritual Israel, and not outward in the flesh. “. . . [T]hey are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel” (Rom. 9:6, emp. added). Romans 2:29 declares, “But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.” The Jews resented Christians partly because the New Testament appropriated so many terms that were exclusively theirs and granted them to the Church and individual members of it.

This new group is to be one body, one people, keeping the unity of the faith in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3). “Jew” and “Israel” are now the specific children of God under the New Covenant—a change bitterly resented by the Old Israel.

### **First, Write My Laws on Their Hearts**

This cannot mean just memorizing by heart the old Law, for many Jews had done that. Many loved God’s word, but did not have it written on their hearts. David came close, in speaking by the Spirit, “Your word have I hid in my heart That I might not sin against You” (Ps. 119:11). “I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law *is* within my heart” (Ps. 40:8).

What does it mean to have it written on our heart? Hugo McCord in a lecture provided this: “You’re driving through a school zone, ignoring a sign that says, ‘School Zone, 15 mph.’ Suddenly a small boy runs into the path of your car. You hit the brakes immediately, and by the time you stop he is lying on your hood. You lose your breath, your heart stops its beating; suddenly the boy jumps up and runs off. You never again have to be reminded by a sign, for that law is written in your heart.” You now take God at His every word!

It means that we make no decision without considering the Will of God; our hearts are filled with God rather than with stones; we have come to love Him even though we began in fear. We now see Him as a loving Father (as neither Jew nor Muslim can do), because of what we know of Him through Christ.

### **Second, Not Teach Every Man His Fellow-Citizen, Brother**

This point stymies many sectarians. Gerald Hawthorne, commented:

Verse 11, which seems not yet to have been fulfilled, can be understood as a powerful, perhaps poetic, as none before him, has been brought into an intimate and profound relationship with God, so that his will conforms to the will of God ‘by a direct personal communication of instruction and influence. (1521)

First, he says it has not been fulfilled, but then grants it means a special relationship with God that no one else but Christians have today. I believe his claim is false: first, because I know of no personal, intimate relationship with God taught in the Scripture. We have a faith relationship, not an intimate one (2 Cor. 5:7b). He knows us personally and intimately, but I do not know Him that way; it is through faith in His word—indirect and not personal; I pray, but I do not get responses directly back from Him as *intimate* would imply. A commonly sung song states: “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.” I have never had an inner secret revealed to me by God in my life that is not available to you also—through His Divine Word.

The picture: under the Old Covenant a child was born into it by virtue of being of the “seed” of Abraham; he had to then be taught to know the Lord as he grew; under the New, one must be drawn by teaching to know the Lord before he becomes a child of God. “All will know me” obviously means “all in the Covenant” (8:11). Thus, in the family of God, everyone knows Him and needs not be taught to “know him.” THIS INCIDENTALLY DOES AWAY WITH INFANT BAPTISM! Under the New Covenant one has to be taught to know the Lord first (John 6:44-45); learning may not stop, but the foundation has to be known about the Lord’s before one can be in the Covenant. Under infant baptism, there is a reversion to the Old in that a baby is sprinkled, now in the Covenant and has to be taught to “know the Lord” by age 12.

When our lives are vile and immoral, it is evident we do not know Christ. Paul describes this in Ephesians 4:17-20 and 21-24 (Pace 311). “But you did not learn Christ in this way.” Let us not claim to know or have more than can be sure of from Scripture just because the Baptists claim it—mistakenly!

But the immediate context suggests we can personally and boldly approach God in prayer, which I believe is based on Hebrews 4:14-16. This is the most amazing thing.

### **Third, Our Sins are Remembered No More (8:12; 10:17)**

Under the Old Covenant, there was the annual remembrance of sin on Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement); but under the New we

have a weekly reminder that our sins are removed when we meditate seriously in the Lord’s Supper (Matt. 26:28).

“Real forgiveness” is what the first covenant lacked (Heb. 9:9; 10:1-3, 11). In Christ, God treats us as if we had never sinned. But he allows earthly consequences of sin to remain (David was forgiven, but “the sword shall not depart from your house” 2 Sam. 12:11). One may be forgiven the guilt of his sin, but consequences still come on us for our wrongdoing. For instance, Manasseh repented of his horrible sins, but his son became a godless idolater and reigned only two years; however, his grandson Josiah became the greatest king Judah ever had (2 Kings 23:25). Did Manasseh live long enough to train his grandson properly and be blessed in that action? Perhaps so! However, God wipes the slate clean when He forgives and never brings up those sins against us again.

If one says, “I’ll forgive you, but I will never forget,” has not forgiven as God can and does. How wonderful our blessings under the New Covenant.

### **Conclusion**

The old system was so outdated that it was soon coming to a total end (8:13). We can be assured the Temple will never be rebuilt, for that would be turning from the better to the poorer, from the heights to the depths, from the most wonderful to the inferior.

Jesus as our High Priest understands. G. C. Brewer told of preaching in the 1920s in Chattanooga, TN, when the church was small and met in a room of the YMCA. On a Sunday evening he preached about Jesus as our High Priest and how He understands all we go through since He endured every temptation we can face (Heb. 4:15-16). A young man had been in the audience whom brother Brewer had not seen before. As he was leaving he said, “Mr. Brewer, I don’t believe what you said tonight!” Brewer invited him to a side room where the young man added, “Jesus was never married; he never had a child nor a wife who deserted him.” He said he had a pistol and was looking all over Chattanooga to find them and when he did he would kill both his wife and her boyfriend, take the baby and escape. “Jesus never faced any temptation like that.” Brewer knew that was strictly true, and pondered how to answer. He noticed a piano in the corner of the room and the answer struck him. “Young man, do you see this

piano? It has not had all the pieces of music ever written played on it, but every note of every piece has been played. I could run my hand along the keys and do that now. Jesus never faced exactly what you are going through, but he did have a beloved disciple who betrayed Him and others who ran from Him in time of greatest need. He truly understands.” Such is the High Priest to whom we can come in every time of need.

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## *The Need for Spiritual Growth*

*Terry G. Jones*

It is a fact of nature that that which lives, grows. The converse of that is true as well. That is, that which does not grow dies. This is true with plant life. It is true in the animal kingdom, and it is true with humans as well. It is essential that people grow physically, mentally, and especially, spiritually.



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The Bible emphasizes time and again the need for spiritual growth. The apostle Peter clarified that Christian growth is the antidote for apostasy. “You therefore, beloved, since you know these things beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ . . .” (2 Peter 3:17-18). Failure to grow and mature as Christians will lead to eternal destruction. The stagnation and stunted growth of the church at Laodicea drew the ire and condemnation of the Lord. To them He said, “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth” (Rev. 3:15-16).

In the passage that has been assigned for this study, the author of The Book of Hebrews directs a pointed rebuke toward those to whom he is writing for their lack of spiritual growth and their willful immaturity.

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the

word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits. (Heb. 5:12-6:3)

It is obvious that they had not made the kind of progress that God had expected of them. They failed to realize their place and purpose in the kingdom of God. They had forgotten that they had been taught in order to teach others. They had been saved that they might save others.

In order for us to be what God expects of us there is a need for spiritual growth. Our text reveals the need for Christian maturity by emphasizing what spiritual growth does.

### **Produces Teachers (5:12a)**

It is very obvious that these brethren had failed to reach their potential even though there had been sufficient time for them to do so.

From the passage before us, it is plain that spiritual maturity is not simply a matter of time. Many who have been Christians many years may be in the condition of these Hebrew Christians. True spiritual growth is the result of prayer, study, meditation, faithfulness, diligence, exercise, and the successful struggle against temptations. (Coffman 107)

Sadly, there are scores of folks that have been in the church for years with little spiritual progress to show for it. There are two things here that demand our attention.

*The Objective.* The writer says, "...by this time you ought to be teachers." Having been taught God's saving plan, they should have been teaching it to others. The inherent objective of every new

convert is to bring others to Christ. To the young man Timothy, the apostle Paul instructed, "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2).

The Apostle does not mean by this, that the Hebrew brethren should all be teachers in a public and official sense; but simply that they should be able to explain the Gospel to others in their several places and relations, as parents, neighbors, and friends. The Church of Christ is a school for the improvement of all its members; and while it is certainly impossible for everyone to become an efficient Elder or Evangelist, it is nevertheless the duty of all to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18). (Milligan 206)

*The Omission.* They ought to have been teachers, but they were not, because they had omitted the spiritual nourishment that would have enabled them to do so. They were not properly feeding upon the word of God which left them ill-equipped for the work that the Lord expected of them. They needed to "be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). Spiritual growth produces teachers.

### **Prevents Ignorance (5:12b)**

Their failure to properly feed upon God's word left them woefully ignorant. That is a very dangerous condition. Israel was condemned for the same thing. "My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children" (Hos. 4:6). Their ignorance brought about two things.

*The Requirement.* Instead of being teachers, the writer states, "you need someone to teach you." Though they had shirked their responsibility to grow, they were not alleviated from the requirement of being taught.

*The Repetition.* Just like the elementary school student who does not meet the class requirements and has to repeat the course,

these brethren needed to be taught again. No wonder there is a teacher shortage in the church. There are far too many folks who need to be taught again, and again, and again, when they could be among those doing the teaching. Far too many church members are using the excuse that they do not know enough to be teachers. That is evidence of the need for spiritual growth which prevents ignorance.

### **Properly Nourishes (5:12c)**

*Basic Fundamentals.* That which they again needed to be taught was, “the first principles of the oracles of God.” *First principles* comes from *stoicheia* and refers to the very rudiments or elements of God’s word. What is being said is that they needed to go all the way back and learn again the ABC’s of Christianity.

*Baby Food.* Here we find the real problem. The reason these folks had not matured properly is because they were malnourished “and you have come to need milk and not solid food.” Some parts of the Bible are meatier than others. Eventually, we have to move past the milk and feed on solid food. To the Corinthian church, Paul said, “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able” (1 Cor. 3:1-2).

If there is anything a child dislikes, it is to be called a baby. That is too degrading and goes against his innate desire: to grow up! He wants to become independent. He looks ahead and compares himself constantly with those children who are older and more mature.

The author of Hebrews calls the reader of his epistle “an infant.” To him it is incredible that adults in the faith are still nurtured on spiritual milk, not solid food. He uses the word *infant* to put his readers to shame. (Kistemaker 149)

Christians certainly should be ashamed when they have not matured through the study of the Word of God. Proper nourishment produces spiritual growth.

### **Perpetual Infancy (5:13)**

To partake only of milk is to be *under nourished*. Infants that never graduate from milk to solid food will eventually die of malnutrition. This same principle is true spiritually. The text also reveals that to partake only of milk is to be “*unskilled* in the word of righteousness.” Unskilled means without experience. Their perpetual infancy kept them from having any advanced experience achieved by those who had matured in the gospel. Paul said, “When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things” (1 Cor. 13:11). Neil Lightfoot simplified this by saying, “The general sense seems to be that the readers were amateurs in the word of righteousness (probably, God’s word that makes men upright) because they had been feeding on milk. They had turned to their second childhood” (113). Spiritual growth is the remedy for perpetual infancy.

### **Practices Discernment (5:14)**

Babies must be under the constant watch and care of parents because they have no sense of danger. They do not yet have the experience or understanding that knives are sharp and stoves are hot. Nor do they know that poisonous substances are harmful and could be fatal if swallowed.

These Jewish Christians were in the same predicament. Because they were unskilled in the word of righteousness and still spiritual babies, they were unable to see the difference between good and evil.

The senses are sharpened by experience. As an adult does not need someone to stand over him, always reminding him what foods are good and bad to eat, so the adult Christian is able to distinguish good from evil. The latter expression does not refer to good and bad in morals but to good and bad in teaching. It is a mark of maturity to be able to discern truth from error, just as it is a mark of maturity to be able to teach. The two are linked inseparably. (Lightfoot 113-14)

The spiritually immature will always have great difficulty discerning the difference between true teaching and error, and are

in great danger of falling prey to the false teachers of the world. Paul assured the Ephesians that the Lord had provided everything necessary,

For the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive. (Eph. 4:12-14)

Coffman has made a sobering assessment of the sad consequences of these things:

The great loss to the spiritual infant is that he may be misled, an eventuality that becomes certain unless he attains some degree of spiritual maturity. The church needs full-grown men, men who are not blown about by every wind of doctrine, men who have triumphed over the flesh, men of deep and loving personality, able to comfort the weak and the discouraged, and prepared to stand against all obstacles whatsoever. The pity of the present age of the church is seen in congregations of spiritual infants, uninstructed in the weightier things of the true faith, and indeed utterly ignorant of them, incapable of recognizing the most arrogant heresies, even those that deny the Lord, and still, after so many years, possessing only the most elementary knowledge of Christianity. (107)

The Lord's church is in serious need of members who are given to deep study of the Bible and have devoted themselves to maturing into spiritual giants, carrying the banner of truth and beating back the waves of religious error. However, as Martel Pace has observed, "Our saddest problem in the church today is the vast number of Christians who are unable to determine the dangers of false teaching" (210). Spiritual growth will enable Christians to practice discernment.

### Perfects Individuals (6:1-2)

There are plenty of things in life that can serve as hindrances to spiritual growth. However, if we are to mature as we should then we must constantly press on toward that goal. Paul declared that to be exactly what he did.

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. (Philip. 3:12-15)

*Leaving the First Principles (1a).* As Hebrews chapter six begins, the writer continues the discussion of spiritual growth by saying, "Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection. . . ." In this we see that he sets before his readers the goal for them to achieve, encouraged them to do it, and told them how to do it. Earlier he had told them that they must *learn* the first principles (5:12), now he instructs them to *leave* the first principles. Having sufficiently fed upon the milk of God's Word, they now must move on to the meat.

*Listing the First Principles (1b-2).* After instructing them to *learn* the first principles and *leave* the first principles, he now *lists* the first principles so there would be no doubt about what he was instructing them to do. ". . . [N]ot laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment."

A good foundation only needs to be laid once. He lists six elementary principles that serve as a foundation upon which they should build:

First, "*repentance from dead works.*" Repentance is certainly a part of the foundation because it is the first thing commanded of believers who seek God's forgiveness (Acts 2:37-38). It is also

required of Christians who sin (Acts 8:22). Repentance involves a change of mind and turning from evil (2 Cor. 7:10).

Second, “*faith toward God.*” It doesn’t get any more basic than faith toward God. There is no salvation for those who do not believe. “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6). Salvation is only for those who believe in God and obey His Word. Jesus said to the disciples, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:15-16).

Third, “*the doctrine of baptisms.*” Coffman documents seven different baptisms that are recorded in the New Testament:

The use of the plural “baptisms” doubtless sprang from the fact that no less than seven baptisms are mentioned in the NT, these being: (1) the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11), (2) the baptism of fire (Matt. 3:11), (3) the baptism of John (Matt. 3:16), (4) the baptism unto Moses (1 Cor. 10:2), (5) the baptism of suffering (Luke 15:30), (6) the baptism for the dead (1 Cor. 15:29), and (7) the baptism of the great commission (Matt. 28:18-20). The seventh of these is beyond question the “one” baptism of Ephesians 4:5; and the knowledge of these things was most certainly part of the elementary things that one had to know in order to become a Christian. (111)

Gospel baptism is an immersion (Col. 2:11-12) in water (Acts 8:39-40) for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

Fourth, “*of laying on of hands.*” Dan Winkler provides a wonderfully concise explanation of this biblical practice:

We need to know that the “laying on of hands” was done to: (a) transfer guilt (Ex. 29:10-24), (b) transfer a miraculous gift (Acts 8:14-19; 19:1-6; cf. 1 Cor. 12:7-11) or (c) commission and encourage (Num. 8:10-11; Acts 6:3-6; 13:1-3). We also need to know that, whereas miraculous gifts have ceased (1 Cor. 13:8-10), there is still a need to encourage the non-

Christian (cf. 1 Cor. 9:19-22; 2 Cor. 5:11) as well as the Christian (Rom. 14:19; 1 Thess. 5:11; Heb. 3:13). (54)

Fifth, “*of resurrection of the dead.*” The resurrection of Christ was the central theme of the preaching of the apostles. “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Paul had earlier declared, “And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:1-2). This was certainly a subject frequently addressed by Jesus Himself. In John 5:28-29 He said, “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.” This doctrine provides great comfort and hope in this life.

Sixth, “*and of eternal judgment.*” Among the great and fundamental Christian doctrines is that of eternal judgment of all men by the Lord. The Hebrews writer declared, “And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (9:27). To the Athenians, Paul said, “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man who He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:30-31). All men should live each day in view of that grand event. That judgment will reveal the eternal destiny of all men (Matt. 25:31-46). Spiritual growth leads to the perfection of individuals. Those individuals who learn these fundamentals of the Christian faith can go on to perfection.

### **Pursues God’s Will (6:3)**

In all of our plans and desires we must consider the will of God and desire that to be accomplished. The writer has just provided a list of fundamentals of the Christian faith that was intended to serve as a foundation upon which he could lead his readers toward



spiritual maturity. This he intended, with the permission of God, to do. Pace stated, “The writer must have meant, ‘We will go on to maturity with God’s help and permission’” (219). Spiritual growth leads us to pursue God’s will.

The need for spiritual growth can easily be seen in the positive things that result from it. We have observed just from this text that spiritual growth *produces teachers, prevents ignorance, properly nourishes, hinders perpetual infancy, practices discernment, perfects individuals and pursues God’s will*. On the other hand, Hebrews 6:4-8 shows that a lack of spiritual growth leads to apostasy and eternal destruction. Spiritual growth is not something that is bestowed upon us, it is the result of daily effort to draw closer to God through the study of His Word and the practice of His will.

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Heb. 13:20-21)

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#### Biographical Sketch

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# *No More Sacrifice for Sins*

*Martel Pace*

We have previously established from Hebrews 4:15-16 that we have a Great High Priest Who enables us to have a most blessed and unexpected benefit: that we can now come **boldly** to the very throne of grace in Heaven, as it were, into the presence of the Father Himself. We can do this by faith and prayer at any and every point of need. We can even now approach God in spiritual worship and ascend spiritually into Heaven by faith and prayer! This statement cannot be found in all Judaism or Islam; it is uniquely Christian.

Our confidence and boldness are through Jesus Christ by His atoning blood shed on the cross; our better hope is all because of Christ (7:19). It is by Him that this “new and living way” (10:20) has been opened up to Glory. This way is open only to “brethren” since we are the ones who have participated in the “heavenly calling” (3:1). We reach our ultimate destination by the One Who allowed His “veil, that is, His flesh” (10:20), to be torn on the cross. Hebrews calls this the “veil” (10:19), that was torn by an unseen hand. That tearing of the veil was a visible representation of the power of God accepting His chosen means to achieve our redemption and approving His Son’s offering. His flesh was torn on the cross—the veil was torn as He died. The four inch thick veil was replaced annually by the ladies of Jerusalem so that it was never rotten enough to tear except by an act of God.

Who could have imagined, without the revelation Hebrews provides, that we as ordinary mortals, lower than angels, could enter by our spirits into the throne room of heaven!? As a result of these assurances, we should already feel at home with God. But our feelings must be led by faith and not the other way around. It is “new” because it was not known until Christ came and opened the entrance, the “way” to the Father (John 14:6). Who could have guessed that One so thoroughly human as we are, could have died in our stead (2 Cor. 5:19-21)? Muslims believe this is an atrocious idea, beneath the righteousness of God who does all things fairly. To them, allowing the innocent to die for the guilty is completely

abhorrent. If they understood the love of God they could more naturally grasp that His love overcame His desire for justice (but the cross demonstrated both His love and His justice as nothing else could Rom. 3:24-26).

### **Since We have a Great High Priest (10:21-22)**

We recognize that He is “over the house of God,” which is the church He paid for by His blood (Acts 20:28; Rom. 5:9; Eph. 1:7; 5:25; Col. 1:14). Therefore, because we have a great priest we can and must “draw near with a sincere heart and full assurance of faith.” This may be properly rendered as “keep on drawing near.” We can take God at His word, believing each promise and obeying every command. This can only be done through purification, as Israel of old had to purify themselves before approaching God at Sinai (Ex. 19:10), so also the Christian is a purified one with a sincere heart and real faith in His Father.

We are “sprinkled” with the cleansing blood when our “bodies are washed with pure water” (10:22). The sprinkled blood of Jesus alone prepares us, thereby enabling us to approach the Father. This sprinkling is in conjunction with baptism in water, but when done, the water was not made impure for it was not a ceremonial cleansing as in Judaism, but a cleansing of the soul’s guilt. First Peter 3:20-22 takes this a step further in saying that baptism saves through the resurrection of Jesus who is now at the right hand of God; this text is in full agreement with Hebrews as it implies the blood has been delivered and Jesus now is there interceding (Heb. 7:25). The cleansing alludes to baptism at which time we are purified, as Ananias declared to Saul/Paul: “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).

### **The Second “Let us”: Hold Fast and Stimulate One Another Hebrews 10:23-25**

This holding fast causes one to remain part of the church (Heb. 3:6), and in 3:14 holding fast to the end is part of being a partaker with Christ. The reasoning here is similar to that in Romans 6:1-5 where saints—those who have been baptized—are admonished not to continue in sin. We once acknowledged the “good confession”

as to who our Lord is, just as He did before Pontius Pilate (1 Tim. 6:12-13).

Our hope is the whole of the Christian faith, all the Gospel has promised and Hebrews affirms. This epistle/sermon shows how to maintain that hope in spite of all obstacles. Our faith includes the confidence that “He is a rewarder of those who seek him” (Heb. 11:6b).

This passage contains the keys to successful Christian living. Nothing else in Scripture is quite like this immensely interesting and profitable passage serendipity in Hebrews. These three verses are the avenue to constant faithfulness! They show how to get and give encouragement.

A brief review is in order. We can be sure of all these things. We know God “is faithful” to His promises (10:23), whether the promises concern a rest in Heaven (Heb. 4:9), or forgiveness (Heb. 8:12; 10:17), or the right to approach the very throne of mercy with our petitions (Heb. 4:15-16).

Verse 24 is a powerful one in showing how much each member needs “stirring up. *Stir up* is *paroxusmos*, from which we get “paroxysm” that implies a “sudden outburst of emotion.” Were it not for the modern negative connotation of “provoke” (KJV) it would be the strong word needed for this action going beyond mere *stimulation*. The word could mean a “sharp disagreement” as in Acts 15:39. The point is that we should get emotional about stirring each other up toward greater faithfulness! At the point in history that I believe this admonition was given (as we shall note later), this urging was to the saving not only of souls, but of life and limb. What the faithful were urging their brothers and sisters to do would seem unreasonable and might even produce a strong disagreement.

How do we explain the action required in verse 25? Recall that 3:12-13 is the key verse in Hebrews: “Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called ‘Today,’ so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” The author is not saying, “You must exhort one another to assemble,” but “You must assemble in order to exhort.” They had no other means of exhorting (except perhaps by note sent through a messenger) than

being together in an assembly. How could early Christians encourage and strengthen one another, except by being together. Edifying, exhorting, and encouraging are essential purposes of the assembly (1 Cor. 14:26-33).

The Preacher did not consider it possible for one who did not meet regularly with other believers to be faithful to the Lord. The “loner” may be a believer, but he is not normally a steadfast one.

This verse is not urging attendance merely at the weekly Lord’s Day assembly, as important as that is, but in a time of real stress, special gatherings for encouragement are needed. Hearing one another in prayer to the Father, with boldness, would encourage a greater boldness that would be desperately needed in just a few months at most.

With this in mind we should be able to readily discern the meaning of “the day drawing near” (v. 25). Some have imagined it to be the first day of the week. The construction of the words and situation eliminates that possibility.

Others have thought it was the final judgment. We cannot “see” the Judgment Day approaching! Jesus said He did not know when His second coming would be with its attendant Judgment Day! “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only” (Matt. 24:36). Incidentally, if Jesus did not know while on Earth just when His return would be, and He knew well the prophecies of Daniel, how dare anyone today presume a greater understanding of the time. The usual response from Dispensational Premillennialists is, “Oh, we know we don’t know the exact day and hour, but we can get close. Times are so bad now, it must be near.” They have been preaching this at least since 1909 with the first printing of Scofield’s Bible, but the root ideas go back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Cyrus I. Scofield’s notes in his Bible (Foy E. Wallace used to say, “It was certainly Scofield’s and not the Lord’s”), promoted the Seven Dispensations of time theory, always proposing that the end was imminent. One hundred years have proved him wrong, but his followers do not seem to realize how often they must alter their “almost here” date (John Hagee, Nov. 2007, virtually predicted the coming “Rapture” in 2008). If they even come close to the time it would belie the intent of the expression “like a thief in the night” (hinted in Matt. 24:43; Luke 12:39 and utilized in 1 Thess. 5:2-4 and 2 Peter 3:10).

Stafford North’s excellent book by this title destroys Dispensationalism. We just cannot “see” the Day of Judgment approaching.

The same can be said for the day of our individual deaths; many doctors have predicted imminent death only to be disappointed when the patient lived another decade! I cannot “see” the day of my death even though I know that due to age and advancing infirmities (though still minor) that day is much closer.

What day could they see? Jesus gave *one* great sign in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke “When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies . . .” (Luke 21:20-21), then the disciples were to flee the city. That sounds crazy! When surrounded they were to flee? How, when surrounded?

We are fortunate that Josephus gave a detailed account, when he had no intention of supporting the Scripture or Jesus’ prophetic powers. Christ announced, “Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.”

Josephus had no idea why the Roman Army left the first siege when it had Jerusalem in its grasp, and said they left “without any reason in the world” (496). But we know the reason! Eusebius said that no faithful Christian perished in the holocaust accompanying the second siege and destruction (86). With this one great sign, the saints of Jerusalem could “see” their deliverance.

Imagine how many were mocked as they fled. It is highly probable other Jews were saying, “Don’t you see how God has delivered us just as he did in the days of Hezekiah. This shows we are His faithful ones; how foolish you are to leave all you have behind!” The final warning to leave is hinted at in Hebrews 13:13-14: “Leave the camp. . . . For here we do not have a lasting city.” Jerusalem must have been the “city” in mind here. Our Preacher knew the time was short when he spoke and the author when he penned this treatise. Perhaps even the time to grow in the word was short, for he said, “And this we will do, if God permits” (Heb. 6:3). Moses Stuart gave a summary of verses 23-25: “Brethren, do everything in your power to guard against apostasy. And this the more, because a return to Judaism would now be very ill-timed; the season is near, when the Jewish temple and state are to be destroyed” (475).

### The Results of Forsaking the Assembly (10:25-31)

Verses 26-31 are terrifying and are intended to be so (“It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” v. 31). There are so many passages in Hebrews which deny the impossibility of apostasy that it is difficult to choose the one most potent. This ranks high among them and has some similarities to 6:4-6. Naturally, Calvinists feel compelled to say, “These Jews prove they were not true converts when they kept on sinning willfully.” A study of the benefits received by those mentioned in chapter six demonstrate they could not have been false converts (6:4-5). In the earlier passage it became “impossible to renew them again to repentance,” and here is the strong utterance, “For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins” (10:26).

The sin for which there is no more sacrifice is a willful or rebellious one that is continued in. The warning is given to impress on the first readers the dangerous consequences of forsaking the assembly of the church and thereby forsaking the Lord. It becomes evident that if one forsakes the church he indeed is simultaneously forsaking Jesus! The popular opinion of today is that Christ and the Church are not closely related; as usual, the general populace is in great error. The distressful utterance found here cannot apply to the merely weak Christian or a new convert. It fits only one who is a purpose-driven apostate from the faith who knew better than what his life has come to.

Whether the departure from regular assemblies of the saints was due to derision, sarcasm or cowardice, it remained a disastrous sin (See Rev. 21:8). The attacks from their fellow Judeans must have been horrendous and constant. How many drifted into this dire state is impossible to know, but it must have been several to deserve this drastic warning.

The Old Testament Covenant provided nothing in the way of sacrifice and forgiveness for this kind of sin; this fact was surely well-known to the Jewish community who had rejected Christ in turning away from His church. The *knowledge* (not *gnosis*, but *epignosis*) here suggests to “know fully” in contrast with elemental knowledge. Some are “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge [*epignosis*] of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7). Many Jews had a “zeal for God” but were lacking this knowledge (Rom. 10:3-

4). This person was and is set in his ways and committed to his departure from the only sacrifice that could or ever would bring forgiveness. If he thinks his sacrifices at the Temple were efficacious, he is deadly wrong. The “once for all time sacrifice” (Heb. 7:27; 9:12, 26, 27, 28; 10:10) of Christ is never to be repeated, in spite of Roman Catholic claims that it is repeated regularly in the Mass.

The following verses need only be read to shock even the hardened deviant:

For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY” and again, “THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE.” It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Heb. 10:26-31, emp. added)

It is noteworthy that the first of the two quotations does not correspond to any in the Hebrew or LXX text we have, but they are exactly as found in Rom. 12:19 (such items in my commentary are referred to as possible “Pauline Pointers”). However, the truth taught is the same. Did Paul or Luke give a paraphrase or have access to a manuscript type which we do not have today? Preachers often paraphrase a passage to expound on it more thoroughly.

To think one has “trampled underfoot the Son of God” (v. 29) is certainly equivalent to those who after becoming hardened, were offered the chance to return and cannot because such would only mock the one once crucified for him, with impossibility of repentance simply “crucifying Him again” and “put him to an open shame” (6:6).

## The Necessity of Local Membership

I choose to stress the implied fact in Hebrews that one obtain and retain membership in a local church if he is to remain faithful (I can see how only rare exceptions might apply, such as Paul and Timothy traveling continually among many churches). Ephesians 1:22-23 stresses that the “fullness of Him who fills all in all” is to be found in the church. The spiritual blessings of redemption, hope and confidence in the faith are for those who are in the church. Hebrews goes farther in a last admonition to steadfastness: “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.” Who are the leaders? They are hardly the civil authorities who do not seek to bless our souls. These can only be the ones given charge over a local congregation—the elders, presbyters, shepherds, or overseers (Acts 20:17, 28 and 1 Peter 5:1-4 contain all these terms). Note that these men are always mentioned in the plural in the New Testament, and were a body of men in the local church. Peter mentioned himself in the singular as an “elder” (1 Peter 5:1). He could have been in that activity while remaining in Jerusalem until elders were appointed or an apostle could probably have done both the work of evangelism and overseeing souls. That would have been a temporary role in the church, but they still rule through their writings. As apostles they could surely fill many positions, even as “deacons” until such were appointed to special tasks (Acts 6:1-6, where the term “deacon” is not found but its cognate verb is used). The Jerusalem elders may have taken on their role slowly from the apostles. It is hard for me to see how so many denominations can say, “We see no pattern in the New Testament for church organization, so we just have one pastor. It’s simple and faster to get things done.”

How sad it will be on Judgment Day, when your name is called and “Brother Smith,” an old elder from your Earth days has to say, “We saw him seldom at worship and could find out little about his conduct since he was never active in the local church!” What grief and sorrow that would bring to an elder, but even more so to you.

What if one happens to be in a small congregation that has no qualified men as yet to be elders? Then, work diligently to help get them qualified.

But, if that is difficult to achieve, Hebrews has another answer to the problem. It is found in 12:15: “See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.” “See to it” (or “looking carefully” NKJV) is from *episkopeo*, which is a cognate of *episkopos* (overseer) and means that every member should do the work of looking after the souls of other members! If all did this, then even in congregations with elders, their work would be much easier and far more successful.

Jesus died for His church, which means the people who are added to it when saved (Acts 2:47). Incidentally, Ferguson said that the word “church” is a proper term to use in this verse (as in the KJV) since the “added to them” certainly meant the “community” of the saved (232-33). The church in Jerusalem was a local church which soon had elders (Acts 11:30 and following). They were appointed in every church (Acts 14:23) and may have been empowered with special spiritual gifts to qualify as elders more quickly.

This is what the Lord’s Church is all about:

- Looking after one another in the local church.
- Encouraging strongly, stirring up.
- Doing so enthusiastically.
- To keep everyone saved and then meeting again in Heaven.

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# *Faith Defined and Demanded*

*Glenn Hawkins*

## **Introduction**

I want to begin by thanking Denver Cooper and the school for inviting me to be a part of this wonderful lectureship. The topic assigned to me is: Faith Defined and Demanded, and our text is a most familiar one – Hebrews 11:1-6.



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The entire eleventh chapter of Hebrews has been called the “hall of faith” chapter of the Bible. There is also a definite connection with what the author has previously said in Hebrews 10:38-39, “Now the just shall live by faith: but if *any man* draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.” What kind of faith do the just live by? What kind of faith characterizes those who believe “to the saving of the soul”? Hebrews 11 answers both of these questions.

## **Faith Described?**

Hebrews 11:1 states, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (KJV). Other English translations render this verse as follows: “Now faith is assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen” (ASV). The New King James Version renders this as: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” The New American Standard (updated version) translates: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” The New International Version translates: “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” The

English Standard Version renders this verse: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

The question before us is: Is this verse a definition of faith or more of a description of what faith does? Scholars like Neil Lightfoot, Robert Milligan, Burton Coffman, and F. F. Bruce argue that faith is being described rather than being logically defined.

Before proceeding on to a word study of *faith*, let us look at the two Greek words used here in Hebrews 11:1 that describe (define?) faith. First is the word *hupostasis*, translated as “substance,” “confidence” in Hebrews 3:14, “assurance.” Literally, the word means “to stand under.” Thayer defines the word, “a setting or placing under; thing put under, substructure, foundation.” He also defines it as “confidence, firm trust, assurance” (645). Second is the word *elegchos*, which is translated “evidence” or “conviction.” Thayer says that this word means “a proof, that by which a thing is proved or tested” (202). James McKnight says “the word for evidence (or assurance) denotes a strict proof or demonstration; a proof which thoroughly convinces the understanding and determines the will” (560).

The word we need to look at next is the word faith. The Greek word translated *faith* is *pistis*. Here it is used as a noun. Lidell and Scott define the noun as follows: “a means of persuasion, an argument, proof” (1272-73). Thayer defines the word as “conviction of the truth of any thing, belief; in the New Testament of a conviction or belief respecting man’s relationship to God and divine things, generally with the included idea of trust and holy fervor born of faith and conjoined with it.” Thayer further states of faith that when it relates to God, “*pistis* is the conviction that God exists and is the creator and ruler of all things, the provider and bestower of eternal salvation through Christ” (512-13).

Faith is used in the New Testament in at least seven different ways, five of which relate directly to our salvation. First, faith is used to designate “belief”, such as in Hebrews 11:6. Second, faith sometimes means “trust”, as in John 14:1. Third, faith often refers to obedience, as in John 3:36 (ASV). Fourth, faith frequently refers to steadfastness, loyalty or “faithfulness”, as in Galatians 3:9 and Revelation 2:10. Fifth, sometimes faith is used to refer to the content of faith, hence “the faith,” as in Romans 10:9 and Jude 3. Sixth, sometimes faith is used of strong personal conviction, as in

Romans 14:2, 23. Seventh, faith is used on occasion to speak of a spiritual gift, as in 1 Corinthians 12:8-9 (Sztanyo 6).

### Misunderstood Concept

Notwithstanding the plain definitions of faith that I have set forth, there are still many misunderstandings about what faith means. In the eyes of some, faith is divorced from both knowledge and reason. In his book, *Atheism: The Case against God*, George Smith wrote:

The conflict between Christian theism and atheism is fundamentally a conflict between faith and reason. This, in epistemological terms, is the essence of the controversy. Reason and faith are opposites, two mutually exclusive terms: there is no reconciliation or common ground. (5)

Smith also stated clearly: “It is logically impossible to reconcile faith and reason” (101).

I, of course, deny that such is the case. Faith and reason are complements, not opposites. An example, which might help here, is to note the relationship between the mind and the body. In his book *Faith and Reason*, Dick Sztanyo wrote: “The body is not the mind, nor is the mind the body. Yet they are inseparably joined in this present mode of existence. Therefore, the body and the mind can be, and ought to be, distinguished, but not separated” (5). Sztanyo went on to note that “faith is primarily an act of both the intellect and the will, whereas reason is essentially an act of the intellect” (5).

Some philosophers have also sought to distinguish between faith and knowledge. Immanuel Kant denied knowledge to make room for faith (B:xxx). Others, like Soren Kierkegaard, talk about the “leap of faith.”

Even in our brotherhood, we have statements like the following:

In all matters of religious epistemology we come to the question of distinguishing between absolutely provable knowledge and that which is faith—dependent to some degree or other. . . . In other words, men of strong faith act like they have absolute knowledge, even though in this life



they can never have more than strong faith. (Thomas 131-33)

The same author goes on to say, “Absolute final knowledge, beyond which there can be no greater, would not leave room for faith. . . . We act as though we have as much certainty as the apostles had. This is real faith” (Thomas).

Another statement from one in our brotherhood who wrote: “. . . [T]he existence of God . . . cannot be proved in a final absolute sense. After all, there must be room for faith if we are free beings” (Gilbert 8-9). With all due respect to these men and others like them, I must disagree. These statements leave open the possibility that God may not exist, the Bible may not be God’s Word, and Jesus may not be God’s Son. Can you imagine Peter, Paul and John espousing this concept of faith? Remember before we can believe “in” something, we must believe that, that something exists. Sztanyo said “. . . any concept of faith that severs it from its objective, epistemological base (i.e. foundation of knowledge) is at variance with Biblical teaching” (Sztanyo 24).

### Clarification of the Concept

The position set forth in Sztanyo’s book is this: “faith is the volitional commitment of an informed intellect” (25). This means that evidence must be presented to the mind or intellect. If the evidence is conclusive, then the individual can make a commitment. Faith combines both reason and intellect.

The Scriptures themselves point out that we can both believe and know the same object in such passages as 1 Timothy 4:3, 2 Timothy 1:12, John 4:42 and 6:69.

I am indebted to Dick Sztanyo and his book *Faith and Reason* for much of what I have said so far. While out of print, this book can be downloaded from the Apologetics Press website.

### A Study of the Text

With these thoughts in mind, I want to go to the text assigned me—Hebrews 11:1-6. We have already looked at verse one. Verse two reads, “For by it, the elders obtained a good report” (KJV). The it here is the faith that verse one talks about. The elders refers

to the men of old or the “fathers” as in Hebrews 1:1. These men were approved of God because of the faith they demonstrated.

Verse three reads, “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.” Since no human being was in existence when the worlds were made, and since something cannot come from nothing, something always existed. That something was and is God. By and through divine revelation (the Bible) we came to a knowledge of how this universe was created. The writer of Hebrews has in mind the first chapter of Genesis where God simply spoke and things were created. The apostle Paul spoke of this in Romans 1:20 when he wrote: “For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead: so that they are without excuse.”

Verse four reads, “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and by it he being dead yet speaketh.” In matters of salvation and worship, our “faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17).

This means that Abel must have known by revelation what kind of sacrifice to offer. God has always regulated the kind of worship He will accept and those who offer unauthorized worship do so at their own peril. Burton Coffman had some pointed comments about what the blood of Abel teaches (255-59).

Verse five reads, “By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him; for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.” The Greek word used here *translated* is *metatithemi*, meaning “taken up.” Both Enoch and Elijah were “taken up.” They did not experience the usual manner of death. The reason assigned by the author is that Enoch was pleasing to God because he walked by faith. How absurd it is to think that Enoch only acted and walked with God only “as if” he knew God existed, but could not really know it!

Verse six reads, “But without faith it is impossible to please Him; for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.” The importance of the kind of faith we have described earlier and

which was manifested in the lives of the men and women mentioned in Hebrews 11 is seen in the fact that we and they could not please God without it. This passage sets forth two truths that one must believe: 1) that God is, and 2) that He rewards those who diligently seek Him.

On what basis can a person come to believe in God? Is one to take some kind of irrational leap of faith? Or should one “act like” there is a God even though there is not enough evidence to prove that He exists? In order for us to trust and obey God, we must first come to know that He is – that He exists.

### **How God’s Existence can be Demonstrated**

The existence of God can be demonstrated – proven – by looking at the natural world and at man himself. The **cosmological** argument or the argument from cause and effect proves that a Supreme Being exists. Nothing produces no thing. If ever there was a time when no thing existed, there would be nothing now. But something exists, therefore something always was. Was that something mind (intelligence) or matter? We know that matter is not eternal and we know matter (non-living) cannot produce anything. Therefore something (intelligence, mind) always existed. The Earth is an effect. It must have an adequate cause. God is the cause – the uncaused, eternal cause.

There is also the **teleological** argument, also called the argument from design. If something exhibits the characteristics of design, it must have a designer. The Earth and man himself exhibit fantastic marks of design. Therefore they had a designer – God.

The **moral** argument also supports our belief in the existence of God. The fact that human beings possess a sense of “oughtness” and that he possesses moral concepts of right and wrong argues for the existence of a Supreme Being from whom this sense of “oughtness” came. Even an atheist will agree that some things are right or wrong, but has no real basis for saying so except that he prefers this conduct or action over some other action or conduct. If morality is subjective and relative as some argue, then on what basis can you ever argue that one man’s morality is any better than anyone else’s morality? Man has a conscience. The conscience acts as a moral governor. When he does something he knows he should not do, his conscience bothers him. But where did that conscience

come from? Did man evolve a conscience? Did some human-like creature along the evolutionary chain say to himself, “You know, I ought to have a sense of ought”? If he said that, he already had one! Moral awareness or consciousness cannot be explained apart from God, the Moral Governor of the universe.

Besides these arguments proving the existence of God, there is the existence of the Bible itself – the supernatural revelation of God. I do not have the time to deal with this in a detailed way, but suffice it to say that the Bible cannot be explained apart from the existence of God. The Bible is not a humanly-produced book. All the evidence points to it being God’s Word.

Now that we believe and know that there is a God, and that God has revealed Himself in His Word, we can walk before Him in faith and be pleasing to Him, just like those Old Testament worthies mentioned in Hebrews 11.

### **God Rewards**

The second truth in verse 6 is that “He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” God rewards the individual who seeks Him in this life and the life to come. God rewarded Abel and Enoch, as He did all others mentioned in this great chapter.

Faith is the volitional commitment of an informed intellect. Faith is taking God at His Word. It is doing what God said do, for the reason God said do it, in the way God said do it, simply because God said do it.

### **Conclusion**

Let us all truly resolve to walk by faith knowing that our Heavenly Father will be pleased and that we will one day dwell with Him throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity.

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### Biographical Sketch

Glenn Hawkins was born October 16, 1943, in Dexter, MO, to Jack and Frona Hawkins. He graduated high school in Newark, OH, and attended Ohio Valley College where he attained his A. A. degree in 1963. In 1965 he was awarded his B.A. in Bible at Harding University, followed by his M.A. in Philosophy of Religion from Harding Graduate School of Religion in 1975.

He has done local work with the George Street Church of Christ in St. Marys, WV, St. Clair, MO, Waverly, TN, and Macon Road in Memphis, TN. Since 1975 he has ministered to the church in Massillon, OH. He has also taught Bible at Ohio Valley College, writes a weekly news paper article entitled *Truth for Today*. He has spoken on several lectureships and written for several Gospel papers. He serves as co-director of Family Camp Week at Northeastern Ohio Christian Youth Camp.

On June 27, 1965, he married the former Hope Shutts from Parkersburg, WV, and they are the parents of Ken Hawkins of Atlanta, GA, and Adam Hawkins of Massillon, OH. They are the grandparents of Addison Grace Hawkins.

## Christ - Superior to the Angels

Charles J. Aebi

### Introduction

Hebrews is one of my favorite books in the New Testament, and I appreciate West Virginia School of Preaching making it the theme of the 2009 Lectureship. I am grateful to the Hillview



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church and the school for the privilege of working with the school, and I thank you for assigning me the topic: *Christ - Superior to Angels*. I could not have asked for a better subject.

Martel Pace says that “the underlying design of the whole treatise of Hebrews is to show that the new covenant towers above and takes the place of the old covenant” (21). Hebrews affirms that the new covenant is spoken through Jesus Christ (1:2), not through angels as was the old covenant (2:2). Hebrews 1 is perhaps the strongest single New Testament chapter on the divinity of Christ, and after a warning about neglecting our great salvation (2:1-4), it is followed by a clear statement in Hebrews 2:5-18 affirming the humanity of Jesus. Thus Jesus Christ is indeed portrayed in Hebrews as *Our Man in Heaven*, which is the title Edward Fudge gave to his commentary on the book. In this, as in other aspects of His past and current working in every sphere of His influence, Christ is superior to the angels.

### What We Know About Angels

The Bible, the only reliable source, tells us a number of things about angels. They are of a higher order than mankind (Psalm 8:5), though man is over Earth's creatures (Ps. 8:6-8). Angels as well as men have served as God's messengers in both the old and new

covenants; Zechariah and Revelation are examples of both being used. Hebrews 2:2, Acts 7:53, and Galatians 3:19 say that the law of Moses was given through angels, and Deuteronomy 33:2 is sometimes cited to say many angels were involved in the Sinai lawgiving. The word *angel* (*áγγελος*) means, depending on context, either a human or supernatural messenger. “The word angel is applied in Scripture to an order of supernatural or heavenly beings whose business it is to act as God’s messengers to men, and as agents who carry out His will” (Wilson 132). There are times when it seems evident that *angel* refers to a human messenger, such as in Revelation 2-3 where Jesus tells John to address the letters to the seven churches to the angel of each church, but we more often think of angels as a class of heavenly servants God sent on various missions to do His will or to communicate His will to men. Such angels sometimes appeared in human form, as to Abraham, Lot, and Jacob. We know the names of two angels, Gabriel and Michael (Dan. 9-10; Luke 1:19, 26; Jude 9), and that there is some ranking among angels, for Michael is called “the archangel.” Sometimes we are told that angels in heaven have concerns with the affairs of people, as with the little ones in Matthew 18:10 and with a sinner who repents in Luke 15:10. That Christ is superior to angels is no mean thing, for angels are obviously great and have done great things. Rotherham said:

[Angels] are holy messengers, heavenly messengers, God’s messengers. As such, they are great in power and might and personal dignity (Psalm 103:20; 2 Peter 2:10); their faces are striking to behold (Acts 6:15; Judges 13:6); their knowledge, though not unlimited, is nevertheless vast (2 Samuel 14:17; Matthew 24:36); their numbers are overwhelming—“myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands” (Revelation 5:11); their access to the Divine Presence seems to be near and constant (Matthew 18:10); and finally their work is of the most varied and constant character—in executing which they can be swift as the winds, formidable as fire-flames (Psalm 104:4). They are spirits; but it would be too much to say they are disembodied or unembodied spirits. They appear to be unsusceptible of death (Luke 20:36). Although their home

appears to be heaven, yet have they such intimate relations with this world that in one place the apostle Paul speaks of them as a part of it, although distinguished from men: “a spectacle to the world, both to messengers and to men” (1 Corinthians 4:9). (42-43)

We would like to know more about the angels’ concern with women having a symbol of authority on their heads (1 Cor. 11:10). In fact, we would like to know many things about angels that God has not seen fit to reveal to us. There is much idle speculation about angels in television series and books, and there are many who think that they see angels at times. We do not know a lot about angels, and we lack space to discuss much of what the Bible does tell us about them, but we can say here that angels are not divine, not deity. Christ is, and what is said about Him in Hebrews is not said about angels, nor is it stated about them elsewhere in the New Testament. Jesus is even more superior to angels than the carpenter is to his chest or cabinet, for the carpenter only takes wood that he did not make and shapes it into the form to fit his pattern. Christ created angels as He created the heavens and the Earth (Heb. 1:9), speaking them into existence out of nothing by His word (11:3). Whether or not Hebrews 1:7 refers to Christ creating angels, John 1:3 certainly does when it says, “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.” So the angels are created beings as are humans and everything else. People have many notions about angels, and no doubt angels are superior in many ways to men (Psalm 8), but Christ is superior to them, for Christ is deity. When He was born as a human, Christ took on the form of a servant lower than the angels, but even in human form He was worshiped and ministered to by angels. While He was as human as His mother, Mary, He was as divine as His Father, God; angels are neither human nor divine.

### **What Is Said of Christ in Hebrews 1:1-14 Is Not Said of Angels**

Hebrews 1 informs us of several things about the divine nature of Christ, but says none of those things about angels. In fact it specifically reminds us that those things are not said of angels, and offers this as proof that Christ is superior to the angels. Hebrews 1:1-2 says that Christ is the Prophet through whom God speaks the

gospel, as opposed to Old Testament prophets through whom God spoke in times past. Angels are not said to be mediators of the new covenant; Christ is. The Old Testament prophets are called angels (meaning messengers) in Hebrews 2:2-3 (NKJV) “For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation. . .?” In this passage, the context is the Old Testament (“the word spoken through angels”) as opposed to the gospel of the great salvation which we dare not neglect. Sometimes an Old Testament revelation was by angels (as to Lot), and angels were used in the New Testament to advise Mary, Joseph, John (in Revelation), and others, but the new covenant message was spoken through Christ even when He used angels to convey the message, as in Revelation 17.

Christ is superior to the angels as the Creator is to the created, for Jesus is the agent of creation who made the universe (“through whom also He [God] made the worlds” 1:2) and the Sustainer of it (“upholding all things by the word of His power” 1:3). Angels are not said to have had a part in that. Reference has already been made to the angels along with everything else having been made by Jesus. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being” (John 1:1-3, NASB). There were no angels in the beginning; there was only God, the triune Being that is God –the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In John 1 the Son is called the Word who was also Creator and Sustainer, as is affirmed in Colossians 1:16-17: “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist” (NKJV). Hebrews 1:8 affirms that Jesus, the Son, is God, and 1:10 insists that the Son, who continues to be the subject, is the *LORD* who created the heavens and laid the foundation of the Earth.

Christ is said to be the heir of all things (1:2). Angels are not said to be heirs, though Christians are heirs who inherit salvation, and joint heirs with Christ (1:14; Rom. 8:16-17). This is not said about angels; perhaps that is something that angels might desire to look

into (1 Peter 1:12). Christ is superior to the angels by having been appointed heir of all things by God the Father. “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth,” Jesus said (Matt. 28:18); it is all His.

Angels are portrayed in art, literature, and films to be bright and glorious in the same way God is pictured, but the Bible does not picture angels as the representation of God’s glory and person. The Scriptures do so represent Christ. Hebrews 1:3 says Jesus is “the brightness of His [God’s] glory and the express image of His person” (NKJV). This is translated “the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature” (NASB), “the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being” (NIV), “the effulgence of his glory, and the very image of his substance” (ASV), and “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (ESV). Christ’s radiance is not a reflection of God’s glory as the moon reflects the sun; Jesus radiates the glory of God because Jesus is God—is deity. In other words, **Jesus is composed of God-stuff; angels are not!** Angels are sons of God; we are sons of God; but Christ is *the Son* of God—the only one of His kind, because He is God. As such, He is necessarily superior to the angels, for although they are superhuman, they are not deity.

All of these things are said about Christ but are not said of angels. Now we come to direct contrasts in which the writer points out how Christ is superior to the angels and cements it with quotations from the Old Testament prophecies about God and Christ. Whether the angels are identified as messengers, as in 2:2, or as heavenly beings sent on definite missions, it is specifically affirmed in Hebrews 1:4-14 that Christ is superior in several ways.

#### **Christ Has a Better Name than Angels (4-5)**

Christ is superior to angels because He has a better name than they, a name bestowed because He had atoned for sin and was enthroned in Heaven. When he had purged our sins and returned to heaven, Jesus occupied a position superior to that of the angels, “having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they” (Heb. 1:4). Lightfoot writes, “The participle **having become** points back to a certain point in time. The Son became superior to the angels when He took His seat at God’s right hand. Prior to this, while in human

form, His position was a little lower than the angels” (56). Hewitt says that Christ’s superiority in Hebrews 1:4-5 springs from His redemption and exaltation to the throne rather than from His being eternal (54). Milligan says:

And be it observed that here, as well as in the clause immediately preceding, the exaltation of Christ is spoken of as a result and consequence of his humiliation and his obedience unto death. The idea of the Apostle is, not that he was made better than the angels by his incarnation, but that having by himself made purification for our sins, and having been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of them that slept, he then *became* γειοεμνος in rank, dignity, and authority, superior χρειττον to them: he was then exalted to a sphere of glory, dignity, and authority, which is as far above that of the highest angels, as the name which he inherited is superior to theirs. (58-59)

Compare these two passages about Christ’s superior name:

[W]ho being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For to which of the angels did He ever say: “*You are My Son, Today I have begotten You*”? And again: “*I will be to Him a Father, And He shall be to Me a Son*”? (Heb. 1:3-5, emp. added)

[B]ut made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the

earth, and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philip. 2:7-11)

Jesus is referred to by several names and titles in the New Testament like Lord, Christ, Messiah, Son of man, Rabbi, and Savior; but as Hughes and Burdick note, the name here declared to be superior to that of angels is “Son—a name to which no angel could lay claim” (2348). Christ’s inheritance is that of the Son who has been made the heir of all things (1:1). Hebrews 1:5 asks two rhetorical questions by citing two Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah—Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14. “To which of the angels did God ever say” these things? The answer is obvious to one who knows the Old Testament Scriptures: God never said either of these things to any angel.

“I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son” is a part of the promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:11b-17. Like some other prophecies in historical settings, this had multiple fulfillments—of David heading a dynasty of kings, of one of them building the temple, of his lineage not being replaced as was Saul’s, of God’s being with the Davidic kings, and of a son of David having an everlasting kingdom. Parts of this prophecy had been understood by the Jewish nation in general to apply to the Messiah, who was declared by the Pharisees to be the Son of David (Matt. 22:42). To all of the Davidic kings God would be a Father if they would just be His sons, but it was to the one King who would be eternal that God referred to in 1 Samuel 7:14—to the Messiah. He never said this to an angel.

“You are My Son, Today I have begotten You” is from Psalm 2:7, which is also quoted in Hebrews 5:5 as referring to the High Priesthood of Christ and in Acts 13:33 as referring to the resurrection of Christ. Psalm 2 prophesies the rejection of the LORD’S Christ by the world’s rulers and their people (Herod, Pilate, Gentiles, and Jews-Acts 4:25-28) and of the LORD’S reversing their decision and enthroning Jesus anyway (vv. 4-6). The Messiah speaks in Psalm 2:7, repeating God’s decree: “The Lord said to me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You,’” referring to His resurrection to reign. God scorned the Jews’ and Gentiles’ rebellion against His Messiah (Anointed, King) and

inaugurated Jesus as the eternal King in spite of them. Psalm 2 thus refers to Christ's resurrection and His priestly reign at God's right hand. This is Christ's inheritance and name, which is far superior to that of the angels.

### **Christ Is Worshiped by Angels (6)**

Angels were commanded to worship Christ, which proves that He is superior to angels. "But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: 'Let all the angels of God worship Him'" (Heb. 1:6, NKJV). Translations differ on the positioning of the adverb "again" in this verse. The KJV, RSV, NIV, and ESV put it first, making it a transition word as it is in verse 5, merely introducing the sentence. Milligan says that Luther, Calvin, Beza, Bleek, Ebrard, Stuart, and others held this position (62). The ASV, NKJV, and NASB all put "again" later in the sentence, making it refer to a second bringing of Christ into the world; the Greek word order favors this, but that is not always decisive. Of those who believe "again" refers to a specific event, four positions have been taken as regards the time when angels were commanded to worship Jesus—at His birth, at His resurrection, at His ascension and coronation, and at His second coming at the end of the age.

One may immediately think of the angels singing as one of them announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds (Luke 2:8-14). Kistemaker thinks verse 6 refers to the birth of Jesus, since nothing is said in the context about the end of the world (38). Allen seems to agree that the time meant is Jesus' birth (30). Boatman thinks verse 6 refers to the resurrection (30-31), as does Macknight, who says God's command to angels to worship Christ

. . . was given after his resurrection, which being, as it were, a second incarnation, is fitly called *a bringing him a second time into our world*: when, as the reward of his having suffered death during his first residence in the world, he was made in the human nature the object of the worship, not only of men, but of angels. (39)

Coffman says it refers to the resurrection, "because it is certain that angels now worship Christ and that their doing so does not wait upon some future event like the second coming" (27). F. F. Bruce

thinks it refers to Christ's ascension and coronation (57-58). Lightfoot agrees, saying, "If a particular occasion is in view, it would seem that reference is being made to the Son's enthronement in heaven" (59-60). Pink argues that Hebrews 1:6 refers to angels worshiping Jesus at his second coming, and he cites Matthew 16:27 and John 1:51 (54). Hewitt, waxing premillennial, says, "The reference would seem to be to the second advent of Jesus Christ and to the establishment of His messianic kingdom" (56).

Coffman warns against the danger of missing the real point of angels worshiping Christ as their superior by our being too concerned with the time of the command (28), and Pace says,

Whatever the first part of this verse means, the significant thing is that **angels** are so inferior to Christ that they were commanded to **worship Him**. Only divine beings can properly accept worship; even angels forbade men to worship them (see Rev. 22:8, 9). (42)

### **Christ Is the Eternal King Who Is Called "God" (7-9)**

Angels are inferior to Christ because He is God, the eternal King who both lived by and reigns by the principles of righteousness. Angels are ministering spirits with some "fire" power, but the Son is God—"But to the Son He says, 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions'" (Heb. 1:8-9, quoting Psalm 45:6-7). No clearer statement is made in Scripture of the deity of Jesus: Christ is addressed as God. Pace describes the controversy among scholars over whether Jesus is being addressed as God, whether the translation is correct, and whether the statement in Psalm 45 meant that; but there can be no doubt that the author of Hebrews understood it to mean that God the Father addressed Christ the Son as God. Lightfoot says, "The speaker in both verses is, of course, God. God speaks to the angels as messengers, He addresses the Son as 'God,' who has an everlasting sovereignty. The angels stand before the throne; the Son sits on the throne" (60).

Christ is the King at God's right hand (3, 8, 9, 13). He is the Messiah or anointed one (9). He is the King who rules from the throne of God in heaven (8, 13). And He is the King who rules by righteousness (8b)—the same righteousness in which he lived a sinless life on Earth (Matt. 3:15; Heb. 4:15; 1 Peter 2:21-22). Christ is the Eternal One (11-12); He rules "forever and ever;" He was not created like angels, but He created them. He is by nature as well as by the Father's declaration, superior to angels because He is God and they are God's ministers.

Coffman says, "This verse has proved offensive to commentators who apparently resent such a blunt reference to Christ as God; but all kinds of learned arguments, predicated upon the Greek word, whether nominative or vocative, are not able to obscure the obvious and only meaning" (28). He scoffs at the idea of some that Psalm 45 refers to Solomon: "Solomon does not fit the declaration here. His throne was not forever and ever; he did not love righteousness, but did love a thousand women; and, as for hating iniquity, he was a gross idolater. No, in the words of Christ himself, 'A greater than Solomon is here!'" (29). Milligan's view of Psalm 45 is that it "is a simple allegory designed to celebrate, primarily and exclusively, the perfections, conquests, and righteous administration of Christ" (67). Whatever the Old Testament use of Psalm 45, we have in Hebrews 1:8-9 an inspired interpretation of Psalm 45:6-7, and we cannot gainsay that without impeaching the author of Hebrews: Christ is addressed as God.

### **Christ Was Anointed Above His Companions (9)**

Christ was anointed above His companions, the angels, who are being described as inferior to Christ in the context of Hebrews 1:9. Some would make Christians His *companions* (*metochoi*) here because the same word is translated *partakers* in 3:14, where it clearly refers to Christians, who are spoken of as Jesus' brethren in Hebrews 2:11-12. Pace notes these facts but says of 1:9, "However, in this context, angels must be the companions that are meant even though Jesus is the eternal Son and they are created beings" (48). Using the RSV, Lightfoot says:

If it is asked who are His comrades, the response must be the angels. The argument thus far irresistibly suggests this. They are His celestial comrades who constitute His

heavenly court. The word "comrade" is not to be pressed, as if to say that the Son is like the angels. Everything in the context is against this, and indeed here in this verse the Son is made superior to the angels. (61)

Allen correctly says, after noting other ideas, "However, contextually, the best explanation is that his comrades are angels" (32). Pink thinks the angels are Christ's "fellows," and he suggests that Hebrews 1:9 has a parallel in Colossians 1:16, 18 in which angels may be included in "principalities and powers" but "that in all things He may have the preeminence" (65-66).

Not everyone agrees that the "companions" are angels. Kistemaker says that the word companions in 1:9 refers not to angels but to Jesus' followers (44). Bruce says, "The angels cannot be intended; their inferiority to the Son is so insisted on here that they could scarcely be described as his 'companions'" (61). But would not Christians be at least as inferior as angels? Bruce thinks it refers to Christians because they are the ones spoken of in 2:10-11 and 3:14. Perhaps basing his conclusion on the thought that Psalm 45 describes some earthly king, Milligan believes the companions or "fellows" (KJV, ASV) are fellow kings of the Earth. Hewitt thinks it applies to all three—to fellow kings, to all people in fellowship with God, and especially to angels (58). Boatman seems to think he is talking about rulers and saints (40).

The anointing of verse 9 goes back to the *throne* and *scepter* of verse 8 and the kingdom promises cited in verse 5, which note that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the eternal King promised to Israel to come as one of David's descendants. Kings and priests were anointed in the Old Testament, and the king was referred to as "the LORD'S anointed" (2 Sam. 1:14). One of the reasons Jesus is superior to angels is that He is "the LORD'S Anointed," Jehovah's Messiah. To make sense in its context, *companions* would seem to have to refer to angels, though Jesus was surely anointed above any of the suggested categories. He was anointed above the angels who were His companions before He came to Earth and must still be His companions since He has returned to Heaven.

### **Christ Is the Eternal Creator and Judge (9-12)**

Christ is superior to the angels because He is the eternal Creator who made everything and the Judge who will wrap it all up. Psalm



102:25-27, which was addressed to Yahweh (Jehovah), is said to describe Christ, what He did, and what His eternal nature is. The opening words are, *You, LORD*, which affirms that Jesus is being addressed as Jehovah, as some passages in the Old Testament seem to imply. Some have gone so far as to say that “Jehovah” in the Old Testament always refers to Christ; sometimes it does, but Scriptures like Psalm 2 and Psalm 110 can only refer to the Father when they use the word “Jehovah.” Nevertheless, Jesus clearly is called “Jehovah” in Hebrews 1:10. He is as much God as the Father is.

Christ is the Creator of Heaven and Earth, verse 9 affirms, as do Hebrews 1:2, John 1:1-3, and Colossians 1:16-17. Christ not only created everything, He sustains them (Heb.1:3; Col. 1:17). He was in the beginning with God, before there were angels, men, or a universe. Not only that, but He also is unchanging, unaffected by time and circumstance. The created universe will perish—be burned up or dissolved (2 Peter 3:10-12)—and this will happen at Christ’s behest (“Like a cloak, You will fold them up,” Heb. 1:12). Thus Christ is not only the Creator and sustainer of the universe, He is also its Judge. He will determine the disposition of it, as He will of humans (Acts 17:31; John 5:22).

No angel, nor the whole host of them together, could create the universe, and none (except perhaps Satan) would dare be so presumptuous as to attempt to judge it. Christ is, once again, proven superior to the angels, because He is Eternal and they are not, because He is Creator and they are not, because He is Judge and they are not.

### **Christ Is the Ruler and Director of Angels (13-14)**

No angel was ever invited to sit at the right hand of God while His enemies were made His footstool, but that is what Psalm 110:1 promised Christ. Psalm 110 is thoroughly and exclusively Messianic, and it is referred to directly or indirectly in the New Testament probably more than any other Old Testament prophecy of Christ. Here again we have the Kingship of Christ brought up, as it has been in verse 3 and in the quotations from Psalm 2:7, 2 Samuel 7:14, and Psalm 45:6-7. The angels are ministering spirits sent forth to serve Christians by Him who has all authority in Heaven and on Earth (Heb. 1:14; Matt. 28:18) and who has been

made Head over all things and has preeminence in all things (Col. 1:18). Since He now exercises all authority, He must be the One who sends forth angels as ministering spirits (Heb. 1:14).

Angels were sent to inform Abraham of the coming birth of Isaac, to help Lot get out of Sodom, to threaten Balaam, to reveal some things to Daniel, and in various ways to help God’s people. Angels were sent to help Jesus in Gethsemane (Luke 22:43) and after His temptation (Mark 1:13). Angels told the women of Jesus’ resurrection (Luke 24:4-7) and told the apostles at Jesus’ ascension about His return (Acts 1:10-11). An angel got the apostles out of prison (Acts 5:19), and an angel told Philip to go preach on the Jerusalem-Gaza road (Acts 8:26). Angels have perhaps worked behind the scenes in ways we cannot imagine. Angels have been sent as servants to do many helpful and sometimes very wondrous things. But no angel was anointed King of the universe to sit at God’s right hand, as was Jesus the Christ.

Both Bales (22-23) and Pace (51) note that the arguments in Hebrews 1:5-14 are based on the silence of Scripture regarding the work and position of angels. Sometimes we are confronted by people with unscriptural practices like instrumental music in worship who say, “Where did God say not to do it?” They ask the wrong question; the right question is, “Where did God say to do it?” The author of Hebrews asks, “For to which of the angels did He ever say . . . ?” and “But to which of the angels has He ever said. . . ?” (Heb. 1:5, 13). This same question is implied in the other quotations of what God *did say* about Christ, and the definite meaning is that these things that are true of Christ are not true of angels, *because God did not say it about angels*. The argument from silence is definitive, in this case proving clearly that **Christ is superior to angels**.

### **Conclusion**

Jesus is superior to the angels by having a better name than they have. His superiority is shown by the fact that angels have worshiped Him. He is the Eternal King who is called God, a term never given to any angel. He was anointed above His companions, the angels. He is the Creator of the universe and will be its Judge. And He is the Ruler at God’s right hand and the Director who

sends forth angels as ministering spirits. In every way Jesus is superior to angels.

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#### Biographical Sketch

Charles J. Aebi is a native of southwestern Pennsylvania. He was raised with a denominational background, but obeyed the gospel in 1949 and began preaching in 1952. He has a B.S. degree from Penn State, an M.A. from Abilene Christian, and a Ph.D. from Ohio University. Charles has served for 57 years as minister for churches in West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Texas, and has preached and held workshops in several states and in foreign countries.

He has served as an elder for several years each in three congregations. He currently serves as a minister and an elder for the Barlow-Vincent Church of Christ in Vincent, OH. He taught Bible for 34 years at Ohio Valley College (now University), serving 15 years as academic dean and 6 years as chairman of the Bible Department. He retired from the college in 1998 and now teaches at West Virginia School of Preaching.

Charles and his wife Imogene have four children and twelve grandchildren. All of the men in the family preach on occasion; all of the men and women teach Bible classes; and all the grandchildren but the next to the youngest have obeyed the gospel. Two of the grandchildren are married, and eight are now students at Christian colleges.

# Christ and the Better Covenant

Joe E. Galloway

## Introduction

The book of Hebrews was written to persuade Christians of Jewish background not to turn back again to the Judaism of the Old Covenant. An often repeated word in the book is “better” (Gk.



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*kreiton*): Jesus is **better** than the angels (Heb. 1:4); God now expects **better** things of Christians (Heb. 6:9); we have a **better** hope (Heb. 7:19); Jesus is both surety and mediator of a **better** covenant (Heb. 7:22; 8:6; 9:15); Christ’s blood is a **better** sacrifice (Heb. 9:23); Heaven is a **better** possession (Heb. 10:34) – a **better** country (Heb. 11:16); God has provided some **better** things for us (Heb. 11:40); the blood of sprinkling speaks **better** things for us than the blood of Abel (Heb. 12:24).

Another key word is *eternal* (Gk. *aionios*). This word is used to contrast the absoluteness, the enduring nature, of the New Testament system with the temporary nature of the Old Testament system. Christ provided **eternal** salvation (Heb. 5:9); His blood was the means of **eternal** redemption (Heb. 9:12); it was through the **eternal** Spirit that He offered this blood (Heb. 9:14); we now receive the promise of **eternal** inheritance (Heb. 9:15); His blood ratified the **everlasting** covenant (Heb. 13:20). Our present lesson deals with this **better** and **eternal** covenant.

In the opening verse of this chapter the writer emphasized the main point (“the sum”) of what he had been discussing about the priesthoods of Levi and Melchizedek. “We have such a high priest [Jesus, who offered Himself as the sacrifice] who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (8:1)

(unlike the Levitical priesthood and that of Melchizedek, Jesus cannot and does not serve as priest on Earth, v. 4).

Verse 2 tells us Jesus is “a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.” “The true tabernacle” is the church that Christ built (Matt. 16:18). The *sanctuary*, corresponding to the Most Holy Place of the Old Testament tabernacle, is Heaven. As minister or High Priest, Jesus serves from His throne at God’s right hand.

Every year on the Day of Atonement it was the high priest’s responsibility to atone for the sins of Israel. (Read Leviticus 16 for a detailed description of the offerings he made on that day: first for his own sins; then for the sins of the people.)

This was a type of what Jesus did as our High Priest. Being Himself sinless, Jesus did not first have to offer for His own sins (Heb. 7:27). He offered Himself on the cross just one time – as a sacrifice for our sins. When He ascended back into Heaven He presented His blood at God’s mercy seat:

But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. (Heb. 9:11-12)

For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us. (Heb. 9:24)

But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God. (Heb. 10:12)

When He was seated at God’s right hand, Jesus also was placed in the position of head over all things to the church. Discussing the power of God toward us through Christ, Paul said:

Which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly

places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all. (Eph. 1:20-23)

**“But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry” (v. 6)**

Jesus came to Earth to serve. According to Hebrews 10:5-7, when Jesus was coming into this world He said, “Lo, I come . . . to do thy will, O God.” He told the people of Israel, “I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me” (John 6:38). Acts 10:28 very succinctly says of Jesus, “Who went about doing good. . . .” After telling His disciples that the way to true greatness was service, Jesus said, “Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28).

The “more excellent ministry” phrase of this verse points out that Jesus’ ministry is better than that of the Levitical priesthood.

1. Their service was on Earth. Jesus serves on His throne at the right hand of the Majesty in Heaven (Heb. 8:1).
2. Their priesthood came to an end because of death (Heb. 7:23). “Because he continueth ever, [Jesus] hath an unchangeable priesthood” (Heb. 7:24).
3. They were made priests without an oath, but God swore with an oath regarding Jesus, “Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 7:21).
4. They had to offer daily sacrifices and sacrifice for their own sins. Jesus had no sins and His one-time sacrifice of Himself was sufficient for all time (Heb. 7:26-27).

**“He is the mediator of a better covenant . . . established upon better promises” (v. 6)**

Two mediators were involved in the giving of the Old Testament: Moses and the angels. “Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator” (Gal. 3:19). “Who received the

law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it” (Acts 7:53). “For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation...?” (Heb. 2:2-3). The Hebrews writer has already shown in chapter one that Jesus is much better than the angels. In chapter three he proved that Jesus is greater than Moses. So, it has already been established as fact that the Mediator of the New Testament is a better mediator than that of the Old Testament.

A mediator was literally one who stood in the middle. He was a go-between who served as an arbitrator between two parties. He had to remain neutral as he served in this capacity. When Moses served as the mediator of the first covenant, he would go up unto God on the mount and then take His message back down to the people (Ex. 19:3, 7). He then would take the people’s response back up onto Sinai to the LORD (Ex. 19:8). This was done repeatedly until the covenant was completed.

Jesus served as the one Mediator between God and man in making the New Covenant. “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5). He was able to serve as an unbiased go-between. He had demonstrated that He completely understood man’s situation. He had lived on Earth in a human body (Heb. 2:14), He knew “the feeling of our infirmities,” and He “was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). Yet, He also understood completely God’s position. He had existed eternally as God (Philip. 2:5-6; John 1:1).

Winford Claiborne gives an excellent outline summary of why the New Covenant is called “a better covenant:”

1. “A better hope” (Heb. 7:19).
2. “Established on better promises” (Heb. 8:6).
3. We have “in heaven a better and an enduring substance” (Heb. 10:34).
4. “Better resurrection” (Heb. 11:35).
5. While the Mosaic law was great, the new covenant is better in every way (176-77).

### **The First Covenant Was Not Faultless (v. 7)**

The Old Testament law functioned perfectly in the reasons for which God gave it, yet it was not intended to be God’s completed plan for man’s redemption. Paul wrote, “Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good” (Rom. 7:12). Yet, Hebrew 7:18 speaks of “the weakness and unprofitableness thereof.”

What was the purpose of the Law? First, it helped men to see the sinfulness of sin and that man cannot save himself by perfect law-keeping.

Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid, But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. (Rom. 7:13-14)

Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. (Rom. 3:20)

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is ever one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. (Gal. 3:10, quoted from Deut. 27:26)

It became evident to honest people who lived under the Law that they did not and could not keep it perfectly. But, they had to do so to avoid being under its curse. There was no way for them to deliver themselves from this curse. Their dilemma was what Paul expressed: “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” To which he was able to later respond: “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 7:24-25).

The second purpose of the Law was to prepare for the coming of the Christ through the nation of Israel. “Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made . . .” (Gal. 3:19). “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Gal. 3:24). “For Christ is the end of

the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Rom. 10:4). Once Jesus had lived among men, died on the cross to make forgiveness possible, ascended back to the right hand of God, and brought His unmovable kingdom into being, the purpose of the Old Testament had come to an end. At His cry of triumph, “It is finished” (John 19:30), a number of connected things had come to a successful conclusion. His work of redemption was completed (John 17:4); He had fulfilled what the Law had said concerning Him (Matt. 5:18); the Old Testament has come to an end so that the New Testament could take its place (Heb. 10:9).

### **The Weakness of the Old Law**

We have already pointed out that the weakness of the Law was not its content. God gave it, so its laws were holy, just, and good (Rom. 7:12). Its weakness was in the human beings to whom it was given. Paul indicated this when he said, “For what the law could not do, in that it was **weak through the flesh**...” (Rom. 8:3, emp. added). Man has a fleshly body that creates desires which, when yielded to, lead to sin (James 1:14-15). At times we all sin (Rom. 3:23). Once sin was committed, it was not in man’s power to bring about his forgiveness by his good works – even by doing the deeds of the law (Rom. 3:28). The blood of animals sacrificed could not take away sins (Heb. 10:4), but merely pointed toward the Lamb of God whose blood could take away all sins.

Verse eight emphasizes this same truth: “For finding **fault with them**, he saith . . .” (emp. added). God’s promise to make a new covenant with His people was brought about by the fact that they continued to break His first covenant. God loved them and wanted them to be saved. Yet, their sins continued to separate them from Him.

Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. (Isa. 59:1-2)

Earlier, God had spoken of the coming remedy, the death of His Son in man’s stead (Isa. 53:5-7). Isaiah then wrote:

Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. (Isa. 53:10-11)

Twice the apostle Paul wrote that the Law would have continued, if salvation could have come from it: “If there had been a law given which would have given life, verily righteousness would have been by the law” (Gal. 3:21); “If righteousness came by the law, then Christ is dead in vain” (Gal. 2:21). The same thought is given in Hebrews 7:11 – “If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchizedek, and not be called after the order of Aaron?”

### **Jeremiah’s Prophecy Fulfilled With the Coming of the New Covenant (8:8-12)**

These verses are directly quoted from Jeremiah 31:31-34 (and is one of the longest Old Testament quotations given in the New Testament). The book deals with Israel’s going into Babylonian captivity because of their disregard for God’s Covenant. Seventy years of captivity would occur before their return (2 Chron. 36:21). Although they would return, like the broken potter’s vessel they would never “be made whole again” (Jer. 19:11). The first part of chapter 31 indicates that Israel’s repentance was taking place and that God’s “everlasting love” would permit many of them to return to their homeland. The prophecy in 31:31-34 is with reference to what would occur after Israel had returned from their captivity in Babylon. The virgin birth of Jesus seems to be alluded to in verse 22 (“a woman shall compass a man”). After this occurred, God would make “a new covenant” with His people that would not be like the one He had made at Sinai when they left Egypt.

This New Covenant would be made “with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” (Heb. 8:8). The kingdoms of Israel and Judah had divided more than three hundred years before the time of Jeremiah. In fact, Israel had been taken into Assyrian captivity

about a century before Judah was carried into Babylon. A few from the various northern tribes had filtered back into Judah, so some suggest that this is the basis for “with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” of Jeremiah’s prophecy. We think it more likely that this expression refers to God’s New Testament people, the church. This is now “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16). It was to “brethren” – members of the Lord’s church – that James addressed his epistle (James 1:2). He addressed them as “the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” (James 1:1). The church, regardless of ethnic background, is now God’s “house of Israel” and “house of Judah.”

### **Contrasts Between the Two Covenants**

First, the Old Covenant was written on two tables of stone (Ex. 31:18); the New Testament is to be written in the hearts (minds) of God’s people (Heb. 8:10). This same contrast is given in 2 Corinthians 3:3. Although some under the Old Testament treasured God’s word in their hearts (e.g., Psalm 119:10-11), to others that covenant was no more than words inscribed in stone (or later, written on parchment). To be God’s people today, one must first receive His word in his heart (Rom. 10:10; Acts 16:14).

Second, children were born into the old covenant (as descendants of Abraham) and then were to be taught by their parents to know and honor God. To be God’s children in the New Testament we must first be taught and then obey (John 9:44-45; Matt. 28:19-20). This is the reason that now “all shall know me, from the least to the greatest” (Heb. 8:11).

Third, instead of sins being completely forgiven during Old Testament times, they were remembered again each year (Heb. 10:1-4). Under the New Covenant when one obeys the gospel his sins are permanently forgiven (Heb. 8:12). So complete is the forgiveness in the New Testament that those forgiven are called “new creatures” (2 Cor. 5:17).

Frank Cox gave an excellent illustration of forgiveness in the *Gospel Advocate* in 1967 (280). He told of a medical doctor who shortly before his death went through his books and drew a red line through the debts of certain patients who were poor. He wrote to the side of these entries, “Forgiven, unable to pay.” The doctor’s wife, following his death, decided to try to collect some of these

debts, taking them to court. To prove that the debts had been made, she produced the account books. The judge asked if this was her husband’s handwriting. She affirmed that it was. The judge then responded. “No court in the world would give you a verdict against these people when your husband, with his own pen, has written, ‘Forgiven; unable to pay.’” Once our debt of sin is forgiven, this debt is no longer owed! God will remember it no more!

Fourth, the Old Testament was dedicated with the blood of animals; the New Testament has been dedicated by the blood of Christ.

For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, saying, “This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you.” (Heb. 9:19-20)

Regarding His blood, Jesus said, “This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matt. 26:28). It is called “the blood of the covenant” and “the blood of the everlasting covenant” (Heb. 10:29; 13:20). This is an important difference in these two covenants since Christ’s blood that dedicated the New Testament takes away sins, but the blood of animals that dedicated the Old could not take away sins (Heb. 10:4).

### **Conclusion (v. 13)**

When God said in Jeremiah’s day, “a new covenant,” this immediately suggested that the first covenant was old. But, what is meant that the old “is ready to vanish away”? Possibly this suggests that Jeremiah’s implication that the first covenant was **old** showed that (from the time Jeremiah said this onward) it was known that the Old Testament’s time was limited.

A second explanation, we think to be more probable. The Old Covenant ended when Jesus died on the cross (Col. 2:14). However, the various sacrifices and ceremonies of the temple service continued to be practiced by the Jews until the temple was destroyed by the Roman armies in AD 70. At the time Hebrews

was being written, the time of Jerusalem's destruction was very near at hand. When this destruction came, no trace of the authorized Old Testament worship at the temple could continue. When Hebrews 8:13 was written the Old Testament system had ended in God's sight and acceptance. However, it was going to "vanish away" completely with the temple's destruction within a very short time.

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#### Biographical Sketch

Joe E. Galloway was born in Wood County, WV, of Christian parents and has two brothers and one sister who are members of congregations in Wood Co. He graduated from the three year program at Freed-Hardeman College in 1957. He has done local work at various congregations in WV, OH, and TN, and worked for a period of time in Tampere, Finland. He presently serves as an elder of the Cherokee Church of Christ in Johnson City, TN, does a weekly TV program over WJHL, Johnson City, which is also featured over the GBN, and teaches part time at the Tri-Cities School of Preaching near Elizabethton, TN. He has written a number of Bible Correspondence Courses and presently conducts a Bible Correspondence Course program that sends out 3,000 – 4,000 lessons per year. He has been married to the former Barbara J. Anderson for the past 52 years. They have four children and eleven grandchildren.

## *Christ and the Remaining Rest*

*Bruce Daugherty*

Rest is a word that speaks powerfully. At the end of the day, we desire to lay our heads in rest. At the end of a busy week, we look forward to some hours with the family in relaxation. At the end of



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a busy year, many people pause for a moment of reflection on the accomplishments of the year. At the end of a career, weary workers desire to retire from their chosen field of service and providing.

This desire for rest is eloquently captured in a poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow entitled, "The Day is Done."

Come, read to me some poem,  
Some simple and heartfelt lay,  
That shall soothe this restless feeling,  
And banish the thoughts of day.

Not from the grand old masters,  
Not from the bards sublime,  
Those distant steps echo  
Through the corridors of time.

For, like strains of martial music,  
Their mighty thoughts suggest  
Life's endless toil and endeavor;  
And tonight I long for rest.



Read from some humbler poet,  
Whose songs gushed from his heart,  
As showers from the clouds of summer.  
Or tears from eyelids start;

Who, through long days of labor,  
And nights devoid of ease,  
Still heard in his soul the music  
Of wonderful melodies.

Such songs have power to quiet  
The restless pulse of care,  
And come like the benediction  
That follows after prayer.

Then read from the treasured volume  
The poem of thy choice,  
And lend to the rhyme of the poet  
The beauty of thy voice.

And the night shall be filled with music,  
And the cares, that infest the day,  
Shall fold their tents, like the Arabs,  
And as silently steal away. (87)

The universal desire for rest is acknowledged in Scripture. God rested on the seventh day to teach humanity the importance of rest (Gen. 2:2). David sang, “He restoreth my soul,” as he praised the Good Shepherd (Ps. 23:3). Jesus withdrew from His ministry to be alone with the disciples for the purpose of rest (Mark 6:31).

Rest is the word that the Hebrews writer used to exhort weary, tired, struggling Christians to persevere in faith. In chapter three of Hebrews, the theme of rest is introduced. Chapter four elaborates on that theme. The focus of this study will be to understand the nature of the rest that remains for God’s people as viewed in Hebrews 4:1-11. Armed with an understanding of this rest, every Christian can be encouraged to follow the exhortation of the Hebrews writer: “Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest” (Heb. 4:11).

### Context of the Rest that Remains

The original recipients of the epistle are not identified, but their condition is made apparent in the letter. These Christians are in danger, not from succumbing to the world, like the Corinthians, nor in exposure to false doctrine like the Colossians. The threat posed to these converts from a Jewish background was a temptation to drift back under the umbrella of Judaism and enjoy protection from persecution. They had been Christians for some time and had proved their loyalty to Christ in their early days (Heb. 10:33-34). But the heady early days of conversion were overshadowed by present conditions. Daily exposure to shame and reproach had replaced zeal with a defeatist spirit (Heb. 12:12; 13:13). They had failed to mature in Christ and were in danger of drifting away from the faith (Heb. 2:2; 5:11-14). The danger of developing an “evil heart of unbelief” was very real (Heb. 3:12; 12:15).

. . . [T]he persons addressed were in the mental and spiritual condition common in every age of the Christian Church, a condition of languor and weariness, of disappointed expectations, deferred hopes, conscious of failure and practical unbelief. They were Christians but had slender appreciation of their calling, misconstrued their experience, and had allowed themselves to drift away from boldness of hope and intensity of faith. (Dods 236)

What was the solution to this condition? The author’s aim is to get his readers to once again listen to the word of God. This word had been spoken to the fathers in the past, but now was revealed in Christ. The opening three verses of the epistle form the overture to the entire “word of exhortation” (Heb. 13:22). The readers (or better, listeners) were encouraged to reconsider “God’s word in a Son” (Thompson, *Hermeneutics* 234).

The superiority of Jesus to both the angels and to Moses as “a Son,” forms the first major unit in the epistle (Guthrie ). In this unit (Heb. 1:5-3:6), Jesus is featured as the supreme example of a faithful Son. The unit then transitions to a word of warning to the Christian readers by noting the unfaithfulness of those who hardened their hearts in the wilderness (Ps. 95:8). Hebrews 3:7-

4:13 develops the warning which is the author's commentary on Psalm 95.

In the author's reading of the wilderness story, the disobedience of Israel was total, and "all" who left Egypt failed to enter the promised land (3:16-19). Israel, a "model" of disobedience, did not enter the promised rest. The Psalm citation "they shall never enter my rest" (Heb. 3:11; Ps. 95:11) is understood as evidence that the rest was never attained. (Thompson, *Hermeneutics* 232)

Key words for this section are *today* and *rest*.

### Correctly Identifying the Rest that Remains

Three rests are spoken of in the fourth chapter of Hebrews. Reference is made to God's resting on the seventh day of creation (Heb. 4:4). Rest is also the word used to describe the promised land of Canaan as the rest for the Israelites after their bondage in Egypt and years of wandering in the wilderness (Heb. 4:8). But the "rest that remained" was something else (Heb. 4:9).

Notwithstanding the assertions of 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventists, it is not the Jewish Sabbath, to be kept and observed by Christians, that is under contemplation in the chapter. The confusion lies with the use of the word "Sabbath." Note the verse in the ASV - "There remaineth therefore a sabbath rest for the people of God." Attention must be given to the specific terminology used in the text:

The inspired writer does not employ the word *ἀνάπαυσις* (*anapausis* - cessation of labor), which is the regular term for the seventh-day Sabbath rest in the LXX. Neither are the words *ἀνεσις* (*anesis* - relief) or *κοίμησις* (*koimesis* - slumber) utilized. Eleven times in Hebrews 3-4 the noun *κατάπαυσις* (*katapausis*) and its verbal form *καταπαύω* (*katapauo*) appear, referring to "a state of settled or final rest." And once, in 4:9, the term *σαββατισμός* (*sabbatismos*) emerges (its only occurrence in the NT), meaning "a state of rest, a sabbath-state," which is a

reference to the type of rest rather than the day of rest. (Moore 389-90)

The Jewish Sabbath cannot be under consideration for a couple of reasons. First, this rest was something that these people had not yet entered (Heb. 4:11). Since these former Jews, now Christians, had enjoyed the seventh day rest from the time of the giving of the covenant at Mt. Sinai, this passage must be referring to something other than the Jewish Sabbath. Second, later in the book, the writer will point out that the old covenant is being replaced by the new (Jer. 31:31; Heb. 8:6-8). If the old covenant was being replaced, the observances of the Mosaic covenant, including the rest of the seventh day, would no longer be kept.

The inheritance of the "land flowing with milk and honey" was a kind of rest for the Israelites. Joshua, a type of Christ, led the Israelites in the conquest of the land and gave them rest (Josh. 22:4; 23:1). The idolatrous Canaanites were driven out and the Israelites enjoyed houses they had not built, fruit trees they had not planted, and vineyards they had not cultivated. Their rest was intended to be "an active yet peaceful and prosperous existence, saturated with the manifold blessings of God" (Moore 389). But this was not the rest that the Hebrew writer had in mind. As proof he quotes from the Hebrew Scriptures. "Today if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Ps. 95:7-8; Heb. 4:7). The writer makes the point that if Joshua had provided the rest under consideration, then David would not have spoken of another rest. As one commentator says, "God's promise of rest had never been completely fulfilled or withdrawn" (Lightfoot 95). Thompson concurs saying, ". . . [T]he full benefits of salvation were never attained in the Old Testament. Hence the Old Testament texts reflect an awareness of imperfection and a lack of fulfillment and imply 'another day' (Heb. 4:8)" (*Hermeneutics* 233).

By means of a Jewish hermeneutic rule known as *gezerah shawah*, the writer tied Genesis 2:2 to Psalm 95 to indicate the rest that remained (232). The rest that remained is the same type of rest as God enjoyed after the labor of creation.

This rest has been available since the creation, but never before Christ has it been entered by men. This rest is God's

ultimate promise to his people; it will be realized at the end when his people share with God “a better country, a heavenly one” (11:16). (Thompson, *Letter* 64)

The citation of Joshua would have surely brought the reader’s attention to the second Joshua, Jesus. In Greek, the word for Joshua is the same as Jesus. This second Joshua, whose name means “Jehovah is salvation,” is superior to the first in that he was able to do what the first had not been able to accomplish. Jesus promised rest to those who will accept his invitation. “Come unto me all ye who are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me. For I am meek and lowly in heart and you shall find rest for your souls” (Matt. 11:28-30). Jesus gives rest to sin laden humanity. To accept Christ is to enter rest. This is a rest free from the sorrow, pain, anxiety, restlessness of sin (Martin 42). Christ’s rest is not inactivity, but service as indicated by the invitation to take His yoke. The relationship one enjoys as a new creation of God is the rest found in Christ.

### **Characteristics of the Rest that Remains**

Several characteristics of this rest are given in the passage. First, it is a reality that the writer wanted his readers to appreciate. Believers were able to enter into it (Heb. 4:3)! Second, it is eternal. It was prepared from the foundation of the world (Heb. 4:3). God’s plan of saving men is eternal and was purposed before creation (Eph. 3:8-11). Third, it is a ceasing of labor and works (Heb. 4:4, 10; Rev. 14:13). However, just as the Israelites would enter the rest of the Promised Land yet be active and productive, this rest involves Christian service. Fourth, it is an “already/not yet” aspect of God’s Kingdom. Just as the Christian presently enjoys salvation in Christ, it will not be until the end that this salvation is enjoyed perfectly. In one sense the rest contemplated is “not yet” - it is the rest of the transcendent world of God that is to come (Gen. 2:2; Heb. 3:1; 4:10; 11:14, 16; 13:14; Rev. 14:13). But it is also a part of the believer’s present blessings as indicated by the word “today.” “The new day, the ‘Today’ of the psalm, is the end-time foreseen by David. It is the time which began with Christ” (Thompson, *Letter* 65). Believers in Christ enter that rest now as indicated by the present tense of the verb in Hebrews 4:3. But full

enjoyment of that rest will only be finally realized when labors and toils, sorrow and tears will be ended.

### **Conditions of the Rest that Remains**

But God’s promise of rest has conditions! The history lesson of God’s people in the wilderness experience recounted in chapter three is for the purpose of warning God’s people in the present. Because of unbelief and disobedience nearly an entire generation of Israelites missed the rest that was promised. Like Israel of old, the promise of rest could be missed if not combined with faith (Heb. 4:2). This passage gives insight into the nature of faith in the book of Hebrews. Faith according to the Hebrews writer is a patient commitment, a trust, an assurance which perseveres until the end. “For we have become partakers of Christ *if* we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end” (Heb. 3:14, emp. added). “Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience” (Heb. 4:11).

Every effort, no matter the pain and cost, needed to be given as the promised rest was pursued. Obedience and attention to the word would be part of how these Christians would exercise diligence to enter the promised rest (Heb. 4:12-13). It was not enough to have begun the Christian life. It was not enough to have heard the Gospel (Heb. 4:2). Perseverance was needed to the end.

Can history teach anything? Yes, according to the Hebrews writer! Even a negative example like those who fell in the wilderness could serve as a model to avoid for God’s people living in the present. The repetition of this point that the author makes in the passage gives a sense of urgency for diligence to be applied by these faltering Christians (Thompson, *Letter* 66).

### **Consideration of the Lesson**

The warning to learn from the negative example of the past was a call to perseverance to those original readers who were in danger of slipping away from Christ. The warning also implied that Israel of old had not completed everything that God intended in the word *rest*. The promise of rest remained. But those Christians needed to continue in faith. They needed to exercise all effort in entering the rest that remained for them.

The message is also applicable today. The assurance of a heavenly rest ought to be an encouragement to faithfulness in every age. Though we do not face the same conditions as the original readers, the need to persevere with faith in Christ is always needed. Rest is assured to those who are faithful until the finish! Have you combined faith with the preaching of the gospel? Are you striving to enter the rest that remains?

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#### **Biographical Sketch**

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# *Jesus - The Perfect Sacrifice*

*Eddie Cloer*



**Eddie Cloer** has been preaching the gospel for forty years. He has been an instructor at Harding University since 1976 and teaches Old and New Testament survey classes.

For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never by the same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, ‘Sacrifice and offering You have not desired, but a body You have prepared for Me; in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have taken no pleasure. Then I said, “Behold, I have come (In the scroll of the book it is written of Me) to do Your will, O God.”’ After saying above, ‘Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have not desired, nor have You taken pleasure in them’ (which are offered according to the Law), then He said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Your will.’ He takes away the first in order to establish the second. By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (Heb. 10:1–10)

One simply cannot think accurately about the Old Testament without thinking of the sacrifices that were offered throughout it.

These are its backbone. An unmistakable crimson stream of sacrificial blood flowed from the sacrifices made by Adam and Eve, from every altar in the Patriarchal and Mosaical Ages, and on down to the offering of the last Paschal lamb before Jesus bowed His head at His crucifixion and uttered the comprehensive Greek word *tetelestai* (tete- $\div$ -lestai), which we translate, "It is finished."

To count the bulls, heifers, lambs, birds, and goats; to imagine the continual slaughter that took place; to envision the wood, fires, smoke, and worshipful settings; and to grasp the temporary expiation that occurred overwhelms us as almost nothing else does. It is a thought that makes our minds spin with the innumerable. Only figurative expressions can convey the magnitude of these offerings, and only broad strokes can paint the picture of these altars soaked with blood. If the carcasses of the animals and birds were piled on top of each other, up, up they would go, until the mountain of them would tower above Mount Everest in size.

In addition to the individual sacrifices that were made, the national and festival sacrifices are also unforgettable. For example, at the dedication of the temple, Solomon offered 22,000 oxen and 120,000 lambs (2 Chron. 7:5); and in Josiah's reformation, 30,000 sheep and goats and 3,000 bulls were offered as God's people renewed their keeping of the Passover (2 Chron. 35:7).

However, the most amazing realization about the sacrifices that color red the entire Old Testament is the truth that they were incomplete and insufficient for the forgiveness of the sins of the worshipers. The writer of Hebrews said, "For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb. 10:4). Instead of taking away sin, these sacrifices lifted the sins up and pointed them toward the cross of Christ, where they would be finally and fully forgiven. The writer of Hebrews further said, "Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins" (Heb. 10:11). With every sacrifice that was offered in Old Testament times, there came a promise and a prophecy. God made both. He accepted the sacrifice as He promised to fulfill it with the death of Christ; and, in receiving the sacrifice, He Himself was prophesying that one day the perfect sacrifice would be made to complete it.

The early part of Hebrews 10 delineates for us the perfect sacrifice Jesus offered. This text is preceded by the writer's

argument of the necessity of such a sacrifice. He said, "For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance" (Heb. 9:15). The text is followed by a declaration of its perfect result: "Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh" (Heb. 10:19-20). In the text itself, Hebrews 10:1-17, the perfect sacrifice of Jesus is described as "the one offering" through which Jesus "has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Heb. 10:15).

Hebrew 10 begins by saying that *Jesus' sacrifice was perfect in its expiation*. The text says:

For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never by the same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. (vv. 1-4)

Though truth and mystery collide in these words and leave us with questions we would like to raise, an absolute affirmation is clearly made: The Old Testament sacrifices could "never by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near." Even though the worshiper engaged in the faithful observance of the Law's commands, he was not cleansed by them. In the midst of these offerings, His conscience retained the stain of sin. By necessity, these sins would be remembered each year, for it was impossible, the writer said, "for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."

Consequently, the death of Jesus was not just the death of a Galilean teacher; it was the perfect sacrifice that gathered into it all the sacrifices that had been offered by the true worshipers in the past and fulfilled them. The sacrifices that had gone before were

shadows of the ultimate sacrifice that Christ, the Messiah, would make. Jesus, “at the consummation of the ages,” was “manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb. 9:26). His death ended one age and began another.

Because of its fulfilling nature, the cross of Christ, the cross that became the greatest altar of this Earth’s history, is the sublime teaching of the entire Bible. The Old Testament looks forward to it; the Gospels picture it; and the rest of the New Testament elaborates upon it and applies it to life. At the cross, God finally was able to say through His justice and grace, “For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more” (Heb. 10:17; cf. 8:12).

Through Jesus’ death, there was complete forgiveness. No sin was held over until the next year; no sin was forgiven in part; eternal hope was not partially extended. Jesus became a Savior who would not only save us but would also keep us saved as He continually cleansed the sins of those who walk in the light (1 John 1:7).

Further, Hebrews 10 said that *Jesus’ sacrifice was perfect in its execution*. The writer said:

Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, “Sacrifice and offering You have not desired, but a body You have prepared for Me; in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have taken no pleasure.” Then I said, “Behold, I have come (In the scroll of the book it is written of Me) to do Your will, O God.” After saying above, “Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have not desired, nor You have taken pleasure in them” (which are offered according to the Law), then He said, “Behold, I have come to do Your will.” (Heb. 10:5–9a)

The reason Jesus’ sacrifice was perfect in expiation is that His sacrifice was perfect in execution. God’s divine justice required the perfect execution of the sacrifice for the sin of the world. For identification, God sent His Son to be one of us. He was just as much divine as if He were not human at all; He was just as much human as if He were not divine at all. However, the identification

requirement carried with it flawless behavior and perfect obedience to the will of God. “Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation” (Heb. 5:8-9). For the sake of intensity, this sacrifice required the divine Son of God. The burden that He would carry was so great that no mortal man could shoulder it; only Deity was capable of doing it. Only the God/Man, Jesus Christ the Son of God, could make this sacrifice.

This section of our text, with the aid of the pictorial prophecy of Psalm 40, puts before us this amazing truth in the form of a conversation that took place between Jesus and His Father. Jesus requested a body (the Hebrew really has the idea of an earthly, obedient mind), through which He would carry out the eternal purpose of God. The sacrificial systems of the Old Testament eras were not, in truth, God’s great plan for the salvation of the world; they only led up to that great plan. God’s eternal salvation revolved around the sacrificial death of His Son. In the conversation, Jesus asked God to give Him the physical body and earthly mind through which He could carry out perfectly His will for the salvation of this world.

In one giant stroke, allusions are made here to the incarnation, the earthly ministry, and the redemptive cross. We also see not only the absolutely necessity of Jesus’ coming but we also see the supreme significance of it. His coming is the greatest of all events in the history of the world.

In addition to all this, Hebrews 10 announces that *Jesus’ sacrifice was perfect in its endurance*. The writer said, “He takes away the first in order to establish the second. By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb. 10:9b, 10).

The word *once* is significant. It is used four times in this passage—a section that begins with the latter part of chapter 9 and ends with the beginning part of chapter 10 (Heb. 9:26, 27, 28; 10:10). The once of the time sequence is given in 9:26: “But now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away the sin by the sacrifice of Himself.” The text also gives the once of sacred appointment: “For men to die once and after this comes judgment” (Heb. 9:27). He gives the once of atoning

sacrifice: “Having been offered once to bear the sins of many” (Heb. 9:28). Finally, we see the once of divine scope: “By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb. 10:10).

The perfect expiation of Jesus’ sacrifice implies its perfect endurance or continuance. If Jesus’ sacrifice had the ability to cleanse completely those who initially received its power, it follows that it would have the ability to cleanse all the people of His creation who needed its saving strength—not only in the first century, but also throughout all Earth time. Jesus’ death brought to the world the only plan of salvation that God is ever going to give it. His blood reached back to fulfill the sacrifices that were offered in the Patriarchal and Mosaical Ages, out to those who obeyed the gospel in the first century, and forward to all who would walk down the corridors of this world’s future. In short, as expressed in Hebrews 2:9, He has “tasted of death for every man.”

The big word that arises from this significant passage on the Lord’s death, though not used in it, is the word “sufficiency.” Jesus, with His perfect sacrifice, met all the spiritual needs that the human race has had or ever will have. At conversion, our sins were forgiven through His blood; in our daily walk with Christ, His blood keeps us saved; at death’s door or when Jesus comes with the clouds, He will receive us and take us to our Father. He is our initial Savior, our continual Savior, and our eternal Savior. He saved us yesterday, saves us today, and will save us tomorrow. In light of this great plan that has been given, with Paul we can exclaim, “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38, 39).

Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; nor was it that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place

year by year with blood not his own. Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him. (Heb. 9:23–28)

### Biographical Sketch

Eddie Cloer attended Harding University, Searcy, AR; Oklahoma Christian University, Oklahoma City, OK; and Harding Graduate School of Bible and Religion, Memphis, TN. He holds the Bachelor of Arts, Master of Theology, and Doctor of Ministry. His doctoral thesis focused on evangelistic preaching. Having begun his preaching career at age fifteen, he has preached the gospel for forty years. He has been the local preacher for congregations in Clarksville, Hot Springs, and Blytheville, AR. He has preached in more than 850 Gospel Meetings in thirty-five states, London, Singapore, and Ukraine with some 1,545 converts in one Ukrainian campaign, firmly establishing the work of Christ in Donetsk.

Eddie has taught at Harding University since 1976. As a faculty member of the College of Bible and Religion, he annually teaches Old and New Testament survey classes.

For more than twenty years, he has been the publisher and editor of *Truth for Today*, a fifty-two page monthly publication for preaches and teachers, emphasizing expository preaching. In the last fifteen years the magazine has covered the entire New Testament and many books from the Old. He is founder of *Truth for Today Printed Preacher School*, which now has about 22,000 enrollees from around the world, representing 75% of Earth’s populated land area.

Eddie is the author of two commentaries, *Truth for Today Commentaries: Psalms 1-50*; *Truth for Today Commentaries: Psalms 51-89*, as well as several books, including *What Is “the Church”?*; *God’s Design for “the church”*; *“The Church;” The*



*People of God's Purpose; "Thus Far the Lord Has Helped Us,"  
and Come, Let Us Magnify the Lord.*

He and his wife, Susan, have two children and two grandchildren.

## *Jesus and Our City*

*Eddie Cloer*

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. (Heb. 11:8-10)

All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them. (Heb. 11:13-16)

In the beginning of Hebrews 11, that great review of ancient men and women of the faith, stand two moving passages about the abiding city that all of God's people seek, 11:8-10 and 11:9-16. As Jesus prepared to leave Earth, He promised, "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). The Old Testament servants named in Hebrews 11 had not received a specific promise like the one that Christ gave His apostles and us about their and our eternal home; but they had made faith-founded inferences of such a city. Deep within them, there was a continual longing for it. They looked for it, sought it, and moved toward it.

Connected to this hunger for "a better country, a heavenly one," and growing out of the leadership that God gave them, there came to them an overarching nomadic lifestyle. They became the first

true pilgrims. They moved from place to place, following the promises of God, having their hearts fixed on the city “which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”

Neither the Old Testament nor the New allows the servant of the Lord to discard his status as a pilgrim. He is to live “as an alien in the land,” as a sojourner “in a foreign land.” He may not dwell in tents as Isaac and Jacob did, but he lives as a “fellow heir of the same promise,” as one who is “looking for the city” that God is preparing for him (Heb. 11:9-10). Abraham and others of like faith down through the years have always acknowledged that this world was not their eternal home. Continually, God’s people have been constrained to make a frank confession about their lifestyle: Knowing that they have not yet received the promises God has made to them, and knowing that some distant day in the future these promises will be fulfilled, they have confessed that they are “strangers and exiles on the earth” (Heb. 11:13).

To the scattered Christians of the first century, Peter applied the two descriptive terms “aliens and strangers” (1 Peter 2:11). They were “aliens,” for their citizenship was in heaven (Philip. 1:25) and their code of conduct came from their heavenly King. They were “strangers,” for they lived as visitors, people who had no settled place here. They were people who knew that their journey was a temporary one, an earthly experience that, at its best, prepared them for their entrance into their true homeland and their city that abides forever.

As was the case with Abraham, this pilgrim status affects the totality of the Christian’s life. It could be summarized in Paul’s words to the Corinthians:

But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none; and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess; and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away. (1 Cor. 7:29-31)

To be sure, his words were written for a unique setting (perhaps one of persecution), but they called upon the Corinthians to enter into the rigorous life of a pilgrim, the “as though” life of one who is only passing through to a better, eternal place.

What does it mean to be a Christian pilgrim? What does it mean to make one’s way through this world anticipating the fulfillment of the promises of God, living here as a sojourner, using the things of this world but never possessing them? What does it mean to live, work, and play as one who is primarily awaiting his summons to enter the eternal city where his true citizenship lies? Let us explore the answers to these questions.

### **The Pilgrim and His Personal Life**

The pilgrim has brought his personal life—his total self, ambitions and all—and laid them at the feet of Jesus. The meaning of discipleship demands this. He has answered the challenge of Jesus: “For whoever wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me” (Matt. 16:26). He has given up that which is not in harmony with the Lord’s way. That is the negative part. He has taken up his cross, the life and work that Jesus calls us to embrace. That is the positive part. He keeps up with Jesus, going where He goes and doing what He does. That is the companionship part. He has become a person with one focus, saying when asked, “For to me to live is Christ” (Philip. 1:21a).

As Paul spoke of this pilgrim lifestyle, he put it—through the Spirit who guided him—in the terms of a personal crucifixion. He wrote, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me” (Gal. 2:20). In conversion, he had died to this world, his personal desires and prejudices, and even his personal ambitions. He had moved from “me” and “mine” to “Him” and “His.” He removed “I” from the center of his life and allowed “Christ” to become the Lord of his mind. By faith, he began to live through the mind of Christ. He became a pilgrim who would live the way Christ had lived in this world.

## **The Pilgrim and His Possessions**

How does a pilgrim view this world and the things in it? We remember the other words the Lord used in regard to following Him as a disciple. He said, “So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions” (Luke 14:33). Salvation is free, but discipleship will cost us everything. Discipleship has pilgrim status built into it. The Christian alien buys but he knows that he does not possess what he has bought. He uses this world, but he does not make full use of it, for it is his servant, not his master. Why hold tightly to something that is only temporary and will tomorrow be gone? There is nothing “real,” in the sense of permanency, about his “estate.” He knows that he possesses only loan papers, not a deed.

The rich young ruler stands throughout the passing years as an illustration of this prickly truth. He had kept the commandments but had not been a disciple. He had been religious but had not given his heart to God. Jesus operated upon his soul by insightfully saying, “If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me” (Matt. 19:21). The young man had too much of the world in him to become the disciple that Jesus would require him to be. Radical conversion was needed, but the young ruler could not submit to it. He would be a “card-carrying” disciple, but he could not live as a pilgrim who would seek God’s glory rather than his own pleasure and profit.

## **The Pilgrim and His Passion, His Driving Force in Life**

The pilgrim has an ambition that is much different from other people in the world. He is consumed by the passion of doing his Savior’s will while he is here. He remains here only as a servant of His, as an ambassador of his King. He has been saved out of the world and he has been sent back into it as a missionary to teach those who will listen.

He does not hold his personal wishes dear to himself. When the need arises, he is quite willing to forgo them. In various ways, he offers himself for the gospel. He is not attached to possessions, people, politics, or his own personal rights. He finds that Paul’s words reflex his approach to serving others:

To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it. (1 Cor. 9:20-23)

At times, he knows that he must say, “If food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again” (1 Cor. 8:13). In whatever he does, whether in eating, drinking, or any other activity, he desires to do all things to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). He does not intend to be a stumbling block to anyone, whether young, middle-aged, or aged. In a sense, he strives to please all people in all things, refusing to live for his own profit and choosing to invest what he is and has into the salvation and spiritual growth of others (1 Cor. 10:32-33).

The pilgrim life is not the easiest life to live, especially if one is trying to live for Christ in America, “the home of the brave and the land of the free.” Our good land of privilege and opportunity breathes individualism, the pursuit of happiness, and entrepreneurship. However, the pilgrim life is the only authentic, true-to-the-facts life one can live. Neither saint nor sinner can ever own anything here. At birth, we brought nothing into the world; and, at death, we will take nothing out of it. After our departure from Earth, we will never return to it. Whether we choose to be pilgrims or not, we will always live as only visitors in this world. Our claim that we own land or possessions is a hollow and empty boast. God has given us ownership of only one thing—our hearts.

Pilgrims in this world are distinguished in two ways. First, they are identified by whether or not they are conscious of their pilgrim status. Second, they are identified by their citizenships. They are either citizens of Heaven or citizens of eternal darkness. The Christian has chosen to seek the eternal city of Christ. He keeps

intact his choice by passing through this world as Christ's servant, and not as his own. To use Matthew Henry's words, "This world is his passage, not his portion." He lives for that eternal tomorrow by using the world and the things in it to God's glory, and not for his own profit and pleasure. He looks and lives for that city by making it his passion to live for the fulfillment of Christ's will, and not for his own earthly ambitions. He is not a citizen of this world trying to go to Heaven; he is a citizen of Heaven trying to get through this world.

For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. (Rom. 14:7-9)

For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? (1 Cor. 4:7)

## *Keep On Keeping On*

*Wirt Cook*

### **Introduction**

There are many catch-phrases that we often use not knowing their source or origin, but realizing their truth and value. Just to mention a few: "Hindsight is 20/20," meaning: we can always look



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back and see how a matter could have been better said or better handled. "The past is a good signpost, but not a good hitching post," meaning: we are to learn from the past but not live in the past. "Inch by inch it's a cinch, but yard by yard it's too hard," meaning: accomplishment is better gained by small progressive steps rather than taking on more than you can handle. All of these statements apply to our topic and our text, but there is another of which we know the source and is synonymous with our topic, it is "Never give up, never, never give up." I have heard several variations of this statement, but this is the actual statement. Winston Churchill made it in a speech to motivate British troops to be steadfast in the battles of World War II that would ultimately lead to victory. This statement characterized the life of Churchill as he became Prime Minister of England at the age of 62, dueled with Adolph Hitler until Hitler's death. At age 80 he was again elected to Parliament in the House of Commons. In that same year he exhibited some 60 of his paintings. So his life was one of perseverance, he never gave up, he kept on keeping on.

I do not know the origin of the title of our lesson, "Keep on keeping on." I have heard it and used it all my preaching career, but I do not know its source. However, these four words best state the message of our text. There are many passages that command

steadfastness; “Be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord...” (1 Cor. 15:58), is one. However, in our text the writer wants his readers to *remember* the things from their past that will motivate them to “keep on keeping on.” So the key phrase in this passage of Scripture is “call to remembrance,” (KJV), “call to mind” (BER), “continue to remember”(Wms), or “don’t ever forget” (TAY). The use of memory for the purpose of motivation was used by other writers of the Scriptures (cf. 2 Peter 1:12; 3:1-2).

Considering the previous verses in this chapter and the warnings in chapter six of the dangers of falling away from the Lord, the writer relates the things they were to keep on remembering that would incite them to keep on keeping on.

### **Remember Your Conversion**

“But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated . . .” (Heb. 10:32). This makes reference to their becoming Christians. To many of these Hebrews he was asking them to remember back thirty-five years to the day of Pentecost, when they were enlightened that the Messiah had been crucified, and by gladly receiving the Word they “were baptized” that same day (cf. Acts 2:36-41), as were others later.

Christ came into the world as the light of the world that men should not walk in darkness, but could have the light of life (cf. John 1:4-5; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35-36, 46). The Word of God is light for those who would be spiritually illuminated (cf. Ps. 119:105, 130; 1 John 1:7).

Children of God must always keep in mind their conversion by: (1) hearing and learning the glorious Gospel of Christ (John 6:44-45); (2) believing the Good News (Mark 16:16; John 8:24); (3) by godly sorrow turning away from sin to the Savior (2 Cor. 7:10; Luke 13:3); (4) confessing Jesus as the only begotten Son of God and Lord of their life (Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:9-10); (5) by baptism into the body of Christ (Mark 16:16; Rom. 6:3-5); and (6) being faithful into death to receive a crown of life (Rev. 2:10). Remember the joy that accompanied that day you were made free from sin by the grace of God and experienced the peace that passes understanding? Unless you remember this or keep this in mind and add to your faith the godly qualities mentioned in 1 Peter 1:5-8

then you are “blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins” (1 Peter 1:9). We must remember these things and “give diligence to make our calling and election sure: for if you do these things you shall never fall” (1 Peter 1:10). In other words, keep on remembering the day of your illumination, your conversion, that you may keep on keeping on.

### **Remember Your Conflicts**

“Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after you were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions: Partly, whilst ye were made a gazing stock both by reproaches and afflictions . . .” (Heb. 10:32-33).

The apostle here is possibly making reference to the death of Stephen (Acts 7), and the persecution that followed when the Christians were driven from Jerusalem and went everywhere preaching the Word (Acts 8:1-4). It would also include the time of James’ martyrdom (Acts 12:1-3).

In becoming Christians they realized that they would be persecuted, become public spectacles, and objects of ridicule. This was to be their plight. Lightfoot says regarding this passage:

A striking term is used to describe the insults that were theirs—*theatrizo*, to be made “theatrical display,” “held up to shame,” to be made a “public show” (NEB). This term is taken from the practice of arraigning and punishing criminals before a crowd assembled in a theater. (196)

Other Scriptures also warn of these things. Paul warned the Philippians, “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake” (Philip. 1:29). To Timothy Paul said, “Yea, and all that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). The apostle Peter says that Christ suffered for us leaving a pattern that we should follow and that if and when we do suffer as Christians we glorify Christ (1 Peter 2:21; 4:19).

Think of all the great disciples that have given their lives for His cause. All of the apostles suffered and died because they would not deny Him. John suffered for the Lord but was permitted to survive because God had more revelation to give through him. Think of all

those that were mutilated in the Roman arenas by lions and gladiators for the sport of their citizens. Think of all the tens or hundreds of thousands that sacrificed their lives for the Faith, for the preservation of the sacred Scriptures, or for religious freedom. We are truly blessed to live in this time of Christian freedom. Are we thankful? We should thank God every day for this great blessing and by our works show our love for Him.

In this century we have not suffered except by grieving for the lost or maybe verbal abuse at times. Some have suffered physically for the Faith and few have died, but not many. Suffering for Christ in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be far more severe than the last century. Christian values, ethics, and morals are under attack as never before. Satan and his allies are gaining ground in their assault of Christian principles that have made this country great. Free thinkers with their liberal ideas are suppressing Christian influence day by day. Unless we can turn things around our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren will be put into the situation of suffering as those early Christians did. What will we do, idly stand by and watch it happen or will we stand up and defend the Truth? (cf. 1 Peter 3:15). Our conflicts have been mild, but they must be remembered. And surely we will keep in mind the great suffering of others for us that cause us to keep on keeping on.

### **Remember Your Companions**

“Ye became companions of them that were so used” (Heb. 10:33). These Hebrew Christians were not only persecuted, they had become sharers with them that were so treated. But consider some with whom they shared their plight, Peter, James, John, Paul, and other of the apostles and disciples. What a fellowship.

When one becomes a Christian his companionship changes. He no longer holds to the old friends he had, but associates himself with those of like precious faith. You now have a spiritual fellowship that supersedes all other associations. You have companions that are: 1) Single-minded because the defense and spread of the Gospel is your priority (Philip. 1:17, 12); 2) You are service-minded because that is what our Savior was (Philip. 2:5-11); 3) You are spiritual-minded because your citizenship is in Heaven and you are seeking things above (Philip. 3:20; Col. 3:1-3); 4) You are secure-minded because you serve a God that will

provide the peace that passes all understanding, and will supply all your needs (Philip. 4:7, 9, 19). This is the abundant life that Jesus came to provide (John 10:10). The abundant life is not free from persecution and suffering, but you have those who suffer with you and are a sustaining force for you.

The greatest companionship that we have is with our Lord Jesus. We have fellowship and companionship with Him through the testimony of the apostles. John says “that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full” (1 John 1:3-4). John further relates that our walking in the light provides fellowship with the Lord (cf. 1 John 1:6-7). We have fellowship, joint participation, communion, and companionship by means of the elements of the Lord’s supper (cf. 1 Cor. 10:16-17). The Book of Philippians sets forth our Lord Jesus as: (1) the purpose of our life “for me to live is Christ” (1:21); (2) the pattern of our life “let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (2:5); (3) the prize of our life “I press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (3:14); and (4) the power of our lives “I can do all things through Christ which strengthened me” (4:13). Surely Christ is the greatest companion of all. He is one that we can cast all our cares upon knowing He will never leave us nor forsake us, even as He had promised the Hebrew Christians (cf. 1 Peter 5:7; Heb. 13:5).

Back in the early 1960s, before I became a Christian, I was a career sailor flying in blimps as a crew electrician. One of our pilots was an outstanding religious man who always set the right example and was concerned about those who were not Christians. All twenty-one of our crew members had been entrapped in religious discussions, encouraged to take the Bible as our only guide, and exhorted to attend church services by this man. We called him “Deacon” Johnson, perhaps somewhat in derision, but everyone in our crew had high regard for Lt. Commander Johnson because he lived what he proclaimed and was by no means hypocritical. In 1963, shortly after I became a Christian, we were visiting another congregation of the Lord’s church about fifty miles away. When we entered the church building we were greeted by none other than my former pilot, brother “Deacon” Johnson. I

was never so happy to discover that someone was a member of the body of Christ as he.

The companionship we enjoy as Christians is truly sweet. It is encouraging to know that there are those who will suffer with us, weep with us, and rejoice with us. Let us keep on remembering those spiritual companions that will help you to keep on keeping on.

### **Remember Your Compassion**

“For ye had compassion of me in my bonds” (Heb. 10:34). According to Milligan, this passage is better rendered “for ye sympathized with them who were in bonds.” He then goes on to say “This reading is, on the whole, best sustained by both internal and the external evidence”. He concludes comments on this passage by stating:

It is therefore satisfaction to know that the difference of these readings does not materially affect the sense of the passage; the obvious purpose of the writer being in either case to praise and encourage the Hebrews on account of their former sympathy for those who were in bonds and afflictions. . . .” (371-72)

The King James translation of this passage has been used as one of the proofs that the apostle Paul was the writer of this book. But if the second translation is true it would negate this as a proof of Paul’s authorship. However, there are a number of other passages that better prove Paul as the writer.

Compassion is care and concern motivated by love, which is a fruit of the Spirit and is a necessary trait of the child of God, (Gal. 5:22). Love is one of those qualities that must be added to our faith (2 Peter 1:5-7). It is through love for others that our discipleship is made known, (John 13:35). Peter tells us to “be of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous” (1 Peter 3:8). A remembering of compassion will encourage one to be faithful to the Lord and to keep on keeping on.

### **Remember Your Compensation**

You “took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance” (Heb. 10:34). It is obvious from this passage that the Hebrew Christians at one time were not as concerned about material things as they were about future inheritance. He is calling them to remember that time. They had been joyful about giving that which they could not keep in order to obtain that which they could not lose. They had been interested in laying up treasure in Heaven because that is where their hearts were. Unlike today’s society, they were not caught up in the world of materialism, but maybe they were headed in that direction. Thus, the writer calls them to remember those former days.

One of the real problems in our world today is materialism. People are more concerned about things than theology, more concerned about the creature than the Creator. This is a dangerous position to be in for who knows when God will give up on us as a nation (cf. Rom.1:25). We have those forces at work today who are turning the truth of God into a lie, that are calling evil good and good evil; that are putting darkness for light and light for darkness (cf. Isa. 5:20). When we became Christians we counted the things that were gain to us as loss for our Lord Jesus (cf. Philip. 3:7-9). John says we are to “Love not the world, neither the things of the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15).

Let us not forget our compensation as God’s children. Let us not “set [our] mind on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven...” (Philip. 3:19-20). We must always look for and hasten unto the day of the Lord’s coming or be ready at death to obtain that eternal dwelling that God has promised to them that are faithful, obedient believers. Remembering this will incite us to keep on keeping on.

### **Remember Your Confidence**

“Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward” (Heb. 10:35). They were not to throw away or give up on their boldness in the Lord. Milligan says, “There seems to be an illusion here to the conduct of weak or cowardly soldiers, who in the day of battle were wont to throw aside their

shields and turn their backs on the enemy. This was regarded by the ancients as extremely dishonorable” (373). He tells of a practice of the Lacedemonian women giving their sons shields before they went into battle and saying to them, “Bring this back, or be brought back upon it.”

As Christian soldiers we are to be bold in our battle with Satan and his forces. We not only have the spiritual armor that will protect and sustain us, but we have the sword of the Spirit by which to expose and defeat Satan (cf. Eph. 6:11-18). The Lord is on the side of His children and “If God be for us who can be against us” (Rom. 8:31). “So that we may boldly say the Lord is my helper I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Heb.13:6). The Christian must always remember that “Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4). May we, by the grace of God, always maintain our confidence and boldness that keeps us keeping on.

### **Remember Your Condition**

“For ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise” (Heb. 10:36). Some other translations use synonymous terms such as endurance, steadfastness, longsuffering, etc. It is obvious that the imperative “to remember” of verse 32, or call to mind the former days was because they needed patience to continue to do the will of God no matter what confronted them. Without patient endurance they would not inherit the promise. It is implied that they would have to “suffer according to the will of God” (1 Peter 4:19). But certainly it would be better to “suffer for well doing, than for evil doing” (1 Peter 3:17). They needed to remember that the “light afflictions, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17).

The one great need that many Christians have is patience. It is something that is learned according to Paul (cf. Philip. 4:11). Paul told Timothy that “godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Tim. 6:6), and that the man of God was to “follow after . . . patience . . . fight the good fight of faith, lay hold of eternal life” (1 Tim. 6:11-12). If one has patience to do God’s will he will by faith

receive God’s promise of eternal life. Patience will cause one to keep on keeping on.

### **Remember His Coming**

“For yet a little while, and He that cometh will come, and will not tarry” (Heb. 10:37). This verse and the first part of verse 38 is a quotation from the book of Habakkuk 2:2-4. The vision of Habakkuk was to be applied to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians some twenty years after he wrote it. Here many are prone to apply this to the second coming of our Lord Jesus. However, a more fitting application would be the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 which would occur about seven years from this writing. It seems that the emphasis on “*yet a little while*” and “*will not tarry*” indicate a more immediate situation as in the case of Habakkuk. The context of this passage and the writer encouraging the Hebrew Christians to prepare for a period of suffering by remembering their previous suffering under the Roman emperor Nero seems to be more appropriate. Most passages that deal with a coming of the Lord usually have an immediate application to the ones being addressed by that writing. However, some would apply to the final coming of the Lord in judgment on the unrighteous and glorification of the righteous (cf. John 5:28-29; John 12:48; 2 Cor. 5:1-11; 1 Thess. 4:13-18 etc.) in the end time.

All that we learn from the passages that deal with the Lord coming in judgment in any given situation, whether Old or New Testament, would be an incentive to righteous living and steadfastness in the Lord today. This is true for two reasons: (1) All of us will die one day, and (2) The Lord may come in our lifetime, therefore it behooves us to prepare and stay prepared for either one of these events by keeping on keeping on.

### **Remember Your Conviction**

“Now the just shall live by faith . . .” (Heb. 10:38). This statement which is a quotation of Habakkuk 2:4 is found in two other passages in the New Testament: Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11. In all these passages there are some slight variations of grammatical relations to the phrase *by faith* but it does not affect the sense of the passage. The purpose of the writer is to encourage



the Hebrew Christians not to abandon the faith, but be strong in faith giving glory to God. Lightfoot says of this passage, “The one grand justification principle of lost men is faith, that the righteous man is made righteous by faith and thus shall live....the righteous man shall live by his faithfulness” (198).

This passage is an introduction to Hebrews chapter 11, which explains what faith is and shows its necessity (cf. Heb. 11:1, 6). Then to reinforce the explanation and necessity he gives some sixteen personal examples of faith. All, in any dispensation, who are justified or made right with God, find that justification on the basis of faith in the Lord. That faith is demonstrated by obedience to Him. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1).

Let us remember that our conviction rests in the Lord and His Word. We are reminded to “trust in the Lord will all thine heart; lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Prov. 3:5-6). Thus our faith is not in self but in the Lord. Faith in the Lord means faithfulness to Him, which means keep on keeping on.

### **Remember Your Continuation**

“. . . [B]ut if any man draw back my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul” (Heb. 10:38-39).

The writer’s closeness to the Hebrews is seen in this: that if one of you who are justified by faith be a quitter, I personally (*my soul*) shall not be pleased. It is important for them to remember their former suffering and conflicts and their faithfulness that carried them through those difficult times, because they are going to be repeated and even more severely. If they draw back, backslide, or tuck their tail between their legs, and retreat from the faith they will suffer destruction of the soul.

However, he ends on a positive note by his personal confidence in their faithfulness, seeing “them that believe to the saving of the soul.” He knows they are those who by “suffering according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful creator” (1 Peter 4:19), and looks to the time when they will be “Receiving the end of your faith, even the

salvation of your soul” (1 Peter 1:9). Such reward demands a keep on keeping on.

### **Conclusion**

I am sure all of us have seen some good demonstrations of perseverance. In my years of preaching I have witnessed this trait in every place I have preached, not always by Christians, but by others as well, some of which had severe handicaps.

In the early 1990s, Jerry Traynor, a resident of Parkersburg, determined he would walk across the United States. It took nearly a year, but through rain, snow, sleet, extremely hot and cold days, he accomplished his task. Jerry was not the first to walk across the USA, but he was the first to do it on crutches. Jerry was crippled in both legs. How did he do it? He kept on keeping on.

In the late 1960s I was introduced to the Geroni brothers, Nick and Ralph. Both had been faithful Catholics all their lives. Nick was converted to the Lord by Charles Brown in Red Bank, New Jersey. Nick then converted Ralph. After Ralph became a Christian he never missed a service of the church for 18 years, not one. He was in church regardless of the weather. He never missed because of sickness. He did not drive or own a car. If his ride did not come, he would call another or walk. Amazing is it not? Oh, I failed to mention that Ralph was totally blind. How was he able to accomplish this? He just kept on keeping on.

In this passage of Scripture (Heb. 10:32-39), the writer calls for a remembrance of conversion, conflicts, companions, compassion, compensation, confidence, conditions, the Lord’s coming, and their convictions to incite their continuation in the faith, to get them to keep on keeping on.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58). May the things that we have learned from God’s Word and the things we have experienced in our lives motivate us to “never give up, never, never give up,” and to “keep on keeping on.”

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### Biographical Sketch

Wirt Cook was born in Mingo County, WV, March 4, 1936. He attended elementary and high school in West Virginia and Ohio. He is a veteran of eleven years of military service with the United States Navy (1954-1965). He was baptized into Christ on January 5, 1963 by Charles L. Brown while serving with the military at the Naval Air Station in Lakehurst, NJ. He is married to the former Miss Dorothy Faye Donley of Belfry, KY. They have five children, eleven grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. He is a graduate of Sunset School of Preaching, Lubbock, TX, and earned a Bachelor of Science degree from Alabama Christian School of Religion, Montgomery, AL.

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Wirt has written articles for several Gospel journals. He has taught Bible related courses at Ohio Valley College and Kiev Bible Institute, Kiev, Ukraine.

# *Christ and the Silence of the Scriptures*

*Steve Higginbotham*

How one understands the authority of Scripture is, in my understanding, the single most important ingredient to achieving unity among God's children. In order for unity to exist, there must



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be an agreement upon a standard by which to measure one's beliefs and practices. Without a common understanding of how the Bible authorizes, even the most earnest desire and irenic spirit are insufficient to attain and maintain unity when one fails to acknowledge the authority of God's word, and to make proper application of it. In support of the above affirmation, one need only look at our own history over the past one hundred years. A little more than a century ago, the United States Census Bureau, for the first time, listed Churches of Christ and Christian Churches as two separate religious bodies. This official recognition of the division that existed between Churches of Christ and Christian Churches was the culmination of half a century of disagreement over such issues as the missionary society and the employment of instruments of music in worship. While the missionary society and instrumental music in worship certainly played a role in the division that occurred, the primary reason for the division was how brethren understood the authority of the Scriptures.

While both sides would readily affirm that they believed in the authority of Scripture, they disagreed with each other concerning how the Scriptures authorize; in other words, how to interpret the "silence" of the Scriptures. [For the record, I will use the terms "silence of the Scriptures," and the "principle of silence" in a colloquial sense throughout this lecture. More precisely stated, the

principle of silence would be better called the principle of authority. Technically, we are not trying to interpret the silence of God, but we are trying to determine how we are to interpret the words of God.] Both groups claimed adherence to the motto, “We speak where the Bible speaks, and where the Bible is silent, we are silent.” However, to those in Churches of Christ, God’s silence on musical instruments in Christian worship meant they were unauthorized, and therefore should not be employed. To those in Christian Churches, God’s silence on musical instruments in Christian worship meant that they could use them since Scripture is silent, and there is no explicit prohibition against their use.

Consequently, division was inevitable due to this fundamental difference in the way Scripture is approached, and authority is ascertained. How is one to understand silence after God has already spoken? Is silence prohibitive or permissive? Is silence intentional or incidental? Disagreement over this fundamental issue is what divided us 100 years ago, and continues to keep us separated today.

Fortunately, determining whether silence is prohibitive (withholding authority) or permissive (granting authority) after God has said what He intended to say, does not require that we consult the writings of Alexander Campbell, Thomas Campbell, Ulrich Zwingli, or any other religious personality. The answer to this question is set forth in Scripture, itself. All we need to do is allow the Scripture to be its own interpreter.

### **Hebrews 7:14 and the Principle of Silence**

“For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood” (Heb. 7:14). This passage provides us a example of the “principle of silence” put into application. In Numbers 8:1-26, God explicitly authorized the sons of Levi to function as priests. However, Jesus, our High Priest (Heb. 3:1) did not come from the tribe of Levi; He came from the tribe of Judah (Heb. 7:14). The Hebrews writer used this fact as evidence that there had to have been a change in the law, for of this tribe, (the tribe of Judah) “Moses *spoke nothing* concerning the priesthood.” In other words, God’s silence was understood as prohibitive. The fact that God was silent or “spoke nothing” concerning the tribe of Judah becoming priests was viewed as

prohibitive, not permissive. God’s silence concerning the other tribes of Israel serving as priests did not give them permission to become priests, but rather demonstrated that they were not authorized to function as priests.

God did not need to go through all 12 tribes of Israel and declare, “No one from the tribe of Reuben may be a priest. No one from the tribe of Simeon may be a priest. No one from the tribe of Judah may be a priest etc.” The Hebrews writer used the fact that He spoke nothing concerning these other tribes as proof that they were not authorized to function as priests. In other words, God’s silence was prohibitive.

### **Hebrews 7:14 and Practical Application of the Principle of Silence**

I think it is important to remember just what the Bible is. It is a communication from God to man through the use of words. The words in the Bible were used in the same way that we use words every day. How much difficulty do you have communicating to another person or understanding what they mean when speaking to you? Generally speaking, we understand each other without too much difficulty. The same principles that allow us to understand each other in everyday life, if applied to the Scriptures, would help us to understand God’s communication to us as well.

For example, while I know this is an old illustration, it drives home the truthfulness of the prohibitive nature of silence. Suppose I ordered a pair of pants from a retail store. Then to my surprise, three days later five semi trucks appear in my driveway, unloading all sorts of merchandise. Suppose I would then go to the men unloading the merchandise and say, “What are you doing? I did not order any of these items. The only thing I ordered was a pair of pants.” Imagine them responding with the following, “We know that. We saw your order for your pants and have fulfilled that order. But we also noticed that you were silent about all these other items, so we assumed that your silence gave us permission to add them to your order.”

Everyone can see that such reasoning is foolish. No retailer would ever take such liberties with my order. However, is it not ironic that men attempt to take such liberties with God’s orders? My silence does not give the retailer permission to charge me for

all these other items about which I was silent. However, when it comes to how to understand the Bible, many people tend to jettison the common, everyday rules of language we use to communicate with each other.

### **Hebrews 7:14 and the Biblical Application of the Principle of Silence**

In addition to the application of this principle of silence in every day usage, there are many biblical illustrations of this same principle.

For example, the last recorded words of God to Noah, prior to the flood were, “Come into the ark” (Gen. 7:1). A year later, Noah removed the covering of the ark, and saw that the surface of the ground was dry (Gen. 8:13). However, the text reveals that he did not exit the ark for nearly another two full months (Gen. 8:14). One can only imagine how badly Noah must have wanted out of that ark, but Noah did not exit the ark until God *spoke* to Noah, saying, “Go out of the ark” (Gen. 8:15-16). Noah did not understand silence as permission to leave the Ark, he waited for the authority of the Lord before he acted.

Another biblical example of the principle of silence is seen in the giving of the Ten Commandments. The very first commandment given said, “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Ex. 20:3). However, the children of Israel did not always observe this command. Their disobedience to this command provides us with a rather interesting commentary from the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah, the prophet was told to stand in the gate of the temple and to urge the people to “Amend your ways . . .” (Jer. 7:3). What ways did they need to amend? According to Jeremiah 7:31, they had built high places upon which to burn their sons and daughters. But note the principle to which God appeals to condemn their action. God said they were guilty of doing that “which ***I did not command***, nor did it come into My heart.” God used the principle of silence to condemn their idolatry! Their condemnation was not based upon the original prohibition of idolatry, but rather was based on the equivalent practice of doing that which the Lord had not commanded.

In Leviticus 10:1-2, Nadab and Abihu sinned by ignoring this principle of silence. They offered strange fire before the Lord

“which He had not commanded them.” By doing that which the Lord had ***not commanded*** them, they were found guilty. Nowhere did God say, “You cannot use this fire.” However what God did do is tell them what fire they were supposed to use, and there was no permission to be found in God’s silence about other fires.

In connection with the Ark of the Covenant, God appointed the tribe of Levi to transport the ark of the covenant (Deut. 10:8). However, there was no specific prohibition regarding other tribes from carrying it. Was God’s silence about other tribes to be understood as prohibitive? Certainly, for a parallel passage explicitly says, “No one may carry the Ark of God but the Levites, for the Lord has chosen them to carry the ark of God and to minister before Him forever” (1 Chron. 15:2). When God commanded the Levites to carry the Ark, His silence about other people carrying the ark was not considered permissive, but rather prohibitive.

In 1 Samuel 13:8-14, King Saul made an unauthorized offering at Gilgal. Rather than waiting for Samuel to offering a burnt offering to the Lord, Saul offered a burnt offering without him. Samuel then told Saul that he had acted foolishly and had not kept the commandment of the Lord. One might ask, “Where is the commandment that forbade kings from offering sacrifices to God?” There need not be a specific command forbidding such action. The reason is that God commanded the priests to offer sacrifices, and the principle of silence did not give permission to others to do the same, but instead was considered restrictive or prohibitive.

In Hebrews 1:5, the Hebrew writer argued for the superiority of Jesus over the angels. In an effort to prove his affirmation that Jesus is superior to the angels, he asked the question, “For to which of the angels did He ever say: ‘You are my Son, Today I have begotten you?’” (Heb. 5:1a). In other words, the author was arguing that since God never called the angels “His Son,” they had no right to claim such a status. However, the One to whom He spoke these words, Jesus, could claim such a status. This is the principle of silence at work.

There are many other passages that teach and illustrate this same principle. Scripture is clear in teaching that after God has said what He intended to say, there is no authority in silence, but rather authority is bound up in what God has spoken. However, in spite

of this biblical teaching, efforts are being put forth to negate this truth.

### **Hebrews 7:14 and Consistency**

Some claim that it is inconsistent to affirm that silence is prohibitive (thus excluding instruments in worship), while at the same time affirming that such things as baptisteries, public address systems, song books, and PowerPoint projectors, about which the Bible is also silent, are permitted.

Such a claim of inconsistency fails to distinguish between an “aid” and an “addition.” Every command of God requires that we use expedient actions to fulfill His commands. In Genesis 6:14-16, God commanded Noah to build an ark out of gopher wood. Though the Bible is silent concerning the type of tools Noah was to use to build this ark, no one would argue that the use of tools was unauthorized. On the contrary, they were authorized expedients or “aids” that could be used to obey the Lord’s precise command. However, had Noah chosen to use another type of wood in place of or in conjunction with the gopher wood God commanded, such action would have been unauthorized. Using another kind of wood, about which God was silent, would not be considered an aid to obeying the Lord’s command, but rather an unauthorized addition to the Lord’s command.

There exists a great need for people to understand the difference between an aid which does not add to or diminish from the Lord’s command and an addition which changes the nature of the Lord’s command.

### **Hebrews 7:14 and the Abandonment of Authority?**

Some today are actually contending that this entire discussion about what is and is not authorized is in itself divisive, and that we do not need authority for all that we do. Some are affirming that such an approach to Scripture robs us of our liberty in Christ and forces the Scriptures to be used in a way in which they were never intended to be used.

However, think of the far-reaching implications of such a position. If we ignore the principle of silence as affirmed in Hebrews 7:14, then how could one oppose such practices as infant

baptism, sprinkling, prayer to saints, baptism for the dead, the office of a Pope, and animal sacrifices? Where would it stop?

Not long ago, a preacher was asked if there was anything wrong with worshiping God by sacrificing a sheep on an altar? His reply was as follows, “Only from the sheep’s point of view!!” He then proceeded to say,

. . . [I]f you were honestly, from your hearts, engaging in this act of worship to express genuine thanksgiving to your God, and you both believed this to be acceptable to Him, and it was done in such a way that none of your brethren were caused to stumble and none who were lost were hindered from being drawn to the Lord, and if you did not seek to bind this practice upon others, then I would find no reason to condemn your worshipful expression. (Maxey)

Do you see where the rejection of this principle takes us? There is no end. Anything and everything apart from that which is explicitly forbidden becomes permissible. Such an approach to interpretation not only flies in the face of common sense, but countless biblical examples proving otherwise.

We must call people back to the Bible, and seek a “thus sayeth the Lord.” We must speak where the Bible speaks, and where the Bible is silent, we must be silent. Whatever we do, in word or in deed, must be done in the name of (by the authority of cf. Acts 4:7) the Lord. We must call people to respect the authority of God’s word, and to act only in harmony with His revelation. To do otherwise is to depart from a view of authority that Scripture itself upholds through precept and example.

### **Conclusion**

I challenge all men to heed the words of the Puritan preacher, Richard Baxter (1615-1691) who stated:

For what man, dare go in a way which has neither precept nor example to warrant it? Can that be obedience which has no command for it. . . . O, the pride of man’s heart, that instead of being a law-obeyer, will be a law-maker! For my part, I will not fear that God will be angry with me for

doing no more than He has commanded me, and sticking close to the rule of His word, in matter of worship; but I should tremble to add or diminish! (24)

May we have such reverence for God and His authority that we might all tremble at the very thought of adding to or diminishing ought from God's word!

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#### **Biographical Sketch**

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# *Christ and the Perfect Tabernacle*

*Dan Kessinger*

## **Introduction**

It has been suggested that the theme of the great book of Hebrews is a single word: **better**. Christ is a better high priest, a better lawgiver, we live under a better covenant that includes a



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greater opportunity to serve with better promises. Our sacrifice is better, as is the medium for the writing of God's law. Here in chapter nine, we are reminded that we serve God in a better tabernacle, a spiritual one not made with hands.

In keeping with the character of Hebrews, chapter nine discloses that like so many other Old Testament items, people, and situations, the tabernacle and its contents had a greater significance than the Jewish worshiper might have realized. They were, as stated in Hebrews 8:5, copies and shadows of heavenly things. Was this an indication that the tabernacle was in some sense a copy of the dwelling place of God? Even if so, this conclusion is not warranted by the context. Instead, the heavenly things in question turn out to be the New Covenant that God intended to make with His people, as prophesied by Jeremiah.

Chapter eight closes with an assurance that the Old Covenant is now obsolete; chapter nine begins with a description of the tabernacle and its articles. These are said to be symbolic (v. 9), literally a parable (Strong 54). The challenge for the student of this section of Scripture is to better understand the tabernacle and its service, and then to properly apply them to New Testament Christianity.



## The Significance of the Tabernacle

In verse eleven we read, “But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation.” Thus the preceding verses must all have had lasting spiritual significance beyond their Old Testament virtues. The chapter begins with an affirmation that the tabernacle, and by implication all of the other items as well, are of earthly origin. While we have no quarrel with Paul’s statement “we know that the law is spiritual” (Rom. 7:14), the matter presented here is one of contrast. That is to say, when compared to their New Testament counterparts, these items, particularly the tabernacle itself, are earthly. This is not to say that they are of human origin and design, but rather that they are visible and of earthly construction. While they were built according to a Divine pattern, they were constructed by human artisans. The tabernacle and all of the items therein were made of physical material, and destined to be eventually destroyed, as are all physical things.

Why does Hebrews nine use the tabernacle as a template rather than the temple that was presumably still standing, or the famed temple of Solomon? Some believe that temples, even Solomon’s, were never really pleasing to God, but were only endured by Him. Others believe that this is evidence that the temple in Jerusalem had already been destroyed. Perhaps the Hebrews writer was inspired to use the tabernacle as a basis of comparison because it was a tent, a sign of pilgrimage. It seems most likely that the tabernacle is cited not because it was a tent, not because of problems with subsequent temples, but because of its primacy. Thus, the comparison between primitive Christianity and the primitive tabernacle are appropriate. All of the temples in Jerusalem were but larger scale models of the original tabernacle, which was in effect a model of the church. Perhaps this same reasoning accounts for the use of tabernacle rather than temple in Revelation 21:3. “And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.’”

The physical tabernacle is a much overlooked Old Testament structure, perhaps owing to David’s statement as he desired to

build a temple. “That the king said to Nathan the prophet, ‘See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells inside tent curtains’” (2 Sam. 7:2). This suggests to the casual reader that the tabernacle was a humble place, perhaps even a bit shabby by comparison to a permanent dwelling. In all probability, the tabernacle had been destroyed some time previous to this, perhaps by the Philistines when they also captured the Ark. Thus, David probably referred to another tent that had been made to replace the original. Considering the tabernacle’s considerable size, its elaborate and ornate construction, and its costly materials, no unbiased observer would have considered it an unfitting or inappropriate house for the articles of God. Though the tabernacle could be moved, it was no small task, as demonstrated by its remaining at Shiloh for a considerable time after the conquest. In addition to this, the three divisions of Levi were entrusted with disassembly, transport, and assembly. This was no pup tent!

To say that the tabernacle here represents features of Christianity seems obvious. Not only is the church pictured as the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16), but also there is the matter of New Testament priesthood (1 Peter 3:9). What makes this tabernacle greater and more perfect? It is made without hands, and is not of this creation. It is interesting to compare the phrase “not made with hands” to the wording of Daniel describing the establishment of God’s ultimate spiritual kingdom on Earth (Dan. 2:34, 45). Indeed God does not dwell in temples made with hands (Isa. 57:15; Acts 7:48; 17:24), but among those who serve Him. Just as surely as Christ is the greater High Priest, so His tabernacle is greater as well.

Aside from the spiritual nature of the church, there is one other outstanding feature of the New Testament tabernacle: in it, the worshiper can celebrate true forgiveness. Lightfoot notes that the purpose of this description is to demonstrate the inadequacy and ineffectiveness of the services in the tabernacle (163). He further writes: “In the final analysis, then, worship in the old regime was an exercise in futility—a conclusion which when reached causes the author to push ahead in succeeding lines to the uniqueness and finality of Christ’s sacrifice” (163). As much as anything, the distinction between the covenants is one of time’s perspectives. That is to say that tabernacle service, though much aware of past

sin, was done in prospect of eventual forgiveness. The Christian may celebrate the fact that his sins are really forgiven.

### **The Holy Place**

As the Hebrews writer examines the tabernacle in detail, he begins with the Holy Place. Under Jewish law, the priests were to perform certain functions in the Holy Place on a regular basis. These included keeping the lamp lit continually, the placement of the showbread, and the burning of incense on the Altar of Incense. The Holy Place was a place set aside for these special services rendered in God's honor. The Altar of Burnt Offerings lay outside the Holy Place, and in sight of the general public. Though of seemingly less significance than the second veil, the Holy Place's doorway was also a veil.

The Hebrews writer chooses to forego a discussion of the Altar of Incense until later, for reasons that will become evident. Instead, he focuses our attention on the lamps and the showbread. It seems clear that the Holy Place is a type of the church established by our Lord. Christians are called to a life of service as priests; they have entered into a close relationship, even a fellowship with their God; they have no need for the priestly services of another. Those who elevate themselves to a priesthood above other Christians have in effect re-erected a veil that God ordered destroyed (Coffman 188). Ironically, it is common for the corrupt priests of Roman Catholicism, Mormonism etc., to hide their activities behind veils, both literal and figurative. These monstrosities, masquerading as religion, have excellent reasons to obscure their activities! But true New Testament Christianity has no need for veils. All may enter into the priestly service to God who choose to enter.

God's word is symbolized by the lamp (Ps. 119:105, et al.). Thus it seems safe to conclude that the Holy Place, the church, is shown to be guided by God's word. Whether or not the two sides of the menorah symbolize Old and New Testaments, and of how much significance are its seven branches is a matter of conjecture. However, it is difficult to argue against this symbolism: that we, the nation of priests have our way and service illuminated by the lamp of God. Like the lamp, the showbread is thought by some to have a great and detailed significance.

Twelve loaves of bread were kept fresh on the table and were arranged in two rows, suggesting the providence of God in the provisions made for his people, the two rows reminding one of the two Israels, the fleshly Israel and the spiritual Israel. (Coffman 183)

It may be that the author has no particular significance in mind for the showbread, (or for that matter even the lampstand), and is only citing them as matters of a detailed description. If, however, the lampstand did represent God's guiding word, then perhaps the showbread is part of the same picture. It seems significant that the priests were to eat the showbread (though only at the appropriate time). Is it possible that both the lampstand and the bread represent God's word? God's word is food for the soul just as surely as it is an illumination for the pathway. In God's new tabernacle, He invites all to become priests, to see, to eat, and to live.

### **The Most Holy Place**

A discussion of the contents of the Most Holy Place begins at verse three. This section of the tabernacle was hidden by a veil, even from those serving in the Holy Place. In fact, as we are reminded in verse seven, the Most Holy Place was severely restricted from human activity. "But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance." For three hundred and sixty four days in the year, the Most Holy Place was empty, and only a few dozen priests had ever been privileged to traverse that veil.

The room itself was virtually empty, containing only the Ark of God, though the writer also cites the golden altar of incense as belonging to the Most Holy Place. There is some discussion over the use of the word "censer" in reference to the altar of incense. Both KJV and NKJV read "censer" here, while ASV RSV and ESV read "altar of incense." Grammatically, the case is stronger for its translation as "censer," a reference to the tool used by priests to carry live coals. The priest's censer was an elaborate shovel of sorts, probably similar to an old fashioned bed warmer. They were important tools of the priesthood, playing an important role in the sin of Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10), and also in the

rebellion led by Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. In the latter case, Eleazar was ordered to retrieve the censers from the burned corpses of the rebellious. Though the men had proved themselves anything but, God affirmed that the tools of their trade were holy!

In spite of the fact that the LXX only employs the word *thymiaterion* in reference to the priest's censer, and never to the altar of incense, it seems that it is thus used here. In reference to this new usage, Bruce wrote:

This fact, however, is not decisive for its meaning here. The word in itself simply means "a place where incense is put" or "a vessel for burning incense" and was used not only in the sense of "censer", [sic] but also in the general sense of "incense altar" and more particularly, Philo and Josephus, of the incense altar in the Israelite tabernacle or temple. (184-85)

One of the reasons for some hesitation in understanding the censer to be the altar of incense is that it is said to belong to the Most Holy Place. It is significant that the Hebrews writer does not state emphatically that the censer was in the Most Holy, but that it belonged to that place. The placement of the altar in the Holy Place was significant. Exodus 30:6 reads, "And you shall put it before the veil that is before the ark of the Testimony, before the mercy seat that is over the Testimony, where I will meet with you." The altar of incense was literally only inches away from the place that symbolized the very presence of God Himself. The significance of this juxtaposition could not be more striking to the reader of Revelation 5:8. "Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints."

Those who have become New Testament priests (Christians) sometimes experience a faltering faith with regard to God's involvement in their lives. Though they may persevere, the nagging doubt persists as to whether God is really as close as they hope. Is He listening? Is He really concerned? The lesson of the Most Holy Place and the altar of incense is a resounding affirmation that God is close; He is concerned; He is listening; He

is holding our hands. And even if we are not yet able to see Him face to face, He will remain at our side. "Am I a God near at hand," says the LORD, "And not a God afar off?" (Jer. 23:23) ". . . [A]nd lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20).

The Most Holy Place must also be considered in light of the service of the High Priest. On the Yom Kippur, and on that day alone, he was to enter in order to make an atonement for sin. It is significant that this atonement was not a license to transgress. The KJV reads "errors," the NKJV specifies "sins of ignorance," and ESV likewise reads "unintentional sin." It seems possible to define this word too restrictively, in such a way as to suggest that those who committed sin, in spite of knowing better, could not be forgiven. Perhaps all of us have done the same. The word in question is *agnoema* and its root survives in agnostic (one who does not/cannot know) today. Strong gives a more general meaning to the word than "sin of ignorance," defining it as a thing ignored (7). Thus the wording of the old KJV may well be best, suggesting that forgiveness can be had by those who sin out of weakness as well as ignorance. Nonetheless, one cannot argue that the Day of Atonement was a blessing for those sinned intentionally, with the plan of being forgiven at a later date.

With regard to our High Priest's entrance beyond the veil (Heb. 6:19-20), it is a matter of both hope and responsibility that we consider Him. Only He has entered into the presence of God in a literal sense, there having presented Himself as a sacrifice for sin and making intercession on our behalf. Like the yearly sacrifice on the Day of Atonement, His sacrifice is also not intended as a license for deliberately continuing in sin. In contrast to the once a year entrance by the High Priest, Christ has made His sacrifice and entrance once for all (Heb. 9:12, 28). For those who refuse Him, there is no other sacrifice, especially in the case of willful sin. Hebrews 10:26 reads, "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins."

### **The Ark and the Presence of God**

It may seem almost redundant to carefully consider the role of the Ark in this discussion, as in considering the Holy of Holies, we

have already given weight to the lofty notion of the presence of God. However, it was the Ark itself that emphasizes the point, and given its contents, clarifies it as well. Since a temple, properly speaking, is little more than a dwelling place for God (or a god in pagan temples), it might be asked what role was served by first the tabernacle and later the succession of temples. After all Solomon affirmed that God did not really dwell any more in that marvelous temple than He did throughout the “Heaven of Heavens” (1 Kings 8:27). But in first the tabernacle, and then in the temple, God did dwell in a special if not in a literal way.

Viewing the matter from the outside in, it would seem that as people gathered outside the Holy place, they were gathering in the name of (by the authority/command of) God. They were God’s people who were honoring the name of God by their obedience to His command to sacrifice. His name was on their lips; they even composed special songs, the so-called Psalms of Degrees or Ascents that were sung as they made their way to the temple to worship. God was present on the outside because His people were willing to honor Him.

Inside the Holy place, the priests were likewise serving in the name of God. As they kept the lamps of the sanctuary lit in accordance with God’s command to Moses, and as they faithfully replaced the showbread on each Sabbath, eating the leftovers, they were fulfilling God’s standard of holiness. God’s presence was clear to see for any who desired to compare the actions of the priests in sacrifice and service in the Holy Place. But God was no more literally in the Holy Place than He was outside that first veil. An omnipresent God cannot be confined in such a physical space.

Was God literally in the Most Holy Place then? The same arguments from the nature of God prevent our making this case. Even though the most Holy Place was a symbol of the ultimate presence of God, it cannot be that God was any more literally inside the veil than He was outside of it. The High Priest was to treat that area as though it were sacred ground; indeed it was sacred, but that sanctity was not necessarily because of God’s literal presence. There were a great many other Old Testament places that were either thought to be sacred, or were designated as such from the Lord. When God appeared to Moses in a burning bush, he was informed that he was standing on holy ground (Ex.

3:5). What made it holy? Was it not because God chose to reveal Himself and communicate with Moses at that location? Had not Moses always been in the presence of God? If not, where did God go during those forty years that Moses had been in exile? Hebrews 4:13 reads, “And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.” Jacob dreamed of angels ascending and descending to and from Heaven. God also spoke to him, reaffirming the Abrahamic promise. After awakening, he called that place Bethel, or “house of God.” Did this mean that God was now absent from Padan Aram, where his father and mother were? Surely we would conclude that God was able to be in both places at once, not to mention all of the other places. But at Bethel, He had revealed Himself and communicated with His servant. Thus, Jacob called that location “House of God.”

As we continue inward, we realize that the place we are now investigating was forbidden territory, even for the priests. Only the High Priest could ever penetrate that veil, and then only on Yom Kippur. Out of respect for God, he was to behave as though he were in the very presence of God Almighty, and indeed he was in God’s presence. In that chamber was only one article of furniture, in which some could argue lay the only justification for the building of a tabernacle or temple at all: the Ark of God. Even though the High Priest was authorized to enter the Most Holy Place on Yom Kippur, he had to exercise the proper care in approaching the Ark of God. He was forbidden to allow his eyes to linger on its wonder, to “gawk,” as my Dad would have put it. He was to obscure it from his vision with smoke from incense before he began his duties. Every step was a reminder that while in the presence of God, we are sinful creatures who are unworthy to approach God on these or any other terms.

So one might conclude that at long last we have discovered the true and literal presence of God: it was at the Ark of the Covenant. But again, we are not dealing with a God who is finite and physical. He was no more literally confined to the Ark than He was confined to Bethel, Shiloh, Jerusalem, Sinai, or any of our meeting houses today. What was the purpose of the Ark of the Covenant? The answer helps us to understand the presence of God. The Ark is also called the “Ark of the Testimony” (Ex. 25:22) in reference to

its primary contents. The Ark was a protective container for the two tables of stone. Though the text here in Hebrews tells us of the pot of manna and the walking stick of Aaron also being within the Ark, it was primarily the Ark of the Covenant or Testimony. First Kings 8:9 states emphatically that the Ark contained only the two tables, the other items either having evidently been removed to another location or stolen by the Philistines. Within the Ark was the Decalogue, the simple commands that comprised a foundation for living right before God in the Jewish Covenant. Where is God then? The answer is that He is where (and wherever) His law is kept and honored.

But the matter of God's presence is not complete without an examination of another feature of the Ark, that is, the ornate lid, the so-called "mercy seat." The entire Ark was of course of fabulous construction, of Acacia wood overlaid with hammered gold. Minus the lid it would have been of untold worth and beauty. But the lid was the most outstanding part of all. On it were two cherubim, with wings outstretched toward one another, at once obscuring the space between them, and also in an attitude of curiosity, expressing curiosity as to the contents of the Ark. This unseen space between the wings seems to represent an actual literal presence of God that must be guarded from the eyes of man. In Leviticus 16:2 we read, "and the LORD said to Moses: 'Tell Aaron your brother not to come at just any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud above the mercy seat.'" So is this finally where God was living, that is on the lid or mercy seat of the ark? After all, He is called "the LORD of hosts, who dwells between the cherubim" (1 Sam. 4:4). But again, in a literal sense, God was no more there than anywhere else.

The mercy seat is significant to our understanding of the nature of God and of His covenant toward us. One significant fact is that God is said to dwell on the Ark rather than in it. Why are details supplied concerning that lid of the Ark, seemingly just as important as the contents, if not more so? The term mercy seat is the common translation of the word *hilasterion*, defined as either the process of atoning or specifically, the lid of the Ark (Strong 37). But why is the lid referenced in such a particular way?

Vincent's argument on the word may shed some light on the matter. He notes that the Hebrew word for propitiation is "almost always used in the Old Testament of the mercy seat or golden cover of the ark" (44). He went on to write:

This term has been unduly pressed into the sense of expiatory sacrifice. In the case of the kindred verbs, the dominant Old Testament sense is not propitiation in the sense of something offered to placate or appease anger; [sic] but atonement or reconciliation, through the covering, and so getting rid of the sin which stands between God and man. (44-45)

What is the significance of the mercy seat to the presence of God? The mercy seat was more than a lid, it was a covering. It stood above the law, and covered it as well. Its purpose was not to obscure the law, but there the blood was applied on Yom Kippur, thus covering the sins, thus protecting the worshiper from the penalties demanded by law. It was a covering that really covered. It was indeed the mercy seat: it was the place where God sits above His own law.

Where is the Holy Place today? It is where priests serve God. Where is Christ today? He is in the Most Holy Place, at the right hand of God. Where is the very presence of God today? He is wherever His word is honored and obeyed, illuminating and feeding those who hear Him. Where is God's very heart today? God's heart, His center is in a place of mercy where sinners may find their transgressions forgiven by a loving God who longs to do just that through His Son. The God who dwelt between the cherubim on the mercy seat is alive and well, and just as full of mercy as He ever was. "Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:7).

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## Biographical Sketch

Dan is the son of Bob (deceased) and Doris Kessinger. He was born in Michigan and grew up in Kentucky, West Virginia, and Georgia, returning home to West Virginia to stay in 1973. He and his wife, the former Mary Amy West, have two boys, D. J. and Thomas.

Dan graduated from Walton High School in Roane County, WV, and attended Ohio Valley College where he earned associate and bachelor degrees in Biblical Science.

Dan preached his first sermon in the Spring of 1982 at the Mt. Zion church of Christ in Walker, WV. He has served congregations in Belle, Long Valley, Gandeeville, Proctor, and since February of 1994, the Dewey Avenue Church of Christ in St. Marys. In addition to his local work (including a weekly radio program), Dan conducts gospel meetings and appears on lecture programs each year. He is a frequent contributor to religious journals, and is the author of *A Cloak of Malice*. He has worked with WV Christian Youth Camp since 1984, and West Virginia School of Preaching since 1995.

# Christ - Superior to Moses

Mark Tabata

## Introduction

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house. For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God. And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end. (Heb. 3:1-6)



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I am honored to be invited to take part in this lectureship. I am very thankful for Hillview Terrace Church of Christ, and for West Virginia School of Preaching. I have many, many fond memories of my time here, and am very grateful for the tutelage I received at this place, and a love for my fellow Christians in this area. May God bless you. I have been asked to speak about the subject of the superiority of Christ to Moses, as documented in Hebrews 3:1-6.

## Christ Is Superior in His Role

One of the reasons Jesus is absolutely superior in His role to Moses is due to His unique identification with both *God* and *man*. Notice that verse one here starts with the word *therefore*. This ties

the discussion back to the preceding section, where the apostle establishes how Jesus is superior in His duty of bringing true reconciliation between God and man. He points out several times that the reason He was able to accomplish this is due to the fact that He is both God AND man. Throughout Hebrews, we see ample evidence that Jesus Christ is God. Hebrews 1:8, our author wrote: “But to the Son He says: ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom’” “For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God” (Heb. 3:4).

Notice that in both these verses, Jesus is referred to as God. In chapter 1 and verses 4-5, the writer is talking about how we know Jesus is superior to the angels. One of the reasons is because it is affirmed in the Old Testament (the idea is authorized) that Jesus is King; however, the concept is never affirmed (authorized) that angels would be king. Therefore, because the idea is never authorized that an angel would be king; that concept was not taught.

Note how this sheds light on the controversy of what we can and cannot do in our assemblies today, and in our Christian life. It is often taught that we may engage in anything that is not expressly forbidden; that if the Bible does not authorize something, then that “something” is allowed. This is exactly what this text opposes! George Beals has an excellent comment on this point:

This is what Heb. 1:5 is teaching with respect to Jesus and angels. There is in God’s word an affirmation that Jesus is king. So we believe it, teach it and live by it. There is the absence of an affirmation in God’s word that any angel is a king. So we do not believe it, teach it or live by it. The writer expects us to see that, due to the absence of an affirmation in God’s word, we are to operate on the basis that no angel is king. (113-14)

Further, in Hebrews 3:4, we are reminded of the superiority of Christ over the household. Why? Well, Moses was a faithful servant over his household; but Christ is superior in that the one who builds a house is superior to it. Furthermore, since Christ built

the house (in fact, since He built all things as GOD, the text is saying), He is superior to both Moses and the house of Israel.

It is a well-known fact that throughout our country, there is a widespread attack upon Jesus as God. Indeed, it is claimed (through many outlets of the media, especially in the realm of popular fiction, such as Dan Brown’s, *The Da Vinci Code*) that Jesus never claimed to be God; and that His Deity was only “attached” to Him sometime during the third-fourth century AD, at a church council (really a council of the Catholic church), and later endorsed by the Roman Emperor Constantine.

Before dealing directly with these matters, let me point out that all too often, Christians are not sharing the truth of God’s Word with people on these matters, despite the fact that we are commanded to do such. In 1 Peter 3:15 we find: “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.” Notice that word *defense*. Of this word, we are told:

The word was often used of the argument for the defense in a court of law, and though the word may have the idea of a judicial interrogation in which one is called to answer for the manner in which he has exercised his responsibility (Beare), the word can also mean an informal explanation or defense of one’s position. The word would aptly describe giving an answer to the skeptical, abusive, or derisive inquiries of ill-disposed neighbors (Kelly). (Rogers and Rogers 575)

Therefore, it is our duty to deal with these attacks upon Christianity. Indeed, the whole book of Hebrews presupposes the notion that Christians understand this, since the whole book is (in essence) a powerful defense of the Christian system. Furthermore, perhaps we do not realize the current culture of unbelief that these media features have created. One author tells us about these very real dangers when he writes:

Only 9 percent of middle-aged adults and 14 percent of adults in their early thirties identify themselves as atheists

or agnostics. Yet, when it comes to the people who have grown up in the shadow of such claims about Jesus-persons presently in their late teens and early twenties—nearly 20 percent openly refer to themselves as atheists or agnostics. Put another way, one out of every five college-aged students has rejected not merely *Jesus* but the very possibility of knowing God at all. (Jones 4)

Since the New Testament Scriptures, being genuine, credible, and faithfully transmitted, teach that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (John 1:1, 14; 8:58; 10:30-31; Titus 2:12-14; Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:8; 3:1-4). The apostle makes it absolutely clear that Jesus is, first and foremost, superior to Moses because He is *God*.

### **His Role as Designer**

Notice that this text makes it clear that God is the One Who has created all effects. Indeed, we see here an indirect argument for the existence and self-sufficient nature of God. All things began to exist-except for God. Hence, everything had a beginning point-except God. This teaches us about His eternity (the fact that He has always and will always exist).

There are many people in our country today who are atheists (one who claims to know there is no God), especially in the school systems. This should not surprise us; because the evidence is clear from atheists themselves that they are trying to push God out of the schools. This movement attempts to undermine any mention of God in the workplace, and even in the home! As one apologist documents:

The well-organized movement to promote Darwinism and exclude alternatives is part of a larger educational project in today's public schools. . . . If religion is so bad, what should be done about it? It should be eradicated. According to Sam Harris, belief in Christianity is like belief in slavery. . . . But how should religion be eliminated? Our atheist educators have a short answer: through the power of science. . . . How is all this to be achieved? The answer is simple: through indoctrination in the schools. . . . Of course, parents-especially Christian parents-might want to

say something about all this. That's why the atheist educators are now raising the question of whether parents should have control over what their children learn. Dawkins asks, "How much do we regard children as being the property of their parents? It's one thing to say people should be free to believe whatever they like, but should they be free to impose their beliefs on their children? Is there something to be said for society stepping in? What about bringing up children to believe manifest falsehoods? Isn't it always a form of child abuse to label children as possessors of beliefs that they are too young to have thought out?" . . . Psychologist Nicholas Humphrey argued in a recent lecture that just as Amnesty International works to liberate political prisoners around the world, secular teachers and professors should work to free children from the damaging influence of their parents' religious instruction. . . . Children spend the majority of their waking hours in school. Parents invest a good portion of their life savings in college education to entrust their offspring to people who are supposed to educate them. Isn't it wonderful that educators have figured out a way to make parents the instruments of their own undoing? Isn't it brilliant that they have persuaded Christian moms and dads to finance the destruction of their own beliefs and values? Who said atheists weren't clever? (D'Souza 32-37)

Regarding the existence of the universe, there are really only two possibilities. Notice this simple argument: Either the universe is here as the result of an infinite number of causes and effects without an ultimate uncased First Cause, known as an infinite regress, or else the universe is here as the creative act of a fully self-sufficient and eternal Being (i.e. God). An infinite regress is impossible. Therefore, God exists.

Many people today continue to believe that the universe has always existed. This belief commonly referred to as an *infinite regress*, the belief that there has been an eternal chain of causes and effects without an uncaused First Cause (i.e. God), is clearly refuted by logical reasoning, Scriptural testimony, and scientific evidence. Think about some of these reasons. For one thing, if an



infinite number of causes and effects existed, the universe should be absolutely perfect by now. As Peter Kreeft, well-known philosopher and defender of Christianity, documents:

If there is no Creator and therefore no moment of creation, then everything is the result of evolution. If there was no beginning or first cause, then the universe must have always existed. That means the universe has been evolving for an infinite period of time-and, by now, everything should already be perfect. There would have been plenty of time for evolution to have finished and evil to have been vanquished. But there still is evil and suffering and imperfection-and that proves the atheist wrong about the universe. (qtd. in Strobel 35)

Take this a step further. If the universe has always been here-if there has always been this constant chain of causes and effects-everything should be absolutely *imperfect* by now. After all, it would have had sufficient time to become completely imperfect. But the universe is not completely imperfect. Therefore, the universe has not always been here. Again, if the universe has always been here, if it were here as the result of an infinite regress, everything should be both completely perfect and completely imperfect. But this is impossible. They cannot be both completely perfect and completely imperfect. Therefore, an infinite regress is impossible. Another theologian points out another problem with the idea of an “infinite regress.” He chronicles:

This demonstration of the non-existence of actual infinities can be applied in two real-world areas, time and causality. The best way to show that time is not infinite, that it had a beginning, is to observe that there is a “now.” If now exists, then time cannot be infinite. To show this, picture the moment “now” as a destination, like a train station. Then picture time as train tracks that are actually infinitely long. If you were a passenger waiting on the train to arrive, how long would you have to wait? The answer is: forever. You can never reach the end of infinity; thus, infinitely long train tracks cannot ever be crossed. There is no end to

arrive at, no station. If infinitely long train tracks could be crossed, they would be the equivalent of a one-ended stick, a nonsensical notion. . . . But there is an end, a “now”; the train did arrive at the station. This means the tracks of time cannot be infinitely long. There cannot be an infinite number of preceding moments prior to the present moment. The past is not an actual infinite. Thus, time had to have a beginning. (Powell 32)

All of this goes to show us that there cannot be an endless chain of causes and effects; there had to be some kind of Beginner of the whole chain. However, if this Beginner were also an effect (a created being), He would simply be part of the chain of causes and effects. So, this Being would have to be completely non-contingent; unlike an effect, it does not depend upon anything outside of Itself for existence. It is completely self-sufficient. This Being is properly termed God, as this verse in Hebrews clearly implies.

Regarding the Scriptural testimony, it is clear that the universe, including time itself, had a beginning (Heb. 3:4; Titus 1:1-2; Gen. 1:1; John 1:1-4). Hence, Christ is superior to Moses in His role as Designer.

### **His Role as Man**

The text makes it clear that Jesus is not only superior to Moses because of His *Divine* nature, but also because of His *human* nature. Look back at the end of chapter two:

Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted. (Heb. 2:17-18)

Our text in Hebrews ties in with both the Deity and the humanity of Jesus by the word therefore in chapter 3:1. The uniqueness of Christ to completely sympathize with the Divine viewpoint, as well as being able to sympathize with human temptation and weakness-encumbered with the reality of actually committing personal sin-is

what serves to make Jesus Christ the perfect High Priest for Christians. Perhaps we sometimes forget about the humanity of Christ Jesus. Yet, is it not this one of our most fatal mistakes? All so often, we imagine that we serve a God Who cannot understand us and our plight in life; however, it is really in Jesus Christ-being both God and man-that we see that God *does* understand our problems, and our trials, and our temptations. Really, this is why He is able to be the great Mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5). This is why the Hebrews writer tells us that our source of confidence before God comes, not from our own perfect works, but from the righteousness of Jesus Christ Himself. In Hebrews 7:25 we find: "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."

Our confidence in prayer is a direct result of the role of Jesus Christ as our High Priest. The Hebrews writer declared: "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:15-16). Moses, in all of his glory, could not be that wonderful Mediator that we needed. As great a leader as Moses was, he could not be the propitiation for our sins; he could not be the High Priest that could stand "in the gap" between a holy and righteous God and sinful mankind. Only Jesus can do that, and through that knowledge, we have *salvation* and *confidence*.

### **His Role as Apostle**

The text tells us that Christ is our "Apostle." The word *apostle* carries with it the idea of "one sent." It also carries with it the idea of one invested with great authority on behalf of his superior. As one authority comments on the meaning of this important word:

It meant a representative equipped with the full powers of his principal. . . . It is interesting to note that the Jewish *shaliach* (apostle) could not hand on his commission to anyone else; it was for him alone. . . . There was something unique and unrepeatable about their position. . . . (Green 84)

There was a special authority that Jesus had. Yes, the apostles of Christ had power and authority, but not the same kind that Christ possessed; for the things which they bound and loosed had already been *bound and loosed* in Heaven (Matt. 18:18). Indeed, Christ had a special authority that Moses-or any other human being-never has had (Matt. 28:18; Eph.1:22-23; Rev. 1:4-5).

### **Christ Is Superior in His Responsibility**

We begin by looking at the responsibility of Moses in guiding Israel. He had quite a huge responsibility before him. His duty was to guide and deliver the people of Israel out of captivity. As such, Moses was faithful in all his house. Notice some interesting parallels between Moses and Jesus. First, Moses' duty was to build, or establish, the house of Israel. In the same way, the responsibility of Christ was to build, or establish, the spiritual house of Israel, the church of God (Matt. 16:18; Gal. 3:26-29; Heb. 2:10-13). The physical house of Israel was composed primarily of the physical seed of Abraham; but notice that the spiritual house of Israel (the church) is composed of anyone, of any nation, who submits to God (Acts 10:34-35; Rom. 2:4-12; Heb. 5:8-9). Second, Moses' duty was to bring the Law to the people of Israel; Jesus' duty was to bring the New Testament Law to the spiritual house of Israel (Heb. 1:1-3). The Law of Moses, as important as it was in convicting people of sin and showing them the proper way to walk for that day and age (Gal. 3:10-12, 21; Rom. 3:19-20), was only temporary in nature (Heb. 8; Gal. 3:24-25), and was inferior to the Law of Christ (Heb. 10:9-10). Third, the sacrifices of Moses were given for the consciences of the people of Israel, and to prepare them for the coming Messiah, yet they could never truly remove the sins of the people (Heb. 10:1-4). However, the blood of the spotless Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, is able to completely remove our sins (Heb. 9:11-22). I love the famous poem by Thomas Haweis entitled, "*Welcome! Sinner, Come!*"

From the cross uplifted high,  
Where the Savior deigns to die.  
What melodious sounds we hear,  
Bursting on the ravished ear!  
"Love's redeeming work is done-

Come and welcome! Sinner, come!”

Sprinkled now with blood the throne;  
Why beneath thy burdens groan?  
On My pierced body laid,  
Justice owns the ransom paid:  
Bow the knee, and kiss the Son,  
Come and welcome, sinner, come...

Soon the days of life shall end-  
Lo, I come-your Savior, Friend!  
Safe your spirit to convey  
To the realms of endless day,  
Up to My eternal home-  
Come and welcome! Sinner, come! (283)

Finally, notice that the prophet Moses had the responsibility of leading the physical house of Israel into the land of Canaan, a land “overflowing with milk and honey;” and, as faithful as Moses was in his task before God to this end (as our text documents), it is only a shadow of the superior salvation that Jesus has planned for His spiritual household (Heb. 11:13-16; 13:14; Col. 1:5; 1 Peter 1:3-5; John 14:1-6). Truly, Heaven will be worth it all! However, we seem to often forget that we are, indeed, pilgrims here. The inevitable result of focusing on this world will be that we lose sight of Heaven. A defender of the faith is supposed to have said, “If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. . . . It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at Heaven and you will get earth ‘thrown in;’ aim at Earth and you will get neither.” We must not lose sight of our heavenly goal Christ has prepared for us. While Moses was faithful in all his house, Christ was much more faithful, and superior in every way.

### **Christ Is Superior in His Rewards**

The text tells us that we must continue to “hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.” In the Greek New Testament, this carries with it the idea of a *continual*

*activity* beginning at a point in the past, continuing through the present time, and into the future. In other words, we must continue today to hold fast to our confidence and rejoicing that we began holding onto in the past (when we were baptized into Christ Heb. 10:22-25), and we must persevere in that dedication to Christ. Then, and only then, will we continually receive blessings of being Christ’s house.

There is, of course, great reward in Heaven (which we have already noticed). However, notice also that there is great reward in the *relationships* we have in the household of Christ. We have the blessing of having the holy Godhead, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, in communion with us. Really, this is one of the most profound teachings of the entire Bible. In Matthew 28:19 Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

For a long time, I have heard so much controversy over what it means to be baptized “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” I thought that it was something that absolutely had to be recited at the point of baptism; but then I learned that something else is taught in this passage. As Wayne Jackson says in his one of his excellent books:

What did Christ mean by baptizing them “into the name” of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit? Many scholars were uncertain. Then archaeologists began to uncover numerous Greek papyri containing the phrase *eis to onama*, “into the name.” It was a technical expression denoting “into the possession” of someone. A slave was sold into the name, i.e., into the possession of his owner. . . . What a thrilling concept! When one, in believing penitence, turns to the Lord by the obedient act of being immersed in water, by that submission, he becomes the possession of the divine Godhead. (56)

Is that not really what the gist of the whole book of Hebrews is about? The amazing relationship, that close-knit friendship and communion God desires with us, and that we have in the church of Christ? It was this close-knit relationship for which God made us

in the first place (Eph. 1:4-7; Deut. 32:9; Acts 17:26-28), and it is only *in the church* that we find this relationship restored (Eph. 2:16). We have an amazing relationship with other Christians now. Thanks be to God, we are brothers and sisters in the Lord's household (Heb. 3:6). As such, it is our duty to exhort one another daily (Heb. 3:12-13). We need to restore each other in the spirit of gentleness (Gal. 6:1). We need to work together, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:1-6).

We also see the freely bestowed rewards of God's forgiveness (Heb. 7:25), the power of prayer (Heb. 4:15-16), receiving the loving discipline of God (Heb. 12:3-11), the promise of angelic protection, guidance, and deliverance (Heb. 1:14; 12:22-24), the beauty of worshipping God acceptably (Heb. 13:15), the knowledge that God is working in us and through us those things which are well-pleasing in His sight (Heb. 13:20-21), and a host of other blessings which cannot even be named here. Indeed, in every way, while Moses was a faithful servant of God, Christ is far superior to him in every way!

### Conclusion

In conclusion, I want to share these words with you, written by a Jew who now believes in and follows Jesus Christ. This man is not a New Testament Christian, but has an amazing statement about the superior nature of Jesus Christ that I believe is absolutely fitting in the closing words of this lecture. Michael Brown was a young man who lived according to the world for a long, long time. Raised in a strictly Jewish home, he was taught that Jesus was a false prophet. A friend, inviting him to church, challenged him to examine the Bible's case for Jesus Christ. He was absolutely amazed, and became a believer. His parents, worried, called the local rabbi. The rabbi informed him that Christians had twisted the Scriptures to try and make Jesus look superior to Moses and Judaism. He was told that if he understood the original languages of the Bible, he would understand this. So, he went and learned the original languages! In an interview with Lee Strobel, he tells us these words:

Yeshua is the right continuation of my Jewish roots. . . .  
He's the Messiah of Israel and the savior of the world. He's

the one to whom I owe my life, and through him I've come to know God. He is the one who provided me complete forgiveness of sins, who loved me when I was a miserable, ungrateful, rebellious, proud wretch. He put a new heart and a new spirit within me; he has turned my life around and given it meaning. He's the fullness of God in bodily form. He's the very expression and image of the Father-in-seeing him, I see and know God. And he's the only hope of the world. Outside of him, all we see is darkness. He's the hope of Israel. Israel will run out of options and finally in the end recognize that the one that it thought was the source of all its pain and suffering through the years is its only hope. He's the beginning and end, the all in all. I cannot imagine existence outside of him. I cannot imagine truth outside of him. I can't imagine purpose in life outside of him. So really he is the ultimate expression of God to the human race. That's why I'm spending my life talking to Jewish people-as compassionately and accurately as I can-about the reality of Jesus the Messiah. I just can't withhold God's very best from those he dearly loves. (qtd. in Strobel 225)

May God richly bless you all.

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### Biographical Sketch

Mark was born in Charleston, WV and reared in New Martinsville. He graduated from Capitol High School in Charleston and from West Virginia School of Preaching in the class of 2001. He has worked with the Steward Park Road church, the Church of Christ in Clarington, OH, and is now working with the Hazard Village Church of Christ in Hazard, KY.

## Christ - Perfected through Suffering

Eddie Cooper

I feel both humbled and honored to be asked to be a part of this great lectureship program. My association with this congregation has been a long one and has been a real source of encouragement through the years. Thanks to the elders and the lectureship committee for inviting me to be a part of this series.



**Eddie Cooper** has served congregations in Ohio and West Virginia. Presently he serves as minister for the Washington Street Church of Christ, St. Albans, WV.

The topic assigned to me has been an enriching experience for study and I pray that it will benefit all who hear or read the lecture presented.

### Introduction

My lecture is *Christ Perfected through Suffering*, based on the text of Hebrews 5:5-9.

Before we begin, let us make sure we understand the words used in the topic. Christ, as used in the New Testament means “the anointed of God.” Let us look at this word *anointed*. Vine describes this word in the following way:

The NT title of Christ is derived from the Greek *christos* which is exactly equivalent to the Hebrew *mashiach*, for it is rooted in the idea of “to smear with oil.” So the term *Christ* emphasizes the special anointed of Jesus of Nazareth for His role as God’s chosen one. (59)

Anytime we study about Christ, it should cause us to think seriously about what He has done for us, and continues to do, as “the anointed of God.”

The word perfected comes from the word *perfect* which is the Greek word *teleioo*, which means: “fulfill, to bring something to its goal, to make perfect, to consecrate, etc” (Arndt and Gingrich 817-18).

**Suffering** is something of which most of us know something about. Some during Job’s day believed that all suffering was the direct result of sin—they were wrong. Some suffering is the result of other’s sins. We shall note during our study how and why Jesus suffered. It is my opinion that we can never really comprehend all that Jesus suffered for humanity.

The fifth chapter of the book of Hebrews deals with Christ as our High Priest, and can be divided into four categories:

1. The nature of the high priest’s office under the Mosaic system.
2. The appointment of Jesus as our high priest.
3. The Lord’s qualifications to be high priest.
4. The responsibility of Christians to Christ as high priest. (We will not deal with this one in this lecture.)

### **History of the Priesthood**

The Jews had reverence for their priests, especially the high priest. It was unique in that, the Levitical priesthood represented the Jew’s union with God. And, we remember in Exodus 19:6 that the whole nation was said to be a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” From what we learn of the priests, they had to have a gracious character, a natural disposition, a wisely trained and cultured character and the discipline of personal experience of the sorrows of human life. How well these are demonstrated in the life of Christ.

As the high priest, under the old covenant, he represented God’s purity and His covenant with the people. He bore the names of the twelve tribes on his breastplate, showing Him to be a representative of the people before the Lord.

And the stones shall have the names of the sons of Israel, twelve according to their names, like the engravings of a signet, each one with its own name; they shall be according to the twelve tribes. . . . So Aaron shall bear the names of

the sons of Israel on the breastplate of judgment over his heart, when he goes into the holy place, as a memorial before the Lord continually. (Ex. 28:21, 29)

This would have been a sight to behold. It was the high priest that had the responsibility of overseeing the work of the other priests in the temple, and taking the responsibility of his most important task on the Day of Atonement. On this day, he was required to offer a bull for his own sins and that of his household (Lev. 16:6). Once purified, he could then slaughter the goat selected as the sin offering for the people (Lev. 16:15). Only then did he make his annual trip into the Most Holy Place to sprinkle the mercy seat with this blood.

A second goat, called the scapegoat (Lev. 16:10), was sent off to the wilderness, to “bear on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land; and he shall release the goat into the wilderness” (Lev. 16:22). This goat symbolically carried with it the sins of all the people. This ritual was carried out year after year for centuries.

### **Qualifications of a Priest**

A qualified priest must meet two qualifications. He must be: 1) “selected from among men” (Heb. 5:1), and 2) “called by God” (Heb. 5:4). Men were not chosen simply because they belonged to the tribe of Levi, but were also to “have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray” (Heb. 5:2). According to Vine the word *compassion* means “to treat with mildness or moderation, to bear gently” (116).

In contrast to Christ, who had no sin, the high priest, under the Mosaic covenant, was a man with all the weaknesses which are common to man. And as such, needed sacrifices for his sins just as the other people did. Hebrews 7:27 states: “[Jesus] does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices first for His own sins and then for the people’s, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.”

Zechariah made clear the fact that Jesus would represent His people before God in His role as High Priest: “Yes, He shall build the temple of the Lord, He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule on His throne: So He shall be a priest on His throne. And the counsel of peace shall be between them both” (Zech. 6:13). This

prophecy teaches that Christ would **sit** and **rule** and **be priest on His throne** at the same time. Jesus has been called a High Priest “after the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 6:20). As Melchizedek was priest and king at the same time upon an earthly throne, so Jesus is Priest and King upon a spiritual throne in Heaven.

“For”—in view of chapter 4, we do have in Jesus a sufficient High Priest. The high priest had to be one of the people he served (Ex. 28:1). The priesthood was established by God for the benefit of men.

Jesus did not glorify Himself, but was chosen of God (Heb. 5:5, 6, 10). The duty of man, whether priest or not, is not to glory in himself, but to glorify God. Jesus always manifested such an attitude, even as High Priest (John 4:34; 8:29; 9:4). In Hebrews 5:4, we notice these words: “And no man taketh this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was.” “No one has a right to enter into this office unless he has the qualifications which God has prescribed. There were fixed and definite laws in regard to the succession in the office of the high-priest, and to the qualifications of him who should hold the office” (Barnes 113).

A man called of God is not to be regarded as an independent man, who may carry out his priesthood in his own ways. He belongs to some order. Jesus did not come on His own; the Father sent Him to accomplish a specific mission (John 5:30, 43; 8:54).

The high priest had to deal compassionately on those “going astray” through ignorance (cf. Lev. 4:1-35; 5:14-19; Num. 15:27-29). The high priest was to deal compassionately with the people, not excusing their sin, but acknowledging the possibility of atonement. Again, we need to make note that under the Law, priests were beset with their own weaknesses, they were also sinners, making atonement for themselves, as well as the people. Hebrews 2:17-18 declares:

Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.

In these verses, we are assured that Jesus is *merciful* and *faithful* as His people’s High Priest because He was made like His brothers in every respect. He was exposed to all the tests and trials that they have to endure.

### Where Is Our High Priest

Jesus left heaven with a mission (Philip. 2:5-8). He was the sin offering for lost humanity. Jesus came because something better than bulls or goats had to be offered to redeem man; something better than the Levitical priesthood had to be arranged to cleanse the sins of mankind (Heb. 7:11-17). From this text, we learn that the Levitical Priesthood was not perfect. That Old Covenant had an imperfect priesthood, and animal blood sacrifices that could not take away sins (Heb. 10:4). And, because there was not perfection in this priesthood, another priest had to arise. This priest was to be after the order of Melchizedek and not after the order of Aaron. The new priest was to be of the tribe of Judah, and not the tribe of Levi (Heb. 7:14).

“Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:12). Our High Priest has gone into the presence of God (Heb. 4:14; 10:11, 12). Being at the right hand of God, He makes intercession for us (Rom. 8:34). Our High Priest is also our **Advocate**, that is, one who pleads the case of another (1 John 2:1).

### How Did Jesus Come?

Hebrews 5:7 says, “...who in the days of His flesh.” This designates the period during which Jesus walked on Earth as a man. We learn here something of the nature of His becoming flesh; the incarnation (John 1:1, 14). We often hear individuals say that “Jesus was a man just like other man.” How ridiculous can one be?

One would think that **Son**. Christ’s identity as the Son of God can be established on several grounds: 1) He was born of a virgin (Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-39); 2) There were the signs which He performed (John 20:30, 31); 3) Most impressive in Scripture is the testimony of the Father Himself, Who said: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17; cf. 17:5); and 4) His resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:4).

## How Did He React to What He Had to Do?

This verse also says, “. . . when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear” (Heb. 5:7). The word *prayers* here is *deesis*, which means “special, definite requests.” The word *supplications* means “requests made” and points to dependence upon God. It seems that the expressions “cries and tears” refers to Jesus’ experience in Gethsemane. The “cries and tears” intensify the author’s interest in Jesus’ humanity.

There may be an allusion here to the manner in which Jews speak of prayer. ‘Rabbi Yehudah said: ‘All human things depend on repentance and the *prayers* which men make to the holy blessed God; especially if *tears* be poured out with the prayers. There is no *gate* which *tears* will not pass through. (Clarke 718)

“Jesus participated in the human situation so completely that he experienced the natural human fear at the prospect of death” (Thompson 76-77). This was a situation of extreme anguish for our Savior. We can read of His **agonizing** over His death in Luke 22:44: “And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.” From Albert Barnes, we read:

The fact that the Son of God thus wept should be allowed deeply to affect our hearts. ‘He wept that we might weep; Each sin demands a tear. He wept that he might redeem us; we should weep that our sins were so great as to demand these bitter woes for our salvation. That we had sinned; that our sins caused him such anguish; that he endured for us this bitter conflict, should make us weep. Tear should answer tear, and sigh respond to sigh, and groan to groan, when we contemplate the sorrows of the Son of God in accomplishing our redemption. (116)

These prayers were addressed to Him who was “able to save from death,” which implies a situation in which He was facing the prospect of death. Our Lord cried out for deliverance from death.

Jesus came to die. The agony of Christ at Gethsemane was occasioned by something other and deeper than the fear of physical death. He was about to face the judgment of a holy God against sin. He was going to be separated from the fellowship of the Father. “He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed saying, ‘O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will’” (Matt. 26:39; cf. Ps. 22:21; Matt. 27:46).

It is interesting in this regard, that God had the power to deliver Christ from death, but it was God’s will that Christ die for our sins. The prayers of Christ were heard “in that he feared.” That is, His reverence for His Father was a vital part of His life. Such utter dependence on the Father was needed during this most difficult hour.

## Jesus Learned Obedience by Suffering

Even though, He was the Son of God, He totally and freely submitted to the will of God. He certainly knew obedience before He ever came to Earth. And, while on Earth, He constantly lived in harmony with the will of the Father. His desire was always to do His Father’s will. “Jesus said to Him, ‘My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work’” (John 4:34).

According to Hebrews 12:5, the writer encourages the readers to think of the suffering they endure as the discipline which is fitting for *sons*. From this passage we read, “And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him.”

Regardless of the kind of **Son** He was, He was not exempt from the rule that suffering is a discipline. Jesus’ death was a form of obedience. “And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Philip. 2:8). “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by one Man’s obedience many were made righteous” (Rom. 5:19).

The point is used to show that Jesus was well fitted to be the Savior for mankind; and the argument is that He set us an example of obedience in light of all that He was to endure. Christ suffered



because there was no other way to atone for lost mankind (Heb. 2:14, 15; 1 Peter 2:21-25).

### Christ's Perfection

Christ was **made perfect** through suffering. This certainly would not imply that He was imperfect formerly. The Greek word *teleioo* can denote "to fulfill, to bring something to its goal, to make perfect, to consecrate, etc." (Arndt and Gingrich 817-18).

Jesus is qualified to come before God (5:8, 9), not by cleansing, but by proving His obedience. His is an eternal qualification (7:28) which enables Him, by his once-for-all-high-priestly work, to qualify those who he represents to come before God (10:14) in the heavenly sanctuary as those whose sins are expiated. (Delling 1166)

Christ's perfection involved at least three things: He shared in human weakness (5:8; 2:10-18), overcame death (2:15), and was exalted to God's right hand. Certainly this qualified Him to the high priesthood that is superior to the Levitical priesthood (7:28). Let us note Hebrews 7:28: "For the law appoints as high priests men who have weaknesses, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever."

Because of His suffering, Christ is the **author** (literally, the source) of eternal salvation—to those who obey Him. Wayne Jackson points out that *obey* in the original language, is a present tense, participle form. "The thrust is—the 'ever-obeying him' ones." In the setting of Hebrews, the author, in describing Christ this way, is chiefly thinking of all the resources that flow from Christ's priestly activities that make a Christian's life of obedience possible. Now, the ONE who became first obedient (5:8) now, as the heavenly High Priest, demands obedience. The importance of obedience is seen in these passages: Matthew 7:21-23; Luke 6:46; John 14:15; Romans 6:16-18; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 2:3-5; 3:24; 5:2, 3; Revelation 22:14.

### Conclusion

Because of his sin, man is separated from God (Isa. 59:1, 2). Provision has been made for man to be forgiven by the precious blood of Jesus (1 Peter 1:18, 19).

Under the Law of Moses, Aaron and his descendants were appointed to offer sacrifices for the people. Then, Jesus became our High Priest under the new covenant. Recognizing the impossibility of forgiveness of sins by the blood of bulls and goats (Heb. 10:4), Jesus entered into the holy place, Heaven, and presented His blood as a sacrifice for our sins. Since the penalty for sin is death, man was not able to pay the price. But, the presentation of His blood as a sacrifice for our sins, Jesus obtained eternal redemption for us.

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### Biographical Sketch

Eddie was born April 23, 1946, to Denver and Florence Cooper. He married Barbara Buckley of Parkersburg, WV, on September 2, 1966. They have two sons, Dr. Jason Cooper, and his wife Martha;

and Scott who is Chief Financial Officer and Manager of Tennessee Farmers Co-Op in Nashville.

He graduated from St. Marys High School, St. Marys, WV, and from Ohio Valley University with an A.S. degree in Bible in 1966. He graduated Abilene Christian University with a B.A. in Bible in 1969. He has worked with churches in Ohio, West Virginia, and Texas, and is currently serving the Washington Street Church of Christ in St. Albans, WV.

Eddie has done extensive work with youth camps including Northeastern Ohio Christian Youth Camp, where he served on the board of directors and at West Virginia Christian Youth Camp in Pennsboro, where he also served on the board. He has done a great deal of writing for *Teenage Christian*, *Bible Herald*, *Gospel Truths*, *Gospel Advocate*, *Therefore Stand*, *Christian Bible Teacher*, *West Virginia Christian* and *Upon the Rock*. He holds Gospel meetings each year and has appeared on several lectureships.

## *The Great Salvation*

*Denver E. Cooper*

Many are the occasions of life in which lives of people are saved. Just a few months ago a pilot crash landed a plane on the Hudson River. All passengers and crew were saved. A child fell in an open well. Only by drilling a hole close by were people able to save the



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child. The news of the salvation of the people in both cases was flashed around the world immediately. All who heard of the heroic salvations were overjoyed by the success. We are happy when such events take place though only a few are saved ; only the mortal body is saved. The apostle Paul writes of a much more important salvation when he asks: “How shall WE escape if we neglect so great salvation?” (Heb. 2:3a, emp. added).

It is important we notice that Paul included himself as one who might neglect the great salvation. It is salvation of those who had become Christians, not those who had not yet obeyed the gospel of Christ. The first question one might ask is, “Why is this the great salvation?”

First, it is great because of the price which was paid for it. God gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16). Of course, the price Christ paid was His very blood and body. “What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” said Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20.

This was accompanied by His crucifixion, a form of torture not invented by the Romans, but perfected by them. Originally dead bodies were impaled on sharpened stakes or poles and left for the animals and elements to show victory over and contempt for the

conquered (South 32). The Romans used the awful method, nailed or tied victims to poles or crosses leaving them to a slow, agonizing death. None of the New Testament writers went into detail about the death on the cross. This seems to me to be another strong evidence of the authenticity of the Scriptures. What man, of our day, writing about the death of Christ would not have gone into great detail regarding the pain and suffering of Christ? Any modern day writer would have told where the spikes were placed in His feet, what kind of spikes they were, the kind of thorns were used, how long were the thorns, probably how it was placed on His head, how long He breathed while in the agonizing position, etc. But no New Testament writer gave any such information. We must depend on secular writers for such explanations. Incidentally, no reference is made by any other writer about a building in the shape of a cross; a cross or crosses on buildings or a piece of jewelry tied about the neck in the shape of a cross. Everyone living at that time surely knew of the excruciating and shameful pain of death by hanging on a cross. Yet no New Testament writer went into any great detail of the tragedy.

Second, the salvation was great because, unlike the law of Moses, which included just the Jews, it was to be carried to every creature in the world. Matthew 28:19a, declares, “[G]o ye therefore, and teach all nations.” while Mark says “preach the gospel to every creature” (16:16). In so doing the salvation offered was superior to the old law which included only a part of a nation. Marshall Keeble was approached by a white man who declared that the black man did not constitute a nation; hence there was no need to preach to him, for Matthew had said to preach to the nations. Keeble replied to him, but Mark said preach the Gospel to every creature and “I is a creature, isn’t I”? The apostle Paul said: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16). And in Galatians 3:26-27, he added, “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Third, it is great because it is the last plan God has prepared (Eph. 3:11) for all mankind and He made it quite clear that every accountable being is subject to the invitation. Jesus declares, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. My yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30).

Freedom from sin is not granted to mankind by the law of Moses, but salvation is only in Christ (John 8: 32). The Gospel does not remit sin because it is “little” sin. Many people look on their sin as so small that it cannot possibly cause them to be lost. But on the other hand some think sins are so black and awful that they can never be forgiven. In fact there is no sin that is so small or so large that it cannot be reached by the blood of Christ. This is evidenced by statements of those who sinned. Paul stated that he was chief of sinners. He said: “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph. 3:8). Again, he said, “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philip. 3: 13-14).

We know that Saul was standing nearby when Stephen was stoned to death. He was carrying letters in his pockets from the chief priests authorizing him to persecute Christians as he made his way to Damascus just before he was converted (Acts 7:58). Yet, Christ gave him the information he needed and where to go so that he could be told what to do to be saved.

It is a great salvation because of the head of the church. Christ humbled Himself as He dwelt among men. His life, examples, death and exaltation to the throne in Heaven gave Him the right to be called the head of the church (Col. 1:18). There is no man who can fill that position. Not the Pope, Knox, Luther, Wesley, Mohammed, Smith, or any other person alive or dead.

Paul has already suggested that it is possible to neglect the great salvation. He even included himself. For some reason it was possible that one might try to escape (flee from) the great salvation. Knowing the Bible makes one wonder why anyone

would want or try to escape the salvation which gives him his eternal hope.

### **How One Neglects**

How might one neglect the great salvation? It might be done by withholding the key of salvation from others, as the Pharisees did. Jesus said, “Woe unto ye lawyers! For ye have taken away the key of knowledge; ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered” (Luke 11:52).

Just not telling others how to be saved results in neglecting salvation. The great commission includes about seven billion people populating the world. We were told by Basil Overton, a preacher speaking in chapel, that there are an estimated three and one half billion people living on Earth who have not even heard the name Jesus. With all the preaching being done through the various media, how can it be that there are yet those who have not heard of Jesus?

Perhaps one neglects the great salvation by failing to read and study the Bible, thus never able to come to the knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 3:7). He may fail to show his love for the Bible by failing to read the Scriptures on a regular basis; by failing to attend Bible classes where he can increase his knowledge of the word of God (2 Peter 3:18).

One may fail to visit and minister to the needy. In Acts nine we have the example of Dorcas who had died and was mourned over by those for whom she had made garments. We do not hear anything about her till the episode of her healing in Chapter nine. She must have been a humble person. I doubt that she went about bragging about all that she did to help the widows or the poor of the community. That is all we know about her, but what a way to conclude whatever days she may have had remaining on Earth. Do you not suppose she continued her good deeds?

Then there are those faithful Christians in Acts four who saw the need to sell their lands and houses and brought it and laid it at the apostle’s feet. Among them was a good man by the name of Barnabas, a Levite of the country of Cyprus: “Having land sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet” (Acts 4:36, 37).

We learn from Acts 9:27 that Barnabas introduced Paul to the elders at Jerusalem. He must have had a good influence on the brethren there because they were afraid of Paul at the beginning. In Acts 11:22 we learn of the confidence the brethren at Cyprus had in Barnabas and learn the reason for it. “For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.”

Nothing is said about Barnabas reminding the brethren that he had contributed to the needs of those in need in Jerusalem. I knew a rather wealthy brother in Christ who was very liberal toward those who were less fortunate. Though one might mention people whom he had helped in the past, he long ago would have forgotten that he had helped them. I expect that is the way with Barnabas.

The salvation is great because it provides a way to avoid the danger of going to Hell. We do not like to think or talk about Hell. Not many think they are going there. Emanuel Daugherty spoke of a recent poll he had seen in which the majority believed in Heaven, yet 80% of that same number did not believe there is a place called Hell. Have you ever talked with one who readily admits that he is going to be lost when he dies? He believes that someday, somehow he is going to enjoy the beauties of Heaven with his loved ones regardless of how they have treated God, Christ and the Holy Spirit while they were alive on the Earth. However, Jesus has taught us:

Enter ye at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth unto destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. (Matt. 7:13-14)

The salvation is great because of the Father’s provisions for His children. He has assured His children that they shall never want for the things they need (Matt. 6:33; 1 Peter 5:7). He also provides protection, just as a good father provides for his children (Heb. 11:6-11).

## Therefore

The book of Hebrews begins with the word *therefore* which indicates something of importance relating to the Great Salvation has preceded. In the Old Testament God used many messengers to deliver His commands to His people. Moses was one according to John 7:22. Many other prophets helped in revealing God's word to the people. Now, One better than Moses or any of the other prophets is the One, the only One, through whom God speaks. He it is by whom the inheritance is more excellent than all or any of the angels (Heb. 1:14). Of none of the great prophets did God declare "thou art my son" (Heb. 1:6). Yes, all Christians may be called heirs, or sons of God, but there is a difference when God refers to Christ as the "begotten" (Heb. 1:5).

Therefore, we ought (must, are obligated) to give the more earnest (to exceed) in our efforts to maintain our faith in Christ which is commanded by the supreme authority of the Father. Teachers were already endeavoring to convert Christians back to the law of Moses. Paul's question is how shall we escape so great salvation? Stephen tried to show the Jews the futility of returning to the law when he said:

Ye stiff necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed them that showed before of the coming of the Just One of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers; who have received the law by the disposition of angels and have not kept it. (Acts 7:51-53)

Indeed angels played an important part in giving the law. Paul uses the first chapter of Hebrews to deny the Jews' argument that the Law was important because it was delivered by angels. Christ was far superior to the angels or anyone else who had a part in delivering the Old Testament law. Paul argues that Jesus is more important than a prophet. Aaron is spoken of as being Moses' prophet in Exodus 4:16. He no longer was God's spokesman.

## Those Punished Under the Law

Paul continues, "For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast [and it certainly was], and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward [and they did], how shall we escape if we neglect so Great Salvation . . ." (Heb. 2:2-3).

Let us notice Leviticus chapter ten. There Nadab and Abihu, priests of God, were appointed to light the altar of incense. They were the right men; they were chosen for the right job; brought the right censers; to the right place at the right time. Was anything wrong? Yes! They obtained fire from the wrong place. We do not know where they got it; only that it was fire NOT commanded of God. They might have supposed one fire is as good as another; it will burn just the same; surely it will be alright. Those men had never tried using fire from some other source. They did not know what would happen. Yet, God, the very first time they used strange fire, smote them with death. No warning at all! A just recompense of reward!

In Numbers chapter 15 we read of a man who was gathering wood, sticks to build a fire. Why gather sticks on the Sabbath? I do not know. Could it have been that some one of the family was sick? Perhaps it was a cold day. At any rate it seems no one knew the penalty for picking up sticks. The children of Israel did not know. Even Moses their long time leader did not know the penalty. The people enquired of Moses and Aaron; who had to take the question to God. What shall we do? God said take him outside the camp and let the camp stone him to death. Now, keep in mind that never before had they had a case like this, yet God said stone him to death. My, what severe punishment! A just recompense of reward!

I have always felt sorry for Moses because of the account recorded in Numbers chapter 20. Of course, all of the 80 years before that time, with the Israelites rebelling, complaining and murmuring must surely have worn on his patience by the time he got to this point in their travels. Those Israelites were such complainers and quarrelers.

At Kadesh, where Miriam died, the whole congregation found no water there which caused them to quarrel with Moses saying:

. . . “Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the Lord! And why have you brought up the congregation of the Lord into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there? And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us unto this evil place? It is no place of seed, or figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink.” And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell upon their faces: and the glory of the Lord appeared unto them and the Lord spake unto Moses saying, “Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock so thou shalt give their congregation and their beasts drink.” And Moses took the rod from before the Lord, as he commanded him. [So far Moses has complied implicitly] And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, “Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?” [Mistake number one] “Must WE fetch you water out of this rock?” And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: [Mistake number two] and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also. (Num. 20:3-11)

Well, now, it sounds as if all has gone well. Moses took the rod from before the Lord as He had commanded him. They have gathered the congregation together. Water has come out of the rock abundantly, and both the congregation and beasts have had their fill of water. What can be the matter? God’s instruction this time differed from the first time. Now he was only to speak to the rock, not strike it. So far as we know this is the first time Moses has failed to honor God. “And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them” (Num. 20:12).

Later in verses 23-29 we learn that Moses, Aaron and Eleazar went to Mount Hor where Aaron was stripped of his priestly

garments. They were placed on Eleazar. Aaron died. Moses and Eleazar descended the mountain and the people mourned for Aaron thirty days. Sometime later Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah that is over against Jericho.

And the Lord showed him all the land of Gilead unto Dan. And all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim, and Manasseh and all the land of Judah, unto the utmost sea. And the south and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, unto Zoar. And the Lord said unto him, “This is the land which I swore unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord.” And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Bethpeor; but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day. (Deut. 34:1-7)

God says it was a just recompense of reward!

### **Importance of the Warning**

The warning is important to us: “. . . [W]hich at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will” (Heb. 2:3-4).

The Great Salvation is great because of the source. According to Paul it first began to be spoken by the Lord. The Savior spoke of the salvation while He was on Earth. It was totally different from the words spoken by the angels or by Moses and superceded all that they had said. The Great Commission was spoke by Jesus first to the apostles. Matthew records it this way: “And Jesus came and spoke unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 28:18-19). Mark declares, “And he said unto them, ‘Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that

believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned;" (Mark 16:15-16) Luke states: "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46-47).

In order to have the complete plan of Christ for the steps in the Great Salvation one must accept the terms stated in all of these passages. He must GO, as he goes he is to PREACH the GOSPEL. He that believes, repents and is baptized, shall be saved. Those are not the words of mortal man, but of the Son of God. They must be obeyed by every accountable creature on Earth. The terms given by the Lord are more impressive than any words spoken by Moses and in every way superior to his law.

In addition to Christ giving the plan of salvation, it was confirmed unto us by them that heard him. Paul must have been excluded at this time, but would receive the same message later. The apostles continued to preach what Christ had taught and told them to preach for in Acts 2:37-38, we read:

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Then Peter said unto them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

God climaxed it all by "bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will" (Heb. 2:4).

### Some Important Lessons

1. The Great salvation is such because of its source, having been the purpose of God before the world began.
2. It is world wide in scope and includes every accountable human being.

3. It was first taught by Christ to the apostles who in turn were guided by the Holy Ghost as they taught men to continue teaching the plan of salvation.
4. We are warned that we may slip from it or that the word of God may slip from us.
5. Allowing it to slip from us one would receive a just recompense of reward.
6. Those of the Old Testament who were punished for failure to keep God's Word, many of whom had no knowledge of the punishment that might accompany the sin, were nevertheless punished by God.
7. There is no way to escape the punishment of God if we neglect the salvation.

### Conclusion

May God help each of us to be careful not to turn to the left or to the right, but maintain a strait path to the eternal home.

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### Biographical Sketch

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## *The Chastening of the Lord*

*Steve Stevens*

### **Introduction**

I am grateful for the opportunity to be a part of the 2009 Victory Lectureship. I am indebted to the elders and the director of the



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WVSOP for the invitation to speak today. The topic assigned this hour is *The Chastening of the Lord*. The text assigned is Hebrews 12:3-13:

For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness



unto them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Our text occurs in the context of an exhortation to run the race set before us. The race is a metaphor for living the Christian life. It is to be run with patience. Patience is not the passive quality in a Christian's life where we set down and wait for something to happen. Throughout the New Testament it is used with the force of steadfastness, endurance, and perseverance. To run this race without quitting requires resources, and the apostle mentions the following resources available to Christians in chapter twelve from which we can draw: 1) the cloud of witnesses comprised of the Old Testament worthies discussed in chapter eleven (v. 1); 2) the example of Jesus Himself (vv. 2-4); 3) the chastening of the Lord (vv. 5-13) and, 4) the grace of God (vv. 14-29). The scope of our assignment deals with points 2 and 3.

The recipients of this Treatise were undergoing persecutions and trials. The writer refers to some of those trials in chapter 10:32-39:

But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

Included were afflictions, reproaches, and the spoiling of their goods. The concern was the possibility that these Christians would cast away their confidence and draw back unto perdition. How were they to hold fast in the face of persecutions, afflictions, and trials of faith? The tendency when subjected to strong and lasting opposition and hardships is to become discouraged to the point of quitting the race. What can we draw from to prevent this from occurring in our lives?

The first resource given in our text is Jesus: "consider Him." The word for consider in 12:3 is not the same word used in the Greek in 3:1 or 10:24. It is used in Romans 12:6: "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith." It is translated here as *proportion*. Our English word *analogy* comes from the noun form of this verb. It is a mathematical term signifying "to compute" by comparing things together in their due proportions (Pink 913). (Note: I am indebted to Arthur W. Pink and his *Expositions of Hebrews* for many of the rich thoughts in this lecture.) We are instructed to draw an analogy between what Christ suffered for us and what you and I are suffering for Him. The servant is not greater than the Master! Often we think and feel that the cup of our suffering is a little fuller than that of our fellow Christians' cups. We are considering the wrong cup. Look at the cup which Christ drank for all of us. He endured the "contradiction of sinners." He befriended publicans and His critics murmured about it. He performed acts of mercy on the Sabbath day and they accused Him of breaking the Law of Moses. His miracles were attributed to the power of Beelzebub. His hometown could never see Him as anything but the carpenter's son. He was labeled a winebibber and a glutton. He was rejected, denied, and betrayed by His own. His tormentors slapped Him, spit on Him, beat Him, mocked Him, reviled Him, humiliated and ridiculed Him, nailed Him to a cross between two common thieves in shame, and approvingly watched Him die an excruciating death. When did He ever complain, murmur, revile back, lose heart or quit? He endured with steadfastness until He finished the work given Him to do. The Captain and Completer, the Founder and Finisher of our faith provides the Divine antidote for weariness, fainting, and discouragement—"consider him."

A further encouragement is offered even though the readers of this book were facing hardships, trials, and afflictions. They had “not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.” What they were suffering was not as extreme as it might have been or yet could possibly be. Brethren, as soldiers in the Lord’s army we may be called upon to lay down our life for the cause of Christ. We cannot quit or let up in our battle against sin due to difficulties, trials, or persecutions. There is no time for slothfulness. There is no furlough in the heat of the battle. If we are committed to paying the ultimate price in serving our Captain then suffering anything less should not be a problem. If unkind words and hostile threats defer and defeat us, then what will happen if we are ever called upon to face martyrdom for Jesus? We are engaged in an agonizing struggle against sin. Our attitude should echo the words of Paul, “I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 21:13). If our commitment is to take up the cross daily and follow Him then the afflictions and persecutions should not stop us or even slow us down.

The second resource given to motivate us to steadfast Christian living is the “chastening of the Lord.” The chastening of the Lord is *child training*. It involves God educating, nurturing, and disciplining each and every one of His children. Not all sufferings, afflictions, and persecutions are chastening from the Lord. God knows what His chastisements are, however we as His children must learn to discern what sufferings and afflictions are common to man and which are the chastening of the Lord. From a mere human perspective we often see persecutions as no more than the malice and rage of evil men. Our reasoning and perceptions sense only material loss and physical discomfort in afflictions and the set backs of life. Yet, the possibility exists that it is much more where God’s children are concerned.

Therefore, the apostle stirs the memory of his readers with a passage of Scripture from Proverbs 3:11-12: “My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.” The Word of God teaches us that the chastening of the Lord is a fact and the reality of it is proof that we are maturing and the Lord has a hand in directing the process. Satan wants us to believe that the tests, trials, and difficulties of

life are proof that God does not love us. This just is not the case! However, it sure seems like it is true at times. How can I know that God loves me even when He chastens me?

Three evidences are cited. One is the Scriptures which plainly teach this in the quote from Proverbs (vv. 5-8). Two is our own personal experience with an earthly father who chastises His children (vv. 9-10). Three is the result it produces in our lives when God chastens us (vv. 11-13).

The verses quoted in this passage were written over 1,000 years ago under the Mosaic Dispensation. Nevertheless, the writer insists that they were equally addressed to his readers who had forgotten them—“the exhortation which speaketh unto you.” There is little, if any, virtue in trials and persecutions *per se*. What is of tremendous importance is how we handle the afflictions and sufferings of life. We can be hardened and calloused when they occur and then we can grit our teeth and grin and bear it. We can be overwhelmed and crushed by them and therefore fall into despair and quit on life. We can develop the habit of complaining and murmuring about everything which tests us and thus become miserable and bitter about life. Or, we can develop a Scriptural understanding about how to handle the chastening of the Lord.

God’s Word teaches us about how we should respond to the Lord’s chastening. Do not despise it. This unique word occurs only in this text in all of the New Testament. It literally means to “care little” about something, and hence to regard it lightly. The essence of the meaning is to have something of great value but to not value it according to its worth. The chastening of the Lord is valuable and precious. We must not disregard it and depreciate it if we are to gain its wonderful results in our lives.

“Nor faint when thou art rebuked of him. . . .” Part of the Lord’s chastening involves His rebuke. Whether by His Word or the providential circumstances of life, God will convince us when there is sin in our lives that needs cleansed or areas of our lives that need improved and strengthened. God desires His children to be mature and productive family members and not spiritually pampered babies. As faithful children we should receive the rebuke and gratefully and humbly respond by confessing our fault, immediately seeking forgiveness, accepting reconciliation, and restoring ourselves to a pursuit of excellence in serving our Master.

Instead, we often *faint*. This word means to give up all exertion. Our heart fails us as we are seemingly overcome by a sense that whatever rebuke is issued, it is more than we can bear. We proceed to question our relationship to God. Why would God do this or allow this to happen to me if He really loves me. We doubt His promises, we lose hope, and the resulting unbelief leads to despair, despondency, and desertion of Christian living. We are instructed by the Scriptures to ‘**despise not** the chastening of the Lord’ ‘**nor faint** when thou art rebuked by him.’ Why not?

Because in reality His chastening is proof of His love! God is pruning, purging, and purifying our lives. God wants us to know that He chastens us because He loves us. In five books of the Bible He reveals this great truth about His chastening of us:

Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty. (Job 5:17)

Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law; that thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit be digged for the wicked. (Ps. 94:12-13)

My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth. (Prov. 3:11-12).

And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. (Heb. 12:5-6)

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. (Rev. 3:19)

Every Dispensation is given this knowledge—the Patriarchal, the Mosaical, and the Christian! We are slow to recognize, realize, and remember this truth.

The chastening of the Lord at times involves *scourging* of God’s children. The word can refer to physical beatings as in Hebrews 11:36, or be used metaphorically of sufferings intended to discipline and educate God’s children. Even the scourging is governed by God’s love for us. Four great truths are revealed in verse 6: 1) Every son is chastened. Even the best of God’s children need His discipline in their lives; 2) There is no *if* we will be chastened, because God will chasten us. That only leaves the *when* and *how* He will do it; 3) In chastening us the Lord acts as a Father in the best interest of His children; and, 4) As to the *why* we learn that the Lord chastens those whom He loves.

Pink offers a valuable contrast which draws three distinctions between Divine punishment and Divine chastisement worthy of consideration at this point. The first is the character in which God acts. In punishment, the Lord acts as a Judge while in chastening us He acts as a Father. Punishment is a penal sentence passed on one who is guilty as charged. The second is the recipients of each act. The objects of punishment are enemies while the subjects of chastening are children. Punishment is a judicial act, whereas chastening is a parental act. The third contrast is the design of each action. Punishment is retributive while chastening is remedial. The former is motivated by Divine Wrath and the latter by Divine Love (929-30). May we look by faith at the chastening of the Lord and see the God of love acting in our best interest for the good of our souls. May we share the sentiment of Job when he said, “Show me wherefore thou contendest with me” (10:2). It is not for us to judge others regarding the chastening of the Lord in their lives. “Form the habit of heeding His taps, and you will be less likely to receive raps” (934).

The apostle continues instructing us as to how we are to handle the chastening of the Lord. He has told us to *despise not, nor faint*, and in verse seven he adds *endure* chastening. What does it mean to endure? We have a perfect example in 12:2 where Jesus endured the cross and in 12:3 where He “endured such contradictions of sinners against himself.” Jesus steadfastly, heroically, and without murmuring or complaining carried out His Father’s will. God will chasten and we ought to endure it. The benefit for us occurs when we have properly endured the divine chastening. It then becomes

proof that the Lord is dealing with us as sons and hereby we are assured of our legitimacy in the family of God.

Those who are without the chastening of the Lord are illegitimate professors of their claim to be children of God. The language is harsh to our sensitive ears, but hear it—“then ye are bastards.” God is not their spiritual Father. This is a significant point because the Law of Moses (remember we are dealing with an audience from a Hebrew background) stated in Deuteronomy 23:2: “A bastard shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to his tenth generation shall he not enter into the congregation of the LORD.” This is about inclusion versus exclusion. If God is truly your spiritual Father and you are His legitimate child (born of water and spirit) then you will be trained, disciplined, and educated under His loving hand. Do not despise it, nor faint from it, but endure it. To be excluded from the chastening of the Lord proves you are not His child and He is not your spiritual Father. What a sad and tragic discovery this would be.

There is a second proof that the chastening of the Lord is evidence of God’s love for us. It is based upon our personal experience with our fathers of the flesh. Verses nine and ten present an argument from the lesser to the greater. Our earthly fathers are chastisers of their children. How do we respond to their correction? We give reverence to them. *Reverence* means simply to “feel respect for” (Vine 532) our fathers. Shall we not MUCH RATHER be in subjection to our heavenly Father? The writer offers several contrasts to support this affirmation. Our fleshly fathers offer chastening for a few days of our entire life while our heavenly Father chastens us throughout our entire Christian life. The former views the temporal value of life, whereas, the latter views the spiritual and eternal values. Our fleshly fathers administer discipline in imperfect knowledge and sometimes in irritable temper, however, the heavenly Father guides us with His unerring wisdom and in His untiring love. Our fleshly fathers chasten after their own pleasure (what seems good to them), and yet, the Father of spirits chastises His children for their profit (advantage; expediency). If we submit to the lesser of these fathers with respect, then why we would not more readily submit to the greater of them with respect?

Why would we be upset with God when He uses fire to refine our souls and remove the dross from our lives, when He uses the fan to winnow the chaff from our souls, when He cuts with the pruning-fork to lop off barren excesses of our lives, and when He plows our hearts to break-up fallow soil and uproot the weeds which would choke the spiritual life out of us? Should we not rather thank Him, praise Him, and respect Him for not leaving us to our own carnality and immaturity?

There is not disproportionate, inappropriate, or mis-motivated chastening ever done by the Lord on behalf of His children. His chastisement is always the right action applied in the proper degree for as long as it is needed. We have a fondness for the world and the Lord must wean us from it. His chastening is not without rhyme or reason whether we understand it or not. The apostle has revealed to us at least part of the Lord’s purpose in chastening those He loves. It is to secure **life** for us—that we “live” (v. 9). Spiritual life (Rom. 8:6), abundant life (John 10:10), and eternal life (John 3:16) are concerns of the heavenly Father for His sons. Yea, it is always about living and life when the Lord chastens. It is about **profit**—our profit! (v. 10). If we endure chastening it is our character that is built, it is our lives that are spiritually enriched, and it is our person that conforms to the image of Christ. It is about His **holiness** and how we can become partakers of it. The Scriptures teach us “be ye holy in all manner of conversation” (1 Peter 1:15), and that without holiness no man will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14). The Lord knows what we need to become partakers of His holiness and exercises us in whatever manner will best accomplish His Will.

The final witness is called to prove that the chastening of the Lord is motivated by His love for us. Verse eleven points to the results that chastening produces in our lives if we endure it. The culture of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in America is characterized by superficial things. The unbelieving and ungodly of this world readily sacrifice their future for immediate gratification. This is always the consequence when we evaluate discipline in the terms of the present—now! From our human perception—based entirely upon our human senses—chastening seems not joyous, but grievous. If we are not careful we will find ourselves guilty of despising the chastening of the Lord and fainting at His rebuke.

Notice carefully how the apostle worded this passage. It contains two very important qualifications.

The first is in respect to our sensing of the chastisement. It **SEEMS** not to be joyous, but grievous. How easily we humans are fooled by what “seems to be.” The Earth seems to stand still, yet we **KNOW** that it spins at 1,000 miles per hour while orbiting through space around the Sun at 65,000 miles per hour. The Sun **SEEMS** to rise in the East and travel across the sky to set in the West, and yet we **KNOW** it is the Earth moving in relationship to the Sun. The Moon **SEEMS** larger as it begins its ascent into the night sky from the horizon and smaller when it reaches its apex, however we **KNOW** it is the same size (if you do not believe me measure it and see). *Seeming* can lead one into error both in matters of science and faith. There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but it does not always prove to be what it seems.

The second qualification in this verse is seen in the searching word *afterward*. Have we not passed through sorrow, suffering, disappointments, trials, afflictions, and testing? After we have gone through the experience it has affected us. It has changed us. It has either made us stronger or has brought us to despair. If we will endure, if we will be exercised by the chastening, then it will yield results which would not come by any other means. Chastenings never seem joyous in the form they assume because they always touch a tender place needing improvement in our lives. They seem grievous because the force they use can be severe. Remember that the yield only comes *afterwards*.

How may we properly assess their value and thereby endure them? As we examine the events in our lives that may be possible chastenings of the Lord let us view them in the following light: 1) It is possible that they could have been more severe; 2) If God meted out what my failures fully merit without any mercy or love, then I would deserve worse; 3) Compare what I have suffered with what Jesus suffered for me (Pink 977). Chastening proves that the Lord is a faithful heavenly Father, and if we endure it, then it improves us. What does it produce?

The peaceable fruit of righteousness. This is not a wild and riotous fruit. This is not an evil or vile branch in the vine. In this context chastening yields righteousness and thus parallels “His holiness” in verse 10. It is putting sin to death and living soberly

and godly in this present world. It is peaceable because it tames and quiets our restless behaviors and thoughts, obediently bringing them into harmony with the will of the Lord.

The author now signals that he has come to the point of application with the word *wherefore*. The Word of God is not just for information that we might accumulate facts. It is provided to incline our hearts so that we might implement what is being taught. Two vitally important elements are identified as factors contributing to successfully running a race or fighting a battle. Picture hands which are loose, dangling, hanging down, and feeble knees which need bracing and bandaging to just barely keep going. Discouraged and weakened Christians are losing resolve, limping along, and ready to collapse. Are we helpless? How are we to lift them up and straighten the path?

Arm your mind against discouragement and despair. Consider God’s design in chastening us. Remember the fruit which chastening afterward yields when we are exercised by it and endure it. Consider Jesus who endured the cross. In short allow chastening to mature and strengthen us so that we might “make straight paths.” The idea of *straight* is to make something horizontally level with all the obstacles removed so that we, as well as, others do not stumble and fall. The word *paths* is derived from a word that means “wheel” and signifies the track made by the wheel. Thus, the path is marked out for others to easily follow. The reference is to every Christian living his or her life in such a manner that his or her fellowman may see it clearly and follow it. *Lest* is a word of caution which warns us that carelessness in our race or combat is likely to influence discouraged Christians in an adverse way. If we are not steadfast we will run the risk of becoming a discourager to others, and therefore a source of affliction instead of help. The phrase “but let it rather be healed” signifies to correct what is amiss; to make things whole. It refers to each of us providing the support so that the one who is lapsed can recover and finish the race or the battle.

Thomas Traherne (1636-1674) said:

Love can forbear, and love can forgive . . . but love can never be reconciled to an unlovely object. He can never therefore be reconciled to your sin, because sin itself is

incapable of being altered; but he may be reconciled to your person, because that may be restored.

This explains why God hates sin, but can love the sinner; and even when He is angry at our sins, He chastens us in love. May we learn to properly value and productively profit from the chastening of the Lord.

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#### Biographical Sketch

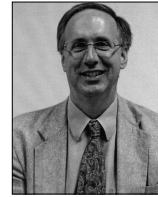
Steve Stevens is a native of West Virginia. He has been preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ since June of 1970. He worked as the located preacher for the Norway Church of Christ, near Fairmont, WV, from 1975 until 1981. He moved to work with the Church of Christ in Hundred, WV, beginning on April 1, 1981, and continues to labor with the brethren there at the present. God has blessed him with a supportive and godly wife, the former Karen Barnhart of New Freeport, PA. They have been married for 33 years and God has blessed them with eight children. Steve currently teaches New Testament Greek at West Virginia School of Preaching.

## *Christ - The Author and Finisher*

*Brent Gallagher*

#### Introduction

The book of Hebrews is full of rich material detailing the temporary nature and insufficiencies of Judaism, the completeness and superiority of Christ as opposed to the Old Covenant and its



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teachings, and warnings and exhortations to those who might leave Christianity for Judaism or who might simply go back into the world. Throughout the book there is an emphasis on the greatness and the completeness of Christ. The topic of this lecture, which comes from Hebrews 12:1-2, is *Christ - the Author and Finisher*.

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb. 12:1-2)

The *therefore* of 12:1 connects it to the previous chapter. All the ones in chapter eleven who by faith persevered are described as surrounding the recipients of Hebrews as “so great a cloud of witnesses.” The word translated as *witnesses* (Gk. *marturon*), can describe those who witness or see something such as those who saw Timothy make “the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (1 Tim. 6:12). *Marturon* can also be used in the sense of those who are examples to be followed. Elders are to have a

good testimony (*marturian*) among those who are outside (1 Tim. 3:7). Commentators are divided as to whether the witnesses of 12:1 are actually watching Christians and “cheering them on” as they run the Christian race or whether witnesses is used in the sense of examples to be followed. In commenting on this passage Lenski has noted:

It is very dramatic to make these *martures* spectators who are lining the ramparts of heaven, leaning over to watch us in the running of the race like the crowds in a great stadium who are watching the athletic events. The unsatisfactory feature about this idea is its spiritualistic touch: the spirits of the dead are still hovering over and around us. The souls of the saints are at rest, they are no longer concerned about the trials that occur on earth. . . . They are witnesses whose lives, works, sufferings, deaths attest their own faith, testify to us through the pages of Holy Writ and in other history that they were true men of faith indeed (the faith defined in 11:1). (424)

The comparison of Christianity to an athletic contest is not unusual in the New Testament (1 Cor. 9:24-27; Gal. 5:7; 2 Tim. 2:5). This race, which is mentioned in 12:1, is to be run with endurance (*hupomones*).

*Hupomones* originally had a meaning of remaining or standing firm in the midst of difficulty, especially describing soldiers engaged in battle. Its meaning evolved in classical Greek to describe one who would remain steadfast in times of difficulty purely for the sake of his honor. It is a common word in the New Testament as it is used to describe the Christian’s need for patience in dealing with others and with the circumstances of life, especially, persecution. (Falkenroth 772)

It is an appropriate word in Hebrews because of the struggling faith of the readers and their response to persecution. The author of Hebrews tells his readers in 10:36 they “have need of endurance

[*hupomones*], so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise.”

In running the Christian race the Hebrews are told in 12:1 to “lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us.” The word which is translated *weight*, (*ongkon*), is found only here in the New Testament. It is described as “weight, burden, impediment” (Bauer et al. 553).

The phrase “which so easily ensnares us” is translated from the word *euperistaton* which also is only found here in the New Testament. It is defined as “easily ensnaring, constricting, obstructing” (324). Bruce states concerning this passage:

The athlete must discipline himself; he must divest himself of all superfluous weight, not only of heavy objects carried about the body but of excess bodily weight. There are many things which may be perfectly alright in their own way, but which hinder a competitor in the race of faith; they are weights which must be laid aside. It may well be that what is a hindrance to one entrant in this spiritual contest is not a hindrance to another; each must learn for himself what in his case is a weight or an impediment. But there are other things which are not perfectly all right in their own way but are essentially wrong; there is “sin which doth so easily beset us.” Our author is not referring so much to some specific “besetting sin,” in the common use of the phrase, but to sin itself, as something which will inevitably encumber the runner’s feet and trip him up before he has taken more than a step or two. (349-50)

The phrase “looking unto Jesus” is found in verse two. *Aphorontes*, “looking,” means to “look away, fix one’s eyes trustingly” (Bauer et al. 127). One of the keys in running the Christian race is to focus on Jesus. Jesus is presented in the book of Hebrews as Divine. He shares a special relationship with the Father which no human or angels share (Heb. 1:5-2:9). But the humanity of Jesus is also emphasized throughout Hebrews. He is able to help suffering Christians because He also suffered (Heb. 2:14-18). He is a perfect High Priest who can sympathize with

humanity's frailties because He was tempted yet remained sinless (Heb. 4:14-16).

One way the Hebrews were to look to Jesus is that He was able to endure the cross, "despising the shame" because of "the joy that was set before Him." Speaking of crucifixion Lightfoot writes:

Death by crucifixion was a death reserved for slaves and criminals, an experience unfit for civilized men. Of it Cicero had said: "Let the very mention of the cross be far removed not only from a Roman citizen body, but from his mind, his eyes, his ears." But Jesus endured it. He suffered as few men have been called upon to suffer. Indeed, crucifixion was torture. With hands and feet nailed to a cross, the victim was unable to move or protect himself from heat or cold or insects. Yet uppermost in the author's mind at this point is the indignity and degradation of it all: Jesus, he says, despised its bitter shame. What a contemptible sort of death it was – the victim stripped of his clothing, unable to take care of his bodily needs. But Jesus did not shrink from doing what He knew to be the will of God. (229-30)

"The joy that was set before Him" appears to be the reward He enjoyed knowing He was doing the Father's Will and that He would shortly be with His Father. The night of Jesus' betrayal, in speaking to His apostles, He makes reference to His desire for His joy to be in them and that their joy would be complete (John 15:11; 16:20-22, 24). Later that evening, in Jesus' high-priestly prayer, He prays that God will "glorify Your Son," and also He states that He Himself had glorified God on Earth and had "finished the work you gave Me to do" (John 17: 2, 4). Also in this prayer, He prays that His disciples "may have My joy fulfilled in themselves" (John 17:13). This submissive attitude of obedience of Jesus to the Father is emphasized earlier in Hebrews (10:5-10).

Because of Jesus' obedience in going to the cross He "has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." This phrase undoubtedly goes back to Psalm 110:1 which reads "The Lord said to My Lord, 'Sit at My right hand till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'" There are almost twenty references to Psalm 110:1 in

the New Testament. Jesus and others understood it to be a reference to the rule of the Messiah (Matt. 22:41-46; Rom. 8:34; Col. 3:1). The verb translated "has sat down" (*kekathiken*) is in the perfect tense which suggests that Jesus has sat down and continues to sit at the right hand of God's throne.

The Christians who were to run the race unfettered and unencumbered were to look to the example of Jesus – His obedience and the reward He received as a result of such obedience. As they looked to Jesus they were to recognize Him as "the author and finisher of *our* faith." *Archegon*, which is translated as "author" in verse two, is found only four times in the New Testament and it is used only of Jesus. As one will see when he looks at these four passages, the word can have different shades of meaning. *Archegon* had an interesting origin in classical Greek. It described one who had founded a city and gave it his name and became its guardian. This is from where the sense of "originator" or "author" comes. It also had the connotation of one who was a "captain" (Delling 487). These different senses of the word can be noticed in the following passages in which it is found in the New Testament:

[A]nd killed the Prince [*archegon*] of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses." (Acts 3:15)

Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince [*archegon*] and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. (Acts 5:31)

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the Captain [*archegon*] of their salvation perfect through sufferings. (Heb. 2:10)

[L]ooking unto Jesus, the author [*archegon*] and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb. 12:2)



*Teliotes* is the word which is translated *finisher* in verse two. This is the only occurrence of this word in the New Testament but it has a clear relationship to *telos* (end, goal, last part) and *telios* (having obtained the end or purpose, complete, perfect) and their variations which are found throughout the New Testament (Bauer et al. 809-10) .

There is some disagreement over the *exact* meaning of the phrase “the author and finisher of *our* faith.” Some of the disagreement hinges on the understanding of the phrase “*our* faith.” The Greek, *tes pisteos*, which is literally “the faith,” is found in the genitive case (possession), hence the word *our* is supplied in many translations to explain this fact. Some understand faith to refer to *the faith*, the New Testament. Others believe the reference is to the personal trust in God which Jesus perfected. Another view is that the reference is to the principle of faith itself which Jesus originated and perfected. In the following passages the faith is synonymous with the New Testament: “Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith” (Acts 7:6). “But they were hearing only, ‘He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once *tried* to destroy’” (Gal. 1:23).

Milligan believes the Hebrews writer is using the word “faith” in two senses—of the New Testament and of the trust which Jesus showed during His earthly life:

“*Our*” should be omitted and *the* inserted before the word *faith*, which is used here, as in many other parts of Scripture, to denote the Christian religion in its great fullness. See Acts vi. 7; xiii. 8; Gal. i. 23; iii:23; and Jude 3. The object of the Apostle in introducing this clause is therefore manifestly twofold: (1) to encourage us by keeping constantly before our minds the fact that Jesus is himself the Leader and Perfecter of the faith, regarded as God’s plan of justification, sanctification, and redemption; and (2) to fill us with his mind and temper, by keeping constantly before us his example as the very best possible illustration of the nature, power, and efficacy of faith. For such was his trust in God and in the word of his grace, that

he willingly endured the greatest sufferings and reproaches “for the joy that was set before him;” the joy of presently sitting down with the Father on his throne, and saving a world by means of his own death and mediation. (343-44)

Lightfoot states the phrase is used in reference to Jesus’ perfect trust and obedience when he writes:

So the Christian runner must have his eye set on Jesus—“with no eyes for anyone or anything except Jesus.” On Him the Christian casts his steady gaze because He is the **pioneer** and **perfecter** of faith. . . . It was Jesus who first taught the “great salvation” (2:3), and it was He who led the way in it. He is the leader and inspiration for men’s faith, the goal toward which they strive as runners in the race. Thus the thought passes from the encouragement of earthly examples to Jesus as the supreme example who is to be imitated. And He is the example for men *because* He is the **perfecter** of faith. That is, in Him faith has had its full expression, its ultimate consummation. In Him faith has attained perfection, especially in His sufferings (cf. 5:7-10). (229)

Bruce believes there is more involved in the phrase “author and finisher of *our* faith” than Jesus simply trusting in God.

In Greek the definite article stands before “faith”; in AV, ERV, ARV and RSV this is represented by the possessive pronoun “our.” But more probably we should recognize here the regular Greek usage of the article before an abstract noun, where English as regularly omits it. Jesus, that is to say, is presented as the one who has blazed the trail of faith and as the one who Himself ran the race of faith to its triumphant finish. But in what sense is He the trail-blazer or pathfinder of faith? We can understand how He is called the pioneer of salvation in Ch. 2:10; apart from Him there is no Savior. We can understand, too, how for His people in the Christian age he provides a better example and incentive in running the race of faith than all

who went before Him. But, when we consider that they did go before Him, how can He be called the *pioneer* of faith? Our author's answer might well be that they did not really go before Him; *He* went before them as truly he has gone before us. "Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt" (as Jude most probably says), who accompanied and nourished that same people in the wilderness (as Paul quite explicitly says), is perhaps envisaged here as having led all the people of God, from earliest times, along the path of faith, although, since His incarnation and passion, His personal example makes His leadership available to His people in a way that was impossible before. (351)

It would seem that how one interprets the words *author* and *faith* would affect how he would understand the word finisher. If he views faith as the New Testament, then Christ would be seen as having completed that revelation (John. 16:12,13; Jude 3). If the word author is understood to mean *pioneer* then Jesus is seen as the One who blazed the trail and also completed that trail. In this sense Jesus truly finished or completed faith by His perfect obedience. Throughout Hebrews there is emphasis on Jesus' desire to obey God—even to the point of dying on a cross (Heb. 5:7). Regardless of *exactly* what the Holy Spirit intended by the phrase "author and finisher of *our* faith" some truths can be learned.

First, Christianity originates not with man but with God. God chose to reveal His New Covenant through Jesus. The book of Hebrews begins by affirming this fact.

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. (Heb. 1:1-3)

Second, this New Covenant of Jesus has been completed. Jude writes of "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints"

(Jude 3). Those who claim modern-day revelations do so without biblical authority. Third, as valuable as it is to look at different examples of faith and obedience that one finds in Hebrews 11 and elsewhere in Scripture, there is no better example of faith and obedience than Jesus. As the Hebrews writer says in 12:2 we should be "looking to Jesus." Throughout Hebrews there is encouragement given to those who were struggling with their faith to remember that Jesus is a perfect High Priest who understands what struggles Christians have (Heb. 2:14-18; 4:14-16). Also, there is the reminder that Jesus was obedient as a Son and that He actually learned obedience through His suffering (Heb. 5:8). If one truly focuses on Christ then he can have the assurance that he will live with Him eternally.

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### Biographical Sketch

Brent Gallagher was born in Dover, OH. He is a graduate of Freed-Hardeman University and Harding Graduate School of Religion. He has worked with churches in New Matamoras, OH, Pine Grove, WV, and is presently with the Oakwood Road Church of Christ in Fairmont, WV. He is married to the former Janie Higginbotham of Chester, WV, and they have three children: Ryan (Kay) Gallagher of Hamilton, AL, Amy (Chris Saunders) of Fairmont, and Jason who is a student at Freed-Hardeman University.

## Implications of the Cross

*Emanuel Daugherty*

### Introduction

I am thankful to have a part in the 15th Annual West Virginia School of Preaching Lectures. Each year for the past several years, the Lectureships have given attention to books of the Bible from



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the Old and New Testaments. This year the lectures will focus on the great and wonderful Book of Hebrews. My lectures will be taken from that wonderful closing chapter of the book—chapter 13 verses 10-16.

We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

### The Christian's Altar (9-11)

Leading up to the section of Scripture for discussion, the author states “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever.” This verse ties the preceding admonitions to the verses that follow. The

unchanging nature of the Son of God assures us of the truth of the doctrine before and after. He then gives the warning, “Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines.” Milligan says “the admonition is general, and may refer to any doctrine” (376), but goes on to say that in the context the apostle is warning of the Jewish doctrine concerning meats, clean and unclean, according to the Law. Paul in Romans 14 speaks of the discord among the churches due to Judaizing teachers on this subject. No doubt the Judaizers boasted of the priestly right to eat of the altar under the Law. “Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?” (1 Cor. 10:18), and “Do you not know that they who minister about the holy things live of the things of the temple? And they who wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?” (1 Cor. 9:13). The warning to the Roman saints would serve the Hebrew readers also. “The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17).

The author of Hebrews continues by saying, “We have an altar. . . .” What is the Christian’s altar? Many suggestions are given by the commentators. “It is the Lord’s Supper,” or “It is just a suggestive statement, no specific thing is meant.” “The altar is Christ himself.” Some have even suggested that it is the altar of the Old Testament. But that cannot be true for that would require reverting back to Old Testament sacrifices and ceremonies which things are done away by the cross (Col. 2:14-15).

Let us attempt to end the speculation by thinking about the altar itself. What is the purpose of an altar? It is the place where a sacrifice is laid and offered to God. That being true, the Christian’s altar is the cross of Christ. He was laid on the altar (the cross) and offered as a sacrifice to God. Paul so described Him “For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Cor. 5:7).

But what is it that a Christian is to eat from the altar of the Christ? Is it not to partake of the benefits that the death of Christ brings? *Eat* is a metaphor representing the blessings and benefits that Christ offers. We might compare this to the terminology Jesus used in John chapter 6 where He instructed the disciples that they were to “eat my flesh and drink my blood” (vv. 51-56). Jesus was not at all suggesting that one is to literally eat His flesh and drink His blood—that is cannibalism! (This teaching in John 6 has no

reference to the Lord’s Supper! This is where the Roman Catholics formulate their doctrine of Transubstantiation; i.e., when the priest blesses the bread and fruit of the vine, they become the literal body and blood of the Lord!). So then how does the Christian partake (eat) of Christ? Look at 1 Peter 2:2-3: “Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.” We eat of Christ, partake of His blessings and benefits, as we imbibe in the teaching of His word. “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matt. 5:6). The cross of Christ is our altar, we eat of that altar, as we partake of the benefits the cross offers.

“Those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat” of the altar of the Christian. Why is this true? Because they did not believe in the sacrifice of Christ as the atonement for sin and had not obeyed the Gospel. Christ is a stumbling block to the Jews. “Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded” (1 Peter 2:6; Isa. 28:16). He is not the Messiah they looked for. The pagans thought the early Christians were atheists because they had no sacred buildings, no altars, no sacrificing priests, therefore they must not have any god! They, the Jews and pagans, as well as all unbelievers of the present day, have no right to eat of this altar. If any were to say: “You Christians have no altar and no sacrifices” our author would say: “We have an altar—and a better one than the Jews had under the Levitical order.”

### **Alienation – “Jesus . . . Suffered Without the Gate . . . Outside the Camp” (12, 13).**

John records, “The place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city” – thus outside the gate (19:20). This thought takes us back to the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16. The Day of Atonement was observed once each year on the tenth day of the 7th month (October). On this day the High Priest would select two goats, one was to be sacrificed and the other was the scapegoat that was to symbolically bear the sins of the people into the wilderness. Also a bullock was to be offered as a sin offering for the priest and his family, its blood and the blood of the slain goat was to be taken

inside the Holy of Holies and sprinkled on the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant. The service of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement is a type of the work of Christ. Jesus' death on the Cross is portrayed in this event, but with great differences:

- Jesus is identified in the slain animals – His blood was shed and sprinkled on the mercy seat in Heaven.
- His death was a one-time offering for sin, never needing to be repeated whereas, under the law, sacrifices were continually made, some daily, for sin (Heb. 7:27; 9:28; 10:10, 12, 14).
- The blood of Christ cleansed the conscience, cleansing from sin. The blood of bulls and goats can never take away sin (Heb. 10:1-4).
- The Day of Atonement caused sins to be remembered (10:3); whereas the blood of Christ remits sin. “For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb. 8:12).
- Jesus did not offer Himself as a sacrifice for His own sin since He was sinless (4:15).
- The Cross was the instrument of death to those judged as criminals. Thus, Jesus was alienated by the world.
- Jesus suffered the cross outside Jerusalem, outside the gate, outside the camp, He went forth “bearing the sins of many” (Isa. 53:12).

### **Tribulation – “Jesus . . . Suffered” (12).**

The cross as an instrument of death was most barbaric and cruel—the suffering in the Garden, the arrest and trial, the humility, mockery and shame, the crown of thorns, the slapping, spitting, and beating with a scourge, and finally the nails driven in His hands and feet to the cross and lifted up and dropped into a hole.

The irony of it all was that Jesus suffered as the innocent for the guilty! (Heb. 5:7-9).

### **Sanctification – “Jesus . . . Suffered . . . That He Might Sanctify the People” (12).**

Jesus' alienation, tribulation, and accusation were for our

sanctification! Sanctified (*hagiazō*) means separated unto God, the course of life befitting those who are separated to God. We enter into the relationship of sanctification with God by our faith and obedience in the death of Christ for our sin. We are set apart, separated for the Master's will. Our life and whatever life brings—whether fortune and fame and lowliness and obscurity is to be given to Him and His cause.

Our sanctification takes place when we are obedient to His will; that is, when we are washed (in baptism), sanctified (set apart for service), justified (God remembers my sin no more) (1 Cor. 6:11).

### **Accusation – “Jesus . . . Was Reproached” (13).**

In his trial and on the Cross Jesus was reproached. *Reproach* (*oneidismos*) – defamation, upbraid, revile (Vine 282). “Reproach” – 1. a: a cause or occasion of blame, discredit, or disgrace. b: the quality of state so incurred. 2: the act or action of reproaching: REBUKE. 3: one subjected to censure or scorn. (Webster, 7th New Collegiate Dictionary).

Jesus suffered reproach by His own people (John 1:11; Isa. 53:1). By their rejection of His claims to be the Messiah, reproach was brought upon Him. He suffered reproach at His trial. Though Pilate found Him innocent three times, the Jewish tribunal was bound and determined to put Him to death. In Matthew 26:59-61 the chief priests looked for false witnesses whom they could hire to testify falsely, but none were found. Finally, they found two men who made reference to Jesus statement to destroy the temple and in three days raise it back again. But Mark says that even in this they contradicted themselves (Mark 14:55-59). Jesus suffered reproach from the mouth of the Jews at His crucifixion.

And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, “You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, “He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”

Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing. (Matt. 27:39-44)

### **Let Us Go to Him . . . Outside the Camp (13)**

The writer of Hebrews says concerning his Jewish readers and subsequently to us as well, “Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.” The degradation, humiliation, disgrace, and shame that Jesus bore we are to share. To go to Jesus “outside the camp” is to accept His shame and suffering on our behalf. It is “outside the camp” that we identify with Christ in His Passion. The Cross was a *stumbling block to the Jews, and foolishness to the Greeks* (1 Cor. 1:23), but *to the saved it is the power of God* (1 Cor. 1:18). It is one thing to be a staunch and steadfast confessor of Jesus in the assembly; it is altogether different to be as bold in our defense of Him before the world.

I’m not ashamed to own my Lord, no to defend his cause,  
Maintain the honors of his word, the glory of his cross.  
(Watts)

We are not to be ashamed of Him, and we must not be a shame to Him (Matt. 10:32-33; Mark 8:38; Acts 8:37; Matt. 16:24). Moses considered shame of following the Christ of greater value than the treasures of Egypt (Heb.11:26). Do we place the same value and worth on Christ today? Will we go to Him outside the camp, bearing the stigma of His rejection by His own people, and the shame of the Cross?

### **Here We Have No Continuing City (14)**

The author of Hebrews continues his arguments against apostasy of Christians of Jewish background. An inordinate love for the old city of David would prove fatal. The disciples of Jesus were enamored with Jerusalem’s beauty—“his disciple came to him for to show him the buildings of the temple.” Jesus replied, “See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down” (Matt. 24:1-2). Within about nine years the city of Jerusalem would be destroyed; staying in Jerusalem would be disaster to the Jews, saints or unbelievers. “It is vain to seek refuge in Jerusalem which,

according to prophecy, will soon become a heap of ruins” (Matt. 24); and in no other city on earth can we find a secure and permanent habitation” (Milligan 379).

The hope of the Christian is the hope of Abraham, “For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10).

### **Let Us Offer the Sacrifice of Praise (15-16)**

“Christian’s do have sacrifices to offer and they are not confined to a few annual festivals” (Reese 242). In this passage the offering is put forth is “the fruit of our lips.” This phrase is from the Greek Septuagint (LXX) version. But the Hebrew Massoretic text renders it, “the calves of our lips.” This text reflects a play on words making clear the point that “God is primarily interested not in calves slain upon material altars, but in ‘calves of our lips’; that is, the spiritual sacrifice of lips devoted to the acknowledgment of God and the praise of Him” (242).

Paul in the letter to the Romans says we are to “offer our bodies as a living sacrifice” (Rom. 12:1-2; note the Macedonians who “first gave themselves” (2 Cor. 8:5). The sacrifice of praise stems from a heart full of love and devotion to Christ. Jesus said that the mouth speaks what is in the heart (Matt. 12:34; see Prov. 23:7). Therefore ‘the fruit of our lips’ will praise Him in word and song (Ps. 19:14; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Raymond Brown offers four thoughts on the sacrifices Christian’s are to offer continually: 1) the sacrifice of thankful praise, 2) the sacrifice of unashamed witness to His name, 3) the sacrifice of compassionate service (10:33-34), and 4) the sacrifice of generous giving which is to be regularly, proportionately, and cheerfully (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 9:7) (261-62).

Christians are admonished to not be neglectful in doing sacrificial service to others. “But do not forget to do good and to share” (v. 16; see Gal. 6:10). Doing good to our fellow men involves a sharing with them. The word here is *koinonia*, which is also translated as fellowship. Jesus himself “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38). We must do the same (James 1:27). “We should, as far as in us lies, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, instruct the ignorant, and assist in converting the world to Christ” (Milligan 380). Why should we do this? “For with such sacrifices

God is well pleased.” Peter describes well the spiritual nature of the Christian life “as living stone, are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). F. F. Bruce sums up by saying, “Christianity is sacrificial through and through; it is founded on the one self-offering of Christ, and the offering of His people’s praise and property, of their service and their lives, is caught up into the perfection of His acceptable sacrifice, and is accepted of Him” (407).

These few verses from Hebrews 13 are a rich treasure filled with encouragement, admonition, and assurance for the Christian!

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#### Biographical Sketch

Emanuel Daugherty was born in Philippi, WV, January 12, 1939. He was baptized February 5, 1950, by Miris Wright in Warren, OH. He married Judith R. Null, July 16, 1958, and to their union was born: Bruce (Gayle), who preaches for the 10th & Clairmont Sts. Church of Christ in Cambridge, OH; Ramona (Stephan) Haynes, Fishinger-Kenny Church of Christ, Columbus, OH; Rachel (Maken) Cornell, Alkire Road, Grove City, OH; Rebecca Poe, husband Brad preaches at Rome Church of Christ,

Proctorville, OH. The Daugherty’s have eight grandchildren, four boys and four girls, and one great-grandson.

He graduated from Braceville High School, Trumbull County, OH, 1956, Memphis School of Preaching 1968, and Alabama Christian School of Religion (Southern Christian University) in 1982; also Railroad Communications School (1962) and various military schools (1956-1962). He has preached at Alkire Road Grove City, OH (1968-1989); Dewey Avenue, St Marys, WV (1989-1994); and served as Director and Teacher for West Virginia School of Preaching (1994-2003). He has held Gospel meetings in West Virginia, Ohio, Illinois, Kentucky, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Wisconsin, and Italy. Emanuel is the author of a *Commentary on the Book of Daniel* and currently serves as a faculty member at West Virginia School of Preaching and preaches for Salem Church of Christ, Marshall County, Glen Easton, WV.

# *Refuse Not the Christ*

*J. D. Conley*

For me, this fine lectureship is one of the highlights of the year. It is a time when my spirit is nourished and refreshed. I am humbled by the gracious invitation and extend my sincere gratitude to the elders of this good congregation, the capable lectureship



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committee and the director. I also express my appreciation to all of those who have invested countless hours and have labored tirelessly in the production of the lectureship book. It is a great blessing to have at ready reference all fifteen volumes of *The Victory Lectures*, which now include, *The Treatise to the Hebrews: The Perfect Christ*. No better theme could have been selected. May God continue to shine His loving favor upon West Virginia School of Preaching and the Hillview Terrace church.

## **Introduction**

The peerless apostle Paul touched on the greatest tragedy of the race when he Divinely penned for the benefit of Gentile readers, “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient” (Rom. 1:28). A deliberate denial of God, in the mind, amounts to the same thing as a refusal. This refusal is shown to be particularly heinous in that it is made square in the face of incontrovertible evidence. Paul said in verse 28, such an action is inexcusable. Refusing God intellectually, or simply by not heeding His Word, will bring eternal punishment. The Gentile world needed to hear this, as well as all the nations today. But many,



because the message of refusal is so dire, shun Heaven's guidance even more vehemently.

Next, Paul drops the proverbial shoe on the Jews by telling them that they too had lived in an inexcusable way before God (Rom. 2:1), that *even they* had lived in a state of refusal and would not escape the judgment of God, provided they remained in their hard and impenitent state (Rom. 2:3, 5).

Just a few years later, the writer of the book of Hebrews (I believe he was Paul) was once again informing the Jews of their need to listen and abide by the words which come from Heaven's portals. Spiritual Israel, the church, is no different. We also must give special attention to obeying instead of refusing the words of the Savior and His terms of salvation:

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him. (Heb. 2:1-3)

Truly, a refusal to listen to the Godhead is inexcusable (Rom. 1:20), and will not slip God's notice (Heb. 4:13), nor will it go unpunished (2 Thess. 1:8-9; 1 Peter 4:17).

Thus, the entire human race has set before it *the* most vital and crucial obligation—*obeying God*—which is the whole of man (Eccl. 12:13), and is accomplished today through the teachings of His Son Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1). This study will deal with the certain consequences of refusing Christ as clearly set forth in the assigned text:

See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet

once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire. (Heb. 12:25-29)

### **Refusal of the Christ Brings Ignorance (v. 25)**

“See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. . . .” In the context the *Him* is Christ. When one makes the decision not to listen to the all-knowing Christ, he has chosen to remain moral and spiritual pygmies. Jesus fervently prayed, “And this is life eternal, that they might *know* thee the only true God, *and Jesus Christ*, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3, emp. added). Note the priority placed on knowing the Father and the Son—*eternal life*. This verse, by itself, shows the crucial need of knowing God, thereby staying out of the vortex of ignorance. John said, “And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments” (1 John 5:3). If we do not know God, either by a direct refusal, or an apathetic one, we cannot know to keep His commandments. Either type of refusal brings ignorance of the worst kind which ends in eternal death, not life.

“For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven.” The second mention of the word *him* is a reference to Moses. The point being made here is simple and direct. “If the Jews were held accountable for listening to and obeying the voice of Moses, how could anyone ever justify refusing to listen to and obey the Son of God?” (Claiborne 324). “This is an argument from the less to the greater. If those who refused him that spoke on earth (Moses and the law) did not escape, how much more will those not escape who refuse Him who speaks from heaven?” (Bright 222).

Woe to them who submit to Allah or Buddha, and bow the knee to any lower case g-gods, “like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device” (Acts 17:29). To all who subscribe to the teachings of false prophets e.g.: Joseph Smith, Charles Taze Russell, Ellen G. White, Mary Baker Eddy, Benny

Hinn, John Hagee, T. D. Jakes, Tim Lahaye, Rick Warren, Joel Osteen, ad infinitum (cf. Deut. 18:20-22), or even to Moses himself, you have been sufficiently warned. If you refuse the Christ, you will not escape His judgment nor can Heaven be yours. Jesus said long before these others, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). Peter declared, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Jesus also said with bluntness, “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). The words of Christ are final, even taking precedent over the words of angels (Heb. 2:2, 3; Gal.1:8). The Father once broke the silence of Heaven to make this all important point, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” (Matt. 17:5). To refuse Christ the Son, is to refuse God the Father. Such a mindset fosters ignorance which brings about eternal damnation (cf. John 5:39; 6:63, 68; 12:48).

### **Refusal of the Christ Brings Terror (vv. 25b, 26)**

Another look at the last part of verse 25, coupled with the words of verse 26, reveals that refusing the Christ is an invitation for terror to enter in.

For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.

Since the events of 9/11 this country has gone to extraordinary measures to prevent another terrorist attack. Our luggage is minutely examined at the airport, as well as our persons. To leave the country and return one has to go through, at least to some degree, an interrogation process. The old ad, “Fly the friendly skies,” has lost its charm. Yet we try our best to justify these inconveniences because the price is worth it. In fact, we will do about anything to protect ourselves against any future acts of terror.

But as this passage seems to suggest, to refuse the Christ is to ultimately bring upon the stubborn rejecter *God* induced terror! “Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.” This event will be so frightening that all other acts of human induced terror combined, will pale in comparison! “Whose voice then shook the earth” refers of course to when the law was given at Mount Sinai, which in and of itself, was a terrifying event (cf. Ex. 19:16-18; Ps. 68:8). But consider the promise of what is to yet to come “Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.”

These words are quoted from Haggai 2:6. When first spoken, as the next verse in Haggai shows, they had reference to the reconstruction of the temple under Zerubbabel. God said that He would shake all the nations and make their treasures flow in, to fill the temple with splendor. The author of Hebrews, however, sees in these words a grander meaning, fully convinced that they point to the dissolution of the cosmic order at the Second Advent. When the law was given, the earth quaked; when Christ comes again, heaven and earth will be completely shaken. (Lightfoot 241)

As verse 25 stresses there will be no escape for those who choose not to listen to the words of Jesus Christ. Just as surely as those on Mount Sinai who refused to listen to Moses did not get away with it, neither will those even on Mount Zion escape with impunity! Once again an argument from the lesser to the greater is being advanced. If the law of Moses could not be rejected, then certainly the law of Christ cannot. Terror of the worst sort awaits all of those who refuse the Christ, whether it be those outside of His covenant (the alien sinner) or those indifferent to it while in it (apathetic members of the church). The quaking Day of the Lord is coming. Peter wrote:

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great

noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? (2 Peter 3:9-12)

Paul's words mesh perfectly with those of Peter as he too depicts what the Lord's return shall be like:

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. (2 Thess. 1:7-9)

Oh, how all men need to see the great need and obligation to obey Christ!

#### **Refusal of the Christ Brings God's Will Nonetheless (vv. 25-27)**

Man's refusal of the Christ, regardless of how stubborn, cannot overthrow God's will (Acts 5:38, 39). Man can choose to ignore God's will, run roughshod over it, and pretend it does not matter to his heart's content, but it will not make any difference. His will *shall* be accomplished. myriads are those who have followed Jehoiakim's foolish example (cf. Jer. 36:20-32), and have, with the penknives of their minds (or a literal penknife), cut out and discarded parts of God's Word they do not like. But such action is utterly foolish. God's Word cannot be set aside by extracting verses or destroying copies. His Word stands, regardless of how many Bibles are kept closed, mutilated or burned.

Man's refusal of the Christ will be dealt with in the way Heaven sees fit. This too is God's will. Retribution may not come when we think it should, but it shall come, and it will be harsh and exacting (Rom. 1:18, 12:19; Heb. 10:31). But it is also God's will that the

world turns to Christ. God wants every soul to obey the Gospel of Christ (Mark 16:15).

He does not want a single soul to perish (2 Peter 3:9). "But the day of the Lord *will come*" (2 Peter 3:10a, emp. added). This is precisely why the admonitions are in our text, "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh." Why? Because God's will shall most assuredly be carried out. There is no circumventing it; there is no ignoring it. All men are confronted with His will regardless of what they may think of it. There is simply no escaping it. No amount of denial, hiding, or running from it, will slow or hinder in anyway its fulfillment. Men can deny the Deity of Christ, they can write libraries of books disclaiming His Divine Sonship, they can debate it endlessly, and yet, even as they are doing so the clouds may suddenly contain His presence (Acts 1:11; Rev. 1:7)! A refusal of Christ brings God's will nonetheless! "Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven." It is God's will that this Earth pass away (Heb. 1:10-12; 2 Peter 3:10). It is God's will that the heavens one day pass away and become a roiling inferno (2 Peter 3:10, 12). Man is wholly incapable of stopping this catastrophe. That being the case, let us see that it is also God's will that all men everywhere accept the invitation Jesus Christ extends through the Gospel (Matt. 11:28-30; Rev. 3:20). Christ has spoken (Heb. 1:1). Any man who refuses Him, his guilt, and therefore his punishment, will be that much the greater. Refusing the Christ does not absolve man of his spiritual responsibilities, or make him any less accountable to God. All it does is kindle God's wrath and puts man in the unenviable position of enmity with Him.

Something else that man cannot, and has not prevented God from accomplishing, is His determination to usher in the kingdom/church and the terms of the new covenant (v. 28; 13:20). In a sense these things shook the world and Heaven as well. The noted scholar, Albert Barnes provides his explanation concerning the shaking of Earth and Heaven:

The shaking of the earth here evidently refers to the commotions among the nations that would prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. But also heaven. This may refer either (1) to the extraordinary phenomena in the heavens at the birth, the death, and the ascension of Christ;

or (2) to the revolutions in morals and religion which would be caused by the introduction of the gospel . . . or (3) it may be more literally taken as denoting that there was a remarkable agitation in heaven - arising from the fact so wonderful as that the Son of God should descend to earth, suffer, and die. I see no reason to doubt that the latter idea may have been included here; and the meaning of the whole then is, that while the giving of the law at Mount Sinai, fearful and solemn as it was, was an event that merely shook the earth in the vicinity of the holy mount, the introduction of the gospel agitated the universe. (313)

Whichever interpretation one takes of these verses; the second coming of Christ in judgment, or the coming of Christ into the world to usher in the Gospel and Kingdom, man has been, and will be, powerless to stop it. Refusal of the Christ brings God's will nonetheless!

### **Refusal of the Christ Brings Rejection (v. 28)**

“Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.” To refuse the Christ is to reject His kingdom. One therefore cannot say, “Give me Christ but not the church,” or “Give me the man but not the plan.” The alien sinner, as well as some of our own confused brethren, need to understand that salvation cannot be had apart from the church of Jesus Christ. Paul also said, “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is *the saviour of the body*” (Eph. 5:23, emp. added). Notice Christ is the savior of the body. The body is the church (Eph. 1:22, 23; Col. 1:18), and there is only one (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 4:4). Since salvation is only in Christ, and He has only promised to save His body, the church, this truth cannot be set aside. Though the passage in Hebrews is talking about the permanency and indestructibility of the church, we should also see that this truth about salvation being in the church cannot be moved (cf. Dan. 2:44; Acts 2:47). Man's refusal of truth does not change truth to falsehood. Jesus is truth and God's Word is truth (John 14:6; 17:17). To refuse Christ and His teaching, is to reject God and His Word. God's children, of all people, must not

reject the singularity of the church, or its strict realm of salvation. May we never reject in any way whatsoever, that which God has graciously given us to receive, i.e. the glorious church of Jesus Christ “the kingdom of God's dear Son” (Eph. 5:27; Col. 1:13)!

But the passage also conveys that a refusal of Christ and His Kingdom results in rejection of grace. Not a rejection of God's grace so much as it is man's gratitude toward God. Of course, man's ingratitude toward God's spiritual blessings regarding the Christ and His kingdom, incur the loss of the Father's favor. A. T. Robertson offers this information on the word *grace* in the passage: “Present active volitive subjunctive; Let us keep on having grace. . . . Let us keep on having gratitude” (442).

Adam Clarke adds: “Let us have, keep, or hold fast, the benefit or gift, that is, the heavenly kingdom which God has given us” (783).

However Christians should be thankful that they have not only received this Kingdom, having been added to the church (Acts 2:41, 47), but also that this Divine institution is eternal, (2 Peter 1:11). We need not fret over what man or the nether regions can do to the church (Matt. 16:18b). No power on Earth, or force in Hell, can destroy it or discard a single spiritual blessing from it. Peter also spoke on the subject of how grateful we ought to be for the church and the status we now enjoy with God the Father:

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10)

By refusing the Christ man makes not one, but two fatal flaws. He not only rejects His only Savior (Acts 4:11), but in the process demonstrates his thoughtless mindset for everything His loving Father in Heaven has done for him. Such folks are bereft of any hope. Refuse not the Son and deny not the Father our undying gratitude and devotion.

“‘Wherefore’ (*dio*). Ground for loyalty to Christ and for calm trust in God” (Robertson 442).

Additionally, verse 28 also teaches that a refusal of Christ brings a stubborn rejection of service and reverence to, and for God. Because we have received a Kingdom which cannot be moved, a Kingdom unlike all others: “. . . [L]et us by patiently and perseveringly submitting to the will of God in all things, obtain from him such measures of grace as will enable us to serve him with godly fear and dread” (Milligan 475).

How sad that any child of God should have to be admonished to serve God acceptably, have reverence for His name, and fear Him! After all He has done for us through Christ, our loyalty and devotion to Him ought never to be suspect. Still, apathy and digression are widespread throughout the brotherhood. This grand chapter concludes by providing *the* great deterrent for apostasy. Each digressive in the Lord’s church should read it and heed it with knocking knees, because:

### **Refusal of the Christ Brings Punishment**

This is a terrifying verse. The consuming fire of God awaits those who reject the Christ. This Divine conflagration awaits all those who refuse Christ in any shape or form. Marvin Vincent makes the following comments concerning God: “He is the God of both covenants . . . but though now revealed in Jesus Christ, and offering all the privileges of the new covenant, his anger burns against those who reject those privileges” (560). Lightfoot adds: “Remembering the majesty of God goes a long way toward checking digression and apostasy” (242).

Some Gospel preachers have been ridiculed for preaching fear of, and for God. This ridicule has been defended on the grounds that fear only means respect. Though this is true in some passages, it is not true in all. For example, how does one get around passages such as “Work out your own salvation with *fear* and *trembling*” (Philip. 2:12, emp. added)? Or “Knowing therefore the *terror* of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Cor. 5:11, emp. added)? Also what about another verse in Hebrews which proclaims, “It is a *fearful* thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31, emp. added). It seems that since God is referred to here as “a consuming fire,” we best be afraid of Him and what He can do to us if we are not!

Could it be that widespread refusal of Christ is due in large part to no fear of God (Rom. 3:18)? As subjects in the kingdom “let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor. 7:1).

### **Conclusion**

Each man, woman, boy and girl has a choice. If we choose to remain unshakably true to the Christ, if we refuse to refuse Him, then on that last great day, when the foundations of Earth shall crumble and melt, we will stand secure with Him. If not, we will quickly and inevitably fall into the hands of the living God, who is a consuming fire. Knowing this terrible day is approaching, what will you do with Jesus who is called Christ?

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### Biographical Sketch

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## Christ - After the Order of Melchizedek

D. Gene West

### Introduction

When it is incumbent to attempt an explication of any passage of Scripture to which is attached some degree of difficulty, no matter



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how remote, one thing is certain: there will be a great number of theologians and bibliologists who will inundate the student of the Word of God with all kinds of speculation, both reasonable and ridiculous. By reasonable it is meant that they will arrive at conclusions that are possible, but simply cannot be demonstrated by anything clearly stated in the Word of God, and as such must be left in the realm of opinion, no matter how appealing they may be. By ridiculous it is meant that they are the fantastic imaginations, if not ravings, of minds that are wholly bent in the wrong direction—they are simply wrongheaded! The passage assigned is no exception to that rule. As a matter of fact one religious cult in our country has built the doctrine of an exclusive and elitist priesthood on the mere name of one of the characters to be studied—Melchizedek; a priesthood totally unknown to God and most certainly to the great Priest and King of Salem himself. This erstwhile cult developer—a despoiler of innocent women, who was justifiably shot to death while attempting, with a revolver in his hand, to escape jail in Nauvoo, IL, claimed to have received revelations from God Himself regarding this priesthood. From his book, *Pearl of Great Price*, we read:

The messenger who visited us on this occasion and conferred this Priesthood upon us, said that his name was John, the same that is called John the Baptist in the New Testament, and that he acted under the direction of Peter, James and John, who held the keys of the Priesthood of Melchizedek, which Priesthood, he said, would in due time be conferred on us, and that I should be called first Elder of the Church, and he (Oliver Cowdery) the second. It was on the fifteenth day of May, 1829, that we were ordained under the hand of this messenger, and baptized. . . . Immediately on our coming up out of the water after we had been baptized, we experienced great and glorious blessings from our Heavenly Father. No sooner had I baptized Oliver Cowdery, than the Holy Ghost fell upon him, and he stood up and prophesied many things which should shortly come to pass. And again, so soon as I had been baptized by him, I also had the spirit of prophecy, when, standing up, I prophesied concerning the rise of this Church, and many other things connected with the Church, and this generation of the children of men. We were filled with the Holy Ghost, and rejoiced in the God of our salvation. (Smith 56-57)

There is only one thing that causes doubt that this ever happened as was claimed. The statement plainly says the keys to the Priesthood of Melchizedek were held by Peter, James, and John. That would mean that in some sense these men had to be successors of the great Old Testament Priest. Yet the Bible plainly stresses the important truth that Melchizedek had neither predecessors nor successors! From Hebrews 7:3 it can be read concerning this great Priest called Melchizedek that he was, “without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually.” If he had neither predecessors nor successors, then it would not be possible for Peter, James and John to hold the keys to his Priesthood and grant that priesthood to others! This idea is fantastic!

Still another fantastic notion set forth regarding the identification of Melchizedek, was advanced by a theologian George

Washington Reaser (not to be confused with “reasoner”) in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in a book entitled *Melchizedek: Or, the Exaltation of the Son of Man*. He conjectured that God had created an Adam as His only true High Priest and placed one on every planet in the solar system. (Rather smacks of the idea that the moon is peopled by human beings who dress as Quakers, advanced by the same cult leader shot in Illinois, does it not?) Our Adam was the only one who sinned and fell from his estate of great High Priest of our planet. When he did this it demanded that God, in the course of time, send another Adam from another planet to interact with Abraham after whom the Priesthood of Jesus could find some similitude. Hence, our Melchizedek was an “extra-terrestrial visitor which would explain his having no parents or offspring, since like Adam he was a created being, who unlike Adam never sinned. (1-65).

Having observed some of the more bizarre and fanciful theories regarding who Melchizedek was and who possesses his priesthood, let attention be turned to the Holy Scriptures from which the remainder of this lesson will be developed.

### **Melchizedek and the Scriptures**

The name Melchizedek is found eleven times in the Sacred Volume with nine of those occurrences in the great book of Hebrews (cf. Gen. 14:18; Ps. 110:4; Heb. 5:6; 5:10; 6:20; 7:1, 10-11, 15, 17, 21). The name in Hebrew means “My King is Righteous,” and in Greek it means, “King of Righteousness.” There is no essential difference in the meaning of the name in the two languages. These passages will be relied upon to teach essentially all that can be surely known about this man and the One of whom He was the antitype—Jesus Christ, our Lord.

### **Melchizedek and Abraham**

The story of Abram and Melchizedek is told almost as a parenthesis in the story of Abram’s rescuing his nephew Lot who had moved to the city of Sodom, where he and his were captured when Sodom fell during a war between the kings: Amraphel of Shinar, Arioch of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer of Elam, Tidal king of Goyim, who fought against: Bera of Sodom, Birsha of Gomorrah, Shinab of Admah, Shemeber of Zeboiim and the unnamed king of

Zoar. In order to rescue his nephew, Abram raised an army of some 318 men from among his servants and with the help of his allies Eschol and Aner, he defeated the four Kings in a night battle near Damascus. Abram took spoils captured from the five kings, including his nephew Lot and began his journey back to Mamre, a place in or near ancient Hebron, some eighteen or twenty miles south of what was later called Jerusalem. He was first stopped by the King of Sodom who requested that Abram give him the persons he had captured. Abram told this king he had sworn an oath to God not to take anything, and the matter of spoils could be worked out by the king and Abram's allies, Eschol and Aner (cf. Gen. 14:17, 21-24). Before the division of the spoils could take place, Abram was greeted by still another King whose name was Melchizedek. This man was King of the city later called Jerusalem, at that time called Salem. He filled the two highest offices in his city, for he was not only King, but also Priest of God Most High—Abram's God, the God who ruled nations.

Some insist he was the first priest of the Old Testament, but inasmuch as Abel, son of Adam, offered acceptable sacrifice to God, that view cannot be upheld, if by "first" the advocate means the "first" chronologically and not of primary importance. Though Abel is not specifically called a priest, surely he was one since he offered pleasing sacrifice to God. At any rate, Melchizedek, of whom nothing is revealed in the Old Testament beyond this incident, was both King and Priest, or High Priest of Salem, the name of which means "peace." Perhaps, this is the city that later belonged to Jebusites, which was later captured by David and named "the city of David" (2 Sam. 5:9; Josh. 15:8). Later, it was renamed Jerusalem, a name meaning "city of peace," or some say, "city of righteousness" (Fausset 347).

When Abram was greeted by the great Melchizedek, he served the "Father of the faithful" bread and wine, which may have New Testament significance due to the fact that these elements are used in the weekly memorial of Christ, or it may be nothing more than a symbol of hospitality. Melchizedek was king of righteousness—that is what his name means and, as was observed earlier, king of peace—the name of his city-state; these were also character traits found in him. Regarding Melchizedek, Martel Pace in his work *Hebrews in the Truth for Today Commentary* series wrote:

Melchizedek was highly respected by **Abraham**, who deemed his work worthy of receiving tithes (**a tenth part of all the spoils**). Why did the father of the Hebrews make this offering to Melchizedek? In Genesis 14:22-24, Abraham stated that he would take nothing for himself because of an oath he had made to God. He knew that in offering to Melchizedek he was giving to God. We know of no law demanding that Abraham make such an offering. However, he was obviously doing so in keeping with the religion of God during the Patriarchal Age. This fact indicates that there was a system of worship which included men who were ordained of God to be priests and could lead in worship. It is possible that both Job and Jethro (the father-in-law of Moses; Ex. 3:1; 18:1-27) fell into this category. As to when this kind of worship ceased from history, we cannot say with certainty, but it must have occurred sometime before Christ came. By the first century A.D., although there were some righteous Gentiles who followed the law of Moses or the law written in their hearts to a limited degree, the majority had given up on God; consequently, He gave up on them (see Rom. 1:18, 24, 28; 2:14, 15). (260)

The patriarchal priesthood would have passed out of existence for the Jews with the coming of the Law of Moses, and for the Gentiles with the death of Christ on the cross. God has never left mankind without law of some sort, though the greater portion of the Gentiles long since abandoned it. Hence, Melchizedek administered to the needs of Abram, and followed that ministering with a blessing, which was in turn followed by the reception of tithes from the Father of the Jewish nation, it is more than suggested that Abram recognized this priest as a superior. Now, if Melchizedek became the antitype and Jesus the type, as some scholars insist, it follows that Jesus was as superior to all that had gone before Him as Melchizedek was to Abram to whom the patriarch paid great homage. That is precisely the argument in a nutshell that the inspired author of Hebrews will make as 7:1-10 clearly shows.



### **Melchizedek and Psalm 110:4**

Before moving to a study of this passage, it is fitting to take a brief look at the second passage in the Old Testament where Melchizedek is mentioned. That is, of course, Psalm 110:4 in which these words are found: “The LORD has sworn and will not relent, You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” Unless there is a wish to deny the existence of Old Testament prophecy, all will immediately recognize these words as prophecy not applicable to the author—most likely David. David was never a priest of any kind! Though he was King of all Israel, he could not function as a priest as Saul learned when he decided to do just that (1 Sam. 13:5-15). Consequently, the statement cannot be applied to David in any way. But, if it did not apply to David, then to whom did it apply? The author of the treatise to the Hebrews answers clearly and unmistakably when he quoted the prophecy and applied it to our Lord, Jesus Christ, which subject is first introduced in Hebrews 5:6-11.

The question must be asked, “Does such a thing as Old Testament prophecy exist?” There are those, even among us, who say that it does not, that the New Testament writers simply appropriated Old Testament language to suit their purposes. In a brief but powerful work entitled *Clouds without Water*, Wayne Jackson quoted two modernists in our midst, one from Abilene Christian University and one from Pepperdine University, both of whom deny the existence of Old Testament prophecy as it relates to Christ and His church. He quoted the Abilene scholar as saying, “There is no unequivocal specific prediction of the coming of Jesus Christ and/or the church in the Old Testament. New Testament speakers reinterpreted and reapplied Old Testament texts to Christ and/or the Church” (7). Jackson went on to paraphrase the Pepperdine scholar writing, “Another writer contends that the interpretation of the Old Testament from a ‘Christological perspective’ is a ‘danger[ous]’ procedure since such does not yield due consideration to the historical context” (7). This is apprehended to mean that since the Old Testament was written much later than we think it was, according to the Pepperdine scholar, most of it just two to four hundred years before the birth of Jesus, it is totally unreliable as an instrument of predictive prophecy. That makes the Pepperdine scholar wrong on two

counts! Jackson continued: “The gentleman obviously has never considered the fact that the omniscient Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:10) could: (a) provide prophecies that are **exclusively** messianic, or (b) speak of matters that had a **primary** ancient application and yet an **ultimate** fulfillment in Christ (see Jackson 2009, 201-03)” (7). Jackson here referred to his book *The Bible on Trial*, par. added.)

Though modernistic scholars among us claim that Old Testament prophecy concerning Jesus and/or the church is fraudulent, or at least unreliable, it is the better part of wisdom for Christians to stay with the Scriptures, accepting them at face value until they are proved to be false; such efforts having been made for centuries with no success. Therefore, the words of the author of Hebrews will be accepted at face value and explicated as being the true and faithful message of God for both ancient and modern times. To do less would show an untowardness to brethren and unfaithfulness to God. Consequently, Hebrews 5:6-11 presents itself as the first passage for consideration.

### **Hebrews 5:6-11 and Christ after the order of Melchizedek**

The author of Hebrews here wrote:

As He also says in another place: You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek; who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, called by God as High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

The information in this passage that particularly draws attention is that that is found in verses six and ten, leaving the other to be covered by other speakers.

This passage actually begins back in 4:15 where Jesus is presented as the Christian's High Priest. After making certain assertions regarding that station and work of our Lord, the writer hastened to point out five important truths: (1) That every human High Priest is appointed for the purpose of sacrificing those things that pertain to God; the Christian's High Priest is no exception to that rule. (2) The Jewish High Priest was obliged to offer first for his own sins and then for those of the people when sprinkling the sacrificial blood on the Mercy Seat. In this matter, our Lord is different in that He had no sin for which to offer sacrifice (Heb. 4:15) but He did offer Himself for those of man. (3) Affirming that no High Priest ever usurped that honor, but was called to that high office by God, the author went on to assert that the same was true of Jesus; He did not glorify Himself to become High Priest (v. 5). He was able to assume this high and exalted office because the Father had owned Him as Son (v. 5) and appointed Him to that office. (4) The apostle's proof was to quote Psalm 110:4 and apply it to Jesus (v. 6). (5) Then in the tenth verse, the author asserted most emphatically that God called Jesus to be High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. Since these words "according to the order of" will come to the fore again in this lesson, they will not be dealt with here. The Hebrews writer then continued by upbraiding those Christians for weakness of faith due to a lack of development into teachers of the Word before returning to his discussion of Christ's being prophetically set forth as High Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. This propels the discussion to the seventh chapter of this grand treatise where considerable information can be gleaned and the argument for the superiority of Christ over the High Priesthood of Aaron is fully developed.

### **This Melchizedek, King of Salem and Christ King of Kings Hebrews 7:1-25**

It is meet that the whole passage be inserted here before discussion of its salient parts. The author wrote:

For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham gave

a tenth part of all, first being translated king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, meaning king of peace, without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually. Now consider how great this man was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils. And indeed those who are of the sons of Levi, who receive the priesthood, have a commandment to receive tithes from the people according to the law, that is, from their brethren, though they have come from the loins of Abraham; but he whose genealogy is not derived from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better. Here mortal men receive tithes, but there he receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives. Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him. Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law. For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life. For He testifies: You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. And inasmuch as He was not made priest without an oath (for they have become priests without an oath, but He with an

oath by Him who said to Him: The LORD has sworn And will not relent, You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek).” (7:1-21)

To this must be added Hebrews 7:24, “But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood.”

What are the salient points and germane facts to be ascertained from this reading? They are not so many as one may think on the surface, but they are certainly important ones. Our Lord is being compared to the most unique priest known in the Bible, and that by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The author of Hebrews began by telling the story of the encounter between Melchizedek and Abram from Genesis fourteen. He pointed out that the Priesthood of Melchizedek was unique in that he received it, not from either father or mother—making it an appointment from God and a unique one. This passage does not mean that Melchizedek had no parents and was a created being as some insist, but that so far as his priesthood was concerned there was no genealogy, furthermore, when this priesthood began no one knows and when it ended no one knows, so it was a perpetual priesthood so far as its history is concerned, for God chose not to tell mankind when the priesthood of this man began and when it ended. So far as this matter is concerned, virtually the same could be said for the Priesthood of Jethro the father-in-law of Moses. (Hebrew: *Yithro* who probably descended from Abraham through Keturah. Some later research into the biblical Hebrew indicates that Reuel may have been the name of Jethro’s father. M’Neil 355). There is no biblical record of the person(s) from whom he inherited his priesthood and there is no biblical record of who succeeded him as priest of the Most High God. He is simply presented as such a priest in Exodus chapters 2, 3 and 18. No implication is intended that Melchizedek and Jethro were equal in priesthood, but merely the fact that the histories of the predecessors and successors of these men are nowhere recorded in Scripture. In that regard both were “without genealogy.” The Holy Spirit caused the author of Hebrews to present Melchizedek as a one-of-his-kind priest, which is the point the writer desires his readers to apprehend.

The greatness of Melchizedek is further emphasized by virtue of his relationship to Abram the father of the Jewish nation. In the fourth verse the fact that Abram paid tithes to one he knew to be greater, and in the sixth verse that Abram received blessing from this Priest are accentuated. In verse 7-11 the author highlighted the fact that Levi, still unborn, and whose priesthood was not yet developed, paid tithes to Melchizedek while in the body of Abram. This made Melchizedek and his priesthood superior to that of Levi and demonstrates the superiority of Melchizedek over Abram, a recognized superiority by Abram who did what he did voluntarily. There is no evidence that Abram did this previously, or that he ever repeated this action. Hence, there are a number of unique happenings in this passage. The point the apostle made in the 11<sup>th</sup> verse, based on the information given here, is an astounding one! If perfection—salvation—could have come through the ministrations of the Levitical Priesthood, there would have been no further need for an additional priesthood. However, perfection—salvation did not come through this priesthood, but through the one that was of the order of Melchizedek, i.e. the Priesthood of Christ. A rather long quotation from Fred L. Horton in his work, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, which should fill in all the gaps missed in these comments. Horton wrote:

According to Hebrews the Levitical priesthood is of an inferior order (Heb. vii. 4ff.). Indeed, it may rightly be said that Levi himself gave a tithe to Melchizedek since he was at that time in his father’s loins (vii. 9-10). The lesser (Abraham) is blessed by the greater (Melchizedek) (vii.7). Melchizedek is without end of life, and because he has no end of life nor beginning of life, the priesthood which he possesses comes about not through priestly succession but through the infinite quality of that life (vii. 16). Christ is a priest ‘according to the order of Melchizedek’ in that he is ‘according to the likeness’ (κατὰ την ὁμοιότητα) [according to the likeness] of Melchizedek (vii.15). Christ is ‘another priest’ (ἑτερος, vii.15). Melchizedek’s priesthood continues into perpetuity (vii.3), and hence it is improper to speak of Christ being Melchizedek’s successor in the priesthood. Melchizedek has no successor in the

Priesthood. The meaning of κατὰ τὴν τάξιν Μελχισεδέκ [according to the order of] is expressed as κατὰ τὴν ὁμοιότητα Μελχισεδέκ, [according to the likeness of Melchizedek] which includes the idea of recapitulation. Every feature of significance of Melchizedek's priesthood is recapitulated on a grander scale in Christ's priesthood. . . . Just as Melchizedek is the first priest in the old order, so is Christ 'another priest' forever. . . . The 'antitypology' of the author involves taking an earthly entity and contrasting it or connecting it to its heavenly counterpart or type. The words ἀφωμοιωμένος τῷ υἱῷ τοῦ θεοῦ [having been made like the Son of God] assure us that in Heb. vii the same scheme is operative. We gain an understanding of Christ's priesthood, the eternal heavenly priesthood, by understanding the features of the earthly perpetual priesthood of Melchizedek. (160-62)

Neil Lightfoot pointed out five comparisons of Melchizedek and Christ in his fine little work, *Everyone's Guide to Hebrews* (92-93).

1. Melchizedek was a priest and so is Christ. Genesis describes Melchizedek in exalted terms, "priest of God Most High." Melchizedek as priest blessed Abraham. Abraham, in turn acknowledged Melchizedek as priest and gave him a tenth of everything.
2. Melchizedek was a king and so is Christ. Melchizedek as priest-king prefigured Christ as king and priest. This, as the author has shown, is the very substance of Psalm 110. Messiah is to "sit" at God's right hand (Ps. 110:1)—this is kingly language. Messiah is addressed as a "priest forever"—this is priestly language.
3. Melchizedek is righteousness and peace and so is Christ. . . . Also, Melchizedek was king of "Salem" (probably Jerusalem), which means that he was "king of peace." We are not to think that these names are just wordplays. Names to Jewish readers were significant. They stood for the essential nature of that to which they belonged. The inference is that Melchizedek as priest-

king points to the Messiah who truly is King of Righteousness and the Prince of Peace (cf. Ps. 72:7; Isa. 9:6-7; Rom. 5:1).

4. Melchizedek is priest without genealogy and so is Christ. Melchizedek is described by three thought-provoking words—"fatherless," "motherless," and "genealogyless." What does this mean? Certainly it does not mean that Melchizedek literally had no father or mother. Melchizedek was a real person, a real priest, a real king of a real city. Suppose we translate the terms slightly differently—"father unknown," "mother unknown," and "genealogy unknown." Although Genesis is filled with genealogies, Melchizedek seems to appear suddenly on the scene "without father or mother." He was a priest but not on the basis of his family history. Notice how this fits the context. Just a few verses later, Melchizedek is contrasted with the Levitical priests with respect to *genealogy*. "This man" referring to Melchizedek who "has not their genealogy" (v.6). Melchizedek's priesthood rested on who he was, not on who his parents were. In this respect, again, he illustrates Christ as priest.
5. Melchizedek's priesthood is timeless and so is Christ's. Genesis relates neither when Melchizedek began his priesthood nor when he ended it. It does not tell us about his birth or death. In this sense, then, according to the author, Melchizedek "has neither beginning of days nor end of life." And because Christ has been from all eternity and Melchizedek has not, Melchizedek in reality "resembles the Son of God."

The next point accentuated is that Jesus Christ did not come from the right tribe to belong to the priesthood of Aaron. Like Melchizedek, who belonged to no Israelite tribe, Jesus belonged not to the priestly tribe, but to the royal tribe of Judah. Therefore, He could not officiate at the Levitical altar, but like Melchizedek, could officiate at another altar (His own) which was superior to that of the Levites. Then in verses fifteen and sixteen the Hebrews

author highlighted the fact that since Jesus was a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, His altar was not a physical one, like that of the Levites, but a spiritual one at which only He could minister due to “the power of an endless life.” John Fernan spoke to this matter involving Christ, Melchizedek and the Levitical priesthood in his work, *Christ Our High Priest*, when he wrote:

*Melchisedech Superior to Abraham and Levitical Priests.* Paul now recalls the superiority of Melchisedech over Abraham, as indicated by the fact that he blessed Abraham and received tithes from him (7:1-2). And, from this, he argues to his superiority over the Levitical priests, *i.e.*, the official priests of the Jews, who, with Aaron, were descendants of Levi. Abraham was superior to all the tribe of Levi; he was their Patriarch and Founder in that he was father to Jacob who founded all the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Hence, the sons of Levi were “in the loins” of Abraham when he made obeisance to Melchisedech, and, through their Father, they, too, paid tithes (7:4-10). . . . *Christ Superior to Melchisedech.* The pattern of Paul’s argument thus far might be traced in the following steps: The Levitical priests, as Abraham’s descendants, were acknowledged to be inferior to Melchisedech. But Melchisedech was inferior to Christ as a reflection is to the reality which it dimly mirrors. Hence Christ, the Priest of the New Covenant, is superior to the priesthood of the Old. . . . Paul now concludes Chapter VII with additional points of superiority of Christ’s priesthood over that of the Old Covenant. Unlike the others, Christ was appointed priest by divine oath. Unlike the others, who were numerous, He is unique. And, unlike the others who were beset with sin themselves and had to sacrifice daily, and for themselves first, He was sinless and perfect offering only once, and then for the sins of others: “For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, set apart from sinners, and become higher than the heavens” (7:26). (2, 214-15)

Coming to the apex of his argument, after accenting that the Priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Psalm 110:4, the apostle emphasized that Jesus was made a High Priest after the order of—according to the similitude of, Melchizedek and as such was the perfect High Priest for the Christian for all times. This meant that He brought a better covenant than that of under which the Priesthood of Aaron served. This was the final and perfect Covenant in which Jesus was the “uttermost” Savior and High Priest. That means that He was, is, and ever will be, at one and the same time: Redeeming Sacrifice and Sacrificing High Priest, Atonement and Mercy Seat, Founder of the New and Better Covenant, Intercessor and Advocate for His people; He is all that is, or ever will be needed to accomplish eternal salvation for mankind. There is no other Savior, nor will there ever be, for He was offered once for the sins of many! (Heb. 9:26 & 28; 10:10) Praise God for His unspeakable gift! Mathison in his splendid new work, *From Age to Age*, summarized as follows:

In 7:11-28, the author of Hebrews turns his attention to a demonstration of the superiority of the priest like Melchizedek. In verses 11-19, the insufficiency of the Levitical priesthood is argued. Had the Levitical priesthood been sufficient, there would have been no need for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, but this is precisely what Psalm 110 anticipated (Heb. 7:17). The change in the priesthood means a change in the Mosaic law (v.12) because the Mosaic law said nothing about priests descended from Judah (vv. 13-14). In verses 20-28, the author of Hebrews builds on what he has said, explaining the permanence and efficacy of the new priesthood inaugurated by Christ. (621-22)

Mankind, whether Jew or Gentile should seek no other Savior, Redeemer and High Priest, nor should we ever expect this one to any more sacrifice Himself for our redemption. That, like the creation of the universe, was a one-time-event never to be repeated as was emphasized in Hebrews 7:27; 9:24-28; 10:10 and 1 Peter 3:18. The divinely inspired author of the Hebrews treatise,

speaking of our Lord's function as High Priest, wrote in 7:27, "[W]ho does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for *this He did once for all when He offered up Himself*" (emp. added). The "once-for-allness" of this Sacrifice has a finality that cannot be gainsaid. Our Lord was and is, Sacrifice, offering High Priest and the Mercy Seat all at once. No other being in the universe, or in all the ages, functions in such a manner for the spiritual well-being of weak human creatures.

### Conclusion

There is no way a mere human being can do justice to so grand a theme as that of Christ and Melchizedek. The longer it is studied the more inadequate the feeling of ever conquering such a subject. However, gratitude—deep gratitude can be the response of true hearts for what God has done for us through that One who in every regard is superior to all men, even the great Melchizedek from whom Abram accepted blessing and paid tithes. How utterly and deeply thankful we should be to the One who "so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him might not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). So gratitude should cause us to serve Him as if there were no limits to the strength we are willing to expend on His behalf. Are you grateful to God for the gift of His Son, our blessed Redeemer and Savior, our Great High Priest?

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### Biographical Sketch

D. Gene West, a native of Hancock County, WV, was baptized into Christ by the late Jess W. Nutter, April 11, 1950, and began preaching in February, 1953. He currently serves the Hillview Terrace Church of Christ in Moundsville, WV, and serves as a teacher of English Grammar, Acts, Hebrews, Philippians, Philemon, Romans, Galatians, Ezekiel, Jeremiah – Lamentations, and Revelation at West Virginia School of Preaching.

He and his wife, the former Shirley Bissett are the parents of three children, Kandi Davis, Mary Amy Kessinger, and Todd C. West. They are the grandparents of seven grandchildren.

Gene graduated Freed-Hardeman University, West Liberty University, Fairmont State University, and has done graduate work at Southern Christian University and West Virginia University. After ten years of intense study, he authored a moderate preterist commentary on Revelation entitled: *Avenging His Holy Saints, Apostles and Prophets*. This is a hardbound work of some 847 pages, including the indices. He has also written: *A Student's Commentary on the Book of Acts* and *A Student's Commentary on the Treatise to the Hebrews*, as well as *Messianic Prophecy Outlined* and some tracts on Islam, the Names of God, Homosexuality and some others.

Gene holds Gospel meetings each year, speaks on various brotherhood lecture programs and makes frequent mission trips to the British Isles where he helps brethren in Scotland and England. He gave minimal assistance to British brethren in the publication of a wonderful anthology edited by brother Joe Nisbet of

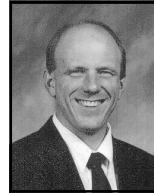
Aberdeen, Scotland entitled *Historical Survey of the Churches of Christ in the British Isles*, and serves as the American agent for the sale of this great book.

With the exception of seven years, he has lived and worked with God's people within a hundred miles of his place of birth.

## *Christ and Practical Christianity*

*Andrew J. Robison IV*

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” This verse is non-contextually misused about as much as “Judge not, that you be not judged.” This author hears it most when discussing the delineation between God's Old Law and His New Covenant in



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Christ. First, an argumentative denominationalist appeals to an Old Testament passage to justify some present day preferred worship practice. Second, the counter comes that men today do not live under the Mosaic Law. Third, the retort comes with an air of knowing superiority, “Yes, but Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” The arrogant assumption is that Christ's eternal nature somehow overrides the Divinely announced dissolution of the Mosaic system (Col. 2:14; Eph. 2:14-16; Gal. 3; Hebrews).

If such conversation has not degraded into a battle of egos, it might be observed that the very point of the treatise to the Hebrews is to defend Christ's eternal unchangeableness through the course of a change in law. Though Christ was Creator, Savior, and then ascended and exalted Lord, there came changes in the ways God spoke to people and what He demanded of them. This is an incontrovertible message of Hebrews 1:1-4:

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the Fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who, being the brightness of His glory and express image of His

person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

Note: Christ was active in creation—“through whom also He made the worlds.” Note: He changes not in that He is “upholding all things by the word of His power.” But also note that He changed roles at times—from Creator abiding in Heaven to Son of Man suffering on Earth, to exalted Prince (Acts 5:31) with all things under His feet (Heb. 2:5, 8). So, did He change or did He not? He did not. The same Christ interrupted His glory in Heaven, but was glorified there again (cf. John 17:5).

It is also of paramount interest that God, who created through Christ and speaks through Christ in the last days, also spoke in former times in other ways. He had other laws. This negates neither the immutability of the Father nor the Son. For all the changes in laws were parts of the master plan devised “before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4). The prophecies set in motion for the redemption of mankind immediately after the Fall (Gen. 3:15) found their fulfillment in the establishment of a special nation, Israel, for the purposes of a genealogical and tutorial foundation for the Christ to come in glorious fulfillment and establishment of His church, according to God’s eternal purpose (Gal. 3:24-25; Eph. 3:11). The fact that Deity does not change does not mean that His laws never have. Nor does it justify borrowing elements from one law at one’s preference. Indeed, one who would do so would be bound to keep the whole law (Gal. 5:3; cf. James 2:10). Rather, the changing of God’s law through time at predicted points for specified purposes gloriously proves the “immutability of His counsel” (Heb. 6:17).

### **Glorious Themes**

To the point of Hebrews 13, the Hebrews writer has labored to demonstrate the superiority of Christ’s final, ultimately intended law over all that came previously, particularly the original-audience-revered Mosaic economy. It is better in its Messenger: Christ over the angels (Heb. 1-2). It is more promising in its rest

(Heb. 3-4). Its priesthood is perfect, and not subject to human faults and frailties (Heb. 5-8). Its tabernacle is heavenly (Heb. 9) and its sacrifices are permanent, not subject to repeatability (Heb. 10). As the author comes to the portion of His inspired homily that demands a stirring summary and call to action, he reminds them of their heroes (from both the Patriarchal and Mosaic ages) who lived by faith, doing very different things that God had specifically required (Heb. 11). Then, he calls them to live by the same faith as that great cloud of witnesses (Heb. 12:1-4). They should expect discipline from a loving heavenly Father (Heb. 12:5-17). They should realize the glory of their calling to a heavenly Mount Zion, an unshakeable kingdom, the church, those registered in Heaven (Heb. 12:18-29). These are some of the highest themes in all of Holy Scripture!

Hebrews 13 then calls these struggling Christians back down, so to speak, to Earth. It is one thing to examine principles in ivory towers of learning, and quite another to act upon those principles in a real, functioning, every day world. Many noble and talented blue-collar workers express continual frustration at young white-collar upstarts who “think they know everything,” having “never worked a day in their lives.” In classroom theory many philosophies work out well, until tackled in real time with real people. Christianity is immune to such a divisive dilemma. It teaches the highest principles in the world, but works them out in the most practical manners.

Some have noted that the book of James, known popularly as “The Book of Practical Christianity,” has much direct connection with teachings of the Son of God during His earthly ministry, particularly in the Sermon on the Mount (Barclay 22). It should be no surprise that the Divine One was practical. Yet it so takes some people aback that they have hijacked Christianity into the realms of the meaningless esoteric thought.

Early Gnosticism’s antinomian branch taught a confusing array of doctrines that boiled down to this convenient expediency: Men were too evil in the flesh to behave morally. Therefore, they could “eat, drink, and be merry” without disturbing the salvation of their souls. Their meticulous doctrine exempted them from any behavioral restraint. Only the higher classes could achieve the special knowledge required (Rutherford 1240-48). Theirs was not a



religion for the humble, hard-working man. All of this quite directly contradicts 1 Corinthians 1:26.

Existentialism, popularized in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, encouraged individuals to seek their own truths and rejected a rationalistic approach to everyday living (“Existentialism”). Soren Kirkegaard, a Danish philosopher and one of the doctrines’ foremost proponents, observed, “There is no lack of information in a Christian land; something else is lacking, and this is a something which one man cannot directly communicate to the other” (qtd. in Craddock 9). One may readily attribute truth to the first part of the statement and acknowledge notorious American apathy. While the second portion may evoke curiosity, in the end exception must be taken. After a rationalistic approach to the difference in the covenants, the Hebrews writer “gets down to the brass tacks” of the situation with very pertinent, pointed communications about behavior that must not be lacking in a Christian land. It does have the capability of being communicated.

Hebrews 13 calls the reader down from the philosophical mountain heights to the valley of everyday living. Rational philosophy is rooted in Christianity, and it has its very practical outcomes. Christ was a miracle-worker sometimes temporarily mystifying in his parables (cf. Matt. 13:10-17) but always clear in the end (cf. Matt. 21:45). He was a teacher of the deepest of ideas, but was also One who could feed people, supervise as they gathered leftovers (John 6), touch a leper (Mark 1:40-45), and diffuse a dramatic situation charged by hypothetical doctrine by focusing on the humanity of the exploited (John 8:1-11). He was a down-to-earth Savior. And He is always the same.

## Love

Note the disarming contrast from the curious juxtaposition of Hebrews 12:29 and 13:1, for which there were originally, of course, no chapter and verse divisions. “For our God is a consuming fire!” Then, “Let brotherly love continue.” The Hebrews writer might not have received an A in the Creative Writing Course’s unit on transitions and segues. But his aim was higher. And the two really do go together. God made a purposeful habit of connecting His holiness with what some would deem minute details. Consider the lofty language of Leviticus 11:44a:

“For I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy, for I am holy.” Lofty words, are they not? Leviticus 11:44b then consecutively reminds of a dietary restriction: “Neither shall you defile yourselves with any creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” What does one have to do with the other? Some would modernly inquire, “If I have an appreciation for the greatness of God, shouldn’t I be permitted to think He’ll excuse minor faults of behavior? After all, doesn’t He have bigger things with which to concern Himself?” They miss the defining practicality of the holiness of God. Because God is holy, do what He says, no matter how insignificant a matter it may seem. This principle, the New Testament confirms, applies to all conduct (1 Peter 1:15-16).

Nevertheless, it could never be said that brotherly love is a minute detail in God’s scheme. Actually, it was noted by the Lord as the basis for the world understanding who had given themselves to Christ (John 13:34, 35). Men have styled John “the apostle of love” because of his numerous calls to living with the attitude and actions of love within the church. While the Greek word *agape* has been a word characteristic of Christianity (Vine 20), *phileo* (used in Heb. 13:1) seems not far behind in its intensity. “It is an unselfish love, ready to serve” (Vine 21). Both are used in the New Testament for the love of the brethren.

Of *agape*: One who does not love his brother makes no rational, defensible claim to knowing or loving God (1 John 3:10-11; 4:7-8, 20-21). This love must be manifested not in an inwardly guarded feeling, but “in deed and truth” (1 John 3:18). In rebuking the Corinthians for worship-time egotistical showiness, Paul wrote, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor. 13:1). Miraculous spiritual gifts would fade, he taught in that chapter, but faith, hope, and love would continue. The greatest of these, all know, is love (1 Cor. 13:8-13).

Of *phileo*, Paul writes, “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another” (Rom. 12:10). “But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another” (1 Thess. 4:9).

Brotherly love (*phileo*) is inextricable from obeying the truth to becoming a Christian (1 Peter 1:22). It must be pursued in the Christian life to avoid barren, unfruitful blindness (2 Peter 1:7-11).

*Agape* and *phileo* love go hand in hand in the church. There may be those whose personalities clash, but they are to unconditionally treat each other with the respect and dignity due highly regarded family. Tender affection is to be more than a feeling, it is to be the rule of treatment. In both written covenants He authored, God demanded love for one's neighbor as oneself (Lev. 19:18; Mark 12:31 [*agape*]). Especially in the brotherhood of Christ (Mark 3:31-35; Heb. 2:11-12) should this practicality be diligently observed.

Somehow brethren tend to forget this core principle. Church experience teaches that some have prided themselves in knowing detailed answers to doctrinal disputes, and have divided churches over their knowledge. Where doctrine is the real issue, such separation may be necessary. Usually, though, the supposed doctrinal dispute is nothing more than a front for personality differences, fueled into a fire by the neglect of this four word command, "Let brotherly love continue." But, then, the precision-minded belligerent might object, "One cannot continue what he never had." In which case it is time to repent and start.

### Hospitality

"Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by doing so some have unwittingly entertained angels" (Heb. 13:2). This is the next step in unchanging Christian practicality. Love is to be shown not only to one's known brethren, but kindness is to be displayed toward strangers. Jesus taught the principle:

For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Matt. 5:46-48)

The perfection required is defined earlier in the passage about loving one's enemies:

But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matt. 5:44-45)

As God displays kindness often even to those who hate Him, so the Christian must do. At the very least this means treating strangers with generosity.

The Good Samaritan in Jesus' parable set this bar (Luke 10:25-37). Respected religious men—a priest and a Levite—ignored the needs of an unidentified traveler. A Samaritan (despised as not only a stranger but also an enemy by Jesus' immediate audience) risked health and life and suffered loss of time and money to care for the wounded stranger.

Who has unwittingly entertained angels? The passage (Heb. 13:2) is no promise of meeting incarnate heavenly beings. This original audience trained in Hebrew history would know immediately of their respected forefather Abraham's encounter with three men (Gen. 18:2), two of whom were later identified as angels (Gen. 19:1), leaving one to be an assumed reference to the presence of the Lord (Gen. 18:9-33). He hurriedly greeted them with a bow for respect, water for their dirtied feet, and bread for refreshment. For this, He was blessed with a conversation with the Lord.

Is hospitality's level taking a nosedive in the Lord's church? How many congregations set out meal lists for visiting preachers and struggle to find families to open their homes for a meal? How many members of the church only visit on Sunday and Wednesday, ten minutes before and after services, if that? As persecution increases, the church may need to manufacture daily meeting scenarios for a restoration of first-century fashioned encouragement (Acts 2:46). This paragraph likely indicts many, and it is confined to relations among brethren! What of strangers?

A more sinister world raises difficult ethical questions concerning the extension of hospitable hands. Days gone by in America have yielded heart-warming anecdotes about widows who

“lodged strangers” and “relieved the afflicted” (1 Tim. 5:10). Would any rational widow dare open doors to the unknown today? Drugged, violent perverts would be sure to enter! How is anyone—widow or not—to follow the biblical command to entertain strangers? The umbrella principle leaves room for judgment in particulars. Systems and programs that provide the homeless a meal work with many churches. They all require hospitable, generous volunteers. There is an opportunity to serve. Care for orphans is accomplished through biblical, financial cooperation. One need not feel bound to assume unnecessary personal risk to find ways to provide. What of a stranded traveler? A cell phone call to a roadside courtesy service is, in many places, law enforcement’s preferred response. There are ways; there are avenues. The ingenuity of man can be employed to adjust to the ever-changing peculiarities of humanity. One simply must not cast off the principle with the changing particulars.

### **Prison Ministry**

Brethren, strangers, and even prisoners are afforded equal protection to charitable treatment by the holiness of God. These may have been brethren who were unjustly imprisoned for their faith. Even if that is not the case, the unchangeable Christ mandated that His people would be judged in part by their treatment of the incarcerated:

Then the King will say to those on His right hand, “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me. (Matt. 25:34-36)

Inasmuch as they had so helped the least of Christ’s brethren they had helped Him, and it was reason for reward.

Prison ministries flourish in certain places in the brotherhood. Who else will reach out to these outcasts of society? To be sure, when convicted justly, these deserve their casting. God’s duly appointed governments are God’s ministers to reward good and

avenge evil (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17). Once in the process of paying a debt to society, can these criminals actually rehabilitate? That is often the stated goal of the state. The answer is decidedly in the affirmative when Christ is involved. Christ’s word has the power to change lives (Heb. 4:12; Rom. 1:16), turning the basest of sinners into grace-appreciating saints (1 Cor. 15:9-10). While some criminals, alienated from society, may take advantage of well-meaning ministers and water-trough baptisms to make their record of rehabilitation more appealing to a parole board or like entity, others are genuinely converted and dutifully serve their time while beginning the Lord’s business of evangelization in their present station.

Praise God that He commands seeking the outcasts! For if this was not His nature, none of mankind would have been bought. While still sinners (might this be defined as criminals alienated from God?), Christ died for the ungodly (Rom. 5:8-10; cf. 3:10-23). He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). The parallels of the saved sinner and the rehabilitated convict are striking.

To drive home the comparison, the Hebrews writer gives this reason for helping the mistreated prisoners: “Since you yourselves are in the body also.” Might this reflect the incarceration of the real, inward man to a temporary, pain-suffering body? The healthy revel in the glories of their abilities. The paralyzed, on the other hand, comprehend this imprisonment. Being in the body brings suffering that the Christian hopes one day to escape (2 Cor. 4:16-5:8). Then, in everlasting life, his soul will be free. A reminder of this temporal limitation ought to be reason enough to reach out to those more narrowly bound—in the confines of a wall and a cell. They can there live and function, as heaven-bound souls within a body can do, but they require the comfort of others as those afflicted bodily require the comfort of one another and the all-powerful God (2 Cor. 1:3-4, 8-9).

### **Marriage**

It would be difficult to imagine the possibility of any other than Deity coming up with such a succinct, pithy statement of the morality expected of man as found in Hebrews 13:4: “Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.” The sex drive was created to be a

powerful force in men. Therefore, a loving God regulated it for man's protection. In a discussion of sexual immorality, Paul observed the nature of this drive:

All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. (1 Cor. 6:12-13)

The passage continues with the pointed command to “flee sexual immorality” (6:18) and to be married to avoid burning (1 Cor. 7:1-9). Marriage is the honorable means for expression of sexual intimacy. All else is judged by God.

The problems with this practicality are manifold. Defining marriage is a forefront battle in the current U.S. culture war. The more biblically minded crowd lobbies the courts and the voters for the “traditional” one-man and one-woman arrangement. The atheistic, evolutionistic humanists push for broader classifications, the most popular of which now is homosexuality. How far their agenda goes in making this a Civil Rights issue remains to be seen. Angry militants demand respect for their alternative lifestyle choice via legislation, court decisions, and workplace benefits for partners. Whatever may become of all of that, the Christian is reminded that an unchanging God (Mal. 3:6) established the marital framework prior to any society's formation (Gen. 2:24-25). His will supersedes whatever any government may say. Nations may make certain choices, but the Christian holds to God's word. One word of caution is obligatory: Never, ever does the Bible warrant either hate or violence toward homosexuals or anyone with whom the Christian disagrees. Tolerance is a Christian virtue, but it does not equal endorsement. Love should permeate the Christian's dealings with people. He must be one who pursues peace with all (Heb. 12:14), even (especially?) those practicing things the Bible regards as sin.

Avoiding marriage is a practice of greatly increasing numbers of heterosexual American citizens. They avoid marriage, but do not avoid the intimacy, as God would necessarily demand (1 Cor.

6:18-7:5; 1 Thess. 4:3-8). Following the string of fornications is a sewer full of problems: STDs, pregnancies out of wedlock, abortions, jealousy, and, for those married and committing adultery—divorces. God really knew what way was best for man's expression of these desires. He should be respected as the Creator of them. His ways are never old-fashioned; this principle does not change.

### **Contentment**

Contentment with one's worldly possessions is one cardinal doctrine of the Christ. Seeking treasures on earth is a no-no (Matt. 6:19-21). Being godly with contentment is great gain (1 Tim. 6:8). A parabolic rich fool once forfeited his soul about the time he was finally satisfied with his financial portfolio (Luke 12:16-21). He would not be the only rich man to regret for eternity his love of money (Luke 16:19-31). While riches are not inherently evil (1 Tim. 6:17-19), the love of them is (1 Tim. 6:9-10). It is this love that propels man into covetousness.

Covetousness is easily defined by the fullness of Old Law's tenth commandment: “You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's” (Ex. 20:17). It is an unhealthy, obsessive desire for physical possessions (or relationships) one does not have, but someone else in said one's experience does. It is greed controlling the heart of man. Since it has such a grasp on the heart, it is unapologetically deemed idolatry (Col. 3:5). How many Christians still put money ahead of God? There is no way to serve both, not even in an economically blessed America. After Jesus' instruction on choosing heavenly riches over earthly ones (Matt. 6:19-21) and His insistence that one's inner life (eye, light) can be controlled by one or the other (Matt. 6:22-23), He observed: “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt. 6:24).

Covetousness is adequately avoided if contentment is cultivated. Again the words of the unchanging Christ from the Sermon on the Mount come to the fore. After a lesson on how God cares for items of His creation not endowed with souls (birds,

lilies), Christ concludes that worry over what to eat, drink, or wear is exhibitiv of a lack of trust in one’s heavenly Father (Matt. 6:31-34). Trust and covetousness cannot cohabit.

The apostle Paul had learned the lesson of contentment well. Presumably impoverished, from a prison cell he wrote:

. . . [F]or I have learned in whatever state I am to be content. I know how to be abased and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (Philip. 4:11-13)

The Hebrews writer agrees that confidence in Christ inspires contentment, which in turn squelches covetousness. Note his connection in Hebrews 13:5-6: First—no covetousness; second—contentment; third—the Lord is our helper—what need is there to fear?

Could a secondary definition of covetousness be the desire to feel all-powerful in providing for oneself: “If I could just have this much money or that much land, I wouldn’t have to worry” (in the vein of Luke 12:16-21)? This temptation is eliminated by trust in the all-powerful Christ. The Hebrews writer makes his point with references to Joshua 1:5 and Psalm 118:6.

### **Submission to Authority**

The final point of practical Christianity in this assigned text is the need to submit to authority. The principle is rampant in Scripture. Wives are to submit to husbands and husbands to the Lord (Eph. 5:22-33; 1 Cor. 11:1ff.). Citizens are to submit to governmental authorities (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17). Brethren are to submit to one another in the fear of God (Eph. 5:21). Slaves (employees) are to submit to masters (employers), and even masters are to remember their submission to their Master in Heaven while they deal out treatment to their Earth-bound employees (Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:22-25). Children are to obey and honor their parents (Eph. 6:1-4).

To whom is submission required in Hebrews 13:7? The description comes in two primary parts, followed by two secondary

considerations. “Remember those who rule over you...” (v. 7). Within the context of the church is there anyone who does any ruling? Some would say no, but they must blatantly dismiss such concepts as “overseer” in such passages as Acts 20:28. Elders serve in such a capacity. But how does one know the submission to those who rule over you is limited to a spiritual sphere here? He knows by the other considerations.

These rulers were ones who spoke the word of God to these Hebrews. This qualification alone could, in limited theory, have it referring to the apostles and preachers who brought the word to them. Indeed, the Greek word here used, *hegeomai*, “simply means to lead” (Claiborne 338). The demand to remember them would not necessarily mean these ones had any authority over the Hebrew Christians.

Verse seventeen of the passage clarifies, though, that these were men of some authority. Using the same Greek word for “rule,” the next phrase demands that church members be submissive. So the description then seems to be to someone who had the dual qualities of speaking the word of God to these people, and exercising some sort of authority over them, indeed, as those who watch out for their souls as those who must give account. That sounds a lot like the elders’ work as described by Paul in Acts 20:28-32. Though Paul spoke the word of God to many, he was careful not to claim dominion over their faith (2 Cor. 1:24). This would eliminate apostles from consideration. Of course, to counter, those charged with overseeing (cf. also 1 Peter 5:2) are to strike the proper balance of overseeing without setting themselves up as lords (1 Peter 5:3) over the flock (1 Peter 5:1-4; similar Greek words are used in 2 Cor. 1:24 for not having dominion and 1 Peter 5:3 for not being lords). Nevertheless, the fact that elders have some authority, and are to be effective teachers of the word (Titus 1:9; 1 Tim. 3:2) qualifies them uniquely for the description in Hebrews 13:7.

The two secondary considerations serve dually as instructions to the church. Follow their faith; know the outcome of their conduct. From those two considerations alone some might argue that the biblical list of characters from Hebrews 11 is here in view. But, that would ignore the first two considerations—how do long-

deceased people rule over the presently living? And how would they have spoken the word of God to first-century Christians?

Christ, by His sacrifice, was simultaneously identified as a Passover Lamb (1 Cor. 5:7; John 1:29) and the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 2:25; cf. John 10). In purchasing the church with His blood, He appointed an order of organization that designated men meeting certain qualifications (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) be the spiritual leaders of the church—responsible for exemplary conduct, overseeing, being sure that truth is taught, and watching out for souls—to keep the saved saved (1 Peter 5:1-4; Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17). Church members, as a matter of practical Christianity, need to submit to these authority figures unless they wander outside of godly conduct (1 Thess. 5:12-13; 1 Tim. 5:19-20).

### Conclusion

What fitting content for a portion of closing remarks in a letter that defends the doctrine of the Christ. With opening remarks such as “we must give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest we drift away” (Heb. 2:1), the Hebrews writer launched into a discussion of the many ways Christ’s Law is different, unique, and better than the Old Law, but, at the same time, grew out of it as the culmination of God’s eternal plan (Heb. 1:1-2). How fitting to wind down the treatise with an abrupt jump from the highly spiritualized remarks of chapter 12 (“heavenly Jerusalem,” “Our God is a consuming fire”) to the very non-nonsense, matter-of-fact, here’s-how-to-behave admonitions of chapter 13.

Christians are to be moral, hospitable, outreaching, loving, selfless creatures who submit to the Divinely established pattern of authority. Everybody can understand that. It is the simplistic beauty of Christ’s doctrine. One need not understand the intricacies of the spiritual realm; he must not be too obsessed with the angelic (cf. Col. 2:18). He may not grasp the several contrasts of typology, nor be able to describe the significance of the priesthood of Melchizedek (Heb. 7), but he can comprehend that the unchangeable Christ wants his unwavering devotion—first in heart, then followed with action (cf. Matt. 15:16-20). He must love his brethren; this he knows. He should be nice to strangers and help the mistreated. He should be loyal to his wife, avoid greed,

and be submissive to the elders in the church. He can get that. He can do that. And for doing it, he will be rewarded in Heaven in the presence of this glorified Christ, even alongside the highest of scholars, as long as they were likewise so practically obedient.

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### Biographical Sketch

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# *Living By Faith*

*Frank Higginbotham*

The people of God have always lived lives that were directed by faith. This has been true of God's people in the Old Testament as well as the New. We suggest that a better understanding of this expression can be had by looking at its use in the Bible. The first



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reference that we look at is in its use by an Old Testament prophet of God. When the prophet Habakkuk sought an answer concerning why God would use a wicked nation to punish His own people who had sinned, He was told that the just shall live by faith. Habakkuk was determined to have an answer from God concerning this matter.

I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved. And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith. (Hab. 2:1-4)

He was told that the just shall live by faith. This great statement concerning living by faith is also used in the New Testament. As Paul explained to the church at Rome that he had a desire to preach

the gospel to them, he restated this great fact concerning the way God's people live their lives.

I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. (Rom. 1:14-17)

This same expression in regard to our living by faith is used by Paul in explaining the fact that people are no longer subject to the Old Testament Law. We are not justified by the Law but by faith in the gospel of Christ. "But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith" (Gal. 3:11). Some of God's people were still resisting the change of law that God had made. They felt that justification by faith should still come by the Old Testament Law. However, God's plan is now made known by the New Testament Law.

The fact that we are living by faith is also explained by the writer of the Hebrew letter in the following passage. "For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him" (Heb. 10:37-38).

The great book of Hebrews is a book that highlights the life that is lived by those who recognize God as their maker and Lord. We are surrounded by a host of people who trusted God and were able to do so successfully. The eleventh chapter of this book gives us a list of faithful servants of God who bare witness to the fact that it is possible to overcome great obstacles and to still remain faithful to God. The kind of life that overcomes is the life that is lived by faith. Chapter twelve suggests that the many people who have been justified by faith serve as a witness to what happens when people live by faith. "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1).

Walking by faith means that our manner of life is directed by the Word of God. We are not at liberty to follow our own way or a way devised by some man.

Since faith comes by hearing God's word (Rom. 10:17) it follows that walking by faith means walking as directed by God's word. Negatively, it means (1) that we should not walk by sight (2 Cor. 5:7), (2) that we should not be guided by our own fallible, human feelings and emotions (Rom. 8:4), (3) that we should not rely merely upon what seems right in our own eyes (Prov. 14:12), (4) that we should not be guided by human traditions (Mark 7:9) (5) that we ought not to be influenced in our religious convictions and practices by the opinions of human majorities (Mt. 7:14), (6) that we must not allow the views and customs of our ancestors to be determinative (1 Peter 1:18), and (7) that we have no business consulting merely our own desires and pleasures where sacred things are involved, "For Christ pleased not himself" (Rom. 15:3). (Coffman 259)

Coffman further quotes Westcott in reference to the elements involved in a life that is lived by faith.

Westcott noted that the faith described here has two elements, (1) the belief that God is, and (2) that He is morally active; in other words, it is a faith in the existence of God and in the moral government of God. (261)

We see that it is clear that the word *faith* is a confident trust in God conjoined with obedience to His word. In describing the word, faith, Thayer had this to say: "Used especially of the faith by which a man embraces Jesus, i.e. a conviction, full of joyful trust, that Jesus is the Messiah—the divinely appointed author of eternal salvation in the kingdom of God, conjoined with obedience to Christ" (511). Those who embrace the doctrines of Calvin are commonly prone to try to define faith as being separate from obedience. Their acceptance of this false teaching causes them to go to any length to separate faith from any act of obedience. In the letter that Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus he explained that



our salvation is by faith (Eph. 2:5). This is further explained in verse eight when he makes this statement.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. (Eph. 2:8-10)

Does this verse remove every kind of works from our salvation? If it does, it also eliminates faith from being necessary. "Jesus answered and said unto them, 'This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent'" (John 6:29). Faith is called "a work of God." Does this mean that faith is eliminated from God's plan? The works that were eliminated are the works of boasting not the works of God. Faith and baptism are both works of God. Man did not come up with either faith or baptism. They are works designed to make it possible to obtain salvation. It was God who made us to realize that our salvation depends on doing the works of God. Surely we cannot earn our salvation, but salvation is not possible without our submission to the commands of God.

But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do. (Luke 17:7-10)

Doing the things commanded of God is not an attempt to earn our salvation. We cannot earn it, but salvation is not possible without it. Salvation and living by faith cannot be separated from acts of human obedience. The book of James makes the statement that we are justified by works and not faith only (James 2:24). We are

instructed to be doers of the word and not hearers only (James 1:21). Even Christ had to learn obedience. In a time when His fleshly side was rebelling against death, Christ obeyed.

Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him. (Heb. 5:7-9)

We know what is required in order to be saved and to go to Heaven from the words of Christ. Even Christ had to learn obedience. Why should we rebel when being told that God wants obedience?

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. (Matt. 7:21-23)

Our Lord proclaimed that only those who obey have the right to expect a home in Heaven. Because of an intense dislike for the command of baptism, some have tried to eliminate any act on our part as being necessary for our salvation. It is not uncommon to hear these people loudly proclaiming that Christ did it all. He did everything that is necessary to bring salvation to the lost soul, we are told. It is certain that Christ did His work and did it well, but was it His work to do for us the necessary things that God requires? If Christ did everything, then is the doctrine of universalism correct? Will God save all men without them doing any thing? It is hard to see that if our obedience has nothing to do with salvation, our disobedience will condemn us.

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. (2 Thess. 1:7-9)

Paul affirmed that our disobedience will cause us to experience the wrath of God. What kind of reasoning would lead us to think that obedience is not necessary? The eleventh chapter of Hebrews shows the definite connection between faith and obedience. Two of the examples used by this writer include Noah and Abraham. Both were required by God to submit to the things God commanded.

Living by faith means we obey God even when we do not understand the particulars about the command. Noah was given instructions that would have been very hard to accept. Noah was not surrounded by a host of people who would give support and help in this huge task. Many must have felt that Noah had lost his mental capacity. Noah was justified by faith when he believed God enough that he made an ark to the saving of his soul and the souls of others. What did Noah know about rain? Had he ever seen a flood? What did he understand about building an ark? Why was God so specific about the material used in building the ark and why did He choose the particular dimensions? In spite of this, he moved with an undisturbed faith. He trusted God and obeyed the voice of God.

Living by faith means we obey God when we do not know where it will lead. Abraham likewise understood that faith in God required an obedient conduct. God told him to leave his land and relatives. He obeyed without knowing where he was going. This required great faith that God would see him through any problems he might face. He also showed his complete faith in God when he offered his son in sacrifice.

And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land

of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. (Gen. 22:1-2)

Abraham began his preparation to carry out God's orders immediately. He did this in complete obedience to God's instruction. Abraham demonstrated great and complete trust in the Lord. "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Prov. 3:5-6). His trust was so strong, he felt that God would still keep His Word even though he killed his son. The Hebrews writer explained that Abraham believed God would raise him up and keep His Word (Heb.11:19). Trust is demonstrated when we obey. We cannot separate faith from obedience. God is worthy of our trust. He never fails. "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). Having God on our side assures success. With God at our side, who could challenge us? "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Rom 8:37).

Living by faith means that we obey God even when others reject our position. It has never been a popular thing to be a Christian or to live for God. Those who love God find themselves in a minority position. This was clearly true in the days of Noah. Throughout all the world Noah was only able to find seven others who would accept God and follow His ways.

By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 3:19-21)

Jesus prepared His disciples for this as He taught them about the narrow way to Heaven.

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be

which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. (Matt. 7:13-14)

Few are on the way that leads to Heaven but there are many on the way that leads to death. We should expect to find ourselves being opposed by the majority.

For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you: Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead. (1 Peter 4:3-5)

When others find that we will not engage in the same worldly things they do, it follows that they will speak evil about us. Jesus said that we are blessed when people speak against us. We need to be sure that what they say is a false accusation, not a true one. “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake” (Matt. 5:11). Some folk seem to feel better when they are able to cut another person down for doing the right thing. Being in the minority should not surprise us. Noah was only able to convince seven other people besides himself that God was right when He told about a flood and the preparation that needed to be done to get ready for it. Only his family believed him while others mocked.

Living by faith means that we build a life that is based on a strong hope of a home in Heaven. The Hebrew writer tells us in chapter eleven that Abraham obeyed God with a hope that included a city made by God that is eternal in the heavens (Heb. 11:10). We really do not know how much he understood about this future home but we do know that it was a moving force in his way of life. This is also an important part of the life of faith today. Paul states that we are saved by hope (Rom. 8:24). When we remove the hope of a home in Heaven from our Christian life, we take away a very

strong motive for doing the right thing. The hope of Heaven serves as a stabilizing force in life.

That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil. (Heb. 6:18-19)

When we look about us at all of the sad and discouraging things that have to do with this life, it is great to think about going to a place without these problems. We must live by faith in order to obtain this blessing.

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.” And he that sat upon the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” And he said unto me, “Write: for these words are true and faithful.” (Rev. 21:1-5)

To think of a place where there is no sorrow, sickness or death is a motive for living a life of faith. The cost of obtaining a home in Heaven is minimal when compared to the dreadful cost of not serving God. No man can afford to pay this price. Paul the apostle states that the suffering of this world is not worthy to be compared to the glory that will be revealed (Rom. 8:18). Words cannot adequately describe what Heaven shall be like but it will be well worth it to live by faith.

It is with the greatest degree of respect that we read about the faith of Noah, the faith of Abraham, and the faith of all others who are listed in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. Truly, the world was not worthy of such greats.

They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. (Heb.11:38)

Living by faith is the way God's people have always conducted their lives. In doing this we are making the preparation necessary for us to enjoy the blessings of Heaven.

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#### **Biographical Sketch**

Frank Higginbotham was born in New Martinsville, WV, February 21, 1933. He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. A. G. (Bus) Higginbotham. He was graduated from Magnolia High School in New Martinsville, WV, and from Florida Christian College in Tampa, FL. His first located work was with the Columbia Street Church of Christ in Fairmont, WV. From there he worked with the church in Wellsburg and the West Street church in Weirton, WV. In 1964 he moved to the Virginia Avenue Church of Christ in Chester, WV, and is currently in his 45<sup>th</sup> year with this congregation. Frank has done radio and TV preaching and has been preaching for 57 years. He is speaker at this time for 'Bible Meditations.' This 15 minute program is produced five days a

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Frank is married to Rose Marie (King) Higginbotham and they are the parents of three children. Donna (passed away in 1965), Janie Gallagher who is married to Brent Gallagher (the preacher for the Oakwood Road Church of Christ in Fairmont), and Steve who is the preacher for the South Green Street Church of Christ in Glasgow, KY. The Higginbotham's have seven grandchildren.

# *Scripture Index*

**GENESIS**

1:1	211
1:1-31	115
2:2	146, 149, 150
2:24-25	312
3:15	55, 304
6:14-16	188
7:1	186
8:13	186
8:14	186
8:15-16	186
14:17	288
14:18	287
14:21-24	288
14:22-24	289
15:20	78
17:4	72
18:2	309
18:9-33	309
19:1	309
22:1-2	325
22:1-24	72
22:16	73
22:16-17	73

**EXODUS**

2:1-25	294
3:1	289
3:1-22	294
3:5	200
3:6	53
4:16	234
17:1-7	21
18:1-27	289, 294
19:3	138
19:6	220
19:7	138
19:8	138
19:10	102
19:16-18	277
20:3	186
20:17	313
25:22	201
28:1	222
28:21	221

28:29	221
29:10-24	96
30:6	198
31:18	142
33:14	22
35:30-35	32

**LEVITICUS**

4:1-35	222
5:11-13	39
5:14-19	222
7:11	39
10:1-2	186
10:1-20	197, 235
11:44a	306
11:44b	307
16:1-34	136, 265
16:2	202
16:6	33, 221
16:6-16	33
16:7-11	33
16:10	221
16:11	33
16:14	33
16:15	221
16:15-16	33
16:22	221
19:18	308
25:1-55	49

**NUMBERS**

8:1-26	184
8:10-11	96
15:1-41	235
15:27-29	222
19:1-22	33
19:2	33
20:1-29	235
20:3-11	236
20:12	236
20:23-29	236

**DEUTERONOMY**

5:1ff	38
10:8	187
12:10	22
18:15-18	83
18:18-21	62
18:20-22	276
23:2	248
25:7-10	52
25:19	22
27:26	139
32:9	216
32:46-47	45
33:2	120
34:1-7	237

**JOSHUA**

1:5	314
1:13	22
1:15	22
15:8	288
21:44	22
22:4	22, 149
23:1	22, 149

**JUDGES**

13:6	120
------	-----

**1 SAMUEL**

4:4	202
7:14	125
13:5-15	290
13:8-14	187

**2 SAMUEL**

1:14	129
5:9	288
7:2	195
7:11b-17	125
7:14	6, 125, 131
12:11	87
14:17	102

**1 KINGS**

8:9	120, 202
8:27	200

**2 KINGS**

9:7	2
23:25	87

**1 CHRONICLES**

15:2	187
23:25	22
28:9	46

**2 CHRONICLES**

7:5	156
17:7-9	11
35:7	156
36:21	141

**NEHEMIAH**

8:9	11
9:6	52

**JOB**

5:17	246
9:32-33	63
10:2	247
23:3	61
23:12	51

**PSALMS**

2:1-12	125, 126, 130
2:7	6, 125, 130
8:1-9	121
8:5	119
8:6-8	119
14:1	19
19:14	269
22:21	225
23:3	146

37:31	48
40:1-17	159
40:8	51, 85
45:1-17	6, 127, 128, 129
45:6-7	6, 127, 128, 131
51:6	53
53:1	19
53:1-6	19
68:8	277
72:7	297
94:12-13	246
95:1-11	148, 149
95:1-2	21
95:1-7	21
95:1-11	21
95:2	21
95:4-5	21
95:6-7a	21
95:7	21
95:7-8	149
95:7-11	21
95:8	147
95:11	148
102:25-27	130
103:20	120
104:4	120
110:1	130, 256, 296
110:1-7	130, 296, 299
110:4	32, 287, 290, 292, 299
118:6	314
119:10-11	142
119:11	85
119:97	48
119:104	48
119:105	170, 196
119:130	170
142:4	46

**PROVERBS**

3:5-6	178, 325
3:11-12	244, 246
14:12	321
23:7	269
23:23	47

**ECCLESIASTES**

12:13	274
-------	-----

**ISAIAH**

5:20	175
9:6-7	297
28:16	265
53:1	267
53:5-7	140
53:10-11	141
53:11	67
53:12	266
55:7	203
55:11	46
57:15	195
59:1	227
59:1-2	63, 140
59:2	34, 227
61:1-2	49

**JEREMIAH**

7:3	186
7:31	186
19:11	141
23:23	199
31:22	141
31:31	149
31:31-34	83, 84, 141
36:20-32	278

**EZEKIEL**

16:60-62	83
34:25-26	83
44:23	11

**DANIEL**

2:34	195
2:44	280
2:45	195
9:1-10:21	120

**HOSEA**

4:6	91
-----	----

**JOEL**

2:13	53
------	----

**HABAKKUK**

2:1-4	319
2:2-4	177
2:4	177

**HAGGAI**

2:6	277
-----	-----

**ZECHARIAH**

6:13	221
------	-----

**MALACHI**

3:6	312
-----	-----

**MATTHEW**

1:18-25	223
3:11	96
3:15	128
3:16	96
3:17	6, 223
4:1-10	46
5:6	48, 265
5:11	326
5:16	54
5:17	47, 50
5:17-20	3
5:18	140
5:44-45	309
5:46-48	308
6:19-21	52, 313
6:22-23	313
6:24	313
6:31-34	314
6:33	55, 233
7:13-14	233, 326

7:14	321
7:21-23	226, 323
9:36	54
10:19-20	4
10:32-33	268
11:28-30	150, 230, 279
12:34	269
13:10-17	306
15:16-20	316
16:18	136, 213, 280
16:18b	281
16:21	12
16:24	268
16:26	165
16:27	127
17:5	6, 62, 233, 276
18:10	120
18:18	213
19:21	166
20:18	12
20:28	137
21:15-16	12
21:23	12
21:41-45	12
21:41-46	257
21:45	306
22:37-38	53
22:42	125
23:2	53
23:3	53
23:27-28	53
23:36	16
24:1-2	268
24:1-51	105, 269
24:2	10
24:36	104, 120
24:43	104
25:31-46	97
25:34-36	310
26:3-4	12
26:28	87, 143
26:29-4	4
26:37-38	46
26:39	225
26:47	12
26:59	12

26:59-61 267  
 27:1 12  
 27:3 12  
 27:12 12  
 27:20 12  
 27:39-44 268  
 27:41 12  
 27:46 67, 225  
 27:62-63 12  
 28:11-13 12  
 28:18 123, 131, 213  
 28:18-19 237  
 28:18-20 96, 142  
 28:19 215  
 28:19a 230  
 28:19-20 142  
 28:20 199

**MARK**

1:13 131  
 1:40-45 306  
 3:5 46  
 3:31-35 308  
 6:31 146  
 7:9 321  
 8:38 268  
 12:18-27 52  
 12:24 52  
 12:31 308  
 12:36 21  
 13:1-37 105  
 13:2 10  
 13:30 16  
 14:55-59 267  
 16:15 279  
 16:15-16 96, 238  
 16:16 170, 230

**LUKE**

1:1-80 12  
 1:19 120  
 1:26 120  
 2:1-39 223  
 2:8-14 126

2:46 48  
 2:47 48  
 2:46-47 11  
 2:48 47  
 2:52 46  
 4:19 49  
 4:21 49  
 6:46 226  
 9:31 27  
 10:25-27 309  
 11:52 232  
 12:1 53  
 12:16-21 313, 314  
 12:39 104  
 13:3 170  
 14:33 166  
 15:1-32 46  
 15:10 120  
 15:30 96  
 16:19-21 313  
 17:7-10 322  
 19:10 51, 311  
 19:44 10  
 20:36 121  
 21:5 10  
 21:6 10  
 21:20-21 105  
 21:32 16  
 22:41-44 67  
 22:43 131  
 22:44 224  
 24:4-7 131  
 24:46-47 238

**JOHN**

1:1 1, 138, 208, 223,  
 1:1-3 122, 130  
 1:1-4 211  
 1:1-5 1  
 1:1-51 122  
 1:3 121  
 1:4-5 170  
 1:11 267  
 1:14 1, 46, 208, 223  
 1:29 12, 55, 316

1:51 127  
 3:10 50  
 3:16 76, 229, 249, 300  
 3:17 55  
 3:34 50  
 3:36 112  
 4:3-4 50  
 4:6 46  
 4:7-8 46  
 4:14 51  
 4:25 51  
 4:31 51  
 4:32 51  
 4:34 47, 222, 225  
 4:39 51  
 4:41 51  
 4:42 114  
 5:22 130  
 5:28-29 97, 177  
 5:30 222  
 5:39 59, 276  
 5:43 222  
 6:1-71 306  
 6:29 322  
 6:38 137  
 6:44-45 86, 170  
 6:51-56 264  
 6:63 276  
 6:68 276  
 6:69 114  
 7:16 50  
 7:22 234  
 8:1-11 306  
 8:12 170  
 8:24 170  
 8:29 222  
 8:32 46, 67, 231  
 8:54 222  
 8:58 208  
 9:4 50, 222  
 9:5 170  
 9:44-45 142  
 10:1-42 316  
 10:10 173, 249  
 10:25 54  
 10:30 49

10:30-31 208  
 11:35 46  
 11:38 46  
 11:47-53 82  
 12:35-36 170  
 12:46 170  
 12:48 177, 276  
 13:34 307  
 13:35 174, 307  
 14:1 112  
 14:1-6 214  
 14:2 163  
 14:6 47, 101, 276, 280  
 14:10 50  
 14:12 55  
 14:12-14 5  
 14:15 51, 226  
 15:11 46, 256  
 15:14 51  
 16:12 260  
 16:13 260  
 16:14 4  
 16:20-22 256  
 16:24 256  
 17:2 256  
 17:3 50, 275  
 17:4 54, 140, 256  
 17:5 304  
 17:13 46, 256  
 17:17 280  
 17:20-21 6  
 19:20 265  
 19:30 46, 55, 140  
 20:30-31 223  
 20:31 223

**ACTS**

1:10-11 131  
 1:11 279  
 1:16 21  
 2:1-47 5  
 2:22-40 31  
 2:36-41 170  
 2:37-38 95, 238  
 2:38 96



2:41 281  
 2:46 309  
 2:47 109, 280, 281  
 3:1-26 13  
 3:12-26 66  
 3:15 257  
 3:22-23 83  
 4:7 189  
 4:8-12 31  
 4:11 281  
 4:12 276  
 4:25 21  
 4:25-28 125  
 4:36 232  
 4:37 232  
 5:19 131  
 5:31 257, 304  
 5:38 278  
 5:39 278  
 6:1-6 108  
 6:1-15 14  
 6:3-6 96  
 6:7 11, 12, 13, 258  
 6:15 120  
 7:1-60 31, 171  
 7:6 258  
 7:38 4  
 7:48 195  
 7:51-53 234  
 7:53 120, 138  
 7:58 231  
 8:1-4 171  
 8:14-19 96  
 8:22 96  
 8:26 131  
 8:37 170, 268  
 8:39-40 96  
 9:1-43 232  
 9:27 233  
 10:28 137  
 10:34-35 213  
 10:34-48 31  
 10:38 51, 269  
 11:22 233  
 11:30 109  
 12:1-3 171

13:1-3 96  
 13:8 258  
 13:14-43 31  
 13:15 16  
 13:33 125  
 14:23 109  
 15:39 103  
 16:14 142  
 17:24 195  
 17:26-28 61, 216  
 17:29 275  
 17:30-31 97  
 17:31 130  
 19:1-6 96  
 20:17 108  
 20:28 102, 108, 315,  
 316  
 20:28-32 315  
 21:13 244  
 21:20-25 12  
 21:26 13  
 22:16 102  
 28:1-31 15

#### ROMANS

1:4 223  
 1:16 230, 311  
 1:14-17 320  
 1:17 177  
 1:18 278, 289  
 1:20 61, 115, 274  
 1:24 289  
 1:25 175  
 1:28 273, 289  
 2:1 274  
 2:3 274  
 2:4-12 213  
 2:5 274  
 2:14 289  
 2:15 289  
 2:29 84  
 3:2 50  
 3:10-23 311  
 3:18 283  
 3:19-20 213

3:20 139  
 3:23 63, 140  
 3:24-26 102  
 3:28 140  
 5:1 178, 297  
 5:8-10 311  
 5:9 36, 102  
 5:19 225  
 6:1-5 102  
 6:3-5 74, 170  
 6:16-18 226  
 7:12 139, 140  
 7:13-14 139  
 7:14 194  
 7:24-25 139  
 8:1 81  
 8:3 140  
 8:3-4 84  
 8:4 321  
 8:6 249  
 8:16-17 122  
 8:18 327  
 8:24 326  
 8:31 176, 325  
 8:34 81, 223, 257  
 8:37 325  
 8:38-39 160  
 9:2 47  
 9:6 84  
 10:3-4 107  
 10:4 140  
 10:9 112  
 10:9-10 170  
 10:10 142  
 10:16-21 76  
 10:17 115, 321  
 11:22 76  
 12:1-2 269  
 12:6 243  
 12:10 307  
 12:19 107, 278  
 13:1-7 311, 314  
 14:1-23 264  
 14:2 113  
 14:7-9 168  
 14:17 264

14:19 97  
 14:23 113  
 15:3 321  
 16:17 3

#### 1 CORINTHIANS

1:18 268  
 1:23 268  
 1:26 11, 306  
 2:1-2 97  
 2:10 291  
 3:1-2 92  
 3:16 195  
 4:7 168  
 4:9 121  
 5:7 27, 264, 316  
 6:11 267  
 6:12-13 312  
 6:18 312  
 6:18-7:5 312  
 6:19 229  
 6:20 229  
 7:1-9 312  
 7:29-31 164  
 8:6 5  
 8:13 167  
 9:13 264  
 9:19-22 97  
 9:20 12  
 9:20-23 167  
 9:24-27 254  
 10:1-14 27  
 10:2 96  
 10:11 41  
 10:16-17 173  
 10:18 264  
 10:31 167  
 10:32-33 167  
 11:1ff 314  
 11:10 121  
 12:6 12  
 12:7-11 96  
 12:8-9 113  
 13:1 307  
 13:8-10 96

13:8-13 307  
 13:11 93  
 14:26-33 104  
 15:1-4 31  
 15:3-4 97  
 15:9-10 311  
 15:24 5  
 15:29 96  
 15:51-53 52  
 15:58 55, 170, 179  
 16:1-2 269

**2 CORINTHIANS**

1:3-4 311  
 1:8-9 311  
 1:24 315  
 3:3 142  
 4:16-5:8 311  
 4:17 176  
 5:1-11 177  
 5:7 321  
 5:7b 86  
 5:11 97, 282  
 5:17 142  
 5:18-21 35  
 5:19-21 101  
 5:21 36  
 7:1 283  
 7:10 96, 170  
 8:5 269  
 9:7 269  
 12:7 5

**GALATIANS**

1:6-9 2  
 1:8 276  
 1:23 258  
 2:20 165  
 2:21 141  
 3:1-29 303  
 3:9 112  
 3:10 139  
 3:10-12 213  
 3:11 177, 320

3:19 4, 37, 120, 137, 139  
 3:21 141, 213  
 3:23 258  
 3:24 139  
 3:24-25 213, 304  
 3:26-27 230  
 3:26-29 213  
 4:4-5 49  
 5:3 304  
 5:7 254  
 5:22 174  
 6:1 216  
 6:10 269  
 6:16 84, 142

**EPHESIANS**

1:4 304  
 1:4-7 216  
 1:7 102  
 1:20-23 137  
 1:22 280  
 1:22-23 108, 213  
 1:23 280  
 2:5 322  
 2:8-10 322  
 2:14-16 303  
 2:11-22 35  
 2:16 216  
 3:3-6 46  
 3:8 231  
 3:8-11 150  
 3:11 230, 231, 304  
 4:1-6 216  
 4:3 85  
 4:4 280  
 4:5 5, 96  
 4:12-14 94  
 4:17-20 86  
 4:21-24 86  
 5:19 269  
 5:21 314  
 5:22-23 314  
 5:23 280  
 5:25 102  
 5:25b 84

5:27 281  
 6:1-4 314  
 6:5-9 314  
 6:10-18 54  
 6:11-18 176

**PHILIPPIANS**

1:12 172  
 1:17 54, 172  
 1:21 173  
 1:21a 165  
 1:25 164  
 1:29 171  
 2:5 173  
 2:5-6 138  
 2:5-8 223  
 2:5-11 172  
 2:6 46  
 2:7 46  
 2:7-11 125  
 2:8 34, 36, 55, 225  
 2:12 282  
 2:12-13 55  
 3:7-9 175  
 3:12-15 95  
 3:13-14 231  
 3:14 173  
 3:19-20 175  
 3:20 172  
 4:7 173  
 4:8 54  
 4:9 173  
 4:11 176  
 4:11-13 314  
 4:13 173  
 4:19 173

**COLOSSIANS**

1:1-29 2  
 1:5 214  
 1:13 281  
 1:14 102  
 1:15 2  
 1:15-17 1

1:16 129  
 1:16-17 122, 130  
 1:17 130  
 1:18 129, 131, 231, 280  
 2:9 49, 208  
 2:11-12 96  
 2:14 143, 303  
 2:14-15 264  
 2:18 316  
 3:1 257  
 3:1-3 172  
 3:5 313  
 3:16 269  
 3:22-25 314

**1 THESSALONIANS**

1:3 55  
 4:3-8 313  
 4:9 307  
 4:13-18 177  
 5:2-4 104  
 5:11 97  
 5:12-13 316

**2 THESSALONIANS**

1:6-9 226  
 1:7-9 278, 324  
 1:8-9 274

**1 TIMOTHY**

1:3 3  
 1:15 54  
 1:19 75  
 2:3-4 51  
 2:5 34, 138, 212  
 2:5-6 34, 37  
 3:2 315  
 3:1-7 316  
 3:7 254  
 4:3 114  
 4:15 49  
 5:10 310

5:19-20 316  
6:6 176  
6:8 313  
6:9-10 313  
6:11-12 176  
6:12 253  
6:12-13 103  
6:17-19 313

## 2 TIMOTHY

1:12 114  
2:2 91  
2:5 254  
2:15 91  
3:7 106, 232  
3:12 171

## TITUS

1:1-2 211  
1:5-9 316  
1:9 315  
2:11-14 56  
2:12-14 208

## HEBREWS

1:1 3, 115, 125, 274,  
279  
1:1-2 20, 122, 316  
1:1-2a 38  
1:1-2:4 62  
1:1-3 1, 213, 260  
1:1-4 303  
1:1-14 1, 119, 121  
1:1-2:18 304  
1:1-3:6 21  
1:2 1, 5, 6, 41, 63,  
119, 122, 130  
1:3 6, 59, 63, 122,  
123, 128, 130,  
1:3-5 124  
1:4 63, 82, 123, 135,  
216  
1:4-5 123, 124, 206

1:4-6 125  
1:4-14 20, 123  
1:4-2:4 4  
1:4-2:18 3  
1:5 6, 7, 63, 125,  
126, 129, 131,  
187, 206, 234  
1:5b-12 6  
1:5-14 131  
1:5-2:9 255  
1:5-3:6 147  
1:6 63, 126, 127, 234  
1:7 121,  
1:7-9 127  
1:8 6, 62, 63, 122,  
128, 129, 140,  
206, 208  
1:8b 128  
1:8-9 6, 63, 127, 128  
1:9 121, 128, 129,  
130  
1:9-12 130  
1:10 5, 6, 122, 130,  
279  
1:10-12 279  
1:11-12 64, 128  
1:12 130  
1:13 128, 131  
1:14 122, 123, 131,  
234  
2:1 316  
2:1-3 274  
2:1-4 5, 16, 119  
2:2 119, 120, 123,  
147, 276  
2:2-3 122, 138, 235  
2:3 5, 62, 259, 276  
2:3a 229  
2:3-4 62, 237  
2:4 238  
2:5 304  
2:5-9 31  
2:5-18 60, 62, 119  
2:6 63  
2:6-8 3  
2:7 63

2:8 304  
2:9 46, 60, 63, 67,  
160  
2:10 54, 62, 65, 257,  
259  
2:10-11 129  
2:10-13 213  
2:10-18 226  
2:11-12 63, 128, 308  
2:14 63, 138, 226  
2:14-15 64  
2:14-18 255, 261  
2:15 226  
2:17 14, 62, 64, 81  
2:17-18 35, 211, 222  
2:18 63  
3:1 59, 101, 150,  
184, 211, 243  
3:1-4 208  
3:1-4:16 148, 305  
3:1-5 20  
3:1-6 4, 205  
3:1-19 23  
3:4 206, 211  
3:1-4:13 4  
3:6 102, 216  
3:7-11 21  
3:7-19 16, 19, 20, 27  
3:7-4:13 4, 147  
3:11 148  
3:12 20, 22, 23, 25,  
45, 147  
3:12-13 16, 24, 103, 216  
3:13 26, 97  
3:14 102, 112, 128,  
129, 151  
3:15 21  
3:15-16 27  
3:15-19 27  
3:16-19 148  
3:17 20, 27  
3:18 27  
3:19 72  
4:1-11 146  
4:1-13 16  
4:2 151

4:3 150  
4:4 148, 150  
4:7 149  
4:8 148, 149  
4:9 103, 148  
4:10 150  
4:11 146, 149, 151  
4:12 311  
4:12-13 45, 151  
4:13 201, 274  
4:14 14, 223  
4:14-16 16, 35, 86, 256,  
261  
4:15 14, 46, 128, 138,  
266, 292  
4:15-16 81, 87, 101, 103,  
212, 216  
5:1 221  
5:1a 187  
5:1-8:13 305  
5:1-14 220  
5:2 221  
5:2-3 84  
5:4 221  
5:5 125, 222, 292  
5:5-9 219  
5:6 222, 287, 292  
5:6-11 290, 291  
5:7 223, 224, 260  
5:7-9 266, 323  
5:7-10 259  
5:8 226, 261  
5:8-9 38, 159, 213  
5:9 135, 226  
5:10 83, 222, 287  
5:11-14 147  
5:12 11, 95  
5:12a 90  
5:12b 91  
5:12c 92  
5:12-6:3 90  
5:12-14 11, 16  
5:13 93  
5:14 93  
6:1a 95  
6:1-2 95

6:1-3 16  
 6:1b-2 95  
 6:3 10, 97, 105  
 6:4-5 106  
 6:4-6 106  
 6:4-8 75, 98  
 6:6 107, 108  
 6:9 135  
 6:11 71  
 6:11-12 10, 16  
 6:13-16 72  
 6:15 77  
 6:17 304  
 6:17-18 73  
 6:18-19 327  
 6:19 75  
 6:19-20 74, 199  
 6:20 75, 222, 287  
 7:1 287  
 7:1-2 298  
 7:1-10 289  
 7:1-21 294  
 7:1-25 292  
 7:1-28 7, 316  
 7:3 286  
 7:4ff 295  
 7:4-10 298  
 7:6 295, 297  
 7:7 295  
 7:7-11 295  
 7:9-10 295  
 7:10-11 287  
 7:11 141, 295  
 7:11-17 223  
 7:11-19 299  
 7:11-28 299  
 7:12 299  
 7:12-14 3, 7, 17  
 7:13-14 299  
 7:14 5, 184, 185, 186,  
 188, 223  
 7:15 287, 295, 297  
 7:16 295, 297  
 7:17 32, 287, 299  
 7:18 41, 139

7:19 82, 101, 135,  
 138  
 7:20-22 83  
 7:20-28 299  
 7:21 137, 287  
 7:22 36, 82, 135  
 7:23 137  
 7:23-24 83  
 7:24 137, 294  
 7:25 14, 38, 79, 81 83,  
 102, 212, 216  
 7:26 14, 298  
 7:26-27 137  
 7:26-28 83  
 7:27 38, 40, 107, 136,  
 221, 266, 299,  
 300  
 7:28 38, 226  
 8:1 14, 59, 135, 137  
 8:1-3 83  
 8:1-13 83, 213  
 8:2 5, 32, 136  
 8:4 83, 136  
 8:5 84, 193  
 8:6 34, 36, 37, 38,  
 82, 84, 135, 137,  
 138  
 8:6-8 149  
 8:6-13 4, 83  
 8:7 38, 139  
 8:7-13 38  
 8:8 36, 38, 141  
 8:8-12 84, 141  
 8:9 36, 193  
 8:10 36, 38, 142  
 8:11 85, 86, 142  
 8:12 38, 86, 103, 142,  
 158, 266  
 8:13 16, 38, 87, 143,  
 144  
 8:16 34  
 9:1 32, 38  
 9:1-28 4, 305  
 9:2 38  
 9:4 36  
 9:8-10 38

9:9 87, 193  
 9:11 14, 32, 38, 194  
 9:11-12 136  
 9:11-14 31, 34, 42  
 9:11-22 213  
 9:11-26 31, 42  
 9:12 32, 33, 36, 38, 40  
 42, 82, 84, 107,  
 135, 199, 223  
 9:12-13 32, 38  
 9:12-14 32  
 9:12-26 31  
 9:13 32, 33  
 9:14 32, 33, 38, 42,  
 135  
 9:15 34, 36, 37, 38, 40  
 42, 135, 157  
 9:15-22 31, 34, 42  
 9:16 36, 39, 42  
 9:16-17 39  
 9:16-23 36  
 9:17 36, 37, 39  
 9:18 36, 38  
 9:18-22 38, 39  
 9:19-20 143  
 9:19-22 38  
 9:20 36, 39  
 9:21-22 39  
 9:22 36, 39  
 9:23 42, 82, 135  
 9:23-26 31, 40, 42  
 9:23-28 38, 161  
 9:24-25 42  
 9:24-28 38, 299  
 9:24 40, 136  
 9:25 40  
 9:26 40, 107, 158,  
 159, 299  
 9:27 97, 107, 159  
 9:28 107, 159, 160,  
 199, 266, 299  
 10:1 38  
 10:1-3 87  
 10:1-4 142, 157, 213,  
 266  
 10:1-10 155

10:1-17 157  
 10:1-39 305  
 10:3 266  
 10:4 33, 38, 140, 143,  
 156, 223, 227  
 10:5-7 137  
 10:5-9a 158  
 10:5-10 256  
 10:9 33, 38, 140  
 10:9b 159  
 10:9-10 213  
 10:10 107, 159, 160,  
 266, 299  
 10:11 87, 156, 223  
 10:12 136, 223, 266  
 10:14 226, 266  
 10:15 157  
 10:15-17 84  
 10:16 36  
 10:17 86, 103, 158  
 10:19 101  
 10:19-20 157  
 10:20 101  
 10:21 14, 81  
 10:21-22 102  
 10:22 102  
 10:22-25 215  
 10:23 103, 172  
 10:23-25 102, 105  
 10:24 103, 243  
 10:25 10, 103, 104  
 10:25-31 106  
 10:26 106, 199  
 10:26-31 106, 107  
 10:28 66  
 10:29 36, 107, 143  
 10:31 106, 278, 282  
 10:32 170, 176  
 10:32-33 171  
 10:32-39 179, 242  
 10:33 172  
 10:33-34 147, 269  
 10:34 82, 135, 138,  
 174, 175  
 10:35 175  
 10:36 176, 254

10:37 177  
 1037-38 320  
 10:38 177  
 10:38-39 111, 178  
 11:1 111, 112, 115  
     178, 242, 254  
 11:1-6 111, 114  
 11:1-40 111, 116, 117,  
     163, 178, 261,  
     305, 315, 324  
 11:3 115, 121  
 11:4 115  
 11:5 115  
 11:6 96, 112, 115,  
     117, 178  
 11:6b 103  
 11:6-11 233  
 11:8-10 163  
 11:9-10 164  
 11:9-16 163  
 11:10 269, 326  
 11:13 164  
 11:13-16 163, 214  
 11:14 150  
 11:16 82, 135, 150  
 11:17 72  
 11:19 325  
 11:26 268  
 11:32 9  
 11:35 82, 138  
 11:36 247  
 11:38 328  
 11:40 135  
 12:1 242, 253, 254,  
     255, 320  
 12:1-2 54, 253  
 12:1-3 59  
 12:1-4 305  
 12:1-29 316  
 12:2 247, 257, 261  
 12:2-4 242  
 12:3 243, 247  
 12:3-11 216  
 12:3-13 241  
 12:5 225  
 12:5-6 246

12:5-8 245  
 12:5-13 242  
 12:5-17 305  
 12:6 247  
 12:9 249  
 12:9-10 245  
 12:10 249, 251  
 12:11-13 245  
 12:12 147  
 12:14 249, 312  
 12:14-29 242  
 12:15 109, 147  
 12:18-29 305  
 12:22-24 216  
 12:24 34, 36, 38, 82,  
     135  
 12:25 275, 277  
 12:25b 276  
 12:25-27 278  
 12:25-29 275  
 12:26 276  
 12:28 279, 280, 282  
 12:29 306  
 13:1 306, 307  
 13:1-25 9, 304, 305, 306,  
     316  
 13:2 308, 309  
 13:4 311  
 13:5 173  
 13:5-6 314  
 13:6 176  
 13:7 10, 314, 315  
 13:9-11 263  
 13:10-16 263  
 13:12 265, 266  
 13:13 147, 265, 267,  
     268  
 13:13-14 105  
 13:14 5, 10, 150, 214,  
     268  
 13:15 216  
 13:15-16 269  
 13:16 269  
 13:17 10, 11, 315, 316  
 13:20 5, 36, 38, 135,  
     143, 279

13:20-21 98, 216  
 13:22 ix, 16, 147  
 13:24 9

### JAMES

1:1 142  
 1:2 142  
 1:14-15 140  
 1:21 323  
 1:22-25 26  
 1:27 269  
 2:10 304  
 2:20-24 77  
 2:24 322

### 1 PETER

1:3-5 214  
 1:5-8 170  
 1:9 171, 179  
 1:10 171  
 1:10-12 3  
 1:12 123  
 1:15 249  
 1:15-16 307  
 1:18 227, 321  
 1:19 227  
 1:20 41  
 1:22 226, 308  
 1:23 45  
 2:2-3 265  
 2:5 270  
 2:6 265  
 2:6-8 78  
 2:9-10 281  
 2:11 164  
 2:13-17 311, 314  
 2:21 47, 171  
 2:21-22 128  
 2:21-25 226  
 2:24 55  
 2:25 316  
 3:8 174  
 3:9 195  
 3:15 172, 207

3:17 176  
 3:18 299  
 3:19-21 325  
 3:20-22 102  
 4:3-5 326  
 4:17 274  
 4:19 171, 176, 178  
 5:1 108  
 5:1-4 108, 315, 316  
 5:2 315  
 5:3 315  
 5:4 315  
 5:7 173, 233

### 2 PETER

1:3 3  
 1:5-7 174  
 1:7-11 308  
 1:11 281  
 1:12 170  
 1:21 46  
 2:10 120  
 3:1-2 170  
 3:8 49  
 3:9 279  
 3:9-12 278  
 3:10 104, 279  
 3:10a 279  
 3:10-12 130  
 3:12 279  
 3:15-16 20, 89  
 3:17-18 89  
 3:18 49, 91, 232

### 1 JOHN

1:3-4 173  
 1:6-7 173  
 1:7 36, 158, 170, 279  
 2:1 223  
 2:2 76  
 2:3-5 226  
 2:15 175  
 3:10-11 307  
 3:18 307

3:24	226
4:4	176
4:7-8	307
4:19	46
4:20-21	307
5:2	226
5:3	226, 275

#### **JUDE**

3	3, 112, 258, 260, 261
9	120

#### **REVELATION**

1:4-5	213
1:7	279
2:1-3:22	120
2:10	112, 170
3:15-16	89
3:19	246
3:20	279
5:8	198
5:11	120
14:13	150
15:11	120
17:1-18	122
19:10	59
21:1-5	327
21:3	194
21:8	106
22:8	127
22:9	127
22:14	226
22:17	47
22:18-19	2

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