

AN EXPOSITION OF
HEBREWS

VOLUME 1

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Before taking up the study of this important Epistle let writer and reader humbly bow before its Divine Inspirer, and earnestly seek from Him that preparation of heart which is needed to bring us into fellowship with that One whose person, offices, and glories are here so sublimely displayed. Let us personally and definitely seek the help of that blessed Spirit who has been given to the saints of God for the purpose of guiding them into all truth, and taking of the things of Christ to show unto them. In Luke 24:45 we learn that Christ opened the understanding of the disciples “*that they might understand the Scriptures.*” May He graciously do so with us, then the entrance of His words will “give light” (Psalm 119:130), and in *His light we shall “see light.”*

In this opening article we shall confine ourselves to things of an introductory character, things which it is necessary to weigh ere we take up the details of the Epistle. We shall consider its addressees, its purpose, its theme, its divisions, its characteristics, its value, and its writer. Before doing so, let us say that we expect to quote freely from other expositors, and where possible name them. In some cases we shall not be able to do so owing to the fact that extensive and long-distance traveling has obliged the writer to break up five libraries during the last twenty years. During those years he has read (and owned most of them) between thirty and forty commentaries on Hebrews, from which he has made notes in his Bible and taken helpful extracts for his own use when lecturing on this Epistle. As most of these commentaries have been disposed of, we can now do no more than make a general acknowledgement of help received from those written by Drs. John Owen, John Gill, Moses Stewart, Andrew Bonar, Griffith-Thomas, and Messrs. Pridham, Ridout, and Tucker. Let us now consider: —

1. ITS ADDRESSES.

In our English Bibles we find the words “The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews” as the address. Perhaps some of our readers are not aware that the titles found at the head of the different books of the Bible are *not* Divinely inspired, and therefore are not accounted canonical as are the contents. No doubt these titles were originated by the early scribes, when making copies of the original manuscripts — manuscripts, all traces of which have long since disappeared. In some instances these titles are unsatisfactory; in a few,

grossly erroneous. As an example of the latter, we may refer to the final book of Scripture. Here the title is “The Revelation of St. John the Divine,” whereas the opening sentence of the book itself designates it “The Revelation of Jesus Christ!”

While treating in general with the titles of the books of Scripture, we may note that in almost all of the Epistles there is a Divinely-named addressee in the opening verses. But we may add, the contents of each Epistle are *not* to be restricted to those immediately and locally addressed. It is important that the young Christian should grasp this firmly, so that he may be fortified against ultra-dispensational teaching. There are some, claiming to have great light, who would rob the saints today of the Epistle of James because it is addressed to “the Twelve Tribes which are scattered abroad.” With equal propriety they might take from us the Epistles to the Philippians and Colossians because they were addressed only to the saints in those cities! The truth is that what Christ said to the apostles in Mark 13:17 “What I say unto *you*, I say unto *all*” — may well be applied to the whole of the Bible. *All* Scripture is needed by us (2 Timothy 3:16, 17), and all Scripture is God’s word to us. Note carefully that while at the beginning of his Epistle to Titus Paul *only* addresses Titus himself (Titus 1:4), yet at the close of this letter he expressly says, “Grace be with you *all!*” (Titus 3:15)

Ignoring then the man-made title at the head of our Epistle, we are at once struck by the *absence* of any Divinely-given one in the opening verses. Nevertheless, its first sentence enables us to *identify* at once those to whom the Epistle was originally sent: see Hebrews 1:1, 2. They to whom God spake through the prophets were the children of Israel, and it was also *unto them* He had spoken through His Son. In Hebrews 3:1, we find a word which, however, *narrows the* circle to which this Epistle was first sent. It was not the Jewish nation at large which was addressed, but the “holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling” among them. Clear confirmation of this is supplied in the Epistles of Peter. His first was addressed, locally, to “the elect sojourners of the Dispersion (Hebrews 1:1 — Gk., “*eklektois, parepidenois, diasporas*”). His second Epistle (see Hebrews 3:1) was addressed, locally and immediately, to the same company. Now in 2 Peter 3:15 the apostle makes specific reference to “our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written *unto you.*” Thus all doubt is removed as to whom our Epistle was first sent.

The Epistle itself contains further details which serve to identify the addressees. That it was written to saints who were by no means young in the faith is clear from Hebrews 5:12. That it was sent to those who had suffered severe persecutions (cf. Acts 8:1) is plain from what we read in Hebrews 10:32. That it was addressed to a Christian community of considerable size is evident from Hebrews 13:24. From this last reference we are inclined to conclude that this Epistle was first delivered to the church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:22), or to the churches in Judea (Acts 9:31), copies of which would be made and forwarded to Jewish Christians in foreign lands. Thus, our Epistle was first addressed to those descendants of Abraham who, by grace, had believed on their Savior- Messiah.

2. ITS PURPOSE.

This, in a word, was to instruct Jewish believers that Judaism had been superceded by Christianity. It must be borne in mind that a very considerable proportion of the earliest converts to Christ were Jews by natural birth, who continued to labor under Jewish prejudices. In his early Epistles the apostle had touched several times on this point, and sought to wean them from an undue and now untimely attachment to the Mosaic institutions. But only in *this* Epistle does he deal fully and systematically with the subject.

It is difficult for us to appreciate the position, at the time this Epistle was written, of those in Israel who had believed on the Lord Jesus. Unlike the Gentiles, who, for long centuries past, had lost all knowledge of the true God, and, in consequence, worshipped idols, the Jews had a Divine religion, and a Divinely-appointed place of worship. To be called upon to *forsake* these, which had been venerated by their fathers for over a thousand years, was to make a big demand upon them. It was natural that even those among them who had savingly believed on Christ should want to retain the forms and ceremonies amid which they had been brought up; the more so, seeing that the Temple still stood and the Levitical priesthood still functioned. An endeavor had been made to link Christianity on to Judaism, and as Acts 21:20 tells us there were many thousands of the early Jewish Christians who were “zealous of the law” — as the next verses clearly show, the *ceremonial* law.

“Instead of perceiving that under the new economy of things, there was neither Jew nor Gentile, but, that, without reference to external distinctions, all believers in Christ Jesus were now to live together in

the closest bonds of spiritual attachment in holy society, they dreamed of the Gentiles being admitted to the participation of the Jewish Church through means of the Messiah, and, that its external economy was to remain unaltered to the end of the world” (Dr. J. Brown).

In addition to their natural prejudices, the *temporal circumstances* of the believing Jews became increasingly discouraging, yea, presented a sore temptation for them to abandon the profession of Christianity. Following the persecution spoken of in Acts 8:1, that eminent scholar, Adolph Saphir — himself a converted Jew — tells us: “Then arose another persecution of the believers, especially directed against the apostle Paul. Festus died about the year 63, and under the high priest Ananias, who favored the Sadducees, the Christian Hebrews were persecuted as transgressors of the law. Some of them were stoned to death; and though this extreme punishment could not be frequently inflicted by the Sanhedrim, they were able to subject their brethren to sufferings and reproaches which they felt keenly. It was a small thing that they confiscated their goods; but they banished them from the holy places. Hitherto they had enjoyed the privileges of devout Israelites: they could take part in the beautiful and God-appointed services of the sanctuary; but now they were treated as unclean and apostates. Unless they gave up faith in Jesus, and forsook the assembling of themselves together, they were not allowed to enter the Temple, they were banished from the altar, the sacrifice, the high priest, the house of Jehovah.

“We can scarcely realize the piercing sword which thus wounded their inmost heart. That by clinging to the Messiah they were to be severed from Messiah’s people, was, indeed, a great and perplexing trial; that for the hope of Israel’s glory they were banished from the place which God had chosen, and where the divine Presence was revealed, and the symbols and ordinances had been the joy and strength of their fathers; that they were to be no longer children of the covenant and of the house, but worse than Gentiles, excluded from the outer court, cut off from the commonwealth of Israel. This was indeed a sore and mysterious trial. Cleaving to the promises made unto their fathers, cherishing the hope in constant prayer that their nation would yet accept the Messiah, it was the severest test to which their faith could be put, when their loyalty to Jesus involved separation from all the sacred rights and privileges of Jerusalem.”

Thus the *need* for an authoritative, lucid, and systematic setting forth of the real relation of Christianity to Judaism was a pressing one. Satan would not miss the opportunity of seeking to persuade these Hebrews that their faith in Jesus of Nazareth was a mistake, a delusion, a sin. Were *they* right, while the vast majority of their brethren, according to the flesh, among whom were almost all the respected members of the Sanhedrim and the priesthood, wrong? Had God *prospered* them since they had become followers of the crucified One? Or, did not their temporal circumstances evidence that He was most displeased with them? Moreover, the believing remnant of Israel had looked for a speedy return of Christ to the earth, but thirty years had now passed and He had not come! Yes, their situation was critical, and there was an urgent need that their faith should be strengthened, their understanding enlightened, and a fuller explanation be given them of Christianity in the light of the Old Testament. It was to meet this need that God, in His tender mercy, moved His servant to write this Epistle to them.

3. ITS THEME.

This is, the super-abounding excellence of Christianity over Judaism. The sum and substance, the center and circumference, the light and life of Christianity, is *Christ*. Therefore, the method followed by the Holy Spirit in this Epistle, in developing its dominant theme, is to show the immeasurable superiority of Christ over all that had gone before. One by one the various objects in which the Jews boasted are taken up, and in the presence of the superlative glory of the Son of God they pale into utter insignificance. We are shown:

First, His superiority over the prophets, Hebrews 1:1-3.

Second, His superiority over angels in Hebrews 1:4 to Hebrews 2:18.

Third, His superiority over Moses in Hebrews 3:1-19.

Fourth, His superiority over Joshua, Hebrews 4:1-13.

Fifth, His superiority over Aaron in Hebrews 5:14 to 7:18.

Sixth, His superiority over the whole ritual of Judaism, which is developed by showing the surpassing excellency of the new covenant over the old, in Hebrews 7:19 to Hebrews 10:39.

Seventh, His superiority over each and all of the Old Testament saints, in Hebrews 11:1 to Hebrews 12:3. In the Lord Jesus, Christians have the substance and reality, of which Judaism contained but the shadows and figures.

If the Lord permits us to go through this Epistle — Oh that He may come for us before — many illustrations and exemplifications of our definition of its theme will come before us. At the moment, we may note how frequently the comparative term “better” is used, thus showing the *superiority* of what we have in Christianity over what the saints of old had in Judaism. In Hebrews 1:4, Christ is “better than angels;” in Hebrews 7:19, mention is made of a “better hope;” in Hebrews 7:22, of a “better testament” or “covenant;” in Hebrews 8:6, of “better promises;” in Hebrews 9:23, of “better sacrifices;” in Hebrews 10:34 of a “better substance;” in Hebrews 11:16, of a “better country;” in Hebrews 11:35, of a “better resurrection,” and in Hebrews 11:40, of the “better thing.” So, too, we may observe the seven *great* things mentioned therein, namely: the “great salvation” (Hebrews 2:3), the “great High Priest” (Hebrews 4:14), the “great Tabernacle” (Hebrews 9:11), the “great fight of afflictions” (Hebrews 10:32), the “great recompense” (Hebrews 10:35), the “great cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1), the “great Shepherd of the sheep” (Hebrews 13:20).

Again; in contrast from what the believing Hebrews were called upon to *give up*, they were reminded of what they had *gained*. Note how frequently occurs the “we *have*” — a great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14, 8:1), an anchor of the soul (Hebrews 6:19), a better and enduring substance (Hebrews 10:34), an altar (Hebrews 13:10). Once more, we may note how these Hebrews were encouraged to forget the things which were behind and to press toward those which were before. All through this Epistle the *forward look* is prominent. In Hebrews 1:6 and Hebrews 2:5, mention is made of a “world (or ‘habitable earth’) to come;” in Hebrews 6:5, of an “age to come;” in Hebrews 8:10, of a “new covenant,” yet to be made with the house of Israel; in Hebrews 9:11 and Hebrews 10:1, of “good things” to come; in Hebrews 9:28, of a “salvation” to be revealed; in Hebrews 10:37, of the coming Redeemer, in Hebrews 11:14 and Hebrews 13:14, of a “city” yet to be manifested.

Throughout this Epistle great prominence is given to the *Priesthood* of Christ. The center of Judaism was its temple and the priesthood. Hence the

Holy Spirit has here shown at length how that believers now have in Christ the substance of which these supplied but the shadows. The following passages should be carefully weighed: — Hebrews 2:17; 3:1; 4:14, 15; 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1; 9:11; 10:21.

“Though deprived of the temple, with its priesthood and altar and sacrifice, the apostle reminds the Hebrews, ‘we have’ the real and substantial temple, the great High Priest, the true altar, the one sacrifice, and with it all offerings, the true access into the very presence of the Most Holy” (Adolph Saphir).

4. ITS DIVISIONS.

These have been set forth so simply by Dr. J. Brown we cannot do better than quote from him:

“The Epistle divides itself into two parts — the first, doctrinal; the second, practice — though the division is not so accurately (closely, A.W.P.) observed, that there are no duties enjoined or urged in the first part, and no doctrines stated in the second. The first is by far the larger division, reaching from the beginning of the Epistle down to the 18th verse of the 10th chapter. The second commences with the 19th verse of the 10th chapter, and extends to the end of the Epistle. The superiority of Christianity to Judaism is the great doctrine which the Epistle teaches; and constancy in the faith and profession of that religion, is the great duty which it enjoins.”

5. ITS CHARACTERISTICS.

In several noticeable respects Hebrews differs from all the other Epistles of the New Testament. The name of the writer is omitted, there is no opening salutation, the ones to whom it was first specifically and locally sent are not mentioned. On the positive side we may note, that the typical teachings of the Old Testament are expounded here at greater length than elsewhere; the priesthood of Christ is opened up, fully, only in this Epistle; the warnings against apostasy are more frequent and more solemn, and the calls to steadfastness and perseverance are more emphatic and numerous than in any other New Testament book. All of these things are accounted for by the fleshly nationality of those addressed, and the circumstances they were then in. Unless we keep these features steadily in mind, not a little in this Epistle

will necessarily remain obscure and dark. Much of the language used, the figures employed, the references made, are only intelligible in the light of the Old Testament Scriptures, on which Judaism was based. Except this be kept before us, such expressions as “*purged* our sins” (Hebrews 1:3), “there remaineth therefore a *Sabbath-keeping* to the people of God” (Hebrews 4:9), “leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection” (Hebrews 6:1), “our bodies washed with pure water” (Hebrews 10:22), “we have an altar” (Hebrews 13:10), etc., will remain unintelligible.

The first time that *Christ* is referred to in this Epistle it is as seated at “the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:3), for it is with a *heavenly* Christ that Christianity has to ‘do: note the other reference in this Epistle to the same fact — Hebrews 1:13, 8:1, 10:12, 12:2. In perfect accord with Hebrews 1:3, which strikes the keynote of the Epistle, in addition to the heavenly Christ, reference is made to “the heavenly calling” (Hebrews 3:1), to “the heavenly gift” (Hebrews 6:4), to “heavenly things” (Hebrews 8:5), to “the heavenly Country” (Hebrews 11:16), to the “heavenly Jerusalem” (Hebrews 12:22), and to “the church of the First-born, whose names are written in Heaven” (Hebrews 12:23). This emphasis is easily understood when we remember that our Epistle is addressed to those whose inheritance, religious relationships, and hopes, had been all *earthly*.

In Hebrews 13:22 there is a striking word which defines the *character* of this Epistle: “And I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word *of exhortation*, for I have written a letter unto you in few words.” Upon this verse Saphir has well said,

“The central idea of the Epistle is the glory of the New Covenant, contrasted with and excelling the glory of the old covenant; and while this idea is developed in a systematic manner, yet the aim of the writer throughout is eminently and directly practical. Everywhere his object is exhortation. He never loses sight of the dangers and wants of his brethren. The application to conscience and life is never forgotten. It is rather a sermon than an exposition.... In all his arguments, in every doctrine, in every illustration, the central aim of the Epistle is kept prominent — the exhortation to *steadfastness*.”

This is, indeed, a peculiarity about Hebrews. In his other Epistles, the apostle

rarely breaks in on an argument to utter an admonition or exhortation; instead, his wellnigh uniform method was to open with doctrinal exposition, and then base upon this a series of practical exhortations. But the unusual situation which the Hebrews were in, and the peculiar love that the writer bore to them (cf. Romans 9:3) explains this exception.

What has just been said above accounts for what we find in Hebrews 11. Nowhere else in the Bible do we find such a lengthy and complete description of *the life of faith*. But here a whole chapter, the longest in the Epistle, is devoted to it. The reason for this is not far to seek. Brought up in a system with an elaborate ritual, whose worship was primarily a matter of *outward* symbols and ceremonies; tempted as few ever have been to walk by sight, there was a special and most pressing need for a clear and detailed analysis and description of what it means to “walk by faith.” Inasmuch as “example is better than precept,” better because more easily grasped and because making a more powerful appeal to the heart, the Holy Spirit saw well to develop this important theme by an appeal to the history of saints recorded in the Scriptures of the Hebrews.

But it is most important that we recognize the fullness of the term *faith*. As Saphir well said, “Throughout Scripture faith means more than trust in Jesus for personal safety. This *is* the central point, but we must take care that we understand it in a true and deep manner. Faith, as the apostle explains in the Epistle to the Corinthians, is looking at the things which are not seen and temporal: it is preferring spiritual and eternal realities to the things of time, sense, and sin; it is leaning on God and realizing His Word; it is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Thus every doctrine and illustration of this Epistle goes straight to the heart and conscience, appeals to life, addresses itself to faith. It is one continued and sustained fervent and intense appeal to cleave to Jesus, the High Priest; to the substantial, true, and real worship. A most urgent and loving exhortation to be steadfast, patient, hopeful, in the presence of God, in the love and sympathy of the Lord Jesus, in the fellowship of the great cloud of witnesses.”

Another prominent characteristic, concerning which there is no need for us now to enlarge upon, is the repeated *warnings* in this Epistle *against apostasy*. The most solemn and searching exhortations against the danger of falling away to be found anywhere in Holy Writ were given to these,

Hebrews 2:1-3, most of the third and fourth chapters, Hebrews 6:4- 6, 10:26-29, 12:15-17, will at once occur to all who are familiar with the contents of this Epistle. The occasion for and the need of them has already been pointed out: the disappointing of the hopes the Hebrews had cherished, the persecutions they were then enduring, and the Divine judgment which was on the very eve of falling on Jerusalem (in AD 70) made them imperative.

6. ITS VALUE.

Let us mention first its *evidential* value. The Epistle is particularly rich in proofs of the *verbal* inspiration of Scripture. This is seen in the way the apostle refers to the Old Testament, and the use he makes of it. Mark how in Hebrews 1:5-9 when quoting from the Psalms, 2nd Samuel, Deuteronomy, he refers these utterances to God Himself — “He saith,” Hebrews 10:6-8. So in Hebrews 3:7 “the Holy Spirit saith.” Observe how when quoting from the Old Testament the apostle attentively weighs *every word*, and often builds a fundamental truth on a single expression. Let us cite a few from the many examples of this:

See how in Hebrews 2:8 the apostle argues from the authority of the word “*all*.” In Hebrews 2:11, when quoting from Psalm 22, he deduces the conclusion from the expression “My brethren” that the Son of God took to Himself human nature. Observe that in Hebrews 3:7-19 and Hebrews 4:2-11, when quoting from Psalm 95, he builds on the words “Today,” “I have sworn.” and “My rest;” also in Hebrews 3:2-6 how his conclusions there are drawn from the words “servant,” and “My house” in Numbers 12:7. His whole argument in chapter 8 is based on the word “*new*” found in Jeremiah 31:31. How blessedly he makes use of the words “My son” from Proverbs 3:11 in Hebrews 12:5-9! How emphatically he appeals in Hebrews 12:26, 27 to the words “once more” in Haggai 2:6,7. Is it not abundantly clear that in the judgment of the apostle Paul the Scriptures were Divinely inspired even to the *most minute* expression?

The *evangelical* value of this Epistle has been recognized by Christians of all schools of thought. Here is set forth with sunlight clearness the preciousness, design, efficacy and effects of the great Sacrifice offered once and for all. Christ has Himself purged our sins (Hebrews 1:3); He is able to save “to the uttermost” (Hebrews 7:25); by His one offering He has “perfected forever the sanctified” (Hebrews 10:14); by His blood a new and living way has been

opened for His people into the Holiest (Hebrews 10:19,20): such are some of its wondrous declarations. Emphasizing the inestimable worth of His redemptive work, it is here that we read of an “eternal salvation” (Hebrews 5:9), “eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:12), and of the “eternal inheritance” (Hebrews 9:15).

The *doctrinal* importance of this book is exceeded by none, not even by the Roman Epistle. Where its teachings are believed, understood, and embodied in the life, ritualism and legalism (the two chief enemies of Christianity) receive their death blow. In no other book of Scripture are the sophistries and deceptions of Romanism so clearly and systematically exposed. So fully and pointedly are the errors of Popery refuted, it might well have been written *since* that satanic system became established. Well did one of the Puritans say, “God foreseeing what poisonous heresies would be hatched by the Papacy, prepared this antidote against them.”

But perhaps its chief distinctive value lies in its exposition of the Old Testament types. It is here we are taught that the Tabernacle and its furniture, the priesthood and their service, the various sacrifices and offerings, all pointed to the person, offices, and glories of the Lord Jesus. Of Israel’s priests it is said, “who served unto the example and shadow of heavenly things” (Hebrews 8:5); the first tabernacle was “a figure for the time then present” (Hebrews 9:9); the ceremonial law had “a shadow of good things to come” (Hebrews 10:1). Melchizedec was a type of Christ (Hebrews 7:15), Isaac was a figure of Him (Hebrews 11:9), and so on. The details of these will be considered, D.V.,^[1] in due course.

7. ITS WRITER.

This, we are fully assured, was the apostle Paul. Though he was distinctively and essentially the “apostle of the Gentiles” (Romans 11:13), yet his ministry was by no means confined to them, as the book of Acts clearly shows. At the time of his apprehension the Lord said,

“He is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My Name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15).

It is significant that Israel is there mentioned *last*, in harmony with the fact that his Epistle to the Hebrews was written *after* most of his others to Gentile saints. That this Epistle *was* written by Paul is clear from 2 Peter 3:15. Peter

was writing to saved Jews as the opening verses of his first Epistle intimates; 2 Peter 3:1 informs us that this letter was addressed to the same people as his former one had been. Then, in Hebrews 10:15, he declares that his beloved brother Paul “also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written *unto you.*” If the Epistle to the Hebrews be not *that* writing, where is it?

CHAPTER 2

THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST OVER THE PROPHETS

(HEBREWS 1:1-3)

Before taking up the study of the opening verses of our Epistle, let us adduce further evidence that the apostle Paul was the writer of it. To begin with, note its Pauline *characteristics*. First, a *numerical* one. There is a striking parallel between his enumeration in Romans 8:35-39 and in Hebrews 12:18-24. In the former he draws up a list of the things which shall not separate the saint from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. If the reader will *count* them, he will find they are seventeen in number, but divided into a seven and a ten. The first seven are given in verse 35, the second ten in Hebrews 10:38, 39. In Hebrews 12:18-23 he draws a contrast between Mount Sinai and Mount Sion, and he mentions seventeen details, and again the seventeen is divided into a seven and a ten. In Hebrews 10:18, 19, he names seven things which the saints are *not* “come unto”; while in Hebrews 10:22-24 he mentions ten things they *have* “come unto,” viz., to Mount Sion, the City of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, an innumerable company of angels, the general Assembly, the Church of the Firstborn, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator, to the Blood of sprinkling. Compare also Galatians 5:19-21, where the apostle, when describing the “works of the flesh,” enumerates *seventeen*. So far as we are aware, no other Epistle writer of the New Testament used this number seventeen in such a manner.

Again; the *terms* which he used. We single out one only. In Hebrews 2:10 he speaks of the many *sons* which Christ is bringing to glory. Now Paul is the *only* New Testament writer that employs the term “sons.” The others used a different Greek word meaning “children.”

For *doctrinal* parallelisms compare Romans 8:16, with Hebrews 10:15, and 1 Corinthians 3:13 with Hebrews 5:12-14, and who can doubt that the Holy Spirit used the *same* penman in both cases?

Note a *devotional* correspondency. In Hebrews 13:18, the writer of this Epistle says, “Pray for us.” In his other Epistles we find Paul, more than once, making a similar request; but *no other* Epistle-writer is placed on

record as soliciting prayer!

Finally, it is to be noted that *Timothy* was the companion of the writer of this Epistle, see Hebrews 13:23. We know of no hint anywhere that Timothy was the fellow-worker of anyone else but the apostle Paul: that he companied with *him* is clear from 2 Corinthians 1:1, Colossians 1:1, 1 Thessalonians 3:1, 2.

In addition to the many Pauline characteristics stamped on this Epistle, we may further observe that it was written by one who had been in “bonds” (see Hebrews 10:34); by one who was now sundered from Jewish believers (Hebrews 13:19) — would not this indicate that Paul wrote this Epistle while in his hired house in Rome (Acts 28:30)? Again; here is a striking fact, which will have more force with some readers than others: if the Epistle to the Hebrews was *not* written by the apostle Paul, then the New Testament contains only *thirteen* Epistles from his pen — a number which, in Scripture, is ever associated with evil! But if Hebrews was also written by him, this brings the total number of his Epistles to fourteen, i.e., 7 x 2 — seven being the number of perfection and two of witness. Thus, a *perfect witness* was given by this beloved servant of the Lord to Jew and Gentile!

In the last place, there is one other evidence that the apostle Paul penned the Hebrews’ Epistle which is still more conclusive. In 2 Thessalonians 3:17, 18 we read,

“The *salutation* of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every Epistle, so I write, the *grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ *be with you all.*”

Now, if the reader will turn to the closing verse of each of the first thirteen Epistles of this apostle, it will be found that this “token” is given in each one. Then, if he will refer to the close of the Epistles of James, Peter, John and Jude, he will discover a noticeable *absence* of it. Thus it was a *distinctive* “token” of the apostle Paul. It served to identify *his* writings. When, then at the close of Hebrews we read “*grace be with you all*” the proof is conclusive and complete that none other than Paul’s hand originally wrote this Epistle.

Ere passing from this point a word should be added concerning the distinctive *suitability* of Paul as the penman of this Epistle. In our little work “Why Four Gospels” (pages 20-22), we have called attention to the *wisdom* of God

displayed in the selection of the four men He employed to write the Gospels. In each one we may clearly perceive a special personal fitness for the task before him. Thus it is here. All through the Epistle of Hebrews Christ is presented as the glorified One in Heaven. Now, it was *there the* apostle Paul first saw the Lord (Acts 26:19); who, then, was so well suited, so experimentally equipped, to present to the Hebrews the rejected Messiah at God's right hand! *He* had seen Him there; and with the exceptions of Stephen, and later, John of Patmos, he was the only one who had or has!

Should it be asked, *Why* is the apostle Paul's *name* omitted from the preface to this Epistle? A threefold answer may be suggested.

First, it is addressed, primarily, to converted "Hebrews," and Paul was not characteristically or essentially an apostle *to them*: he was the apostle to the Gentiles.

Second, the inscribing of his name at the beginning of this Epistle would, probably, have prejudiced many Jewish readers against it (cf. Acts 21:27, 28; 22:17-22).

Third, the supreme purpose of the Epistle is to exalt Christ, and in this Epistle *He* is the "Apostle," see Hebrews 3:1. Therefore the impropriety of Paul making mention of his own apostleship. But let us now turn to the contents of the Epistle:

Hebrews 10:1-3. These verses are not only a preface, but they contain a summary of the doctrinal section of the Epistle. The keynote is struck at once. Here we are shown, briefly but conclusively, the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. The apostle introduces his theme in a manner least calculated to provoke the antipathy of his Jewish readers. He begins by acknowledging that Judaism was of Divine authority: it was *God* who had spoken to their fathers.

"He confirms and seals the doctrine which was held by the Hebrews, that unto them had been committed the oracles of God; and that in the writings of Moses and the prophets they possessed the Scripture which could not be broken, in which God had displayed unto them His will" (Adolph Saphir)

It is worthy of note that the Gospels open with a summary of Old Testament history from Abraham to David, from David to the Captivity, and from the

Captivity to Jesus, the Immanuel predicted by Isaiah (see Matthew 1), and that the Epistles also begin by telling us that the Gospel expounded by the prophets had been “promised afore by God’s prophets in the Holy Scriptures” (Romans 1:1-3).

Having affirmed that God *had* spoken to the fathers by the prophets, the apostle at once points out that God has now spoken to us by His Son.

“The great object of the Epistle is to describe the contrast between the old and new covenants. But this contrast is based upon their unity. It is impossible for us rightly to understand the contrast unless we know first the resemblance. The new covenant is contrasted with the old covenant, not in the way in which the light of the knowledge of God is contrasted with the darkness and ignorance of heathenism, for the old covenant is also of God, and is therefore possessed of Divine glory. Beautiful is the night in which the moon and the stars of prophecy and types are shining; but when the sun arises then we forget the hours of watchfulness and expectancy, and in the clear and joyous light of day there is revealed to us the reality and substance of the eternal and heavenly sanctuary” (Adolph Saphir).

Let us now examine these opening verses word by word.

“God” (verse 1). The particular reference is to the Father, as the words “by (His) Son” in verse 2 intimate. Yet the other Persons of the Trinity are not excluded. In Old Testament times the Godhead spoke by the Son, see Exodus 3:2, 5; 1 Corinthians 10:9; and by the Holy Spirit, see Acts 28:26, Hebrews 3:7, etc. Being a Trinity in Unity, one Person is often said to work by Another. A striking example of this is found in Genesis 19:24, where Jehovah the Son is said to have rained down fire *from* Jehovah the Father.

“God.... spake.” (verse 1). Deity is not speechless. The true and living God, unlike the idols of the heathen, is no dumb Being. The God of Scripture, unlike that absolute and impersonal “first Cause” of philosophers and evolutionists, is not silent. At the beginning of earth’s history we find Him speaking: “*God said*, Let there be light: and there was light” (Genesis 1:4). “He spake and it was done, He commanded and it stood fast” (Psalm 33:9). To men He spake, and still speaks. For this we can never be sufficiently thankful.

“God who at sundry times.... spake” (verse 1). Not once or twice, but many times, did God speak. The Greek for “at sundry times” literally means “by many parts,” which necessarily implies, some at one time, some at another. From Abraham to Malachi was a period of fifteen hundred years, and during that time God spake frequently: to some a few words, to others many. The apostle was here paving the way for making manifest the superiority of Christianity. The Divine revelation vouchsafed under the Mosaic economy was but *fragmentary*. The Jew desired to set Moses against Christ (John 9:28). The apostle acknowledges that God had spoken to Israel. But *how*? Had He communicated to them the fullness of His mind? Nay. The Old Testament revelation was but the refracted rays, not the light unbroken and complete. As illustrations of this we may refer to the *gradual* making known of the Divine character through His different titles, or to the prophecies concerning the coming Messiah. It was “here a little and there a little.”

“God who.... in divers manner spake” (verse 1). The majority of the commentators regard these words as referring to the *various ways* in which God revealed Himself to the prophets — sometimes directly, at others indirectly — through an angel (Genesis 19:1, etc.); sometimes audibly, at others in dreams and visions. But, with Dr. J. Brown, we believe that the particular point here is *how* God spake *to the fathers* by the prophets, and not how He has made known His mind to the prophets themselves.

“The revelation was sometimes communicated by typical representations and emblematical actions, sometimes in a continued parable, at other times by separate figures, at other times — though comparatively rarely — in plain explicit language. The revelation has sometimes the form of a narrative, at other times that of a prediction, at other times that of an argumentative discourse; sometimes it is given in prose, at other times in poetry” (Dr. J. B.).

Thus we may see here an illustration of the *sovereignty* of God: He did not act *uniformly* or confine Himself to any one method of speaking to the fathers. He spake by way of promise and prediction, by types and symbols, by commandments and precepts, by warnings and exhortations.

“God.... spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets” (verse 1). Thus the apostle sets his seal upon the Divine inspiration and authority of the Old Testament Scriptures. The “fathers” here goes right back to the beginning of

God's dealings with the Hebrews — cf. Luke 1:55. To “the fathers” God spake “by,” or more literally and precisely, “*in*” the prophets. This denotes that God possessed their hearts, controlled their minds, ordered their tongues, so that they spake not their own words, but *His* words — see 2 Peter 1:21. At times the prophets were themselves conscious of this, see 2 Samuel 23:2, etc. We may add that the word “prophet” signifies the mouthpiece of God: see Genesis 20:7, Exodus 7:1, John 4:19 — she recognized *God* was speaking to her; Acts 3:21!

“God... hath in these last days spoken unto us by” — better “in (His) Son” (verse 2).

“Having thus described the Jewish revelation he goes on to give an account of the Christians, and begins it in an antithetical form. The God who spake to ‘the fathers’ now speaks to ‘us.’ The God who spake in ‘times past,’ now speaks in these ‘last days.’ The God who spake ‘by the prophets,’ now speaks ‘by His Son.’ There is nothing in the description of the Gospel revelation that answers to the two phrases ‘at sundry times,’ and ‘in divers manners’; but the ideas which they necessarily suggest to the mind are, the *completeness* of the Gospel revelation compared with the imperfection of the Jewish, and the *simplicity* and clearness of the Gospel revelation compared with the multi-formity and obscurity of the Jewish” (Dr. J. Brown).

“This manifesting of God’s will by parts (‘at sundry times,’ etc.), is here (verse 1) noted by way of distinction and difference from God’s revealing His will under the Gospel; which was all at one time, viz., the times of His Son’s being on earth; for then the whole counsel of God was made known so far as was meet for the Church to know it while this world continueth. In this respect Christ said, ‘*All* things that I have heard of My Father, I have made known to you’ (John 15:15), and ‘the Comforter shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you’ (Hebrews 14:26). The woman of Samaria understood this much: ‘When the Messiah is come, He will tell us all things’ (John 4:25). Objection: the apostles had many things revealed to them later. Answer: those were no other things than what Christ had revealed before, while He lived” (Dr. Gouge).

The central point of contrast here is between the Old Testament “prophets” and Christ “the Son.” Though the Holy Spirit has not here developed the details of this contrast, we can ourselves, by going back to the Old Testament, supply them. Mr. Saphir has strikingly summarized them under seven heads.

“**First**, they were many: one succeeded another: they lived in different periods.

Second, they gave out God’s revelation in ‘divers manners’ — similitudes, visions, symbols. Each prophet had his peculiar gift and character. Their stature and capacity varied.

Third, they were sinful men — Isaiah 6:5, Daniel 10:8.

Fourth, they did not possess the Spirit constantly. The ‘word’ came to them, but they did not *possess* the Word!

Fifth, they did not understand the heights and depths of their own message — 1 Peter 1:10.

Sixth, still less did they comprehend the whole of God’s revelation in Old Testament times.

Seventh, like John the Baptist they had to testify ‘I am not the Light, I am only sent to bear witness of the Light.’”

Now, the very opposite was the case in all these respects with the “Son.” Though the revelation which God gave the prophets is equally inspired and authoritative, yet that through His Son possesses a greater dignity and value, for *He* has revealed all the secrets of the Father’s heart, the fullness of His counsel, and the riches of His grace.

“In these last days” (verse 2). This expression is not to be taken absolutely, but is a contrast from “in time past.” The ministry of Christ marked “the last days.” That which the Holy Spirit was pressing upon the Hebrews was the *finality* of the Gospel revelation. Through the “prophets” God had given predictions and foreshadowings; in the Son, the fulfillment and substance. The “fullness of time” had come when God sent forth His Son (Galatians 4:4). He has nothing now in reserve. He has no further revelation to make. Christ is the *final* Spokesman of Deity. The written Word is now complete. In conclusion, note how Christ *divides history*: everything before pointed toward Him, everything since points back to Him; *He* is the Center of all

God's counsels.

“Spoken unto us” (verse 2).

“The pronoun us refers directly to the Jews of that age, to which class belonged both the writer and his readers; but the statement is equally true in reference to all, in every succeeding age, to whom the word of this salvation comes. God, in the completed revelation of His will, respecting the salvation of men through Christ Jesus, is still speaking to all who have an opportunity of reading the New Testament or of hearing the Gospel” (Dr. J. Brown).

“In (His) Son” (verse 2). Christ is the “Son of God” in two respects.

First, eternally so, as the second Person in the Trinity, very God of very God.

Second, He is also the “Son as incarnate.” When He took upon Him sinless human nature He did not cease to be God, nor did He (as some blasphemously teach) “empty” Himself of His Divine attributes, which are inseparable from the Divine Being. “*God* was manifest in flesh” (1 Timothy 3:16). Before His Birth, God sent an angel to Mary, saying,

“*He* (the Word become flesh) shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

The One born in Bethlehem's manger was the *same* Divine Person as had subsisted from all eternity, though He had now taken unto Him another, an additional nature, the human. But so perfect is the *union* between the Divine and the human natures in Christ that, in some instances, the properties of the one are ascribed to the other: see John 3:13, Romans 5:10. It is in the *second* of these respects that our blessed Savior is viewed in our present passage — as the Mediator, the God-man, God “*spake*” in and through Him: see John 17:8, 14, etc.

Summarizing what has been said, we may note how that this opening sentence of our Epistle points a threefold contrast between the communications which God has made through Judaism and through Christianity.

First, in their respective *characters*: *the* one was fragmentary and incomplete; the other perfect and final.

Second, in the *instruments* which He employed: in the former, it was sinful men; in the latter, His holy Son.

Third, in the *periods* selected: the one was “*in time past*,” the other in “*these last days*,” intimating that God has now fully expressed Himself, that He has nothing in reserve. But is there not here something deeper and more blessed? We believe there is. Let us endeavor to set it forth.

That which is central and vital in these opening verses is God *speaking*. A silent God is an unknown God: God “speaking” is God expressing, *revealing* Himself. All that we know or can now know of God is what He has revealed of Himself through His Word. But the opening verse of Hebrews presents a contrast between God’s “*speakings*.” To Israel He gave a revelation of Himself in “*time past*”; to them He also gave another in “*these last days*.” *What*, then, was the *character* of these two distinct revelations?

As we all know, God’s Word is divided into two main sections, the Old and the New Testaments. Now, it is instructive to note that the distinctive character in which God is revealed in them strikingly corresponds to those two words about Him recorded in the first Epistle of John; “*God is light*” (Hebrews 1:5); “*God is love*” (Hebrews 4:8). Mark attentively the order of these two statements which make known to us what God actually is in Himself.

“*God is light*.” It was in this character that He was revealed in Old Testament times. What is the very first thing we hear Him saying in His Word? This: “*Let there be light*” (Genesis 1:3). In what character does He appear to our fallen first parents in Genesis 3? As “*light*,” as the holy One, uncompromisingly judging sin. In what character was He revealed at the flood? As the “*light*,” unsparingly dealing with that which was evil. How ‘did He make Himself known to Israel at Sinai? As the One who is “*light*.” And so we might go on through the whole Old Testament. We do not say that His love was entirely unknown, but most assuredly it was not fully revealed. That which was *characteristic* of the revelation of the Divine character in the Mosaic dispensation was God as *light*.

“*God is love*.” It is in this character that He stands revealed in New Testament times. To make known His love. God sent forth the Son of His love. It is only in Christ that love is fully unveiled. Not that the light was absent; that could not be, seeing that He was and is God Himself. The love which he exercised and manifested was ever an holy love. But just as “*God is light*” was the characteristic revelation in Old Testament times, so “*God is*

love” is characteristic of the New Testament revelation. In the final analysis, *this* is the contrast pointed to in the opening verses of Hebrews.

In the prophets God “spoke” (revealed Himself) as *light*: the requirements, claims, demands of his holiness being insisted upon. But in the Son it is the sweet accents of *love* that we hear. It is the *affections* of God which the Son has expressed, appealing to ours; hence, it is by the heart, and not the head, that God can be known.

“God... hath in these last days spoken unto us by (His) Son.” It will be noted that the word “His” is in italics, which means there is no corresponding word in the original. But the omission of this word makes the sentence obscure; nor are we helped very much when we learn that the preposition “by” should be “in.” “God hath spoken in Son.” Yet really, this is not so obscure as at first it seems. Were a friend to tell you that he had visited a certain church, and that the preacher “spoke in Latin,” you would have no difficulty in understanding what he meant: “spoke *in* Latin would intimate that that particular language marked his utterance. Such is the thought here. “In Son” has reference to that which *characterized* God’s revelation. The thought of the contrast is that God, who of old had spoken *prophet-wise*, now speaks *son-wise*. The thought is similar to that expressed in 1 Timothy 3:16, “God was manifest in flesh,” the words “in flesh” referring to that which characterized the Divine manifestation. God was not manifested in intangible and invisible ether, nor did He appear in angelic form; but “*in* flesh.” So He has now spoken “*in Son*,” Son-wisely.

The whole revelation and manifestation of God is now in Christ; He alone reveals the Father’s heart. It is not only that Christ declared or delivered God’s message, but that He *himself* was and is God’s message. All that God has to say to us is in His Son: all His thoughts, counsels, promises, gifts, are to be found in the Lord Jesus. Take the perfect life of Christ, His deportment, His ways; *that* is *God* “speaking” — revealing Himself — to us. Take His miracles, revealing His tender compassion, displaying His mighty power; they are *God* “speaking” to us. Take His death, commending to us the love of God, in that while we were yet sinners, He died for us; that is *God* “speaking” to us. Take His resurrection, triumphing over the grave, vanquishing him who had the power of death, coming forth as the “first fruits of them that slept” — the “earnest” of the “*harvest*” to follow; that is *God*

“speaking” to us.

That which is so blessed in this opening sentence of the Hebrews’ Epistle, and which it is so important that our hearts should lay hold of, is, that God has come out in an entirely new character — *Son-wise*. It is not so much that God speaks to us in *the* Son, but God addresses Himself to us in Son-like character, that is, in the character of *love*. God might have spoken “*Almighty-wise*,” as He did at Sinai; but that would have terrified and overwhelmed us. God might have spoken “*Judge-wise*,” as He will at the great white Throne; but that would have condemned us, and forever banished us from His presence. But, blessed be His name, He has spoken “*Son-wise*,” in the *tenderest* relation which He could possibly assume.

What was the announcement from Heaven as soon as the Son was revealed? “Unto you is born” — what? Not a “*Judge*,” or even a “*Teacher*,” but “*a Savior, which is Christ the Lord*” (Luke 2:11). There we have the *heart* of God revealed.

It is the *character* in which God “spoke” or revealed Himself which this opening sentence of our Epistle emphasizes. He has appeared before us in the person of His beloved Son, to bring us a knowledge of the Divine affections, and this in order to engage our affections. In the very nature of the case there can be nothing higher. Through Christ, God is now fully, perfectly, finally revealed.

We lose much if we fail to keep constantly in mind the fact that Christ is *God* — “*God manliest* in flesh.” We profess to believe that *He is* Divine, the second person of the blessed Trinity. But it is to be feared that often we forget this when reading the record of His earthly life or when pondering the words which fell from His lips. How necessary it is when taking up a passage in the Gospels to realize that there it is God “speaking” to us “*Son-wise*,” God’s affections made known.

Take the familiar words of Luke 19:10, “The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost.” But who was this “*Son of man*?” It was *God* “*manifested in flesh*”; it was God revealing Himself in His “*Son*” character. Thus, this well-known verse shows us *the heart* of God, yearning over His fallen creatures. Take, again, that precious word of Matthew 11:28, “Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” Those words were uttered by “*Jesus of Nazareth*,” yet they illustrate what is said in

Hebrews 1:2: it was God “speaking” Son-wisely, i.e., bringing to poor sinners a knowledge of Divine affections. Let us re-read the four Gospels with this glorious truth before us.

Cannot we now discern the wondrous and blessed contrast pointed in the opening verses of Hebrews? How different are the two revelations which God has made of His character. In Old Testament times God “spoke,” revealed Himself, according to what He is as *light*; and this, in keeping with the fact that it was “in the prophets” — those who made known His *mind*. In New Testament times God has “spoken,” revealed Himself, according to what He is as *love*; and this, in keeping with the fact that it was “in Son” He is now made known. May we not only bow before Him in reverence and godly fear, but may our hearts be drawn out to Him in fervent love and adoration.

CHAPTER 3

THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST OVER THE PROPHETS

(HEBREWS 1:1-3)

That which distinguishes the Hebrews' Epistle from all other books is that it has for its subject the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. Its theme is the super-abounding excellency of the new covenant. The method followed by the Holy Spirit in developing His theme is to take Him who is the center and circumference, the life and light of Christianity, even Christ, and hold before Him one object after another. As he does so, elevated, important, venerated, as some of those objects are, yet, in the presence of the "*Son*" their glories fade into utter insignificance.

Someone has suggested an analogy with what is recorded in Matthew 17. There we see Christ upon the holy Mount, transfigured before His disciples; and, as they continue gazing on His flashing excellency, they saw no man "save Jesus only." At first, there appeared standing with Him, Moses and Elijah, and so real and tangible were they, Peter said, "If Thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for Thee, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." But as they looked "a blight cloud overshadowed them." and a Voice was heard saying, "This is My Beloved Son: hear *Him*" (Luke 9:35). How significant are the words that immediately followed: "And when the Voice was passed, Jesus was found *alone*." The glory associated with Moses and Elijah was so eclipsed by the infinitely greater glory connected with Christ, that they faded from view.

Now it is something very much like this that we see here all through the Hebrews' Epistle. The Holy Spirit takes up one object after another, holds each one up as it were in the presence of the all-excellent "Son," and as He does so, their glory is eclipsed, and the Lord Jesus is "found *alone*." The prophets, the angels, Moses, Joshua, the Levitical priesthood, the Old Testament men of faith, each come into view; each is compared with Christ, and each, in turn, fades away before His greater glory. Thus, the very things which Judaism most highly esteemed are shown to be far inferior to what God has now made known in the Christian revelation.

In the opening verses the keynote of the Epistle is at once struck. As is usual

in Scripture, the Spirit has placed the key for us over the very entrance. There we see an antithesis is drawn. There we behold a contrast between Judaism and Christianity. There we are shown the immeasurable superiority of the latter over the former. There we have brought before us the “Son” as the Speaker to whom we must listen, the Object on which to gaze, the Satisfier of the heart, the One through whom God is now perfectly and finally made known. God hath, in these last days, “spoken unto us in Son.” As God is the *Source* from which all blessings flow, *He* is set before us in the very first word of the Epistle. As Christ is the *Channel* through which all blessing comes to us, *He* is mentioned next, and that, in His highest character, as “Son.” The more these opening verses are prayerfully pondered, the more will their wondrous depths, exhaustless contents, and unspeakable preciousness be made apparent.

In the preceding article we pointed out how that in the first two verses of Hebrews a contrast is drawn between Christ and the prophets. Israel regarded them with the highest veneration, and justly so, for they were the instruments Jehovah had condescended to employ in the giving forth of the revelation of His mind and will in Old Testament times. But Divine as were their communications, they were but introductory to something better and grander. The revelation which God made through them was neither complete nor final, as was hinted at in its fragmentary character: “in many parts and in many ways” God, of old, spake to the fathers in the prophets. Over against this, as transcending and excelling the Old Testament revelation, God has, in these last days “spoken to us in Son,” i.e., in Christianity has given a new, perfect, final revelation of Himself.

Thus, the superiority over Judaism of Christianity is here denoted in a twofold way:

First, by necessary implication the latter, not being diverse and fragmentary, is one and complete; it is the grand consummation toward which the other was but introductory; it is the substance and reality, of which the former furnished but the shadows and types.

Second, by the instruments employed: in the one God spoke “*in the prophets*,” in the other “*in (His) Son*.” Just as far as the personal glory of the Son excels that of the prophets, so is the revelation God made through Christ more sublime and exalted than that which He made under Judaism. In the one

He was made known *as light* — *the* requirements, claims, demands of His holiness. In the other, He is manifested as *love* — *the* affections of His heart are displayed.

Now, to prevent the Hebrews from concluding that Christ was nothing more than another *instrument* through which God had “*spoken*,” the Holy Spirit in the verses which we are now to take up, brings before us some of the highest and most blessed of our Savior’s personal excellencies. He there proceeds to exalt the Hebrews’ conception of the Divine Prophet and Founder of the new economy. This He does by bringing into view seven of His wondrous glories. To the contemplation of those we now turn. Let us consider.

1. HIS HEIRSHIP.

“*Whom He hath appointed Heir of all things*” (verse 2).

There are three things here claiming attention. First, the character in which Christ is viewed. Second, His appointment unto the inheritance. Third, the scope of the inheritance.

First, this declaration that God has appointed the Savior “Heir of all things” is similar in scope to that word of Peter’s on the day of Pentecost.

“*Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ*” (Acts 2:36).

In both passages the reference is to the honor which has been conferred upon the Mediator, and in each case the design of speaker or writer was to magnify the Christian revelation by showing the exalted dignity of its Author and Head.

That the title “Heir” is similar in force to “Lord” is clear from Galatians 4:1,

“*The heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all.*”

Yet though there is a similarity between the terms “Heir” and “Lord,” there is also a clear distinction between them; not only so, we may admire the Divine discrimination in the one used in Hebrews 1:2. Strikingly does it follow immediately after the reference to Him as “Son,” in fact furnishing proof thereof, for the son *is the* father’s heir.

The word “heir” suggests two things: dignity and dominion, with the

additional implication of legal title thereto. For its force see Genesis 21:10, 12; Galatians 4:1, etc.

“An ‘heir’ is a successor to his father in all that his father hath. In connection with the Father and the Son, the supreme sovereignty of the One is nowise infringed upon by the supreme sovereignty of the Other — cf. John 5:19. The difference is only in the manner: the Father doeth all *by* the Son, and the Son doeth all *from the* Father” (Dr. Gouge).

The title “Heir” here denotes Christ’s proprietorship. He is the Possessor and Disposer of all things.

Second, unto an inheritance Christ was “appointed” by God. This at once shows us that the “Son” through whom God has revealed Himself, is here viewed not in His abstract Deity, but mediatorially, as incarnate. Only as such could He be “*appointed*” Heir; as God the Son, essentially, He could not be deputed to anything.

This “appointment” was in the eternal counsels of the Godhead. Two things are hereby affirmed: certainty and valid title. Because God has predestined that the Mediator should be “Heir of all things,” His inheritance is most sure and absolutely guaranteed, for “the Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul?” (Isaiah 14:27); hath He not said, “My counsel *shall* stand, and I will do all My pleasure” (Isaiah 46:10)! Again: because God has “appointed” the Mediator “Heir” we are assured of His indubitable *right* to this supreme dignity. That which is said of Christ’s being made priest, in Hebrews 5:5, may also be applied to this other dignity: Christ glorified not Himself to be an Heir, but He that saith to Him, “Thou art My Son, today have I begotten Thee,” also “appointed” Him Heir.

Above we have said, This appointment was in the eternal counsels of the Godhead. With our present passage should be compared Acts 2:23, “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.” Thus there were two chief things to which the Mediator was “appointed”: sufferings (cf. Also 1 Peter 1:19, 20), and glory — cf. 1 Peter 1:11. How this shows us that, from the beginning, *Christ* was the Center of all the Divine counsels. Before a single creature was called into existence, God had appointed an “Heir” to all things, and that Heir was the Lord Jesus. It was the predestined *reward* of His

Voluntary humiliation; He who had not where to lay His head, is now the lawful Possessor of the universe.

This appointment of Christ to the inheritance was mentioned in Old Testament prophecy: “Also I will make Him My Firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth” (Psalm 89:27). “Firstborn” in Scripture refers not so much to primogeniture, as to dignity and inheritance: see Genesis 49:3 for the first occurrence. It is remarkable to observe and most solemn to discover that, in the days of His flesh, Israel recognized Him as such:

“*This is the Heir come let us kill Him, and the inheritance shall be ours*” (Mark 12:7),

was their terrible language.

Third, a few words now on the extent of that Inheritance unto which the Mediator has been deputed: “Whom He hath appointed Heir of *all* things.” The *manifestation* of this is yet future, but confirmation of it was made when the risen Savior said to the disciples, “All power is *given* unto Me in heaven and earth” (Matthew 28:18). At that time we will recall God’s words,

“I will declare the decree (i.e., the “*appointment*”), Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee. Ask of Me, and I shall give Thee the heaven for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession” (Psalm 2:7, 8).

His proprietorship of mankind will be evidenced when He shall

“sit upon the throne of His glory: and before Him shall be gathered all nations; and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats” (Matthew 25:31, 32).

His right to dispose of all will be witnessed at the great white throne. But it is when this world has passed away that His universal Heirship will be fully and eternally displayed: on the new earth shall be “the *throne* of God and of the Lamb” (Revelation 22:1)!

“How rich is our adorable Jesus! The blessed Lord, when He was upon the cross, had nothing. He had not where to lay His head; even His very garments were taken from Him. He was buried in a grave which belonged not to Him or to His family. On earth He was poor to the very last; none so absolutely poor as He. But as man, He is to

inherit all things; as Jesus, God and man in one person. All angels, all human beings upon the earth, all powers in the universe, when asked, ‘Who is Lord of all?’ will answer, ‘Jesus the Son of Mary’” (Saphir).

Such is the reward which God has ordained for the once humiliated One.

But most wonderful of all is that word in Romans 8:16, 17,

“The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirits, that *we* are the children of God; and if children, then *heirs*; heirs of God, and jointheirs with Christ.”

This the angels are not. It is because of their indissoluble union with Him that His people shall also enjoy the Inheritance which God has appointed unto the Son. Herein we discover the Divine discrimination and propriety in here speaking of Christ not as “Lord of all things,” but “Heir.” *We* can never be “joint-lords,” but grace *has* made us “joint-heirs.” Because of this the Redeemer said to the Father, “the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given *them*” (John 17:22).

2. HIS CREATORSHIP.

“By whom also He made the worlds” (verse 2). The Greek term for the last word is “*aionas*,” the primary meaning of which is *ages*. But here, by a metonymy, it seems to be applied to matter, and signifies, the *universe*.

“*Aion* properly denotes time, either past or future; and then comes to signify things formed and done in time — the world.... The *aionas* is plainly the synonym of the *ta panta* (“all things”) in the preceding clause” (Dr. J. Brown).

Two things incline us to this view.

First, other scriptures ascribe creation to the Son: John 1:3; Colossians 1:16.

Second, this gives force to the previous clause: He was, in the beginning, appointed Heir of all things because He was to be their Creator. Colossians 1:16 confirms this: “all things were created by Him and *for* Him.”

“By whom also He made the worlds.” Here is furnished clear proof of the Mediator’s Diety: only *God* can create. This also is brought in for the purpose of emphasizing the immeasurable value of the new revelation which God has made. Attention is focused on the One in whom and through whom God has

spoken in the “last days.” Three things are told us in verse 2 concerning Christ: first, we have His person — He is the “Son”; second, His dignity and dominion — He is the “Heir of all things”; third, His work — He has “made the worlds,” heaven and earth. If, then, His dignity be so exalted, if His glory be so great, what must not be the word of such a “Son”! what the fullness of truth which God has made known to His people by Him!

3. HIS EFFULGENCY.

“Who being the brightness of (His) glory” (verse 3). In this verse the Holy Spirit continues to set forth the excellencies of Christ, and in the same order as in the preceding one. First, the Divine dignity of His person, His relation to the Father — He is the Brightness of His glory. The Greek verb from which “brightness” is derived, signifies “to send forth brightness or light,” and the noun here used, such brightness as cometh from light, as the sunbeams issuing from the sun. The term is thus used metaphorically. So ably has this been developed by Dr. Gouge we transcribe from his excellent commentary of 1650:

“No resemblance taken from any other creature can more fully set out the mutual relation between the Father and the Son:

1. “The brightness issuing from the sun is the same nature that the sun is — cf. John 10:30.
2. It is of as long continuance as the sun: never was the sun without the brightness of it — cf. John 1:1.
3. The brightness cannot be separated from the sun: the sun may as well be made no sun, as have the brightness thereof severed from it — cf. Proverbs 8:30.
4. This brightness though from the sun is not the sun itself — cf. John 8:42.
5. The sun and the brightness are distinct from each other: the one is not the other — cf. John 5:17.
6. All the glory of the sun is this brightness — cf. John 17:5; 2 Corinthians 4:6.
7. The light which the sun giveth the world is by this brightness — cf. John 14:9.... Thus the Son is no whit inferior to the Father, but

every way His equal. He was brightness, the brightness of His Father, yea, also the brightness of His Father's glory. Whatever excellency soever was in the Father, the same likewise was in the Son, and that in the most transplendent manner. Glory sets out excellency; brightness of glory, the excellency of excellency."

That which is in view in this third item of our passage so far transcends the grasp of the finite mind that it is impossible to give it adequate expression in words. Christ is the irradiation of God's glory. The Mediator's relation to the Godhead is like that of the rays to the sun itself. We may conceive of the sun in the firmament, yet shining not: were there no rays, we should not see the sun. So, apart from Christ, the *brightness* of God's "glory" could not be perceived by us. Without Christ, man is in the dark, utterly in the dark concerning God. It is in Christ that God is *revealed*.

4. HIS BEING.

"The express image of His person," or, more literally, "the impress of His substance" (verse 3).

The Greek for "express image" is a single word, and the verb from which it is derived signifies "to engrave," and in its noun form "that which is engraved," as the stamp on a coin, the print pressed on paper, the mark made by a seal. Nothing can be more like the original mold or seal than the image pressed out on the clay or wax, the one carrying the very form or features of the other. The Old Testament saints did not perfectly "express" God, nor can angels, for they are but finite creatures; but Christ, being Himself God, could, and did. All that God is, in His nature and character, is expressed and manifested, absolutely and perfectly, by the incarnate Son.

"And the very impress of His substance." Here again we are faced with that which is difficult to comprehend, and harder still to express. Perhaps we may be helped to get the thought by comparing 1 Timothy 6:16 with Colossians 1:15:

"*Dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see,*"

"*Who* is the image of the invisible God." All true knowledge of God must come from His approach unto us, for we cannot by "reaching" find Him out. The approach must come from *His* side, and it *has* come,

“the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him” (John 1:18).

“The very impress of His substance.” This is the nearest approach to defining God’s essence or essential existence. The word “substance” means essential being or essential existence; but how little we know about this! God — self-existent: One who never had a beginning, yet full of all that we know of blessed attributes. And Christ, the incarnate Son, is the very “impress,” as it were, of that substance. As we have said, the original term is taken from the impress of a seal. Though we had never seen the seal we might, from beholding the impress of it (that which is exactly like it), form a true and accurate idea of the seal itself. So Christ is the Impress of the substance of God, the One in whom all the Divine perfections are found. Though essentially Light, He is also the Outshining of the “Light”; though in Himself essentially God, He is also the visible Representation of God. Being “with God” and being God, He is also the Manifestation of God; so that by and through Him we learn what God is.

“The very impress of His substance.” It is not enough to *read* Scripture, nor even to compare passage with passage; nor have we done all when we have prayed for light thereon; there must also be meditation, *prolonged meditation*. Of whom were these words spoken? Of the “Son,” but as incarnate, i.e., as the Son of man; of Him who entered this world by mysterious and miraculous conception in the virgin’s womb. Men doubt and deny this, and no wonder, when they have nothing but a corrupt reason to guide them. How can a sin-darkened understanding lay hold of, believe, and *love* the truth that the great God should hide Himself in a frail human nature! That Omnipotence should be concealed in a Servant’s form! That the Eternal One should become an Infant of days! This is the “great mystery” of godliness, but to the family of God is “without controversy.”

But if the human mind, unaided, is incapable of grasping the fact of the great God hiding *Himself* in human form, how much less can it apprehend that that very hiding was a *manifestation*, that the concealing was a revealing of Himself — the Invisible becoming visible, the Infinite becoming cognizable to the finite. Yet such it was: “And the very impress of His substance.” *Who was?* The incarnate Son, the Man Christ Jesus. Of *whose* “substance?” Of God’s! But how could that be? God is *eternal*, and Christ died! True, yet He

manifested His Godhead in the very way that He died. He died as none other ever did: *He* “laid down” His life. More, He manifested His Godhead by rising again: “destroy this temple” (His body) said He, “And I will raise it again”; and He did. His Godhead is now manifested in that “He is alive forever more.”

But God is *immutable* and *self-sufficient*, and Christ *hungered and thirsted*, True; because He was made “in all things like unto His brethren,” and because that from actual experience of these things, He might be able to “succor them that are tempted.” Moreover, He manifested *His* self-sufficiency by miraculously feeding the five thousand, and by His absolute power over all Nature — ruling the winds and waves, blasting the fig tree, etc.

But God is *Lord of all*, and Christ was “Led as a lamb to the slaughter”: He seemed so helpless when arrested and when hanging upon the cross! But appearances are deceptive; sometimes it is a greater thing to withhold the putting forth of power than to exert it! Yet glimpses of *His* Lordship flashed forth even then. See Him in the Garden, and those sent to apprehend Him prostrate on the ground (John 18:6)! See Him again on the Cross, putting forth His power and “plucking a brand from the burning”: it was the power of God, for nothing short of *that* can free one of Satan’s captives! Yes, Christ *was*, ever was, the “very impress of His substance,” “for in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9).

5. HIS ADMINISTRATION.

“Upholding all things by the word of His power” (verse 3). The Spirit of truth continues to describe the dignity and majesty of Him in whom God now “speaks” to us. Here is a declaration that is unequivocal in meaning and unlimited in its scope. Against the statement “by whom” *God* “made the worlds,” it might be argued that, after all, the “Son” was only a minister, an agent whom God employed for that great work. In reply it would be sufficient to point out that there is no hint in Scripture of God ever having assigned to a mere creature, no matter how exalted his rank, a work which was in any wise comparable with the stupendous task of “making the worlds.” But as if to anticipate such an objection, to show that the “Son” is high above the noblest and most honored of God’s ministers, it is here affirmed that “He upholdeth all things by the word of His power,” that is, His

own power; we may add that the Greek reads “His own” as in Matthew 16:26 — “his own soul”; and “His own house” (Hebrews 3:6). The “upholding” of all things is a *Divine* work.

We have said that the term “Heir” connotes two things: dignity and dominion. In the opening clauses of verse 3 the dignity of the Mediator is set forth; here, it is His dominion which is brought before us. As it was said that He is appointed Heir of “all things,” so are we now told that He upholds “all things” — all things that are visible or invisible, in heaven or earth, or under the earth: “all things” not only creatures, but all events.

The Greek word for “upholding” means to “carry or support,” see Mark 2:3; it also signifies “to energize or impel,” see 2 Peter 1:21. It is the word used in the Septuagint for “moved” in Genesis 1:2. That which is in view in this fifth glory of Christ is His *Divine providence*.

“The term ‘uphold’ seems to refer both to preservation and government. ‘By Him the worlds were made’ — their materials were called into being, and arranged in comely order: and by Him, too, they are preserved from running into confusion, or reverting back into nothing. The whole universe hangs on His arm; His unsearchable wisdom and boundless power are manifested in governing and directing the complicated movements of animate and inanimate, rational, and irrational beings, to the attainment of His own great and holy purposes; and He does this by the word of His power, or by His powerful word. All this is done without effort or difficulty. He speaks, and it is done; He commands, and it stands fast” (Dr. J. Brown).

What a proof that the “Son” is *God!*

He who appeared on earth in *servant* form, is the Sustainer of the universe. He is Lord over all. He has been given “power over all flesh” (John 17:2). The Roman legions who destroyed Jerusalem were “*His* armies” (Matthew 22:7). The angels are “*His* angels,” see Matthew 13:41; 24:31. Every movement in heaven and earth is directed by Jesus Christ: “by Him all things consist” (Colossians 1:17). He is not only at the head of the spiritual realm, but he “upholds *all things*.” All movements, developments, actions, are borne up and directed by the word of His power. Glimpses of this flashed forth even in the days of His flesh. The winds and the waves were subservient to His

word. Sickness and disease fled before His command. Demons were subject to His authoritative bidding. Even the dead came forth in response to His mighty fiat. And all through the ages, today, the whole of creation is directed by the will and word of its Heir, Maker, and Upholder.

6. HIS EXPIATION.

“When He had by Himself purged our sins” (verse 3). Here is something still more wondrous. Striking is it to behold the point at which this statement is introduced. The cross was the great stumbling-block unto the Jews; but so far was the apostle from apologizing for the death of the “Son,” he here includes it as among His highest glories. And such indeed it was. The putting away of the sins of His people was an even greater and grander work than was the making of the worlds or the upholding of all things by His mighty power. His sacrifice for sins has brought greater glory to the Godhead and greater blessing to the redeemed than have His works of creation or providence.

“Why has this wonderful and glorious Being, in whom all things are summed up, and who is before all things the Father’s delight and the Father’s glory; why has this infinite light, this infinite power, this infinite majesty come down to our poor earth? For what purpose? To shine? To show forth the splendor of His majesty? To teach heavenly wisdom? To rule with just and holy right? No. He came to *purge our sins*. What height of glory! What depths of abasement! Infinite in His majesty, and infinite in His self-humiliation, and in the depths of His love. What a glorious Lord! And what an awful sacrifice of unspeakable love, to purge our sins by Himself”! (Saphir).

“By Himself purged our sins.” This has reference to the atonement which He has made. The metaphor of “purging” is borrowed from the language of the Mosaic economy — cf. 9:22. The Greek word is sometimes put for the *means* of purging (John 2:6), sometimes for the *act* itself (Mark 1:44). Both are included here: the *merits* of Christ’s sacrifice, and the *efficacy* thereof. The tense of the verb, the aorist, denotes a *finished* work, literally, “having purged.” Another has suggested an additional and humbling thought which is pointed by this metaphor — the *filth* of our sins, which needed “purging” away. The contrastive and superlative value and efficacy of Christ’s sacrifice is thus set before us. *His* blood is here distinguished from that of the legal and ceremonial purifications. None of them could purge away sins — Hebrews

10:4. All they did was to sanctify to “the purifying of the flesh” (Hebrews 9:13), *not* to the “purifying of the *soul!*”

“The manner and power of this purification form the subject of this whole Epistle. But in this short expression, ‘by Himself He purged our sins,’ all is summed up. By Himself; the Son of God, the eternal Word in humanity. Himself: the priest, who is sacrifice, yea, altar, and everything that is needed for full and real expiation and reconciliation. Here is fulfilled what was prefigured on the day of atonement, when an atonement was made for Israel, to cleanse them from all sins, that they may be clean from all their sins before the Lord (Leviticus 16:30). Thus our great High Priest saith unto us, Ye are clean this day before God from all your sins. He is the fulfillment and the reality, because He is the Son of God. ‘The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin’ (1 John 1:7). The church is purchased by the blood of Him who is God (Acts 20:28, with His own blood). Behold the perfection of the sacrifice in the infinite dignity of the incarnate Son. Sin is taken away. Oh, what a wonderful thing is this!” (Saphir).

7. HIS EXALTATION.

“Sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high” (verse 3). Unspeakably blessed is this. The One who descended into such unfathomable depths of shame, who humbled Himself and became “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross,” has been highly exalted above all principality and power, and dominion, and every name which is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come. All-important is it, too, to mark carefully the connection between these two wondrous statements: “*when* He had by Himself purged our sins, *sat down* on the right hand of the Majesty on high.” We cannot rightly think of the God-man as *where* He now is, without realizing that the very circumstance of His being there, shows, in itself, that “our sins” are put away for ever. The present possession of glory by the Mediator is the conclusive evidence that my sins *are* put away. What blessed connection is there, then between our peace of soul, and His glory!

“Sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.” Three things are here denoted.

First, high honor: “sitting,” in Scripture, is often a posture of dignity, when

superiors sit before inferiors: see Job 29:7, 8; Daniel 7:9, 10; Revelation 5:13.

Second, it denotes settled continuance. In Genesis 49:24 Jacob said to Joseph that his “bow *sat* in strength,” fittingly rendered “abode in strength.” So in Leviticus 8:35, “abode” is literally “sit.” Though He will vacate that seat when He descends into the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16) to receive His blood-bought people unto Himself, yet it is clear from Revelation 22:1 that this position of highest honor and glory belongs to Christ for ever and ever.

Third, it signifies rest, cessation from His sacrificial services and sufferings. It has often been pointed out that no provision was made for Israel’s priests to sit down: there was no chair in the Tabernacle’s furniture. And why? Because their work was never completed — see Hebrews 10:1, 3. But Christ’s work of expiation *is* completed; on the cross He declared, “*It is finished*” (John 19:30). In proof of this, He is now seated on High.

The term “*the Majesty on high*” refers to God Himself. “Majesty” signifies such greatness as makes one to be honored of all and preferred above all. Hence it is a delegated title, proper to kings, cf. 2 Peter 1:16. In our passage it denotes God’s supreme sovereignty. It is brought in here to emphasize and magnify the exaltation of the Savior — elevated to the highest possible dignity and position. The “right hand” speaks of power (Exodus 15:6), and honor (1 Kings 2:19). “*On high*” is, in the Greek, a compound word, used nowhere else in the New Testament; literally, it signifies, “the highest height,” the most elevated exaltation that could be conceived of or is possible. Thus we are shown that the highest seat in the universe now belongs to Him who once had not where to lay His head.

It is to be observed that in Hebrews 10:2, 3 the Holy Spirit has, briefly, set forth the three great offices of the Mediator.

First, His *prophetic*: He is the final Spokesman of God.

Second, His *kingly*: His royal majesty — upholding all things, and that, by the word of His power, which affirms His absolute sovereignty.

Third, His *priestly*: the two parts of which are expiation of His people’s sins and intercession at God’s right hand.

In conclusion, it should be pointed out how that everything in these opening verses of Hebrews is in striking contrast from what Israel enjoyed under the

old economy. They had prophets; Christ is the final Spokesman of Diety. They were His people; He, God's "Son." Abraham was constituted "heir of the world" (Romans 4:13); Christ is the "Heir" of the universe. Moses made the tabernacle; Christ, "*the* worlds." The law furnished "*a* shadow of good things to come"; Christ is the Brightness of God's glory. In Old Testament times Israel enjoyed theophanic manifestations of Christ; now, He is revealed as the Image of God's person. Moses bore the burden of Israel (Numbers 11:11, 12); Christ, "upholds *all* things." The sacrifices of old took not sins away; Christ's sacrifice did. Israel's high priests never sat down; Christ has.

CHAPTER 4
CHRIST SUPERIOR TO ANGELS
(HEBREWS 1:4-14)

One of the first prerequisites for a spiritual workman who is approved of God, is that he must prayerfully and constantly aim at a “rightly dividing” of the Word of Truth (2 Timothy 2:15). Preeminently is this the case when he takes up those passages treating of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Unless we “rightly divide” or definitely distinguish between what is said of Him in His essential Being, and what is predicated of Him in His official character, we are certain to err, and err grievously. By His “essential Being” is meant what He always was and must ever remain as God the Son. By His “official character” reference is made to what may be postulated of Him as Mediator, that is, as God incarnate, the God-man. It is the *same* blessed person in each case, but looked at in different relationships.

It is failure to thus rightly divide what is said in the Word of Truth concerning the Lord Jesus which has caused unregenerate men to entertain most dishonoring and degrading views of Him, and has led some regenerate men to err in their interpretation of many passages. As illustrations of the former we may cite some of the more devout unitarians, who, appealing to such statements as “My Father is greater than I” (John 14:28),

“when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself *be subject* unto Him that put all things under Him” (1 Corinthians 15:28), etc.,

have argued that though the Son be superior to all creatures, yet is He inferior to the Father. But the passages cited do not relate to the “essential Being” of Christ, but speak of Him in His Mediatorial character. As an example of the latter we may mention how that such an able exegete as Dr. John Brown interprets the second half of Hebrews 1:4 as referring to the essential Being of the Savior.

Thus it will be seen that that to which we have drawn attention above is something more than an arbitrary theological distinction; it vitally affects the forming of right views of Christ’s person and a sound interpretation of many passages of Holy Writ. Now in His Word God has not drawn the artificial lines which man is fond of making. That is to say, the essential and the

official glories of Christ are often found intermingling, rather than being separately classified. A case in point occurs in the first three verses of Hebrews 1. First we are told that, at the close of the Mosaic dispensation, God spoke to the Hebrews by (in) His Son. Obviously this was upon earth, *alter the* Word had become flesh. Thus the reference is to Christ in His *Mediatorial* character. Second, “whom He hath appointed Heir of all things” manifestly views Him in the same character, for, in His essential Being no such “appointment” was needed — as God the Son “all things” *are* His. But when we come to the third clause, “*by* whom also He made the worlds” there is clearly a change of viewpoint. The worlds were made long before the Son became incarnate, therefore *this* postulate must be understood of Him in His eternal and essential Being.

The inquiring mind will naturally ask, *Why* this change of viewpoint? Why introduce this higher glory of the Son in the midst of a list of His Mediatorial honors? — for it is clear that the Holy Spirit *returns* to these in the clauses which follow in verse 3. The answer is not far to seek: it is to *exalt* the Mediator in our esteem; it is to show us that the One who appeared on earth in Servant form was possessed of a dignity and majesty which should bow our hearts in worship before Him. He who “by Himself purged our sins” is the same that “made the worlds.” The crucified was the Creator! But this is not the wonder set forth in this passage. In order to be crucified it was needful for the Creator to become man. The Son of God (though never ceasing to be such) became the Son of man, and this Man has been exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on high. So beautifully has the late Mr. Saphir written on this point we transcribe from him at length: —

“Is it more wonderful to see the Son of God in Bethlehem as a little babe, or to see the Son of man at the right hand of the Father? Is it more marvelous to see the Counselor, the Wonderful, the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace, the Everlasting Father, a child born unto us, and a Son given unto us — or to see the Son of man, and in Him the dust of earth, seated at the right hand of God? The high priest entered once a year into the holy of holies, but who would have ventured to abide there, or take up his position next to the cherubim, where the glory of the Most High was revealed? But Jesus, the Son of man, ascended, and by His own power, and in His own right, as well as by the appointment of the Father, He is enthroned, crowned

with glory and majesty. On the wings of omnipotent love He came down from heaven, but to return to heaven, omnipotence and love were not sufficient. It was comparatively easy (if I may use this expression of the most stupendous miracle) for the Son of God to humble Himself, and to come down to this earth; but to return to heaven, it was necessary for Him to be baptized with the baptism of suffering, and to die the death upon the accursed tree. Not as He came down did He ascend again; for it was necessary that He who in infinite grace had taken our position should bow and remove our burden and overcome our enemies. Therefore was His soul straightened to be baptized with His baptism; and therefore, from the first moment that He appeared in Jerusalem, He knew that the temple of His sacred body was to be broken, and He looked forward to the decease which He should accomplish on that mount. Not as He came did He ascend again; for He came as the Son of God; but He returned not merely as the Son of God, but as the Son of God *incarnate*, the Son of David, our brother and our Lord. Not as He came did He ascend again; for He came alone, the Good Shepherd, moved with boundless compassion, when He thought of the lost and perishing sheep in the wilderness; but He returned with the saved sheep upon His shoulders, rejoicing, and bringing it to a heavenly and eternal home. He went back again, not merely triumphing, but He who had gone forth weeping, bearing precious seed, who Himself had been sown, by His sacrifice unto death, returned, bringing His sheaves with Him.... It was when He had by Himself purged our sins that He sat down at the right hand of God; by the power of His blood He entered into the holy of holies; as the Lamb slain God exalted Him, and gave Him a name which is above every name.”

Thus that which is prominent, yea dominant, in this opening chapter in Hebrews is the *Mediatorial* glories of the Son. True, His essential glory is referred to in verse 2: “By whom also He made the worlds,” but, as already stated, this is introduced for the purpose of exalting the Mediator in our esteem, to prevent us forming an unworthy and erroneous conception of His person. The One who “by Himself purged our sins” is the same person as made the worlds, it is He who is “the Brightness of God’s glory, and the

express Image of His substance.” What ground, what cause have we for exclaiming,

“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, and wisdom and strength, and honor and glory, and blessing” (Revelation 5:12)?

To this the God-man is entitled. Because of this, God exalted Him to His own right hand. Having shown His infinite elevation above the prophets we have next revealed His immeasurable superiority over the angels.

“Being made so much better than the angels, as He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they” (verse 4).

Before attempting to expound the details of this verse, it may be well for us first to inquire, *Why* does the Holy Spirit here introduce the “angels?” What was His particular purpose in showing Christ’s superiority over them? To these questions a threefold answer, at least, may be returned:—

First, because the chief design of the Holy Spirit in this Epistle is to exalt the Lord Jesus, as the God-man, far above every name and dignity. In the next section (chapter 3) He shows the superiority of Christ over Moses. But to have commenced with Moses, would not have gone back far enough, for Moses the mediator, received the law by “the disposition of angels” (Acts 7:53). Inasmuch as angels are described in Holy Writ as “excelling in strength,” and thus as far raised in the scale of being above man, it was necessary, in order to establish Christ’s superiority over *all* created beings, to show that He was much better than they. To prove that God the Son was superior to angels were superfluous, but to show that the Son of man has been exalted high above them was essential if the Hebrews were to ascribe to Him the glory which is His due.

Second, the object before the Holy Spirit in this Epistle in presenting the supreme dignity and dominion of the Mediator was to demonstrate the immeasurable superiority of Christianity over Judaism. The method He has followed here is very striking and convincing. The old order or economy was given by “the disposition of *angels*” (Acts 7:53). Exactly what this means perhaps we cannot be quite sure, though there are several scriptures which throw light thereon, for in Deuteronomy 33:2 we read: “The Lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; He shined forth from Mount Paran,

and He came with ten thousand of saints” — “holy ones,” i.e., “angels.” Again, Psalm 68:17 tells us,

“The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai.”

Finally, Galatians 3:19 says,

“Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed would come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained *by angels* in the hand of a mediator.”

Thus, the glory of Jehovah at Sinai (the beginning of the Mosaic economy) was an angelic one, and the employment of angels in the giving of the law stamped a dignity and importance upon it. But the legal dispensation has been set aside by a new and higher glory revealed in “*the Son*,” and Hebrews 1 shows us the angels subservient to Him, and not only so, closes with the statement that they are now the *servants* of the present “heirs of salvation!”

Third, it is necessary to show the superiority of Christ (the Center and Life of Christianity) over the angels, because the Jews regarded them as the most exalted of all God’s creatures. And rightly so. It was as “the Angel of the covenant” (Malachi 3:1), the “Angel of the Lord” (Exodus 3:2), that Jehovah had appeared most frequently unto them. From earliest times angelic ministration had been a chief instrument of Divine power and medium of communication. It was “the Angel of the Lord” who delivered Hagar (Genesis 16:7), and who appeared to Abraham. Angels delivered Lot (Genesis 19:1). It was the Lord’s “angel” who protected Israel on the pass-over-night (Numbers 20:16). Thus the Jews esteemed angels more highly than man. To be told that the Messiah Himself, God the Son incarnate, had become *man* made Him, in their eyes, *inferior* to the angels. Therefore, was it necessary to show them from their own Scriptures that the Mediator, God manifest *in flesh*, possessed a dignity and glory as far excelling that of the angels as the heavens are higher than the earth.

“Being made so much better than the angels.” This verse may be termed the text, and the remainder of the chapter, the sermon — the exposition and application of it. The first key to its meaning and scope lies in its first two words (which are but one in the Greek), “being made.” Grammatically it seems almost a blemish to open a new paragraph with a participle; in truth, it

demonstrates the perfection of the Spirit's handiwork. It illustrates a noticeable difference which ever distinguishes the living works of God from the lifeless productions of man — contrast the several parts of a chair or table with the various members of the human body: in the one the several sections of it are so put together that its pieces are quite distinct, and the joints between them clearly perceptible; in the other, the ending of one member is lost in the beginning of the next. Our analogy may be commonplace, but it serves to illustrate one of the great differences between the writings of men and the Scriptures of God. The latter is a *living* organism, a body of truth, vitalized by the breath of God!

Though verse 4 begins a distinct section of the Epistle it is closely and inseparably united to the introductory verses which precede, and more especially to the final clauses of verse 3. Unless this be kept in mind we are certain to err in our interpretation of it. At the close of verse 3, Christ is presented as the One who has purged the sins of His people, in other words, as the Son of man, God incarnate, and it was *as such* He has been exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on high. There is now a Man in the glory. And it is this *Man*, the “second Man (1 Corinthians 15:47) who has been made better than the angels,” and who has obtained “a more excellent name than they.” It is *this* which the opening participle makes clear, being designed to carry our thoughts back to what has been said at the close of verse 3.

“Being made so much better than the angels.” To appreciate the force of this we must, briefly, consider the *excellency* of the “angels.” Angels are the highest of all God's creatures: heaven is their native home (Matthew 24:36). They “excel in strength” (Psalm 103:20). They are God's “ministers” (Psalm 104:4). Like a king's gentlemen-in-waiting, they are said to “minister *unto* the Ancient of days” (Daniel 7:10). They are “holy” (Matthew 25:31). Their countenances are like “lightning,” and their raiment is as white as snow (Matthew 28:3). They surround God's throne (Revelation 5:11). They carry on every development of nature.

“God does not move and rule the world merely by laws and principles, by unconscious and inanimate powers, but by living beings full of light and love. His angels are like flames of fire; they have charge over the winds, and the earth, and the trees, and the sea (the book of Revelation shows this A.W.P.). Through the angels He

carries on the government of the world” (Saphir).

But glorious as the angels are, elevated as is their station, great as is their work, they are, nevertheless, in subjection to the Lord Jesus *as Man*; for in His human nature God has enthroned Him high above all.

“The apostle in the former verses proves Christ to be more excellent than the excellentest of men; even such as God extraordinarily inspired with his holy Spirit, and to whom he immediately revealed his will that they might make it known to others. Such were the priests, prophets, and heads of the people. But these, as well as all other men, notwithstanding their excellencies, were on earth mortal. Therefore he ascendeth higher, and calleth out the celestial and immortal spirits, which are called angels. Angels are of all mere creatures the most excellent. If Christ then be more excellent than the most excellent, He must needs be the most excellent of all. This excellency of Christ is so set out, as thereby the glory and royalty of His kingly office is magnified. For this is the first of Christ’s offices which the apostle doth in particular exemplify: in which exemplification He giveth many proofs of Christ’s divine nature, and showeth Him to be man as He is God also; and in the next chapter, so to be God as He is man also: ‘like to his brethren’ (Hebrews 2:17)” (Dr. Gouge).

“Being made so much better than the angels.” Through Isaiah God had promised that the “Man of sorrows” who was to be “cut off out of the land of the living” for the transgression of His people, should be richly rewarded for His travail:

“Therefore, will I divide Him a portion with the great and He shall divide the spoil with the strong” (Isaiah 53:12).

In Psalm 68:18, He is represented as ascending “on high,” and that, as a mighty conqueror leading captives in His train and receiving gifts for men.

In Philippians 2 we learn that He who took upon Him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men, who became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross,

“God also hath highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name, that at (in) the name of Jesus (given to Him at

His incarnation) *every knee* should bow, of things *in heaven and in earth, and under the earth*” (verses 9-11).

He has been “made so much better than the angels” first of all, by the *position* accorded Him — He is seated on the right hand of the Majesty on High: angels are “*round about* the throne” (Revelation 5:11), the Lamb is *on* the Throne!

“As He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they” (verse 4).

“*We* who live in the West think a name of slight importance: but God always taught His people to attach great importance to names. The first petition in the Lord’s prayer is, ‘Hallowed be Thy name;’ and all the blessings and privileges which God bestowed upon Israel are summed up in this, that God revealed unto them His name. The name is the *outward expression* and the pledge and seal of all that a person really and substantially is; and when it says that the Son of God has received a higher name than angels, it means that, not only in dignity, but in kind, He *is* high above them” (A. Saphir).

“The descriptive designation given to Christ Jesus, when contrasted to that given to angels, marks Him as belonging to a higher order of beings. Their name is created spirits; His name is the only-begotten Son of God” (Dr. J. Brown).

“*As* He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than *they*” (verse 4). When commenting on the first part of this verse we endeavored to show that the reference is to the Father rewarding the Mediator for His sacrificial work, and attention was directed to the parallel supplied in Philippians 2:9-11. That passage begins by saying: “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him,” and this finds its counterpart here in “being made so much better than the angels.” Then follows the statement “*and* hath given Him a name which is above every name,” the parallel being found in “*a* more excellent name than *they*,” i.e., the highest of all created beings. Finally, His *right* to this exalted name is to be owned by every knee bowing before it; so also the last clause of Hebrews 1:4 affirms Christ’s right to His more excellent name. Is it not more than a coincidence that the corresponding passage to Hebrews 1:4 is found in one of the apostle *Paul’s* Epistles!

“*He* hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.” This affirms the right of Christ to His more excellent name. The English rendering here seems slightly misleading. The Greek for “*He* hath by inheritance obtained” is a single word. It is a technical term relating to legal title, secure tenure. The right of inheritance which Sarah would not that the son of the bondwoman should have, is expressed by this word: “shall not the heir” (Galatians 4:30) “Shall not by inheritance obtain,” or, “shall not inherit.” Christ’s right to His supreme dignity is twofold: first, because of the union between His humanity and essential Deity; Second, as a reward for His mediatorial sufferings and unparalleled obedience to His Father.

“For unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art My Son?” (verse 5).

Having affirmed the superiority of Christ over angels, the Holy Spirit now supplies proof of this, drawing His evidence from the Old Testament Scriptures. The first passage appealed to is found in the second Psalm, and the manner in which it is introduced should be noted. It is put in the form of a question. This was to stir up the minds of those who read the Epistle. It is worthy of remark that this interrogative form of instruction is found quite frequently in the Pauline Epistles e.g., 1 Corinthians 9:4-10, Galatians 3:1-5 — and much more so than any other New Testament writer. This method of teaching was often employed by the Lord Jesus, as a glance at the Gospels will show. Observe, too, how the question asked in our text assumes that the Hebrews were *familiar* with the entire contents of Scripture. The interrogative way of presenting this quotation was tantamount to saying: Judge for yourselves whether what I say be true-where in the Sacred Writings is there any record of God’s addressing an angel as His “Son”? They could not thus judge unless they were well versed in the Word.

“Unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art My Son”? The answer is, To none of them. Nowhere in the Old Testament Scriptures is there a single instance of God’s addressing an angel as “My Son.” It is true that in Job 38:7 the angels are termed “sons of God,” but this simply has reference to their *creation*. Adam is termed a “son of God” (Luke 3:38) in the same sense. So, regenerated saints are “sons of God” by virtue of new creation. But no *individual* angel was ever addressed by the Father as “My Son.” The Lord Jesus was, both at His baptism and His transfiguration. Herein we perceive

not only His pre-eminence, but His uniqueness.

“Unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee” (verse 5)?

This latter expression has occasioned not a little difficulty to some of the commentators, and, in the past, has been made the battleground of fierce theological fights. The issue raised was “the eternal *Son-ship* of Christ.” Those affirming understood “this day (or “today”) the Greek is the same as in Luke 23:43 — to be *timeless*, and “this day have I begotten Thee” to refer to the eternal generation of the Son by the Father. Much of the fighting was merely a strife “about *words*,” which was to no profit. Though Scripture clearly teaches the Godhead and absolute Deity of the Son (Hebrews 1:8, etc.) and affirms His eternity (John 1:1, etc.), it nowhere speaks of His eternal “son-ship,” and where Scripture is silent it behooves us to be silent too. Certainly *this* verse does not teach the eternal son-ship of Christ, for if we allow the apostle to define his own terms, we read in Hebrews 4:7, “*He limiteth a certain day, saying in David, Today,*” etc. This, it appears to us, illustrates the Spirit’s foresight in thus preventing “*today*” in Hebrews 1:5 being understood as a timeless, limitless “day” — eternity.

Further proof that the Spirit is not here treating of the essential Deity or eternal son-ship of Christ is seen by a glance at the passage from which these words are taken. Hebrews 1:5 contains far more than the mere quotation of a detached sentence from the Old Testament. The reference is to the second Psalm, and if the reader will turn to and read through it, he should at once see the striking propriety in the apostle’s reference to it here. This is the *first* Old Testament passage quoted in Hebrews, and like the first of anything in Scripture claims special attention because of its prime importance. Coming as it does right after what has been said in verse 4, namely, that He who, positionally, had been made lower than the angels, is now exalted above them, an appeal to the 2nd Psalm was most appropriate. That has two divisions and treats of the humiliation and exaltation of the Messiah! In verse 3 counsel is taken against Him; in verses 10-12, kings and judges are bidden to pay homage to Him.

Now it is in this 2nd Psalm that the Father is heard saying to the Messiah, “Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee” (verse 7). The whole context shows that it is the Father addressing the Son in time, not eternity; on

earth, not in heaven; in His mediatorial character, not His essential Being. Nor is there any difficulty in the “today have I begotten Thee,” the Holy Spirit having explained its force in Acts 13:33. There the apostle declared to the Jews that God had fulfilled *the* promise made unto the fathers, namely, that He had “raised up Jesus,” i.e. Had sent the Messiah unto them. Acts 13:33 has no reference to Christ’s resurrection, but relates to His incarnation and manifestation to Israel — cf. Deuteronomy 18:18, “I will *raise them up* a Prophet”; also Acts 3:26. It was not until Acts 13:34, 35 that the apostle brought in His resurrection “raised Him up *from the dead*.” Thus in Acts 13 Psalm 2 is cited to prove the Father had sent the Savior to Israel and His promise so to do had been fulfilled in the Divine incarnation. We may add that the word “again” in Acts 13:33 is not found in the Greek and is omitted in the Revised Version! If further proof be needed that the “*This day* have I begotten Thee” refers to the *incarnation* of Christ, Luke 2:11 supplies it, “unto you is born *this day* in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord” — could so much be said of any but the only-begotten Son of God? Thus “*this day*” is here, by an angel’s voice expressly referred to the day of the Savior’s birth.

“This day have I begotten Thee.” This, then, is another verse which teaches the *virgin-birth* of Christ! His humanity was “begotten” by God the Father.

Though the Son of man, He was not begotten by a man. Because His very humanity was begotten by the Father it was said unto His mother,

“That holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

“And again, I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son” (verse 5).

The opening “and” connects this second quotation with the first; what follows clearly and conclusively fixes the scope of the first part of this verse. Here is indubitable proof that the Holy Spirit is speaking of Christ not according to His essential glory, but in His mediatorial character, as incarnate. Had the first part of verse 5 referred to the *eternal* relationship of the Son of the Father as practically all of the older (Calvinistic) commentators insist, it would surely be meaningless to add the quotation which follows, “I *will be*” does not take us back into the timeless past! Nor was there any occasion for the first Person of the Trinity to assure the Second

that He would be “*a Father unto Him.*” Clearly, it is the Father accepting and owning as His Son the One whom the world had cast out.

“*And again, I will be to Him a Father and He shall be to Me a Son.*” This second quotation is from 2 Samuel 7:12-17, which forms part of one of the great Messianic predictions of the Old Testament. Like all prophecy it had a minor and major scope and receives a partial and ultimate fulfillment. Its first reference was to Solomon, who, in many respects, was a remarkable type of the Lord Jesus. But its chief application was to Christ Himself. That Solomon did not exhaust its fulfillment is clear enough from the language of verse 13 itself, for, as Dr. Brown has pointed out,

“It refers to a son to be *raised up* after David had gone to be with his fathers, whereas Solomon was not only born but crowned before David’s death; and the person to be raised up, whosoever he is, was to be settled ‘in God’s house and kingdom,’ and his throne was to be ‘established forevermore’, — words certainly not applicable, in their full extent, to Solomon.”

Doubtless none would have argued for an exclusive reference to Solomon had it not been for the words which follow in 2 Samuel 7:14. But competent Hebrew scholars tell us that “if he commit iniquity” may fairly be rendered “whosoever shall commit iniquity” and find their parallel in Psalm 89:30-33.

“I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son.” This was God’s promise concerning the Messiah, David’s Son a thousand years before He appeared on earth. “*I will be to Him a Father.*” I will *own* Him as My Son, I will *treat* Him accordingly. This He did. In death He would not suffer Him to see corruption. He raised Him from the dead. He exalted Him to His own right hand. “And He shall be to Me a Son”: He shall act as such. And He did. He ever spake of Him as “Father,” He obeyed Him even unto death. He committed His spirit into His hands.

“*And again, when He bringeth in the First-begotten into the world, He saith, ‘And let all the angels of God worship Him’*” (verse 6). This is a quotation from Psalm 97:7, which in the Sept. reads, “*Worship Him, all ye His angels.*” What a proof was this that the Son had been “made *so much better than the angels*”: so far were these celestial creatures from approaching the glory of the incarnate Son, they are commanded to worship Him! But before we enlarge upon this, let us mark attentively the special character in which Christ

is here viewed. Many are His titles, and none of them is without its distinctive significance. It is as “First-begotten” or “Firstborn” that the angels are bidden to render Him homage. As many are far from clear as to the precise value and meaning of this name, let us look at it the more closely. The Greek word, “*pro-tokokos*,” is found nine times in the New Testament, eight of them referring to the Lord Jesus. It is manifestly a title of great dignity.

This New Testament title of Christ, like many another, has its roots in the Old Testament. Its force may be clearly perceived in Genesis 49:3, where Jacob says of Reuben,

“Thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength,
the *excellency of dignity*, and the *excellency of power*.”

Thus, the primary thought in it is not primogeniture, but dignity, honor, dominion. Note in Exodus 4:22, God calls Israel His “firstborn” because to them belonged the high honor of being His favored people. In the great Messianic prediction of Psalm 89, after promising to put down His foes and plague them that hate Him (verse 23), and after the perfect Servant says “*Thou art My Father, My God, and the Rock of My salvation*” (verse 26), the Father declares,

“*I will make Him My Firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth*”
(verse 27).

Clearly, then, this title has no reference whatever to the eternal origin of His Being, i.e. His “eternal Son-ship,” still less does it intimate His creation in time as Russellites and others blasphemously affirm; but relates to the high position of honor and glory which has been conferred upon the Son of man because of His obedience and suffering.

The first occurrence of this term in the New Testament is in Matthew 1:25, “she brought forth her firstborn Son,” and the second is parallel — Luke 2:7. That Mary had other sons is clear from Matthew 13:55. The Lord Jesus was not only the first in time, but the Chief, not only among but over them. In Romans 8:29 we read, that God has predestinated His elect to be conformed to the image of His Son in order that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren, i.e. Their Chief and most excellent Ruler. In Colossians 1:15, He is designated the “Firstborn of every creature,” which most certainly *does not* mean that He was Himself the first to be created, as many today wickedly

teach, for never does Scripture speak of Him as “*the* Firstborn of God,” but affirms that He is the Head and Lord of every creature. In Colossians 1:18, He is spoken of as “the Firstborn from the dead,” which does not signify that He was the first to rise again, but the One to whom the bodies of His saints shall be conformed — see Philippians 3:21. In Hebrews 11:28, this term is applied to the flower and might of Egypt. In Hebrews 12:23, the Church in glory is termed “the Church of the Firstborn.” This title then is synonymous with the “appointed Heir of all things.” It is, however, to be distinguished from “Only-begotten” in John 1:18, 3:16. This latter is a term of *endearment*, as a reference to Hebrews 11:17 shows — Isaac was not Abraham’s *only* “begotten,” for Ishmael was begotten by him too; but Isaac was his *darling*: so Christ is God’s “Darling” — see Psalm 22:20, 35:17.

“Under the law the ‘firstborn’ had authority over his brethren (cf. Romans 8:29, A.W.P.), and to them belonged a double portion, as well as the honor of acting as priests; the firstborn in Israel being holy; that is to say, consecrated to the Lord. Reuben, forfeiting his right of primogeniture by his sin, his privileges were divided, so that the dominion belonging to it was transferred to Judah and the double portion to Joseph, who had two tribes and two portions in Canaan by Ephraim and Manasseh (1 Chronicles 5:1, 2); while the priesthood and the right of sacrifice was transferred to Levi. The word ‘firstborn’ also signifies what surpasses anything as of the same kind, as ‘the firstborn of the poor’“ (Isaiah 14:30); that is to say, the most miserable of all; and ‘firstborn of death’ (Job 18:13), signifying a very terrible death, surpassing in grief and violence. The term ‘firstborn’ is also applied to those who were most beloved, as Ephraim is called ‘the firstborn of the Lord’ (Jeremiah 31:9), that is, His ‘dear son.’ In all these respects the application of ‘firstborn’ belongs to the Lord Jesus, both as to the superiority of His nature, of His office, and of His glory” (Robert Haldane).

“And again when He bringeth in the First-begotten into the world,” etc. Commentators are divided as to the meaning and placing of the word “again,” many contending it should be rendered,

“*When* He shall bring in again into the habitable earth the Firstborn.” There is not a little to be said in favor of this view.

First, the Greek warrants it. In the second part of verse 5 the translators have observed the order of the original — “and again, I will be unto Him,” etc. But here in verse 6 they have departed from it — “And again, when He bringeth in” instead of “when He shall bring in again.”

Secondly, we know of nothing in Scripture which intimates that the angels worshipped the infant Savior. Luke 2:13, 14 refers to them adoring God in heaven, and not His incarnate Son on earth. But Revelation 5:11-14 shows us all heaven worshipping the Lamb on the eve of His return to the earth, when He comes with power and glory. Scriptures which mention the angels in connection with Christ’s second advent are Matthew 13:41; 16:27; 24:31; 25:31; 2 Thessalonians 1:7.

That verse 6 has reference to the second advent of Christ receives further confirmation in the expression “when He *bringeth* in the First-begotten into the world.” This language clearly looks back to Jehovah putting Israel into possession of the land of Canaan, their promised inheritance.

“Thou shalt *bring them in*, and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance” (Exodus 15:17).

“To drive out the nations from before thee, greater and mightier than thou art, to *bring thee in*, to give thee their land for an inheritance” (Deuteronomy 4:38).

In like manner, when Christ returns to the earth, the Father will say to Him,

“Ask of Me, and I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine *inheritance*, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy *possession*” (Psalm 2:8).

In addition to what has just been said on “when He *bringeth* in the firstborn” into the world we would call attention to what we doubt not, is a latent contrast here. It is set over against His *expulsion* from the world, at His first advent. Men, as it were, drove Him ignominiously from the world. But He will re-enter it in majesty, in the manifested power of God. He will be “brought into it” in solemn pomp, and the same world which before witnessed His reproach, shall then behold His Divine dominion. Then shall He come, “*in the glory of His Father*” (Matthew 16:27), and then shall the angels render gladsome homage to that One whose honor is the Father’s chief delight. Then shall the word go forth from the Father’s lips, “*Let all the angels of God worship Him.*”

Our minds naturally turn back to the first advent and what is recorded in Luke 2. But there the angels praised the Sender, not the Sent: God in the highest was the object of their worship though the moving cause of it was the lowly Babe. But when Christ comes back to earth it is the Firstborn Himself who shall be worshipped by them. It was to this He referred when He said, “*When* He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father’s and of the holy angels.” The “glory of the angels,” i.e. The glory they will bring to Him, namely, their worship of Him. Then shall be seen “the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man” (John 1:51). May we who have been sought out and saved by Him “worship” Him *now* in the time of His rejection.

CHAPTER 5

CHRIST SUPERIOR TO ANGELS

(HEBREWS 1:7-9)

The verses which are now to be before us continue the passage begun in our last article. As a distinctive section of the Epistle this second division commences at 1:4 and runs to the end of the second chapter. Its theme is the immeasurable superiority of Christ over the angels. But though the boundaries of this section are clearly defined, yet is it intimately related to the one that precedes. The first three verses of chapter one contain a summary of that which is afterwards developed at length in the Epistle, and, really, Hebrews 1:4-14 is a setting forth of the proofs for the various affirmations made in verses 2, 3.

First, in verse 2, the One whom the Jewish nation had despised and rejected is said to be “Son,” and in verse 5 we are shown that He against whom the kings of the earth did set themselves and the rulers take counsel together, is addressed by Jehovah Himself as “Thou art My Son.”

Second, in verse 2 the One who had been crucified by wicked hands is said to be “*the* Heir of all things,” and in verse 6 proof of this is given: God affirmed that He is the “Firstborn” — the two titles being practically synonymous in their force.

Thus it will be seen that the method followed here by the Holy Spirit, was in moving the apostle to first make seven affirmations concerning the exalted dignity and dominion of Christ, and then to confirm them from the Scriptures. The proofs are all drawn from the Old Testament. From it He proceeds to show that the Messiah *was to be* a person superior to the angels. Psalm 2 should have led the Jews to *expect* “the Son” and Psalm 97:7 ought to have taught them that the promised Messiah was to receive the adoration of all the celestial hierarchies. In verses 5, 6 the Spirit has established the superiority of Christ both in name and dignity; in the verses which follow He shows the inferiority of the angels in nature and rank.

“And of the angels He saith, Who maketh His angels spirits” (verse 7).

This is a quotation from Psalm 104, the opening verses of which ascribe praise unto Jehovah as Creator and Governor of the universe. Its second and

third verses apparently relate to the intermediary heavens, and the fourth verse to their inhabitants; verse five and onwards treats of the earth and its earliest history. The fact that the earth is mentioned right after the angels suggests that they are there viewed as connected with mundane affairs, as the servants God employs in regulating its concerns.

The Spirit's purpose in quoting this verse in Hebrews 1 is evident: it was to point a contrast between the *natures* of the angels and the Son: they were "made" — created; He is uncreated. Not only were the angels created, but they were created by Christ Himself "*Who maketh*" which looks back to the last clause of verse 2, "*He (The Son) made the worlds:*" it is the making of the worlds that Psalm 104 speaks of. Moreover, they are here termed not merely "the angels," but "*His angels!*" They are but "spirits," He is "God;" they are "His ministers," He is their Head (Colossians 2:10).

"*Who maketh His angels spirits.*" The Hebrew word for "spirits" in Psalm 104:4 and the Greek word rendered "spirits" in Hebrews 1:7 has both a primary and secondary meaning, namely, spirits and "winds." It would seem from the words which follow — "and His ministers a flame of fire" — that God is not only defining the nature of these celestial creatures, but is also describing their qualities and activities. Thus we are inclined to regard the words before us as having a double force. A threefold reason may be suggested why the angels are likened unto "winds."

First, their power to render themselves invisible. The wind is one of the very few things in the natural world which is unseen by the eyes of man; so the angels are one of the very few classes of God's creatures that are capable of passing beyond the purview of man's senses.

Second, because of their great power. Like as the wind when commissioned by God, so the angels are able to sweep everything before them (2 Kings 19:35).

Third, because of the rapid speed at which they travel. If the reader will ponder carefully Daniel 9:21, 23, he will find that during the brief moments the prophet was engaged in prayer, an angel from the highest heaven reached him here on earth! Other analogies will be suggested by prayerful meditation.

"And His ministers a flame of fire" (verse 7). Here, as always in Scripture, "fire" speaks of Divine judgment, and the sentence as a whole informs us that

the angels are the executioners of God's wrath. A number of passages supply us with solemn illustrations of this fact. In Genesis 19:13 we read that the two angels said to Lot concerning Sodom, "*We will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord: and the Lord hath sent us to destroy it.*" Referring to God's judgments which fell upon Egypt we are told,

"He cast upon them the fierceness of His anger, wrath and indignation, and trouble, by sending evil angels" (Psalm 78:49),

by which we do not understand fallen angels but "angels of evil," i.e. Angels of judgment — compare the word "*evil*" in Isaiah 45:7, where it is contrasted *not* with "good" but "peace." Again, in Matthew 13:41, 42 we read, "The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall *cast* them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." Does not this passage throw light on Revelation 20:15? — "*And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire*" — by whom, if not the angels, the executioners of God's wrath!

"And His ministers a flame of fire." Doubtless these words refer also to the brilliant brightness and terrifying appearance of the angels, when manifested in their native form to mortal eyes. A number of scriptures confirm this. Note how when Baalam saw the angel of the Lord that he "fell flat on his face" (Numbers 22:31). Note how it is said of the angel who rolled back the stone of the Savior's sepulcher that "his countenance was like lightning," and that

"for fear of him the keepers did shake and become as dead men" (Matthew 28:3, 4).

This accounts for the "fear not" with which angels so frequently addressed different ones before whom they appeared on an errand of mercy: see Matthew 28:5; Luke 1:30; 2:10. Note how in proof the angels are "*a flame of fire,*" we are told that when the angel of the Lord came to Peter, "*a light shined in the prison*" (Acts 12:7)! Yea, so resplendent is an angel's brightness when manifested to men, that the apostle John fell at the feet of one to worship (Revelation 19:10) — evidently mistaking him for the Lord Himself, as lie had appeared on the mount of transfiguration.

"But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever"

(verse 8).

Here the Holy Spirit quotes from still another Psalm, the 45th, to prove the superiority of Israel's Messiah over the angels. How blessed and marked is the contrast presented! Here we listen to the Father addressing His incarnate Son, owning Him as "God." "Unto the Son He saith," that others might hear and know it. "Thy throne, O God." How sharp is the antithesis! How immeasurable the gulf which separates between creature and Creator! The angels are but "spirits," the Son is "God." They are but "*ministers*," His is the "*throne*." They are but "*a flame of fire*," the executioners of judgment, He the One who commands and commissions them.

"But unto the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God." This supplies us with one of the most emphatic and unequivocal proofs of the Deity of Christ to be found in the Scriptures. It is the Father Himself testifying to the Godhead of Him who was despised and rejected of men. And how fittingly is this quotation from Psalm 45 introduced at the point it is in Hebrews 1. In verse 6 we are told that all the angels of God have received command to "worship" the Mediator, now we are shown the *propriety* of them so doing — He is "God!" They must render Divine honors to Him because of His very nature. Thus we may admire, once more, the perfect *order* of Scripture.

"But unto the Son, He saith, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever." Difficulty has been experienced by some concerning the identity of the "throne" here mentioned. It is clear from what precedes and also from what follows in verse 9. — "Thy God," that the Son is here addressed in His mediatorial character. But is it not also clear from 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 that there will be a time when His mediatorial kingdom will come to an end? Certainly not. Whatever the passage in 1 Corinthians 15 may or may not teach, it certainly does not contradict other portions of God's Word. Again and again the Scriptures affirm the *endlessness* of Christ's mediatorial kingdom: see Isaiah 9:7; Daniel 7:13, 14; Luke 1:33; etc. Even on the new earth we read of "The *throne* of God and of the Lamb" (Revelation 22:1)!

If then it is not the mediatorial kingdom which Christ shall deliver up to the Father, *what* is it? We answer, His *Messianic* one, His kingdom on *this* earth. In Luke 19:12, (the Gospel which, distinctively, sets forth His perfect humanity) Christ speaks of Himself as a "Nobleman" going into a far country to "receive for Himself a *kingdom* and to return," after which He added,

“when He was returned, having received the kingdom,” etc. (verse 15). It is to this Matthew 25:31 refers,

“When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of *His* glory.”

As in the days of His first advent, the second Person of the Trinity (incarnate) was more dishonored than the Father or the Spirit, so, following His second advent *He* shall. For a season, be more honored than They. Following this, then He shall, still in His character as “Son of man” (see John 5:27) “execute judgment,” i.e., on His enemies. Then, having put down (by power, *not* having reconciled by grace) all opposing forces, He shall “*deliver up the kingdom to God*” (1 Corinthians 15:24) — observe that it is not “taken from” Him!

That it is *not* the mediatorial kingdom which Christ shall deliver up to the Father is clear from 1 Corinthians 15:28, where we are expressly told “then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him.” As the God-man, the Mediator, He will be officially subservient to the Father. This should be evident. Throughout eternity the mediation of Christ will be needed to preserve fellowship between the Creator and the creature, the Infinite and the finite, hence five times over (the number of *grace*) in Holy Writ occur the words, “Thou art a Priest forever after the order of Melchisedek.” But in His essential Being the Son will *not* be in subjection to His Father, as is clear from John 17:5.

Thus we trust it has been made clear that whereas the Messianic kingdom of the Son will be but temporal, His Mediatorial kingdom will be eternal. His kingdom on this earth will continue only for a limited time, but His kingdom on the new earth will last forever. Blessed is it to observe that, even as Mediator, Christ is thus owned by the Father “Thy throne, O *God*, is forever and ever.” How far above the angels that puts Him!

“A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Thy kingdom” (verse 8). The apostle is still quoting from the 45th Psalm, and continuing to advance proofs of the proposition laid down in Hebrews 1:4. There is no difficulty in perceiving how the sentence here cited contributes to his argument. The “scepter” is the badge of royalty and the emblem of authority. An illustration of this is furnished in the book of Esther. When Ahasuerus would give evidence of his authoritative favor unto Esther, he held out his scepter to her

(see Esther 5:2; 8:4). So here the “scepter” is the emblem of royal power.

“The Son is the King; the highest dignity belonging to the angels is that they hold the first rank among His subjects” (Dr. J. Brown).

The suffering Savior is now the supreme Sovereign; the mighty angels are His servants.

“A scepter of *righteousness* is the scepter of Thy kingdom.” This is very blessed. The scepter of Christ’s kingdom then is one not merely of power, arbitrarily exercised, but a “righteous” one. “The Greek word joined by the apostle to the scepter signifieth rectitude, straightness, evenness; it is opposed to wickedness, roughness, unevenness. So doth the Hebrew word also signify; it is fitly applied to a scepter, which useth to be straight and upright, not crooked, not inclining this way or that way; so as that which is set out by a scepter, namely, government, is hereby implied to be right and upright, just and equal, not partially inclining to either side” (Dr. Gouge).

Of old the Triune God declared,

“*He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God*” (2 Samuel 23:3).

This has never yet been perfectly exemplified on earth, but ere long it will be. When the Lord Jesus shall return to Jerusalem and there establish His throne, He will order all the affairs of His kingdom with impartial equity, favoring neither the classes nor the masses. As the Anti-type of Melchizedek, He will be both “King of righteousness” and “King of peace” (Hebrews 7:2). These are the two qualities which will characterize His reign.

“*Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and upon His Kingdom, to order it and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever*” (Isaiah 9:7).

Then will be fulfilled that ancient oracle.

“*Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a *righteous* Branch, and a king shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.*” (Jeremiah 23:5).

The rewards He will bestow, the judgments He will execute, will be administered impartially. But let it not be forgotten that this is equally true of His government even now, though faith alone perceives it; in all dispensations it remains that “justice and judgment are the habitation of Thy Throne” (Psalm 89:14).

“Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity” (verse 9). The past tense of the verbs is to be carefully observed. It is still the Father addressing His Son, owning on high the moral perfections He had manifested here upon earth. The reference is to the Lord Jesus in the days of His humiliation. The words before us furnish a brief but blessed description both of His character and conduct. First, He loved righteousness. “Righteousness” signifies the doing of that which is right.

The unerring standard is the revealed will of God. From that standard the incarnate Son never deviated. As a Boy of twelve He said,

“Wist ye not that I must be about My Father’s business?” (Luke 2:49)

— perform His pleasure, respond to His wishes. When replying to John’s demur against baptizing Him, He replied,

“Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15).

When tempted by the Devil to follow a course of self-will, He answered,

“It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

So it was all through: He “became *obedient* unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8).

“Thou hast loved righteousness.” This is much more than *doing* righteousness. These words reveal to us the spring of all Christ’s actions, even devotedness and affection unto the Father. “I *delight* to do Thy will, O God” (Psalm 40:8), was the confession of the perfect One. “O how love I Thy law! It is My meditation all the day” (Psalm 119:97), revealed His attitude toward the precepts and commandments of Holy Writ. Herein we perceive His uniqueness. How often *our* obedience is a reluctant one! How often God’s will crosses ours; and when our response is an obedient one, frequently

it is joyless and unwilling. Different far was it with the Lord Jesus. He not only performed righteousness, but “loved” it. He could say, “Thy law is within My *heart!*” (Psalm 40:8) — the seat of the affections. When a sinful creature is said to have God’s law in his heart it is because He has *written* it there (see Hebrews 8:10).

Because He loved righteousness, Christ “hated iniquity.” The two things are inseparable: the one cannot exist without the other (Amos 5:15). Where there is true love for God, there is also abhorrence of sin. Illustrations of the Savior’s hatred of iniquity are found in His action at the close of the Temptation and in His cleansing of the Temple. Observe how, after meeting the vile solicitations of the Devil with the repeated “it is written,” He, with holy abhorrence said, “Get thee hence, Satan” (Matthew 4:10). See Him, as the Vindicator of His Father’s house, driving before Him its profane traffickers and crying,

“*Make not My Father’s house an house of merchandise*” (John 2:16).

What must it have meant for One who thus loved righteousness and hated iniquity to tabernacle for thirty-three years in such a world as this! And what must it have meant for such an One to be “numbered with the transgressors” and “made sin” for His people!

“Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity.” This is true of Him still, for He changes not.

“*He that hath My commandments, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him*” (John 14:21).

So He still “hates”:

“*So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans which thing I hate*” (Revelation 2:15).

To what extent do these two things characterize you and me, dear reader? To the extent that we are really walking with Christ: no more, no less. The more we enjoy fellowship with Him, the more we are conformed to His image, the more shall *we* love the things He loves, and hate the things He hates.

“*Therefore, God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of*

gladness” (verse 9).

The Spirit is still quoting from the 45th Psalm. The enemies of God’s truth would discover here a “flat contradiction.” In verse 8 the One spoken to is hailed as “God,” on the throne. But here in verse 9 He is addressed as an inferior, “*Thy* God hath anointed Thee.” How could the same person be both supreme and subordinate? If He Himself had a God, how could He at the same time be God? No wonder Divine things are “foolishness to the natural man!” Yet is the enigma easily explained, the seeming contradiction readily harmonized. The Mediator was, in His own person, both Creator and creature, God and man. Once we see it is as Mediator, as the God-man, that Christ is here spoken to, all difficulty vanishes. It is this which supplies the key to the whole passage. Much in Hebrews 1 cannot be understood unless it be seen that the Holy Spirit is there speaking not of the essential glories of Christ, but of His mediatorial dignities and honors.

“Therefore, God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee.” Concerning this Dr. Gouge has well said,

“Christ is God-man, God may be said to be His God three ways:

1. As Christ’s human nature was created of God, and preserved by Him like other creatures.
2. As Christ is mediator, he is deputed and sent of God (John 3:34), and he subjected himself to God and set himself to do the will of God, and such works as God appointed him to do (John 4:34; 9:4). In these respects also God is his God.
3. As Christ, God-man, was given by God to be a head to a mystical body, which is the church (Ephesians 1:22, 23); God, therefore, entered into covenant with him in the behalf of that body (Isaiah 42:6; 49:8). Thus he is called the messenger (Malachi 3:1) and the mediator of the covenant (Hebrews 8:6). Now, God is in an especial manner their God, with whom he doth enter into covenant; as he said unto Abraham, ‘I will establish my covenant between me and thee,’ etc., ‘to be a God unto thee’ (Genesis 17:7). As God made a covenant with Abraham and his seed, so also with Christ and His seed, which are all the elect of God. This is the ‘seed’ mentioned in Isaiah 53:10. So by special relation between God and Christ, God is

his God in covenant with him. God also is, in especial manner, the God of the elect through Christ.”

“Therefore, God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee.” While here on earth the Mediator owned that God *was* His God. He lived by His Word, He was subject to His will, He was entirely dependent on Him. “I will put My trust in Him” was His avowal (Hebrews 2:13); yea, did He not declare,

“I was cast upon Thee from the womb: Thou art My God from My mother’s belly” (Psalm 22:10)!

Many similar utterances of His are recorded in the Psalms. On the cross He owned His subjection, crying, “My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” Even after His resurrection we hear Him saying,

“I ascend unto My Father and to your Father; and *My God*, and your God” (John 20:17).

So now, though seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high, He is there making “intercession.” So when He returns to this earth in glory, He will “ask” for the inheritance (Psalm 2:8). How this brings out the truth of His humanity, real Man, though true God. Mysterious, wondrous, blessed Person; upholding all things by the Word of His own power, yet in the place of intercession; Himself the “Mighty God” (Isaiah 9:6), yet owning God as *His* God!

“Thy God hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness.” There is a plain reference here to the ancient method, instituted by God, whereby the kings of Israel were established in their office. Their coronation was denoted by the pouring of oil upon their heads: see 1 Samuel 10:1; 16:13; 1 Kings 1:39, etc. It was in allusion to this the kings were styled “anointed” (2 Samuel 19:21) and “the anointed of the Lord” (Lamentations 4:20).

“The apostle and Psalmist are both speaking of the Messiah as a prince, and their sentiment is ‘God, even Thy God, hath raised Thee to a kingdom far more replete with enjoyment than that ever conferred on any other ruler. He has given Thee a kingdom which, for extent and duration, and multitude and magnitude of blessings as far exceeds any kingdom ever bestowed on man or angels as the heaven is above the earth’” (J. Brown).

Though we are assured that this anointing of Christ with the “oil of gladness”

(following the mention of His “scepter” and “kingdom” in verse 8) is a reference to His investiture on High with royal honors — the “blessing of the Lord” which the King of glory received at the time of His ascension (Psalm 24:5, and note carefully the whole Psalm) — yet we do not think this exhausts its scope. In addition, we believe there is also a reference to His being honored as our great High Priest, for it is written, “He shall be a Priest upon His throne” (Zechariah 6:13). Thus there is also a manifest allusion in our verse to what is recorded in Psalm 133. There we read. “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, Aaron’s beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments — cf. Exodus 30:25, 30. This is most precious, though its beauty is rarely perceived. How few see in these verses of Psalm 133 anything more than a word expressing the desirability and blessedness of saints on earth dwelling together in concord. But is *this* all the Psalm teaches? We trow not. What then is the analogy pointed between what is said in verse 1 and verse 2? What is the meaning of “how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. *It is like* the precious ointment upon the head,” etc?

What resemblance is there between brethren dwelling together in unity and the precious anointing-ointment which ran down from Aaron’s head to the skirts of his garments? It seems strange that so many should have missed this point. As the high priest of Israel, Aaron foreshadowed our great High Priest. The anointing of his “head” prefigured the anointing of our exalted Head. The running down of the fragrant unguent even to the skirts of Aaron’s garments, adumbrated the glorious fact that those who are members of the body of Christ partake of His sweet savor before God. The analogy drawn in Psalm 133 is obvious: the dwelling together of brethren in unity is “good and pleasant” not simply for the mere sake of preserving peace among them, but because it illustrates the spiritual and mystical union existing between Christ and His people. Our dwelling together in unity is “good and pleasant” not only, nor primarily, for our own well-being, but because it gives an outward manifestation, a concrete example of that invisible and Divine *oneness* which exists between the Head and the members of His body.

“Anointed Thee with the oil of gladness.” As ever in the Old Testament, the “oil” was an emblem of the Spirit, and the anointing both of Aaron and of David were typifications of the enduement of Christ with the Holy Spirit. But

the reference here is not (as some of the commentators suppose) to the coming of the Spirit upon Christ at the time of His baptism. This should be apparent from the structure of verse 9. The words “Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity” look back to the earthly life of the Lord Jesus, as the past tense of the verbs intimate; the “*therefore*, God, even Thy God, hath anointed Thee,” shows that this was the reward for His perfect work, the honoring of the humbled One. It is closely parallel with what we are told in Acts 2:36, “God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ;” and Acts 5:31, “Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior.”

“Anointed Thee with the oil of gladness” refers, we believe, to the Holy Spirit’s being made officially subordinate to the Mediator. Just as the incarnate Son was subject to the Father, so is the Spirit now subject to Christ. Just as the Savior when here glorified not Himself, but the Father, so the Spirit is here to glorify Christ (John 16:14). There are several scriptures which plainly teach the present official subordination of the Spirit to Christ:

“But when the Comforter is come, whom *I will send* unto you from the Father” (John 15:26).

That which took place on the day of Pentecost manifested the same fact: as His forerunner announced, “I indeed baptize with water, but *He* (Christ) shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Mark 1:8). In Revelation 3:1 the Lord Jesus is referred to as “*He that hath* the seven Spirits of God,” i.e. The Holy Spirit in the fullness of His perfections and the plentitude of His operations; “hath” to minister the Spirit unto His people. It is further proof that the suffering Savior has been exalted to the place of supreme Sovereignty.

“Above Thy fellows.” Opinion is divided among the commentators as to whether the reference be to angels or to Christians. Both the Hebrew word in Psalm 45:7 and the Greek word here signify “such as partake of one and the same condition.” If it be borne in mind that the Holy Spirit is speaking here of Christ in His Mediatorial character, we are less likely to be stumbled by the thought of angels being termed His “fellows.”

“They are stiled His fellows in regard of that low degree whereunto the Son of God, Creator of all things, humbled Himself by assuming a creature nature; so that as He was a creature (Man), angels are His fellows” (Dr. Gouge).

Nor must we overlook the fact that the chief design of the whole of this passage is to evidence the Mediator's superiority over the angels.

As already pointed out, the central thought of verse 9 is the investiture of Christ with *royal* honors, following right after the mention of His "scepter" and "kingdom" in verse 8. Angels are also rulers; great powers are delegated to them; much of the administration of God's government is committed into their hands. But the Man Christ Jesus has been exalted high above them in this respect too. A close parallel is found in Colossians 1:18, where it is said of the Lord Jesus, "that in all things He might have the pre-eminence." It is important to note that in the immediate context there, *angels* are mentioned in connection with "thrones, dominions, principalities and powers" (verse 16)! But Christ has been given a "*scepter*" and royal honors which exalt Him high above them all.

But what has been said above does not exhaust the scope of these closing words of Hebrews 1:9. As is so often the case in Scripture (evidencing the exhaustless fullness of its words) there is at least a *double* reference in the term "fellows:" first to the angels, second to Christians — thus supplying a *link* with verse 14, where the "heirs of salvation" are more directly in view. That the term "fellows" applies also to believers is clear from Hebrews 3:14 where "*metochos*" is specifically used of them: "For we are made *partakers* (fellows) of Christ," if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.

Though the wondrous grace of God has so united His people to His beloved Son that "he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:17), yet we must carefully bear in mind that He is "the Firstborn (Chief) among many brethren" (Romans 8:29). Though members of His body, He is nevertheless the Head. Though joint-heirs with Him, He is our Lord! So, too, though Christians have been "anointed" with the Spirit (1 John 2:20, 27), yet our blessed Redeemer has been "anointed with the oil of gladness *above* His fellows." The Spirit is now subject to His administration; not so to ours. Christ is the one who is "glorified," the Spirit is the Agent, we the vessels through which He works. Thus in *all* things Christ has "the pre-eminence."

It is indeed striking to see how much was included in the ancient oracle concerning the Messiah which the Spirit here quoted from Psalm 45. Let us attempt to summarize the content of that remarkable prophecy.

First, it establishes His Deity, for the Father Himself owns Him as “*God.*”

Second, it shows us the exalted position He now occupies: He is on the throne, and there for ever.

Third, it makes mention of His Kingship, the royal “scepter” being wielded by Him.

Fourth, it tells of the impartiality of His government and the excellency of His rule: His scepter is a “righteous” one.

Fifth, it takes us back to the days of His flesh and makes known the perfections of His character and conduct here on earth: He “loved righteousness and hated iniquity.”

Sixth, it reveals the place which He took when He made Himself of no reputation, as Man in subjection to God: “Thy God.”

Seventh, it announces the reward He received for such condescension and grace: “*Therefore....* God hath anointed Thee.”

Eighth, it affirms He has the pre-eminence in all things, for He has been anointed with the oil of gladness “*above* His fellows.” May the Spirit of God stir us up to search more prayerfully and diligently the volume of that Book in which it is written of Him.

CHAPTER 6

CHRIST SUPERIOR TO ANGELS

(HEBREWS 1:10-13)

The closing verses of Hebrews 1 present a striking climax to the apostle's argument. They contain the most touching and also the most thrilling references to be found in this wondrous chapter. In it the Holy Spirit completes His proof for the superiority of the Mediator over the angels, proof which was all drawn from Israel's own Scriptures. Five times He had cited passages from the Old Testament which set forth the exalted dignities and glories of the Messiah. A sixth and a seventh is now quoted from the 102nd and the 110th Psalms, to show that He who had passed through such unparalleled humiliation and suffering, had been greeted and treated by God as One who was worthy of supremest honor and reward. The details of this will come before us in the course of our exposition.

It is very striking to observe how that the *character* of these seven quotations made by the Holy Spirit from the Old Testament agree perfectly with the *numerical* position of each of them. One is the number of *supremacy*: see Zechariah 14:9 — there will be none other in that day to dispute the Lord's rule for Satan will be in the Pit. So the first quotation in Hebrews 1 brings out the supremacy of Christ over the angels as "Son" (verse 5). Two is the number of *witness*: see Revelation 11:3, etc. So the force of the second quotation in Hebrews 1 is the unique relation of the Son to the Father borne witness to. Three is the number of *manifestation*, and in the third quotation we see the superiority of the Mediator manifested by the angels "worshipping" Him (verse 6). Four is the number of the *creature*, and in the fourth quotation the Holy Spirit significantly turns from Christ, who is more than creature, and dwells upon the inferiority of the angels (verse 7) who are "made." Five is the number of *grace*, and the fifth quotation brings before us the "throne" of the Savior (verse 8), which *is* "the throne of Grace" (Hebrews 4:16). Six is the number of *man*, and the sixth quotation (verses 10-12) contains God's response to the plaint of the Son of Man's being taken away "in the midst of His days." Seven is the number of completion and of *rest* after a finished work: see Genesis 2:3; and so the seventh quotation views Christ as now seated at God's right hand (verse 13), as the reward of His finished work. How perfect is every detail of Holy Writ!

The final verse of Hebrews 1 furnishes the fullest demonstration of the superiority of Christianity over Judaism and the exaltation of Christ above the celestial hierarchies. So far are the angels below the Savior, they are sent forth by Him to minister unto His people. The fact of this ministry, as well as the nature and value of it, are known to but few today. The subject is a most interesting as well as important one, and will well repay much fuller study than our limited space here permits us to indulge in. May the bare outline we attempt stimulate our readers to fill it in for themselves.

“And Thou, Lord, in the beginning, hast laid the foundation of the earth” (verse 10).

The opening “*and*” shows that the apostle is continuing to advance proof of the proposition laid down in verse 4. This proof of Christ’s excellency is taken from a work peculiar to God, creation. The argument is based upon a Divine testimony found in the Old Testament. The argument may be stated thus: The Creator is more excellent than creatures; Christ is the Creator, angels are creatures; therefore Christ is more excellent than angels. That Christ *is* Creator is here proved; that angels are creatures, has been shown in verse 7. This verse also completes the answer to a question which verse 4 may have raised in the minds of some, namely, what is the “more excellent name” which the Mediator has obtained? The reply is “Son” (verse 5), “God” (verse 8), “*Lord*” (verse 10).

“And Thou, Lord, in the beginning, hast laid the foundation of the earth.” The Psalm from which this is quoted is a truly wondrous one; in some respects it is, perhaps, the most remarkable of the whole series. It lays bare before us the Savior’s very soul. Few, if any, of us would have thought of applying it to Christ, or even dared to, had not the Spirit of God done so here in Hebrews 1. This Psalm brings before us the true and perfect humanity of Christ, and depicts Him as the despised and rejected One. It reveals Him as One who *felt*, and felt deeply, the experiences through which He passed. It might well be termed the Psalm of the Man of Sorrows. In it He is seen opening His heart and pouring out His grief before God. We lose much if we fail to attend carefully to the context of that portion which the Spirit here quotes. Let us go back to its opening verses:

“Hear My prayer, O Lord, and let My cry come unto Thee. Hide not Thy face from Me, in the day when I am in trouble; incline Thine

ear unto Me: in the day when I call answer Me speedily. For My days are consumed like smoke, and My bones are burned as an hearth. My heart is smitten, and withered like grass; so that I forget to eat My bread. By reason of the voice of My groaning My bones cleave to my skin. I am like a pelican of the wilderness; I am like an owl of the desert. I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the housetop, Mine enemies reproach Me all the day, and they that are mad against Me are sworn against Me. For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled My drink with weeping. Because of Thine indignation and Thy wrath: for Thou hast lifted Me up, and cast Me down. My days are like a shadow that declineth; and I am withered like grass” (verses 1-11).

The above quotation is a longer one than we are accustomed to make, but it seemed impossible to abbreviate without losing its pathos and its moving effects upon us. There we are permitted to behold something of the Savior’s “travail of soul.” How it should bow our hearts before Him! These plaintive sentences were uttered by our blessed Redeemer either amid the dark shadows of Gethsemane, or under the more awful darkness of Calvary. But notwithstanding His awful anguish, mark the perfect confidence in God of this suffering One:

“But Thou, O Lord, shalt endure forever, and Thy remembrance unto all generations. Thou shalt arise and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favor her, yea, the set time, is come. For Thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favor the dust thereof. So the heathen shall fear the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth Thy glory. When the Lord shall build up Zion, He shall appear in His glory. He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer. This shall be written for the generation to come: and the people which shall be created shall praise the Lord. For He hath looked down from the height of His sanctuary; from heaven did the Lord behold the earth; to hear the groaning of the prisoner, to loose those that are appointed to death; to declare the name of the Lord in Zion and His praise in Jerusalem; when the people are gathered together, and the kingdoms to serve the Lord” (verses 12-22).

Blessed is it to behold here the Savior looking away from the things seen to the things unseen: from the dark present to the bright future.

“He weakened My strength in the way; He shortened My days. I said O My God, take Me not away in the midst of My days” (verses 23, 24).

Here again we are permitted to hear the “strong crying” (verse 7) of Him who was “acquainted with grief” as none other ever was. Few things recorded in the Word are more affecting than this: that the Lord Jesus, the perfect Man, should, at the age of thirty-three, be deemed by men as unfit to live any longer. He had hardly entered upon man’s estate when they crucified Him. Do you think *that* was nothing to Christ? Ah, brethren, He felt it deeply. Who can doubt it in the light of this awful plaint: “*He weakened My strength in the way; He shortened My days. I said, O My God, take Me not away in the midst of My days.*” As Man He felt acutely this “cutting off” in His very prime.

Those words of the Savior make manifest what He suffered in His soul. He was perfect Man, with all the sinless sensibilities of human nature. A very touching type of Christ’s being cut off in the early prime of manhood is found in Leviticus 2:14. Each grade of the meal-offering described in Leviticus 2 pointed to the *humanity* of the Redeemer. Here in verse 14 Israel was bidden to take “*green ears of corn dried by the fire*” and offer it to the Lord as an offering. The “green ears of corn” (compare John 12:24 where Christ speaks of Himself under this figure) had not fully ripened, and so, were “dried by the fire” — symbol of being subjected to God’s judgment. So it was with Christ. Man’s sickle went over the field of corn and He was “cut off” in the midst of His days: when He was barely half of the “three score years and ten” (Psalm 90:10).

And what was Heaven’s response to this anguished cry of the Savior? The remainder of the Psalm records God’s answer:

“Thy years are throughout all generations. Of old hast Thou laid the foundation of the earth. And the heavens are the work of Thy hands. They shall perish, but Thou shalt endure, yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt Thou change them, and they shall be changed: But Thou art the same, and Thy years shall have no end” (verses 24-27).

“How marvelous is this! How incomprehensible this union of divine and human, of eternity and time, sadness and omnipotence! Do not wonder that such language of anguish, faintness and sorrow, of agonizing faith, is attributed by the Holy Spirit to Jesus. Remember the life of Jesus was a life of faith, a real, true, and earnest conflict; and that, although He constantly took firm hold of the promises of God, yet His feelings of sorrow, His sense of utter dependence on God, His anxious looking forward to His last suffering, all this was a reality. He gained the victory by faith; He knew that He was, through suffering, returning to the Father. He knew that as Son of Man and Redeemer of His people He would be glorified with the glory which He had with the Father before the foundations of the world were laid” (Saphir).

Let us examine closely the blessed reply of the Father to the plaintive petition of His suffering Son. “And, Thou, Lord.” Before His incarnation, David, by the Spirit, called Him “Lord” (Matthew 22:43). At His birth, the angels who brought the first glad tidings of His advent to this earth, hailed Him as “Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11). During His earthly ministry the disciples owned Him as “Lord” (John 13:13). So, too, is He often referred to in the Epistles (Romans 1:3, etc.). But here, it is none other than the Father Himself who directly addresses as “*Lord*” that suffering Man, as He lay on His face in the Garden, sweating as it were great drops of blood. Thus may, and thus should, every believer also say of Him, “*My Lord, and my God*” (John 20:28), and *worship* Him as such.

“Thou, Lord, in the beginning.” This phrase sets forth the *eternity* of the being of Him who became the Mediator. If Christ “*in the beginning*” laid the foundation of the earth, then *He* must be without beginning, and thus, eternal; compare (Proverbs 8:22, 23).

“Hast laid the foundation of the earth.” We have been deeply impressed with the fact that God has some good reason for referring in His Word to “the foundation” and “foundations” of the earth or world more than twenty-five times. We believe it is to safeguard His people from the popular delusion of the day, namely, that the earth revolves on its axis, and that the heavenly bodies are stationary, only *appearing* to our sight to move, as the banks and trees seem to be doing to one seated in a rowing boat or sailing ship. This

theory was first advanced (so far as the writer is aware) by Grecian heathen philosophers, echoed by Copernicus in the fifteenth century, and re-echoed by science “falsely so called” (see 1 Timothy 6:20) today. Alas, that so many of God’s servants and people have accepted it. Such a conceit cannot be harmonized with “*a foundation*” so often predicated of the earth; which, necessarily, implies its *fixity*! Nor can such a theory be squared with the repeated statements of Holy Writ that the “sun moves” (Joshua 10:12), etc. The writer is well aware that this paragraph may evoke a pitying smile from some. But that will not move him. Let *God* be true and every man a liar. We are content to believe what *He* has said. Paul was willing to be a fool for Christ’s sake (1 Corinthians 4:10), and we are willing to be thought a fool for the Scripture’s sake.

“**And the heavens are the work of Thine hand**” (verse 10).

This seems to bring in an additional thought. In the preceding clause creation is ascribed to Christ; here the greatness of His power. The heavens being of so far vaster dimensions than the earth, suggests the omnipotency of their Maker.

“**They shall perish, but Thou remainest**” (verse 11).

This verse makes mention of still another perfection of Christ, namely, His *immutability*. The earth and the heavens shall perish. The apostle John, in prophetic vision, saw “*a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away*” (Revelation 21:1). But Christ “*remaineth.*” He is “*the same yesterday, and today, and forever.*”

“**And they all shall wax old as doth a garment, and as a vesture shalt Thou fold them up, and they shall be changed**” (verses 11, 12).

This emphasizes the mutability of the creature. Two resemblances are employed: first the earth may be said to “wax old as doth a garment” in that it is not to last forever, but is appointed to an end: see 2 Peter 3:10. The longer, therefore, it has continued, the nearer it approaches to that end; as a garment, the longer it is worn, the nearer it is to its end. May not the increasing number of earthquakes evidence that “old age” is fast coming upon it? Second, the heavens may be said to be “folded up as a vesture,” inasmuch as Scripture declares “the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll” (Isaiah 34:4).

“*Thou shall fold them up.*” This intimates Christ’s absolute control over all

creation. He that made all hath an absolute power to preserve, alter, and destroy all, as it pleaseth Him. He is the Potter, we are but the clay, to be molded as He will. Our Lord Jesus Christ, being true God, is the Most High and supreme Sovereign over all, and He doeth all

“that man may know that Thou, whose name is *Jehovah*, art the Most High over all the earth” (Psalm 83:18).

“*By the* word of the Lord were the heavens made” (Psalm 33:6); by the same word shall they be folded up. The practical value of this for our hearts is plain; such a Lord may be safely trusted; such a Lord should be revered and worshipped. In what holy awe should He be held!

“But Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail” (verse 12).

“The mutability of creatures being distinctly set out, the apostle returneth to the main point intended, which is Christ’s immutability. It was before generally set down in the phrase, ‘Thou remaineth.’ Here it is illustrated in two other branches. Though all these three phrases in general intend one and the same thing, namely, immutability, yet, to show that there is no tautology, no vain repetition, of one and the same thing, they may be distinguished one from another:

“‘Thou remaineth,’ pointeth at Christ’s eternity before all times; for it implieth his being before, in which he still abides. ‘Thou art the same’ declares Christ’s constancy. There is no variableness with him; thus, therefore, he says of himself, ‘I am the Lord, I change not’ (Malachi 3:6). ‘Thy years shall not fail’ intendeth Christ’s everlastingness; that he was before all times, and continueth in all ages, and will beyond all times so continue” (Dr. Gouge).

“But Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail.” *This* was God’s answer to the plaint of Christ’s being “cut *off*” in the midst of His days. As man, *His* “years” should have no end! As God the Son He *is* eternal in His being; but as Man, in resurrection, He received “life for evermore” (cf. Hebrews 7:14-17). Do we really grasp this? For nineteen hundred years since the Cross, men have been born, have lived, and then died. Statesmen, emperors, kings have appeared on the scene and then passed away. But there is one glorious Man who spans the centuries, who in His own humanity bridges those nineteen hundred years. He has not died, nor even grown old; He is “*the*

same yesterday, and today, and forever!”

“But Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail.” What assurance was this for the believing of Israel who had been sorely perplexed at the “cutting off” of the Messiah, in the midst of His days! Humbled as He had been, yet was He the Creator. In servant form had He appeared among them, but He was and is the sovereign Disposer of all things. Died he had on the cross, but He was now “alive for evermore.” Their own Scriptures bore witness to it: God Himself affirmed it!

And what is the practical application of this wondrous passage for us today! Surely this:

First, such a Savior, who is none other than Him who made heaven and earth, is a mighty Redeemer, “Able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him.”

Second, such an One, who is immutable and eternal, may be safely and confidently trusted; none can pluck out of *His* hand!

Third, such an One, who is “Lord” over all, is to be held in holy awe and given the worship, submission, and service which are His due.

“But to which of the angels said He at any time, Sit on My right hand until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool?” (verse 13).

This completes the proof of what the apostle had said in verses 2, 3. The Old Testament itself witnessed to the fact that the rejected Messiah is now seated at God’s right hand, and this by the word of the Father Himself. The quotation is from the 110th Psalm, a Psalm quoted more frequently in the New Testament than any other.

Verses 13 and 14 belong together. In them another contrast is pointed between Christ and the angels. As an argument it may be stated thus: He that sitteth at God’s right hand is far more excellent than ministers: Christ sitteth at God’s right hand, and angels *are* “ministers;” therefore, Christ is far more excellent than they. The former part is proved in verse 13, the latter is shown in verse 14.

As D.V. the subject of verse 13 will come before us again in our studies in this Epistle, we will now offer only the briefest comment. The Speaker here is the Father; the One addressed is the Son, but in His mediatorial character,

for it was as the Son of Man that God exalted Him. Further proof of this is supplied by “until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool.” As mediatorial King and Priest, Christ is subservient to the Father; He is subject to Him who has “put all things under Him;” (1 Corinthians 15:27).

“*Until* I make.” Christ is not to sit at God’s right hand forever. 1 Thessalonians 4:16 says, “The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout,” etc. He remains there throughout this present Day of Grace. Then, following a brief interval, His enemies shall be made His footstool. This will be at His return to the earth: see Revelation 19:11-21; Isaiah 63:1-3, etc. Then Christ *Himself* will subdue His enemies: note the “He” in 1 Corinthians 15:25; but it will be by the Father’s decree, see Psalm 2:6-9.

“Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” (verse 14).

This verse presents a fact which should awaken in every Christian varied and deep emotions. Alas that, through lack of diligence in searching the Word, so many of the Lord’s people are largely in ignorance of much that is said therein, and here referred to.

It should awaken within us a sense of *wonderment*. The angels are portrayed as *our* attendants! When we remember who and what they are — their exalted rank in the scale of being, their sinlessness, their wondrous capacities, knowledge and powers — it is surely an astonishing thing to learn that they should minister unto us. Think of it, the unfallen angels waiting upon the fallen descendants of Adam! The courtiers of Heaven ministering to worms of the earth! The mighty angels, who “excel in strength,” taking notice of and serving those so far beneath them! Could you imagine the princes of the royal family seeking out dwellers in the slums and ministering to them, not once or occasionally, but constantly? But the analogy, altogether fails. The angels of God are sent forth to minister unto redeemed sinners! Marvel at it.

It should awaken within us *fervent praise to God*. What an evidence of His grace, what a proof of His love that He sends forth His angels to “minister” unto us! This is another of the wondrous provisions of His mercy, which none of us begin to appreciate as we should. It is another of the blessed consequences of our *union* with Christ. In Matthew 4:11 we read, “angels came and ministered unto Him.” Therefore, because Divine grace has made us one with Him, they do so to us too. What a proof is this of our oneness

with Him! Angels of God are sent forth to minister unto redeemed sinners! Bow in worship and praise.

It should deepen within us *a sense of security*. True, it may be abused, but rightly appropriated, how it is calculated to quiet our fears, counteract our sense of feebleness, calm our hearts in time of danger! Is it not written, “The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them;” then *why* be afraid? We doubt not that every Christian has been “delivered” many more times from the jaws of death by angelic interposition, than any of us imagine. The angels of God are sent forth to minister unto redeemed sinners. Then let the realization of this deepen within us a sense of the Lord’s protecting care for entrusting us to His mighty angels.

“Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be the heirs of salvation?” (verse 14).

Three things are to be considered: those to whom the angels minister, why they thus minister and the form their ministry takes.

Those to whom the angels minister are here termed “heirs of salvation,” an expression denoting at least four things. There is an Estate unto which God has predestined His people, an inheritance — *willed* to them by God. This Estate is designated “salvation,” see 1 Thessalonians 5:9, where our appointment unto it is mentioned. It is the consummation of our salvation which is in view, Hebrews 9:28; 1 Peter 1:3,4. Well may this estate or inheritance be called “Salvation,” for those who enter it are forever delivered from all danger, freed from all enemies, secured from all evils. This expression “heirs of salvation” also denotes our *legal rights* to the inheritance: our title is an indefeasable one. Further, it presupposes the coming in of *death*, Christ’s death. Finally, it implies the *perpetuity* of it — “to him and his heirs forever.”

It is to these “heirs of salvation” that the angels minister. To enable us the better to grasp the *relation* of angels to Christians, let us employ an illustration. Take the present household of the Duke of York. In it are many servants, honored, trusted, loved. There are titled “ladies” and “lords” of the realm, yet they are serving, “ministering,” to the infant Princess Elizabeth. At present, she is inferior to them in age, strength, wisdom and attainments; yet is she superior in rank and station. She is of the royal stock, a princess, possibly heir to the throne. In like manner, the heirs of salvation are now in the stage of their infancy; they are but babes in Christ; this is the period of

their minority. The angels far excel us in strength, wisdom, attainments; yet are they our servants, they “minister” unto us. Why? Because we are high above them in birth, rank, station. We are children of God, we are joint-heirs with Christ, we have been redeemed with royal blood, yea, we have been made “kings and priests unto God” (Revelation 1:6). O how wonderful is our rank — members of the Royal family of Heaven, therefore are we “ministered” unto by the holy angels. What a calling is ours! What provision has Divine love made for us!

Let us now inquire, Why do they thus “minister” unto us? For what reason or reasons has God ordained that the angels should be our attendants? All His ways are ordered by perfect wisdom. Let us then reverently inquire as to His purpose in this arrangement.

First, is it not to exercise the graces of obedience and benevolence in the angels themselves? Such a task being assigned them constitutes a real test of their fidelity to their Maker. They are bidden to leave the glories of Heaven and come down to this poor sin-cursed earth; yes, oftentimes to seek out children of God in hovels and workhouses. What a test of their loyalty to God! Not only so, but what an opportunity is thus afforded for the exercise in them of the spirit of benevolence! As the frail and suffering children of God, how their sympathies must be drawn out. There are no such objects in Heaven, there is no distress or suffering there; and methinks, that were the angels to be confined to that realm of unclouded bliss, they would be stoics — unable to sympathize with us poor afflicted creatures. Therefore, to cultivate both the spirit of obedience and of benevolence, God has commissioned them to “minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.”

Second, has not God assigned to them this ministry in order to give them a closer acquaintance with His own wondrous grace and matchless love for poor sinners? The angels are not simply far-distant spectators of the outworking of God’s wondrous purpose of mercy, but have been made, in part, the actual administrators of it! Thus, by virtue of this commission which they have received from Him, they learn in a practical way how much He cares for us.

Third, has not God assigned to them this ministry in order that there might be a closer bond between the different sections of His family? That word in Ephesians 3:15, refers, we believe, not only to the redeemed of Christ, but to

all of Heaven's inhabitants — “of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.” Yes, the angels are members of God's “family” too. Note how in Hebrews 12:22, 23 the two great sections of it are placed side by side: “to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the Firstborn.” Thus, the angels are commissioned to minister for those who shall be heirs of salvation in order that there may be formed a closer bond of intercourse and sympathy between the two great sections of God's family.

Fourth, has not God assigned them this ministry in order to magnify the work of the Lord Jesus? The angels are not only subject to Christ as their Lord, are not only called on to worship Him as God, but they are also employed in watching over the safety and promoting the temporal interests of His redeemed. No doubt this fourth named reason is both the primary and ultimate one. How this magnifies the Savior! Commissioning them to “minister for those who shall be heirs of salvation” is God's putting His imprimature upon the cross-work of Christ.

Let us now consider *how* the angels “minister” to us.

First, in *protecting from temporal dangers*. A striking example of this is found in 2 Kings 6:15-17. Elisha and his servant were menaced by the king of Syria. His forces were sent out to capture them. An host compassed the city where they were. The servant was terrified; then the prophet prayed unto the Lord to open his eyes, “and the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha,” which, in the light of Psalm 68:17 and Hebrews 1:7, we know were the protecting angels of God. In the sequel we learn that the enemy was smitten with blindness, and thus the servants of God escaped. This was a concrete illustration of Psalm 34:7, “The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them.”

Second, in *delivering from temporal dangers*. A case in point is that which is recorded of Lot: “And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife and thy two daughters which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city. And while he fingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the Lord being merciful unto him, and they brought him forth, and set him without the city.” How often angels have “hastened” us when in

the place of danger, and “laid hold” of us while we lingered, perhaps the Day will reveal.

Another example is found in the case of Daniel. We refer to the time when he was cast into the lions’ den. All Bible readers are aware that the prophet was miraculously preserved from these wild beasts, but what is not generally known is the particular instrumentality which God employed on that occasion. This is made known in Daniel 6:22:

“*My God hath sent His *angel*, and hath shut the lions’ mouths, that they have not hurt me.*”

What an illustration is this of Psalm 34:7,

“*The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them!*”

Nor is angelic deliverance of God’s people confined to Old Testament times. In Acts 5:17-19 we read,

“*Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees) and were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison, But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth.*”

Again, in Acts 12:6-9 we read,

“*The same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains; and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.... And he went out, and followed him.*”

One other form which the ministry of angels takes in connection with their custody of God’s children is brought before us in Luke 16:22:

“*And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom.*”

To our natural feelings, a death-bed scene is often a most painful and distressing experience. There we behold a helpless creature, emaciated by disease, convulsed with pain, panting for breath; his countenance pallid, his

lips quivering, his brow bedewed with a cold sweat. But were not the spiritual world hidden from us by a veil of God's appointing we should also see there the glorious inhabitants of Heaven surrounding the bed, waiting for God's summons, to convoy that soul from earth, through the territory of Satan, up to the Father's House. There they are, ready to perform their last office in ministering for those who shall be heirs of salvation. Then, Christian, why fear death?

It should be carefully noted that angels are mentioned in the plural number in Luke 16:22, so also are they in Psalm 91:11, 12:

“For He shall give His *angels* charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. *They* shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.”

There is nothing whatever in Scripture to support the Romish tradition of a single guardian angel for each person or Christian: the plural number in the above passages make directly against it.

“Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” (verse 14).

“This text wears an interrogative form; but it is just equivalent to a strong affirmation. It is certain that no angel sits on the throne of God; it is certain that they are all *ministering* spirits. A minister is a servant — a person who occupies an inferior place, who acts a subordinate part, subject to the authority and regulated by the will of another. The angels are ‘*ministering* spirits,’ they are not *governing* spirits. Service, not dominion, is their province. In the first phrase there is an expression of their being God's ministers or servants; in the second, that He *sends forth*, commissions these servants of His to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation. They are His servants, and He uses their instrumentality for promoting the happiness of His peculiar people. There is a double contrast. The Son is the co-ruler — they are servants; the Son sits they are sent forth” (Dr. J. Brown).

Finally, it should be observed that “ministering spirits” is a title or designation. Not only do the angels render service to God's saints, but they have an *office* so to do. It is not simply that they “go forth” to minister for

them, but they are “sent forth.” They do not take this work upon themselves, but have received a definite charge or commission from their Maker. How this evidences, once more, the preciousness to Christ of those whom He purchased with His blood! O that our hearts may be bowed in wonderment and worship for this blessed provision of His love toward us while we are left in this wilderness scene. O that our fears may be removed, and our hearts strengthened by the realization that, amid the dangers and perils with which we are now surrounded, the angels of God are guarding and ministering both for and to us.

CHAPTER 7
CHRIST SUPERIOR TO ANGELS
(HEBREWS 2:1-4)

The title of this article is based upon the fact that the opening verses of Hebrews 2 contains an exhortation based upon what has been said in chapter 1. Thus, our present portion continues the second section of the Epistle. Inasmuch as it opens with the word “Therefore” we are called upon to review that which has already been before us.

The first section of the Epistle, contained in its first three verses, may be looked at in two ways: both as forming an Introduction to the Epistle as a whole, and as a distinct division of it, in which is set forth the superiority of Christ over the prophets. In what follows, to the end of the chapter, we are shown the superiority of Christ over angels. This is affirmed in verse 4, and the proofs thereof are found in verses 5-14. These proofs are all drawn from the Old Testament Scriptures, and the completeness and perfection of the demonstration thus afforded is evidenced by their being *seven* in number. Thus, centuries before He appeared on earth, the Word of Truth bore witness to the surpassing excellency of Christ and His exaltation above all creatures.

As an analysis and summary of what these seven passages teach concerning the superiority of Christ over the angels, we may express it thus:

1. He has obtained a more excellent name than they verses 4, 5.
2. He will be worshipped by them as the Firstborn, verse 6.
3. He made them, verse 7.
4. He is the Divine throne-sitter, verses 8, 9.
5. He is anointed above them, verse 9.
6. He is the Creator of the universe, immutable and eternal verses 10- 12.
7. He has a higher place of honor verses 13, 14.

It is striking to note that these same seven quotations from the Old Testament also furnish proof of the seven-fold glory of the Mediator affirmed in verses 2, 3. There He is spoken of,

First, as the “*Son:*” proof of this is supplied in verse 5, by a quotation from

the 2nd Psalm.

Second, He is denominated the “Heir:” proof of this is given in verse 6, where He is owned as the “Firstborn.”

Third, it is said in verse 2 that He “made the worlds:” proof of this is given in verse 10 by a quotation from the 104th Psalm.

Fourth, He is called “the Brightness of God’s glory:” in verse 9 an Old Testament Scripture is quoted to show that He has been “anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows.”

Fifth, He is the “express Image” of God’s person: in verse 8, Scripture is quoted to show that the Father owned Him as “*God*.”

Sixth, in verse 3 it is said that He has “purged our sins”: in verse 14 we have mention of “the heirs of salvation.”

Seventh, in verse 3 it is affirmed that He has “sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high”; in verse 13 the 110th Psalm is quoted in proof of this. What an example is this of “proving all things” (1 Thessalonians 5:21), and that, by the Word of God itself!

Having set forth the excellency of Christ’s Divine nature and royal function, the apostle now, in chapter 2, proceeds to show the reality and uniqueness of His humanity. In passing from one to the other the Holy Spirit moves him to make a practical application to his hearers of what he had already brought before them, for the two things which ever concern and the two ends at which the true servant of God ever aims, are, the glory of the Lord and the spiritual good of those to whom he ministers. God’s truth is not only addressed to our understanding, but to our conscience. It is designed not only to instruct, but to move us and mould our lives.

In one sense the first four verses of chapter 2 form a parenthesis, inasmuch as they interrupt the apostle’s discussion of Christ’s relation to angels, which is resumed in verse 5 and amplified in verse 9. But this digression, so far from being a literary blemish, is very beautiful. When is it that a well-trained mind ceases to think logically? Or an instructed preacher to speak in orderly sequence? Is it not when his heart is moved? When his emotions are deeply stirred? So was it here with the apostle Paul. His great heart yearned for the salvation of his brethren according to the flesh; therefore, did his mind turn for a moment *from the* theme he was pursuing, to address himself to their

consciences. He who said to the saints at Rome,

“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved” (Hebrews 10:1),

could not calmly write to the Hebrews without breaking off and making an impassioned appeal to them. This, we shall, D.V., find he does again and again.

That which is central in our present parenthesis is an exhortation to give good heed to the Gospel. This admonition is first propounded in verse 1, and then enforced in verses 2-4. Two points are noted for the enforcing of this duty; one is the danger; the other, the vengeance, which is certain to follow on the neglect of the Gospel. The danger is intimated in the word, “Lest we should let them slip.”

The vengeance is hinted in the question. “How shall we escape”? This is emphasized by a solemn warning, namely, despisers of God were summarily dealt with under the law; therefore, those who shut their ears to the Gospel, which is so much more excellent, are, without doubt, treasuring up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath (Romans 2:4, 5). We are now ready to attend to the details of our present portion.

“Therefore, we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip” (verse 1).

In this verse, and in those which immediately follow, the apostle specifies a duty to be performed in regard of that most excellent Teacher which God sent to reveal His Gospel unto them. This duty is to give more than ordinary heed unto that Gospel. Such is the force of the opening, “Therefore,” which signifies, for this cause: because God has vouchsafed so excellent a Teacher, He must be the more carefully attended unto. The “therefore” looks back to all the varied glories which set forth Christ’s excellency named in the previous chapter. Because He is God’s “Son,” therefore give heed. Because He is “the Heir of all things,” therefore give heed. Because He “made the worlds,” therefore give heed; and so on. These are so many grounds on which our present exhortation is based.

“*Therefore* is equivalent to, ‘Since Jesus Christ is as much better than the angels, as He hath received by inheritance a more excellent

name than they — since He is both essentially and officially inconceivably superior to these heavenly messengers, His message has paramount claims on our attention, belief, and obedience’,” (Dr. J. Brown).

The eminency of an author’s dignity and authority, and the excellency of his knowledge and wisdom, do much commend that which is spoken or written by him. If a king, prudent and learned, takes upon himself to instruct others, due attention and diligent heed should be given thereunto.

“The Queen of the South came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon” (Matthew 12:42),

and counted those of his servants who stood continually before him and heard his wisdom, to be happy (1 Kings 10:8). But a greater than Solomon is here referred to by the apostle: therefore, we *ought* “to give the more earnest heed.” It was usual with the prophets to preface their utterances with a “Thus saith the Lord,” and thereby arrest the attention and awe the hearts of their hearers. Here the apostle refers to the person of the Lord Himself as the argument for hearing what He said.

“Therefore *we* ought.”

“It is striking to see how the apostle takes the place of such as simply had the message, like other Jews, from those who personally heard Him; so completely was he writing, not as the apostle magnifying his office, but as one of Israel, who were addressed by those who companied with Messiah on earth. It was confirmed ‘unto *us*,’ says he, again putting himself along with his nation, instead of conveying his heavenly revelations as one taken out from the people and the Gentiles to which he was sent. He looks at what was their proper testimony, not at that to which he had been separated extraordinarily. He is dealing with them as much as possible on their own ground, though, of course, without compromise of his own” (William Kelly).

“*We ought* to give the more earnest heed.” Here the apostle addresses himself to the *responsibility* of his readers. Here is an exhortation to the performing of a specific duty. The Greek verb is very strong and emphatic; several times it is translated “must.” Thus, in 1 Timothy 3:2, “A bishop must be

blameless”; that is, it is his duty so to be. That to which the apostle here pointed was a necessity lying upon his readers. It is not an arbitrary matter, left to our own caprice to do or not to do. “Give the more earnest heed,” is something more than a piece of good advice; it is a Divine precept, and God has commanded us “to keep His precepts diligently” (Psalm 119:4). Thus, in view of His sovereignty, and His power and rights over us, we “*ought* to give the more earnest heed” to what He has bidden us do. Descending to a lower level, it is the part of wisdom so to do, and that for our own good; we “ought to earnestly heed the things which we hear” in order to our own happiness.

“To ‘give heed’ is to apply the mind to a particular subject, to attend to it, to consider it. It is here opposed to ‘neglecting the great salvation.’ No person can read the Scriptures without observing the stress that is laid on *consideration*, and the criminality and hazards which are represented as connected with inconsideration. Nor is this at all wonderful when we reflect that the Gospel is a moral remedy for a moral disease. It is by being believed it becomes efficacious. It cannot be believed unless it is understood: it cannot be understood unless it is attended to. Truth must be kept before the mind in order to its producing an appropriate effect; and how can it be kept before the mind, but by our giving heed to it” (Dr. J. Brown).

“The duty here intended is a serious, firm, and fixed settling of the mind upon that which we hear; a bowing and bending of the will to yield unto it; an applying of the heart to it, a placing of the affections upon it, and bringing the whole man into conformity thereunto. Thus it comprises knowledge of the Word, faith therein, obedience thereto, and all other due respects that may any way concern it” (Dr. Gouge).

“To the things which we have heard.” To “hear” is not sufficient, there must be prayerful meditation, personal appropriation. No doubt the wider reference was to the Gospel, which these Hebrews had heard; though the more direct appeal was concerning that which the apostle had brought before them, in the previous chapter concerning the person and work of God’s Son. To us, today, it would include all that God has said in His Word.

“Lest at any time we should let slip.” There is a difficulty here in making quite sure of the Spirit’s precise meaning. The expression “we should let slip”

is one word in the Greek, and it occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. The absence of the pronoun seems to be designed for the allowing of a *double* thought: lest we “let slip” the things we have heard, and, or, lest we ourselves slip away — apostatize.

“Lest at any time we let them slip.” The danger is real. The effects of sin are stamped on our members; it is easy to recall the things of no value, but the things of God slip out of our mind. The fault is our own, through failing to give “the more earnest heed.” Unless we “keep in memory” (1 Corinthians 15:2), and unless we are duly informed by them, they slip away like water out of a leaky utensil.

“Lest haply we drift away.” Understood thus, these words sound the first warning-note of this Epistle against apostasy, and this verse is parallel with 3:14; 4:1; 12:25. Perseverance in the faith, continuance in the Word, is a prime pre-requisite of discipleship, see John 8:31; Colossians 1:23, etc. Many who heard, and once seemed really interested in spiritual things, “concerning the faith *have* made shipwreck” (1 Timothy 1:19).

Thus, in the light of the whole context four reasons may be mentioned *why* we should give the more earnest heed to the things which God has spoken unto us:

First, because of the glory and majesty of the One by whom He has communicated His mind and will, the Son.

Second, because the message of Christianity is final.

Third, because of the infinite preciousness of the Gospel.

Fourth, because of the hopeless perdition and terrible tortures awaiting those who reject or let slip the testimony of God’s wondrous grace.

“For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward” (verse 2).

The apostle here advances another reason why the Hebrews ought to attend diligently to the Gospel. Having shown that such attention should be given because of the excellency of its Author and Publisher, and because of the benefits which would be lost through negligence, he now announces the certain vengeance of Heaven on its neglecters, a vengeance sorer than even

that which was wont to be executed under the Law.

The opening “for” indicates that what follows gives a reason for persuading the Hebrews. The “if” has the force of “since,” as in John 8:46; 14:3; Colossians 3:1, etc. The “word spoken by angels” seems to refer to the Mosaic law, compare Acts 7:53; Galatians 3:19.

“The only difficulty seems to arise out of the express declaration made by the sacred historian, that Jehovah spake all the words of the law. But the difficulty is more apparent than real. What lies at the foundation of the apostle’s whole argument is *God* spake both the Law and the Gospel. Both the one and the other are of Divine origin. It is not the origin, but the *medium* of the two revelations which he contrasts. ‘He made known His will by the ministry of angels in the giving of the law; He made known His will by the Son in the revelation of mercy.’ It seems probable from these words that the audible voice in which the revelation from Mount Sinai was made, was produced by angelic ministry” (Dr. J. Brown).

Because the word spoken, ministerially, by angels was the Word of the Lord, it was “steadfast” — firm, inviolable, not to be gainsaid. Proof of this is furnished in the “and every transgression,” etc. The distinction between “transgression” and “disobedience” is not easy to define. The one refers more to the outward act of violating God’s law; the other, perhaps, to the state of heart which produced it. The words “receive a just recompense of reward” signify that every violation of God’s law was punished according to its demerits. The term “reward” conveys the thought of “that which is due.” Punishment for the breaking of God’s law is not always administered in this life, but is none the less sure: see Romans 2:3-9.

This verse sets out a most important principle in connection with the governmental dealings of God: that principle is that the Judge of all the earth will be absolutely just in His dealings with the wicked. Though the direct reference be to His administration of the Law’s penalty in the past, yet, inasmuch as He changes not, it is strictly applicable to the great assize in the Day to come. There will be degrees of punishment, and those degrees, the sentence meted out to each rebel against God, will be on this basis, that every transgression and disobedience shall receive “*a just* recompense of reward.” In brief, we may say that punishment will be graded according to light and

opportunity (Matthew 11:20-24; Luke 12:47, 48), according to the nature of the sins committed (John 19:11; Mark 12:38-40; Hebrews 10:29), according to the number of the sins committed (Romans 2:6, etc.).

“*How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?*” (verse 3). This verse evokes a number of questions to which, perhaps, no conclusive and final answers may be furnished. Who are referred to by the “we”? How shall we escape — *what?* Exactly what is in view in the “so great salvation?” In pondering these questions several considerations need to be steadily kept before us.

First, the people to whom this Epistle was directly addressed and the circumstances in which they were then placed.

Second, the central purpose of the Epistle and the character of its distinctive theme.

Third, the bearing of the context on this verse and its several expressions.

Fourth, light which other passages in this Epistle may shed upon it.

The relation between this verse and the preceding ones is evident. The apostle had just been pressing upon his brethren the need of their more earnestly giving heed unto the things which they had heard, which is more or less defined in the second half of verse 3: “which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord” — the reference being to His preaching of the Gospel. By a metonymy, the Gospel, that reveals and proclaims God’s *salvation*, is here meant. In Ephesians 1:13 it is styled “The gospel of your salvation,” in Acts 13:26 the “word of this salvation,” in Romans 1:16 it is called “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth,” and in Titus 2:11, “the grace of God which bringeth salvation.” The Gospel dispensation is denominated “the Day of Salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). Ministers of the Gospel are they “which show unto us the way of salvation” (Acts 16:17).

That under this word “salvation” the Gospel be meant, is also evident from the contrastive expression in verse 2 — “the word spoken by angels.” That word was spoken before the time of the Gospel’s publication (note that the term “*Gospel*” is never once found in the Old Testament), and obviously signified the Law.

Fitly may the Gospel be styled “salvation:”

First, because in opposition to the Law (which was a “ministration of condemnation” 2 Corinthians 3:9), it is a ministration of salvation.

Second, because the Author of the Gospel is “salvation” itself: see Luke 2:30, John 4:22, etc., where “salvation” is synonymous with “the Savior.”

Third, because whatever is needful to a knowledge of salvation is contained in the Gospel.

Fourth, because the Gospel is God’s appointed means of salvation: see 1 Corinthians 1:21. True, in Old Testament times God’s elect had and knew the Gospel — Galatians 3:16; Hebrews 4:2 — yet it was not publicly proclaimed and fully expounded. They had it under types and shadows, and in promises and prophecies.

The excellency of this salvation is denoted by the words “so great.” The absence of any co-relative implies it to be so wondrous that its greatness cannot be expressed. Upon this Dr. J. Brown has well said:

“The ‘salvation’ here, then, is the deliverance of men through the mediation of Jesus Christ. This salvation is spoken of by the Apostle as unspeakably great: not merely a great salvation, nor even *the* great salvation but ‘so great salvation’ — an expression peculiarly fitted to express his high estimate of its importance. And who that knows anything about that deliverance can wonder at the Apostle using such language?

“What are the *evils* from which it saves us? The displeasure of God, with all its fearful consequences in time and eternity; and ‘who knows the power of His anger?’ We must measure the extent of infinite power, we must fathom the depths of infinite wisdom, before we can resolve the fearful question. We can only say, ‘According to Thy fear, so is Thy wrath.’ The most frightful conception comes infinitely short of the more dreadful reality. A depravity of nature ever increasing, and miseries varied according to our varied capacities of suffering — limited in intensity only by our powers of endurance, which an almighty enemy can enlarge indefinitely, and protracted throughout the whole eternity of our being — these are the evils from which this salvation delivers.

“And what are the *blessings* to which it raises? A full, free, and

everlasting remission of our sins — the enjoyment of the paternal favor of the infinitely powerful, and wise, and benignant Jehovah — the transformation of our moral nature — a tranquil conscience — a good hope down here; and in due time, perfect purity and perfect happiness for ever in the eternal enjoyment of God.

“And *how* were these evils averted from us? — how were these blessings obtained for us? By the incarnation, obedience, suffering, and death of the Only-begotten of God, as a sin-offering in our room! And how are we individually interested in this salvation? Through the operations of the Holy Spirit, in which He manifests a power not inferior to that by which the Savior was raised from the dead, or the world was created. Surely such a deliverance well merits the appellation, a ‘so great salvation!’”

But this great salvation, which is made known in the Gospel, may be “neglected.” While it is true that salvation is not only announced, but is also secured to and effectuated in God’s elect by the Holy Spirit, yet it must not be forgotten that the Gospel addresses *the moral responsibility* of those to whom it comes. There is not only an effectual call, but a general one, which is made unto “the sons of men” (Proverbs 8:4). The Gospel is for the sinner’s *acceptance*, see 1 Timothy 1:15; 2 Corinthians 11:41. The Gospel is more than a publication of good news, more than an invitation for burdened souls to come to Christ for relief and peace. In its first address to those who hear, it is a Divine mandate, an authoritative command, which is disregarded at the sinner’s imminent peril. That it *does* issue a “command” is clear from Acts 17:30; Romans 16:25, 26. That disobedience to *this* “command” will be punished, is clear from John 3:18, 1 Peter 4:17, 2 Thessalonians 1:8.

The Greek word here rendered “neglect” is translated “made light of” in Matthew 22:5. In this latter passage the reference is to the King making a marriage for His Son, and then sending forth his servants to call them which were bidden to the wedding. But they “made light of” the King’s gracious overtures and “went their ways, one to his family, another to his merchandise.” The parable sets forth the very sin against which the apostle was here warning the Hebrews, namely, failure to give earnest heed to the things which were spoken by the Lord, and neglecting His great salvation. To “neglect” the Gospel, is to remain inattentive and unbelieving. How, then,

asks the apostle, shall such “escape?” “Escape” what? Why, the “damnation of Hell” (Matthew 23:33)! Such, we take it, is the first meaning and wider scope of the searching question asked in verse 3. Should it be objected, This cannot be, for in the “we” the apostle Paul manifestly included himself. The answer is, so also does he in the “we” of Hebrews 10:26! That the “we” includes more than those who had really believed the Gospel will be clear from verse 4.

Coming now to the narrower application of these words and their more direct bearing upon the regenerated Hebrews whom the Holy Spirit was specifically addressing, we must consider them in the light of the chief design of this Epistle, and the circumstances in which the Hebrews were then placed; namely, under sore temptation to forsake their espousal of Christianity and to return to Judaism. Looked at thus, the “so great salvation” is only another name for Christianity itself, the “better thing” (Hebrews 11:40) which had been brought in by Christ. Judaism was about to fall under the unsparing judgment of God. If, therefore, they turned from their allegiance to Christ and went back to that which was on the eve of being destroyed, how could they “escape” was the question which they must face?

Hebrews 2:3 must be interpreted in harmony with its whole context. In the opening verse of chapter 2 the apostle is making a practical and searching application of all he had said in chapter 1, where he had shown the superiority of Christianity over Judaism, by proving the exaltation of Christ — the Center and Substance of Christianity — over prophets and angels. In Hebrews 1:14, He had spoken of the “heirs of salvation” which, among other things, pointed to their salvation as being yet future. In one sense they had been saved (from the penalty of sin), in another sense they were still being saved (from the power of sin), in still another sense they were yet to be saved (from the presence of sin). But God ever deals with His people as *accountable* creatures. As moral beings, in contrast from stock and stones, He addresses their responsibility. Hence, God’s saints are called upon to give diligence to make their “calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10) — sure unto themselves, and unto their brethren. This, among other things, is done, by using the Divinely-appointed means of grace, and by perseverance and continuance in the faith: see John 8:31; Acts 11:23; 13:43; 14:22; 2 Timothy 3:14, etc.

The Christian life is likened unto a “race” set before us: 1 Corinthians 9:24; Philippians 3:13, 14; 2 Timothy 4:7; Hebrews 12:1. A “race” calls for self-discipline, personal exertion, perseverance. The Inheritance is set before us in promise, but it is written,

“Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise” (Hebrews 10:36).

The “promise” is secured by faith and patience, by actually “running” the race set before us. In the light of this, “neglect” would signify failure to “give diligence” to make our calling and election sure, failure to “press forward” and “run the race.” If then we “neglect,” how shall we “escape?” Escape what? Ah, note how abstractly the apostle worded it. He did not specify the “what.” It all depends upon the state of the individual. If he be only a lifeless professor and continues neglecting the Gospel, Hell will be his certain portion. But if he be a regenerated believer, though a careless and worldly one, then lack of assurance and joy, profitless and fruitlessness, will be his portion; and then, how shall he “escape” the chastening rod of the holy Father? Thus, the question asked in our verse addresses itself to *all* who read the Epistle.

“Which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard” (verse 3).

This need not detain us long. Its central design is to emphasize the importance and need of heeding that which had been spoken by Christ: with it should be carefully compared Deuteronomy 18:18, 19; Luke 9:35. Incidentally, the words “at the first *began*” intimates that Christ was the first Gospel-Preacher! The reference is to that which was preached first by Christ Himself, recorded in the Gospels; then, to that which was proclaimed by His apostles, reported in the book of Acts. The title here given to the Savior, “Lord,” emphasizes both His dignity and authority, and intimates that the responsibility of the Hebrews was being addressed. Till Christ came and preached, “the people sat in darkness and in the shadow and region of death;” and when He began to preach, they “saw great light” (Matthew 4:16). With the “confirmed unto us” compare Luke 1:1, 2. The apostle was calling the Hebrews’ attention to the *sureness* of the ground on which their faith rested.

“God also bearing witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own

will” (verse 4).

The reference here is to the miracles wrought by God through the apostles in the early days of the Christian era. The book of Acts records many examples and illustrations of what is here said: see 5:9, 10; 13:11; 3:7; 9:40; 19:12, etc. The Gospel was first preached by the Lord Himself, then it was confirmed by the apostles, and then again by God Himself in such works as could not be performed by a Divine power. “Bearing witness with” is a single word in the Greek, but a double compound. The simple verb signifies to witness to a thing as in John 1:7; the compound, to add testimony to testimony, or to add a testimony to some other confirmation; the double compound, to give a joint-testimony or to give-witness-together with one another. A similar compound is used in Romans 8:16.

The means employed by God in thus confirming the witness of His servant are described by four terms: signs, wonders, miracles, gifts. The first three refer to the same things, though under different aspects. “Signs” denote the making more simple and evident that which otherwise could hardly be discerned; compare the use of the terms in Matthew 12:38; 16:1, and note the “see” and “show.” “Wonders” points both to the striking nature of the “signs” and to the effects produced in those who beheld them: compare Acts 2:19; 7:36. “Miracles” refers to the supernatural power which produced the “signs” and “wonders.” The Greek word is rendered “mighty deeds” in 2 Corinthians 12:12. Thus, “miracles” are visible and wondrous works done by the all-mighty power of God, above or against the course of nature. Our text speaks of “*divers* miracles”: many sorts of supernatural interpositions of God are recorded in the Acts.

An additional means employed by God in confirming the Gospel was “gifts of the Holy Spirit.” The Greek word here rendered “gifts” means “divisions” or “distributions”; in the singular number it occurs in Hebrews 4:12, where it is translated “dividing asunder.” In its verbal form it is found in 1 Corinthians 7:17, “God hath distributed to every man.” Because these distributions of the Holy Spirit originated not in those by whom they were exercised and through whom they were displayed, they are not unfitly translated “gifts”; the reference being to the gifts extraordinary, manifested through and by the apostles. These “gifts” may also be seen in the book of Acts — the day of Pentecost, e.g., also in 1 Corinthians 12:4 and what there follows. We may

add that these “divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit” were given by God *before* the New Testament was written. Now that the Scriptures are complete they are no longer needed, nor given.

“According to His own will.” The fore-mentioned divers miracles and distributions of gifts were ordered and disposed according to the sovereign pleasure of Deity. The act of distributing is attributed to God the Father in 1 Corinthians 7:17, to the Son in Ephesians 4:7, to the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:11. The Greek signifies, “according to *His* own will.” The will of God is the one rule by which all things are ordered that He Himself doeth, and whereby all things ought to be ordered that His creatures do. Scripture distinguishes between the secret and revealed will of God, see Deuteronomy 29:29, where both are referred to. The secret will of God is called His “counsel” (Isaiah 46:10), the “counsel of His will” (Ephesians 1:11), His “purpose” (Romans 8:28), His “good pleasure” (Ephesians 1:9). The revealed will of God is made known in His Word, and is so called because, just as the ordinary means by which men make known their minds is by the word of their mouth, so the revelation of God’s will is called “His Word.” This revealed will of God is described in Romans 12:2, and is primarily intended in the second clause of the Lord’s prayer. Here in our text it is the secret will of God which is meant.

In these days of creature-pride and haughtiness, we need reminding that God is sovereign, conferring with none, consulting none; doing as *He* pleases. God’s will is His only rule. As He creates, governs, and disposes all things, so He distributes the gifts of His Spirit “according to His own will.” Should any murmur, His challenge is “Is it not lawful for Me to do what I will with Mine own?” (Matthew 20:15). It is important to note that these gifts of the Spirit were distributed *not* “according to the faith” of those who received them — just as in the parable of the talents the supreme Sovereign distributed them unequally, according to His own good pleasure. May Divine grace bring both writer and reader into complete subjection to the secret will of God and obedience to His revealed will.

What has been before us in verses 2, 3 tells us how firm and sure is the foundation on which our faith rests. In giving earnest heed to the Gospel, notwithstanding its unique and amazing contents, we are not following cunningly devised fables, but that which comes to us certified by

unimpeachable witnesses. First, it began to be spoken by the Lord Himself. Though this was sufficient to make the Gospel “worthy of all acceptance,” God mercifully, because of our weakness, caused it to be “confirmed” by those who had heard the Lord for themselves. The witness of these men was, in turn, authenticated by Divine displays of power through them such as was never seen before or since. Finally, additional attestation was furnished in supernatural outpourings of the Holy Spirit. Thus, God has graciously added witness to witness and testimony to testimony. How thankful we should be for these many infallible proofs! May this consideration of them result in the strengthening of our faith to the praise of the glory of God’s grace.

CHAPTER 8

CHRIST SUPERIOR TO THE ANGELS

(HEBREWS 2:5-9)

The scope, the order of thought, and the logical bearings of our present passage are not so easily discerned as those we have already gone over. That it, the first part at least, picks up the thread dropped in Hebrews 1:14 and continues to exhibit the superiority of Christ over angels, is clear from verse 5; but when we reach verse 9 we read of Jesus being “made a little *lower* than the angels.” At first glance this seems to present a real difficulty, but, as is generally the case with such passages, in reality verse 9, taken as a whole, supplies the key to our present portion.

In Hebrews 1:4-14 the Holy Spirit, through the apostle, has furnished a seven-fold proof of the superiority of Israel’s Messiah over the angels. This proof, taken from their own Scriptures, was clear and incontrovertible. In Hebrews 2:1-4 a parenthesis was made, opportunity being taken to give a solemn and searching application to the consciences and hearts of the Hebrews of what had just been brought before them: the authority of the Gospel was commensurate with its grace, and God would avenge the slights of that which was first proclaimed by His Son, as surely as He had the refractions of that law which he had given by the mediation of angels. Now here in Hebrews 2:5 and onwards an objection is anticipated and removed.

The objection may be framed thus: How could supremacy be predicated of One who became Man, and died? As we have shown in a previous article, the Jews actually regarded the angels with a higher veneration than the greatest of the “*fathers*” — *Abraham*, *Moses*, *Joshua*, and *David*. And rightly so; their own Scriptures declared that they “excel in strength.” Thus a real difficulty was presented to them, in the fact that He whom the apostle affirmed had, by inheritance, obtained “*a more excellent name*” than angels, was known to them as “the Son of man,” for man was a creature *inferior* to angels. Moreover, angels do not die, Christ had; how, then, could He be their superior?

The method followed by the Holy Spirit in meeting this objection and removing the difficulty is as follows: He shows (in verse 9) that so far from

the humiliation and suffering endured by Christ tarnishing His glory, they were the meritorious cause of His exaltation. In support of this a remarkable quotation is made from the 8th Psalm to prove that God has placed *man*, and not angels, at the head of the future economy — the “world to come.” The design of God in that economy is to raise “man” to the highest place of all among His creatures, and that design has been secured by Christ’s becoming Man and dying, and thus obtaining for Himself and His people that state of transcendent dignity and honor which the Psalmist prophesied should be possessed by man in the Age to come.

Thus, those commentators are mistaken who suppose that in Hebrews 2:5 the apostle begins to advance *further proof* of Christ’s superiority over angels. Complete demonstration of this had been made in chapter 1, as the *seven* Old Testament passages there cited go to show. True it is that what the apostle says in verse 5 makes manifest the exaltation of the Savior above the celestial hierarchies, yet his purpose in so doing was to meet an objector. What we have in our present section is brought in to show that the evidence supplied in chapter 1 could not be shaken, and that the very objection which a Jew might make against it had been duly provided for and fully met in his own Scriptures. Thus may we admire the wisdom of Him who knoweth the end from the beginning, and maketh even the wrath of man to praise Him.

“For unto the angels hath He not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak” (verse 5).

In taking up this verse three questions need to be duly pondered: What is here referred to in “the world to come?” What is meant by its being “put in subjection?” What bearing has this statement upon the apostle’s argument? Let us endeavor to deal with them in this order.

Commentators are by no means agreed on the signification of this term “the world to come.” Many of the older ones, who were post-millennarians, understood by it a reference to the present Gospel dispensation, in contrast from the Mosaic economy. Others suppose that it refers to the Church, of which Christ, and not angels, is the Head. Others look upon it as synonymous with the Eternal State, comparing it with the Lord’s words in Matthew 12:32,

“Whosoever speaketh against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.”

The objection against this last view is that the Greek word for “world” is quite different in Hebrews 2:5 from that which is used in Matthew 12:32.

We believe the first key to the right understanding of this expression is to be found in the particular term used here by the Holy Spirit, translated “world.” It is neither “*kosmos*,” the common one for “world,” as in John 3:16, etc.; nor “*aion*,” meaning “age,” in Matthew 13:35, Hebrews 9:26, etc. Instead, it is “*oikoumene*,” which, etymologically, signifies “habitable place”; but this helps us nothing. The word is found fifteen times in the New Testament. In thirteen of them it appears to be used as a synonym for “*earth*.” But in the remaining passage, namely, Hebrews 1:6, light is cast upon our present verse. As we sought to show in our exposition of that verse, the words “when again He brings in the Firstborn into the world” (*oikoumene*) refer to the second advent of Christ to this earth, and point to His millennial kingdom. This, we are satisfied, is also the reference in Hebrews 2:5.

The “world to come” was a subject of absorbing interest and a topic of frequent conversation among all godly Jews. Unlike us, the object of hope set before them was not Heaven, but a glorious kingdom on earth, ruled over in righteousness by their Messiah. This would be the time when Jerusalem should be no more “trodden down by the Gentiles,” but become “a praise in all the earth”; when heathen idolatry should give place to “*the knowledge of the glory of the Lord*,” filling the earth as the waters do the sea. In other words, it would be the time when the kingdom-predictions of their prophets should be fulfilled. Nor had there been anything in the teachings of Christ to show these expectations were unwarranted. Instead, He had said,

“Ye which have followed Me, in the regeneration (Millennium) when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren for My name’s sake, shall receive an hundred-fold,” etc. (Matthew 19:28-30).

Those who had believed in Him as the Savior from sin, eagerly awaited the establishing of His kingdom on earth: see Acts 1:6.

The “world to come” is the renovated earth under the reign of the Messiah. In the spiritual arithmetic of Scripture the number of the earth is *four*; a number plainly stamped upon it: note the four seasons of the year, the four points to its compass. How striking is it to note, then, that the Word speaks of exactly

four earths, namely, the pre-Adamic, the present, the Millennial (delivered from the curse), the new earth. The “world to come” is the time when Israel shall dwell in their own land in peace and blessing, when wars shall be made to cease, when oppression and injustice shall end, when all the outward creation shall manifest the presence of the Prince of peace.

Not unto the angels hath God “put in subjection” this world to come. “Put in subjection” is the translation of a single compound Greek word, meaning “to put under.” In its simple form it signifies to appoint or ordain; in its compound, to appoint over. Note the relative “He”: God places in subjection whom He will and to whom He will. Because God hath not put the world to come in subjection to angels, therefore angels have no authority over it.

“It is the good pleasure of God to use an angel where it is a question of providence, or law, or power; but where it comes to the manifestation of His glory in Christ, He must have other instruments more suited for His nature, and according to His affections” (W. Kelly).

To whom, then, hath God subjected the world to come? Instead of supplying a categorical answer, the apostle leaves his readers to draw their answer from what an Old Testament oracle had said.

Ere taking up the point last raised, let us now consider the bearing which the contents of this 5th verse has upon the apostle’s argument. It opens with the word “for,” which intimates that there is a glance backwards to and now a continuation of something said previously. This casual particle connects not with the first four verses of our chapter, for, as we have shown, they are of the nature of a parenthesis. The backward glance is to what was said in Hebrews 1:14, where we are told,

“Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?”

The Inheritance will not be governed by angels; they are but *ministers* to its “heirs.” “*For* He (God) hath not put in subjection to angels the world to come” (the earthly inheritance) whereof we speak. Thus the connection is clear. The “whereof we speak” takes us back to Hebrews 1:14, and is amplified in Hebrews 2:6-9.

Before turning to that which follows, let us summarize that which has been

before us in verse 5. In Hebrews 1:14, the apostle had affirmed that the angels are in a position of *subjection* to the redeemed of Christ; now he declares that, in the Millennial era also, not angels, but the “heirs of salvation,” shall occupy the place of governmental dominion. The “world to come” is mentioned here because it is in the next Age that the Inheritance of salvation will be entered into and enjoyed. In view of what follows from Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2:5, may possibly set forth a designed contrast from the pre-Adamic earth, which, most probably, was placed under the dominion of unfallen Satan and his angels. The *practical* bearings of this verse on the Hebrews was: Continue to hold fast your allegiance to Christ, *for* the time is coming when those who do so shall enter into a glory surpassing that of the angels.

“But one in a certain place testified, saying, ‘What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? Or the son of man, that Thou visitest him?’”
(verse 6).

In seeking to discover the relevancy of this quotation and its bearing upon the apostle’s argument, the scope and details of this remarkable and little-understood Psalm from which it is taken, need to be carefully studied. But observe, first, *how* the quotation is introduced, “But one in a certain place testified, saying.” It suggests that the Hebrews were so familiar with the Holy Scriptures that it was not necessary to give the reference! The “*But*” intimates that the apostle is about to point a contrast from the angels: not “*and*,” but “*but!*”

Before proceeding further, let us ponder the doctrinal teaching of Psalm 8. Upon this we cannot do better than reproduce the summary of it given by Dr. Gouge:

“The main scope of the Psalm is, to magnify the glory of God: this is evident by the first and last verses thereof. That main point is proved by the works of God, which in general He declares to be so conspicuous, as very babes can magnify God in them to the astonishment of His enemies, verse 2. In particular He first produceth those visible glorious works that are above; which manifest God’s eternal power and Godhead, verse 3.

Then He amplifieth God’s goodness to man (who had made himself a mortal miserable creature, verse 4), by setting forth the high

advancement of man above all other creatures, not the angels excepted, verses 5-7. This evidence of God's greatness to man so ravished the prophet's spirit, as with an high admiration he thus expresseth it, 'What is man?' etc. Hereupon he concludeth that Psalm as he began it with extolling the glorious excellency of the Lord."

The force of the 4th verse of Psalm 8, the first here quoted in Hebrews 2, may be gathered from the words which immediately precede: "When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained — What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that Thou visitest him?" In view of the magnitude of God's creation, in contrast from the heavenly bodies, What is man? This is confirmed by the particular word which the Holy Spirit has here employed. In the Old Testament. He has used four different words, all rendered "man" in our English version. The one used here is "*enosh*," which signifies "frail and fallen man." It is the word used in Psalm 9:20! What is man, fallen man, that the great God should be mindful of him? Still less that He should crown him with "glory and honor?" Ah, it is *this* which should move our hearts to deepest wonderment, as it will fill us with ever-increasing amazement and praise in the ages yet to come.

"What is man that Thou art mindful of him? Or the son of man that Thou visitest him?" (verse 6).

The latter clause seems to be added in order to emphasize the preceding thought. "Son of man" is added as a *diminution* for "man": compare Job 25:6 for a parallel. Another reason why this second clause may be added to verse 6 is to show that it is *not* Adam who is here spoken of. From the contents of verses 5-7 many have thought that Psalm 8 was referring to the father of the human family (see Genesis 1:26); but this second part of its fourth verse seems to have been brought in designedly to correct us. Certainly Adam was not a "*son* of man!"

"Thou madest him a little lower than the angels" (verse 7).

This supplies additional proof that it is not Adam who is here in view. Both the Hebrew word used in Psalm 8:5 and the Greek word in Hebrews 2:7 signify the failing or falling of a thing from that which it was before.

“The word ‘made lower’ does not signify to be created originally in a lower condition, but it signifies to be brought down from a higher station to a lower” (Dr. J. Brown).

The Hebrew word is used to denote the falling of the waters when Noah’s flood decreased (Genesis 8:4); and, negatively, of the widow’s oil that did not fail (1 Kings 17:14, 16). The Greek word is used of the Baptist when he said, “I must decrease” (John 3:30).

But to what is the Holy Spirit here referring in our 7th verse? First, it should be pointed out that both the Hebrew and Greek word here for “little” has a double force, being applied both to time and degree. In 1 Peter 5:10 it is rendered “a while,” that is, a short space of time; so also in Luke 22:58 and Acts 5:34. Such, we believe, is in force here, as it certainly is in the 9th verse. Now in what particular sense has God made frail and fallen man a “little while” lower than the angels? With Dr. J. Brown we must answer,

“*We* cannot doubt that man, even in his best estate, was in some respects inferior to the angels; but in some points he was on a level with them. One of these was immortality; and it deserves consideration, that this is the very point referred to when it is said of the raised saints, the children of the resurrection, ‘Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels’” (Luke 20:36).

Thus, for a season, man, through being subject to *death*, has been made “lower than the angels.”

“Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; Thou crownedst him with glory and honor, and didst set him over the works of Thy hands” (verse 7).

Just as in the first part of this verse reference is made to the humiliation of man, so the second part of it speaks of God’s exaltation of man.

“The verbs being expressed, not in the Future, but in the past tense, will not be felt as an objection to its being considered as a prediction, this being quite common in the prophetic style. Most of the predictions, for example, in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah are expressed in the past tense” (Dr. J. Brown).

To this we may add, all prophecy speaks from the standpoint of God’s eternal purpose, and so certain is this of accomplishment, the past tense is used to

show it is as sure as if it were already wrought out in time: compare “*glorified*” in Romans 8:30, and see Romans 4:17. Thus we understand the second part of this 7th verse as referring to the coming glorification of Christ’s redeemed.

“Thou crownedst him with glory and honor, and didst set him over the works of Thy hands.” This is applied by the Spirit to the redeemed, the “heirs” of Hebrews 1:14, “whereof we speak” (Hebrews 2:5). That the redeemed *are* to be “*crowned*” is clearly taught in the New Testament.

For example, in 2 Timothy 4:7, 8 the apostle says,

“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a *crown* of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give be at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing.”

So also James declares,

“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the *crown* of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him” (James 1:12).

They are to be crowned with “glory and honor.” In Scripture “*glory*” is put for the excellency of a thing: hence, what is here predicted is, that the dignity which God will place upon His saints will be the most excellent they could be advanced unto. The Hebrew word means that which is real and substantial, in contrast from that which is light and vain. The word for “honor” implies that which is bright: and in Psalm 110:3 is rendered “beauty.” Its distinctive thought is that of being esteemed by others. Thus we have here a striking word upon the glorification of the redeemed. First, they are to be “*crowned*,” that is, they are to be elevated to a position of the highest rank. Second, they are to be crowned with “*glory*,” that is, they will be made supremely excellent in their persons. Third, they are to be crowned with “honor,” that is, they will be looked up to by those below them.

“And didst set him over the works of Thy hands.” This has reference to the rule and reign of God’s saints in the Day to come. In Daniel 7:18, 27 we read,

“But the saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever.... And the kingdom and

dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him.”

So also in Revelation 2:26 we are told, “And he that overcometh and keepeth My works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations.”

“Thou hast put all things under his feet” (verse 8). The language here employed shows plainly the connection between this quotation from the 8th Psalm and what the apostle had declared in verse 5. There he had said, “For unto the angels hath He not put in subjection the world to come whereof we *speak*.” Here we learn that unto “man” will the world to come be placed in subjection. Here we learn that “man,” frail and fallen, but redeemed and exalted by the Lord, will have, in the world to come, “all things” put under his feet. It is the blessed sequel to Genesis 1:26 — the earthly Paradise regained. The *absoluteness* of this “subjection” of the world to come unto redeemed man, is intimated by the figure which is here used, “under his feet”; lower a thing cannot be put. It is not simply “*at* his feet,” but “under.” The *scope* of the subjection is seen by the “*all* things.” This goes beyond the terms of Psalm 8:7,8, for the last Adam has secured for His people more than the first Adam lost. All creation, even angels, will then be “in subjection” to man.

“For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him” (verse 8).

This is the apostle’s comment on his quotation from Psalm 8.

“Thou hast bestowed on man such honors as Thou hast bestowed on none of Thy creatures. Thou hast set him at the head of the created universe. From this passage it appears that, with the single exception of Him who is to put all things under him, i.e., God, all things are to be put under man. In the world to come even angels are subordinate to them. Man is next to God in that world” (Dr. J. Brown).

In Revelation 21:7 we read,

“He that overcometh shall inherit *all things*; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son.”

Our joint-heirship with Christ (Romans 8:17) will be *manifested* in the world

to come. What a prospect! O for faith to lay hold of it and *enjoy* it, even now. Were it more real to us, the trifling baubles of this world would fail to attract us. Were it more real to us, the trials and troubles of this life would be unable to sadden or move us. May the Lord enable each of His own to look away from the things seen to the things unseen.

“But now we see not yet all things put under him” (verse 8). This is the language of an hypothetical objector, which confirms and establishes what was said in the opening paragraphs of this article. The “him” here is the “man” of verse 6. Anticipating the objection that Jesus of Nazareth could not be superior to the angels, seeing that He was Man, the apostle met it by showing that one of God’s ancient oracles declared that he who, for a short season, was made lower than the angels, has been crowned with glory and honor and set over the works of His hands; yea, that *all* things, and therefore angels, have been “put in subjection under him.” But how can this be? Says the objector: “Now we *see not* yet all things put under him.” What you have said is belied by the testimony of our senses; that which is spread before our eyes refutes it. Why, so far from “all things” being in subjection to man, even the wild beasts will not perform his bidding! Unanswerable as this difficulty might appear, solution, satisfactory and complete, is promptly furnished. This is given in our next verse.

“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels.... crowned with glory and honor” (verse 9).

It is most blessed to observe how the apostle meets the objector: he does so by pointing at once and directly to Him who is the Center of all our hopes and in whose Person all our interests and blessings are bound up.

“The following appears to me to be the track of the apostle’s thoughts: ‘In the world to come, men, not angels, are to occupy the first place. An ancient oracle, which refers to the world to come, clearly proves this. The place to be occupied by man in that world is not only a high place, but is the first place among creatures. The words of the oracle are unlimited. With the exception of Him who puts all things under man, everything is to be subjected to him. This oracle must be fulfilled. In the exaltation of Christ, after and in consequence of His humiliation, we have the begun fulfillment of the prediction, and what, according to the wise and righteous

counsels of heaven, were necessary, and will be the effectual means of the complete accomplishment of it in reference to the whole body of the redeemed from among men” (Dr. J. Brown).

“But we see Jesus.” What is meant by this? To what was the apostle referring? *How* do we “see Jesus?” Not by means of mysterious dreams or ecstatic visions, not by the exercise of our imagination, nor by a process of visualization; but by *faith*. Just as Christ declared, in John 8:56, “Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he *saw* it, and was glad.” Faith is the eye of the spirit, which views and enjoys what the Word of God presents to its vision. In the Gospels, Acts, Epistles, Revelation, God has told us about the exaltation of His Son; those who receive by faith what He has there declared, “see Jesus crowned with glory and honor,” as truly and vividly as His enemies once saw Him here on earth “crowned with thorns.”

It is this which distinguishes the true people of God from mere professors. Every real Christian has reason to say with Job,

“I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but *now* mine eye *seeth* Thee” (Job 42:5).

He has “seen” Him leaving Heaven and coming to earth, in order to “seek and to save that which was lost.” He has “seen” Him as a sacrificial Substitute on the cross, there bearing “our sins in His own body on the tree.” He has “seen” Him rising again in triumph from the grave, so that because He lives, we live also. He has “seen” Him highly exalted, “crowned with glory and honor.” He has “seen Him *thus as* presented to the eye of faith in the sure Word of God. To Him the testimony of Holy Scripture is infinitely more reliable and valuable than the testimony of his senses.

The name by which God’s Son is here called is that of His humiliation. “Jesus” is *not* a title; “Savior” is an entirely different word in the Greek. “Jesus” was His human name, as Man, here on earth. It was as “Jesus of Nazareth” that His enemies ever referred to Him. But not so His own people: to the apostles He said, “Ye call Me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am” (John 13:13). Only once in the four Gospels do we ever find any of His own speaking of Him as “Jesus of Nazareth” (Luke 24:19). and that was when their faith had completely given way. It was the language of unbelief! That He is referred to in the narrational form in the Gospels as “Jesus” is to emphasize His humiliation.

When we come to the Acts, which treats of His exaltation, we read there, “God hath made this same Jesus.... both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). So in the Epistles: God has

“given Him a name which is above every name,” and that name is “Lord” (Philippians 2:9, 10).

Thus, it is either as “Christ” which *is* a title, or as the Lord Jesus Christ, that He is commonly referred to in the Epistles: read carefully 1 Corinthians 1:3-10 for example. It is thus that His people should delight to own Him. To address the Lord of glory in prayer simply as “Jesus,” or to speak of Him to others thus, breathes an unholy familiarity, a vulgar cheapness, an irreverence which is highly reprehensible.

After the four Gospels the Lord Christ is never referred to in the New Testament simply as “Jesus” save for the purpose of historical identification (Acts 1:11, e.g.), or to stress the humiliation through which He passed, or when His enemies are speaking of Him. Here in Hebrews 2:9, “Jesus” rather than “the Lord Jesus” is used to emphasize His humiliation: it was the One who had passed through such unparalleled shame and ignominy that had been “crowned with glory and honor.” May Divine grace enable both writer and reader to entertain such exalted views of this same Jesus that we may ever heed the exhortation of 1 Peter 3:15: “But sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord” (Revised Version).

Now that which it is of first importance for us to observe is the *use* which the apostle here makes of the Savior’s glorification. The exaltation of Jesus is both the proof and pledge of the coming exaltation of His redeemed. The prophecy of Psalm 8 has already begun to receive its fulfillment. The crowning of Jesus with glory and honor is the ground and guarantee of the ultimate glorification of all His people. Christ has entered Heaven as the “First-fruits,” the earnest of the coming harvest. He passed within the veil as the “Forerunner” (Hebrews 6:20), so that there *must be* others to follow.

Here, then is, we believe, the true interpretation and application of Psalm 8. The verses quoted from it in Hebrews 2 refer not to Adam, not to mankind as a whole, nor to Christ Himself considered alone, but to His redeemed. The Holy Spirit, through the Psalmist, was looking forward to *a new order of man*, of which the Lord Jesus is the Head. In the Man Christ Jesus, God has brought to light a new order of Man, One in whom is found not merely

innocence, but *perfection*. It is of *this* “man” that Ephesians 2:15 speaks: “To make in Himself of twain (redeemed from among the Jews and from the Gentiles) one *new man*”; and also Ephesians 4:13:

“Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a *perfect man*, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

As God looks at His incarnate Son He sees, for the first time, a perfect Man, and us in Him. And as we, by faith, “see Jesus crowned with glory and honor,” we discover both the proof and pledge of ourselves yet being “crowned with glory and honor.”

“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels.... crowned with glory and honor,” as the ground and guarantee of our approaching exaltation. Here then is the Divine answer to the question asked by the Psalmist long ago: “When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast made — What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?” Ah, brethren in Christ, when you go out at night and view the wondrous heavens, and then think of your own utter insignificance; when you meditate upon the glory of God’s majesty and holiness. And then think of your own exceeding sinfulness, and are bowed into the dust; remember that up there is a Man in the glory, and that that Man is the measure of God’s thoughts concerning *you*. Remember, that by wondrous and sovereign grace, you have been not only predestined to be conformed to His image, but that you should, as a joint-heir with Him, share *His inheritance*. May the Lord grant each Christian reader that faith which will enable him to grasp that wonderful and blissful prospect which the Word of God sets before him.

CHAPTER 9

CHRIST SUPERIOR TO ANGELS

(HEBREWS 2:9-11)

In our last article we were obliged, through lack of space, to break off our exposition of Hebrews 2 in the middle of a verse; to have continued further would have required us to go to the end of verse 11, and this would have made it much too long. However, the point at which we left off really completed the first thought which the apostle establishes in our present section. As we sought to show, at verse 5 the apostle begins meeting an objection which might be, and most probably was, made against what he had set forth in chapter one, namely, the immeasurable superiority of the Mediator, Israel's Messiah, above the angels. Over against this, two difficulties stood in the way, which needed clearing up.

First, How could Christ be superior to angels, seeing that He was *Man*?

Second, How could He possess a greater excellency than they, seeing that He had died?

The difficulty was satisfactorily removed by an appeal to Psalm 8, where God had affirmed, in predictive language, that He had crowned "*man*" with glory and honor and put "all things in subjection under his feet." To this the objector would rejoin, "But now we see not yet all things put under him" (verse 8), how, then, does Psalm 8 prove your point? In this way, answers the apostle, In that even now, "*we* see (by faith) *Jesus* crowned with glory and honor," and in *His* exaltation we find the ground and guarantee, the proof and pledge, of the coming exaltation of all His people.

In the remainder of this most interesting portion of Hebrews 2, we shall see how the Holy Spirit enabled the beloved apostle to meet and dispose of the second difficulty of the Jews in a manner equally convincing and satisfactory as He had dealt with their first objection. Though it be true that angels do not and cannot die (Luke 20:36), and though it be a fact that Jesus had died, yet this by no means went to show that He was inferior to them. *This* is the particular point which the apostle is here treating of and which it will now be our object to consider.

First, he shows *why* it was necessary for Christ to die, namely, in order that He should taste death for every son, or, as it reads in the A.V., "for every

man” (verse 9).

Second, he declares that God had a benevolent design in suffering His Son to stoop so low: it was by His grace that He so “tasted death” (verse 9).

Third, he affirms that such a course of procedure was *suited* to the nature and honoring to the glory of Him who orders all things: it “became Him” (verse 10).

Fourth, he argues that this was inevitable because of Christ’s oneness with His people (verse 11).

Fifth, he quotes three Old Testament passages in proof of the union which exists between the Redeemer and the redeemed. Let us now turn to our passage and attentively weigh its details.

“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that He, by the grace of God, should taste death for every man” (verse 9).

The central thought of this verse was before us in the preceding article, namely, the exaltation of the once-humbled One. Now we must examine its several clauses and note their relation to each other. Really, there are five things in this verse, each of which we shall consider

First, the humiliation of the Mediator: “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels.”

Second, the character of His humiliation: “*For*,” or much better “by the suffering of death.”

Third, the object of His humiliation: to “taste death for every man,” better “every son.”

Fourth, the moving cause of His humiliation: “*by* the grace of God.”

Fifth, the reward of His humiliation: “crowned with glory and honor.”

“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels.” How these words should melt our hearts and move our souls to profoundest wonderment! That He, the Creator of angels, the Lord of them, the One who before His incarnation had been worshipped by them, should be “made lower” than they; and this for *our* sakes! Our hearts must indeed be dead if they are not thrilled and filled with praise as we ponder that fathomless stoop.

As was pointed out under our exposition on verse 7, the Greek word here for “little” is used in the New Testament in two senses: sometimes where it is a matter of degree, at others where it is a case of time. Here it is the latter, for “a little season.” In what particular sense the apostle is here contemplating Christ’s being “made lower” than the angels, the next clause tells us.

“For the suffering of death.” Many have experienced difficulty with this clause. That which has exercised them is whether the words “for the suffering of death” state the *purpose for which Christ* was “made a little lower than the angels,” or, whether “for the suffering of death” gives the *reason why* He has been “crowned with glory and honor.” Personally, we are fully satisfied that neither of these give the real thought.

The difficulty mentioned above is self-created. It is occasioned by failure to rightly define the reference to Christ’s being made “a little lower than the angels.” As already stated, we believe this signified “for a little while.” If the reader will turn back again to our comments on Hebrews 2:7 he will see we have adopted the suggestion of Dr. J. Brown to the effect that the specific reference is to *mortality*, the angels being incapable of dying. This, we are assured, is the meaning of the verse now before us. All ambiguity concerning this clause of verse 9 disappears if the first word be rendered “by” instead of “for.” The English translators actually give “by” in the margin. The Greek preposition is “*dia*,” and is translated “by” again and again, both when it governs a noun in the accusative or the genitive case.

Thus by altering “for” to “by” it will be seen that in this third clause the Holy Spirit has graciously defined His meaning in the second.

- (1.) “But we see Jesus;”
- (2.) “who was made a little season lower than the angels;”
- (3.) “by the suffering of death.”

It was in *this* particular that Jesus was made for a season lower than the angels, namely, by His passing through a death of sufferings — an experience which, by virtue of the constitution God had given them, they were incapable of enduring. Therefore, the point here seized by the Holy Spirit in affirming that Jesus had been made lower than the angels, was *His mortality*. But here we must be very careful to explain our terms. When we say that Christ, by virtue of His incarnation, became “mortal,” it must not be understood that He

was subject to death in His body as the fallen descendants of Adam are. His humanity was holy and incorruptible: no seed or germ of death was in it, or could attack it. He laid down His life of Himself (John 10:18). No; what we mean is, and what Scripture teaches is, that in becoming man Christ took upon Him a nature that was *capable* of dying. This the angels were not; and in *this* respect He was, for a season, made lower than they.

“By the suffering of death.” This expression denotes that Christ’s exit from the land of the living was no easy or gentle one, but a death of “suffering”; one accompanied with much inward agony and outward torture. It was the “death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). It was a death in which He suffered not only at the hands of men and of Satan, but from God Himself. It was a death in which He fully satisfied the demands of infinite holiness and justice. This was a task which no mere creature was capable of performing. Behold here, then, the wonder of wonders: Christ undertook a work which was far above the power of all the angels, and yet to effect it He was made lower than them! If ever power was made perfect in weakness, it was in this!

“Crowned with glory and honor.” This is the dominant clause of the verse. Concerning it we cannot do better than quote from Mr. C.H. Welch:

“The crowning with glory and honor is the consecration of Christ as the Priest after the order of Melchizedek. ‘And no man taketh this *honor* unto himself... So also Christ *glorified* not Himself’ (Hebrews 5:4, 5). We shall find an allusion to this in Hebrews 3:3, ‘for this man was counted worthy of more *glory* than Moses, inasmuch as He who builded the house hath more *honor* than the house. Thus we find Christ superior in honor and glory to both Moses and Aaron; and when we see Him crowned with honor and glory we are indeed considering Him who is the Apostle (Moses) and High Priest (Aaron) of our profession.’”

Here, then, is the first part of the apostle’s answer to that which was, for the Jews, the great “stumbling block” (1 Corinthians 1:23). He who by the suffering of death had been made, for a little season, lower than the angels, has, because of His humiliation and perfect atoning sacrifice, been “highly exalted” by God Himself. He has been “raised far above all principality and power, and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come” (Ephesians 1:21). It is not

simply that this exaltation followed the Mediator's suffering and death, but, as the "therefore" in Isaiah 53:12 and the "wherefore" of Philippians 2:9 plainly denote, were the meritorious reward thereof. Thus, so far from the Cross needing an apology, it has magnified the Savior. So far from Christ's degradation and death being something of which the Christian need be ashamed, they are the very reason why God has so signally rewarded Him. The "crown of thorns" which man gave Him, has been answered by the "crown of glory and honor" that God has bestowed upon Him. The humbled Christ is humiliated no longer; the Throne of the Universe is where He is now seated.

Ere passing on to the next verse, let us ask the reader, Have *you* "crowned with glory and honor" Him whom the world has cast out? Do you, in a practical way, own Him as your Lord and Master? Is *His glory* and honor ever the paramount consideration before you? Is He receiving from you the devotion and adoration of a worshipping heart? "*Worthy* is the Lamb." O may He, indeed, occupy the throne of our hearts and reign as King over our lives. In what esteem does the Father hold His once humiliated Son: He has crowned Him with glory and honor; then what *must* He yet do with those who "despise and reject" Him?

"That He by the grace of God should taste death for every man." Here is the second part of the apostle's answer to the Jew's objection. God had a benevolent design in permitting His Son, for a season, to become lower than the angels. The end in view fully justified the means. Only by the Son tasting death could the sons of God be delivered from the ruins of the fall; only thus could the righteousness and mercy of God be reconciled. This, we take it, indicates the relation of this final clause to the remainder of the verse: God's *design* in making His Son lower than the angels was that He might become the Redeemer of His people. The opening conjunction "that" (*hopos*, meaning "to the end that"), expressing purpose, is conclusive.

There has been considerable discussion as to the precise import of the expression "tasted death." Here, as ever in Scripture, there is a fullness in the language used which no brief definitions of man can ever embrace. The first and most obvious thought suggested by the language is, that the Savior consciously, sensibly, experienced the bitterness of death.

"The death of our Lord Jesus Christ was a slow and painful death;

He was ‘roasted with fire’ as was prefigured by the Paschal lamb. But it was not merely that it lasted a considerable time, that it was attended with agony of mind as well as pain of body; but that He came, as no finite creature can come, into contact with death. He tasted death in that cup which the Lord Jesus Christ emptied on the cross” (Saphir).

He tasted that awful death *by anticipation*. From the beginning of His ministry (yea, before that, as His words in Luke 2:49 plainly show), there was ever present to his consciousness the Cross, with all its horror, see Matthew 16:21, John 2:4, 3:16, etc. At Calvary He actually drained the bitterer cup. The death He tasted was

“The curse which sin brings, the penalty of the broken law, the manifestation of the power of the devil, the expression of the wrath of God; and in all these aspects the Lord Jesus Christ came into contact with death and tasted it to the very last” (Saphir).

“That He by the grace of God should taste death for every man.” The opening words of this clause set forth the efficient cause which moved the Godhead in sending forth the Son to submit to such unparalleled humiliation: it was free favor of God. It was not because that the ends of Divine government required mercy should be shown to its rebels, still less because that they had any claim upon Him. There is nothing whatever outside God Himself which moves Him to do anything: He “worketh all things after the counsel of His *own* will” (Ephesians 1:11). It was solely by the grace and good pleasure of God, and not by the violence of man or Satan, that the Lord Jesus was brought to the Cross to die. The appointment of that costly sacrifice must be traced back to nothing but the sovereign benignity of God.

“For every man.” This rendering is quite misleading. “*Anthropos*,” the Greek word for “man” is *not* in the verse at all. Thus, one of the principal texts relied upon by Arminians in their unscriptural contention for a general atonement vanishes into thin air. The Revised Version places the word “man” in italics to show that it is not found in the original. The Greek is “*panta*” and signifies “every one,” that is, every one of those who form the subjects of the whole passage — every one of “the heirs of salvation” (Hebrews 1:14), every one of the “sons” (Hebrews 2:10), every one of the “brethren” (Hebrews 2:11). We may say that this is the view of the passage taken by Drs. Gouge

and J. Brown, by Saphir, and a host of others who might be mentioned. Theologically it is demanded by the “tasted death *for* every one,” i.e., substitutionally, in the room of, that *they* might not. Hence, every one for whom He tasted death shall themselves never do so (see John 8:52), and this is true *only* of the people of God.

What we have just said above is confirmed by many Scriptures. “For the transgression of *My people* was He stricken” said God (Isaiah 53:8), and all mankind are not His “people.” “I lay down My life *for the sheep*,” said the Son (John 10:10), but every man is not of Christ’s sheep (John 10:26). Christ makes intercession on behalf of those for whom He died (Romans 8:34), but He prays not for the world (see John 17:9). Those for whom he died are redeemed (Revelation 5:9), and from redemption necessarily follows the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14), but all have not their sins forgiven.

“For it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (verse 10).

This gives the third part of the apostle’s reply to the objection which he is here rebutting, and a most arresting statement it is: he now takes still higher ground, advancing that which should indeed bow our hearts in worship. The word “became” means suited to, in accord with, the character of God. It was consonant with the Divine attributes that the Son should, for a season be “made lower than the angels” in order to “taste death” for His people. It was not only according to God’s eternal purpose, but it was also suited to all His wondrous perfections. Never was God more Godlike than when, in the person of Jesus, He was crucified for our sins.

“For it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” There are five things in this verse claiming our reverent and diligent attention.

First, the particular character in which God is here viewed; as the One “for whom are all things and by whom are all things.”

Second, the manner in which it “became” the Most High to bring many sons unto glory by giving up His beloved Son to the awful death of the cross.

Third, the particular character in which the Son Himself is here viewed: as “The Captain of our salvation.”

Fourth, in what sense He was, or could be, “made perfect through sufferings.”

Fifth, the result of this Divine appointment: the actual conducting of many sons “unto glory.”

First, then, the special character in which God is here viewed. “For it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things.” This expression sets forth the high sovereignty of God in the most unqualified and absolute manner: “all things” without exception, that is, all creatures, all events. “For whom are all things” affirms that the Most High God is the Final Cause of everything: “The Lord hath made all things *for* Himself” (Proverbs 16:4), i.e., to fulfill His own designs, to accomplish His own purpose, to redound to His own glory. So again we read in Revelation 4:11,

“Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for Thou hast created all things, and *for* Thy pleasure they are and were created.”

This blessed, basic, yet stupendous truth is to be received with unquestioning and un murmuring faith. He who maketh the wrath of man to praise Him (Psalm 76:10) will not only vindicate His broken law in the punishment of the wicked, but His justice and holiness shall be magnified by their destruction. Hell itself will redound to His glory.

“And by whom are all things.” Every creature that exists, every event which happens, is by God’s own appointment and agency. Nothing comes to pass or can do so without the will of God. Satan could not tempt Peter without Christ’s permission; the demons could not enter the swine till *He* gave them leave; not a sparrow falls to the ground apart from His decree. This is only another way of saying that God actually *governs the* world which He has made. True, there is much, very much in His government which *we* cannot understand, for how can the finite comprehend the Infinite? He Himself tells us that His ways are “past finding out,” yet His own infallible word declares,

“For of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things: to whom be glory forever” (Romans 11:36).

“For whom are all things, and by whom are all things.” Nothing so stirs up

the enmity of the carnal mind and evidences the ignorance, the sin, and the high-handed rebellion of fallen man as the response which he makes when this great fact and solemn truth is pressed upon him. People at once complain, if this be so, then we are mere puppets, irresponsible creatures. Or worse, they will blasphemously argue, If this be true, then God, and not ourselves, is to be charged with our wickedness. To such sottish revilings, only one reply is forthcoming,

“Nay but, O man who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why hast Thou made me thus?” (Romans 9:20).

Consider now the *appropriateness* of this title or appellation of Deity. The varied manner in which God refers to Himself in the Scriptures, the different titles He there assumes are not regulated by caprice, but are ordered by infinite wisdom; and we lose much if we fail to attentively weigh each one. As illustrations of this principle consider the following. In Romans 15:5, He is spoken of as “The God of patience and hope”: this, in keeping with the subject of the four preceding verses. In 2 Corinthians 4:6, He is presented thus: “God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts,” which is in beautiful keeping with the theme of the five preceding verses. In Hebrews 13:20, it is “The God of Peace” that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus. Why? Because His holy wrath had been placated at the cross. So in Hebrews 2:10 the apostle would silence the proud and wicked reasoning of the Jews by reminding them that they were replying against the Sovereign Supreme. For Him are all things and by Him are all things: His glory is the end of everything, His will the law of the universe; therefore, to quarrel with *His method* of bringing many sons unto glory was insubordination and blasphemy of the worst kind.

And what are the *practical bearings* upon us of this title of God?

First, an *acknowledgment* of God in this character is due from us and required by Him. To believe and affirm that “for Him are all things, and by Him are all things” is simply owning that He *is* God — high above all, supreme over all, directing all. Anything short of this is, really, atheism.

Second, *contentment* is the sure result to a heart which really lays hold of and rests upon this truth. If I really believe that “all things” are for God’s glory and by His invincible and perfect will, then I shall receive submissively, yea,

thankfully, whatsoever He ordains and sends me. The language of such an one must be, "It is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth Him good" (1 Samuel 3:18).

Third, confidence and praise will be the outcome. God only does that which "becomes" Him; therefore, whatsoever He does must be right and best. Those who truly recognize this "*know* that all things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8:28). True it is that our short-sighted and sin-darkened vision is often unable to see *why* God does certain things, yet we may be fully assured that He always has a wise and holy reason.

"For it became Him." More immediately, the opening "for" gives a reason for what has been advanced at the close of verse 9. Should it be reverently inquired why God's "grace" chose *such* a way for the redeeming of His elect, here is the ready answer: it "became Him" so to do. The Greek term signifies the answerableness or agreement of one thing to another. Thus, "*speak* thou the things that *become* sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1), i.e., that are agreeable thereto. So, too, the Greek term implies the *comeliness* of a thing. Thus, "which *become* women professing godliness (1 Timothy 2:10). The adorning of Christian women with good works is a comely thing, yea, it is the beauty and glory of their profession. In like manner the grace of God which gave Christ to taste death for His people, answered to the love of His heart and agreed with the holiness of His nature. Such an appointment was suited to God's character, consonant with His attributes, agreeable to his perfections. Never did anything more exhibit, and never will anything more redound to the glory of God than His making the Son lower than the angels in order to taste death for His people. A wide field of thought is here set before us. Let us, briefly, enter into a few details.

It "became" God's *wisdom*. His wisdom is evidenced in all His works, but nowhere so perspicuously or conspicuously as at Calvary. The cross was the masterpiece of Omniscience. It was there that God exhibited the solution to a problem which no finite intelligence could ever have solved, namely, how justice and mercy might be perfectly harmonized. How was it possible for righteousness to uphold the claims of the law and yet for grace to be extended to its transgressors? It seemed impossible. These were the things which the angels desired to look into, but so profound were their depths they had no line with which to fathom them. But the cross supplies the solution.

It “became” the *holiness* of God. What is His holiness? It is impossible for human language to supply an adequate definition. Perhaps about as near as we can come to one is to say, It is the antithesis of evil, the very nature of God hating sin. Again and again during Old Testament times God manifested His displeasure against sin, but never did the white light of God’s holiness shine forth so vividly as at Calvary, where we see Him smiting His own Beloved because the sins of His people had been transferred to Him.

It “became” His *power*. Never was the power of God so marvelously displayed as it was at Golgotha. Wherein does this appear? In that the Mediator was enabled to endure within the space of three hours what it will take an eternity to expend upon the wicked. All the waves and billows of Divine wrath went over Him (Psalm 42:7). Yet was He not destroyed. There was concentrated into those three hours of darkness that which the lost will suffer forever and ever, and nothing but the power of God could have upheld the suffering Savior. Yea, only a Divine Savior could have stood up under that storm of outpoured wrath; that is why God said,

“I have laid help upon One that is *mighty*” (Psalm 89:19).

It “became” His *righteousness*. He can by no means clear the guilty. Sin must be punished where ever it is found. God’s justice would not abate any of its demands when sin, through imputation, was found upon Christ: as Romans 8:32 says, He “spared not His own Son.” Never was the righteousness of God more illustriously exhibited than when it cried,

“Awake O sword against My Shepherd, and against the Man that is My Fellow saith the Lord of hosts: smite the Shepherd” (Zechariah 13:7).

It “became” the *love* and *grace* of God. Innumerable tokens of these have and do His children receive, but the supreme proof of them is furnished at the cross. “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). The mercy of God is over all His works, but never so fully and so gloriously was it manifested as when Christ became Man and was made a curse for His people, that theirs might be the blessing.

We must next consider the special character in which the Savior Himself is here contemplated: “The Captain of their salvation.” This is one out of more

than three hundred titles given to the Lord Jesus in the Scriptures, each of which has its own distinctive meaning and preciousness. The Greek word is “*Archegos*,” and is found four times in the New Testament. It signifies the “Chief Leader.” It is the word rendered “Author” in Hebrews 12:2, though that is an unhappy rendition. It is translated “Prince” in Acts 3:15 and Acts 5:31. Thus, it is a title which calls attention to and emphasises the dignity and glory of our Savior, yet, in His mediatorial character.

It needs to be borne in mind that in New Testament days the “captain” of a regiment did not remain in the rear issuing instructions to his officers, but took the lead, and by his own personal example encouraged and inspired his soldiers to deeds of valor. Thus the underlying thoughts of this title are, Christ’s going before His people, leading His soldiers, and being in command of them. He has “gone before” them in three respects.

First, in the way of obedience, see John 13:15.

Second, in the way of suffering, see 1 Peter 2:21.

Third, in the way of glory: He has entered heaven as our forerunner, so that faith says, “Thanks be unto God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Thus it will be seen that verse 10 continues the same thought as verse 9.

“The Captain of their salvation.” The plain and necessary implication of this title is that we are passing through a country full of difficulties, dangers, oppositions, like Israel in the Wilderness on their way to the promised inheritance; so that we need a Captain, Guide, Leader, to carry us safely through. This title of Christ’s, then, is for the *encouragement* of our hearts: the grace, the faithfulness, and the power of our Leader guarantees the successful issue of our warfare. It teaches us once more that the *whole* work of our salvation, from first to last, has been committed by God into the hands of Christ.

“To make the Captain of their salvation perfect through suffering.” This sentence has occasioned real trouble to many: how can a perfect person be “made perfect?” But the difficulty is more imaginary than real. The reference is not to the person of Christ, but to a particular office which He fills. His character needed no “Perfecting.” Unlike us, no course of discipline was required by Him to subdue faults and to develop virtues. We believe that

verse 9 supplies the key to the words we are now considering: “being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him.” The previous verse speaks of Christ “learning obedience by the things which He suffered,” which does not mean that He learned to obey, but rather that He learned by experience what obedience is. In like manner it was by the experiences through which He passed that Christ was “perfected,” not experimentally, but officially, to be “the Captain” of our salvation. A striking type of this is furnished by the case of Joshua, who, as the result of his experiences in the wilderness, became experimentally qualified to be Israel’s “captain,” leading them into Canaan.

“To make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” Two other things need to be borne in mind: the particular design of this passage, and the special purpose and aim of the Epistle as a whole. The special design of the apostle was to remove the scandal of Christ’s humiliating death, which was such a stumbling-block to the Jews. Therefore, he here affirms that the sufferings of Christ eventuated not in ignominy but glory: they “perfected” His equipment to be the “Captain” of His people, verse 18 amplifies. In regard to the scope of the Epistle as a whole, this word of the apostle’s was well calculated to *comfort* the afflicted and sorely-tried Hebrews: their own Captain had reached glory via sufferings — sufficient for His soldiers to follow the same path. Thus, this word here is closely parallel with 1 Peter 4:1.

It should be added that the Greek word for “perfected” is rendered “consecrated” in Hebrews 7:28. By His sufferings Christ became qualified and was solemnly appointed to be our Leader. It was *by* His sufferings that He vanquished all His and our foes, triumphing gloriously over them, and thus He became fitted to be our “Captain.” What reason have we then to *glory in the* Cross of Christ! The eye of faith sees there not only consummate wisdom, matchless mercy, fathomless love, but victory, triumph, glory. By dying He slew death.

“In bringing many sons unto glory.” This is both the Captain’s work and reward. The term “glory” is one of the most comprehensive words used in all the Bible. It is almost impossible to define; perhaps “the sum of all excellency” is as near as we can come to it. It means that the “many sons” will be raised to the highest possible state and position of dignity and honor.

It is *Christ's own* "glory" into which they are brought: "And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one" (John 17:22, and see Colossians 3:4).

Into this "glory" *many* sons are to come. Some have difficulty in harmonizing this word with "many be called, but *few* chosen" (Matthew 20:16). In contrast from the vast multitudes which perish, God's elect are indeed "few" (Matthew 7:14); His flock is only a "little" one (Luke 12:32). Yet, considered by themselves, the redeemed of all generations will constitute "*many*."

Into this "glory" the many sons do not merely "come," but are "*brought*." It is the same word as in Luke 10:34 where the Good Samaritan "brought" the poor man that was wounded and half dead, and who could not "come" of himself, to the "inn." Let the reader consult these additional passages: Song of Solomon 2:4; Isaiah 42:16; 1 Peter 3:18. This "bringing" of the many sons "unto glory" is in distinct stages. At regeneration they are brought from death unto life. At the Lord's return they will be brought to the Father's House (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17). The whole is summarized in the parable of the lost sheep; see Luke 15:4-6.

In closing, let us ask the reader, "Are *you* one of these many "sons" whom Christ is bringing "unto glory"? Are you quite sure that you are? It is written, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Romans 8:14). Is *this* true of you? Can others see the *evidences* of it? Is your daily life controlled by self-will, the ways of the world, the pleasing of your friends and relatives, or by the *written Word*, for that is what the Spirit uses in leading His sons.

Above we have contemplated that which "became" God; let our final consideration be that which "becomes" His favored children. "Let your conversation (manner of life) be as it *becometh* the Gospel of Christ" (Philippians 1:27). If we are now light in the Lord, let us "walk *as* children of light" (Ephesians 5:8). Let us seek grace to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called" (Ephesians 4:1).

CHAPTER 10

CHRIST SUPERIOR TO ANGELS

(HEBREWS 2:11-13)

Inasmuch as we feel led to break up the second half of Hebrews 2 into shorter sections than is our usual habit (so that we may enter more in detail), it will be necessary to begin each chapter with a brief summary of what has already been before us. Though we dislike using valuable space for mere repetitions, yet this seems unavoidable if the continuity of thought is to be preserved and the scope of the apostle's argument intelligently followed. Moreover, as we endeavor to study the holy Word of God, it is ever the part of wisdom to heed the Divine injunction, "he that believeth shall not make haste" (Isaiah 28:16). To pause and review the ground already covered, serves to fix in the memory what otherwise might be crowded out. As said the apostle to the Philippians,

"to write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe" (Hebrews 3:1).

In the opening chapter of our Epistle, from verses 4 to 14, seven Old Testament passages were quoted for the purpose of showing the superiority of Israel's Messiah over the angels. The first four verses of chapter 2 are parenthetical, inasmuch as the argument of that section is broken off in order to make a searching application to the conscience of what has already been said. At Hebrews 2:5 the discussion concerning the relative positions of the Mediator and the celestial creatures is resumed. Two objections are now anticipated and dealt with — this is made clear by the last clause of verse 8, which is the interjecting of a difficulty. The objections are: How could Christ be superior to angels, seeing that He was *Man*? And, How could He possess a greater excellency than they, seeing that He had *died*?

In meeting these objections appeal was

First made to the 8th Psalm, which affirmed, in predictive language, that God has crowned "man" (redeemed man) with "honor and glory," and that He has put "all things under *his* feet"; and in the exaltation of Jesus faith beholds the ground and guarantee, the proof and pledge, of the coming exaltation of all His people (verse 9).

Second, the necessity for the Mediator's humiliation lay in the fact that He must "taste death," as the appointed Substitute, if "every son" was to receive

eternal life (verse 9).

Third, the apostle affirmed that God had a benevolent design in suffering His Son to stoop so low: it was by His “grace” that He tasted death (verse 9).

Fourth, it is announced that such a course of procedure was suited to the nature and honoring to the glory of Him who ordains all things: it “became Him” (verse 10).

Fifth, the Divine love and wisdom in causing the Captain of our salvation to be perfected “through sufferings” was fully vindicated, for the outcome from it is that many sons are brought “unto glory.”

In Hebrews 2:11, which begins our present portion, the needs-be for the Son’s humiliation is made still more evident: “For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified, are all of one: for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren.” The opening “for” at once intimates that the Holy Spirit is still advancing confirmation of what He had said previously, and is continuing to show *why* the Lord of angels had been made Man. It may help the reader to grasp the force of this verse if we state it thus: It was imperative that Christ should be made, for a season, “lower than the angels” if ever He was to have ground and cause to call *us* “brethren.” *That* is a title which presupposes a *common* state and standing; for this He must become “one” with them. In other words, the Redeemer must identify Himself with those He was to redeem.

We may add that the opening “for” of verse 11 supplies an immediate link with verse 10: a further reason is now advanced why it “became” God to make the Captain of His people perfect through sufferings, even because He and they are “all of one.” Herein lies the *equity* of Christ’s sufferings. It was not that an innocent person was smitten in order that guilty ones might go free, for that would be the height of injustice, but that an innocent Person, voluntarily, out of love, *identified Himself with* transgressors, and so became answerable for their crimes. Therefore, “in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren” (Hebrews 2:17). How this should endear Him to us!

“All of one,” is very abstract, and for this reason not easy to define concretely.

“Observe that it is only of sanctified persons that this is said. Christ

and the sanctified ones are all of one company, men together in the same position before God; but the idea goes a little further. It is not of one and the same Father; had it been so, it could not have been said, 'He is not ashamed to call them brethren.' He could not then do otherwise than call them brethren. If we say 'of the same mass' the expression may be pushed too far, as though He and others were of the same nature as children of Adam, sinners together. In this case Jesus would have to call every man His brother; whereas it is only the children whom God hath given Him, 'sanctified' ones, that He so calls. But He and the sanctified ones are all as men in the same nature and position together before God. When I say 'the same' it is not in the same state of sin, but the contrary, for they are the Sanctifier and the sanctified, but in the same proof of human position as it is before God as sanctified to Him; the same as far forth as man when He, as the sanctified One is before God" (Mr. J.N. Darby).

Though the above quotation is worded somewhat vaguely, nevertheless we believe it approximates closely to the thought of the Spirit. They, Christ and His people, are "all of one." Perhaps we might say, All of one class or company. If Christ were to be the Savior of men, He must Himself be Man. This is what the quotations from the Old Testament, which immediately follow, go to show. We do believe, however, that the "all of one" is a little fuller in scope than that brought out by Mr. Darby's comments. The remainder of Hebrews 2 seems to show it also has reference to the oneness in *condition* between the Sanctifier and the sanctified, i.e., in this world. The Shepherd went before the sheep (John 10:4): the path they follow is the same He trod. Thus, "all of one" in position, in sufferings, in trials, in dependency upon God.

"For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one." Many of the commentators have quite missed the meaning of this "all of one." Had sufficient attention been given to the context they should have seen that the apostle is *not* here treating of the oneness of Christians with Christ in acceptance before God and in glory — that, we get in such passages as Ephesians 1 and 2; instead, he is bringing out the oneness of Christ with His people in their humiliation. In other words, the apostle is not here speaking of our being lifted up to Christ's level, but of His coming down to ours. That

which follows clearly establishes this.

But what is meant by “*He* that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified”? The Sanctifier is Christ Himself, the sanctified are the many sons who are being brought to glory. “The source and power of sanctification are in the Son of God our Savior. We who were to be brought unto glory were far off from God, in a state of condemnation and death. What could be more different than our natural condition and the glory of God which we are awaiting? Condemned on account of our transgressions of the law, we lived in sin, alienated from God, and without His presence of light and love. We were dead; and by ‘dead’ I do not mean that modern fancy which explains death to mean cessation of existence, but that continuous, active, self-developing state of misery and corruption into which the sinner has fallen by his disobedience. Dead in trespasses and sins, wherein we *walked*; dead while living in pleasing self (Ephesians 2:1, 2, 1 Timothy 5:6). What can be more opposed to glory than the state in which we are by nature? And if we are to be brought into glory, it is evident we must be brought into holiness; we must be delivered and separated from guilt, pollution, and death, and brought into the presence of God, in which is favor, light, and life — that His life may descend into our souls, and that we may become partakers of the Divine nature.

“Christ is our sanctification. ‘By one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified’ (Hebrews 10:14). By the offering of His body as the sacrifice for sin, He has sanctified all that put their trust in Him. To sanctify is to separate unto God; to separate for a holy use. We who were far off are brought nigh by the blood of Christ. And although our election is of God the Father (who is thus the Author of our sanctification, Jude 4), and the cleansing and purification of the heart is generally attributed to the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:4,5), yet is it in Christ that we were chosen, and from Christ that we receive the Spirit, and as it is by the constant application of Christ’s work and the constant communication of His life that we live and grow, Christ is our sanctification.

“We are sanctified through faith that is in Him (Acts 26:18). By His offering of Himself He has brought us into the presence of God. By the Word, by God’s truth, by the indwelling Spirit, He continually

sanctifies His believers. He gave Himself for the church, ‘that He might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing of water by the Word’ (Ephesians 5:26). ‘Sanctify them through Thy truth’ (John 17:17; 15:3).

“Christ Himself is the foundation, source, method, and channel of our sanctification. We are exhorted to put off the old man and to put on the new man day by day, to mortify our members which are upon the earth. But in what way or method can we obey the apostolic exhortations, but by our continually beholding Christ’s perfect sacrifice for sin as our all-sufficient atonement? In what other way are we sanctified day by day, but by taking hold of the salvation which is by Him, ‘The Lamb that is slain’? Jesus is He that sanctifieth. The Holy Spirit, the Comforter, is sent by Christ to glorify Him, and to reveal and appropriate to us His salvation. We are conformed to the image of Christ by the Spirit as coming from Christ in His glorified humanity” (Saphir).

“For which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren” (verse 11). Because Christ became Man, He is not ashamed to own as “brethren” those whom the Father had given to Him. The community of nature shared by the Sanctifier and the sanctified furnishes ground for Him to call them “brethren.” That He did so in the days of His humiliation may be seen by a reference to Matthew 12:49; John 20:17. That He will do so in the Day to come, appears from Matthew 25:40. That He is “not ashamed” to so own them, plainly intimates an act of condescension on his part, the condescension arising out of the fact that *He* was more than Man, none other than “the Lord of glory.” There is, no doubt, a latent contrast in these words: the world hated them, their brethren according to the flesh despised them, and called them “*apostates*”; but the Son of God incarnate was not ashamed to call them “brethren.” So, too, He owns us. Therefore, if *He* is “not ashamed” to own us, shall *we* be “ashamed to confess Him!” Moreover, let us “not be ashamed” to own as “brethren” the poorest of the flock!

“For which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren.” Ere passing from these blessed words, it needs to be said, emphatically, that this grace on the part of Christ *does not* warrant His people becoming so presumptuous as to speak of Him as their “Brother.” Such a thing is most reprehensible.

“Question, May we by virtue of this relation, call the Son of God our Brother? Answer, We have no example of any of the saints that ever did so. They usually gave titles of dignity to Him, as Lord, Master, Savior. Howsoever the Son of God vouchsafes this honor unto us, yet we must retain in our hearts an high and reverent esteem of Him, and on that ground give such titles to Him as may manifest as much. Inferiors do not use to give like titles of equality to their superiors, as superiors do to their inferiors. It is a token of love in superiors to speak to their inferiors as equals; but for inferiors to do the like, would be a note of arrogancy” (Dr. Gouge).

The same principle applies to John 15:15. Christ in His condescending grace may call us His “friends,” but this does *not* justify us in speaking of Him as our “*Friend*”!

“Saying, I will declare Thy name unto My brethren” (verse 12). Once more the apostle appeals to the written Word for support of what he had just affirmed. A quotation is made from Psalm 22, one which not only substantiated what had been said in verse 11, but which also made a further contribution towards removing the objection before him. As is well known, the 22nd is the great Cross Psalm. In verses 20, 21, the suffering Savior is heard crying, “Deliver My soul from the sword (of Divine justice, cf. Zechariah 13:7), My darling from the power of the dog (the Gentiles, cf. Matthew 15:24-26). Save Me from the lion’s (the Devil’s, cf. 1 Peter 5:8) mouth.” Then follows faith’s assurance, “For Thou *hast* heard Me from the horns of the unicorn.” This is the turning point of the Psalm: the cries of the Sufferer are heard on High.

What a conclusive and crushing reply was this to the objecting Jew! God’s own Word had foretold the humiliation and sufferings of their Messiah. There it was, unmistakably before them. What could they say? The Scriptures *must* be fulfilled. No reply was possible.

But more: not only did the 22nd Psalm announce beforehand the sufferings of the Messiah; it also foretold His victory. Read again the last clause of verse 21: “Save Me from the lion’s mouth: for Thou *hast* heard Me.” Christ *was* “saved,” not from death, but out of death, cf. Hebrews 5:7. Now what is the very next thing in Psalm 22? This: “I will declare Thy name unto My brethren” (verse 22). Here the Savior is seen on resurrection ground,

victorious over every foe. It is *this* which the apostle quotes in Hebrews 2:12. Now that which it is particularly important to note is that in this verse from Psalm 22 Christ is heard saying He would declare the Father's name unto His "brethren." That could only be possible on resurrection ground. Why? Because by nature they were "dead in trespasses and sins." But as "quicken together with Christ" (Ephesians 2:5) they were made sons of God, and therefore the "brethren" of the risen Son of God. Hence the great importance of noting carefully the very point at which verse 22 occurs in the 22nd Psalm. The Lord Jesus never called His people "brethren" on the other side of the Cross! He spoke of them as "disciples," "sheep," "friends," but never as "brethren." But as soon as He was risen from the dead, He said to Mary,

"Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father and to your Father" (John 20:17).

Here, then, was the unanswerable reply to the Jews' objection: Christ could reach *resurrection* ground only by passing through death, cf. John 12:24.

"I will declare Thy name unto My brethren." Here the Son is heard addressing the Father, promising that He would execute the charge which had been given Him. The Greek word for "declare" is very emphatic and comprehensive. It means, To proclaim and publish, to exhibit and make known. To declare God's "Name" signifies to reveal what God is, to make known His excellencies and counsels. This is what Christ came here to do: see John 17:6,26. None else was competent for such a task, for none knoweth the Father but the Son (Matthew 11:27). But only to His "brethren" did Christ do so. They are the "babes" unto whom heavenly things are revealed (Matthew 11:25); they are the ones unto whom are made known the "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 13:11). From all others these blessed revelations are "hid," to those "without" they are but "parables."

"In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto Thee" (verse 12). This completes the quotation from Psalm 22:22. No doubt the first fulfillment of this took place during the "forty days" of Acts 1:3: mark how Acts 1:4 brings in the assembly; though its ultimate fulfillment is yet future. The *position* in which Christ is here viewed is very blessed, "*in the midst*": it is the Redeemer leading the praises of His redeemed. Strangers to God may go through all the outward forms of mere "religion," but they never *praise* God. It is only upon resurrection ground that worship is possible. A beautiful type

of this is found in Exodus 15:1: it was only after Israel had crossed the Red Sea, and the Egyptians were dead upon the shore, that “Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song.” Note how Moses, the typical mediator, *led* their praises!

“And again, I will put My trust in Him” (verse 13). The apostle is still replying to the Jews’ objection, How could Jesus of Nazareth be the superior of angels, seeing that He was Man and had died? Here, in verses 12, 13, he quotes Messianic passages from the Old Testament in proof of the statements made in verses 10, 11. First, Psalm 22:22 is cited, in which Christ is heard addressing His redeemed as “brethren.” The implication is unmistakable: that is a title which presupposes a common position and a common condition, and in order to do that the Lord of glory had to be abased, come down to their level, become Man. Then, in the same passage, the Savior is heard “singing praise” unto God. This also views Him as incarnate, for only as Man could He sing praise unto God! Moreover, it is not as Lord over the church, but as One “in the midst” of it He is there viewed. Thus “all of one” is illustrated and substantiated.

A second quotation is now made, from Isaiah 8:17, according to the Septuagint version. The passage from which this is taken is a very remarkable one. Beginning at verse 13 the exhortation is given, “Sanctify the Lord of Hosts Himself; and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread.” This means, give Him His true place in your hearts, recognize His exalted dignity, bow before His ineffable majesty, submit to His high sovereignty, tremble at the very thought of quarreling with Him.

Then, in verse 14, the Lord of Hosts is brought before us in a twofold character: “And He shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.” These expressions, Sanctuary and Stone of stumbling, define the relation of the Lord to the elect and to the non-elect. To the one He is Refuge, a Resting-place, a Center of worship; to the other, He is an offense. “The Stone” is one of the titles of Christ, and it is most interesting and instructive to trace out the various references, the first being found in Genesis 49:24. Here in Isaiah 8, it is Christ in His *lowliness* which is in view. Israel was looking for One who would be high among the great ones of the earth, therefore when One who was born in a manger, who had toiled at the

carpenter's bench, who had not where to lay His head, appeared before them, they "despised and rejected" Him. The figure used here is very affecting. How *low* a place must the Lord of glory have taken for Israel to "stumble" over Him, like a stone lying at one's feet! Thus, once more, the Holy Spirit refers to an Old Testament passage in which the Messiah was presented in humiliation, as it were "a stone" lying on the ground.

It is scarcely necessary to add that the very lowliness into which the Savior entered, coming here not to be ministered unto but to minister, and give His life a ransom for many, is that which makes Him a "precious Stone" (1 Peter 2:6) to all whose faith sees the Divine glory shining beneath the humiliation. What is more moving to our hearts, what is mere calculated to bow them in worship before God as we behold His Son in John 13? — verily, "a Stone" at the feet of His disciples, washing them! Blessed is it to know that the very Stone which the builders rejected "*is* become the head of the corner" (Psalm 118:22), that is, has been exalted.

Returning now to Isaiah 8, verse 15 amplifies what was said in the previous one: "And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken." How solemnly and how literally this was fulfilled in the history of the Jews we all know. Then, in verse 16, we have stated the *consequences* of Israel's rejection of their Messiah: "Bind up the testimony, seal the law among My disciples." Ever since there has been a veil over Israel's heart, even when reading the Holy Scriptures (2 Corinthians 3:15).

Now comes the word in Hebrews 2:13, "I will put My trust in Him" (Isaiah 8:17, Septuagint version). A most blessed word is this. It reveals the implicit confidence of the Savior in God. Notwithstanding the treatment which He met with from both the houses of Israel, His trust in Jehovah remained unshaken; He looked away from the things seen to the things unseen. The *relevancy* of this citation in Hebrews 2 is obvious: such a thing could not have been unless Christ had become Man — considered simply as God the Son, to speak of Him "trusting" was unthinkable, impossible. Wonderful proof was this of what had been affirmed in Hebrews 2:11 concerning the oneness which exists between Christ and His people: He, like they, was called on to tread the path of faith.

"I will put My trust in Him." This is indeed a word which should bow our hearts in wonderment. What a lowly place had the Maker of heaven and earth

taken! How these words bring out the reality of His humanity! The Son of God had become the Son of Man, and while here on earth He ever acted in perfect accord with the place which He had taken. He lived here a life of faith, that is, a life of trust in and dependence upon God. In John 6:57 we hear Him saying, “I live by the Father.” This is what He pressed on Satan when tempted to manufacture bread for Himself.

Isaiah 8:17 is not the only Old Testament passage which speaks of Christ “trusting” in God. In Psalm 16:1, He cries, “Preserve Me, O God: for in Thee do I put My trust.” As Man it was not fitting that He should stand independent and alone; nor did He. The whole of this Psalm views Him in the place of entire dependency — in life, in death, in resurrection. Strikingly will this appear if verses 10, 11 be compared with John 2:19 and John 10:18. In the passages in John’s Gospel, where His *Divine* glory shines forth through the veil of His humanity, He speaks of raising Himself from the dead. But here in Psalm 16, where the perfections of His manhood are revealed, He is seen trusting in God to raise Him again. How important it is to get the Spirit’s viewpoint in each passage!

“I will put My trust in Him.” This perfection of our Lord is not sufficiently pondered by us. The life which Jesus Christ lived here for thirty-three years was a life of faith. That is the meaning of that little-understood word in Hebrews 12:2: “Looking off unto Jesus (His name, as Man), the Author (Greek, same as “Captain” in 2:10) and Perfecter of faith.” If these words be carefully weighed in the light of their context, their meaning is plain. In Hebrews 11 we have illustrated, from the Old Testament saints, various aspects of the life of faith, but in Jesus we see *every* aspect of it *perfectly* exemplified. As our Captain or Leader, He has gone before His soldiers, setting before them an inspiring example. The path we are called on to tread, is the same He trod. The race we are bidden to run, is the same He ran. And we are to walk and run as He did, by faith.

“I will put my trust in Him.” This was ever the expression of His heart. Christ could say, and none but He ever could,

“I was cast upon Thee from the womb: Thou art My God from My mother’s belly” (Psalm 122:10).

Never did another live in such complete dependence on God as He:

“I have set the Lord always before Me; because He is at My right hand, I shall not be moved” (Psalm 16:8)

was His language. So evident was His faith, even to others, that His very enemies, whilst standing around the Cross, turned it into a bitter taunt:

“He trusted on the Lord that He would deliver Him, let Him deliver Him, seeing He delighted in Him” (Psalm 22:8).

How blessed to know that when *we* are called on to walk by faith, to submit ourselves unto and live in dependency on God, to look away from the mists of time to the coming inheritance, that Another has trod the same path, that in putting forth His sheep, the Good Shepherd went before them (John 10:4), that He bids us to do nothing but what He has Himself first done.

“I will put My trust in Him.” This is *still* true of the Man Christ Jesus. In Revelation 1:9 we read of “the kingdom and *patience* of Jesus Christ”: that is the patience of faith, cf. Hebrews 11:13. Hebrews 10:12,13 interprets: “But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth *expecting* till His enemies be made His footstool.” That is the expectation of *faith*, awaiting the fulfillment of God’s promise. Ah, dear reader, fellowship with Christ is no mystical thing, it is intensely practical; fellowship with Christ means, first of all, walking by faith.

“And again, behold I and the children which God hath given Me” (verse 13).

This completes the quotation made from Isaiah 8:17, 18. The pertinency of these words in support of the apostle’s argument is evident: it is Christ’s taking His place before God as Mediator, owning the “children” as His gift to Him; it is Christ as Man confessing His oneness with them, ranking Himself with the saints — “I and the children,” compare “My Father and your Father” (John 20:17). It is the Lord Jesus presenting Himself to God as His Minister, having faithfully and successfully fulfilled the task committed to Him. He is here heard addressing the Father, rejoicing over the fruits of His own work. It is as though He said, “Here am I, O Father, whom Thou didst send out of Thine own bosom from Heaven to earth, to gather Thine elect out of the world. I *have* performed that for which Thou didst send Me: behold I and the children which Thou hast given Me.” Though He had proved a stone of

stumbling and a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, yet was He not left without a people; “children” had been given to Him, and these He owns and solemnly presents before God.

Who are these “children?” First, they are those whom the Mediator brings to God. As we read in 1 Peter 3:18,

“For Christ hath also once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might *bring us to God.*”

This is what Christ is seen doing here: formally presenting the children to God. Second, they are here regarded as the “children” of *Christ*. In Isaiah 53:10, 11 it was said, “He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hands. He shall see of *the travail* of His soul, and shall be satisfied.” In John 13:33 and John 21:5 He is actually heard *owning* His disciples as “children.” Nor was there anything incongruous in that. Let the reader ponder 1 Corinthians 4:14, 15: if they who are converted under the preaching of God’s servants may be termed *their* “children,” how much more so may they be called “children” of Jesus Christ whom *He* has begotten by His Spirit and by His Word!

“Behold I and the children which God hath given Me.” Those whom God hath given to Christ were referred to by Him, again and again, during the days of His public ministry. “All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me” (John 6:37).

“I have manifested Thy name unto the men which Thou gavest Me out of the world: Thine they were, and Thou gavest them Me I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given Me” (John 17:6, 9).

They were given to Christ before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). These “children” are God’s elect, sovereignly singled out by Him, and from the beginning chosen unto salvation (2 Thessalonians 2:13). God’s elect having been given to Christ “before the foundation of the world,” and therefore from all eternity, throws light upon a title of the Savior’s found in Isaiah 9:6: “The everlasting Father.” This has puzzled many. It need not. Christ is the “everlasting Father” because from everlasting He has had “children!”

Why were these “children” given to Christ. The first answer must be, For His

own glory. Christ is the Center of all God's counsels, and His glory the one object ever held in view. Christ will be eternally glorified by having around Him a family, each member of which is predestined to be "conformed to His image" (Romans 8:29). The second answer is, That He might save them:

"All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me, and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37).

"Behold I and the children which God hath given Me." We doubt not that the ultimate reference of these words looks forward to the time anticipated by that wonderful doxology found at the close of Jude's Epistle: "Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to *present* you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever." When the Lord Jesus shall, in a soon-coming Day, gather the company of the redeemed unto Himself and

"*present* it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing" (Ephesians 5:27)

then shall He triumphantly exclaim, "Behold I and the children which God hath given Me." In the meantime let us seek to take unto our hearts something of the blessedness of these words that, even now, the "joy of the Lord" may be our strength (Nehemiah 8:10).

"Behold I and the children which God hath given Me." Let us endeavor to point out one or two plain implications. First, *how dear*; how precious, must God's elect be unto Christ! They are the Father's own "gift" unto Him. The value of a gift lies not in its intrinsic worth, but in the esteem and affection in which the giver is held. It is in this light, first of all, that Christ ever views His people — as the expression of the Father's own love for Himself. Second, how certain it is that Christ will continue to care for and minister unto His people! He cannot be indifferent to the welfare of one of those whom the Father has given to Him. As John 13:1 declares, "having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." Third, *how secure* they must be! None of His can possibly perish. Beautifully is this brought out in John 18:8, 9, where, to those who had come to arrest Him, Christ said, "If therefore ye seek Me, let these go their way: that the saying might be fulfilled, which He spake, Of them which Thou gavest Me have I lost none."

Inexpressibly blessed is that which has been before us in Hebrews 2:12, 13. The Lord's people are there looked at in a threefold way.

First, Christ owns them as His "*brethren*." O the wonder of it! The ambitious worldling aspires to fleshly honors and titles, but what has he which can, for a moment, be compared with the honored title which Christ confers upon His redeemed? Next time you are slandered by men, called some name which hurts you, remember, fellow-Christian, that *Christ* calls you one of His "brethren."

Second, the entire company of the redeemed are here denominated "the church," and Christ is seen in the midst singing praise. There, they are viewed corporately, as a company of worshippers, and He who is "a Priest forever" leads their songs of joy and adoration.

Third, the Lord Jesus owns us as His "children," children which have been given to Him by God. This speaks both of their nearness and dearness to Himself. Surely the contemplation of these wondrous riches of grace must impel us to cry,

"To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen"
(Revelation 1:6).

CHAPTER 11

CHRIST SUPERIOR TO ANGELS

(HEBREWS 2:14-16)

The closing verses of Hebrews 2 are so rich and full in their contents and the subjects with which they deal are of such importance that we feel the more disposed to devote extra space for the exposition of them. More and more we are learning for ourselves that a short portion of Scripture prayerfully examined and repeatedly meditated upon, yields more blessing to the heart, more food to the soul, and more help for the walk, than a whole chapter read more or less cursorily. It is not without reason that the Lord Jesus said in the parable of the Sower,

“that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the Word, keep, and bring forth fruit with patience” (Luke 8:15).

The only way in which the Word is “kept” or held fast is through prolonged meditation and patient or persevering study.

The verses which are to be before us on this occasion form part of the apostle’s inspired explanation of “the Son’s” becoming Man and suffering the awful death of the cross. If the reader will turn back to the third paragraph of the preceding article he will there find five reasons (substantiated in verses 9, 10), as to why Christ endured such humiliation. In verses 11-13 four more are advanced. It was necessary for the second Person of the holy Trinity to be made lower than the angels if He were to have ground and cause for calling us “brethren” (verses 11, 12), for that is a title which presupposes a common ground and standing. Then, it was necessary for the Lord of glory to become “all of one” with His people if, in the midst of the church, He should “sing praise” unto God (verse 12); and this, the Old Testament scriptures affirmed, He would do. Again, it was necessary for Him who was in the form of God to take upon Him “the form of a servant” if He was to set before His people a perfect example of the life of faith; and in Isaiah 8:17, He is heard saying, by the Spirit of prophecy, “I will put My trust in Him” (verse 13). Finally, His exclamation “Behold I and the children which God hath given Me” (verse 13), required that He should become Man and thus rank Himself alongside of His saints.

In verses 14-16 we have one of the profoundest statements in all Holy Writ which treats of the Divine incarnation. For this reason, if for no other, we must proceed slowly in our examination of it. Here too the Holy Spirit continues to advance further reasons as to why it was imperative that the Lord of angels should, for a season, stoop beneath them. Three additional ones are here given, and they may be stated thus: first, that He might render null and void him who had the power of death, that is, the Devil (verse 14); second, that He might deliver His people from the bondage of that fear which death had occasioned (verse 15); third, Abraham's children could only be delivered by Him laying hold of Abraham's seed (verse 16).

“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (verse 14).

“The connection between this verse and the preceding context may be stated thus: Since it became Him for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering; and since, according to Old Testament prophecies, the Sanctifier and the sanctified, the Savior and the saved, must be of the same race; and since the saved are human beings, — the Son of God, the appointed Savior, assumed a nature capable of suffering and death — even the nature of man, when He came to save, that in that nature He might die, and by dying accomplish the great purpose of His appointment, the destruction of the power of Satan, and the deliverance of His chosen people” (Dr. J. Brown).

The opening words of our verse denote that the Holy Spirit is drawing a conclusion from the proof-texts just cited from the Old Testament. The Greek words for “forasmuch then” are rendered “seeing therefore” in Hebrews 4:6, and their force is, “it is evident hereby” that the Son of God became the Son of Man for the sake of those whom God had given Him.

“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (verse 14).

Here we have the eternal Word becoming flesh, the Son of God becoming the Son of man. Let us consider,

First, the Wonder of it;

Second, the Needs-be of it;

Third, the Nature of it;

Fourth, the Perfection of it;

Fifth, the Purpose of it.

First, The tragic thing is that, for the present, our minds are so beclouded and our understandings so affected by sin, it is impossible for us to fully perceive the *wonder* of the Divine incarnation. As the apostle wrote, “But now we see through a glass darkly” (1 Corinthians 13:12). But thank God this condition is not to last for ever; soon, very soon, we shall see “face to face.” And when by God’s marvelous grace His people behold the King in His beauty, they will not, we think, be bewildered or dazed, but instead, filled with such wonderment that their hearts and whole beings will spontaneously bow in worship.

Another thing which makes it so difficult for us to grasp the wonder of the Divine incarnation is that there is nothing else which we can for a moment compare with it; there is no analogy which in any wise resembles it. It stands unique, alone, in all its solitary grandeur. We are thrilled when we think of the angels sent forth to minister for those who shall be heirs of salvation: that those wondrous creatures, which so far excel us in wisdom and strength, should have been appointed to be our attendants; that those holy creatures should be commissioned to encamp round about poor sinners; that the courtiers of Heaven should wait upon worms of the earth! Truly, that *is* a great wonder. But oh my brethren, that wonder pales into utter insignificance and, in comparison, fades away into nothingness, before this far greater wonder — that the Creator of angels should leave His throne on High and descend to this sin-cursed earth; that the very One before whom all the angels bow should, for a season, be made lower than they; that the Lord of glory, who had dwelt in “light unapproachable,” should Himself become partaker of “flesh and blood”! *This* is the wonder of wonders.

So wonderful was that unparalleled event of the Divine incarnation that the heavenly hosts descended to proclaim the Savior newly-born. So wonderful

was it that the “glory of the Lord,” the ineffable Shekinah, which once filled the temple, but had long since retired from the earth, appeared again, for “the glory of the Lord shone round about” the awestruck shepherds on Bethlehem’s plains. So wonderful was it that chronology was revolutionized, and *anno mundi* became *anno domini*: the calendar was changed, and instead of its dating from the beginning of the world, it was re-dated from the birth of Christ; thus the Lord of time has written His very signature across the centuries.

Second, Passing on now, let us consider the *needs-be* for the Divine incarnation.

This is plainly intimated both in what has gone before and in what follows. If the “children” which God had given to His Son were to be “sanctified” then He must become “all of one” with them. If those children who are by nature partakers of flesh and blood were to be “delivered from him that had the power of death, that is the devil,” then the Sanctifier must also “likewise take part of the same.” If He was to be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, He must in all things “be made like unto His brethren.” If He is to be able to “succor them that are tempted,” then He must Himself, “suffer, being tempted”; and, as God Himself “cannot be tempted,” He had to become Man in order to that experience.

The needs-be was real, urgent, absolute. There was no other way in which the counsels of God’s grace towards His people could be wrought out. If ever we were to be made “like Him,” He first had to be made like us. If He was to give us of His Spirit, He must first assume our flesh. If we were to be so joined unto the Lord as to become “one spirit” (1 Corinthians 6:17) with Him, then He must first be joined with our flesh, so as to be “all of one” with us. In a word, if we were to become partakers of the Divine nature, He must be made partaker of human nature. Thus we perceive again the force of the apostle’s reply to the objection which he is here removing — How could it be that a Man was superior to angels? He has not only shown from the Jews’ own scriptures that the Man Christ Jesus had been given a name more excellent than any pertaining to the celestial hierarchies, but here he shows us the needs-be for the Lord of glory to become Man. If we were to be “conformed to His image” then He must be “made in the likeness of sin’s flesh.” If the children of Abraham were to be redeemed, then He must take on

Him the “seed of Abraham.”

Third, The *nature* of the Divine incarnation is here referred to in the words “flesh and blood.” That expression speaks of the frailty, dependency, and mortality of man. This is evident from the other passages where it occurs. The words “flesh and blood” are joined together five times in the New Testament: Matthew 16:17, 1 Corinthians 15:50, Galatians 1:16, Ephesians 6:12, Hebrews 2:14. It is a humbling expression emphasizing the weakness of the flesh and limitations of man: note how in Ephesians 6:12, “flesh and blood” is contrasted from the mightier foes against which Christians wrestle.

“Flesh and blood” is the present state in which is found those children whom God has designed to bring unto glory. By their natural constitution and condition there is nothing to distinguish the elect from the non-elect. The Greek noun for “partakers” is derived from the root signifying “common”: in Romans 15:27, Gentile believers are said to be “partakers” of Israel’s spiritual blessings, that is, they enjoy them in common, one with another. So God’s children are “partakers,” equally with the children of the Devil, of “flesh and blood.” Nor does our regeneration effect any change concerning this: the limitations and infirmities which “flesh and blood” involve still remain. Many reasons for this might be suggested: that we may not be too much puffed up by our spiritual standing and privileges; that we might be rendered conscious of our infirmities, and made to feel our weakness before God; that we might abase ourselves before Him who is Spirit; that the grace of compassion may be developed in us — our brethren and sisters are also partakers of “flesh and blood,” and often we need reminding of this.

In the words “He also Himself likewise took part of the same” we have an affirmation concerning the *reality* of the Savior’s humanity. It is not merely that the Lord of glory *appeared* on earth in human form, but that He actually became “flesh and blood,” subject to every human frailty so far as these are freed from sin. He knew what hunger was, what bodily fatigue was, what pain and suffering were. The very fact that He was “the Man of sorrows” indicates that “He also Himself likewise took part of the same.” Thereby we see the amazing condescension of Christ in thus conforming Himself to the condition in which the children were. How marvelous the love which caused the Lord of glory to descend so low for us sons of men! There was an infinite disparity between them: He was infinite, they finite; He omnipotent; they

frail and feeble; He was eternal, they under sentence of death. Nevertheless, He refused not to be conformed to them; and thus He was “crucified through weakness” (2 Corinthians 13:4), which refers to the state into which He had entered.

Fourth, The *perfection* of the Divine incarnation is likewise intimated in the words “He also Himself likewise took part of the same.” These words emphasize the fact that Christ’s becoming Man was a *voluntary* act on His part. The “children” were by nature subject to the common condition of “flesh and blood.” They belonged to that order. They had no say in the matter. That was their state by the law of their very being. But not so with the Lord Jesus. He entered this condition as coming from another sphere and state of being. He was the Son who “thought it not robbery to be equal with God.” He was all-sufficient in Himself. Therefore it was an act of condescension, a voluntary act, an act prompted by love, which caused Him to “take part of the same.”

These words also point to the *uniqueness* of our Lord’s humanity. It is most blessed to observe how the Spirit here, as always, has carefully guarded the Redeemer’s glory. It is not said that Christ was a “*partaker* of flesh and blood,” but that “He likewise took part of the same.” The distinction may seem slight, and at first glance not easily detected; yet is there a real, important, vital difference. Though Christ became Man, real Man, yet was He different, radically different, from every other man. In becoming Man He did not “partake” of the foul poison which sin has introduced into the human constitution. *His* humanity was not contaminated by the virus of the Fall. Before His incarnation it was said to His mother, “That *Holy* Thing which shall be born of thee” (Luke 1:35). It is the sinlessness, the uniqueness of our Lord’s humanity which is so carefully guarded by the distinction which the Holy Spirit has drawn in Hebrews 2:14.

Fifth, The *purpose* of the Divine incarnation is here intimated in the words that “through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.” It was with *this* end in view that the Son of God took part in “*flesh* and blood.” In the several passages where the Divine incarnation is referred to in the New Testament different reasons are given and various designs are recorded. For example, John 3:16 tells us that one chief object in it was to reveal and exhibit the matchless love of God. 1 Timothy 1:15 declares that

“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” But here in Hebrews 2:14 it is the destroying of him that had the power of death that is mentioned.

The object of the Holy Spirit in our present passage is to display the glorious and efficacious side of that which was most humbling — the infinite stoop of the Lord of glory. He is pointing out to those who found the Cross such a stumbling-block, how that there was a golden lining to the dark cloud which hung over it. That which to the outward eye, or rather the untaught heart and mind, seemed such a degrading tragedy was, in reality, a glorious triumph; for by it the Savior stripped the Devil of his power and wrested from his hands his most awful weapon. Just as the scars which a soldier carries are no discredit or dishonor to him if received in an honorable cause, so the cross-sufferings of Christ instead of marking His defeat were, actually, a wondrous victory, for by them He overthrew the arch-enemy of God and man.

“That through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.” It is most blessed to note the bearing of this statement upon the special point the apostle was discussing. The Jews were stumbled by the fact that their Messiah had died. Here the Holy Spirit showed that so far from that death tarnishing the glory of Christ, it exemplified it, for by death He overthrew the great Enemy and delivered His captive people. “Not only is He glorious in heaven, but He hath conquered Satan in the very place where he exercised his sad dominion over men, and where the judgment of God lay heavily upon men” (Mr. J.N. Darby).

“That through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.” Three things here claim attention:

First, what is meant by the Devil having “*the* power of death”?

Second, what “death” is here in view?

Third, in what sense has Christ “destroyed” the Devil?

From the words of the next verse it is clear that the reference is to what particularly obtained before Christ became incarnate. That it does not mean the Devil had absolute power in the infliction of physical death in Old Testament times is clear from several scriptures. Of old Jehovah affirmed,

“See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no god with Me: I kill, and I make alive” (Deuteronomy 32:39).

Again,

“*the* Lord killeth, and maketh alive; He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up” (1 Samuel 2:6).

And again,

“unto God the Lord belong the issues from death” (Psalm 68:20).

These passages are decisive, and show that even during the Mosaic economy the giving of life and the inflicting of death were in the hands of God only, no matter what instruments He might employ in connection therewith.

The particular kind of “*death*” which is here in view is explained for us in the words “that through death lie” etc. The death which Christ died was “the wages of sin” — the penal infliction of the law, suffering the wrath of a holy God. The point raised here is a deeply mysterious one, yet on it Scripture throws some light. In John 8:44, Christ declared that the Devil was “*a* murderer” (literally “man-slayer”) from the beginning. In Zechariah 3:1, we are shown Satan standing at Jehovah’s right-hand to resist Israel’s high priest. Upon the subject Saphir has said,

“But which death did Christ die? That death of which the Devil had the power. Satan wielded that death. He it was who had a just claim against us that we should die. There is justice in the claim of Satan.

“*It* is quite true that Satan is only a usurper; but in saving men God deals in perfect righteousness, justice, truth. According to the Jewish tradition the fallen angels often accuse men, and complain before God that sinful men obtain mercy. Our redemption is in harmony with the principles of righteousness and equity, on which God has founded all things. The prince of this world is *judged* (John 16:11); he is conquered not merely by power, but by the power of justice and truth.... He stood upon the justice of God, upon the inflexibility of His law, upon the true nature of our sins. But when Christ died our very death, when He was made sin and a curse for us, then all the power of Satan was gone.... And now what can Satan say? The justice, majesty, and perfection of the law are vindicated more than if all the human race were lost forever. The penalty due to the broken law Jesus endured, and now, as the law is vindicated, sin put away, death swallowed up, Christ has destroyed the Devil.”

Inasmuch as the Devil is the one who brought about the downfall of our first parents, by which sentence of death has been passed upon all their posterity (Romans 5:12); inasmuch as he goeth about as a roaring lion “seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8); inasmuch as he challenged God to inflict upon the guilty the sentence of the law (Zechariah 3:1); and, inasmuch as even the elect of God are, before their regeneration, under “the power of darkness” (Colossians 1:13 and cf. Acts 26:18), dead in trespasses and sins, yet “walking according to the Prince of the power of the air”; the Devil may be said to have “the *power* of death.”

The word “*destroy* him that had the power of death” does not signify to annihilate, but means to make null and render powerless. In 1 Corinthians 1:28 this same Greek word is rendered “bring to naught”; in Romans 3:3 “without effect”; in Romans 3:31 “make void.” Satan has been so completely vanquished by Christ the Head that he shall prevail against none of His members. This is written for the glory of Christ, and to encourage His people to withstand him. Satan is an enemy bespoiled. Therefore is it said, “Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). To such as believe there is assurance of victory. If the Devil gets the upper hand of us, it is either because of our timidity, or lack of faith.

“To ‘destroy him that had the power of death’ is to strip him of his power. It is said by the apostle John, ‘for this purpose was the Son of God manifested, to destroy the works of the Devil,’ i.e. Ignorance, error, depravity, and misery. In the passage before us, the destruction is restricted to the peculiar aspect in which the Devil is viewed. To destroy him, is so to destroy him as having ‘the power of death’ — to render him, in this point of light, powerless in reference to the children; i.e., to make death cease to be a penal evil. Death, even in the case of the saints, is an expression of the displeasure of God against sin; but it is not — as but for the death of Christ it must have been — the hopeless dissolution of his body: it is not the inlet to eternal misery to his soul. Death to them for whom Christ died consigns, indeed, the body to the grave; but it is ‘in the sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection,’ and it introduces the freed spirit into all the glories of the celestial paradise” (Dr. J. Brown).

This stripping Satan of his power of death was accomplished by the laying

down of the Savior's life, "that through death He might destroy."

"The means whereby Christ overcame Satan, is expressly said to be death. To achieve this great and glorious victory against so mighty an enemy, Christ did not assemble troops of angels, as He could have done (Matthew 26:53), nor did He array Himself with majesty and terror, as in Exodus 19:16; but He did it by taking part of weak flesh and blood, and therein humbling Himself to death. In this respect the apostle saith, that Christ 'having spoiled principalities and powers, made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in the cross' (Colossians 2:15), meaning thereby, His death. The apostle there resembleth the cross of Christ to a trophy whereon the spoils of enemies were hanged. Of old conquerors were wont to hang the armor and weapons of enemies vanquished on the walls of forts and towers." (Dr. Gouge.)

"That through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." A striking type of this is furnished in Judges 14:12-19 — will the reader please turn to this, before considering our brief comments. The riddle propounded by Samson prefigured what is plainly declared here in Hebrews 2:14. The greatest "eater" (Judges 14:14), or "consumer," is Death. Yet out of the eater came forth meat: that is, out of death has come life; see John 12:24. Note in Judges 14 how, typically, the natural man is, of himself, utterly unable to solve this mystery. The secret of the death of Christ, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, must be *revealed*. Finally, note how that a change of raiment was provided for those to whom the riddle was explained — a foreshadowment of the believer's robe of righteousness!

"And deliver them who through fear of death were all their life-time subject to bondage" (verse 15).

It needs to be carefully borne in mind that throughout this passage the apostle has in view a particular class of persons, namely, the "heirs of salvation," the "sons" of God, the "brethren" of Christ. Here they are described according to their unregenerate condition: subject to bondage; so subject, all their unregenerate days; so subject through "the fear of death." It was to deliver them from this fear of death that Christ died. Such we take it is the general meaning of this verse. 2 Timothy 1:7 gives the sequel: "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

The opening “And” and the verb “deliver” (which is in the same mood and tense as “destroy” in the previous verse) intimate that Christ’s death had in view these two ends which cannot be separated, namely, destroying the Devil, delivering us. Just as Abraham destroyed those enemies who had taken Lot captive together with the other inhabitants of Sodom, that he might “deliver” them (Genesis 14:14), and as David destroyed the Amalekites, that he might “deliver” his wives and children and others out of their hands (1 Samuel 27:9), so Christ vanquished the Devil, that he might “deliver” those who had (by yielding to his temptations) fallen captive to him. What thanks is due unto Christ for thus overthrowing our great adversary!

To the “fear of death,” *i.e.*, that judgment of God upon sin, all men are in much greater bondage than they will own or than they imagine. It was this “*fear*” which made Adam and Eve hide themselves from the presence of God (Genesis 3:8), which made Cain exclaim, “*my punishment is greater than I can bear*” (Genesis 4:13), which made Nabal’s heart to die within him (1 Samuel 25:37), which made Saul fall to the ground as a man in a swoon (1 Samuel 28:20), which made Felix to tremble (Acts 24:25), and which will yet cause kings and the great men of the earth to call on the mountains to fall on them (Revelation 6:15, 16). True, the natural man, at times, succeeds in drowning the accusations of his conscience in the pleasures of sin, but

“as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool”
(Ecclesiastes 7:6).

It is from this fearful bondage that Christ delivered His people: through His grace, by His spirit filling them “*with all joy and peace in believing*” (Romans 15:13).

A beautiful and most complete type of the truth in our present verse is to be found in 1 Samuel 17. Will the reader turn to that chapter and note carefully the following details:

First, in verses 4-8 there we have, in figure, Satan harassing the Old Testament saints.

Second, where was David (type of Christ) during the time Goliath was terrifying the people of God? Verses 14, 15 answer: In his father’s house, caring for his sheep. So through the Mosaic economy Christ remained on High, in the Father’s house, yet caring for His sheep.

Third, Goliath defied Israel for “forty days,” verse 16 — figure of the forty centuries from Adam to Christ, when the Old Testament saints lived in fear of death, for “life and immortality” were only brought “to light through the Gospel” (2 Timothy 1:10).

Fourth, next we see David leaving his father’s house, laden with blessings for his brethren, verses 17, 18. Note the “early in the morning,” verse 20, showing his *readiness* to go on this mission.

Fifth, mark the sad reception he met with from his brethren, verse 28: his efforts were unappreciated, his purpose misunderstood, and a false accusation was brought against him.

Sixth, in verses 32, 38-49, we have a marvelous type of Christ defeating Satan in the wilderness: note how David went forth in his *shepherd* character (verse 40 and compare John 10). He took “five” stones out of the brook (the place of running water — figure of the Holy Spirit) but used only one of them; so Christ in the Wilderness selected the Pentateuch (the first five books of Scripture) as His weapon, but used only one of them, Deuteronomy. Note David *slew* him not with the stone! He stunned him with that, but slew him with his *own* sword: so Christ vanquished him that had the power of death “*through death*.” Read again verse 51 and see how accurate is the figure of Christ “bruising” the Serpent’s *head*.

Finally, read verse 52 and see the typical climax: those “*in fear*” *delivered*. What a marvelous Book is the Bible!

“For verily He took not on angels; but He took on the seed of Abraham” (verse 16).

This verse, which has occasioned not a little controversy, presents no difficulty if it be weighed in the light of its whole context. It treats not of the Divine incarnation, that we have in verse 14; rather does it deal with the purpose of it, or better, the consequences of Christ’s death. Its opening “for” first looks back, remotely to verses 9,10; immediately, to verses 14, 15. The Spirit is here advancing a *reason* why Christ tasted death for every son, and why He destroyed the Devil in order to liberate His captives; because not angels, but the seed of Abraham, were the objects of His benevolent favor. The “for” and the balance of the verse also, looks forward, laying a foundation for what follows in verse 17: the ground of Christ’s being made

like to His brethren and becoming the faithful and merciful High Priest was because He would befriend the seed of Abraham.

The Greek verb here translated “He took on” or “laid hold” is found elsewhere in some very striking connections. It is used of Christ’s stretching out His hand and rescuing sinking Peter, Matthew 14:31, there rendered “caught.” It is used of Christ when He “took” the blind man by the hand (Mark 8:23). So of the man sick of the dropsy. He “took” and healed him (Luke 14:4). Here in Hebrews 2:16 the reference is to the almighty power and invincible grace of the Captain of our salvation. It receives illustration in those words of the apostle’s where, referring to his own conversion, he said, “for which also I am (was) *apprehended* (laid hold) of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:12). Thus it was and still is with each of God’s elect. In themselves, lost, rushing headlong to destruction; when Christ stretches forth His hand and delivers, so that of each it may be said, “Is not this a brand *plucked* from the burning” (Zechariah 3:2). “Laid hold of” so securely that none can pluck out of His hand!

But not only does our verse emphasize the invincibility of Divine grace, it also plainly teaches the absolute sovereignty of it. Christ lays hold not of “the seed of Adam,” all mankind, but only “the seed of Abraham” — the father of God’s elect people. This expression, “the seed of Abraham,” is employed in the New Testament in connection with both his natural and his spiritual seed. It is the latter which is here in view:

“Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many, but as of one, And to thy seed which is Christ” (Galatians 3:16)

— not only Christ personal, but Christ mystical. The last verse of Galatians 3 shows that: “And if ye be Christ’s then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to promise.”

This verse presents an insoluble difficulty to those who believe in the *universality* of God’s love and grace. Those who do so deny the plain teaching of Scripture that Christ laid down His life for “the sheep,” and for them alone. They insist that justice as well as mercy demanded that He should die for all of Adam’s race. But why is it harder to believe that God has provided no salvation for part of the human race, than that He has provided none for the fallen angels? They were higher in the scale of being; they, too,

were sinners needing a Savior. Yet none has been provided for *them!* He “laid not on” angels.

But more: Our verse not only brings out the truth of election, it also presents the solemn fact of reprobation. Christ is not the Savior of angels. “And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, He hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6). On this Dr. J. Brown has well said:

“What an overwhelming subject of contemplation is this! He is not the Savior of angels, but of the elect family of men. We are lost in astonishment when we allow our minds to rest on the number and dignity of those whom He does not lay hold of, and the comparative as well as real vileness of those of whom He does take hold. A sentiment of this kind has engaged some good, but in this case not wise men, in an inquiry why the Son of God saves men rather than angels. On this subject Scripture is silent, and so should we be. There is no doubt that there are good reasons for this, as for every other part of the Divine determinations and dispensations; and it is not improbable that in some future stage of our being these reasons will be made known to us. But, in the meantime, I can go no further than, ‘even so, Father, for so it hath seemed good in Thy sight.’ I dare not ‘intrude into things, which I have not seen,’ lest I should prove that I am ‘vainly puffed up by a fleshly mind.’ But I will say with an apostle, ‘Behold the goodness and severity of God; on them that fell, severity’ — most righteous severity; ‘but to them who are saved, goodness’ — most unmerited goodness.” (Dr. J. Brown.)

May the Lord add His blessing to what has been before us.

CHAPTER 12

CHRIST SUPERIOR TO ANGELS

(HEBREWS 2:17, 18)

The verses which are now to be before us complete the second main division of the Epistle, in which the apostle has set forth the superiority of Christ over angels, and has met and removed a double objection which might be made against this. In showing that it was necessary for the Son of God to become Man in order to save His people from their sins, the Holy Spirit took occasion to bring out some striking details concerning the real and perfect humanity of Christ. In Hebrews 2:11 He affirms that Christ and His people are “all of one.” This receives a seven-fold amplification, which is as follows:

First, they are one in sanctification, verse 11.

Second, they are one in family relationship, verses 11, 12a.

Third, they are one in worship, verse 12b.

Fourth, they are one in trust, verse 13.

Fifth, they are one in nature, verse 14.

Sixth, they are one in the line of promise, verse 16.

Seventh, they are one in experiencing temptation, verse 18.

It is remarkable to notice, however, that in this very passage which sets forth Christ’s identification with His people on earth, the Holy Spirit has carefully guarded the Savior’s glory and shows, also in a seven-fold way, His uniqueness:

First, He is “the Captain of our salvation” (verse 10), we are those whom He saves.

Second, He is the “Sanctifier,” we but the sanctified (verse 11).

Third, the fact that He is “not ashamed to call us brethren” (verse 11), clearly implies His superiority.

Fourth, He is the Leader of our praise and presents it to God (verse 12).

Fifth, mark the “I, and the children” in verse 13.

Sixth, note the contrast between “partakers” and “took part of” in

verse 14.

Seventh, He is the Destroyer of the enemy, we but the delivered ones verses 14, 15. Thus, here as everywhere, *He* has the pre-eminence in all things.”

Another thing which comes out strikingly and plainly in the second half of Hebrews 2 is the distinguishing grace and predestinating love of God. Christ is His “Elect” (Isaiah 42:1), so called because His people are “chosen in Him” (Ephesians 1:4). Mark how this also is developed in a seven-fold manner.

First, in “bringing many *sons* unto glory.” (verse 10).

Second, “the Captain of *their* salvation” (verse 10).

Third, “they who are sanctified,” set apart (verse 11).

Fourth, “in the midst of the church” (verse 12).

Fifth, “the children which God hath given me” (verse 13).

Sixth, “He took on Him the seed of Abraham” (verse 16), not Adam, but “Abraham,” the father of God’s chosen people.

Seventh, “to make reconciliation for the sins of *the* people” (verse 17).

If the reader will turn back to the third paragraph in article 10, and the second and third in article 11, he will find that we have called attention to twelve distinct reasons set forth by the apostle in Hebrews 2:9-16, which show the meetness and necessity of Christ’s becoming man and dying. In the verses which we are now to ponder, two more are advanced:

First, the incarnation and death of the Savior were imperative if He was to be “a merciful and faithful High Priest” (verse 17).

Second, such experiences were essential that He might be able to “succor them that are tempted” (verse 18). Thus, in the fourteen answers given to the two objections which a Jew would raise, a *complete* demonstration is once more given of the two leading points under discussion.

Though our present portion consists of but two verses yet are they so full of important teaching that many more pages than what we shall now write might well be devoted to their explication and application. They treat of such

weighty subjects as the incarnation of Christ, the priesthood of Christ, the atoning-sacrifice of Christ, the temptation of Christ, and the succor of Christ. Precious themes indeed are these; may the Spirit of truth be our Guide as we prayerfully turn to their consideration.

“Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people” (verse 17).

The Holy Spirit here adduces a further reason why it was necessary for the Son of God to become incarnate and lay down His life for His people: it behooved Him so to do that He might be an effectual High Priest. As the priesthood of Christ will come before us again and again in the later chapters, D.V., we shall not here discuss it at length. Let us now ponder the several words and clauses of our present verse.

“Wherefore” is the drawing of a conclusion from what has been said in the previous verses. “It behooved Him”: the Greek word is not the same as for “it became” Him in Hebrews 2:10. There the reference is to the Father, here to the Son; that signified a comeliness or meetness, this has reference to a necessity, though not an absolute one, but in conjunction with the order of God’s appointment in the way sinners were to be redeemed, and His justice satisfied, cf. Luke 24:46. “To be made like unto His brethren” is parallel with “all of one” in verse 11 and “He also Himself likewise took *part*” in verse 14. The expression goes to manifest the reality of Christ’s human nature: that He was Man, such a man as we are.

The words “it behooved Him in all things to (His) brethren to be made like” are not to be taken absolutely. When the writer points out that, in view of other scriptures, the word “all” must be limited in such passages as John 12:32, 1 Timothy 2:4, 6, etc., some people think we are interpreting the Bible so as to suit ourselves. But what will *they* do with such a verse as Hebrews 2:17? Can the words “*in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren*” be understood *without* qualification? Was He made like unto us in the depravity of our natures? Did He suffer from physical sicknesses as we do? Emphatically no. How do we know this? From other passages. Scripture needs to be compared with Scripture in order to understand any verse or any expression. The same Greek words here rendered “*all things*” (*kapapanta*)

occur again in Hebrews 4:15, where we are told that Christ “was in all points (things) tempted like as we are sin *excepted*” for thus the Greek word should be rendered. Thus the Holy Spirit expressly declares that the “all things” is *not* universal!

What then does the “all things” signify and include? We answer, everything which Scripture does not except or exclude “when people saw Him, they did not notice in His outward appearance anything super-human, glorious, free from earthly weakness and dependency. He did not come in splendor and power. He did not come in the brightness and strength which Adam possessed before he fell. ‘In all things He became like unto us’ in His body, for He was hungry and thirsty; overcome with fatigue, He slept; in His mind, for it developed. He had to be taught. He grew in wisdom concerning the things around Him; He increased, not merely in stature, but in mental and normal strength. In His affections, for He loved. He was astonished; He marveled at men’s unbelief. Sometimes He was glad, and ‘rejoiced in spirit’; sometimes He was angry and indignant, as when He saw the hypocrisy of the Jews. Zeal like fire burned within Him: ‘The zeal for the house of God consumed Me’; and he showed a vehement fervor in protecting the sanctity of God’s temple. He was grieved; He trembled with emotion; His soul was straightened in Him. Sometimes He was overcome by the waves of feeling when He beheld the future that was before Him.

“Do not think of Him as merely *appearing* a man, or as living a man only in His body, but as Man in body, soul, and spirit. He exercised faith; He read the Scriptures for His own guidance and encouragement; He prayed the whole night, especially when He had some great and important work to do, as before setting apart the apostles. He sighed when He saw the man who was dumb; tears fell from His eyes when at the tomb of Lazarus He saw the power of death and of Satan. His supplications were with strong crying and tears; His soul was exceeding sorrowful” (Saphir).

Thus, the Son of God was made like unto His brethren in that He became Man, with a human spirit, and soul and body; in that He developed along the ordinary lines of human nature, from infancy to maturity; and, in that He passed through all the experiences of men, sin, and sickness excepted.

“That He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to

God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.” The Son of God became the Son of Man in order that He might be an High Priest. There was an absolute necessity for this.

First, because of the infinite disparity there is between God and men: He is of infinite glory and majesty, and dwells in that light which no man can approach unto (1 Timothy 6:16); they are but dust and ashes (Genesis 18:27).

Second, because of the contrariety of nature between God and men: He is most pure and holy, they most polluted and unholy.

Third, because of the resultant enmity between God and men (Romans 5:10; Colossians 1:21). Hence we may observe: there is no immediate access for any man to God without a priest; there is no priest qualified to act for men in things pertaining to God, but Jesus Christ, the God-man. Thus has He been appointed “Mediator between God and men” (1 Timothy 2:5,6).

Because of the perfect union between His two natures, the Lord Jesus is “a merciful and faithful High Priest”: “merciful” man-wards, “faithful” God-wards.

To be “merciful” is to be compassionate, ever ready, under the influence of a tender sympathy, to support, comfort, and deliver. Having trod the same path as His suffering and tried people, Christ is able to enter into their afflictions. He is not like an angel, who has never experienced pain. He is Man; nor are His sympathies impaired by His exaltation to heaven. The same human heart beats within the bosom of Him who sits at God’s right hand as caused Him to weep over Jerusalem! To be “faithful” means that His compassions are regulated by holiness, His sympathies are exercised, according to the requirements of God’s truth. There is a perfect balance between His maintenance of God’s claims and His ministering to our infirmities.

“To make reconciliation for the sins of the people.” It is a pity that the translators of the A.V. Rendered this clause as they did. The Revisers have correctly given: “to make *propitiation* for the sins of the people.” The Greek word here is “*Hilaskeothai*,” which is the verbal form of the one found in 1 John 2:2 and 1 John 4:10. The word for “reconciliation” is “*katallage*,” which occurs in 2 Corinthians 5:18, 19, and Romans 5:11, though the word is there wrongly rendered “the atonement.” The difference between the two terms is vital though one which is now little understood. Reconciliation is one of the

effects or fruits of propitiation. Reconciliation is between God and us; propitiation is solely God-ward. Propitiation was the appeasing of God's holy anger and righteous wrath; reconciliation is entering into the peace which the atoning sacrifice of Christ has procured.

“To make propitiation for the sins of the people.” Here is the climax of the apostle's argument. Here is his all-conclusive reply to the Jews' objection. Atonement for the sins of God's elect could not be made except the Son became Man; except He became “all of one” with those who had, from all eternity been set apart in the counsels of the Most High to be “brought unto glory”; except He took part in “flesh and blood,” and in all things be “made like unto His brethren.” Only thus could He be the *Redeemer* of the “children” which God had given Him.

In Scripture the first qualification of a redeemer was that he must belong to the same family of him or her who was to be redeemed:

“If thy brother be waxen poor, and hath sold away of his possession, and if any of his kin come to redeem it, then shall he redeem that which his brother sold” (Leviticus 25:25).

The redeemer must be a “kinsman”: this fact is fully and beautifully illustrated in the book of Ruth (see Hebrews 2:20; 3:12, 13; 4:1, 4, 6). Neither pity, love, nor power were of any avail till *kinship* was established. The important bearing of this on what immediately follows we shall now endeavor to show.

“To make propitiation for the sins of the people.” This word, in the light of its setting, is one of the most vital to be found in all Holy Writ on the subject of the Atonement, bringing out, as it does, the absolute righteousness of God in connection therewith. At the back of many minds, we fear, there lurks the suspicion that though it was marvelous grace and matchless love which moved God to give His Son to die for sinners, yet that, strictly speaking, it was an act of unrighteousness. Was it really just for an *innocent* person to suffer in the stead of the guilty? Was it right for One who had so perfectly honored God and kept His law at every point, to endure its awful penalty? To say, It *had* to be, there was no other way of saving us, supplies no direct answer to our question; nay, it is but arguing on the jesuitical basis that “the end justifies the means.”

Sin must be punished; a holy God could not ignore our manifold transgressions; therefore, if we are to escape the due reward of our iniquities a sinless substitute must be paid the wages of sin in our stead. But will not the Christian reader agree that it had been infinitely better for all of us to be cast into the Lake of Fire, than that God should act unrighteously to His Own Beloved? Has, then our salvation been secured at the awful price of a lasting stigma being cast upon the holy name of God? This is how the theological schemes of many have left it. But not so the Holy Scriptures. Yet, let us honestly face the question: Was God *just* in taking satisfaction from His spotless Son in order to secure the salvation of His people?

It is at this point that so many preachers have shown a zeal which is *not* “*according to knowledge*” (Romans 10:2). In their well-meant but carnal efforts to simplify the things of God, they have dragged down His holy and peerless truth to the level of human affairs. They have sought to “illustrate” Divine mysteries by references to things which come within the range of our senses. God has said,

“The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he *know*, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Why not believe what He has said? You cannot teach a corpse, and the natural man is dead in sin. If the Word of God does not bring him life and light, no words of ours can or will. And to go outside of Holy Writ for our “illustrations” is a piece of impertinency, or worse. When a preacher attempts to simplify the mystery of the three Persons in the Godhead by an illustration from “nature” he only exhibits his foolishness, and helps nobody.

Thus it has been with the sacred truth and holy mystery of the Atonement. Good men have not hesitated to ransack the annals of history, both ancient and modern, to discover examples of those who, themselves innocent of the crime committed, volunteered to receive the penalty due to those who were guilty. Sad, indeed, is it to behold this unholy cheapening of the things of God; but what is far worse, most reprehensible is it to observe their misrepresentations of the greatest transaction of all in the entire history of the universe. An innocent man bearing the punishment of a guilty one may meet the requirements of a human government, but such an arrangement could never satisfy the demands of the righteous government of God. Such is *its*

perfection, that under it no innocent person ever suffered, and no guilty person ever escaped; and so far from the atonement of the Son of God forming an exception to this rule, it affords the most convincing evidence of its truth.

Once we perceive that the Atonement is founded upon the *unity* of Christ and His people, a unity formed by His taking part in flesh and blood, the righteousness of God is at once cleared of the aspersion which the illustrations of many a preacher has, by necessary implication cast upon it. The propitiation rendered unto God was made neither by a stranger, nor an intimate friend, undergoing what another merited; but by the Head who was responsible for the acts of the members of His spiritual body, just as those members had been constituted guilty because of the act of their natural head, Adam — when “by the offense of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation” (Romans 5:18). It is perhaps worthy of notice in this connection that, in the over-ruling providence of God, it is the *head* of a murderer’s body which is dealt with when capital punishment is inflicted either decapitation as in France, hanging by the neck as in England, or being gassed as in some parts of the United States. Thus the head is held responsible for the feet, which were swift to shed blood, and the hand which committed the lethal crime.

However great the dignity of the substitute, or however deep his voluntary humiliation, atonement for us would not have been possible unless that substitute became actually, as well as legally, one with us. In order to ransom His church, in order to purge our sins, Christ must so unite Himself with His people, that their sins should become His sins, and that His sufferings and death should become their sufferings and death. In short, the union between the Son of God and His people, and theirs with Him, must be as real and as intimate as that of Adam and his posterity, who all sinned and died in him. Thus did He, in the fullness of time, assume their flesh and blood, bear their sins in His own body on the tree, so that they, having died to sin, may live unto righteousness, being healed by His stripes. Therefore, no human transaction can possibly illustrate the surety-ship and sacrificial death of Christ, and any attempt to do so is not only to darken counsel by words without knowledge, but is, really, to be guilty of presumptuous impiety. Probably more than one preacher will be led to cry with the writer, “Father, forgive me, for I knew not what I did.”

Here, then, is the answer to our question: so far from the salvation of God's elect having been procured at the unspeakable price of sullyng the holy name of Deity, the manner in which it was secured furnishes the supremest demonstration of the inexorable justice of God; for when sin was found upon Him, God "spared not His own Son" (Romans 8:32). But it was against no "innocent Victim" that God bade His sword awake. It was against One who had graciously condescended to be "numbered with transgressors," who not only took their place, but had become one with them. Had He not first had a real and vital relation to our sins, He could not have undergone their punishment. The *justice* of God's imputation of our sins to the Savior's account rested upon His *oneness* with His people.

It is this fact which is iterated and reiterated all through the immediate context. "Both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one" (verse 11), "Behold I and the children which God hath given Me" (verse 13), "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same" (verse 14), "Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren" (verse 17). Why? Why? Here is the inspired answer: "To make propitiation for the sins of the people." That was only possible, we say again, because of His union with them. When Christ became one with His people their guilt became His, as the debts of a wife become by marriage the debts of the husband. This itself is acknowledged by Christ,

"For innumerable evils hath compassed Me about: Mine iniquities have taken hold upon Me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of Mine head: therefore My heart faileth Me" (Psalm 40:12).

"To make propitiation for the sins of the people." In the light of all that has gone before in the Epistle, this statement is luminous indeed. The whole context shows us His *qualifications* for this stupendous work, a work which none but He could have performed.

First, He was Himself "the Son," the brightness of God's glory and the very impress of His substance. Thus it was the dignity or Deity of His person which gave such infinite value to His work.

Second, His moral perfections as Man, loving righteousness and hating iniquity (Hebrews 1:9), thus fulfilled every requirement of the law.

Third, His union with His people which caused him “made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.”

The “propitiation” (which is the New Testament filling out of the Old Testament “to make an atonement”) which Christ made, was the perfect satisfaction that He offered to the holiness and justice of God on behalf of His people’s sins, so that they could be righteously blotted out, removed for ever from before the face of God, “as far as the east is from the west.” This sacrificial work of the Savior’s was a priestly act, as the words of our present verse clearly enough affirm.

For “the sins of the people” is parallel with Matthew 1:21; John 10:11. They plainly teach that atonement has been made for the sins of God’s elect only. “The people” are manifestly parallel with the “heirs of salvation” (Hebrews 1:14), the “many sons” (Hebrews 2:10), the “brethren” (Hebrews 2:12), the “seed of Abraham” (Hebrews 2:16). It is with them alone Christ identified Himself. The “all of one” of Hebrews 2:11 is expressly defined as being only between “He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified.” He laid hold of “the seed of Abraham,” and not “the seed of Adam.” He is the “Head” not of mankind, but of “the church which is His body” (Ephesians 1:21-23). A *universal* atonement, which largely fails of its purpose, is an invention of Satan, with the design of casting dishonor upon Christ, who would thus be a defeated Savior. A *general* atonement, abstractedly offered to Divine justice, which is theoretically sufficient for everybody, yet in itself efficient for nobody, is a fictitious imagination, which finds lodgment only in those who are vainly puffed up by a fleshly mind. A particular atonement, made for a definite people, all of whom shall enjoy the eternal benefits of it, is what is uniformly taught in the Word of God.

“For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted He is able to succor them that are tempted” (verse 18).

Here is the final reason given why it was necessary for the Son to become Man and die: He is the better able to succor His tried people. It was not simply His having been “tempted” that qualified Him, for God Himself may be tempted (Numbers 14:22), though not with evil (James 1:13). So men may be tempted, yet as to be moved little or nothing thereby. But such temptations as make one *suffer*, do so work on him, as to draw out his pity to other tempted ones, and to help them as far as He can. It is *this* point which the

Spirit has here seized.

“For in that He Himself hath suffered, being tempted.” The subject of Christ’s being tempted is an important one, for erroneous conceptions thereof necessarily produce a most dishonoring conception of His peerless Person. If the Lord wills, we hope to discuss it more fully when we come to Hebrews 4:15, yet feel we must offer a few remarks upon it now. That the temptations to which our blessed Lord was subjected were real ones is evidenced from the inspired declaration that He “suffered” from them, but that they involved a conflict *within* Him, or that there was any possibility of His yielding thereto, must be emphatically denied. That He became Man with a human spirit and soul and body, and therefore possessed a human will, we fully believe; but that there was the slightest inclination for His heart or will to yield to evil solicitations, is wicked to so much as imagine. Not only was *His* humanity sinless, but it was “holy” (Luke 1:35), and His inherent holiness repelled all sin as water does fire.

The temptations or trials which Christ suffered here on earth must not be limited to those which came upon Him from Satan, though these are included.

First, Christ suffered bodily hunger (Matthew 4:1,2), etc.

Second, His holy nature suffered acutely from the very presence of the foul Fiend, so that He said, “Get thee hence” (Matthew 4:10).

Third, the temptations from the Pharisees and others “grieved” Him (Mark 3:5)

Fourth, from the words of His own disciples, which were an “offense” unto Him (Matthew 16:23).

Fifth, His greatest sufferings were from His Father’s temptings or tryings of Him. (See John 12:27; Matthew 26:38, 39; 27:46). Note how in Luke 22:28, “My temptation,” the Savior spoke of His whole life as one unbroken experience of trial! How real and deep His “sufferings” were, many of the Messianic Psalms reveal.

The very fact that He *suffered* when “tempted” manifests His uniqueness.

“He suffered, never yielded. *We* do not ‘suffer’ when we yield to temptation: the flesh takes pleasure in the things by which it is

tempted. Jesus suffered, being tempted. It is important to observe that the flesh, when acted upon by its desires, does not suffer. Being tempted it, alas, enjoys. But when, according to the light of the Holy Spirit and fidelity of obedience, the spirit resists the attacks of the enemy, whether subtle or persecuting, then one suffers. This the Lord did, and this we have to do” (Mr. J.N. Darby).

“He is able to succor them that are tempted.” Having passed through this scene as the Man of sorrows, He can, experimentally, gauge and feel the sorrows of His people, but let it be dearly understood that it is not the “flesh” in us which needs “succoring,” but the new nature, the faithful heart that desires to please Him. We need “succor” *against the* flesh, to enable us to mortify our members which are upon the earth. Not yet has the promised inheritance been reached. We are still in the wilderness, which provides nothing which ministers to us spiritually. We are living in a world where everything is opposed to true godliness. We are called upon to “run the race which is set before us,” to “fight the good fight of faith,” and for this we daily need His “succor.”

The Greek word for “He is able” implies both a fitness and willingness to do a thing. Christ is both competent and ready to undertake for His people. If we have not, it is because we ask not. The Greek word for “succor” here is very emphatic, and signifies a running to the cry of one, as a parent responding to the cry of distress from a child. A blessed illustration of Christ’s “succoring” one of His own needy people is found in Matthew 14:30, 31, where we read that when Peter saw the wind was boisterous he was afraid, and began to sink, and cried “Lord save me.” And then we are told, “And *immediately* Jesus stretched forth His hand and caught him.”

On one occasion the Lord Jesus asked His disciples, “Believe ye that I am able to do this” (Matthew 9:28). And thus He ever challenges the faith of His own. To Abraham He said, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” (Genesis 18:14). To Moses, who doubted whether the Lord would give flesh to Israel in the wilderness, He asked, “Is the Lord’s hand waxed short?” (Numbers 11:23). To Jeremiah the searching question was put, “Is there anything too hard for Me?” (Jeremiah 32:27). So He still asks, “Believe ye, that I am able to do this?” Do *what?* We may ask. Whatever you are really in need of — give peace, impart assurance, grant deliverance, supply succor.

“*He* is able to succor them that are tempted.” Remember who He is, the God-man. Remember the experiences through which He passed! He, too, has been in the place of trial: He, too, was tempted — to distrust, to despondency, to destroy Himself. Yes, He was tempted “*in* all points like as we are, sin excepted.” Remember His present position, sitting at the right hand of the Majesty on high! How blessed then to know that He *is* “able” both to enter, sympathetically, into our sufferings and sorrows, and that He has power to “succor.”

*“As Man, a man of sorrows,
Thou hast suffered every woe,
And though enthroned in glory now,
Canst pity all Thy saints below.”*

Oh, what a Savior is ours! The all-mighty God; yet the all-tender Man. One who is as far above us in His original nature and present glory as the heavens are above the earth: yet One who can be “touched with the feeling of our infirmities,” One who is the Creator of the universe; yet One who became Man, lived His life on the same plane ours is lived, passed through the same trials we experience, and suffered not only as we do, but far more acutely. How well-fitted is such a One to be our great High Priest! How self-sufficient He is to supply our every need! And how completely is the wisdom and grace of God vindicated for having appointed His blessed Son, to be made, for a season, lower than the angels! May our love for Him be strengthened and our worship deepened by the contemplation of what has been before us in these first two chapters of Hebrews.

CHAPTER 13

CHRIST SUPERIOR TO MOSES

(HEBREWS 3:1-6)

Our present portion introduces us to the third division of the Epistle, a division which runs on to Hebrews 4:6. The first division, comprising but the three opening verses of the first chapter, evidences the superiority of Christ over the prophets. The second division, Hebrews 1:4 to the end of chapter 2, sets forth the superiority of Christ over the angels. The one we are now commencing treats of the superiority of Christ over Moses.

“The contents of this section may be stated briefly thus: That the Lord Jesus Christ, the mediator of the new covenant, is high above Moses, the mediator of the old dispensation, inasmuch as Jesus is the Son of God, and Lord *over* the house; whereas Moses is the servant of God, who is faithful *in* the house. And upon this doctrinal statement is based the exhortation, that we should not harden our hearts lest we fail to enter into that rest of which the possession of the promised land was only an imperfect type. This section consists of two parts — a doctrinal statement, which forms the basis, and an exhortation resting upon it” (Saphir).

Of all the godly characters brought before us in the Old Testament scriptures, there is not one who has higher claims on our attentive consideration than the legislator of Israel. Whether we think of his remarkable infancy and childhood, his self-sacrificing renunciation (Hebrews 11:24-26), the commission he received from God and his faithfulness in executing it, his devotion to Israel (Exodus 32:32), his honored privileges (Exodus 31:18), or the important revolutions accomplished through his instrumentality; “it will be difficult to find,” as another has said, “in the records either of profane or sacred history, an individual whose character is so well fitted at once to excite attachment and command veneration, and whose history is so replete at once with interest and instruction.”

The history of Moses was remarkable from beginning to end. The hand of Providence preserved him as a babe, and the hand of God dug his grave at the finish. Between those terms he passed through the strangest and most contrastive vicissitudes which, surely, any mortal has ever experienced. The

honors conferred upon him by God were much greater than any bestowed upon any other man, before or since. During the most memorable portion of their history, all of God's dealings with Israel were transacted through him. His position of nearness to Jehovah was remarkable, awesome, unique. He was in his own person, prophet, priest and king. Through him the whole of the Levitical economy was instituted. By him the Tabernacle was built. Thus we can well understand the high esteem in which the Jews held this favored man of God — cf. John 9:28, 29.

Yet great as was Moses, the Holy Spirit in this third section of Hebrews calls upon us to consider One who so far excelled him as the heavens are above the earth. First, Christ was the immeasurable superior of Moses in His own *person*: Moses was a man of God, Christ was God Himself. Moses was the fallen descendant of Adam. Conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity; Christ was sinless, impeccable, holy. Again; Christ was the immeasurable superior of Moses in His *Offices*. Moses was a prophet, through whom God spake; Christ was Himself “the Truth,” revealing perfectly the whole mind, will, and heart of God. Moses executed priestly functions (Exodus 24:6; 32:11); but Christ is the “great High Priest.” Moses was “king in Jeshurun” (Deuteronomy 33:5); Christ is “King of kings.” To mention only one other comparison, Christ was the immeasurable superior of Moses in His *work*. Moses delivered Israel from Egypt, Christ delivers His people from the everlasting burnings. Moses built an earthly tabernacle, Christ is now preparing a place for us on High. Moses led Israel across the wilderness but not into the Canaan itself; Christ will actually bring many sons “unto glory.” May the Holy Spirit impress our hearts more and more with the exalted dignity and unique excellency of our Savior.

“Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus” (verse 1).

There are three things in this verse which claim our attention: the exhortation given, the people addressed, the characters in which Christ is here contemplated. The exhortation is a call to “consider” Christ. The people addressed are “holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling.” The characters in which the Savior is viewed are “the Apostle and High Priest.”

“Wherefore.” This word gives the connecting link between the two chapters

which precede and the two that follow. It is a perfect transition, for it looks both ways. In regard to that which goes before, our present verse makes known the *use* we are to make of it; we are to “consider” Christ, to have our hearts fixed upon Him who is “altogether lovely.” In regard to that which follows, this basic exhortation lays a foundation for the succeeding admonitions: if we render obedience to *this* precept, then we shall be preserved from the evils which overtook Israel of old — hardening of the heart, grieving the Lord, missing our “rest.”

The exhortation given here is, “Wherefore.... consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession.” Three questions call for answers: what is meant by “considering” Him; why we should do so; the special characters in which He is to be considered. There are no less than eleven Greek words in the New Testament all rendered “consider,” four of them being simple ones; seven, compounds. The one employed by the Holy Spirit in Hebrews 3:1 signifies to thoroughly think of the matter, so as to arrive at a fuller knowledge of it. It was the word used by our Lord in His “consider the ravens, consider the lilies” (Luke 12:24, 27). It is the word which describes Peter’s response to the vision of the sheet let down from heaven: “I considered and saw four-footed beasts” (Acts 11:6). It is found again in Matthew 7:3, Romans 4:19, Hebrews 10:24. In Acts 7:31 “*katanoeo*” is rendered “to behold.” In Luke 20:23 it is translated “perceived.” In all, the Greek word is found fourteen times in the New Testament.

To “consider” Christ as here enjoined, means to thoroughly ponder who and what He is; to attentively weigh His dignity, His excellency, His authority; to think of what is *due* to Him. It is failure to thoroughly weigh important considerations which causes us to let them “slip” (Hebrews 2:1). On the other hand, it is by diligently pondering things of moment and value that the understanding is enabled to better apprehend them, the memory to retain them, the heart to be impressed, and the individual to make a better use of them. To “consider” Christ means to *behold* Him, not simply by a passing glance or giving to Him an occasional thought, but by the heart being fully occupied with Him. “Set Me as a seal upon thine heart” (Song of Solomon 8:6), is His call to us. And it is our failure at this point which explains why we know so little about Him, why we love Him so feebly, why we trust Him so imperfectly.

The motive presented by the Spirit here as to *why* we should so “consider” Christ is intimated in the opening “Wherefore.” It draws a conclusion from all that precedes. Because Christ is the One through whom Deity is now fully and finally manifested, because He is the Brightness of God’s glory and the very Impress of His substance; because, therefore, He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than the angels; because He, in infinite grace, became “all of one” with those that He came to redeem, having made propitiation for the sins of His people; because He is now seated at the right hand of the Majesty on High, and while there is “a merciful and faithful High Priest;” because He has Himself suffered being tempted and is able to succor them who are tempted; — therefore, He is infinitely worthy of our constant contemplation and adoration. The opening “Wherefore” is also an anticipatory inference from what follows: because Christ is worthy of more honor than Moses, therefore, “consider” Him.

There are two special characters in which the Holy Spirit here bids us contemplate Christ. First, as “*the* Apostle.” This has reference to the *prophetic* office of Christ, the title being employed because an “apostle” was the highest minister appointed in New Testament times. An apostleship had more honors conferred upon it than any other position in the church (Ephesians 4:11): thus the excellency of Christ’s prophetic office is magnified. The term apostle means one “sent forth” of God, endowed with authority as His ambassador. In John’s Gospel Christ is frequently seen as the “Sent One,” 3:34, 5:36, etc. The general function of Christ as a prophet, an apostle, a minister of the Word, was to make known the will of His Father unto His people. This He did, see John 8:26, etc. His special call to that function was immediate: “as My Father hath sent Me, so send I you” (John 20:21).

Christ is more than an apostle, He is “the Apostle,” that is why none others, not even Paul, are mentioned in this Epistle. He eclipses all others. He was the *first* apostle, the twelve being appointed by Him. His apostolic jurisdiction was more extensive than others; Peter was an apostle of the circumcision. Paul of the Gentiles; but Christ preached both to them that were nigh and to them that were far off (Ephesians 2:17). He received the Spirit more abundantly than any other (John 3:34). With Him the Messenger was the message: He was Himself “the Truth.” The miracles He wrought (the “*signs* of an apostle” 2 Corinthians 12:12) were mightier and more numerous

than those of others. Verily, Christ is “the Apostle,” for in *all* things He has the pre-eminence. The special duty for us arising therefrom is, “*Hear ye Him*” (Matthew 17:5) — cf. Deuteronomy 18:15, 18.

The second character in which we are here bidden to “consider” Christ Jesus, is as the “High Priest of our profession.” As the priesthood of Christ will come before us, D.V., in detail in the later chapters, only a few remarks thereon will now be offered. As we have already been told, the Lord Jesus is “a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God” (Hebrews 2:17). This at once gives us the principal feature which differentiates His priestly from His prophetic office. As Prophet, Christ is God’s representative to His people; as “Priest,” He is their representative before God.

As the Apostle He *speaks to* us from God, as our High Priest He speaks for us to God. The two offices are conjoined in John 13:3, “He was from God, and went to God.” Thus He fills the whole space between God and us: as Apostle He is close to me; as Priest, He is close to God.

“Of our profession.” The Greek word here is a compound and properly signifies “a consent.” In the New Testament, it is used for the confession of a thing (1 Timothy 6:12, 13), and to set forth the faith which Christians profess (Hebrews 4:14). Here it may be taken either for an act on our part — the confessing Christ to be “the Apostle and High Priest,” or, the subject matter of the faith we profess. Christians are not ashamed to own Him, for He is not ashamed to own them. The apostleship and priesthood of Christ are the distinguishing subjects of our faith, for Christianity centers entirely around the person of Christ. The confession is that which faith makes, see Hebrews 10:23. The cognate of this word is found in Hebrews 11:13 and Hebrews 13:15, “giving thanks:” these two references emphasizing the “stranger and pilgrim” character of this profession, of which Christ Jesus is the Apostle and High Priest.

It remains now for us to notice the people to whom this exhortation is addressed: they are denominated “holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling.” These Hebrews were addressed as “brethren” because they belonged spiritually to the family of God.

“He evidently refers to the blessed truth just announced, that Jesus, the Son of God, is not ashamed to call us brethren” (Hebrews 2:11). He means therefore those who by the Spirit of God have been born

again, and who can call God their Father. He addresses those of God who are in Christ Jesus, who were quickened together with Him; for when He rose from the dead He was ‘the first-born among many brethren’. He calls them ‘holy brethren,’ because upon this fact of brotherhood is based their sanctification: ‘He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one’” (Saphir).

No doubt the “holy brethren” was also designed to distinguish them from their brethren according to the flesh, the unbelieving Jews. By his use of this appellation the apostle to the Gentiles evidenced his interest in and love for the Hebrews: he acknowledged and esteemed them as “brethren.”

“What an interesting and delightful view is thus presented to our minds of genuine Christians scattered all over the earth — belonging to every kindred, and people, and tongue, and nation — distinguished from one another in an almost infinite variety of ways, as to talent, temper, education, rank, circumstances, yet bound together by an invisible band, even the faith of the truth, to the one great object of their confidence, and love, and obedience, Christ Jesus — forming one great brotherhood, devoted to the honor and service of His Father and their Father, His God and their God! Do *you* belong to this holy brotherhood? The question is an important one. For answer, note Christ’s words in Matthew 12:50” (Dr. J. Brown).

“Partakers of the heavenly calling.” This at once serves to emphasize the superiority of Christianity over Judaism, which knew only an earthly calling, with an earthly inheritance. The word “partakers” signifies “sharers of.” The calling wherewith the Christian is called (Ephesians 4:1) is *heavenly*, because of its origin — it proceeds from Heaven; because of the means used — the Spirit and the Word, which have come from Heaven; because of the sphere of our citizenship (Philippians 3:20); because of the end to which we are called — an eternal Heaven. Thus would the Holy Spirit press upon the sorely-trying Hebrews the inestimable value of their privileges.

Finally, the whole of this appellation should be viewed in the light of the relation between those addressed and Christ. How is it possible for sinful worms of the earth to be thus denominated? Because of their union with the incarnate Son, whose excellency is imputed to them, and whose position they

share. We are partakers of the heavenly calling because He, in wondrous condescension, partook of our earthly lot. What He has, we have; where He is, we are. He is the Holy One of God, therefore are we holy. He has been “made higher than the heavens,” therefore are we “partakers of the heavenly calling!” Just so far as our hearts really lay hold of this, shall we walk as “strangers and pilgrims” here. Where our “Treasure” (Christ) is, there will our hearts be also. That is why we are here bidden to “consider” Him.

“Who was faithful to Him that appointed Him, as also Moses was in all His house” (verse 2).

“To speak of Moses to the Jews was always a very difficult and delicate matter. It is hardly possible for Gentiles to understand or realize the veneration and affection with which the Jews regard Moses, the man of God. All their religious life, all their thoughts about God, all their practices and observances, all their hopes of the future, everything connected with God, is with them also connected with Moses. Moses was the great apostle unto them, the man sent unto them of God, the mediator of the old covenant” (Saphir).

Admire then the perfect wisdom of the Holy Spirit so plainly evidenced in our passage. Before taking up Christ’s superiority over Moses, He points first to a resemblance between them, making mention of the “faithfulness” of God’s servant. Ere taking this up let us dwell on the first part of the verse.

“Who was faithful to Him that appointed Him.” The chief qualification of an apostle or ambassador is, that he be *Faithful*. Faithfulness signifies two things: a trust committed, and a proper discharge of that trust.

“Our Lord had a trust committed to Him... this trust He faithfully discharged. He sought not His own glory, but the glory of Him that sent Him; He ever declared His message to be not His own, but the Father’s; and He declared the whole will or word of God that was committed unto Him” (Dr. John Owen).

Christ was ever faithful to the One who sent Him. This was His chief care from beginning to end. As a boy, “I must be about My Father’s business” (Luke 2:49). In the midst of His ministry, “I must work the works of Him that sent Me” (John 9:4). At the finish, “Not as I will, but as Thou wilt” (Matthew 26:39).

“As also Moses was faithful in all His house.”

“The key to the whole paragraph is to be found in the meaning of the figurative term ‘house,’ which so often occurs in it (just seven times, A.W.P.). By supposing that the word ‘house’ here is equivalent to *edifice*, the whole passage is involved in inextricable perplexity. ‘House’ here signifies a family or household. This mode of using the word is an exemplification of a common figure of speech, by which the name of what contains is given to what is contained. A man’s family usually resides in his house, and hence is called his house. This use of the word is common in the Bible: ‘The House of Israel,’ ‘the House of Aaron,’ ‘the House of David,’ are very common expressions for the children, the descendants, the families of Israel, Aaron and David. We have the same mode of speech in our own language, ‘the House of Stuart,’ ‘the House of Hanover.’ Keeping this remark in view, the verse we have now read will be found, short as it is, to contain in it the following statements: — Moses was appointed by God over the whole of His family: Moses was faithful in discharging the trust committed to him. Jesus is appointed by God over the whole of His family: Jesus is faithful in the discharge of the trust committed to Him” (Dr. J. Brown).

“The house, the building, means the children of God, who by faith, as lively stones, are built upon Christ Jesus the Foundation, and who are filled with the Holy Ghost; in whom God dwells, as in His temple, and in whom God is praised and manifested in glory. The illustration is very simple and instructive. We are compared unto stones, and as every simile is defective, we must add, not *dead* stones, but *lively* stones, as the apostle in his epistle to the Ephesians speaks of the building *growing*. The way in which we are brought unto the Lord Jesus Christ and united with Him is not by *building*, but by *believing*. The builders rejected the ‘chief cornerstone’ (Psalm 118:22); but ‘coming unto Christ’ (1 Peter 2:4, 5), simply believing, ‘ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house.’ When we go about the works of the law we are trying to build, and as long as we build we are not built. When we give up working, then by faith the Holy Ghost adds us to Christ, and grafts up into the living Vine, who is also the Foundation. We are rooted and

grounded. The house is one, and all the children of God are united in the Spirit” (Saphir).

That which the Spirit has here singled out for mention in connection with Moses, the typical “apostle,” is that he was *faithful* in all God’s house, faithful in the discharge of his responsibilities concerning the earthly family over which Jehovah placed him. Although he failed personally in his faith, he was faithful as an “apostle.” He never withheld a word which the Lord had given him, either from Pharaoh or from Israel. In erecting the tabernacle all things were made “according to” the pattern which he had received in the mount. When he came down from Sinai and beheld the people worshipping the golden calf, he did not spare, but called for the sword to smite them (Exodus 32:27, 28). In all things he conformed to the instructions which he had received from Jehovah (Exodus 40:16).

“For this Man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who hath builded the house hath more honor than the house” (verse 3).

The apostle now proceeds to present Christ’s superiority over Moses. But ere considering this, let us admire again the heavenly wisdom granted him in the method of presenting his argument. In the previous verse he has acknowledged the greatness of Moses, and here he also allows that he was worthy of glory, or praise. This would at once show that Paul was no enemy of Judaism, seeking to disparage and revile it. Equally striking is it to note how, in now turning the eyes of the Hebrews to One who is infinitely greater than Moses, he does not speak of his *failures* — *his* slaying of the Egyptians (Exodus 2), his slowness in responding to the Lord’s call (Exodus 3,4), his angered smiting of the rock (Numbers 20); but by presenting the *glories* of Christ.

This third verse presents to us the first of the evidences here furnished of the superiority of Christ over Moses: He is the Builder of God’s house; this, Moses never was. Its opening “*For*” looks back to the first verse, advancing a reason or argument *why* the Hebrews should “consider” the Apostle and High Priest of their confession, namely, because He is worthy of more glory than Moses the typical apostle.

“The phrase, ‘to build the house,’ is equivalent to, be the founder of the family. This kind of phraseology is by no means uncommon. It is

said, Exodus 1:21, that God ‘made houses’ to those humane women who refused to second the barbarous policy of Pharaoh in destroying the infants of the Israelites: i.e. He established their families, giving a numerous and flourishing offspring. In Ruth 4:11, Rachel and Leah are said to have built the house of Israel. And Nathan says to David, 2 Samuel 7:11: ‘Also the Lord telleth thee that He will make thee a house;’ and what the meaning of that phrase is, we learn from what immediately follows, Hebrews 5:12’ (Dr. J. Brown).

The contrast thus drawn between Christ and Moses is both a plain and an immense one. Though officially raised over it, Moses was not the founder of the Israelitish family, but simply a member of it. With the Apostle of our confession it is far otherwise. He is not only at the head of God’s family (Hebrews 2:10, 13 — His “sons,” His “children”), but He is also the Builder or the Founder of it. As we read in Ephesians 2:10, “for we are His workmanship, created in (or “by”) Christ Jesus.” Moses did not make men children of God; Christ does. Moses came to a people who were already the Lord’s by covenant relationship; whereas Christ takes up those who are dead in trespasses and sins, and creates them anew. Thus as the founder of the family is entitled to the highest honor from the family, so Christ is worthy of more glory than Moses.

“For every house is builded by some man; but He that built all things is God” (verse 4).

Here the Spirit brings in a yet higher glory of Christ. The connection is obvious. In the preceding verse it has been argued: the builder is entitled to more honor than the building: as then Christ is the Builder of a family, and Moses simply the member of one, He must be counted worthy “of more glory.” In verse 4, proof of this is given, as the opening “for” denotes. The proof is twofold: Christ has not only built “the house,” but “all things.” Christ is not only the Mediator, “appointed” by God (verse 2), but He *is* God. To how much greater glory then is He justly entitled!

“For every house is builded by some one,” should be understood in its widest signification, regarding “house” both literally and figuratively. Every human habitation has been built, every human family has been founded, by some man. So “He that built all things” is to be taken without qualification. The entire universe has been built (“framed,” Hebrews 11:3) by Christ, for “all

things were made by Him” (John 1:3), all things

“that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible”
(Colossians 1:16).

Therefore Christ made Moses, as the whole family of Israel. “He that built all things is *God*.” The Holy Spirit here designedly uses the Divine title because the work attributed to Christ (building the family of God) is a Divine work: because it proves, without controversy, that Christ is greater than Moses; because it ratifies what was declared in the first chapter concerning the Mediator, that He is true God. Therefore should all “honor the Son even as they honor the Father” (John 5:23).

“And Moses verily was faithful in all His house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; but Christ as a Son over His own house” (verses 5, 6).

These words bring before us the next proofs for the superiority of Christ over Moses: the typical apostle was but a servant, Christ is “Son;” the one was but a testimony unto the other. The position which Divine grace allotted to Moses was one of great honor, nevertheless he ministered before Jehovah only as a “servant.” The words “in all His house” should be duly pondered: other servants were used in various parts of the family, but the glory of Moses was that he was used in every part of it; that is to say, he was entrusted with the care and regulation of the whole family of Israel. Still, even this, left him incomparably the inferior of the Lord Jesus, for He was a Son not “*in* all His house,” but “*over* His own House.”

“And Moses verily was faithful in all His house, as a servant.” Here again the apostle would subdue the prejudices of the Jews against Christianity. He was not discrediting the greatness of Moses. So far from it, he *repeats* what he had said in verse 2, emphasizing it with the word “verily.” Yet the faithfulness of Moses was as a “servant,” a reminder to all, that this is the quality which should ever characterize all “servants.” The word “as a servant” has the same force as in John 1:14, “we beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father:” thus the “as” brings out the *reality* of the character in view. Moses faithfully conducted himself *as* a “servant,” he did not act as a lord. This was evidenced by his great reverence for God (Exodus 3:6), his earnestly desiring an evidence of God’s favor (Exodus 34:9), his preferring the glory of the Lord to his own glory (Hebrews 11:24-

26, Exodus 32:10-12), and in his meekness before men. (Numbers 12:3).

“For a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after.” This was a word much needed by the Jews. So far from the revelation of Christianity clashing with the Pentateuch, much there was an anticipation of it. Moses ordered all things in the typical worship of the house so that they might be both a witness and pledge of that which should afterwards be more fully exhibited through the Gospel. Therefore did Christ say,

“For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed Me: for he wrote of Me” (John 5:46).

And on another occasion we are told,

“And beginning at *Moses* and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:27).

“But Christ as a Son over His own house.” Here is the final proof that Christ is “counted worthy of more glory than Moses.” The proofs presented in this passage of our Lord’s immeasurable superiority are seven in number, and may be set forth thus: Moses was an apostle, Christ “the Apostle” (verse 1). Moses was a member of an “house:” Christ was the Builder of one (verse 3). Moses was connected with a single house, Christ “built all things,” being the Creator of the universe (verse 4). Moses was a man; Christ, God (verse 4). Moses was but a “servant” (verse 5); Christ, the “Son.” Moses was a “testimony” of things to be spoken after (verse 5), Christ supplied the substance and fulfillment of what Moses witnessed unto. Moses was but a servant in the house of Jehovah, Christ was Son over His own house (verse 6). The Puritan Owen quaintly wrote, “Here the apostle taketh leave of Moses; he treats not about him any more; and therefore he gives him, as it were, an honorable burial. He puts this glorious epitaph on his grave: “Moses, a faithful servant of the Lord in His whole house.”

“But Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house are we” (verse 6).

Here the “house” is plainly defined: it is a spiritual house, made up of believers in Christ. Not only are the “brethren” of verse 1, partakers of the heavenly calling, but they are members of the spiritual family of God, for in them He dwells. How well calculated to comfort and encourage the sorely-

tried Hebrews were these words “whose house are we!” What compensation was this for the loss of their standing among the unbelieving Jews!

“If we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end” (verse 6).

Do these words weaken the force of what has last been said? In nowise; they contained a much-needed warning.

“There were great difficulties, circumstances calculated especially to effect the Jew, who, after receiving the truth with joy might be exposed to great trial, and so in danger of giving up his hope. It was, besides, particularly hard for a Jew at first to put these two facts together: a Messiah come, and entered into glory; and the people who belonged to the Messiah left in sorrow, and shame, and suffering here below” (W. Kelly).

The Hebrews were ever in danger of subordinating the future to the present, and of forsaking the invisible (Christ in heaven) for the visible (Judaism on earth), of giving up a profession which involved them in fierce persecution. Hence their need of being reminded that the proof of *their* belonging to the house of Christ was that they remained steadfast to Him to the end of their pilgrimage.

“If we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.” As the same thought is, substantially, embodied again in verse 14, we shall now waive a full exposition and application of these words. Suffice it now to say that the Holy Spirit is here pressing, once more, on these Hebrews, what had been affirmed in Hebrews 2:1,

“Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.”

Let each Christian reader remember that our Lord has said, “*If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed*” (John 8:31).

CHAPTER 14

CHRIST SUPERIOR TO MOSES

(HEBREWS 3:7-12)

In the first six verses of our present chapter four things were before us.

First, the call to “consider” the Apostle and High Priest of our profession.

Of old, Moses was God’s apostle or ambassador to Israel, Aaron, the high priest. But Christ combines both these offices in His own person.

Second, the superiority of Christ over Moses: this is set forth in seven details which it is unnecessary for us to specify again.

Third, the one thing which the Spirit of God singles out from the many gifts and excellencies which Divine grace had bestowed upon Moses, was his “faithfulness” (verses 2, 5); so too is there said of Christ Jesus that He was “faithful to Him that appointed Him” (verse 2).

Fourth, the assertion that membership in the household of Christ is evidenced, chiefly, by holding fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end (verse 6).

That there is an intimate connection between these four things and the contents of our present passage will appear in our exposition thereof.

“If we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.” The “hope” mentioned here is that made known by the Gospel (Colossians 1:23), the hope which is laid up for God’s people in Heaven (Colossians 1:5), the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). Christians have been begotten unto a living hope (1 Peter 1:3), that “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13), namely, the return of our God and Savior Jesus Christ, when He shall come to take us unto Himself, to make us like Himself, to have us forever with Himself; when all God’s promises concerning us shall be made good. The reference to the holding fast the confidence of this hope is not subjective, but objective. It signifies a fearless profession of the Christian faith. It is to be

“ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you, a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15).

Stephen is an illustration. Then, this hope is also to be held fast with

“rejoicing” firm unto the end: Paul is an example of this, Acts 20:24.

What follows in our present portion contains a solemn and practical application of that which we have briefly reviewed above. Here the apostle is moved to remind the Hebrews of the unfaithfulness of Israel in the past and of the dire consequences which followed their failure to hold fast unto the end of their wilderness pilgrimage the confidence and rejoicing of the hope which God had set before them. A passage is quoted from the 95th Psalm which gives most searching point to both that which precedes and to that which follows. The path in which God’s people are called to walk is that of faith, and such a path is necessarily full of testings, that is, of difficulties and trials, and many are the allurements for tempting us to wander off into “By-path meadow.” Many, too, are the warnings and danger signals, which the faithfulness of God has erected; unto one of them we shall now turn.

“Wherefore” (verse 7). This opening word of our present passage possesses a threefold force.

First, it is a conclusion drawn from all that precedes.

Second, it prefaces the application of what is found in Hebrews 3:1-6.

Third, it lays a foundation for what follows.

The reader will observe that the remaining words of verse 7 and all of verses 8-11 are placed in brackets, and we believe rightly so, the sentence being completed in verse 12:

“Wherefore take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.”

The reasons for this exhortation have been pointed out above.

First, because of the supreme excellency of our Redeemer, exalted high above all Israel’s prophets, and given a name more excellent than any ever conferred on the angels; therefore, those who belong to Him should give good heed that they harden not their hearts against Him, nor depart from Him.

Second, because the Apostle, Christ Jesus, is worthy of more honor than Moses, then how incumbent it is upon His people to be especially watchful that they be not, by any means, turned from that obedience which He requires

and which is most certainly due Him.

Third, in view of the lamentable history of Israel, who, despite God's wondrous favors to them, hardened their hearts, grieved Him, and so provoked Him to wrath, that He swore they should not enter into His rest, how much on our guard we need to be of "holding fast" the confidence and rejoicing of our hope "firm unto the end!"

"As the Holy Spirit saith." Striking indeed is it to mark the way in which the apostle introduces the quotation made from the Old Testament. It is from the 95th Psalm, but the human instrument that was employed in the penning of it is ignored, attention being directed to its Divine Author, the One who "moved" the Psalmist — cf. 2 Peter 1:20, 21. The reason for this, here, seems to be because Paul would press upon these Hebrews the weightiness, the Divine authority of the words he was about to quote: consider well that what follows are the words of the Holy Spirit, so that you may promptly and uncomplainingly submit yourselves thereunto.

"As the Holy Spirit saith." Striking indeed is it to mark the way it links up with Hebrews 1:1 and Hebrews 2:3. In the former it is God, the Father, who "spake." In Hebrews 2:3, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be *spoken* by the Lord?" there it is the Son. Here in Hebrews 3:7 the Speaker is the Spirit; thus, by linking together these three passages we hear all the Persons of the Godhead. Observe, next, the tense of the verb used here; it is not "the Holy Spirit said," but "saith:" it is an ever-present, living message to God's people in each succeeding generation.

"Whatever was given by inspiration from the Holy Ghost, and is recorded in the Scripture for the use of the Church, He continues therein to speak it unto us unto this day" (Dr. John Owen).

Let the reader also carefully compare the seven-times-repeated, "he that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit *saith* unto the churches" in Revelation chapters 2 and 3.

"As the Holy Spirit saith." Dr. Gouge has pointed out how that this sentence teaches us four things about the Holy Spirit.

1. First, that He is true God: for "*God* spake by the mouth of David" (Acts 4:25). "God" spake by the prophets (Hebrews 1:1), and they "spake as they

were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21).

2. Second, the Holy Spirit is a distinct person: He “saith.” An influence, a mere abstraction, cannot speak.

3. Third, the Holy Spirit subsisted before Christ was manifested in the flesh, for He spake through David. True, He is called, “the Spirit of Christ,” yet that He was before His incarnation is proven by Genesis 1:2 and other scriptures.

4. Fourth, He is the Author of the Old Testament Scriptures, therefore are they of Divine inspiration and authority.

“Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts” (verses 7, 8).

Here begins the apostle’s quotation from Psalm 95, the first portion of which records a most fervent call (verses 1, 6) for the people of God to be joyful, and come before Him as worshippers. Most appropriate was the reference to this Psalm here, for the contents of its first seven verses contain, virtually an amplification of the “consider” of Hebrews 3:1. There the Hebrews were enjoined to be occupied with Christ, and if their hearts were engaged with His surpassing excellency and exalted greatness, then would they

“come before His presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto Him with psalms” (Psalm 95:2).

Their Apostle and High Priest had “built all things” (Hebrews 3:4), being none other than God. The same truth is avowed in Psalm 95:3-5,

“For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In His hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is His also. The sea is His, and He made it: and His hands formed the dry land.”

The apprehension of this will prepare us for a response to what follows,

“O come, let us worship, and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For He is our God; and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand” (Psalm 95:6, 7).

The next thing in the Psalm is, “Today, if ye will hear His voice harden not your heart.” So the next thing in Hebrews 3 is, “whose house are we if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.” Thus the Psalmist admonished those addressed in his day to hearken to the

voice of the Lord, and not to harden their hearts against Him as had their ancestors before them. By quoting this here in Hebrews 3, the apostle at once intimated what is the *opposite* course from holding fast their confidence.

“Today” signifies the time present, yet so as to include a continuance of it. It is not to be limited to twenty-four hours, instead, this term sometimes covers a present interval which consists of many days, yea years. In Hebrews 3:13 it is said, “But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today.” So in Hebrews 13:8 we read, “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today and forever.” So in our text. As that present time wherein David lived was to him and those then alive “today”, so that present time in which the apostle and the Hebrews lived was to them “today,” and the time wherein we now live, is to us “today.” It covers that interval while men are alive on earth, while God’s grace and blessing are available to them. It spans the entire period of our wilderness pilgrimage. Thus the “end” of Hebrews 3:6 is the close of the “today” in verse 7.

“If ye will hear His voice.” “Unto you, O men I call; and My voice is to the sons of man” (Proverbs 8:4). But no doubt the immediate reference in our text is unto those professing to be God’s people. The “voice” of God is the signification of His will, which is the rule of our obedience. His will is made known in His Word, which is a *living* Word, by which the voice of God is now uttered. But, alas, we are capable of closing our ears to His voice. Of old God complained,

“The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know. My people doth not consider” (Isaiah 1:3).

To “hear” God’s voice signifies to attend reverently to what He says, to diligently ponder, to readily receive, and to heed or obey it. It is the hardening of our hearts which prevents us, really, hearing His voice, as the next clause intimates. To it we now turn.

“If ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.” It is to the *heart* God’s Word is addressed, that moral center of our beings out of which are the issues of life (Proverbs 4:23). There may be conviction of the conscience, the assent of the intellect, the admiration of understanding, but unless the heart is moved there is no response. A tender heart is a pliable and responsive one; a hard heart is obdurate and rebellious. Here hardening of the heart is attributed to the creature: it is due to impenitency (Romans 2:5), unbelief (Hebrews

3:12), disobedience (Psalm 95:8).

“It appears that unto this sinful hardening of the heart which the people in the wilderness were guilty of, and which the apostle here warns the Hebrews to avoid, there are three things that do concur:

1. *A sinful neglect*, in not taking due notice of the ways and means whereby God calls any unto faith and obedience.

2. *A sinful forgetfulness and casting out* of the heart and mind such convictions as God by His word and works, His mercies and judgments, His deliverances and afflictions, at any time is pleased to cast into them and fasten upon them.

3. *An obstinate cleaving of the affections* unto carnal and sensual objects, practically preferring them above the motives unto obedience that God proposeth unto us. Where these things are so, the hearts of men are so hardened, that in an ordinary way, they cannot hearken unto the voice of God. Such is the nature, efficacy and power of the voice or word of God, that men cannot withstand or resist it without a sinful hardening of themselves against it. Every one to whom the word is duly revealed, who is not converted of God, doth *voluntarily* oppose his own obstinacy unto its efficacy and operation. If men will add new obstinacy and hardness to their minds and hearts, if they will fortify themselves against the word with prejudices and dislikes, if they will resist its work through a love to their lusts and corrupt affections, God may justly leave them to perish, and to be filled with the fruit of their own ways” (Dr. John Owen).

“Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness” (verse 8).

The reference here is to what is recorded in the early verses of Exodus 17.

There we are told that the congregation of Israel journeyed to Rephidim, where there was “no water for the people to drink.” Instead of them counting on Jehovah to supply their need, as He had at Marah (Exodus 15:25) and in the wilderness of Sin (Hebrews 16:4), they “did chide with Moses” (verse 2),

“and when they thirsted, the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to

kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?” (verse 3).

Though Moses cried unto the Lord, and the Lord graciously responded by bringing water out of the rock for them, yet God’s servant was greatly displeased, for in verse 7 we are told, “And he called the name of the place Massah (Temptation) and Meribah (Strife), because of the chiding of the children of Israel and because they tempted the Lord, saying, Is the Lord among us, or not”.

Once more we would point out the oppositeness of this quotation to the case of the Hebrews.

“The thought of Moses (in verses 1-5 A.W.P.) naturally suggests Israel in the wilderness. Faithful was the mediator, through whom God dealt with them; but was Israel faithful? God spake: did they obey? God showed them wonder signs: did they trust and follow in faith? And if Israel was not faithful unto Moses, and their unbelief brought ruin upon them, how much more guilty shall we be, and how much greater our danger, if we are not faithful unto the Lord Jesus” (Saphir).

It is not only true that the difficulties and trials of the way test us, but these testings reveal the state of our hearts — a crisis neither makes nor mars a man, but it does *manifest* him. While all is smooth sailing we appear to be getting along nicely. But are we? Are our minds stayed upon the Lord, or are we, instead, complacently resting in His temporal mercies? When the storm breaks, it is not so much that we fail under it, as that our habitual lack of leaning upon God, of daily walking in dependency upon Him, is made evident. Circumstances do not change us, but they do *expose* us. Paul rejoiced in the Lord when circumstances were congenial. Yes, and he also sang praises to Him when his back was bleeding in the Philippian dungeon. The fact is, that if we sing only when circumstances are pleasing to us, then our singing is worth nothing, and there is grave reason to doubt whether we are rejoicing “in the Lord” (Philippians 4:4) at all.

The reason Israel murmured at Meribah was because there was no water; they were occupied with their circumstances, they were walking by sight. The crisis they then faced only served to make manifest the state of their hearts, namely, an “evil heart of unbelief.” Had their trust been in Jehovah, they would at once have turned to Him, spread their need before Him, and

counted on Him to supply it. But their hearts were hardened. A most searching warning was this for the Hebrews. Their circumstances were most painful to the flesh. They were enduring a great fight of afflictions. How were they enduring it? If they were murmuring that would be the outward expression of unbelief within. Ah, it is easy to *profess* we are Believers, but the challenge still rings out,

“What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works?” (James 2:14).

“When your fathers tempted Me, proved Me, and saw My works forty years” (verse 9).

The “when” looks back to what is mentioned in the previous verse. The “Day of Temptation in the wilderness” covered the whole period of Israel’s journeyings from the Red Sea to Canaan.

“The history of the Israelites is a history of continued provocation. In the wilderness of Sin they murmured for the want of bread, and God gave them manna. At Rephidim they murmured for the want of water, and questioned whether Jehovah was with them and He gave them water from the rock. In the wilderness of Sinai, soon after receiving the law, they made and worshipped a golden image. At Taberah they murmured for want of flesh and the quails were sent, followed by a dreadful plague. At Kadesh-barnea they refused to go up and take possession of the land of promise, which brought down on them the awful sentence referred to in the Psalm; and after that sentence was pronounced, they presumptuously attempted to do what they had formerly refused to do. All these things took place in little more than two years after they left Egypt. Thirty-seven years after this, we find them at Kadesh again, murmuring for want of water and other things. Soon after this, they complained of the want of bread, though they had manna in abundance, and were punished by the plague of fiery flying serpents. And at Shittim, their last station, they provoked the Lord by mingling in the impure idolatry of the Moabites. So strikingly true is Moses’ declaration: ‘Remember, and forget not, how thou provoked the Lord thy God to wrath in the wilderness: from the day that thou didst depart out of the land of Egypt, until ye came unto this place ye have been

rebellious against the Lord', Deuteronomy 9:7' (Dr. J. Brown).

“When your fathers tempted Me, proved Me, and saw My works forty years” (verse 9).

Israel's terrible sins in the wilderness are here set forth under two terms: they “tempted” and “proved” Jehovah, the latter being added as an explanation of the former. To tempt one is to try or prove whether he be such as he is declared to be, or whether he can or will do such and such a thing. By tempting God Israel found out by experience that He was indeed the God He had made Himself known to be. In this passage the tempting of God is set down as a sin which provoked Him, and so is to be taken in its worst sense. Instead of believing His declaration, Israel acted as though they would discover, at the hazard of their own destruction, whether or not He would make good His promises and His threatenings.

“In particular men tempt God by two extremes: one is presumption, the other is distrustfulness. Both these arise from unbelief. That distrustfulness ariseth from unbelief is without all question. And however presumption may seem to arise from overmuch confidence, yet if it be narrowly searched into, we shall find that men presume upon unwarrantable courses, because they do not believe that God will do what is meet to be done, in His own way. Had the Israelites believed that God in His time and in His own way would have destroyed the Canaanites, they would not have presumed, against an express charge, to have gone against them without the ark of the Lord and without Moses, as they did, Numbers 14:40, etc. Alas, what is man!

“Men do presumptuously tempt God, when, without warrant, they presume on God's extraordinary power and providence; that whereunto the devil persuaded Christ when he had carded Him up to a pinnacle of the temple, namely, to cast Himself down, was to tempt God; therefore, Christ gives him this answer, ‘Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God,’ Matthew 4:5-7. Men distrustfully tempt God when in distress they imagine that God cannot or will not afford sufficient succor. Thus did the king of Israel tempt God when he said, ‘The Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab,’ 2 Kings 3:13. So that prince who said ‘Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be’, 2 Kings 7:2’ (Dr. W. Gouge).

“And saw My works forty years.” This brings out the inexcusableness and heinousness of Israel’s sin. It was not that Jehovah was a Stranger to them, for again and again He had shown Himself strong on their behalf. The “works” of God mentioned here are the many and great wonders which He did from the time that He first took them up in Egypt until the end of the wilderness journey. Some of them were works of *mercy*. In delivering them from enemies and dangers, and in providing for them things needful. Others were works of *judgment*, as the plagues upon the Egyptians, their destruction at the Red Sea, and His chastening of themselves. Still others were *manifestations* which He made of Himself, as by the Cloud which led them by day and by night, the awesome proofs of His presence on Sinai, and the Shekinah glory which filled the tabernacle. These were not “works” done in bygone ages, or in far-distant places, of which they had only heard; but were actually performed before them, upon them, which they “saw.” What clearer evidence could they have of God’s providence and power? Yet they tempted Him! The clearest evidences God grants to us have no effect upon unbelieving and obdurate hearts.

An unspeakably solemn warning is this for all who profess to be God’s people today. A still more wonderful and glorious manifestation has God now made of Himself than any which Israel ever enjoyed. God has been manifested in flesh. The only-begotten Son has declared the Father. He has fully displayed His matchless grace and fathomless love by coming here and dying for poor sinners. When He left the earth, He sent the Holy Spirit, so that *we* now have not a Moses, but the third Person of the Trinity to guide us. God made known His laws unto Israel, but His complete Word is now in our hands. What more can He say, than to us He has said! How great is our responsibility; how immeasurably greater than Israel’s is our sin and guilt, if we despise Him who speaks to us!

A further aggravation of Israel’s sin is that they saw God’s wondrous works for “forty years.” God continued His wonders all that time: despite their unbelief and murmuring the manna was sent daily till the Jordan was crossed! Man’s incredulity cannot hinder the workings of God’s power:

“What if some did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid” (Romans 3:3).

An incredulous prince would not believe that God could give such plenty as

He had promised when Samaria by a long siege was famished; yet, “it came to pass as the man of God had spoken” (2 Kings 7:18). Nor would the Jews, nor even the disciples of Christ, believe that the Lord Jesus would rise again from the dead: yet He did so on the third day. O the marvelous patience of God! May the realization of it melt and move our hearts to repentance and obedience.

“Wherefore I was grieved with that generation” (verse 10).

In these words, and those which follow, we learn the fearful consequences of Israel’s sin.

“When God says He ‘was grieved’ He means that He was burdened, vexed, displeased beyond that forbearance could extend unto. This includes the judgment of God concerning the greatness of their sin with all its aggravations and His determinate purpose to punish them. Men live, speak and act as if they thought God very little concerned in what they do, especially in their sins; that either He takes no notice of them, or if He do, that He is not much concerned in them; or that He should be grieved at His heart — that is, have such a deep sense of man’s sinful provocations — they have no mind to think or believe. They think that, as to thoughts about sins, God is altogether as themselves. But it is far otherwise, for God hath a *concernment of honor* in what we do; He makes us for His glory and honor, and whatsoever is contrary thereunto tends directly to His dishonor. And this God cannot but be deeply sensible of; He cannot deny Himself. He is also concerned as a God of *Justice*. His holiness and justice is His nature, and He needs no other reason to punish sin but Himself” (Dr. John Owen).

“And said, They do always err in their heart” (verse 10).

To err in the heart signifies to draw the wicked and false conclusion that sin and rebellion pay better than subjection and obedience to God. Through the power of their depraved lusts, the darkness of their understandings, and the force of temptations, countless multitudes of Adam’s fallen descendants imagine that a course of self-will is preferable to subjection unto the Lord. Sin deceives: it makes men call darkness light, bitter sweet, bondage liberty. The language of men’s hearts is,

“What is the Almighty, that we should serve Him? And what profit should we have, if we pray unto Him?” (Job 21:15).

Note Israel “*always* erred in their hearts,” which evidenced the hopelessness of their state. They were radically and habitually evil. As Moses told them at the end,

“Ye have been rebellious against the Lord from the day that I knew you” (Deuteronomy 9:24).

“And they have not known My ways” (verse 10). The word “ways” is used in Scripture both of God’s dispensations or providences and of His precepts. A way is that wherein one walks. It is not God’s secret “ways” (Isaiah 55:9, Romans 9:33), but His manifest ways are here in view. His manifest ways are particularly His *works*, in which He declares Himself and exhibits His perfections, see Psalm 145:17. The works of God are styled His “ways” because we may see Him, as it were, walking therein: “they have seen Thy goings, O God” (Psalm 68:24). Now it is our duty to meditate on God’s works or “ways” (Psalm 143:5), to admire and magnify the Lord in them (Psalm 138:4,5), to acknowledge the righteousness of them (Psalm 145:17). God’s precepts are also termed His way and “ways” (Psalm 119:27, 32, 33, 35), because they make known the paths in which He would have us walk. Israel’s ignorance of God’s ways, both His works and precepts, was a willful one, for they neglected and rejected the means of knowledge which God afforded them; they obstinately refused to acquire a practical knowledge of them, which is the only knowledge of real value.

“So I swear in My wrath, They shall not enter into My rest” (verse 11).

This was the fearful issue of Israel’s sin. The patience of God was exhausted. Their inveterate unbelief and continued rebellion incensed Him. The sentence He pronounced against them was irrevocable, confirmed by His oath. The sentence was that they should not enter into Canaan, spoken of as a “rest” because entrance therein would have terminated their wilderness trials and travels; “God’s rest,” because it would complete His work of bringing Israel into the land promised their fathers, and because His sojournings (see Leviticus 25:23) with His pilgrims would cease.

“We may observe,

1. When God expresseth great indignation in Himself against sin, it is to teach men the greatness of sin in themselves.
2. God gives the same stability unto His threatenings as unto His promises. Men are apt to think the *promises are firm* and stable, but as for the threatenings, they suppose some way or other they may be evaded.
3. When men have provoked God by their impenitency to decree their punishment irrevocably, they will find severity in the execution.
4. It is the presence of God alone that renders any place or condition good or desirable, ‘they’ shall not enter into My rest” (Dr. John Owen).

“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (verse 12).

Here the apostle begins to make a practical application to the believing Hebrews of the solemn passage which has just been quoted from the 95th Psalm. He warns them against the danger of apostatizing. This is clear from the expression “*in departing from the living God.*” The same Greek verb is rendered “fall away” in Luke 8:13, and in its noun form signifies “*apostasy*” in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. Such apostasy is the inevitable outcome of giving way to an “*evil heart of unbelief,*” against which the apostle bids those to whom he was writing to “*take heed.*”

Thus the contents of this verse at once bring before us a subject which has been debated in Christendom all through the centuries — the possibility or the impossibility of a true child of God apostatizing and finally perishing. Into this vexed question we shall not here enter, as the contents of the verses which immediately follow will oblige us taking it up, D.V. In our next article. Suffice it now to say that what is here in view is the *testing of profession*; whether the profession be genuine or spurious, the ultimate outcome of that testing makes evident in each individual’s case.

“Take heed brethren.” The introducing here of this blessed and tender title of God’s saints is very searching. Those unto whom the apostle was writing, might object, “The scripture you have cited has no legitimate application to us; that passage describes the conduct of unbelievers, whereas *we* are

believers.” Therefore does the apostle again address them as “brethren;” nevertheless, he bids them “take heed.” They were not yet out of danger, they were still in the wilderness. Those mentioned in Psalm 95 began well, witness their singing the praises of Jehovah on the farther shores of the Red Sea (Exodus 15). They too had avowed their fealty to the Lord:

“all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do” (Exodus 19:8);

yet the fact remains that many of them apostatized and perished in the wilderness. Therefore the searching relevancy of this word, “take heed brethren lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief.”

“In departing from the living God.” The reference here is plainly to the Lord Jesus Himself. In Matthew 16:16 the Father is denominated “the living God,” here and in 1 Timothy 4:10 the Son is, in 2 Corinthians 6:16 (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:16) the Holy Spirit is. The reason for the application of this Divine title to the Savior in this verse is apparent: the temptation confronting the Hebrews was not to become atheists, but to abandon their profession of Christianity. The unbelieving Jews denounced Jesus Christ as an impostor, and were urging those who believed in Him to renounce Him and return to Judaism, and thus return to the true God, Jehovah. That Christ is God the apostle had affirmed here, in verse 4, and he now warns them that so far from the abandonment of the Christian profession and a return to Judaism being a going back to Jehovah, it would be the “*departing from the living God.*” That Christ was the true and living God had been fully demonstrated by the apostle in the preceding chapters of this epistle.

The extent to which and the manner in which the warning from Psalm 95 and the admonition of Hebrews 3:12 applies to Christians today, we must leave for consideration till the next chapter. In the meantime let us heed the exhortation of 2 Peter 1:10,

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure,”

and while attending to this duty, let us pray the more frequently and the more earnestly for God to deliver *us* from “*an evil heart of unbelief.*”

CHAPTER 15
CHRIST SUPERIOR TO MOSES
(HEBREWS 3:13-19)

There are two great basic truths which run through Scripture, and are enforced on every page: that God is sovereign, and that man is a responsible creature; and it is only as the balance of truth is preserved between these two that we are delivered from error. The Divine sovereignty should not be pressed to the exclusion of human responsibility, nor must human responsibility be so stressed that God's sovereignty is either ignored or denied. The danger here is no fancied one, as the history of Christendom painfully exhibits. A careful study of the Word, and an honest appropriation of all it contains, is our only safeguard.

We are creatures prone to go to extremes: like the pendulum of a clock in motion, we swing from one side to the other. Nowhere has this tendency been more sadly exemplified than in the teachings of theologians concerning the security of the Christian. On the one hand, there have been those who affirmed, Once saved, always saved; on the other hand, many have insisted that a man may be saved today, but lost tomorrow. And both sides have appealed *to the Bible* in support of their conflicting contentions! Very unwise and unguarded statements have been made by both parties. Some Calvinists have boldly declared that if a sinner has received Christ as his Savior, no matter what he does afterward, no matter what his subsequent life may be, he cannot perish. Some Arminians have openly denied the efficacy of the finished Work of Christ, and affirmed that when a sinner repents and believes in Christ he is merely put in a salvable state, on probation, and that his own good works and faithfulness will prove the deciding factor as to whether he should spend eternity in Heaven or Hell.

Endless volumes have been written on the subject, but neither side has satisfied the other; and the writer for one, is not at all surprised at this. Party-spirit has run too high, sectarian prejudice has been too strong. Only too often the aim of the contestants has been to silence their opponents, rather than to arrive at the truth. The method followed has frequently been altogether unworthy of the "children of light." One class of passages of Scripture has been pressed into service, while another class of passages has been either ignored or *explained away*. Is it not a fact that if some Calvinists were honest

they would have to acknowledge there are some passages in the Bible which they wish were not there at all? And if some Arminians were equally honest, would they not have to confess that there are passages in Holy Writ which they are quite unable to fit into the creed to which they are committed? Sad, sad indeed, is this. There is nothing in the Word of God of which any Christian needs be afraid, and if there is a single verse in it which conflicts with his creed, so much the worse for his creed.

Now the subject of the Christian's security, like every other truth of Scripture, has *two* sides to it: into it there enters both God's sovereignty and human responsibility. It is failure to recognize and reckon upon this which has wrought such havoc and created so much confusion. More than once has the writer heard a renowned Bible-teacher of orthodox reputation say, "I do not believe in the perseverance of saints, but I do believe in the preservation of the Savior." But that is to ignore an important side of the truth. The New Testament has much to say on the *perseverance* of the saints, and to deny or ignore it is not only to dishonor God, but to damage souls.

There have been those who boldly insisted that, if God has eternally elected a certain man to be saved, that man *will be* saved, no matter what he does or does not do. Not so does the Word of God teach. Scripture says,

"God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit *and belief of the truth*" (2 Thessalonians 2:13),

and if a man *does not* "believe the truth" he will never be saved. The Lord Jesus declared, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3); therefore, if a sinner, *does not* "repent," he will not be saved. In like manner, there are those who have said, If a man is *now* a real Christian, no matter how he may live in the future, no matter how far or how long he may backslide, no matter what sins he may commit, he is sure of Heaven. Put in such a way, this teaching has wrought untold harm, and, at the risk of our own orthodoxy being suspected, we here enter a solemn and vigorous protest against it.

The writer has met many people who profess to be Christians, but whose daily lives differ in nothing from thousands of non-professors all around them. They are rarely, if ever, found at the prayer-meeting, they have no family worship, they seldom read the Scriptures, they will not talk with you about the things of God, their walk is thoroughly worldly; and yet they are

quite sure *they are* bound for heaven! Inquire into the ground of their confidence, and they will tell you that so many years ago they accepted Christ as their Savior, and “once saved always saved” is now their comfort. There are thousands of such people on earth today, who are nevertheless, on the Broad Road, that leadeth to destruction, treading it with a false peace in their hearts and a vain profession on their lips.

It is not difficult to anticipate the thoughts of many who have read the above paragraphs: “We fully agree that there are many in Christendom resting on a false ground of security, many professing the name of Christ, who have never been born again; but this in nowise conflicts with the declaration of Christ that no sheep of His shall ever perish.” Quite true. But what we would here point out and seek to press on our readers is this: I have no right to appropriate to myself the blessed and comforting words of the Savior found in John 10:28, 29, *unless I answer to* the description of His “sheep” found in John 10:27; and I have no warrant for applying His promise to those who give no evidence of being conformed to the characters of those He there has in view. Let no man dare separate what God Himself has there joined together.

The passage begins with, “*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.*” That is the Lord’s own description of those whom *He* owns as His “sheep.” Now if, to the contrary, I am “hearkening” to the seductive voice of this world, if I am “following” a course of self-will, self-seeking, self-gratification, what right have I to regard myself as one of the “sheep” of Christ? None at all. And if, notwithstanding, I do profess to be one of His, then my walk gives the lie to my profession. And any one who comes to me with words of comfort, pressing upon me the *promises* of God to His people, is only encouraging me in a course of wrong-doing and bolstering me up in a false hope.

It may be replied, “Yet a real Christian may leave his first love.” True, and before a church that had done so, the Lord Jesus appeared and said — not, “It will be alright in the end,” but —

“Repent, and do the first works, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick” (Revelation 2:5).

“But a real Christian may backslide, and in a large measure become worldly again.” Then if he does, *his* need is *not* to hear about the eternal security of

God's saints, but the eternal and fearful consequences of giving way to an evil heart of unbelief if such a course be continued in. "Yes, but if he *is* one of God's people, he will be chastened, and grace will restore him; and therefore I cannot see the need or propriety of giving him to believe there is a danger of his being lost."

Ah, it is not without reason that the Lord Jesus declared, more than once, "he that *endureth to the end* shall be saved." And let it not be forgotten that in Matthew 13:20, 21. He spoke of some who "but endureth *for a while*"! Again it may be objected, "Such a pressing of the need of perseverance of God's elect is uncalled for: if a *man be* a Christian, he *will* persevere, and if he persevere then there is no need of urging him *to* persevere." Not so did the apostles think or act. In Acts 11:22, 23 we read, "they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad and *exhorted* them all, that with purpose of heart they would *cleave unto the* Lord." Again, in Acts 13:43 we read,

"Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to *continue* in the grace of God."

Once more, in Acts 14:21, 22 we are told

"And when they had preached the Gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and Iconium, and Antioch, Confirming the souls of the disciples, *exhorting them to continue* in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."

According to the views of some, such earnestness on the part of the apostles was quite unnecessary. But the impartial Christian reader will gather from the above passages that the apostles believed in no *mechanical* salvation, wherein God dealt with men as though they were stocks and stones. No, they preached a salvation that needed to be *worked out* with "fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12); in a salvation which calls human responsibility into exercise; in a Divine salvation effectuated by the *use* of the means of grace which God has mercifully provided for us. True we *are* "kept by the power of God," but the very next words afford us light on *how* God *keeps* — "*through* faith" (1 Peter 1:5). And not only does faith feed on the promises of God, but it is stirred into healthful exercise and directed by the solemn *warnings* of Scripture.

A real need then is there for such words as these,

“But Christ as a Son over His own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end” (Hebrews 3:6).

“Oh, blessed word and promise of God, that *He* will keep us unto the end. But *how* is it that we are kept? Through faith, through watchfulness, through self-denial, through prayer and fasting, through our constant taking heed unto ourselves according to His Word. ‘Hold fast’ if you desire it to be manifested in that day that you are not merely outward professors, not merely fishes existing in the net, but the true and living disciples of One Master.” (Saphir).

“But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (verse 13).

“There is need of constant watchfulness on the part of the professors of Christianity, lest under the influence of unbelief they ‘depart from the living God.’ ‘Take heed,’ says the apostle. There is nothing, I am persuaded, in regard to which professors of Christianity fall into more dangerous practical mistakes than this. They suspect everything sooner than the soundness and firmness of their belief. There are many who are supposing themselves believers who have no true faith at all, — and so it would be proved were the hour of trial, which is perhaps nearer than they are aware, to arrive; and almost all who have faith suppose they have it in greater measure than they really have it. There is no prayer that a Christian needs more frequently to present than, ‘Lord, increase my faith’; ‘deliver me from an evil heart of unbelief.’

“All apostasy from God, whether partial or total, originates in unbelief. To have his faith increased — to have more extended, and accurate and impressive views of ‘the truth as it is in Jesus’ — ought to be the object of the Christian’s most earnest desire and unremitting exertion. Just in the degree in which we obtain deliverance from the ‘evil heart of unbelief’ are we enabled to cleave to the Lord with full purpose of heart, to follow Him fully, and, in opposition to all the temptations to abandon His cause, to ‘walk in all His commandments and ordinances blameless.’ To

prevent so fearful and disastrous a result of apostasy from the living God, the apostle calls on them to strengthen each other's faith by mutual exhortation, and thus oppose those malignant and deceitful influences which had a tendency to harden them in impenitence and unbelief" (Dr. J. Brown).

To "exhort one another daily" is to call attention to and stir up one another for discharging our mutual duties. But in performing this obligation we are sadly lax: like the disciples upon the mount of transfiguration (Luke 9:32) and in Gethsemane (Luke 22:45), we too are very dull and drowsy and in constant need of both exhortation and incitation. As fellow pilgrims in a hostile country, as members of the same family, we ought to have "care for one another" (1 Corinthians 12:25), to "love one another" (John 13:34), to "pray one for another" (James 5:16), to "comfort one another" (1 Thessalonians 4:18), to "admonish one another" (Romans 15:14), to "edify one another" (1 Thessalonians 5:11), to have "*peace* one with another" (Mark 9:50). Only thus are we really helpful one to another. And, note, the exhorting is to be done "daily," for we must not be weary in well doing. *While* it is called "Today" warns us that our sojourn in this scene is but brief; the night hastens on when no man can work.

"Lest any of you be hardened" adds force to the duty enjoined. In verse 8 the terrible damage which hardness of heart produces had been pointed out; here it is warned against. The implication is unmistakable: hardness of heart is the consequence of neglecting the means for softening it — "lest." Clay and wax which are naturally hard, melt when brought under a softening power, but when the heat is withdrawn they revert again to their native hardness. The same evil tendency remains in the Christian. The flesh is "weak," our heart "deceitful"; only by the daily use of means and through fellowship with the godly are we preserved. Oftentimes the failure of a Christian is to be charged against his brethren as much as to his own unfaithfulness. How often when we perceive a saint giving way to hardness of heart we go about mentioning it to others, instead of faithfully and tenderly exhorting the offending one!

"Through the deceitfulness of sin." Here is the cause of the evil warned against and upon which we need to be constantly upon our guard. It is the manifold deceits of sin which prevail over men so much. The reference here is to the corruption of our nature, with which we are born, and which we ever

carry about with us. It is that which, in Scripture, is designated the “flesh,” the lustings of which are ever contrary to the Spirit. God’s Word speaks of “deceitful lusts” (Ephesians 4:22), the “deceitfulness of riches” (Matthew 13:22), for their innate depravity causes men to prefer material wealth to vital godliness and heavenly happiness. So we read of the “deceivableness of unrighteousness” (2 Thessalonians 2:10); philosophy (the proud reasoning of that carnal mind which is enmity against God) is termed “vain deceit” (Colossians 2:8); and the lascivious practices of formal professors are called “their own deceivings” (2 Peter 2:13). This is one of the principal characteristics of sin: it deceives.

“All the devices of sin are as fair baits whereby dangerous hooks are covered over to entice silly fish to snap at them, so as they are taken and made a prey to the fisher” (Dr. Gouge).

This deceitfulness of sin should serve as a strong inducement to make us doubly watchful against it, and that because of our foolish disposition and proneness of nature to yield to every temptation. Sin presents itself in another dress than its own. It lyingly offers fair advantages. It insensibly bewitches our mind. It accommodates itself to each individual’s particular temperament and circumstances. It clothes its hideousness by assuming an attractive garb. It deludes us into a false estimate of ourselves. One great reason why God has mercifully given us His Word is to expose the real character of sin. By the deceitfulness of sin the heart is *hardened*.

“To be hardened is to become insensible to the claims of Jesus Christ, so that they do not make their appropriate impression on the mind, in producing attention, faith, and obedience. He is hardened who is careless, unbelieving, impenitent, disobedient” (Dr. J. Brown).

In the light of the whole context the specific reference in the exhortation of verse 13 constitutes a solemn caution against apostasy. What we particularly need to daily exhort one another about is to cleave fast to Christ, lest something else supplant Him in our affections. The whole trend of our sinful natures is to depart from the living God, to grasp at the shadows and miss the substance. This was the peculiar danger of the Hebrews. Sin was trying to deceive them. It was seeking to draw them back to Judaism as the one true and Divinely-appointed religion. To guard against the insidious appeals being

made, the apostle urges them to “exhort one another daily,” that is, promptly and frequently. The importance of taking heed to this injunction is placed in its strongest light by what immediately follows.

“For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end” (verse 14).

These words complete the exhortation commenced at verse 12. They are added as a motive to enforce the dissuasion from apostasy (verse 12), and also the warning against that which occasions it (verse 13). The contents of this verse are similar in their force to that which was before us in verse 6: in both instances it is profession which is being put to the proof. There are two classes on which such exhortations have no effect: the irreligious who are dead in trespasses and sins, and have no interest in such matters; and the self-righteous religionist, who, though equally dead spiritually, yet has an intellectual interest. Many a professing Christian, who is infected by the Laodicean spirit of the day, will shrug his shoulders, saying, Such warnings do not concern me, there is no danger of a real child of God apostatizing. Such people fail to get the good of these Divine warnings, their conscience never being reached. But where there is a heart which is right with God, there is always self-distrust, and such an one is kept in the place of dependency through taking heed to the solemn admonitions of the Spirit. It is these very warnings against departure from God which *curb the* regenerate.

“Persistency in our confidence in Christ unto the end is a matter of great endeavor and diligence, and that unto all believers. It is true that our persistency in Christ doth not, as to the issue and event, depend absolutely on our own diligence. The *unalterableness of union with Christ*, on the account of the faithfulness of the covenant of grace, is that which doth and shall eventually secure it. But yet our own diligent endeavor is such an indispensable means for that end as that without it, it will never be brought about.

Hence are many warnings given us in this and other epistles, that we should take heed of apostasy and falling away; and these cautions and warnings are given unto all true believers, that they may know how indispensably necessary, from the appointment of God, and the nature of the thing itself, is their watchful diligence and endeavor unto their abiding in Christ” (Dr. John Owen).

But it should be pointed out that these solemn warnings of Scripture ought not to be pressed upon weak Christians, who though anxious to walk acceptably before God, are lacking in assurance.

“Observe here — for Satan, and our own conscience when it has not been set free often make use of this epistle — that doubting Christians are not here contemplated, or persons who have not yet gained entire confidence in God: to those who are in this condition its exhortations and warnings have no application. These exhortations are to preserve the Christian in a confidence *which he has*, and to persevere, not to tranquillise fears and doubts. This use of the epistle to sanction such doubts is but a device of the enemy. Only I would add here that, although the full knowledge of grace (which in such a case the soul has assuredly not yet attained) is the only thing that can deliver and set it free from its fears, yet it is very important in this case practically to maintain a good conscience, in order not to furnish the enemy with a special means of attack” (J.N.D.).

For the right understanding of this verse it is of first importance that we should note carefully the tense of the verb in the first clause: it is not “we shall be made partakers of Christ if” — that would completely overthrow the gospel of God’s grace, deny the efficacy of the finished Work of Christ, and make assurance of our acceptance before God impossible before death. No, what the Spirit here says is, “We are made partakers of Christ,” and in the Greek it is expressed even more decisively: “For partakers we have become of the Christ.” The word “partakers” here is the same as in Hebrews 3:1, “partakers of the heavenly calling,” and at the end of Hebrews 1:9 is rendered, “fellows.” Perhaps, “companions” would be a better rendering. It means that we are so “joined unto the Lord,” as to be “one spirit” with Him (1 Corinthians 6:17). It is to be so united to Christ that we are “members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones” (Ephesians 5:30). It is to be made by grace, “joint-heirs” with Him (Romans 8:17). The word “made partakers of Christ” shows there was a time when Christians were not so. They were not so born naturally; it was a privilege conferred upon them when they “received” Him as their Savior (John 1:12).

“If we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.” This

does not express a condition of our remaining partakers of Christ in the sense of its being a contingency.

“What is the one thing which the Christian desires? What is the one great thing which he does? What is the one great secret which he is always endeavoring to find out with greater clearness and grasp with firmer intensity? Is it not this: ‘my Beloved is mine, and I am His’? The inmost desire of our heart and the exhortation of the Word coincide. To the end we must persevere; and it is therefore with great joy and alacrity that we receive the solemn exhortations: ‘He that endureth unto the end shall be saved’; ‘No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.’ We desire to hear constantly the voice which saith from His Heavenly throne, ‘To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My kingdom, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne’” (Saphir).

To hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end is to furnish evidence of the genuineness of our profession, it is to make it manifest both to ourselves and others that we have been made “partakers of Christ.” Difficulties in the path are presupposed, severe trials are to be expected: how else could faith show itself? Buffetings and testings do but provide occasions for the manifestation of faith, they are also the means of its exercise and growth. The Greek word for “confidence” here is not the same as in verse 6: there the “confidence” spoken of is to make a bold and free confession of our faith; here, it is a deep and settled assurance of Christ’s excellency and sufficiency, which supports our hearts. The one is external, the other is internal. To “hold fast the beginning of our confidence” signifies to “continue in the faith, grounded and settled” (Colossians 1:23). It is to say with Job, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.” (Job 13:15).

“Firm unto the end.” This is the test. At the beginning of our Christian course, our confidence in Christ was full and firm. We knew that He was a mighty Savior, and we were fully persuaded that He was able to keep that which we have committed unto Him against that day. But the roughness of the way, the darkness of the night, the fierceness of the storm into which, sooner or later, we are plunged, tends to shake our confidence, and perhaps (much to our sorrow now) we cried, “Lord, carest Thou not”? Yet, if we were

really “partakers of Christ” though we fell, yet were we not utterly cast down. We turned to the Word, and there we found help, light, comfort. In it we discovered that the very afflictions we have experienced were what God had told us *would be* our portion for “we are appointed thereunto” (1 Thessalonians 3:3). In it we learned that God’s chastenings of us proceeded from His love (Hebrews 12). And now, though we have proved by painful experience to have less and less confidence in ourselves, in our friends, and even in our brethren, yet, by grace, our confidence in the Lord has grown and become more intelligent. Thus do we obtain experimental verification of that word, “Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof” (Ecclesiastes 7:8).

“While it is said, Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation” (verse 15).

The apostle continues to make practical application of the solemn passage he had been quoting from Psalm 95, pressing upon them certain details from it. That which is central in this verse is its directions for cleaving fast to Christ. Two things are to be observed: the duty to be performed, positively to “hear His voice,” negatively not to “harden their hearts.” This duty is to be performed promptly, “Today,” and is to be persevered in — “whilst it is said today” i.e. To the end Of our earthly pilgrimage. The opportunity which grace grants us is to be eagerly redeemed, the improvement of it is to be made as long as the season of opportunity is ours. The admonition is again pointed by the warning of Israel’s failure of old. Thus the sins of others before us are to be laid to heart, that we may avoid them.

“When we hear God’s voice — and, oh, how deafly and sweetly does He speak to us in the person of His Son Jesus, the Word incarnate, who died for us on Golgotha! — the *heart* must respond.... By this expression is meant the center of our spiritual existence, that center out of which thoughts and affections proceed, out of which are the issues of life, that mysterious fount which God only can know and fathom. Oh that Christ may dwell *there!* God’s voice is to *soften* the heart. This is the purpose of the divine word — to make our hearts tender. Alas, by nature we are *hard-hearted*: and what *we* call good and soft-hearted is not so in reality and in God’s sight.

When we receive God's word in the heart, when we acknowledge our sin, when we adore God's mercy, when we desire God's fellowship, when we see Jesus, who came to save us, to wash our feet and shed His blood, for our salvation, the heart becomes soft and tender. For repentance, faith, prayer, patience, hope of heaven, all these things make the heart tender: tender towards God, tender towards our fellow-men" (Saphir).

“For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses” (verse 16).

The apostle here begins to describe the kind of persons who sinned in the provocation, amplification being given in what follows. His purpose in making mention of these persons was to more fully evidence the need for Christian watchfulness against hardness of heart, even because those who of old yielded thereto provoked God to their ruin. The opening “for” gives point to what has preceded. The unspeakably solemn fact to which He here refers is that out of six hundred thousand men who left Egypt, but two of them were cut off in the wilderness, Caleb and Joshua.

The Greek word “*provoke*” occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, but the Sept. employs it in Psalm 78:17, 40; 106:7, 33; Jeremiah 44:8, etc. They “vexed” Him (Isaiah 63:10), and this because of their contempt of His word. Hereby they showed they were not of God, see John 8:47, 1 John 4:6. Should any unsaved man or woman read these lines, we would say, Beware of provoking God by *thine* obstinacy. To them that believe not, the gospel becomes “a savor of death unto death.”

“But with whom was He grieved forty years”? (verse 17).

This being put in the form of a question was designed to stir up the conscience of the reader, cf. Matthew 21:28, James 4:5, etc. “Was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness”? (verse 17).

“He doth not say ‘they died,’ but their ‘carcasses fell,’ which intimates contempt and indignation. God sometimes will make men who have been wickedly exemplary in sin, righteously exemplary in their punishment. To what end is this reported? It is that we may take heed that we ‘fall not after the same example of unbelief’ (Hebrews 4:11). There is then an example in the fall and punishment

of unbelievers” (Dr. John Owen).

“And to whom sware He that they should not enter into His rest, but to them that believeth not”? (verse 18).

Having reminded the Hebrews in the previous verse that sin was the cause of Israel’s destruction of old, he now specifies the character of that sin, Unbelief. The order is terribly significant: they harkened not to God’s voice; in consequence, their hearts were hardened; unbelief was the result; destruction, the issue. How unspeakably solemn! The Greek word here rendered “believed not” may, with equal propriety, be rendered “*obeyed* not”; it is so translated in Romans 2:8; 10:21. It amounts to the same thing, differing only according to the angle of view-point: looked at from the mind or heart, it is “unbelief”; looked at from the will, it is “disobedience.” In either case it is the sure consequence of *refusal* to heed God’s voice.

“So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief” (verse 19).

“The apostle does not single out the sin of making and worshipping the golden calf; he does not bring before us the flagrant transgressions into which they fell at Beth-peor. Many much more striking and to our mind more fearful sins could have been pointed out, but God thinks the one sin greater than all is *unbelief*. We are saved by faith; we are lost through unbelief. The heart is purified by faith; the heart is hardened by unbelief. Faith brings us nigh to God; unbelief is departure from God” (Saphir).

There is no sin so great but it may be pardoned, if the sinner believe; but “he that believeth not shall be damned.”

The application of the whole of this passage to the case of the sorely-tried and wavering Hebrews was most pertinent and solemn. Twice over the apostle reminded them (verses 9, 17) that the unbelief of their fathers had been continued for “forty years.” Almost that very interval had now elapsed since the Son had died, risen again, and ascended to heaven. In Scripture, forty is the number of probation. The season of Israel’s testing was almost over; in A.D. 70 their final dispersion would occur. And God changeth not. He who had been provoked of old by Israel’s hardness of heart, would destroy again those who persisted in their unbelief. Then let *them* beware,

and heed the solemn warning, “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.” May God grant us hearts to heed the same admonitory warning.

CHAPTER 16
CHRIST SUPERIOR TO JOSHUA
(HEBREWS 4:1-3)

The exhortation begun by the apostle in Hebrews 3:12 is not completed till Hebrews 4:12 is reached, all that intervenes consisting of an exposition and application of the passage quoted from Psalm 95 in Hebrews 3:7-11. The connecting link between what has been before us and that which we are about to consider is found in Hebrews 3:19, "So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief." These words form the transition between the two chapters, concluding the exhortation found in verses 12, 13, and laying a foundation for the admonition which follows. Ere proceeding, it may be well to take up a question which the closing verses of Hebrews 3 have probably raised in many minds, namely, seeing that practically all the adults who came out of Egypt by Moses perished in the wilderness, did not the promises of God to bring them into Canaan fail of their accomplishment?

In Exodus 6:6-8, Jehovah said unto Moses, "Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments: and I will take you to Me for a people, and I will be to you a God... and I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the Lord." We quote now from the helpful comments of Dr. J. Brown upon these verses:

"This is a promise which refers to Israel *as a people*, and which does not by any means necessarily infer that all, or even that any, of *that* generation were to enter in. No express condition was mentioned in this promise — not even the believing of it. Yet, so far as that generation was concerned, this, as the event proved, was plainly implied; for, if it had been an absolute, unconditional promise to *that* generation, it must have been performed, otherwise He who cannot lie would have failed in accomplishing His own word. There can be no doubt that the fulfillment of the promise *to them* was suspended on their believing it, and acting accordingly. Had they believed that Jehovah was indeed both able and determined to bring His people Israel into the land of Canaan, and, under the influence

of this faith, had gone up at His command to take possession, the promise would have been performed to them.

“This was the tenor of the covenant made with *them*: ‘Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, *then* ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people: for all the earth is Mine: and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation’ (Exodus 19:5, 6). ‘Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of Him, and obey His voice, provoke Him not; for He will not pardon your transgressions: for My name is in Him. But *if thou* shalt indeed obey His voice, and do all that I speak; *then* I will be an Enemy unto thine enemies, and an Adversary unto thine adversaries’ (Exodus 23:20-22).

“Their unbelief and disobedience are constantly stated as the reason why they did not enter in. ‘Because all those men have seen My glory, and My miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted Me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to My voice; surely they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked Me see it’ (Numbers 14:22, 23), cf. Joshua 5:6. God promised to bring Israel into the land of Canaan; but He did not promise to bring them in whether they believed and obeyed or not. No promise was broken to *those* men, for no absolute promise was made to them.

“But their unbelief did not make the promise of God of none effect. It was accomplished to the next generation: ‘And the Lord gave unto Israel all the land which He swore to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein’ (Joshua 21:43). Joshua appealed to the Israelites themselves for the completeness of the fulfillment of the promise, see Joshua 23:14. That generation believed the promises that God would give Canaan, and under the influence of this fact, went forward under the conduct of Joshua, and obtained possession of the land for themselves.”

This same principle explains what has been another great difficulty to many, namely, Israel’s actual tenure of Canaan. In Genesis 13:14, 15 we are told, “And the Lord said unto Abraham, after that Lot was separated from him,

Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place from where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy *seed for ever*.” This promise was repeated again and again, see Genesis 7:8, etc. How then came it that the children of Israel occupied the land only for a season?

Their descendants, for the most part are not in it today. Has, then, the promise of God failed? In no-wise. In His promise to Abraham God did not specify that any particular generation of his descendants should occupy the land “for ever” and herein lies the solution to the difficulty.

God’s promise to Abraham was made on the ground of pure grace; no condition whatever was attached to it. But grace only super-abounds where sin has abounded. Sovereign grace intervenes only after the responsibility of man has been tested and his failure and unworthiness manifested. Now it is abundantly clear from many passages in Deuteronomy 31:26-29, that Israel entered Canaan not on the ground of the unconditional covenant of grace which Jehovah made with Abraham, but on the ground of the conditional covenant of works which was entered into at Sinai (Exodus 24:6-8). Hence, many years after Israel had entered Canaan under Joshua, we read,

“And an Angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of the land of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swore unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break My covenant *with you*. And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars; *but ye have not obeyed My voice: Why have ye done this? Wherefore* I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be a thorn in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you” (Judges 2:1-3).

The same principles are in exercise concerning God’s fulfillment of His *gospel* promises.

“The gospel promise of eternal life, like the promise of Canaan, is a promise which will assuredly be accomplished. It is sure to all ‘the seed.’ They were ‘chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.’ Eternal life was promised in reference to them before the times of the ages, and confirmed by the oath of God. They have been redeemed to God by ‘the blood of the Lamb,’ and are all called

in due time according to His purpose. Their inheritance is ‘laid up in heaven’ for them, and ‘they are kept for it by the mighty power of God, through faith unto salvation.’ And they shall all at last ‘inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world.’

“But the Gospel revelation does not testify directly to anyone that Christ so died for him in particular, that it is certain that *he* shall be saved through His death: neither does it absolutely promise salvation to all men; for in this case all must be saved, — or God must be a liar. But it proclaims, ‘he that believeth shall be saved — he that believeth not shall be damned.’ It is as believers of the truth that we are secured of eternal life; and it is by holding fast this faith of the truth, and showing that we do so, that we can alone enjoy the comfort of this security. ‘The purpose of God according to election must stand,’ and all His chosen will assuredly be saved; but they cannot know their election — they cannot enjoy any absolute assurance of their salvation independent of their continuance in the faith, love, and obedience of the Gospel, *see* 2 Peter 1:5-12. And to the Christian, in every stage of his progress, it is of importance to remember, that he who turns back, turns ‘back to perdition’; and that it is he only who believes straight onward — that continues in the faith of the truth — that shall obtain ‘the salvation of the soul’” (Dr. J. Brown).

Our introduction for this article has already exceeded its legitimate limits, but we trust that what has been said above will be used of God in clearing up several difficulties which have exercised the minds of many of His beloved people, and that it may serve to prepare us for a more intelligent perusal of our present passage. The verses before us are by no means easy, as any one who will really study them will quickly discover. The apostle’s argument seems to be unusually involved, the teaching of it appears to conflict with other portions of Scripture, and the “rest” which is its central subject, is difficult to define with any degree of certainty. It is with some measure of hesitation and with not a little trepidation that the writer himself now attempts to expound it, and he would press upon every reader the importance and need of heeding the Divine injunction of 1 Thessalonians 5:21, “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”

It should be evident that the first thing which will enable us to understand our passage is to attend to the *scope* of it. The contents of this chapter are found not in Romans or Corinthians or Ephesians, but in Hebrews, the central theme of which is the superiority of Christianity over Judaism, and there is that in each chapter which exemplifies this. The theme is developed by the presentation of the superlative excellencies of Christ, who is the Center and Life of Christianity. Thus far we have had Christ's superiority over the prophets, the angels, Moses. Now it is the glory of Christ which excels that attaching to Joshua.

Our next key must be found in noting the *connection* between the contents of chapter four and that which immediately precedes. Plainly, the context begins at Hebrews 3:1, where we are bidden to "consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession." All of chapter 3 is but an amplification of its opening verse. Its contents may be summarized thus: Christ is to be "considered," attended to, heard, trusted, obeyed: first, because of His exalted personal excellency:

He is the Son, "faithful" over His house; second, because of the direful consequences which must ensue from not "considering" Him, from despising Him. This second point is illustrated by the sad example of those Israelites who hearkened not unto the Lord in the clays of Moses, and in their case the consequence was that they failed to enter into the rest of Canaan.

In the first sections of Hebrews 4, the principal subject of chapter 3 is *continued*. It brings out again the superiority of our "Apostle," this time over Joshua, for he too was an "apostle" of God. This is strikingly brought out in Deuteronomy 34:9,

"And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom; *for* Moses had laid hands upon him; and the children of Israel hearkened unto him, and did as the Lord commanded Moses"

— the prime thought of the "laying on of hands" in Scripture being that of *identification*. Let the reader compare Joshua 1:5, 16-18. The continuation of the theme of Hebrews 3 in chapter 4 is also seen by the repeated mention of "rest," see Hebrews 3:11, 18 and cf. Hebrews 4:1, 3, etc. It is on this term that the apostle bases his present argument. The "rest" of Hebrews 3:11, 18 refers to Canaan, and though Joshua actually conducted Israel into this (see marginal rendering of Hebrews 4:8), yet the apostle proves by a reference to

Psalm 95 that Israel never really (as a nation) entered into the rest of *God*. Herein lies the superiority of the Apostle of Christianity; Christ *does* lead His people into the true rest. Such, we believe, is the line of truth developed in our passage.

“Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it” (verse 1).

The opening words of this chapter bid us seriously take to heart the solemn warning given at the close of verse 3. God’s judgment upon the wicked should make us more watchful that we do not follow their steps. The “us” shows that Paul was preaching to himself as well as to the Hebrews. “Let us therefore fear” has stumbled some, because of the “Fear thou not” of Isaiah 41:10, 43:1, 5, etc. In John 14:27, Christ says to us, “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” And in 2 Timothy 1:7, we read,

“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.”

On the other hand, believers are told to “Fear God” (1 Peter 2:17), and to work out their own salvation “with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). How are these two different sets of passages to be harmonized?

The Bible is full of paradoxes, which to the natural man, appear to be contradictions. The Word needs “rightly dividing” on the subject of “fear” as upon everything else of which it treats. There is a fear which the Christian is to cultivate, and there is a fear from which he should shrink. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and in Proverbs 14:26, 27 we read, “In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence.... The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life”; so again, “Happy is the man that feareth always” (Proverbs 28:14). The testimony of the New Testament inculcates the same duty: Christ bade His disciples, “Fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell” (Matthew 10:28). To the saints at Rome Paul said, “Be not high-minded, but fear” (Romans 11:20). To God’s people Peter wrote, “Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear” (1 Peter 1:17). While in Heaven itself the word will yet be given:

“Praise our God all ye His servants, and ye that fear Him both small and great” (Revelation 19:5).

Fear may be called one of the disliking affections. It is good or evil according

to the object on which it is placed, and according to the ordering of it thereon. In Hebrews 4:1 it is placed on the right object — an evil to be shunned. That evil is unbelief, which, if persisted in, ends in apostasy and destruction. About this the Christian needs to be constantly on his guard, having his heart set steadily against it. Our natural proneness to fall, the many temptations to which we are subject, together with the deceitfulness of sin, the subtlety of Satan, and God's justice in leaving men to themselves, are strong enforcements of this duty. Concerning God Himself, we are to fear Him with such a reverent awe of His holy majesty as will make us careful to please Him in all things, and fearful of offending Him. This is ever accompanied by a fearsome distrust of ourselves. The fear of God which is evil in a Christian is that servile bondage which produces a distrustful attitude, kills affection for Him, regards Him as a hateful Tyrant. This is the fear of the demons (James 2:19).

“Let us therefore fear.”

“It is salutary to remember our tendency to partiality and onesidedness in our spiritual life, in order that we may be on our guard, that we may carefully and anxiously consider the ‘Again, it is written’; that we may be willing to learn from Christians who have received different gifts of grace, and whose experience varies from ours; above all, that we may seek to follow and serve the Lord Himself, to walk with God, to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd. Forms of godliness, types of doctrine, are apt to become substitutes instead of channels, weights instead of wings.

“The exhortations of this epistle may appear to some difficult to reconcile with the teachings of Scripture, that the grace of God, once received, through the power of the Holy Spirit by faith, can never be lost, and that they who are born again, who are once in Christ, are in Christ for ever. Let us not blunt the edge of earnest and piercing exhortations. Let us not pass them over, or treat them with inward apathy. ‘Again it is written.’ We know this does not mean that there is any real contradiction in Scripture, but that various aspects of truth are presented, each with the same fidelity, fullness and emphasis. Hence we must learn to move freely, and not to be cramped and fixed in one position: we must keep our eyes clear and open,

and not look at all things through the light of a favorite doctrine. And while we receive fully and joyously the assurance of our perfect acceptance and peace, and of the unchanging love of God in Christ Jesus, let us with the apostle consider also our sins and dangers, from the lower yet most real earthly and time-point of view.

“When Christ is beheld and accepted, there is peace; but is there not also fear? ‘With Thee is forgiveness of sin, that Thou mayest be feared’ (Psalm 130:4). Where do we see God’s holiness and the awful majesty of the law as in the cross of Christ? Where our own sin and unworthiness, where the depths of our guilt and misery, as in the atonement of the Lord Jesus? We rejoice with fear and trembling.... It is because we know the Father, it is because we are redeemed by the precious blood of the Savior, it is as the children of God and as the saints of Christ, that we are to pass our earthly pilgrimage in fear. This is not the fear of bondage, but the fear of adoption; not the fear which dreads condemnation, but the fear of those who are saved, and whom Christ has made free. It is not an imperfect and temporary condition; it refers not merely to those who have begun to walk in the ways Of God. Let us not imagine that this fear is to vanish at some subsequent period of our course, that it is to disappear in a so-called ‘higher Christian life.’ No; we are to pass the time of our sojourn here in fear. To the last moment of our fight of faith, to the very end of our journey, the child of God, while trusting and rejoicing, walks in godly fear” (Saphir).

“Lest a promise being left us.” It is very striking to observe how this is expressed. It does not say, “lest a promise being made” or “given.” It is put thus for the searching of our hearts. God’s promises are presented to faith, and they only become ours individually, and we only enter into the good of them, as we appropriate or lay hold of them. Of the patriarchs it is said concerning God’s promises

- (1.) “having seen them afar off,
- (2.) and were persuaded of them,
- (3.) and embraced them” Hebrews 11:13).

Certain promises of Jehovah were “left” to those who came out of Egypt.

They were not “given” to any particular individuals, or “made” concerning that specific generation. And, as the apostle has shown in Hebrews 3, the majority of those who came out of Egypt failed to “embrace” those promises, through hearkening not to Him Who spake, and through hardening their hearts. But Caleb and Joshua “laid hold” of those promises and so entered Canaan.

When the apostle here says, “Let us fear therefore lest a promise being left” — there is no “us” in the Greek — he addresses the *responsibility* of the Hebrews. He is pressing upon them the need of walking by faith and not by sight; he is urging them to so take unto themselves the promise which the Lord has “left,” that they might not seem to come short of it. But to what is the apostle referring when he says, “lest *a promise* being left”? Surely in the light of the context the primary reference is clear: that which the Gospel makes known. The Gospel proclaims salvation to all who believe. The Gospel makes no promise to any particular individuals. Its terms are “*whosoever* believeth shall not perish.” That promise is “left,” left on infallible record, left for the consolation of convicted sinners, “left” for faith to lay hold of. This promise of salvation looks forward, ultimately, to the enjoyment of the eternal, perfect, and unbroken rest of God in heaven, of which the “rest” of Canaan, as the terminal of Israel’s hard bondage in Egypt and their wearisome journeyings in the wilderness, was the appropriate figure.

“Any of you should seem to come short of it.” Passing over the word “seem” for a moment, let us inquire into the meaning of “to come short of it.” Here again the language of Hebrews 11:13 should help us. As pointed out above, that verse indicates three distinct stages in the faith of the patriarchs.

First, they saw God’s promises “afar off.” They seemed too good to be true, far beyond their apprehension.

Second, they were “persuaded of them” or, as the Revised Version renders it, “*greeted* them,” which signifies a much closer acquaintance of them.

Third, and “embraced them”; they *did not* “come short,” but took them to their hearts. It is thus the awakened and anxious sinner has to do with the Gospel promise. Wondrous, unique, passing knowledge as it does, that promise is “left” him, and the Person that promise points to is to be “greeted” and “embraced.” “That which was from the beginning

- (1.), which we have heard
- (2.), which we have seen with our eyes
- (3.), which we have looked upon
- (4.), and our hands *have handled* of the Word of Life” (1 John 1:1).

At this stage perhaps, the reader is ready to object against what has been advanced above, “But how can the ‘promise’ here refer to that presented in the Gospel before poor sinners, seeing that the apostle was addressing believers? Is not the ‘promise’ plainly enough defined in the ‘of entering into His rest?’” Without attempting now to enter into a fuller discussion of God’s “rest,” it should be clear from the context that the primary reference is to the eternal sharing of His rest in heaven. *This* is the believer’s hope which is laid up for you in heaven,

“whereof ye heard before in the Word of the truth *of the Gospel*”
(Colossians 1:5).

At first this “hope” appears “afar off,” but as faith grows it is “greeted” and “embraced.” But only so as faith is in exercise. If we cease hearing and heeding the Voice which speaks to us from heaven, and our hearts become hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, the brightness of our hope is dimmed, we “come short” of it; and if such a course be continued in, hope will give way to despair.

The whole point of the apostle’s exhortation here is a pressing upon Christians the imperative need of persevering in the faith. Israel left Egypt full of hope, as their song at the Red Sea plainly witnessed, *see* Exodus 15:13-18. But, alas, their hopes quickly faded. The trials and testings of the wilderness were too much for them. They walked by sight, instead of by faith; and murmuring took the place of praising, and hardness of heart instead of listening to the Lord’s voice. So too the Hebrews were still in the wilderness: their profession of faith in Christ, their trust in the Lord, was being tested. Some of their fellows had already departed from the living God, as the language of Hebrews 10:25 dearly implies. Would, then these whom the apostle had addressed as “holy brethren” fail, finally, to enter into God’s rest? So it is with Christians now. Heaven is set before them as their goal: toward it they are to daily press forward, running with perseverance the race that is set before them. But the incentive of our hope only has power over the

heart so long as faith is in exercise.

What is meant by “*seeming* to come short” of the Gospel promise of heaven?

First, is not this word inserted here for the purpose of modifying the sharpness of the admonition? It was to show that the apostle did not positively conclude that any of these “holy brethren” were apostates, but only that they might appear to be in danger of it, as the “lest” warned.

Second, was it not to stir up their godly fear the more against such coldness and dullness as might hazard the prize set before them?

Third, and primarily, was it not for the purpose of showing Christians the *extent* to which they should be watchful? It is not sufficient to be assured that we shall never utterly fall away; we must not “seem” to do so, we must give no occasion to other Christians to think we have departed from the living God. The reference is to our *walk*. We are bidden to “abstain from all *appearance* of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:22). Note how this same word “seem” signifies “appeared” in Galatians 2:9. The very appearance of backsliding is to be sedulously avoided.

“For unto us was the Gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard” (verse 2).

The contents of this verse unequivocally establish our definition of the “*promise*” in verse 1, namely, that it has reference to the Gospel promise, which, in its ultimate application, looks forward to the eternal rest in heaven. Here plain mention is made of the “*gospel*.” The obvious design of the apostle in this verse is to enforce the admonition of us fearing a like judgment which befell the apostate Israelites, by avoiding a like course of conduct in ourselves — unbelief.

The Gospel preached unto Israel of old is recorded in Exodus 6:6-8, and that it was *not* “mixed with faith in them that heard it” is seen from the very next verse, “And Moses so spake unto the children of Israel, but they *hearkened* not unto Moses for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage.” We need hardly say that was not the only time a gospel message was proclaimed to them, *see* Numbers 13:26, 27, 30; and for their unbelief, Numbers 14:1-4.

“But the word preached did not profit them.” “They were none the better for it. They did not obtain the blessing in reference to which a

promise was given them: they did not enter into Canaan: they died in the wilderness” (Dr. J. Brown).

The reason for this was, because they did not receive the good news in faith. The mere hearing of the Gospel is not enough: to profit, it must be believed. Thus Hebrews 4:2 is parallel with Hebrews 2:3.

“For we which have believed do enter into rest” (verse 3).

Failure to rightly understand these words led many of the commentators right off the track of the apostle’s argument in this passage. It pains us to have to take issue here with some eminent expositors of Scripture, but we dare not call any man, however spiritual or well-instructed, our “father.” We must follow the light which we believe God has granted us, though we would again press upon the reader *his* responsibility for “proving all things” for himself.

“For we which have believed do enter into rest.” Many have taken these words as referring to a spiritual rest into which believers enter here and now. But we believe this is a mistake. The apostle did not say, “We which believe *have entered* into rest.” To which it may be replied, “Nor did he say, ‘We which have believed *shall* enter into rest.’” True, for to have put it thus would have weakened his argument. Moreover, it would be to evacuate the exhortation of verse 11 of its significance, “Let us labor therefore *to* enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.” If then verse 3 does not refer to a spiritual rest into which believers now enter, what is its meaning?

Bagster’s Interlinear (and we know of no English translation which is its equal) gives, “For we enter into the rest, who believe.” This is a literal word for word rendering of the Greek into English. Put thus, the historical tense is avoided, and we have simply an abstract statement of a doctrinal fact. This verse gives us the positive side of verse 2, defining the characters of those who will enter God’s rest, namely, Believers. Unbelieving Israelites did not, believing Christians shall. It is important to remember that the “*rest*” of this whole passage is as yet only “promised,” verse 1.

“For we which have believed do enter into rest.”

“The apostle speaks of believers of all ages as a body, to which he and those to whom he was writing belonged, and says, ‘It is we who

believe, and we alone, who under any dispensation can enter into the rest of God” (Dr. J. Brown).

The opening “for” signifies that what follows is added as a reason to confirm what has been previously stated. The reason is drawn from the law of contraries, the inevitable opposites. Of contraries there must be opposite consequences. Now faith and unbelief are contraries, therefore their consequences are contraries. As then unbelievers cannot enter into God’s rest (Hebrews 3:18), believers must (Hebrews 4:3), *that is their* privilege. Such we believe is the force of this abstract declaration.

“The qualification of such as reap the benefit of God’s promise is thus set down, ‘Which have believed.’ To believe is to yield such credence to the truth of God’s promise, as to rest on Him for participation of the thing promised. We can have no assurance of the thing promised till we do believe the promise: ‘After that ye believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise’ (Ephesians 1:13). ‘I know whom I have believed,’ saith the apostle, and thereupon maketh this inference, ‘and I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day’ (2 Timothy 1:12). This, Christ manifested by the condition which He required of those whom He cured, thus, ‘If thou canst believe, all things are possible,’ Mark 9:23.” (Dr. Gouge).

The second half of verse 3 we must leave for the next chapter. In the meantime, “Let us therefore fear.”

“The absolute safety, the fixed and unchanging portion of the chosen people of God can never be doubted. From the eternal, heavenly, divine point of view, saints can never fall; they are seated in heavenly places with Christ; they are renewed by the Spirit, and sealed by Him unto everlasting glory. But who sees the saints of God from this point of view? Not the world, not our fellow-Christians. They only see our character and walk... From our point of view, as we live in time, from day to day, our earnest desire must be to continue steadfast, to abide in Christ, to walk with God, to bring forth fruit that will manifest the presence of true and God-given life. Hence the apostle, who says to the Philippians, ‘Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work

in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ' (Hebrews 1:6), adds to a similar thought in another epistle, 'If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel.' In the one passage Paul's point of view is the heavenly, eternal one; in the other he looks from earth heavenwards, from time to eternity. And in what other way could he think, speak, exhort, and encourage both himself and his fellow-Christians but in this manner? For it is by these very exhortations and warnings that the grace of God keeps us. It is in order that the elect may not fall, it is to bring out in fact and time the (ideal and eternal) impossibility of their apostasy, that God in His wisdom and mercy has sent to us such solemn messages and such fervent entreaties, to watch, to fight, to take heed unto ourselves, to resist the adversary" (Saphir).

CHAPTER 17
CHRIST SUPERIOR TO JOSHUA
(HEBREWS 4:3-10)

There has been so much confusion in the minds of commentators, so many conflicting interpretations of Hebrews 4 in the past, that we deem it the more necessary to go slowly, and endeavor to supply full proof of the exposition which we are here advancing. That which appears to have occasioned the most difficulty for many is the statement made at the beginning of verse 3, “For we which have believed do enter into rest,” or, more literally, “for we enter into the rest, who believed.” Having regarded this verse as setting forth a spiritual rest into which believers now enter, they have altogether failed in their understanding of the second part of verse 1. That sinners do enter into rest upon believing is clear from the promise of Christ in Matthew 11:28. That the measure in which this is *enjoyed*, subsequently, will be determined by the degree and frequency with which faith is kept in exercise, we fully allow. But these things are not the subjects of which Paul is treating here in Hebrews 4.

Considering that Hebrews 4:3 speaks of the believer’s present rest, many expositors have read this into the opening verse of the chapter, and have regarded its admonition as meaning, Let Christians be on their guard lest, through carelessness and backsliding, they “seem to come short” in their experimental enjoyment of Christ’s rest. In other words, they look upon the “rest” of the opening verses of Hebrews 4 as signifying *communion* with the Lord. They argue that this *must* be what was in the apostle’s mind, for he was not addressing the unconverted, but “holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling.” With considerable ingenuity they have appealed to the context, the contents of the closing verses of Hebrews 3, as supporting their contention. Those who failed to enter into Canaan (which they consider was a figure of the saints’ present portion) were not heathen, but Israelites, the covenant-people of God. We must therefore expose the error of this interpretation before proceeding farther.

First, we would remind the reader once more that the apostle was not here writing to Gentile Christians, but to Hebrews, whose circumstances and temptations were peculiar, unique. There was a very real and grave danger menacing them, not so much of interrupting their spiritual fellowship with

Christ, but of shaking their faith in Him altogether. The temptation confronting them was the total abandonment of their Christian profession, of their faith in Jesus of Nazareth, now exalted at the right hand of God; and returning to Judaism. This fact must be kept in mind as we take up the study of each chapter of this Epistle. To lose sight of it, courts certain disaster in our interpretation.

Second, while it is true that the apostle's warning in Hebrews 3 is taken from the history of Israel, the covenant people of God, it needs to be borne in mind that in connection with Israel there was an election within an election, a spiritual one within the national. Romans 9:7, 8 distinctly affirms, "Neither because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed." Unless this fact be steadily remembered, much misunderstanding and error will ensue. The fact is that Israel *as a Nation*, in Old Testament times, is *not* a type of God's elect in this New Testament dispensation (as so many have wrongly supposed), but a figure of *Christendom* as a whole. It was only the spiritual remnant, the elect of God within the nation, who foreshadowed His saints of today.

Third, close attention to what is said of the Israelites in Hebrews 3 shows conclusively that they were an illustration not of true Christians out of communion with God, but instead, of nominal professors who were never born again. In proof of this note in Hebrews 3:10 it is said of them, "They do always err in heart;" now though believers err frequently they do not so "always;" then it is added, "they have not known My ways" — could this be said of the spiritual election of God? Surely not. Again, in verse 11, We are told, "So I swear in My wrath, They shall not enter into My rest:" but God is never wrathful with His own children. Further, in verse 17 it is not simply said that "they died" but that their "carcasses fell" in the wilderness, sure proof is such language that they were not children of God, for "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (Psalm 116:15). Finally, the words of the apostle in Hebrews 3:19 admit of no misunderstanding, "So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief." Thus, they were "children in whom is *no* faith" (Deuteronomy 32:20).

Now at the beginning of chapter 4 the apostle applies this solemn warning to

test the profession of those who were in danger of “departing from the living God.” First he says, “Let us *therefore* fear.” The “therefore” would have no real force if after referring to unbelievers he should apply their example to warn believers, of the tendency and danger of ceasing to have *communion* with the Lord; in such a case his illustration would be strained and irrelevant. No, when he says, “Let us therefore fear” he obviously has in mind the danger of an empty profession, and sets them to a testing of their faith, which test is answered by perseverance. “Lest a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.” It was *not* a “rest” of communion into which they *had* entered but were warned against leaving, or failing to enjoy; but instead, a rest that was *promised*. What follows clearly defines “His rest” and confirms what we have said above. It has to do with the Gospel, and not with precepts to saints! And the point insisted on is the presence or absence of *faith*.

The order of thought in Hebrews 4, so far as we discern it, is as follows: First, there is a searching exhortation made (verse 1) to all who profess to be Christians, that they should work out their salvation with fear and trembling, and that their walk should be such as to give no one the impression that they “seem” to be departing from Christ. This is followed by a solemn warning (verse 2) that, the mere hearing of the Gospel is not enough; to profit us, it must be received by faith. Third, this is followed by the declaration that only believers enter into the rest of God. In the remainder of our passage the Spirit makes further comment on Psalm 95 and shows (by negative inference) what the “rest” of God is, and how that the believer’s entrance into it is yet future.

“For we which have believed do enter into rest, as He said, As I have sworn in My wrath, if they should enter into My rest” (verse 3).

The relation of these two clauses the one to the other, is denoted by “as He said,” what follows being a quotation from the 95th Psalm; their connection with the opening words of the verse being that they supply proof of what is there said. As pointed out in the previous article, “For we enter into the rest, who believed,” simply informs us *who* are privileged to enter God’s rest, namely, Believers. Corroboration of this is now furnished.

Upon the second clause of this verse we cannot do better than quote from Dr. Gouge:

“These words ‘as He said’ may have a double reference. One immediate, to the words next before. Considered thus, they furnish a proof by the rule of contraries. The force of the argument resteth on that ruled case, which the apostle taketh for granted, verse 6, namely, that ‘some *must* enter’ into that rest which God hath promised. Hereupon this argument may be made: If some ‘must enter,’ then believers or unbelievers: But not unbelievers, for God by oath hath protested against them; Therefore believers shall enter.”

“The other reference is more remote to the latter part of the former verse. If the first clause of verse 3 be included in a parenthesis, the reference of this unto the former verse will appear to be the more fit. For it showeth unbelievers reap no benefit by the word of promise, because God hath sworn that such shall not enter His rest. The relative ‘He’ is to God. That which He said was in and by David, in Psalm 95:11.”

Upon the words here quoted from the Psalm, Dr. J. Brown said,

“*According* to the Hebrew idiomatical elliptical mode of expressing an oath, ‘*they shall not enter into My rest*’.”

“**Although the works were finished from the foundation of the world**” (verse 3).

It is at this point the real difficulty of our passage begins, due in part to its peculiar grammatical structure. “The passage that follows wears a peculiarly disjointed appearance, and has occasioned perplexity to interpreters. I apprehend that the last clause of the 3rd verse should be disconnected from the words immediately preceding, and should be connected with those which immediately follow. Along with the 4th and 5th verses, it appears to be a kind of explanatory note on the expression, ‘the rest of God’.” With this explanation the writer is in full accord, indeed, it seems to him impossible to see in the passage any connected sense unless it be taken thus. Continuing to quote from Dr. Brown:

“A promise is left us of entering into *His rest*. The ‘rest’ of God, in its primary use in the Old Testament scriptures, is descriptive of that state of cessation from the exercise of creating energy, and of satisfaction in what He hath created, into which God is represented

as entering on the completion of His six days' work, when in the beginning 'He formed the heavens and the earth, and all their hosts.' In this sense the phrase was plainly not applicable to the subject which the apostle is discussing; but in these words he shows that the phrase, the *rest of God* is not in the scriptures so appropriated to the rest of God after the creation as not to be applicable, and indeed applied, to other subjects.

“Verses 4, 5. Although the works were finished from the foundation of the world (for He spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, ‘And God did rest the seventh day from all His works’), yet in this place again, ‘If they shall enter into My rest.’ In this way the three apparently disjointed members are formed into one sentence; and that one sentence expresses a sentiment calculated to throw light on the language which the apostle has employed.”

“*Although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.*” This sentence is introductory to what immediately follows, in which the apostle, step by step, leads the Hebrews to the consideration of an higher and better rest than ever was enjoyed in this world. There were two “rests” frequently mentioned in the Old Testament as special pledges of God’s favor: the Sabbath and the land of Canaan: the former being styled “the Sabbath of rest to the Lord” (Exodus 35:2), and “the Sabbath of the Lord” (Exodus 20:10); the latter, “the rest which the Lord gave them” (Deuteronomy 12:9; Joshua 1:15). In view of these the Hebrews might well say, We have always enjoyed the Lord’s Sabbath, and our fathers have long occupied Canaan, why then do you speak so much about entering into God’s rest? The verses which follow meet this objection, showing that neither of those “rests” was meant by David in Psalm 95, nor by himself here in Hebrews 4.

The “rest” to which the apostle was pointing the Hebrews was so blessed, so important, so far surpassing anything that Judaism had known, that he was the more careful they should not be mistaken in connection with *its* nature and character.

First, he clears the way for a definition of it by pointing out what it *does not* consist of. He begins with the Sabbath which is the first “rest” mentioned in Scripture.

Second, he passes on to the rest of Canaan. The rest of the Sabbath *did*

foreshadow the heavenly rest, and Canaan *was*, in an important sense, a figure of it too; but Paul would turn them from types and shadows to contemplate and have them press forward to the antitype and substance itself.

This reference to “the works” being “finished from the foundation of the world” takes us back to Genesis 2:1, 2. It is the works of creation and restoration, detailed in Genesis 1. The word “foundation” here carries with it a double thought: stability and beginning. As pointed out in our remarks upon Hebrews 1:10, “foundation” denotes the fixity of that which is reared upon it: it is the lowest part of an edifice, upon which the whole of the structure rests. As the “foundation” is the first thing attended to in connection with a building, so this term is used here to denote the *beginning* of this present world system.

“For He spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise,
And God did rest the seventh day from all His works” (verse 4).

God’s rest on that primitive seventh day possesses at least a fourfold significance.

First, it denoted His own complacency, His satisfaction in what He had made: “And God saw everything that He had made and, behold, it was *very good*.”

Second, it was the Creator setting before His creatures an example for them to follow. Why had God taken “six days” to make what is described in Genesis 1? Had He so pleased, all could have been done in one day, yea, in a moment! Obviously it was for the purpose of teaching us. Just as the great God employed in works of usefulness, in providing for the temporal necessities of His creatures, so should we be. And just as God has ceased from all the works of those six days and on the seventh day “rested,” so must we.

Third, that primitive Sabbath was the prophetic pledge of the “rest” which this earth shall enjoy during the reign of Christ.

Fourth, it was a foreshadowing and earnest of the eternal Sabbath, when God shall “rest in His love” (Zephaniah 3:17).

Perhaps it needs to be added that the words “and God did rest” do not signify, absolutely, that He remained in a state of inactivity. The “rest” of Scripture is never a condition of inertia. The words of our Savior in John 5:17 respecting

the Sabbath day, “My Father worketh hitherto” in nowise conflict with Genesis 2:3. God’s “rest” there was from creating new kinds of creatures; what Christ speaks of is His work in doing good to His creatures; it concerns God’s providences, which never cease day or night, preserving, succoring, governing His creatures. From this we learn that our keeping of the Sabbath is not to consist of a state of idleness, but is fore-bearing from all the ordinary works of the preceding six days. The Savior’s own example in the Gospels teaches us that works of absolute necessity are permissible, and works of mercy proper. Isaiah 58:13, 14 informs us *how* the Sabbath is to be kept. John 5:17 linked to Genesis 2:3 also contains a hint of the eternal “rest” of heaven: it will be a ceasing from all the carnal works in which we were engaged here, yet it will not be a state of idleness as Revelation 22:3 proves.

“And in this again, If they shall enter into My rest” (verse 5).

The line of argument which the apostle is here pursuing will the more readily be perceived if due attention be paid to the word “again”. He is proving that there was *another* “rest” of God beside that which followed upon His works of creation. This is evident from the language of Psalm 95, upon which he comments in the next verse. Thus the Holy Spirit warns us that each expression used in Holy Writ must be interpreted strictly in harmony with its context. A great deal of unnecessary confusion had been avoided if expositors heeded this simple but fundamental rule. Take the oft-quoted words of James 5:16, “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man available much.” How often the “righteous man” here is regarded as synonymous with “Christian,” one who is “*righteous*” in Christ.” But such a view ignores the context. This statement is found not in Romans, but James. The epistle of James does not give us the believer’s standing, so much as his state. The prayers of a Christian whose ways are *not* “right” before God, “avail” little or nothing. So all through the book of Proverbs the “*righteous*” man is not regarded there as one who is righteous imputatively, but practically.

Take again the believer’s present experimental “rest.” There are numbers of passages in the New Testament where the *same* word “rest” is found, but they by no means all refer to the same thing or experience. Each reference needs to be studied in the light of its immediate context, in the light of the particular book in which it is found, (remembering the special theme of that book), and in connection with what is predicated of that “rest”.

“Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matthew 11:28, 29).

Here it is obvious, almost at first glance, that two distinct “rests” are before us. The first may be designated rest of *conscience*, which the convicted sinner, groaning beneath the intolerable load of his conscious sins, obtains when he casts himself on the mercy of Christ. The second is rest of *soul*, which alas, many professing Christians know very little, if anything, about. It is obtained by *taking* Christ’s “yoke” upon us and “learning” of Him.

“Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief” (verse 6).

The first words give intimation of an inference being drawn from what has gone before. In verse 5, God’s protestation against unbelievers is recorded, here the apostle infers therefrom that there is a rest for believers to enter into. Since God has made promise of some entering into His rest, then they *must* do so: if no unbelievers, then believers. The words, “*it* remaineth” here signify “*it* followeth,” for no word of God can fall to the ground. No promise of His can be utterly made void. Though many reap no good thereby, yet others shall be made partakers of the benefit of it. Though the vast majority of the adult Israelites perished in the wilderness, yet Caleb and Joshua entered Canaan.

“And they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief.” The word “preached” here means “evangelize.” The same root word is rendered “gospel” in verse 2. This shows us,

First, that God has employed only one instrument in the saving of sinners from the beginning, namely, the preaching of the gospel, cf. Galatians 3:8.

Second, that the demand of the Gospel from those who hear it is *faith*, taking God at His word, receiving with childlike simplicity and gladness the good news He has sent us.

Third, that “unbelief” shuts out from God’s favor and blessing. In Hebrews 11:31 we are told, “By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not.” It was not because the others were Canaanites, heathen,

wicked people, but because they *believed not* that they “perished.” Solemn warning was this for the Hebrews whose faith was waning.

“Again, He limiteth a certain day, saying in David, Today” (verse 7).

It is evident that Hebrews 5:6 is an incomplete sentence, finished, we apprehend, in Hebrews 5:11. What follows in verses 7-10 is a parenthesis, and to its consideration we must now turn. The purpose of this parenthesis is to *establish the* principle on which the exhortation is based, namely, that since there is a “rest of God” for believers to enter, and seeing that Israel of old failed to enter therein, it behooves us today to give the more earnest heed to the word of the Gospel which we have heard, and to “labor to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.”

“Again He limiteth a certain day, saying, in David, Today, after so long a time, as it is said, Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts” (verse 7).

This may be called the text which the apostle goes on to expound and apply. The Revised Version rendering of it is much to be preferred: “He again defineth a certain day, Today, saying in David, so long a time afterward (even as hath been said before), “Today if ye will hear” etc. Having drawn an argument from Psalm 95:11 to show that the promise of rest which is “left” (verse 1) Christians, is not the same as that mentioned in Genesis 2:3, the apostle now proceeds to point out that there is another “*rest*” to be sought after than the land of Canaan — let us not deem the demonstration of this *needless*, lest we be found impugning the wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

The apostle’s argument here turns on the word “Today” found in Psalm 95:7. This was what was “limited” or “defined.” The “after so long a time” refers to the interval which elapsed after the Israelites perished in the wilderness and the writing of that Psalm, which contained a Divine exhortation for God’s people living then. Betwixt Moses and David was a period of five centuries (Acts 13:20).

“The apostle’s argument may thus be framed: That rest wherewith men are invited to enter four hundred and fifty years after a rest possessed, is another rest than that which Israel possessed. But the rest intended by David is a rest wherein he inviteth men to enter four hundred and fifty years after Canaan was possessed. Therefore

Canaan is not that rest” (Dr. Gouge).

“For if Joshua had given them rest, then would He not afterward have spoken of another day” (verse 8).

It is plain that the apostle is here anticipating a Jewish objection, which may be stated thus: Though many of the Israelites which were in the wilderness entered not into Canaan, yet others did; for Joshua conducted their children thither. To obviate this, the apostle proves that the Old Testament Scriptures spoke of another “rest” besides that. He does not deny Canaan to be a rest, but he denies that it was the only rest, the rest to be so rested in as no other was to be sought after. The “then would he have not afterward have spoken of another day” is the proof that Joshua did not settle God’s people in the “rest” which David mentioned.

It is right here that we may discern the point to which the apostle would direct the Hebrews’ attention, though to spare their feelings he does not state it explicitly. It was a glorious thing when Joshua led Israel’s hosts out of the wilderness, across the Jordan, into the promised land. Truly that was one of the outstanding epochs in their national history. Nor would the apostle, directly, deprecate it. Yet if the Hebrews would but meditate for a moment on the *nature* of that rest into which the illustrious successor of Moses led their fathers, they must see that it was very far from being the perfect state. It was only an earthly inheritance. It was filled with enemies, who had to be dispossessed. Its continued tenure was dependent on their own faithfulness to God. It was enjoyed comparatively only a short time. Different far is the rest of God into which the Apostle of Christianity will yet lead His people. Listen to His own words,

“In My Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that, where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:2, 3).

Here, then, we may see the superiority of Christ over Joshua, as the rest into which He brings His people excels that into which Joshua conducted Israel.

“There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God” (verse 9).

This verse gives the conclusion drawn from the preceding argument. The apostle had shown that the “rest” mentioned by David was neither the rest of

the primitive Sabbath in Genesis 2 nor the rest of Canaan into which Joshua had conducted the second generation of Israel. *Therefore* there “remaineth a rest to the people of God:” that is, there is some other rest for God’s people to look forward to. Thus, the “therefore” here is, first of all, a general inference drawn from all that precedes. A “promise is left” of entering into God’s rest (verse 1). That promise must be appropriated, “mixed with faith” in those who hear it (verse 2). Only believers will enter that rest, for God hath sworn that unbelievers shall not enter therein (verse 3). Although there is a rest of God mentioned in Genesis 2 (verses 2, 3), and although Joshua led Israel into the rest of Canaan (verse 8), yet neither of these “rests” was what is promised Christians (verse 8). Hence, we can only conclude there is *another* “rest” for God’s people (verse 9).

That the Christian’s perfect “rest” is yet future is clear from the language of verse 11, where the Hebrews were admonished to “labor therefore to enter into that rest.” Thus, regarding verse 9, first, as a general conclusion drawn from the whole of the context, we understand it to mean: “Thus it is evident there is a rest for the people of God.” These words were designed to *reassure the* hearts of the Hebrews. In turning their backs on Judaism the “rest” of Canaan was relinquished, but this did not mean that they had, because of their faith in Christ, *ceased to be* “the people of God,” nor did it involve the forfeiture of all privileges and blessings. Nay, the apostle had warned them in Hebrews 3:6, 12, 14 that it was impossible to retain the privilege of belonging to the people of God except through faith in Christ. Now he assures them that only for such people was there a rest of God remaining.

Above, we have pointed out that the “therefore” of verse 9 denotes, first of all, that the apostle is here drawing a general conclusion from all he had said in the context. We would now call attention to a more specific inference pointed by that word. It needs to be most carefully observed that in this verse the Holy Spirit employs an entirely different word for “rest” than what he had used in verses 1, 3-5, 8. There the Greek word is rightly rendered “rest,” but here it is “*sabbatismos*” and its meaning has been properly given by the translators in the margin — “keeping of a Sabbath.” The Revised Version gives the text itself, “There remaineth therefore a Sabbath rest for the *people* of God.”

The purpose of the Holy Spirit in employing this term here is not difficult to

discover. He was writing to Hebrews, Jews who had professed to become Christians, to have trusted in the Lord Jesus. Their profession of faith involved them in sore trials at the hands of their unbelieving brethren. They denounced them as apostates from the faith of their fathers. They *disowned* them as the “*people of God.*” But as we have said the apostle here reassures them that now only believers in Christ had any title to be numbered among “the people of God.” Having renounced Judaism for Christ the question of the “Sabbath” must also have exercised them deeply. Here the apostle sets their minds at rest. A suitable point in his epistle had now been reached when this could be brought in: he was speaking of “rest,” so he informs them that under Christianity also, “there *remaineth* therefore a Sabbath-keeping for the people of God.” The *specific* reference in the “*therefore*” is to what he had said in verse 4: *God did rest* on the seventh day from all His works, *therefore* as believers in Christ are the “people of God” they must rest too.

“There *remaineth* therefore a Sabbath-keeping for the people of God.” The reference is not to something future, but to what is present. The Greek verb (in its passive form) is never rendered by any other English equivalent than “remaineth.” It occurs again in Hebrews 10:26. The word “remain” signifies “to be left after others have withdrawn, to continue unchanged.” Here then is a plain, positive, unequivocal declaration by the Spirit of God: “There remaineth therefore a Sabbath-keeping.” Nothing could be simpler, nothing less ambiguous. The striking thing is that this statement occurs in the very epistle whose theme is the superiority of *Christianity* over Judaism; written to those addressed as “holy brethren, partakers of the *heavenly* calling.” Therefore, it cannot be gainsaid that Hebrews 4:9 refers directly to *the Christian Sabbath*. Hence we solemnly and emphatically declare that any man who says there is no Christian Sabbath takes direct issue with the New Testament scriptures.

“For he that is entered into his rest he also hath ceased from his own works, as God from His” (verse 10).

In this verse the apostle expressly defines the *nature* of that excellent rest of which he had been speaking: it is a cessation from our works, as God from His. The object in thus describing our rest is to show that it is not to be found in this world, but is reserved for the world to come. The argument of this verse — its opening “*for*” denotes that further proof is being supplied to

confirm what has been said — is taken from the self-evident principle that rest is not enjoyed till work is ceased from. This world is full of toil, travail and trouble, but in the world to come there is full freedom from all these.

“Thy commandment is exceedingly broad” (Psalm 119:96).

There is a breadth and fullness to the words of God which no single interpretation can exhaust. Just as verse 9 has at least a double application, containing both a general conclusion from the whole preceding argument, and also a specific inference from what is said in verse 4, so is it here. Not only does verse 9 state a general principle which serves to corroborate the apostle’s inference in verse 9, but it also has a specific reference and application. The change in number of the pronoun here is not without meaning. In verse 1 he had used a plural, “us,” so in verse 3 “we,” and again in verse 11 he uses “us,” but here in verse 10 it is “he and his.”

“It appears to me that it is the rest of Christ from His works, which is compared with the rest of God from His works in creation.” (Dr. John Owen).

The reference to Christ in verse 10 (remember the section begins at Hebrews 3:1 and concludes with Hebrews 4:14-16) completes the positive side of the apostle’s proof of His superiority over Joshua. In verse 8 he had pointed out that Joshua *did not* lead Israel into the perfect rest of God; now he affirms that Christ, our Apostle, has entered it, and *His* entrance is the pledge and proof that His people shall — “whither the Forerunner is *for us entered*” (Hebrews 6:20). But more: what is said of Christ in verse 10 clinches our interpretation of verse 9 and gives beautiful completeness to what is there said: “There remaineth therefore a Sabbath-keeping to the people of God. *For* He that is entered into His rest, He also hath ceased from his own works, *as* God from His.”

Thus, the Holy Spirit here teaches us to view Christ’s rest from his work of Redemption as parallel with God’s work in creation. They are spoken of as parallel in this respect: the relation which each “work” has to *the keeping of a Sabbath!* The opening “for” of verse 10 shows that what follows furnishes a reason *why* God’s people, now, must keep the Sabbath. That reason invests the Sabbath with a fuller meaning than it had in Old Testament times. It is now not only a memorial of God’s work of creation, and a recognition of the Creator as our Proprietor, but it is also an emblem of the rest which Christ

entered as an eternal memorial of His finished work; and inasmuch as Christ ended His work and entered upon His “rest” by rising again on the *first* day of the week, we are thereby notified that the Christian’s six work-days must run from Monday to Saturday, and that his Sabbath must be observed on Sunday. This is confirmed by the additional fact that the New Testament shows that after the crucifixion of Christ the first day of the week was the one set apart for Divine worship. May the Lord bless what has been before us.

CHAPTER 18
CHRIST SUPERIOR TO JOSHUA
(HEBREWS 4:11-16)

The verses which are to be before us complete the present section of our Epistle, a section which begins at Hebrews 3:1 and which has two main divisions: the first, setting forth the superiority of Christ over Moses; the second, His superiority over Joshua. In the last six verses of chapter 4 a practical application is made of what had previously been said. That application begins with an exhortation for Christians to “labor therefore to enter into that rest.” Both the nature and the place of this “rest” have been defined in the earlier verses. As the opening verse of the chapter shows, it is the “rest of God” which is, in promise, set before us. Beautifully has another said:

“But what did God mean by calling it *His* rest? Not they enter into *their* rest, but His Own. Oh, blessed distinction! I hasten to the ultimate and deepest solution of the question. God gives us *Himself*, and in all His gifts He gives us Himself. Here is the distinction between all religions which men invent, which have their origin in the conscience and heart of man, which spring up from the earth; and the truth, the salvation, the life, revealed unto us from above, descending to us from heaven. All religions seek and promise the same things: light, righteousness, peace, strength, and joy. But human religions think only of creature-light, creature-righteousness, of a human, limited, and imperfect peace, strength and blessings. They start from man upwards. But God gives us Himself, and in Himself all gifts, and hence all His gifts are perfect and divine.

“Does God give us righteousness? He Himself is our righteousness, Jehovah-Tsidkenu. Does God give us peace? Christ is our peace. Does God give us light? He is our light. Does God give us bread? He is the bread we eat. As the Son liveth by the Father, so he that eateth Me shall live by Me (John 6). God Himself is our strength. God is ours, and in all His gifts and blessings He gives Himself. By the Holy Spirit we are one with Christ, and Christ the Son of God is our righteousness, nay, our life. Do you want any other real presence? Are we not altogether ‘engodded,’ God dwelling and

living in us, and we in Him? What more real presence and indwelling, awful and blessed, can we have than that which the apostle described when he said: 'I live; yet not I, But Christ liveth in me?' Or again, 'I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.' Thus God gives us *His* rest as our rest" (Saphir).

Following the exhortation to labor to enter into God's rest, reference is made to the living, powerful, and piercing character of the Word of God, and the effects it produces in regeneration. In the light of the solemn warning which follows in verse 13, the contents of verse 12 seem to be brought in for the purpose of enabling the Hebrews to test the genuineness of their Christian profession: sufficient is there said for them to discover whether or not they had been born again. Then the chapter closes with one of the most precious passages to be found in our Epistle, or indeed in the whole of the New Testament. It makes known the gracious provisions which God has made for His poor people while they are yet in the place of testing. It brings before us the sufficiency and sympathy of our great High Priest, in view of which Christians are bidden to "come boldly unto the throne of grace," that they "may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." May the Spirit of God condescend to open up to us this portion of His Word.

"Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief" (verse 11).

As pointed out in the preceding article, this verse completes the sentence begun at verse 6. It is in view of the solemn fact that the great majority of those Israelites to whom the Gospel of Rest was first preached did not receive it in faith, and so perished in the wilderness, and hence because that only true believers will enter into God's rest, the Hebrews were now enjoined to spare no efforts in making sure that they would not fail and miss it. This 11th verse is also the complement to verse 1.

The verb for "let us labor" is derived from another verb meaning "to make haste." It is designed to point a contrast from "any of you should seem to come short of it" in verse 1. There the word is derived from a root meaning "afterwards," and some able linguists declare that the word for "come short of" means, literally, "be a day late." We believe the Spirit's designed reference is to what is recorded in Numbers 14. Israel had already crossed the wilderness, and had reached Kadesh-barnea. From thence Moses had sent the

twelve spies to view the land of Canaan. They had returned with a conflicting report. Ten of them magnified the difficulties which lay ahead, and discouraged the people but Caleb said, “Let us go up *at once*, and possess it” (Numbers 13:30). The congregation listened only to the ten, and

“wept that night” and “murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would God we had died in this wilderness! And wherefore hath the Lord brought us into this land, to fall by the Sword, that our wives and children should be a prey? Were it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make us a captain and let us return into Egypt” (Numbers 14:1-3).

Then it was that the wrath of Jehovah was kindled against His unbelieving people, saying,

“How long shall I bear with this evil congregation which murmur against Me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against Me. Say unto them, As truly as I live, saith the Lord, as ye have spoken in Mine ears, *so* will I do to you: Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness” (Numbers 14:27-29).

But instead of bowing to the Lord’s solemn sentence, we are told,

“And they rose up early in the morning, and gat them up into the top of the mountain, saying, Lo, we be here, and *will* go up unto the place which the Lord hath promised” (verse 40).

Moses faithfully expostulated with them, “Wherefore now do ye transgress the commandment of the Lord? But it shall not prosper. Go not up, for the Lord is not among you; that ye be not smitten.” But they heeded him not:

“They presumed to go up unto the hill top... Then the Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites which dwelt in that hill, and smote them, and discomfited them, even unto Hormah” (verses 44, 45).

They were a day late! They had delayed, they had failed to trust the Lord and heed His voice through Caleb the previous day, and now they “came short” of entering the promised rest of Canaan.

It was in view of Israel’s procrastination at Kadesh-barnea that the apostle

admonished the Hebrews, “*Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.*” As we pointed out the word “seem” regarded their *walk*: let there be nothing in their ways which gave the appearance that they were halting, wavering, departing from Christ. For Christians to *seem* to come short, be a day late, in laying hold of the promise “left” them of entering into God’s rest, means to sink to the level of the ways of the world, to settle down *here*, instead of going forward as “strangers and pilgrims.” It means to look back to and long for the flesh-pots of Egypt. Ah, my reader, to which does your daily life witness? To the fact that you have *not yet* entered your “rest,” or that you *have* found a substitute for it *here*? If so, heed that solemn word,

“*Arise ye, and depart for this is not your rest: because it is polluted, it shall destroy, even with a sore destruction*” (Micah 2:10).

Having then warned the Hebrews in verse 1 what to *avoid*, the apostle now tells them in verse 11 what to *essay*. They were to “*labor*” to enter into that rest. As stated above, the Greek word is derived from another verb meaning “*to make haste*;” the one used here signifies to “*give diligence*” and is so rendered in the Revised Version. In 2 Timothy 2:15 it is translated “*study*.”

“The word ‘labor’ is equivalent to ‘eagerly and perseveringly seek.’ The manner in which the Hebrew Christians were to ‘labor to enter unto that rest,’ was by believing the truth, and continuing ‘steadfast and unmoveable’ in the faith of the truth, and in the natural results of the faith of the truth” (Dr. J. Brown).

It is human responsibility which is here being addressed again, and Hebrews 4:11 is closely parallel with the exhortations of 1 Corinthians 10:10-12 and 2 Peter 1:5-10.

Our real “rest” is yet to come, it is but “promised” (verse 1); in the meantime we are to press forward to it.

“*This world is not a fit place, nor this life a fit time, to enjoy such a rest as is reserved in heaven. Rest here would glue our hearts too much to this world, and make us say, ‘It is good to be here’ (Matthew 17:4). It would slack our longing desire after Christ in heaven. Death would be more irksome, and heaven the less welcome. There would be no proof or trial of our spiritual armor,*

and of the several graces of God bestowed on us. God's providence, prudence, power, mercy, could not be made so well discerned. This rest being to come, and reserved for us, it will be our Wisdom, while here we live, to prepare for trouble, and to address ourselves to labor: as the soldiers in the field and as the laborers in the daytime. Yet withal to have our eye upon this rest to come; that thereby we may be the more encouraged and incited to hold out to the end" (Dr. Gouge).

"Lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief." To enforce the previous exhortation the apostle points out the danger and damage that would follow a neglect thereof. The "rest" is a word of caution and calls for circumspection as a preventative against apostasy. The "lest any man" intimates that this care and circumspection is not to be restricted to one's own self, but extended to our fellow-pilgrims. The word "fall" signifies to fall utterly: it is used in Romans 11:22. Professors may fall away; many have done so (see 1 John 2:19, etc.); then let *us* be on our guard. The "example" of others having fallen through unbelief should make us wary.

"We may well observe from this exhortation,

1. That great oppositions will and do arise against men in the work of entering into God's rest... But notwithstanding all these difficulties, the promise of God being mixed with faith will carry us safely through them all.

2. That as the utmost of our endeavor and labors are required to our obtaining an entrance into the rest of Christ, so it doth very well deserve that they should be laid out therein. Men are content to lay themselves out to the utmost and to spend their strength for the 'bread that perisheth,' yea 'for that which is not bread.' But the rest of the Gospel deserves our utmost diligence and endeavor. To convince men thereof is one of the chief ends of the preaching of the Gospel" (Dr. John Owen).

As was the case with the contents of verses 9, 10, so we are assured there is a *double* reference to the words of verse 11: a general and a specific.

The general, refers to the future and perfect rest of the Christian in heaven; the specific, being to that which is the emblem and type of it, namely, the

weekly sabbath. This, we believe, is why the Holy Spirit here says, “Let us give diligence therefore to enter into *that* rest,” rather than “into *His* rest,” as in verse 1. “*That* rest” designedly includes both the eternal rest of God, and the sabbath rest, spoken of in verse 10. This we are to “give diligence” to enter, not only because the sabbath-desecration of worldlings is apt to discourage us, but also because there are professing Christians who loudly insist that there is no such thing *as* a “Christian sabbath.” Beware lest we fail to heed this word of God, and “fall through the same example of unbelief” as Israel in the wilderness, who failed to listen to God.

“For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (verse 12).

The first word of this verse (which has the force of “because”) denotes that the apostle is here furnishing further reason *why* professing Christians should give diligence in pressing forward to the rest which is set before them. That reason is drawn from the nature of and the effects produced by the Word of God. This verse and the one which follows appear to be brought in for the purpose of *testing* profession and enabling exercised souls to discover whether or not they have been born again.

“Let us give diligence therefore to enter into that rest.... For the Word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” It should be evident that the first thing emphasized here is that Christianity consists not so much of external conduct, as the place which the Word of God has *within* us. The Word of God “piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit” is the effect which it produces, under the application of the Lord, when a sinner is regenerated. Man is a tripartite being, consisting of spirit and soul and body. This, we believe, is the first and deepest meaning of Genesis 1:26, “And God said, Let *us* make man in Our image, after Our likeness.” God Himself is a Trinity in Unity, and such He made man to be.

The “spirit” is the highest part of man, being the seat of God-consciousness. The “soul” is the ego, the individual himself, and is the seat of self-consciousness; man *has a “spirit,”* but he *is* “a living soul.” The “body” is his

house or tabernacle, being the seat of sense-consciousness. In the day that man first sinned, he died spiritually. But in Scripture “death” never means extinction of being; instead, it always signifies *separation* (see Luke 15:24). The nature of man’s spiritual “death” is intimated in Ephesians 4:18, “*alienated from the life of God.*” When Adam disobeyed his Maker, he became a fallen creature, separated from God. The first effect of this was that his “spirit” no longer functioned separately, it was no more in communion with God. His spirit *fell* to the level of his soul.

The “soul” is the seat of the emotions (1 Samuel 18:1, Judges 10:16, Genesis 42:21, etc.). It is that part of our nature which stirs into exercise the “lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.” The unregenerate man is termed “the *soulical* man” (1 Corinthians 2:14), the Greek word there being the adjectival form of “psyche” or “soul.” That is to say, the unregenerate man is entirely dominated by his soul, his lusts, his desires, his emotions. Spiritual considerations have no weight with him whatsoever, for he is “alienated from the life of God.” True, he *has* a “spirit,” and by means of it he is capable of perceiving all around him the evidences of the “eternal power and godhead” of the Creator (Romans 1:20). It is the “candle of the Lord” (Proverbs 20:27) within him; yet has it, because of the fall, *no* communion with God. Now at regeneration there is, literally, a “dividing asunder of soul and spirit.” The spirit is restored to communion with God, made *enrapport* with Him, “reconciled.” The spirit is raised from its immersion in the soul, and once more functions separately: “For God is my witness, whom I serve with my *spirit*” (Romans 1:9); “my *spirit* prayeth” (1 Corinthians 14:14) etc.

The first consequence of this is intimated in the closing words of verse 12, “And is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” The Word of God now exposes his innermost being. Having eyes to see, he discovers, for the first time, what a vile, depraved and hell-deserving creature he is. Though, in the mercy of God, he may have been preserved from much outward wickedness in his unregenerate days, and so passed among his fellows as an exemplary character, he now perceives that there dwelleth “no good thing” in him, that every thought and intent of his desperately wicked heart had, all his life, been contrary to the requirements and claims of a holy God. The Word has searched him out, and discovered him to himself. He sees himself a lost, ruined, undone sinner. This is ever the first conscious effect of

the new birth, for one who is still “dead in trespasses and sins” has no realization of his awful condition before God.

Ere passing on let us earnestly press upon the reader what has just been before us, and ask, has the Word of God thus “pierced” you? Has it penetrated, as no word from man ever has, into your innermost being? Has it exposed the workings of your wicked heart? Has it detected to you the sink of iniquity which dwells within? Make no mistake about it, dear friend, the thrice holy God of Scripture “requireth truth in the *inward* parts” (Psalm 51:6). If the Word of God *has* searched you out, then you cried with Isaiah “Woe is reel for I am undone” (Hebrews 6:5); with Job, “I abhor myself” (Hebrews 42:6); with the publican, “God be merciful to me the sinner” (Luke 18:13). But if you are a stranger to these experiences, no matter what your profession or performances, no matter how highly you may think of yourself or Christians think of you, *God* says you are still *dead* in sin.

Let it not be supposed that we have attempted to give above a *complete* description of all that takes place at the new birth; not so, we have confined ourselves to what is said in Hebrews 4:12. Nor let it be thought that the language of this verse is to be *restricted* to what occurs at regeneration, not so, that is only in initial reference. The activities of the Word of God therein described are repeated whenever a Christian gets out of communion with Him, for then he is dominated to a large extent by his soul rather than his spirit. It should not need pointing out, yet the terrible ignorance of Scripture prevailing today makes it necessary, that when a child of God is walking in communion with Him, His word does not come to *him* as a “sword”; rather is it “a lamp” unto his feet. If the reader will compare Revelation 2:12 and Revelation 19:15 he will obtain confirmation of this.

The relation of this 12th verse to the whole context is very striking, and its contents divinely appropriate. It brings out the dignity and Deity of “The Apostle” of our profession. It shows the *sufficiency* of His Word. It is striking to note that just *seven* things are here said of it.

First, it is the “Word of God.”

Second, it is living, or “quick.”

Third, it is mighty, “powerful.”

Fourth, it is effectual, “sharper than any two edged sword.”

Fifth, it is penetrating, “piercing.”

Sixth, it is regenerative, “even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit.”

Seventh, it is revealing and exposing, bringing to light the “thoughts and intents of the heart, etc.”

The reference to the Word piercing to the dividing asunder of “the joints (external) and marrow” (internal) tells of its discriminating power over every part of our being. The more we submit ourselves unto its searching and convicting influence the more shall we be blest.

“Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (verse 13).

The rendering of the A.V. here is faulty, the opening “Neither” being quite misleading. The Revised Version gives “And there is no creature that is not manifest in His sight” etc. Thus the first word denotes that a reason is being given for the power and efficacy of the Word, a reason which is drawn from the nature of Him whose Word it is, namely, God; who being Himself the Searcher of the heart and the Discerner of all things, is pleased to exercise that power in and by the ministry and application of His Word. The two verses taken together supply a further reason why Christ’s voice should be heeded, even because, as God, He is the omniscient One.

“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession” (verse 14).

The connection between this and what has gone before is most blessed. The closing verses of our chapter contain precious words of encouragement. They tell of the wondrous provisions of God’s grace for His people while they are still in the place of testing. They assure us that none of those who are really the people of God shall, finally, miss the perfect and eternal rest.

The Revised Version reads, “Having then a great High Priest”; *Bagster’s interlinear* gives, “Having therefore a High Priest, great.” The general reference is back to what was said in 1:3, 2:17, 3:1: the Divine sonship, the incarnation, the exaltation of Jesus, our High Priest, is the supreme motive for holding fast our profession. The particular reference is to the apostle’s

main point in this chapter: if the question be asked, What hope have we poor sinners got of entering into *God's* rest? The answer is, Because Christ, our High Priest, has already entered heaven, and we also must do so in and by Him. The immediate reference is to what had been said in verses 12, 13: we shall be assuredly found out if we fall from our profession, therefore it becomes us to hold it fast.

As the priesthood of Christ will, D.V., come before us more fully in the chapters that follow, we shall offer here only a few brief remarks on the verse now before us. First, it is to be noted that the Holy Spirit here designates Christ the “great High Priest”; no other, neither Aaron nor Melchizedek, is so denominated. Its use emphasizes the supreme dignity, excellency, and sufficiency of our High Priest. Second, He has “passed in (Greek “through”) the heavens.”

“This word signifies to pass through notwithstanding any difficulties that may seem to hand. Thus it is said that an angel and Peter ‘passed the first and second wards’ (Acts 12:10). Our Lord Christ having assumed our nature, passed through the virgin’s womb; and being born, in His infancy, childhood, and manhood, passed through many difficulties, temptations, afflictions, persecutions, yea, death itself and the grave; after His resurrection He passed through the air and the stellar heavens, entering the heaven of heavens. Thus we see that nothing could hinder Him from that place where He intended to appear as our Priest before His Father” (Dr. Gouge).

“For we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (verse 15).

Most blessed is this. The third thing said in verse 14 of our exalted High Priest is that He is “the Son of God.” Well may poor sinners, conscious of their unworthiness and vileness, ask, How may we, so weak and worthless, approach unto and seek the mediation of *such an* One? To reassure our poor hearts, the Holy Spirit at once reminds us that albeit Christ *is* such a great and glorious Priest, yet, withal, He is full of sympathy and tender compassion for His afflicted people. He is “merciful” (Hebrews 2:17), as well as omnipotent. He is Man, as well as God. He has Himself been tempted in all things, like ourselves, sin excepted.

“But was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin,” or literally, “who has been tempted in all things according to our likeness, apart from sin” i.e. In spirit, and soul, and body.

“He was tempted — tried, exercised — for no more doth the word impart. Whatever is the moral evil in temptation is due to the depraved intention of the tempter, or from the weakness and sin of the tempted. In itself, it is but a trial, which may have a good or bad effect. He was tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Sin may be considered as to its principle, and as to its effect. Men are tempted to sin by sin, to actual sin by habitual sin, to outward sin, by indwelling sin. And this is the greatest source of sin in us who are sinners. The apostle reminds us of the holiness and purity of Christ, that we may not imagine that He was liable unto any such temptations unto sin from within as we find ourselves liable unto, who are never free from guilt and defilement. Whatever temptation He was exposed unto or exercised withal, as He was with all and of all sorts that can come from without, they had none of them in the last degree any effect unto Him. He was absolutely in all things ‘without sin’; He neither was tempted by sin, such was the holiness of His nature; nor did His temptation produce sin, such was the perfection of His obedience” (Dr. John Owen).

The Man Christ Jesus was the Holy One of God, and therefore He *could not* sin. But were not Satan and Adam created without sin, and did not they yield to temptation? Yes; but the one was only a created angel the other merely man. But our Lord and Savior was not a created being; instead, He was “God manifest in flesh.” In His humanity He was “holy” (Luke 1:35) and, as such, as high above unfallen Satan or Adam as the heavens are above the earth. He was not only impeccable God, but impeccable Man. The prince of this world came, but found *nothing* in Him (John 14:30). Thus, He is presented before us not only as an example to be followed, but as an Object upon which faith may rest with unshaken confidence.

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (verse 16).

This verse sets before us the second use we are to make of the priesthood of Christ. The first is named in verse 14, to “hold fast our profession”; here, to

“come boldly unto the throne of grace.” In relation to the whole context this verse makes known the wondrous and blessed provision God has made for His wilderness people. Herein, too, we may behold again the immeasurable superiority of Christianity over Judaism. The Israelites were confined to the outer court; none at all save the high priest was permitted to draw near to God within the veil. But all Christians, the youngest, weakest, most ignorant, have been “made nigh” (Ephesians 2:13); and in consequence, freedom of access to the very throne of Deity is now their rightful and blessed portion.

“And having such a High Priest in heaven, can we lose courage? Can we draw back in cowardice, impatience, and faint-heartedness? Can we give up our profession, our allegiance, our obedience to Christ? Or shall we not be like Joshua and Caleb, who followed the Lord fully? Let us hold fast our profession; let us persevere and fight the good fight of faith. Our great High Priest in the highest glory is our righteousness and strength. He loves, He watches, He prays, He holds us fast, and we shall never perish. Jesus is our Moses, who in the height above prays for us. Jesus our true Joshua, who gained the victory over our enemies. Only be strong, and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed. In that mirror of the Word in which we behold our sin and weakness, we behold also the image of that perfect One who has passed through the conflict and temptation, who as the High Priest bears us on His loving heart, and as the Shepherd of the flock holds us in safety forever more. Boldly we come to the throne of grace. In Jesus we draw near to the Father. The throne of majesty and righteousness is unto us a throne of grace. The Lord is our God. There is not merely grace on the throne, but the throne is altogether the throne of grace. It is grace which disciplines us by the sharp and piercing Word, it is grace which looks on us when we have denied Him, and makes us weep bitterly. Jesus always intercedes: the throne is always a throne of grace. The Lamb is in the midst of the throne. Hence we come boldly.

“Boldly is not contrasted with reverently and tremblingly. It means literally ‘saying all,’ with that confidence which begets thorough honesty, frankness, full and open speech. ‘Pour out your heart before Him.’ Come as you are, say what you feel, ask what you need. Confess your sins, your fears, your wandering thoughts and

affections. Jesus the Lord went through all sorrows and trials the heart of man can go through, and as He felt affliction and temptation most keenly, so in all these difficulties and trials He had communion with the Father. He knows therefore, how to succor them that are tempted, how fully and unreservedly, then, may we speak to God in the presence and by the mediation of the man Christ Jesus!

“The Lord Jesus is filled with tender compassion and the most profound, lively, and comprehensive sympathy. This belongs to the perfection of His high-priesthood. For this very purpose He was tempted. He suffered. Our infirmities, it is true, are ultimately connected with our sinfulness; the weakness of our flesh is never free from a sinful concurrence of the will; and the Savior knows from His experience on earth how ignorant, poor, weak, sinful, and corrupt His disciples are. He loved them, watched over them with unwearied patience; prayed for them that their faith fail not; and reminded them the spirit was willing, but the flesh is weak. He remembers also His own sinless weakness; He knows what constant thought, meditation, and prayer are needed to overcome Satan, and to be faithful to God. He knows what it is for the soul to be sorrowful and overwhelmed, and what it is to be refreshed by the sunshine of Divine favor, and to rejoice in the Spirit. We may come in to Him expecting full, tender, deep sympathy and compassion. He is ever ready to strengthen and comfort, to heal and restore, He is prepared to receive the poor, wounded, sin-stained believer; to dry the tears of Peter weeping bitterly; to say to Paul, oppressed with the thorn in the flesh, ‘My grace is sufficient for thee.’

“We need only understand that we are sinners, and that He is High Priest. The law was given that every mouth may be shut, for we are guilty. The High Priest is given that every mouth may be opened.... We come in faith as sinners. Then shall we obtain mercy; and we always need mercy, to wash our feet: to restore to us the joy of salvation, to heal our backslidings, and bind up our wounds. We shall obtain help in every time of need. For God may suffer Satan and the world, want and suffering, to go against us; but He always causes all things to work together for our good. He permits the time of need, that we may call upon Him, and, being delivered by Him,

may glorify His name” (Saphir).

“We should come therefore with boldness to the throne of grace”
(Bagster).

Then let us do so, in the full confidence of our acceptance before God in the person of His Beloved (Ephesians 1:6). The verb in Hebrews 4:16 is not in the aorist tense, but the present — let us “come” constantly, continually; let us form the habit of doing so. This is the first of seven occurrences of this blessed word in our epistle: the other references are Hebrews 7:25; 10:1, 22; 11:6; 12:18, 22. To “*obtain* mercy” is passive, and refers to past failures. “Finding grace” is active, and signifies that we humbly, earnestly, and believingly seek it. To “help in time of need:” this is daily, yea, hourly. But whenever the need may be, spiritually or temporal, grace all-sufficient is ever-available. May it be ours to constantly *seek* it, for the unchanging promise is, “Seek, and ye shall find.”

CHAPTER 19

CHRIST SUPERIOR TO AARON

(HEBREWS 5:1-4)

We are now to enter upon the longest section of our Epistle (Hebrews 5:1-10,39), and a section which is, from the doctrinal and practical viewpoints, perhaps the most important of all. In it the Holy Spirit treats of our Savior's *priesthood*. Concerning this most blessed and vital subject the utmost confusion prevails in Christendom today. Yet this is scarcely to be wondered at. For not only has the time now arrived when the majority of those who profess the name of Christ "will not endure sound doctrine," who after their own fleshly and worldly lusts have heaped to themselves teachers that tickle their itching ears with God-dishonoring novelties, but they have turned away their ears from the truth, and are "turned unto fables" (2 Timothy 4:3, 4). Never was there a time when true God-fearing Christians more needed to heed that Divine admonition, "*Prove* all things, hold fast that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Our only safeguard is to emulate the Bereans and search the Scriptures daily to ascertain whether or not the things we hear and read from men — be their reputation for scholarship, piety, and orthodoxy never so great — are according to the unerring Word of God.

Romanists, and with them an increasing number of Anglicans (Episcopalians), virtually set aside the solitary grandeur of the Priesthood of Christ and the sufficiency of His Atonement, by bringing in human priests to act as mediators between God and sinful men. Arminians are in fundamental error by representing the priestly office and ministry of Christ as having a relation to and a bearing upon the whole human race. Most of the leaders among the Plymouth Brethren have wrested the Scriptures by denying the *priestly* character of Christ's death by insisting that He only entered upon His priestly office after His ascension, and by affirming that it bears no direct relation to sin or sins, but is only a ministry of sympathy and succor for weakness and infirmities. But as it will serve no profitable purpose to deal with the errors of others, let us turn to the positive side of our subject.

Three references to the High Priesthood of Christ have already been before us in the preceding chapters of our Epistle.

First, in Hebrews 2:17 we read, "Wherefore, in all things it behooved Him to

be made like unto 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.” This, of itself, is quite sufficient to expose the sophistries of those who teach that the priestly work of Christ has nothing to do with “sins.”

Second, in Hebrews 3:1 we have been exhorted to, “consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.”

Third, in Hebrews 4:14 we are told, “We have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God.” Here again is a single statement which is alone sufficient to prove that our Savior entered upon His priestly office *before* His ascension, for it was *as* the “great High Priest” He “passed into the heavens.”

Supplementing our previous comments on Hebrews 4:14 and introducing what is to be before us, let us note that the Lord Jesus is designed a “*great* High Priest.” This word at once emphasizes His excellency and pre-eminency. Never was there, never can there be another, possessed of such dignity and glory. The “greatness” of our High Priest arises,

First, from the dignity of His person: He is not only Son of man, but Son of God (Hebrews 4:14).

Second, from the purity of His nature: He is “without sin” (Hebrews 4:15), “holy,” (Hebrews 7:26).

Third, from the eminency of His order: that of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:6).

Fourth, from the solemnity of his ordination: “with an oath” (Hebrews 7:20, 21) — none other was.

Fifth, from the excellency of His sacrifice: “Himself, without spot” (Hebrews 9:14).

Sixth, from the perfection of His administration (Hebrews 7:11, 25) — He has satisfied divine justice, procured Divine favor, given access to the Throne of Grace, secured eternal redemption.

Seventh, from the perpetuity of His office: it is untransferable and eternal (Hebrews 7:24). From these we may the better perceive the blasphemous arrogance of the Italian pope, who styles himself “*pontifex maximus*” — the *greatest* high priest.

“No part of the Mosaic economy had taken a stronger hold of the

imaginings and affections of the Jews than the *Aaronical High-priesthood*, and that system of ritual worship over which its occupants presided. The gorgeous apparel, the solemn investiture, the mysterious sacredness of the high priest, the grandeur of the temple in which he ministered, and the imposing splendor of the religious rites which he performed, — all these operated like a charm in riveting the attachment of the Jews to the now overdated economy, and in exciting powerful prejudices against that simple, spiritual, unostentatious system by which it had been superceded.

In opposition to those prejudices, the apostle shows that the Christian economy is deficient in nothing excellent to be found in the Mosaic; on the contrary, that it has a more dignified High Priest, a more magnificent temple, a more sacred altar, a more efficacious sacrifice; and that, to the spiritually enlightened mind, all the temporary splendors of the Mosaic typical ceremonial, wax dim and disappear amid the overwhelming glories of the permanent realities of the Christian institution” (Dr. John Brown).

But once more we could fain pause and admire the consummate wisdom of the Spirit of God as exhibited in the method pursued in presenting the truth in this Epistle. Had it opened with the declaration of Christ’s superiority over Moses and Aaron, the prejudices of the Jews had been at once aroused. Instead, the personal dignity of the mediatorial Redeemer has been shown (from their own Scriptures) to be so great, that the glory of the angels was so far below His, it follows as a necessary consequence that, the honor attaching to the illustrious of earth’s mortals must be so too. Moreover, at the close of chapter 4, the High Priesthood of Christ is presented in such a way that every renewed heart must be won by and to it. There the apostle had announced not only that our High Priest is Divine (verse 14), holy, (verse 15), and had passed into the heavens, but also that He is One filled with tender sympathy toward our infirmities, having Himself been tempted in all points like as we are (sin excepted); and, moreover, that through Him we have obtained free access to God’s throne of grace, so that there we may obtain mercy (the remitting of what *is* due us) and find grace (the receiving that to which we are *not* entitled) to help in time of need. How we should *welcome* such a Priest! How thankful we should be for Him!

Having thus comforted the hearts of God's children by assuring them of the tender compassion of Christ as the pledge of His effectual intercession for them on high, the apostle now proceeds to set forth more precisely the nature and glory of the priesthood of the Incarnate Son. He pursues the same method as was followed in the previous sections. As in Hebrews chapters 1 and 2, He has been compared and contrasted with angels, and in Hebrews chapters 3 and 4, with Moses and Joshua, so now in the present and succeeding chapters the order and functions of the Aaronic priesthood are examined, that the way may be paved for a setting forth of the more excellent order to which *our* High Priest belongs.

“In the course of the section he makes it evident that whatever was essential to the office of a high priest was to be found in Christ Jesus, that whatever imperfections belonged to the Aaronical high priesthood were not to be found in Him, and that a variety of excellencies were to be found in Him of which none of the Aaronical priests were possessed,” (Dr. J. Brown).

“For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way, for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins. And no man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron” (verses 1-4).

Here we have defined the intrinsic nature of the priestly office.

The verses just quoted above contain a general description of the Levitical high priests. Five things are here said concerning them.

First, he must be “taken from among men,” that is, he must partake of the nature of those on whose behalf he acts.

Second, he acted not as a private individual, but as a public official: “*is* ordained for men.”

Third, he came not empty-handed before God, but furnished with “gifts and sacrifices for sins.”

Fourth, for he himself was not exempt from infirmity, so that he might the more readily succor the distressed (verses 2, 3).

Fifth, he did not presumptuously rush into his office of himself, but was chosen and approved of God (verse 4). Let us look at each of these more closely.

“For every high priest taken from among men.” First, then, his humanity is insisted upon. An angel would be no fitting priest to act on behalf of men, for he possesses not their nature, is not subject to their temptations, and has no experimental acquaintance with their sufferings; therefore is he unsuited to act on their behalf: therefore is he incapable of having “compassion” upon them, for the motive-spring of all real intercession is heart-felt sympathy. Thus, the primary qualification of a priest is that he must be personally related to, possess the same nature as, those for whose welfare he interposes.

“For every high priest taken from among men.” Bearing in mind to whom this Epistle was first addressed, it is not difficult for us to discern why our present section opens in this somewhat abrupt manner. As was pointed out so frequently in our articles upon Hebrews 2, that which so sorely perplexed the Jews was, that the One who had appeared and tabernacled in their minds in human form should have claimed for Himself divine honors (John 5:23, etc.). But if the Son of God had never become *man*, He could never have officiated as priest, He could never have offered that sacrifice for the sins of His people which Divine justice required. The Divine Incarnation was an imperative necessity if salvation was to be secured for God’s elect.

“It was necessary for Christ to become a real man, for as we are very far from God, we stand in a manner before Him in the person of our Priest, which could not be were He not one of us. Hence, that the Son of God has a nature in common with us does not diminish His dignity, but commends it the more to us; for He is fitted to reconcile us to God, because He is man” (John Calvin).

“Is ordained for men.” This tells us the reason why and the purpose for which the high priest was taken “from among men:” it was that he might transact on behalf of others, or more accurately, in the stead of others. To this position and work he was “ordained” or appointed by God. Thereby, under the Mosaic economy, the Hebrews were taught that men could not directly and personally approach unto God. They were sinful, He was holy; therefore was there a breadth between, which they were unable to bridge. It is both solemn and striking to observe how at the very beginning, when sin first entered the

world, God impressed this awful truth upon our fallen parents. The “tree of life,” whose property was to bestow immortality (Genesis 3:22), was the then emblem and symbol of God Himself. Therefore when Adam transgressed, we are told,

“So He drove out the man; and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life” (Genesis 3:24).

Thereby man was taught the awful fact that he is “*alienated from the life of God.*” (Ephesians 4:18).

The same terrible truth was pressed unto the Israelites. When Jehovah Himself came down upon Sinai, the people were fenced off from Him:

“And thou shalt set bounds upon the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death” (Exodus 19:12).

There was the Lord upon the summit, there were the people at the base: separated the One from the other. So too when the Tabernacle was set up. Beyond the outward court they were not suffered to go; into the holy place, the priests alone were permitted to enter. And into the holy of holies, where God dwelt between the cherubim, none but the high priest, and he only on the day of atonement, penetrated. Thus were the Hebrews, from the beginning, shown the awful truth of Isaiah 59:2 — “Your iniquities have *separated* between you and your God.”

But in the person of their high priest, through his representing of them before God, Israel might approach within the sacred enclosure. Beautifully is that brought out in the 28th chapter of Exodus, that book whose theme is *redemption*. There we read,

“And thou shalt take two onyx stones, and grave on them the names of the children of Israel... and thou shalt put the two stones upon the shoulders of the ephod for stones of memorial unto the children of Israel: and Aaron shall bear their names before the Lord... And thou shalt make the breastplate of judgment and thou shalt set in it setting of stones... and the stones shall be with the names of the children of Israel.... And Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in

the breast-plate of judgment upon his heart when he goeth in unto the holy, for a memorial before the Lord continually” (verses 9, 12, 15, 17, 21, 29).

Concerning the high priest being “ordained for men” we are told,

“Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness” (Leviticus 16:21).

“Is ordained for men.” The application of these words to the person and work of Christ is patent. He not only became Man, but had received appointment from God to act on behalf of, in the stead of, men: “Lo I come, to do Thy will, O God” (Hebrews 10:9), announce both the commission He had received from God and His own readiness to discharge it. What that commission was we learn in the next verse: “By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” He came to do what men could not do — satisfy the claims of Divine justice, procure the Divine favor. Note, in passing “ordained for men,” not mankind in general, but that people which God had given Him — just as Aaron, the typical high priest, confessed not the sins of the Canaanites or Amalekites over the head of the goat, but those of Israel only.

“In things pertaining to God,” that is, in meeting the requirements of His holiness. The activities of the priests have God for their object: it is His character, His claims, His glory which are in view. In their application to Christ these words, “in things pertaining to God” distinguishes our Lord’s priesthood from His other offices. As a prophet, He reveals *to us* the mind and will of God. As the King, He subdues *us* to Himself, rules over and defends *us*. But the object of His priesthood is not us, but *God*.

“That He may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.” To “offer” is the chief function of the high priest. He offers to God for men. He offers both gifts and sacrifices; that is, eucharistic or thanksgiving offerings, and sacrificial or propitiatory sacrifices.

“The first word includes, as I think, various kinds of sacrifices, and is therefore a general term; but the second denotes especially the

sacrifices of expiation. Still the meaning is, that the priest without a sacrifice is no peace-maker between God and man, for without a sacrifice sins are not atoned for, nor is the wrath of God pacified. Hence, whenever reconciliation between God and man takes place this pledge must ever necessarily precede. Thus we see that angels are by no means capable of obtaining for us God's favor, because they have no sacrifice" (John Calvin).

"That He may offer both gifts and sacrifice for sins." The application of these words to the Lord Jesus, our great High Priest, calls attention to a prominent and vital aspect of His death which is largely lost sight of today. The sacrificial death of Christ was a *priestly* act. On the Cross Christ not only suffered at the hands of men, and endured the punitive wrath of God, but He actually "accomplished" (Luke 9:31) something: He *offered* Himself as a sacrifice to God. At Calvary the Lord Jesus was not only the Lamb of God bearing judgment, but He was also His Priest officiating at the altar.

"For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices:

wherefore it is of necessity that this Man have somewhat also *to offer*" (Hebrews 8:3).

As Hebrews 9:14 also tells us, He "*offered* himself without spot to God."

Christ on the Cross was far more than a willing victim passively enduring the stroke of Divine judgment. He was there *performing* a work, nor did He cease until He cried in triumph, "It is finished." He "loved the Church and *gave* Himself for it" (Ephesians 5:25). He "*laid down* His life" for the sheep (John 10:11, 18) — which is the predicate of an active agent. He "*poured out* His soul unto death" (Isaiah 53:12). He "dismissed His spirit" (John 19:30).

"Hell's utmost force and fury gathered against Him: heaven's sword devouring Him, and heaven's God forsaking Him: earth, and hell, and heaven, thus in conspiring action against Him, unto the uttermost of heaven's extremest justice, and earth's and hews extremest injustice: — what is the glory of the Cross if it be not *this*: that with such action conspiring to subdue *His* action, His action outlasted and outlived them all, and He did not die subdued and overborne in the dying, He did not die till He *gave* Himself in death" (H. Martin on "*The Atonement*").

“Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself is compassed with infirmity” (verse 2).

Passing now from the design of the Levitical priesthood, we have a word upon their qualifications, the first of which is *compassion* unto those for whom he is to act.

“The word here translated ‘have compassion’ is rendered in the margin ‘reasonably bear with.’ A person could not be expected to do the duties of a high priest aright if he could not enter into the feelings of those whom he represented. If their faults excited no sentiments in his mind but disapprobation — if they moved him to no feeling but anger, he would not be fit to interpose in their behalf with God — he would not be inclined to do for them what was necessary for the expiation of their sins, and the accomplishment of their services. But the Jewish high priest was one who was capable of pitying and bearing with the ignorant and erring; for ‘he himself also was compassed with infirmity.’ ‘Infirmity,’ here, plainly is significant of sinful weakness, and probably also of the disagreeable effects resulting from it. The Jewish high priest was himself a sinner. He had personal experience of temptation, and the tendency of man to yield to it — of sin, and of the consequences of sin; so that he had the natural capacity, and ought to have had the moral capacity, of pitying his fellow-sinners” (Dr. J. Brown).

And what, we may enquire, was the Spirit’s design in here making mention of this personal qualification in the Levitical high priest? We believe His purpose was at least fourfold.

First, implicitly, to call attention to the failure of Israel’s high priests. It is very solemn to mark how that the last of them failed, most signally, at this very point. When poor Hannah was “in bitterness of soul,” and while she was in prayer, weeping before the Lord, Eli, because her lips moved not thought that she was drunken, and spoke roughly to her (1 Samuel 1:9-14). Thus, instead of sympathizing with her sorrows, instead of making intercession for her, he cruelly misjudged her. True, it is “human to err;” equally evident is it that the ideal priest would never be found among the sons of men.

Second, was not the Spirit of God here paving the way for a contrast of the

superiority of our great High Priest over the Aaronical?

Third, does not this statement of verse 2 show, once more, that the value and efficacy of his work was inseparably connected with the *personal* qualifications of the priest himself, namely, his moral perfections, his human sympathy?

Fourth, thus there was emphasized again the necessity for the Son of God becoming man, only thus could He acquire the requisite human compassion.

“This compassionate, loving, gentle, all-considerate and tender regard for the sinner can exist in perfection only in a sinless one. This appears at first sight paradoxical; for we expect the perfect man to be the severest judge. And with regard to *sin*, this is doubtless true. God charges even His angels with folly. He beholds sin where we do not discover it. And Jesus, the Holy One of Israel, like the Father, has eyes like a flame of fire, and discerns everything that is contrary to God’s mind and will. But with regard to the *sinner*, Jesus, by virtue of His perfect holiness, is the most merciful, compassionate, and considerate Judge. For we, not taking a deep and keen view of sin, that central essential evil which exists in all men, and manifests itself in various ways and degrees, are not able to form a just estimate of men’s comparative guilt and blameworthiness. Nay, our very sins make us more impatient and severe with regard to the sins of others. Our vanity finds the vanity of others intolerable, our pride finds the pride of others excessive. Blind to the guilt of our own peculiar sins, we are shocked with another’s sins, different indeed from ours, but not less offensive to God, or pernicious in its tendencies. Again, the greater the knowledge of Divine love and pardon, the stronger faith in the Divine mercy and renewing grace, the more hopeful and the more lenient will be our view of sinners. And finally the more we possess of the spirit and heart of the Shepherd, the Physician, the Father, the deeper will be our compassion on the ignorant and wayward.

“The Lord Jesus was therefore most compassionate, considerate, lenient, hopeful in His feelings toward sinners, and in His dealings with them. He was infinitely holy and perfectly clear in His hatred and judgment of sin; but He was tender and gracious to the sinner.

Beholding the sinful heart in all, esteeming sin according to the Divine standard, according to its real inward character, and not the human, conventional, and outward measure; Jesus, infinitely holy and sensitive as He was, saw often less to shock and pain Him in the drunkard and profligate than in the respectable, selfish, and ungodly religionists. He looked upon sin as the greatest and most fearful evil, but on the sinner as poor, lost, and helpless. Thus, while Jesus, in perfect holiness, judges most truly, lovingly, and tenderly of us, He knows by experience the weakness of the flesh, and the difficulty and soreness of the struggle. What a marvelous fulfillment of the Priest's requisite, that he should be taken from men! One to whom we can look with full and calm trust, our Representative, the Man Christ Jesus, possessed of perfect, Divine love and compassion" (Abbreviated from Adolph Saphir).

Those for whom the high priest was deputed to act are here described as "*the ignorant and them that are out of the way.*" These are not two different classes of people, instead, those words give a twofold description of sinners. It has been rightly said that "*in the Bible all sin is represented as the result of ignorance, but of blameable ignorance.*" "The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble" (Proverbs 4:19). "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God" (Romans 3:11). Every sinner is a fool. "Out of the way" means that men have turned aside from the path which the *Word* of God has marked out for them to walk in:

"All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6).

"And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins" (verse 3).

"There was none who could offer sacrifice for the sins of the high priest; therefore, he must do it for himself. He was to offer for himself in the same way and for the reasons as he offered for the people, and this was necessary, for he was encompassed with the same infirmities and was obnoxious as to sin, and so stood in no less need of expiation or atonement than did the people" (Dr. John Owen).

For scriptures where the high priest was bidden to present an offering for his

own sin, let the reader consult Leviticus 4:3, 9:7, 16:6, 24.

“And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins” (verse 3).

Here again we may observe the Spirit of God calling attention to the imperfections of the Levitical priests that the way may be prepared for presenting the infinitely superior perfections of Christ. But that is not all we have in this verse. It is the personal *qualifications* of the one who exercises his office which is now before us. Before Aaron could present an offering on behalf of Israel, he must first bring a sacrifice for his own sins, that he might be purified and stand accepted before Jehovah. In other words, the one who was to come between a holy God and a sinful people must himself have no guilt resting upon him, and must be an object of Divine favor. Thus, personal fitness was an essential qualification of the priest: in the case of the Levitical, a ceremonial fitness; with Christ, a personal and inherent.

“And no man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron” (verse 4).

“The foregoing verses declare the personal functions of a high priest, but these alone are not sufficient to invest any one with that office; for it is required that he be lawfully called thereunto. Aaron was called of God immediately, and in an extraordinary way. He was called by the command of God given to Moses, and entrusted to him for execution; he was actually separated and consecrated unto the office of high priest, and this was accomplished by special sacrifices made by another for him; and all these things were necessary unto Aaron, because God, in his person, erected a new order of priesthood” (Dr. John Owen).

“And no man taketh this honor to himself.” The expression “this honor” refers to the high priestly office, for one to approach unto the Most High, to have personal dealings with Him, to transact on behalf of others before Him, obtaining His favor toward them, is a signal privilege and great favor indeed. To mark this distinguishing honor, Aaron was clothed in the most gorgeous and imposing vestments (Exodus 28). Looking beyond the type to the Antitype, we may discern how that the Spirit is, once more, bringing before the Hebrews that which was designed to remove the offense of the Cross. To carnal reason the death of Christ was a humiliating spectacle; but the

spiritually enlightened see at Calvary One performing the functions of an office with high “honor” attached to it.

“But he that is called of God, as was Aaron.” This was the ultimate and most important qualification: no man could legitimately act as high priest unless he was Divinely called to that office.

“The principle on which the necessity of a Divine calling to the legitimate exercise of the priesthood rests is an obvious one. It depends entirely on the will of God whether He will accept the services and pardon the sins of men; and suppose again that it is His will to do so, it belongs to Him to appoint everything in reference to the manner in which this is to be accomplished. God is under no obligation to accept of every one, or of any one who, of his own accord, or by the choice of his fellow-men, takes it upon him to offer sacrifices or gifts for himself or for others; and no man in these circumstances can have reason to expect that God will accept of his offerings, unless He has given him a commission to offer them, and a promise He will be appeased by them. This, then, from the very nature of the case, was necessary to the legitimate discharge of the functions of a high priest” (Dr. J. Brown).

What the apostle is here leading up to was the proof that *God* was the Author of Christ’s Priesthood. As that will come before us in the verses which follow, we pass it by now.

“But he that is called of God, as was Aaron.” That which makes an office lawful is the personal call of God. A most important principle is this to recognize, but one which, in these days of abounding lawlessness, is now flagrantly ignored. The will of man is to be entirely subordinated to the will of God. Everything connected with His work is to be regulated by the Divine appointments. Expediency, convenience, popular customs, are ruled out of court. Nor is any one justified in rushing into a holy office uncalled of God. To elect myself, or to have no higher authority than the election of fellow-sinners, is to usurp the authority of God.

All ministry is in the hand of Christ (Revelation 2:1). He appointed the twelve apostles, and later the seventy disciples, to go forth. He bids us

“Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that *He* send forth

laborers into His harvest” (Matthew 9:38).

When He ascended on high *He*

“gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers” (Ephesians 4:11).

In the days of Paul it was said, “How shall they preach, except they be sent?” (Romans 10:15). But in these days, how many there are who *run without* being “sent!” Men have taken it upon themselves to be evangelists, pastors, teachers, who have received no call from God to such a work. The *absence* of His call, is evidenced by the absence of the qualifying gift. When God calls, He always equips.

Returning to the call of Aaron, we may observe that a time came when his official authority was challenged (Numbers 16:2). The manner in which God vindicated His servant is worthy of our most thoughtful attention. The record of it is found in Numbers 17: Aaron’s rod budded and brought forth almonds. *Supernatural fruit* was the sign and pledge that he had been called of God. Let this be laid well to heart. Judged by *this* standard, how many today stand accredited as God’s sent-servants? When God calls a man, He does not send him forth on any fruitless errand.

It is a solemn thing for one to obtrude himself into a sacred office. The tragic case of Uzzah (2 Chronicles 26:16-21) is a lasting warning. Alas, how rarely is it heeded; and how grievously is God dishonored! There are those who decry a “one-man ministry,” and cut themselves off from many an edifying message from God’s true servants; but after twenty years’ experience on three continents, the writer much prefers that which some so unchristianly condemn, to the lawlessness and fleshly exhibitions of an “every-man ministry” which is their alternative. Again: how many are urged to become Sunday School teachers and open-air speakers who have received neither call nor qualification from God to such work! Again: how many go forth as missionaries, only a few years later, at most, to abandon the work: what a proof that they were not “sent” or “called by God!” Let every reader weigh well Hebrews 5:4. Unless *God* has called you, enter not into any work for Him. Let restless souls seek grace to heed that Divine command, “*Be swift to hear, slow to speak*” (James 1:19).

CHAPTER 20
CHRIST SUPERIOR TO AARON
(HEBREWS 5:5-7)

The central design of the Holy Spirit in this Epistle needs to be kept steadily before the mind of the reader: that design was to prove the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. The center and glory of Judaism was the divinely appointed priesthood: what, then, had Christianity to offer at this point?

“The unbelieving Jews would be apt to say to their Christian brethren, ‘your new religion is deficient in the very first requisite of a religion — you have no high priest. How are your sins to be pardoned, when you have none to offer expiatory oblations for you? How are your wants to be supplied, when you have none to make intercession for you to God?’ The answer to this cavil is to be found in the apostle’s word ‘We *have* a High Priest’ Hebrews 4:14,” (Dr. J. Brown).

That God has provided His people with a High Priest is the fulfillment of His own promise. On the demonstrated failure of the Aaronical priesthood in the days of Eli and his sons (1 Samuel 1:14, 2; 12-17, 22), the Lord declared,

“And I will raise Me up a faithful Priest, that shall do according to that which is in Mine heart and in My mind: and I will build Him a sure house” (1 Samuel 2:35).

The fulfillment of this is found in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. But in taking up the study of the priesthood of Christ it is of the greatest possible importance to perceive that *both* the typical persons of Aaron and Melchizedek were required to prefigure the varied actions, and excellencies of the great High Priest who is the center and heart of Christianity. It was failure to recognize this which has resulted in so many inadequate and faulty treatises on the subject.

Both Aaron and Melchizedek were needed to set forth the various phases of Christ’s priestly ministry. But before the apostle could take up the latter, he had first to show that Christ fulfilled all which was adumbrated by the former: before he could dwell upon the points in which Christ’s excelled the Levitical priesthood, he must first establish its parallels and similarities. This the apostle does in Hebrews 5. In its first four verses we have a description of

the Levitical high priest:

First with respect to his nature (verse 1),

Second his employment (verse 1),

Third his qualification (verse 2),

Fourth his duty (verse 3),

Fifth his call (verse 4).

In the verses which immediately follow, an application of this is made, more directly, to Christ. In so doing the Holy Spirit had before Him a double design:

He first shows the *fulfillment of the type*. God's purpose in appointing Israel's high priests was to foreshadow the person and work of the Lord Jesus. Thus, there must be some resemblance between the one and the other. Second, that the Hebrews might know that the ministry and service of the Levitical order had *terminated*. Their purpose having been served, they were no longer needed; now that the Substance had come, the shadows were superfluous. Nay, more, their very retention would repudiate the design of their institution: they were *prefigurative*, therefore to perpetuate them would deny that the Reality had come. For the Levitical priesthood to go on functioning would argue that it had a value and a use apart from Christ. Hence the necessity of showing the relation of Aaron's priesthood to Christ's, that it might the more plainly appear that a continuance of the former was not only useless but pernicious.

That there *was* a close connection between the priesthood of Aaron and that of Christ is evident from the opening verse of our present passage. Having stated, "No man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as Aaron," the apostle now adds, "*So also* Christ" (verse 5), or, "In like manner Christ." Thus, unmistakably, a parallel is here drawn. *As* it was with the Levitical high priests in all things necessary to that office, *so*, in like manner, was it with the Christ. In verses 5-10 the same five things (personal sin excepted) predicated of Aaron and his successors were found in our great High Priest. That there were, also, dissimilarities was inevitable from the personal imperfections that appertained to Aaron and his descendants: had there been anything in Christ which corresponded to their blemishes and failures, He had been disqualified.

“So also Christ glorified not Himself to be made an high priest”
(verse 5).

In 2:17, 3:1, 4:14 it had been affirmed that Christ *is* High Priest. A difficulty is now anticipated and met. Considering the strictness of God’s law, and the specified requirements for one entering the priestly office, and more especially seeing that Jesus did not belong to the tribe of Levi, *how* could He be said to be “Priest?” In meeting this difficulty, the apostle emphasizes the fact that the *chief* requirement and qualification was a Divine *call*: “No man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God” (verse 4): applying that rule the apostle now shows, from Scripture itself, our Lord’s right and title to this office. Ere weighing the proof for this, let us note that He is here designated “the Christ”: the apostle’s design was to demonstrate that the promised Messiah, the Hope of the fathers, was to be High Priest forever over the house of God. The “Anointed One” signified His unction unto this office.

“So also Christ glorified not Himself to be made an high priest.” He did not take this dignity unto Himself; He did not obtrude Himself into office. As He declared,

“If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing: it is My Father that honoureth Me.” (John 8:54).

No, He had made Himself of no reputation; He had taken upon Him the form of a servant (Philippians 2:7), and He ever acted in perfect subjection to the Father. Nor was there any need for Him to exalt Himself: He had entered into a covenant or compact with the Father, and He might be safely trusted to fulfill His part of the agreement. “He that shall humble Himself shall be exalted” (Matthew 23:12) was no less true of the Head than of His members.

“So also Christ glorified not Himself to be made an high priest.” He to whom the authority belonged, invested Christ with the honors of priesthood, as He had Aaron. An ellipsis needs supplying to complete the implied antithesis: “But *He* glorified Him,” or *He* (God) made Him to be High Priest.” That Christ was *glorified* by being invested with the high priesthood is here plainly inferred. It was a high honor bestowed upon His mediatorial person, that is, upon His *humanity* (united unto His deity). Scripture plainly teaches that His mediatorial person was capable of being glorified, with degrees of glory, by augmentation of glory: see John 17:1; 1 Peter 1:21. This honor appears more

plainly when we come to consider the *nature* of the work assigned Him as Priest: this was no less than healing the breach which sin had made between God and men, and this by “magnifying the law and making it honorable.” It appears too when we contemplate the *effects* of His work: these were the vindicating and glorifying of the thrice holy God, the bringing of many sons unto glory, and the being Himself crowned with glory and honor. By that priestly work Christ has won for Himself the love, gratitude, and worship of a people who shall yet be perfectly conformed to His image, and shall praise Him world without end.

How wonderful and blessed it is to know that the honor of Christ and the procuring of our salvation are so intimately connected that it was His *glory* to be made our Mediator! There are three chief offices which Christ holds as Mediator: He is prophet, priest and potentate. But there is an importance, a dignity and a blessedness (little as carnal reason may be able to perceive it) attaching to His *priestly* office which does not belong to the other two. Scripture furnishes three proofs of this.

First, we never read of “our *great* prophet,” or “our *great* King,” but we do of “our great High Priest” (Hebrews 4:14)!

Second, the Holy Spirit nowhere affirms that Christ’s appointment to either His prophetic or His kingly office “glorified” Him; but this *is* insisted upon in connection with His call to the sacerdotal office (Hebrews 5:5)!

Third, we read not of the dread solemnity of any divine “oath” in connection with His inauguration to the prophetic or the kingly office, but we *do* His priestly —

“The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, thou art a priest forever.”
(Psalm 110:4)!

Thus the priesthood of Christ is invested with supreme importance.

“So also Christ glorified not Himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto Him, Thou art My Son, today have I begotten Thee.” (verse 5).

The apostle here cites the testimony of the 2nd Psalm: but *how does* this quotation confirm the priesthood of Christ or prove His “call” to that office? That the quotation here *is* adduced as proof-text is clear from the next verse — “As He saith *also* in *another* Psalm,” which is given as further

confirmation of His call. In weighing carefully the purpose for which Psalm 2:7 is here quoted, observe,

First, it is not the priesthood but His *call* thereunto which the apostle has before him.

Second, his object was simply to show that it was from *God* Christ had all His mediatorial authority.

Third, in Psalm 2:7, God declares the incarnate Christ to be His Son.

The proclamation. “Thou art My Son,” testified to the Father’s *acceptance* of Him in the discharge of all the work which had been committed to Him. This solemn approbation by the Father intimated that our Redeemer undertook nothing but what God had appointed. The Father’s owning of Christ in human nature as “My Son,” acclaimed Him Mediator — Priest for His people. In other words, Christ’s “call” by God consisted of the formal and public owning of Him as the incarnate Son. Psalm 2:7 describes the “call.”

It is to be observed that Psalm 2:7 opens with the words, “*I will declare the decree,*” which signifies a public announcement of what had been eternally predestinated and appointed in the everlasting covenant. It was God making known that the Mediator had received a Divine commission, and therefore was possessed of all requisite authority for His office. The deeper meaning, in this connection, of the proclamation, “Thou art My Son,” tells us that Christ’s sufficiency as Priest lies in His *Divine* nature. It was the dignity of His person which gave value to what He did. Because He was the Son, God appointed Him High Priest: He would not give this glory to another. Just as, because He is the Son, He has made Him “Heir of all things.” (Hebrews 1:2.)

“Thou art My Son.” The application of these words to the call which Christ received to His priestly office, refers, historically, we doubt not to what is recorded in Matthew 3:16, 17. There we behold a shadowing forth on the lower and visible plane of that which was to take place, a little later, in the higher and invisible sphere. There we find the antitype of what occurred on the occasion of Aaron’s induction to the priestly office. In Leviticus 8 we find three things recorded of the type:

First, his call (verses 1, 2).

Second, his anointing (verse 12).

Third, his consecration, (verse 22)

These same three things, only in inverse order again (for in *all* things He has the pre-eminence) are found on the occasion of our Savior's baptism, which was one of the great crises of His earthly career. For thirty years He had lived in retirement at Nazareth. Now the time had arrived for His public ministry. Accordingly, He consecrates, dedicates Himself to God — presenting Himself for baptism at the hands of God's servant. Second, it was at the Jordan He was anointed for His work: "God *anointed* Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 10:38). Third, it was there and then He was owned of God. "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." That was the Father's attestation to His acceptance of Christ for His priestly office and work.

Above, we have pointed out the first historical fulfillment of the prophetic word recorded in Psalm 2:7. As all prophecy has at least a double accomplishment, we find, accordingly, this same word of the Father's approbation of the Son recorded a second time in the Gospel narratives. In Matthew 17:5 we again hear the Father saying, "Thou art my Son," or "This is My Beloved Son." Here it was upon the mount, when Christ stood glorified before His disciples. It was then that God provided a miniature tableau of Christ's glorious kingdom. As Peter says, "We are eye-witnesses of His majesty" (2 Peter 1:16). And no doubt this is the profounder reference in Hebrews 5:5, for the 2nd Psalm, there quoted, foretells the setting up of Christ as "King." Yet, let it not be forgotten that the priesthood of Christ is the basis of His kingship: "He shall be a priest upon His throne." (Zechariah 6:13). It is as the "Lamb" He holds His title to the throne (Revelation 22:1) — cf. The "wherefore" of Philipians 2:9. He is a Priest with royal authority, a King with Priestly tenderness.

"As He saith also in another, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (verse 6).

A further proof of God's call of Christ to the priestly office is now given, the quotation being from the 110th Psalm, which was owned by the Jews as a Messianic one.

There the Father had by the Spirit of prophecy, said these words to His incarnate Son. Thus a double testimony was here adduced. The subject was of such importance that God deigned to give unto these Hebrews

confirmation added to confirmation. How graciously He bears with our dullness: compare the “twice” of Psalm 62:11, the “again” of the Lord Jesus in John 8:12,21 etc., the “*many*” proofs of Acts 1:3. “*As He saith*” is another evidence that God was the Author of the Old Testament. Here, the Father is heard speaking through David; in Psalm 22:1, the Son; in Hebrews 3:7, the Spirit. “*As He saith,*” namely unto the Son.

The Father’s here *speaking* to Him was His “call,” just as in Hebrews 7:21, it is His “oath.” “*Thou art a priest*” was declarative of His eternal decree, of the everlasting covenant between the Father and the Son, wherein He was designated unto this office. Thus was Christ “called of God as was Aaron.”

“Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared” (verse 7).

In seeking to expound this verse three things require attention. To ascertain its scope, or theme, to discover its relation to the context and its own contribution unto the apostle’s argument, and to define its solemn terms. Its theme is the priestly ministry of Christ: this is evident from the expression “offered up.”

“As the theme of verses 4-6 is, ‘Jesus Christ has been divinely appointed to the priestly office, so the theme of verses 7-9 is Jesus Christ has successfully executed the priestly office.’” (Dr. J. Brown).

Its relation to the context is that the apostle was here showing the “compassed with infirmity” (verse 2) is found in the Antitype: the “strong crying and tears” being the proof. Its terms will be weighed in what follows. Ere submitting our own interpretations, we first subjoin the helpful analysis of Dr. Brown.

“The body of the sentence (verses 7-10) divides itself into two parts:

1. ‘He’ Christ in the character of a Priest ‘learned obedience by the things which He suffered.’
2. ‘He’, in the same character, ‘has become the Author of eternal salvation to all that obey Him.’ The clauses, ‘In the days of his flesh,’ and ‘though He were a Son,’ qualify the general declaration, ‘He learned obedience by the things which He suffered,’ and the clauses, ‘when *He* had offered up,’ ‘prayers and supplications with

strong crying and tears, unto Him that was able to save Him from death,' and 'when He had heard' — or having been heard — 'in that He feared,' contain in them illustrations both of the nature and extent of those sufferings by which Christ learned obedience; whilst the clause, 'being made perfect,' qualifies the second part of the sentence, connecting it with the first, and showing how His 'learning obedience by the things which He suffered,' led to His being 'the Author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.'”

In this 7th verse two other of the qualifications of Israel's high priest are accommodated to Christ.

First, his being “compassed with infirmity” (verse 2) so as to fit him for having compassion on those for whom he transacted. In like manner was the Son, when He entered upon the discharge of His office, compassed with sinless infirmity. This is here exemplified in a threefold way.

First, the time when He fulfilled the Aaronic type, namely, “in the days of His flesh,” which was before He was “crowned with glory and honor.”

Second, from His condition, “in the days of His flesh,” which signifies a state of weakness and humiliation.

Third, from the manner of His deportment: “with strong crying and tears,” for these proceed from the “infirmity” of our nature — angels do not weep.

Second, Israel's high priest was appointed to “offer.” (verses 1, 2). This is what Christ is here seen doing: *offering* up to *God* — “to Him that was able to save Him.” This was a sacerdotal act, as is clear from the fact that the declaration of verse 7 is immediately preceded (verse 6), and succeeded (verse 10) by a reference to His *priesthood*. Let us now examine our verse clause by clause.

“Who in the days of His flesh.”

“Flesh as applied to Christ, signifies human nature not yet glorified, with all its infirmities, wherein He was exposed unto — hunger, thirst, weariness, labor, sorrow, grief, fear, pain, death itself. Hereby doth the apostle express what he had before laid down in the person of the high priest according to the law — he was ‘compassed’ with

infirmity.” (Dr. John Owen.)

The word “flesh” is often used in Scripture of man as a poor, frail, mortal creature: Psalm 78:39, 65:2. The “days of His flesh” is antithetical to “made perfect.” They cover the entire period of our Lord’s humiliation, from the manger to the grave — cf. 2 Corinthians 5:16. During that time Christ was “a man of sorrows,” filled with them, never free from them; “and acquainted with grief,” as a companion that never departed from Him. No doubt there is special reference to the close of those days when His sorrows and trials came to a head.

“The ‘days of His flesh’ mean the whole time of His humiliation — that period when He came among men as one of them, but still the Son of God, whose majesty was hid. As applied to Christ ‘flesh’ intimates that He put on a true humanity, but a humanity under the weight of imputed guilt, with the curse that followed in its train — a sinless, yet a sin-bearing humanity. The Lord felt the weakness of the flesh in His whole vicarious work, and though personally spotless, was in virtue of taking our place, subjected to all that we were heir to. We do not, indeed, find in Him the personal consequences of sin, such as sickness and disease, but the consequences which could competently fall to the sinless substitute; for He never was in Adam’s covenant, but was Himself the last Adam. As He took flesh for an official purpose, He submitted to the consequences following in the train of sin-bearing — hunger and thirst, toil and fatigue in the sweat of His brow, persecution and injustice, arrest and sufferings, wounds and death.” (Professor Smeaton on the Atonement.)

“When He had offered up prayers and supplications.” The Greek word for “offer up” signifies “to bear toward.” It occurs in this Epistle sixteen times, and always as a *priestly* act. See Hebrews 8:3, 9:7, 14, 10:11, 14, 18, etc. Prayers and supplications are expressive of the frailty of human nature, for we never read of angels praying. “Prayers” are of two kinds: petitions for that which is good, requests for deliverance from that which is evil: both are included here. The Greek word for “supplications” occurs nowhere else in the New Testament; in its classical usage it denotes an olive bough, lifted up by those who were supplicating others for peace. What is here in view is Christ

“offering” *Himself* unto God (Hebrews 9:14), His offering being accompanied with priestly prayers and supplications. These are mentioned to exemplify His “infirmity,” and to impress upon us how great a work it was to make expiation for sin. These prayers and supplications are not to be restricted to the agony of Gethsemane, or the hours of torture on the Cross; they must be regarded as being offered by Him through the entire period of His humiliation.

“The pressure of human guilt habitually weighed down His mind and He was by way of eminence a Man of prayer, as well as a Man of sorrows.” (Dr. Brown.)

“With strong crying and tears.” These words not only intimate the intensity of the sufferings endured by our Priest, but also the extent to which He felt them. The God-man was no stoic, unmoved by the fearful experiences through which He passed. No, He suffered acutely, not only in body, but in His soul too. The curse of the law, under which He had spontaneously placed Himself, smote His soul as well as His body, for *we* had sinned in both, and He redeemed both. These crying and tears were evoked not by what He received at the hands of man, but what imputed guilt had brought down upon Him from the hand of God. He was overwhelmed by the pressure of horror and anguish, caused by the Divine anger against sin.

“With strong crying and tears.” These were, in part, the fulfillment of that prophecy in Psalm 22:1: “the words of My roaring.” A part of those “strong cryings” are recorded in the Gospels. To His disciples He said, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death” (Matthew 26:38). To the Father He prayed, “If Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me” (Luke 22:42). There we read of Him “being in an agony,” that “He prayed more earnestly,” that “His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.” Such was the “*travail* of His soul” that He cried for deliverance. He voluntarily entered the place into which sin had brought us: one of misery and wretchedness. No heart can conceive the terribleness of that conflict through which our Blessed Substitute passed.

“Jesus cried with a loud voice, My God, My God, Why hast Thou forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46):

here again we witness the “strong crying” accompanying His sacrifice. And what is the application of this to us? If His sacrifice was offered to God with

“strong crying and tears” let none of us imagine we are savingly interested therein if our hearts are unmoved by the awfulness of sin, and are in the coldness of impenitence and the sloth of unbelief. Let him who would approach unto Christ ponder well how He approached unto God on behalf of sinners.

“Unto Him that was able to save Him from death.” The particular character in which our suffering Surety here viewed God, calls for close attention. These words reveal to us how Christ contemplated Deity at that time: “unto Him that is able.” Ability or power is either natural or moral. Natural power is strength and active efficacy; in God, omnipotence. Moral power is right and authority; in God, absolute sovereignty. Christ looked toward both. In view of God’s omnipotence He sought deliverance; in view of His sovereignty, He meekly submitted. The former was the object of His faith; the latter, of His fear. These two attributes of God should ever be before us when we approach unto His footstool. A sight of His omnipotence will encourage our hearts and strengthen our faith: a realization of His high sovereignty will humble us before Him and check our presumption.

“Unto Him that was able to save Him from death.” This also makes known the *cause* of His “strong crying and tears:” it was His sight of death. What “death?” Not merely the separation of the soul from the body, but the “wages of sin,” that curse of the law which God, as a just judge, inflicts on the guilty. As the Surety of the covenant, as the One who had voluntarily taken upon Himself the debts of all His people, the wrath of a holy God must be visited upon Him. To this Christ referred when He said,

“I am afflicted and ready to die from youth up; I suffer Thy terrors, I am distracted” (Psalm 88:15).

Fiercer grew the conflict as the end was neared, and stronger were His cries for deliverance:

“The sorrows of death compassed Me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon Me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech Thee, deliver My soul” (Psalm 116:34).

But what was the “deliverance” which He sought? Exemption from suffering this death? No, for He had received commandment to endure it (John 10:18,

Philippians 2:8). What then? Note carefully that Christ prayed not to be delivered from *dying*, but from “death.” We believe the answer is twofold. First, He sought to be *sustained* under it. When death as the penal visitation of God’s anger upon Him for our sins was presented to His view, He had deep and dreadful apprehension of the utter inability of frail human nature bearing up under it, and prevailing against it. He was conscious of His need of Divine succor and support, to enable Him to endure the incalculable load which was upon Him. Therefore it was His duty, as perfect yet dependent Man, to pray that He might not be overwhelmed and overborne. His confidence was in “Him that is able.” He declared,

“For the Lord God will help Me, therefore shall I not be confounded” (Isaiah 50:17).

“And was heard in that He feared.” The best commentators differ in their understanding of these words. Two interpretations have been given, which, we believe, need to be combined to bring out the full meaning of this clause. Calvin gave as its meaning that the object of Christ’s “fear” was the awful judgment of God upon our sins, the smiting of Him with the sword of justice, His desertion by God Himself. Arguing against the “fear” here having reference to Christ’s own piety, because of which God answered Him, this profound exegete points out the *absence* of the possessive “His fear;” that the Greek preposition “*apo*” (rather than “*huper*”) signifies “from,” not “on account of;” and that the word “fear” means, for the most part, anxiety — “consternation” is its force as used in the Sept. His words are, “I doubt not that Christ was ‘heard’ *from that* which He feared, so that He was not overwhelmed by His evils or swallowed up by death. For in this contest the Son of God had to engage, not because He was tried by unbelief (the source of all our fears), but because He sustained as a man in the flesh the judgment of God, the terror of which could not have been overcome without an arduous effort” — and, we may add, without a Divine strengthening.

The sufferings of Christ wrung His soul, producing sorrow, perplexity, horror, dread. This is shown by His exercises and agony in Gethsemane.

While He suffered God’s “terrors,” He was “distracted” (Psalm 88:15). “I am poured out like water,” He exclaimed,

“and all My bones are out of joint: My heart is like wax, it is melted in the midst of My bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd;

and My tongue cleaveth to My jaws” (Psalm 22:14, 15).

And again, He cried,

“Save Me, O God; for the waters are come in unto My soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing.... Let not the water-flood overflow Me, neither let the deep swallow Me up” (Psalm 69:1, 2, 15).

Fear, pain, torture of body and soul, were now His portion. He was then enduring that which shall yet cause the damned to weep and wail and gnash their teeth. He was deserted by God. The comforting influences of His relation to God were withdrawn. His relation to God as *His* God and Father were the fount of all His comfort and joy. The sense of this was now suspended. Therefore was He filled with heaviness and sorrow inexpressible, and, “and with strong crying and tears” He prayed for deliverance.

“*And* was heard.” This means, first of all, God’s approval or acceptance of the petitioner himself. Christ’s prayer here was answered in the same way as was Paul’s request for the removal of the thorn in his flesh — not by exemption, but by Divine succor which gave enablement to bear the trial. In Gethsemane

“There appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, *strengthening Him*” (Luke 22:43).

So too on the Cross.

“His mind and heart were fortified and sustained against the dread and terror which His humanity felt, so as to come to a perfect composure in the will of God. He was heard insofar as He desired to be heard; for although He could not but desire deliverance from the whole, as He was man, yet He desired it not absolutely as the God-man, as He was wholly subject to the will of the Father” (Dr. John Owen).

“And was heard in that He feared.” Other commentators have rightly pointed out that the Greek word for “fear” here signifies godly reverence or piety: cf. Hebrews 12:28, where it is found in its noun form. Having from godly fear offered up prayers and supplications, He was heard. His personal perfections made His petition acceptable. This was His own assurance, at the triumphant completion of His sufferings: “Thou hast heard Me from the horns of the

unicorns” (Psalm 22:21). This brings us to the second and ultimate meaning of the Savior’s petition to be delivered “from death,” and the corresponding second response of the Father.

“To ‘save from death’ means, to deliver from death after having died. God manifested Himself as ‘Him who was able to save Him from death,’ when, as ‘The God of peace’ — the pacified Divinity — ‘He brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus that great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the everlasting covenant’. Hebrews 13:20” (Dr. J. Brown).

Thus, to summarize the contents of this most solemn and wonderful verse, we here learn:

First, that our blessed Substitute, in the discharge of His priestly work, encountered that awful wrath of God which is the wages of sin — “death.”

Second, that He encountered it in the frailty of human nature, compassed with infirmity — “in the days of His flesh.”

Third, that He felt, to an extent we are incapable of realizing, the visitation of God’s judgment upon sin — evidenced by His “strong crying and tears.”

Fourth, that He cried for deliverance: for strength to endure and for an exodus from the grave.

Fifth, that God answered by bestowing the needed succor and by raising Him from the dead.

Many are the lessons which might be drawn from all that has been before us. Into what infinite depths of humiliation did the Son of God descend! How unspeakably dreadful was His anguish! What a hideous thing sin must be if such a sacrifice was required for its atonement! How real and terrible a thing is the wrath of God! What love moved Him to suffer so on our behalf! What must be the portion of those who despise and reject such a Savior! What an example has He left us of turning to God in the hour of need! What fervor is called for if our prayers are to be answered! Above all, what gratitude, love, devotion and praise are due Him from those for whom the Son of God died!

CHAPTER 21

CHRIST SUPERIOR TO AARON

(HEBREWS 5:8-10)

The first ten verses of Hebrews 5 present to us a subject of such vast and vital importance that we dare not hurry over our exposition of them. They bring to our view the person of the Lord Jesus and His official work as the great High Priest of God's people. They set forth His intrinsic sufficiency for the discharge of the honourable but arduous functions of that office. They show us His right and title for the executing thereof. They reveal His full qualifications thereunto. They make known the nature and costliness of His sacrificial work. They declare the triumphant issue thereof. Yet plain as is their testimony, the subject of which they treat is so dimly apprehended by most Christians today, that we deem it necessary to devote a lengthy introduction to the setting forth of the principal features belonging to the Priesthood of Christ.

Let us begin by asking the question, Why did God ordain the office of priesthood? Wherein lay the *necessity* for it? The first and most obvious answer is, Because of sin. Sin created a breach between a holy God and His sinful creatures. Were God to advance toward them in His essential character it could only be in judgment, involving their sure destruction; for He "will by no means clear the guilty" (Exodus 34:7). Nor was the sinner capable of making the slightest advance toward God, for he was "alienated from the life of God" (Ephesians 4:18), and thus, "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1); and as such, not only powerless to perform a spiritual act, but completely devoid of all spiritual aspirations. Looked at in himself, the case of fallen man was utterly hopeless.

But God has designs of *grace* unto men, not unto all men, but unto a remnant of them chosen out of a fallen race. Had God shown grace to all of Adam's descendants, the glory of His grace had been clouded, for it would have looked as though the provisions of grace were something which were due men from God, because of His having failed to preserve them from falling into sin. But grace is *unmerited* favor, something to which no creature is entitled, something which he cannot in any wise *claim* from God.

Therefore it must be exercised in a *sovereign* manner by the Author of it

(Exodus 33:19), that grace may appear to be grace (Romans 11:6).

But in determining to show grace unto that people whom He had chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4, 2 Timothy 1:9), God must act in harmony with His own perfections. The sin of His people could not be ignored. Justice clamored for its punishment. If they were to be delivered from its penal consequences, it could only be by an adequate satisfaction being made for them. Without blood shedding there is no remission of sins. An atonement was a fundamental necessity. Grace could not be shown at the expense of justice; no, grace must “reign through righteousness” (Romans 5:21). Grace could only be exercised on the ground of accomplished redemption (Romans 3:24).

And *who* was capable of rendering a perfect satisfaction unto the law of God? Who was qualified to meet all the demands of Divine holiness, if a sinful people were to be redeemed consistently with its claims? Who was competent both to assume the responsibilities of that people, and discharge them to the full satisfaction of the Most High? Who was able both to honor the rights of the Almighty, and yet enter sympathetically into the weakness and needs of those who were to be saved? Clearly, the only solution to this problem and the only answer to these questions lay in a *Mediator*, one who had both ability and title to act on God’s behalf and on theirs. For this reason was the Son of God appointed to be made in the likeness of sin’s flesh, that as the God-man He might be a “merciful and faithful High Priest” (Hebrews 2:17); for *mediatorship* is the chief thing in priesthood.

Now this is what is brought before us in the opening verse of Hebrews 5. There we are shown three parties: on the one side God, on the other side men, and the high priest as the connecting link between:

“For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins” (verse 1).

No correct conception of priesthood can exist where this double relation and this double service are not perceived. In Christ alone is this perfectly made good. He is the one connecting link between Heaven and earth, the only Mediator between God and “men” (1 Timothy 2:5). From Deity above, He is the Mediator downward to men beneath; and from men below, He is the Head upward to God. Priesthood is the *alone channel* of living relationship with a

holy God. Solemn and awful proof of this is found in the fact that Satan, and then Adam, fell because there was *no Mediator* who stood between them and God, to maintain them in their standing before Him.

Above we have said, that Christ is the one connecting link between Heaven and earth, that He alone bridges the chasm between God and His people, considered as fallen and mined sinners. Our last sentence really sums up the whole of Hebrews chapters 1 and 2. There we have a lengthy argument setting forth the relation between the two natures in Christ, the Divine and the human, and the needs-be of both to fit Him for the priestly office. He must be the Son of God in human nature. He must “in all things be made like unto His brethren” in order that He might be “a merciful and faithful High Priest;” in order that He might “make propitiation for the sins of the people;” and in order that He might be “able to succor them that are tempted.” Hebrews 2:17, 18 brings us to the climax of the apostle’s argument in those two chapters.

The priestly work of Christ was to “make propitiation for the sins of the people.” It was to render a complete satisfaction to God on behalf of all their liabilities. It was to “magnify the law and make it honorable.” (Isaiah 42:21). In order to do this it was necessary for the law to be kept, to be perfectly obeyed in thought, word and deed. Accordingly, the Son of God was “made under the law” (Galatians 4:4), and “fulfilled” its requirements (Matthew 5:17). And this perfect obedience of Christ, performed substitutionally and officially, is now imputed to His people: as it is written, “By the obedience of One shall many be (legally) made righteous” (Romans 5:19). But “magnifying the law” also involved His enduring its penalty on the behalf of His peoples’ violation of its precepts, and this He suffered, and so “redeemed us from the curse of the law” by “being made a curse for us” (Galatians 3:13).

To sum up now the ground we have covered.

1. The *occasion* of Christ’s priesthood was sin: it was this which alienated the creature from the Creator.
2. The *source* of Christ’s priesthood was grace: rebels were not entitled to it; such a wondrous provision proceeded solely from the Divine favor.
3. The *Junction* of Christ’s priesthood is mediation, to come between, to officiate for men God-wards.

4. The *qualification* for perfect priesthood is a God-man: none but God could meet the requirements of God; none but Man could meet the needs of men.
5. The *work* of priesthood is to make propitiation for sin. To these we may add:
6. The *design* of priesthood is that the claims of God may be honored, the person of Christ glorified, and His people redeemed.
7. The *outcome* of His priesthood is the maintaining of His people in the favor of God. Other subsidiary points will come before us, D.V., in the later chapters.

Verses 8, 9 of Hebrews 5 complete the passage which was before us in the preceding article. That we may the better perceive their scope and meaning, let us recapitulate the teaching of the earlier verses. In this first division of Hebrews 5 the apostle's design was to show how that Christ fulfilled the Aaronic type.

First, He had been Divinely called or appointed to the priestly office (verses 4-6).

Second, to fit Him for compassion on behalf of those for whom He officiated, He was "compassed with (sinless) infirmity" (verses 3, 7).

Third, He had "offered" to God, as Priest, "as for the people so also for himself" (verse 3), "strong crying and tears" (verse 7). That which is now to be before us, brings out still other perfections of Christ which qualified Him to fill the sacerdotal office, and also makes known the happy issues therefrom.

"Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered" (verse 8).

In view of His unspeakable humiliation, portrayed in the previous verse, the Divine dignity of our High Priest is here mentioned both to guard and enhance His glory.

"The things discoursed in the foregoing verse seem to have an inconsistency with the account given us concerning the person of Jesus Christ at the entrance of this Epistle. For He is therein declared to be the Son of God, and that in such a glorious manner as to be deservedly exalted above all the angels in heaven. Here He is

represented as in a low, distressed condition, humbly, as it were, begging for His life, and pleading with ‘strong crying and tears’ before Him who was able to deliver Him. These things might seem unto the Hebrews to have some kind of repugnancy unto one another. And, indeed, they are a ‘stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense,’ unto many at this day; they are not able to reconcile them in their carnal minds and reasonings.... “The aim of the apostle in this place is, not to repel the objections of unbelievers, but to instruct the faith of those who do believe in the truth of these things. For He doth not only manifest that they were all possible, upon the account of His participation of flesh and blood, who was in Himself the eternal Son of God; but also that the whole of the humiliation and distress therein ascribed unto Him was necessary, with respect unto the office which He had undertaken to discharge, and the work which was committed unto Him. And this he doth in the next ensuing and following verses” (Dr. John Owen).

“Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered” (verse 8).

First, what relation does this statement bear to the passage of which it is a part?

Second, what is the particular “obedience” here referred to?

Third, in what sense did the Son “learn obedience”?

Fourth, how did the things “which He suffered” teach Him obedience?

Fifth, what are the practical lessons here pointed for us? These are some of the questions raised by our verse which call for answer.

“Though He were a Son” looks back more immediately to verse 5, where a part of Psalm 2:7 is quoted.

“That quotation has also reminded us of the Divine dignity and excellence of Christ as the ground of His everlasting priesthood. Jesus had a Divine commission; He was appointed by the Father because He was the Son; and thus He was possessed of all requisite qualifications for His office. Nevertheless the Son had to ‘learn obedience.’ He must not only possess authority and dignity, but be able to sympathize with the condition of sinners. By entering the

circle of human experience He was made a merciful and faithful High Priest, and through suffering fitted for compassionately guiding our highest interests, as well as conducting our cause. The bond of brotherhood, the identity of suffering and sorrow, fitted Him to be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He was made like unto His brethren (Hebrews 2:17); He suffered, that He might be in a position to succor them that are tempted (Hebrews 2:18); He was made in all respects like us, with the single exception of personal sinfulness (Hebrews 4:15); and He learned obedience by what He suffered. The design of all this was, that He might be a compassionate and sympathizing High Priest” (Professor Smeaton).

Here then is the answer to our first question. In the 8th verse the Holy Spirit is still showing how that which was found in the type (verse 3), is also to be seen in the Antitype. What could more emphatically exemplify the fact that our High Priest was “compassed with infirmity” than to inform us that He not only felt acutely the experiences through which He passed, but also that He “learned obedience” by those very experiences? Nor need we hesitate to go as far as the Spirit of truth has gone; rather must we seek grace to believe all that He has said. None were more jealous of the Son’s glory than He, and none knew so well how His glory had been displayed by His voluntary descent into such unfathomable depths of shame. While holding firmly to Christ’s absolute deity, we must not (through a false conception of His dignity) shrink from following Him in thought and affection into that abyss of humiliation unto which, for our sakes, He came. When Scripture says, “He learned obedience” we must not whittle down these words to mean anything less than they affirm.

“Yet learned He obedience” brings out, very forcibly, the *reality* of the humanity which the Son assumed. He became true Man. If we bow to the inspired statement that “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52), why balk — as many have — at He “learned obedience?” True, blessedly true, these words do not signify that there was in Him a will which resisted the law of God, and which needed severe discipline to bring it into subjection. As Calvin well says, “Not that He was driven to this by force, or that He had need of being thus exercised, as the case is with oxen or horses when their ferocity is to be tamed; for He was abundantly willing to render to His Father the obedience which He owed.”

No, He declared, “I *delight* to do Thy will, O God” (Psalm 40:8). And again, “My *meat* is to do the will of Him that sent Me” (John 4:34).

But what is “obedience?” It is subjection to the will of another: it is an owning of the authority of another; it is performing the pleasure of another. This was an entirely new experience for the Son. Before His incarnation, He had Himself occupied the place of authority, of supreme authority. His seat had been the throne of the universe. From it He had issued commands and had enforced obedience. But now He had taken the place of a servant. He had assumed a creature nature. He had become man. And in this new place and role He conducted Himself with befitting submission to Another. He had been “made under the law,” and its precepts must be honored by Him. But more: the place He had taken was an official one. He had come here as the Surety of His people. He had come to discharge their liabilities. He had come to work out a perfect righteousness for them; and therefore, as their Representative, He must obey God’s law. As the One who was here to maintain the claims of God, He must “magnify the law and make it honorable,” by yielding to it a voluntary, perfect, joyous compliance.

Again; the “obedience” of Christ formed an essential part of His priestly oblation. This was typified of old — though very few have perceived it — in the animals prescribed for sacrifice: they were to be “without spot, without blemish.” That denoted their excellency; only the “choice of the flock” (Ezekiel 24:5) were presented to God. The antitype of this pointed to far more than the sinlessness of *Christ* — *that* were merely negative. It had in view His positive perfections, His active obedience, His personal excellency. When Christ “offered Himself without spot to God” (Hebrews 9:14), He presented a Sacrifice which had already fulfilled every preceptive requirement of the law. And it was as Priest that He thus offered Himself to God, thereby fulfilling the Aaronic type. But in all things *He* has the pre-eminence, for at the cross He was both Offerer and Offering. Thus there is the most intimate connection between the contents of verse 8 and its context, especially with verse 7.

“Yet learned He obedience.” The incarnate Son actually entered into the experience of what it was *to* obey. He denied Himself, He renounced His own will, He “pleased not Himself” (Romans 15:3). There was no insubordination in Him, nothing disinclined to God’s law; instead, His obedience was

voluntary and hearty. But by being “made under the law” as Man, He “learned” what Divine righteousness required of Him; by receiving commandment to lay down His life (John 10:18), He “learned” the extent of that obedience which holiness demanded. Again; as the God-man, Christ “learned” obedience experimentally. As we learn the sweetness or bitterness of food by actually tasting it, so He learned what submission is by yielding to the Father’s will.

“But, moreover, there was still somewhat peculiar in that obedience which the Son of God is said to learn from His own sufferings, namely, what it is for a *sinless person* to suffer for sinners, ‘the Just for the unjust.’ The obedience herein was peculiar unto Him, nor do we know, nor can we have an experience of the ways and paths of it” (Dr. John Owen).

“By the things which He suffered” announces the *means* by which He learned obedience. Everything that Christ suffered, from first to last, during the days of His flesh, is here included. His entire course was one of suffering, and He had the experience of obedience in it all. Every scene through which He passed provided occasion for the exercise of those graces wherein obedience consists. Meekness and lowliness (Matthew 11:29), self-denial (Romans 15:3), patience (Revelation 1:9), faith (Hebrews 2:13), were habitually resident in His holy nature, but they were only capable of exercise by reason of His suffering. As His suffering increased, so His obedience grew in extent and intensity, by the very pressure brought to bear upon it; the hotter the conflict grew, the more His inward submission was manifested outwardly (compare Isaiah 50:6, 7). There was not only sufferings passively endured, but obedience in suffering, and that the most amazing and unparalleled.

To sum up now the important teachings of this wonderful verse: He who personally was high above all obedience, stooped so low as to enter the place of obedience. In that place He learned, by His sufferings, the actual experience of obedience — He obeyed. Hereby we learn what was required to the right discharge of Surety-ship: there must needs be both an active and a passive obedience vicariously rendered. The opening word “though” intimates that the high dignity of His person did not exempt Him from the humiliation which our salvation involved. The word “yet” is a note of exclamation, to deepen our sense of wonderment at His infinite

condescension on our behalf, for in His place of servitude He never ceased to be the Lord of glory.

“He was no less God when He died, than when He was ‘declared to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead,’ Romans 1:4” (Dr. John Owen).

And what are the practical lessons here pointed for us?

First, our Redeemer has left us an example that we should follow His steps. He has shown us how to wear our creature nature: complete and unquestioning subjection to God is that which is required of us.

Second, Christ has hereby taught us the extent to which God ought to be submitted unto: He was “obedient unto death.”

Third, obedience to God cost something: “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12).

Fourth, sufferings undergone according to the will of God are highly instructive. Christ Himself learned by the things which He suffered; much more may we do so, who have so much more to learn (Hebrews 12:10, 11).

Fifth, God’s love for us does not exempt from suffering. Though the Son of His love, Christ was not spared great sorrows and trials: sufficient for the disciple to be as his Master.

“And being made perfect, He became the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him” (verse 9).

“The apostle having declared the sufferings of Christ as our High Priest, in His offering of Himself, with the necessity thereof, proceeds now to declare both what was effected thereby, and what was the especial design of God therein. And this in general was that, the Lord Christ, considering our lost condition, might be every way fitted to be a ‘perfect cause of eternal salvation unto all that obey Him,’ There are, therefore, two things in the words, both which God aimed at and accomplished in the sufferings of Christ.

1. On His own part, that He might be ‘made perfect;’ not absolutely, but with respect unto the administration of His office in the behalf of sinners.
2. With respect unto believers, that He might be unto them the

‘Author of eternal salvation’” (Dr. John Owen).

This is a good epitome of the teaching of the 9th verse, but a number of things in it call for fuller elucidation.

“And being made perfect.” The word, “perfect” is one which is found frequently in this Epistle. It signifies “to consummate” or “complete.” It also means “to dedicate” or “fully consecrate.” Our present passage contains its second occurrence, the first being in Hebrews 2:10, to which we must refer the reader. There the verb is used actively with respect to the Father: it became Him to “make perfect” the Captain of our salvation. Here it is used passively, telling of the *effect* of that act of God on the person of Christ; by His suffering He was “*perfected*.” It has reference to the setting apart of Christ as Priest.

“The legal high priests were consecrated by the sufferings and deaths of the beasts which were offered in sacrifice at their consecration (Exodus 29). But it belonged unto the perfection of the priesthood of Christ to be consecrated in and by His own sufferings” (Dr. John Owen).

It is most important to note that the reference here is to what took place in “the days of His flesh,” not at His resurrection or ascension — verses 7-9 form one complete statement. The Greek is even more emphatic than the A.V.: “And having been perfected became to those that obey Him all, the Author of salvation eternal.” It was not in heaven that He was “*perfected*,” but *before* He “became the Author of salvation” — cf. Hebrews 10:14, which affirms our oneness with Him in His approved obedience and accomplished sacrifice.

“And being made perfect” does not contemplate any change wrought in His person, but speaks of His being fully qualified to officiate as Priest, to present Himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for the sins of His people. His official “perfecting” was accomplished in and by means of His sufferings. By His offering up of Himself He was consecrated to the priestly office, and by the active presentation of His sacrifice to God He discharged the essential function thereof. Thus, the inspired declaration we are now considering furnishes another flat contradiction (cf. Hebrews 2:17) of those who affirm that Christ was not constituted and consecrated High Priest till His resurrection. True, there were other acts and duties pertaining to His

sacerdotal office yet to be performed, but these depend for their efficacy on His previous sufferings; those He was now made meet for. The “being made perfect” or “consecrated” to the priestly office at the Cross, finds a parallel in our Lord’s own words, “For their sakes I sanctify (dedicate) Myself” (John 17:19). “Here is the ultimate end why it was necessary for Christ to suffer: that He might thus become initiated into His priesthood” (John Calvin).

“He became the Author of eternal salvation.”

“Having thus been made perfect through such intense, obedient, pious suffering — having thus obtained all the merit, all the power and authority, all the sympathy, which are necessary to the discharge of the high priestly functions of Savior, ‘He is become the Author of eternal salvation.’ This is the second statement which the apostle makes in illustration of the principle, that our Lord has proved Himself qualified for the office to which He has been divinely appointed by a successful discharge of its functions, the subsidiary clause, ‘being made perfect,’ connects this second statement with the first; showing how our Lord’s ‘learning obedience by the things which He suffered in the days of His flesh’ — His humbled state led to His being now, in His exalted state, ‘the Author of salvation to all who obey Him’.... ‘Being made perfect’ is just equivalent to ‘having thus obtained’ every necessary qualification for actually saving them” (Dr. J. Brown).

The “Author of salvation” conveys a slightly different thought than the “Captain of salvation” in Hebrews 2:10. There it is Christ actually conducting many sons, by the powerful administration of His Word and Spirit, unto glory. Here it is the work of Christ as the meritorious and efficient Cause of their salvation. It was the perfect satisfaction which He rendered to God, the propitiatory sacrifice of Himself, which has secured the eternal deliverance of His people from the penal consequences of their sins. By His expiation He became the purchaser and procurer of our redemption. His intercession and His gift of the Spirit are the effects and fruits of His perfect oblation.

“He has done everything that is necessary to make the salvation of His people consistent with, and illustrative of, the perfections of the Divine character and the principles of the Divine government; and He actually does save His people from guilt, depravity and misery

— He actually makes them really holy and happy hereafter” (Dr. J. Brown).

The salvation which Christ has procured and now secures unto all His people, is here said to be an “*eternal*” one.

First of all, none other was suited unto us. By virtue of the nature which we have received from God, we are made for eternal duration. But by sin we made ourselves obnoxious to eternal damnation, being by nature “the children of wrath, even as others” (Ephesians 2:3). Therefore an eternal salvation was our deep and dire need.

Second, the merits of our Savior being infinite, required from the hand of Justice a corresponding salvation, one infinite in value and in duration: cf. Hebrews 9:12.

Third, the salvation procured by our great High Priest is here contrasted with that obtained by the Levitical high priest: the atonement which Aaron made, held good for one year only (Leviticus 16); but that which Christ has accomplished, is of eternal validity.

“To all them that obey Him” describes those who are the beneficiaries of our High Priest’s atonement. “The expression is emphatical. To all and every one of them that obey Him; not any one of them shall be exempted from a share and interest in this salvation; nor shall any one of any other sort be admitted thereunto” (Dr. John Owen).

It is not all men universally, but those only who bow to His scepter. The recipients of His great salvation are here spoken of according to the terms of human accountability. All who hear the Gospel are commanded to believe (1 John 3:23); such is their responsibility. The “obedience” of this verse is an evangelical, not a legal one: it is the “obedience *of faith*” (Romans 16:26). So also in Acts 5:32 we read of the Holy Spirit “whom God hath given to them that obey Him.” But this “obedience” is not to be restricted to the initial act, but takes in the whole life of faith. A Christian, in contradistinction from a non-Christian, is one who *obeys* Christ (John 14:23). The “all them that obey Him” of Hebrews 5:9 is in opposition to “yet learned He obedience” in the previous verse: it identifies the members with their Head!

Before taking up the next verse, let us seek to point out how that the passage

which has been before us, not only shows Christ provided the substance of what was foreshadowed by the Levitical priests, but also how that He excelled them at every point, thus demonstrating the immeasurable superiority of Christ over Aaron.

First, Aaron was but a man (verse 1); Christ, the “Son.”

Second, Aaron offered “sacrifices” (verse 1); Christ offered one perfect sacrifice, once for all.

Third, Aaron was “compassed with infirmity” (verse 2); Christ was the “mighty” One (Psalm 89:19).

Fourth, Aaron needed to offer for his own sins (verse 3); Christ was sinless.

Fifth, Aaron offered a sacrifice external to himself; Christ offered Himself.

Sixth, Aaron effected only a temporary salvation. Christ secured an eternal one.

Seventh, Aaron’s atonement was for Israel only; Christ’s for “all them that obey Him.”

“Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchizedek” (verse 10).

This verse forms the transition between the first division of Hebrews 5, and its second which extends to the end of chapter 7 — the second being interrupted by a lengthy parenthesis. In the first section treating of our Lord’s priesthood, the apostle has amplified his statement in Hebrews 2:17, 18, and has furnished proof that Christ fulfilled the Aaronic type. In the second section wherein he treats of our Lord’s sacerdotal office, he amplifies his declaration in Hebrews 4:15, and shows that in Christ we have not only an High Priest, but “a great High Priest.” The different aspects of his theme treated of in these two divisions of Hebrews 5 is intimated by the variation to be noted in verses 6,10. In the former he says, “Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek,” but in verse 10 he adds, “Called of God an High Priest after the order of Melchizedek.”

The Greek word for “called” in verse 10 is entirely different from the one used in verse 4, “called of God.” The former signifies to ordain or appoint; the latter to salute or greet. To the right understanding of the purport of verse 10, it is essential to observe carefully the exact point at which this statement

is introduced: it is not till *after* the declarations that Christ had “offered up” (verse 7), had “learned obedience” (verse 7), had been “made perfect,” and had become “the Author of salvation” (verse 9), we are told that God saluted Christ as “High Priest after the order of Melchizedek.” What is found in verse 6 does not in any wise weaken the force of this, still less does it clash with it. In verses 5, 6 the Spirit is not treating of the *order* of Christ’s priesthood, but is furnishing proof that He had been called to that office by God Himself.

We do not propose to offer an exposition of the contents of this 10th verse on the present occasion, but content ourselves with directing attention to the important fact that it was consequent upon His being officially “made perfect” and becoming “the Author of eternal salvation,” that Christ was saluted by God as “High Priest after the order of Melchizedek.” This act of God’s followed the Savior’s death and resurrection. It was God’s greeting of the glorious Conqueror of sin and death. Hence the propriety of His new title. If the reader refers to Genesis 14 he will find that the historical Melchizedek first comes on the scene to greet Abraham after his notable conquest of Chedorlaomer and his allies. It was upon his “return from the slaughter” of the kings, that Melchizedek appeared and blessed him. Thus he owned Abraham’s triumph. In like manner, God has greeted the mighty Victor. May the Spirit of God fit our hearts and minds for a profounder insight of His living oracles.

CHAPTER 22

CHRIST SUPERIOR TO AARON

(HEBREWS 5:11-14)

At the close of our last article we pointed out that the 10th verse of Hebrews 5 forms the juncture of the two divisions of that chapter. In the first section, verses 1-9, the apostle has shown how Christ fulfilled that which was typified of Him by the Levitical high priests, and also how that He excels Aaron in His person, His office, and His work. The second section, which begins at verse 10 and extends, really, to the end of chapter 10, continues to display the superiority of Christ over Aaron, principally by showing that the Lord Jesus exercises a priesthood pertaining to a more excellent order than his. In substantiation of this the apostle, in verse 10, makes reference to Psalm 110:4. His purpose in so doing was twofold: first, to allow that Christ was not a high priest according to the constitution, law, and order of the Aaronic priesthood; second, to remind the Hebrews there was a priesthood antecedent unto and diverse from that of Aaron; which had also been appointed of God, and that for the very purpose of prefiguring the person of our great High Priest.

But at this point a difficulty has been presented to many students. We might state it thus: Seeing that this Epistle expressly declares, again and again, that Christ is priest “after the order of Melchizedek,” how can it be true that Aaron, who belonged to a totally different order, could prefigure His priestly office and work? This difficulty has largely resulted from failure to observe that the Holy Spirit has not said Christ is “an high priest of the order of Melchizedek,” but, “alter the order of,” etc. The difference between the two expressions is real and radical. The word “of” would have necessarily limited His priesthood to a certain order. For when we say, as we must, that Phineas and Eli were “high priests of the order of Aaron,” we mean that they had the very same priesthood that Aaron had. But it is not so with Christ. *His* priesthood is not restricted to any human order, for no mere man could possibly sustain or perform the work which pertains to Christ’s priesthood.

As we have pointed out on previous occasions, it is of the very greatest importance, in order to a clear understanding of the priesthood of God’s Son, to perceive that *both* Aaron and Melchizedek were needed to foreshadow His sacerdotal office. The reason for this was, that the priestly work of Christ

would be performed in two distinct stages: one in the days of His humiliation, the other during the time of His exaltation. Aaron prefigured the former, Melchizedek the latter. In perfect keeping with this fact Christ is not said to be a high priest “after the order of Melchizedek” in Hebrews 2:17; 3:1, or 4:15. It was not until *after* the apostle has shown in Hebrews 5:5-9 that Christ fulfilled that which Aaron typified (Hebrews 5:1-4), that He is “saluted of God” as an high priest after the order of *Melchizedek*. And, we would here point out again that, this was wondrously and blessedly adumbrated in Genesis 14, where Melchizedek is seen coming to meet and greet the *victorious* Abraham.

There were various things, peculiar to the person of Melchizedek, above and beyond what appertained to Aaron, which rendered him an illustrious type of our great High Priest; and when Christ is designated Priest “after the order of Melchizedek,” the meaning of that expression is, according to the things revealed in Scripture concerning that Old Testament character.

“Because of the especial resemblance there was between what Melchizedek was and what Christ was to be, God called His priesthood Melchizedekian” (Dr. Owen).

“After the order of Melchizedek” does not mean a limitation of His priesthood to that order — else it had said “of the order of Melchizedek” — but points to the particulars in which his priesthood also prefigured that of Christ’s. The various details of which that resemblance consisted are developed in Hebrews 7; all that we would now call attention to is, that nowhere in Scripture is Melchizedek ever seen offering a sacrifice, instead, we read, he “brought forth bread and wine” (Genesis 14:18) — typically, the *memorials* of the great Sacrifice already offered, once for all.

It was in death that Christ fulfilled the Aaronic type, making a full and perfect atonement for the sins of His people. It is in resurrection that He assumed the character in which Melchizedek foreshadowed Him — a *royal* Priest. It was after He had been officially “perfected” and had become “the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him” that the Lord Jesus announced, “All power is *given* unto Me in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18). There was first the Cross and then the Crown: first He “offered up Himself” (Hebrews 7:27), then He entered “into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Hebrews 9:24); and there He is seated “a

Priest upon His throne” (Zechariah 6:13).

“Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchizedek” (verse 10).

A most important point had now been reached in the apostle’s argument, the central design of which was to exhibit the immeasurable superiority of Christianity over Judaism. The very center of the Jewish economy was its temple and priesthood; so too, the outstanding glory of Christianity, is its Priest who ministers in the heavenly sanctuary, officiating there in fulfillment of the Melchizedek type. But though the apostle had now arrived at the most important point in this treatise, it was also one which required the most delicate handling, due to the fleshly prejudices of his readers. To declare that, following His exodus from the grave, God Himself had greeted Christ as priest “after the order of *Melchizedek*,” was tantamount to saying that the Aaronic order was thus Divinely set aside, and with it, all the ordinances and ceremonies of the Mosaic law. This was the hardest thing of all for a Hebrew, even a converted one, to bow to; for it meant repudiating everything that was seen, and cleaving to that which was altogether invisible. It meant forsaking that which their fathers had honored for fifteen hundred years, and following that which the great majority of their brethren according to the flesh denounced as Satanic. In view of the difficulty created by this prejudice, the apostle interrupts the flow of his argument, and pauses to make a lengthy parenthesis.

“The apostle has scarcely entered on the central and most important part of his epistle, when he feels painfully the difficulty of explaining the doctrine of the heavenly and eternal priesthood of the Son, and this not merely on account of the grandeur and depth of the subject, but on account of the spiritual condition of the Hebrews, whom he is addressing. He had presented to their view the Lord Jesus, who after His sufferings was made perfect in His exaltation to be the High Priest in heaven. When he quotes again the 110th Psalm, ‘Thou art a priest, forever after the order of Melchizedek,’ the solemn and comprehensive words which are addressed by the Father to the Son, he has such a vivid and profound sense of the exceeding riches of this heavenly knowledge, of the treasures of wisdom and consolation which are hidden in the heavenly Priesthood of our

ascended Lord, that he longs to unfold to the Hebrews his knowledge of the glorious mystery; especially as this was the truth which they most urgently needed. Here and here alone could they see their true position as worshippers in the true tabernacle, the heavenly sanctuary. Here and here alone was consolation for them in the trial which they felt on account of their excision from the temple and the earthly service in Jerusalem; while from the knowledge of Christ's heavenly priesthood they would also derive light to avoid the insidious errors, and strength to overcome the difficulties which were besetting their path" (Adolph Saphir).

In the course of his parenthesis which we are now about to begin, the apostle strikes two distinct notes: first he sounds a solemn warning, and then he gives forth a gracious encouragement. The warning is found in Hebrews 5:11–6:8, the encouragement is contained in 6:9-20. Just so long as Christians have the flesh in them and are subject to the assaults of the Devil, do they need constant warning; and just so long as they are harassed by indwelling sin and are left in an hostile world, do they stand in need of heavenly encouragement. All effective ministry to the saints proceeds along these two lines, alternating from the one to the other. Preachers will do well to make a careful note of this fact, fully exemplified in all the Epistles of the apostles; and every Christian reader will do well to take to heart the solemn and searching passage we are now to take up.

“Of whom we have many things to say” (verse 11).

“Of whom:” concerning Christ as the fulfiller of the Melchizedek type, the apostle had much in mind, much that he desired to bring before his brethren. There were many things pertaining to this order of priesthood which were of deep importance, of great value, and most necessary to know; things which concerned the glory of Christ, things which concerned the joy and consolation of His people. But these things were “hard to be uttered,” or as the Revised Version has, “hard of interpretation.” This does not mean that the apostle himself found it difficult to grasp them; nor does it mean they were of such a nature that he labored to find language for expressing himself clearly. No, it was because the things themselves were *unpalatable* to the Hebrews, that the spirit of the apostle was straitened. This is seen from the next clause.

“And hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing” (verse 11).

“To be ‘dull of hearing’ is descriptive of that state of mind in which statements may be made without producing any corresponding impression, without being attended to, without being understood, without being felt. In a word, it is descriptive of mental listlessness. To a person in this state, it is very difficult to explain anything; for, nothing, however simple in itself, can be understood if it be not attended to” (Dr. J. Brown).

The Revised Version is again preferable here; “ye are *become* dull of hearing.” They were not always so. Time was when these Hebrews had listened to the Word with eagerness, and had made diligent application thereof.

“When the Gospel was first preached to them, it aroused their attention, it exercised their thoughts; but now with many of them it had become a common thing. They flattered themselves that they knew all about it. It had become to them like a sound to which the ear had been long accustomed — the person is not conscious of it, pays no attention to it” (Dr. J. Brown).

The Greek word for “dull” is translated “slothful” in Hebrews 6:12. It signifies a state of heaviness or inertia. These Hebrews had become mentally and spiritually what loafers are in the natural world — too indolent to bestir themselves, too lazy to make any effort at improvement. They were spiritual sluggards; slothful. Let the reader turn to Proverbs 12:27, 19:24, 21:25, 24:30-34, 26:13-16, and remember these passages all have a *spiritual* application. To become, “dull of hearing” or “slothful,” is the reverse of “giving diligence” in 2 Peter 1:5, 10. In such a condition of soul, the apostle found it difficult to lead the Hebrews on to the apprehension of higher truth. He had many things to say unto them, but their coldness, lethargy, prejudice, restrained him. And this is recorded for *our* learning; it has a voice for *us*; may the Spirit grant us a hearing ear.

“Ye are become dull of hearing.” Of how many Christians is this true today! “Ye did run well; who did hinder you?” (Galatians 5:7). This is a cause of mourning unto all the true servants of God. Because iniquity abounds, the love of many waxes cold. Affections are set upon things below, rather than upon things above. Many who are deluded into thinking their eternal salvation is secure, evidence no concern over their present relationship to

God. And Christians who mingle with these lifeless professors are injuriously affected, for “evil communications corrupt good manners” (1 Corinthians 15:33). There is little “reaching forth unto those things which are before” (Philippians 3:13) and, consequently, little *growth* in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord. By the very law of our constitution, if we do not move forward, we slip backward.

There are few who seem to realize that truth has to be “bought” (Proverbs 23:23), purchased at the cost of subordinating temporal interests to spiritual ones. If the Christian is to “increase in the knowledge of God” (Colossians 1:10), he has to give himself whole-heartedly to the things of God. It is impossible to serve God and mammon. If the heart of the professing Christian be set, as the heart of the nominal professor is, upon earthly comforts, worldly prosperity, temporal riches, then the “true riches” will be missed — sold for “a mess of pottage” (Hebrews 12:16). But if, by Divine grace, through the possession of a new nature, there is a longing and a hungering for spiritual things, that longing can only be attained and that hunger satisfied by giving ourselves entirely to their ceaseless quest. “*The loins of our minds*” (1 Peter 1:13) have to be girded, the Word has to be “studied” (2 Timothy 2:15), the means of grace have to be used with “all diligence” (2 Peter 1:5). It is the diligent soul which “shall be made fat” (Proverbs 13:4).

How many who sit under the ministry of a true servant of God are “dull of hearing!” There is little waiting upon God, little real exercise of heart, before the service, to prepare them for receiving His message. Instead, the average hearer comes up to the house of God with a mind full of worldly concerns. We have to “*lay aside* all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness” if we are to “receive with meekness the engrafted Word” (James 1:21). We have to listen unto God’s Word with a right motive; not out of idle curiosity, not merely to fulfill a duty, still less for the purpose of criticizing; but that we “*may grow* thereby” (1 Peter 2:2) — grow in practical godliness. And, if what we have heard is not to be forgotten, if it is really to profit the soul, it must be meditated upon (Psalm 1:2), and accompanied with earnest prayer for grace to enable us to “heed” what has been heard.

“For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of

God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat” (verse 12).

The opening “for” intimates that the apostle is here substantiating the charge which he had preferred against the believing Hebrews at the close of the preceding verse. His reproof was with the object of emphasizing the sad state into which their inertia had brought them. Their condition was to be deplored from three considerations.

First, they had been converted long enough to be of help to others.

Second, instead of being useful, they were useless, needing to be grounded afresh in the ABC’s of the Truth of God.

Third, so far from having the capacity to masticate strong food, their condition called for that which was suited only to a stunted babyhood.

“For when for the time ye ought to be teachers.” This, it seems to us, is only another way of saying, Consider how long you have been Christians, how long you have known the Truth, and what improvement of it ought to have been made! It was a rebuke for their having failed to “redeem the time” (Ephesians 5:16). Most probably among these Hebrews were some who had been called during the days of Christ’s public ministry, others no doubt were among the three thousand saved on the day of Pentecost, since which, about thirty years had passed. During that time they had the Old Testament Scriptures which clearly testified to all they had been taught concerning Christ. The Gospel had been preached and “confirmed” unto them (Hebrews 2:1-3). Moreover, as the book of Acts shows, the apostles had labored hard and long among them, and much of the New Testament was now in their hands. Hence, in Hebrews 6:7 they are likened to the earth which drinketh in the rain that “cometh *oft* upon it.” Thus, every privilege and opportunity had been theirs.

“Ye ought to be teachers.” This tells us the improvement which should have been made of, and the use to which they ought to have put, the teaching they had received. The Gospel is given by God to the Christian, not only for his own individual edification and joy, but as a “pound” to be traded with for Christ’s glory (Luke 19:13), as a “light” for the illumination of others (Matthew 5:15, 16). “You ought to be teachers” shows that this was a duty required of them. How little is this perceived by Christians today! How few

listen to the ministry of the Scriptures with an ear not only for their own soul's profit, but also with the object of being equipped to help others. Instead, how many attend the preaching of the Word simply as a matter of custom, or to satisfy their conscience. Two aims should be prayerfully sought by every Christian auditor: his own edification, his usefulness to others.

“Ye ought to be *teachers*.” Let not the searching point of this be blunted by saying, God does not want all His people to be public preachers. The New Testament does not limit “teaching” to the pulpit. One of the most important spheres is *the home*, and that should be a Christian seminary. Under the law God commanded the Israelite to give His words to the members of his household:

“And Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (Deuteronomy 6:7).

Does God require less from us now, in this dispensation of full light? No, indeed. Note, again, how in Titus 2:3-5, the older sisters are bidden to “teach the young women:” never was there a greater need for this than now. So in 2 Timothy 2:2, the brethren are to “teach others also.” Yes, every Christian “ought to be” a teacher.

“Ye have need that one teach you again.” The apostle continues his reproof of the listless Hebrews, and presses upon them the inevitable consequence of becoming “dull of hearing.” Spiritual sloth not only prevents practical progress in the Christian's life, but it produces retrogression. It was not that they had lost, absolutely, their knowledge of Divine truth, but they had failed to lay it to heart, and live in the power of it. In 2 Peter 1, Christians are called on to *add* to their faith “virtue, and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love;” and then the apostle adds, “For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

On the other hand, we are solemnly warned, “But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.” This was the condition of the Hebrews.

“Which be the first principles of the oracles of God.” Because of their unresponsiveness of heart, they had gone back so far that they were only fit to be placed in the lowest form of learners; they needed to be re-taught their ABC’s. Clear proof was this of their dullness and lack of proficiency. The “*first principles* of the oracles of God” signify the rudiments of our faith, the first lessons presented to our learning, the elementary truths of Scripture. Until these are grasped by faith, and the heart and life are influenced by them, the disciple is not ready for further instructions in the things of God. In the case of the Hebrews, those “first principles” or elementary doctrines were, that the Old Testament economy was strictly a typical one, that its ordinances and ceremonies foreshadowed the person and work of God’s Son, who was to come here and make an atonement for the sins of His people. He had thus come: the types had given place to the great Antitype, and therefore the shadows were replaced by the Substance itself. True, he had left this scene, gone into heaven, itself, there to appear in the presence of God for His people. Thither their faith and affections should have followed Him. But instead, they wanted to go back again to the temple-services in Jerusalem. They were setting their hearts upon the now effete types and figures, which the apostle hesitated not to call “the weak and beggarly elements” (Galatians 4:9).

Instead of walking by faith, the Hebrews were influenced by the things of sight. Instead of looking forward to an ascended and glorified Savior, they were occupied with a system which had foreshadowed His work in the days of His humiliation. Thus they needed to be taught afresh the “first principles of the oracles of God.” They needed to be reminded that that which is perfect had come, and therefore that which was in part had been done away. And what is the present-day application of this expression to Christians? This: the elementals of our faith are, that Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners; that His salvation is perfect and complete, leaving nothing for us to add to it; that the only fitness He requires from sinners is the Spirit’s discovery to them of their *need* of Him. The greater the sinner I know myself to be, the greater my need of Christ, and the more I am *suited* to Him, for He died for “the ungodly” (Romans 5:6). It was the realization of my ruin and wretchedness which first drew me to Him. If I cast myself, in all my want and poverty, upon Him, then He has received me, for His declaration is, “him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out.” Believing this, I go on my way

rejoicing, thanking Him, praising Him, living on Him and for Him.

But instead of living in the joyous assurance of their acceptance in the Beloved, many give way to doubting. They question their “interest in Christ;” they wonder, “Am I His, or am I not?” They are continually occupied with self, either their good self or their bad self. And thus their peace is at an end. Instead of affections set upon Christ, their attention is turned within, occupied with their faith or their lack of it. Instead of walking in the glorious sunshine of the conscious favor of God, they dwell in “Doubting Castle,” or flounder in the “Slough of Despond.” Thus, instead of themselves being teachers of others, they have need that one teach them again “which be the first principles of the oracles of God.” They are fit only for the kindergarten. They require to be told once more that faith looks away from self, and is occupied entirely with Another. They need to be told that Christ, not faith, is the sinner’s Savior; that faith is simply the empty hand extended to receive from Him.

This clause is susceptible of various legitimate applications. Let us consider its bearing upon another class of Christians, among which may be numbers of our readers. Time was when, in the “far country,” you sought to be filled with the husks which the swine fed on (Luke 15). But you found your quest was in vain. To change the figure, you sampled one after another of the world’s cisterns, only to find that “whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again” (John 4:13). You discovered that the things of the world could not meet your deep need. Then, weary and heavy-laden, you were brought to Christ, and found in Him that “altogether lovely” One. O the joy that was now yours! “Thou O Christ art all I want,” was your confession. But is this the language of your heart today? Alas, “thou hast left thy first love” (Revelation 2:4), and with it, peace and contentment are also largely a thing of the past. Like a sow that returns to her wallowing in the mire, many go back to the world for recreation, then for satisfaction. Ah, have not you, my reader, need to be taught again “which be the first principles of the oracles of God?” Do you not need reminding that nothing in this scene can minister to the new nature, a nature which has been created for heaven? Do you not need to relearn that Christ alone can satisfy your heart?

The “oracles of God” is one of many names given to the Holy Scriptures. Stephen called them the “living oracles” (Acts 7:38).

“They are so in respect of their Author, — they are the oracles of ‘the living God;’ whereas the oracles with which Satan infatuated the world were most of them at the shrines and graves of dead men. They are so in respect of their use and efficacy: they are ‘living’ because life-giving oracles unto them that obey them (Deuteronomy 32:47). Because they are ‘the oracles of God,’ they have supreme authority over the souls and consciences of us all. Therefore are they also infallible truth” (Dr. John Owen).

“And are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.” Here the apostle continues to rebuke the Hebrews for their laxity, and sets before them their deteriorated condition under a figure designed to humble them: he likens them to infants. The same similitude is used in 1 Corinthians 3:1,2. “*Milk*” here signifies the same thing as the “first principles of the oracles of God.” The “strong meat” had reference to the offices of Christ, especially His priesthood, as suited to our needs and affections. “*Milk*” is appropriate for babes, but Christians ought to grow and become strong in the Lord. They are exhorted to “*be not children in understanding*” (1 Corinthians 14:20). They are bidden to “quit ye like men” (1 Corinthians 15:13).

“For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe” (verse 13).

“Useth milk” means, lives on nothing else. By the “word of righteousness” is meant the Gospel of God’s grace. In 1 Corinthians 1:18 it is termed “*the Word of the Cross,*” because that is its principal subject. In Romans 10:8 it is designated “the Word of Faith,” because that is its chief requirement from all who hear it. Here, the Word of Righteousness, because of its nature, use and end. In the Gospel is “the righteousness of God revealed” (Romans 1:16, 17), for Christ is “the end of the law for righteousness unto every one that believeth” (Romans 10:4). Now the Hebrews are not here said to be ignorant of or utterly without the Word of Righteousness, but “unskillful” or “inexperienced” in the use of it. They had failed to improve it to its proper end. Did they clearly apprehend the Gospel, they had perceived the needlessness for the perpetuation of the Levitical priesthood with its sacrifices.

The one unskilled in the Word of Righteousness is a “babe.” This term is here used by way of reproach. A “babe” is weak, ignorant. A spiritual “babe” is

one who has an inadequate knowledge of Christ, i.e. An experimental knowledge and heart-acquaintance with Him. Let the reader note that a state of infancy was what characterized God's people of old under Judaism (Galatians 4:1-6). They were looking forward to the Christ that was to come, and whose person and work was represented to their eyes by typical pictures and persons. Such was the ground to which these Hebrews had well-nigh slipped back. Earthly things were engrossing their attention. So it is still. A person may have been a Christian twenty or thirty years, but if he is not forgetting the things which are behind, and constantly pressing to the things before, he is, in actual experience and spiritual stature, but "a babe."

"But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (verse 14).

Here the apostle completes the antithesis begun in the preceding verse, and describes the character of those to whom strong meat is suited. By necessary implication his statement explains to us *why* the Hebrews had become "dull of hearing." There is much here of deep practical importance. "Strong meat" is contrasted from "milk" or the "first principles" of God's Word, which we have defined above. This "strong meat" is the appropriate portion of those who have left infancy behind, who have so assimilated the "milk" of babyhood they have "grown thereby," grown in faith and love. This growth is produced and promoted by *using* our spiritual "senses" or faculties. Infants *have* "senses," but they know not how to exercise them to advantage. The proper use of our spiritual faculties enables us to distinguish between "good and evil". It was here the Hebrews had failed so lamentably.

"A child is easily imposed upon as to its food. Its nurse may easily induce it to swallow even palatable poison. But a man, 'by reason of use,' has learned so to employ his senses as to distinguish between what is deleterious and what is nourishing" (Dr. J. Brown).

The same holds good in the spiritual realm. There is in the new man that which corresponds to our "five senses" naturally, namely, understanding, conscience, affections. But these have to be trained and developed. It is only by the constant and assiduous exercise of minds upon spiritual things, by the diligent study of the Word, by daily meditation thereon, by the exercise of faith therein, by earnestly supplicating the Spirit for light, that we acquire the

all-important discernment to distinguish between good and evil, Truth and error. “Senses exercised” means ability or fitness acquired, as a disciplined soldier is equipped for his duty, or a trained athlete is for his work. Such capacity is only attained by the Christian through a constant and sedulous application of himself to the things of God. “By reason of use” refers not to spasmodic effort, but to a regular practice, a confirmed habit. The outcome is a spiritual ability to judge rightly of all that is presented to his notice.

It was here the Hebrews had failed, as, alas, so many Christians do now.

“Their senses had not been exercised; that is, they had not walked closely with God, they had not followed the Master, listening earnestly to His voice, and proving what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God. They had not conscientiously applied the knowledge which they had, but allowed it to remain dead and unused. If they had really and truly partaken of the milk, they would not have remained babes” (Adolph Saphir).

Because of their slothfulness, they were unable to distinguish between “good and evil,” i.e., between Truth and error, the promptings of the Spirit and the solicitations of Satan, the desires of the new nature and the lustings of the old. They were like babes are in the natural world, unable to discriminate between what is wholesome and what is hurtful; therefore were they unable to see the difference between what was right under the Judaic economy, and what was now suited to Christianity.

“Senses trained to discern both good and evil” has reference to what is set before a believer as food for his soul. The “good” is that which is nutritious and suited to his nourishment, “evil” is that which tends not to his edification, but to his destruction. Scripture itself is “evil” when wrongly divided and misapplied. This is seen in Satan’s misuse of Scripture with Christ (Matthew 4:6). Truth becomes “evil” when it is not presented in its due and Divine *proportions*. The enemies of the Hebrews were appealing to the Old Testament Scriptures, as Romanists now do to favor their elaborate form of worship and priesthood. In many other ways is Satan active today in setting before God’s people both “good and evil,” and unless their spiritual faculties have been diligently trained, through much waiting upon God, they fall easy victims to his half-lies.

“If people really *loved and cherished* what they so fondly called ‘the

simple gospel,' their knowledge and Christian character would deepen, and all the truths which are centered in Christ crucified would become the object of their investigation and delight, and enrich and elevate their experience. There are no doctrines more profound than those which are proclaimed when Christ's salvation is declared. All our progress consists in learning more fully the doctrine which at first is preached unto us" (Adolph Saphir).

It is *using the* light we already have, putting into *practice* the truth already received, which fits us for more. Unless this *is* done, we retrograde, and the light which is in us becomes darkness. Manna not used breeds worms (Exodus 16:20)! Milk undigested — not taken up into our system — ferments. A backslidden state deprives us of a sound judgment. The secret of "senses trained to discern good and evil" is revealed in Hosea 6:3, "Then shall we know, if we *follow on* to know the Lord." May His grace stir us up so to do.

CHAPTER 23

INFANCY AND MATURITY

(HEBREWS 6:1-3)

The interpretation which we shall give of the above verses is not at all in accord with that advanced by the older writers. It differs considerably from that found in the commentaries of Drs. Calvin, Owen and Gouge, and more recently, those of A. Saphir, and Dr. J. Brown. Much as we respect their works, and deeply as we are indebted to not a little that is helpful in them, yet we dare not follow them blindly. To “prove all things” (1 Thessalonians 5:21) is ever our bounden duty. Though it is against our natural inclination to depart from the exposition they suggested (several, with some diffidence), yet we are thankful to God that in later years He has granted some of His servants increased light from His wondrous and exhaustless Word. May it please Him to vouchsafe us still more.

The writers mentioned above understood the expression “the principles of the doctrine of Christ,” or as the margin of the Revised Version more accurately renders “the word of the beginning of Christ,” to refer to the elementary truths of Christianity, a summary of which is given in the six items that follow in the second half of verse 1 and the whole of verse 2; while the “Let us go on unto perfection,” they regarded as a call unto the deeper and higher things of the Christian revelation. But for reasons which to us seem conclusive, such a view of our passage is altogether untenable. It fails to take into account the central theme of this Epistle, and the purpose for which it was written. It does not do justice at all to the immediate context. It completely breaks down when tested in its details.

As we have repeated so often in the course of this series of articles, the theme of our Epistle is the immeasurable superiority of Christianity over Judaism. Unless the interpreter keeps this steadily in mind as he proceeds from chapter to chapter, and from passage to passage, he is certain to err. This is the key which unlocks every section, and if attempt be made to open up any portion without it, the effect can only be strained and forced. The importance of this consideration cannot be overestimated, and several striking exemplifications of it have already been before us in our survey of the previous chapters. Here too it will again stand us in good stead, if we but use it. The apostle is not contrasting two different stages of Christianity, an infantile and a mature;

rather is he opposing, once more, the substance over against the shadows. He continues to press upon the Hebrews their need of forsaking the visible for the invisible, the typical for the antitypical.

That in taking up our present passage it is also of first importance to study its *connection with the* immediate context, is evident from its very first word, "Therefore." The apostle is here drawing a conclusion from something said previously. This takes us back to what is recorded in Hebrews 5:11-14, for a right understanding of which depends a sound exposition of what immediately follows. In these verses the apostle rebukes the Hebrews for their spiritual sloth, and likens them to little children capacitated to receive nothing but milk. He tells them that they have need of one teaching them again "which be the first principles of the oracles of God," which denoted they had not yet clearly grasped the fact that Judaism was but a temporary economy, because a typical one, its ordinances and ceremonies foreshadowing Him who was to come here and make an atonement for the sins of His people. Now that He had come and finished His work the types had served their purpose, and the shadows were replaced by the Substance.

The spiritual condition in which the Hebrew saints were at the time the Holy Spirit moved the apostle to address this Epistle to them, is another important key to the opening of its hortatory sections. As we showed in our last article, the language of Hebrews 5:11-14 plainly intimates that they have gone backward. The *cause* of this is made known in the 10th chapter, part of which takes us back to a point in time prior to what is recorded in chapter 5. First in Hebrews 10:32 we read, "But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great flight of afflictions." This "great flight of afflictions" they had, as verse 34 tells us, taken "*joyfully.*" Very remarkable and rare was this. How was such an experience to be accounted for? The remainder of verse 34 tells us, "*Knowing* in yourselves that ye have in heaven a *better* and an enduring substance."

But this blessed and spiritual state which characterized the Hebrews in the glow of "first love" had not been maintained. While affections were set upon things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God, whilst faith was in exercise, they realized that their real portion was on High. But faith has to be tested, patience has to be tried, and unless faith be maintained "hope deferred maketh the heart sick" (Proverbs 13:12). Alas, their faith had

wavered, and in consequence they had become dissatisfied to have *nothing* down here; they became impatient of waiting for an *unseen and future* inheritance. It was for this reason that the apostle said to them,

“Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise” (Hebrews 10:35, 36).

Now it was this discontented and impatient condition of soul into which they had fallen, which accounts for the state in which we find them in Hebrews 5:11, 12. So too it explains the various things referred to in chapter 6. That is why the apostle was moved to set before them the most solemn warning found in verses 4-6. That is why we find *“hope”* so prominent in what follows: see verses 11, 18, 19. That is why reference is made to *“patience”* in verse 12. That is why Abraham is referred to, and why *his* *“patience”* is singled out for mention in verse 15. And that is why in our present passage the Hebrews are urged to *“go on unto perfection,”* and why the apostle interposes a doubt in the matter: *“This will we do, if God permit”* (verse 3), for there was good reason to believe that their past conduct had provoked Him. Thus we see again how wondrously and how perfectly Scripture interprets itself, and how much we need to *“compare spiritual things with spiritual”* (1 Corinthians 2:13).

The sixth chapter of Hebrews does not commence a new section of the Epistle, but continues the digression into which the apostle had entered at Hebrews 5:11. In view of the disability of those to whom he was writing receiving unto their edification the high and glorious mysteries which he desired to expound, the apostle goes on to set before them various reasons and arguments to excite a diligent attention thereunto.

First, he declares his intention positively: to *“go on unto perfection”* (verse 1).

Second, he names, what he intended to *“leave,”* namely, *“the word of the beginning of Christ”* (verses 1-3).

Third, he warns of the certain doom of apostates (verses 4-8).

Fourth, he softens this warning in the case of the converted Hebrews (verses 9-14).

Fifth, he gives an inspiring encouragement to faith, taken from the life of Abraham (verses 15-21).

“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ” (verse 1).

As already pointed out, the first word of this verse denotes that there is a close link between what has immediately preceded and what now follows. This will appear yet more clearly if we attend closely to the exact terms here used. The word “principles” in this verse is the same as rendered “first” in Hebrews 5:12. The word “doctrine” is found in its plural form and is translated “oracles” in Hebrews 5:12. The word “perfection” is given as “of full age” in Hebrews 5:14. Thus it is very evident that the apostle is here *continuing* the same subject which he began in the previous chapter.

“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ.” The rendering of the A.V. of this clause is very faulty and misleading. The verb is in the past tense, not the present. *Bagster's Interlinear* correctly gives “Wherefore *having left*.” This difference of rendition is an important one, for it enables us to understand more readily the significance of what follows. The apostle was stating a positive fact, not pleading for a possibility. He was not asking the Hebrews to take a certain step, but reminding them of one they had already taken. They had left the “principles of the doctrine of Christ,” and to them he did not wish them to return.

“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ.” More accurately, “Wherefore having left the word of the beginning of Christ.” *Bagster's Interlinear*, which gives a literal word for word translation of the Greek, renders it, “Wherefore, having left the of the beginning of the Christ discourse.” This expression is parallel with the “first principles of the oracles of God” in Hebrews 5:12. It has reference to what God has made known concerning His Son under Judaism. In the Old Testament two things are outstandingly prominent in connection with Christ: first, prophecies of His coming into the world; second, types and figures of the work He should perform. These predictions had now received their fulfillment, those shadows had now found their substance, in the incarnation, life, death, resurrection and ascension of the Son of God. This, the “holy brethren” (Hebrews 3:1) among the Jews had acknowledged. Thus they had “left” the ABC's, for the Word Himself, the pictures for the Reality.

“Let us go on unto perfection.” There is the definite article in the Greek, and “The Perfection” is obviously set in apposition to “The word of the beginning of Christ:” note, not of “the Lord Jesus,” but of “Christ,” i.e., the Messiah. It is the contrast, once more, between Judaism and Christianity. That which is here referred to as “The Perfection” is the full revelation which God now made of Himself in the person of His incarnate Son. No longer is He veiled by types and shadows, His glory is seen fully in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6). The only begotten Son has “declared” Him here on earth (John 1:18); but having triumphantly finished the work which was given Him to do, He has been “received up into glory” (1 Timothy 3:16), and upon an exalted and enthroned Christ the affection of the believer is now to be set (Colossians 3:1).

“Wherefore having left... let us go on unto perfection.” The first word looks back to all that the apostle had said. It is a conclusion drawn from the contents of the whole preceding five chapters. Its force is: In view of the fact that God has now spoken to us in His Son; in view of who He is, namely, the appointed Heir of all things, the Maker of the worlds, the Brightness, of God’s glory, and the very Impress of His substance, the One who upholds all things by the word of His power; in view of the fact that He has by Himself “purged our sins,” and, in consequence, has sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having been made so much better than angels, as He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they; in view of the further fact that He was made in all things like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things God-ward, to make propitiation for the sins of the people, and having, in consequence of His successful prosecution of this stupendous work been “crowned with glory and honor;” and, seeing that He is immeasurably superior to Moses, Joshua and Aaron; — let us give Him His due place in our thoughts, hearts and lives.

“Let us go on unto perfection” has reference to the apprehension of the Divine revelation of the full glory of Christ in His person, perfections, and position. It is, from the practical side, a “perfection” of knowledge, spiritually imparted by the Holy Spirit to the understanding and heart. It refers to the mysteries and sublime doctrine of the Gospel. It is a perfection of knowledge in revealed truth. Yet, of course, it is only a relative “perfection,” for an absolute apprehension of the things of God is not attainable in this life. Now “we know in part” (1 Corinthians 13:9).

“If any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth *nothing* yet as he ought to know” (1 Corinthians 8:2).

Even the apostle Paul had to say,

“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13, 14).

“Let us go on unto perfection.” Students are not agreed as to the precise force of the plural pronoun here. Some consider it to be the apostle linking on the Hebrews to himself in the task immediately before him; others regard the “us” as the apostle graciously joining himself with them in their duty. Personally, we think that both these ideas are to be combined. First, “let us go on:” it was his resolution so to do, as the remaining chapters of the Epistle demonstrate; then let them follow him. Thus considered it shows that the apostle did not look upon the condition of the Hebrews as quite hopeless, notwithstanding their “dullness” (Hebrews 5:11) — I shall therefore go on to set before you the highest and most glorious things concerning Christ. Second, the apostle condescends to unite himself with them in their responsibility to press forward. “Wherefore:” in view of the length of time we have been Christians, let us be diligent to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was, thus, a call to stir them up.

“Let us go on” is passive, “be carried on.” It is a word taken from the progress which a ship makes before the wind when under sail. Let us, under the full bent of our will and affections be stirred by the utmost endeavors of our whole souls, be borne onwards. We have abode long enough near the shore, let us hoist our sails, pray to the Spirit for His mighty power to work within us, and launch forth into the deep. This is the duty of God’s servants, to excite their Christian hearers to make progress in the knowledge of Divine truth, to urge them to pass the porch and enter the sanctuary, there to behold the Divine glories of the House of God. Though the verb is passive, denoting the effect — “Let us be carried on” — yet it included the active use of means for the producing of this effect. “All diligence” is demanded of the Christian (2 Peter 1:5). Truth has to be “bought” (Proverbs 23:23). That which God has given us must be put into practice (Luke 8:18).

“Let us go on unto perfection.” What, we may ask, is the application of this to Christians today? To the Hebrews it meant abandoning the preparatory and earthly system of Judaism, (which occupied their whole attention before believing in Christ as the sent Savior) and, by faith, laying hold of the Divine revelation which has now been made in and through Him: set your affection on an ascended though invisible Christ, who now serves in the Heavenly Sanctuary on your behalf. For Christians it means, Turn away from those objects which absorbed you in the time of your unregeneracy, and meditate now on and find your joy and satisfaction in things above. Lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily besets, and run with perseverance the race that is set before us, “looking off unto Jesus” — the One who while here left us an example to follow, the One who is now enthroned on High because of the triumphant completion of His race.

To the Hebrews, this much-misunderstood exhortation of Hebrews 6:1 was exactly parallel with the word which Christ addressed to the eleven immediately prior to His death: “Ye believe in God, believe also in Me” (John 14:1): Ye have long avowed your faith in “God,” whom, though invisible, ye trust; now “believe *also* in Me,” as One who will speedily pass beyond the range of your natural vision. I am on the point of returning to the Father, but I shall still have your interests at heart, yea, I am going to “prepare a place for you;” therefore, trust Me implicitly: let your hearts follow Me on high: walk by faith: be occupied with an ascended Savior. For us today, the application of this important word signifies, Be engaged with your great High Priest in heaven, dwell daily upon your portion in Him (Ephesians 1:3). By faith, behold Christ, now in the heavenly sanctuary, as your righteousness, life, and strength. See in God’s acceptance of Him, His adoption of you, that you have been reconciled to Him, made nigh by the precious blood. In the realization of this, worship in spirit and in truth; exercise your priestly privileges.

Thus, the “perfection” of Hebrews 6:1 is, strictly speaking, scarcely doctrinal or experimental, yet partakes of both. “The law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did” (Hebrews 7:19). It is Christ who has ushered in that which is “perfect.” It is in Him we now have a full revelation and manifestation of the eternal purpose and grace of God. He has fully made known His mind (Hebrews 1:2). And, by His one all-sufficient offering of Himself, He has “*perfected* forever” (Hebrews 10:14), them whom God set

apart in His everlasting counsels. Christ came here to fulfill the will of God (Hebrews 10:9). That will has been executed; the work given Him to do, He finished (John 17:4). In consequence, He has been gloriously rewarded, and in His reward all His people share. This is all made known to us for

“the hearing of faith.” “Not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works” (verse 1).

It is most important to see that the contents of the second half of verse 1. and the whole of verse 2 are a parenthesis. The “Let us be carried on to perfection” is completed in “*this* will we do if God permits” in verse 3. That which comes in between is a definition or explanation of what the apostle intended by his “Having left the word of the beginning of Christ.” The six items enumerated — “repentance from dead works,” etc. — have nothing to do with the “foundations of Christianity,” nor do they describe those things relating to the elementary experiences of a Christian. Instead, they treat of what appertained to Judaism, considered as a rudimentary system, paving the way for the fuller and final revelation which God has now made in and by His beloved Son. Unless the *parenthetical* nature of these verses is clearly perceived, interpreters are certain to err in their exposition of the details.

“Not laying again the foundation,” etc. It is to be remarked that there is no definite article in the Greek here, so it should be read, “a foundation,” which is one of several intimations that it is not the “fundamentals of Christianity” which are here in view. Had these verses been naming the basic features of the new and higher revelation of God, the Holy Spirit had surely said, “the foundation;” that He did not, shows that something less important was before Him. As said above, this “foundation” respects Judaism. Now there are two properties to a “*foundation*,” namely, it is that which is first laid in a building; it is that which bears up the whole superstructure. To which we may add, it is generally lost to sight when the ground floor has been put in. Such was the relation which Judaism sustained to Christianity. As the “foundation” precedes the building, so had Judaism Christianity. As the “foundation” bears the building, so the truth of Christianity rests upon the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament, of which the New Testament revelation records the fulfillment. As the “foundation” is lost to sight when the building is erected on it, so the types and shadows of the earlier revelation are superseded by the substance and reality.

“Not laying again a foundation,” etc. This is exactly what the Hebrews were being sorely tempted to do. To “lay again” this foundation was to forsake the substance for the shadows; it was to turn from Christianity and go back again to Judaism. As Paul wrote to the Galatians, who were being harassed by Judaisers,

“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Hebrews 3:24).

To which he at once added, “But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.” Thus, under a different figure, he was here in Hebrews 6:1 simply saying, Let us be carried on to maturity, and not go back again to the things which characterized the days of our childhood.

“Not laying again a foundation,” etc. It will be noted that the apostle here enumerates just *six* things, which is ever the number of man in the flesh. Such was what distinguished Judaism. It was a system which appertained solely to man in the flesh. Its rites and ceremonies only “sanctified to the purifying of the flesh” (Hebrews 9:13). Had the fundamentals of Christianity been here in view, the apostle had surely given seven, as in Ephesians 4:3-6. The first which he specifies is “repentance from dead works.” Observe that it is not “repentance from *sins*.” That is not what is in view at all. This expression “dead works” is found again in Hebrews 9:14 (and nowhere else in the New Testament), where a contrast is drawn from what is said in verse 13: the blood of bulls and goats sanctified to the purifying of the flesh, then much more should the blood of Christ cleanse their conscience from dead works. Where *sins* are in question the New Testament speaks of them as “wicked works” (Titus 1:16), and “abominable works” (Colossians 1:21). The reference here was to the unprofitable and in-efficacious works of the Levitical service: cf. Hebrews 10:1, 4. Those works of the ceremonial law are denominated “dead works” because they were performed by men in the flesh, were not vitalized by the Holy Spirit, and did not satisfy the claims of the living God.

“And of faith toward God.” Of the six distinctive features of Judaism here enumerated, this one is the most difficult to define with any degree of certainty. Nevertheless, we believe that if due attention be given to the particular people to whom the apostle was writing all difficulty at once vanishes. The case of the Jew was vastly different from that of the Gentiles.

To the heathen, the one true God was altogether “unknown” (Acts 17:23). They worshipped a multitude of false gods. But not so was it with Israel. Jehovah had revealed Himself to their fathers, and given to them a written revelation of His will. Thus, “faith toward God” was a national thing with them, and though in their earlier history they fell into idolatry again and again, yet were they purified of this sin by the Babylonian captivity. Still, their faith was more of a form than a reality, a tradition received from their fathers, rather than a vital acquaintance with Him: see Matthew 15:8, 9, etc.

Israel’s national faith “toward God” had, under the Christian revelation, given place to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. A few references from the New Testament epistles will establish this conclusively. We read of “the faith of Jesus Christ,” and “the faith of the Son of God” (Galatians 2:16, 20); “your faith in the Lord Jesus” (Ephesians 1:15); “by faith of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 3:9); “your faith in Christ” (Colossians 2:5); “the faith which is in Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 3:13). As another has said, “All the blessings of the gospel are connected with ‘faith,’ but it is faith which *rests in Christ*. Justification, resurrection-life, the promises, the placing of sons, salvation, etc., are all spoken of as resulting from faith which rests upon Christ... ‘Hebrews’ reveals Christ as the ‘one Mediator between God and men.’ It reveals Christ as ‘a Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek,’ and urges the divine claim of the Son of God. The apostle is directing his readers to look away from self to Christ, the Center, the Sum of all blessing. This is not merely ‘faith toward God,’ but it is faith which comes to God by the way of the mediation and merits of His Son.”

“Of the doctrine of baptisms” (verse 2).

Had the translators understood the scope and meaning of this passage it is more than doubtful if they had given the rendering they did to this particular clause.

It will be observed that the word “baptism” is in the plural number, and if scripture be allowed to interpret scripture there will be no difficulty in ascertaining what is here referred to. It is neither Christian baptism (Matthew 28:19), the baptism of the Spirit (Acts 1:5), nor the baptism of suffering (Matthew 20:23), which is here in view, but the carnal ablutions which obtained under the Mosaic economy. The Greek word is “*baptismos*.” It is found but four times on the pages of the New Testament: in Mark 7:4, 5 and

Hebrews 6:2; 9:10. In each of the other three instances, the word is rendered “washings.” In Mark 7 it is the “washing of cups and pans.” In Hebrews 9:10 it is “meats and drinks and divers washings and carnal (fleshly) ordinances,” concerning which it is said, they were “imposed until the time of reformation.”

It is to be noted that our verse speaks of “the *doctrine* of baptisms.” There was a definite teaching connected with the ceremonial ablutions of Judaism. They were designed to impress upon the Israelites that Jehovah was a holy God, and that none who were defiled could enter into His presence. These references in Hebrews 6:2 and Hebrews 9:10 look back to such passages as Exodus 30:18, 19; Leviticus 16:4; Numbers 19:19, etc. Typically, these “washings” denoted that all the defiling effects of sin must be removed, ere the worshipper could approach unto the Lord. They foreshadowed that perfect and eternal cleansing from sin which the atoning blood of Christ was to provide for His people. They had no intrinsic efficacy in themselves; they were but figures, hence, we are told they sanctified only “to the purifying of the flesh” (Hebrews 9:13). Those “washings” effected nought but an external and ceremonial purification; they

“could not make him that did the service perfect as pertaining to the conscience” (Hebrews 9:9).

“And of laying on of hands.” The older commentators quite missed the reference here. Supposing the previous clause was concerned with the Christian baptisms recorded in the Acts, they appealed to such passages as Acts 8:17; 19:6, etc. But those passages have no bearing at all on the verse before us. They were exceptional cases where the supernatural “gifts” of the Spirit were imparted by communication from the apostles. The absence of this “laying on of hands” in Acts 2:41; 8:38; 16:33, etc., shows plainly that, normally, the Holy Spirit was given by God altogether apart from the instrumentality of His servants. The “laying on of hands” is not, and never was, a distinctive Christian ordinance. In such passages as Acts 6:6; 9:17; 13:3, the act was simply a mark of *identification*, as is sufficiently clear from the last reference.

“And of laying on of hands.” The key which unlocks the real meaning of this expression is to be found in the Old Testament, to which each and all of the six things here mentioned by the apostle look back. Necessarily so, for the

apostle is here making mention of those things which characterized Judaism, which the Hebrews, upon their profession of their personal faith in Christ had “left.” The “laying on of hands” to which the apostle refers is described in Leviticus 16:21, “And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness.” This was an essential part of the ritual on the annual Day of Atonement. Of this the Hebrews would naturally think when the apostle here makes mention of the “*doctrine* (teaching)... of laying on of hands.”

“And of resurrection of the dead.” At first glance, and perhaps at the second too, it may appear that what is here before us will necessitate an abandonment of the line of interpretation we are following. Surely, the reader may exclaim, you will not ask us to believe that these Hebrews had “left” the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead! Yet this is exactly what we do affirm. The difficulty which is seemingly involved is more imaginary than real, due to a lack of discrimination and failure to “rightly divide the Word of Truth.” The resurrection of the dead was a clearly revealed doctrine under Judaism; but it is supplanted by something far more comforting and blessed under the fuller revelation God has given in Christianity. If the reader will carefully observe the preposition we have placed in italic type, he will find it a valuable key to quite a number of passages.

“We make a great mistake when we assume that the resurrection as taught by the Pharisees, held by the Jews, believed by the disciples, and proclaimed by the apostles, was one and the same” (C. H. W.).

The great difference between the former and the latter may be seen by a comparison of the scriptures that follow.

“After the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: and have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection *of the* dead, both of the just and unjust” (Acts 24:14, 15).

That was the Jewish hope:

“Martha saith unto Him, I know that he shall rise again in the

resurrection at the last day” (John 11:24).

Now in contrast, note,

“He charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead. And they kept *that* saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean” (Mark 9:9, 10).

It is this aspect of resurrection which the New Testament epistles emphasize, an elective resurrection, a resurrection of the redeemed before that of the wicked: see Revelation 20:5, 6; 1 Corinthians 15:22, 23; 1 Thessalonians 4:16.

“And of eternal judgment.” In the light of all that has been before us, this should occasion no difficulty. The Jewish church, and most of Christendom now, believed in a General Judgment, a great assize at the end of time when God would examine every man’s life,

“For God shall bring every work into judgment with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

This is described in fullest detail in the closing verses of Revelation 20. It is the Great White Throne judgment.

Let us now, very briefly, summarize what has just been engaging our attention. The Hebrews had confessed their faith in Christ, and by so doing had forsaken the shadows for the Substance. But hope had been deferred, faith hath waned, persecutions had cooled their zeal. They were being tempted to abandon their Christian profession and return to Judaism. The apostle shows that by so doing they would be laying *again* “a foundation” of things which had been left behind. Rather than this, he urges them to be carried forward to “perfection” or “full growth.” That meant to substitute “repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18), for “repentance from dead works;” trust in the glorified Savior, for a national “faith toward God;” the all-cleansing blood of the Lamb, for the inefficacious “washings” of the law; God’s having laid on Christ the iniquities of us all, for the Jewish high-priest’s “laying on of hands;” a resurrection “from the dead,” for “a resurrection of the dead;” the Judgment-seat of Christ, for the “eternal judgment” of the Great White Throne. Thus, the six things here mentioned belonged to a state of things before Christ was manifested.

“And this will we do if God permit” (verse 3).

Here we learn of the apostle’s resolution as to the occasion before him, and the limitation of his resolution by an express subordination of it to the good pleasure of God. The “this will we do” has reference to “Let us go on unto perfection.” The use of the plural pronoun is very blessed. Though a spiritual giant when compared with his fellow Christians, the apostle Paul never imagined he had “attained” (Philippians 3:12). “This will we do” means, I in teaching, you in learning. In the chapters that follow, we see how the apostle’s resolution was carried out. In Hebrews 5:10 he had said, “an High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, of whom we *have* many things to say.” By comparing Hebrews 6:3 with Hebrews 5:11,12 we learn that no discouragement should deter a servant of God from proceeding in the declaration of the mystery of Christ, not even the dullness of his hearers.

“And this will we do, if God permit.” This qualifying word may have respect unto the unknown sovereign pleasure of God, to which all our resolutions must submit: “I trust to tarry a while with you, if the Lord permit” (1 Corinthians 16:7 and cf. James 4:13-15). Probably the apostle also had before him the sad state into which the Hebrews had fallen (Hebrews 5:11-14), in view of which this was a solemn and searching word for their conscience: because of their sloth and negligence there was reason to fear they had provoked God, so that He would grant them no further light (Luke 8:18). Finally, we believe the apostle looked to the Divine enablement of himself; were He to withdraw His assistance the teacher would be helpless: see 2 Corinthians 3:5. To sum up — in all things we must seek God’s glory, bow to His will, and recognize that all progress in the Truth is a special gift from Him (John 3:27).

CHAPTER 24

APOSTASY

(HEBREWS 6:4-6)

The passage which is now to occupy our attention is one of the most solemn in the Hebrews' epistle, yea, to be met with anywhere in the New Testament. Probably few regenerate souls have read it thoughtfully without being moved to fear and trembling. Careless professors have frequently been rendered uneasy in conscience as they have heard its awe-inspiring language. It speaks of a class of persons who had been highly privileged, who had been singularly favored, but who, so far from having improved their opportunities, had wretchedly perverted them; who had brought shame and reproach on the cause of Christ; and who were in such a hopeless condition that it was "impossible to renew them again unto repentance." Well does it become each one of us to earnestly lift up his heart to God, beseeching Him to prevent us making such a shipwreck of the faith.

As perhaps the majority of our readers are aware, the verses before us have proved one of the fiercest theological battlegrounds of the centuries. It is at this point that the hottest fights between Calvinists and Arminians have been waged. Those who believe that it is possible for a real Christian to so sin and backslide as to fall from grace and be lost eternally, have confidently appealed to these verses for proof of their theory. It is much to be feared their theory prejudiced them so much, that they were incapable of examining impartially and weighing carefully its varied terms. With their minds so biased by their views of apostasy, they have rather taken it for granted that this passage describes a true child of God, who, through turning his back upon Christ, ultimately perishes. But Scripture bids us "Prove all things" (1 Thessalonians 5:21), and this calls for something more than a superficial and hurried investigation of what is, admittedly, a difficult passage.

If on the one hand, Arminians have been too ready to read into this passage their unscriptural dogma of the apostasy of a Christian, it must be confessed that many Calvinists have failed to grapple successfully with and interpret satisfactorily the most knotty points in these verses. They are right in affirming that Scripture teaches, most emphatically and unequivocally the Divine preservation and the human perseverance of the saints, as they have also wisely pointed out that the Word of God does not and cannot contradict

itself. If our Lord asserted that His sheep should “never perish” (John 10:28), then certainly Hebrews 6 will not teach that some of them do. If through the apostle Paul the Holy Spirit assures us that nothing can separate the children from the love of their Father (Romans 8:35-39), then, without doubt, the portion now before us does not declare that something will. It may not always be easy to discover the perfect consistency of one scripture with another, yet we must hold fast to the unerring harmony and integrity of God’s Truth.

The chief difficulty connected with our passage is to make sure of the class of persons who are there in view. Is the Holy Spirit here describing regenerated or unregenerated souls? The next thing is to ascertain what is meant by, “If they shall fall away.” The last, what is denoted by “It is *impossible* to renew them again unto repentance.” Anticipating our exposition, we are fully assured that the “falling away” which is here spoken of signifies a deliberate, complete and final repudiation of Christ — a sin for which there is no forgiveness. So too we understand the “impossible” to renew them again to repentance, announces that their condition and case is beyond hope of recovery. Because of this, Calvinists have, generally, affirmed that this passage is treating of mere professors.

But over against this there are two insuperable objections: first, mere professors have nothing from which to “fall away”; second, mere professors have *never* been “renewed” unto repentance.

In addition to the controversy which these verses have occasioned, not a few have turned them unto an unwarrantable use.

“Misapprehension of this passage has also, I believe, in many cases occasioned extreme distress of mind to two classes of persons, — to nominal professors, who, after falling into gross sin, have been awakened to serious reflection; and to real Christians, on their falling under the power of mental disease, sinking into a state of spiritual languor, or being betrayed into such transgressions of the Divine law as David and Peter were guilty of: and this has thrown all but insurmountable obstacles in the way of both ‘fleeing for refuge, to lay hold on the hope set before them’ in the Gospel. All this makes it the more necessary that we should carefully inquire into the meaning of the passage. When rightly understood, it will be found to give no countenance to any of the false conclusions which

have been drawn from it, but to be like every other part of inspired Scripture, ‘profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness’, — well-fitted to produce caution, no way calculated to induce despair” (Dr. J. Brown).

Before attempting an elucidation of the above-mentioned difficulties, and to prepare the way for our exposition of these verses, the contents of which have so sorely puzzled many, let us recall, once more, the condition of soul into which these Hebrew Christians had fallen. They had “become dull of hearing” (Hebrews 5:11), “unskillful in the Word of Righteousness” (Hebrews 5:13), unable to masticate “strong meat” (Hebrews 5:14). This state was fraught with the most dangerous consequences. “The Hebrews had become lukewarm, negligent, and inert; the gospel, once dearly seen and dearly loved by them, had become to them dull and vague; the persecutions and contempt of their countrymen a grievous burden, under which they groaned, and under which they did not enjoy fellowship with the Lord Jesus. Darkness, doubt, gloom, indecision, and consequently a walk in which the power of Christ’s love was not manifest, characterized them. Now, if they continued in this state, what else could be the result but apostasy? Forgetfulness, if continued, must end in rejection, apathy in antipathy, unfaithfulness in infidelity.

“Such was their danger. And if they succumbed to it their state was hopeless. No other gospel remains to be preached, no other power to rescue and raise them. They had heard and known the voice which saith, ‘Come unto Me, and I will give you rest’. They had professed to believe in the Lord who died for sinners, and to have chosen Him as their Savior and Master. And now they were forgetting and forsaking the Rock of their Salvation. If they deliberately and wilfully continued in this state, they were in danger of final impenitence and hardness of heart.

“The exhortation must be viewed in connection with the special circumstances of the Hebrews. After the rejection of the Messiah by Israel, the gospel had been preached unto the Jews by the apostles, and the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit had been manifested among them. The Hebrews had accepted the gospel of the once crucified and now glorified Redeemer, who sent down from heaven

the Spirit, a sign of His exaltation, and a pledge of the future inheritance. Having thus entered *into the sphere of new covenant manifestation*, any one who willfully abandoned it could only relapse into that phase of Judaism which crucified the Lord Jesus. There was no other alternative for them, but either to go on to the full knowledge of the heavenly priesthood of Christ, and to the believer's acceptance and worship through the Mediator in the sanctuary above, or fall back into the attitude, not of the godly Israelites before Pentecost, such as John the Baptist and those who waited for the promised redemption, nor even into the condition of those for whom the Savior prayed, 'for they know not what they do'; but into a state of willful conscious enmity against Christ, and the sin of rejecting Him, and putting Him to an open shame" (Adolph Saphir).

"The danger to which this spiritual inertness exposed the Hebrews was such as to justify the strongest language of exhortation and reproof. Apostasy from Christ was a step more easy and natural to a Jewish than to a Gentile believer, because the way was always open and inviting them, as men, to return to those associations which once carried with them the outward sanctification of Jehovah's name, and which only the *power* of grace had enabled them to renounce. When heavenly realities became inoperative in their souls, the visible image was before them still, and here was the danger of their giving it the homage of their souls. If there were not an habitual exercise of their spiritual senses, the power of discernment could not remain: they would call evil good, and good evil. The ignorance which springs from spiritual neglect begins its own punishment of apathetic dullness on the once clear mind, and robs the spirit of its power to detect the wily methods of the Devil. It is in the presence of God alone that the Christian can exert his spiritual energies with effect. Abiding in Christ, maintains us in that presence. A more unhappy error cannot befall a believer than to separate, in the habit of his mind, acquired knowledge from the living Christ. Faith dies at once when separated from its object. Knowledge indeed is precious, but the knowledge of God is a progressive thing (Colossians 1:10), whose end is not obtained this

side of the glory (1 Corinthians 8:2). The extreme experience of an advancing Christian is that of continual initiation. With a prospect ever-widening he has a daily deepening apprehension of the grace wherein he stands, and in which he is more and more established, by the word of righteousness....

“A clear and *growing* faith, in *heavenly* things was needed to preserve Jewish Christians from relapse. To return to Judaism was to give up Christ, who had left their house ‘desolate’ (Matthew 23:38). It was to fall from grace, and place themselves not only under the general curse of the law, but that particular imprecation which had brought the guilt of Jesus’ blood on the reprobate and blinded nation of His murderers” (A. Pridham).

It should be pointed out, however, that it is just as easy, and the attraction is just as real, for a Gentile Christian to return to that world out of which the Lord has called him, as it was for a Jewish Christian to go back again to Judaism. And just in proportion as the Christian fails to walk with God daily, so does the world obtain power over his heart, mind and life; and a continuance in worldliness is fraught with the most direful and fatal consequences.

“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened” etc.
(verse 4).

Here the apostle continues the digression which he began at Hebrews 5:11. The parenthesis has two divisions: the first, Hebrews 5:11-14 is reprehensible; the second, Hebrews 6:1-20 is hortatory. In chapter 6 he exhorts the Hebrews unto two duties: to *progress* in the Christian course (verses 1-11); to *persevere* therein (verses 12-20). The first exhortation is proposed in verses 1,2 and qualified in verse 3. The *motive* to obedience is drawn from the danger of apostasy (verses 4-6). The opening “For” of verse 4 intimates the close connection of our present passage with that which immediately precedes. It draws a conclusion from what the apostle had been saying in Hebrews 5:11-14. It amplifies the “if” in verse 3. It points a most solemn warning against their continuance in their present sloth. It draws a terrible contrast from the possibility of verse 3.

“The apostle regards the retrogression of the Hebrews with dismay. He sees in it the danger of an entire, confirmed, wilful, and

irrecoverable apostasy from the truth. He beholds them on the brink of a precipice, and he therefore lifts up his voice, and with vehement yet loving earnestness he warns them against so fearful an evil” (Adolph Saphir).

Three things claim our careful attention in coming closer to our passage: the persons here spoken of, the sin they commit, the doom pronounced upon them. In considering the persons spoken of it is of first importance to note that the apostle does *not* say, “*us* who were once enlightened”, nor even “*you*”, instead, he says “*those*”. In sharp contrast from them, he says to the Hebrews, “Beloved, we are persuaded better things of you”.

“Afterwards, when the apostle comes to declare his hope and persuasion concerning these Hebrews that they were not such as those whom he had before described, nor such as would fall away unto perdition, *he doth* it upon three grounds whereon they were differenced from them as:

1. That they had such things as did ‘accompany salvation’; that is, such as salvation is inseparable from. None of these things therefore had he ascribed unto those whom he describeth in this place (verses 4-6); for if he had so done, they would not have been unto him an argument and evidence of a contrary end, that these should not fall away and perish as well as those. Wherefore he ascribes nothing to these here in the text that *doth* peculiarly ‘accompany salvation’.

2. He describes them by their *duties of obedience* and fruits of faith. This was their ‘work and labor of love’ towards the name of God, verse 10. And hereby, also, doth he differentiate them from those in the text, concerning whom he supposeth that they may perish eternally, which these fruits of saving faith and sincere love cannot do.

3. He adds, that, in the preservation of those there mentioned, the *faithfulness of God* was concerned: ‘God is not unrighteous to forget’. For they were such he intended as were interested in the covenant of grace, with respect whereunto alone there is any engagement on the faithfulness or righteousness of God to preserve men from apostasy and ruin; and there is so with an equal respect unto all who are so taken into the covenant. But of those in the text

he supposeth no such thing; and thereupon doth not intimate that either the righteousness or faithfulness of God was anyway engaged for their preservation, but rather the contrary” (Dr. John Owen).

It is scarcely accurate to designate as “mere professors” those described in verses 4, 5. They were a class who had enjoyed great privileges, beyond any such as now accompany the preaching of the Gospel. Those here portrayed are said to have had *five* advantages, which is in contrast from the six things enumerated in verses 1, 2, which things belong to man in the flesh, under Judaism. Five is the number of *grace*, and the blessings here mentioned pertain to the Christian dispensation. Yet were they not true Christians. This is evident from what is *not* said. Observe, they were not spoken of as God’s elect, as those for whom Christ died, as those who were born of the Spirit. They are not said to be justified, forgiven, accepted in the Beloved. Nor is anything said of their faith, love, or obedience. Yet *these* are the very things which distinguish a real child of God.

First, they had been “enlightened”. The Sun of righteousness had shone with healing in His wings, and, as Matthew 4:16 says, “The people which sat in darkness saw great light, and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up”. Unlike the heathen, whom Christ, in the days of His flesh, visited not, those who came under the sound of His voice were wondrously and gloriously illumined.

The Greek word for “enlightened” here signifies “to give light or knowledge by teaching”. It is so rendered by the Septuagint in Judges 13:8, 2 Kings 12:2, 17:27. The apostle Paul uses it for “to make manifest”, or “bring to light” in 1 Corinthians 4:5, 2 Timothy 1:10. Satan blinds the minds of those who believe not, lest “the light of the gospel should shine unto them” (2 Corinthians 4:4), that is, give the knowledge of it. Thus, “enlightened” here means to be instructed in the doctrine of the gospel, so as to have a clear apprehension of it. In the parallel passage in Hebrews 10:26 the same people are said to have “received the knowledge of the truth”, cf. Also 2 Peter 2:20, 21. It is, however, only a *natural* knowledge of spiritual things, such as is acquired by outward hearing or reading; just as one may be enlightened by taking up the special study of one of the sciences. It falls far short of that spiritual enlightenment which *transforms* (2 Corinthians 3:18). An illustration of a unregenerate person being “enlightened”, as here, is found in the case of

Balaam; Numbers 24:4.

Second, they had “tasted” of the heavenly gift. To “taste” is to have a personal experience of, in contrast from mere report.

“Tasting does not include eating, much less digesting and turning into nourishment what is so tasted; for its nature being only thereby discerned it may be refused, yea, though we like its relish and savor, on some other consideration. The persons here described, then, are those who have to a certain degree understood and relished the revelation of mercy; like the stony-ground hearers they have received the Word with a transcient joy” (John Owen).

The “tasting” is in contrast from the “eating” of John 6:50-56.

Opinion is divided as to whether the “heavenly gift” refers to the Lord Jesus or the person of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps it is not possible for us to be dogmatic on the point. Really, the difference is without a distinction, for the Spirit is here to glorify Christ, as He came from the Father by Christ as His ascension “Gift” to His people. If the reference be to the Lord Jesus, John 3:16, 4:10, etc., would be pertinent references: if to the Holy Spirit, Acts 2:38, 8:20, 10:45, 11:17. Personally, we rather incline to the latter. This Divine Gift is here said to be “heavenly” because from Heaven, and leading to Heaven, in contrast from Judaism — cf. Acts 2:2, 1 Peter 1:12. Of this “Gift” these apostates had “tasted”, or had an experience of: compare Matthew 27:34 where “tasting” is opposed to actual drinking. Those here in view had had an acquaintance with the Gospel, as to gain such a measure of its blessedness as to greatly aggravate their sin and doom. An illustration of this is found in Matthew 13:20, 21.

Third, they were “made partakers of the Holy Spirit”. First, it should be pointed out that the Greek word for “partakers” here is a different one from that used in Colossians 1:12 and 2 Peter 1:4, where real Christians are in view. The word here simply means “companions”, referring to what is external rather than internal. It is to be observed that this item is placed in the center of the five, and this because it describes the animating principle of the other four, which are all effects. These apostates had never been “born of the Spirit” (John 3:6), still less were their bodies His “temples” (1 Corinthians 6:19). Nor do we believe this verse teaches that the Holy Spirit had, at any time, wrought *within* them, otherwise Philippians 1:6 would be contravened.

It means that they had shared in the benefit of His supernatural operations and manifestations: “The place was shaken” (Acts 4:31) illustrates. We quote below from Dr. J. Brown:

“It is highly probable that the inspired writer refers primarily to the miraculous gifts and operations of the Holy Spirit by which the primitive dispensation of Christianity was administered. These gifts were by no means confined to those who were ‘transformed by the renewing of their minds’. The words of our Lord in Matthew 7:22, 23 and of Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:1, 2 seem to intimate, that the possession of these unrenewed men was not very uncommon in that age; at any rate they plainly show that their possession and an unregenerate state were by no means incompatible”.

Fourth, “And have tasted the good Word of God”.

“I understand by this expression the promise of God respecting the Messiah, the sum and substance of all. It deserves notice that this promise is by way of eminence termed by Jeremiah ‘that good word’ (Jeremiah 33:14). To ‘taste’, then, this ‘good Word of God’, is to experience that God has been faithful to His promise — to enjoy, so far as an unconverted man can enjoy the blessings and advantages which flow from that promise being fulfilled. To ‘taste the good Word of God’, seems, just to enjoy the advantages of the new dispensation” (Dr. J. Brown).

Further confirmation that the apostle is here referring to that which these apostates had witnessed of the fulfillment of God’s *promise* is obtained by comparing Jeremiah 29:10,

“After seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform My *good word* toward you, in causing you to return to this place”.

Observe how studiously the apostle still keeps to the word “taste”, the better to enable us to identify them. They could not say with Jeremiah, “Thy words were found and I did *eat* them” (Jeremiah 15:16).

“It is as though he said, I speak not of those who have received nourishment; but of such as have so far tasted it, as that they ought to have desired it as ‘sincere milk’ and grown thereby” (Dr. John

Owen).

A solemn example of one who merely “tasted” the good Word of God is found in Mark 6:20: “for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly”.

Fifth, “And the powers of the world to come,” or “age to come.” The reference here is to the new dispensation which was to be ushered in by Israel’s Messiah according to Old Testament predictions. It corresponds with “these last days” of Hebrews 1:2, and is in contrast from the “time past” or Mosaic economy. Their Messiah was none other than the “mighty God” (Isaiah 9), and wondrous and glorious, stupendous and unique, were His miraculous works. These “powers” of the new Age are mentioned in Hebrews 2:4, to our comments on which we would refer the reader. Of these mighty “powers” these apostates had “tasted”, or had an experience of. They had been personal witnesses of the miracles of Christ, and also of the wonders that followed His ascension, when such glorious manifestations of the Spirit were given. Thus they were “without excuse”. Convincing and conclusive evidence had been set before them, but there had been no answering faith in their hearts. A solemn example of this is found in John 11:47, 48.

“If they shall fall away.” The Greek word here is very strong and emphatic, even stronger than the one used in Matthew 7:27, where it is said of the house built on the sand, “and great was the fall thereof”. It is a complete falling away, a total abandonment of Christianity which is here in view. It is a wilful turning of the back on God’s revealed truth, an utter repudiation of the Gospel. It is making “shipwreck of the faith” (1 Timothy 1:19). This terrible sin is not committed by a mere nominal professor, for he has nothing really to fall away from, save an empty name. The class here described are such as had had their minds enlightened, their consciences stirred, their affections moved to a considerable degree, and yet who were never brought from death unto life. Nor is it backsliding Christians who are in view. It is not simply “fall into sin”, this or that sin. The greatest “sin” which a regenerated man can possibly commit is the personal denial of Christ: Peter was guilty of this, yet was he “renewed again unto repentance”. It is the total renunciation of all the distinguishing truths and principles of Christianity, and this not secretly, but openly, which constitutes apostasy.

“If they shall fall away”.

“This is scarcely a fair translation. It has been said that the apostle did not here assert that such persons *did* or *do* ‘fall away’; but that if they did — a supposition which, however, could never be realized — then the consequence would be they could not be ‘renewed again unto repentance’. The words literally rendered are, ‘And have fallen away’, or, ‘yet have fallen’. The apostle obviously intimates that such persons might, and that such persons did, ‘fall away’. By ‘falling away’, we are plainly to understand what is commonly called apostasy. This does not consist in an occasional falling into actual sin, however gross and aggravated; nor in the renunciation of some of the principles of Christianity, even though those should be of considerable importance; but in an open, total, determined renunciation of all the constituent principles of Christianity, and a return to a false religion, such as that of unbelieving Jews or heathens, or to open infidelity and open godlessness” (Dr. J. Brown).

“It is impossible.... if they fall away, to renew them again unto repentance”. Four questions here call for answer. What is meant by “renewed unto repentance”? What is signified by “renewed again unto repentance”? Why is such an experience “impossible”? To whom is this “impossible”? Repentance signifies a change of mind: Matthew 21:29, Romans 11:29 establish this. It is more than a mental act, the conscience also being active, leading to contrition and self-condemnation (Job 42:6). In the unregenerate, it is simply the workings of nature; in the children of God it is wrought by the Holy Spirit. The latter is evangelical, being one of the things which “accompany salvation”. The former is not so, being the “sorrow of the world”, which “worketh death” (2 Corinthians 7:10). This kind of “repentance” or remorse receives most solemn exemplification in the case of Judas: Matthew 27:3, 5. Such was the repentance of these apostates. The Greek verb for “renew” here occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. Probably “restore” had been better, for the same word is used in the Sept., for a Hebrews verb meaning to renew in the sense of restore: Psalm 103:5; 104:30; Lamentations 5:21. Josephus applies it to the renovation of the Temple!

But what is meant by “renewing unto repentance”?

“To be ‘renewed’ is a figurative expression for denoting a change, a

great change, and a change for the better. To be ‘renewed’ so as to change a person’s mind is expressive of an important and advantageous alteration of opinion, and character and service. And such an alteration the persons referred to had undergone at a former period. They were once in a state of ignorance respecting the doctrines and evidences of Christianity, and they had been ‘enlightened’. They had once known not of the excellency and beauty of Christian truth, and they had been made to ‘taste of the heavenly gift’. They once misunderstood the prophecies respecting the Messiah, and were unaware of their fulfillment, and, of course, were strangers to that energetic influence which the New Testament revelation puts forth; and they had been made to see that that ‘good word’ was fulfilled, and had been made partakers of the external privileges and been subjected to the peculiar energies of the new order of things. Their view, and feelings, and circumstances, were materially changed. How great the difference between an ignorant, bigoted Jew, and the person described in the preceding passage! He had become as it were a different man. He had not, indeed, become, in the sense of the apostle, a ‘new creature’, His mind had not been so changed as unfeignedly to believe ‘the truth as it is in Jesus’; but still, a great and so far as it went, a thorough change had taken place” (Dr. J. Brown).

Now it is impossible to “renew again unto repentance” those who have totally abandoned the Christian revelation. Some things are “impossible” with respect unto the *nature* of God, as that He cannot lie, or pardon sin without satisfaction to His justice. Other things which are possible to God’s nature are rendered “impossible” by His *decrees* or purpose: see 1 Samuel 15:28, 29. Still other things are “possible” or “impossible” with respect to the rule or order of all things God has appointed. For example, there cannot be faith apart from hearing the Word (Romans 10:13-17).

“When in things of duty God hath neither expressed command thereon, nor appointed means for the performance of them, they are to be looked upon then as impossible [as, for instance, there is no salvation apart from repentance, Luke 13:3. (A.W.P.)]; and then, with respect unto *us*, they are so absolutely, and so to be esteemed. And this is the ‘impossibility’ here principally intended. It is a thing

that God hath neither commanded us to endeavor, nor appointed means to attain it, nor promise to assist us in it. It is therefore that which we have no reason to look after, attempt, or expect, as being not possible by any law, rule, or constitution of God.”

“The apostle instructs us no further in the nature of future events but as our own duty is concerned in them. It is not for us either to look or hope, or pray for, or endeavor the restoration of such persons unto repentance. God gives a law unto us in these things, not unto Himself. It may be possible with God, for aught we know, if there be not a contradiction in it unto any of the holy properties of His nature; only He will not have us to expect any such thing from Him, nor hath He appointed any means for us to endeavor it. What He shall do we ought trustfully to accept; but our own duty toward such persons is absolutely at an end. And indeed, they put themselves wholly out of *our* reach” (Dr. John Owen).

It needs to be carefully observed that in the whole of this passage from Hebrews 5:11 onwards the apostle is speaking of *his own ministry*. In God’s hands, His servants are instruments by which He works and through whom He accomplishes His evangelical purpose. Thus Paul could properly say “I have *begotten you* through the gospel” (1 Corinthians 4:15). And again,

“My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you” (Galatians 4:19).

So the servants of God had, through the preaching of the Gospel, “renewed unto repentance” those spoken of in Hebrews 6:4. But they had apostatised; they had totally repudiated the Gospel. It was therefore “impossible” for the *servants* of God to “renew them *again* unto repentance”, for the all-sufficient reason that they had no other message to proclaim to them. They had no other Gospel in reserve, no further motives to present. Christ crucified *had been* set before them. Him they now denounced as an Imposter. There was “none other name” whereby they could be saved. Their public renunciation of Christ rendered their case hopeless so far as God’s servants were concerned. “Let them alone” (Matthew 15:19) was now their orders: compare Jude 22. Whether or not it was possible for God, consistently with His holiness, to shame them, our passage does not decide.

“Seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh” (verse 6).

This is brought in to show the aggravation of their awful crime and the impossibility of their being renewed again unto repentance. By renouncing their Christian profession they declared Christ to be an Imposter. Thus they were irreclaimable. To attempt any further reasoning with them, would only be casting pearls before swine. With this verse should be carefully compared the parallel passage in Hebrews 10:26-29. These apostates had “received the knowledge of the truth”, though *not* a saving knowledge of it. Afterward they sinned “wilfully”: there was a deliberate and open disavowal of the truth. The nature of their particular sin is termed a “treading under foot the Son of God (something which no real Christian ever does) and counting (esteeming) the blood of the covenant an unholy thing”, that is, looking upon the One who hung on the Cross as a *common* malefactor. For such there “remaineth no more sacrifice for sins”. Their case is hopeless so far as man is concerned; and the writer believes, such are abandoned by God also.

“Seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame.”

“They thus identify themselves with His crucifiers — they entertained and avowed sentiments which were He on earth and in their power, would induce them to crucify Him. They exposed Him to infamy, made a public example of Him. They did more to dishonor Jesus Christ than His murderers did. They never professed to acknowledge His divine mission; but these apostates had made such a profession — they had made a kind of trial of Christianity, and, after trial, had rejected it” (Dr. J. Brown).

Such a warning was needed and well calculated to stir up the slothful Hebrews. Under the Old Testament economy, by means of types and prophecies, they had obtained glimmerings of truth as to Christ, called “the word of the beginning of Christ”. Under those shadows and glimmerings they had been reared, not knowing their full import till they had been blessed with the full light of the Gospel, here called “perfection”. The danger to which they were exposed was that of receding from the ground where Christianity placed them, and relaxing to Judaism. To do so meant to re-enter that House which Christ had left “desolate” (Matthew 23:38), and would be to join forces with His murderers, and thus “crucify to *themselves the* Son of God afresh”, and by their apostasy “put Him to an open (public) shame”. We may

add that the Greek word here for “crucify” is a stronger one than is generally used: it means to “crucify up”. Attention is thus directed to the erection of the cross on which the Savior was held up to public scorn.

Taking the passage as a whole, it needs to be remembered that all who had professed to receive the Gospel were not born of God: the parable of the Sower shows that. Intelligence might be informed, conscience searched, natural affections stirred, and yet there be “no root” in them. All is not gold that glitters. There has always been a “mixt multitude” (Exodus 12:38) who accompany the people of God. Moreover, there is in the real Christian the old heart, which is “deceitful above all things and desperately wicked”, and therefore is he in constant need of faithful *warning*. Such, God has given in every dispensation: Genesis 2:17; Leviticus 26:15, 16; Matthew 3:8; Romans 11:21; 1 Corinthians 10:12.

Finally, let it be said that while Scripture speaks plainly and positively of the perseverance of the saints, yet it is a perseverance of *saints*, not unregenerate professors. Divine preservation is not only in a safe state, but also in a *holy* course of disposition and conduct. We are “kept by the power of God *through faith*”. We are kept by the Spirit working in us a spirit of entire dependency, renouncing our own wisdom and strength. The only place from which we cannot fall is one down in the dust. It is there the Lord brings His own people, weaning them from all confidence in the flesh, and giving them to experience that it is when they are weak they are strong. Such, and such only, are saved and safe forever.

CHAPTER 25

THE TWOFOLD WORKING OF THE SPIRIT

(HEBREWS 6:4-6)

In our last article we attempted little more than an explication of the terms used in Hebrews 6:4-6. Lack of space prevented us from throwing upon these verses the light which other portions of God's Word affords, yet this is necessary if we are to form anything like a true and adequate conception of the particular characters which are there in view. One chief reason why students of Scripture continue to experience difficulty in ascertaining the meaning of any verse therein, is because they fail to prayerfully and *patiently* compare "spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Corinthians 2:13). All of us are in far too much a hurry, and for this reason miss the best of what God has provided — true both of temporal and spiritual things. Probably few of our readers considered that we had succeeded in clearing away all the difficulties raised by this solemn passage, therefore the need of a further article thereon.

On the present occasion we propose to take up our passage more from a topical viewpoint than an expository, seeking (as God may be pleased to graciously enable) to open up more fully that in it which has caused the most trouble, namely, the precise relation of the Holy Spirit to the characters therein mentioned. They who "fall away" and whom it is "impossible to renew again unto repentance", are said to have been "made partakers of the Holy Spirit". We ask now, On what has the Spirit wrought? What was the character of His work toward them? *How* had they been made "partakers" of Him? To what extent? This leads us to point out that Scripture reveals a twofold working of God's Spirit with men: with the elect, *and* with the non-elect. It is of the latter we shall here treat.

Concerning the Spirit's work with the non-elect, we begin by enquiring, Upon what does He work? We answer, Upon the faculties of men's souls.

First, He works upon the *understanding*. There are in all men natural faculties of understanding, will, and affection. A man could not love God unless he had in him the faculty of affection — a stone could never love God! So a man could never understand spiritual things unless he had the faculty of understanding. With the elect, the Holy Spirit "renews" the understanding (Romans 12:2 compared with Titus 3:5); but with the non-elect, He only

enlightens or educates it. The understanding of fallen and unregenerate men, which is enlightened by the Spirit, is capable of knowing, in some measure, both the Godhead, and parts of His law. Let us give Scripture proof of this.

In Romans 1:18 we read of men who “hold the truth in unrighteousness”, and what is there referred to is explained in what follows: “Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed unto them. For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made: His eternal power and Godhead” (verses 19, 20). The reference there, as the later verses show, is to the Heathen. Now what we would press upon the attention of the reader is, that in addition to poor fallen nature, God has granted to men a manifestation of Himself; that which “may be known of God”, which He “hath *showed* unto them”. It is not merely that creation reveals a Creator, but that the Creator *has revealed Himself* — “when they knew God” (verse 21), and that must have been by the Spirit’s enlightening their natural understanding.

Again, in Romans 2:14, 15 we read,

“For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law are a law unto themselves: Which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness”.

The Holy Spirit is speaking here of men according to “nature”, not grace. In his natural heart there is written “the work of the law” — by whom but by the finger of God! Except for this, man would be destitute of moral light, for the Fall robbed him of all light.

The understanding in man, or the principle of reason, may, by education and contact with others, be developed to a considerable extent, so that a man may become exceeding wise; nevertheless, his knowledge and wisdom is only *natural*, even though his understanding be exercised upon supernatural objects. But let now the light of reason and the light of conscience be brought to the Scriptures for instruction, and man’s knowledge will be much further increased, yet still his light is but *natural*, it rises not to the level of what grace produces. Proof of this is seen in the case of the Jews:

“Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God; and knowest His will, and approvest the things that

are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; and are confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness” (Romans 2:17-19).

How like thousands of unregenerate souls in Christendom today!

From the last-quoted passage we learn what is the effect of the light of nature (reason) being brought to the law of God: it is increased and improved. As we have seen above, a man has some light by nature that there is a God; let that light be brought to Scripture, and he becomes “confident” there is. A man by nature has some light about the duties which God requires of him; let him bring that light to the Scriptures and he will have “the *form* (systematized) of knowledge, and of the *truth* in the law” (Romans 2:20). When the understanding of the natural man is illumined by the Scriptures, his light is both ratified and added unto, yet is it still *natural* light which he has; it is but the educating of his natural reason.

Second, the Holy Spirit works upon the *affections* of the natural man. There is in fallen man a natural devotion to a deity. This is evidenced by the fact that practically all of the heathen worship some god or other. In Acts 13:50 we read of “devout women” being stirred up against Paul and Barnabas: they had a devotion in them which is common to mankind. Now let men bring their natural devotion to the Scriptures and they will come to know of the true God, and learn to reverence Him too; yet is that only nature improved. Through the Word, the Holy Spirit may (usually, does) convince its reader that the Maker of heaven and earth is the true God, and therefore worthy of honor and homage. The fact is, though very few indeed recognize it, the identical principle which causes a Hindu to worship Buddha, causes the Anglo-Saxon to worship the Father of Jesus Christ.

Again; there is in every sinner the natural recognition that his sins deserve eternal death, and that God, unless He be appeased, will punish him. Doubtless many of our readers will feel inclined to call into question this last statement; let our appeal again be to the Word of Truth. There we read,

“Who, knowing the judgment of God, that they might commit such things are worthy of death” (Romans 1:32).

That, be it noted, is said of the heathen. No bring one having such knowledge to the law of God, and what will follow? This,

“But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things” (Romans 2:2).

There it is the Jews speaking. The natural man enlightened from the Word has his conviction deepened.

Again, if a man is conscious of his sins, and realizes that the justice of God calls for their punishment, is it not natural for him to think next of a *mediator*, to desire someone to intercede for him with God? Such a concept is by no means a sure evidence of regeneration.

This too is found in mere nature. Every heathen religion, with the propitiatory offerings which are brought to their gods, exemplifies it. Romanism with its mediating priests demonstrates the same fact in this land. Illustrations are also to be found in the Holy Scriptures. When Pharaoh was convicted of his sins, he entreated Moses to intercede for him (Exodus 10:16, 17). So too wicked Simon Magus desired Peter to pray for him (Acts 8:24).

Once more; there is in the heart of every natural man a desire for happiness, and for a greater happiness than this poor world can provide. It is plainly evident that man rests not in anything down here, for like a bee which goes from one flower to another, so the heart of man cannot be satisfied with any earthly object. When Balaam saw the blessedness of God’s people, he exclaimed, “Let me die the death of the righteous” (Numbers 23:10). The most abandoned wretch does not want to go to hell, and to the very end he hopes that he will be taken to heaven.

So, likewise, is the matter of believing that a man really is a child of God. There is such self-love and self-flattery in the fallen heart that if an unregenerate man hears, out of the Word of God, the good news that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, *he* at once concludes that he is the man God will honor, as wicked Haman imagined that *he* was the man king Ahasuerus would honor. So when the Holy Spirit has terrified a man’s conscience, by giving it a sight of sin before a holy God, when he learns about remission of sins through Christ, he at once fondly imagines that his own sins are pardoned. Alas, in the vast majority of cases it has to be said, “the pride of thine heart hath deceived thee” (Obadiah 3).

Now let us take note of how the Holy Spirit may work upon the *natural* principles of the human soul, mightily raising them, and yet *not* changing a

man's heart. Just as the rays of the sun shining upon plants in a garden adds no new nature to them, but serves to aid their best development, so the Holy Spirit when He deals with the reprobate communicates nothing new to them, yet raises their natural faculties to their highest point. The principles or faculties of man's soul *are* capable of being wrought upon *without the* impartation of regenerating grace. As we have seen, man's understanding is illuminated by the light of conscience, but let the Holy Spirit — *without* imparting a new eye — still further enlighten that conscience, bring before it the exalted claims of the thrice holy God, and its knowledge will be greatly increased. Nevertheless, this educated conscience falls far below the level of the spiritual discernment possessed by one who has been brought out of death into life. Let us particularize:

1. THE SPIRIT RESTRAINS THE CORRUPTIONS OF MEN.

In Genesis 20:6 we read of how God bound the lust of Abimeleck when Sarah was at his mercy, "I also withheld thee from sinning against Me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her". So in 2 Peter 2:20 we read of some "having escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ", yet from what follows in the next two verses it is clear they were never regenerated. There the apostle uses the similitude of a sow being washed from her filth, and being kept for a while, after she is washed, from going back again into the mire; yet is there no changing or "renewing" of the swine's nature.

Contrast now what is said of the Lord's people in 2 Peter 1:3, 4,

"According as His Divine power hath given unto us all things pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be partakers of the Divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust".

In 2 Peter 2:20, the Greek word for the "pollutions" of the world, signifies the gross and outward defilements into which the irreligious run; but in 2 Peter 1:4, the regenerated are said to have escaped "*the corruption*" that is in the world *through lust* or "desire", i.e. The inward disposition toward evil. Moreover, the Lord's people are made "partakers of the Divine nature", which means, the Divine image is stamped upon them: "life and godliness"

are seen in them.

Again; in the similitude used in 2 Peter 2:20, the apostle likens those who have known “the way of righteousness” to a dog that has been made sick, but which turns to its own vomit again. The figure is very striking and forcible. When the Holy Spirit brings the Word of God to bear upon an unregenerate man’s conscience, he is made sick at heart. Of Christians it is said, “For ye have not received the Spirit of bondage again to fear” (Romans 8:15), but to the non-elect He often becomes a Spirit of “*bondage*” by binding their sins upon their conscience. Whereas before they had a glimmering light that the judgment of God is against sinners, their conscience now is set on fire, and the temporary consequence is that sins are refused with loathing, vomited out. Yet, like a dog, such a one loves them still, and ultimately returns thereto.

2. THE SPIRIT CAUSES MEN TO TURN NATURALLY TOWARD THE REDEEMER.

When conscience is wrought upon by a few sparks of God’s wrath falling upon it, what saith the soul next? This, O for a physician! There is, as we have pointed out above, a natural principle in men which causes them to make use of a mediator unto God — a witch-doctor, a priest, or a preacher, as the case may be. Now a man who has lived under the sound of the Gospel learns that Christ is the one Mediator. Scriptural education has taught him this, just as the heathen education teaches a Turk that Mahomet is the one mediator. And, by the same principle that Agrippa believed Moses and the prophets, the unregenerate “Christian” (?) *believes* in Christ. Nay further, the light of the Spirit shining upon him, as the sun on the plants, develops his natural understanding and causes him to now remember that Redeemer which before he ignored.

A scripture clearly to the point of what we have just said above is Psalm 78:34, 35,

“When He slew them, then they sought Him: and they returned and enquired early after God. And they remembered that God was their Rock, and the high God their Redeemer”.

Yet what immediately follows? This, “Nevertheless they did flatter Him with their mouth”. And what signifies this “flattering”? Why, they sought Him merely out of *self-love*, simply because they felt their very lives were in

imminent danger. There is a seeking out of friendship, out of love to the object. But if one seek unto an enemy because he hath need of him, that is but “flattery” or self-love. So if sinful man feels he is in extremity, if his conscience remains sick, mere nature will call for the Physician.

Self-love is the predominant principle in the natural man: he loves himself more than he loves God; it is this which lies at the root of depravity and sin. Now when a man’s conscience is convicted so that he perceives his need of a physician, and recognizes that happiness comes from Christ, such good news appeals to his self-love. Satan, who knows human nature so well was right when he said, “skin for skin yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life” (Job 2:4). Make the self-love of the natural man conscious of the wrath of God, and he is ready to “accept Christ”, or do anything else which the preacher bids him; yet that is only the workings of nature, he is still unregenerate.

When the storm arose and threatened to sink the ship in which Jonah lay asleep we read, “Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god”; then the captain awoke Jonah and said.

“Arise, call upon thy God, if so be God will think upon us that we perish not” (Hebrews 1:5,6).

So a conscience terrified by the prospect of Hell, will cause a man to seek Christ after a natural way. It is but the instinct of self-preservation at work. Add to this, the craving for happiness which self-love ever seeks, and hearing that such happiness is to be found only in Christ, little wonder that multitudes seek Him now for what they can get *from* Him, as of old they sought Him for the sake of the loaves and fishes.

In John 6:33, we are told that Christ announced,

“For the bread of God is He which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world”.

What was their response? This, “Then they said unto Him, Lord, evermore give us this bread”. Yet their eager request sprang not from a renewed heart, but from the corrupt spring of self-love. Proof of this is found in the immediate sequel. In verse 36 the Lord tells them plainly, ye “believe not”. In verse 41 we are told that they “murmured at Him”. Yet that very same people said to the Lord, “Evermore give us this Bread”! Ah, all is not gold that

glitters.

An enlightened understanding, moved by self-love, is prepared to take up Divine duties never practiced before, yea, to walk in the commandments of God. This was demonstrated plainly at Sinai. When Jehovah appeared before Israel in His awesome majesty, and their conscience was smitten by His manifested holiness, they said to Moses, “Go thou near, and hear all that the Lord our God shall say; and speak thou unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee; and we will hear and do”. They were prepared to receive and obey the Lord’s statutes. Yet mark what God said of them, “Oh, that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear Me, and keep all My commandments always”. They still lacked the principle of regeneration!

3. THE SPIRIT ELEVATES THE NATURAL FACULTIES OF MAN.

Just as the shining of the sun causes plants to grow higher and fruits to be sweeter than would be the case were the heavens to remain cloudy and overcast, so the Spirit works upon the faculties of the unregenerate and causes them to bring forth that which left to themselves they would not produce. Or, just as fire will raise the temperature and level of water, causing it to bubble up and ascend in steam, though the principle of heat is in the fire and not in the water, for when the fire is withdrawn the water returns to its natural coldness again; so the Spirit enlightens the understandings of the non-elect, stirs their affections, and moves their wills to action, without communicating a new principle to them, without regenerating them.

He elevates the *understanding*. In Numbers 24:2 we read that the Spirit of God came upon Balaam, the consequence of which he has told us:

“The man who had his eyes shut, but now opened, hath said: he hath said, which heard the words of God, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling but having his eyes opened: How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, thy tabernacles, O Israel!” (verses 3-5).

Thus Balaam had a vision of the Almighty, and perceived the blessed estate of His people; yet was he still unregenerate!

He elevates the *affections*. In 1 Samuel 11:1-3 we read of how the enemies of Jehovah insulted His people. Then we are told,

“And the Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard these tidings,

and his *anger was kindled greatly*” (verse 6).

That was holy indignation, yet it proceeded from a reprobate! As the winds blowing upon the sea will, at times, raise its waters to a great height, so the Spirit, under a faithful sermon, will blow upon the affections of the unregenerate, and elevate them to nobler objects and occupations. Yet, He stops short of making them new creatures in Christ Jesus.

Again; as we have seen, there is in man a natural desire for real happiness, hence, when Christ is presented in the Gospel, many receive Him “with joy”; yet, are they, for the most part, but *stony-ground* hearers, destitute of any root of vital godliness (Matthew 13:20, 21). Nature may be so raised by the light which the Holy Spirit brings to it, that unregenerate men may taste of the heavenly gift, Christ, see John 4:10. So too they are enabled to *taste* of the “powers of the world to come”. As in their conscience, they get a taste of Hell, and so know for a certainty that there is a Hell, the same natural principle which desires a happiness which is beyond this world, is *confirmed* and comforted when they have a “taste” of what belongs to the world to come.

He elevates the will and sets it to work in the way of obedience to God. The Holy Spirit is the Author of all moral and civil righteousness which there is in the world. The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus to issue a proclamation for the building of His house (Ezra 1:1, 2); and He also moved Caiaphas to prophesy of Christ (John 11:51). Of wicked Herod we read that, when he heard John “he did many things, and heard him gladly” (Mark 6:20). And God will be no man’s Debtor: every act of obedience, performed by him in obedience to His Word, shall be rewarded: a temporary joy shall be the portion of such. The tragic thing is that so many conclude from such an experience that they are in a state of grace, and therefore become loud in their professions of assurance, being fully persuaded that *they are* really born-again persons.

Now we trust that what has been said will enable some of our readers to understand the better what is found in Hebrews 6:4-6. One eminent commentator suggested that these verses describe neither the regenerate nor the unregenerate, but a third condition, midway between; because there must be a third state between that of mere nature and that of supernatural grace. Nor are we at all surprised that he arrived at this conclusion. Few indeed have

perceived the force of 1 Corinthians 12:6, “And there are *diversities of operations*, but it is the same God which worketh all in all”.

There *are* operations of the Spirit upon men’s hearts which are above nature, which are works of Divine power, which produces that in and from unregenerate men which leads multitudes of them to fondly imagine that they have been actually born again, and yet *this* work of the Spirit falls far short of that “*exceeding greatness* of His power to us-ward who believe” (Ephesians 1:19). Hebrews 6:4-6 supplies a most striking example of this, for there we have men who are made “partakers of the Holy Spirit”. There we see a work which is above nature, for they taste of the “heavenly Gift”. It is a work of power, for they taste of the “*powers* of the world to come”. As 1 Corinthians 12:4 tells us, “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit”. And why is this? 1 Corinthians 12:11 answers, “But all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will”: He proportions His power as He pleases, to an inferior or a superior work. Note carefully, there are “good gifts” from above, as well as “perfect gifts” (James 1:17)!

Of old Jehovah said, “My Spirit shall not always strive with man” (Genesis 6:3). There we find the Spirit putting forth power upon man, for He “strives” with him; yet, not in the fullness of His power, or it had not been resisted. In other cases He puts forth power and men yield thereto (as did Balaam), yet is that power simply directed to the winding up of man’s natural faculties to their greatest height, and comes far short of regenerating them. This is clearly illustrated in the parable of the Sower. There is the stony-ground hearer, who received the Word with joy, yet falls away in time of persecution. There is also the thorny-ground hearer, who withstands persecution, and brings forth fruit, yet not “to perfection”. And both of them represent unregenerate souls.

And *why* does God put forth His power upon the reprobate, yet not the “*exceeding greatness*” of His power? God has seen well to *test* men in various ways. First, He gave them the light of nature, the work of the law written in their hearts, augmented by the light of conscience — a light which enabled men to know there was a God and of their duties toward Him. And Socrates, who knew nothing of the Scriptures, went so far as to die for the truth that there was One God. But this light of nature did not regenerate men, nor enable them to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit.

Again; He tried the Jews with His Law. He would make it evident how far the

light of nature, improved by the light of His Law, would go. And let it not be forgotten that of Israel under the Law it is said. “Thou gavest also Thy good Spirit to instruct them” (Nehemiah 9:20). Nevertheless, the law was “weak through the flesh” (Romans 8:3): it could not bring forth that which was truly spiritual. And just as God gave Socrates as the highest product of what the light of nature could produce, so He gave Saul of Tarsus — a man who walked *blamelessly* (Philippians 3:6) — as the highest product under the Law.

But now He is trying men with the Gospel, to show how far human nature as such can go. That Gospel is accompanied with the Spirit, and Hebrews 6:4-6 shows us the highest point which can be attained under it, by man in the flesh. He may be enlightened, renewed unto repentance, enjoy the Word of God, be made a partaker of the Holy Spirit, and yet apostatize and perish forever. So too the same characters are said to have “done despite unto the Spirit of grace” (Hebrews 10:26). The tragic thing is that the vast majority in Christendom look upon these inferior workings of the Spirit as evidence of His new-creating grace.

And *what*, we may enquire, *is God’s purpose* in these secondary operations of His Spirit? It is manifold. We can barely mention the leading designs.

First, it is *to exhibit the excellency of Grace*. Every thing in nature hath either its counterfeit or counterfoil. If there are stationary stars, there are also shooting stars. If there are precious stones, there are pebbles which closely resemble yet differ widely from them. The one serves to set off the other. So there is a natural faith —

“Many believed in His name when they saw the miracles which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself unto *them*” (John 2:23, 24);

“The demons believe” (James 2:19) — and there is a supernatural faith, “the faith of God’s elect” (Titus 1:1), called “*precious* faith” (2 Peter 1:1)! So there are common operations of the Spirit, and special operations; inferior workings upon the flesh, and superior workings that beget “spirit” (John 3:6). By virtue of this contrast, God says to each of His elect, See how much I have wrought on mere nature in the reprobate! Yet it was not grace; I might have done no more for you, but I showed the “exceeding greatness of My power” (Ephesians 1:19) toward you.

Second, to show *the depravity of human nature*. No matter under what trial God places man, that which is born of the flesh remains naught but flesh. The Law was weak through the flesh; so too is the Gospel, notwithstanding the shining of God's Spirit upon men. The conscience may be convicted, the understanding enlightened, the affections raised, and the will moved, yet it still remains true that "every man at his *best* state is altogether vanity" (Psalm 39:5). Men may be instructed in the truth, believe in the living God, "accept Christ as their personal Savior", contend for the faith once delivered to the saints, and pass among men for devout Christians, yet be no better than "whited sepulchers, full of dead men's bones".

Third, to *place bounds upon sin*. The general workings of God's Spirit upon the reprobate serve to curb the risings of man's corrupt nature. As it is His presence here upon earth which hinders the full manifestation of the mystery of iniquity in the appearing of the anti-Christ (2 Thessalonians 2), so His operations upon the non-elect prevent many outbursts of wickedness. In the time of Israel's apostasy the Holy Spirit (the "glory") withdrew gradually, stage by stage (Ezekiel 11), so as the apostasy of Christendom increases, the restraining operations of the Spirit are decreasing and hence the rising tide of lawlessness.

Fourth, to *afford protection for the elect*. God's flock is only "*the little*" one (Luke 12:32), very, very much smaller than is commonly supposed. Christ Himself declared that only "FEW" are in the *Narrow Way* which leadeth "unto life" (Matthew 7:14). Nor must Revelation 7:9 be made to contradict these clear passages; instead, the "great multitude which no man could number" is to be compared with and interpreted by the expressions found in Judges 6:5, 7:12; 2 Chronicles 12:3; Joel 1:6. Now suppose that only the elect had been reformed by the Gospel, and all the rest of the world had remained in utter enmity against it, then the fruits of the Gospel had been too bare, being without leaves. The leaves of a tree, though not fit for the table, *are* serviceable to the fruit, and ornamental to the tree, for without them the fruit would be exposed to ripen on bare twigs.

An acknowledgement of the doctrine of the Gospel, where it is not accompanied by regeneration of heart, may indeed be suitably compared to the leaves of a tree which shelter and protect the fruit. Thus they are serviceable, though not valuable in God's account. The leaf of the vine does more

good to the grapes against a scorching sun, than the leaf of any other fruit tree — how much we may learn from God’s creatures if only we have eyes to see! So God’s elect have been outwardly shaded by the multitude of nominal Christians around them. For this we may well thank the kind providence of our Lord. Moreover, God has rewarded the doctrinal faith of the great crowd of unregenerate professors by preserving our public liberties, which the little handful of the regenerate could never, humanly speaking, have enjoyed, without the others.

Again; the operations of the Spirit upon the reprobate have shamed the wicked, increased sobriety, promoted morality, and caused nominal professors to support externally the preaching of the Gospel, the carrying on of the ministry, and thus providing for the benefit of common hearers. This is all useful in its season, but will reap no reward in eternity. The writer most seriously doubts if there be a single church on earth today, having in it sufficient of God’s elect to support a preacher, were all the unregenerate in it excluded.

Yea, most probably, most of God’s own sent-servants, would be so completely dismayed if they could but see into the hearts of those who have a name to live and are dead, that they would be in despair. Yet though we cannot see into the hearts of professors, we *can* form an accurate idea of what is in them, for “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh”. And the worldliness and emptiness of the ordinary speech of the majority shows plainly *Who is not* in their hearts.

We sincerely trust and earnestly pray that it may please our God to strike terror into the souls of many who read this article, that their false peace may be disturbed, and their worthless profession be exposed. Should some of the more thoughtful exclaim with the apostles, “Who then can be saved”? we answer in the words of our Lord, “With men this is *impossible*” (Matthew 19:26). Conclusive proof is this, my reader, that no sinner can be saved by *any* act of his own; and faithfulness requires us to tell you frankly that if your hope of Heaven is resting upon *your* act of “accepting Christ”, then your house is built upon the sand. But blessed be His name, the Redeemer went on to say, “But with God all things are possible”. “Salvation is of the Lord” (Jonah 2:9), not of the creature (Romans 9:16). Then marvel not that Christ said, “Except a man be born *again*, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

CHAPTER 26

THE TWO CLASSES OF PROFESSORS

(HEBREWS 6:7, 8)

Our preceding article was entitled “*The Twofold Working of the Spirit*”. This was suggested by the contents of the first six verses of Hebrews 6. In them we find persons belonging to two entirely different classes are spoken of. The former, one in whom a work of Divine grace had been wrought, effectually applying to them the “great salvation” of God. The latter, one upon whom a work of Divine grace was also wrought, transforming its objects to a considerable degree, yet falling short of actually regenerating them.

“The Lord is good to all: and His tender mercies are over all His works” (Psalm 145:9),

but the *richness* of His “mercy” is reserved for the objects of His great love (Ephesians 2:4). So too God puts forth His power in *varying* degrees, proportioned to the work which He has before Him. Thus, Christ referred to His casting out of demons “with the *finger* of God” (Luke 11:20). Speaking to Israel, Moses said, “With a strong *hand* hath the Lord brought thee out of Egypt” (Exodus 13:9). When referring to the amazing miracle of the Divine incarnation Mary said, “*He* hath showed strength with His *arm*” (Luke 1:51). But when Paul prayed that God would enlighten His saints to apprehend His stupendous miracle of grace in salvation, it was that they might know “*the exceeding greatness* of His power to us-ward”.

God’s power was put forth and is displayed in the natural creation (Romans 1:20). It will be made known in Hell, upon the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction (Romans 9:22). It is exercised upon the reprobate in this life (in some more than in others, according to His sovereign pleasure) in subduing their corruptions, restraining their sins, reforming their characters, causing them to receive the doctrine of the Gospel. But the greatest excellency and efficacy of His power is reserved for His beloved people. His power toward *them* is such that it exceedeth all our thoughts:

“Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, *according to the power that worketh in us*” (Ephesians 3:20).

The recognition of only one of the two distinct operations of God’s Spirit

upon men has divided theologians into two opposing camps. On the one hand, are the Arminians, who insist that Scripture teaches a *common* grace of God toward all men, a grace which may be despised. So far they are right, for Jude 4 expressly speaks of a class who turn “the *grace* of our God into lasciviousness”. But they err when they teach there is no special grace, which is always efficacious upon those in whom it works. On the other side, the majority of modern Calvinists (the older ones did not) deny a common grace of God to all men, and insist in *distinguishing grace* to the elect only. In this they are wrong, and hence their unsatisfactory interpretations of Hebrews 6:4-6 and 10:26.

Now as we have shown in our last article, James 1:17 tells us “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above” etc. Two distinct “gifts” are here referred to. Scripture draws a clear line of distinction between that which God calls “good”, and that which He designates “perfect”. The main difference between them being that, usually, “good” is applied to something which is temporal, “perfect” to that which is spiritual. The operations of the Spirit upon the non-elect produces that which is “good”, that which accomplishes a useful purpose in time, that which is serviceable to God’s elect. But His operations upon the children of God produces that which is “perfect”, i.e. Spiritual, supernatural, eternal. The difference between these two classes and their relation to God in time, was clearly foreshadowed in the Old Testament. The commonwealth of Israel was the type of Christendom as a whole; the “remnant according to the election of grace” in Israel (Romans 11:5), represented the regenerated people of God now. Hence in both the Tabernacle and the Temple there were two distinct grades of worshippers; so there are today. Those who are merely nominal Christians are the outer-court worshippers; the regenerated Christians, who have been made “kings and *priests* unto God” (Revelation 1:6), worship in the holy place (Hebrews 10:19). Both classes are contemplated in Hebrews 6.

In the short passage which is to be before us on this present occasion, the apostle sums up and makes a searching application of all that he has been writing about in the preceding verses, and this in the form of a parable or similitude. In the context two different classes of people are viewed, though at first it is by no means easy to distinguish between them, the reason for this being that they have so much in common. They had both enjoyed the same external privileges, had been enlightened under the same Gospel ministry,

had alike been made “partakers of the Holy Spirit”, and had all made a good profession. Yet, of the second class it had to be said, as Christ said to the young ruler, “One thing thou lackest”, namely, the shedding abroad of God’s love in their hearts, evidenced by *leaving all* and following Christ.

The first class is addressed in the opening verses of our chapter, where the apostle bids the truly regenerated people of God “Go on unto perfection”, i.e. Having left the temporal shadows, seek to apprehend that for which they had been apprehended — live in the power and enjoyment of the spiritual, supernatural, and eternal. This, the apostle had said, “will we do, if God permit” (verse 3). Divine enablement was needed if they were to “possess their possessions” (Obadiah 1:17), for the regenerate are just as dependent upon God as are the unregenerate. The second class are before us in verses 4-6, where we have described the principal effects which the common operations of the Spirit produce upon the natural faculties of the human soul. Though those faculties be wound up to their highest pitch, yet the music which they produce is earthly not heavenly, human not Divine, fleshly not spiritual, temporal not eternal. Consequently, they are still liable to apostatize, and even though they should not, they are certain to perish eternally.

The apostle’s design in this 6th chapter was to exhort the Hebrews to *progress* in the Christian course (verses 1-3), and to *persevere* therein (verses 12-20). The first exhortation is presented in verse 1 and qualified in verse 3. The *motive* to obedience is drawn from the danger of apostacy: (verses 4-6, note the opening “for”). His purpose in referring to this second class (of unregenerate professors, who apostatize) was, to warn against the outcome of a continuance in a state of slothfulness. Here in the similitude found in verses 6, 7, he continues and completes the same solemn line of thought, showing what is the certain and fearful doom of all upon whom a regenerating work of grace is not wrought. First, however, he describes the blessedness of the true people of God.

“For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it and bringeth forth herbs meet for them for whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God; But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned” (verses 7, 8).

In taking up these verses we shall endeavor to give, first, an interpretation of them; second, make an application of their contents. The interpretation respects, in its direct and local reference the Jews, or rather, two classes among the Jews; the application belongs to all who come under the sound of the Gospel.

The two verses quoted above are designed to illustrate and confirm the solemn admonition found in the six preceding verses, therefore are they introduced with the word “for”. In the context two classes of people are in view, both of which were, according to the flesh, Jews. This we have sought to establish in our previous expositions. With the first class the apostle identified himself, note the “we” in verse 3; from the second class Paul dissociates himself, note the words “those” in verse 4 and “they” in verse 6. So, too, two different pieces of ground are now described:

First, fruitful ground, which depicts those who have been truly regenerated, and who in consequence, had received the Word into good and honest hearts.

Second, unfruitful ground, which represents that class against whose sin and doom the apostle was warning the Hebrews; namely, those who, however great their privileges and fair their professions, bring forth only thorns and briars, who, being rejected by God, are overtaken with swift and terrible destruction.

“For the earth which drinketh in the rain”. The prime reference is to the Jewish nation. They were God’s vineyard (see Isaiah 5:7,8; Jeremiah 2:21 etc.). It was unto them God had sent all His servants, the prophets, and last of all His Son (see Matthew 21:35-37). The “rain” here signifies the Word, or Doctrine which the Lord sent unto Israel: “My doctrine shall drop as the rain” (Deuteronomy 32:2 and cf. Isaiah 55:10, 11). Note how when Ezekiel was to prophesy or preach, his message would “drop” as the rain does (Ezekiel 21:2 and cf. Amos 7:16). The figure is very beautiful. The rain is something which no man can manufacture, nor is the Word of human origin. Rain comes down from above, so is the Gospel a heavenly gift. The rain refreshes vegetation, and causes it to grow, so too the Doctrine of God revives His people and makes them fruitful. The rain quickens living seeds in the ground, though it imparts no life to dead ones; so the Word is the Spirit’s instrument for quickening God’s elect (John 3:5; James 1:18), who previously had (federal) life in Christ.

There is nothing in nature that God assumes the more into His own prerogative than the giving of rain. The first reference to it in Scripture is as follows,

“For the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth” (Genesis 2:5).

All rain is from God, who gives or withholds it at His pleasure. The sending of rain He appeals to as a great pledge of His promises and goodness:

“Nevertheless He left not Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven” etc. (Acts 14:17).

Whatever conclusions men may draw from the commonness of it, and however they may imagine they are acquainted with its causes, nevertheless God distinguishes Himself from all the idols of the world in that none of them can give rain:

“Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles that can cause rain?” (Jeremiah 14:22).

Hence the prophet said, “Let us now fear the Lord our God, that giveth rain” (Jeremiah 5:24).

The high sovereignty of God is also exhibited in the manner of His bestowal and non-bestowal of rain:

“Also I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest: and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereon it rained not withered” (Amos 4:7).

Thus it is absolutely in connection with His providential sending of the Gospel to nations, cities, and individuals: it is of God’s disposal alone, and He exercises a distinguishing authority thereon.

“Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Spirit to preach the Word in Asia, After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: *but* the Spirit suffered them not” (Acts 16:6, 7).

God sends His Gospel to one nation and not to another, to one city and not to another — there are many large towns both in England and the United States where there is no *real* Gospel preached today — and at one season and not at

another.

The natural is but a shadowing forth of the spiritual. What a contrast was there between Egypt (figure of the world), and Canaan (type of the Church)!

“For the land, whither thou goest in to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt, from whence ye came out, where thou sowedst thy seed, and waterest with thy foot, as a garden of herbs. But the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven: A land which the Lord thy God careth for; the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year unto the end of the year... I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain” (Deuteronomy 11:11, 12, 14).

Thus, — there were two special wet seasons: the first in October (the beginning of Israel’s year), when their seed was cast into the ground: the other in March when their corn was nearly grown. Hence we read, “Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest” (Joshua 3:15, and cf. 1 Chronicles 12:15). Besides these, were many “showers” (Psalm 65:10).

“The rain that cometh oft upon it”. The reference is to the repeated and frequent ministerial showers with which God visited Israel. To them He had called, “O earth, earth, earth, hear the Word of the Lord!” (Jeremiah 22:29).

It was looking back to these multiplied servants which Jehovah had sent to His ancient people that Christ said,

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, *how often* would I have gathered thy children together” (Matthew 23:37).

This then was the “earth” in which were the plants of God’s husbandry.

In what follows to the end of the passage the apostle distributes the plants into two classes: “herbs” (verse 7), “thorns and briers” (verse 8). The former, represent those who, having believed and obeyed the Gospel, brought forth the fruits of practical godliness. These constituted that “remnant according to the election of grace” (Romans 11:5), which obtained mercy, when the rest of their brethren according to the flesh were blinded. These still continued to be the vineyard of the Lord, a field which He cared for. They formed the first

Gospel church, gathered out from the Hebrews, which brought forth fruit to the glory of God, and was blessed by Him. The latter, were made up of obstinate unbelievers on the one hand, who persistently rejected Christ and His Gospel; and on the other hand, of those who embraced the profession of the Gospel, but after a season returned again to Judaism. These were rejected of God, fell under His curse and perished.

“And bringeth forth herbs”. Several have noted the close resemblance which our present passage bears to the parable of the Sower, recorded in the Gospels. There are some notable parallels between them; the one of most importance being, to observe that in both places we have men looked at, not from the standpoint of God’s eternal counsels (as for example, Ephesians 1:3-11), but according to *human responsibility*. The earth which receives the rain, is a figure of the hearts and minds of the Jews, to whom the Word of God had been sent, and to whom, in the days of Christ and His apostles, the Gospel had been preached. So our Lord compared His hearers unto several sorts of ground into which the seed is cast — observe how the word “dressed” or “tilled” presupposes the seed. What response, then, will the earth make to the repeated rains? Or, to interpret the figure, What fruit is brought forth by those who heard the Gospel? That is the particular aspect of truth the Holy Spirit here has before Him.

“And bringeth forth herbs”. The verb here properly signifies the bringing forth of a woman that hath conceived with child, cf. Luke 1:31. So here the earth is said to bring forth as from a womb impregnated, the rains causing the seeds to issue in fruit. The Greek word for “herbs” occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It appears to be a general term for vegetables and cereals. It is found frequently in the Sept. as the equivalent of the Hebrews “*eseb*”, which has the same extensive meaning. Now just as the cultivator of land has a right to expect that, under the providential blessings of God, his toils shall be rewarded, that the seed he has sown and the ground he has tilled, should yield an increase, so had Jehovah the right to expect fruit from Israel:

“And He looked that it (His vineyard) *should* bring forth grapes”
(Isaiah 5:4).

“Meet for them by whom it is dressed”. The Greek may be rightly rendered thus: equally so, as in the margin, “for whom” it is dressed: either makes good sense. “By whom” would look to the actual cultivator; “for whom,” the

proprietor. The apostle's design here is to show the importance of making a proper use of receiving God's Word: a "meet" or suitable response should be forthcoming.

The ministry of the Gospel tests the state of the hearts of those to whom it comes, just as the fallen rain does the ground which receives it; tests it by exhibiting its character from what is brought forth by it. As it is in nature, so it is in grace; the more frequently the rain falls, and the more the ground be cultivated, the better and heavier should be the yield. Thus it is with God's elect. The more they sit under the ministry of the Word, and the more they seek grace to improve what they hear, the more fruit will they yield unto God. Thus it had been with the godly in Israel.

"Receiveth blessing from God." The "blessing" here is not antecedent in the communication of mercies, for that we have at the beginning of the verse; rather is it a consequent upon the bringing forth of "herbs" or fruit. What we have here is God's acceptance and approbation, assuring His care unto a further improvement:

"A vineyard of red wine: I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day" (Isaiah 27:2, 3).

Three things then are included in God's blessing of this fruitful field:

First, His owning of it: He is not ashamed to acknowledge it as His.

Second, His watch-care over it, His pruning of the branches that they may bring forth more fruit (John 15:2).

Third, His final preservation of it from evil, as opposed to the destruction of barren ground. All this was true of that part of Israel spoken of in Romans 11:5.

"But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected" (verse 8). It is important to note that in the similitude there is a common subject of the whole, which is then divided into two parts, with very different events ascribed unto each. The common subject is "the earth," of the nature whereof both parts are equally participant. Originally, and naturally, they differ not. On this common subject, on both parts or branches of it, the "rain" equally falls. And too both are equally "dressed." The difference between them lies, first, in what each part of "the earth" (Israel) produced; and secondly, God's

dealings with each part. As we have seen, the one part brought forth “herbs” meet for the dresser or owner: a suitable response was made to the rain given and the care expended upon it. The other, which we are now to look at, is the very reverse.

“But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected.” Everything here is in sharp antithesis from the terms of the preceding verse. There, the good ground, “bringeth forth”, the Greek word signifying a natural conception and production of anything in due order and season. But the evil ground “*beareth*” thorns and briers, the Greek verb signifying an unnatural and monstrous production, a casting out in abundance of that which is not only without the use of means, but actually against it. As God said of His Israelitish vineyard,

“He looketh that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth *wild grapes*” (Isaiah 5:2).

The Greek for “thorns and briers” is identical with the Sept. rendering of Genesis 3:18, which, in our Bibles, is rendered, “thorns and thistles”. Three thoughts seem suggested by the term here given to the product of this evil ground.

First, it brought forth that which was of no profit to its owner, that which promoted not the glory of God.

Second, “thorns and briers” are of a hurtful and noxious nature: see Ezekiel 28:24, etc.

Third, these terms tell us that all which is brought forth by the natural man is under the *curse* of God: Genesis 3:18, 4:11, 12.

“But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected”. Land which, after cultivation, brings forth only such products, is abandoned by the farmer as worthless. The Greek word here for “rejected”, signifies the setting aside as useless after trial has been made of a thing. The application of it here is to by far the greater part of the Jewish people.

First, Christ had warned them

“the kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matthew 21:43).

Second, after their full and open rejection of Himself and His Gospel, Christ

told them, “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate” (Matthew 23:38).

Third, proof that the Nation as a whole *had been* “rejected” by God, is found in Acts 2:40, when, on the day of Pentecost, Peter bade the believing remnant, “Save yourselves from this untoward generation”.

“And is nigh unto cursing”. This is in sharp contrast from what was said of the good ground: “receiveth blessing from God”. The word “cursing” here, means, “given over to execration”, or “devoted to destruction”. It was given over to be “burned”, which, according to the analogy of faith, means, it would be visited with Divine judgment. Israel had become a barren tree, a cumberer of the ground, and the word had gone forth, “Cut it down”(Luke 12:7, 9). Further proof that Israel as a nation *was* given over to “execration”, is found in the solemn incident of Christ’s *cursing* of the “fig tree” (Matthew 21:19), figure of the Jews, see Matthew 24:32. True, a short respite had been granted — another “year” (Luke 13:8) — hence the “*nigh* unto cursing”.

“Whose end is to be burned”. In Eastern lands, when a husbandman discovers that a piece of ground is worthless, he neglects it, abandons it. Next, he breaks down its fences, that it may be known it is outside the bounds of his possession. Finally, he sets fire to its weeds, to prevent their seeds being blown on to his good ground. Thus it was with Israel. In the last chapter of Acts we see how the apostle Paul warned the Jews how that God had set them aside (Acts 28:25-28), and shortly after, the solemn words of Christ in Matthew 22:7 were fulfilled, “He sent forth His armies, and destroyed those murderers, and *burned up* their city”.

The contents of Hebrews 6:7, 8 are not to be restricted to the regenerated and unregenerated Jews, for “as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man” (Proverbs 27:19). “This is a similitude most appropriate to excite a desire to make progress in due time; for as the earth cannot bring forth a good crop in harvest except it causes the seed as soon as it is sown to germinate, so if we desire to bring forth good fruit, as soon as the Lord sows His Word, it ought to strike roots in us without delay; for it cannot be expected to fructify, if it be either choked or perish. But as the similitude is very suitable, so it must be wisely applied to the design of the apostle.

“The earth, he says, which be sucking in the rain produces a blade suitable to the seed sown, at length by God’s blessing produces a ripe crop; so they who receive the seed of the Gospel into their

hearts and bring forth genuine shoots, will always make progress until they produce ripe fruit. On the contrary, the earth, which after culture and irrigation, brings forth nothing but thorns, affords no hope of a harvest; nay, the more that grows which is its natural produce, the more hopeless is the case. Hence the only remedy the husbandman has is to burn up the noxious and useless weeds. So they who destroy the seed of the Gospel, either by their indifference or by corrupt affections, so as to manifest no sign of good progress in their life, clearly show themselves to be reprobates, from whom no harvest can be expected. The apostle then, not only speaks here of the fruit of the Gospel, but also exhorts us promptly to embrace it, and he further tells us, that the blade appears presently after the seed is sown, and that grain follows the daily irrigations". (Dr. John Calvin).

The Lord Jesus completed His parable of the Sower by saying, "Take heed therefore *how ye hear*" (Luke 8:18): how you profit by it, what use you make of it; be sure that *you* are a good-ground hearer.

1. *Such*, are those in whom, first, the Word falls, as into "an honest and good heart" (Luke 8:15), i.e., they bow to its authority, judge themselves by it, are impartial and faithful in applying it to their own failures.
2. Second, they "receive" the Word (Mark 4:20): they make personal appropriation of it, they take it home to themselves, they apply it to their own needs.
3. Third, they "understand" it (Matthew 13:23): they enter into a spiritual and experimental acquaintance with it.
4. Fourth, they "keep" it (Luke 8:15): they retain, heed, obey, practice it.
5. Fifth, they "bring forth fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15), they persevere, overcome all discouragements, triumph over temptations, and walk in the paths of obedience. Upon such the "blessing" of God rests.

Now in contrast from the good-ground hearer, are the wayside, stony, and thorny-ground hearers. These, we believe, are they who come under the common or inferior operations of the Holy Spirit, spoken of in our last article. Let it be carefully noted,

First, that even of the wayside hearer (the lowest grade of all) Christ said the

Seed was “sown in his *heart*” (Matthew 13:19).

Second, that of the stony-ground hearers it is said, “the same is he that heareth the Word, and anon with joy receiveth it” (Matthew 13:20), and “for a while believeth, and in time of temptation falls away” (Luke 8:13).

Third, that of the stony-ground hearer Christ said, “Which when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection” (Luke 8:14). Yet none of them had been born of the Spirit. All that they had brought forth, under His gracious operations, was but the works of the flesh — “thorns and briers”.

Above, in our interpretation, we called attention to the difference between the “bringeth forth” of herbs in verse 7, and the “beareth” thorns in verse 8. There is a like producing, but an unlike manner and measure. The former

“Bring forth in their lives what was before conceived and cherished in their hearts. They had the *root* in themselves of what they bring forth. So doth the word here used signify, viz., to bring forth the fruit of an inward conception. The doctrine of the gospel as cast into their hearts, is not only rain but seed also. This is cherished by grace, as precious seed, and as from a spiritual root or principle in their hearts, bringeth forth precious fruit. And herein consists the difference between the fruit-bearing of the true believers, and the works of hypocrites or false professors. These latter bring forth fruit *like mushrooms*, they come up suddenly, have oft-times great bulk and goodly appearance, but are merely a forced excrescence, they have no natural seed or root in the earth. They do not proceed from a living principle in the heart”. (Dr. John Owen).

Thus, it should be most carefully borne in mind that the “thorns and briers” of verse 8 have reference not to sins and wickedness as men view things, but to the *best* products of the flesh, as cultivated by “*religion*”, and that, as instructed out of the Scriptures, and “enlightened” by the Holy Spirit. This is evident from the fact that the thorns and briers, equally with the “herbs”, are occasioned by the same “rain” which had come oft upon the earth, and from which they sprang. However fair the professions of the unregenerate may appear in the eyes of their fellows, no matter what proficiency they may reach in an understanding of the letter of Scripture, nor what their zeal in contending for the faith, loyalty to their church, self-sacrifice in their service;

yet, in the sight of Him who searcheth the heart and taketh note of the *root* from which things spring, all is worthless. These products or works are only the fruits of a nature which is under the curse of a holy God.

“But that which beareth thorns and briers is *rejected*” i.e., of God. Little did the Jews believe this when Paul penned those words. Their great boast was that they *were* God’s people, that He preferred *them* above all others. Nevertheless, though He yet withheld His wrath for a little space, He had disowned them. The sad analogy to this is found everywhere in Christendom today. Countless thousands who bear the name of Christ, and who have no doubts but that *they* are among the true people of God, are yet “rejected” by Him. Are you, my reader, among them?

What need is there for every professing Christian to heed that word in 2 Peter 1:10, “Give diligence to make your calling and election sure”! Those who sit under the ministry of God’s Word are upon trial, and it is high time that many of us who have been so long privileged, should call on ourselves to a strict account with respect to our improvement thereof. What are we bringing forth? Are we producing “the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God” (Philippians 1:11)? If so, all praise to Him who has made us fruitful. Or are we, though not notoriously wicked persons, yet so far as fruit for God is concerned, cumberers of the ground? If upon inquiry we find ourselves at a loss to be sure of which sort of ground we belong unto, and this because of our barrenness and leanness, unless we are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, we shall give ourselves no rest until we have better evidences of our bearing spiritual fruit.

O let these solemn words search our hearts: “*And* is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned”. Such is the awful fate confronting multitudes of professing Christians in the churches today, who resist all exhortations to produce the fruit of godly living. Corrupt desires, pride, worldliness, covetousness, are as plainly to be seen in their lives, as are thorns and briers on abandoned ground. O what a thought! Professing *Christians*, “nigh unto cursing”! Soon to hear their last sermon. Soon to be cut off out of the land of the living. Afterwards to hear from the lips of Christ the fearful sentence,

“Depart from *Me*, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41).

CHAPTER 27

TWO CHRISTIANS DESCRIBED

(HEBREWS 6:9-11)

The passage which is to be before us is in strong and blessed contrast from what we found in verses 4-6. There we beheld a class of people highly favored, blest with grand external privileges, richly gifted, and wrought upon by the Holy Spirit. There we see the faculties of the natural man's soul wound up to their highest pitch: the conscience searched, the understanding enlightened, the affections drawn out, and the will moved to action. There we have described the character of a class which constitutes a very large proportion of those who profess the name of Christ. Yet, though they have never been born again, though they are unsaved, though their end is destruction, nevertheless, it is by no means an easy matter for a real child of God to identify them. Oftentimes their head-knowledge of the truth, their zeal for religion, their moral qualities, put him to shame. Still, if he weigh them in the balances of the sanctuary, they will be found wanting.

The careful reader of the four Gospels, will discover that in the days of His flesh, the Lord Jesus healed those concerning whom nothing is recorded of their faith. The blessings which He dispensed were not restricted to His disciples. Temporal mercies were bestowed upon natural men as well as upon spiritual. And, be it carefully noted, this was something more, something in addition to, the providential goodness of the Creator, which is extended to all of Adam's race:

“He maketh His sun to rise, on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:45).

Rather did those gracious acts of Christ unto the unbelieving, foreshadow that which we designated in the preceding article, the inferior operations of His Spirit. On a few Christ bestowed spiritual blessings, saving mercies; to others, He imparted temporal blessings, mercies which came short of saving their recipients.

In our last article we made reference to James 1:17: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above”. We believe that, in keeping with the character, theme and purpose of that epistle, those words have reference to two distinct classes of gifts, for two different classes of people: the “good”

referring to those bestowed, under Gospel-ministry on the non-elect; the “perfect” imparted to God’s own people. A scripture which we believe supplies strong corroboration of this is found in Psalm 68:18. There, in a Messianic prophecy concerning the ascension of Christ, we read, “Thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also”: gifts are bestowed by Christ on two distinct classes. It is to be particularly observed that a part of this verse is quoted by the Spirit in Ephesians 4:8; part of it we say, for its closing words, “the rebellious also” are there omitted. And why? Because in Ephesians it is the elect of God (see Hebrews 1:3, 4 etc.) who are in view. Yet, in addition to them, Christ has received “gifts” for the “rebellious also”; that is, for the non-elect too.

Few indeed have perceived that there is *a double work of GOD* being prosecuted under the ministry of the Gospel. Plain intimation of this is found in the words of Christ in Matthew 22:14, “For many are called, but few chosen.” Half of the human race has never heard the Gospel; those who have, are divided into four classes, as Christ has taught us in His parable of the Sower. The “wayside” hearers are those upon whom the preaching of the Gospel produces no effect. The “stony” and the “thorny” ground hearers are they which form a very large percentage of “church members” or who are “*in fellowship*” with those known as “the Brethren”. Of these it is said that they “for a while believe” (Luke 8:13); nor are they unproductive, yet they “bring no fruit to perfection” (Luke 8:14). In them the “enmity” of the carnal mind is, to a considerable extent, subdued; yet it is not vanquished. There is a work of the Spirit upon them, yet it falls short of the new creation. They are “called” but not “chosen”.

Only as due attention is paid to the distinction just noted, are we really able to appreciate the point and meaning of the qualifying language which the Spirit of God has used when speaking of the saving call of God’s elect. For example, in Romans 8:28, they are denominated the called “according to His purpose”, which notes a distinction from others who receive an inferior “call” according to His providence, under the general proclamation of the Gospel. So too in 2 Timothy 1:9 we read of those “called with a holy calling... according to His own purpose and grace”, which is the language of discrimination, signifying there are others called yet not with “a holy calling”. So again in 1 Peter 5:10, “The God of all grace, who hath called *us* unto His eternal glory”, is in antithesis from the many who are only called

unto a temporal righteousness in this world.

It needs to be very carefully noted that the “us” of the Epistles is frequently used with a far narrower discrimination than from all the rest of the world: very often the “us” is in contrast from the great crowd of lifeless professors which ever surrounds the little handful of God’s true people — professors which, though spiritually lifeless, are yet to be distinguished from the vast multitudes of non-professors; distinguished by a real work of the Holy Spirit upon them, but still an abortive work. Of this class the Epistle of James has much to say. Concerning them John, in his first Epistle, declares

“They went out from *us*, but they were not of us; for if they had been of *us*, they would have continued with us” (Hebrews 2:19).

A work of “calling” must have been wrought upon them, for they had once separated from the world, and united themselves with the true people of God. Moreover, that work of “calling” must have produced such a change in them that *they* had been accounted real Christians, or otherwise they had not been admitted among such.

The occasion of Christ’s uttering those words “For many are called, but few chosen” (Matthew 22:14) is exceedingly solemn and searching. The context records the parable of the wedding-feast of the King’s Son. First, the invitation to it had been given to the Jews, but they despised it, mistreated God’s servants, and, in consequence, their city was destroyed. Then God’s servants are sent forth into the Gentile highways to bring in others. But when the King inspects the guests, He sees a man “which had not on a wedding-garment”. The awful sentence goes forth, “Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness.” Immediately after, Christ said, “For many are called, but few chosen”.

Now in sharp and blessed contrast from the many professing the name of Christ who have received only the inferior call of God through the Gospel — a call which, yet, leads them to assent to the doctrine of His word, which brings them to espouse the outward cause of Christ in this world, which produces a real reformation in their ways, so that they become respectable and useful members of their community, as well as provide a measure of protection to the *few* of God’s “chosen” from the openly antagonistic world; — our present passage treats of “the *remnant* according to the election of grace” (Romans 11:5). This is clear from its opening words, “But, beloved,

we are persuaded better things of you.” The “But” sets these “beloved” ones in opposition from those mentioned in verse 8. The “better things” also points an antithesis. “Better” is an adjective in the comparative degree, set over against something which is merely “good”. Those described in verses 4, 5 had good things, yet these possessed something far better. Mark how this confirms what we have said on James 1:17!

In verses 9-12 we find the apostle doing three things: first, he expresses his good will towards the Hebrew saints; second, he declares his judgment concerning their state; third, he gives the grounds upon which his judgment was based. His aim was that they should make a proper use of what he had set before them in the first eight verses, so that on the one hand they might not be discouraged, and on the other hand not become careless. We subjoin Dr. J. Brown’s summary of our passage.

“The general meaning of this paragraph, all the parts of which are closely connected together, plainly is: The reason why I have made these awful statements about apostates, is not because I consider you whom I am addressing as apostates for your conduct proves that this is not your character, and the promise of God secures that this doom shall not be yours; but that you may be stirred up to persevering steadiness in the faith, and hope, and obedience of the truth, by a constant continuance in which alone you can, like those who have gone before you, obtain in all their perfections the promised blessings of the Christian salvation.”

“But, beloved” (verse 9). This term testified to the apostle’s good will toward and affection in the Hebrew saints. Such an expression was more than the formal language of courtesy; it revealed the warmth of Paul’s heart for God’s people. Though he had spoken severely to them in Hebrews 5:11-14, it was not because he was unkindly disposed toward them. Love is faithful, and because it seeks the highest good of its objects, will reprove, rebuke, admonish, when occasion calls for it. Spiritual love is regulated not by impulse, but by principle. Herein it differs from the back-boneless amiability and affability of the flesh, and from the maudlin sentimentality of the day.

“We hence conclude, that not only the reprobates ought to be reproved, severely, and with sharp earnestness, but also the elect themselves, even those whom we deem to be children of God” (John

Calvin).

“The apostle hastens to comfort and encourage, lest the Hebrews should be overwhelmed with fear and sorrow, or lest they should think that their condition was regarded by him as hopeless. The affection of the writer is now eager to inspire hope, and to draw them with the cords of love. The word ‘beloved’ is introduced here most appositely, a term of endearment which occurs frequently in other epistles, but only once in ours; not that the apostle was not filled with true and fervent love to the Hebrew Christians, but that he felt obliged to restrain as it were his feelings, by reason of the prejudices against him. But here the expression bursts forth, as in a moment of great danger or of anxious suspense the heart *will* speak out in tender language (Adolph Saphir).

“But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you”. In these words the apostle sets forth his judgment concerning the spiritual state of the Hebrews (cf. Hebrews 3:1). The “persuasion” here did not amount to an infallible certitude, but was a strong confidence based on good grounds. It is similar to what we find in Romans 15:14,

“I myself also am persuaded of you my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.”

So again in 2 Timothy 1:5,

“When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.”

However low the spiritual condition of these Hebrews (Hebrews 5:11- 14), there had been, and still was found in them, fruit, such as manifested them to be truly regenerated souls. It ever holds good that a tree is known by its fruits, hence, the genuineness of my Christian profession is evidenced by what I bring forth, or its worthlessness by what I fail to produce. There may be a “form of godliness” (2 Timothy 3:5), but if the power thereof be “denied” by my works (Titus 1:16) then is it profitless and vain.

“But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you.” It is the bounden duty of every pastor to ascertain the spiritual condition of his people: “Be thou

diligent to know *the state* of thy flocks” (Proverbs 27:23). This is very necessary if the servant of God is to minister suitably and seasonably. While he is ignorant of their state, he knows not when or how to rebuke or console, to warn or encourage. A general preaching at random is little more than a useless formality. A physician of bodies must acquaint himself with the condition of his patients, otherwise he cannot prescribe intelligently or effectually. Equally so it is with a physician of souls. The same principle holds good in the fellowship of Christians one with another. I cannot really love a brother with the Gospel-love which is required of me, unless I have a well-grounded persuasion that he *is* a brother.

“And things that accompany salvation” (verse 9). The word “accompany” signifies “conjoined with”, or inseparable from, that which has a sure connection with “salvation”. The principal things that “accompany salvation” are sorrow for and hatred of sin, humility or self-abnegation, the peace of God comforting the conscience, godly fear or the principle of obedience, a diligent perseverance in using the appointed means of grace and pressing forward in the race set before us, the spirit of prayer, and a joyous expectation of being conformed to the image of Christ and spending eternity with Him. True Gospel faith and sincere obedience are far “better things” than the most dazzling gifts ever bestowed on unregenerate professors.

To believe on Christ is very much more than my understanding assenting and my will consenting to the fact that He is a Savior for sinners, and ready to receive all who will come to Him. To be received by Christ, I must come to Him renouncing all my righteousness (Romans 10:3), as an empty-handed beggar (Matthew 19:21). But more; to be received by Christ, I must come to Him forsaking my self-will and rebellion against Him (Psalm 2:11, 12; Proverbs 28:13). Should an insurrectionist and seditionist come to an earthly king seeking his sovereign favor and pardon, then, obviously, the very law of his coming to him for forgiveness requires that he should come on his knees, laying aside his hostility. So it is with a sinner who comes to Christ for pardon; it is against the law of faith to do otherwise.

An “unfeigned faith” (2 Timothy 1:5) in Christ, is one which submits to His yoke and bows to His authority. There is no such thing in Scripture as receiving Christ as Savior *without also* receiving Him as Lord:

“As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus *the Lord*, walk ye in

Him” (Colossians 2:6).

If it be an honest and genuine faith, it is inseparably connected with a spirit of obedience, a desire to please Him, a resolve to not henceforth live unto self, but unto Him which died for me (2 Corinthians 5:15). The man who really thinks he has a saving faith in Christ, but yet has no concern for His glory and no heart for His commandments, is blinded by Satan. There are things which “*accompany* salvation”, that have a certain connection therewith. As light is inseparable from the shining of the sun, as heat is inseparable from fire, so good works are inseparable from a saving faith.

“Though we thus speak” (verse 9). The reference is to what the apostle had said about apostates in verses 6, 8, and which had been written to these Hebrews as a solemn and searching warning for them to take to heart.

“In the visible professing church, all things outwardly seemed to be equal. There are the same ordinances administered unto all, the same profession of faith is made by all, the same outward duties are attended unto, and scandalous offenses are by all avoided. But yet things are not internally equal. In a great house, there are vessels of wood and stone, as well as of gold and silver. All that eat outwardly of the bread of life, do not feed on the hidden manna. All that have their names enrolled in the church’s book, may yet not have them written in the Lamb’s book. There are yet better things than gifts, profession, participation of ordinances and whatever is of the like nature. And the use hereof in one word is to warn all sorts of persons, that they rest not in, that they take not up with an interest in, or participation of the privileges of the church, with a common profession, which may give them a name to live; seeing they may be dead or in a perishing condition in the meantime” (Dr. John Owen).

“For God is not unrighteous to forget your work” (verse 10).

Here the apostle makes known the ground on which his “persuasion” rested, and that was, the unchanging faithfulness of God toward His covenant promises unto His people, and why he believed that these Hebrews were numbered among them. The foundation on which confidence should rest concerning my own security unto eternal glory, as that of my fellow-Christians, is nothing in the creature. “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed” (Lamentations 3:22). The believer’s perseverance is not the

cause but the consequence of God's preservation.

“For God is not unrighteous to forget your work”. A scripture which enables us to understand the force of these words is 1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins”. God is “faithful” to His covenant engagements with us in the person of His Son; “just”, to the full satisfaction which He rendered unto Him. The very justice of God is engaged on the behalf of those whom Christ redeemed.

His veracity towards us is pledged:

“In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, *promised* before the world began” (Titus 1:2).

And because God is immutable, without variableness or shadow of turning, He cannot go back on His own oath:

“For I am the Lord, I change not; *therefore* ye sons of Jacob are not consumed” (Malachi 3:6).

Therefore have we the absolute assurance that

“He which hath begun a good work in you will *finish it*” (Philippians 1:6).

“For God is not unrighteous to forget your work”. Some have found a difficulty here, because these words seem to teach that heaven is a reward earned by good works. But the difficulty is more seeming than real. What God rewards is only what He Himself hath wrought in us: it is the Father's recognition of the Spirit's fruit.

“The act of a benefactor in entering into engagements with his beneficiary may be wholly gratuitous, and yet, out of his act, rights may grow up to the beneficiary. The advantages thus acquired are not the less gracious, because they have become rights; for they originated in free grace” (Dr. Sampson, 1857).

It may look now as though God places little value on sincere obedience to Him, that in this world the man who lives for self gains more than he who lives for Christ; yet, in a soon-coming day it shall appear far otherwise.

“For God is not unrighteous to forget your works”.

“God does not pay us a debt, but performs what He has of Himself

freely promised, and not so much on our works, as on His own grace in our works; nay, He looks not so much on our works, as on His own grace in our works. And this is to be ‘righteous’, for He cannot deny Himself.... God is righteous in recompensing works, because He is true and faithful; and He has made Himself a debtor to us, not by receiving anything from us, but, as Augustine says, by freely promising all things” (John Calvin).

They who imagine there is an inconsistency between the God of all grace “rewarding” His people, will do well to ponder carefully the Reformer’s words.

“Your work”. We believe the reference here is to their *faith*.

First, because he is here speaking of the “things that accompany salvation”, and faith is inseparable therefrom.

Second, because faith “worketh by love” (Galatians 5:6), and the very next thing mentioned in our verse is their “labor of love”.

Third, because in 1 Thessalonians 1:3 we read of the “work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope”, and in Hebrews 6:11, we have their “hope” mentioned. Should it be inquired, Why did the apostle omit the express mention of “faith” here? We answer, Because their faith was so small and feeble. To have commended their faith directly, would have weakened the force of his repeated exhortations in Hebrews 3:12, 4:1, 2, 6:12, 12:1 etc. “Your work” refers not to any single work, but to a course of working, i.e., the whole course of obedience to God, of which faith is the principle moving thereunto. Evangelical obedience is thus denominated “your work” because this is what they had been regenerated unto (see Ephesians 2:10), and because such a course calls for activity, pains, toil; cf. “all diligence” (2 Peter 1:5).

A living faith is a *working* faith (James 2:17). Two things are plainly and uniformly taught throughout the New Testament. Justification is by faith, and not by works, (Romans 4, etc.). Yet, such justifying faith is a living, operative, fruitful faith, evidencing itself by obedience to the commands of God (1 John 2:4, etc.). Christ gave Himself for us that

“*He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works*” (Titus 2:14).

This greatly needs emphasizing today and pressing repeatedly upon those professing to be believers in the Lord Jesus, for multitudes of these have a name to live, but “art dead” (Revelation 3:1). Their faith is not that of God’s elect (Titus 1:1), but nothing better or different than that which the demons have (James 2:19).

“Your faith and the labor of love”, for so the Greek reads. These were the evidences upon which the apostle grounded his confidence concerning the Hebrew saints.

Five things are to be noted.

First, this distinguishing grace, their “labor of love”: let the reader turn to and ponder carefully 1 John 3:16-19; 4:7-12.

“Mutual love among believers is a fruit of the Spirit of holiness, and an effect of faith, whereby being knit together in the bond of entire spiritual affection, on the account of their joint interest in Christ; and participation of the same, new, divine, spiritual nature from God, they do value, delight and rejoice in one another, and are mutually helpful in a constant discharge of all those duties whereby their eternal, spiritual and temporal good may be promoted” (Dr. John Owen).

Note “*labor of love*”: a lazy love, like that of James 2:15, 16, is no evidence of saving faith. True love is active, diligent, untiring.

Second, “Which ye have showed”. This gives us the second feature of their love. It was not a secret and unmanifested love: but one that had been plainly evidenced in a practical way. In James 2:18 the professor is challenged to “show” his faith, today it would also be pertinent to ask many of those who bear the name of Christ to “show” their love, especially along the line of 1 John 5:2. “Which ye have showed toward His name,” defines,

Third, the *end before them* in the exercise of their ardent love in ministering to the saints. The words last quoted have a threefold force.

1. Objectively, because God’s name is upon His people (Ephesians 3:15). It is both blessed and solemn to know that whatever is done unto the people of God, whether it be good or evil, is done toward the name of Christ: Matthew 25:34-45.

2. Formally: they ministered to the saints *as* the people of God. This it is which gives spiritual love its distinctive character: when it is exercised to souls *because* God's name is on them.

3. Efficiently: the “name of God” stands for His authority. God requires His people to love one another, and when they do so out of obedience to Him, it is, necessarily, done “toward His name”, having respect to His will.

Fourth, “In that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister”. This tells us, fourth, the *manner* in which their love had been exercised: in an untiring service.

Fifth, it announces, the objects of their love, God's “saints”. Many of God's people are in various kinds of temporal distress, and one reason why their loving Father permits this is, that their brethren and sisters in Christ may have the holy privilege of ministering to them: see Romans 15:25-27, 2 Corinthians 8:21, 9:11-15. But let such ministry be rendered not from sentimental considerations, nor to satisfy an uneasy conscience, still less with the object of vain glory, to gain a reputation for benevolence; rather let it be “*shown toward* His name”. It is the owning of His authority, the conscious performance of His will, which alone gives life, spirituality and acceptance unto all those duties of love which we are able to perform to others.

In summing up the teaching of verses 9, 10, let us observe *how* the apostle justified the Hebrews according to his Master's rule in Matthew 7:15-20. Genuine Christians give plain evidence that *their* profession of the Gospel *is* accompanied by transforming grace. The obedience of faith and the labor of love toward the saints — not from human instincts, but out of submission to the revealed will of God — both in the past and in the present, were the visible ground of Paul's good persuasion concerning them. It is important to note *what* were the particular graces singled out for mention. The apostle says nothing about their clear views of the truth, their missionary activities, zeal for “their church” — which are the things that many formal professors boast in.

“And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end” (verse 11).

The apostle looks back to the exhortation of v. 1 and also the solemn warning pointed in verses 4-8. His purpose had been to excite them unto a diligent

persevering continuance in faith and in love, with the fruits thereof. All he had said was unto this end. The closer connection of this verse with the preceding one is: having expressed his conviction about their spiritual state, and having assured them of a blessed issue of their faith from the fidelity of God, he now presses upon them their responsibility to answer to the judgment he had formed of them, by diligent progress unto the end.

In this verse (11) the apostle, with heavenly wisdom, makes known the proper use and end of Gospel threatenings (verses 6-8), and Gospel promises (verses 9, 10): either may be, and often are, abused. Many have looked upon threatenings as serving no other purpose than a terrifying of the minds of men, causing them to despair; as if the things threatened must inevitably be their portion. Few have known how to make a right application of them to their consciences. On the other hand, many have abused the promises of God: those who had no title to such have suffered themselves to be deceived, and to be so falsely comforted by them to lie down in a carnal security, imagining that no evil could befall them. But here the apostle reveals the proper end of each, both to believers and unbelievers: the threatenings should stir up to earnest examination of the foundation of our hope; the promises should encourage unto a constant and patient diligence in all the duties of obedience. What wisdom is needed by a minister of the Gospel to make a proper and due use of both upon his hearers!

“And”, or rather (Greek) “But we desire”. In verses 9, 10 the apostle had told them what was *not* his object in making to them the statements of verses 4-8; now he tells them what it was. The word “desire” here signifies an intense longing; without this, preaching is cold, formal, lifeless. “That every one of you”: the loving care and untiring efforts of the minister should be extended to all the members of his flock. The oldest, as much as the youngest, is in need of constant exhortation. “Do show the same diligence... unto the end”. Unless this be done, our profession will not be preserved nor God glorified. Paul knew nothing of that half-heartedness and sluggish neglect of the means of grace which today satisfies the generality of those bearing the name of Christ. “Give thyself *wholly* to them” (1 Timothy 4–5).

Many are very “diligent” in their worldly business, still more are most punctual in prosecuting their round of pleasure and fleshly gratification; but there are very few indeed who exercise a godly concern for their souls. To an

earnest endeavor after personal holiness, the work of faith and labor of love, the vast majority of professors are strangers, nor can they be persuaded that any such things are required or expected from them. They may be regular attenders of “church” from force of custom; they may perform certain acts of charity for the sake of their reputation; but to be really exercised in heart as to how they may please and honor God in the details of their lives, they know nothing and care still less. Such are *destitute* of those things which “accompany salvation”; they are deluded and lost souls. Make no mistake, my reader, unless there is in you a work of faith in keeping God’s commandments, and a labor of love toward His saints as such, then “the root of the matter” (Job 19:28) is not in you. This is the test of profession, and the rule whereby each of us shall be measured.

Nor can this work of faith and labor of love be persisted in without studious diligence and earnest endeavor. It calls for the daily searching of the Scriptures, and that, not for intellectual gratification, but to learn God’s will for my walk. It calls for watchfulness and prayer against every temptation which would turn me aside from following Christ. It requires that I should rightly abstain from “fleshly lusts that war against the soul” (1 Peter 2:11), yielding myself unto God as one that is passed from death unto life, and my members “*as instruments of righteousness unto God*” (Romans 6:13). It requires that I “lay aside every weight” (whatever hinders vital godliness) and the sin which doth so easily beset (the love of self), and run (which calls for the putting forth of all our energies) the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1, 2), and that race is a fleeing from the things of this doomed world, with our faces set steadfastly towards God. Those who despise, or even continue to neglect such things, are only nominal Christians.

This “diligence” is to be shown “to the full assurance of hope”. Full assurance here signifies a firm conviction or positive persuasion. “Hope” in the New Testament means an ardent desire for and strong expectation of obtaining its object. Faith looks to the Promiser, hope to the things promised. Faith begets hope. God has promised His people perfect deliverance from sin and all its troubles, and full enjoyment of everlasting glory with Himself. Faith rests on the power and veracity of God to make good His word. The heart ponders these blessings, and sees them as yet future. Hope values and anticipates the realization of them. Like faith, “hope” has its degrees. “Full assurance of hope” signifies a steady prevailing persuasion, a persuasion

which issues from faith in the promises made concerning “good things to come”. The “diligence” before mentioned, is God’s appointed *means* toward this full assurance: compare 2 Peter 1:10, 11. To cherish a hope of Heaven while I am living to please self is wicked presumption. “Unto the end”: no furloughs are granted to those called upon to “*fight the* good fight of faith” (1 Timothy 6:12); there is no discharge from that warfare as long as we are left upon the field of battle. No spiritual state is attainable in this life, where “reaching forth unto those things which are before” (Philippians 3:13) becomes unnecessary.

CHAPTER 28

CHRISTIAN PERSEVERANCE

(HEBREWS 6:12-15)

Two exhortations were set before the Hebrew Christians in the 6th chapter of this epistle. First, they were bidden to turn their backs upon Judaism and go on unto a full embracing of Christianity (verse 1). The application to God's people today of the principle contained in this exhortation is, Abandon everything which enthralled your hearts in your unregenerate days, and find your peace, joy, satisfaction in Christ. In contemplating the peculiar temptation of the Hebrews to forsake the Christian position and path for a return to Judaism, let us not lose sight of the fact that a danger just as real menaces the believer today. The flesh still remains within him, and all that Satan used in the past to occupy his heart, still exists in the present. Though Israel came forth from the House of Bondage, passed through the Red Sea, and started out joyfully (Exodus 15:1) for the promised land, yet it was not long ere their hearts went back to Egypt, lusting after its fleshpots (Exodus 16:3).

It is worse than idle to reply to what has been pointed out above by saying, Real Christians are in no "danger", for God has promised to preserve them. True, but God has promised to preserve His people in a way of holiness, not in a course of sinful self-will and self-gratification. Those whom Christ has declared shall "never perish" are they who "hear His voice and follow Him" (John 10:27, 28). The apostles were not fatalists, neither did they believe in a mechanical salvation, but one that required to be worked out "with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). Therefore Paul, moved by the Holy Spirit, did not hesitate to refer to the Israelites who were "overthrown" in the wilderness, and say,

"Now these things were our examples to the intent that *we* should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolators, as were some of them;... Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.... Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for *our admonition*....Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth *take heed* lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:6-12).

The second exhortation of Hebrews 6 is found in verses 11, 12, the first part of which was before us at the close of our last chapter. There the apostle says, "And we desire that everyone of you do show the same diligence". This, together with the verses that follow, is a call to perseverance in the path of godliness. To a church which had left its "first love" Christ said, "Repent, and do the first works" (Revelation 2:4, 5).

What are these "first works"? A submitting of ourselves unto God, an humbling of ourselves before Him, a throwing down of the weapons of our hostility against Him. A turning unto Christ as our only hope, a casting of ourselves upon Him, a trusting in the merits of His precious blood. A taking of His yoke upon us, bowing to His Lordship, owning His authority, earnestly seeking grace to do His commandments.

Now the Christian is to continue as he began. He is to daily own his sins before God. He is to daily renew the same acts of faith and trust in Christ which he exercised at the first. Instead of counting upon some experience in the past, he is to maintain a *present* living upon Christ. If he continues to cast himself upon the Redeemer, putting his salvation wholly in His hands, then He will not, cannot, fail him. But in order to cast myself upon Christ, I must be *near* Him; I cannot do so while I am following Him afar off. To be near Him, I must be in separation from all that is contrary to Him. Communion is based upon an obedient walk: the one cannot be without the other. For the maintenance of this, I must "show the *same* diligence" I did when I was first convicted of my lost estate, saw Hell yawning at my feet ready to receive me, and fled to Christ for refuge.

This same diligence which marked my state of heart and regulated my actions when I first sought Christ, is to be continued "*unto* the end". This means persevering in a holy living, and unto this the servants of God are to be constantly urging their hearers.

"Ministerial exhortation unto duty, is needful even unto them who are sincere in the practice of it, that they may abide and continue therein. It is not easy to be apprehended how God's institutions are despised by some, neglected by others, and by how few, duly improved; all for want of taking right measures for them. Some there are, who, being profoundly ignorant, are yet ready to say, that they know as much as the minister can teach them, and therefore, it

is to no purpose to attend unto preaching. These are the thoughts, and this is too often the language, of persons profane and profligate, who know little, and practice nothing of Christianity. Some think that exhortations unto duty, belong only unto them who are negligent and careless in their performance; and unto them, indeed they do belong, but not unto them only, as the whole Scripture testifieth. And some, it may be, like well to be exhorted unto what they do, and do find satisfaction therein, but *how few are there* (it was the same then! A.W.P.) who look upon it as a means of God whereby they are enabled for, and kept up unto their duty, wherein, indeed, their use and benefit doth consist. They do not only direct unto duty, but through the appointment of God, they are means of communicating grace unto us, for the due performance of duties” (Dr. John Owen, 1680).

“Do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end”. Hope is a spiritual grace quite distinct from faith or love. Faith casts me upon God. Love causes me to cleave to and delight in pleasing Him. Hope sustains under the difficulties and discouragements of the way. It supports the soul when the billows of trouble roll over it, or when we are tempted to despair, and give up the fight. That is why, in the Christian’s armor, Hope is called “the helmet”(1 Thessalonians 5:8), because it wards off the sharp blows or bears the weight of those strokes which befall the saint in trials and afflictions. Hope values the things promised, looks forward to the day of their realization, and thus is nerved to fresh endeavor. Hope views the Promised Land, and this gives alacrity to the weary pilgrim to continue pressing forward. Hope anticipates the welcome and the glorious fare awaiting us at the Heavenly Port, and this gives courage to go on battling against adverse winds and waves. There is the test.

Many pretend to the possession of a good hope who yet have no faith. Others make a profession of faith who yet have no real hope. But real faith and real hope are inseparable. A spiritual faith eyes the Promiser, and is assured that He cannot lie. A spiritual hope embraces the promises, esteems them above all silver and gold, and confidently anticipates their fulfillment. But between the present moment and the actual realization of our hope lies a rugged path of testing, in which we encounter much that wearies, disheartens and retards us. If we are really walking in the path of God’s appointment, there will be

oppositions to meet, fierce persecutions to be endured, grievous troubles to be borne. Yet, if our valuation of God's promises be real, if our anticipation of their fulfillment be genuine, the comfort and joy they afford will more than offset and over-balance the effects of our trials. The exercise of hope will alone deliver from fainting and despondency under continued afflictions.

Now to be in the enjoyment of "the full assurance of hope unto the end", the Christian must continue giving "the same diligence" to the things of God and the needs of his soul, as he did at the beginning. When the terrors of God first awakened him from the sleep of death, when he was made to feel his own awful danger of being cast into the eternal burnings, when he learned that Christ was the only Refuge, no half-hearted seeker was he. How diligently he searched the Word! How earnestly he cried unto God! How sincere was his repentance! How gladly he received the Gospel! How radical was the change in his life! How real did Heaven seem unto him, and how he longed to go there! How bright was his "hope" then! Alas, the fine gold has become dim; the manna has lost much of its sweetness, and he has become as one who "cannot see afar off" (2 Peter 1:9). Why? Ah, cannot the reader supply the answer from his own experience?

But we dare not stop short at the point reached at the close of the preceding paragraph. Backsliding is dangerous, so dangerous that if it be persisted in, it is certain to prove fatal. If I continue to neglect the Divine means of grace for spiritual strength and support, if I go back again into the world and find my delight in its pleasures and concerns, and if I am not recovered from this sad state, then that will demonstrate that I was only the subject of the Holy Spirit's *inferior* operations, that I was not really regenerated by Him. The difference between thorny-ground and the good-ground hearers is, that the one brings forth no fruit "to perfection" (Luke 8:14), whereas the other brings forth fruit "with patience" or perseverance (Luke 8:15). It is *continuance* in Christ's word which proves us His disciples indeed (John 8:31). It is *continuing* in the faith, grounded and settled, and being "not moved away from the hope of the Gospel" (Colossians 1:23) which demonstrates the reality of our profession.

"He said *to the end* that they might know they had not yet reached the goal, and were therefore to think of further progress. He mentioned *diligence* that they might know they were not to sit down

idly, but to strive in earnest. For it is not a small thing to ascend above the heavens, especially for those who hardly creep on the ground, and when innumerable obstacles are in the way. There is, indeed, nothing more difficult than to keep our thoughts fixed on things in heaven, when the whole power of our nature inclines towards, and when Satan by numberless devices draws us back to earth” (John Calvin).

Once more would we press upon our hearts that it is only as “diligence” in the things of God is continually exercised that a scriptural “hope” is preserved, and the full assurance of it attained.

First, because there is an inseparable connection between these two which is of Divine institution: God Himself has appointed “diligence” as the means and way whereby His people shall arrive at this assurance: cf. 2 Peter 1:10, 11.

Second, because such “diligence” has a proper and necessary tendency unto this end. By diligence our spiritual faculties are strengthened, grace is increased in us, and thereby we obtain fuller evidence of our interest in the promises of the Gospel.

Third, by a faithful attention to the duties of faith and love we are preserved from sinning, which is the principal evil that weakens or impairs our hope.

“That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (verse 12).

These words confirm what we have said above concerning the force of the exhortation found in verse 11. There the apostle, is giving a call to perseverance in the path of practical holiness. But there are multitudes of professing Christians that cherish a hope of heaven, who nevertheless continue in a course of self-will and self-pleasing.

“There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness” (Proverbs 30:12).

Christ came here to save His people “from their sins” (Matthew 1:21) not in them. No presumption is worse than entertaining the idea that I am bound for Heaven while I live like a child of Hell.

“That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and

patience inherit the promises”. This verse forms the connecting link between the preceding section and the closing one of this chapter. The apostle here warns against any evil, indolence and inertia, which stands opposed to giving “diligence”: they are the opposite virtue and vice. Slothfulness persisted in would effectually prevent the performance of the duty just enjoined. In Hebrews 5:11 Paul had charged the Hebrews with being “dull (slothful — the same Greek word) of hearing”, not absolutely, but relatively; they were not as industrious in heeding “the word of *righteousness*” (Hebrews 5:13) as they ought to have been. Here he bids them be not slothful in good works, but emulators of the saints who had gone before.

“That ye be not slothful”.

“He knew that the utmost intention of our spirits, the utmost diligence of our minds, and endeavors of our whole souls, are required unto a useful continuance in our profession and obedience. This, God requireth of us; this, the nature of things themselves about which we are conversant, deserveth; and necessary it is, unto the end which we aim at. If we faint or grow negligent in our duty, if careless or slothful, we shall never hold out unto the end; or if we do continue in such a formal course as will consist with this sloth, we shall never come unto the blessed end which we expect or look for. The oppositions and difficulties which we shall assuredly meet with, from within and without, will not give way unto feeble and languid endeavors. Nor will the holy God prostitute eternal rewards unto those who have no more regard unto them, but to give up themselves unto sloth in their pursuits. Our course of obedience is called running in a race, and fighting as in a battle, and those who are slothful on such occasion will never be crowned with victory. Wherefore, upon a due compliance with this caution, depends our present perseverance, and our future salvation” (Dr. John Owen).

The slothfulness against which the apostle warns, is in each of us by nature. The desires of the “old man” are not toward, but away from the things of God. It is the “new man” which is alone capacitated to love and serve the Lord. But in addition to the two natures in the Christian, there is the individual himself, the possessor of those natures, the “I” of Romans 7:25, and *he* is held responsible to “make not provision for the flesh” (Romans

13:14) on the one hand, and to “desire” the sincere milk of the Word that he may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2) on the other. It is the consciousness of this native sloth, this indisposition for practical holiness, which causes the real saint to cry out, “Draw me, we will run after Thee” (Song of Solomon 1:4); “Make me to go in the path of Thy commandments, for therein do I delight”;

“Order my steps in Thy Word, and let not any iniquity have dominion over me” (Psalm 119:35, 133).

It is this which distinguishes the true child of God from the empty professor — his wrestling with God in secret for grace to enable him to press forward in the highway of holiness.

“But followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises”. The reference here is to the believing forefathers of the Hebrews, who, by continuing steadfast in faith and persevering in hope amidst all the trials to which they were exposed, had now entered into the promised blessings — Heaven. Dr. J. Brown has pointed out that there is no conflict between this declaration and what is said in Hebrews 11:13. Though during their lives they had “not received the promises”, yet at death, they *had* entered into their rest, and are among “the spirits of just men made perfect” (Hebrews 12:23). The word “inherit” denotes their right thereto.

The example which the apostle here sets before the Hebrews was that of the Old Testament patriarchs. Just as in the 3rd chapter he had appealed to one portion of the history of their fathers in warning, so now he makes reference to another feature of it in order to encourage. Two things are here to be taken to heart: the happy goal reached by the patriarchs and the path of testing which led thereto. Two things were required of them: faith and patience. Their faith was something more than a general faith in God and the inerrancy of His Word (James 2:19); it was a special faith which laid hold of the Divine promises concerning the covenant of grace in Christ Jesus. Nor was this a mere notional faith, or bare mental assent to the Truth: it was marked by a practical and influential acknowledgement that they were “strangers and pilgrims on the earth” see Hebrews 11:13. Such is the faith which God requires of us today.

The second grace ascribed unto the patriarchs is their “patience” or “long-suffering” as the word is usually rendered. A different word is employed in Hebrews 10:36 and Hebrews 12:1, where an active grace is in view. Here it is

more of a passive virtue, hence it is used of the “long-suffering” of God in Romans 9:22, 1 Peter 3:20 etc.

“It is a gracious sedate frame of soul, a tranquility of mind on holy grounds with faith, not subject to take provocation, not to be wearied with opposition” (Dr. John Owen).

It is a spirit which refuses to be daunted by the difficulties of the way, which is not exasperated by trials and oppositions encountered, so as to desert the course or flee from the path of duty. In spite of man’s hatred, and of the seeming slowness of God’s deliverance, the soul is preserved in a quiet waiting upon Him.

“These were the ways whereby they came to inherit the promises. The heathen of old fancied that their heroes, or patriarchs, by great, and, as they were called, heroic actions, by valor, courage, the slaughter and conquest of their enemies, usually attended with pride, cruelty and oppression, made their way into heaven. The way of God’s heroes unto their rest and glory, unto the enjoyment of the Divine promises, was by faith, long-suffering, humility, enduring persecution, self-denial, and the spiritual virtues generally reckoned in the world unto pusillanimity, and so despised. So contrary are the judgments and ways of God and men even about what is good and praiseworthy” (Dr. John Owen).

As reasons *why* the apostle was moved to set before the Hebrews the noble example of their predecessors, we may suggest the following.

First, that they might know he was exhorting them to nothing but what was found in those who went before them, and whom they so esteemed and admired. This, to the same end, he more fully confirms in chapter 11.

Second, he was urging them to nothing but what was needful to all who shall inherit the promises. If “faith and patience” were required of the patriarchs, persons who were so high in the love and favor of God, then how could it be imagined that these might be dispensed with as *their* observance!

Third, he was pressing upon them nothing but what was practicable, which others had done, and which was therefore possible, yea, easy for them through the grace of Christ.

Ere turning from this most important verse, we will endeavor to anticipate

and dispose of a difficulty. Some of our readers who have followed attentively what has been said in the last few paragraphs, may be ready to object, but this is teaching salvation by works; you are asking us to believe that Heaven is a wage which we are required to earn by *our* perseverance and fidelity. Observe then how carefully the Holy Spirit has, in the very verse before us, guarded against such a perversion of the gospel of God's grace. First, in the preposition He used: it is *not* "who for faith and patience inherit the promises", but "through". Salvation is not bestowed because of faith and patience, in return for them; yet it *does* come "through" them as the Divinely appointed *channel*, just as the sun shines into a room through its windows. The windows are in no sense the cause of the sun's shining; they contribute nothing whatever to it; yet are they *necessary* as the means by which it enters.

Another word here which precludes all ground of human attainment and completely excludes the idea of earning salvation by anything of ours, is the verb used. The apostle does *not* say "purchase" or "merit", but "*inherit*". And how come we to "inherit"? By the same way as any come to an inheritance, namely, by being the true heirs to it. And *how* do we become "heirs" of this inheritance? By God's gratuitous adoption.

"Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs" (Romans 8:15-17).

God, by an act of His sovereign will, made us His children (Ephesians 1:4, 5). This Divine grace, this free assignment, is the foundation of all; and God's faithfulness is pledged to preserve us unto our inheritance (verse 10). Yet, we are *such* heirs as have *means* assigned to us for obtaining our inheritance, and we are required to apply ourselves thereunto.

"For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself" (verse 13)

The opening "For" denotes that the apostle is here giving a reason why he had appealed to the example of the patriarchs, as those who "through faith and patience inherit the promises": that they really did so, he now proves by a most illustrious instance. Paul here cites the case of one whom he knew would be most notable and forcible. God made promise to Abraham, but he

did not obtain the fulfillment thereof until after he had “patiently endured” (verse 15).

The one to whom God made promise was Abraham. He was originally called “Abram”, which signifies “an exalted father”. Upon Jehovah’s renewal of the covenant to him, his name was changed to Abraham, God giving as the reason “for a father of many nations have I made thee” (Genesis 17:5). The reference was not only to those nations which should proceed naturally from him — the descendants of Ishmael (Genesis 17:20) and of Keturah’s sons (Genesis 25:1-4) — but to the elect of God scattered throughout the world, who should be brought to embrace his faith and emulate his works. Therefore is he designated “the father of all them that believe”, and “the father of us all” (Romans 4:11, 16).

“Because he could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself”. The assurance which was given to Abraham was the greatest that Heaven itself could afford: a promise and an oath. We say the greatest, for in verse 16 the apostle declares that amongst men an “oath” is an end of strife; how much more when the great God Himself takes one! Moreover, observe He swear “by Himself”: He staked Himself; it was as though He had said, I will cease to be God if I do not perform this. The Lord pledged His veracity, declared the event should be as certain as His existence, and that it should be secured by all the perfections of His nature. Dr. J. Brown has rightly pointed out,

“The declaration was not in reality made more certain by the addition of an oath, but so solemn a form of asseveration was calculated to give a deeper impression of its certainty”.

“Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee” (verse 14).

It seems strange that almost all of the commentators have quite missed the reference in the preceding verse. There we read, “God made promise to Abraham”. Some have regarded this as pointing back to the first promise Jehovah made to the patriarch in Genesis 12:2, renewed in Genesis 15:5; others have cited Genesis 17:2, 6; still others, the promise recorded in Genesis 17:15, 16; and thus they limit the “patiently endured” (Hebrews 6:15) to a space of twenty-five years, and regard the “he obtained the promise” as finding its fulfillment at the birth of Isaac. But these conjectures are completely set aside by the words of our present verse, which are a direct

quotation from Genesis 22:17, and that was uttered *after* Isaac was born.

That which God swore to was to bless Abraham with all blessings, and that unto the end: “Surely, blessing I will bless thee”. The phrase is a Hebrew mode of expression, denoting emphasis and certainty. Such reduplication is a vehement affirmation, partaking of the nature of an oath: where such is used, it was that men might know God is in earnest in that which He expressed. It also respects and *extends* the thing promised or threatened: I will do without fail, without measure, and eternally without end. It is indeed solemn to note the first occurrence in Scripture of this mode of expression. We find it in the awful threat which the Lord God made unto Adam:

“But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof dying thou shalt die”
(Genesis 2:17).

It is Genesis 2:17 which supplies the first key that unlocks the meaning of Genesis 22:17. These are the first two occurrences in Holy Writ of this unusual form of speech. They stand in direct antithesis the one to the other. The first concerned the curse, the second respected the blessing. The one was the sentence of irrevocable doom, the other was the promise of irreversible bliss. Each was uttered to an individual who stood as the head and representative of a family, upon whose members the curse and the blessing fell. Each head sustained a *double* relationship. Adam was the head of the entire human family, and the condemnation for his sin has been imputed to all his descendants (Romans 5:12, 18, 19). But in a narrower sense Adam was the head of the non-elect, who not only share his condemnation, partake of his sinful nature, but also suffer his eternal doom. In like manner, Abraham was the head of a natural family, that is, all who have descended from him; and they share in the temporal blessings which God promised their father. But in a narrower sense Abraham (type of Christ as the “everlasting Father” Isaiah 9:6 and cf. Isaiah 53:10, “His seed”, and His “children” in Hebrews 2:13) was the head of God’s elect, who are made partakers of his faith, performers of his works, and participants of his spiritual and eternal blessings.

It was through their failing to look upon Abraham as the type of Christ as the Head and Father of God’s elect, which caused the commentators to miss the deeper and spiritual significance of God’s promise and oath to him in Genesis

22. In the closing verses of Hebrews 6 the Holy Spirit has Himself expounded the type for us, and in our next article (D.V.) we shall seek to set before the reader some of the supporting proofs of what we have here little more than barely asserted. The temporal blessings wherewith God blessed Abraham — “God hath blessed Abraham in all things” (Genesis 24:1 and cf. Hebrews 5:35) — were typical of the spiritual blessings wherewith God has blessed Christ. So too the earthly inheritance guaranteed unto Abraham’s seed, was a figure and pledge of the Heavenly inheritance which pertains to Christ’s seed. Let the reader ponder carefully Luke 1:70-75 where we find the type merging into the antitype.

“Surely, blessing I will bless thee” is further interpreted for us in Galatians 3:14, where we read, “That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ”. Thus, in blessing Abraham, God blessed all the heirs of promise, and pledges Himself to bestow on them what He had sworn to give unto him: “If ye be Christ’s then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29). That the deeper and ultimate signification of Genesis 22:17 had reference to spiritual and future “blessing” is not only established, unequivocally, by Romans 9:7, 8, but also by the fact that otherwise there had been *no relevancy* in Paul’s setting before the Hebrews, and us, the example of Abraham.

That with which God promised to bless Abraham and his seed was faith, holiness, perseverance, and at the end, salvation (Galatians 3:14). That which God pledged Himself unto with an oath was that His power, His long-suffering, should be engaged to the uttermost to work upon the hearts of Abraham and his spiritual children, so that they would effectually attain unto salvation. Abraham was to live on the earth for many long years after God appeared unto him in Genesis 22. He was to live in an adverse world where he would meet with various temptations, much opposition, many discouragements; but God undertook to deliver, support, succor, sustain him unto the end, so that His oath should be accomplished. Proof of this is given in our next verse.

“And so after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise”
(verse 15).

This means that, amid all the temptations and trials to which he was exposed, Abraham studiously persevered in believing and expecting God to make good

His word. The emphatic and all-important word here is “And *so*” which joins together what was said in verses 13, 14 and what follows here in verse 15. It was in *this* way and manner of God’s dealing with him; it was in *this* way of conducting himself. He “patiently endured”, which covers the whole space from the time that God appeared to him in Genesis 22 until he died, at the age of one hundred and seventy-five years (Genesis 25:7). It is this exercise of hope unto the end which Paul was pressing upon the Hebrews. They professed to be Abraham’s children, let them, then, manifest Abraham’s spirit.

“He obtained the promise”: by installments.

First, an earnest of it in this life, having the blessing of God in his own soul; enjoying communion with Him and all that that included — peace, joy, strength, victory. By faith in the promise, he saw Christ’s day, and was glad (John 8:56).

Second, a more complete entering into the blessing of God when he left this world of sin and sorrow, and departed to be with Christ, which is “far better” (Philippians 1:23) than the most intimate fellowship which may be had with Him down here. Abraham had now entered on the peace and joy of Paradise, obtaining the Heavenly Country (Hebrews 11:16), of which Canaan was but the type.

Third, following the resurrection, when the purpose of God shall be fully realized in perfect and unending blessing and glory.

CHAPTER 29

THE ANCHOR OF THE SOUL

(HEBREWS 6:16-20)

In our last article we saw that the Holy Spirit through Paul exhorted the people of God to “be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (verse 12). This declaration was illustrated and exemplified from the history of one who has been highly venerated both by Jews and believing Gentiles, namely, Abraham, of whom it is here declared, “after he had patiently endured, he received the promise” (verse 16). We cannot but admire again the heavenly wisdom given to the apostle, inspiring him to bring in Abraham at this particular point of his epistle. In chapter 3 we saw how that, before he set forth the superiority of Christ over Moses, he first made specific mention of the typical mediator’s *faithfulness* (verse 5); so here, ere setting forth the superiority of Christ over Abraham (which *is* done in Hebrews 7:4), he first records his triumphant *endurance*. How this shows that we ought to use every lawful means possible in seeking to remove the prejudices of people against God’s truth!

The mention of Abraham in Hebrews 6 should occasion real searchings of heart before God on the part of all who claim to be Christians. Abraham is “the father of all them that believe” (Romans 4:11), but as Christ so emphatically declared to those in His day who boasted that Abraham was their father, “If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do (not merely “ye ought to do”!) the works of Abraham” (John 8:39), and as Romans 4:12 tells us, Abraham is “the father of circumcision (i.e., spiritual circumcision: Colossians 2:11) to those who are not of the (natural) circumcision only, but who also *walk* in the steps of that faith of their father Abraham”. In his day (1680) John Owen said,

“It is a sad consideration which way and by what means some men think to come to Heaven, or carry themselves as if they think so. There are *but Jew* who deem more than a naked profession to be necessary thereunto, but living in all sorts of sins, they yet suppose they shall inherit the promises of God. This was not the way of the holy men of old, whose example is proposed to us. True, some think that faith at least be necessary hereunto, but by faith they understand little more than a mere profession of true religion”.

It behooves us, if we value our souls, to examine closely the Scriptural account of the nature and character of Abraham's faith. It was far more than a bare assenting to the veracity of God's Word. It was an operative faith, which caused him to separate himself from the world (Hebrews 11:8, 9), which led him to take the place of a stranger and pilgrim down here (Hebrews 11:13), which enabled him to patiently endure under severe trials and testings. In the light of other scriptures, the words, "patiently endured" (Hebrews 6:15) enable us to fill in many a blank in the Genesis history. Patiently "endured" what? Mysterious providences, the seeming slowness of God to make good His promises, that which to sight and sense appeared to repudiate His very love (Genesis 22:2). Patiently "endured" what? The attacks of Satan upon his faith, the insinuations of the Serpent that God had ceased to be gracious, the temptation of the Devil to be enriched by the king of Sodom (Genesis 14:21). Patiently "endured" what? The cruel sneers, the biting taunts, the persecution of his fellow-men, who hated him because his godly walk condemned their ungodly ways. Yes, like his Redeemer afterwards, and like each one of his believing children today, "he endured the contradiction of sinners against himself".

But the Holy Spirit had another design here in referring to the case of Abraham. Having so faithfully warned us of the danger of apostasy, having so earnestly set before us the imperative need of faithful perseverance, He now closes this lengthy parenthesis with a most glorious message of *comfort*, which is designed to set the hearts of God's children at perfect rest, allay their fears of uncertainty as to their ultimate issue, strengthen their faith, deepen their assurance, and cause them to look forward to the future with the most implicit confidence. It is ever God's way to wound before He heals, to alarm the conscience before He speaks peace to it, to press upon us our responsibility ere He assures of His preserving power. "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure", is preceded by "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12, 13).

And *what* is it that the Holy Spirit here uses *to comfort* the hearts of God's tried and troubled and trembling people? Why, the wondrous and glorious Gospel of His grace. This He does by now making known the deeper design and significance of His reference to Abraham. He shows that the promise which God made to "the father of all that believe", to which promise He

designed to add His oath, concerned not Abraham alone, but is, without fail, to be made good to all his spiritual seed. Yea, He shows how God's dealings with Abraham in time, were but a shadowing-forth on this earth-plane of His covenant-transactions with Christ and His seed in Heaven ere time began. May the Lord grant the much-needed wisdom, guidance and grace, that both the writer and reader may be led to a fight and clear apprehension of this most blessed subject.

Ere turning to verse 16 let us attempt to show the connection of our present passage with its context, by giving a brief analysis of the verses which were before us in the preceding article.

1. Abraham is set before us as an example: verse 12 and the opening "For" of verse 13.
2. God made promise to Abraham: verse 13.
3. That promise had immediate reference to Christ and the benefits of His mediation: Galatians 3:16.
4. In addition to His promise, God placed Himself on oath to Abraham: verse 13.
5. The peculiar nature of that oath: God swore by Himself: verse 13.
6. God swore by Himself because there was none greater to whom He might appeal: verse 13.
7. Abraham's faith, resting on the ground of God's promise and oath, patiently endured and obtained the promise: verse 15.

The emphatic and important words of verse 15 are its opening "And so", or "And thus", the reference being to the absolute faithfulness of the divine promise, followed by the divine oath, namely "Surely, blessing I will bless thee" (verse 14). In other words, God's oath to Abraham was the guarantee that He would continue to effectively work in him and invincibly preserve him to the end of his earthly course, so that he should infallibly enter into the promised blessing. Though Abraham was to be left in the place of trial and testing for another seventy-five years, his entrance was not left contingent upon his own mutable will. Though it is only through "faith and patience" any inherit the promises (verse 12), yet God has solemnly pledged Himself to sustain these graces in His own unto the end of their wilderness journey and

right across Jordan itself, until entrance into Canaan is secured: “These *all* died in faith” (Hebrews 11:13).

“For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife” (verse 16).

The design of this verse is to give us an explanation of *why* it is that the great God has placed Himself on oath. When we consider who He is and what He is, we may well be amazed at His action. When we remember His exalted majesty, that he “humbles” Himself to so much as “behold” the things that are in heaven (Psalm 113:6), there is surely cause for wonderment to find Him “swearing” by Himself. When we remember that He is the God of Truth, who cannot lie, there is reason for us to enquire why He deemed not His bare word sufficient.

“For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife”. The opening “*for*” looks back to God “swear by Himself” of verse 13. The apostle here appeals to a custom which has obtained among men in all ages. When one party avers one thing, and another, another, and each stands firmly by what he says, there is not only mutual contradiction, but endless strife. Where matters of interest and importance are concerned between two or more men, the difference between them can only be settled by them being placed on oath. In such cases an oath is necessary for the governing and peace of mankind, for without it strife must be perpetual, or else ended by violence. Thus, the purpose or design of oaths among men is to place bounds upon their contradictions and make an end of their contentions.

Strikingly has Dr. John Owen pointed out in his remarks upon verse 16:

“As these words are applied to or are used to illustrate the state of things between God and our souls, we may observe from them:

First, that there is, as we are in a state of nature (looking at the elect as the descendants of fallen Adam — A.W.P.), a difference and strife between God and us.

Second, the promises of God are gracious proposals of the only way and means for the ending of that strife.

Third, the oath of God interposed for the confirmation of these promises (better, “in addition to” the promises — A.W.P.) is every

way sufficient to secure believers against all objections and temptations in all straits and trials, about peace with God through Jesus Christ”.

“Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by oath” (verse 17).

The relative “wherein” or “wherefore” has, we believe, both an immediate connection with verse 16, and a more remote one to what has been declared in verse 13. Regarding it, first, as a conclusion drawn from the general principle enunciated in the preceding verse, its force is this: since an oath serves to establish man’s words among his fellows, the great God has condescended to employ this means and method to confirm the faith of His people. Because an oath gives certainty among men unto the point sworn to, God has graciously deigned that the heirs of promise shall have the comfort of a Divine dual certainty. The more remote connections with verse 13 will appear in the course of our exposition: it is to here give assurance that what God so solemnly pledged Himself to do for and give unto Abraham, is equally sure and certain to and for all his children — the “wherein” signifies “in which” *oath*.

God’s design in swearing by Himself was not only that Abraham might be fully persuaded of the absolute certainty of His blessing, but that the “heirs of promise” should also have pledge and proof of the immutability of His counsel concerning them; for the mind and will of God was the same toward all of the elect as it was toward the patriarch himself. Though we are lifted to a much greater height in these closing verses of Hebrews 6, yet the application which the apostle is here led to make of God’s dealings with Abraham, is identical in principle with what we find in Romans 4. There we read of Abraham believing God and that it was counted unto him for (better “unto”) righteousness, and in verse 16 the conclusion is drawn: “Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to *all* the seed”; while in verses 23, 24 we are told, “Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was reckoned to him, but for *us also*, to whom it shall be reckoned, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead” — cf. Galatians 3:29.

We come now to enquire, What is the “immutability of His counsel” which

God determined to show the more abundantly unto the heirs of promise? To ascertain this, we need first to consider God's "counsel". Like the expression the "will of God", His "counsel" has a *double* reference and usage in the New Testament. There is the revealed "will" of God, set forth in the Scriptures, which defines and measures human responsibility (1 Thessalonians 4:3, e.g.), but which "will" is perfectly done by none of us; there is also the secret and invincible will of God (Romans 9:19, etc.), which is wrought out through each of us. So we read, on the one hand, that "the Pharisees and lawyers *rejected* the counsel of God against themselves" (Luke 7:30); while on the other hand, it is said of the crucifiers of Christ, they

"were gathered together for to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done" (Acts 4:27, 28).

The "*immutability* of His counsel" declares plainly in which of the two senses the term is to be taken in Hebrews 6.

The "counsel" of God in Hebrews 6:17 signifies His everlasting decree or eternal purpose. It is employed thus of Christ's death in Acts 2:23, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel, and foreknowledge of God". It bears the same meaning in Ephesians 1, as is abundantly clear if verse 9 be compared with verse 11: in the former we read, "Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath *purposed* in Himself"; in the latter it is said, "being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after *the counsel* of His own will". Both of those verses take us back to the Divine determination before this world was created; equally plain is it that both of them are treating of the eternal resolutions of God concerning the *salvation* of His people: cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

Still more specially the "counsel" of God in Hebrews 6:17 concerns the holy and wise purpose of His will to give His Son Jesus Christ to be of the seed of Abraham for the salvation of all the elect, and that, in such a way, and accompanied by such blessings, as would infallibly secure their faith, perseverance, and entrance into Glory. In other words, the "counsel" of God respects the agreement which He entered into with Christ in the Everlasting Covenant, that upon His fulfillment of the stipulated conditions, the promises made to Him concerning His seed should most certainly be fulfilled. Proof of this is found in comparing Luke 1:72, 73, with Galatians 3:16, 17. In the

former we read of Zacharias prophesying that God was “to remember His holy *covenant*, the *oath* which He sware to our father Abraham”. In the latter, the Holy Spirit brings out the hidden meaning of God’s dealings with the patriarch: “Now to Abraham and his seed were the *promises* made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, the covenant, that was confirmed before of God *in Christ*”.

Referring to the covenants made by Jehovah with the patriarchs, as affording so many types of that Everlasting Covenant (Hebrews 13:20) made with Christ, Mr. Hervey (1756) when refuting the terrible heresies of John Wesley, wrote:

“True, it is recorded that God made a covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, with Jacob, and with David: but were they in a capacity to enter into a covenant with their Maker? To stand for themselves or be surety for others? I think not. The passages mean no more than the Lord’s *manifesting*, in an especial manner, the grand Covenant to them, ratifying and confirming their personal interest in it, and further assuring them that *Christ*, the great Covenant-Head, should spring from their seed. This accounts for that remarkable and singular mode of expression which often occurs in Scripture: ‘I will make a covenant with them’. Yet there follows no mention of any conditions but only a promise of unconditional blessings”.

Now what is particularly important to note here is, that God was “willing more abundantly to *show* unto the heirs of promise, the *immutability* of His counsel”, and therefore, “confirmed it by (or as the margin much more accurately renders it “interposed Himself by”) an oath”. This leads us to call attention to the distinction between God’s “counsel” and His “promise”. His “counsel” is that which, originally, was a profound and an impenetrable secret in Himself; His “promise” is an open and declared revelation of His will. It is most blessed to perceive that God’s promises are but the transcripts of His eternal decrees; His promises now make known to us in words the hitherto secret counsels of His heart. Thus, “the immutability of His counsel” is that from which His sure promises proceed and by which it is expressed.

But in addition to His promise, God was willing “more abundantly” to “show”, or reveal, or make known to His people, the unchangeableness of His counsel. All proceeds from the *will* of God. He freely purposed to give

unto the elect, while they are in this world, not only abundant, but “more abundant” proofs of His everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3), His gracious concern for their assurance, peace and joy. This He did by “interposing Himself by an oath”. The Greek word which the A.V. has rendered in the text “confirmed”, has for its prime meaning “to mediate” or “intervene”. This at once directs our thoughts to the Mediator, of whom Abraham was the type. It was to Christ that the original Promise and Oath were made. Hence, in Titus 1:2 we read,

“In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began”:

as the elect were not then in existence, the promise must have been made to their Head. Concerning God’s oath to Christ we read,

“The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (Psalm 110:4).

Now it is not unto all mankind, but only unto a certain number of persons to whom God designs to manifest the immutability of His counsel, and to communicate the effects thereof. These are here denominated “the heirs of promise” which includes all the saints of God both under the Old and New Testament. They are called “heirs of promise” on a double account: with respect unto the promise itself, and the thing promised. They are not yet the actual possessors, but waiting in expectation (cf. Hebrews 1:14): proof of this is obtained by comparing Hebrews 11:13, 17, 19. In this the members are conformed to their Head, for though Christ is the “Heir of all things” (Hebrews 1:2), yet He, too, is “expecting” (see Hebrews 10:13). The “heirs of promise” here are the same as “the children of promise” in Romans 9:8.

“That by two immutable things in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us” (verse 18).

In order to simplify our exposition of this verse, we propose taking up its contents in their inverse order, and doing so under a series of questions. First, what is “the hope set before us?” Where is it thus “set before us”, What is meant by “fled for refuge *to* lay hold upon the hope”? What is the “strong consolation”? How do the “two immutable things” supply this strong consolation?

In seeking to ascertain the character of “*the hope*” of verse 18 it needs to be carefully distinguished from the “strong consolation”, which at once intimates that it is not the grace of hope within the heart of the believer. Further corroboration of this is found in the words, “set before us”, which clearly speaks of what is objective rather than subjective; and too, it is to be “laid hold of”. Moreover, what is said of this “hope” in verse 19 excludes the idea of an internal expectation. The needed help is found in 7-19 where of the “better hope” it is said, “by the which we draw nigh unto God”: John 14:6, Ephesians 2:18, etc. In 1 Timothy 1:1, the Lord Jesus Christ is distinctly designated “our Hope”, and is He not the One whom God hath “set before” His people? Is not “that blessed Hope” for which we are to be “looking” (Titus 2:13), Christ Himself?

Where is it that Christ is “set before us” as “the hope”? Surely, in the Gospel of God’s grace. It is there that the *only* hope for lost sinners is made known. The Gospel of God is “the Gospel of Christ” (Romans 1:16), for it exhibits the excellencies of His glorious person and proclaims the efficacy of His finished work. Therefore in Romans 3:25, it is said of Christ Jesus, “Whom God hath *set forth* a propitiation through faith in His blood”; while to the Galatians Paul affirmed, “before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently (openly) *set forth* among you — crucified”. In the Gospel, Christ is presented both as an Object of Faith and an Object of Hope. As an Object of Faith it is what He has done for the elect, providing for them a perfect legal standing before God: this is mainly developed in Romans. As an Object of Hope it is what Christ will yet do for His people, bring them out of this wilderness into the Promised Land. In Hebrews we are seen as yet in the place of trial, moving toward the Inheritance.

What is meant by “fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us”? It expresses that which the Gospel requires from those who hear it — appropriating it unto one’s self. Saving faith is explained under various figures. Sometimes as “*believing*”, which means the heart resting upon Christ and His finished work. Sometimes as “coming to Christ”, which means a turning from every other refuge and closing with Him as He is set forth in the Gospel. Sometimes as a “setting to our seal that God is true” (John 3:33 cf. Isaiah 44:5), which means ratifying His testimony by our receiving it. Sometimes as the committal of our soul and its eternal interests into the hands of the Lord (2 Timothy 1:12). Sometimes as a “submitting ourselves

unto the righteousness of God” (Romans 10:3), which means repudiating our own works and resting upon the vicarious obedience and sacrifice of Christ. Here, it is pictured as a “fleeing for refuge”, the figure being taken from an Old Testament type.

Under the Law, God made merciful provision for the man who had unintentionally slain another: that provision was certain cities appointed for refuge for such. Those cities are spoken of in Numbers 35, Deuteronomy 19, Joshua 20. Those cities were built on high hills or mountains (Joshua 20:7), that those seeking asylum there, might have no difficulty in keeping them in sight. So the servants of Christ who hold Him up, are likened unto “a city which is set upon a hill” (Matthew 5:14). They were a refuge from “the avenger of blood” (Joshua 20:3): cf., “flee from the wrath to come” (Matthew 3:7). They had a causeway of stones approaching them as a path to guide thereto (Deuteronomy 19:3): so in the Gospel a way of approach is revealed unto Christ. Those who succeeded in entering these cities secured protection and safety (Numbers 35:15): so Christ has declared “him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37).

Now the particular point to be noted in the above type is that the one who desired shelter from the avenger of blood had to personally *flee to* the city of refuge. The figure is very impressive. Here was a man living in peace and comfort, fearing none; but having now slain another at unawares, everything is suddenly changed. Fear within, and danger without, beset on either hand. The avenger of blood threatens, and nothing is left but to flee to the appointed place of refuge, for there alone is peace and safety to be found. Thus it is with the sinner. In his natural condition, a false serenity and comfort are his. Then, unawares to him, the Holy Spirit convicts him of sin, and he is filled with distress and alarm, till he cries, “What must I do to be saved”? The Divine answer is, “Flee for refuge and lay hold of the hope set before us”.

But let us not fail to note here the immeasurable superiority of Christianity over Judaism as seen in the vast difference between the “refuge” under the Law, and that made known in the Gospel. The cities of refuge were available only for those who had unintentionally killed a person. But we have been conscious, deliberate, lifelong rebels against God; nevertheless Christ says, “Come unto Me *all* ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you

rest”. Again, the man-slayer in the city was safe, yet his very refuge was a *prison*: it is the very opposite with the believer — Christ opened for him the prison-door and set him at liberty (Isaiah 61:2), Christ “makes free” (John 8:36). Again, in entering the city of refuge he turned away from his inheritance, his land and cattle; but the one who lays hold of Christ obtains an inheritance (1 Peter 1:4). For the man-slayer to return to his inheritance meant death; for the Christian, death means going to his inheritance.

Those who have fled to Christ to “lay hold on eternal life” (1 Timothy 6:12), are entitled to enjoy “strong consolation”. On this the Puritan Manton said,

“There are three words by which the fruits and effects of certainty and assurance is expressed, which imply so many degrees of it: peace, comfort, and joy. Peace, denotes rest from accusations of conscience. Comfort, a temperate and habitual confidence. Joy, an actual feeling, or high-tide of comfort, an elevation of the saints”.

Strong consolation is a firm and fixed persuasion of the love of God toward us, and the assurance that

“our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17).

“David encouraged himself in the Lord *his* God” (1 Samuel 30:6).

It remains for us now to consider what it is which supplies and supports the “strong consolation” in the believer. This is stated at the beginning of our verse: “That by two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie”. These are, His promise and His oath. The assurance of the believer rests upon the unchanging veracity of God. Were He influenced by His creatures, God would be constantly changing His plans (as we do), willing one thing today and another tomorrow; in such case who could confide in Him? None, for no one would know what to expect; thus, all certainty would be at an end. But, blessed be His name, our God is “without variableness or shadow of turning” (James 1:17), and therefore the immutability of His counsel is the very life of our assurance.

For the stay of our hearts and the full assurance of our faith, God has graciously given to us an irrevocable deed of settlement, namely, His promise, followed by His oath, whereby the whole inheritance is infallibly secured unto every heir of promise. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but

God's words never shall (Luke 21:33). All the promises recorded in Scripture are but copies of God's assurances made *to Christ* for us from everlasting, so that the Divine oaths and covenants mentioned in Holy Writ are but transcripts of the original Covenant and Oath between God and Christ before the foundation of the world. Note how the words "impossible for God to lie", link up with "in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began" (Titus 1:2)!

Near the close of the previous article we pointed out how that the deeper and spiritual significance of God's promise and oath to Abraham in Genesis 22 has been missed by most of the commentators, through their failure to see in him a type of Christ as the Head and Father of God's elect. There we find God swearing to the patriarch, "Blessing I will bless thee." The application of these words to Christ as the Representative of His people is clearly seen in Psalm 45:2, where God says to Him who is Fairer than the children of men, "God hath *blessed* Thee *forever*". Let it also be pointed out that God's promise and oath to David in Psalm 89 also gives an adumbration of

His transactions with the Mediator before the world began: "My Covenant will I not break... His seed shall endure forever" (verses 34-36). Thus, our "strong consolation" issues from the implicit assurance that God has bound Himself in Christ to "bless" His people.

"For all the promises of God *in Him* (Christ) are Yea, and in Him Amen" (2 Corinthians 1:20)!

"Which (hope) we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil" (verse 19).

We deeply regret that we feel obligated to part company with every commentator that we have consulted on this verse. Owing to the general mistake of making the "hope" of verse 18 a subjective one, hardly any two are agreed upon the meaning of the "anchor" here. Some regard it as God's promise; others, His oath; others, Christ's priesthood; others, the believer's assurance; and so on. The only point upon which there is common consent is, that the figure is *dropped* in the very next clause! — "entereth into that within the veil". Below we give the literal rendering of *Bagster's Interlinear*.

"Which as an anchor we have of the soul both certain and firm, and entering into that within the veil".

Now an anchor is used for securing a ship, particularly in times of storm, to prevent it from *drifting*. It is an *invisible* thing, sinking down beneath the waters and gripping firmly the ground beneath. The winds may roar and the waves lash the ship, but it rides them steadily, being held fast by something outside itself. Surely the figure is plain. The “anchor” is *Christ Himself*, sustaining His people down here in this world, in the midst of the wicked, who are likened unto “the troubled sea, when it cannot rest” (Isaiah 57:20). Did He not declare, “Neither shall any pluck them out of My hand” (John 10:28)? Certainly there is nothing in us “both sure and steadfast”: it is the love (John 13:1), power (Matthew 28:18, 20), and faithfulness (Hebrews 7:25) of Christ which is in view.

“Whither the Forerunner is for us entered, Jesus, made an High Priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek” (verse 20).

Surely this explains for us the previous verse: it was the entrance of Christ into Heaven which settles fast the “Anchor” within the veil! It was *for us* Christ has gone on High! A “forerunner” is one who has already traversed every step of the race which is set before us (Hebrews 12:1,2), and who has entered into possession of that toward which he ran. Because Christ has been where we now are, we shall soon be where He now is. Thus, the force of this figurative title of our Redeemer is not only designed to give assurance of our security, but to show us *where* that security lies entirely outside of ourselves: held fast by a triumphant and ascended Christ. Hence the force of His name here: “Jesus”, who “shall save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

Condensing from Dr. Owen’s excellent remarks: — Christ is a “Forerunner” *for us*,

First, by way of *declaration*. It belongs unto a forerunner to carry tidings and declare what success has been obtained in the affair of which he is to render account. So when the Lord Christ entered Heaven, He made an open declaration of His victory by spoiling principalities and leading captivity captive: see Psalm 45:4-6, 68:18, 24-26.

Second, by way of *preparation*. This He did by opening the way for our prayers and worship: 10:19-22 and making ready a place for us, John 14:2, 3.

Third, by way of *occupation*. He has gone into Heaven, in our name, to take possession and reserve it for us: Acts 26:18, 1 Peter 1:4.

“Made an high priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek”. Having warned us of our danger (Hebrews 5:11–6:8), having exhorted us to continue pressing forward (Hebrews 6:11-15), having assured our hearts of infallible preservation (Hebrew 6:16-19), the apostle now returns to the very point he had dropped at Hebrews 5:10. This final clause of Hebrews 6 forms a pertinent and perfect transition between the apostle’s digression at Hebrews 5:11 and onwards, and the description of Christ’s priesthood which follows in chapter 7, etc. He now declares who and what that “Forerunner” was, who *for us has* gone on High, even Jesus, our great High Priest. The apostle has led us on to the “perfection” which he mentioned at the beginning of this chapter (Hebrews 6:1, 3) — Christ within the veil!

CHAPTER 30
MELCHIZEDEK
(HEBREWS 7:1-3)

In Hebrews 2:17, the apostle announced that the Lord Jesus is “a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God”, while in Hebrews 3:1 he calls on those who are partakers of the heavenly calling to “Consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession”. Having shown in Hebrews chapters 3 and 4 the superiority of Christianity’s Apostle over Judaism’s, viz, Moses, whose work was completed by Joshua, Paul then declared that “We have a great High Priest, that is passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God”, an High Priest who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, seeing that He also was tempted in all points like us (in His spirit, His soul, and His body), sin excepted; for which reason we are bidden to

**“Come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy,
and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:14-16).**

In the opening verses of Hebrews 5 we are shown how Christ fulfilled the Aaronic type, and how that He possessed every necessary perfection to qualify Him for filling the sacerdotal office, see articles 19 to 21. But while the Holy Spirit there shows how Christ provided the substance of what was foreshadowed by the Levitical priests, He is also particular to exhibit how that Christ excelled them at every point. Finally, he declares that the Lord Jesus was, “Called of God an High Priest after the order of Melchizedek” (verse 10). We have previously called attention to it, but as this detail is so important and so little understood, we repeat: it is highly essential to observe that Christ is *not* there said to be “High Priest *of* the order of Melchizedek”, but “*alter* the order of”, etc. The difference between the two expressions is real and radical: “of” would have *limited* His priesthood to that particular order; “after” simply shows that there is a *resemblance* between them, as there also was between Aaron’s and Christ’s.

At Hebrews 5:11 the apostle declared,

**“Of whom we have many things to say and hard to be uttered,
seeing ye are dull of hearing”.**

The *difficulty* lay in the strong disinclination of man to relinquish that which has long been cherished, which nowhere appears more evident than in

connection with religious things. To say that Christ was a High Priest “after the order of *Melchizedek*” was tantamount to affirming that the *Aaronic* order was Divinely set aside, and with it, all the ordinances and ceremonies of the Mosaic law. “This”, as we said in an earlier article, “was the hardest thing of all for a Hebrew, even a converted one, to bow to, for it meant repudiating everything that was seen, and cleaving to that which was altogether invisible. It meant forsaking that which their fathers had honored for fifteen hundred years, and espousing that which the great majority of their brethren according to the flesh denounced as Satanic.

The Hebrews had become “dull of hearing”. They were too slothful to make the effort needed for a proper understanding of the nature of Christ’s priestly office and work. In Hebrews 3:1 the apostle had called on them to, “Consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession”, and in Hebrews 7:4 he again says, “Now consider”. The Greek word means to “ponder intensely” to “behold diligently”, to “weigh thoroughly” the things proposed unto us. It is at this point so many fail: they imagine all that is required of them is to *hear* the Word of God expounded, and if anything appears to them hard to understand, they conclude it is not for them; hence, they make little progress in Divine things and fail to “increase in the knowledge of God” (Colossians 1:10). And this is not simply an “infirmity”, it reveals a sad state of soul; it shows a lack of *interest* in spiritual things. This was the state of the Hebrews: they had gone back.

The condition of soul in which a Christian is has very much to do with his spiritual receptivity. He may hear the best of preaching and read the soundest of books, yet if his heart be not right with God, he will not be profited. His head knowledge of Truth may be increased and his pride puffed up, but his soul is not fed, nor is his walk influenced God-wards. It was thus with the Corinthians, therefore we find the apostle writing to them,

“And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as babes in Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:1).

It was thus with the Hebrews: the spirit of the apostle was straitened. He longed to expound to them the excellency of the glories of Christ’s priesthood, but he had to pause and address himself to their sorrowful state of heart. In this he has left an example which all teachers do well to weigh and imitate.

As we have seen, at Hebrews 5:11 the apostle makes a digression, which is continued to the end of the 6th chapter. It is most instructive to observe the *order* he followed. The better to appreciate it, let us review the contents of this parenthetical section in their inverse order. In chapter 7, he sets forth the official glories of Christ. But what immediately precedes? This: at the close of Hebrews chapter 6 (verses 16-20) he presents the sure ground which true Christians occupy for having a “strong consolation”. Thus, it is only as the heart is set at perfect rest before God, fully assured of His favor, of His unchanging grace, that the soul is in any condition to ponder, to appreciate, to revel in the glories of Christ. It is faith’s realization of the unceasing and effectual intercession of our great High Priest within the veil, which keeps the heart in peace. The contemplation of the essential Holiness of God would fill the soul with despair, but it is turned into hope and joy by seeing *Jesus* at His right hand “for us”. The secret of victory is to be, in spirit, where our Forerunner is.

And what precedes the blessed assurance which the closing verses of Hebrews chapter 6 are designed to convey to the believer? This: a call to faithful perseverance in running the race set before us; a bidding of us “be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (verses 9-15). We are not entitled to the comfort which comes from resting upon the immutability of the Divine counsels while we are following a course of self-will and self-pleasing. Only those who are really walking with God have any right to the *joy* of His salvation. To talk of our certainty of reaching Heaven while out of the path of obedience, is nothing but a carnal presumption.

And what, in turn, precedes the call to a steady continuation in well-doing, to the exercise of faith and love? This: a solemn warning against the danger of apostasy (verses 4-7). The sluggards of Hebrews 5:11-14 must be aroused, the careless plainly told of what the final outcome would be were indifference to the righteous claims of God persisted in. There are some who refuse to allow that verses 4-7 contain a warning given to real Christians against the danger of apostasy. They say it would be quite inconsistent for the Holy Spirit to so warn them, while in verses 16-20 He gives the most absolute assurance of their security. Ah, but mark it well, the assurance in verses 16-20 is for “the heirs of promise”, and not for all professing believers. The warning is to make us examine ourselves and make sure that

we *are* “heirs”. This, the truly regenerate *will* do; whereas the self-complacent and presumptuous will ignore it, to their own eternal undoing.

In confirmation of what has been pointed out above, we quote the following from John Owen:

“As the minds of men are to be greatly prepared for the communication of spiritual mysteries unto them, so the best preparation is by the cure of their sinful and corrupt affections, with the removal of their barrenness under what they have already heard and been instructed in. It is to no purpose, yea, it is but the putting of new wine into old bottles to the loss of all, to be daily leading men into the knowledge of higher mysteries, whilst they live in a neglect of the practice of what they have been taught already”.

At the close of his hortatory digression, the apostle returns to the precise point at which his orderly argument had been interrupted, as will immediately appear by comparing Hebrews 5:10 and Hebrews 6:20. Jesus was, and is for ever, High Priest. This was an entirely new doctrine for the Hebrews. Our Lord Himself had made no specific reference to it during the days of His earthly ministry, nor is there any record of it in the preaching of the apostles. Yet the teaching of both One and the others was based upon and assumed this fundamental fact. But now the Holy Spirit was pleased to give a clear unfolding of this precious truth. It was “hard” for even converted Jews to receive. Their chief objection would be that, to assert Christ was High Priest, yea, the *only* High Priest of His Church, was affirming something inconsistent with and contrary to the Law, for He did not (according to the flesh) belong to the Levitical tribe, He was not in the line of the priests.

It is most important for us to take account of this difficulty which presented itself to the minds of the Hebrews, for unless we recognize that one of the chief objects before the apostle in chapter 7 was to *remove* this very difficulty, we are certain to err in our understanding of the details of his argument. It was not the design of the apostle to teach that the nature and functions of Christ’s priesthood had no resemblance to that of the Aaronic. Far from it. He could not now contradict all that he has so explicitly set forth in Hebrews 5:1-9. There he had plainly shown that the Lord Jesus had fulfilled the Aaronic type by Himself offering to God a perfect and final Sacrifice for the sins of His people. To this he again returns in chapter 9,

where he declares that Christ had (as Aaron foreshadowed) “by His own blood entered into the Holy Place, having obtained eternal redemption” (verse 12). Let it not be forgotten that the atoning ministry of Israel’s high priest was consummated *within* the veil, Leviticus 16:12-14.

In Hebrews 7 the apostle proves that so far from the priestly office and work of the Lord Jesus conflicting with what God had instituted through Moses, it was the fulfillment of His own counsels as made known in the Old Testament Scriptures. At the same time he takes occasion to submit the proof that the priesthood of Christ was far more glorious than that of Aaron’s. This he does by an appeal to an ancient oracle, the mystical meaning of which had been hidden from the Jews, yea, the very letter of which appears to have been quite forgotten by them. We refer to the 110th Psalm, which will come before us in the course of examining our present chapter.

“For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the most high God”
(verse 1).

At the close of chapter 6 the Holy Spirit directs our gaze into the Holiest, whither for us the Forerunner hath entered, even Jesus our great High Priest. He now proceeds to emphasize the *dignity* of His priesthood, showing that it is accompanied by royal majesty, that it is intransmissible, and that it abideth forever. Thus our confidence in Him should be complete and entire, unwavering and unceasing. Thus too we may perceive again the immeasurable superiority of Christianity over Judaism by the super-excellency of its Priest.

“For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the most high God”. The opening “For” has, we believe, a double connection. More immediately, it forms the closest possible link between what is declared in Hebrews 6:20, and what is to immediately follow. There it was affirmed that “Jesus is made an High Priest *forever*, after the order of Melchizedek”; here it will be shown that thus it was, *mystically*, with Melchizedek himself. This will be the more apparent if the second half of verse 2 and the whole of verse 3, saving its final clause, be placed in a parenthesis, reading it thus: “For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, abideth a priest continually”. More remotely the opening “For” of the verse, looks back to Hebrews 5:10, 11: he now brings forth the “many things” he had to say to him.

“For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the most high God”. Two

things are here affirmed of Melchizedek: be was king, and he was priest. Almost endless conjectures have been made as to the *identity* of Melchizedek. Questions have been raised as to what order of beings he belonged to. Some have insisted that he was a Divine person, others that he was an angel, still others that he was Christ Himself in theophanic manifestation — as when He appeared to Joshua (Joshua 5:14), or in Babylon's furnace (Daniel 3:25), etc. Others, allowing that he was only a man, have speculated as to his nationality, family connections, and so on. But as the Holy Spirit has not seen fit to give us any information on these points, we deem it irreverence (Deuteronomy 29:29) to indulge in any surmises thereon.

The first time Melchizedek is brought before us on the pages of Holy Writ is in Genesis 14. There he confronted Abraham, without introduction, in the land of Canaan. At that time all the world had fallen into the grossest of idolatry and the most awful immorality: Romans 1:19-31. Even the progenitors of Abraham worshipped false gods: Joshua 24:2. At that time Canaan was inhabited chiefly by the Sodomites on the one hand (Genesis 13), and by the Amorites (Genesis 15:16) on the other. Yet, in the very midst of these people who were sinners above others, God was pleased to raise up a man who was an illustrious type of Christ! A signal instance was this of the absolute sovereignty of God. He can raise up instruments for His service and unto His glory, when, where, and as it pleases Him. He can raise up the greatest light in the midst of the greatest darkness: Matthew 4:16.

Melchizedek was “king of Salem”: in the light of Psalm 76:2 there can be no doubt but what this was the earlier or original name for Jerusalem: “In Salem also is His tabernacle, and His dwelling-place in Zion”. Only *Jerusalem* can there be intended. Further, Melchizedek was “priest of the most high God”, and this in the days of Abraham! Thus, Jerusalem had a king many centuries before David, and God had a priest which He owned long ere Aaron was called! It has been rightly pointed out that,

“The argument of the apostle, deducing and illustrating the superiority of Christ's priesthood over the Aaronic, from and by the relation of Melchizedek to the Levitical priesthood, is in some respects analogous to the argument of the apostle with regard to the law, and its parenthetical and inferior position, as compared with the

Gospel.... the Jews were shocked when the apostle Paul taught that it was not necessary for the Gentiles to observe the law; that for the new covenant church the law of *Moses* was no longer the rule and form of life. And therefore the apostle in his epistle to the Galatians, tells them that the law was given four hundred years after the promise had been made unto Abraham, and that therefore there was no injustice, and no inconsistency, in the bringing in of a new dispensation, which was in fact only a return in a fuller and more perfect manner to that which was from the beginning in the mind of God” (Adolph Saphir).

There is, indeed, a still closer analogy than has been pointed out by Mr. Saphir between Paul’s argument in Hebrews 7 and that which he used to the Galatians. Melchizedek was the king-priest of Jerusalem. Now in Galatians 4:26, we are told that, “Jerusalem which is above, is free, which is the mother of us all”. The word “above” there has misled almost all of the commentators. The primary reference is not to location, but to *time*, it is antithetical from “now is”, *not*, from “below”! In the immediate context the apostle contrasts two covenants, each of which was associated with a city. Paul there calls attention to the fact that the “promise” which God made to Abraham both preceded and outlasted the law! So too does the “Jerusalem” of the promise. Melchizedek was connected with Jerusalem before the Law was first given, and it was a type of Heaven: Hebrews 11:10, etc.

It is indeed striking to discover that God’s first priest was this king of Salem — which signifies “peace”, Jerusalem meaning “the foundation of peace”. Jerusalem was to be the place where the incarnate Son of God was to begin the exercise of His sacerdotal office; moreover, it was to be the seat of His local church (Acts 1–15) until the significance of the type had been effected. In the history of that unique city we see the sovereign pleasure of God again exercised and exemplified, for He appoints various intervals of blessing unto places. Jerusalem was first privileged with the presence of this priest of the most high God. Afterwards, for a long season, it was given over to the idolatrous Jebusites: see Joshua 15:63, 2 Samuel 5:6, etc. Then, in process of time, it was again visited with Divine favor and made the headquarters of the solemn worship of Jehovah. Now, as for centuries past, it is “trodden down of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24). But in the future it will again be the center of Divine blessing on earth: Isaiah 2:1-4. In like manner God hath dealt with

many another place and city.

“Who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him” (verse 1).

The historical reference is to Genesis 14:18, 19.

“Whether any intercourse had previously taken place between these two venerable men, or whether they afterwards continued to have occasional intercourse, we cannot tell; though the probability seems to be, that Melchizedek was not a stranger to Abraham when he came forth to meet him, and that, in an age when the worshippers of the true God were comparatively few, two such men as Abraham and Melchizedek did not live in the same district and country without forming a close intimacy” (Dr. J. Brown).

“And blessed him”. This was a part of the priestly office as we learn from Deuteronomy 21:5: “And the priests the sons of Levi shall come near for the Lord thy God hath chosen to minister unto Him, and *to bless* in the name of the Lord”. The “blessing” Abraham received, is recorded in Genesis 14:19: “Blessed be Abraham of the most high God, Possessor of heaven and earth”. Absolutely, only God can either bless or curse, for He only has sovereign power over all good and evil. This power He exercises directly (Genesis 12:3): yet by a gracious concession and by His institution, God also allows men to invoke blessings on others. In the Old Testament we find parents blessing their children (Genesis 9:26, 27:27, 48:20. etc.), and the priests blessing the people (Numbers 6:24- 26).

In both instances it was *Christ* that was typically in view.

“In the blessing of Abraham by Melchizedek, all believers are virtually blessed by Jesus Christ, — Melchizedek was a type of Christ, and represented Him in what He was and did, as our apostle declares. And Abraham in all these things, bare the person of, or represented, all his posterity according to the faith. Therefore doth our apostle in the foregoing chapter entitle all believers, unto the promises made unto him, and the inheritance of them. There is, therefore, more than a bare story in this matter. A blessing is in it conveyed unto all believers in the way of an ordinance forever” (John Owen).

It deserves to be noticed that the final act of Christ ere leaving this earth was that

“He led them out as far as to Bethany, and He lifted up His hands, and *blessed* them” (Luke 24:50).

“To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all” (verse 2).

Melchizedek’s “blessing” of Abraham was the *exercise* of his priesthood; Abraham’s paying him tithes was the *recognition* of it. Abraham had just obtained a most memorable victory over the kings of Canaan, and now in his making an offering to Melchizedek, he acknowledged that it was God who had given him the victory and owned that Melchizedek was His servant. Under the Mosaic dispensation we find the Levitical priests were supported by the tithes of the people: Numbers 18:24. In like manner, God’s servants today ought to be so maintained: 1 Corinthians 9:9, 10. Melchizedek’s receiving of Abraham’s tithe was a sacerdotal act: it was given as *to God*, and received by *His* officer in this world. This comes out plainly in the apostle’s reasoning thereon in the later verses.

“First being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is King of peace” (verse 2).

The Holy Spirit now gives us the mystical signification of the proper names used in the previous verse, which conveys more than a hint to us that there is nothing meaningless or superfluous in the perfect Word of God. Everything has an “interpretation”.

“*In the* Scripture everything is of importance; we cannot read and interpret the Scripture as any other book, since Scripture is not like any other book, even as no other book is like the Scripture. The Scripture is among books what the man Christ Jesus is among men... These quotations and expositions of Scripture in Scripture are ‘grapes of Eshcol’, examples of, not exceptions to, the fruitful Carmel, whence they come. Thus who can fail to see the significance of the name Seth, who was given instead of Abel, one who was ‘firm and enduring’ in the place of him who ‘vanished’? or of the name of Joshua (God’s Savior), who brought Israel into the promised land”? (Adolph Saphir).

This 2nd verse of Hebrews 7 furnishes a clear and decisive proof of the

verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. The revelation which God has given to us was not communicated in the rough, and then left to men to express it in their own words. No; so far from that being the case, every “jot and tittle” of the originals were given under the immediate superintendence of the Holy Spirit.

“Hence the names of persons and places, the omissions of circumstances, the use of the singular or plural number, the application of a title — all things are under the control of the all-wise and gracious Spirit of God. Compare Paul’s commentary on the word ‘all’ in Psalm 8:7, and the important deductions from it in Hebrews 2:8 and 1 Corinthians 15:27; on the word ‘new’ Jeremiah 31, Hebrews 8:13; the singular ‘seed’ Galatians 3:16. What a wonderful superstructure is built on Psalm 110:4! Each word is full of most important and blessed meaning. In Psalm 32:1, 2 no mention is made of works, hence Romans 4:6” (Adolph Saphir).

Let us consider now the “interpretation” which is here given us. Melchizedek means “king of righteousness” and Salem “king of peace”. But observe it well that the Holy Spirit has also emphasized the *order* of these two: “first” king of righteousness, “after that also” king of peace. This calls attention to another important and blessed detail in our type. Doubtless, the historical Melchizedek was both a righteous and peaceable king, but what the apostle here takes up is not the personal characteristics of this man, but how he represented Christ in His mediatorial office and work. Now the “King of righteousness” and “of peace” is the Author, Cause, and Dispenser of righteousness and peace. Christ is the Maker and Giver of peace because He is “the Lord our righteousness” (Jeremiah 23:6). Righteousness must go first, and then peace will follow after. This is the uniform order of Scripture wherever the two are mentioned together: peace never precedes righteousness. Mark well the following passages:

“Surely His salvation is nigh them that fear Him; that glory may dwell in our land. Mercy and truth are met together: righteousness and peace have kissed” (Psalm 85:9, 10).

“And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever” (Isaiah 32:17).

“In His days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth” (Psalm 72:7).

Jesus Christ is “the Righteous” One (1 John 2:1). He came here to “fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15), to “magnify the law and make it honorable” (Isaiah 42:21). He came here as the vicarious Representative of His people, being made under the law for them (Galatians 4:4), obeying the law for them (Matthew 5:17), and thus wrought out a perfect obedience for them (Romans 5:19). Therefore are they made “the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). He also came here to pacify the wrath of God against His people’s sins (Ephesians 2:3) to be a propitiation (Romans 3:25), to “make peace through the blood of His cross” (Colossians 1:20). Hence we are told,

“Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

How minutely accurate, then, how Divinely perfect was the type! The very word Melchizedek means “King of righteousness”, while the name of his capitol signifies “peace”. Well did John Owen remark:

“I am persuaded that God Himself, by some providence of His, or other intimation of His mind, gave that name of ‘peace’ first unto that city, because there He designed not only to rest in His typical worship for a season, but also in the fullness of time, there to accomplish the great work of peace-making between Himself and mankind.... Wherefore our apostle doth justly argue from the signification of those names which were given, both to the person and place, by divine authority and guidance, that they might teach and fore-signify the things whereunto by him they are applied”.

Christ is not only the Producer of righteousness and the Maker and Giver of peace, but He is also the *King* of both. All authority has been given to Him in heaven and in earth (Matthew 28:18). He is, even now, upholding all things by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3). He is expressly declared to be “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and the Lord of lords” (1 Timothy 6:15). In the Millennium this will be openly demonstrated here upon earth. Then it will appear to all that He is a *righteous* Branch, for as King He shall “reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth” (Jeremiah 23:5), and, as Isaiah 9:7 tells us, “Of the increase of His government *and peace* there shall be no end”. Meanwhile, faith views Him today as King, King of righteousness and King of peace.

“Without father, without mother, without pedigree, having neither

beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God” (verse 3).

Up to this point everything has been plain and simple, but here, judging from the laborious strugglings of most expositors, we enter deep water. Yet, in reality, it is not so. Men, as usual, have created their own difficulty; and, as is generally the case, they have done so through ignoring the immediate context. Had these statements in verse 3 referred to him as a *man*, it would surely be quite impossible to understand them. But it is not as man he is referred to, but as *priest*. Once this is clearly seen and firmly grasped little or no difficulty remains.

That Melchizedek was not a superhuman creature, a divine or angelic being, is unequivocally established by Hebrews 5:1, where we are expressly told,

“For *every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God*”.

To be possessed of human nature is an essential prerequisite in order for one to occupy and exercise the sacerdotal office. The Son of God could not serve as Priest till He became incarnate. Observe carefully how that in verse 4 Melchizedek is expressly declared to be a “man”. What, then, it may be asked, is the meaning of the strange statements about him in verse 3? We answer, their meaning is to be explained on the principle of the apostle’s subject in this passage.

“Without father, without mother, without descent”. Now in connection with the Aaronic priesthood, personal genealogy was a vital prerequisite, hence the great care with which they preserved their pedigree: see Ezra 2:61, 62. But, in contradistinction from them, Melchizedek was priest of an order where natural descent was not regarded, an order free from the restrictions of the Levitical, Numbers 3:10, etc; therefore was he an accurate type of Christ, who belonged not to the tribe of Levi. Neither the book of Genesis, nor any of the later scriptures, say a word about Melchizedek’s parentage, and this *silence* was a part of the type.

“Having neither beginning of days nor end of life” is to be explained on the same principle. The Jewish priests “began” their “days” as *priests* at the age of twenty-five, when they were permitted to wait upon their brethren: Numbers 8:24 and cf. 1 Chronicles 23:27, 28. At the age of thirty they began

their regular priestly duties: Numbers 4:3. At the age of fifty their *priestly* “life” ended: “from the age of fifty years they shall *cease* waiting upon the service, and shall serve no more” (Numbers 8:25). But no such restriction was placed upon the sacerdotal ministry of Melchizedek: so, in this too, he was an eminent type of Christ.

“But made like unto the Son of God”, or, more literally “but assimilated to the Son of God”. It is very striking to note that it is not the Son of God who was “assimilated to Melchizedek”, but vice versa. In the order of *time* Christ subsisted before Melchizedek; in the order of *nature*, Melchizedek was a priest before Christ was. The priesthood of the Son of God, ordained and appointed by the Eternal Three, was the *original*, and Melchizedek’s priesthood furnished the *copy*, and a copy *given in advance* is the same thing as the type. Melchizedek was “assimilated to the Son of God” as a type.

First, as priest of the most high God.

Second, as being a royal priest, possessing personal majesty and authority.

Third, as being the king of righteousness.

Fourth, as king of peace.

Fifth, as the one who “blessed Abraham”.

Sixth, as the one who received the grateful gifts of God’s people represented by Abraham.

Seventh, as not owing his priesthood to natural genealogy.

Eighth, as abiding a priest beyond the bounds of the Levitical limitations.

“Abideth a priest continually” (verse 3).

Note carefully it is not that the *natural* life of Melchizedek had no end, but that his *priestly* life did not cease at the age of fifty; in other words, he continued a priest to the very end of his earthly existence, which shows he had no vicar or successor, deriving a priesthood from his.

“The expression ‘abideth a priest *continually*’, therefore, is the equivalent to saying that he had a *perpetual priesthood* in contradistinction from those whose office terminated at a definite

period, or whose office passed over into the hands of others” (A. Barnes).

In the verses that follow, the apostle reasons from these facts and shows the superiority of Melchizedek as a priest to Aaron and his sons. This, D.V. Will come before us in our next article.

CHAPTER 31

MELCHIZEDEK, CONTINUED

(HEBREWS 7:4-10)

The chief design of the apostle in this chapter was not to declare the *nature* of Christ's priesthood, nor to describe the exercise thereof; instead, he dwells upon the *excellency* of it. The nature of Christ's sacerdotal office had been treated of in the first half of Hebrews chapter 5 and is dealt with again, at length, in Hebrews chapter 9. But here he occupies us with the great *dignity* of it. His reason for so doing was to display the immeasurable superiority of Christianity's High Priest over that of Judaism's, and that, that the faith of the Hebrews might be established and their hearts drawn out in love and worship to Him. Unless the scope of the apostle's theme in this chapter be clearly apprehended, it is well-nigh impossible to appreciate and understand the details of his argument.

The proof for the *excellency* of Christ's priesthood is drawn from the Old Testament. In His written Word God had given hints of an alteration from the Levitical priesthood, and the introduction of another more efficacious and glorious. It is true that those hints were of such a character that their signification could not be perceived at the time, for it is "the glory of God to *conceal* a thing" (Proverbs 25:2), and this (in part) that His creatures may be taught their complete dependency upon Him, and that He may have the honor of *revealing* what they by mere searching cannot find out. He has chosen to make known His counsels gradually, so that

"the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Proverbs 4:18).

As "life and immortality", so all spiritual truth, was brought to light by the Gospel (2 Timothy 1:10). Much truth was enfolded in the prophecies, promises, and institutions of the Old Testament, yet in such a way as that it was in a great measure incomprehensible until God's time came to unfold them (1 Peter 1:10,11). The great secret of the manifold wisdom of God was hidden in Himself from the beginning of the world (Ephesians 3:9, 10), yet not so absolutely so, that no intimation of it had been given. But it had been given in *such* a way in the Scriptures that much was obscure to the understanding of the saints in all generations till it was interpreted and

displayed by the Gospel. More than once we read of Israel's chief seer and singer speaking of inclining his ear unto a "parable" and opening his "*dark saying*" upon the harp (Psalm 49:4, 78:2). In sharp contrast therefrom, in the New Testament dispensation,

“the darkness is past, and the true light *now* shineth” (1 John 2:8).

In consequence of the fuller revelation which God has made to us through the Gospel, all the glorious evidences of His grace which now appear unto us in the Old Testament Scriptures, is in consequence of a *reflection* of light upon them from the New Testament. This it is which supplies the key to our present Epistle. In Luke 24:27, we read of how Christ began at Moses and the prophets, expounding unto the two disciples who were journeying to Emmaus, “the things concerning Himself”, while in verse 45 we are told that He “opened the understanding” of the eleven “that they might understand the Scriptures”. It has been thought by some (and we deem it quite probable) that in this very Hebrews’ Epistle the Holy Spirit has recorded for *our* instruction and joy the very things which the risen Savior communicated to those two favored disciples. Whether this be the case or no, certain it is that the leading design of the Spirit in this Epistle is to give us light on many Old Testament mysteries by means of the fuller revelation which God has now made by and through Jesus Christ.

A notable illustration and example of this principle appears in the case of Melchizedek, the priest-king. That strange and striking individual is first introduced to us in the sacred narrative in Genesis 14. Then a single verbal reference is made to him again in the 110th Psalm, and nothing more is said of him in the Old Testament. Therefore we need not be surprised that the Jews appear to have given little or no consideration to him. It is not until he is contemplated in the light of the New Testament that we are able to discern in him an eminent type of Christ. This we sought to examine in our last article, all that we now emphasize is that the chief points which the apostle dwells upon are that Melchizedek had neither predecessor nor successor in his sacred office. Melchizedek did not belong to a *line* of priests as did Eleazar, Eli, etc. It was in *this* respect, more especially, that he was “made like unto the Son of God”, our great High Priest.

The various appellations under which our Lord is referred to in this Epistle call for due attention. They are not used at haphazard, but with precision and

design. In Hebrews 2:9 it is “Jesus” that faith beholds — the humiliated but now glorified Savior. In Hebrews 3:6 it is “Christ”, the Anointed One, who is over God’s house. But in Hebrews 7:3, it is “the Son of God”, as High Priest, unto whom Melchizedek was made a similitude. The Spirit here jealously guards the honor of Him whom it is His office and delight to glorify. He hereby intimates to the Hebrews that though Melchizedek were such an excellent person, yet he was infinitely beneath Him whom he represented. The typical person was but man; the antitype, Divine! Furthermore, one who was more than mortal was required in order to fulfill that which Melchizedek foreshadowed: he who should be capable of discharging an always-living, constant-abiding, uninterrupted priesthood, *must be* “the Son of God”!

In the first three verses of Hebrews 7 the apostle mentions those details in which Melchizedek resembled the great and glorious Priest of Christianity; in verses 4-10 he *applies* the type unto his immediate purpose and design. Having affirmed that Christ, the promised Messiah, was a Priest after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 6:20), and having given a description of the person and office of that typical character from the inspired narrative of Moses (Genesis 14:), he now dwells upon various details in the type in order to establish the argument which he has in hand. That which the apostle particularly designed to prove, was that a more excellent priesthood than that of Aaron’s, having been introduced according to the purpose and promise of God, it necessarily followed that the ceremonies and institutions connected with it had now been abolished.

“Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils” (verse 4).

The apostle here calls upon the Hebrews to attentively mark and seriously ponder the official dignity of this ancient servant of God. The word “man” has been supplied by the translators, and should have been placed in italics. In the Greek it is simply “now consider how great *this*”, i.e. Royal priest. Think of how great he “must have *been*”, seems preferable to “was”. His exalted rank appears from the fact that none other than Abraham, the father and head of Israel, had shown him deference.

The force of the apostle’s reasoning here is easily perceived. To give tithes to another who is the servant of God is a token of official respect, it is the recognition and acknowledgement of his superior status. The value of such

official tokens is measured by the dignity and rank of the person making them. Now Abraham was a person of very high dignity, both naturally and spiritually. Naturally he was the founder of the Jewish nation; spiritually he was the “father” of all believers (Romans 4). In his person was concentrated all the sacred dignity belonging to the people of God. How “great” then must be Melchizedek, seeing that Abraham himself owned his official superiority! And therefore how “great” must be that *order* of priesthood to which he belonged!

That upon which the Jews insisted as their chief and fundamental privilege, and which they were unwilling to forego, was the greatness of their ancestors, considered as the high favorites of God. They so gloried in Abraham and their being *his* children, that they opposed this to the person and doctrine of Christ Himself (John 8:33, 53). With regard to official dignity, they looked upon Aaron and his successors as to be preferred above all the world. Whilst they clung to such fleshly honors, the Gospel of Christ, which addressed them as lost sinners, could not be but distasteful to them. To disabuse their minds, to demonstrate that those in whom they trusted came far short in dignity, honor, and greatness, of the true High Priest, the apostle presses upon them the eminence of him who was a type of Christ, and shows that the greatest of all their ancestors paid obeisance to him.

Three proofs of the eminence of Melchizedek are found in the verse before us.

First, in the nomination of the person that was subject unto him: “*even Abraham*”.

Second, in the dignity of Abraham; “*the patriarch*”.

Third, in that Abraham gave him a tenth of the spoils.

Abraham was not only the root and stock of the Israelitish people, but he was the one who first received the promise of the covenant (Genesis 15:18); therefore they esteemed him next unto God Himself. A “patriarch” is a father, prince or ruler of a family. The sons of Jacob are thus denominated (Acts 7:8, 9), for the twelve tribes descended from them. None else is termed a “patriarch” except David (Acts 2:29), and he, because the royal family came from his loins. But David and Jacob’s sons, all sprang from Abraham, thus was he, pre-eminently, “the patriarch”. Yet great as Abraham was,

Melchizedek was still greater, for he was “priest of the most high God”, and as such the father of the faithful owned him.

Let us not miss the *practical* lesson which the above facts teach us. Therein we learn of what *true* “greatness” consists. The Christian is to measure things by a different standard from that which worldlings employ. They look upon those who occupy prominent social and political positions as being the eminent of the earth. The vulgar mind esteems the wealthy and opulent as those who are most to be envied. But the anointed eye sees things in another light: the fashion of this world passeth away. Death levels all distinctions. Presidents and millionaires, kings and queens, are no more than the poorest beggar when their bodies are reduced to lifeless clay. And what of their souls? Ah, what concern have such after *eternal* interests? Learn, my reader, that true “greatness” consists in the favor of God and our nearness to Him. The meanest of His saints have been made “kings and priests unto God” (Revelation 1:6).

Ere leaving this verse, a few words need to be said upon the subject of *tithing*. There are few things on which many of the Lord’s people are more astray than the matter of giving to His cause and work. Are our offerings to be regulated by sentiment and impulse, or by principle and conscience? That is only another way of asking, Does God leave us to the promptings of gratitude and generosity, or has He definitely specified His mind and stated *what* portion of His gifts to us are due Him in return? Surely He has not left this important point undefined. He has given us His Word to be a lamp unto our feet, and therefore He cannot have left us in darkness concerning any obligation or privilege that pertains to our dealings with Him.

At a very early date the Lord made it known that a definite portion of the saints’ income should be devoted to Him who is the Giver of all. There was a period of twenty-five centuries from Adam until the time that God gave the law to Israel at Sinai, but it is a great mistake to suppose that His people were, at that time, without a definite communication from Him upon their several duties. A careful study of the book of Genesis reveals clear traces of a primitive revelation, which seems to have centered about these things: the offering of sacrifices to God, the observance of the Sabbath, and the giving of tithes. While we cannot today place our finger upon any positive enactment or command of God for any of those three things in those early days,

nevertheless, from what *is* recorded we are *compelled* to assume that such must have been given.

No one can point to a “thus saith the Lord” requiring Noah to offer a sacrifice to Him, nor can we assign chapter and verse giving a command for the saints to tithe ere the law was given; yet is it impossible to account for either without presupposing a revelation of God’s mind on those points. The fact that Abraham *did* give a tithe or tenth to Melchizedek, intimates that he acted in accordance with God’s will. So too the words of Jacob in Genesis 28:22 suggests the same thing. This principle of recognizing God’s ownership and owning His goodness, was later incorporated into the Mosaic law: Leviticus 27:30. Finally, it is taken note of here in Hebrews 7, and in the humble judgment of the writer the passage which is before us presents an argument which admits of no refutation. Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, and Abraham is the father of all that believe (Romans 4; Galatians 3). He is the pattern man of faith. He is the outstanding exemplar of the stranger and pilgrim on earth whose Home is in Heaven. Melchizedek is the type of Christ. If then Abraham gave the tithe to Melchizedek, most assuredly every Christian should give tithes to Christ, our great High Priest.

“And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham; But he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises” (verses 5, 6).

In these verses the apostle strengthens the argument drawn from the important facts presented in verse 4, while at the same time he anticipates and obviates any counter argument which might be advanced against him. His argument consists of two parts: Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedek, Abraham was blest by him. In response, the Jews might reply, *That* does not establish the superiority of Melchizedek over the Levitical order, for the Aaronic priesthood also received tithes. To this the apostle answers by pointing out that Aaron’s sons were all descended from Abraham, and therefore they, in their progenitor, paid tithes to the royal priest of Jerusalem, and by so doing owned his pre-eminence. Let us amplify this analysis.

In verse 5 the apostle acknowledges that God had granted the Levitical

priests the right to receive tithes from His people (Numbers 18:21-24), and thus they were set above all other Israelites; nevertheless, they too had “come out of the loins of Abraham”, and inasmuch as *he* had given a tenth to a priest of another order, his descendants were therefore inferior to *that* priest. Moreover, the Levites had “received” the priestly office, and accepted tithes by command “according to the law”. Thus, the Aaronic priesthood was wholly *derived* in its functions and privileges. But not so Melchizedek’s. *He* was under no law. He was “king”, as well as priest, and therefore belonged to a superior order. In this also he was a type of Christ, who, by virtue of His Divine nature, has authority *in Himself*, to receive and to bless. The words “take tithes... of their brethren” finds its counterpart in 1 Corinthians 9:11-14. The Aaronic priesthood was not supported by a tax levied on the idolatrous Canaanites, but by the gifts of the Lord’s people!

The manner in which the apostle expresses himself in verse 5 deserves our closest notice, his language plainly intimating that his eye was on the high sovereignty of God. Observe that he did not simply say, “the priests have a commandment to take tithes”, but “they that are *of* the sons of Levi”. God distributed dignity and bestowed office in His Church (Acts 7:38) as it pleased Him. Not all the posterity of Abraham were set apart to receive tithes, and not all who belonged to the tribe of Levi; but only the family of Aaron was called to the priesthood. This appointment of His imperial will God required all to submit to: Numbers 16:9,10. It was something new to Israel to see the whole tribe of Levi taken into peculiar (official) nearness to Jehovah; yet to it they submitted. But when the “priests” were taken out *of the* tribe of Levi and exalted above all, some rebelled: Numbers 16:1-3, etc.

The same principle holds good today. It is true, blessedly true, and God forbid that we should say a word to weaken it, that all believers enjoy equal nearness to God, that every one of them belongs to that “holy priesthood” who are to “offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). Nevertheless, all believers are *not* called by God to occupy the same position of ministerial honor, all are not called to be preachers of His Gospel or teachers of His Word (James 3:1). God calls and equips whom He pleases to engage in His public service, and bids the rank and the of His people “obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves” (Hebrews 13:17). Yet, sad to say, in some circles the sin of Korah is repeated. They demand an ecclesiastical socialism, where any and all are allowed to

speak. They “*heap* to themselves teachers” (2 Timothy 4:3). This ought not to be.

In verse 6 the apostle repeats the same thing he had said in verse 2. The Levitical priesthood received tithes from those descended from Abraham, and that was an evidence of official dignity conferred upon them by God’s appointment. But Melchizedek received tithes of Abraham himself, which not only manifested his superiority to Aaron but to him from whom Aaron sprang. The apostle’s insisting on this so particularly shows how difficult a matter it is to dispossess the minds of men of things which they have long held and in which they boast. The Jews clung tenaciously to their descent from Abraham, in fact rested upon it for salvation. Much patience is required in order to deal faithfully but lovingly with those in error.

“In *meekness* instructing those that oppose themselves” (2 Timothy 2:25)

is a needed word for every teacher.

Melchizedek not only received tithes from Abraham, but he actually pronounced blessing upon him, which was a further evidence of his official superiority to the patriarch. To make this detail the more emphatic, the apostle stresses the dignity of Abraham, for the more glorious he was, the more illustrious the dignity of the one qualified to pronounce a benediction upon him. Thus Abraham is here referred to as he who “had the promises”. He was the first of the Israelitish race with whom God made the covenant of life. It was no ordinary honor which Jehovah conferred upon the father of the faithful. As the immediate result of his receiving the promises, Abraham “saw” the Day of Christ (John 8:56). Yet great as was the privilege and honor bestowed upon Abraham it did not hinder him from showing subjection to Melchizedek, God’s vicegerent.

There is an important practical lesson for us in verse 6. The one who had received the “promises” of God was now blest! Ah, we may have the promises of God stored in our minds and at our tongue’s end, but unless we also have the blessing of God, what do they avail us? Moreover, it is particularly, the blessing of *Christ* (typified by Melchizedek) which makes the promises of God effectual to us. Christ is Himself the great subject of the promises (2 Corinthians 1:20), and the whole blessing of them comes forth from Him alone (Ephesians 1:3). In Him, from Him, and by Him, are all

blessings to be obtained. Apart from Christ all are under the curse.

“And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better”
(verse 7).

This verse summarizes the argument contained in verses 4-6.

“These words are plainly to be understood with limitations. It does not follow that, because a priest under the law blessed the king, he was in a civil capacity the king’s superior, any more than that a Christian minister instructing or even reproofing a man of high civil rank who is a member of the church of which he is pastor, is civilly his superior. The apostle’s argument is: The person who accepts of priestly benediction from an individual acknowledges his spiritual superiority, just as the highest authority in the land, if he were becoming a member of a voluntary Christian society, would acknowledge that its pastor was ‘over him in the Lord’” (John Brown).

“Let us first know what the word *blessed* means here. It means indeed a solemn praying, by which he who is invested with some high and public honor, recommends to God men in private stations and under his ministry. Another way of blessing is when we pray for one another, which is commonly done by all the godly. But this blessing mentioned by the apostle was a symbol of greater authority. Thus Isaac blessed his son Jacob, and Jacob himself blessed his grandsons (Genesis 27:30, 48:15). This was not done mutually, for the son could not do like the father; but a higher authority was required for such a blessing as this. And this appears more evident still from Numbers 6:23, where a command is given to the priest to bless the people, and then a promise is immediately added, that they would be blessed whom they blessed. It hence appears that the blessing of the priest depended on this, — that it was not so much man’s blessing as that of God. For as the priest in offering sacrifices represented Christ, so in blessing the people he was nothing more than a minister and legate of the supreme God” (John Calvin).

The application of the principles expressed by the above writers to the case in hand is apparent. The blessing of the priest in Old Testament times (type of Christ’s blessing His people now), though pronounced as the minister of God,

was an evidence of high honor of the one uttering it. Though Abraham was more eminent than any of his descendants, yet he himself was indebted to the royal priest of Jerusalem.

“And here men that die receive tithes; but there he of whom it is witnessed that he liveth” (verse 8).

Here the apostle advances a further argument to support his demonstration of the inferiority of the Aaronic order of priesthood to the Melchizedekian: the “here” referring to the former, the “there” to the latter as stated in Genesis 14. The point singled out for notice is that, the Levitical order of office was but temporary, not so of that priest who blest Abraham.

“The type is described as having no end; the order of priesthood which it represents is therefore eternal” (Calvin).

The Scripture makes no mention of the death of Melchizedek when it relates that tithes were paid to him; so the authority of his priesthood is limited to no time, but on the contrary there is given an intimation of perpetuity.

Some have stumbled over the statement here made about Melchizedek: “it is witnessed that he liveth”. These words have been appealed to in proof that he was a superhuman being. But if this statement be interpreted in the light of its context, there is no difficulty. It was not absolutely and personally that Melchizedek still lived, but typically and as a representation of Christ. Scripture frequently attributes to the type what is found alone in the anti-type. Thus, the paschal lamb was expressly called *God’s* Passover (Exodus 12:11), when in reality it was only a pledge and token thereof. So the emblems on the Lord’s table are denominated the body and blood of Christ, because they *represent* such. The blessedness of this detail will come before us, D.V., in the later verses.

“And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, paid tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchizedek met him” (verses 9, 10).

In these verses the apostle meets the last objection which a carping Jew could make upon the subject. Against what the apostle had been saying, it might be advanced: Granting that Abraham himself paid tithes to Melchizedek, it does not follow that Melchizedek was superior to all Abraham’s descendants. Abraham was, in some sense, a priest (Genesis 12:7), yet he was not so by

virtue of any office which God had instituted in His Church. But in the days of Moses, Jehovah did institute an order and office of priesthood in the family of Aaron, and were not they, by Divine appointment, superior, because superceding the earlier order of Melchizedek? This the apostle makes reply to.

Many find it difficult to follow his line of thought, and that, because they are so ill-acquainted with the most important truth of headship and representation. Let us quote here from F. S. Sampson,

“Abraham was truly the covenant-head of his posterity in the line of Isaac and Jacob, in whose descendants the promises made to him were fulfilled. It was in virtue of this covenant with Abraham, that the Jews inherited their distinguished privileges as a nation. It was the transaction with Abraham which brought them into the relation of a ‘peculiar people’ to Jehovah; and hence, in his patriarchal character and acts, he stood forth as the representative or federal head of the nation, so far as all the promises, privileges, and institutions of the Judaical were concerned. He was both their natural progenitor and their covenant-head, by the appointment of God. We must remember that He was concerned, through His providence and promises, in all this business. Therefore, when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek as a priest of the most High God, and received a blessing from him, it was a historical fact intentionally introduced by God’s providence, with a view to its becoming a feature of the type (so to speak) which Melchizedek, in his history and functions, was foreordained to present, of the supreme and eternal High Priest. This providential incident prefigured and represented, by the Divine intention, the supremacy of the antitype; and in it Abraham acknowledged the official superiority of the type, not only over himself, but over his posterity then in his loins, represented by and acting in him”.

The principle of federal representation lies at the very base of all God’s dealings with men, as a careful study of Romans 5:12-19 and 1 Corinthians 15:45-47 reveals. Adam stood for and transacted on the behalf of the whole human race, so that what he did, they *legally* did; hence his sin, guilt and death, are imputed to all his posterity, and God deals with them accordingly.

So too Christ stood for and transacted on the behalf of all His seed, so that what He did, they *legally* did; hence, His meeting the demands of the law, His death and resurrection-life, are imputed to all who believe on Him. In like manner, Abraham stood for and transacted on the behalf of all his posterity, so that God's covenanting with him, is to be regarded as His covenanting with them also. Proof of this is found in the title *here* (and nowhere else) given to Abraham, viz., "the patriarch" (verse 4), which means, head or father of a people.

Thus the apostle here brings to a head his argument by pointing out that, virtually and representatively (not personally and actually), Levi himself had paid tithes to Melchizedek. We repeat, that Abraham in Genesis is not to be considered only as a private individual, but also as the head and representative of all his children.

When Abraham gave tithes he did so not only in his own name, but also in that of all his descendants. Abraham had been called of God and separated to His service as the head of His elect people. There was more than a natural relation between him and his descendants. Jehovah promised to be a God unto him and to his seed after him, and therefore Abraham covenanted with God in the name of and as the representative of his seed. What God gave unto Abraham He gave unto his children, but he received the grant of it as the representative of his children, who, four hundred years later, took possession of it.

The typical teaching of Genesis 14 is exceedingly rich, but difficult to apprehend through lack of familiarity with the leading principles which interpret it. In Melchizedek's blessing of Abraham, we have a foreshadowing of Christ, as our great High Priest, blessing the whole election of grace (Luke 24:50). In Abraham's owning Melchizedek as priest of the most high God by giving him tithes, we have prefigured the subjection to Christ of all His believing people. It lay outside the apostle's scope to fully expound this type in Hebrews 7 (cf. Hebrews 9:5). Here he practically confines himself to a single point, viz., showing that the High Priest of Christianity far exceeded in honor and glory that of Judaism's. His argument in verses 9, 10 is to the effect that Melchizedek had been as much and as truly honored by Abraham as though the whole Levitical priesthood had personally done him homage.

The all-important and inexpressibly blessed truth for us to lay hold of is that

in verses 9, 10 we have an *illustration* of the most soul-satisfying truth revealed in Holy Writ. Just as Levi was “*in Abraham*”, not only seminally but representatively, so every one of God’s children was “*in Christ*” when He wrought out that glorious work which has honored and pleased God high above everything else. When the death-sentence of the law fell upon Christ, it fell upon the believer, so that he can unhesitatingly say, “I was crucified with Christ” (Galatians 2:20). So too when Christ arose in triumph from the tomb, all His people shared His victory (Ephesians 2:5, 6). When He ascended on high, they ascended too. Let all Christian readers pray earnestly that God may be pleased to reveal to them the meaning, blessedness, and fullness of those words “In Christ”.

CHAPTER 32
THE PRIESTHOOD CHANGED
(HEBREWS 7:11-16)

In Hebrews 5:1-9 the apostle has shown (in part, for he returns to the same theme again in Hebrews chapter 9) how Christ fulfilled that which Aaron had foreshadowed of Him as the High Priest of His people. Then, in Hebrews 5:11 he declares Christ had been hailed by God as High Priest “after the order of Melchizedek”. Immediately following, the apostle adds that, though he had “*many things*” to say of him, he was restrained through the Hebrews’ dullness. After a lengthy parenthesis in which he corrects their faulty condition, return is made to the subject of Christ’s priesthood in Hebrews 6:20, which is amplified in Hebrews chapter 7. The main object now before him was to show that Christ is superior to the Jewish high priest, and, in proof, he appeals to the striking type of Melchizedek. Concerning that type he pointed out that not only was Melchizedek greater in his own person than Aaron, but that his superiority had been *owned* by the whole Levitical stock, inasmuch as they, represented by Abraham, had done homage to him.

In the second section of Hebrews chapter 7 which begins at verse 11, the apostle points out the inevitable inferences which must be drawn from and the certain corollaries which are involved in what had just been shown. The fact that the Messiah was Priest after the order of Melchizedek, necessarily set aside the Levitical order. The fact that God had sent His Son to perform a sacerdotal work, plainly signified that the ministry of Aaron and his successors was inadequate. The fact that “perfection” was not brought in till Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice to God, clearly showed that imperfection attached to those who preceded Him. To bring this out the more clearly was the great design of the apostle in the verses which are to be before us. He had now reached that which was the most difficult for the Jews to receive, viz., that what had been so long venerated by their fathers had now been set aside by God.

To announce that the Mosaic economy was temporary, inadequate, defective, was unbelievable to a pious but unregenerate Israelite, and it was something which was far from easy to prove to a regenerated Jew. They believed that the Levitical system of priesthood *was* “perfect”. It had been instituted by Jehovah Himself, so surely it must be sufficient and permanent! If the whole

Aaronic system was of Divine appointment how could it possibly be, *in itself*, so unsatisfactory that it must now be discarded? The apostle might have reasoned from the analogies supplied by Nature. Many things made by God — such as chrysalis for the butterfly — serve a temporary purpose and then become useless when a more perfect stage of development is reached. But the apostle takes much higher ground and proves by invincible logic that the Levitical system *was* imperfect, and therefore had been superceded by something else.

God had raised up a Priest who belonged not to the Levitical tribe. This the believing Hebrews freely granted: that Jesus Christ had by His sacrifice put away their sins and brought them nigh unto God, was the glorious truth they espoused when they received the Gospel. But they were slow to perceive and acknowledge the necessary *implications* of it. That the Lord Jesus was Priest “after the order of Melchizedek”, intimated unequivocally that the priesthood which preceded His was incapable of producing “perfection”, for there was no need of introducing something new if the old met all the requirements of God. But more: not only did Christ’s bringing in “perfection” presuppose the imperfection of the old order, but it necessarily involved a *change of economy*, i.e. All that was distinctly associated with the Levitical system was now effete, out of date. It is *this* which the apostle proceeds to show.

It was never the intention of God that the Levitical priesthood should remain forever, for in the *Old Testament* Scriptures He gave intimation of *another* Priest, of another order, rising to supercede the former. That intimation was to be found, first, in Genesis 14, where the head and representative of the whole Jewish race had owned Melchizedek as the priest of the most High God. Still plainer was the prophecy which God gave to David. In the 110th Psalm He had greeted the Messiah with these words, “Sit Thou at My right hand” (verse 1), and then He had declared,

“The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (verse 4).

This the apostle here cites, and by so doing bases his argument on a ground which no pious Jew could gainsay: the inspired and infallible testimony of Holy Scripture. Therefore if Christ was Priest “after the order of Melchizedek”, the Aaronic *must be* imperfect, or there had been no need for introducing this change.

“If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need that another priest should rise after the order of Melchizedek, and not be called after the order of Aaron?” (verse 11).

The apostle now points out some of the *consequences* of Christ’s being a Priest “after the order of Melchizedek”. The first he mentions is that the Levitical was unable to bring in “perfection”. This was evident. Had it done so there was no need for introducing another. But wherein was it that the Levitical system fell short? What was it that it failed to *procure*? To answer these questions we need to carefully weigh the expression “*perfection*”.

The term “perfection” is one of the characteristic and key-words of this Epistle. It has a different shade of meaning than it has in the other Pauline Epistles. Unless careful attention be paid to its immediate connections, we are almost certain to fall into an erroneous conception of its force. It has to do more with *relationship* than experience, though as the relationship is spiritually apprehended a *corresponding* experience follows. It concerns the *objective* side of things rather than the subjective. It looks to the judicial and vital aspect rather than to the experimental and practical. Its first occurrences are in Hebrews 2:10 and Hebrews 5:9, used of Christ Himself, where the obvious reference is what pertained to Him officially rather than personally. Then it is found in Hebrews 6:1 — compare our comments thereon. In Hebrews 9:9 we are told that in Old Testament times the gifts and sacrifices offered “could not make him that did the service perfect as pertaining to the conscience”. The same thing is affirmed in Hebrews 10:1. But in blessed contrast therefrom we read,

“For by one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified” (Hebrews 10:14).

“Perfection” means the bringing of a thing to that completeness of condition designed for it. Doctrinally it refers to the producing of a satisfactory and final relation between God and men. It speaks of that unchangable standing in the favor and blessing of God which Christ has secured for His people. In Hebrews 12:23 we read of “the spirits of just men *made perfect*”, which does not mean that the Old Testament saints had been perfected in holiness and happiness (though that, of course, was true of them), but that they had been “made perfect” as their *title* to heavenly glory. This did not take place till the

sacrifice of Christ had been offered, though, in the certain prospect of its accomplishment, they had received the blessings which flow from it long before: cf. Hebrews 11:40.

In our present section the apostle insists that “*perfection*” could not be produced by the Levites, and that a priesthood which *did* bring in perfection must be superior. It therefore remains for us to enquire next, What are the great *ends* of priesthood? What is it that the priest should effect? The priest was the mediator who drew near unto God on behalf of others. His work was to present to Him a sacrifice for the satisfying of Divine justice. It was to effect such a procuring of His favor and such a securing of a standing-ground before Him for those whom he represented, that their conscience might be at peace. It was to come forth from His presence that he might pronounce blessing. Had the Levitical priesthood been able to obtain these things? Had Aaron and his successors obtained God’s remission from all the consequences of sin and brought in a complete and abiding redemption? No, indeed.

The office and work of a priesthood may be considered two ways: first, as it respects *God*, who is the prime and immediate object of all the proper acts of that office; second, as it respects *His people*, who are the subject of its blessings and the beneficiaries of its administration. As priesthood respects God, its chief design was to make expiation of sin by means of an atoning sacrifice. But this the Levitical priesthood was unable to do. A typical, ceremonial, and temporary value attached to their sacerdotal ministrations; but an effectual, vital, and permanent did not. This is positively stated in Hebrews 10:4,

“For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins”.

Why, then, were such appointed? To exhibit the holy claims of God and the requirements of His justice; to prefigure the great Sacrifice yet to come.

Let us next inquire, *What* was the “*perfection*” which *Christ* hath brought in? And here we cannot do better than give a summary of the most helpful exposition of John Owen. That which Christ hath produced to the glory of God and the blessing of His people is,

First, *righteousness*. The introduction of all imperfection was by sin. This

made the law weak (Romans 8:3) and sinners to be “without strength” (Romans 5:6). Therefore perfection must be introduced by righteousness. That was the fundamental of the new covenant: see Isaiah 60:21, Psalm 72:7, etc. Therefore do the saints speak of Christ as “The Lord our righteousness” (Jeremiah 23:6). Christ has brought in an “everlasting righteousness” (Daniel 9:24), and therefore are believers “made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Second, *peace* is the next thing which belongs to the evangelical “perfection” of Christianity. As the High Priest of the covenant it pertained to the Lord Jesus to make peace between God and sinners.

“When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son” (Romans 5:10).

Therefore is He denominated “The Prince of peace” (Isaiah 9:6): He is such because He has “made peace through the blood of His cross” (Colossians 1:20). The result of this is that believers have “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). Thus the evangel we proclaim is “The Gospel of peace” (Ephesians 6:15).

Third, *light*. God designed for Christians a greater measure of spiritual light and knowledge of the mysteries of His wisdom and grace than were attainable under the law. God reserved for His Son the honor of making known the *fullness* of His counsels (John 1:18, Hebrews 1:1, 2). There was under the Levitical priesthood but a “*shadow* of good things to come” (Hebrews 10:1), but the mystery of them remained hid in God (Ephesians 3:9). The prophets themselves perceived not the depths of their own predictions (1 Peter 1:11, 12). Hence, the attitude of the Old Testament Church was a looking forward unto a fuller revelation: “till the day break, and the shadows flee away” (Song of Solomon 2:17, 4:6). The contrast between the two economies is seen in 1 John 2:8, “The darkness is past, and the true light *now* shineth”.

Fourth, *access to God*. There belongs to the “perfection” which Christ hath brought in, a liberty and boldness of approach unto the throne of grace that was not only unknown but expressly forbidden under the law. At Sinai the people were fenced off at the foot of the mount, when Jehovah appeared to Moses on its summit. In the tabernacle, none save the priests were suffered to go beyond the outer court, and they not at all into the holy of holies where

God dwelt. How blessed is the contrast today.

“For through Him we both *have access* by one Spirit unto the Father” (Ephesians 2:18).

To us the word is,

“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (Hebrews 10:19, 22).

Fifth, the *unveiling of the future state*. Christ hath “brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel” (2 Timothy 1:10). Whatever knowledge of resurrection and eternal blessedness individual saints enjoyed in Old Testament times, it was *not* conveyed to them by the ministrations of the Levitical priesthood. That which characterized the people under the Mosaic law was that they “through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Hebrews 2:15). Nor could it be otherwise while the curse of the law hung over them. But now our great High Priest has endured the curse for us. He entered the devouring jaws of death. But He did not remain there. He triumphed over the grave, and in the resurrection of Christ His people have the evidence, guarantee, and pattern, of their own victory too. He has gone on High, and that as *our “Forerunner”* (Hebrews 6:20). And His request is,

“Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am” (John 17:24).

Sixth, *joy*.

“The kingdom of God is.... righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17).

True it is that many of the Old Testament saints rejoiced greatly in the Lord, yet it was not by virtue of the Levitical priesthood. The ground of their joy was that death would be swallowed up in victory (Isaiah 25:8), and that awaited the death and resurrection of Christ. Therefore did Abraham rejoice to see *His* day (John 8:56). But ordinarily their joy was mixed and allayed with a respect unto temporal things: see Leviticus 23:39-41, Deuteronomy 12:11, 12, 18, etc. But the Christian has a joy “unspeakable, and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:8). It is that inexpressible satisfaction which is wrought in the love of God by Jesus Christ. This gives the soul a repose in all trials, refreshment

when it is weary, peace in trouble, delight in tribulations: Romans 5:1-5.

Seventh, glorying in the Lord. This is the fruit of joy. One chief design of the Gospel is to exclude all human boasting, to empty us of glorying in self (Romans 3:27, Ephesians 2:9). God has so ordered things that no flesh should now glory in His presence, so that he that glorieth must glory in the Lord (1 Corinthians 1:29, 31). Thus it was promised of old: see Isaiah 45:25. Glorying in the Lord is that high exultation of spirit which causes believers to esteem their interest in heavenly things high above things present, to despise and condemn all that is contrary thereto, to say with the apostle, “God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ”. If the reader desires to follow up more fully the contrast between the glory and excellency of the two economies, the Mosaic and the Christian, let him study 2 Corinthians 3.

Ere leaving this blessed subject, let us make a brief practical application of what has been before us. To be a real Christian is to have a personal and vital interest in and be an actual participant of those blessings which the “perfection” of Christ has brought in. Multitudes make an outward profession of the same; few have an experimental acquaintance with them. Again; the pre-eminence of Christianity over Judaism is entirely spiritual and cannot be discerned by the carnal eye: wherein it excels has been pointed out above — it consists of a clearer knowledge of God, a freer approach to Him, a fuller enjoyment of Him. Finally, let it be said that the attempts to find glory and satisfaction in outward forms and ceremonies is to prefer the Levitical priesthood before that of Christ’s. *That* is the outstanding sin of all ritualists.

A brief word needs to be added upon the parenthetic clause of verse 11: “For under it the people received the law”. Its evident design was to strengthen the apostle’s argument. It is brought in as a subsidiary proof that “perfection” could not be by the Levitical priesthood. We are therefore disposed to regard “the law” here as referring to the whole system of the Mosaic economy. The passive “received the law” is a single word in the Greek, and really means “were legalized”. The reference is not to bring to the actual giving of the law, but to the state of the people under it, their being brought beneath its power. The law demanded perfect righteousness, but fallen man was incapable of producing it (Romans 3:19, 20; 8:3); nor could the Levitical priesthood effect it. Thus the only hope lay outside of themselves.

“Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Romans 10:4).

“For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law” (verse 12).

Here the apostle names the second *consequence* which must be drawn from the facts stated in verses 1-10.

First, the Levitical priesthood was inadequate, incapable of producing “perfection”.

Second, therefore it was but a temporary institution, and the whole economy connected with it must be set aside. In other words, Judaism as such, was now defunct. Thus “a change of the law” means a change of dispensation, a change of Divine administration. This at once fixes the meaning of “*law*” in the parenthetic clause of the previous verse. The reference is not to the ten commandments, but to the Mosaic system.

The “change also of the law” or setting aside of the Mosaic system was that to which the Jews were so strenuously opposed. They stoned Stephen (Acts 7:58, 59), and vented their rage upon Paul, on this very charge (Acts 21:28). Yea, many who professed the faith of the Gospel continued to obstinately contend that the Mosaic law remained in force (Acts 21:20). It was this same contention which caused so much trouble in the early churches, the Judaisers harassing the Gentile converts with their insistence upon circumcision and subjection to the ceremonial law. Difficult as it was for a pious Jew to believe that God should have set aside as dead and useless the whole solemn system of worship, which He had appointed in so glorious a manner and accepted for so many centuries, yet the proof that He had done so was abundant and clear. The law and the Gospel could not mix. Works and grace are antithetical. Moses must disappear when Christ was revealed: carefully compare Mark 9:5-8! So far from God’s people being the losers they are immeasurably the gainers by His bringing in the “better hope” (Hebrews 7:19).

“For He of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar” (verse 13).

The argument of this verse, introduced by the “for” makes it plain that it is not the moral law which the apostle had reference to at the close of the preceding verse: the closing words of the next verse make this still more

evident. We mention this because certain “Dispensationalists” have appealed to Hebrews 7:12 in their misguided efforts to show that Christians are, in no sense, under the ten commandments. The moral law is not at all under discussion in this passage. 1 Corinthians 9:21, Matthew 5:18, etc. are quite sufficient to prove that the moral law has not been (and never will be) repealed.

“For He of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar”. The apostle’s object here is to give further proof that the Levitical priesthood, and the entire ceremonial law, has been set aside by God. He appeals to the fact that our Lord, according to the flesh, belonged not to the tribe of Levi, and therefore His sacerdotal office was not according to the Aaronic order. The expression “attendance at the altar” signifies, “exercising priestly functions”. The “these things” looks back to what is said at the end of verse 11, which receives amplification in verses 17, 21.

The honor of the Aaronic order of priesthood continued, by Divine appointment and privilege, within the bounds of the Levitical tribe: Exodus 40:12-16. None belonging to any other tribe in Israel was suffered to officiate at the altar or minister in the holy place. So strictly was this institution observed, that when one of Israel’s kings dared to violate it, the judgment of God fell immediately upon him (2 Chronicles 26:18-21). In smiting Uzziah with leprosy God maintained the sanctity of His law, and gave a most solemn warning against any obtruding into holy office who have received no Divine call to it. Furthermore, this exercise of God’s severity should have been more than a hint to Israelites that when *He* did introduce a priest of another tribe then the priesthood of the old order *must* have been Divinely set aside.

“For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood” (verse 14).

The opening “for” at once denotes the apostle is here continuing his proof that the Levitical priesthood and economy was now a thing of the past so far as God’s recognition of it was concerned. His words here contain a double assertion: our Lord, according to His humanity, belonged to the tribe of Judah; of that tribe Moses revealed nothing concerning priesthood. All that was needed to complete the proof of his argument was that Christ was a Priest: this he shows in the ensuing verses. The appeal made to this verse by

those who deny that the Lord Jesus entered upon His priestly office till after His ascension, proceeds from such gross ignorance or malice that it deserves no direct refutation.

First, it was “evident” that our *Lord* “*sprang*” — as the “Rod” out of Jesse’s stem — from Judah. This was included in the faith of believers that the Messiah was to come out of the royal tribe. Such prophecies as Genesis 49:8-10, 2 Samuel 7:12, Isaiah 11:1-5, Micah 5:2 had made that very plain. The genealogy recorded in Matthew 1 established the same fact. Whoever therefore acknowledge the Lord Jesus to be the true Messiah, as all to whom the apostle was directly writing did, (though most of them still clung to the ceremonial law), granted that He was of the tribe of Judah. Nor did the unbelieving Jews deny it. In passing, we have noted that Judah signifies “praise”: Christ still dwells in the midst of His people’s praises!

Second, about Judah Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. The apostle’s object is to render it conclusive that God’s raising up of a Priest out of the royal tribe, must necessarily exclude all the house of Aaron from sharing His office. Moses did specify that the priesthood should be exercised by those belonging to the tribe of Levi, but he nowhere intimated that a time would come when it should be transferred to the royal family. Again we may take note of the significance of the silences of Scripture, and the justification of arguing therefrom. As, for example, no mention is made of the month in which the Savior was born, intimating that God did not intend us to celebrate the anniversary of His birth: cf. Jeremiah 7:31. Paul here reasons from the silence of Moses as being quite sufficient to show that the legal or Aaronic priesthood could not be transferred to the tribe of Judah.

“And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchizedek there ariseth another priest” (verse 15).

In this and the next verse the apostle presents the third *consequence* which follows from the facts set forth in verses 1-10.

First, he had pointed out from those facts that, it necessarily followed the Levitical priesthood was inadequate, for it was unable to bring in “perfection”.

Second, therefore it was evident that the Levitical priesthood could only be a temporary institution, and that the whole economy connected with and based

upon it must be set aside.

Third, he now insists that the priesthood of Christ must be radically different from and be immeasurably superior to the Levitical order. So much for the general scope of these two verses. Let us now attend to their details.

“And it is yet far more evident”. What is it that was “far more evident”? What was the particular point to which the apostle was here calling the Hebrews’ attention? Not that Christ had sprung from the tribe of Judah, nor that He fulfilled the Melchizedek type, but that the Levitical priesthood and economy was now obsolete. The proof that this *was* so obvious is presented in what immediately follows. That proof may be expressed thus: the priesthood of Christ was no temporary expedient, brought in only to supply the deficiency of the Levitical order. No; it was a permanent office and abiding ministry. Therefore as God would not own two separate and different priesthoods, the former and inferior must give place to the latter. The second, “consequence” had been drawn from the tribal humanity of Christ; this third “*consequence*”, from the character of His priesthood.

“And it is yet far more evident”. It is to be carefully noted that the apostle did not say “*it* is far more *certain*”. No, he was not absolutely comparing one thing with another, but comparing them only with respect to their evidential significance, the relative force of those facts to all who were capable of weighing them. The fact that God had caused our great “High Priest” to spring from the tribe of Judah rather than from that of Levi, made it obvious that the Aaronic order could no longer continue. But the further fact that He had been made “after the similitude of Melchizedek”, rendered this still more obvious. The apostle is but adding argument to argument, in order to show how wrong it was for the Hebrews to still cling to Judaism.

“For that after the similitude of Melchizedek there ariseth another priest”. The Greek word for “similitude” means “likeness” and occurs elsewhere only in Hebrews 4:15. The emphatic here is “*another* priest”. It is not “*allos*” which means another of the same species, but “*heteros*”, another of a totally different order: one who was a stranger to the house of Aaron. Let the reader consult Exodus 29:33, Leviticus 22:10, Numbers 16:40, and he will see how impossible it was for one from the tribe of Judah to perpetuate the Levitical priesthood. The word “ariseth” is also very emphatic. It means to be brought forth after an extraordinary manner: cf. Judges 5:7, Deuteronomy 18:18,

Luke 1:69. The arising of Christ in His priestly office put an end to the Aaronic, just as His arising in the hearts of His people (2 Peter 1:19) puts an end to their looking to anything or anyone else for salvation.

“Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life” (verse 16).

This completes the sentence begun in verse 15. The apostle is still showing how manifest it was that the Levitical priesthood had been set aside, for one infinitely superior had now been set up by God. The contrast here made between the two is very striking. The Aaronic was constituted “according to the law of commandment fleshly”. The same expression is used in Ephesians 2:15 to designate the whole system of worship under Judaism. This emphatic denomination may be accounted for by the fact that under it commandments were so multiplied, and because of the severity wherewith obedience was exacted. The Levitical priesthood was “*carnal*”,

First, inasmuch as the sacrifices offered at their consecration were the bodies of beasts.

Second, inasmuch as the priesthood was by fleshly propagation, from father to son.

Third, inasmuch as their ministrations availed *only* to the “purifying of the flesh” (Hebrews 9:13). In sharp contrast, Christ was not dedicated to His office by the sacrifice of beasts, nor did He claim any right to it by His natural descent.

“Who is made... after the power of an endless life”. Let the reader compare our remarks on Hebrews 5:5. The Lord Christ did not merely on His own authority and power take the priestly office upon Himself, but by the appointment of His Father. The way or manner in which He was “made priest” is here stated: according to “the power of an indissoluble life”. These words have been grossly wrested by those who seek to prove by them that Christ never entered upon the priestly office until after His resurrection. It is truly pitiable to find those who ought to know better echoing the errors of “annihilationists”. Christ officiated as priest before His resurrection, or He could not have offered Himself as a sacrifice to God. As this will, D.V., come before us again in the 9th chapter we will say no more thereon at the present juncture.

Christ's "indissoluble life" here has unquestionable reference to His life as *the Son of God*. Upon *that* depends His own mediatorial life forever, and His conferring eternal life upon His people: John 5:26, 27. It was only by the Mediator being made priest "after *the power of* an indissoluble life" that He was qualified to discharge that office, whereby *God* was to redeem His church with His own blood (Acts 20:28) — i.e., here called "His blood" because the humanity had been taken up into union with the second person in the Godhead. Should it be objected, But Christ died! True, yet his *person* still lived: though actually dead in His human nature, He was still alive in His indissoluble person, and therefore there was *no* interruption whatever to the discharge of His sacerdotal office; no, not for a moment. Thus the contrast between Aaron and Christ is that of a mortal man and

"The King eternal, immortal, invisible" (1 Timothy 1:17).

How deeply thankful should every Christian be for *such a* Priest. The eternal Word became flesh. The Lord of glory stooped to become man. As the God-man He mediates between the ineffably holy God and sinful creatures. The Savior is none other than Immanuel (Matthew 1:21, 23). In His humanity, He suffered, bled and died. But in His Divine-human person He Himself quickened that humanity (John 2:19, 10:18). We profess not to understand the mystery, but by grace, we believe what the Scriptures record concerning Him. The "life" that was given to Christ as the Mediator (unlike that of His humanity) was an indestructible one. Therefore He is "a Priest *forever*", and therefore "He ever liveth to make intercession" (Hebrews 7:25). Hallelujah!

CHAPTER 33

JUDAISM SET ASIDE

(HEBREWS 7:17-19)

As stated in the opening paragraphs of the preceding article, the apostle had now reached (in the second section of Hebrews 7) the most difficult and delicate part of his task, namely, to satisfy believing Jews that God had set aside the entire system which He had Himself instituted in the days of Moses. It is exceedingly difficult for us to form any adequate estimate of what that meant to them; in truth, it was the severest test to which the faith of God's people has ever been put. To be assured that God had discarded as dead and useless the entire order of solemn worship which He had appointed in so glorious a manner and which He had accepted for so many generations, was indeed a sore trial of faith. To acquiesce in His sovereign pleasure in this momentous matter called for no ordinary measure of grace. To establish the truth thereof Paul was led of the Spirit to enter into such detail that every valid objection was fairly met and clearly refuted.

There are many today who quite fail to appreciate the reason why the apostle should here pursue his argument so laboriously and enter into so many minute details. That these should strike anyone as "*dry*", uninteresting and unprofitable, is because he is insensible of the vast importance of what the apostle had before him. Rightly did John Owen affirm that "he hath the greatest argument in hand that was ever controverted in the church of God, and upon the determination whereof the salvation or ruin of the church did depend. The worship he treated of was immediately instituted by God Himself, and had now continued near fifteen hundred years in the church. All that while it had been the certain rule of God's acceptance of the people, or of His anger toward them; for whilst they complied with it, His blessing was continually upon them, and the neglect of it was still punished with severity".

The final exhortation which God had given to Israel through the last of His prophets was,

“Remember ye the law of Moses My servant... lest I come and smite the earth with a curse” (Malachi 4:4-6).

Those are the closing words of the Old Testament! So highly did the Jews esteem their great and singular privileges above all other nations, that they

would rather die than part with them. So high ran their feelings against those who pressed upon them the claims of Christ that, the charge preferred against the first Christian martyr was,

“We have heard him speak blasphemous words *against Moses and God...* This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words *against the holy place and the law*” (Acts 6:11, 13):

and though he remonstrated so faithfully, earnestly, and tenderly with them, they “gnashed on him with their teeth” and “stoned” him (Acts 7:54, 59). It was therefore most necessary that Paul should proceed cautiously, carefully and slowly, omitting nothing that was of any force in favor of the cause he was pleading.

The truth of God requires no vindication from us, nor are we called upon to attempt any justification for what may strike some as being unnecessarily tedious. Yet, in addition to intimating the needs be for Paul to enter so microscopically into the signification and application of the details of the Melchizedek type, we may profitably observe how that he has left an example which servants of God today need to take to heart. The course here followed by this beloved teacher supplies a most helpful illustration of what is meant by believers being “established in the *present truth*” (2 Peter 1:12). All truth is eternal, and in itself is equally valuable and applicable to each age and generation. Yet portions of it are especially so from their timely pertinency to particular seasons, and that because of the opposition made against them. Thus Paul’s teaching here about the abolishing of the Mosaic ceremonies with the introduction of a new priesthood and new ordinances of worship was then the “present truth” in the knowledge and confirmation of which the people of God were vitally concerned. The same principle holds good continuously. Each portion of God’s truth may become of peculiar urgency by virtue of some special opposition thereto.

In His sovereign wisdom God is pleased to exercise and try the faith of His saints by various heresies which are fierce, persistent, and subtle oppositions to His Truth. None of the Devil’s agents, while posing as the champions of the Cause of Christ or as revealing new and fuller “light” from Heaven, reject *all* the Gospel or repudiate all the fundamentals of the faith. No, Satan is far too clever to show *his* hand so openly. Rather do his wolves, who aim at robbing God’s children of their inheritance, appear in sheep’s clothing, and

pretend to great reverence for the Scriptures. Instead of repudiating the entire faith delivered to the saints, they insidiously direct their attack upon some single portion thereof; and thus a defense of what is directly opposed becomes the “present truth” for that day in which the saints need establishing, because of the Enemy’s attempt to overthrow them.

Though Satan hates all Truth, yet he is far too wary to send his satellites among the people of God and openly deny *all* that they hold dear. Nor can he gain *any* advantage over them while they are really walking *with* God, in humble, dependent, obedient submission to Him. No, he has to watch and wait until he discovers what professing Christians, because of their lust and prejudices, are most inclined to receive. As the spirit of worldliness increases among them, then he presses that which is most calculated to hide from their view the *heavenly* calling of God’s people and its inseparable consequence of walking down here as “*strangers and pilgrims*”. As the spirit of egotism and pride is allowed a large place, then that which humbles and abases the flesh is withheld and a species of intellectualism which puffs up, is substituted.

It is indeed solemn and saddening to review the course which Christendom has followed during the last two or three generations in the light of the above principle. As the denying of self and the daily taking up of the cross declined, the heart was prepared for the Satanic delusion that because salvation is by grace alone, that therefore obedience to God, submission to His law, and the actual *doing* of His Word, are quite unnecessary; and thus Paul has been pitted against James, and the teaching of the latter ignored. That there is a Strait gate to be entered and a Narrow way to be traversed, before “life” is actually reached, is almost universally denied by those who pose as the servants of God; yet that only solemnly confirms our Lord’s words, “Few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:14).

Again; as the “professing Church” became more infected with the *lawlessness* abounding in the world, the teaching that the Sabbath is “Jewish” and that the Law of God has been totally abolished, became very acceptable to those intent on pleasing themselves. As the exalted standard of holiness which God has set before His people became lowered by those professing to speak in His name, the monstrous idea that *repentance* belongs only to the “Kingdom age” was readily espoused. As the masses of those who bore the name of Christ refused to take upon them His *yoke* and learn of Him who was

“meek and lowly in heart”, the horrible heresy that the searching precepts of the Sermon on the Mount (found in Matthew 5:7) are not addressed to Christians living today, was greedily devoured. Ah, it is just these things which are now being opposed that have become the “present truth”, in which numbers of God’s people most need to be “established”. It is at these very points that God is now causing the faith of His people to be tested, and the true servants of the Lord will seek grace, wisdom and courage, to emulate the example here left by Paul, and spare no pains to root and ground the saints in what is most needful for them. Such is the *practical application* we need to make of the principle exemplified by the apostle in Hebrews 7.

In the verses immediately preceding our present passage, the apostle had shown that the abolition of the Levitical order was inevitable.

First, he pointed out that *before* Aaron had been called, God Himself had owned another priesthood which was far more excellent, namely, that of Melchizedek’s.

Second, the introduction of that more excellent priesthood for a season, was designed to prefigure what was afterwards to be established, therefore another priesthood had to arise and be given unto the Church in answer to that ancient type.

Third, the new priest after the order of Melchizedek could not consist side by side with that of Levi’s, for He belonged to another tribe, and His sacrifice was of another kind. Hence, inasmuch as the Aaronic priesthood could not take away sins nor make the worshipper perfect before God, and because Christ’s sacerdotal work effected these, therefore the former must give place to the latter. Still further reasons for the necessity of this the apostle continues to advance.

“For He testified, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (verse 17).

This verse completes the sentence begun at verse 15, the design of the whole being to afford a demonstration of what had been said in verse 11. In verse 11 a deduction is drawn from the signification of the Melchizedek type. That type announced the rising of a Priest distinct from and superior to the order of Aaron. From that fact the apostle points out, first, that the Levitical order must be inadequate, imperfect, and therefore must give way before that

which was more excellent; and second, that the revocation of the Aaronic order necessarily involved the setting aside of the whole dispensation or economy connected therewith.

Though the “logic” of his argument was perfect and could not be gainsaid, the apostle does not ask the Hebrews to rest their faith on mere reasoning, but proceeds to *prove* what he has said by an appeal to those Scriptures which they owned as the inspired and authoritative Word of God. He reminds them that not only had the Lord given them more than a hint in the historical narrative of Genesis, that One should arise and fulfill the priestly type recorded therein, but he points out that in one of the great Messianic Psalms Jehovah Himself addresses the Messiah as “A Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek”. We cannot but marvel at the wondrous and perfect ways of our God. At the very time when the church of Israel was in the highest enjoyment of the Levitical priesthood, whose office depended wholly on their genealogy, the Holy Spirit deemed it well to inform them through David that a Priest was to come and be independent of any line of fleshly descent, namely, after the order of Melchizedek, who had none, Psalm 110:4.

Well may we reverently ponder and admire the sovereign wisdom of the Holy Spirit in bringing forth truth unto light according as the state of God’s people require. Here again we see exemplified that basic principle in all God’s dealings with men: “first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear” (Mark 4:28).

First, He inserted in Genesis a very brief account of a person who was a type of Christ.

Second, almost a thousand years afterwards, when, it *may* be all understanding of the Genesis type had been lost, and the people of God were fully satisfied in a priesthood of quite another nature, the Holy Spirit in one word of prophecy intimated that, what Moses had recorded of him to whom Abraham paid tithes, was a foreshadowing of another Priest who was afterwards to arise. Thus God not only gave Israel light upon an important piece of ancient history, but also signified to them that the priesthood which they then enjoyed was not always to continue, but would be superceded by one of another and better nature.

But notwithstanding the plain prophecy recorded in the 110th Psalm, it is evident that at the coming of the Savior and the fulfillment of both type and

prophecy, the Jews had lost all knowledge and understanding of the mystery of Genesis 14 and the promises renewed through David. They thought it strange that there should be a Priest that had no genealogy, no solemn consecration at the hands of man, and no formal investiture with His office. Therefore does the apostle proceed so slowly and carefully in the opening of this mystery, prefacing the same not only by the assertion of how hard it was to understand it aright (Hebrews 5:10), but also with a lengthy discourse (Hebrews 5:11–6:20) to prepare their hearts for a diligent attention thereto. The difficulty before him was not only because the true understanding of Genesis 14 and Psalm 110 had been lost, but because the carnality of those to whom he wrote made them reluctant to admit that the raising up of Christ as Priest after the order of Melchizedek necessarily involved the termination of the Levitical priesthood and the whole system of worship connected therewith.

Difficult as it was for the Jew to be weaned from that system in which he had been brought up and to which he was so deeply attached, nevertheless, his very salvation turned thereon. Therefore we are not to wonder at the apostle's insisting so much on the setting aside of Judaism, for that was the very hinge on which the eternal salvation or destruction of the whole Nation did turn. If they would not forego their old priesthood and worship, their ruin was unavoidable. Christ would either be received by them, or "profit them nothing" (Galatians 5:2). Thus it was that it fell out with the great majority of them! Turning away from the Lord Jesus, they clung tenaciously to their ancient institutions and perished in their unbelief.

Nor should we lose sight of the analogy and parallel furnished by the Jews in connection with salvation today. While it be true that salvation is wholly of grace, and in nowise obtained by any efforts or works of the creature, nevertheless, it is equally true that none can obtain that salvation until there be a complete break from the world and their old manner of life in it. Conversion is a turning *to* God, and to turn to God there must be a turning *from* all that is opposed to Him. None are saved till they "come" to Christ, and the very term "coming to Christ" implies a *leaving* of what is contrary to Him. The Lord Jesus does not save men *in* their sins, but *from* their sins, and before He saves them from their sins, there must be a *repenting* of sin (Luke 13:3), and no man savingly repents of his sins while he lives in and loves them. The wicked have to forsake their "way" *before* God will "pardon"

(Isaiah 55:7). The sinner has to turn his back on the far country, yea, leave it behind him, before he can approach the Father and receive the “best robe” (Luke 15)!

Should any object to what has just been said, But *that* is to make man, in part, his own savior! We reply, Not at all. There is nothing whatever meritorious about repentance, any more than there is about faith. Neither of them are virtues entitling a sinner to salvation, yet they *are* required qualifications, in the same way that an empty-handed beggar is qualified for my charity or a sick person is fit to receive the attention of a physician. Scripture does not teach that a man must reform his life in order to win God’s approval, but it does affirm

“he that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13).

“For He testifieth, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.” Note “He testifieth”, not simply “He said”. The words of the Holy Spirit through David are here appealed to by the apostle in support of what he had said. Brief as is that citation, it nevertheless substantiates all the principle points Paul had made:

First, here was proof that there *should be* another priest not of the tribe of Levi, for Jehovah here affirms of Christ, who sprang from Judah. “Thou art a priest”.

Second, He was a priest “after the order of Melchizedek”.

Third, God Himself owned Him as such.

Fourth, He was so “after the power of an endless life” (verse 16), for He is priest “forever”.

Perhaps one more word needs to be added upon Christ’s being “a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek”. The priesthood of Christ was, in the mind of God, the eternal idea and original exemplar. Accordingly, God called forth Melchizedek, and invested him with his office in such a manner that he might fitly foreshadow Christ. Hence he and his priesthood became an external adumbration of the priesthood of Christ, and therefore is He said to remain a priest “after” his “order”, that is suitably unto the representation made thereof in him.

“For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before the weakness and unprofitableness thereof” (verse 18).

In verse 12 the apostle had affirmed that the priesthood being changed, there was of necessity a change made of the law also. Having, in verses 15- 17, proved the former, he now proceeds to confirm the unescapable inference from it, and this he does by showing that the Priesthood promised and now given, was in all things inconsistent with the Levitical. In verse 12 he had used the milder term “change”; now he insists that the old regime could not be altered and adjusted to the new order of things, but had been altogether “disannulled”.

“For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before”. The reference here is to the entire system of the Mosaic institutions. That system is here spoken of as “the commandment going before”. It was of Divine appointment and authority, yet was it only designed “until the time of reformation” (Hebrews 9:10). The “going before” signifies the introduction of the new Priest in fulfillment of the promise in Psalm 110. The commandment going before was that which regulated the worship of God and obedience to Him prior to the Christian dispensation; but this had now been cancelled and a new law of worship given.

It is indeed striking to note the *warnings* which God gave to Israel of the disannulling of the law.

First, at the very beginning He gave a clear intimation that it had not a perpetuity annexed to it. Immediately after the giving of the law *as a covenant* to Israel, they broke the covenant by setting up the golden calf at Horeb; whereupon Moses breaks the tables of stone, whereon the law was given. Had God intended that that covenant should be perpetuated, He would not have suffered its first constitution to have been accompanied with an express emblem of its abolition.

Second, Moses implicitly declared after the giving of the law that God would provoke Israel to jealousy by a foolish people (*see* Deuteronomy 32:21), which was by calling of the Gentiles (Romans 10:19); whereupon the law of commandments contained in ordinances, was of necessity to be taken out of the way!

Third, through Jeremiah (chapter 31, etc.) Jehovah made known that,

following the revocation of the old, a “new covenant” should be established with the Church! In these and other ways was Israel forewarned that the time would come when the whole Mosaic law, as to its covenant efficacy, would be repealed, unto the unspeakable advantage of God’s people.

If it be asked how and when the commandment respecting Judaism was “disannulled”, the answer is,

First, virtually and really by Christ Himself. He had fulfilled and accomplished it in His own person, and by so doing took away its obligatory power.

Second, formerly, by the new ordinances which Christ instituted. The Lord’s supper (Matthew 26:26-29) and Christian baptism (Matthew 28:19) were altogether inconsistent with the ordinances of the law, for these declared that was passed and done, which they directed unto as future and yet to come.

Third, declaratively by the revealed will of God: in Acts 15 we learn how the Holy Spirit through the apostles (verse 28) expressly declared that the Gentile converts were *not* under obligation to heed the Mosaic law (verse 24).

Fourth, providentially, in A.D. 70, when God caused Jerusalem and the temple to be destroyed.

“For the weakness and unprofitableness thereof”. Here the apostle assigns the reason why God had annulled the Mosaic law. In verse 11 the apostle had asked, If “perfection were obtainable by the Levitical priesthood what need was there for another priesthood to arise? Here he plainly declares that the whole system was, relatively speaking, worthless. This raises a difficulty of no small dimension, namely, in assigning such imperfections to a system which had been given by God Himself. How can it be supposed that the good and holy Jehovah should prescribe such a law unto His people as was always weak and unprofitable?

Absolutely considered no reflection can be made upon the Mosaic law, for it was the product of Divine wisdom, holiness and truth. But with respect unto the *people* to whom it was given, and the end for which it was given, imperfection *did* attach to it. It was given to *sinner*s who were defiled and guilty, and therefore was the law “weak through the flesh” (Romans 8:3), its subject having no power to meet its high demands. Moreover, it was (in itself) incapable of meeting their deep needs; taking away their sins,

bestowing life on them, conforming them to God's holiness. Why, then, was it given? It was "added because of transgression, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made" (Galatians 3:19). It discovered the nature of sin, so that the conscience of man might be sensible thereof. It restrained sin by prohibitions and threatenings, so that it did not run out to an excess of riot. It represented, though obscurely, the ways and means by which sin could be expiated. Finally, it made known the imperative need for the coming of Christ to do for men what they could not do of and for themselves.

“For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God” (verse 19).

There are three things for us to note in this verse.

First, the apostle names a particular instance in which the law was “weak and unprofitable”.

Second, he specifies what had been introduced in the room of that which had been disannulled.

Third, he mentions the design of the law was that it “made nothing perfect”.

“It did not make the church-state perfect, it did not make the worship of God perfect, it did not perfect the promises given to Abraham in their accomplishment, it did not make a perfect covenant between God and man; it had a shadow, an obscure representation, of all these things, but it made nothing perfect” (John Owen).

Above, we sought to answer to the question, Why should God have given His people a law which made nothing perfect? It may further be pointed out that in all things the sovereignty of God is to be submitted unto; and for humble souls there is beauty and blessedness in Divine sovereignty. When the Lord Jesus rejoiced in spirit and returned thanks because heavenly mysteries had been hid from the wise and prudent and revealed unto babes, He assigned no other reason than, “Even so Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight” (Luke 10:21). And until we recognize an excellency in *all* God's dispensations, simply because they are *His*, who giveth no account of His matters, we shall never admire His ways.

Again, men have sinned, and apostatized from God, and therefore it was but just and equal that they should not be reinstated in their reparation at once.

“As God left the generality of the world without the knowledge of what He intended, so He saw good to keep the Church in a state of expectancy, as to the condition of liberty and deliverance intended. He could have created the world in an hour or moment; but He chose to do so in the space of six days, that the glory of His works might be distinctly represented unto angels and men. And He could, immediately after the fall, have introduced the promised Seed, in whose advent the Church must of necessity enjoy all the perfection which it is capable of in this world. But to teach the Church the greatness of their sin and misery, and to work in them an acknowledgement of His unspeakable grace, God proceeded gradually in the very revelation of Him, and caused them to wait under earnest desires and expectations many ages for Christ’s coming” (John Owen).

Finally and primarily, God designed that the Lord Jesus should in *all* things have the pre-eminence. This was due Him because of the glory of His person and the transcendent excellency of His work. But if the law could have made anything perfect, it is evident that this could not have been. Christ is the center of all God’s counsels, the key to every problem. All things are being directed to His ultimate honor and praise. The system of Judaism, with its mysteries and shadows, served as a suitable background, from which might shine forth the more gloriously the full blaze of God’s perfections made manifest by His incarnate Son. “The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth” (1 John 2:8).

“But the bringing in of a better hope did”. When a sufficient discovery had been made of the insufficiency of the law to make things “perfect”, God introduced that which did. A parallel passage is found in Romans 8:3, 4. There too we read of the law being “weak”, and, that, through the faultiness of those to whom it was addressed. There too we read of the law being followed by God’s sending something “better”, namely, His own Son. There too we read of the “perfection” which Christ has brought in for His people. The same thing will come before us again, D.V., when we arrive at Hebrews 10:1-10.

“Hope” is used metonymically, that is to say, for the object itself, the thing hoped for. From the giving of the first promise in Genesis 3:15, renewed in

Genesis 12:3 and Genesis 17:8, the coming of Christ unto this world was the great thing which believers longed for. Abraham rejoiced to see His day (John 8:56), as did the prophets search diligently concerning it (1 Peter 1:11,12). Hence, we read of Simeon “waiting for the Consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25) and of aged Anna speaking of the newly-born Savior to “all them that *looked for* redemption in Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38). In like manner, the “blessed hope” set before God’s saints throughout this dispensation is the “appearing of the glory of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13).

By the introduction of the “better hope” believers now “draw nigh unto God”. The verb here is a sacerdotal term, denoting the approach of priests to God in His worship. By nature we were unable so to do, for we were “alienated from the life of God” (Ephesians 4:18). Sin separated between us and the thrice Holy One. But now we who once were far off “are made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2:13), in consequence whereof both believing Jews and Gentiles “have access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Ephesians 2:18), for the whole election of grace have been made

“a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5).

The right and privilege of believers drawing nigh unto God Himself and the throne of His grace, is further opened in Hebrews 10, particularly verses 19-22. Everything which kept us at a distance from God has been removed by the bringing in of the Better Hope.

In its complete realization and ultimate fulfillment, it is still the “better hope”. Believers are yet here on earth; there is much within and without which mars and interrupts their communion with God. Their being “made perfect” in their state and experience (Hebrews 11:40), and their being actually conducted into the Father’s presence (John 14:1-3) is yet future. But blessed be God, our sins have been put away, we already have “*access* by faith into this grace wherein we stand” (Romans 5:2). The Forerunner has “*for us* entered” within the veil (Hebrews 10:19, 20).

Then, in the meantime,

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews

4:16).

The Lord grant it for His name's sake.

CHAPTER 34
JUDAISM SET ASIDE
(HEBREWS 7:20-24)

It may be well for us to recall the principal design of the apostle in this section of his epistle. This was twofold; first, to demonstrate that the great High Priest of Christianity is far more excellent than was the typical high priest of Judaism, and that, that the faith of the Hebrews might be established and their hearts drawn out in love and worship to Him. Second, to show that it necessarily followed God's bringing in of the new order of priesthood, the old order was completely set aside. The method of proof which the Spirit moved the apostle to pursue was, an appeal to a notable Old Testament type, confirmed by the citation of a Messianic prophecy. From this there was no possible appeal by any who really bowed to the Divine authority of Holy Writ. Blessed it is to see how graciously God has always provided a sure foundation for the faith of His people to rest upon. Yet it is only as His Word is diligently searched that this foundation is fully discovered, and even that, by the directing and illuminating guidance of the Holy Spirit.

An analysis of our chapter reveals that Christ's superiority over Aaron appears in the following points.

First, Aaron was but a man; Christ was "the Son of God" (verse 3 — and note the repetition of this item at the close of the argument in verse 28!).

Second, Aaron belonged to the tribe of Levi; Christ, according to the flesh, sprang from the royal tribe (verse 14), and is the Priest-King.

Third, Aaron was made "after the law of a carnal commandment"; Christ, "after the power of an endless life" (verse 16).

Fourth, Aaron "made nothing perfect"; Christ did (verse 19).

Fifth, Aaron was unable to bring the sinner, "*nigh* unto God" (verse 19); Christ has (verse 25).

Sixth, Aaron was not inducted into his priestly office by a Divine oath; Christ was (verse 21).

Seventh, Aaron had many successors (verse 23); Christ had none.

Eighth, Aaron died (verse 23); Christ “ever liveth” (verse 25).

Ninth, Aaron was a sinner (verse 27); Christ was “separate from sinners” (verse 26).

Tenth, Aaron was only the priestly head of an earthly people; Christ has been “made higher than the heavens” (verse 26).

Eleventh, Aaron had to offer sacrifice “daily” (verse 27); Christ’s sacrifice is “once for all”.

Twelfth, Aaron was filled with “infirmity” (verse 28); Christ is “perfected forevermore”. Well may we praise God for “*such* a High Priest” (verse 26).

In view of the introduction of this Priest par excellent, what room was there for another? No longer was there any need of the type, for the Antitype had appeared. Symbols and shadows have served their purpose when the substance itself is manifested. The things of childhood are put away when manhood is reached. A crutch is dispensed with when the limb is restored. When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part is done away with. This is the unescapable inference which the apostle dwells upon here. “*For* there is *verily* — *of* a truth which cannot be gainsaid, as a fact which cannot be controverted — a disannulling of the commandment going before”. And why? Because “*the* priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law.” The whole system of Judaism had been set aside by God.

One cannot read through the Old Testament without marveling at the long-suffering of the Lord. Notwithstanding the many and great provocations of Israel, He did not set Judaism aside until the end for which He had appointed it had actually been reached. When the promised Messiah appeared, the temple still stood in Jerusalem, its priesthood still functioned, the sacrifices were still offered. But now its purpose had been served, its mission accomplished. The antitype of the temple was seen in the person of God incarnate (John 2:21); that which Aaron foreshadowed was fulfilled in the great High Priest of Christianity; and all the sacrifices found their perfected sequel in the final offering of the Lord Jesus. Therefore did God take “the law of commandments contained in ordinances” and nailed it to the cross (Colossians 2:14), where He left it completely accomplished.

In the verses which are to be before us the apostle dwells upon two things.

First, he calls attention to a most significant and deeply important item in the prophecy given through David, and this, that Christ was constituted Priest by Divine oath, which exalts Him high above priesthood under the law. The profound meaning and inestimable value of this fact will come before us in what follows.

Second, he affirms that Christ is Priest forever, and this in order to show that there should never more be any need of another priest, nor any possibility of a return of the Levitical priesthood. Marvelously full and comprehensive was that brief word in Psalm 110, supplying for us an example of what unsearchable stores of wisdom and truth are laid up in every verse of Scripture, if we are given spiritual sight in their investigation. Signal proof also is this of the *verbal* inspiration of Scripture: every phrase, every word, was indited by Divine wisdom and has its own value and meaning.

“And inasmuch as not without an oath He was made priest” (verse 20).

The opening word has the force of “Moreover”: it is not that the apostle is here drawing a conclusion from a promise previously laid down; instead he moves forward in the argument before him. He here introduces a new consideration for the confirmation of the leading design before him. That the contents of the verse depend upon what follows was the conviction of the translators, as may be seen from the fact that they supply the ellipsis (the words in italics) from verse 21. That which the apostle now insisted upon was, that the dignity of Christ’s sacerdotal office was commensurate with the solemnity of His appointment to it.

Nothing was lacking on the part of God to give eminency and stability unto the priesthood of Christ: “Not without an oath”. This was due unto the glory of His person. The Son of God, in infinite grace, condescending to take upon Him the priestly office and discharge all the duties of it, it was meet that any thing which would contribute unto the glory or efficacy of it, should accompany His undertakings. In this God showed how jealous He is for the honor of His Beloved; in all things He must have the pre-eminence. In everything that He undertook, He was preferred above all others who were ever employed in the service of God, or who ever shall be; and therefore was He made a Priest “not without an oath”.

Moreover, God deemed it needful to encourage and secure the faith of His people. There were many things defective in the priesthood under the law, and it suited the design of God that it should be so. He never intended that the faith of the church should terminate in those priests. But upon the introduction of the priesthood of Christ God has exhibited all that faith is to look unto and lean upon, and therefore did He, in infinite wisdom and grace, grant the highest and most specific evidence of the everlasting continuation of His priesthood. In this manner has He shown that this appointment of His will and mercy is absolutely unchanging, so that if we comply not therewith we must perish forever. (Condensed from John Owen).

The priesthood of Aaron was not instituted with an oath; Christ's was. Now that which is connected with an oath can never be changed, for God is immutable.

“In the same way as He swore unto Abraham, ‘Surely blessing I will bless thee’, in order that by two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have abundant assurance of hope; even thus is it that because the High Priesthood of Jesus can never be altered, because it is based upon the eternal decree and counsel of God, and because it is essentially connected with the very nature and purpose of God Himself, it is introduced with an oath. The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent” (Adolph Saphir).

“For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath, by Him that said unto Him, the Lord swore and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (verse 21).

It should be particularly noted that God never solemnly interposed Himself with an oath with respect unto privilege or mercy but that in each instance it had *Christ in view*. Thus, He swore by Himself unto Abraham that in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed, whereby He announced the immutability of His counsel to send His Son to take His seed upon Him. So also He swore unto David by His holiness that his seed, Christ, “should sit on his throne forever”.

“For those priests were made without an oath, but this with an oath”. Although there is never the slightest alteration in the internal acting of God's will nor the least changing of His purpose, for with Him there is *no* “variableness or shadow of turning”, yet, He frequently alters His works, His

providences, and even some of the things which He appoints unto men at different times, unless they be confirmed with an oath. The Levitical priests were by Divine appointment, and therefore the people of Israel were obligated to obey them. But they did not enter their office by Divine oath, the absence of this intimating that God reserved to Himself the liberty to make an alteration when He saw good.

“But this with an oath, by Him that said unto Him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek”. The person swearing is God the Father, the One unto whom He speaks is God the Son: “The Lord said unto my Lord” (Psalm 110:1). The oath of God is the open declaration of His eternal purpose and unchanging decree. Thus is the same act and counsel of God’s will spoken of in Psalm 2:7. “I will *declare* the *decree*”. Therefore when God is pleased to unveil His decree or reveal His purpose, testifying it to be absolute and unchanging, He does it by way of oath: see Hebrews 6:13, 14, 17 and our comments thereon.

Should it be asked, *When* did God thus sware unto Christ? We must distinguish between two things, or more accurately, two aspects of the same thing, namely: the Divine decree or purpose itself, and the revelation or declaration of it, for the “oath” includes both. As to the decree itself, that takes us back to those eternal federal transactions between the Father and the Son, when the “Everlasting Covenant” was entered into. As to the revelation of it, that was through David. Thus, the many modern commentators who regard this oath as being made with Christ upon His ascension into heaven are seriously mistaken, for that would completely invalidate the apostle’s argument here. Had Christ offered His sacrifice *before* God sware unto Him, He had no pre-eminence herein over the Aaronical priests. The oath must precede His entrance upon and discharge of His priestly office, or otherwise the force of the apostle’s reasoning here would utterly break down.

Not only did God’s oath to Christ make manifest the exalted dignity of Christianity’s High Priest, but it also denoted the great importance of the economy which He introduced and now administers.

“No wise or good man interposes his oath in a matter of trivial consequence. If he voluntarily gives his oath, it is a plain proof that he considers that matter as one of importance. That economy must then be a high and holy one indeed with regard to which Jehovah

swares; and this circumstance must elevate it far above every other economy, though Divine in its origin, that is not distinguished by this highest conceivable mark of its importance in the estimation of Him who alone hath wisdom. But the oath of God marks not only the importance, but the *stability* of the economy in reference to which it is made. God is never represented in Scripture as swearing to everything but what was fixed and immutable” (John Brown).

“By Him that said unto Him, The Lord swear and will not repent, Thou art a Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek”. As this is the final reference in Scripture to Melchizedek perhaps we had better summarize the cardinal features in which he foreshadowed Christ.

First, Melchizedek was the only priest of his class or order, and thus pointed to the solitariness of Christ’s priesthood — He shares it with none.

Second, Melchizedek had no predecessor, and therefore his right to office depended not on fleshly descent; foreshadowing the fact that Christ’s priesthood was quite distinct from the Aaronic.

Third, Melchizedek had no successor: typifying the fact that Christ’s priesthood is final and eternal. Once again we would stress the fact that it is not said Christ is priest of the order of Melchizedek, had He been so, the resemblance between them had been destroyed in a vital particular. Christ did not succeed Melchizedek, but was his Antitype. Unto those who object that nothing is said in the Old Testament about Melchizedek’s offering sacrifice to God, we would reply, Neither is there anything said of his *making intercession*. It was not in *those* things that God designed him to prefigure Christ, but in the particulars pointed out above.

“By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament” (verse 22).

The “by so much” answers to the “in as much” of verse 20, hence our present verse is in immediate connection with verse 20, thus:

“And inasmuch as He was not made a priest without an oath, He is by so much made the surety of a better testament”. Verse 21, though containing the confirmation or proof of the principal assertion, is rightly placed in a parenthesis. On the close connection between verses 20, 22, John Owen said:

“There may be a twofold design in the words.

1. That His being made a priest by an oath, made Him meet to be the surety of a better testament; or,
2. That the testament whereof He was the surety, must needs be better than the other; because He who was the surety of it was made a priest by an oath.” In the one way, he proved the dignity of the priesthood of Christ from the new testament; and in the other, the dignity of the new testament from the priesthood of Christ. And we may reconcile both these verses by affirming that really and efficiently the priesthood gives dignity unto the new testament, and declaratively the new testament sets forth the dignity of the priesthood of Christ.”

“By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament”. These words clearly presuppose three things.

First, that another covenant had existed between God and His people prior to the appearing of Christ. This is dealt with more expressly in Hebrews 8, where the old and the new covenants are compared and contrasted.

Second, that in some respect or respects the old covenant was good — implied by the contrastive “better”. The old covenant was good in itself, as the product of God’s wisdom and righteousness; it served a good purpose, for its statutes restrained sin and promoted godliness; its design was good, for it pointed forward to Christ.

Third, that the old covenant had a “surety”. Many have erred at this point through failing to distinguish between a “mediator” and a “surety”. Moses was the typical mediator; Aaron, the typical surety, for he it was who offered solemn sacrifices in the name and on behalf of the people, making atonement for them according to the terms of the covenant.

“By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better covenant.” Here for the first time in this chapter the apostle expressly names the person who had been referred to and described. Declaration had been made of the nature of the priesthood of Him who was to fill the office according to the Melchizedek type, but now definite application of the whole is made unto the Savior. Two questions had long engaged the attention of the Jews: the nature of the Messiah’s office, and who that person should be. The apostle had demonstrated from their own Scriptures that the Messiah was to be a Priest,

yet not of the Levitical stock; as he had also shown the necessary consequences of this. Now he asserts that it was *Jesus* who is this Priest, for He alone has fulfilled the type and discharged the principal duty of that office. Concerning “Jesus” it is here affirmed that He was “made a Surety”. He was “made so” or appointed so by the will and act of God the Father: compare 1:4, 3:2, 5:5 and our comments thereon for the force of this term “made”. The whole undertaking of Christ, and the efficacy for the discharge of His office, depended entirely upon the appointment of God the Father.

“The Greek word for ‘surety’ properly means a bondsman: one who pledges his name, property or influence, that a certain thing shall be done. When a contract is made, a debt contracted, or a note given, a friend often becomes the *surety* in the case, and is himself responsible if the terms of the contract are not complied with” (A. Barnes).

A “surety” is one who agrees to undertake for another who is lacking in ability to discharge his own obligations. Whatever undertaking the surety makes, whether in words of promise, or in the depositing of real security in the hands of the arbitrator, or by any other personal engagement of life or body, it implies the *deject* of the person for whom any one becomes surety. The surety is *sponsor for* another, standing in the room of and acting for one who is incompetent to act for himself: he represents that other person, and pledges to make good his engagements. Thus, Christ was not a Surety for God, for *He* needed none; but for His own poor, failing and deficient people, who were unable to meet their obligations, incapable of discharging their liabilities. In view of this, Christ agreed to undertake for them, fully pay all their debts, and completely satisfied every demand which God had against them.

A beautiful illustration of the “surety” is found in Genesis 43:8, 9,

“And Judah said unto Israel his father, send the lad with me, and we will arise and go; that we may live, and not die, both me and thou, and also our little ones. I will be *surety* for him; of *my* hand shalt thou require him: if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let *me* bear the blame forever”.

Blessed is it to find how faithful Judah was to his agreement. Later, Joseph’s cup was found in Benjamin’s sack (Genesis 44:12), and on their return into

Egypt and re-appearance before Joseph the governor, we hear him saying,

“For thy servant became surety for the lad unto my father, saying, If I bring him not unto thee, then I shall bear the blame, to my father forever. Now therefore, I pray thee, let thy servant abide *instead of the lad, a bondman* to my lord; and let the lad go with his brethren” (Genesis 44:32, 33).

A blessed New Testament example is found in the case of Paul who volunteered to be surety for Onesimus:

“If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, *put that on mine account*; I Paul have written it with mine own hand, *I will repay*” (Philemon 18, 19).

In like manner Christ engaged Himself unto the Father for His elect, saying, Charge to My account whatsoever My people owe Thee, and I will fully discharge their debts. This is an office in which Christ sustains a *representative character* in relation to those sinners for whom He interposed. It was Christ pledging Himself, or making Himself responsible, for the fulfillment of all that the Everlasting Covenant required on the part of those who are to share its provisions. It is as the Surety of the Covenant that Christ is called the “Second Man”, the “Last Adam” (1 Corinthians 15:47). This title, then, views Christ as *identifying Himself* with those whom the Father gave to Him, and on whose behalf He accomplished the great work assigned Him (see John 6:38, 39, etc.) in their room and stead, making full satisfaction to God.

Let us now observe that Jesus was made “a Surety of a better testament”, or “covenant”, as the term should be rendered, for the word denotes an arrangement or constitution, a dispensation or economy. It signifies that order of things introduced by Christ, in contrast from the order of things which obtained under the Mosaic regime. The Mosaic covenant was administered by the instrumentality of the Levitical priesthood, but the better covenant by Jesus, the Son of God: that was transitory and changing; this is permanent and eternal. It is so because those who enjoy its blessings receive an enablement to comply with its terms, fulfill its conditions, and yield the obedience which God requires therein. For by the ordination of God, our Surety merited and procured for them the Holy Spirit, and all the needed supplies of grace to make them new creatures, and empower to yield

obedience to God from a new principle of spiritual life, and that, faithfully to the end.

It is the *Surety* by the Divine oath which gives stability unto the covenant. God entered into a covenant with the first Adam (see Hosea 6:6 margin), but it had no “surety”! And therefore though our first parent had all the tremendous advantages of a sinless nature filled with holy inclinations, and free from all evil imaginations, desires and habits, yet he broke the covenant and forfeited all the benefits thereof. God made a covenant with Israel at Sinai (Exodus 19 and 24), and appointed the high priest to act as the typical surety of it; yet, as we have seen, that covenant and that surety, made nothing perfect. The purpose of that covenant was to demonstrate the need of another and better one. In contradistinction from these God has made with His elect, in Christ, a covenant “ordered in all things and sure”, “for He laid help upon One that is mighty” (Psalm 89:19).

And what is the practical application to God’s children today of what has been before us? Surely this, that just so far as the new covenant surpasses the old, are we under greater obligations unto God,

“for unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required” (Luke 12:48).

That just so far as the Surety of the better covenant exceeds in dignity and glory the surety under the old regime, are we under higher obligation of rendering to Him more complete submission, deeper devotion, fuller obedience. O my brethren, *what is due* unto that blessed One who left heaven’s glory and came here to this sin-curst world to discharge our obligations, pay our debts, suffer and die in our room and stead! May His love truly “constrain” us to gladsome and whole-hearted surrender to Him, no longer seeking to please ourselves, but living to and for *His* honor and praise. If we do not, that is certain proof that we are yet in our sins, strangers to the Surety of the better covenant.

“And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death” (verse 23).

In this and the following verse the apostle advances his last argument from the consideration of Christ’s priesthood as represented by that of Melchizedek. His design is to present further proof of the excellency of it

above the Levitical, and of His person above theirs. That Paul is still looking back to Melchizedek as a type of Christ, is evident from the description which he had given of him in the earlier verses, namely, that he “abideth a priest continually” (verse 3), and that “it is witnessed that he liveth” (verse 8), for his priesthood did not terminate at the age of fifty as did that of the Levitical. This is the particular detail of the type which is here seized and improved upon, for it was that which gives virtue and efficacy to everything else he had insisted upon. Set *this* aside and all the other advantages and excellencies he had named would be quite ineffectual to secure “perfection”. What lasting profit could it be to the Church to have so glorious a Priest for a season, and then be deprived of Him by the expiration of His office?

Just as what the apostle declares of Christ in verse 24 hath respect to what he had before observed concerning Melchizedek, so what he affirms in verse 23 of the Levitical priests looks back to what he had before declared about them, namely, that they were all mortal men, and nothing more, for they actually died in their successive generations: see verse 8. The apostle expresses himself very emphatically “and truly”. It was not a dubious point he was now handling, but one which was well known and could not be controverted. “They truly were many priests”. It is of the *high* priest’s only, Aaron and his successors, of whom he speaks. Jewish records inform us that there were no fewer than eighty-three high priests from Aaron, the first, to Phinehas, who perished with the temple. Thirteen lived under the tabernacle prior to Solomon, eighteen under the first temple before its destruction by the Babylonians, the remainder under the second temple till A.D. 70.

The reason for this multiplication of priests was “because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death”. Notwithstanding the great dignity of their office, and the solemnities with which they were installed in it, they were but men, subject to infirmity and dissolution, like those for whom they ministered. Mortality suffered them not to continue in the execution of their office. It forbade them so to do in the name of the great sovereign Lord of life and death. A signal instance of this was given in Aaron himself, the first of them. God, to show the nature of that priesthood unto the people, and to manifest that the everlasting Priest was yet to come, commanded Aaron to die *in the sight of* all the congregation: Numbers 20:25-29! In like manner, death seized upon each of his successors.

Thereby did God intimate unto Israel that *imperfection* attached to that office which was so frequently interrupted in its administration.

“But this man, because He continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood” (verse 24).

This is the final proof in our present passage for the immeasurable superiority of our great High Priest over the Levitical priests. The Surety of the better covenant has an unchanging priesthood. The reason for and the ground on which this rests is here stated: “because He continueth ever”. The apostle is not here proving the absolute perpetuity of Christ’s sacerdotal office, but the continuous and uninterrupted administration of it. This was the faith of the Jews concerning the Messiah and His office: “We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth forever” (John 12:34), which was interposed as a difficulty and said by them in reply to our Lord’s declaration that He was to be lifted up in death. It was this perpetuity of office *that* was principally typed out in Melchizedek.

Against this it might be replied, But Jesus Christ died also, no less truly and really than did Aaron and his successors, and thus it would follow that He had no more an uninterrupted priesthood than they. To obviate this difficulty, many of our moderns have fallen back on the error of the Socinians, that Christ did not become a Priest at all until after His resurrection. But such a reply cuts the *knot*, instead of *untying it*. This figment we have already confuted in previous articles. Nor is there anything here in Hebrews 7 which warrants the idea that the administration of Christ’s priesthood is in heaven only. The whole context here shows plainly to all who are not blinded by prejudice that the apostle is treating of the *whole* of Christ’s sacerdotal office.

The death of Christ was a vastly different thing from the death of the Levitical priests, for His death did not prevent Him abiding a priest, as theirs did.

First, He died *as* a Priest; they died *from* being priests; He died in His office, they died out of office.

Second, personal death was no part of their *work*, whereas to die was the chief priestly duty incumbent upon the Lord Jesus.

Third, when they fell under the power of death, they could not extricate themselves from it and return to life and the service of the sanctuary, but the

Son of God had power to lay down His life and take it again. So far from death putting an end to His priesthood, it did not even interrupt the exercise of it. Christ died as a priest, because He was also the Sacrifice for sins, yet through the indissolubleness of His person, His soul and body still subsisting in the person of the Son of God. He abode active in His office without any break: “*He continueth forever*”.

It necessarily follows from what has been pointed out above that Christ hath “an unchangeable priesthood”, subject to no alteration, that cannot pass away. The entire office of the priesthood pertaining and belonging to the new covenant, with its administration, are strictly confirmed unto the person of Jesus, the Son of God. There are none that succeed, any more than any (except typically) preceded Him. This at once exposes and gives the lie to the abominable blasphemy of the Papists who call their ministers “priests”, affirming that they perform the proper work of such by offering sacrifice. It is highly derogatory to the honor of Christ, and subversive of the whole teaching of Scripture, to maintain that any person is now invested with priestly office and performs its proper work. They who wickedly assume this character encroach upon Christ’s lone prerogative, and to suppose them to be what they pretend, would be to regard our Redeemer as a priest, not after the order of Melchizedek, but after the order of Aaron, which admitted of successors.

The abiding of Christ as Priest manifests the continuance of His care for His people. The same love which caused Him, as Priest, to lay down His life for them, remains unchanged within Him. Therefore each one may, with the same confidence, go unto Him with all their concerns, as poor and afflicted people went to Him while He was here upon earth. Again: it is upon the perpetuity of Christ’s *priesthood* that the *security* of His Church rests. “Do we meet with troubles, trials, difficulties, temptations, and distresses? Hath not the church done so in former ages? But was any one true believer ever lost forever? Did not Satan rage, and the world gnash their teeth, to see their power broken by the faith, patience, and suffering of them whom they hated? And was it from their own wisdom and courage that they were so preserved? Did they overcome the enemy by their own blood, or were they delivered by their own power? No; instead, all their preservation and success, their deliverance and eternal Salvation, depended solely on the care and power of their merciful High Priest”. Blessed be His name, He is “the same yesterday,

and today, and forever”. Hallelujah, what a Savior! What a Surety! What a Priest!

CHAPTER 35

THE PERFECT PRIEST

(HEBREWS 7:25-28)

The principal subject in the verses which are to be before us is the same as that which has engaged the apostle throughout this 7th chapter, namely, the pre-eminent excellency of the great High Priest of Christianity. That which he is setting forth is the superiority of our Lord's High Priesthood over that of the Levitical. The various proofs may be expressed thus.

First, because Christ is called of God after the order of Melchizedek, Hebrews 5:10. In enlarging upon the fact, here in chapter 7, the apostle did three things: evidenced the superiority of Melchizedek over the order of Aaron, Hebrews 7:1-10; appealed to the Messianic prediction of Psalm 110:4 in proof that Christ *had been* called after the order of Melchizedek; shows that the fulfillment of this prophecy necessarily involved the setting aside of the Levitical order.

Second, The second proof of the superiority of Christ's Priesthood over the Aaronic order was, the distinguishing solemnity of its institution, namely, by the Divine oath, Hebrews 7:20-22.

Third, it was proved by the perpetual permanency of His Priesthood, Hebrews 7:23, 24.

Fourth, it is proved by the saving efficacy of His priestly work, Hebrews 7:25.

Fifth, it is proved by the personal qualifications which He possesses to serve as Priest, Hebrews 7:26-28.

Sixth, it is proved by the Heavenly Sanctuary in which He now ministers, Hebrews 8:1-5.

Seventh, it is proved by the New Covenant with which it is connected, Hebrews 8:6-13.

Or again, we may view the contents of Hebrews 7 as a setting forth of the *results* from God's having brought in Christ as Priest after the order of Melchizedek. First, it necessarily follows that the Levitical order of priesthood has been abrogated, for that order could not possibly consist side by side with His, verse 11. Second, in consequence of this change of

priesthood, the whole Mosaic ritual has been repealed, verse 12. The reason of this is obvious, the entire ceremonial law presupposed the Aaronic priesthood, to which it was adapted and on which it was based — remove the foundation and the whole structure falls. Third, the introduction of Christ as Priest ushered in an entirely new and immeasurably better economy, verses 19-24. Finally, the providing of such a great High Priest infallibly secures the salvation of all God's people verses 25-28.

In the closing verses of our chapter the apostle brings the whole preceding discourse unto an issue, by making application of it unto the faith and comfort of the Church. His object was not only to open up mysterious Old Testament scriptures, nor only to demonstrate the glory and pre-eminence of Christianity over Judaism, by virtue of the priesthood of Christ; but his chief design was to make evident the efficacy and eternal advantages of all true believers by these things. The climax to which he had been leading up is before us in verse 25, which he enlarges upon in the end of the chapter. That which Christians ought to seek and what they should expect from the blessed and glorious priesthood of Christ is what he now undertakes to make known. In like manner, in all his epistles the apostle makes it clear that the purpose of God in the whole mystery of redemption by Jesus Christ and the institutions of the Gospel, is the salvation of His elect unto the praise of the glory of His grace.

“Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (verse 25).

First, let us endeavor to ponder this inexpressibly precious word in the light of its context. The opening “Wherefore” denotes that an inference is here drawn from that which had previously been said. What then is the premise, or what are the premises, on which this conclusion rests? Or, in plainer language, Why is it that Christ is here said to be able to “save unto the uttermost”? “Wherefore” — because of the oath of His consecration (verse 20), because of the immutability of the Father's purpose (He “will not repent”) verse 21, because of the better covenant of which He is “Surety” (verse 22), and because He “*continueth* ever” an unchanging Priest (verse 24) — “He is able also to save them unto the uttermost”. This we take it, is the connection between verse 25 and its context.

From the consideration of the glorious truth and office of Christ as Priest, the apostle, to strengthen the faith and increase the consolation of God's people, points out the infallible corollary: "He is able". All power is His, abundant sufficiency of ability to accomplish His design of grace. This is the second time we are reminded of the capability of our High Priest. First, in Hebrews 2:18 it was said, "For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted", and see our comments thereon. That which is particularly in view is not the ability of His nature, but of His *office*. It is still the pre-eminency of Christ above the legal high priests which is chiefly intended. By reason of their personal infirmities and the limited tenure of their office, they were unable to effect that which those desiring to approach unto God most stood in need of. But our great High Priest, being free from all such imperfections, "is able". Because His priesthood is indissoluable and perpetual, His office is all-sufficient to meet every need of God's people.

"Wherefore He is able to save them to the uttermost". It is no mere temporal or transient deliverance which Christ effects for His people, but a supernatural, spiritual and eternal one. The word "save" denotes some evil and danger from which deliverance is secured. This is *sin*, with all its terrible consequences — pollution, guilt, the curse of the law, the captivity of Satan, the wrath to come. Wherefore it is written of Christ that He saves His people "from their sins" (Matthew 1:21), "from the curse" (Galatians 3:13), "from the wrath to come" (1 Thessalonians 1:10). "He is able also to save". It was no easy matter to subdue Satan, fulfill the law, take away sin. Placate God, procure pardon, purchase grace and glory, with all that belongs unto God's great salvation. But God "laid help upon One that is mighty" (Psalm 89:19), and He who hath undertaken this work is able to accomplish it, and that by the means He hath designed to use and the way wherein He will proceed.

Now the way in which He has designed to save His people, is by the discharge of Christ's priestly office. God has appointed no other means to that end. We must look for it therein, or go without it. Alas, multitudes are like those sons of Belial who said of Saul when God had anointed him king, "How shall this man save us? And despised him" (1 Samuel 10:27). They understand not (nor do they desire to know) how Christ is able to save sinners by His priestly work, and therefore, under various pretences, they trust to themselves, and despise Him.

“All false religion is but a choice of other things for men to place their trust in with a neglect of Christ. And all superstition, instances of it, be they great or small” (John Owen).

“Wherefore He is able also to save unto the uttermost.” The last word here may have a double sense: it may respect either the perfection of the work, or its duration, so it is variously rendered, completely and entirely or forevermore and forever. Take its first meaning: Christ will not effect part of our salvation and then leave what remains to ourselves or to others.

“He does not relinquish it by reason of death, but He lives on as long as it is necessary that anything should be done for the salvation of His people (A. Barnes).

Consider its second meaning: whatever hindrances and difficulties lie in the way of the salvation of believers, the Lord Jesus is fully competent, by virtue of the exercise of His priestly office, to carry out the work for them unto eternal perfection. No matter what oppositions may arise, He is more than sufficient to cope with and overcome them all. Combining the two meanings: a complete salvation is a never-ending one.

“Them that come unto God by Him”. This clause defines who are the partakers of His salvation. Christ is able to save unto the uttermost, yet all are not saved by Him, yea, they are few indeed that are saved. Multitudes hear of Him, but, loving more the things of time and sense, refusing to forsake all and follow Him, they “will not come” to Him that they “might have life” (John 5:40). Only those who come unto God by Him, does He save. To come to God means, first, to believe on Him (Hebrews 11:6); second, to draw nigh to Him in worship (Hebrews 10:1, 22). It is the latter sense which is here principally in view, for the apostle is speaking of the state of the Church under the new covenant, and its advantage over that of Judaism, by virtue of its relation unto the priesthood of Christ.

“They that come unto God by Christ are such, as believing in Him, do give up themselves in holy obedience to worship God in and by Him” (John Owen).

To come unto God by Jesus Christ is holy worship. So as to be therein interested in His saving power as the High Priest of His people is to come,

First, in *obedience* unto His authority, as to the way or manner of it. There

must be a bowing to His scepter and a practical owning of His lordship, otherwise we are rebels and idolators, not worshippers.

Second, with *reliance* upon His mediation as to the acceptance of it, counting on the sufficiency of His sacrifice to atone for our sins and His intercession to procure the acceptance of our persons and offerings.

Third, with faith in His person as the foundation of it; so to believe in Him as vested with His holy office that the discharge of it *will* save even to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him. Unless we are true believers, our worship will not be accepted.

First, the quickened sinner comes to Christ, is *drawn* to Him by the Father (John 6:44), and through Christ he comes unto God: cf. 1 Peter 3:18. In His priestly office Christ saves from sin unto God. His righteousness carries them beyond Himself as Mediator unto God Himself: cf. Hebrews 10:22. Thus “coming to God” is the fruit and consequence of “coming to Christ”. God is a just and holy God, yet may the believing sinner, in and through Christ, have communication with Him. Suppose I am under an awakening sense of the terrible majesty and consuming holiness of God: I tremble, and dare not approach unto Him — alas, where are they these days who ever have such an experience? But, later, the Holy Spirit takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto me — His compassion for sinners, His mediatory office, His all-sufficient love: then my fears are silenced, and I draw near unto God praising Him for His unspeakable gift. Nor does Christ’s “ability” to save depend upon my coming to Him, rather does it lie in His power to overcome the reluctance of “His own” and incline them *to* come: see John 17:20.

“Seeing that He ever liveth to make intercession for them.” These words express the reason why Christ is able to effectually save His people: that which secures them is His perpetual life — “He ever liveth”; His perpetual work — “to make intercession”. This is what gives efficacy to the priesthood of Christ. The Lord Jesus lives a mediatorial life in Heaven for His people: as He died for them, so He lives for them, and therefore does He assure them “because I live, ye shall live also” (John 14:19). Comparatively few today either understand or appreciate this blessed fact. That Christ died for them, all who assent to the Gospel profess to believe; but that there is an equally vital necessity for Him to now live for and make intercession for them, is something which they perceive not. Nevertheless, Scripture is clear on this

point: “If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:17).

“There are many Christians who dwell on the crucifixion of Jesus in a one-sided way. We cannot dwell too much on the glorious truth that Jesus Christ was crucified for our sins. Yet it is not on the crucifixion, but on Christ the Lord, that our faith rests; and not on Christ as He was on the cross do we dwell, but on Christ who was dead and is risen again, and liveth at the right hand of God, making intercession for us.... When Jesus died upon the cross He put away our sins, but this was only removing an obstacle. The ultimate object of His death upon the cross was His resurrection and ascension, that through suffering He should enter into glory, that He should be the perfect Mediator between God and man, presenting us unto God and bestowing upon us all the blessings which He has purchased for us with His precious blood. He has obtained eternal redemption on the cross, He *applies* the blessings of eternal redemption from the holy of holies. If Christ was not risen we should still be in our sins; and if such a thing were possible, though we might be forgiven, we should be dead and without the Spirit” (Adolph Saphir).

So stupendous is the work of saving believers unto the uttermost, it is necessary for the Lord Jesus to live a mediatory life in heaven for the perfecting and accomplishing thereof. It is indeed generally acknowledged by professing Christians that sinners could not be saved without the death of Christ, but that believers could not be saved without the resurrection-ministry of Christ is not so freely owned or considered. Yet, Romans 5:10 is very explicit on the point:

“For if, when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, *much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life*”.

Let Romans 8:33-35 also be duly weighed. It is one thing to recognize that, by the once offering of Himself, Christ has “obtained eternal redemption for us” (Hebrews 9:12), it is quite another to perceive that His intercession is required in order to the *fruits* of His oblation *being applied* to those for whom it was made.

It appears to many that, seeing Christ fulfilled all righteousness for His

people, redeemed them by His blood, made full atonement for their sins, nothing more was needed. But had Christ left us to build our eternal safety on the foundation which He laid, had He ascended on High to enjoy His reward *without* continuing to exercise His priestly office on our behalf, had He merely secured our right and title unto the heavenly inheritance and left us to press forward to it unaided by Him, everyone of us would quickly fall a prey to the powerful adversaries which constantly seek our destruction. When God “laid the *foundations* of the earth”, the “morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God (angels) shouted for joy” (Job 38:4, 7), yet were the *continued* actings of God’s creative power required unto the perfection of the earth. So the foundation of the new creation was laid gloriously in the death and resurrection of Christ, causing triumphant praise unto God (Colossians 2:15, 1 Timothy 3:16), yet that praise is founded upon the guarantee of Christ’s unchanging love, care, and power, to complete the work He has undertaken.

Those for whom Christ died are not taken to Heaven the moment they believe, but are still left here in the Enemy’s country nor are they yet glorified, instead, the “flesh”, with all its defiling influences, is still left within them. Therefore do they stand in urgent need of the priestly care of Christ, that, in answer to His intercession, God might send them His Spirit, grant them renewed supplies of grace, deliver them from their foes, keep them in communication with the Father, answer the accusations of Satan, preserve them unto the end of their earthly course, and, then receive them unto Himself and “present them faultless before the presence of His glory” (Jude 24).

“Who can express the opposition that continues to be made unto this work of completing the salvation of believers? What power is able to conflict and conquer the remaining strength of sin, the opposition of Satan and the world? How innumerable are the temptations which every individual believer is exposed unto, each of them in its own nature pernicious and ruinous” (John Owen).

“The most glorious prospect that we can take into the things that are within the veil, into the remaining transactions of the work of our salvation in the most holy place, is in the representation that is made unto us of the intercession of Christ. Our High Priest has entered

within the veil where no eye can pierce unto Him, yet is He there as High Priest, which makes Heaven itself to be a glorious temple. Herein we see Him by faith still vested with the office of the priesthood and continuing with the discharge of it. Hence, in His appearance to John, He was clothed with a garment down to the foot and girded about the paps with a golden girdle: both of which were sacerdotal vestments, Revelation 1:13” (Condensed from John Owen).

“The intercession of Christ is the great evidence of the continuance of His love and care, His pity and compassion towards His Church.... But how shall we know that the Lord Christ is thus tender, loving, compassionate, that He continueth so to be; what evidence or testimony have we of it? It is true, He was eminently so when He was upon the earth in the days of His flesh, and when He laid down His life for us. We know not what changes may be wrought in nature itself, by its investiture with glory; nor how inconsistent those affections which in us cannot be separated from some weakness and sorrow, are with His present state and dignity. But herein we have an infallible demonstration of it, that He yet continueth in the exercise of that office, with respect thereunto all those affections of love, pity and compassion are ascribed unto Him” (John Owen).

“For such an High Priest became us, holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens” (verse 26).

In this verse the apostle shows that in order for sinners to come unto God, they have need of an High Priest to encourage and enable them so to do. Not only is a high priest necessary, but there must be one possessed of certain qualifications of excellencies, if ever we are to obtain access to the thrice Holy One. Such a Priest is here described; such a Priest “became us”, was requisite for and suited to poor sinners. None other could expiate our sins, purge our conscience from dead works, procure acceptance with God for us, purchase eternal redemption, administer supplies of grace enabling us to live unto God in all the duties of faith, obedience and worship, comforting us in trials, delivering from temptations, preserving us unto eternal glory.

First, The only high priest fitted to officiate before God on the behalf of

desperately-wicked sinners was one who was “*holy*”. That which is here in view is the absolute purity of Christ’s *nature*. He was entirely free from the slightest spot or taint of our original defilement. Instead of being, as we were, “conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity”, His humanity was “that *holy* thing” (Luke 1:35).

His conception being miraculous, by the immediate operation of the Holy Spirit, and not derived to Him by natural generation, He was completely exempt from the pollutions which corrupts every one of Adam’s descendants. He could say,

“the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me” (John 14:30):

there was nothing within Him to which the Evil one could make a successful appeal. And *such* an High Priest “became us”. Had His nature been defiled, He had been disqualified either to be Priest or Sacrifice. This holiness of His nature was imperative in order to answer for the unholiness of our nature.

Second, He was “*harmless*”. “Holy” tells of what Christ was God-wards: perfectly conformed to the Divine will inwardly, evidenced by His perfect outward conduct. “Harmless” tells of what He was man-wards. He is the only one who has ever walked this earth who never contaminated, tempted, injured, those with whom He came into contact. As “holy”, He loved the Lord His God with all His heart; as “harmless” He loved His neighbor as Himself. He lived not for self, but was ever at the disposal of others. He went about doing good. When reviled, He reviled not again. When ill-treated, He never retaliated. He was the Lamb in the midst of wolves. He was the Sun of righteousness with healing in His wings. How perfectly adapted was He, then, to serve as Priest and meet the exigencies of His people!

Third, “*undefiled*”. He not only entered this world “holy” and “harmless”, but He was so when He left it. Tabernacling for thirty-three years in a world under the curse, mingling daily with sinners, He contracted no defilement. Just as the rays of the sun may shine into the foulest stream without losing any of their purity, so Christ moved in and out amongst the vilest without the glory of His holiness being sullied in the slightest degree. Christ was “undefiled” morally, as the priests under the law were required to be ceremonially. He was never infected by the evils around Him. He touched the leper, and the leper was cleansed. He came into contact with death, and death

was conquered. He was in the presence of the Devil for forty days, and was as spotless at the close as He was at the beginning of them.

Fourth, “separate from sinners”. The position of this clause in our verse must govern its interpretation. It has a double force. It is intimately related to what precedes, as it is closely connected with the words immediately following. As it comes after the “holy, harmless, undefiled”, it gives a summary of what Christ was in Himself, emphasizing His uniqueness and demonstrating His fitness to officiate as Priest. He was the “Blessed” Man of the first Psalm: He walked not in the counsel of the ungodly, stood not in the way of sinners, sat not in the seat of scorners. He was the true Nazarite of Numbers 6. Though He lived amongst sinners, He was infinitely apart from them, in nature and character, motive and conduct. He was in the world, but not “of” it. Thus was He qualified to act as Mediator between God and sinners.

“Separate from sinners”. As this clause prepares the way for “made higher than the heavens”, it stands in sharp antithesis from “He was numbered with transgressors”. On the cross, we behold Him in the place of sinners, but He occupies that place no longer. Death is for ever behind Him. He is now, in the absolute sense, “separate from sinners”, that is, distinguished from those for whom He is interceding. He has been removed from their society unto another sphere. Thus, this clause points another contrast from the high priest under the law. Aaron offered atonement for sinners, and continued amongst them afterwards. Not so Christ.

“Made higher than the heavens”.

“This refers to the present place and state of our great High Priest. He was for a season made lower than the angels, and descended into the lower parts of the earth, and that, for the discharge of the principle part of His priestly office, namely, the offering of Himself for a sacrifice unto God. But He abode not in that state, nor would He discharge His whole *office*, and all the duties of it, therein. And therefore He was made higher than the heavens. He was not made higher than the heavens, that He might be a Priest; but *being* our High Priest, and *as* our High Priest, He was so made, for the discharge of that part of His office which yet remained to be perfected: for He was to live forever to make intercession for us”

(John Owen).

“Absolute perfection of character is not the only requisite in a high priest suited to our circumstances; he must be possessed also of dignified station, or high authority, of unlimited power. He must be one ‘made higher than the heavens’. The phrase is peculiar. It nowhere else occurs in Scripture; but its meaning is obvious enough. He must occupy a place of the highest honor and power. And He must be ‘made higher than the heavens’. Those words plainly imply that His elevation above the heavens is something conferred on Him. It must be beneath the heavens in order to the discharge of some of the functions of His office, and that in consequence of the successful discharge of them, He must be exalted far above all heavens, for the discharge of other functions, and for gaining the grand object, the ultimate end, of His office” (John Brown).

“Jesus went into the holy of holies which was typified in the tabernacle. Above all created heavens, above angels and principalities, Jesus is now in the true Sanctuary, in the presence of God, and there He is enthroned as our perfect High Priest. His position in Heaven demonstrates that when He offered up Himself He put away sin forever, even as it sets forth His divine glory. For who but the Son of God can sit at the right hand of the Majesty on High? As it is written, ‘Be Thou exalted, O God, above the heavens’ (Psalm 57:5)” (Adolph Saphir).

“Made higher than the heavens” by God: this proves that complete expiation has already been made. It emphasizes the fact that Christ has entered the Heavenly Sanctuary on our behalf: see 4:14, 8:1, 2, 9:24 and Ephesians 1:20-23. It announces that He has been exalted above every order of created things. It makes known how immeasurably superior is our High Priest over Aaron.

Ere passing from this verse let us take to heart its searching practical application. The perfections of our High Priest are what we ought to be conformable to.

“If we give up ourselves to the conduct of this High Priest, if by Him alone we design to approach unto God, then conformity unto Him in holiness of nature and life, according to our measure, is

indispensably required of us. None can more dishonor the Lord Christ, no more perniciously deceive and betray their own souls, than by professing Him to be *their* Priest, with their trust thereby to be saved by Him, and yet *not endeavor to be* holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, like unto Him” (John Owen).

“Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice (first for his own sins, and then for the people’s) for this He did once, when He offered Himself” (verse 27).

Let the reader note carefully our punctuation of this verse: by placing the central clause in a parenthesis (as it obviously should be) we are relieved of a difficulty which has baffled most of the commentators. In this and the next verse the apostle names other instances in which our High Priest is pre-eminent over those of the order of Aaron. His perfections, described in verse 26 exempted Him from all the infirmities of the Levitical priests, which disqualified them from making personal atonement. The design of the apostle is to show that Christ was infinitely well-pleasing unto God, and because He was under no necessity to sacrifice for Himself, the offering which He made for His people is of eternal validity. “This he did once” announces there is no need of any further repetition.

The apostle is still contrasting Christ from the Levitical high priests. How could they pacify the declarative holiness of God which had been outraged by others, when God was justly displeased with them for their own sins? They were obliged to offer “daily” from time to time, “day by day” or again and again, by periodical repetition, for their own sins — cf. “from year to year” (Hebrews 10:1), and note that the Hebrews of Exodus 13:10 “from year to year” is, literally, “days to days”. Not only did the legal high priest have to sacrifice for his own sins, the offering which he presented on behalf of the people had no abiding efficacy, but had to be repeated annually. Whereas Christ, being perfect, needed no sacrifice for Himself; and His offering being perfect, there is no need for any further one. Christ’s sacrifice abides “a new and living one” (Hebrews 10:20).

“For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is perfected forevermore” (verse 28).

In this verse the apostle sums up the whole of His preceding discourse,

evidencing the true foundation on which he had built. Those who still adhered to the Mosaic institutions allowed that there must be a priest over God's people, for without such there could be no approach unto Him. So it was under the law, and if the same order be not continued, then the Church must needs be under a great disadvantage. As Owen rightly said, "To lose the high priest of our religion, is to lose the Sun out of the firmament of the Church."

Now the apostle has granted that the high priests who officiated in the tabernacle and temple were appointed by God to that office. His opponents were persuaded that these priests would continue in the church without change or alteration. God has designed a time when they were to be removed, and a Priest of another order introduced in their room. This change so far from being regrettable, was to the great advantage, safety, blessedness, glory of the Church.

First, the Levitical priests were appointed under, by "the law"; but the new and perfect Priest "since the law" (i.e., in Psalm 110:4), showing Christ had superceded them.

Second, they were but "men"; Christ was the "Son of God."

Third, they were "made" by "the law"; Christ by "the word of the oath".

Fourth, they had "infirmity"; the Son had none.

Fifth, they served only in their day and generation; He "for evermore".

"But the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is perfected for evermore".

"The apostle turns again, in a most emphatic and conclusive manner, unto the key-note which he had struck at the beginning of the epistle. The law of Moses constitutes priests that were changing continually. But the Word which came with the oath after the law, consecrated forevermore as High Priest Him who is the Son: compare the same emphasis on 'Son' in Hebrews 1:1, 2. Only the Son could be the High Priest, and He *became the* High Priest. Through His incarnation, through all the experiences of His life of sorrow and of faith, through His death on the cross, through His

resurrection and ascension, Jesus is perfected forevermore” (Adolph Saphir).

Christ abides perpetually in His priestly office because of the validity of His perfect Sacrifice. Hallelujah.

CHAPTER 36
THE PERFECT PRIEST
(HEBREWS 8:1-5)

“This chapter is a continuation of the argument which has been prosecuted in the previous chapters respecting the priesthood of Christ. The apostle had demonstrated that He was to be a priest, and that he was to be, not of the Levitical order, but of the order of Melchizedek. As a consequence, he had proved that this involved a change of the law, appointing the priesthood, and that in respect to permanency and happy moral influence, the priesthood of Christ far surpassed the Jewish. This thought he pursues in the chapter, and shows particularly that it involved a change in the nature of the covenant between God and His people. In the prosecution of this, he

(1.) states the sum or principal point of the whole matter under discussion — that the priesthood of Christ was real and permanent, while that of the Hebrew economy was typical, and was destined in its own nature to be temporary: verses 1-3.

(2.) There was a fitness and propriety of His being removed to heaven to perform the functions of His office there — since if He had remained on earth, He could not have officiated as priest, that duty being by the law of Moses entrusted to others pertaining to another tribe: verses 4, 5.

(3.) Christ had obtained a more exalted ministry than the Jewish priests held, because He was the Mediator in a better covenant — a covenant that related rather to the heart than to external observances: verses 6-13” (Albert Barnes).

The above is perhaps about as good an analysis of Hebrews 8 as can be supplied. We too are satisfied that the passage which is before us is both a continuation and a summarization of the whole preceding discussion of the apostle. In the previous chapters he has produced indubitable proof that Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, is the great High Priest of God’s people, infinitely superior to all the priests who went before Him. The closing verses of chapter 7 especially, supply a conclusive demonstration that He was priest and exercised the priestly office, while He was here on earth, and which He is

now continuing to do in heaven. First, the description given of Him as “High Priest” in Hebrews 7:26 has no pertinency whatever if it treats of what He was here upon earth. Take the expression, “undefiled” — what is there *in heaven* to defile? Nothing whatever. But understanding it to describe one of Christ’s perfections while He was here in the world, it is full of significance.

Rightly did George Smeaton declare,

“Hebrews 7:26, 27 show Christ on earth, as both Priest and Sacrifice. The ‘such’ of verse 26 refers not back to verses 1-25, but to verse 27, cf. Hebrews 8:1. The qualifications described, holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, are descriptive of what He was here on earth when brought into contact with sin and sinners”.

Again; mark well the expression, “made higher than the heavens” in Hebrews 7:26. *Who* was? The first part of the verse tells us: our “High Priest”! Note also that the last clause of verse 27, “this He did once, when He *offered* up Himself”. Who did “this”? Who is the “He”? The Lord Jesus, of course. And in *what* specific character is He there viewed? Why, as “High Priest”. As we are told in Hebrews 2:17, “*He* was a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, *to make* propitiation (Greek) for the sins of the people”, and as Romans 3:25 plainly declares, He made propitiation at the cross. So again, in Hebrews 4:14 we read, “Seeing then that we *have* a great High Priest that is passed into the heavens”. He did not enter heaven to become a priest, He was “*Priest*” when He “passed into the heavens”. Language could not be plainer.

There is no excuse whatever for a mistake at this point, and our only reason for laboring it is that many who have boasted so loudly of their orthodoxy have systematically denied it. That Christ’s sacrifice was a *priestly* one is clear from Ephesians 5:2, “Christ... hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God”: not only as a “sacrifice” but as “an offering”, and none *offered* to God the sacrifices of Israel save the priests. That Christ did not become Priest *after* He entered into heaven is also unequivocally established by Hebrews 9:11, 12,

“But Christ being come *an High Priest* of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands... by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained

eternal redemption for us”.

He passed into heaven *in the capacity* of High Priest. Therefore we say that they who teach Christ became priest after His ascension are unconsciously or consciously, ignorantly or maliciously, corrupting the Truth of God and denying one of the most cardinal articles of our holy faith.

The line of argument followed by the apostle in the opening verses of Hebrews 8 is not easily perceived. So far as the Lord has deigned to open their meaning to us, we understand it to be thus: Since Christ has ascended to the right hand of God, and now sits there as a Priest upon His throne, proof has been given that He is not a Minister of the earthly and Jewish sanctuary, but of the antitypical and heavenly one. Having set forth in chapter 7 the pre-eminence of Christ’s priesthood over the Aaronic order and His all-sufficient qualifications for the office, the apostle now proceeds to evince His faithful execution of the same, and this, to the end of Hebrews 10:19. In chapter 7 it is the excellency of our High Priest’s *person* which is demonstrated; here in Hebrews chapter 8 it is His *ministry* which is contemplated. Note how in verse 2 He is spoken of as “a Minister of the sanctuary”, that in verse 3 He has “somewhat also to offer”, and observe the word “serve” in verse 5 and “ministry” in verse 6. In chapter 8 we are further shown the excellency of our Redeemer’s sacerdotal office, first, from the high Sanctuary in which it is now exercised (verses 1-5); second, from its functions corresponding with the better Covenant with which it is connected (verses 6-13).

“Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an High Priest who is set on the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens” (verse 1).

The participle is in the present tense and should be rendered “of the things of which we are speaking” (cf. Revised Version), the general reference being to the entire contents of the epistle, the specific to what is found in Hebrews 4:14 to Hebrews 10:18. “This is the sum” or crowning point: it is here that all the previous teaching of the epistle culminates, for the priesthood of Christ is, really, its distinguishing theme.

“We have *such* an High Priest”, looks back, particularly, to Hebrews 7:26. John Brown pointed out the very close connection which exists between the closing verses of Hebrews chapter 7 and the opening ones of Hebrews chapter 8, thus,

“It is to be borne in mind that the high-priesthood of Jesus Christ is the great subject of discussion in the section of the epistle of which these words form a part; and that, after having shown the reality of our Lord’s high priesthood by two arguments (Hebrews chapter 5) — the one derived from His legitimate investiture with this office, the other from His successful discharge of its functions — the apostle proceeds to show the pre-eminent excellence and dignity of our Lord’s high-priesthood. He, with much ingenuity, deduces four arguments for the superiority of our Lord’s priesthood to that of Aaron and his sons from the ancient oracle recorded in Psalm 110:4: ‘The Lord hath sworn and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek’. A fifth argument suggested by, though not so wholly grounded on, this ancient oracle, is entered on in Hebrews 7:26, and is prosecuted, if we mistake not, down to the middle of the 6th verse of Hebrews chapter 8, where a new argument for the superiority of our Lord to the Aaronical priests obviously commences, the substance of which is this: — The superiority of our Lord’s priesthood above that of Aaron and his sons is evident from the superior excellence of the covenant with which His priesthood is connected.

“The substance of the argument contained at the middle of verse 6 of Hebrews chapter 8, may be thus expressed: — To fit a person for the successful discharge of the priesthood in reference to man, certain qualifications are necessary. These qualifications are wanting in the Aaronical priesthood: they are to be found in the highest perfection in Christ Jesus. We, that is, *men*, need a high priest ‘holy, harmless, undefiled, made higher than the heavens’. Jewish priests do not answer to this description: Jesus Christ does. In Him we, *Christians*, have such a High Priest; and the conclusion is, He has received ‘a more excellent ministry’. In this way, I apprehend, everything hangs well together, and the apostle’s argumentative illustration appears complete and satisfactory. Indeed, the recurrence of the phrase ‘such a high priest’ (Hebrews 7:26), and ‘we have such a high priest’ (Hebrews 8:1), seems intended for the express purpose of showing that the train of thought is continuous.”

“We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the

Majesty in the heavens". These words point another contrast between Christ and the Levitical priests. It is true that our Lord Jesus entered for a season, a condition of deep humiliation, taking upon Him the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of sin's flesh; and this was necessary unto the sacrifice which He was to offer. But as to His *durable* and abiding state, wherein He continues to discharge His priestly office, He is incomparably exalted above Aaron and his successors. After the Jewish high priest had offered the annual sacrifice of expiation unto God, he passed within the veil with the blood, presenting it before Him. But he stood before the typical mercy seat with holy awe, and upon the fulfillment of his duty immediately withdrew. But Christ, after He had offered His sacrifice unto God, entered heaven itself, not to stand in humble reverence before the throne, but to sit at God's right hand; and that, not for a season, but forevermore.

The immediate design of the Holy Spirit was to comfort the hearts and establish the faith of the sorely-tried Hebrews, who were constantly represented by their unbelieving fellows for no longer having fellowship with the sacred rites of Judaism, and thus, in their esteem, being without any temple, priest or sacrifice. The apostle therefore reminds them again that "We have such an High Priest", who, though invisible, has been exalted in dignity and glory far above those who serve under the law of a carnal commandment. For Christians today the "we have such an High Priest" defines the relation of Christ to God's elect: fallen angels and reprobate sinners have no High Priest, that is one reason why their punishment shall be eternal — there will never be a Mediator to plead their cause.

The great object before the apostle in this epistle was to present that which was calculated to draw the hearts of the Hebrews away from the temple at Jerusalem, to the true Sanctuary of Christian worship on High. It is for that reason that the *ascension* of Christ occupies so prominent a place in it. One of the objections which carnal critics have advanced against the Pauline authorship of Hebrews is the fact that only once (Hebrews 13:20) is the *resurrection* of Christ directly referred to, whereas in all the other epistles of Paul it is given a place of great prominence. But the reason for this is easily accounted for. The emphasis in Hebrews is placed upon Christ's being at God's right hand (Hebrews 1:3, 1:13, 8:1, 8:9, 10:12, 12:2) for the purpose of assuring those who were deprived of the temple-services in Jerusalem, that they *had the* reality and substance of those things which were merely typical

and temporary, and that the real Sanctuary was not on earth, but in heaven, and there Christ Himself is now officiating.

“Who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens”. The exalted position which our great High Priest now occupies should commend both His person and His office in our esteem and assure us what abundant cause we have for expecting the successful discharge of its functions. Who is “*set*” or “seated”: Acts 7:55 warns us against interpreting this in a carnal or literal manner. With Hebrews 8:1 should be compared Hebrews 1:3 (see our comments thereon) and Hebrews 12:2. There are some verbal variations to be noted. In Hebrews 1:3, where Christ’s personal glory as “Son” is in view, there was no need to mention “*the* throne”. In Hebrews 12:2, where it is the reward of the man Christ Jesus, the “throne” is seen, but the “Majesty in the heavens” is not added. Here, in Hebrews 8:1, where the dignity and glory of His priestly office is affirmed, we have mentioned both “the throne” and the “Majesty” of God.

“A Minister of the sanctuary” (verse 2). This is exceedingly blessed.

“Having declared the glory and dignity which He is exalted unto, as sitting down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, what can be farther expected from Him? There He lives, eternally happy in the enjoyment of His own blessedness and glory. Is it not reasonable it should be so, after all the hardships and miseries which He, being the Son of God, underwent in this world? Who can expect that He should any longer condescend unto office and duty? Neither generally have men any other thoughts concerning Him. But where then would lie the advantage of the Church in His exaltation which the apostle designs in an especial manner to demonstrate”? (John Owen).

Our blessed Redeemer, in His exalted glory, still condescends to exercise the office of a public minister in the behalf of His Church. It is required that our faith should not only apprehend what Christ did for us while He was here on earth, but also appropriate what He is now doing for His people in heaven. Indeed, the very life and efficacy of the whole of His mediation depends upon His *present* work on our behalf. Nowhere does the marvelous grace and the wondrous love of the Savior more gloriously appear than in the ministry in which He is now constantly engaged. As all the shame, suffering, and

pains of death deterred Him not from making an oblation for His people, so all the honor and glory, dignity and dominion with which He is now invested, diverts Him not from presenting its virtues before God and pressing for its blessings to be bestowed upon those for whom it was offered. His attention is still concentrated on His poor people in this wilderness world.

The “Sanctuary” in which our great High Priest ministers is Heaven itself: cf. Hebrews 9:24, 10:19. It is the place where the majesty and glory of God are most fully displayed.

“He looked down from the height of His sanctuary, from heaven did the Lord behold the earth” (Psalm 102:19).

Heaven is here called “the Sanctuary” because it is *there* really dwells and actually abides all that was typically prefigured in the holy places of Israel’s tabernacle. In the heavenly Sanctuary does Christ now discharge His priestly office for the good of His Church. It was a joyful time for Israel when Aaron entered the holy of holies, for he carried with him the blood which made atonement for all their sins. So the presence of Christ in heaven, pleading the efficacy of His meritorious blood, should fill the hearts of His people with joy unspeakable: cf. John 14:28.

“And of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man” (verse 2).

This is not, as so many have supposed, an amplification of the preceding clause, but instead, a quite distinct thing. The word “*true*” is not here used in opposition to what is false (the temples of the heathen), but in contrast from the tabernacle of Israel, which was typical, shadowy, temporary. It has the force of that which is real, solid, and abiding. Israel’s tabernacle was but an effigy of the antitypical one.

“Moses gave you not that bread from heaven, but My Father giveth you the *true* Bread from heaven” (John 6:32),

gives the force of the term. But what is the “*true tabernacle*” here referred to? We answer, the Redeemer’s humanity, in which He ministers before God on high. In proof of this note,

First, the metaphor of a “tabernacle” is used for the body of man in 2 Corinthians 5:1 and 2 Peter 1:13.

Second, the Holy Spirit has expressly used this term (in the Greek) in John 1:14, “The Word became flesh and *tabernacled* among us”.

Third, in Hebrews 9:11 “tabernacle” manifestly refers to Christ’s humanity — observe it is there distinguished from “the holy place” (sanctuary) in Hebrews 9:12!

In addition to what has been said above, it should be pointed out that the tabernacle of Israel was the outstanding Old Testament type of the incarnate Redeemer. We have more fully developed this wondrous and beautiful truth in our exposition of John 1:14, to which we would refer the interested reader. Here we must confine ourselves to only two or three details. God sanctified Israel’s tabernacle as a place to dwell in (Exodus 29:44, 45); so in Christ “dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9). God’s glory was most conspicuously manifested in the tabernacle — “The glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle” (Exodus 40:34); so of Christ the apostle declared “we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father” (John 1:14). In the tabernacle, sacrifices and incense were offered to God, and all holy services were performed; so Christ in His body offered up His own sacrifice, prayers, and all holy services (Hebrews 5:7, 10:5). To the tabernacle the people brought all their offerings (Leviticus 1:3), so must we bring all ours to Christ (Hebrews 13:15).

“The true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man”. Here there is a manifest reference to the virgin-birth, the supernatural character of our Lord’s humanity, being parallel with “A body hast *Thou* prepared Me” (Hebrews 10:5). The verb, “pitched” is a word proper unto the erection and establishment of a tabernacle — the fixing of stakes and pillars, with the fastening of cords thereto, was the principal means of setting up one (Isaiah 54:2). It is the *preparation* of Christ’s humanity which is signified: a body which was to be taken down, folded up for a season, and afterwards to be erected again, without the breaking or loss of any part of it. “*Which the Lord pitched*” shows the Divine origin of Christ’s humanity: cf. Matthew 1:20. The words “and not man” declare that no human father was concerned with His generation: cf. Luke 1:34,35.

“For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer” (verse 3).

The opening word of this verse intimates that the apostle is here supplying a confirmation of what he had declared in verses 1, 2. He argues from a general to a particular: “*every* high priest is ordained *to offer*” (that being the specific purpose for which God calls him to this office) therefore, Christ, the great High Priest, must also have been ordained for that end. Thus, the Lord Jesus has done and is still doing that which appertains to the antitypical Sanctuary.

In the opening verses of our chapter we behold the Redeemer in the heavenly sanctuary, ministering there before God on the behalf of His people.

“But *how* did He enter into this sanctuary? The high priests under the law entered into their sanctuary after having offered a sacrifice; and *so also* did the great High Priest of our profession. ‘For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer’. No attentive reader can help being sensible that these words, taken by themselves, do not convey a distinct, complete, satisfactory meaning. The statement is obviously elliptical; and the following seems to be the most probable way of supplying the ellipsis: We have a High Priest which has entered into the heavenly sanctuary, the true holy of holies. Every high priest is appointed to offer up sacrificial gifts in order to his entrance into the earthly sanctuary: it was necessary, as the antitype must correspond to the type, that this illustrious Priest should have somewhat also to offer, for the purpose of opening His way into the true sanctuary.

“Christ’s being there, in the heavenly sanctuary, is the proof at once that an expiatory sacrifice has been offered, and that that sacrifice has been effectual. And what was this ‘somewhat’ which it was necessary that He should offer in order to His entering into the true sanctuary? We have but to look back to find the answer. It was ‘Himself’, ‘holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners’. His perfect, cheerful obedience to the preceptive part of the Divine law, and His perfect, cheerful obedience to the sanctioning part of it, opened for Him, as a High Priest, His way *into* that true holy place, where in the presence of God He acts as a public functionary in the name of His redeemed ones.

“It is plain that He could not have the sacrifices prescribed by the

law to offer, for He did not belong to that class of persons to whom the offering of those was by law restricted; but He had a better sacrifice: read Hebrews 10:5-13” (John Brown).

“The apostle intends to show (verse 3) that Christ’s priesthood cannot co-exist with the Levitical priesthood. He proves it in this way: — The law appointed priests to offer sacrifices to God; it hence appears that the priesthood is an empty name without a sacrifice. But Christ had no sacrifice such as was offered under the law; it hence follows that His priesthood is not earthly or carnal, but one of a more excellent character” (John Calvin).

Thus fax the Holy Spirit has affirmed that the great High Priest of Christians is enthroned in heaven (verse 1); that He is there a “Minister”, serving in the antitypical Sanctuary, and that, in the “true tabernacle”, His own humanity (verse 2); and that His right to entrance there was His own perfect sacrifice (verse 3). He now declares, “For if He were on earth, He should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law” (verse 4). The opening “For” looks back to what had been declared in verses 1,2, and introduces a further proof that the *continuation* of Christ’s priestly ministry *must be* in the heavenly sanctuary. The earthly system, Judaism, had its own priests who offered gifts “according to the law.”

“This mere earthly, typical, inferior priesthood has been already provided for, its rules are fixed, and the order of men defined who fill its functions; and according to those rules, Christ Jesus could not be one of them, not being of the right tribe. The fact, therefore, that He has priestly functions, a fact before proved, shows that His priesthood is in a different sanctuary” (F. S. Sampson).

This 4th verse is the one that is most appealed to by those who deny that Christ entered the priestly office before His ascension. But if it be examined carefully in the light of its setting, nothing whatever is to be found in it which favors the Socinian view. That which the apostle is treating of here in chapter 8 is the *full* execution of the *whole* of Christ’s priesthood: thereunto belonged not only the once oblation of Himself, but His continual intercession as well. Now that intercession must be made in heaven, at God’s right hand. We say “must” for the Old Testament types require it. Aaron had to carry incense, as well as blood, into the holy of holies (Leviticus 16). Had Christ remained on

earth after His resurrection, only half of His priestly work had been performed. His ascension was necessary for the maintenance of God's governmental rights, for the vindication of the Redeemer Himself, and for the well-being of His people; that what He had begun on earth might be continued, consummated and fully accomplished in heaven. The expiatory sacrifice of Christ had been offered once for all, but He must take His place as an Intercessor at God's right hand, if His Church should enjoy the benefits of it.

In this 4th verse the apostle is not only confirming his statement in verses 1,2, but he is also anticipating the objecting Jews: But you Christians have no high priest on earth! True, says the apostle, and well it is that we do not. It is to be carefully noted that the Spirit does not here say that when Christ was on earth He was *not* a Priest — no, He would not flatly contradict what he had plainly affirmed in Hebrews 2:17, 5:7-9, 7:26, 27. Instead, He says "If He *were* on earth," that is, had He remained here, He would not have completely discharged His sacerdotal functions. Had Christ stayed on earth, He had left His office imperfect, seeing that His people needed One to "appear in the presence of God" (Hebrews 9:24) for them. If Aaron had only offered sacrifice at the brazen altar, and had not carried the blood within the veil, he had left his work only half done.

"Seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law"
(verse 4).

This states the reason *why* Christ had not been a perfect priest if He had not gone to heaven: there were already priests, and that, of a tribe which He was not of, that offered gifts on earth, yea, had done so long before He became incarnate. Therefore if the entire design of Christ's priesthood had been merely to be a priest on earth, they would plead possession before Him. But, as verse 5 immediately proceeds to tell us, those priests only served "unto the example and shadow of heavenly things." Nothing but a real priesthood in heaven could supercede and abolish theirs. This is brought out plainly in Hebrews 9:8: the "first tabernacle" was to stand until a Priest went into heaven and executed that office there: so that if Christ is to be Priest alone, He must become a Priest interceding in heaven, or otherwise, the Levitical priests would share that office with Him.

To sum up. The first clause of verse 4 is not an absolute, but a relative

statement: “For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest”. And why? “Seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law”, that is, the place is already occupied. Yes, but *what* place? Why that of offering gifts *according to the law*. Since Christ was above the law, the ideal and perfect Priest, He could not officiate in the temple at Jerusalem, for not only did His fleshly descent from Judah hinder this, but the sanctuary in which He now presents His sacrifice must correspond in dignity to the supreme excellency of His office. Thus, so far from His absence from the earth casting any suspicion on Him it is the necessary consequence of His being who He is and of having done what He has done.

“Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith He, thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount” (verse 5).

Here the apostle furnishes further proof of what he had said at the beginning of verse 4. The presence of the type necessarily implies the absence of the Antitype (cf. Hebrews 9:8-10), because the very nature of a type is to symbolize visibly an absent and unseen reality. From the Divine viewpoint, Judaism was set aside, ended, when God rent the veil of the temple (Matthew 27:51); but from the human, it was not abolished till Titus destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Israel’s priests still served, but the only significance of their ministry was a typical one.

The design of the Spirit in verse 5 is obvious. There was something above and beyond the material tabernacle which God prescribed to Moses: that which he built, only furnished a faint foreshadowing of spiritual and heavenly realities, which are now actualized by Christ on High. The entire ministry of Israel’s priests had to do with earthly and carnal things, which provided but a dim outline of things above. The word “example” signifies type, and is rendered “figures” in Hebrews 9:24. The term “shadow” means an adumbration, and is opposed to the substance or reality; see Colossians 2:17, Hebrews 10:1. “Shadows” are but fading and transitory, have no substance of themselves, and but darkly represent.

“See, saith He, thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount.” “This passage is found in Exodus 25:40, and the apostle adduces it here on purpose, so that he might prove that

the whole service according to the Law was nothing more than a picture, as it were, designed to shadow forth what is found spiritually in Christ” (John Calvin).

The practical application to us of the teaching of verse 5 is: Christians ought to exercise the utmost care and diligence to ascertain the revealed mind of God in what He requires from us in our worship of Him. Though Moses was learned in all the wisdom of Egypt, that was of no value or avail when it came to spiritual acts. He must do all things precisely as Jehovah ordered. In connection with what is styled “Divine worship” today, the great majority of professing Christians follow the dictates of their own wisdom, or inclination of their fleshly lusts, rather than Holy Scripture. Others mechanically follow the traditions of their fathers, or the requirements of popular custom. The result is that the Holy Spirit is grieved and quenched by the worldly inventions of carnal men, and Christ is *outside the* whole thing. Far better not to worship God at all, than to mock Him with human “will worship” (Colossians 2:23). Far better to worship Him scripturally in the seclusion of our homes, than fellowship the abominable mockery that is now going on in almost all of the so-called “churches”.

CHAPTER 37
THE TWO COVENANTS
(HEBREWS 8:6-9)

In the 7th chapter the apostle has demonstrated by irrefutable logic and upon the authority of Holy Scripture that the priesthood of Christ has superseded the Aaronic order. Here in chapter 8 he makes manifest the superior *ministry* of our great High Priest.

First, He is “seated” (verse 1).

Second, He is seated on the throne of Deity (verse 1).

Third, He is a Minister of the heavenly sanctuary (verse 2).

Fourth, His own person provides the antitype of the tabernacle (verse 2).

Fifth, He is presenting before God a more excellent sacrifice (verses 3-6).

Sixth, He is Mediator of a superior covenant (verse 6).

Seventh, that covenant has to do with “better promises” (verse 6).

That upon which the Holy Spirit would here have us focalize our attention is the *place* where our High Priest ministers, and the immeasurable superiority of the *economy* which He is now administering.

This 8th chapter of Hebrews treats of two things: the sphere of our High Priest’s ministry and the better covenant with which it is connected: the one being in suited accord with the other. The 6th verse gives the connecting link between them. The apostle’s object in introducing the “new covenant” at this stage of his argument is obvious. It was to the old covenant that the whole administration of the Levitical priesthood was confined. The entire church-state of the Jews, with all the ordinances and worship of it, and all the privileges connected with it, depended wholly on the covenant which God made with them at Sinai. But the introduction of the new Priesthood necessarily abolished that covenant, and put an end to all the sacred ministrations which belong to it. This it is which the apostle here undertakes to prove.

“The question which troubled the minds and hearts of the Hebrews

was their relation to the Levitical priesthood, and to the old dispensation. The temple was still in Jerusalem, and the Levitical ordinances appointed by Moses were still being observed. Although the Sun had risen, the moon had not yet disappeared. It was waning; it was ready to vanish away. Now it became an urgent necessity for the Hebrew Christians to understand that Christ was the true and eternal High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary, and that the new and everlasting covenant with Judah and Israel was connected with the gospel promise, and not with the law. God Himself had made the first covenant old by promising the new. And now that Christ had entered into the holy of holies by His own blood, the old covenant had passed away; and yet the promises of God to His chosen people remained firm and unchanged” (Adolph Saphir).

That God *had* “changed” the order of priesthood (Hebrews 7:12) was, as we have seen, clearly evidenced by His causing Christ to spring from the tribe of Judah (Hebrews 7:14). God’s raising up of a Priest from *that* tribe necessarily excluded those belonging to the house of Aaron from the sacerdotal office, just as God’s raising up David to sit upon the throne, forever set aside the descendants of Saul from the regal office. Herein we may discern one reason why Jehovah ordained and gave such strict regulations for the distribution of Israel into their tribes, namely, that He might provide for their instruction as to the continuance of the legal worship among them, which could no longer be continued than while the priesthood was reserved unto the tribe of Levi.

This Divine change in the order of priesthood necessarily entailed a change of covenant or economy, as a change of the royal family denotes a new dynasty, or as a new president involves a change of government. The economy with which Christ is connected as far excels the old order of things as His sacerdotal office exceeded that of Aaron’s. Thus the apostle is here really advancing one more argument or proof for the pre-eminence of our Lord’s priesthood. As a Minister or public functionary Jesus Christ is as far superior in dignity to the Levites as the dispensation over which He presides is of a far superior order than the dispensation in which they served.

In approaching the subject of the two covenants, the old and the new, it should be pointed out that it is not always an easy matter to determine whether the “old covenant” designates the Mosaic economy or the covenant

of works which God made with Adam (Hosea 6:7 margin); nor to decide whether the “new covenant” refers to the Gospel dispensation introduced by Christ, or to the covenant of grace which was inaugurated by the first promise made to Adam (Genesis 3:15) and confirmed to Abraham (Genesis 17). In each case the context must decide. We may add that the principal passages where the two covenants are described and contrasted are found in 2 Corinthians chapter 3, Galatians chapter 3 and 4, Hebrews chapters 8, 9 and 12.

“But now hath He obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also He is the Mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises” (verse 6).

“This verse is a transition from one subject to another; namely, from the excellency of the priesthood of Christ above that of the law, to the excellency of the new covenant above the old. And herein also the apostle artificially compriseth and confirmeth his last argument, of the pre-eminence of Christ, His priesthood and ministry, above that of the law. And this He doth from the nature and excellency of that covenant whereof He was the Mediator in the discharge of His office” (John Owen).

“But now hath He obtained a more excellent ministry.” The apostle here introduces his important assertion by a time-mark, the “But now” signifying at this season. It points a contrast from the period of the Mosaic dispensation, when Israel’s priests served “unto the example and shadow of heavenly things” (verse 5). A close parallel is found in Romans 3:21, “but now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested,” which is defined in verse 26 as “to declare *at this time* His righteousness: that He might be just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (verse 26). God in His infinite wisdom gives proper times and seasons to all His dispensations toward His Church. The Lord hastens or consummates all His works of grace in their own appointed time: see Isaiah 60:22. Our duty is to leave the ordering of all the concerns of His people, in the accomplishment of His promises, to God in His own good time: Acts 1:7.

That which is here ascribed unto Christ is “a more excellent ministry.” The priests of old had a ministry, and an excellent one, for it was by Divine appointment they served at the altar (verse 5). So Christ has a ministry, and

“a more excellent” one. In verse 2 He is designated “a Minister of the sanctuary.” He is called such not with respect unto one particular act of administration, but because a standing office has been committed to Him. The service to which Christ has been called is of a higher order and more excellent nature than any which Aaron ever discharged. It is a “more excellent ministry” because it is the real and substantial one, of which the Levitical was but the emblem; it pertains to things in heaven, while theirs was restricted to the earthly tabernacle; it is enduring while theirs was but temporary.

This more excellent ministry Christ is here said to have “obtained.” The way whereby the Lord Jesus entered on the whole office and work of His mediation has been expressed in Hebrews 1:4 as by “inheritance”: that is, by free grant and perpetual donation, made unto Him as the Son — compare our comments on that verse. There were two things which concurred unto His obtaining this ministry:

First, the eternal purpose and counsel of God, decreeing Him thereunto (1 Peter 1:20, Revelation 13:8).

Second, the actual call of God (Hebrews 5:4, 5), which carried with it His unction of the Spirit above measure (Psalm 45:7), for the holy discharge of His whole office.

Thus, Christ obtained this ministry not by any legal constitution, fleshly succession, or carnal ordination, as did the Levitical priests. The exaltation of the human nature of Christ into union with His Deity, for the office of this glorious ministry, depended solely upon the sovereign wisdom, grace, and love of God.

“But now hath He obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also He is the Mediator of a better covenant.” The particular point which the apostle here makes, or rather the conclusion which he here draws from the premises laid down, had been anticipated and intimated in what he said in Hebrews 7:20, 22. There he had declared that the excellency of the covenant of which Christ has been made Surety and Mediator has a proportion with the pre-eminence of His priesthood above that of Aaron’s. His being made a Priest by Divine oath (which the Levites were not) fitted Him to be the Surety of a better economy. Conversely, the covenant of which He is Surety must needs be better than the old regime because He who was the Surety of it had been

made so by Divine oath. Thus, the dignity of Christ's priesthood is demonstrated by the excellency of the new covenant, and declaratively the new covenant sets forth the dignity of Christ's priesthood.

"He is the Mediator of a better covenant." It is most important to recognize that Christ is a *sacerdotal* Mediator. This is made clear by 1 Timothy 2:5, 6, "For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave Himself *a ransom* for all, to be testified in due time." The mediating Priest intervenes with sacrifice and intercession for the reconciling of God and sinners. As we shall (D.V.) yet see, Hebrews 9:15 expressly declares that Christ's priestly work was the very purpose of His being appointed Mediator. So in Hebrews 12:24 His sacrifice is again made prominent in connection with His mediation. Thus the *sacerdotal* character of His mediation cannot be scripturally gainsaid.

Christ has obtained a more excellent priestly ministry corresponding to the superior dispensation of which He is the Mediator. "But now (in this Christian dispensation) hath He (as 'Priest') obtained (from God) a more excellent ministry (than Aaron's) by how much *also* He is the Mediator of a better covenant." He is not only Priest, but Mediator; Priest because He is Mediator, Mediator because He is Priest. It is *by* His priestly office and work that He exercises His mediatorship, standing between two parties and reconciling them. He thus combines in His own person what was divided between two under the old economy, Moses being the typical mediator, Aaron the typical surety. As "Surety" Christ *pledged* Himself to see that the terms of the covenant were faithfully carried out; as "Mediator," He is *negotiating* for His people's blessing. The word "covenant" in this chapter signifies an arrangement or constitution of things, an economy or dispensation. The "old covenant" was that peculiar order of things under which the Jewish people were placed in consequence of the transactions at Sinai. The "new" or "better covenant" is that order of things which has been introduced by Jesus Christ, namely, the Christian dispensation.

"He is the Mediator of a better covenant." A mediator is a middle person between two parties entering into covenant, and if they be of different natures, a perfect mediator would have to partake of each of their natures in his own person. This Christ has done. Such mediation presupposes that the two parties are at such variance they cannot treat directly with the other;

unless this were so, a go-between would be needless. See this fact illustrated in Deuteronomy 5:23-27. In voluntarily undertaking to serve as Mediator, two things were required of Christ: first, that He should remove whatever kept the covenanters at a distance, taking away the cause of enmity between them. Second, that He should purchase and procure, in a way suited to the glory of God, the actual communication of all the good things prepared and proposed in this covenant (grace and glory) unto those on whose behalf He acts as Surety. Finally, He who is this Mediator must be accepted, trusted, and rested in by both parties entering into covenant. On God's part, He has openly declared that He is "well pleased" with Christ (Matthew 3:17); on the part of His elect, they are made willing "in the day of His power" (Psalm 110:3).

““Which was established upon better promises.” Every covenant between God and man, must be founded on and resolved into promises. Hence, essentially, a promise and a covenant are all one, and God calls an absolute promise founded on an absolute decree, His covenant, Genesis 9:11. And His purpose for the continuation of the course of nature to the end of the world, He calls His covenant with day and night, Jeremiah 33:20. The being and essence of a Divine covenant lies in the promise. Hence are they called ‘the covenants of promise,’ Ephesians 2:12. Such as are founded on and consist in promises. And it is necessary that so it should be” (John Owen).

“Which was established upon better promises.” The word “established” here is important to note, for it plainly intimates to us that the apostle is *not* here treating of the Everlasting Covenant *absolutely*, and as it had been virtually administered from the foundation of the world in the way of a promise; but relatively, as it had been *formally* introduced on earth as a new dispensation or economy. In the Divine administration of the Everlasting Covenant it has now been reduced to a fixed statute or ordinance. The term “established” signifies *legally established*, formally established as by a law. All is now fixed in the Church by Divine arrangement and secured by inviolable sanctions. In Hebrews 7:11 the Greek verb here rendered “established” is translated “received the law” — compare our comments thereon.

“The covenant to which the priesthood of Christ refers has been also

established by law. It has been promulgated by Divine authority. The truth with regard to it has been ‘spoken by the Son of God, and confirmed to us by those who heard Him; and God has borne witness with signs and miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit,’ according to His own will” (John Brown).

“Established upon better promises.” Caution requires to be exercised and great care taken at this point lest we err in our understanding of the particular contrast which is here pointed by the word “better.”

“The promises in the first covenant pertained *mainly* to the present life. They were promises of length of days; of increase of numbers; of seed time and harvest; of national privileges, and of extraordinary peace, abundance and prosperity. That there was also the promise of eternal life, it would be wrong to doubt; but this was not the main thing. In the new covenant, however, the promise of spiritual blessings become the *principal* thing. The mind is directed to heaven; the heart is cheered with the hopes of immortal life; the favor of God and the anticipation of heaven are secured in the most ample and solemn manner” (A. Barnes).

Observe well the two words which are emphasized in the above quotation. In Old Testament times God “commanded *the* blessing, life *forever more*” (Psalm 133:3), not only temporal life in Canaan; while His people in New Testament times have “promise of the life that now is,” as well as “of that which is to come” (1 Timothy 4:8)!

Rightly did Adolph Saphir point out,

“The contrast between the old and the new would be viewed in a false light, if we forgot that in the old dispensation spiritual reality and blessings were presented, and were actually embraced in faith by the people of God. The law had a positive or evangelical aspect, although herein also it was elementary and transitory, it acted as a guardian and a tutor; as the snow is not merely an indication of winter, and a contrast to the bright and genial sunshine, and the refreshing verdure of summer, but is also a beneficent protection, cherishing and preparing the soil for the approaching blessings from above. But now the winter is passed, the fullness has come.”

The “better promises” are described in verses 10-13: they are summed up in justification and sanctification, or more briefly still, in *redemption*.

“But what he adds is not without some difficulty, — that the covenant of the Gospel was proclaimed on better promises; for it is certain that the fathers who lived under the Law had the same hope of eternal life set before them as we have, as they had the grace of adoption in common with us, then faith must have rested on the same promises. But the comparison made by the apostle refers to the *form* rather than to the substance; for though God promised to them the same salvation which He at this day promises to us, yet neither the manner nor the character of the revelation is the same or equal to what we enjoy” (John Calvin).

Thus, the “promises” with which the new covenant is concerned are “better” in that they *mainly* respect spiritual and eternal blessings, rather than earthly and temporal ones; in that they have been ratified by the blood-shedding of Christ; in that they are now openly proclaimed to God’s elect among the Gentiles as well as the Jews.

“For if that first covenant had been faultless then should no place have been sought for the second” (verse 7).

The covenant which is here referred to is that into which Jehovah entered with Israel at Sinai: see Exodus 19:5; 34:27, 28; Deuteronomy 4:13. Israel’s response is recorded in Exodus 19:8, 24:3. It was ratified by blood: Exodus 24:4-8. This was not the “first” covenant absolutely, but the first made with Israel *nationally*. Previously, God had made a covenant with Adam (Hosea 6:7), and in some respects the Covenant at Sinai adumbrated it, for it was chiefly one of *works*. So too He had made a covenant with Abraham, which in some respects adumbrated the Everlasting Covenant, inasmuch as it was one purely of *grace*. Prior to Sinai, God dealt with Israel on the basis of the Abrahamic covenant, as is clear from Exodus 2:24; 6:3, 4. But it was on the ground of the Sinaitic covenant that Israel entered Canaan: see Joshua 7:11, 15; Judges 2:19-21; 1 Kings 11:11; Jeremiah 34:18, 19.

“For if that first covenant had been faultless then should no place have been sought for the second.” The connection between this and the preceding verse, intimated by the opening “For” is as follows: there the apostle had affirmed that the Christian covenant is superior to the Judaic; here, he demonstrates

the same thing by arguing from the fact that the old covenant must have been defective, otherwise the new had been superfluous. It is an inference drawn from the facts of the situation. If there was need for a second, the first could not have been perfect, failing to secure that which was most desirable. A parallel is found in Galatians 3:21.

“For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.” Wherein lay its “faultiness?” It was wholly external, accompanied by no internal efficacy. It set before Israel an objective standard but supplied no power to measure up to it. It treated with men in the flesh, and therefore the law was impotent through the weakness of the flesh (Romans 8:3). It provided a sacrifice for sin, but the value thereof was only ceremonial and transient, failing to actually put away sin. It was unable to secure actual redemption. Hence because of its inadequacy, a new and better covenant was needed.

“Every work of God is perfect, viewed in connection with the purpose which He means it to serve. In this point of view, the ‘first covenant’ was faultless. But when viewed in the light in which the Jews generally considered it, as a saving economy, in all the extent of that word, it was not ‘faultless.’ It could not expiate moral guilt; it could not wash away moral pollution; it could not justify, it could not sanctify, it could not save. Its priesthood were not perfected — they were weak and inefficient; its sacrifices ‘could not take away sin,’ make perfect as concerning the conscience, or procure ‘access with freedom into the holiest of all.’ In one word, ‘it made nothing perfect’” (John Brown).

“For finding fault with them, He saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” (verse 8).

The opening “For” denotes that the apostle now confirms what he had just affirmed in verses 6, 7: the proof is found in what immediately follows. The “finding fault” may refer either to the old covenant, or to the people themselves who were under it: finding fault “with it” or “with them.” In view of what is added in verse 9 the translation of the A.V. is to be preferred. It was against the people that God complained for their having broken His covenant.

“He saith, Behold, the days come,” etc. The word “Behold” announces the importance of what follows, and calls to a diligent and admiring attention of the same. “Behold” bids us be filled with wonderment at this marvel of grace. It is indeed striking to observe that the apostle did not rely upon logical deductions and inferences, conclusive though they were. A change of priesthood necessarily involved a change of covenant, or dispensational administration. Nevertheless, obvious as this was, Paul rested not until he *proved* his assertions with a definite and pertinent “thus saith the Lord.” He would not have the faith of the Hebrews stand in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God. Blessed example for God’s servants today to follow. Alas that so many people are contented with the dogmatic assertions of some man who “ought to know what he is saying,” instead of demanding clear proof from the Scriptures.

The text which the apostle here quotes in proof of his assertion is taken from Jeremiah 31:31. It is most blessed to note the time when God gave this precious promise to His people. Beautifully has Adolph Saphir pointed out,

“It is in the night of adversity that the Lord sends forth bright stars of consoling hope. When the darkest clouds of woe were gathering above Jerusalem, and the prophet himself was in the lowest depths of sorrow, God gave to him the most glorious prophecies of Judah’s great redemption and future blessedness. The advent and reign of Messiah, the Lord our righteousness the royal dominion and priesthood of Israel’s Redeemer, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the renewal and restoration of God’s chosen people, the days of unbroken prosperity and blessedness — all the golden Messianic future was predicted in the last days of Jerusalem, when the magnificent fabric of its temple was about to sink into the dust, and its walls and palaces were about to be thrown prostrate on the ground.”

This new covenant God promised to make with “the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.” The word, “Israel” is used in the Scriptures in no less than four distinct senses.

First, it is the name which God gave to Jacob when he wrestled with the angel and prevailed as a prince (Genesis 32:28).

Second, it denotes his fleshly descendants called “the children of Israel,” that

is, the Jewish nation.

Third, it is employed of the ten tribes, the kingdom of Samaria or Ephraim, in contradistinction from the kingdom of Judah, and this, after the Nation was rent asunder in the days of Jeroboam.

Fourth, it is applied spiritually to the whole of God's people (Galatians 6:16). To which we may add,

Fifth, in Isaiah 49:3 (note the verses which follow) it appears to be applied to Christ Himself, as identified with His people. Personally, we believe that it is the second and the fourth of these usages that obtain in our present passage.

The law of *first mention* helps us here. The initial occurrence of any expression or word in Scripture defines its scope and fixes, very largely, its consequent significance. So it is in this case. The name "Israel" was first given to Jacob: from that point onwards he is the man with a double name, sometimes being referred to as Jacob, sometimes as Israel, according as the "old man" or "new man" was uppermost within him. This more than hints at the *double* application of this name; oftentimes it is applied to Jacob's *natural* descendants, at other times to his *spiritual* brethren. When Christ affirmed of Nathanael "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile" (John 1:47), it was the same as though He had said, "Behold a true Israelite, a spiritual prince with *God*." To insist that "Israel" *always* signifies the fleshly descendants of Jacob betrays excuseless ignorance: why does the Holy Spirit speak of "Israel after the flesh" in 1 Corinthians 10:18 if there be no Israel *after the spirit*!

The writer has no doubt whatever in his mind that the time is not far distant when God is going to resume His dealings with the Jewish people, restore them unto their own land, send back their Messiah and Redeemer, save them from their sins, and fulfill to them His ancient promise through Jeremiah. Nevertheless, we are fully assured that it is a serious mistake to *limit* the prophecy of Jeremiah (or any other prediction) to a *single* fulfillment. It is abundantly clear from 2 Corinthians 3 that Christians in this dispensation are already enjoying the good of the new covenant which God has made with them. Moreover, are we not reminded at the Lord's table of our Savior's words, "This cup is the new testament," or "covenant in My blood" (1 Corinthians 11:25)?

It should be pointed out that Old Testament Israel were typical and mystically significant of the whole Church of God. For that reason were the promises of grace under the old economy given unto the saints of God under the name of “Israel,” “Judah,” etc. (carefully compare Romans 2:28, 29), because they were types of those who should really and effectually be made partakers of them. Hence it is that in 2 Corinthians 1:20 we are told that “All the promises of God in Him (Christ) are Yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God *by us.*” Hence it is we read that

“Jesus Christ was a Minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises unto the fathers, *and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy*” (Romans 15:8, 9).

And hence it is that the apostle Paul writing to Christians says, “*Having therefore these promises*” — the preceding verses quoting from Leviticus 26:12, etc! For the same reason in Hebrews 13:6 the Christian is assured that the promise which the Lord made to Joshua belongs to him too.

Thus, by “the house of Israel” and the “house of Judah” in Hebrews 8:8 we understand, first, the mystical and spiritual Israel and Judah; second, the application of this covenant to the literal and fleshly Israel and Judah in the day to come. In other words, we regard those expressions as denominating the whole Church of elect believers, typified of old, by the fleshly descendants of Abraham. Nor is it without reason that the Holy Spirit has here used *both* these names: we believe His (veiled) design was to take in God’s elect among the Jews *and* the Gentiles. Our reason for believing this is because that in the very first inspired sermon preached after the new covenant had been established, Peter said to the *convicted* Jews,

“the promise is unto you, and to your children (descendants) and to all that are afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:39).

It is indeed remarkable that the two emphasized words have a *double* reference.

First, they applied to the literal house of Israel, who were then *outside the* land, in the dispersion (Daniel 9:7);

Second, to elect Gentiles, away from God: see Ephesians 2:13!

At the time God announced His purpose and promise through Jeremiah, the

fleshly descendants of Abraham were divided in *two* hostile groups. They had separate kings and separate centers of worship. They were at enmity with one another. As such they fitly adumbrated the great division between God's elect among the Jews and the Gentiles in their natural and dispensational state. There was a middle wall or partition between them (Ephesians 2:14). There was "enmity" between them (Ephesians 2:16). But just as God announced through Ezekiel (37:16, 17) that the diversified houses of Judah and Israel should "become one," so His elect among the Jews and the Gentiles are now one in Christ (Ephesians 2:14-18)! Therefore are all born-again believers designated the "children" and "seed" of *Abraham* (Galatians 3:7, 29), and thus are they "blessed *with* faithful Abraham" (Galatians 3:9).

"Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in My covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord" (verse 9).

The contrast between the two covenants is first expressed negatively: "not according." The differences between them are many and great. The former was mainly typical, the latter has the substance. The one was administered under an imperfect priesthood, the latter under a perfect one. The one had to do, primarily, with that which was external; the other is, mainly, internal. The Mosaic covenant was restricted to one nation, the Christian is international in its scope.

The old covenant is spoken of as dating from the day when the Lord took Israel, "by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt." This language emphasizes the woeful and helpless condition that Israel was then in: unable to deliver themselves out of their bondage, like children incapable of walking unless supported and led. As Deuteronomy 1:31 says, "The Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went." So in Hosea 11:3 God says, "I taught them to go, taking them by the arms." Such expressions also accentuate the infinite condescension of God toward His people: that He should (so to speak) bow down Himself to reach them in their lowly estate.

"But they continued not in My covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord." "They soon forgot God's works, they waited not for His counsel" (Psalm 106:13). The principal reference is to Israel's conduct at Sinai, when

during the absence of Moses in the mount, they “thrust Him from them” (Acts 7:39), and made and worshipped the golden calf. That was but prophetic or indicative of their whole history. Their shameful conduct is mentioned here for the purpose of magnifying that marvelous grace that shall yet make the new covenant with such a people. “I regarded them not” refers to God’s governmental dealings with Israel: the severity He exercised, consuming them in the wilderness. In view of which we may well heed that searching word, “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest *he* fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

CHAPTER 38

THE TWO COVENANTS

(HEBREWS 8:10-13)

The subject of the two covenants supplies the principal key which unlocks for us the meaning of God's dispensational dealings with His people here on earth. Its importance and blessedness is not surpassed by anything within the entire range of Divine revelation. Yet, sad to say, it is something which is scarcely known at all today by the majority of professing Christians. Covenant-relationship has always been the basis on which God has dealt with His people. The foundation of all is the Everlasting Covenant, a compact or agreement which God made with Christ as the Head and Representative of the whole election of grace. We would refer the interested reader unto two articles upon it, which appeared in the January and February 1930 issues of this magazine. What we shall here endeavor to treat of is the *administration* of that covenant, as it was made known by God, and the various *forms* in which it was established among His saints.

There was an original covenant made with Adam and all mankind in him: see Hosea 6:7 margin. This consisted of an agreement between God and man concerning obedience and disobedience, reward and punishment. To that covenant were annexed promises and threatenings, which were expressed in visible signs or symbols; the first, in the tree of life; the latter in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. By these did God *establish the* original law of creation as a covenant. On the part of man, it was required that he should accept of this law. It was a covenant of works, and had no mediator. That arrangement or constitution formed the basis on which God dealt with Adam, but it ceased as soon as sin entered the world. God had provided a way of salvation for His own elect apart from their personal obligation to sinless obedience *as the condition of life*, and that through their Surety discharging all their responsibilities in His own person. This was made known in the first promise God proclaimed: Genesis 3:15. All who receive the grace which is tendered through the promises of the Gospel, are delivered from the curse of that covenant which Adam, their legal representative, broke.

But though this first earthly covenant is no longer administered as a "*covenant*," nevertheless, all those of Adam's descendants who receive not the grace of God as it is tendered to them in the promises of the Gospel, *are*

under the law and curse of the Adamic covenant, because the obedience which it requires of the creature unto the Creator, and the penalty which it threatens and the curse it pronounces upon the disobedient, has never been met for them by a substitute. Therefore, if any man believe not, the wrath of God (not “cometh,” but) *abideth* on him (John 3:36), and this, because the command and curse, which result from the relation between man and his Maker, and the inflexible righteousness of God as the supreme Governor and Judge of all mankind, must be fulfilled.

Now the children of Israel were not formally placed under the Adamic covenant absolutely, as a *covenant of life*, for, from the days of Abraham the *promise* (a renewal of Genesis 3:15; see Genesis 12:1-3, 17:6-8, etc.) was given unto him and his seed. Let it be carefully noted that in Galatians 3:17 the apostle proves that no “law” would afterwards be given, nor covenant made, that should or could disannul that promise. Had Israel been brought under the Adamic covenant of works it *would* have disannulled the promise, for that covenant and the promise of Grace are diametrically opposed. Moreover, had Israel come formally under the Adamic covenant of works they were all under the curse, and so had all perished eternally.

That there were other *federal* transactions between God and His Church *before* the giving of the law at Sinai, is abundantly clear from the book of Genesis. God entered into covenant with Abraham, making him promises on behalf of his descendants, and appointing a solemn outward seal for its confirmation and establishment. That covenant contained the very nature and essence of what is termed the “new covenant.” Proof of this is found in the fact that the Lord Jesus is said to be “a Mediator of the circumcision, for the truth of God to *confirm* the promises made to the fathers” (Romans 15:8). As He was the Mediator of the new covenant, so far was He from rescinding the promises which God made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that it belonged to His office to ratify and establish them. But it was at Sinai that the Lord entered formally into covenant with Israel as a nation (Hebrews 8:9), a covenant which had all the institutions of Divine worship annexed to it (Hebrews 9:1-6).

In contrast from the covenant which God made with Israel at Sinai, Christ is made “the Mediator of a better covenant” (Hebrews 8:6). This is the covenant of grace, being so called in contrast from that of works, which was made with

us in Adam. For these two, grace and works, do divide the ways of our relation to God, being opposite the one to the other (Romans 11:6). Of this covenant of grace Christ was its Mediator from the beginning of the world, namely, from the giving of the first promise in Genesis 3:15, for that promise was given in view of His incarnation and all that He should accomplish by His future and actual mediation. Christ was as truly the Surety of Abel as He was of the apostle Paul, and God had “respect unto” (was favorable toward and accepted) the one on the ground of Christ’s surety-ship as much as He did the other. To this it may be replied, If such be the case, then wherein lies the superior privilege of the Gospel-dispensation over that of the Mosaic?

In seeking an answer to the above question, it is needful to recognize (as was pointed out in our last article) that the “new covenant” referred to in Hebrews 8 is not the new covenant *absolutely* considered, and as it had been *virtually* administered from the days of Genesis 3:15 in a way of *promise*. For considered thus it was quite consistent with the covenant that God made with Israel at Sinai: in Galatians 3:17 the apostle proves that the renewal of the covenant (as a promise) to Abraham, was in no way abrogated by the giving of the law. Instead, in Hebrews 8 the apostle is treating of such *an establishment* of the new covenant as demanded the revocation of the Sinaitic constitution. What this “establishment” was, is made clear in Hebrews 9 and 10: it was the *ordinances of worship* connected with it.

When Christianity had been formally established by God, not only was the old covenant annulled, but the entire system of sacred worship whereby it was administered, was set aside. When the “new covenant” was first given in the way of a *promise* (Genesis 3:15, renewed Genesis 12, 17, etc.), it did not introduce a system of worship and privileges expressive of the same. But the *promise* of the new covenant *was* included in the Mosaic covenant, nor was it inconsistent with its rights and ceremonies, nay not even with them composed into a yoke of bondage. And why? Because all those rites and ceremonies were added *after the* making of the covenant in Exodus chapters 19 and 24; nevertheless what was added did not and could not overthrow the promise. As the Mosaic system was completed, then all the worship of the Church was to proceed from it and to be conformed to it.

No sinner was ever saved but by virtue of the new covenant and the mediation of Christ therein. The new covenant of grace (in contrast from the

old covenant of works made with the human race in Adam) was extant and effectual throughout the Old Testament era. Then what is the “better covenant” with its “better promises” which the death of Christ has inaugurated? We say again, it is not a new covenant *absolutely* considered. There are many plain passages in the Psalms and the Prophets which show that the Church of old knew and believed the blessed truth of justification and salvation by Christ, and walked with God in the faith thereof: compare Romans 4:3-9. Let those who have access to the incomparable and immortal “*Institutes*” of Calvin read carefully chapters 9–11 in book 2.

“The Church under the Old Testament, had the same promise of Christ, the same interest in Him by faith, remission of sins, reconciliation with God, justification and salvation by the same way and means that believers have under the New. And whereas the essence and substance of the covenant consists in these things, they are not said to be under another covenant, but only a different *administration* of it. But this was so different from that which is established in the Gospel after the coming of Christ, that it hath the appearance and name of another covenant” (John Owen).

The leading differences between the two *administrations* of the covenant of grace may be reduced to the following heads.

First, the *manner* in which the love of God in Christ is made known. The miracle recorded in Mark 8:23, 24 illustrates and adumbrates the two states. The Old Testament saints had sight, but the Object set before their faith was seen at a distance, and through clouds and shadows. The New Testament saints “with open face behold the glory of God in a mirror” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Second, in its *more plentiful* communication of grace unto the Church: John 1:16. Old Testament believers had grace given to them (Genesis 6:8, etc.), but we an “abundance of grace” (Romans 5:17).

Third, in our *access* to God. The revelation of God at Sinai filled the people with terror; His revelation of Himself in Christ, fills us with joy. They were shut out from the holy place; we have freedom to approach His throne (Hebrews 4:16).

Fourth, the *extent* of the dispensation of Divine grace. Under the Old

Testament it was restricted to one nation; now it extends to all nations.

The covenant of grace was the same, as to its *substance*, from the beginning. It passed through the whole dispensation of times before the law, and under the law, of the same nature and efficacy, unalterable, everlasting, “ordered in all things and sure.” The covenant of grace considered absolutely was the promise of grace in and by Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 1:9, Titus 1:2), and that was the *only* way and means of salvation unto the elect from the entrance of sin. Absolutely, in Old Testament times, the covenant consisted only in *promise*, and as such is referred to in Acts 2:39, Hebrews 6:14-16. The full and lawful “establishment” of it (Hebrews 8:6), whence it became *formally* a “covenant” unto the whole Church, was future only. Two things were needed to change the “promise” into a “new covenant”: the shedding of the blood of the only Sacrifice which belonged to it, and the institution of that worship in keeping therewith.

Whilst the Old Testament Church enjoyed all the *spiritual* benefits of the promise, wherein the *substance* of the covenant is contained, before it was confirmed and made the sole rule of worship unto the Church, it was not inconsistent with the holiness and wisdom of God to bring His people under any other covenant, or prescribe unto them what forms of worship He pleased, for they did not render ineffectual the promise before given. Nor did the institutions of the Mosaic covenant divert from, but rather led to, the future establishment of the promise. Yea, the laws and worship of the Mosaic economy were of present use and advantage to the Church while it remained in its state of minority (Galatians 4). For much of the above we are indebted, under God, to the writings of John Owen (1670 A.D.). We now turn again to our passage.

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put My laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people” (verse 10).

“The design of the apostle, or what is the general argument which he is in pursuit of, must still be borne in mind, while considering the testimonies which he produceth in the confirmation of it. His design is to prove that the Lord Christ is the Mediator and Surety of a *better* covenant, than that wherein the service of God was managed

by the high priests according to the law. For hence it follows, that His priesthood is greater and far more excellent than theirs. To this end he doth not only prove that God promised to make such a covenant, but also declares the nature and properties of it, in the words of the prophets. And so, by comparing it with the former covenant, he manifests its excellency above it. In particular, in this testimony, the imperfection of that covenant is demonstrated from its issue. For it did not effectually maintain peace and mutual love between God and the people; but being broken by them, they were thereon rejected of God. This rendered all the other benefits and advantages of it, useless. Wherefore, the apostle insists from the prophet, on those promises of this other covenant, which infallibly prevent the like issue, securing the people's obedience forever, and so the love and relation of God unto them as their God" (John Owen).

The apostle is here contrasting the Christian dispensation from the Mosaic. Having in the previous verse declared in general the abrogation of the old covenant, because of its inadequacy through the weakness of the flesh, he here describes the new covenant which has supplanted it. He shows it to be so excellent in its constitution that none should object against its substitution in place of the old: such is the force of the opening "For." The formal "this is the covenant" announces that it is the duty of Christians to make themselves distinctly and fully informed in the privileges belonging unto them. It was for this very end that the writings of the evangelists and apostles were added to those of the prophets. This new covenant is made with "the house of Israel," which we understand mystically, comprising under it all the people of God. It is taken spiritually for the whole Church, the "Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16).

"After those days" is in antithesis from "in the day" of verse 9, which was an indefinite expression covering the interval between God's sending Moses into Egypt and the arrival of Israel before Sinai. "After those days" means, following the Old Testament era. The dispensation which succeeds that is called "the time of reformation" in Hebrews 9:10. Now just as God's making of the first covenant with Israel was preceded by many things that were preparatory to the solemn establishment of the same — such as His sending of Moses to announce unto them His designs of grace, His delivering them

out of the house of bondage, His miraculous conducting of them through the Red Sea, His making known His law at Sinai — so the new covenant was *gradually* made and established, and that by sundry acts preparatory for it or confirmatory of it. As this is so little understood we must enter into details.

First, the introduction of the new covenant was made by the ministry of John the Baptist (Luke 16:16). He was sent to prepare the way of the Lord. Until his appearing the Jews were bound absolutely unto the covenant at Sinai, without any alteration or addition to any ordinance of worship. But John's ministry was "the beginning of the Gospel" (Mark 1:1,2). He called the people off from resting in the privileges of the old covenant (Matthew 3:8-10), and instituted a new ordinance of worship, baptism. He pointed away from Moses to the Lamb of God. Thus, his ministry was the beginning of the accomplishment of God's promise through Jeremiah.

Second, the incarnation and ministry of the Lord Jesus was a further advance unto the same. His appearing in the flesh laid an axe to the root of the whole Mosaic dispensation (Matthew 3:10), though the tree was not immediately cut down. By His miracles and teaching Christ furnished abundant proof that He was the Mediator of the new covenant.

Third, the way for the introduction of the new covenant having been prepared, it was solemnly enacted and confirmed in and by Christ's *death*: thereby the "promise" became a "testament" (Hebrews 9:14-16). From that time onwards, the old covenant and its administration had received its full accomplishment (Ephesians 2:14-16, Colossians 2:14, 15), and it continued to abide only in the long-suffering of God, to be taken out of the way in His own time and manner.

Fourth, the new covenant was further established in the *resurrection* of Christ. The old covenant could not be abrogated till its curse had been borne, and that was discharged absolutely when Christ was "loosed from the pains of death" and delivered from the grave.

Fifth, the new covenant was promulgated and confirmed on the day of Pentecost, answering to the promulgation of the law at Sinai, some weeks after Israel had been delivered out of Egypt. From Pentecost onwards the whole Church of God was absolved from any duty with respect unto the old covenant and the worship of it (although it was not manifest as yet unto their consciences), and the ordinances of worship and all the institutions of the

new covenant now became obligatory upon them.

Sixth, the question was formally and officially raised as to the continuance of the obligatory form of the old covenant, and the contrary was expressly affirmed by the apostles under the infallible superintendence of the Holy Spirit: Acts 15:1-29.

But at this point a difficulty, already noticed, may recur to our minds: Were not the things mentioned in Hebrews 8:10-13, the grace and mercy therein expressed, actually communicated to God's elect both before Sinai and afterwards? Did not all who truly believed and feared God enjoy these same identical blessings? Unquestionably. What then is the solution? This: the apostle is not here contrasting the internal operations of Divine grace in the Old and New Testament saints, but as Calvin rightly taught, the "reference is to the economical condition of the Church." The contrast is between that which *characterized* the Judaic and the Christian dispensations in the *outward* confirmation of the covenant. While there were individuals like David and Daniel, perhaps many such, in whom the Spirit wrought effectually, yet it is evident that the great majority of Abraham's natural descendants had no experimental acquaintance with the external revelation God had given.

"I will put My laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts." That this is not an experience peculiar to Christians or restored Christians is clear from Psalm 37:30, 31, "The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment. The law of His God is *in his heart*." So, too in Psalm 19:7, 8, we read,

"The law of the Lord is perfect converting the soul... the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart."

But that the major portion of Israel, or even a considerable number of them, were regenerated, at any period in the lengthy history of that nation, there is nothing whatever to show: instead, there is very much to the contrary. This experience is enjoyed by none save God's elect, and in every age they have been but a "little flock."

"I will put My laws into their minds." These words have reference to the effectual operations of the Spirit in His supernatural and saving illumination of our understandings, whereby they are made habitually conformable unto

the whole law of God, which is our rule of obedience in the new covenant. The carnal mind is enmity against God, and is not subject to His law, neither indeed can be (Romans 8:7). But when we are renewed by the Spirit, He works in us a submission to the authority and revealed will of God. As the Lord opened the heart of Lydia “that she *attended unto* the things which were spoken of Paul” (Acts 16:14), so in the miracle of the new birth, the Christian is given an ear to heed and a mind to perceive the holiness, justice, and goodness of God’s law. Yea, that law is effectually *applied* to him, so that it becomes the former of his thoughts, the subject of his meditation, and the regulator of his ways.

The preacher may announce the law of God to the outward ear, but only the Spirit can engrave it on the mind. The realization of this fact ought to drive every minister to his knees. No matter how diligently he has prepared his sermon, no matter how clearly and faithfully he expounds God’s truth, no matter how solemnly and searchingly he endeavors to press it on the individual’s conscience, unless God Himself gives His Word an entrance into the soul, nothing spiritual and eternal is accomplished. Nowhere is the deadness of the “churches” more plainly evidenced today than by the absence of concerted and definite prayer immediately before and immediately after the Word is preached: the “song service” has been substituted for the prayer service. O that God’s own people might be aroused to the need of their coming together and crying, “Lord, open the eyes of these men” (2 Kings 6:20).

“And write them in their hearts.” It is this which renders the former part actually effectual. The “heart” as distinguished from the “mind” comprises the affections and the will. First, the understanding is informed, and then the heart is reformed. An active principle of obedience is imparted, and this is nothing else than a *love* for God Himself. Where there is a real love for God, there is a genuine desire and determination to *please* Him. The heart of the natural man is “alienated” from God and opposed to His authority. That is why, at Sinai, God wrote the commandments upon stones — not so much to secure the outward letter of them, as to represent the *hardness of the hearts* of the people unto whom they were given. But at regeneration God takes away the heart of stone, and gives a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26) — pliable, living, responsive.

Let each reader pause here and lift up his or her heart to God, asking for grace and wisdom to honestly examine themselves in the light of this verse. You may sit under a sound and scriptural ministry every Sabbath, but *what effect* has it upon your inner man? You may be well acquainted with the letter of the Word, but how far is it *directing* the details of your daily walk? Does your mind dwell most on temporal or eternal things, material or spiritual? What engages your thoughts in your seasons of recreation? Is your heart fixed upon God or upon the world? There are thousands of professing Christians who can *talk* glibly of the Scriptures, but whose lives give no evidence that *God* has written His laws in their hearts. Are *you* one of this class?

“And I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people.” This expresses covenant-relationship. It is placed in the center of these promises because it is the spring from which the grace of the other blessings doth proceed. The wicked are living in this world “without God, and without hope” (Ephesians 2:12), but unto the righteous He says, “I am thy Shield, thy exceeding great Reward” (Genesis 15:1). “Happy is that people, that is in such a case, happy is that people, whose God is the Lord” (Psalm 144:15). When He says “I will be to them a God” it means that He will act toward His people according to all that is implied in the name of *God*. He will be their Lawgiver, their Counselor, their Protector, their Guide. He will supply all their needs, deliver from all dangers, and bring them unto everlasting felicity. He will be faithful and long-suffering, bearing with their frailties, never leaving nor forsaking them. “And they shall be My people” expresses both a dignity and a duty. Their dignity is set forth in 1 Peter 2:9; their duty in the verses which follow.

“And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest” (verse 11).

These words point a contrast from the general spiritual ignorance which obtained among the Jews: cf. Isaiah 1:3, etc.

“The words in the 11th verse are not to be understood absolutely, but comparatively. They intimate, that under that covenant there shall be a striking contrast to the ignorance which characterized the great body of those who were under the Old Covenant; that the revelation

of the Divine will shall be far more extensive and clear under the new than under the old economy; and that there shall be a correspondingly enlarged communication of the enlightened influences of the Holy Spirit. They probably also are intended to suggest the idea, that that kind of knowledge which is the peculiar glory of the New Covenant is a kind of knowledge which cannot be communicated by brother teaching brother, but comes directly from Him — the great Teacher, whose grand characteristic is this, that whom He teaches, He makes apt to learn” (John Brown).

“And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord.” During the Mosaic economy, and particularly in the last century before Christ, there was an external teaching of the Law, which the people trusted and rested in without any regard for God’s teaching by the inward circumcision of the heart. Such teaching had degenerated into rival schools and sects, such as the Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, Essenes, etc., and they made void the Word of God through their traditions (Mark 7:13). It was against such the last of Israel’s prophets had announced.

“The Lord will cut off... the master and the scholar out of the tabernacles of Jacob” (Malachi 2:12).

Or, our verse probably has more direct reference to the general knowledge of God which obtained during the Mosaic economy, when He revealed Himself under types and shadows, and was known through “parables and dark sayings.” These were now supplanted by the full blaze of the Gospel’s light.

“For all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest.” God is now known in the full revelation which He has made of Himself in the person of His incarnate Son: John 1:18. As we are told in 1 John 5:20,

“And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may *know* Him that is true”:

“know Him” in the sense that we recognize, own, and practically obey Him as *God*. This spiritual, experimental, vital, saving knowledge of God is now communicated unto all of His elect. As the Savior announced, “They shall be all taught of God” (John 6:45): taught His will and all the mysteries of godliness, which by the Word are revealed. This “knowledge” of God cannot be imparted by any external teaching alone, but is the result of the Spirit’s

operations, though He frequently, yea generally, uses the oral and written ministry of God's servants as His instruments therein.

“For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more” (verse 12).

“This is the great foundational promise and grace of the new covenant. For though it be last expressed, yet, in order of nature, it precedeth the other mercies and privileges mentioned, and is the foundation of the communication of them unto us. This the casual ‘for’ at the beginning of the verse doth demonstrate. What I have spoken, saith the Lord, shall be accomplished, ‘For I will be merciful,’ etc., without which there could be no participation of the other things mentioned. Wherefore, not only an addition of new grace and mercy is expressed in these words, but a reason also is rendered why, or on what grounds, He would bestow on them those other mercies” (John Owen).

In verse 12 a reason is given why God bestows the wondrous blessings enumerated in verses 10, 11. The word here rendered “merciful” is *propitious*, for it is not absolute mercy without any satisfaction having been taken by justice, but grace shown on the ground of a propitiation: cf. Romans 3:24, 25. Christ died to render God propitious toward sinners (Hebrews 2:17), and in and through Him alone is God merciful toward the sins of His people. Just so long as Christ is rejected, the sinner is under the curse. But as soon as He is received, the blessings described in verses 10-12 become his. Note there are just seven blessings named, which exemplifies the perfection of the new covenant.

It is to be noted that no less than three terms are used in verse 12 to describe the fearful evils of which the sinner is guilty, thus emphasizing his obnoxiousness to the holy God, and magnifying the grace which saves him. “Unrighteousness” signifies a wrong done unto God, against man's sovereign Ruler and Benefactor. “Sin” is a missing of the mark, the glorifying of God, which is what ought ever to be aimed at. “Iniquity” has the force of lawlessness, a setting up of my will against God's, a living to please self rather than for His glory. How marvelous is the propitious favor of God toward those who are guilty of such multiplied enormities! The apostle's object was to point another contrast between the covenants. That which

characterized Judaism was a reign of law and justice: that which distinguishes Christianity is the “Throne of Grace.” Note that no “conditions” are here stipulated. But does not the new covenant require repentance and faith? Assuredly: Mark 1:15. But He who requires these has promised also to work them in His people: Acts 5:31.

“In that He saith, A new, He hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away” (verse 13).

That the translators failed to perceive the drift of the apostle’s reasoning here is evident from their adding the word “covenant” in italics. This was not only unnecessary, but its introduction serves to hide the force of the first half of this verse. In it the apostle draws an inference from what God had said through Jeremiah. He singles out one word, “new,” and on it bases an argument: because Christianity is the “establishment” of the new covenant, then the preceding economy must have grown “old,” and “old” is significative of that which draws near its end! How this shows us, once more, that every jot and tittle of Scripture is authoritative, full of meaning, and of sufficient evidence for what may be deduced from it!

“Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.” Here is the conclusion of the apostle’s argument. If the first covenant had been adequate no place had been sought for a second (verse 7). But place *was* sought for the second (verse 8), therefore the first covenant was not faultless. The old covenant had continued for fifteen hundred years, from Moses to Christ; but its purpose had now been served. God gave Israel more than a hint that the Mosaic economy would not last forever, when his providence permitted the nation to be carried down into Babylon. Upon their return from captivity, neither the temple nor its priesthood were ever restored to their pristine glory. And now, as the apostle wrote, in less than ten years Jerusalem and the temple were completely destroyed. If then the Jewish covenant was abolished because it was “old,” how much more ought the “old man” to be put off (Ephesians 4:24), and the “old leaven” purged out (1 Corinthians 5:7)!

FOOTNOTE:

[1] *Deo volente*: God willing.