



**OPEN
HEAVEN**

**AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF
THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS**

R. STANLEY

Open Heaven

(FORMERLY TITLED JESUS IS SUFFICIENT)

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Contents

Introduction — Open Heaven	...	7
1. Inheritance through Christ	...	9
2. Why Salvation is great	...	18
3. How to Fulfill the Heavenly Calling	...	28
4. The Rest God Gives	...	38
5. The Priestly ministry of believers	...	47
6. Antidotes for backsliding	...	57
7. Melchizedek and Christ	...	67
8. New Covenant blessings	...	76
9. The Tabernacle	...	84
10. Faith-Hope-Love	...	93
11. The God pleasing Faith	...	104
12. The Christian Race	...	116
13. Brotherly Love	...	128

HEBREWS CHAPTER ONE

Inheritance through Christ

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews is not clearly known from the Epistle. Paul, Apollos and Barnabas are some of the names suggested. I would prefer to simply call the author throughout our study as the “author of the Epistle.” Gloriously this Epistle begins with the word “God.”

The first chapter explains our inheritance through Christ. The key thought is gathered from verses 2,4 and 14. “His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things” ... “He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they” ... “To minister for those who will inherit salvation.” Our inheritance through Christ as seen in this chapter is fourfold. Each one is presented with the background of a contrast or comparison.

1. The Word of God

vv1 , 2, “God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son.”

The contrast here is between the prophets and Jesus Christ.

Hearing from God is a unique blessing. See what Moses tells the people concerning this: “Ask now concerning the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that, God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether any great thing like this has happened, or anything like it has been heard. Did any people ever hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and live?... Out of heaven He let you hear His voice, that He might instruct you; on earth He showed you His great fire, and you heard His words out of the midst of the fire”... and what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?” (Dt 4:32,33,36,8). Yes, there is no greater blessing than the gift of God’s Word.

When there is no Word of God, darkness is inevitable. It, is pictorially illustrated in the story of Eli in 1 Samuel 3:1-3. “The word of the Lord was rare in those days.” Then following these statements — “And it came to pass at that time, while Eli was lying down in his place, and when his eyes had begun to grow so dim that he could not see, and before the lamp of God went out ...” In the creation history we see darkness gone when God spoke, “Let there be light.” Had not God spoken, there would have only been darkness. We read about Dark Ages in the Church history. What does it mean? The Bible was not available to the people to read and meditate. It was chained and kept on the pulpit. The Roman Catholic priests would tell the people the Bible was too sacred to be read or interpreted by common people. Result? Darkness! The Word of God is too precious a gift from God to he missed.

Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God— and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” Christ is my Righteousness! He is my Sanctification. All “my” righteousness is filthy rags before Him. But when I receive Christ, He becomes my Righteousness and that is beautiful. That is what the Bible calls as the beauty of holiness. There is nothing attractive in “my” righteousness or holiness. But Christ on me is the in my beautiful robe of righteousness.

And the power of Christ is ours. Jn 16:33, “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” His victory is mine. He has overcome and so I will not be overcome. I can go rejoicing! Apostle John writes, “You are of God, little children and have overcome them because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 Jn 4:4).

Though this twofold blessing is ours because of our placement with Christ on the throne, in order to realise its effect in our earthly life we must constantly remember this glorious inheritance and appropriate it by faith and corresponding action of denouncing the filthy attractions of this world. “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory” (Col 3:1-4).

3. The Spirit of God

v9, “You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness more than Your companions.”

Here Christ and His companions are contrasted. There were three anointed offices in the Old Testament — prophet, priest and king. The word Christ means “Anointed” and in Him all these three offices together were fulfilled. He is three-in-one! Hence the anointing on Him was more than His companions — the prophets, priests and kings who were before Him typifying His ministry.

John the Baptist testified of Christ like this: “He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure. The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. He who believes in the Son has everlasting life” (Jn 3:34-36). Look at these verses carefully. First God gives the Spirit to His Son without measure. He has given all things to His Son because of love. If it stops there we are not benefitted. But it says in the next verse that the Son passes on whatever He has received from the Father to those who believe on Him! Hallelujah! Yes, Jesus is not simply a figure to be admired but a Person to be appropriated I God’s Spirit without measure flows to us through His Son.

John said concerning Jesus, “I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Mk 1:8). It is not sprinkling with the Spirit but baptizing — fully I immersing, soaking, overflowing! The Spirit without measure! Apostle Peter understood this truth well when he said on the Day of Pentecost, “Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear” (Acts 2:33). It is an outpouring! Whatever Christ, received from the Father is passed on to us in abundance! What an inheritance in Christ! He keeps not anything with Himself. The three

The song of the redeemed in Heaven is, “You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for you were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth.” But the song of the angels is simply worship unto the Lord and they do not share in His reign (Rev 5:9-12). Paul asks in 1 Cor 6:3, “Do you not know that we shall judge angels?”

In Christ we have the inheritance of sonship and so the angels become our spectators. In Christ we have the inheritance of rulership and so the angels become our servants. Angels are ours because of Christ!

Conclusion

This fourfold inheritance, namely God’s Word, God’s Throne, God’s Spirit and God’s Angels, enables us enjoy the salvation of God in all its fullness. We were saved from the penalty of sin. We are saved from the power of sin. And we will be saved from the very presence of sin. Born again by the Word of God. Sanctified and overcoming by the Throne Life. Transformation into His very image from glory to glory by God’s Spirit. Reigning with Christ surrounded by His holy angels. What an inheritance!

HEBREWS CHAPTER TWO

Why Salvation is Great

The Salvation of God is the theme of this chapter. We read about “so great salvation” (v3) and the “Author of salvation” (v10). The last verse of the previous chapter speaks of “those who will inherit salvation.” God’s salvation is great. It’s glorious. This chapter outlines five reasons why.

1. Testimony of Godhead

vv3,4, “So great a salvation, which at first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will.”

We have the combined witness of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit to our salvation. In the New Testament we find Christ to be the first preacher of the Gospel. True John the Baptist preached before Christ

to die. Man is limited to space and time. In spite of the fact that man is created lower than the angels, God gave him dominion over the earth (Gen 1:28). But when man disobeyed and sinned, he lost this dominion and was filled with fear and guilt. God did not leave him there but provided for him salvation through His Son. This salvation is a restoration of “glory and honour.”

The story of the prodigal son best illustrates this truth. See what the father does the moment the boy is back home. “The father said to his servants, “Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us and be merry” (Lk 15:22,23). Total restoration! Fellowship, authority, dignity and joy! The son came to be just accepted as a servant, but the father restored him to a place of authority with him in the house by giving him a ring! This is what salvation is. Promotion from dunghill to the throne!

There is both a present and a future element in our restored authority. Jesus said, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore ... I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Mt 28:18,19). When the seventy disciples returned with joy over the obedience of demons to them, Jesus said it was because of their citizenship in heaven (Lk 10:17-20). We all can enjoy this authority over the powers of darkness that war against men and our souls. We will overcome because He who is in us is greater than the one in the world, However the completion of our restoration is still in the future. That’s why we read, “But now we do not yet see all things put under him” (v8).

Referring to Psalm 8 again, we read in verse 2, “Out of the mouth of babes and infants You have ordained strength, because of Your enemies, that You may silence the enemy and the avenger.” We know the enemy is not made silent yet. He is busy hissing and roaring! But a day comes — when the Root of Jesse shall stand as a banner to His people — when “the nursing child shall play by the cobra’s hole, and the weaned. Child shall put his hand in the viper’s den” (Isa 11:8,10). A day when the enemy shall be absolutely silenced and subdued that there shall be no hurt or destruction in all His holy mountain, but the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord — only! (Isa 11:9).

Salvation is great because it is RESTORATIVE!

3. Glory through Suffering

vv9-11, “But we see Jesus, who was made little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the Author of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of One.”

Suffering has made the Author of our Salvation perfect. Similarly suffering strengthens and perfects us the inheritors of salvation. Romans 8:35-39, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or nakedness, or peril, or sword ?... in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” Welcome suffering! It is God’s school of discipline, rod of correction, furnace of refining

the seed of promise. Thank you, Lord, for saving my soul! What a sacrifice for the sinless, spotless and blameless Son of God to call fit brothers! What a love of the holy and lofty God the Father to call us His children! Oh, what salvation!

Jesus says, “I will declare!” — His pride. And, “I will sing!” His pleasure. Then, “I will put My trust!” — His protection. Blessed privilege! We can truly confess, “God is my Father. Jesus is my Brother. The Holy Spirit is my Guide. And so I will not fear!” Read verses 14 & 15. “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” Fear kills joy, but release from fear one rejoice.

David explains the joy-life in the House of God in psalm 23:4-6, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for you are with me... you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

Salvation is great because it is REJOICING!

5. Victory in Temptations

vv17,18, “Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brothers, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.”

Salvation does not remove temptations from our life. If there is no war there can be no victory! While salvation past means deliverance from the penalty of sin, and salvation failure is deliverance from the very presence of sin, salvation present is deliverance from the power of sin. We can live a victorious life over sin today. Sin shall not have dominion over us because we are no more under the law of condemnation but the grace of salvation.

Jesus in this chapter is called the Author or the Captain of our salvation (v10). Joshua led God’s people victoriously into Canaan. The name Joshua means, Jehovah my saviour. Jesus, our New Testament Joshua, is “merciful”— His passion to understand our struggles and weaknesses. He is “faithful” — His promises of victory are never-failing, especially when we walk through darkness and despair. He is a “High priest” — His priestly ministry secures God’s favour for us at times of failure and faltering. He is “able” — His power and strength is made perfect in our weakness. Thus He leads us into a life of restfulness as Joshua led Israel into canaan, a land of rest. Rest does not mean absence of war, but “quietness and confidence” because of the all-powerful captain who knows no defeat. Jesus gives rest to the weary and heavy-laden when they come to Him.

Salvation is great because it is RESTING!

Conclusion

Salvation is great because it is a real, restorative, rewarding, rejoicing and restful experience. “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” Neglect of salvation means failure to receive it for ourselves and

On earth He is with us and in Heaven we are with Him. v) Heavenly city or capital 12:22). This is to emphasize how we will share His very throne to rule with Him. The ultimate of our heavenly calling is to be granted to sit with Christ on His Throne as He also overcame and sat down with His Father on His Throne (Rev 3:21).

Heavenly calling may now be defined as receiving the gift of salvation, serving God as priests before Him, growing in holiness and finally being promoted into His very presence to sit with Him on His throne to rule for ever and ever. Rightly the Twentieth century New Testament renders it as the “Call from Heaven!” From rags to rule!

Let’s now study what we are to do in fulfilling the heavenly calling.

1. Consider Christ Jesus.

v1, “Therefore, holy brothers, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High priest of our confession, Christ Jesus.”

To consider means to fix our attention or thoughts on. Christian life is a journey. We are on the road to the literal heaven as heavenly citizens. And Jesus is our captain—to lead, guide and protect. His captainship leads us to glory (2: 10). We must follow Him closely lest we lose the track and miss the goal. We must walk in His steps. We must become like Him. “Like Jesus” should be our motto in this march.

That we must be transformed into the very image of Christ is the eternal desire of the Godhead and was the heartcry of the apostles. Look at these scriptures: The

Father’s desire — Rom 8:29 — “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His son.” The Son’s desire — Eph 4:11-13 — “He Himself (the Son) gave some to be apostles ... till we all come ... to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” The Spirit’s desire — 2 Cor 3:18 — “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” And the aspiration of the apostles — (Col 1:28 — “Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” They did their best to be practical models to the believers under their care to become like Jesus. “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Cor 11:1).

The story is told of a hunch back artist, who painted a life-size portrait of himself without the hump. He would stand near the picture gazing at it for several hours each day. This act, serving as an exercise, ultimately straightened his back! Can we expect less if we keep looking at Jesus always? Husbands and wives living with each other for years begin to look very much alike. This is an inevitable, and blessed result of long fellowship and intimacy.

We are admonished to consider two aspects of Christ. “The Apostle and High Priest” (v1). Apostleship and Priesthood. Why of all these two? It is a complete picture of our total life and ministry as designed by God. An apostle is from God to man, and a priest is from man to God. An apostle brings a message from God to man, and a priest takes the matters of man to God. The apostleship speaks of proclamation and the priesthood of prayer. Jesus said,

b) As a Servant like Moses

In Numbers 12, when Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses God spoke for him. He said, “He (Moses) is faithful in all My house” (v7). Three remarkable manifestations of the faithfulness of Moses are seen in this chapter.

First, his humility and meekness. “Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth” (v31). Haughtiness, arrogance and pride destroy faithfulness. A faithful man keeps his spirit always soft and sweet. He allows not his ego to be inflated by what he thinks of himself or hears others speak of himself. Moses was least disturbed even when his own brother and sister backbit him.

Then, his close communion with God. The Lord testified, “I speak with him face to face even plainly, and not in dark sayings; and he sees the form of the Lord” (v8). God would invite the faithful ones to His joy for eternal communion and reign (Mt 25:21,23). We must break away all ungodly things in our life and remain in joyful fellowship with God. A faithful servant waits at the feet of his master and he has no other duty or delight.

Thirdly, his spirit of love and forgiveness. “Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, Please heal her, O God, I pray!” (v13). Jehovah is a God of love and forgiveness and His faithful servants manifest the same character. A faithful servant does not contradict the nature of his master.

Faithful as a Son and faithful as a servant. One is a privilege and the other responsibility. God is our Father as well as our Lord. Faithfulness to Him means love and obedience. Hold both together.

3. Hold fast till the end.

v6, “Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.”

It is said, a man can live without food for 40 days, without water for 3 days, without air for one or two minutes, but without hope not a second!

Everything in the world changes. Christ alone is unchanging. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. It’s foolish and futile to keep our hope on anything and anyone that changes. Christ is our anchor of hope — not a doctrine or a blessing but a Person. Col. 1:27, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Jer 14:8, “O the Hope of Israel, his Saviour in time of trouble!” 1 Tim 1:1, “The Lord Jesus Christ, our hope.”

We read about the “confidence” and “rejoicing” of hope in verse 6 quoted above. One is the inward assurance and the other the outward acclamation.

a) The inward assurance is grown in our lives by the Holy Spirit. Rom 5:3-5, “We also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” The Holy Spirit pours the water of love on the soil of tribulations so the plant of hope may grow strong. Every trial and tribulation allowed by God Almighty in the life of His child is grabbed by the Holy Spirit as an opportunity to strengthen his muscles of hope. The next trial will only be greater because he has grown stronger. At every crisis

court, even the holy of holies, in the Tabernacle. Christian life is a walk in the innermost sanctuary where we “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor 5:7). A good heart relaxes with the assurance, “God knows!”

c) Exhort one another daily. “Exhort one another daily, while it is called, Today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (v13). We are a Body and the members should help one another, otherwise we will suffer heart failure ! Lone life is unknown to the teaching of the New Testament. We need each other to stay healthy and strong. It is all “us” in the Lord’s prayer and not “me.” And the Lord is not returning to rapture and marry any individual Christian. He comes for the Church which is His Bride. We know only of “gathering weekly,” but the Bible speaks of “exhorting daily.” We simply “go” to a Church and “attend” the service, but we don’t really “fellowship.” We shake hands but ignore the hearts. A backslider can comfortably be attending most of our Church services, the way they are conducted. The front Altar is Old Testament, but the central Table is New. Soloing is Old, but interaction and corporateness is New. Each believer is responsible for the heart condition of the other until there’s a day called “today.”

Conclusion

The Heavenly calling is both a privilege and a responsibility. God is the Author and we are to work it out with Him and He will be the Finisher. “He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it!” (1 Thess 5:24). The end of the Heavenly calling is “His Rest” which is explained in the next chapter.

HEBREWS CHAPTER FOUR

The Rest God Gives

God’s rest to His people is explained in three ways.

First, it, is journeying from bondage to bounty. In chapter three verses 16 to 19 we read about Moses leading God’s people from Egypt through the wilderness towards Canaan. Canaan is called “that rest.” It is a land of abundance and prosperity. A land flowing with milk and honey! Spiritually speaking, Canaan is the earthly foretaste of the Heavenly Rest. “For if Joshua had given them rest then He would not afterward have spoken of another day” (v8). Leaving Egypt is a picture of our deliverance from the PENALTY of sin.

Secondly, the rest is explained as temptation to triumph. This is seen from chapter four verses 14 to 16. We read about weakness, temptation and need. Jesus overcame all temptations and He “passed through the heavens” to the Throne. The Throne in Grace speaks of

caught nothing; nevertheless at your word I will let down the net" (5:5). We know the result! Thirdly we have the centurion. When Jesus was going towards his house to heal his servant, he sent his friends to meet Jesus on the way to tell Him of his unworthiness. This is what he told them to convey to Jesus: "Lord, I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof ... But say the word and my servant will be healed" (7:6,7). Jesus greatly commended his uncommon faith and the servant received his healing instantly. Mary received a spiritual miracle, Peter a material miracle and the Centurion a physical miracle — all because of their simple faith on the Word of God.

Beloved, say yes to every word and line and chapter and book of the Bible. Someone wrote YES on every page of his Bible! When we rest on His Word we will enjoy His rest.

2. Walk diligently with obedience.

v11, "Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience."

In Christian life there is no substitute for obedience. Nothing else of a son pleases his father like his obedience. Saul was the first king of Israel and he was a smart man" But God viewed his disobedience seriously. The prophet told him, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? ... Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from being king" (1 Sam 15:22,23). It is always easy to obey God than trying to please Him with other things. Obedience is true relaxation and rest.

Faith and obedience are inseparable. "By faith Abraham obeyed" (Heb 11:8). Rightly the hymnwriter sang —

*Trust and obey
For there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus
But to trust and obey.*

Obedience is easy when faith is childlike. Our daughter when three years old would jump to me from any height when I called her. She hesitates to do that when she has grown old. She will say, "Daddy, what will happen if you fail to catch me?" The same daddy and the same daughter but the childlikeness is gone. Knowledge and reasoning is necessary but it should only follow faith and never precede it.

Christ is the perfect Example of obedience. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus ... He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death" (Phil 2:5,8). Again, "Though He was a son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the Author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him."

C.T. Studd (1862-1931), that famous Cambridge cricketer, after years of missionary labour in the dark Africa, was one day in his old age reading an old ragged book in dim light with great difficulty. A friend of him asked him what he was doing. "As I come to the end of my life and ministry, I am searching to find if there are commandments of God in His Book which I have failed to obey!" — was the answer. These are men who learnt the secret of God's rest — obedience!

The devil has duped many folks by his age-old lie, "It is impossible to please God!" Beloved, there is nothing

First, we are to confess, Jesus is the Son of God. Nothing is perhaps more important than this confession. For we read in 1 John 5:5, “Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” This speaks of victory over the world. “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world.” Jesus, the Son of God and we the sons and daughters of God are born of God and we are born to win, not to lose! The victory of Jesus is ours because we are all of One.

Secondly, we confess, Jesus passed through the heavens. No powers or force in the heavens could stop Him. This indicates our victory in the heavenly places where we wrestle against “principalities, powers, rulers of darkness and spiritual hosts of wickedness” (Eph 6:12). A very helpful example is in Daniel 10:12,19. We have victory over the prince of the air.

Then we confess, Jesus is the great High Priest. That means we have victory right at the Throne of God. The devil is our adversary but Christ is our Advocate. We overcome the “accuser of brothers” by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimony (Rev 12:10,11).

Victory in the world, in the heavenlies and far above the heavens at the Throne of God! Victory everywhere! In Christian life rest does not mean absence of war but reliance on the Lord with an assurance of victory. There were wars in Canaan, the land of rest. But victory is certain and ours under the captaincy of Jesus our Joshua!

5. Approach the Throne with boldness.

vv15,16, “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come

boldly to the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Today it is the Throne of Grace and tomorrow the Throne of Gory! There is no one who can understand us like Jesus. He at times permits Satan to sift us like wheat but at the same time He prays for us that our faith should not fail (Lk 22:31,32). Jesus said this to Peter immediately after promising to seat him in the throne with Him (v30).

Let’s never hesitate to go to God for any help! His complaint is we never ask or approach Him enough! He is never weary of helping! “Have you not known? ... The everlasting God ... neither faints nor is weary ... He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength!” (Isa 48:28,29). When He has commanded us not to grow weary in well-doing, will He?! Someone said, instead of going to the Throne I will be staying by the Throne! This is Throne life! Seated! Restful and relaxed! Blessed be God who has made us sit together in heavenly places with Christ!

Conclusion

The Bible is a book of parallels. Hebrews 4 is parallel to Psalm 95. The Lord is “our God” (95:7) and we trust Him. He is “our King” (v3) and we obey Him. He is “our Rock” (v1) and we are steadfast and established in Him. He is “our Shepherd” (v7) and we are bold. Again, the obedience of Hebrews 4 is given as worship, bowing down and kneeling in Psalm 95. And bold approach — “Let’s come before His presence with thanksgiving.” The confession — “Let’s shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation.” This is the rest God gives us today which the disbelieving and disobedient Israel of yesterday missed (95:11).

entrance! The Church does not miss her Lord but continues functioning! "Lord, will You not revive us again?" (Psa 85:6). Joel the Prophet of the last days calls the priests of the Lord to prayers and tears. "Gird yourselves and lament, you priests; will, you who minister before the altar; come, lie all night in sackcloth, you who minister to my God; for the grain offering and the drink offering are withheld from the house of your God ... Let the priests, who minister to the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar; Let them say, Spare Your people, O Lord!" (Joel 1:13; 2:17). We have preached, printed and published enough about revival, but not prayed enough for revival. That's why revival tarries! A sick church cannot heal a sick world. Let revival be the first item in our daily prayer List.

Thirdly, we are to pray for the believers with whom we closely move or work. This may refer to the members of the same local Church or fellowship. "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (Js 5:16). Formal greeting and shaking of hands are not enough. Remember your fellow-believers before the Throne regularly. We are not independent but interdependent. We cannot manage with our own prayers. Jesus wanted His disciples to watch with Him in prayer. Paul beseeched the believers to strive with him in prayer. Let's pray for one another-really, fervently. It is to be noted that the requests in the Lords prayer are not for "me" but for "us."

2. Be compassionate on the weak.

v2, "He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also beset by weakness."

We have a poor example of a priest in the story of the good Samaritan. "Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him (the wounded man), he passed by the other side" (Lk 10:31). The priest perhaps was too busy with his religious duties to care for the needy. Then a Levite came that way. He also passed by without any concern. Priesthood belongs to the tribe of Levi! A New Testament priest is not one with clerical collar or full sleeves. He bends down to help the suffering and folds up his sleeves to labour to provide for the needy.

We must follow the example of Jesus our High Priest. See how He identified Himself with men. "In all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted" (Heb 2:17,18). Are we merciful and compassionate towards the needy? In bus stands or railway stations, when see my wife putting her hands in love around beggars the afflicted, I feel ashamed. My false prestige is hurt. I am asking the Lord to give me loving boldness and bold lovingness like Jesus who touched even the lepers.

Backsliding among God's people is not uncommon. The ministry of a priest is not condemnation but restoration. Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins" (Js 5:19,20). What a lowly but lofty ministry! The reason for the hardening of the heart of many a backslider is the failure of immediate attention on the part of other believers. Sin grows and the wall thickens every day. "Am I my brother's keeper?" Who else is?

First, we learn dependence and obedience Prayers ... Supplications... cries... tears... fear” (v7). These are expressions of absolute dependence on God. Times of suffering prove our total inadequacy but His adequacy. We understand and appreciate His strength when we are made to realize our weakness. That’s why Apostle Paul boasted of his infirmities. They were opportunities to realize his weakness and God’s strength. He said, “when I am weak, then I am strong” 2 Cor 12:9, 10). There will be no hypocrisy in our prayers offered in times of real suffering. We cry unto the mountains from where comes our help. Faith is perfected in darkness. “Trust in the Lord and don’t despair. He is a Friend so True!” All these songs are best understood only as we go through valley experiences.

Alongwith dependence comes obedience (v8). “Trust and obey!” Suffering tunes up our heart to hear His whisper more clearly than ever. A father has no pleasure in caning son except to teach him obedience. The Lord convicts us, corrects us and comforts us in the school of suffering. We “learn” obedience. The educative purpose of suffering!

The second purpose of suffering is to make us the helpers of others and practical models for others. “Blessed be the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Cor 1:3,4). Only an ant can understand the language of another ant- only the one who suffered or is suffering can understand the anguish of another sufferer. I was working in the Christian Medical

College Hospital, Vellore as a Hospital Engineer for five years before I entered fulltime ministry. During those years I had seen several suffering patients. But I never understood their suffering or was really moved by their condition until the day I was carried on a stretcher with unbearable renal colic along the same hospital corridor! God deals with us in various ways to produce patterns out of us (1 Tim 1:16).

5. Be skilled in the Scriptures.

vv12-14, “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

All believers as priests must have a working knowledge of the Scriptures. “For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth for he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts” (Mal 2:7). Here are a few examples —

Melchizedek brought “bread and wine” to Abraham and blessed him in the name of God (Gen 14:18,19). Bread and other represent the Word of God. One is a food and the other a drink. The Word of God is both! Then we have the example of Ezra the priest. “Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord and to do it and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel” (Ezra 7:10). King Artaxerxes addressed Ezra as “Ezra the priest, a scribe of

HEBREWS CHAPTER SIX

Artidotes for Backsliding

Though backsliding among Christians is common, it is quite serious. God's will for us is that we do not "fall away" (v6), but be diligent "till the end" (v11).

The seriousness of backsliding is given in verses 4 to 6, "It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame." Backsliding means crucifying Christ afresh! It is spitting on His face, smiting at His back and shaming Him publicly.

Backsliding is never sudden, it is always in stages. First it is walking in the counsel of the ungodly, and then standing in the path of sinners, and finally sitting in the seat of the scornful! (Psa 1:1).

There are two types of backsliding — one from which recovery is possible and the other for which under normal circumstances there is no remedy. The first type can be explained by three conditions. First of all there may be the loss of first love for God and fervour in spiritual matters. This was the condition of the Ephesian Church portrayed by Christ in Revelation 2:4,5. He calls that Church to remembrance of its former state and repentance from the present state. Another condition is the loss of personal holiness and loss of victory over sin. Recovery from this condition is also possible. James 5:19,20, "Brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins." Yet another state of backsliding is the loss of sound faith and being led into strange doctrines. Apostle Paul calls this a spiritual "cancer" (2 Tim 2:17). By the mercy of God, this is also curable through the diligent ministry of a Bible teacher. "A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will" (2 Tim 2:24-26).

There is another type of backsliding which is generally irreversible. It is the open denial and rejection of the Person of Christ. Hebrews 6:4-6 speaks about this type. "It is impossible ... if they fall away, to renew them to repentance ..." The author of Hebrews refers to this condition also in 12:16,17 giving Esau as an example. "Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that

God's Spirit is rain. This demands a twofold response. First our character. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal 5:22,23). The Holy Spirit is outpoured on us that we may bring forth these fruits. If instead we still continue to be manifesting "the works of the flesh" (Gal 5:19-21), we are bearing "thorns and briers" only. Every effort must be taken by us to cooperate with the Spirit to produce in us a Christlike character, manifesting thro' love, joy, peace, etc. The second purpose of the rain of God's Spirit on us is to make us faithful and powerful witnesses of Christ "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you; and you shall be witnesses to Me ... I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" (Acts 1:8; 2:17). After receiving the Holy Spirit, if a Christian is idle and slothful and indifferent towards the furtherance of the Gospel, he has received God's rain in vain.

Next, God's Word is rain, "Let my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, as raindrops on the tender herb, and as the showers on the grass" (Dt 32:1,2). Our response to God's Word must be the increase of faith. "Faith come by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom 10:17). If in spite of repeated hearing of God's Word, we are in unbelief, we are only producing thorns and briers.

The Word of God is also to produce growth in us. "Desire the pure milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby" (1 Pet 2:2). It is not uncommon to see believers who attend every Church service and convention and listen to every sermon, but who never grow. Obviously they are not applying the truths in their life. Only a "doer of the word" is blessed (Js 1:23-25). The word of God "builds us up" and thus prevents backsliding.

Thirdly, rain typifies God's grace. "I will make a covenant of peace with them ... There shall be showers of blessing ... They shall know that I the Lord their God am with them" Ezek 34:25,26,30). "I will pour ... the Spirit of grace ..." (Zech 12:10a). God's grace has come to us in all fullness through Jesus Christ (Jn 1:16,17). Because we are under grace, sin shall not have dominion over us (Rom 6:14). Our responsibility is to lean completely on the grace of the Lord and say no to every temptation from the evil one. The negative response to the shower of God's grace on us is to continue in sin taking advantage of God's forgiving grace. "Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!" (Rom 6:15). When we continue in sin we receive the grace of God in vain. We are producing thorns instead of fruits.

God is freely pouring out His rain on us. The spirit without measure! The Word in plenty! His grace in abundance! Our positive response prevents us from backsliding.

3. Not selfishness but sharing

vv9,10, "But, beloved, we are confident of better things things that accompany salvation ... For is not unjust to forget your work and labour of love which you have shown towards His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister."

Here the reference is to the sharing of our material goods with others, especially God's people. The Bible guarantees spiritual blessing to anyone who is liberal in material giving. Prov 11:24-26, "The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself" 2 Cor 9:1,8-10, "May He who supplies seed to the sower,

motivating atmosphere to finish the race victoriously. Also we are to learn from the faithful leaders God has placed over us. “Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct” (13:7). Missionary biographies and those of God’s very dear saints of the past must be frequently studied. Though today we talk about revival, a new day,

a new thing, and so on and so forth, many times the faith of some of the men of God of the past is simply breathtaking. We have so many Faith Seminars these days but what happened to the quality faith of men like George Muller?

Diligence also means taking refuge in the presence of God (vv18-20). We have “strong consolation” in Him. He is the “anchor of our soul.” In His presence we have the “surety and steadfastness.” Jesus is there in the presence of God for us. He is our High Priest before the Father just for us. When the enemy chases you,, run to the name of the Lord which is a strong tower (Prov 18:10). He cannot touch you when you hide in Christ. The Lord is our refuge and our fortress. When we dwell in His “secret place” and abide under His “shadow,” the fowler cannot trap us! (Psa 91:1-3).

Conclusion

It is not God’s will that any of His children should backslide. Backsliding must be checked at the observation of early signs. God has made ample provisions and laid down clear principles that we may not backslide. Let’s rejoice over the truth that Christ is not only the Alpha of our Christian life but also the Omega!

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will be made His footstool! (Psa 110:1-4).

10. Melchi blessed God as the “Possessor of heaven and earth” (Gen 14:19). “All things were created through Him (Christ) and for Him” (Col 1:16).

One sometimes wonders why Melchizedek appears out of nowhere in the story of Abraham (Gen 14). Suppose we do not have the character Melchizedek in the Old Testament, we will not have a perfect type for the high priestly ministry of Christ. There is no unnecessary passage or detail in the Old Testament. The NT is concealed in the OT and the OT is revealed in the N.T. God’s plan is perfect because He knows the past, present and future. He knows the end from the beginning. The beauty of God is marvelously revealed on the pages of the Holy Writ.

Melchizedek is certainly a mysterious character. He appears and disappears suddenly! There is no reference to him before or after, except in the prophetic anticipation of his antitype in Psalm 110 and the fulfillment of his antitypical high priestly ministry by Christ in Hebrews. Also God has not revealed all the details about Him because it may be too difficult for us to understand or may not be necessary. “Melchizedek of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain” (Heb 5:11). This verse says about the recipients of the Epistle, “You have become dull of hearing.” There is no addressee mentioned in this Epistle. This is a general Epistle and it is written to all Christians. Yes, the best among us has a limited knowledge and experience and it is not possible for us to understand everything with our finite mind (1 Cor 13:9). Again “all Scripture is profitable” (1 Tim 3:16). God in His wisdom

has not revealed in His Word whatever He might have considered not profitable for us. “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Dt 29:29). Beware of anything that is Bible-plus!

After the Antitype has come, there is no need to be researching the obscure details of the Type. Christ has come. The substance has appeared. Why analyse the shadow too much when the substance is already on hand?

Melchizedek blessed Abraham! (Gen 14:19; Heb 7:1). Even so this chapter presents three important blessings for us from Christ our High Priest.

1. Life of Righteousness and Peace

Melchizedek was a King of “Righteousness and peace” (v2). Christ is our righteousness “Of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us ... righteousness” (1 Cor 1:30). We were justified freely by His grace and declared righteous before God. We have no other way to go and appear before an all-holy God. Our own righteousness was simply filthy rags before Him. We were all stinking in sin. The robe of righteousness of Christ was put on us and we take our refuge under Him. The righteousness of Christ is now ours and that makes us acceptable before God. With this imputed and imparted righteousness we should walk in practical righteousness. “He who is righteous, let him be righteous still” (Rev 22:11).

And Christ is our peace. “He Himself is our peace” (Eph 2:14). We were enemies of God. The Law of God was

Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant” (vv18-22). The former covenant was a ministration of death, the latter that of life. “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:23). The fruit of being joined to Jesus is “holiness” and the end is “everlasting life” (Rom 6:22). Our High Priest who made atonement for our sin lives for ever, so shall we.

3. Continuous Intercession

vv24,25, “But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them.”

During His earthly ministry Christ prayed for His disciples and for those who would believe their message and trust Him. He continues the ministry of prayer at the right hand of God, after satisfying all the demands of a holy God through His sinless blood. His intercession is ever acceptable and pleasing before the Father. And all His prayers are for us! What a privilege! The Father denies nothing to the Son. Jesus said, “Father, ... I know that You always hear Me” (Jn 11:42).

The high priestly intercession of Christ strengthens us when we are tempted. “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:15,16). Run to Him when the enemy chases you. Take your refuge under the Blood when the powers of darkness

rally against you. The High Priest knows your frame and He remembers you are just dust (Psa 103:14). He will perfect all that concerns you. But the most important thing is that you must learn to rest and rely on the unfailing intercessory ministry of Christ for you before the Father.

It is not God’s will that we fail and sin but it is a fact that “we all stumble in many things” (Js 3:2). “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 Jn 1:8). God is not happy or pleased when we sin, but at the same time He does not throw us away when we fail. “If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 Jn 2:1). The Blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. Delayed confession and repentance leads to all sorts of complications. The moment we become conscious of any sin in our life we should immediately throw ourselves into the bosom of our Advocate, our High Priest. The Holy Spirit is our Helper here on earth who leads us to conviction and confession. There is no condemnation for us.

Many believers are living in self-condemnation brought on them by the evil one. They always look at their weaknesses and failures. They lose the joy of their salvation and live more miserably than their pre-conversion days. But what does the Bible say? “Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us” (Rom 8:33,34). What can God do more than giving us such clear promises in His written Word? When we fail to believe and appropriate what God has said in His Word, the enemy is

faultless and perfect (vv7,8; 7:18,28). The Old is vanishing but the New is remaining and eternal (v13). The last book of the Old Testament prophesies of the coming of the “Messenger of Covenant” (Mal 3:1).

The definition of the New Covenant is given concisely in verses 10 to 12. It is worth memorizing. The corresponding prophetic passage is Jeremiah 31:31-34.

“I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbour, and none his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for all shall know Me from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more” (vv10-12).

Let’s study the fourfold blessing of this New covenant.

1. Justification

“I will forgive and forget their sins!” God forgives us in and because of Christ. Christ is God’s redemptive Agent to forgive sins. We are familiar with the story of Jesus forgetting and healing a paralytic (Mk 2:1-11). He told the man, “Son, your sins are forgiven you.” When the scribes began to question this authority in their hearts, Jesus said they must know “that the son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins.” “While the risen Christ was expounding the Scriptures to His disciples, He said that repentance and remission of sins should be preached “in His Name” to all nations. Jesus saves! This is the greatest news of Christmas (Mt 1:21).

The forgiveness of sins is because of the cleansing blood of Christ. That’s why Christ in the last supper said, “This

is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Mt 26:28). John writes, “The blood of Jesus Christ His son cleanses us from all sin” (1 Jn 1:7). A blood-sprinkled man has no sin to his credit. It’s all washed away. Perfect cleansing. This is an exclusive blessing of the new covenant. Referring to the OT sacrifices, we read, “It is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins” “But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God ... For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified” (Heb 10:3,4,12,14).

Justification means that He makes us as if we have never sinned! “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isa 1:18). God not only forgives our sins but also forgets them.

We are called to understand and appreciate the length and breadth and depth and height of God’s love. This four-dimensional trove wonderfully manifests itself in His dealing with our sins. Isa 38:17, “You have cast all my sins behind Your back.” The length of His love! Psa 103:12, “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.” The breadth of God’s love! Mic 7:19, “You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.” The depth of His love! Isa 44:22, “I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, and like a cloud, your sins” — The height!

2. Sanctification

“I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts.” This is best explained by 2 Cor 3:3,6. “You are manifestly an epistle of Christ, ministered by us,

Spirit and said, I praise You, Father ... that You have hidden these things from the wise ... and revealed them to babes ... no one knows ... who the Father is but the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. And He turned to His disciples and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see; for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it” (Lk 10:21-24). John the Baptist was the last of the OT prophets and Jesus testified he was the greatest of all. But He also added, “He that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he” (Lk 7:28). Dr. Charles Ryrie in his Study Bible gives this excellent explanation: “The greatness of John the Baptist in the old dispensation before the Cross fades in comparison to the high position every believer has had since Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection, and the descent of the Spirit.” Shall we shout Hallelujah?

Because it says none shall teach his neighbour but all shall know the Lord, does it mean we need no teachers or other ministers today? No. Christ Himself has given apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to the Church (Eph 4:11). But each believer is given an “anointing” from God for discernment. John the apostle writes, “These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie” (1 Jn 2:26,27). This spiritual discernment is developed by systematic, Spirit-guided study of the Scriptures. The NT believers are not to be blind followers of a priestly leader but intelligent disciples of Christ, their Lord and Master.

4. Glorification

“I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” Today we live gloriously and tomorrow we shall be glorified. These are the two aspects of a life under the New Covenant. 2 Corinthians 3:14-18 best illustrates this truth. “For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

The New Covenant blesses us with perfect liberty. In salvation we have liberation or deliverance from the penalty and power of sin today, and from the presence of sin tomorrow. We must stand fast in this liberty that's ours through Christ and should not go back to the old covenant, like the Galatians, and be entangled again with a yoke of bondage (Gal 5:1). Because, “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:1,2). There is no condemnation whatsoever. We are God’s people and He is our God.

The relationship between God and His people today is through the Spirit who has enabled them to call Him, “Abba, Father” (Rom 8:15,17). The end of this relationship is eternal glorification. “And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God” (Rev 21:3).

The outer court was fenced to seven and a half feet height. In this open court were the brazen altar and the laver. The furnishings inside the holy place were the candlestick, the table of showbread and the altar of incense. The most holy place had the ark of the covenant covered by the mercy seat.

The Tabernacle

There was sunlight in the open court, candle light in the inner court and no light in the innermost sanctuary. The most holy place is the heart of Christian experience where one has to walk entirely by faith and he cannot depend on his senses. Maturity in Christian life is learning to walk when the way becomes narrower and narrower, darker and darker and more and more difficult.

The tabernacle was a portable sanctuary for the people of Israel. The nomadic nature of their sojourn precluded the building of a permanent shrine for worship. This tabernacle also served as a prototype for the subsequent permanent building. According to the plan given by God to Moses, the work was carried out by Bezaleel and other workmen. When the task was completed the tent was covered by a cloud which enshrouded the divine glory (Ex 40:34).

The twelve tribes of Israel camped around the tabernacle. Zebulon, Judah and Issachar on the Eastern side; Benjamin, Ephraim and Manasseh on the West; Asher, Dan and Napthali on the North; and Simeon, Reuben and Gad on the South. Each group had its own flag (Num 2:2). Tradition says that Judah, the leader of the eastern section, had a green flag and his emblem was a lion (Gen 49:9). Similarly, Ephraim's flag was yellow

with the emblem of an ox; Dan had a red and white flag with eagle; Reuben's flag was red with a human head as the emblem. This traditional information seems to blend beautifully with the visions of Ezekiel and John (Ezek 1, Rev 4). The aerial view of the tabernacle and the dwellings of the tribes must have been splendid!

The tabernacle is set forth in the New Testament as typical in three ways : a) of the church, as "a habitation of God through the Spirit" (Ex 25:9; Eph 2:19-22); b) Of the believer who is "a temple of the Holy spirit" (1 cor 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16); c) As a portrayal of heavenly reality (Heb 9:23, 24). (Unger's Bible Dictionary, page 1065).

In its minute details the tabernacle speaks of Christ. This is time of the high priest, the furniture, the ritual and the worship.

a) Brazen Altar (Ex 27:1-8)

This was meant for the burnt offering of the animals. This is a picture of Christ shedding His blood for us.

Heb 9:12, "Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption."

v26, "Once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself."

v28a, "Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many."

The brazen altar is the first furniture we see as we enter the outer court. Yes, the very entrance into the presence of God is on the basis of the shed blood of Christ. The blood is foundational. All other blessings follow only

Exodus 30:6 gives the location of this altar in the holy place but the author of Hebrews puts it into the most holy place (Heb 9:3,4). The purpose of the author may be to show its close relationship to the inner sanctuary and the ark of the covenant. On the Day of Atonement the high priest took incense from this altar, along with the blood of the sin offering, into the most holy place (Lev 16:12-14).

This altar speaks of Christ who is our Intercessor and also of the prayers of all saints. Read Heb 7:25 and Rev 5:8; 8:3,4. Our prayers are sweet-smelling before God when we offer them “In the Name of Christ” — which means we pray according to His will-praying as Christ would have prayed.

f) Ark of the Covenant and Mercy Seat (Ex 25:10-22)

Now we have come into the final section in the tabernacle—the Holy of Holies. The ark was so holy that it had to be covered. God’s holiness has a horror and terror around it. God in His wisdom and love covered it with the “mercy” seat! Not with a seat of might but mercy! On each end of the mercy seat was a golden cherub whose wings stretched towards the centre of the lid. The precise appearance of the cherubim is a matter of some uncertainty (Heb 9:5), but in the OT they were generally represented as winged creatures having feet and hands (Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary, page 823).

The ark contained “the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant” (Heb 9:4). The manna is the food from heaven. Aaron’s rod speaks of the authority from heaven. God said, “And it shall be that the rod of the man whom I choose will

blossom” (Num 17:5). The two tablets had on them the law from heaven written down.

Christ is portrayed in all these items inside the ark. He is the manna from heaven (Jn 6:49-51). He is the Lord of authority from heaven. He became Lord by resurrection (Rom 14:9). The budding rod indicates resurrection! And He is the King from heaven giving us His commandments. Christ is the manna; let’s eat Him. He is the Lord; let’s worship Him. He is the King; let’s obey Him.

The manna did not rot inside the ark. This speaks of the freshness one enjoys ever in God’s presence. He makes and keeps everything new before Him.

The mercy seat of the OT is called the throne of grace in the NT (Heb 4:15,16). Because our sins are covered by the blood of Christ, we can “come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

g) Inner Veil (Ex 26:31-35)

This was a curtain which divided the holy place and the most holy place. It was “woven with an artistic design of cherubim.” It was also called the “veil of the covering” because it shielded the ark (Ex 39:34; Num 4:5).

When Christ died, the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom (Mk 15:38). This signifies that the believer now has direct access into the presence of God. “Therefore, brothers, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh ...” (Heb 10:19-22; 6:19,20).

HEBREWS CHAPTER TEN

Faith—Hope—Love

We have been so far studying about the priestly ministry of Christ and how all the rituals and ceremonies of the Old Testament had their substantial fulfillment in Him through the New Covenant. In other words, up to the ninth chapter we have considered what God has done for us in the New Covenant. In chapter ten and henceforth the subject is what we are to do in response to God's working. The first nine chapters are essentially doctrinal and the remaining four chapters make the practical section of the Epistle.

Consecutively in three verses in this chapter we come across the words "Let us." "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of FAITH" (v22). "Let us hold fast the confession of our HOPE without wavering" (v23). "Let us consider one another in order to stir up LOVE" (v24). Faith, hope and love! These are the three cardinal virtues of Christian life. They are to fundamentally characterize

us as God's children. This trio occurs in several places in the New Testament.

1 Cor 13:13, "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three."

1 Thess 1:3, "Your work of faith, labour of love, and patience of hope."

1 Thess 5:8, "Putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation."

1 Tim 6:11, "Pursue... faith, love, patience."

Heb 6:10-12, "Your work and labour of love ... the full assurance of hope ... faith and patience."

Hebrews ten may be called a summary of or an introduction to the next three chapters. Chapter eleven speaks about "faith" (11:1), chapter twelve about "hope" (12:1,2) and thirteen about "love" (13:1). Let's broadly understand these three virtues by an analytical study of this chapter.

1. FAITH: To please God.

v22, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."

We here read about a true heart, a good conscience and a purified body. These explain the various aspects of holiness stemming from faith. God is pleased with such a life.

a) A life of faith is a life totally abandoned to God's will. "Then I (Jesus) said, Behold I come —In the volume of the

Christ and the Father was pleased when the Son offered it back to Him as a sweet-smelling aroma. We are to follow this pattern.” Refusal to live according to the desires of the flesh is an act of faith (Rom 6:11-14).

“This is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality, that, each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honour, not in passion of lust... For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness” (1 Thess 4:3-7).

c) Thirdly, faith enters God’s presence boldly. “Therefore, brothers, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (vv19-22).

The way of faith is the “new and living” way. Sins forgiven, guilt removed, conscience cleared, justified, free! This does not mean we lose our reverence when we approach God. We do have the holy fear but rejoice in faith and assurance.

Worship and prayer must be based on faith and never on feelings. “Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb 11:6). Feelings change but the fact of His presence when we comes to God or assemble in the name of Jesus is unchanging. Those who are used to wait for some kind of “good feeling” in prayer or worship usually get deceived in the spirit realm. Beware!

2 .HOPE: To proclaim to the world.

v23, “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.”

The Church is a hopeful people in a hopeless world. Apostle Paul calls unbelievers as those “who have no hope” (1 Thess 4:13). Believers are optimists. But pessimism has gripped the hearts of leaders of even developed countries. They know not what tomorrow holds for them. But we believers know who holds the future for us. The Christ of yesterday and today will be the same for tomorrow also! (Heb 13:8).

How do we express our hope before the world?

a) First of all we are to boldly proclaim the gospel. There will be mockery and persecution, but we ignore them. “Recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you were made spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated” (vv32,33). The Gospel of Christ is “the” message for this mess-age! Let’s be proud of it! Christ is “the” solution for all the national and international problems. There is no other way. When the world and the individuals ignore the King of kings, the Lord of lords and the Prince of Peace, they are lost.

Before King Agrippa, Apostle Paul made this bold proclamation. “And now I stand and are judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers” (Acts 26:6). When he reached Rome he called the leaders of the Jews together and said to them, “For the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain” (Acts 28:20). Paul’s motivation in witnessing for Christ was the hope of God’s Promise.

they heard from heaven when Christ left them. “This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into Heaven” (Acts 1:11).

Just like people laughed and mocked at the apostles when they preached resurrection, there will be many scoffers in these last days who will ridicule the very idea of Christ coming again (2 Pet 3:3,4). Nobody will hate us or object to our message as long as we preach a “Sweet” Jesus — who just goes about blessing people. It is when we start proclaiming His Second Coming. Resurrection and Judgment, the trouble starts. See Acts 17:30-32 for an example.

If the Lord delays His return, it is only for our good. “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9). The delay in Christ's coming is a warning to the world to repent and a challenge to the Church to reach the world. Jesus said, “This gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Mt 24:14).

3. LOVE: To prepare the Church.

v24, “Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works.”

The author of the Epistle speaks about love here in the context of corporate life. He speaks about “one another” and “ourselves together” (vv24,25). The message is to prepare the Church for “the Day” that’s approaching. There is both the positive side and the negative. Positively,

mutual love is to motivate believers to “good works” (v24). Negatively, it is to prevent backsliders (vv26-29).

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 is perhaps the best Old Testament passage to illustrate this New Testament truth. “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labour.” This relates to the positive aspect namely “good works.” Then the Preacher goes on to say, “For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” The words “falling,” “overpowering” and “breaking” are relating to backsliders. Spiritual warmth and strength are the immediate outcome of fellowship (Eccl 4:11,12).

We all know the parable of the lost sheep. How does a sheep get lost? It gets separated from the flock and strays alone. And it falls an easy prey to the enemy. As long as the chicken stay together and close to the hen, they are safe. But when one chick strays from its mother, the eagle easily snatches it away. God’s perfect will for His children is that they grow together, go together and glow together!

The awfulness of backsliding is explained in verses 29 and 31. “Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? ... It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” Faithful participation and growth in the fellowship of God’s people is God’s antidote for backsliding. There is no substitute for the “love of the brethren” (1 Pet 1:22).

seeing Him who is invisible” and in v8 about Abraham who “went out, not knowing where he was going.” Thirdly, faith is the reliance on God. “Without faith it is impossible to please Him for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (v6). Faith believes that God “IS” and He “REWARDS.” In Other words faith leans on the faithfulness and powerfulness of God. In v11 we meet Sarah counting on the faithfulness of God and in v29 there is Abraham counting on God’s ability or power.

Yes, faith is a substance, an evidence and a reliance. These are the three dimensions of faith noticed in this chapter. God is desirous of seeing faith in His people and pleased when He finds it. Jesus unmistakably indicated this desire when He asked, “When the son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” (Lk 18:81). The very name of God’s people is “believers” —those who believe! We have six lessons from this chapter on God-pleasing faith.

WHAT IS GOD PLEASING FAITH?

1. Believing God as the Creator

When we read Hebrews eleven we often think our faith is so weak and we are nowhere near the heroes we meet in this chapter. But there is an encouragement for us. It is not Abraham or Moses who is on the top of this list but “We!” The “By faith” list begins like this: “By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God” (v3). And this faith is relating to the creative power of God. Believing God as the creator is the basic of all faith. It is concerning His creation of the present worlds (v3) and the future world (vv10,13-16). What does faith in God as the Creator mean ?

a) It means we believe in the creative power of God’s word (v3). The Genesis record of creation repeatedly says, “God said ... and it was so!”

b) Faith in the creator God believes that God is building an unshakable Kingdom. “He waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (v10). All that man builds is or will be shaken. But builds is “a Kingdom which cannot be shaken” (Heb 12:28).

c) This faith leads to the constant realisation of the temporariness of our stay on the earth. “These all ... confessed that they were stranger, and pilgrims on the earth” (v13). Jesus said, “My Kingdom is not of this world” (Jn 18:36). This planet earth is our temporary abode.

d) we believe that our homeland is Heaven. “For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland” (v14). I am excited everytime I listen to Jim Reeves singing —

*This world is not my home,
I’m just a Passing through;
My treasures are laid up
Somewhere beyond the blue;
The angels beckon me
From Heaven’s open door;
And I can’t feel at home
In this world any more!*

From the Prison cell Apostle Paul believers, “Our citizenship is in Heaven” (Phil 3:20).

e) This faith detaches us from earthly-mindedness and materialism. “And truly if they had called to mind that

God is the Saviour. He saves us and our family. We are His watchmen to warn the unbelieving world. Our witness must be passed on to generations to come. God's missionary programme through us never stops until the last man is reached with the gospel. This faith pleases God.

3. Believing God as the Healer

Faith looks to God to heal our bodies today (v11) and resurrect us tomorrow (vv12,19). God is alive, able and willing. Our prosperity is His pleasure. What does the healing faith acknowledge?

a) It acknowledges that God is the Lord of our physical bodies also. "By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed" (v 11). Sarah was ninety years old when God said she would be a mother of nations! (Gen 17:16,17). Her faith on God healed her of barrenness and strengthened her womb to conceive. God is the Lord not only of our soul but also the body (1 Cor 6:13). That means He rules and takes care of all the organs of our body.

b) His healing promises are never failing. "Sarah ... judged Him faithful who had promised" (v 11). She considered not her condition but the power of God. One of the great revelatory promises of God to His people is, "I am the Lord who heals you" (Ex 15:26). Jehovah Raphael Christ has given us a pattern to live on the power of God. "Though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God" (2 Cor 13:4)

c) The healing faith accepts that nothing is impossible with God. "From one man, and him as good as dead, were

born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude-innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore" (v12). God specialises in impossibilities. Faith laughs at impossibilities, looks to God alone and cries it shall be done! When Abraham and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing, God asked them, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Gen 18:14). He challenges us with the same question while we are in impossible situations.

d) The Holy Spirit quickens our mortal bodies and will resurrect our dead bodies. "If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies" (Rom 8:11). It is told of Isaac that "God was able to raise him up, even from the dead" (v19). The indwelling Spirit sustains us today and will raise us up tomorrow. What a privilege to have Him dwell in our earthen vessels!

God is the Healer. He is concerned about our physical bodies also. His healing promises are reliable. No disease or sickness is impossible for Him to heal. He has blessed us with His Spirit of life and resurrection. This faith pleases Him.

4. Believing God as the Lord

Faith accepts God as the Lord. He is to be worshipped (v4) and obeyed (v17). He must have the supremacy and preeminence in our lives. Faith in the lordship of God leads us to a fourfold action.

a) When we believe God is our Lord we will honour Him with our best. "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain" (v4). In the story of these two brothers we read that Cain brought "an" offering to

for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9). This is how we enjoy the comfort of faith on the Comforter.

c) It is important that we understand that true comfort is from God alone. The world and our friends cannot give that. “By faith Moses ... choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward” (vv24-26). Christ gives lasting comfort whereas Egypt offers only passing pleasures. Our God is a God of “all” comfort and He comforts us in “all” our tribulation (2 Cor 1:3,4). The Father is the God of an comfort. The Son is His first Comforter and the Holy Spirit another Comforter. Triple comfort!

d) patient endurance of suffering will be richly rewarded. “The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom 8:18). The apostle is speaking here of the glory of resurrection. At the coming of Christ the saints alive will be translated and the saints asleep resurrected (v5). David said, “A day in your courts is better than a thousand” (Psa 84:10). Just a day in the eternal bliss in the very presence of God is worth all the suffering we have today on this earth. But to think we will be “There” for ever and ever!

God is the Comforter. In His wisdom He allows His children to suffer. But His grace is sufficient for every situation. Human comfort will fail and flee. True and lasting comfort is from God alone. “Our right affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more

exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor 4:17). God is pleased with this faith.

6. Believing God as the Victor

The God-pleasing faith is a victorious faith. It acknowledges God marching before us as the victor. It trusts God for safety (v31) and triumph (vv30,33) in ax situations. Such a faith is optimistic. A threefold knowledge results from this kind of faith.

a) God knows how to protect us from all peril around us. “By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace” (v31). Apostle Peter said, “The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations” (2 Pet 2:9). Rahab was saved because of the red thread which is indicative of the Blood of Christ. The enemy trembles at the Blood. When we are covered. by the Blood, there is no need for any fear. There is power, power, wonderworking power, in the precious Blood of the Lamb!

b) The gates of hell cannot prevail against the Church. “By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days” (v30). The enemy’s fortress crumbled before the mighty shout of Jehovah’s army. The Church is on the offence! Hell cannot hold against the crusade of saints. “I will build My Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it,” said Jesus triumphantly. A student was asked by a Sunday School teacher to summarize the Book of Revelation in a few words. The boy answered, “That’s simple. JESUS WINS!”

c) All the kingdoms shall be subdued. “Though faith subdued kingdoms” (v33). All the kingdoms of the earth

the word, and he becomes unfruitful” (Mt 13:22). Elsewhere Jesus said, “Therefore do not worry, saying, what shall we eat?... drink? ... wear? ... But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Mt 6:31-33). **We need not know what the future holds for us, but it’s enough we know who holds the future for us. Our times are in His hands! One of the fellow runners of Paul was Demas. But he could not make it because he “loved this present world” (2 Tim 4:10). Whereas, Paul testified in the same chapter, “I have finished the race” (2 Tim 4:7). Money is a wonderful servant but a poor master! Beware! Our attitude towards the material world should be that of a dead man towards the flowers the dear ones place on his body! “Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died ...” (Col 3:1-3).**

2. The ensnaring sin

“Let us lay aside ... the sin which so easily ensnares us” (v1).

The reference here is not to “sins” but “the sin.” It is nothing but the sin of unbelief. It is the sin of sins. This sin alone is ultimately responsible to sink men in eternal damnation. Both in his Gospel and epistle Apostle John beautifully explains this. “When He (the Holy Spirit) has come, He will convict the world of sin ... of sin, because they do not believe in Me” (Jn 16:8,9). Refusal to believe on Christ is the greatest of all sins. We can pray for the forgiveness of any of the sins of others but not the sin of unbelief. Because, this is the “sin leading to death” (1 Jn 5:16,17). There were so many moral and spiritual lapses in the life of the people of Israel but God primarily points out their sin of unbelief. “So we see that they could not

enter in because of unbelief” (Heb 3:19). Read also Psalm 106:2,8,12,13 where their sin of unbelief is singled out. “They soon forgot His works” and gave place to doubts and questions. The first sin of our first parents was unbelief. They disbelieved the word of God and tried the suggestion of the devil, All sins stem out of unbelief on God and His Word. The Christian race is hurdled by unbelief.

3. Shame and hostility

“Looking unto Jesus ... who ... endured the Cross, despising the shame” (v2).

The world will never applaud Christians. We cannot escape the mockery and ridicule of people around us. Paul rightly said, “We have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ’s sake ... being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now” (1 Cor 4:9,10a,13). The reason why the world ridicules us is that it cannot understand us. We are a “peculiar” people. Becoming the laughing stock of the world is the blessed lot of each Christian. The cross means misunderstanding and mockery. And the cross is no option. “Whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple” (Lk 14:27). Mockery from the world should not silence us but stir us up to witness more. We are not to be ashamed of Christ and His words “in this adulterous and sinful generation” (Mk 8:38). For all important Biblical truths, Paul comes out with a testimony. “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ!” (Rom 1:16). Let’s ignore the distracting voices of the world and keep running.

7. Disobedience

“See that you do not refuse Him who Speaks” (v25).

No progress in the Christian life is possible without obedience to the principles and instructions God has laid down in His word. As we run the race, God keeps instructing us “from heaven.” His voice keeps us from turning to the left or right. We will have no light on our track if we disobey and turn away from God’s law. “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa 8:20). The Word is made up of Law and Testimony—teaching and examples. We must obey the teaching and follow the examples- if we live in loving obedience to God’s Word, nothing will cause us stumble on the track! (Psa 119:165). Violation of rules will disqualify us though we may be skilled and efficient. “If any one competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules” (2 Tim 2:5). Thank God for all the lessons for Christian race Paul has gathered for us from the Roman and Greek games.

Having crossed the hurdles or having overcome the hindrances in the Christian race, let’s now look at the helps available for us to finish the race successfully.

B) HELPS

1. Encouraging witnesses

“Surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses” (v1).

The Christian race may be compared to a relay race. We may say that the first half was done by the saints of the old Testament and we are to run the finishing part.

They have done their part well! “They obtained a good testimony” (11:2). “The spirits of just men made perfect” are now our witnesses (v23). They are enthusiastically watching how we run. It is like people waving their national flags in high spirits when their sportsmen are racing. We belong to the Kingdom of Heaven, even “the general assembly and Church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven” (v23). The flag of Zion, the city of the living God, is waved merrily. This is the spirit we must catch everyone we read about the heroes of faith in God’s hall of fame. In His days of flesh we read about Moses and Elijah once appearing in glory and speaking to Christ of His death which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem (Lk 9:30,31). God encourages us today in our race as we meditate on the lives of His chosen men and women in the Bible. Theirs was not an easy path. Trials, tribulations and temptations were their daily lot. But they conquered. So can we because their God is our God. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is with us.

2. Example of Jesus

“Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith ... consider Him” (vv2,3).

Jesus Christ is our Captain and Coach. Let’s walk (or run) just as He walked (or ran). “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher” (Lk 6:40). Christ became like us so we can become like Him. He is perfectly aware of all the problems we face in our race because He went through them all. “We do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (4:15). Let’s spend sufficient time in the Gospels to study how Jesus walked

no guarantee our vessel will not be tossed. But we can be assured we will not sink but reach the other side. When the disciples were panicking over the storm, Jesus asked them, “Where is your faith?” In the wind or My Word? (Lk 8:22-25). Jesus had told them at the start of their sailing, “Let’s go over to the other side.” We must understand that we cannot go under for going over! Apostle Paul rightly said, Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it” (Phil 1:6). We cannot lose this confidence even for a moment. He is not only the Author of our race but also its Finisher!

7. Grace of God

“Let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (v28).

The Christian race commences by grace, continues with grace and concludes by grace. It’s all of and by grace. God blesses us with a fresh and sufficient supply each day. The mercies and compassions of the Lord are “new every morning” (Lam 3:22,23). His grace will be sufficient for every thorn-prick on the race ground (2 Cor 12:7-9). His grace takes care of all our weaknesses. He will see us through. One frightful night, at age twenty three, John Newton's waterlogged vessel was lost. Facing death all night long he was prompted to surrender his life to Christ and turn from sin. Miraculously the craft drifted to shore. Shortly he entered the ministry and then wrote the hymn “Amazing Grace” where he sings —

*Thro’ many dangers, toils, and snares,
I have already come.
‘Tis grace that brought me safe thus far;
And grace will lead me home.*

Apostle Paul referring to the Christian race, said, “Run in such a way that You may obtain the Prize” (1 Cor 9:24). Yes, when with the God-given helps we overcome the hurdles and keep running consistently there await heavenly honours for us.

C) HONOURS

1. We will see the Lamb of God, even the Lord Jesus, face to face, as the Finisher of our faith on the other side! (v2). He started the race for us and now He will be there to receive us with hands open.
2. We will enter the joy of the Lord (v2). The end of the race is eternal bliss. No more tears, sorrow or death. It is joy, joy and only joy — never ending!
3. Jesus “sat down at the right hand of the Throne of God” (v2). So shall we sit with Him on His Throne! (Rev 3:21). Our eternal occupation will be worship. No prayer, no preaching, but only Praise!
4. Our sanctification will be complete. We will partake of His holiness in all fullness (v10). We shall be transformed and be just like Him. We will enjoy deliverance from the very presence of sin.
5. We will see the invisible God! (v14). God who dwells in unapproachable light will then dwell with us literally. We shall be His people and He our God in every sense (Rev 21:3).
6. We shall fully enjoy “the blessing” of blessings, even our birthright as the children of God (vv16,17). “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the

the Cross speaks of the former and the horizontal the latter. The entire 13th chapter is on love towards men.

There are seven groups of people to whom we must show our brotherly love.

1. To Strangers

“Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels” (v2).

The manifestation of brotherly love in this chapter is first of all towards strangers and it is HOSPITALITY. The teaching of the Law is explicit. “If a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. But the stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself” (Lev 19:33,34). The apostles repeatedly mentioned this truth in their epistles. Rom 12:9,13, “Let love be without hypocrisy... given to hospitality.” 1 Tim 3:2, “A bishop then must be ... hospitable.” 1 Pet 4:9, “Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.” So hospitality is one of the basic Christian obligations and we are to do it delightfully.

The blessings of hospitality are great. When the writer of the Hebrews spoke about entertaining angels unawares, he obviously had Abraham and Sarah in mind. The story is in Genesis 18. When Abraham saw the three men “in the heat of the day,” he did not run inside to escape the strangers but he ran outside to embrace them I Sarah was equally hospitable. Otherwise she would not have agreed to prepare such rich and delicious meal instantly! As we closely study this story we understand that two of the three men were angels and the other one was the

Lord Himself! What a blessed opportunity the Abrahams would have missed, had they not been given to hospitality! Those who are desirous of seeing angels may try inviting strangers home and feeding them sumptuously!

While speaking about the separation of lambs and goats, Jesus pointed out that the lambs, the rightists, are those given to selfless hospitality. “I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in ... Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (Mt 25:34-40). There is nothing great in entertaining our own friends. There is no merit in it, everybody does it. We are called to entertain strangers. Shall we add this to our doctrine?

2. To Prisoners

“Remember the prisoners as if chained with them, and those who are mistreated, since you yourselves are in the body also” (v3).

Here the brotherly love manifests as SYMPATHY towards the imprisoned. The deliverance ministry of Christ is portrayed in prophecy like this: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me, ... to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound” (Isa 61:11). Though this passage essentially speaks of spiritual salvation, it does have a reference to the liberation of people from social oppression.

Unjust imprisonment is common. The Bible abounds with examples of this. The first occurrence of imprisonment in the OT is in the case of Joseph and that in the NT

with the wife of his youth” Mal 2:14-16). And in the opening pages of the NT there is John the Baptist coming vehemently against the sin of adultery (Mt 14:3,4). The awfulness of this sin cannot be overemphasized. The life-partners should love each other so much that it, would be impossible for them to sacrifice fidelity and faithfulness.”

4. To Opposers

“Let your conduct be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. So we may boldly say, The Lord is my Helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?” (vv5,6).

Love of money is the root of all evil, including hatred and rivalry. Covetousness leads to envy and that to rivalry and hatred. “Godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Tim 6:6-11). This keeps our spirit soft and gentle, especially in our relationship with others.

Isaac serves a good example. His servants were digging wells but the herdsmen of Gerar were quarreling with them over the wells. Isaac did not resist. He left the dispute and moved into another place and started digging afresh. How could he be so generous and soft? He believed God’s promise, “I am with you” (Gen 26:15-25). That’s what exactly the writer of the Hebrews teaches us here. “So we may boldly say, The Lord is my Helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?” Brotherly love towards opposers because of our confidence in God therefore manifests as BOLDNESS.

Believing God and His promises on the face of opposition keeps us calm and composed. We will not agitate. For

example look at, the promises in Isaiah 54:15,17: “Indeed they shall surely assemble, but not because of Me. Whoever assembles against you shall fall for your sake ... No weapon formed against you shall prosper ... This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord.” Jesus knew He was in His Father’s hand so He did not turn bitter against His executors, rather He ministered to them by prayer (Lk 23;34).

5. To Ministers

Verses 7-9, 17-19, 22-24 speak about brotherly love towards the ministers of God. We are to HONOUR them. This honour is to be manifested in four ways.

First, we are to follow their godly examples. “Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the Word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct” (v7). Immediately after this admonition the writer states that most favourite verse, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever” (v8). This verse is quoted very often in the healing and deliverance crusades. This application is proper but the actual context is doctrines. “Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines” (v9). Just like Christ is unchanging, we must remain stable and established in the sound doctrine we are taught. Several preachers are “shifty” these days. Every year they change their doctrines in the name of “new revelations!” Beware! Follow those whose faith and practice is steady and consistent. The writer gives the example of the doctrine of foods! (v9). Beware of any legalism concerning foods and days and clothes. What is important is that “the heart be established by grace.” Avoid extremes.

*So I'll cherish the old rugged Cross,
Till my trophies at last I lay down.
I will cling to the old rugged Cross,
And exchange it some day for a crown.*

Our mouths should always be filled with praise and thanksgiving and not murmuring and complaining over the present sufferings. "For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name, (vv14,15). When we truly love someone we will delightfully go through any loss or suffering for that person. Jesus is our Brother worth suffering for!

7. To the Poor

"Do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (v16).

The manifestation of brotherly love here is CHARITY. "Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal 6:9,10). We must seize every opportunity to share our material goods with the needy and never become tired of giving. God is not tired of giving and we are not tired of receiving. How then can we grow tired of sharing? Amy Carmichael (1861-1951) said, You can give without loving but you cannot love without giving!

We must begin with systematic giving and grow into sacrificial giving. Just as we set aside a minimum of one tenth of our income for God, we can set aside a tenth for

the poor. Both the Testaments abound with the teaching of caring for the poor, but this doctrine is rarely preached. Jesus Said, "The poor are always with you." And in the Law we read, "The poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, you shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy in your land" (Dt 15:11). When we give to God's work, we "give" to God; and when we give to the poor, we "lend" to God! (Prov 19:17). That means both are deposited in Heaven on our account! We must remember God is no man's debtor!

There is a very interesting prescription for healing in Psalm 41:1-3, "Blessed is he who considers the poor ... The Lord will strengthen him on his bed of illness; You will sustain him on his sickbed." You may perhaps be sick even after so much of prayer and treatment. Why not try charity?

Conclusion

There are two benedictions at the end of this chapter (vv20,21,25) which make a perfect ending for the entire Epistle. "May the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." "Grace be with you all. Amen."

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Outlines on miscellaneous subjects for
Personal Meditation and Pulpit Preaching
- ❑ **Bible Studies**
Studies on specific themes
and select books of the Bible
- ❑ **Doctrinal Essays**
Corrective Teaching to uphold
Sound Doctrines of the Bible
- ❑ **Youth Matters**
Practical Guidelines to Young Men
and Young Women for Successful Living
- ❑ **Leaders Column**
Biblical Insights and Practical Lessons
on Christian Leadership
- ❑ **Missionary Challenge**
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the Great Commission of Christ
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frequently asked but rarely answered
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**"Jesus Christ
is able to save completely
those who come to God
through Him,
because He always lives
to intercede for them
at the right hand
of the Throne of the Majesty
in Heaven!"
(Hebrews 7:25;8:1)**

Brother R. Stanley was qualified as a Building Engineer, but he is now a Kingdom-builder for God. He has been a sincere student of the Scriptures since 1962, his 16th year and the year of his rebirth. He and his wife Lilian, a medical doctor, give all their time for Revival and Evangelism, as Missionaries with Blessing Youth Mission. Their daughter Evangeline is undergoing a training in Christian Counselling.