

Hebrews Bible Study

**Foundations of Faith**

(Something Better)

*Sermon Notes*

*Revised Edition 2013-2014*

by  
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These notes have been produced from my personal study of the letter to the Hebrews assisted by William Barclay's *Daily Study Bible*, Robert L. Long's *Notes on The Epistle to the Hebrews*, various study Bibles and some of the multitude of resources available in *e-Sword*.

This is not intended to be an academic work, but it is hoped that the reader may gain a deeper and practical insight into God's Word.

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## **Introduction:**

It is important that the foundations of our Faith are not neglected, or else all that we have built on it will collapse. We need to be reminded from time to time what makes this 'Christianity Thing' work and why it stands out from mere religion.

That is the underlying purpose of the letter to the Hebrews – to bring the Reader back to the Foundational Principals of a relationship with Christ. Originally, it was written to Jews, and so some of the content may be lost on us Gentiles who have little understanding of that culture. While it will pay to keep that in mind as you study this letter, there is still much that can be applied to *all* believers.

In the beginning of the book the Writer lays the foundation as to why we should take notice of Christ and follow His Way. He then reinforces the superiority of the New over the Old, to encourage his readers not to revert back to the *Copy* but to press on with the *Original*. Chapter 10 marks a shift in focus as the Writer goes on to explain how all this affects us, what is expected of us, and how we should live.

## **Background:**

### The Author:

Paul has been put forward as the author, however this is implausible considering the style and content of this letter. It was the third century theologian, Origen, who made the famous remark, "Who wrote the Letter to the Hebrews only God knows for certain". There are few enough clues are given in the text, however it is clear that he (or she?) was a second generation leader rather than one of the original apostles as 'this Great Salvation was... delivered to us by those who heard Him speak' (chapter 2, verse 3). This is also confirmed by the fact that the Author does not appeal to their own authority or testimony of events, but rather to the authority of Christ Jesus who announced the message in the first place. Throughout the letter the writer shows an intimate knowledge of Jewish theology and culture, and is certainly writing to those who share that history.

### The Date:

Most scholars believe Hebrews was written in the late sixties (i.e. AD68), before the destruction of Herod's temple. This seems reasonable in light of the Writer not mentioning that event, however that in itself is not conclusive. Perhaps more convincing is that references to worship practices are spoken of in the present tense (5:1-4, 7:8 & 8:4). Note that this changes from chapter nine to past tense, after the Writer has described the old covenant as obsolete and soon to disappear. There is also a train of thought that the letter was written between two distinct periods of persecution carried out by the emperors Nero and Domitian, which would date it a decade or so later.

### The Purpose:

This letter is quite clearly written by a Jewish Christian for Jewish Christians. Unlike the recipients of most of Paul's letters, these were not people who had been saved from a godless, pagan life but rather they were people with a Godly heritage. They had embraced the Gospel because they could see its truth, but were now becoming older in their faith and complacency was edging its way in. They had been with Christ through difficult times, but were now beginning to take what they had in Him for granted and slip back into the comfort of the 'old way'.

The letter to the Hebrews was written to counter this slide. In contrast to Paul's habit of appealing to his own authority as an apostle, the Writer skilfully argues for the authority of God's Son and His Word. In doing this he reminds us of our obligation to Christ and how a relationship with Him should impact on day-to-day living.

## **The Major Themes:**

There are three broad ideas in this letter:

1. Christ Jesus is superior for who He is (Chapters 1-3, 7, 8);
2. Christ Jesus is superior for what He has done (Chapters 4-5, 9);
3. There is a superior Way for us to live that is by Faith and Obedience. (Chapters 6, 10-13).

These can be broken down into the following major themes, which are spread throughout the letter:

- Christ is Superior to Angels, yet He humbled Himself for our sake:
  - Chapter one gets the readers' focus on Christ, establishes His superiority over angels and emphasises His 'God-ness', or Deity.
  - Chapter two shows us Christ's 'Human-ness', or Humanity, which is so necessary for Him to make an effective sacrifice for our sin.
- Christ is superior to the Moses & Levitical Priesthood:
  - This brings us to Chapter three, where Christ is shown to be superior to Moses because He is the Son, not a servant.
  - Chapters five and seven look at the Superiority of the Melchizedek Order of Priesthood to the Levitical Priesthood.
- The New Agreement in Christ is superior to the Old under the Law:
  - Chapter eight looks at the inadequacy of the Old and the Better Covenant based on better promises.
  - The work carried out by the Aaronic High Priest is compared with those of our Great High Priest in chapter nine the first half of chapter ten. The ability of Christ's sacrifice to completely deal with our sin and guilt shows its superiority to the animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant.
- Faith in Christ is superior to the rewards this world gives:
  - There is a Rest that is still available for those who accept it, as we see in chapter four.
  - If there are superior rewards, there are also more dire consequences for falling short, but always underpinned by God's faithfulness. (Chapter 6)
  - The second half of Chapter 10 begins to direct us towards the life required of us, with chapter 11 giving examples of some of those who rejected what this world had to offer and chose something better.
- Life in Christ is superior to Life in the World:

- In Chapter 12 we look at the training and discipline required to compete in this marathon of life, as well as the reward for those who finish the race.
- The final, brief encouragement is contained in Chapter 13 that follows on from the previous chapter by dealing with specific examples of what is true, reverent worship.

## **In Conclusion...**

While studying Hebrews we need to be mindful not to judge the original readers of this letter, but learn from their mistakes. There are old habits or customs that we also cling to. I'm particularly thinking of traditions within the Church that have little or no basis in Scripture. Some may have been useful once, but are no longer helpful or relevant and we need to seek Godly Wisdom in determining what to keep and what to throw out.

There is solid, foundational teaching throughout this letter and it is always good to keep such essential doctrine fresh and clear in our minds. While foundational, the teaching that the Author gives is by no means basic for it helps to reveal with some clarity the meaning of the symbolism that was such a core part of Jewish worship and culture.

"So, let us leave behind the elementary teaching about Christ and go forward to adult understanding... If God allows, let us go on".

## **God Speaks – With Superior Authority** **Hebrews Chapter 1**

### ***God Speaks***

The Father has always sought relationship with us and communication is essential for any relationship. The 'what' and the 'how' of God speaking are worth looking at, for initially this was through different servants at different times and in different ways – different and at times difficult. [Hosea](#) was required to marry a prostitute as an object lesson in Israel's unfaithfulness to God. [Ezekiel](#) had to cook with dung after having spent over a year lying on his left side. [Isaiah](#) had to wander around naked. God also used such things as these as well as the dreams & visions that He gave to the prophets to speak to the people. At times it was face-to-face counsel as with Moses and Abraham. There are also examples of God using scripture read to Kings, and of His Judgement being brought down on the people. Yet in spite of all this, the people, for the most part failed to listen and the message given was a mere fragment of the whole. The final act of Grace that God had planned was hidden from them:

**1 Peter 1:10-12 NLT** This salvation was something even the prophets wanted to know more about when they prophesied about this gracious salvation prepared for you. **(11)** They wondered what time or situation the Spirit of Christ within them was talking about when he told them in advance about Christ's suffering and his great glory afterward. **(12)** They were told that their messages were not for themselves, but for you. And now this Good News has been announced to you by those who preached in the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. It is all so wonderful that even the angels are eagerly watching these things happen.

This message, so wonderful that even angels are amazed, must surely require a messenger of equal importance. So now a *Son* has come, rather than a *servant*.

Christ is God's final word. There was no need to send another slave after sending His own Son (Refer: [Luke 20:9-17](#)). The time for the servants to speak on God's behalf is over, it is time for the Son Himself to declare what is on the Father's Heart.

### ***Who is this Son?***

He is the spitting image of His Dad. We see later that He shares His mum's humanity, but the focus here is on His position and therefore His authority.

**Col 2:9-10 NLT** For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body. **(10)** So you also are complete through your union with Christ, who is the head over every ruler and authority.

In many of Paul's letters, he starts with a clear declaration of his authority as an Apostle of Jesus Christ. What we have in the opening verses of this letter is a declaration of the position and authority of the One who gave the message. The Writer's focus is firmly on Christ's "God-ness" or Deity, demonstrating Christ's Authority and reaffirming His superiority over previous messengers. **Why is this important?** Quite simply, it is because the Authority of the Messenger affects how we respond to the message.

Christ is called 'The Word' in [John chapter one](#). This word is the Greek word 'logos'. Logos means, "Something said which includes the thought, reasoning (or logic) and the motive".<sup>1</sup> When Christ the Son of God is described by John as the 'Logos' he is

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<sup>1</sup> Strong's

saying that Christ is the condensing into physical form the thought, reasoning and motive of God. In Christ we see what God thinks, we see the logical reasoning behind those thoughts and we see what motivates God. Another way to put it is that *Jesus is personified the things that the Father would say*. This makes sense in light of The Son being "The radiance of the Glory of God, flawless expression of the nature of God" (v3 JBP). Jesus Christ gives us a flesh and blood view of The Father's character. If we would know the will of The Father, if we would hear His very heartbeat then we can observe The Son and know. God knows very well that actions speak louder than words, that's why "God *demonstrates* His love..." ([Romans 5:8](#)). The ongoing statement of Christ's act of Sacrifice on the Cross still speaks volumes – nothing more needs to be spoken.

Seeing as this Son is the Christ, and has not only the character of The Father, but His authority as well, how does that affect our response to the message He brought? Perhaps more importantly, have we taken in what He has to say to us? Naturally we must have some way of knowing and understanding what God wants from us in order to respond to it.

How has He made clear to you what He wants you to do? Often when reading The Word something applicable to you stands out. Hindsight and experience can also be a great help. When we experience the empowering of obedience or the pain of discipline after rebellion, then the desire to know and do God's will is strengthened. It may be that as someone speaks out of God's Word, or in the course of conversation, speaks just the words you need to hear. One thing is certain: God is peace and order. Confusion and turmoil are not from Him. You, being filled with His Spirit, will have that peace when you settle in your heart to do what is His heart's desire.

[1Co 2:16 GNB](#) 'As the scripture says, "Who knows the mind of the Lord? Who is able to give him advice?" We, however, have the mind of Christ.'

He has given us His Spirit so we are able to tap into the thoughts of God, hearing even His heartbeat.

### ***Above All***

What is it that Jesus has done to be set above all else? Verse three continues on with, 'himself the upholding principle of all that is'. *His very nature sets Him apart*. The fact is that 'in Him and through Him and for Him all things exist' and that alone sets Him above all that He has created – our existence is entirely dependant on His Grace. However, there is still more that He has done which has earned Him a Name above every other name – *He has 'effected in person the reconciliation between God and man'*. The rift that we caused in the relationship has been healed by His actions, motivated by Love. This work was completed on the cross when He cried, "It is finished!" This has given Him the right to sit down at the right hand of the Majesty on High. You don't sit down while there's work still to be done! Having been a little lower than angels for a time, He resumed His rightful position once His mission was complete. That position is the one He was fully entitled to, having held it since before the creation of the world though He set it all aside for a time ([Phil 2:5-11](#)). Do we need any more proof that He is far greater than the Angels?

### ***Required Response***

The Son was not made, He is an indivisible part of the Father, and as such cannot be considered in the same class as a created being. Compare the difference in what has been written about Angels and The Son in verses 5 and on. Angels have far more power and splendour than we do, yet far much more than that is the Power and the Glory of the Son of God. We see here that angels are servants of God and are for the benefit of those who are saved. Christ is the Son, who sits along side and rules with the Father, representing us before His Majesty.

It is through Him that our relationship with the Father is restored, it is through Him that the message of that restoration has come and it is through Him that the Father still speaks. With such a Message and such a Messenger how can we possibly fail to do all that He asks of us?



## **Christ's Authority, Humility and Humanity** **Hebrew Chapter 2**

Chapter two emphasises the importance of the Message and Christ's 'Human-ness' or Humanity that is so necessary for Him to make an effective sacrifice for our sin. It also answers a few questions: Where did this Gospel come from? Why is it so important? What happens when we ignore it? Why did Jesus have to suffer and die like He did?

### **1-4      *Such a Message.***

The Gospel's Origin is important, because the authority of the One from whom it comes is important. The message of the Old Covenant was passed to Israel with Heavenly Authority – that of angels, servants and messengers of God. How strict were the judgements imposed when Israel disobeyed! We see some of these requirements detailed in [Exodus 21](#). There were occasions in the wilderness where God brought about His judgment directly, such as in [Numbers 16](#) and [21](#).

Hearing God's Word requires that you firmly anchor your heart and mind to it. Failure to do so will see you to 'drift away' from the Gospel, allowing yourself to be carried along with whatever current of thought is most popular, rather than holding firmly to the Truth. To do so is to treat the Gospel with the same kind of contempt that Israel treated God's Word through Moses while they were in the wilderness, and in doing so not only miss out on the promised blessing, but to suffer judgement as well.

This Good News we have has not been handed down to us by men, or even by angels but the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Because of Jesus' superior position it is vital that we pay close attention to what He has to say. The Apostles have testified as eyewitnesses to this and it has been confirmed as being true 'by signs and miracles, by all kinds of spiritual power, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, all working to the Divine Plan'.

Do we still see these kinds of confirmations of God's message? Perhaps we do not witness many wonders or miracles – at least in our little corner of the world. Be assured that they do still happen in many places. Still, we should be observing the various gifts of the Holy Spirit, both in ourselves and also in our fellow believers. Now I'm not saying that we should see any one particular gift in everyone. No, there are many gifts, as diverse as the people of the Body, and it is the Spirit, not us, who decides how they are distributed. It is when these gifts of Hospitality, Service, Teaching, Generosity, Mercy and so on, are being used as intended that the truth of the Gospel will be confirmed to those who look on.

Note that there is *one* plan, thus no part of God's testimony will contradict another. The revelation of the Holy Spirit will not go against the written Word that we have. Those demonstrations of God's power will come out of His Word rather than adding anything to it. How can such a message, with such an origin be ignored? Surely to do so will invite judgement far more severe than anything Israel faced!

### **5-9      *What Should Be and What Is***

'The world to come' is obviously a reference to the New Heaven and Earth that will replace this current one that is groaning under sin. This quote from Psalm 8 shows us what should have been, what the Creator intended for His 'very good' creation.

This is very obviously *not* what we actually observe. We see the results of millennia of rebellion against a very good God. We see sin and Satan taking ownership of what should be under the authority of good Men. What is encouraging is that we 'do not *yet* see' this. The indication being that all things *will* be restored to their intended order. While we wait for that restoration, we look to Jesus.

The wonder is that God even takes notice of people! Yet He has made us the Crowning Glory of His Creation and just a little lower than the Angels. Man was put on earth to tend it, to be a steward of all the good stuff that God provided in it. To us He has given the responsibility to Manage the Resources of the Earth. However, because of sin we have failed to achieve all that we were created for. Instead of the glory and honour originally intended, we have earned death, so when we look about us we do not see our purpose fulfilled.

But we do see Jesus, who, having been made like us for a while, completely fulfilled all God created us to be. By God's Grace He has even taken on Himself the Death that we all earned, but that He never deserved. For all this He has been crowned with Glory and Honour far above all others. Verse 9 contrasts the 'What should have been' of the previous verses with the 'What actually is' through Christ.

Before going forward, we need to go back to the phrase '...made a little lower than the angels...' in verses 7 and 9. It is here that we see the introduction of Christ's Humanity. Throughout chapter one the Writer emphasises Christ's Deity in order to establish His Authority over the Law. In this last part of chapter two Christ is shown to be perfectly human as well. It is only in this way that He can be 'a High Priest both compassionate and faithful in the things of God' (v17).

### ***'...For whom are all things, and through whom are all things...'***

Everything that exists for God and they exist because of God. Can we really claim to have anything through our own efforts or for our own glory? It can only be through God that 'many sons' are brought to glory and it can only be for His glory that this was done. Sure, you benefit from the relationship, but it is not about you. It is about God – His Grace, His Mercy, His Love, His Power and His Glory. He alone chooses the best way to show these characteristics and that is through the Pioneer of our Salvation.

### ***The One Who Leads The Way***

That one little Greek word '*archegos*' can mean chief, founder, originator, source, origin, or pioneer. It is one who goes first so that others can follow. Barclay mentions this image:

Suppose a ship is on the rocks and the only way to rescue is for someone to swim ashore with a line in order that, once the line is secured, others might follow. The one who is first to swim ashore is the *archegos* of the safety of the others.

This is exactly what Christ has done for us. He has done the hard yards for us so that by following the path he has already set we can have security and safety when we would otherwise have disaster.

### ***11-18 Made Like Us In All Things***

We have in the final paragraphs of this chapter, this stunning imagery of Christ taking on our 'flesh and blood'. Yet there was something more required than merely putting on a skin. The One who initiated our salvation needed to be made

'perfect...through sufferings' (v10). Does this mean that The Son of God was not perfect before He suffered? Certainly in the context of His obedience to the Father and in terms of His morality, Christ was perfect. The Greek word used here means 'to bring to an end, to complete, perfect' so it also has the sense also of meaning 'to bring to full maturity'. I believe that the sense of the word in this case could also be 'enabled to perform the task of Saviour perfectly'. Like us, Jesus had to become mature. We see in [James 1:1-4](#) that suffering brings us to maturity, so also it would have been with Christ. He was required to undergo the whole spectrum of human existence before He could initiate the salvation process for all mankind.

This is no distant, detached god sending pain and disaster on unsuspecting people. What we have here is a God who walked with us, who shared our physical limitations, who experienced pain and sorrow as well as joy. He is not ashamed of us, not ashamed to be identified with His Creation, not afraid to love us and become like us in order to save us. Christ's complete obedience was only part of what was required. It was also essential that He be able to fully sympathise with all we experience and therefore suffering was required to bring to completion His qualification to be Saviour and High Priest.

This 'Incarnation' is inseparable from the Crucifixion. The Cross is the centre piece of God's plan for our salvation, but it was *imperative* that Christ be made like us in all things – Physical Growth, Emotional Growth, Mental Growth, Spiritual Growth. Jesus grew in all these areas, just as we do; yet He achieved a fullness and maturity that could only come from being without sin. He was literally *in the prime of His life!* However, it was only on the *Cross* through *suffering* that He was finally made complete – fully mature.

In sharing our humanity in all aspects, yet without once failing in sin, He is able to destroy the power of the one who had the power of death. What is it that Christ has achieved by becoming like us and dying on the cross? There is a whole bunch of stuff, but in these verses we see five things in particular. They are:

1. Experiencing death on behalf of everyone (v9);
2. Brining many sons to glory (v10);
3. To make men holy (sanctification) (v11);
4. Through His own death to make powerless the one who has the power of death (v14);
5. To set free those who live their lives slaves to the fear of death (v15)

### ***To Sum up...***

Jesus was not some angelic being sent to reveal heavenly secrets to a select one or two. It was imperative that He be made like us in all things, that He experience our life with all of its joys, sorrows and temptations. Christ, who sets us apart, and we who are set apart share the same Source of Life, which is the Father. The only way for Him to neutralise the devil's power over death was to die as a person. It was mankind that sinned; it must be a man who dies. Being made like us in all things, and having suffered and been tempted as we have, He is able to faithfully plead our case before the Father. When we ask the Father for something, the Son is right there saying, "Please do this, I know what that's like." It is because of His experience as a person that He can help us when we struggle with temptation and has been able to provide us with the perfectly pleasing sacrifice for our sins.

## **The Servant, The Son And The Choice** **Hebrews Chapter 3**

First there was the Servant, who prepared the House, and then the Son came to take authority over it. We now have a choice, the same one that faced Israel as they wandered through the wilderness – to believe in the Promise and take hold of it, or not.

### ***The Focal Point.***

Our focus is to be Jesus, the One who is fully qualified to be the way to God. At the foundation of our every thought and action should be His example. The reason for this is seen at the end of chapter two, where Christ's ability to intercede and help is made clear. Christ is the One who should captivate our thoughts. His example, His purpose for us should ever be foremost in minds.

Jesus is described here as 'Apostle and High Priest of our confession'. The word 'apostle' comes from two Greek words, *apo* meaning 'away from' and *stellō* meaning 'to arrange, prepare, or gather up'. *So an Apostle is one who has been sent away on a prepared task.* Generally, it would mean a delegate or ambassador. You do not send out an Ambassador on the spur of the moment. The choice of person and the country to which they are sent are carefully considered. The Mission of Jesus Christ was carefully planned from the foundation of the world. Everything was arranged and prepared long before the Son was sent from the Father.

Christ's suitability for the role of High Priest is covered in chapter two, so I won't go over it again here. Suffice to say that the High Priest is appointed by God to make the necessary sacrifices on behalf of the people, to deal with them sympathetically and gently, and to speak to God on their behalf. Only Christ is perfectly suitable to do all this.

### ***In and Over.***

The comparison of Christ and Moses really needs to be seen through Hebrew eyes in order to be fully appreciated. Of all the prophets who spoke on God's behalf, Moses alone is said to have talked with God 'face to face as a man speaks to his friend'. Moses handed down the Law to Israel, collated and wrote down much of what we have of in the first five books of the Bible and lead Israel from slavery into rest. In reading the Gospel accounts, you see just how much he was respected, even revered, especially by the Pharisees. In [John 9:29](#) we get an idea of the Pharisee's attitude, "We know that God has spoken to Moses; but as for this man, we do not know where he is from." They did not realise that 'this man' is the very Word of God!

The fact that the Writer is addressing Jews explains why the Son must be compared to the Servant. Moses was indeed 'faithful in all God's house'. Yet he was a servant *in* God's house, whereas the Son is *over* God's house. A son who has come of age and has demonstrated that He is completely faithful in doing all his father requires will have authority over the household in a way that even the most reliable servant never can. This House that Christ is over is not built out of wood, bricks or stones. Rather it is built with people – living stones<sup>2</sup> who each have a unique part in making

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<sup>2</sup> [1Peter 2:5](#)

the House what it is. God's House is a building of servants, not bricks and mortar, but a community of people<sup>3</sup>.

The role of Moses was to point to Christ. He was a steward, not a king. Moses' job of leading the people, which included bringing the Law to them, was much the same as the role of the Law itself:

[Galatians 3:21-26 \(NIV\)](#) Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. But Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. *So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith.* Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.

In the same way a steward will hand the running of a house back to his master when he comes, or a baby sitter will return children to the care of their parents, so the Law hands us over to Grace now that the Son has come.

While Moses and Jesus were both appointed by God, we see in this chapter of Hebrews, a comparison between one who *received* the Word of God with the One who *is* The Word of God. Moses worked as a faithful servant in God's House, providing a testimony, a vague image of Christ who was to come. Christ, the faithful Son, provided a crystal clear image of the Father. It was Christ Jesus that built the House, Christ who was the full revelation of the Truth. Christ has been completely faithful to His work, not as a steward, but as Son and heir to the House.

Now, we have been adopted into this Household, with full rights of inheritance. So Christ, who is the Head of the House, is our Head also. This idea of Christ's Headship, leads us into the next part of the chapter – *Submission to the Will of God.*

### ***Don't Harden Up***

Verses 7 to 19 reference [Psalm 95](#). This Psalm starts out with an overflowing of praise and then seems to change course mid way through to what is quoted here. Worship cannot be separated from obedience. 'To obey is better than sacrifice'<sup>4</sup>. You have heard God's instruction, what will you do now? If you 'harden your heart' and refuse to put your confidence in God, if you do not believe in His ability to supply what you need, then the bitterness of disobedience will be yours. This is what we see in [Numbers 14](#) when in spite of God's faithfulness in getting them out of Egypt, most of Israel did not obey God because they did not have confidence that He would (or could) do what He had promised.

Remaining close to Him, knowing what He has called you to do and doing it – this is what is required of us. 'The Rebellion' comes out of a heart that doesn't believe. How often do you see only the Giants and not the Power of God?

### ***Four Ways to Fail***

So Israel blew it because of their sin. Now we use the word 'sin' a lot, it is almost a cliché. We know that it is bad, but do we actually understand what sin is? From

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<sup>3</sup> [Ephesians 2:19-22](#)

<sup>4</sup> [1 Samuel 15:22](#)

verse 16 to 19 The Writer uses *four different words that all mean sin*. Let's look at what they are and what kind of picture they give us of what sin is.

**V16- Provoked or Rebelled.** JB Philips uses the phrase, 'provoked His indignation'. The Writer uses the word *parapikrainō* which means 'to come beside and make bitter'. When someone argues against you, refuses to trust you, even the most patient will become annoyed. This is what Israel did with their constant complaining.

**V17- Sinned.** The Greek word *hamartanō* means 'to miss the mark'. It is used in the sense of having *fallen short* of what was required, or not having met the required standard. As a Workplace Assessor, I would say that the person was not yet competent. Even if they meet all the other criteria, they have not completely met the required standard and will not receive the qualification they seek. In falling short of God's standard, their bodies also fell short of the Promised Land.

**V18- Disobeyed or Disobedient.** The Greek here is *apeitheō*. The prefix 'a' indicates the opposite of the word *peitheō* which means to 'persuade or have confidence in'. The word as used here is translated as *disobey*, but JB Philips, perhaps more accurately, uses the phrase *refused to trust*. *Apeitheō* indicates a lack of confidence or trust in the one who gives the instruction. *Clearly then, the Israelites did not obey God's command because they were not confident that God would do as He had promised.*

**V19- Unbelief** is how most translators render the Greek word *apistia*. This word has the opposite sense of faithful or reliable. They were unfaithful and unreliable. So again, there is this idea of a lack of faith, no confidence in the reliability of the One speaking. They simply did not believe God when He told them what He would do.

Trust cannot be separated from obedience (See [James 2:14-26](#)). If you trust Him, you will obey Him. You can only obey Him if you have full confidence in His instruction.

### ***Stay Close or Fall Away.***

There is a constant danger of complacency and numbing of the conscience when we allow wilfulness, distractions or fear to persist. All of these things stem from unbelief and result in falling away from God. What do I mean by falling away? In a word: *Relationship*. The life and sacrifice of Jesus Christ was about restoring our relationship to the Father and to each other to the original standard. Unless a conscious effort is made in any relationship it will deteriorate to the point of estrangement.

We need not be alone in the struggle. Indeed we cannot be and were never intended to be. Encouraging one another at every opportunity is the way to keep hearts living and supple. Fellowship is essential, it is one way we strengthen our connection with The Vine. We are called to encourage one another – building up each other's strengths, and helping each other to overcome weaknesses. It's no good to put it off; we need to do it *now*, 'today' while you have the chance. If we fail to do this for our Brothers and Sisters in Christ, then sin, with all its treachery, will harden us to God's will. We need one another. Going it alone is not an option for the Christian.

Take a look at [Ecclesiastes 4:9-12](#). Note that two can resist an attack, be that physical or spiritual, better than one. This is such a fundamental principal of how we are designed to function – in community. Interestingly enough, after talking about two, verse 12 finishes by referring to a cord of *three* strands. Who else could this mean except God? Any fellowship of people intertwined with fellowship with God will not be easily broken.

Persistence, endurance, holding fast until the end – this is where the reward lies, there is no prize for failing to finish the race. There are blessings along the journey, but it is only when we have endured to the end that we can enjoy the Promised Rest. Again let me stress, you cannot make it to the end of the journey on your own.

We must be careful to ensure that we do not fall away from the Living God, and that we encourage one another to continue in this Journey of Faith until the very end. Sin is a very subtle thing – be vigilant for yourself and also your brothers and sisters in Christ.

***Trust cannot be separated from obedience.***

In spite of being led so well by a most faithful servant, Israel missed the mark and had no confidence in God. Their rebellion provoked God, made Him angry and the consequence was a cutting off from that which was promised<sup>5</sup>.

The choice then, is whether or not you will believe what God has said through His Son, or follow Israel's example in the desert. We need to choose to believe what God has said, *and act on it*. Failure either to believe, or to act will result in us missing out on what God has promised.

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<sup>5</sup> [1Co 10:1-6](#)

## **The Promised Rest** **Hebrews Chapter 4**

### ***A New Start.***

A lot of people make a fuss about the New Year – it's an excuse to party, or get drunk. Some use it as an opportunity to start fresh and make a bunch of promises to themselves – many of which will never be kept. For me, the sun sets and rises just the same as any other day.

We have seen in chapter 3 that Israel did not initially receive the Promised Land because of their unbelief. They had the chance to make a new start in a new place and, like so many of us do, they blew it. But our God is into restoration and second chances; He does not write us off.

As we move into chapter 4 we see that there is *still* a Promise of Rest, and that there is still the possibility of attaining it or not. What is it that will enable us to enter this Promised Rest and how can we make the best use of such a resource?

### ***Fearful or Full?***

The NIV lets us down somewhat in verse one, telling us to be careful. J.B. Philips uses the phrase, '...be continuously on our guard...' and indeed we do need to be vigilant, but even this is less helpful than it could be. The more accurate rendering is *let us fear...* Now we can be so afraid of what taking God at His word will mean that we fail to act, but of course this is not what is meant. The kind of fear that we need as followers of Jesus is not one that paralyses, or drives us away, but one that spurs us into action to take hold of what God has promised so that we do not miss out on His blessing.

The Greek word that is translated *fallen short* is rendered *destitute* in [11:37](#). *Failing to enter into God's promise left them destitute*. That's pretty strong language! Yet it's no different for us. If we fail to do what our Lord has asked, we are the ones who miss out on the blessing; it makes The Lord sad and leaves us spiritually destitute! There is nothing as enriching and empowering as walking in obedience to the Heavenly Father. *There is nothing that will leave you as empty as going your own way*.

### ***Taking Possession***

We see in verses two and three although they heard what God had promised, almost all of Israel did not enter The Promised Land when Moses brought them to the border. They simply did not have faith – they had no confidence in God. Israel reflects us in that they had the Good News of the Promised Land while we have the Good News of Eternal Salvation. Both messages came from God; both messages need to be believed *and acted on* to be of any use. '...but the word they heard didn't profit them, because it wasn't mixed with faith by those who heard' and so did not enter into that Rest.

What kind of rest is it that the Writer is explaining here? Is it the once-a-week day off? Verse 8 makes it clear that it isn't entry into the Promised Land, so what is it?

The key point is found in verse 10, 'as God rested from His'. God's creative work of forming this world brings to my mind thoughts of landscaping and gardening. If the



Backyard Blitz team came around to my place, I'm sure that all that needs doing in our yard could be done in six days and on day seven, I could kick back in a comfortable chair, cold drink in hand and say, "Very good job Mate." The creative work would be complete; there remains only the day-to-day maintenance – watering, weeding and so on. One could argue that my ultimate rest from gardening would come when we move into a retirement village!

There is the sense that the Rest that is being spoken of is the Rest that comes from the completion of Life's Task; as the hymn says: 'When all my labours and trials are over'. Yet in parallel with this is the idea of another kind of Rest – that is the cessation from the struggle to achieve Salvation. In Christ we have His peace – we take His easy to bear yoke and burden. There is no need to raise a sweat to earn our Salvation. Not that it can be earned anyway as it is already paid for!! Though we do not need to work to achieve Salvation, there is still work to do; God has good work prepared for us ([Eph 2:10](#)) and we are expected to get it done. Ultimately, our rest will be perfected in Eternity, when we have completed our mission here and are brought home.

*God does the hard work for us – so we don't need to struggle with that. We do the work He gives us – comparatively easy to bear and light. Then he brings us to Himself when all is complete.*

The Promise of Rest is still valid, God has not taken it away; it was made ready from the creation of the world. We have peace now, no labour required to achieve Salvation and Eternity as respite from this world's labours.

Those who did not believe God did not enter into the Promised Land. In the same way those who refuse believe the Good News of Jesus Christ will not enter His Rest.

The following is a quote from somewhere, but I can't find the source:

'Just as an approaching shadow points to the arrival of the person casting the shadow, so the **law** pointed to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. *The substance is of Christ.*" Jesus is the one who brought "*the good things to come.*" One of these good things that Jesus brings by His grace is the **full rest** seen in the shadow of the Sabbath.

'This shadow provided regular physical rest for the Israelites. However, it pictured the substantial rest (true spiritual rest) that Jesus brings us. "**Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls**" ([Mat 11:28-29](#)). Jesus is now the **daily Sabbath rest** for all who humbly depend upon Him.'

Those who did not have confidence in God did not enter The Promised Land when Moses brought them to the border. The second chance that this passage speaks of was not Joshua bringing the next generation into the land. If it was God would not have spoken through David so many years later about another time still to come. The Promised Land was only a *type* it was not the *real thing* with regard to this Rest. Israel had only to go in and take possession of the Land - the paddocks had been ploughed, the cities built - the hard yards had already been done. So too with us, Christ has done all the hard work - all we have to do is take possession of His Promise.

Ryrie, in his note on these verses says:

‘Rest in the Christian life comes through complete reliance on God’s promises and surrender to His will’.

That is how to take possession of the Promise.

Note there is an apparent contradiction in verse eleven – make *effort* to enter the *rest*. Our future is certain, our eternal Rest is secure, yet there is still work to be done now. We need to be diligent in maintaining the right attitude. The Writer is urging his readers to ensure that they do not repeat Israel’s mistake in failing to believe what God has clearly said. Remember that while others can see the things you do, the Spirit of God alone lays open the motives underlying the action.

### ***Knife, Scalpel, Sword.***

This Word of God is Living, Effective and Penetrating. It is living in that it continues on and grows, producing fruit and having an influence beyond simply coming into existence. It is active and effective because it achieves the purpose for which it was sent out ([Isa 55:11](#)). The soul, or life principle, is essentially the Physical Life we have, whereas the spirit is that which makes us distinctly human – it looks beyond the physical to the things of God. This Living Word brings into sharp relief our physical existence and our spiritual state, cutting right to the core of our being. It judges our emotions and our rational thoughts, exposing attitudes and intentions.

[Eph 6:17](#) carries this concept of the penetrating Word when referring to the Sword of the Spirit. This is not the Spirit Himself, but the Tool that He uses. John Wesley’s Explanatory Notes expands on the second part of verse 13 in this way:

‘But all things are naked and opened - Plainly alluding to the sacrifices under the law which were first flayed, and then (as the Greek word literally means) cleft asunder through the neck and backbone; so that everything both without and within was exposed to open view.’<sup>6</sup>

A sharp sword will cut open a body. It exposes all of the inner organs. The Holy Spirit, by cleaving open man’s heart attitudes with His sword, exposes the real motives. If we fool those closest to us, if we even fool ourselves - God sees, God knows. We are as exposed as the animal flayed open on the altar. You may appear to be doing all the right things, but in your heart be rebelling.

As God speaks and exposes our thoughts, attitudes and motives His goal is to convict, convince and lead to repentance. His desire for us is to cut out the sin from our lives, even as a surgeon will excise a cancer. He longs to heal us from sin’s influence and empower us to live fully for Him.

Consider this quote of Jesus from [John 12:48](#), “He who puts me on one side and does not take my words to heart, is not without a judge: the word which I have said will be his judge on the last day.” What then remains for those who hear what God plainly says and yet still refuse to believe Him? The Surgeon’s Scalpel that would have brought healing becomes a Sword of Judgement.

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<sup>6</sup> John Wesley’s Explanatory Notes

### **Confident**

We, however, have no need to fear His judgement. We have the *Mega Chief Priest* – this is Christ Jesus who is our Legal Representation before the Great Judge. In fact, He is the son of the Judge! Through Christ the New Agreement was made; through Christ we have complete payment of the penalty due to be paid for our unbelief. Our obligation is to continue to actively cling to what we have openly declared – our Belief, our Faith in Christ. Why is it that we can hold firmly to that belief? It is because we know that He's been there, done that - Christ is not asking us to do anything that He has not done, and is also promising to go with us *and help us do it*.

Our High Priest has 'passed through the heavens' and as it says in chapter one, 'sat down at the right hand of God'. This Jesus who is God in every quality of His existence has also experienced first-hand humanity in all its qualities.

The thing with Jesus is that He has lived as one of us. He has experienced the limitations of fatigue and hunger the grief that comes with the loss of a loved one, the pain of betrayal and abandonment of friends. So when I come to Him and say, "I'm sorry, I've stuffed this up," He won't chuck a wobbly at me or cut me off because He knows it is not easy to live this life. *The big difference between Christ's life and mine is the lack of sin in His.*

We approach the God's Throne of Grace for mercy – as sinners deserving nothing but death. We find there also God's gracious offer of strength for the difficulties of life, and a Saviour longing to help because He knows what life is like for us.

Christ's sacrifice was perfectly accepted, forever. His passing through the heavens was as the Chief Priest of old passed into the Holy of Holies. There He has torn down the barrier separating us from the presence of God. The Son now sits at the right hand of the Father to speak to Him directly on our behalf. We have, through Christ, complete access to the Father.

### **Finally...**

We can have confidence to come into God's presence and experience His peace because He is not some unfeeling, detached being 'out there'. We can draw near, come right up close without fear, but full of confidence, even as a child should be able to approach their parent, because we know that we will not be struck down by an unmerciful king, but lifted up in our time of need.

We can come without fear because of God's perfect Love demonstrated in Christ. We can come with confidence because the sacrifice was perfectly acceptable for all and for always.

## **Christ as High Priest** **Hebrews Chapter 5**

So far the Writer of this letter to the Hebrews has established both Christ's Deity and His Humanity, he has shown how Christ is superior to both Angels and Moses. Here in chapter five, the Old Testament is used to establish the validity of the priestly order that Christ is head of, outlines the High Priest's qualifications, appointment and employment and then compares that with Christ's.

Why was it necessary for the Writer to discuss the Priesthood of Christ? Remember that the Writer is primarily addressing Jews who were familiar with the office of High Priest, perhaps even comfortable with all that went along with it. They needed to understand that Christ's authority as Great High Priest *was* legitimate. It's always hard to let go of the comfortable and familiar and embrace something different. Knowing the Authority of Christ's appointment as High Priest would help them to let go of the shadow, the pale reflection and grasp hold of the real thing that had been presented to them in Christ.

### ***Qualification***

A High Priest *must* be one of those whom he is representing. It would be no use to have an angel represent us before God, because while he would be able to come into God's presence, he would not understand what it is like being a person. By the same token, a High Priest *must* be able to enter into God's presence. Here lies the problem. Sin puts up a curtain between us and God and that can only be passed through under very strict conditions. That is why Christ is perfect as a High Priest.

The Writer makes perfectly clear in chapter two that Christ is completely human and so is able to fully understand what we go through. Yet he is also completely without sin, so there is no barrier to prevent Him coming into the Father's presence.

Our God not only knows how we are made<sup>7</sup>, but in Christ has been made like us. Jesus has been fully immersed in humanity. He has fully experienced all of the same kind of sufferings and difficulties as us. It is for this reason that he is able to deal justly with us, even though he has not failed when tested in the same weaknesses that we have.

### ***Selected, not Elected.***

The High Priesthood is not an office that the ambitious can strive to attain, it is appointed by the One to whom they are answerable. 'No-one takes this honour upon himself...' It is up to God to appoint a High Priest, just as it is up to the Government to appoint an ambassador or Governor General. Priesthood is a calling, not a career. (As an aside, we also have been appointed as priests – how then should we be living?)

Does it matter *who* selects the High Priest? Yes, it does, because the one who is appointed carries the authority of the one who appointed him. If he appoints himself, then he only has his own authority but if he is appointed by one greater than himself then he carries the authority of that greater one. He becomes a *delegate*. Any, or all of the greater person's authority may be delegated. Christ

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<sup>7</sup> [Psalm 103:13-14](#)

carries the Father's *full* authority as Son and heir, as He said, "All authority in heaven and in earth has been given to me."<sup>8</sup>

The Writer goes on to quote two passages from Psalms to show that Christ's appointment as King-Priest was from God. [Psalm 2](#) establishes Messiah as both King and Son:

[Psa 2:6-7 GW](#) "I have installed my own king on Zion, my holy mountain." (7) I will announce the LORD'S decree. He said to me: "You are my Son. Today I have become your Father."

In [2 Samuel 7:14](#) God establishes His covenant with David – a throne that will last forever. Certainly God was speaking of Solomon, but in light of Psalm 2 and the use of this verse in Hebrews, God was also looking ahead to the Coronation of His Son. This was fulfilled when he was raised from the dead and when he was exalted to the right hand of God in heaven, as Paul points out in [Acts 13:33](#). There can be no doubt then that The Son is also King.

[Psalm 110](#) establishes Christ as High Priest, but not just any priest:

[Psa 110:4 GW](#) The LORD has taken an oath and will not change his mind: "You are a priest forever, in the way Melchizedek was a priest."

The declaration made by the Father is in the present tense, indicating the Eternal Nature of the Priesthood. It is made with an oath, so that it might be completely sure and irrevocable. This new Priest was to be to be both King and Priest, just as Melchizedek was. The Levitical Priesthood was not given with an oath, so could be changed by changing the Law. The Kingdom however was given with an oath, and so could not be taken from David's line. *Both the Kingdom and the Priesthood were appointed to Christ with an oath that cannot be revoked.*

### ***Sacrifices and Offerings:***

What exactly is it that a High Priest was supposed to do? We know from this passage that He is to represent others in relation to the things of God and offer Gifts and Sacrifices for sins for the people, as well as for himself (Heb 5:1-3).

Right now Christ is beside the Throne of God, representing us:

[Rom 8:33-34 ISV](#) Who can bring an accusation against God's chosen people? It is God who justifies them! (34) Who can condemn them? Christ Jesus, who died – and more importantly, who has been raised and is seated at the right hand of God – is the one who is also interceding for us!

He has filled us with His Spirit, who speaks to us and for us:

[Rom 8:26-27 ISV](#) In the same way, the Spirit also helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we should. But the Spirit himself intercedes with groans too deep for words, (27) and the one who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, for the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to God's will.

So even now Christ is 'representing us in the things of God' both in person at God's right hand and through His Spirit in us.

Sacrifice can be translated as 'up in smoke'. The sacrifice is completely consumed when it is offered up, essentially nothing remains – all of it is given over to God.

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew 28:18

Gifts, on the other hand are more of a present than a sacrifice. Certainly there would be a cost involved to the giver, but the offering was treated differently and the Gift was not completely destroyed – these most often involved the Priests sharing a portion of it.

It is very obvious the sacrifice Christ offered was Himself for our sins, indeed no other sacrifice was adequate and no further sacrifice is required to deal with sin. But what Gifts were offered up by Him?

**(Heb 5:7 WNT)** For Jesus during his earthly life offered up prayers and entreaties, crying aloud and weeping as He pleaded with Him who was able to bring Him in safety out of death, and He was delivered from the terror from which He shrank.

Christ's earnest requests and approaches for favour were the Gifts He offered up. This was considerably more than, "G'day Dad, I wonder if you'd give me a bit of a hand?" Consider Jesus' response to Lazarus' death in [John 11:33-42](#). When did the Father hear Jesus? When He prayed. But when was it that He prayed? *When He wept!* Tears then are as much prayer as the words themselves, for they show the attitude of the one praying. Verse 7 in Hebrews 5 is particularly alluding to this scene from Luke in the Garden:

**Luk 22:41-44 WEB** He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and he knelt down and prayed, (42) saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." (43) An angel from heaven appeared to him, strengthening him. (44) Being in agony he prayed more earnestly. His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.

'To obey is better than sacrifice', because death is required to deal with disobedience. That is why the OT priests had to offer up gifts and sacrifices, both for their own sin and on behalf of the people. So, the Old Testament Chief Priest is tested and at times may be successful, but in the end he will fail and is required to perform Sin Offerings for himself before making any on behalf of the people he represents. Compare this with Jesus, who though tested in every way that we are did not fail the test at all, ever. 'To obey is better than sacrifice'. What motivates God to make a way for sin to be done away with is His love and mercy for us. Christ 'offered up prayers and petitions' – His 'gift'. The 'sacrifice' He offered up was the total giving up of His life on the Cross. Jesus' offerings were acceptable (v7b), for all time, because of His perfect obedience.

Even though Christ has once and for all dealt with the need for sin offerings by providing the perfect offering of Himself, there is still the need for us to express our praise, thankfulness and devotion. We do this not by following the limited requirements of The Law, but going beyond that to what Grace demands. Consider Romans 12:1, 'I urge you, through God's mercy that you offer your whole being as a live sacrifice, set apart and pleasing to God – this is the logical and rational way for you to serve Him'.

We also offer up our own earnest requests and approaches for favour. Compare what John & James have to say regarding the mind-set we need to come to God:

**Joh 15:7 GW** If you live in me and what I say lives in you, then ask for anything you want, and it will be yours.

**Jam 4:3 EMTV** You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend *it* in *gratifying* your lusts.

What a difference attitude makes! Jesus was heard because He humbly submitted to the Father; we will be heard if we live in Him and if His words are alive in us. If we are motivated by selfishness then we will not be heard. All that we offer must go through Christ in order to be acceptable. Christ's offerings were completely acceptable because of His reverent submission to the Father's will.

### **Learning Obedience**

Even though Christ is God's Son, even though He never sinned, He still needed to become fully qualified for His job of intercession; He still needed to 'learn obedience'. His suffering fully qualified Him as High Priest, thus enabling Him to 'bring many' to God – that is to say, He is the source of salvation, the One through whom sin is dealt with completely, the relationship with God is restored and we can come into God's presence. This rescue, or salvation is enduring – it is in deed eternal. It does not wear out and require redoing as paintwork on a house.

Learning obedience through suffering. How easy it is to do the right thing when it is pleasant! How hard it is when obedience hurts! Anyone can obey when things are going well. The Son & heir still had to learn/grow/mature in obedience through suffering – how much more do we who follow His example! Compare [2:10](#) & [5:8-9](#). The word 'perfect' means made complete, the finished final product, nothing else needs to be added.

Christ's sufferings brought Him to full maturity, proved that He was perfect. It was only after He had submitted Himself to the suffering and come through it successfully that He could provide Salvation and receive the appointment of High Priest. The Son, King High Priest, is Eternal therefore the Salvation He provides is for all eternity. As the Son He is the source of perpetual rescue. As King we must submit to Him as Lord, even as He submitted to the Father. Note that verse 9 explicitly says that He is the source of Eternal Salvation to those who *obey* Him. Christ has set the example of submission to suffering and the result of that is complete maturity.

This concept of growth through trials works in us also, as James points out:

**Jam 1:2-4 WNT** Reckon it nothing but joy, my brethren, whenever you find yourselves hedged in by various trials. (3) Be assured that the testing of your faith leads to power of endurance. (4) Only let endurance have perfect results so that you may become *perfect and complete, deficient in nothing*.

### **Food for Thought:**

There is much that the Writer wants to say about the detail of this New Priesthood; however he expresses a lack of confidence in the Readers' ability to grasp it. It seems that they are content to retain their immaturity and ignorance, without going deeper into the things of God. These people should have been fluent in spiritual principals and teaching others but still needed grounding the basics, the 'ABCs' of faith. They hadn't as yet applied them to their own lives.

Compare the Writer's comments here with those of Paul to the Corinthians:

**1Co 3:1-3 WNT** And as for myself, brethren, I found it impossible to speak to you as spiritual men. It had to be as to worldlings--mere babes in Christ. (2) I fed

you with milk and not with solid food, since for this you were not yet strong enough. And even now you are not strong enough: (3) you are still unspiritual. For so long as jealousy and strife continue among you, can it be denied that you are unspiritual and are living and acting like mere men of the world?

The Writer actually makes a start on some deeper teaching in chapter seven. Yet before that he gives a run down of the basic teaching that we all need to have a grasp of: Repentance; Faith in God; Instructions about baptism; Laying on of hands; Resurrection from the dead; and Eternal judgement. These six things are at the foundation of our relationship with God in Christ. If we don't have a handle on them, how can we expect to be able to pass them on to others?

What is the difference between Infants and Instructors? Ryrie writes in his notes on this verse that maturity comes from these key things:

1. Time (v12);
2. Growth in knowledge of the Word (v13); and
3. Experience in use of the Word (vv13-14).

Mature Christians are 'those who [have] progressed in spiritual life and [have] become Christians of sound judgement and discernment'.<sup>9</sup> If 'putting into practice what has been learned increases your ability to understand'<sup>10</sup> then these people had not been putting those things into practice! Not everyone has the gift of teaching. The Holy Spirit gives gifts to each as He sees fit, according each one's ability and what is best for the Body. *However, we are still expected to be able to correctly handle God's Word;* having a right understanding of the Essentials and being able to pass those on to the people we associate with in the different areas of our lives.

### **Summary:**

We have a representative before God, who not only knows what it is like for us, but is able also to help us. Through the sacrifice of Himself, His ongoing offerings of intercession and through His Spirit in us we can have confidence that there is more than enough strength for every circumstance. Yet it is not enough to remain as we are – there is a requirement for growth to maturity and being able to lead others in the Way that Christ has shown us.

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<sup>9</sup> NIV Study Bible Notes on v14  
<sup>10</sup> Life Application Bible Notes



## **A Better Understanding**

*(Beyond The Basics)*

### **Hebrews Chapter 6**

It is absolutely vital to have a good grasp of the basics, for it is on them that everything else is built – they are foundational to our faith. But what happens when you don't get any further than that? Failure to grow has dire consequences, so what safeguards do we have available? What provision and promises have been provided so that we can grow 'Beyond the Basics'?

#### **The Basics (vv 1 – 3)**

Six different topics are mentioned here as being 'first principals'. These are things which every Christian should have an understanding of. We don't have time to go into each one in depth, although it is worth having a look at each one.

#### **Repentance from things, deeds or acts that are dead.**

We need to remember that the Writer is speaking, not to pagans without knowledge of God or His requirements, but to Jews with a good understanding of the Law which Moses brought to them. This line is perhaps better rendered 'turn away from dead work' – that is good work that is not motivated by faith in God. [James 2](#) shows us that faith without good works is a dead faith. In this passage we see that good works without faith are not only dead, but also lead to death. Faith and good works cannot be separated. Either one without the other and all you have is a good thing that doesn't function.

With their culture of repentance and justification through sacrifice, the Hebrew had a difficult time with this concept of salvation through Grace. We also need to move from this culture of dead works into a life of Faith because 'the righteous will live by faith'.

#### **Faith in God:**

What is faith and why do we need it? Firstly, what it is. You are probably familiar with the first verse of [Hebrews 11](#). From this we know that Faith is the rock-solid reality of the things that we do not yet have, it is being completely convinced that these things are, even though they are not yet able to be seen. There is nothing that we can see or touch that can give us confidence in what God has said. There is no 'proof' as such that He will do as he has promised. What we do have is a written history of His reliability and many of us have a personal experience of His faithfulness. While the written record and personal experiences may help our faith, [Ephesians 2:8](#) explains that both the Salvation and the faith we have is a gift from God, not something that we manufacture or conjure up ourselves.

So why do we need faith? Reading further into Hebrews 11 we find the answer in verse 6:

**Heb 11:6 (Paraphrase)** Without faith we are unable to completely please God, for the one who approaches God *must* have full confidence that He exists and that He will reward those who search for Him.

How can you search for someone whom you don't believe even exists? Why would you put the effort in and gain nothing in return? However, God *Is* and He *longs* to

pour out good things into your cup, squashing them down and filling it again until it overflows and runs into your lap.<sup>11</sup>

**Baptism or Washings: Washing clean, that is Sanctification.**

The word used here is 'baptismos' meaning dipping or washing. Washings were common among Jews for ceremonial purification of priests, persons and various articles. John's baptism was similar to these ceremonial washings, but it was 'unto repentance' and it expressed faith that Messiah was coming soon. Jesus had nothing to repent from, yet His baptism, or washing, was required as an act of obedience to 'fulfil all righteousness'. There was a very good reason for that.

We read in [Numbers 4:3](#) that the Old Testament Priests were consecrated around 30 years of age. Jesus was also around 30 when He started His service ([Luke 3:23](#)). [Leviticus 8:6-36](#) tell us that there was first the ceremonial washing and then the anointing. Christ's service as Priest (but not *High Priest*) commenced on that day when He was baptised, which is why the washing and anointing was required to 'fulfil all righteousness' – He could not be appointed as a Priest without going through that process.

Note that while Christ was baptized as an example of obedience, we are baptized into His death<sup>12</sup> for it is in the sharing of His death that we are washed clean. As His disciples, His students, we baptise with water as a visible symbol of what Christ has actually done in us through the Holy Spirit.

**Laying on of Hands: Anointing to set apart or empower.**

After Jesus was baptised the Holy Spirit descended on Him in a way that is reflected in the anointing with oil to consecrate the Old Testament priests. There are a number of examples of the laying on of hands in the New Testament, with a variety of purposes: Healing, setting someone aside for a particular task or special office, bestowing a spiritual gift, and after being baptised.

When we lay hands on and pray, those already possessing the authority impart a blessing on the one being prayed for. This is not an actual transfer of Spiritual power from one to the other but shows that the one being blessed has the full consent of those who are sending them to perform the work, or asking for healing or enabling.

Baptism and the laying on of hands, is about purification followed by the empowering for the task.

**Resurrection of the Dead:**

The resurrection of the dead is vital for our eternal hopes. Paul makes that abundantly clear in [1 Corinthians 15:16-20](#) – without it 'we are to be pitied more than all men'. Christ Himself was raised from death physically – a fact witnessed by hundreds ([1Cor 15:5-8](#)) and recorded for posterity by eyewitnesses ([John 21:24](#)). Christ has gone through death and beyond; therefore we have confidence that we too shall be raised to eternal life in due course ([1Cor 15:20-23](#)). This hope gives us strength through difficult times ([Rom 8:18](#), [2Cor 4:17](#))

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<sup>11</sup> Luke 6:38

<sup>12</sup> Romans 6:3

**Judgement:**

There is another aspect to the resurrection of the dead. The dead must first be raised before they can be judged ([John 5:26-30](#)). Those who reckon on their deeds being enough to gain salvation will be judged by their deeds. Those whose faith produces righteous works enter into their inheritance. How we respond to what Christ has said is what will be assessed:

[John 12:47-48 NIV](#) <sup>47</sup>“If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. <sup>48</sup>There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day.

While those who follow Christ are not judged to be punished, it is certain that we shall be held accountable:

[1 Cor 4:2-5 NIV](#) <sup>2</sup>Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. <sup>3</sup>I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. <sup>4</sup>My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. <sup>5</sup>Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God.

Often it seems that the guilty get away with their crime, however *all will be judged* with justice: ‘True and just are His judgements’<sup>13</sup>. Even seemingly good works that are not born out of faith are dead works leading to death. Even our best stinks, as Isaiah wrote, ‘We are unfit to worship you; each of our good deeds is merely a filthy rag. We dry up like leaves; our sins are storm winds sweeping us away’<sup>14</sup>. What do we want to be judged on – your own efforts, or Christ’s righteousness and the work that faith in Him produces?

**The Danger (vv 4 -8)**

The recipients of this letter had been doing some good stuff; verse 10 expresses the writer’s confidence in what they had done in the past. However, from what we read in 5:12-14 we know that they had not matured as they ought to. They still had not put into practice the basics and so their progress on to maturity had slowed to the point of being non-existent.

These four verses are a bit difficult to understand and there are many different explanations of what the Writer was trying to get across. A good way to figure out what something means is to find out what it *doesn’t* mean. These verses:

- Are not about slipping back to the old lifestyle for a time (similar to the experience of the prodigal son);
- Are not about accidentally losing or missing out on salvation – security is a vital and unique aspect of following Jesus;
- Are not some hypothetical warning of a threat that cannot happen;
- Are not talking about someone faking their salvation (either consciously or not).

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<sup>13</sup> Rev 19:2a

<sup>14</sup> Isa 64:6

The kind of person mentioned in this warning has been exposed to and even participated in the things of the Kingdom of God. In spite of all that they have seen and heard and experienced (or 'tasted') they deliberately choose to reject Christ, to walk away from what He uniquely offers. *They had to be there to fall away from it.* This must be a deliberate choice, because as long as we remain in Christ our lives are secure<sup>15</sup>. This warning must apply to those who are actually saved, the language used indicates that.

'Enlightened' brings the idea of the sun rising and things which were unidentifiable shadows become clearly seen for what they are. In John 8:12 Jesus says, "I am the light of the world!" and Ephesians 1:18 where Paul prays that their minds may be opened to see God's light we have this idea of being able to see clearly when in Christ. Those who have been enlightened have stepped out of the darkness into the light, coming to understand. However, while the teaching may be understood, it does not automatically follow that it will be taken to heart.

'Tasted the heavenly gift' uses another of the senses to make the point. The use of the word 'taste' in 2:9 gives the idea of a full experience but limited in duration. Here tasting is enough to know what it is like, but not enough to be nourished by it.

This lack of maturity is a symptom of the problem. What may be inhibiting growth? Is it God failing to pour out His Spirit? God 'sends rain on the just and the unjust'<sup>16</sup>, and the illustration of verse 7 shows that the rain is sent to bring life and growth. If the rain is adequate and the seed is good, then there must be a problem with the soil. The ground in verses seven and eight was tilled, it drank in the rain, yet it still produced nothing but weeds.

This is similar to the problem we see in the parable of the sower In [Mark 4:4-20](#) and [Luke 8:5-15](#). All (bar one) experienced real growth, yet only one bore fruit. None of the others *endured* long enough to produce fruit. The soil of course is your heart, your deep self. If the soil is unfertile, what can be done to improve it? We have a house that is built on good old Adelaide clay. Initially, nothing much but weeds would grow. Of the plants that we did cultivate, many died – they did not keep growing, they gave up. However, the plants that *are* growing now are those that have been planted in improved soil – soil that has had compost to feed the dirt and gypsum to break up the clay to let the rain down to the plant roots. Our lives need to be improved with good teaching and discipline. [Hebrews 12:11](#) points out that this disciplining process is not much fun at all, but later it will produce a crop of righteousness.

There is a patch in my yard that remains rock hard, even after good soaking rain. To achieve anything, I need to use a mattock or a cultivator with a gutsy engine and break it up forcefully. *God will not do that in our lives, He will not force His way in or insist that we do what He wants.* When He comes with the good compost of Instruction to feed the soil of your life, let Him. If He needs to dig in sand or gypsum to allow the water of His Spirit to get deeper into your life – let Him! Remember that all discipline hurts at the time, but ultimately produces that most precious fruit – Righteousness.

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

<sup>16</sup> Mat 5:45

*Remaining hard* will result in an infertile life, one in which God cannot cultivate the righteousness that He longs for you. *Giving up* before the finish is the result of failing to let God have His way in your life. You can't go the distance if you don't have the Spiritual Nutrition. Your life may start to sprout, but it will not be able to cope with the extremes of life or its distractions, so that whatever righteousness that starts to grow will wither and perish before it can produce a useful crop.

There remains a choice for each of us – *to move towards maturity or not.*

**Joh 15:6 WEB** If a man doesn't remain in me, he is thrown out as a branch, and is withered; and they gather them, throw them into the fire, and they are burned.

This being the case, what security do we have in Christ?

### **The Promise (vv 9-15)**

The Writer had to point out the consequences of their stagnation. Having chastised them for their immaturity, he shows what will result if they do not grow beyond the basics. In spite of this dire warning, the writer goes on to encourage his readers, and to remind them of God's faithfulness. Verse nine shows us that the recipients of this letter were displaying 'things that accompany salvation'. The Writer was confident of their work, or effort and their love-based helping of others in Christ's name. Note that their love for God was shown by what they *did* in helping His people. [James 2:15-16](#) and [Matthew 25:31-45](#) also carry the message that it is important that we *act* to help each other. There is something else. For as well as doing good there is also the need to *keep doing* good. What is it that Galatians 6:9 says?

**Gal 6:9 MSG** So let's not allow ourselves to get fatigued doing good. At the right time we will harvest a good crop if we don't give up, or quit.

The 'Do not lose heart in doing good' of Galatians 6:9 and the 'We do not want you to become lazy' of verse 12 repeat this theme of Endurance. Abraham, the father of all with true faith, is held up as the example of patient endurance.

There are other passages in the New Testament that also urge us to press on in faith, regardless of what difficulties we face on the Way. Many of them urging us to hang in there in spite of extreme circumstances: [Romans 5:3-5](#), [James 1:3-4](#), [Luke 21:12-19](#) and [2 Timothy 2:11-13](#) to name just a few.

'God has sworn and will not change His mind'. He must remain true to Himself. God gives His word, He speaks His promise. We read in verses 16 & 17 that He also swore an oath, or put another way, made a solemn vow, to make His Word certain, thus ending any argument. It was important for subsequent generations to know that God's purpose for Abraham and his descendants was not going to change. In the same way, God's purpose for our future does not change.

There must be complete security in Christ, or else we are no different from mere religion with its 'maybe you can be good enough'. This concept of absolute security in Christ complements the preceding part by giving us ASSURANCE –

**1John 5:13 NIV** <sup>13</sup>I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Christ has promised not to leave us destitute ([John 14:18](#)) and He must remain true to His promise. By remaining in Christ there is absolute certainty of salvation for *all* who believe. No religion manufactured by man can match that; it is the distinguishing mark that sets the Way apart all else. In verse 10 the Writer encourages his readers by reminding them that their lives were producing fruit, the sign of Spiritual life. He reminds them of the good they have done in the past and that God deals with His people well. God is not a Meany, He is not out to get us, rather He longs to bless. Urging them to press on, to endure to the end the Writer encourages his readers to follow the example of faith that they have in Abraham, instead of bludging.

It was Calvin Coolidge who said, "Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence." First we have to hear God's Word. Then we need to accept it, that is, have full confidence in what He has said. Finally we must persist in believing it, regardless of what our limited human intellect can grasp, because it is from God 'who cannot lie'. In the end you will reap the harvest of righteousness, in your own life and also in the lives of others as God works through you.

There is no real contradiction here – we have complete certainty. If we fail to go the distance we will not receive the promised inheritance; if we take hold of the hope offered, we have a completely secure anchor which will not drag.

### **The Life Line (vv 16-20)**

'Two utterly immutable things', namely what God has said and what He has promised, is our security. The security that we have in Christ gives us the basis for our Hope. We have a safe refuge from this dying World – Christ Jesus Himself. (This compares with the provision God gave in [Deuteronomy 19:1-13](#) – Cities of Refuge - protection from revenge against accidental death).

Though we are 'refugees from this dying world' we have in Christ a source of Hope – we reach out and grab hold of the precious lifeline that He throws to us. In the buoyancy of Christ is our strength, all we need to do is to continue to hold on. Jesus has entered once for all time into the Holiest of Holy Places – the actual presence of the Father. Our Hope is with Him in that Sanctuary as He speaks to the Father on our behalf. Our hope is rock-solid as He remains there and while we remain in Him.

This hope is our lifeline. When the storms of life would sweep us away and dash us against the rocks, the Anchor hold secure. Oh it's still a scary ride at times, but our hope is for both this life and beyond. The security of the hope we have should be something which enables endurance. When you are sure of what you hope for<sup>17</sup> you are not likely to quit before you have achieved what you the goal. This is actually tied in with the resurrection; for if Jesus had not risen and ascended into heaven, He could not have entered within the veil of the True Temple not made with human hands. Thus He could not have be High Priest forever, the same kind of King-Priest that Melchizedek was. Our hope follows Christ beyond that (now torn) veil – intimacy and intercession the result.

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<sup>17</sup> Heb 11:1

## **A Better Hope** **Hebrews Chapter 7**

The High Priesthood has been looked at with some detail in chapter five and touches on Melchizedek, but here in chapter seven the Writer goes into much more detail on the specifics of Melchizedek's Priesthood. What exactly was about the High Priests of Aaron's line that prevented them from being able to do a truly adequate job? What is it about our King and Great High Priest that makes Him so perfect for the task and gives us 'a better hope'?

### **Melchizedek's Superiority to Abraham:**

The first question to ask I suppose is, "Who was this Melchizedek?" To answer that we need to go back to the account we have of him in Genesis:

**Gen 14:18-20 GNB** And Melchizedek, who was king of Salem and also a priest of the Most High God, brought bread and wine to Abram, (19) blessed him, and said, "May the Most High God, who made heaven and earth, bless Abram! (20) May the Most High God, who gave you victory over your enemies, be praised!" And Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of all the loot he had recovered.

So we know then that:

- He was a real person, even though he had no birth, lineage or death recorded. Because of this lack of information, we have someone who is 'as if' eternal.
- He was both King and Priest (Gen 14:18).
- His name means 'King of Righteousness' and he was the king of Salem, so his title was 'King of Peace'. This echoes other names and titles given to the Messiah, as in Isa 9:6 where He is referred to as 'Prince of Peace'.

In these ways Melchizedek was a 'type' of Christ, pointing us to the eternal nature of the Messiah, His dual roles as both King and Priest and the Name and Title bestowed on Him. Does Christ's superiority rely only on His appointment through a superior law, or is His Priesthood fundamentally different from that of the Levites? While it was an external command that gave the Levites the Priesthood, but it is Christ's inherent power of an 'indestructible life' that qualifies Him for the role (verse 16).

Verses seven to ten refer to the account in [Genesis 14](#) where Abram returns from rescuing his nephew and heir Lot. Melchizedek brought food, drink and a blessing for Abram and Abram gave Melchizedek one tenth of the plunder that had been captured from the bad guys. (Incidentally, the refreshments from Melchizedek to Abram were bread and wine – the same that Christ has given us to remember Him by).

The Levites' right to receive the tithe was a legal right, grounded in a special provision in the Law. It was not in anyway based on them being superior to their fellow Israelites. Now Melchizedek was not related to Levi at all, he wasn't even related to Abraham, so there was no legal requirement for him to demand or for Abraham to offer the tenth. Especially seeing as the Law had not yet been introduced! The fact remains that Abraham *did* offer Melchizedek a tenth of his plunder. As priest of God Most High Melchizedek represented the One who had

helped Abe win the battle. In recognition of that and in recognition of Melchizedek's greatness as King, Abram gave him the tithe. Melchizedek accepted that honour by Blessing Abe and Abe, once again recognising Melchizedek's superiority to himself, accepted the blessing. To emphasise the point – it was not because of any legal requirement that Abram gave Melchizedek the tenth, but solely because of the latter's inherent greatness.

*The giving of the tithe is an act of submission to the one who is greater and the blessing is given by the one who is greater to empower the lesser one.* Abraham was a great man, no doubt about it. He had received first hand a Promise, a Covenant, from God ([Gen 12:1-3](#); [12:7](#); [13:14-17](#)) and is the father of all who have real faith in God ([Rom 4:11](#); [4:23-25](#)). Yet here we see that Melchizedek was greater still – he was a Priest of God Most High, King of Righteousness, King of Peace. He accepted Abram's tithe and blessed him.

What then is the relevance of this? The Writer is establishing with his readers just how much greater than Abraham Melchizedek was. As Hebrews, the recipients of this letter would naturally hold Abraham in very high esteem. Yet the one who is descendant and heir is certainly not greater than the one who first received the promise and Levi's descendants are by no means greater than Abraham. Melchizedek was clearly greater than Abraham and so his priesthood was greater than the priesthood formed by Abraham's descendants.

### **The Inadequacy Of The Law And The Levitical Priesthood:**

*Why was there a need for a better priesthood anyway? Was there really a need for a better priesthood than the one centred on Aaron's family?*

The Jews were convinced that the system in place was good enough, that there was no need to change a thing. After all, it was God who gave them the whole system! Yet even in their scriptures were hints that things were not what they thought. The fact that God pointed to another priesthood of a different order indicated that the Law and the Levitical Priesthood were not effective and would be replaced – not just with something new and improved, but with something that was perfect.

Changing to a new priesthood would only be necessary if the old one was inadequate for the task (verse 11). Logically, the new model would have to be better than the old to make it worth the upgrade. In patterning the new priesthood after Melchizedek's we have one that is not only greater than Aaron, but greater than Abraham also.

### **So what was wrong with the Levitical Priesthood and the Law?**

*"When all else fails, read the instructions."* Following the instructions can be very helpful, it means you *can* put together that do-it-yourself bookcase or find your way through an unfamiliar suburb. There may even be times where following instructions can **save** your life. Obeying rules can keep you out of trouble, maybe even save you some dollars, or *prevent* a death, but can rules **give** life?

A long time ago God gave a whole bunch of rules so that we could know what He expects of us. Good rules, rules that *even now* are still relevant. God's Apostle Paul made that clear in Romans 7:12, 'So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is



holy, righteous and good.’ Can these *rules*, this holy, righteous and good Law, make **us** holy, righteous and good? Can it give us **life** - full, abundant, eternal life?

No. They can't. Why? Paul explains this throughout [Romans 7](#). To put it simply, it is because the Law relies on working through our disobedient, unbelieving, sinful nature. The sinful nature of the both the people and priests rendered the Law powerless to effect any permanent change in people. Thus it was unable to offer any certain hope for the future, other than a 'maybe you can be good enough'. Now you know as well as I do that none of us can obey the whole of the Law the whole of the time, so **none** of us can pay what we owe God by what we do.

The former Regulation was weak, useless, unable to make anyone complete – so why was it set up in the first place? Seeing as the Levitical priesthood provided the framework for the Law, the two are inseparable. In Romans 3, Paul gives us an insight into the purpose of the Law and thus also the old priesthood:

**Rom 3:19-21 GNB** Now we know that everything in the Law applies to those who live under the Law, in order to stop all human excuses and bring the whole world under God's judgment. (20) For no one is put right in God's sight by doing what the Law requires; what the Law does is to make us know that we have sinned. (21) But now God's way of putting people right with himself has been revealed. It has nothing to do with law, even though the Law of Moses and the prophets gave their witness to it.

So the Law was to teach us what sin is. Ignorance of the law is no excuse – you are guilty of breaking it even if you didn't know a law existed. However, knowledge of the law gives us the knowledge that we are breaking the law. This knowledge, even when coupled with a desire to do what the law requires is not enough. The sin nature that we have inherited from Adam is exposed by the law and we find as Paul did in Romans 7:7-24 that we cannot escape it on our own.

The Law was based on imperfect priests of Levi, priests who had their own sin to deal with and who subsequently died as a result. The Law was able to expose our sin, but never able to completely deal with it. Something better is required; something that will enable complete spiritual maturity to be obtained. A better or greater priesthood is required to provide a framework for a new law, the Law of the Spirit of Life ([Romans 8:2](#)), that is based on Love ([John 13:34](#)), Grace ([Romans 5:1-2](#)) and Faith ([Romans 3:27](#)). 'For the law made nothing perfect, but the introduction of a better hope did; by which we draw nigh to God'. (Heb 7:19 Webster)

### **The Superiority and Permanency of Christ's Priesthood:**

The source of this superior hope is the Superior High priest that we have in Christ Jesus. Without Him there is no way that we come close to the Father.

Romans 8:3 (NLT) The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins.

There is a Priesthood of a new, yet ancient order, not of the tribe of Levi. This is to make it perfectly clear that it is a *new* order, a superior order of priesthood with the power to bring us to full spiritual maturity. The other very important reason that the

new priesthood is from a different tribe is because the priestly order of Melchizedek requires that the priest also be king. For anyone to be chosen as King, they must be from the king's line – namely the tribe of Judah and a direct descendant of David, who held God's promise regarding an enduring throne. David's capture of Jerusalem gave him the rights previously held by Melchizedek, so it is right that his descendant should be both King and Priest as Melchizedek was.

The requirement for the High Priest to be from the tribe of Levi can be done away with by bringing in a new law – no Levitical priest was ever promised a permanent position, (indeed because all of the them grew old and died, they could not remain as priests anyway). The requirement for the King to be a descendant of David cannot be changed, because God made a promise to David in [2 Samuel 7:13-16](#). What does [Isaiah 9:6-7](#) have to say about the nature of Messiah's reign? It is an eternal reign on David's throne.

### Verse 21 – Sworn Guarantee of Christ's continuing Priesthood.

In the same way, Christ is assured of a permanent position as High Priest:

**Psa 110:4 GW** The LORD has taken an oath and will not change his mind:  
"You are a priest forever, in the way Melchizedek was a priest."

The oath in Psalm 110 guaranteed the security of the New Priesthood. There was no such oath with the Levitical Priesthood and therefore God could choose to do whatever He needed to with it – including completely dismantle it. The new Priesthood and the incumbent would remain forever; there would be no successor. That requires an 'indestructible life'.

Our priest will never change, we will never have to get used to a new one. This High Priest knows me, I am getting to know Him – I am learning what I can ask for, how He will help me. Above all I am learning how much I can rely on His being there to help when I ask.

On what basis is Christ High Priest forever? 'The law which made the Levitical priesthood showed that the priests were frail, dying creatures, not able to save their own lives, much less could they save the souls of those who came to them. But the High Priest of our profession holds his office by the power of endless life in himself; not only to keep himself alive, but to give spiritual and eternal life to all who rely upon his sacrifice and intercession.'<sup>18</sup>

An important point is raised in verse 16; the old order handed the priesthood down from generation to generation, regardless of an individual's suitability for the task (consider Eli's sons in [1 Samuel 2:22-36](#)). Our High priest on the other hand has the power to give life, has the power to continue to intercede for us because His life is not able to be destroyed. Jesus' resurrection proved that His life is most certainly indestructible.

So then, the old is set aside as it is clearly unable to completely and permanently restore the broken relationship we have with the One who made us. Something better is brought in to replace it – a better hope because it is able to save completely

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<sup>18</sup> Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary

and bring to full ripeness the Righteousness that the Father longs to cultivate in our lives.

**Verses 26-28** “Here is the High Priest we need!”

He does not need to keep offering sacrifices – He had no sin of His own to deal with and is therefore able to so effectively deal with our sin by virtue of His own perfect life that no more sacrifice is required. In fact to reject His perfect sacrifice is to blow any chance of the ‘better hope’ He offers.

**To sum it all up:**

The Word of the Oath – came after the Law and was established under a new law of Grace, Love, Faith and the Holy Spirit; established on the framework of a High Priest who is incorruptible. He is morally perfect, eternal and therefore able to save to the uttermost – that is He is able to remove our sin and guilt and cultivate righteousness in our lives, thus giving us a ‘better hope’ than before – one that is secure in God’s promise for eternity.

Here then is the Better Hope we have, the one based on the indestructible life of our eternal King and Priest, the one based on Love, Grace and Faith rather than keeping the Law, the Hope that is as certain as Christ’s resurrection:

**Romans 8:10-11 (NLT)** And Christ lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, the Spirit gives you life because you have been made right with God. <sup>11</sup>The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you.

## **A Better Agreement** *(Out With the Old, In With the New)* **Hebrews Chapter 8**

Throughout this letter, the Writer sets before us what is good and shows us what is better. The Old Agreement was only ever a stopgap – a temporary copy of what is real and eternal.

Chapter seven explains what we need in a High Priest, that we have all we need in Christ Jesus. This gives us a better hope than the old system did because it is centred on a better High Priest. This new priestly appointment requires a new agreement – one that is as superior to the old as the new High Priest is to those of Aaron's line. The Writer looks at this New Covenant in chapter eight and explains why it is necessary by examining the shortcomings of the old.

### **Verse 1 - 3** *The Priest who Rules:*

Christ has 'taken His seat'. Our High Priest has *sat down*. This is significant because there were no seats in the Tabernacle/Temple. The priests of Aaron did not sit down because their work of sacrifice was never finished. 'The blood of bulls and goats could never take away the guilt' ([Heb 10:4](#)), so the sacrifices were performed day in, day out over and over again. The task of every High Priest included offering gifts and sacrifices, yet everything the Old Testament priests offered was a continuous reminder of their disobedience. Even in performing sacrifices and offerings for others they were required to deal first with their own sin.

Consider Jesus' cry from the cross as recorded by John, "It is finished!" ([John 19:30](#)). The work of sacrifice by *our* High Priest is *FINISHED*. However, He is still at work offering intercession for us.

Christ did not sit down just anywhere – He sat down at the Father's right hand. From ancient times this has been a position of trust, for you would not have someone seated close enough to kill you unless you could trust them implicitly. It is also a position of authority equivalent to that of the ruler himself being adjacent to the throne. Consider Joseph's position with Pharaoh in [Genesis 41:37-44](#), it is a similar thing that we are looking at with Christ. Remember, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to [Him]'<sup>19</sup>. Having sat down 'at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens', He is in a position to speak directly to the Father on our behalf. He serves in the presence of God, as the priests of Aaron did, but in the original, heavenly sanctuary – seated rather than standing, as no further sacrifice is required.

### **Verses 4 - 5** *The Copy v The Original:*

In many places overseas, as you walk down the street, you get hassled to buy 'copy watch – Rolex, Tag-Heuer, Breitling? Handbag, copy DVD?' My Mother-in-law bought some copy DVDs for us when she went to Vietnam; some of them are even playable! *If you had bought a copy DVD, would you keep it if you were given a genuine one, especially if the genuine one had all the extra features and deleted scenes?* You see, the things established under the Law were only *copies* of the

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<sup>19</sup> [Mat 28:18](#)

originals in Heaven. These copies helped our finite minds get hold of heavenly things by understanding them in our earthly context.

So we have this bloke who is everything a High Priest needs to be in order to bridge the broken relationship between God and us, but under the old rules, He would not even be considered. This old agreement forged by God with Israel is a physical copy of the heavenly reality. Throughout scripture we see the temporary nature of the things that belong to this world. The physical things of the here and now are not permanent because they are subject to decay through mankind's sin. In the same way, the old way to come to God was never meant to be permanent. Once again, it is sin that makes it so – what with the priests having to get their own sin sorted before they could deal with that of the others and mankind's inability to perfectly fulfil the requirements of the Law, it was obsolescent even while it was still in use!

If then His service is in the original Most Holy Place that would mean that He is the original pattern of a priest and the Levitical priesthood was in fact a copy based on His service! So the Old Covenant was never *really* new!

### **Verse 6** *Superior Service for a Superior Covenant:*

Consider how vastly superior the original heavenly Sanctuary would be to the shadowy copy! Then consider how superior a high priest we have in the Son compared to the men of the Levitical order. Our Great High priest lived a superior life – a perfectly pleasing life, He offered a superior sacrifice and serves in a superior sanctuary. The agreement that He brought into place is vastly superior to the one it replaces, because it is established on much better promises.

### **Verses 7-9** *Who's to Blame?:*

Why didn't the Law work? Whose fault was it? The limitations of the Law are covered in detail throughout chapter 7. The Law was limited in its effectiveness by our limited ability to fulfil all of its requirements. Note that at the beginning of verse 8 the Writer says, 'finding fault with *them*', or 'found the blame with *them*'. So it was the People, not the Promises that were the Problem. Paul's comments in Romans 7:8 highlight this: 'But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the law sin is dead.' As soon as you know something is wrong, it's 'I want to do that!' None of us have what it takes to persist perfectly and fulfil all that the Law required. The Law is holy; the command is holy, righteous and good<sup>20</sup>. Never the less, the Law is spiritual and we are people who are constrained to these bodies of flesh and have been sold into slavery to sin. The Law teaches us what sin is yet it does not empower us to do anything about it! That is why Paul cries out at the end of Romans 7, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"

In the next few verses the Writer brings in confirmation from the Old Testament itself that it was to be made obsolete. The Writer of Hebrews often quotes the Old Testament in order to establish the basis of the authority of what is being said. The Writer knew that his readers recognised that God spoke through Moses and the Prophets and in using their words confirms that the old is passing away and is already superseded even before it was finished with – doesn't *that* sound like modern technology! There was something on the way, and is in fact here now, that

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<sup>20</sup> Romans 7:12

can perfectly deal with the shortcomings of the old. Remember that the Old Covenant was not the original but only a copy of what was already in heaven and a shadow or precursor of what was to come in Christ Jesus.

### **Verses 8-12**    *The New Agreement:*

As 'mediator of a new covenant' Christ's role is far more important than a trade union official negotiating a new work place agreement on behalf of the workers.

This New Agreement or Covenant is described in verses 8 through to 12. A covenant is a binding agreement between two parties, a contract if you will. While a covenant would be legally binding, those mentioned in the Bible are held up by the faithfulness of those who make the agreement more than the rule of law. An agreement, or covenant, is built on both parties promising something. For the new covenant to be superior to the old the promises that it is built on must be superior to the old promises. There are a number of 'covenants' or agreements throughout the Bible between God and men, each one helps to provide an understanding of and foundation for the 'New Covenant' that we are now part of.

#### **With Adam:**

This was the first agreement and was conditional on Adam doing what he was told. Adam was given the task of gardener, or groundsman, blessed to be fruitful and multiply. He was instructed in what he could and could not eat and warned of what would happen if he ate what was banned. Adam's failure to fully believe what God had told him resulted in immediate spiritual death and subsequent physical death.

#### **With Noah:**

Noah's agreement was unconditional in that God would never destroy the earth again by flood but conditional with regard to people's actions. Noah was blessed to be fruitful and fill the earth. He was given instruction about what he could eat and what he could not. Note how similar this is to the covenant with Adam – God was starting over. Death was now part of life and creation was a long way from the 'very good' that it was when first made.

#### **With Abraham:**

Abraham had an unconditional promise. However, his descendants were required to have faith of their own in order to be included in that promise. Faith that results in action is what was required, that is *living faith* as Abraham had. Here we have God clarifying exactly what it is which pleases Him – complete confidence in what He has said which produces action on our part.

#### **With Moses:**

Through Moses God introduced this conditional agreement that we know as 'The Old Testament'. It was conditional on Israel continuing to obey the Law that God gave Moses. This is similar to what Abraham did, that is, hearing God's word and acting on it, but in a formalised system. The Law was from God's own mouth, Israel was to put it into practice. It was a structured way of getting Abraham's descendants to follow in the Faith Footsteps of their ancestor. Looking at Israel's journey reminds us again that we need more than rules and good intentions to please God and deal with sin.

#### **With David:**

God's promise to David was another unconditional covenant. David needed to do nothing more for God to keep His promise. However, Dave's sons were required to have full confidence in God and for that to fully influence what they did. Most did not. This brings us to the one descendant of David who did manage to do that perfectly; one who even more than David himself was a man after God's own heart.

#### With us:

So, the son of Eve who would crush the serpent's head, the descendant of David who was so perfectly after God's own heart has established a new agreement. Not one conditional on what we do or do not do, but one that is founded on His perfectly faithful life and His blood that He poured out in His death. How is the New different from the Old? It is in the way the Father deals with His children.

#### Under the Old Agreement:

The Lord led Israel by the hand out of danger, but they did not continue to obey so the Lord turned away from them. This covenant was conditional on Israel's continued obedience to the Him. We observe Israel being 'led by the hand' as one does a child, (because as anyone who has been shopping with kids knows, you can't trust them to stay near you otherwise). What we do not see is Israel growing spiritually, they remain as spiritual children – the result of this lack of growth is death, as seen in chapter six.

#### Under the New Agreement:

God's Laws are written on the tablets of our heart, instead of tablets of stone. He *will* be our God and we *will* be His children, we *will* really know Him ([1Cor 2:16](#)), He will never leave us ([Matt 28:20](#)). Our wickedness *will* be forgotten and our sins *will* be forgiven. *This agreement is not conditional, it is rock-solid certain.* It is a relationship which grows and develops us to full spiritual maturity. Rather than 'spoon-feeding' via a mediator as God did through Moses under the old covenant, in the New the Father possesses and speaks directly to each one. Our hearts and minds are filled with His law (compare [Phil 4:7](#)). *This gives us the responsibility to behave as spiritual grown-ups.*

#### Verse 12    The Bottom Line:

After all these things have been examined what is the bottom line for us? We are assured of practical mercy and complete erasure of sin. This is absolutely **CERTAIN**. We do not have to hope against hope that our 'good deeds' will *maybe* be enough to outweigh the bad, or that they are good enough to be an effective bribe so that sin is hidden. *No, our sin has been so completely and properly dealt with that it no longer remains.* This is the superior promise of the superior agreement, when we accept it by faith.

#### Verse 13    Passed its Use By Date:

As soon as a new model is developed the old is no longer needed. So, when does something new become old? When that which is better is introduced, the old becomes obsolete. The Old Covenant was only ever a copy and a shadow of what God had long planned, so there's a sense that it was never really new. Unlike the cars and software that undergo continual improvement with each new edition, *this New Covenant is perfect and does not need to be improved upon, so it will never be superseded.*

**Finally...**

Our Great High priest lived a superior life, offered a superior sacrifice and serves in a superior sanctuary. The agreement that He brought into place is vastly superior to the one it replaces, because it is established on an unconditional promise. Therefore we are assured of practical mercy and complete erasure of sin. The certainty and security of this promise is absolute, secured by Christ's blood sacrifice, guaranteed by His resurrection.



**A Better Temple**  
*(Into The Most Holy Place)*  
**Hebrews Chapter 9**

Israel's Tent of Meeting, with all its ceremonies and sacrifices, could not open up the way into God's presence. It was blocked, not only by the massive curtain that hung there, but also by the failure of the people to perfectly live out the requirements of the agreement. What did all the work that went on in the tabernacle and later in the temple actually achieve? What could mere copies hope to do?

William Barclay in his commentary on Hebrews<sup>21</sup> frequently mentions that religion is about access to God. Only with access is there any relationship. Having argued for the superiority of Christ over the patriarchs and as High Priest and having shown the superior hope that we have in Him, the Writer now considers the superior sacrifice offered by our great High Priest. It is only because of the superiority of Christ's life and sacrifice that we can have access to and relationship with God.

**The Tabernacle.**

The first five verses of chapter nine mention some of the key items inside the Tabernacle. Being man-made copies of the God-made realities, both the tabernacle and the things in it were full of meaning. The Writer does not go into much detail on this, either because the original articles were lost and so they could not be described in detail, or simply because he wanted to move quickly onto other things. Some of these items were given to Israel as a direct result of their sin (such as Aaron's rod), and as such were a constant reminder of it. Others, such as the lamp stand pointed directly to the coming Christ, the Light of the World. The word 'tabernacle' means 'dwelling', it was the place where God lived with His people. Significantly, it is also referred to as 'the tent of meeting', indicating both its temporary nature and its function as a place to meet with the LORD. As interesting as it would be, I'm not qualified to look at their significance in any depth, so we'll just move on.

This man-made tent was a busy place, with daily duties and sacrifices carried out by the priests in the outer courts as well as other regular tasks and celebrations throughout the year. There is no mention of a place to sit – indeed for the priests there was no time to sit. There were very intricate ceremonies that had to be carried out perfectly, especially before the high priest could enter into the most holy place, yet even this ceremony was merely an illustration of what was going to occur in reality in the heavenly realm. The restricted access to the Holiest Place was an indication of the restricted access to the true presence of God, which was yet to be opened up.

**Restricted Access.**

There was no end to the work of the Levitical Priests. Every day their work of service had to be carried out and then on the Day of Atonement, the most important task of the High Priest had to be repeated each and every year. In spite of all that was done, they could not restore in any permanent way the relationship with God. There could be no free access to God's presence under the old system. The restrictions and requirements to enter the Most Holy Place were very strict – death

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<sup>21</sup> The Daily Study Bible, The Letter to the Hebrews (Revised Edition, The Saint Andrew Press 1976)

was the result of even the *slightest* deviation. You could not just waltz in, sit down and have a chat with God whenever you felt like it.

Why was access to God's presence was so restricted? It is because the blood of animals cannot clean the conscience! God *cannot* have sin in His presence, and the gifts and sacrifices offered under the Law do not deal with sin deep down, but only outwardly. They dealt with things at a superficial level, washing the body not the mind, until 'the time when Christ should establish the truth' (JB Phillips). That is to say, that time when Christ carries out the truly effective sacrifice and sets in place the better system, entering into the true Holiest Place. The temple system was never meant to be the way to God; it was only ever a stopgap, or first aid.

First aid is all about stabilising the patient until help arrives. You can wash a serious wound and place a dressing on it to stop the bleeding, but that does not fix the problem, the casualty still has to be 'dusted off' and undergo surgery. In the same way the first covenant was little more than a band-aid solution. It made the sinner outwardly (or ceremonially) clean but did nothing to fix the problem of sin. The ceremonies and sacrifices of the old covenant could not repair the damage inside nor could they clear the conscience.

It is not compliance with rules that makes a person right with God<sup>22</sup>. Eating only approved food, special washings and so on do nothing to deal with the real issues. Jesus pointed out in [Mark 7:18-23](#) that it is that which wells up from within a person that must be dealt with. We tend to deal with the symptoms that can be seen, rather than tackle the cause. I think that's because it's easier to do so and it makes us look good to others.

Just as the Law shows us what sin is<sup>23</sup>, but is powerless to produce any change of behaviour<sup>24</sup>, so too the temple sacrifices could do nothing to bring about a change of heart. There could be outward compliance, but inward rebellion (such as seen in [Isaiah 29:13-14](#), and [Matthew 23:27](#)). Even today in this Age of Grace, where God Himself lives in His people, there is still the danger that we can follow all the outward traditions, say all the right words, go to the right meetings and events, yet still be dead on the inside. Christ's perfect sacrifice was intended to bring about such a radical change in us that we no longer keep doing work that leads to dead ends, but that we serve the God of Life. The whole point of the New Covenant was to enable this to happen.

### **Open Invitation.**

Having now had our consciences sprinkled clean (verse 14), and having begun the process of transformation through the renewal of our minds ([Romans 12:2](#)) consider what Christ has done: He has entered the original heavenly sanctuary once only for always (verse 12) and has torn down the barrier that prevents access ([Mar 15:38](#)); He has sat down at the right hand of the Father ([Heb 12:2](#)), having completed all He had to do ([John 19:30](#)).

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<sup>22</sup> [Galatians 3:11](#).

<sup>23</sup> [Romans 7:7](#)

<sup>24</sup> [Romans 8:3](#)

In light of all this, we do not need to fear, nor do we need to hide, but rather we can come to the Mercy Seat with frank openness when we are convinced that Christ has given us the way to do so:

**(Eph 3:12 GNB)** In union with Christ and through our faith in him we have the boldness to go into God's presence with all confidence.

Christ's High Priestly sacrifices go beyond dealing with only the superficial outward appearances to purge the filth from our moral consciousness<sup>25</sup>. More than this, because each of us is able to come freely into God's presence we now have access to His help when we need it:

**(Heb 4:16 GW)** So we can go confidently to the throne of God's kindness to receive mercy and find kindness, which will help us at the right time.

This washing, this purging, this renewal cannot be based on anything we have done, if it could then Christ would not have needed to make the Ultimate Sacrifice<sup>26</sup>

**(Tit 3:5 GW)** he saved us, but not because of anything we had done to gain his approval. Instead, because of his mercy he saved us through the washing in which the Holy Spirit gives us new birth and renewal.

James Murdock in his translation uses the term, 'by the renovation of the Holy Spirit'. It brings to my mind a neglected building that needs to be restored to its full glory as originally intended by the builder. With minds that have their moral consciousness restored to the originally intended beauty, we are able to do the deeds that God, who is Life, has planned for us to do. These *deeds* do not give life but they are the result of a restored life and bring fullness to life.

### **A New Will.**

So to make this all happen, God has written a new will and the old one no longer applies. His Son is the 'First Born' and we have been included with Him in the will with full rights of inheritance – a generous act of love and grace on His part. Christ is the one who negotiated this agreement and He is the Executor of the Will. Who else could have done so? There is no one else who had access to the Father.

Like all wills, this new one did not come into effect until the death was proven. There were plenty of witnesses who saw His blood pour out from the spear wound while He was on the cross. By draining the blood there is proof of death because the life is in the blood<sup>27</sup>. For now this inheritance promised by the new will and testament is held in trust until we 'come of age', yet we do have limited access to it right now in order to provide for our needs here. We will each come into our inheritance fully when we enter eternity.

While we were made to have a relationship with the One who made us, sin has broken that relationship. Death is therefore in essence separation from God. When we sin we are in effect saying, "I don't want anything to do with You God!" And because He has given us the ability to choose, that's what we get. The end result is a permanent separation from His goodness. Death is the natural result of sin, just as surely as jumping up results in falling down:

'The day you eat it you will surely die' (**Gen 2:17**)

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<sup>25</sup> Verse 14

<sup>26</sup> [Galatians 2:21](#)

<sup>27</sup> [Leviticus 17:11](#)

‘... through one man sin entered the world and death through sin...’ ([Rom 5:12](#))

Sin results in death – it is the just payment, because sin cannot be in the same room as God. There must be a death (i.e. separation) when there is sin, and it needs to be the one who sins. The amazing thing about God’s grace is that one of the conditions of this new will was that Christ would take on both our sin and the death it owed. This fact *still* blows my mind!

The first covenant was put into effect with blood, which was used to ceremonially cleanse and set aside the Tabernacle for use. The second covenant, the better one that cleanses and sets us aside for God’s use, was also put into effect with blood, but not just any blood:

[Mat 26:28 GW](#) This is my blood, the blood of the promise. It is poured out for many people so that sins are forgiven.

### **The Real Thing.**

On the Day of Atonement, the high priest would enter into the most holy place of a man made tent of meeting. On the day of our atonement, our Great High Priest entered heaven itself in order to represent us in person to before the Father.

So there is the fact that Christ entered into the presence of God, the Inner Sanctuary, the Most Holy Place – the real one, not the copy – and has torn down the barrier that prevented us from being able to come to God. There is also the fact that Christ’s blood was poured out in order for it to be used to cleanse this heavenly temple, one that was not made by people but by God Himself.

While the inferior copies could be cleaned with the blood of an inferior sacrifice, such as goats and calves, the superiority of the original Sanctuary required the blood of a superior sacrifice. The superiority of Christ’s sacrifice is demonstrated in the fact that it is a once only thing that does away with sin, not merely outwardly but inwardly cleaning the conscience and freeing the victim from sin’s grip. Nothing we do can add to its effectiveness.

Now we know that the church is a living house, one built from people not rocks ([1Peter 2:5](#)). We also know that we have been made holy, that God lives in us and thus we are His temple ([1Corinthians 3:36](#)). I do not see it as too much of a stretch to say that the heavenly things that required a better sacrifice are, in one sense at least, us – His church. Even in the function of the man-made temple parallels with service as priests – declaring the goodness of God, serving others to enable them to draw near to Him. In short doing those good things that God prepared beforehand for us to do<sup>28</sup>.

Because the old system was only a ceremonial cleansing – the animal sacrifice could not permanently clean the conscience – each sin required another sacrifice. Christ’s life, which perfectly met all the requirements of the law, qualified him to offer the perfect sacrifice. His one-off sacrifice at the consummation of the age will forever atone for sin, putting it away as the NASB says. Christ remains in God’s presence, sin cannot bar His access, His service as High Priest cannot be cut short by death. He remains, having done away with sin, having death firmly under His feet, His

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<sup>28</sup> [Ephesians 2:10](#)

ongoing intercession, speaking on our behalf to the Father, leaves the door, or rather the curtain, wide open.

### **The End Point.**

One death (ours) brings Judgement; one death (Christ's) brings Salvation. We die once and face judgement; Christ died once and His second appearing is not about sorting out the sin problem, rather it is to complete what has been started.

The removal of sin's stain upon the conscience is but the first part – this is what opens up the Presence of God for those who accept it. Salvation entails more than that, God's approach to sin is 'holistic' in that it deals with the 'whole person' – the mind, which is washed clean; the spirit which is restored to life by His Holy Spirit and the body.

Now you may have noticed that your body is decaying – many of the parts that used to be trim, taut and terrific are becoming increasingly fat, flaccid and failing. The final phase of Salvation is the utter destruction of the Death, the last enemy<sup>29</sup>, and we shall receive a new body that will never wear out<sup>30</sup>. That's certainly something to look forward to, but how does all this change the way we ought to live each day? Verse 14 is the key verse here:

**(Heb 9:14 GW)** The blood of Christ, who had no defect, does even more. Through the eternal Spirit he offered himself to God and cleansed our consciences from the useless things we had done. Now we can serve the living God.

Being enslaved to sin and crippled by guilt prevents us from effectively serving God who is life and who gives life. With a conscience washed clean we are free to do all the good work that God has prepared for us to do.

With the new covenant came a new commandment. In verse 20 we have a quote from Moses as he instituted the old covenant, 'The blood of the covenant which God has commanded you to keep'. Rather than the many hundreds of rules given through Moses, how much simpler, (not necessarily easier) is the New Commandment which Christ gave as He introduced the New Covenant:

**John 13:34 BBE** I give you a new law: Have love one for another; even as I have had love for you, so are you to have love one for another.

**John 15:17 ISV** I am giving you these commandments so that you may love one another."

If our good work is produced by our Faith<sup>31</sup>, then our driving force must be Love<sup>32</sup> – love for the One who rescued us and empowers us and love for those around us. This life is all about relationship, and without love, self-sacrificing faithfulness, there can be no genuine relationship. None of this could be possible without first having free access to the Father's presence through Christ.

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<sup>29</sup> [1 Corinthians 15:26](#)

<sup>30</sup> [1 Corinthians 15:42-44](#)

<sup>31</sup> [James 2:18](#)

<sup>32</sup> [2 Corinthians 5:14](#)

## **Shadow And Substance** **Hebrews Chapter 10**

### **Introduction:**

Chapter 10 rests on the apex of a curve. It is here that the Writer shifts his focus to the things that matter on a day-to-day basis. We see why the Law is only an outline sketch of what the Father was to do through the Son and we see what this means for us in practical terms – it is where ‘the rubber hits the road’.

### **Made For Holiness (1-18)**

It is easy to see someone coming around a corner when they cast a shadow. This shadow cast by the Law indicated the coming reality of Christ. That reality is the substance of our faith that produces righteousness – not some nebulous idea but rather something that stimulates the production of good works.

All through the first part of this chapter, the Writer is emphasising his point that the Law was not effective in properly dealing sin. If it had been the Perfect Solution, then people would have been perfectly free from their guilt. It wasn't as if you could sacrifice a bull when you turned 21 and that was it. For each sin another sin offering was required, today's sacrifice could not wash away the guilt of tomorrow's failure. This was the requirement for both individuals and the community as a whole. Why else would the same sacrifices have to be made day after day, year after year? In a quote from Psalm 40 we see what God thought of the system of sacrifices that He required of Israel:

You did not want animal sacrifices or sin offerings. But you have given me a body to offer. You were not pleased with burnt offerings or other offerings for sin. Then I said, ‘Look, I have come to do your will, O God – as is written about me in the Scriptures.’

Note the difference between the old and the new: The old was about ritual, about required action and sacrifices and offerings. The new is entirely about obedience. It is only because the Son was perfectly obedient that He could perfectly deal with the problem of our disobedience and unbelief.

Barclay uses the analogy of ineffective medicine when discussing worship under the old agreement<sup>33</sup>, but I think there is a better one. When my mother was diagnosed with metastatic cancer, she was given a number of different medications to help slow down its spread. But that's all any of them could do – there was no cure, no remission, just a delayed journey to the inevitable end, with every unpleasant side effect a reminder of that. The Law and its system of worship was the same. It provided no cure, just an easing of the symptoms and a delaying of the inevitable. However, in Christ we have the cure. We can have remission from the cancer of sin and the hope of complete freedom from it.

What then is the substance, if the ritual of the Law was merely a shadow, or outline sketch? Verse ten gives us God's intention for all these things: It is so that through Christ's once for all time sacrifice we can be made holy for all time. But what *is* holiness and what is it meant to achieve?

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<sup>33</sup> William Barclay, *The Letter To The Hebrews*, The Saint Andrew Press, page 113, 1976

To make something holy is to make it clean, or purify it. It brings to mind the idea of refining impurities from a precious metal or removing stains from a garment. However, it is far more than that. It is also to do with being separate and dedicated to God<sup>34</sup>. Both of these ideas are perfectly demonstrated to us in the person of Christ. "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work." (John 4:34 NIV). Christ was set apart to do the will of the Father, to finish the work set for Him. Here then is true holiness – doing the will of the Father and the work He has set aside for us to do. We are to be about the Father's business and He will give us all that we need to do that.

Instead of the written law memorised, God would through His Spirit put what He required on their hearts. Rather than sacrifice after sacrifice to cover sin after sin, one sacrifice would erase the whole personal record. If God has no record of sin, then there is no need to sacrifice something or someone to deal with it! Here then is the both the foundation and key to the Holiness required of us: Because of the substance of Christ's body we can enter God's presence, fully trusting in the work He has completed, unafraid that we may face death as the High Priest did under the Law<sup>35</sup>.

Our Hope is secure because of God's faithfulness. What is hope? Hope gives us something to look forward to, something to live for, something that motivates us into action. Our hope is certain, which should drive us more consistently than if it were not. Maintaining drive over the long haul is hard when you're on your own and here the Writer reminds us of the necessity of community. Having someone else to encourage and motivate you when your own enthusiasm wanes is vital if you are to endure.

### **Made For Community (19-25)**

The second part of the chapter has to do with the support network that helps make this process of sanctification happen. No one can succeed by themselves. We were made for community and we function best when we have an appropriate support network. We have responsibilities to both the Father and to our brothers and sisters that we need to fulfil – not just for our own benefit, but for theirs as well.

There is a New Way into the Presence of the Most Holy God. Not a back door where you sneak in and not a thick curtain as there once was. We come into His presence when we meet Jesus. We no longer have restricted access to presence of God (one person, once a year). We no longer have fearful anticipation of death because of an unacceptable sacrifice. The sacrifice for our sin was perfect because Christ was perfect. Our sin has been perfectly dealt with – completely and for all time. Christ came in the Flesh. Lived perfectly in tune with the Father's will and through that way we come freely and confidently into the *AWESOME* presence of the Most Holy God.

Christ is our High Priest. He gives us access to the Father, not once every year, but once for always. Our High Priest, of Noble Birth and Eternal Nature lives still and continually pleads our case before the Father. And of course, the Father listens to His Son. His once for all time sacrifice makes it possible for us to be more than just ceremonially clean, it cleans the conscience as well. This kind of purity is essential if

<sup>34</sup> The Complete WordStudy Dictionary

<sup>35</sup> Leviticus 16:2, 22:9 as well as other places.

we are to come into the Presence of God's Holiness without fear. (Of course, this presupposes that we *want* to be in the same room as God in the first place!)

It is inconceivable that God should go to all this trouble to open the way for us to come into His presence just so that we can remain as we are. Right from the beginning His desire has been for our intimacy. From the Fall He has been working to bring us into close relationship with Himself. The problem, as always, is with us. We drift away from God, we seek our own way, while the Father weeps and waits for our return.

We have an open door to God through Christ. We have complete and perfect forgiveness through Christ. Even when we do go our own way, it's just a matter of stop, turn around and go back to where we left the path. When I have blown it I don't feel like hanging around a Holy God, but that is exactly what I need. That's when I need to be in His Presence so that some of His character can rub off on me. Christ is hanging out to be with us. He takes the initiative, He has made it possible – He requires a response from us.

We've seen that holiness, righteousness, sanctification – whatever you want to call it – boils down to being about the Father's business. Unless my children spend time talking with me about all sorts of stuff, they will never really know what I expect of them, or want them to achieve. It is the same with our Heavenly Dad – we need to be in His presence, taking the time to listen to what He has to say in order for us to know what is on His heart for us. Knowing of course is not doing, but it is the starting point.

How do we 'hold fast... without wavering'? It can be a struggle to press on for the long haul, especially when things seem to be taking a long time, but we see only from our low vantage point and not God's. However, if we try to battle on alone it will be next to impossible. We need community. Relationship with the Father forms the foundation for relationship with others in His Family.

There is a natural tendency to withdraw from God and from God's people when we continue in disobedience. There is also a natural tendency to look after one's own interests without consideration of the others. These behaviours feed off each other. If we stay away from godly people then we cannot be influenced by them. If we don't remain close to Christ we are less sensitive to His Spirit leading us. This leads to a spiral dive, increasing in speed and leading to catastrophe.

The original readers of this letter had been through some rough times, particularly just after they had been saved. When things are difficult the survival reflex is often to close up and become self-absorbed. Even if that's not *your* reaction, over time difficulties will wear you down and discourage you. It's not just hard times either. Life gets busy and time is always at a premium. Often priorities get skewed and important things get missed out. (Consider the problem of looking after the widows in Acts 6). More than ever we need to be encouraging one another, finding ways of showing love to each other and looking for good to do.

Of course it is very hard to know how to encourage someone if you don't know what their needs are. How can you know someone's needs if you don't get to know them? How can you get to know them if you don't spend time with them? We need to



meet together, especially in ways where we can talk together and build up and encourage one another's faith. That may be by listening to someone speaking up the front. It may be over a cup of caffeine at someone's kitchen table; perhaps over a snag at a barby, or a scrapbook or in a shed. We need to keep meeting together, now more than ever.

Verses 19 through 22 are quite clearly about relationship. All the cleansing, purification, making holy, is to put us into a state where we can come to the Father. You wouldn't present yourself to the Queen or even the Governor General in dirty, torn clothes that you'd been wearing for a week! No, you wash yourself and put on your best clothes. This is of course what the Father has done for us through Christ. He has taken away the stinky, sin-stained rags we were wearing, given us a bath and clothed us in the Sunday Best of His Righteousness. In doing this, He has made us presentable to Himself. Would we then spit in His face by playing in the mud on the way to see Him? Yet this is a just a little like what the Writer describes in verses 26 to 31.

### **Defiant Disobedience (26-31)**

Note that we have been washed, cleansed, purified, so that we can come into God's presence. *This does not leave us unchanged!* Consider the transformation of the Apostles after their time in Christ's presence. We are not bought out of slavery to sin so that we can return to it. "How can we die to sin and keep living in it?"<sup>36</sup> There is no other way, no other sacrifice for sin, if we refuse Christ's rescue.

There is a consistent call throughout the Bible for our behaviour to match our belief. After calling us to meet together and encourage one another in both faith and good works, the Writer goes on to describe some of the consequences of walking away from Christ when we have seen and experienced the Truth. There is a very similar train of thought here as found in chapter six. I do not think that on-going issues of disobedience are the focus here. Once again we have described a determined effort to reject what is known to be true from first-hand experience. God's Word is both clear and consistent regarding the standards required. Deliberately ignoring or distorting what is clearly and expressly stated, without even considering a change in behaviour, is showing the contempt of verse 29.

Yes, we fall short. Yes, it is often the same old issues. That doesn't mean we give up and say, "Oh, that's just the way I am!" We have a Hero whose attitude is always, "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more." I cannot even imagine the punishment that utter contempt for such Grace would deserve. We should not wonder then at the urgency with which Peter calls for us to 'work hard to prove that you really are among those God has called and chosen'<sup>37</sup>.

### **Defiant Determination (32-39)**

So with Peter's entreaty in mind, we can look at the Writer's call to remember their past history, not that they may wallow in the 'Glory Days' but in order that they recall the difficult times through which God has sustained them. 'Hope does not disappoint' – hope in things that are certain will not. Faithful is the promise, certain is its fulfilment, however we must persist in going forward, confident in Christ's enabling and without turning back when things get difficult. When all our plans turn

<sup>36</sup> Romans 6:1-3

<sup>37</sup> 1 Peter 1:8-11

sour, when life seems unbearably difficult – hold fast. We have in Christ an Eternal Future and Hope, one that goes beyond what we can see in this life, one that is made certain because of the *absolute* faithfulness of Christ.

They had been standing their ground, in spite of hardship and standing with others as they went through their own trials. Why? Because the things of this world do not last, none of it is permanent. We have 'better and lasting possessions' waiting for us when we come into our inheritance. Even if our lives are taken away, we can be certain that the Father has possession of our souls – this is eternal security.

While they go hand in hand, there is a difference between Faith and Hope. Hope is what we hold on to for the future, Faith assures us that it will happen.

Those who quietly sneak away are contrasted with those who are firmly convinced of the Truth of what God has said. The term 'shrink back' or 'turn away' used here is more than hiding from the Bad Guys; it's running away – desertion. There are only two possibilities: believing or deserting. Those who hang in there to the end, believing in God's promise, will be kept secure in God. Those who fail to do so will be cut off.

Before long Christ will return. How do you want Him to find you - pressing forward with the work He has called you to or cowering in the shadows? Confidence in what God has said should give us the boldness to go forward, to advance against the enemy. Knowing this, "What kind of people ought we to be?"<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> 2 Peter 3:11

## Looking to Something Better

(The Heroes)

### Hebrews Chapter 11

While this chapter is obviously about Faith, we need to get a clear idea of why these people held onto their faith and what it produced in their lives. What was it that provoked such a steadfast determination to pursue what they did? What did they hope to gain by sacrificing so much – in many cases their lives?

Right at the heart of faith is belief, belief that the One we put our hope exists. From this place we are able begin the life-long journey of determining the course of action that we are to take. Once there is belief, there can be relationship. With relationship comes understanding of character and knowing what will please Him. It's often hearing what He is saying to us, but it is more often knowing His heart. We see this same progression in our relationships with other people. Whether it's a spouse or a friend, when there is true relationship we know what the other would want without having to be told or asked.

#### **10:39 – 11:2 (SC Paraphrase):**

We are not the kind of people who slink away and are cut out of Eternity; rather we are those who have faith that saves. This faith is the underpinning foundation to those things we look to in the Kingdom of Heaven. It is this attitude that God spoke well of in those who lived long ago.

While there are many differences between the Old and the New Testaments, some basic principals apply to both. The way to please God was the same for Adam, Abel and Abraham as it is for us. Chapter 10 finishes with the declaration that we are not those who fall away, but rather that we continue on with a faith that saves. This chapter looks at just a few of the great cloud of witnesses who have gone on before us. They did not 'shrink back', rather they pressed forward in faith, confident that 'what He had promised, He was able also to perform' (Rom 4:21).

We need to look at the characteristic that makes each of these Heroes someone to look up to – Faith. Faith is by definition, confidence in what God has said, regarding our Origins and our Future as well as the Promises that we rely on day to day. All those mentioned in this chapter displayed that confidence in God.

#### **Pursuing the Kingdom.**

We all have things that we want, stuff we think we need: a better home, a better job, a better life – we all look to give the best we can to those we love and are often looking for something better than we currently have for that very reason. In the same way, the Father wants to give us Something Better. There is a time for contentment, but there is also a place for striving for what is better. However, all those mentioned here knew that the things we can grasp hold of in this world cannot last beyond it. Instead they looked forward to Something Better, something that *would* last, even though from a person's point of view it seemed impossible. Matthew 13:44-46 gives us an insight into their mindset:

<sup>44</sup> "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that a man discovered hidden in a field. In his excitement, he hid it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field.

<sup>45</sup> “Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant on the lookout for choice pearls. <sup>46</sup> When he discovered a pearl of great value, he sold everything he owned and bought it! (NLT)

What we have in this chapter is a selection of those who set aside all they had in order to go after Something Better. How then do *we* receive this better something? It can only be through Faith. None of these held what was promised in their hand, yet they held onto the Promise as if they did. What they were seeking after was in fact the Kingdom of Heaven and they pursued it with every fibre of their being.

Each of these Heroes of Faith heard God’s direction, believed Him and followed through with action. These great deeds carried out are rightly called ‘acts of faith’ because as James points out, faith without action is dead:

James 2:21-24 (NLT) Don’t you remember that our ancestor Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? <sup>22</sup> You see, his faith and his actions worked together. His actions made his faith complete. <sup>23</sup> And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: “Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith.” He was even called the friend of God. <sup>24</sup> So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone.

Everyone mentioned in this chapter, whether named or not, are mentioned because what they believed was proven by what they did. Faith is substance; it is “what really exists under any appearance”<sup>39</sup>. It is not blind because it sees what truly is, rather than what can be identified with mere senses.

The main purpose of this chapter is to show that before Christ’s sacrifice, even before God’s covenant with Israel, *faith* was required to please God. Sacrifices do not give God pleasure – faith does. Adam’s lack of confidence in what God had told him lead to his disobedience. Abel’s sacrifice pleased God because Abel made his sacrifice *by faith*. Giving of the first and the best of his produce demonstrated in a practical way that he believed God would provide his needs from what came later<sup>40</sup>. So many times God says, “I don’t want your sacrifice, I want you!” Sacrifices don’t necessarily reflect a person’s heart and are a constant reminder of the sin that cuts us off from God. The Old Testament blood sacrifices not only reminded people of their failing to meet God’s requirements, but also echoed the then still future sacrifice of ‘the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world’. Those who brought their sacrifice looked forward in faith to that day. What we do won’t please God unless it is a faith-based response to Him and in this way Abel’s act of faith giving still speaks to us of how to please God.

### **Designed and built by God**

As I write this, we are living in rented house some 1400 kilometres from home. We have a place to live and work (or study) and people that we interact with, but it isn’t ‘home’. Often we look forward to the day when we can go to live in the house that we built especially for us, and be with the friends we have left behind there. However, there are still things here that we need to do, tasks that we have yet to finish and the time to move on is not yet.

<sup>39</sup> The Complete WordStudy Dictionary

<sup>40</sup> R.L. Long, Notes on the Epistle to the Hebrews, Page 233, November 8, 1996

It might not be a very subtle metaphor, yet it is very real to us. What we need to remember is that even *that* house is not our final and permanent home. There is yet another that has been especially built for us, where some of those we love have already gone. *That* is where our focus needs to be. That is what we need to be straining towards with all of our being, because *that* home will never need repairs, will never be torn down and will always be ours. This what Jesus was talking about in John 14:2, 'There are many rooms in my Father's house. I wouldn't tell you this, unless it was true. I am going there to prepare a place for each of you.'

When Israel came to the Promised Land the fields, orchards and gardens were already established, the cities were already built. All they had to do was to take possession of it. There were permanent places to live, they no longer needed to pitch tents and move about. Abraham never lived to see his descendants permanently settled there, in fact He was looking beyond even that point in time. We share that promise of a permanent place to live, even more permanent than the houses in which we now live. The gardens, the orchards, the fields – all that we will ever need forever is ready. All we need to do is accept the offer and take possession of the promise.

Our origin is not our destiny. Faith gives us the ability to see what is not yet visible; Hope produces the desire to attain it; Love for the One who is there drives us onward and upward.

### **Perfect Love Cast Out Fear;**

Love when fully mature throws fear out of the way. So too does faith. These Heroes may have been afraid, but they pressed on anyway. When there is the certainty of God's provision there is nothing to be worried about. Anxiety about that which is unknown or dangerous is natural – it's a necessary survival feature, but we are called to 'cast all our anxiety on Him' (1 Peter 5:7). Was there danger for Moses' parents? Of course! Rahab gambled not only her life, but her family's as well. Abram didn't even know *where* he was going – let alone what was there! There is always risk when stepping around a blind corner. However, we can take on board the advice of One who can see what is coming and we know that it is love and desire for our good that motivates Him. What then is there to fear, even if it costs all that we have? God 'rewards those who seek out His plan for them'. We can't see from our perspective how the events of our life are woven into the Tapestry of Time that God is creating, but we *can* trust God.

### **Beyond Belief**

What can God do through ordinary people with faith in an extraordinary God? Plenty. Verses 32 to 35 short-list some of what God will do through those who faithfully believe and obey. Nothing has changed – there are still Mighty Deeds that need to be done. We may never conquer kingdoms but we can work to see justice done. We may never face violent opposition but God will turn our weaknesses into strength, whatever we face. Reading through these verses may cause us to think, "Wow! They did all that through faith?" And indeed they did, but wait, there's more to this.

The contrast between such magnificent, marvellous, miraculous deeds carried out through faith and the very ordinary almost unseen or unknown could not be more stark. We are not promised miraculous deliverance from trials. Consider the young

men in the fiery furnace, "...Our God can save us... but even if He does not we will not bow down..." (Daniel 3:16-18)

'They were out of tune with their times because they were living by faith in God's future world while society all around them was living as though the present world was all there was or ever would be; and God was giving them strength to live like that, thus proving the truth of their claim.'<sup>41</sup>

That bad things should happen to good people seems to be such problem for many. Indeed, if this world were all that there is then that would be a great injustice. However, our Faith tells us that it is not so, that there is much more to life than what we can see, hear, taste, touch or smell. This being the case, why wouldn't we set aside the things of this world, of this life, so that we can pursue the things that really matter – those things that can neither corrode nor be stolen from us? As Jim Elliot said, '*He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.*'<sup>42</sup>

### **Together With Us.**

'None of them received what was promised' – the fruit of their faith had not fully ripened. Even though these people pleased God, the culmination of a life of faith could not be fully realised at that time. Here in verse 13 we read that though the promises were unfulfilled in their time they 'welcomed them from a distance'. In John 8:56 Jesus says to the crowd, 'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad'. It is only in Christ that all the Promises come to fruition.

Through Christ there is 'something better for us'. Better because we live after Christ's sacrifice and look back in faith, even as they looked forward to it. It has only ever been possible to come to the Father through the Son and through faith they looked to the sacrifice that was to come that would forever and completely do away with sin. This great cloud of witnesses who have gone on ahead of us are not seated in the grandstands and cheering. Instead they wait for us at each junction in the road, helping us to follow the right path, urging us on when our strength is all but finished. Together with us, they complete the marathon of life and together we arrive at finish.

Faith is not about believing whatever you want, making your wishes and dreams come true. Faith is about pleasing God by finding out what is on His heart and making that become true. By doing this we give an example and a legacy to those who come after us; we can be the Heroes of Faith for them to look up to.

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<sup>41</sup> N.T. Wright, Hebrews For Everyone, SPCK Publishing, Page 215, 2003

<sup>42</sup> Elisabeth Elliot, *In The Shadow of the Almighty*, Harper and Row, page 108 (Chapter 11) of the 1958 hardback edition.

## **His Kingdom, His Righteousness**

*(Fix Your Eyes on Jesus)*

### **Hebrews Chapter 12**

#### **Our Example and Inspiration.**

These heroes of the Faith, these seekers of the Kingdom who have pioneered the way for us, who inspire us with their examples of steadfastness, surround us. They testify to God's faithfulness in the past, urge us to go forward and trust His faithfulness for the future.

Do we lay aside our own desires and longings to please *them*? No, but we do take courage from their example, knowing that many others before us have faced the same (and worse) difficulties that we have. More than this, we have before us the example of Christ Jesus Himself. His selfless sacrifice, (laying aside His rights even to the point of shedding His blood), is why we cast off the excess baggage, cut away the restrictive robes and pursue His Kingdom and Righteousness with every bit of strength we have.

What do we need to do to 'seek His Kingdom'? If we look to those who have gone before we should be able to get an idea of what's involved. When we look at Jesus, we can see that He cast aside everything that got in the way of His Mission (Philippians 2:5-11). If we are to follow His example, then we must do the same.

The things that hinder literally 'weigh us down'. These are burdens we carry which distract us from our mission, they are day-to-day concerns as well as consumer culture sidetracks. Though some clearly are, they are not *necessarily* bad things. They may very well be good things that benefit the kingdom, *but are they the most important things for you to be working on right now?*

Many businesses and organisations have a 'Mission Statement' in order to focus on their core activities and prevent them from becoming involved in things that hinder progress or growth. We could all benefit from prayerful consideration of what God wants specifically our 'core business' to be for Him – both as individuals and as a Body. However, remember that *Relationships* are always more important than *Mission*. If your work is putting relationships with immediate family, fellow believers, friends and co-workers under excessive strain then it is time to closely examine what you are doing. This doesn't just mean paid employment. I am also referring to voluntary work in the Church or elsewhere.

What was Jesus' priority regarding Service and Relationship? Consider His response to Martha in Luke 10:38-42. Martha was too busy *doing* to hang out with Jesus and listen to what He had to say. Our attitude needs to be the same as Mary's, in that she put *being* with Jesus before *working* for Jesus.

Sin certainly entangles, if you let it. Robertson's Word Pictures describes the Greek here as, "to place around or stand around". It gives the idea of temptation to sin being all around us, or entwining and restricting movement. This is probably even more blatant in this age of social networking and omnipresent advertising than ever before. The long, loose robes so suitable for a Middle Eastern climate surround and tangle the legs when running – that's why I wear shorts when I run! Sin just keeps winding itself around more and more until you can't move. We can become

paralysed by even benign things that captivate us, when our attention should be on the things of The Kingdom.

When sin trips you up, you need to cut it off, get up and keep running. Own up to sin, turn away from it. This requires practise and is part of the reason we experience the Father's discipline.

### **Our Discipline – Training For Strength**

It is the Father's requirement for Holiness in us that leads Him to allow hardship in our lives. Without His Holiness, none of us can even be in the same room as Him. God wants us to be able to see Him, to be with Him. He is committed to whatever is best for us, even if that hurts for a little while. That is Love.

A good Father not only gives life but also takes responsibility for that life. This includes providing physical, emotional and spiritual needs. We can see from these verses that this provision also includes *training and effective discipline* that develops character and brings the child to maturity (compare James 1:2-3).

So there's discipline and the training that produce the result, 'the peaceful fruit of righteousness'. Compare 12:11 with Galatians 5:22-23. Righteousness is what God wants to grow in our lives. Elsewhere it is described as 'Christ likeness'. In Galatians, the characteristics of this fruit are listed. These qualities will increasingly be seen in my life as I become more like Christ; it is an accurate way to gauge my progress. This exercising of faith, as with any exercise, strengthens, is not merely for the sake of being strong or 'buffed' but it is in order to be strong and fit for service to others.

Discipline produces Right Living if we let it do so. Struggling against it will result in becoming broken and bitter. *In what ways is the Father disciplining me at the moment? What do I need to learn from the experience?* The sooner I can pick this lesson up, the sooner I can move on and grow, bearing fruit. God has promised not to allow your Spiritual training to break you (1 Corinthians 10:13), but he will push you to the edge of your limits. Hang in there, let Him do the work that He knows needs to be done in your life for you to fulfil what He has called you to.

### **Our Call: To Live at Peace, To Be Holy.**

Living at peace with others is much more than a simple absence of conflict. We can see here that it must be about actively looking out for people and dealing with issues as they crop up. If we allow things to go unsaid, if we overlook people because we think they are going ok, that gives bitterness an opportunity to take root and spread like the noxious weed that it is.

In Romans 12:18 Paul says, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men". You are only responsible for what you can do, not for what they must do. Be careful to discharge your responsibility.

This living at peace and holiness are very much tied together here. What is Holiness, why do we need it to see God? Holiness is about Purity. Rich Mullins in one of his songs describes it as having God as his 'One Thing'. The complete Word Study Dictionary describes the Greek word here as meaning, 'Clean, pure, clear, in a natural sense unsoiled, unalloyed'. It is the pure in heart who will see God (Matthew 5:8) and here in verse 14, those who are Holy. We must therefore deduce that they



are the same thing. It is because God is 100% clean, right to the core and cannot have *any* un-holiness before Him that we need to be holy. In gracious love, He has made the way for all who choose so to become holy.

Some of the result of this is discipline that will, if we let it, produce that right character which we need. This hurts, more often than not and if we fail to recognise what the end result will be, we can become embittered by the disciplining process. No wonder we are urged to recognise difficulties for what they are – opportunities for growth in Godliness. That bitterness, when it takes hold, can rob us of our birthright.

There are plenty of temptations out there. My aim is to run away from situations where there is a temptation of immorality. There are, however, other snares that are just as deadly, but far less obvious. In Hebrews 12:16 the Writer mentions 'godlessness' alongside of sexual immorality. Sexual impurity is about filling short-term desire without having God's perspective on things. Esau's rejecting his spiritual inheritance is exactly the same kind of thinking. We do not have any record of Esau being sexually immoral<sup>43</sup>, but we do see him selling his eternal inheritance for short-term gain. These are the one and the same – giving up something of great value for immediate gratification.

This passage is saying that we can pass up God's offer of a permanent place with Him in order to fulfil a temporary need, a 'momentary hunger' right now. The contempt that Esau showed for God's promise to Abraham and Isaac is demonstrated in the way that he failed to look forward in faith to what the promise really meant. No wonder in Malachi chapter one, God says that He loved Jacob but hated Esau. Jacob had the faith to see what his inheritance really meant and grasped for it and pleased God with that faith. *What do we do to sacrifice our inheritance for short-term gain?*

### **Our Response and our Destiny.**

To whom have we come? It is certainly not some man-made building, or symbolic place. Indeed it is into the very Holy of Holies (see chapter 9). And it is not just anyone who gives us this Good News of God's Kingdom, nor some angel who calls us to Holiness. It is the Son of the King of Kings Himself – so how important is our response to His invitation!

Missing God's grace, missing the point, failing to take on board what His Grace has done in your own life means you will fail to be gracious to others. Consider The Unmerciful Servant (Matthew 18:23-35) – here one was treated with grace and forgiveness, though undeserved, yet failed to allow that to change his life. This is demonstrated in the way he dealt with a lesser debt with neither grace nor mercy.

So how does my attitude to others measure up to the Grace shown to me? Am I still embittered by poor treatment from others, whether deserved or not? That kind of bitter attitude will poison not only my life but also the lives of those around me.

Our destination, our inheritance, is by its very definition is not something that can be grabbed hold of now; never in this life can we say that we've arrived. It is not to the

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<sup>43</sup> Although he did have multiple wives, that is not the issue here.

earthly copy that we come in fear and trembling, but to the genuine, original, House of God. The Bridegroom calls us; we are drawn to Him by the love that His love for us draws out.

Abel's sacrifice – his murder – speaks to us of faith that is able to produce good work, faith that holds true even to death. This is a faith that pleases God and angers the godless (11:4). You can be certain that same faith will produce the same response as it is cultivated in your own life.

Christ's torture and sacrifice speaks of a more powerful and more beautiful message than Abel's. It speaks clearly and eloquently of a love that holds nothing back – not even life itself. We have in Christ a message of freedom and life. Where Abel's life was taken from him, Christ willingly gave up His life to release us from Debtors' Prison and to give us full life that never ends. 'But even while we still refused to listen or believe, God showed what kind of love He has for us by sending His Son to die for us<sup>44</sup>.

We see again in the end of this chapter the theme of superiority. A Superior Authority who is in a superior position has warned us. For this reason, we have a greater responsibility and face a greater penalty for failing to discharge that responsibility. Verse 26 mentions the 'shaking' not only of this earth, but of heaven as well. Those things that have been created are temporary – destined to be destroyed. Esau sold his birthright for these things.

The things that we can see and hold here and now, these are the temporary things that Esau held in higher regard than the permanent things. My kids, when they were little, would build things from Lego and then complain when they have to pull it all apart and put it away. The whole purpose of Lego is to build it, pull it apart and build something else! A tent also is intended to be a short-term thing. How easily can a tent be shaken, blown away? All that we see and touch is but a temporary place to live - a tent. This is quite unlike the purpose we had in mind when building our house, which was meant to be a place to live and share with others for generations. Jesus has promised a permanent place to live that can never be blown away. The permanent, the Eternal *will* remain. That is to say, those things that Jesus looked towards as He laid aside his life are the things that are worth holding on to.

All that has been given to us an eternal inheritance should provoke a response from us. We are unworthy to be God's slave, yet we have been made His children. That should give us a grateful attitude in our service. 'With reverence & awe', awe here is a word meaning 'apprehension of danger'; treading carefully, keeping alert for danger. Why would this be necessary when approaching a God who is Love? Verse 29 tells us that He is 'an all consuming fire'.

Sin is still sin under the New Agreement; God still cannot have any in His presence. The consequences of treating a message of such grace and love with contempt are dire indeed. We must therefore be alert to the dangers our own inappropriate attitudes bring when we approach The Father in worship or service.

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<sup>44</sup> Romans 5:8 paraphrase

Verses 28 and 29 give us what should be our logical (rational, reasonable) response to the Better Word that we have heard. We are to share in an eternal, unshakable inheritance, so our worship, the honour and respect that is due to The Father who has provided it needs to be appropriate. Only precious metal and stones will come through an intense heat unchanged or purified. We need to ensure that there is only reverence and awe in the way we worship because self-interest arrogance and complacency will not pass through God's consuming fire.

**To Conclude:**

We have the example of the Son who has gone ahead of us (vv 2-4). We have the assurance of the Father's love working for what is best for us (vv 5-11). We have the example of history (vv 16-25). We have the hope of an unshakable inheritance (vv 26-29).

So, we need to look to Jesus, allow Him to teach us how to live, even if it seems unpleasant and painful at the time. We need to pursue His Kingdom and His Righteousness, whatever it costs, because of the cost Christ paid to show us the way.

## **Better Worship**

*(Encouragement to True Relationship)*

### **Hebrews Chapter 13**

#### **Introduction:**

This chapter is primarily about worship, as it follows on from the Writer's call to thankful, genuine worship in chapter 12. True worship benefits all relationships, for when your attitude and response to God is right, it flows on to all relationships. Similarly, when we are right with the people around us, we can connect with God without freely.

Worship is not just about singing good songs in church on Sunday. It's about how we offer ourselves in service, and how what we do reflects God's character to those we work alongside. Colossians 3:16-17 certainly implies that singing is part of it, but Paul says, "*whatever* you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus". That means paid or unpaid work of any kind, study, recreation, hobbies, sport, housework and chores – it is all worship, they are all opportunities to demonstrate Christ's character.

#### **Verses 1-3 Continuing in Brotherly Love:**

The command to keep loving one another as brothers and sisters is one of the first steps in thankful, genuine worship. Much of this chapter gives us ways to put that *philadelphia* into action. The first of these is showing hospitality (verse 2). Both Paul in Romans (12:10-13) and Peter in his first letter (1 Peter 4:8-9) link love with hospitality.<sup>45</sup> The simple meeting together and sharing what you have with others ought to be a vehicle to demonstrate both brotherly affection and unconditional covenant love. How that actually looks is as varied as the people doing it. Whether it's a full meal in your home or having a coffee with someone at a local café, the kindness that can draw people together and strengthen the relationship bond cannot be understated.

'Remember those in prison...those being mistreated...' Here we have a second way we can continue in love for our Family in Christ. There are people who desperately need help, support and encouragement yet have no means of asking for it. There may not be people in Australia who are in prison or who are suffering for their faith at this time, but there are still people who are in prison and suffering. So while the Writer may be thinking particularly of fellow believers, we are called to "do good to *everyone*"<sup>46</sup>. James 1:27 refers to 'caring for orphans and widows in their distress' – people who are vulnerable, who are being or in danger of being exploited. This is another avenue where we can look out for those in need. We are called to protect and help those who cannot do so themselves.

Around the world, in many different places fellow brothers and sister in Christ *are* suffering and imprisoned for choosing to follow Christ. Organisations such as Voice of the Martyrs exist to inform us and support them – and of course there are others as well. There are ways and means that we can remember them and be informed how to effectively pray them, as well as be part of more hands-on support. They are family and we have an obligation to do so.

<sup>45</sup> Interesting enough, the Hebrew word here for capable is elsewhere translated as 'army', 'wealth', 'virtue', 'valour' and strength.

<sup>46</sup> Galatians 6:10

## **Verses 4-7 Faith and Faithfulness: In Marriage**

Faith believes without proof; Faithfulness is that quality in you which enables others to believe you without proof – that you will honour the vow, be it one as important as marriage or something as minor as the promise of ice cream after a swim.

This command to give marriage the honour that it is due must be seen in light of the relationship being a reflection of the church's relationship with Christ. The same kind of set-apartness and exclusivity that should be a marriage is required for our relationship to the Bride Groom. Relationships that reflect those qualities give people around us an image of what we have in Christ and bring Him honour.

I believe this is one reason that Satan seeks to attack godly marriages – to mar the image of Christ and his Bride. The word translated as 'honour' is a word used in a number of other passages throughout the New Testament and is also rendered 'respected' and 'precious'. Marriage then is to be regarded as precious, to be esteemed and valued like precious stones. What does King Lemuel say in Proverbs 31? "How hard it is to find a capable wife! She is worth far more than jewels!" Clearly, this relationship is to be most precious and most valued – guarded as jealously as any treasure, second only to the relationship we have with Christ.

### **In Money**

Contentment with what one has is a theme that occurs several times in Paul's writing. In 1 Timothy 6:3-9 Paul points out that godliness with contentment is very beneficial. Philippians 4:10-14 we see that the source of being able to be content in any and every circumstance is only through God's strength. Here the Writer reminds us of the Father's faithfulness. To be abandoned by a father who ought to be providing everything the child needs must be one of the most difficult things to work through. Yet our Heavenly Father knows what we need (Matthew 6:32) and through Christ generously provides all that we need and more (Romans 8:32).

I find it interesting that money is mentioned immediately after marriage. Any close relationship will have its share of stressors – finance is only one of them. God is faithful and has demonstrated His faithfulness over the millennia. Our security is not to be in finances, but rather on the giver and sustainer of Life. (That's easy for me to say when I have a good wage and a secure job.) David in Psalm 37:25 confidently proclaimed 'Once I was young, and now I am old. Yet I have never seen the godly abandoned or their children begging for bread.' God has not changed since David penned those words and He continues to consistently honour His promise. He has not and will not ever abandon us and leave us to fend for ourselves as if orphaned. He is Father, and as any good father does, He will continue to be there for His kids and to meet their needs.

It is our pre-occupation with 'Now' which results in us chasing after those things that do not last. How does my attitude to the things in my care stack up against what Jesus says it should be? Do I grasp hold of them so as not to lose anything? Do I make the resources at my disposal available to any who needs them? There were no needy people in the first century church – 'they felt that what they owned was not their own, so they shared everything they had'<sup>47</sup>. We have fallen a long way from where we ought to be as a Family.

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<sup>47</sup> Acts 4:32

The question then is, does this truth affect the way I live and the things I do? Honest belief in what God says results in action.

### **In Leadership**

Twice in this chapter the Writer mentions leaders. In verse seven he urges us to look closely at their lives and follow the example they set. Later in verse 17 he reminds us of the responsibilities they have to God and us, as well as our responsibilities to them. It cuts both ways. How can they serve, shepherd and equip us if we refuse to submit to their leadership? How can we submit to their leadership if they are bossing people around not being held to account?

One way we worship sacrificially is in the way we treat those in authority over us (verses 17-18). There is no qualification added to the command to obey your leaders, however, teachers are not to be autocratic or authoritarian. Consider what Jesus says in Mar 10:42-45 NLT So Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. (43) But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, (44) and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else. (45) For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give His life as a ransom for many." Leadership is about service and sacrifice; sometimes that will require tough decisions that others may not see as being service. Those of us under their authority need to remember that and not make their burden any greater than it already is.

Leaders are accountable; this comes out in Jesus' parable about the faithful servant in Luke 12. 'To whoever much is given, of him will much be required; and to whom much was entrusted, of him more will be asked.' They have a very great responsibility and we have a requirement to support them in that. There is a great difficulty in maintaining a blameless conscience, even to want to do what's right at times. Without adequate spiritual support from the people whom you serve, it is impossible to sustain that kind of life.

The faithfulness and faith of those who have led us to and in Christ provide us with a visible, current and on-going example for us to follow. Jesus never changes who He is or what He requires of us. His Good News has not and will not change. Those who are in leadership, those who lead you to Christ, should have a consistency in their faith that emulates that of Christ; consistency that is worth following. That applies to me also as verse 7 is not only good advice to younger Christians; it is a wake up call to those of us who have been trying to follow Jesus for some time. Jesus has not changed the standards and accountability required for leadership. Those of us who have been on the track for a while need to make sure that we have a life worth imitating. If not, then we need to look at the path we should be on and get back on it.

### **Verses 8-19 The Superior Altar and the Sacrifice of Praise**

The over arching theme in Hebrews is one of pressing on in the Grace of Christ, instead of sliding back into the works-oriented Old Covenant. As natural people, we want to be able to achieve what we want on our own, in our own way and without help from God. This trait is something we have all acquired from our original parents when they chose to believe the Deceiver instead of the Father. That is why man-made religions require works to produce results, whereas God requires faith that produces good things. It's a subtle but important difference.

In Mark 7:14-23 Jesus clearly explains that the food we eat has no effect on our standing with God. Eating certain foods, performing weird religious rites will never be things that He needs us to do to be saved. Mixing the old ways or man-made religion with the Gospel is a backwards step, like having both a horse and a tractor to pull a plough. The foundational truths of salvation do not change; it can only ever come through God's gracious love and not by us working to earn it. We have a superior altar in the Cross and there was a superior sacrifice made there, so much so that nothing more can be added to it – it is finished! We still need the on-going process of renewing and regeneration of our hearts and minds so that what we desire and think align with what is on His heart and mind.

Our worship is to be at that altar, that is to say at the foot of the Cross that did not even have the dignity of being part of the city. So rather than sliding back into the old, comfortable ceremony that had no substance, we are called to go "Beyond the boundaries of the camp". This is going beyond what is safe, beyond the familiar, to the places where others won't go. What will this mean for you? Not necessarily the same as for someone else. It may be to orphans in Russia, on Ships in Europe, the poor of Northern India or Outback Aus. It may be the local RSL or Park or Play Group. It will almost invariably involve hanging out with those who are 'unlovely', people who are rejected out of hand as 'Beathens' or 'Bogans'. It won't mean prestige; it will mean reproach – no 'normal' person would want to be around such people. Any disgrace we bear in this city is temporary, far better to have honour in the Enduring City.

### **Verses 20-25**                      **Final Blessing**

God is the God of Peace. If you are experiencing confusion, conflicting emotions, uncertainty these are *not* from God. Where do you find peace? What choice leaves you with that 'quiet strength in the midst of this crazy desperation'<sup>48</sup>? That is the direction God needs you to head towards.

Who can do all that is required in this letter? No one on and of their own can do so. The same power that raised Christ Jesus from the dead is available to us to equip us to do all that He requires of you. When I was getting ready to deploy to the overseas the ADF made sure that I had everything that I needed to do the task I was being sent to do. That included training and equipment. If I need a particular tool or part to fix an aeroplane, then the ADF supplies them – I just have to follow the correct procedure to order it. We have been sent out, deployed if you will into our own Area of Operations and the Commander who sent us will ensure that we have everything we need to achieve the mission.

Through all that the Father leads us through, both the enjoyable and the not, He is 'working in us that which is pleasing'. Here I see an image of a Craftsman shaping the metal into shape. Stretching, shrinking, heating, quenching – none of these actions seem pleasant at the time but in the end produce that which is both beautiful and functional. In what ways is God working to shape your life? We need to recognise what He is doing and allow Him to form us as he sees fit.

This is an *eternal covenant*, not a short-term or one-off deal. God is in this for the longest haul and expects nothing less that the same from us.

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<sup>48</sup> Brian Duncan, "Anonymous Confessions of a Lunatic Friend" 1991

