

Commentary Part II, Chapters 9-13

HEBREWS

IVP New Testament Commentary Series

by Ray C. Stedman

10:1 The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming --not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. 2 If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. 3 But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, 4 because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. 5 Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; 6 with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. 7 Then I said, 'Here I am --it is written about me in the scroll-- I have come to do your will, O God.'" 8 First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). 9 Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. 10 And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. 11 Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. 13 Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, 14 because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. 15 The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: 16 "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds." 17 Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more." 18 And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin. 19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another --and all the more as you see the Day approaching. 26 If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, 27 but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. 28 Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 10:29 How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." 31 It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. 32 Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. 33 Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. 34 You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and

lasting possessions. 35 So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. 36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. 37 For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. 38 But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." 39 But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

Let Us Go On! (10:1-39)

It would be foolish indeed to prefer reading a cookbook to eating a good meal when one is hungry. Not that there is anything wrong with reading a cookbook---it can be very enlightening---but it is not very nourishing! Yet some of the original readers of Hebrews were doing something very much like that. They preferred to content themselves with the externals of faith---such as the law, the Aaronic priesthood and animal offerings---and to ignore the fulfillment of these things in the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. They wanted the cookbook rather than the meal!

As we have seen, the tabernacle in the wilderness, with its regulations and sacrifices, was an accurate and divinely drawn picture of the sacrifice of Jesus and the new arrangement for living which would be available to believers in Christ. But it could only describe these realities up to a point. It was both a comparison and a contrast.

I carry a picture of my wife in my wallet and, when I am away from home, I find it comforting to look at it. But it is quite inadequate, for it is not my wife, only a picture of her. I can look at it, but I cannot have a conversation with it. I cannot laugh together with it, and I cannot persuade it to cook any meals! It is an accurate representation of the real thing, but also a far cry from it. So the law and the tabernacle could never do for believers of any age what the living Christ can do. This is the continuing argument of the writer in chapter 10.

A Willing Sacrifice (10:1-10)

A new aspect, however, is seen in chapter 10. The sacrifice of Jesus was one he came into the world prepared to make! It was no impulsive commitment on his part; he made it only after he had observed human misery. In verses 1-4, the author builds on a point he has made earlier---that the annual repetition of sacrifices in the old order indicated their inability to actually remove sins. Once again he uses a logical-deduction argument. Had they truly cleansed the conscience, there would have been no need to repeat them for the offerers; they would have seen themselves as cleansed from sin's defilement forever. But these sacrifices could not remove sin because they were based only on the death of animals.

The annual repetition did remind offerers that they were still very much sinners and still very much in need of an adequate substitute if their sin was ever to be removed. The sacrifices were but *a shadow of the good things that are coming*---not the realities themselves. A shadow indicates a reality, but has no substance in itself. I waited on a downtown street corner one day for a friend who always wore a Western hat. Suddenly I saw his distinctive shadow on the sidewalk and knew that he was standing just around the corner. I could not actually see him, but I knew he was there. So the offerings witnessed to the person of Christ and his sacrifice, though they were not that reality themselves. They were but his shadow that indicated he was soon to appear.

The *good things that are coming* are the equivalent of *make perfect* which the repeated sacrifice of the Day of Atonement could never achieve. To *make perfect* a sinner before God would be to have sin and its effects totally removed. These include not only the effects on the spirit and soul but the body also---regeneration, full sanctification and resurrection. Though resurrection awaits the final coming of Christ, nevertheless, full and continuing access to God, "without the constant necessity of removing the barrier of freshly accumulated sin" (Bruce 1964:227), was available by faith to every believer in Jesus throughout the believer's lifetime (Rom 5:1-2).

These animal deaths were unwilling, even unconscious, sacrifices of a lower and quite different nature and therefore inadequate substitutes for humans made in the image of God. *It is impossible, says the author, for*

the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin. Isaiah had quoted God long before saying, "I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats" (Is 1:11). Nevertheless, despite this limitation, through the deaths of many animals, one unchanging message was being pounded out. Every sacrifice declared it and every offering told the same story. It was burned in blood and smoke into every listening heart. The essential point for a God-approved dealing with sin in one's life was that a life be laid down. Every dying animal meant a life brought to an end. Sin was serious; it forfeited life. Unless the sin could actually be removed, the sinner must die. To save the sinner from such a fate, an equal and willing substitute must be found. Such a substitute the author now finds described in the words of Psalm 40.

Verses 5-7 quote Psalm 40:6-8 from the Septuagint. They describe, in words directly ascribed to Christ, his complete willingness to sacrifice himself to remove our sins. His was a self-giving life, not self-loving, as animal sacrifices were. Though there are different wordings here than the Hebrew text presents, nevertheless the central point is clear. Jesus saw himself described in the Suffering Servant passages of the Old Testament (*it is written about me in the scroll*), and willingly set himself to fulfilling that role in his incarnation (*Here I am....I have come to do your will O God*). Wholehearted obedience is the quality which God desires in sacrifices. He makes the point many times in the Old Testament, notably, in 1 Samuel 15:22; Isaiah 1:11-14; and Amos 5:21-22. As Morris rightly says, "God takes no delight in the routine performance of the ritual of sacrifice" (1983:91). Undoubtedly, he feels the same way about routine worship services today! (32)

That none of his readers should miss this important point the writer takes pains to indicate clearly, in verses 8-10, the meaning of the quote from Psalm 40. He acknowledges that though God authorized the animal sacrifices of the past, he did not delight in them. Then he stresses the fact that Christ deliberately set himself to do the will of the Father, though he knew it would lead to pain and separation. Intimations of Gethsemane are certainly present in these words, though it was on the cross that they were fully carried out. Here the writer also declares that the death of Jesus, by fulfilling the will of the Father, completely replace the provision of animal deaths which had provided some degree of forgiveness before. Finally, he announces the only possible conclusion: it is by the fulfillment of the will of God in the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ (note the double name, only here in Hebrews) that we (all believers) have been made holy. The Greek expression for *made holy*, indicates action with a lasting effect. We have been made holy by the death of Jesus, and we remain holy even though we struggle with daily weakness and sin. This should be borne in mind when we come to the statement in 12:14, "without holiness no one will see the Lord." It is holiness obtained by faith, not by self-righteous effort, and it is not lost by momentary failure. "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!" (Rom 8:1).

A Complete Sacrifice (10:11-18)

One peculiarity of the tabernacle was that it contained no chairs. The priests were not permitted to sit, but performed their ministries while standing. Our author maintains in verses 11-12 that this symbolically shows that their work was unfinished so their repeated sacrifices could not finally remove sins. But when Christ had offered himself as a sacrifice *for all time*, he sat down at God's right hand (1:3; 8:1; 12:2) for two excellent reasons (v. 13-14).

First, there was nothing left for him to do except to await the outworking of the salvation he had accomplished on the cross. This would, of course, involve his mediation of the new covenant and his intercession for believers. No further sacrifice of any kind was required or needed. Enough had already been done to deal with every form of sin or rebellion. He could remain figuratively seated until his enemies had been totally rendered impotent (*made his footstool*---an allusion again to Ps 110:1).

Second, his sacrifice was so efficacious that it guaranteed the fine perfection of all those who were *being made holy*. This involved not only the regeneration of the spirit and the salvation of the soul, but also, the resurrection of the body of each true believer. The little-understood term *sanctified* of the KJV has been properly replaced in the NIV by the words *being made holy*. It is both an accomplished fact (10:10) and a continuing process (10:14), a phenomenon found frequently in Scripture. We may not understand such a mystery, but we can revel in its reality, as the writer intends us to do. All progress in the spiritual life comes from personally apprehending a fact that is already true. To put it simply, we must see what we already *are* by God's grace, in order to manifest that fact by godly behavior.

To show that such a condition completely fulfills the promises of the new covenant, the writer quotes again Jeremiah 31:33-34, introducing it with the words *The Holy Spirit also testifies . . .* This reveals once more his conviction that the prophets wrote by the inspiration and authority of God. Verse 16 highlights the new understanding of morality which regeneration gives (1 Jn 5:20); and verse 17 reminds us again of the wonder of total forgiveness of sins. This leads to the simple but conclusive statement of verse 18: where sins have been forgiven, no further sacrifice would do!

The Aaronic priesthood; the tabernacle with its typology, its cleansing rituals and animal sacrifices; and the dietary limitations of Israel---all found completion in the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus and his Melchizedek priesthood. The new covenant is in force for all who truly believe. "The old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor 5:17).

The Privileges of Faith (10:19-25)

The result of the operation of the new covenant in believers' lives is a highly visible transformation of their behavior. It flows from an inward change of attitude which is not dependent on outward circumstances. Believers become highly motivated to live at a new level of behavior and need only a bit of guidance about the *form* that new behavior should take. This powerful new motivation and its legitimate expressions now concern our author.

Twice in verses 19-31 the writer uses the phrase *we have*. Following these, there is thrice repeated the words *let us*. The *we have's* mark provision; *let us* indicates privilege.

First, *we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place*. That "Most Holy Place" is the new life in the Spirit which the New Covenant provides ("I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit"---Is 57:15). As we have seen, it is that part of our humanity (the regenerated human spirit which puts us in touch with heaven) where God and humans meet. Through the death of Jesus a way has been opened for us so we may function as spiritual men and women. When Jesus' blood was shed on the cross, the veil before the Holy of Holies was supernaturally torn from top to bottom. That indicated that the way into the presence of God was now open to all who believe in Jesus. We can, therefore, enter with boldness and with no uncertainty as to our acceptance, since everything rests on the blood of Jesus. There is no doubt about our effectiveness, since we are now, to use Paul's helpful term, "co-laborers with God." When we work, he will work too, and when we bear witness, he will speak through us. (33)

It would be difficult to overestimate the value of confidence in human motivation. It is the proffered goal of any number of special courses, weekend retreats, training classes and personal development programs today. Confidence training is the cry of the hour. In the first century, too, men clearly understood that a confident spirit was essential to success in any enterprise. But as the psalmist made abundantly clear,

Unless the LORD builds the house,
its builders labor in vain.
Unless the LORD watches over the city,
the watchmen stand guard in vain. (Ps 127:1)

By itself, human effort is doomed to ultimate failure. Only that jointly shared effort, when God works through expectant humanity, can be permanently successful. Confidence born of that conviction will always prevail.

But believers have more than a confident spirit. They are also reminded that (2) we have *a great priest over the house of God*. All that the writer has said about the Melchizedek priesthood of Jesus is recalled here. Believers have not only a confident spirit, but also a competent advocate. He is continually available, completely aware of our present situation, and vitally involved with us in working all things together for good. His great concern is the welfare of each member of the household of God, and "we are his house," as the writer has told us unmistakably in 3:6.

Encouraged by these two powerful resources, a confident spirit and a competent advocate, believers are now

exhorted to three specific activities. (1) *Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart.* This "drawing near" must be the motive for all subsequent action. It includes more than formal prayer, since the present tense infers a continual drawing near. As the wick of a lamp continually draws oil for the light, so let us continually draw from God the strength and grace we need to function. This must be done (a) *sincerely*, without religious pretense; (b) *believingly*, in simple faith that God means what he says; (c) *without guilt*, having cleansed the conscience by reliance on the sprinkled blood of Jesus; and (d) *with integrity*, in line with our public profession of commitment to Christ expressed in our baptism. This continual drawing near to God is the great privilege of every believer in Jesus, in contrast to the remoteness of the old covenant which excluded everyone from the holy places except the priests. Even they could not enter except under the most stringent conditions. This "drawing near" is that "access by faith into this grace in which we now stand" which Paul describes in Romans 5:2.

Again the writer exhorts, (2) *Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.* Here *profess* is seen as equivalent to "confess," for if we have drawn near to God, then surely the next logical step is to share the certainty of our hope with others. We can share our great expectation with confidence because *he who promised is faithful.* If those who hear us will act in faith as we have acted; they will experience the same blessing, for God is no respecter of persons. He will do as much for the man or woman next door as he has done for you; he will do as much for the janitor as he will do for the boss, and vice versa. We need not fear that God will let us down as his witnesses by showing favoritism to certain ones. He is faithful to keep his promise to anyone.

Another privilege believers may exercise is summarized in verse 24, (3) *Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.* The supportive love of Christians for one another is a powerful factor in maintaining spiritual vigor. It needs to be awakened in both ourselves and others. That does not envision finger-shaking and lecturing, but encouraging words and good example.

Two suggestions are made to bring this about. First, *let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing.* Corporate worship is not an option for a Christian; it is a necessity. It certainly includes regular attendance at church meetings, but means more than that. It means a willingness to help struggling faith whenever Christians meet. The author had already noted the bad effects of neglecting this on the part of some (3:13). Perhaps those who were hardened felt themselves to be sufficient in themselves, needing no one's help. One commentator suggests that if the real reasons for such separation were recorded, they might be easily recognizable in the modern church (Wiley 1959:342). If church services grow dull or boring they need renewal, not abandonment. The gathering of Christians should be an uplifting and exciting occasion. History has repeatedly shown that where this is neglected or permitted to dim, dullness and blandness soon follow.

A second suggestion for spurring one another on is also given: *Let us encourage one another---and all the more as you see the Day approaching.* The destruction of the temple and of the city of Jerusalem was just around the corner. The empire seethed with unrest and premonitions of disaster. These frightening omens were not viewed as signs of God's inability to control his world, as many interpret similar events today. Rather, they were indications that God was working out his predicted purposes just as Jesus, the prophets and the apostles had foretold. No one could know the hour when "the Day" would begin, but its coming was certain and apparently imminent to them. (34) The Lord himself had instructed his disciples: "When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (Lk 21:28).

It is now apparent as we look back over the centuries that it has been the will of God to have each generation feel that it is living in the very last days of civilization. Each century has found the church fearing the cataclysms of its own time as the last to come. Yet, inexorably, each passing century has moved the world nearer the final end. This sense of imminence is God's device to keep believers expectant and full of hope in the midst of the world's darkness. Evil becomes more subtle in our own day, and the difference between truth and error more difficult to detect. The raucous voices of the age pour forth deceitful lies and society becomes permeated with false concepts widely viewed as truth. We too need to gather together to encourage each other and renew our hope by sturdy reaffirmations of the eternal truths of God's Word.

We are a privileged people; privileged to draw near to the living God; privileged to speak out concerning our flaming hope; and privileged to stir one another up to love and good works. Carl F. H. Henry has well said,

"Many Christians now live among neighbors who, swept by tides of immorality, fear herpes more than they fear Hades, and some even think God is a lofty synonym for gobbledygook" (Henry 1989:152). Every age of Christians has had to live in such a world, and today's Christians are no exception. They must take care, therefore, that their Christian witness is real, practically expressed and based on a thorough knowledge of who they are in Christ. Let no one take this lightly, for in the next section our author flashes a brilliant red light of warning.

A Fourth Warning Against Apostasy (10:26-31)

The writer includes himself ("we") as needing this warning also for it encompasses those who have received a full knowledge (*epignosis*) of the truth. It is directed to those who *deliberately keep on sinning* after they fully understand the way of escape in Jesus. It adds seriousness to the exhortation of verse 25 not to abandon meeting together with other Christians (as the initial Greek *gar*, "for," indicates). This recalls John's warning in 1 John 2:19 concerning those who "went out from us." "Their going," he says, "showed that none of them belonged to us." They had known the way of life, but had not chosen to avail themselves of it, and one early sign of heart apostasy is an unwillingness to continue association with true believers.

Yet despite the advantage of full enlightenment, if there is no change in behavior and sin continues to dominate the life of professed believers, they will find no other hiding place from God's wrath, for there is no other sacrifice than Christ's which will avail for sin. Since by unchanged behavior such individuals give evidence that Christ's sacrifice is rejected, the one way of escape is rejected also. Only judgment and "blazing fire" after death awaits, as one of the enemies of God (2 Thess 1:7). This behavior parallels those "having fallen away" of 6:6, where apostasy also led to irremediable judgment.

The NIV has properly translated the opening phrase of verse 26 as, *if we deliberately keep on sinning*. It is not a sin one can stumble into suddenly. It is not the normal falterings of a Christian still learning how to walk in the Spirit. It has been well termed "the leukemia of noncommitment." It is choosing to live for self behind a Christian veneer and refusing to be delivered from sin's reign by the past sacrifice and present high priestly ministry of Jesus. It is not continual sinning from ignorance as many church members manifest, but occurs after full enlightenment. Such people know of the power of Christ to deliver, but have not chosen to avail themselves of it. Their life may appear to be fairly respectable when judged by the world's standards, but what it is like in God's eyes is described in verses 28-30. [\(35\)](#)

The argument proceeds from the less to the greater, very much as the writer had done in 2:2-3. If immediate death was the penalty for violating the law of Moses (which was but a shadow or picture), how much more should one expect severe judgment for continually repeating, knowingly and deliberately, the reality which is Jesus and his sacrifice! What they have done is threefold:

1. They have *trampled the Son of God underfoot!* The writer chooses a title for Jesus which emphasizes his right to be Lord over all. To trample him under foot is to spurn his right to govern life. Lip service is paid to Christian truth but life is lived as one pleases, even adopting the world's values and standards. As one poet has described it:

He lived for himself, and himself alone;
For himself, and none beside.
Just as if Jesus had never lived,
And as if he had never died!

2. They have treated as something common or trivial the blood of the covenant which has power to make one holy. They have regarded the blood of Jesus as having no more value than the blood of any other man, and therefore, in practice, insisted that religious activities ought to be enough to satisfy God. And they are saying this even though they have previously acknowledged that the death of Christ has ruled out such means. Once they regarded themselves as holy (sanctified) by the blood of Jesus, but now they deny this and reject the cross as unnecessary for acceptance before God.

3. They insult the Spirit of grace. The full understanding of redemptive truth, the awareness that the blood of

Jesus can make one holy, the pleasures of meeting together with other Christians; all have been a gracious ministry of the Holy Spirit to the individuals considered here. Now these are being rejected and treated with contempt. It is an egregious insult to the One who was sent to draw men and women to salvation. It usually means to become guilty of the sin which Jesus called "an eternal sin," unpardonable in any age (Mk 3:29).

Verse 30 supports this view of coming judgment with two references to the Song of Moses, found in Deuteronomy 32. The first refers to the destruction of apostates and is quoted also by Paul in Romans 12:20 in a possibly similar connection. The second quote, however, looks more to the severity of God on those of his own who presumptuously play with sin even when knowing better. Such a case is that of David in 2 Samuel 24, who is given a choice of three painful penalties because of his sin in numbering the people of Israel against the express prohibition of the Lord. If even a greatly beloved believer like David could be dealt with severely by God, how much more would the apostate feel the full extent of divine wrath!

In either case, says our author in verse 31, *It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*. To encounter the living God in the full majesty of his holiness is a terrifying and awesome experience. In the first case cited, it is to experience after death the eternal judgment of raging fire "that will consume the enemies of God." The second case is to know in this life the heavy hand of God's displeasure because of deliberate and sinful choices which one is reluctant to give up. Only God can tell the difference between these two cases, for in human eyes they may appear indistinguishable. But that is the purpose for such warnings as we find in Hebrews. As the writer has said: "See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart" (3:12), "Let us, therefore, be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short" (4:1), and "Let us make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall" (4:11). God is not a power to trifle with, for he can do what we cannot do, namely, read hearts. He can be ruthless if it is necessary to waken those sinners to the evil results they are embracing. That ruthlessness is a hidden blessing when the heart is unaware that it is ignoring the death of Jesus as the only adequate sacrifice for sin. Behind his severity is mercy toward those destroying themselves in unbelief God lovingly seeks to waken them to what they are doing before they reach that stage of heart-hardening which deliberately reject Christ. Beyond that point lies the unpardonable sin.

Encouragement to Persevere (10:32-39)

Once again, as in chapter 6, we see the writer's confidence that most of those he addresses are not apostate, as he describes in verses 32-34. He seeks to recall them to the love and steadfastness they had exhibited when their faith in Jesus was new. They had *received the light* as had also those now threatening apostasy, as verse 26 makes clear. But most had: (1) accepted *insult and persecution* to their own person, or supported others so treated; (2) visited and sustained those put in prison for their faith; and (3) actually felt joy over watching their property confiscated, since they took comfort in the fact that their true treasures were in heaven, not on earth.

Such actions were the product of true faith, and he urges them to keep this confident faith in verses 35-36, since perseverance is the proof of reality. The persecutions and injustices they endured presented strong temptations to give up, to accept the values of society around, and to forget what they had learned about the realities of life, death and eternity. Many are tempted today to *throw away [their] confidence*. Confidence is what motivates appropriate action in view of the times in which one lives.

Carl Henry captures the possibilities of the hour in which we now live: "All the modern gods are sick and dying. The nations that long lusted after power are now terrified by it. Sex has played itself out for many who thought an infinity of it would be heaven on earth. The almighty dollar is falling like a burned-out star. It is a day made-to-order for sons of the prophets, for sons of the apostles, for Protestant Reformers, and for evangelical giants" (Henry 1986:107).

Times of danger especially call for renewed confidence, for confidence in Christ anchors the soul in times of pressure. To throw it away through doubt or neglect is to miss the incredibly rich reward that is waiting just around the corner. The coming of Christ is what God has promised (Acts 3:19-20) and for which faith waits (1 Thess 1:10). *You need to persevere*, says the writer. Patience is a moment-by-moment quality, one which grows with practice. As the writer has already said, it is "through faith and patience" that we inherit what has been promised (6:12).

The quotation from Habakkuk 2:3-4 which appears in verses 37-38 is taken from the Septuagint version. (36) The author has made certain changes which adapt it to his specific purposes, without changing its basic thrust. Habakkuk speaks of a revelation which is coming; Hebrews changes it to a person. Since Jesus is both a person and God's last word to man (1:1), the change is appropriate. The main thrust of the quotation is for those who are made righteous by God. Faith will be the center around which all of life revolves. To shrink back from that is to reveal oneself as yet unrighteous and therefore not pleasing to God.

The writer introduces this quotation with the words *For in just a very little while*. These words serve to underscore the emphasis in Scripture on prophetic fulfillment. It has been characteristic of days of decline in the church to lose sight of the hope of Christ's coming. Such weakening of hope invariably gives rise to programs for world betterment which lead Christians to forsake the biblical methods of God's working in society and to become involved in efforts to improve the world without the message of the cross of Christ. These causes become especially appealing when the passage of centuries dims the hope of the Second Coming. Scoffers arise, as Peter predicted, who would say, 'Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation" (2 Pet 3:3-4).

How can we align *in just a very little while* with 2,000 years of waiting? Peter helps, of course, with his reminder that "with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day." By that reckoning it has only been two days since Jesus left us with a promise to return. Further, as we have seen, it is a great mistake to project the limitations of time into eternity. These are two quite different things. Heaven, with all its implications of "absent from the body, present with the Lord" is fully experienced at the death of a believer, and thus the coming of the Lord is never any further away than one's personal death. We need to bear in mind our Lord's words to the persecuted church of Smyrna: "Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev 2:10).

In verse 39, the writer places himself in the picture again, but this time identified clearly with *those who believe and are saved*. The two groups he addresses throughout the letter are here placed in direct contrast. Some are "shrinking back" and are headed for destruction. Others, the majority he feels, continue to believe and thus experience the saving of their souls. This is exactly what Jesus had promised to persecuted saints in Luke 21:19: "By standing firm, you will gain life."

This reference in Habakkuk to the faith by which the righteous shall live serves to introduce the last section of Hebrews with its brilliant focus on this operative word of the Christian life. Faith is the way we begin the life in Christ; faith is also the way it is maintained; and faith is what will bring us at last in triumph through the gates of glory into the very presence of the Lord himself. Chapters 11-13 provide a fitting climax to the letter, pursuing its themes with vivid pictures of faith in human lives.

11:1 Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. 2 This is what the ancients were commended for. 3 By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. 4 By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead. 5 By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. 6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. 7 By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. 8 By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. 9 By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. 11 By faith Abraham, even though he was past age --and Sarah herself was

barren --was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. 12 And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore. 13 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. 14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. 15 If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 Instead, they were longing for a better country --a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. 17 By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, 18 even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." 19 Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death. 20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future. 21 By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff. 22 By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones. 23 By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. 24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. 25 He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. 26 He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. 27 By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. 28 By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel. 29 By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned. 30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days. 31 By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient. 32 And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. 35 Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. 36 Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. 37 They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated-- 38 the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. 39 These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. 40 God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

Faith Made Visible (11:1-40)

Who are the heroes and heroines of the twentieth century? Human nature continually seeks a model to follow. Remember Elvis Presley in the pop musical world, followed by the Beatles and so many others? In the realm of science, there was Albert Einstein; in statesmanship, Winston Churchill; in social work, Mother Teresa. One thoughtful contemporary, George F. Will, has chosen five men who were models for the last millennium (since 1000 A.D.): Machiavelli, Luther, Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln. In the religious honor roll of this century, surely the name of Billy Graham would appear, along with Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Martin Luther King, Jr., and of course, Mother Teresa. None of these names was known to the first-century world, yet the names of heroes and heroines of that time, recorded in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, are still known around the world as models of faith and courage. We are invited now to consider the contribution each has made to our lives today. [\(37\)](#)

The Nature of Faith (11:1-3)

Hebrews 11 has been called the great faith chapter. What, exactly, is faith? If it is so important to the redemptive process, we must have a clear understanding of its nature. That need is supplied in verses 1-2. Faith, according to the NIV text, is always two things: (1) a sense of assurance within us (*being sure of what we hope for*) and (2) a certainty that there are realities which we cannot see with our physical eyes (*certain of what we do not see*). A slightly different sense is conveyed by the KJV text, which I prefer at this point. Paul, in Colossians 1:5, sees faith and love as flowing out of the hope awakened by the gospel. Hope, which "springs eternal in the human breast," comes first. Then, faith sees freedom from sin on the basis of Christ's sacrifice, a consequent loving relationship to God, peace with one's neighbors and joy in the midst of life (all *what we hope for*). These realities, though invisible, are personally appropriated; as a result, love for both God and others flows from the sense of gratitude which faith has awakened. Thus, the famous triumvirate of "faith, hope, and love" are central to all Christian living.

This quality of faith is *what the ancients were commended for*. This is the theme of the rest of the chapter, consisting of a list of those who triumphed in God's eyes because of their faith. Verse 3 provides an example of faith's ability to see invisible realities. No one can see the words by which God brought the universe into being, but since that is the statement of Scripture (Genesis 1 records 9 times "God said"), faith understands that behind everything visible is the invisible command of God. The statement *what is seen was not made out of what was visible* constitutes a scientific truth which modern physicists recognize: behind everything visible is invisible energy. Faith in God's revelation is a way of grasping reality, without necessarily comprehending all the steps that may be involved.

Verses 4-38 list examples of this kind of faith in men and women of the biblical past. The American philosopher Henry David Thoreau is famous for the remark "If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer." That is a good description of the men and women listed here. They hear another drumbeat which others do not, and this accounts for the way they often act contrary to normal expectations. The first three examples, Abel, Enoch and Noah, show us the nature of faith. The rest show how faith behaves in real life.

The Qualities of Faith (11:47)

Though the writer has, throughout the epistle, held up Abraham as our model of faith and perseverance, verses 4-7 indicate that true faith was practiced from the very beginning, even before the Flood. As in a modern docudrama, Abel appears first to testify to the value of faith. He and his older brother Cain lived when the world was young. They enjoyed what we would call today "the simple life," which clearly included a recognition of God and a need for a personal relationship. Each brought an offering which reflected his occupation: Cain, the farmer, brought fruits and grains; Abel, the shepherd, brought fat from the firstborn of his flock.

It is a mistake to read into this Genesis account any hidden reasons for God's acceptance of Abel's offering and rejection of Cain's. (38) Various explanations have been offered, but the writer is silent about everything except that God "spoke well" of Abel's offering because it was "better" than Cain's. The word "better" is *pleiona*, which means "greater" or "more important" as suggested by its use in Luke 12:23: "Life is *more than* food, and the body *more than* clothes." If Abel's sacrifice was more important than Cain's, what made it so? The reason suggested is that it came from a heart made righteous by faith! If Abraham's faith was "credited to him as righteousness" (Rom 4:9), so also was Abel's. Bruce comments on this, "Sacrifice is acceptable to God not for its material content, but in so far as it is the outward expression of a devoted and obedient heart" (1964:283).

We are not told just how God made known to the two brothers his acceptance of one and rejection of the other. Genesis 4:7 indicates that when Cain learned that his offering was unacceptable, he grew angry and rebellious. This revealed the attitude of his heart toward the sovereign choices of God. Cain's subsequent murder of his brother showed his stubborn rejection of the opportunity God gave him to repent and to offer again, presumably with a contrite spirit. Cain's offering was rejected because a heart of pride and self-sufficiency lay behind it. This explanation fits well with the context of Hebrews where the writer repeatedly warns against

possessing "an evil heart of unbelief."

The focus in 11:4, however, is not on Cain but on Abel. *By faith he still speaks*, says the author, even though he is dead. This is a direct allusion to Genesis 4:10, "Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground." It must be linked also with Hebrews 12:24, where our author states that the blood of Jesus "speaks a better word than the blood of Abel." It is often suggested that the blood of Abel cries out for the final vindication promised to all the saints (2 Thess 1:6-7), but the blood of Jesus speaks of proffered forgiveness. This seems a likely explanation of the continuing testimony of Abel. His faith in God was one of trust and loving acceptance of whatever God sent. He was willing to wait for ultimate vindication of injustice and mistreatment. His faith teaches us that we must often wait for God's redress of justice. We do so because we know God cannot ultimately fail to act.

Enoch, the seventh from Adam, appears next on the stage of testimony. In verses 5-6. Two important things mark the character of Enoch's faith: (1) he pleased God by turning away from the godlessness of the world in which he lived and (2) he maintained a daily walk with God which grew so intimate that he was taken to heaven without experiencing death. The Genesis account (5:21-24) indicates that for the first 65 years of his life, Enoch did not walk with God. Presumably he went along with the deteriorating morality of his times, which Genesis 6:5 describes as, "The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time." As Genesis 5:25 suggests, the event which changed Enoch's outlook was the birth of a son, whom he named Methuselah. Some scholars derive the meaning of Methuselah from the Hebrew root *muth*, which means "death," and translate the name "His death shall bring (it)." This would imply a revelation to Enoch of the coming judgment of the world by means of the Flood. The chronology of Genesis 5 places the Flood as occurring the year Methuselah died. In the New Testament, Jude 14-15 mentions such a prophecy given to Enoch, and much of the Wisdom literature of the intertestamental period views Enoch as a farsighted prophet. At any rate, the Genesis account states that from the birth of Methuselah throughout the following 300 years, Enoch "walked with God." This turn in his life was a result of faith, and since faith always requires a word from God to rest upon, it confirms the idea that Enoch was given a revelation of a coming judgment which changed his life. (39)

The walk with God which Enoch experienced was one of deepening intimacy. A walk implies a journey in a certain direction and at a measured and regular pace. Enoch's faith flourished as he walked and God bore witness to him that his daily life was pleasing in his eyes. Enoch is an example to the readers of Hebrews of what the writer longed to see happen to them: a steady, daily growth in grace achieved by the inner resources which God supplies to those who take him at his word and act in faith on what he has said. Enoch enjoyed the continuous presence of an unseen Person, and related his life daily to that Person. The result was a fellowship which death could not interrupt. He was translated to glory and was "not found," implying that someone searched for him for some time, but in vain. He and, later, Elijah are the only two individuals in the Scriptures who never died a physical death. They serve as precursors for a whole generation of Christians who will be so translated at the *parousia* of Jesus (1 Thess 4:17). We learn from Enoch that faith can draw inner strength from God to such a degree that it triumphs over the ravages of death.

Our author views Enoch's faith as so outstanding that it constitutes a general example for all time of how to come to God and to live pleasing to him. *Without faith it is impossible to please God*, he proclaims in verse 6. This brings to mind Paul's similar assertion, "the world through its wisdom did not know him" (1 Cor 1:21). It is impossible through human reasoning or scientific searching to find God: faith in God's self-revelation is essential! But that revelation is not confined to Scripture; it begins with nature as Paul forcefully states in Romans 1:19-20 and the psalmist declares in Psalms 8 and 19.

Hebrews 11:6 is a helpful answer to the persistent question: "What about the primitive peoples of the world who never hear the gospel?" This verse says: *anyone who comes to him God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him*. Nature presents overwhelming evidence of the existence of God. Elizabeth Barrett Browning has put its witness well:

Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush aflame with God.
But only those who see take off their shoes,

The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries!

Only a deliberately resistant mind can set aside nature's testimony to the wisdom and power of an Intelligent Being beyond us. If the witness of nature leads an individual to an honest search for the Creator, God promises to help and *reward those who earnestly seek him*. More and more knowledge will be granted which, if followed, will lead to Jesus. As Peter declared in Acts 4:12, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." what the writer is implying, by linking verse 6 with the life of Enoch, is that Enoch, seeking God and believing the word he was given, found Christ by faith! So we learn from him that faith means turning from human wisdom to God's revelation and walking in daily obedience to it until it leads to a fellowship which death cannot interrupt!

The spotlight of witness then shifts to Noah, who illustrates for us a still different quality of true faith. His faith, too, saw what was invisible, namely the coming of the Flood! (vs. 7). He "saw" it because he believed the warning he received from God 120 years before the Flood came (Gen 6:3, 7). Moved by fear of that catastrophe, Noah obeyed God and built an ark of wood, by means of which his whole family was saved. Such obedient faith, the writer states, *condemned the world*, by showing how wrong it was. This made Noah *an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith*. In the phrase *condemned the world*, we may rightly visualize the mockery and jeering which Noah must have daily faced as he built a huge ship. He was a hundred miles from the nearest ocean, with a ship many times too big for his own needs, and when had had finished, he filled it with animals! Had he lived in our day he would have been dubbed, "Nutty Noah"! Yet Jesus used "the days of Noah" as representative of the condition of the world before his own return, and indicated that his followers must be prepared to face the same kind of scornful hostility that Noah met day after day.

Noah's faith persisted despite massive resistance, and that can only occur when there is an inward change of spirit that is caused by the presence of God. That is what is meant by Noah becoming *heir of the righteousness that comes by faith*. His faith, like Abraham's, was "credited to him for righteousness." He is, in fact, the first individual to be called righteous in the Scriptures (Gen 6:9). His sturdy, obedient faith stands forever as an example of persistence against hostility that marks those who are born of God and who cannot ever be lost. In these three men, Abel, Enoch and Noah, we are shown that faith waits, faith grows in intimacy, and faith persists. Without these qualities it is impossible to please God.

The Activities of Faith (11:8-38)

"Faith without deeds is useless," says James (2:20). If there is true faith, there will be consequent actions. The writer now launches on a lengthy section in which he shows the variety of actions that can accompany faith, depending on the circumstances which an individual faces. The one mark that is shared by all these activities is that each is unusual--it is not the normal reason ordinarily expressed of those who face such situations. Faith makes some people act differently than others. They will not fit the common mold or drift along with the multitude.

The Faith of Abraham and Sarah (11:8-19)

Already in Hebrews, Abraham has shared with Moses a prominent part as an example of faith in the redemptive process. Again, he appears as the pre-eminent role model for all believers in Christ. Verses 8-19 are devoted almost exclusively to Abraham's faith and the author's comments on it. He singles out the highlights of Abraham's life, beginning with his call to leave Mesopotamia and culminating with his willingness to sacrifice Isaac at God's command. At every point, Abraham responded to a promise of God with unwavering obedience. That is the writer's chief point. God promised Abraham a land, a posterity, a great name and universal influence (Gen 12:1-3). Abraham believed God and left his kinfolk his present comforts and prosperity, and, at the age of seventy-five, set out for Canaan, a land he had never visited and knew nothing about (v. 8). When he got there he lived as a resident alien, residing in tents and owning nothing except the cave of Machpelah in Hebron, where he buried his wife, Sarah. The motive for this remarkable behavior was his anticipation that God would fulfill his promise and produce on earth, *a city with foundations* whose architect and builder is God (vv. 9-10). It is amazing how far Abraham saw by faith. He lived two thousand years before Christ, and we live two thousand years after him. Yet Abraham, believing that what God had said would take place, looked across forty centuries of time and beyond to the day when God would

bring to earth a city with eternal foundations, Abraham saw what John saw in Revelation: a city coming down from heaven onto earth (Rev 21). (40) That is what Abraham longed for; an earth run after God's order, where people would dwell together in peace, harmony, blessing, beauty and liberty. Because of that hope he was content to dwell his whole life in tents, looking for God's fulfillment. Abraham shows us that faith seizes upon a revealed event and lives in anticipation of it. Faith gives purpose and destination to life. The hope of achieving a utopian city of peace and universal blessing is what we hold out for even today; "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

The second highlight of Abraham's faith centered on God's promise of a posterity (vv. 11-12). This involved Sarah as well, for though Abraham was now a hundred years old, and Sarah ninety, God had expressly told Abraham that he would have a son who would produce a long line of descendants. Paul, in Romans 4:19, observes without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead . . . and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God."

We must not exclude Sarah from this reckoning of those who triumphed by faith, as the NIV rendering of verse 11 does. For though she laughed incredulously when she overheard God's promise to Abraham that she would bear a son (Gen 18:11-12), nevertheless, God countered her incredulity with the question, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" Those challenging words would surely have been the source of her meditation in the days that followed. Genesis 21:1 states, "Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised." God's invariable method for fulfilling a promise is to awaken faith first in the recipient. Sarah's growth in grace and spiritual maturity is recognized in 1 Peter 3:6, and all this would powerfully support the design of our author by including Sarah's name deliberately. She shared with Abraham that faith which produced *descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore*. (41)

It is highly unlikely, given our author's precise use of language, that these two phrases should both describe the same descendants of Abraham, whether they are physical or spiritual. Abraham was first promised seed "like the dust of the earth" (Gen 13:16). Then some thirteen years later, when God announced the birth of Isaac within a year, Abraham was shown the stars and the promise was given, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars--if indeed you can count them.... So shall your offspring be" (Gen 15:5). This widely separated revelation suggests the phrases should be understood as a reference to two lines of posterity: a heavenly seed (*as numerous as the stars in the sky*) which would embrace all who fit Paul's description: "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal 3:29); and an earthly line (*as countless as the sand on the seashore*), which includes all the physical descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob. This would agree with Paul's statements in Romans 11:11-12 that despite the formation of the church (the heavenly seed), God has not yet finished with his people Israel (the earthly seed). As the writer of Hebrews has intimated, the time will come when God will fulfill the new covenant of grace to "the house of Israel and the house of Jacob." The blending of these two lines will be found in the city for which Abraham looked, on whose gates is written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel and on its foundations the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (Rev 21:12-14).

The writer comments, in verses 13-16, on these Old Testament names. They all died, he admits, without receiving the things promised, though they still expected God to fulfill his word to them. The fact that *they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance* indicates their understanding that the promises were in the future and would have spiritual as well as physical fulfillment. For this reason, their own imminent deaths did not diminish their confidence that the promises would be fulfilled. This lively faith was shown by their willingness to abide as aliens and strangers in the land they had been promised. Toward the end of his life, Abraham described himself as such in Genesis 23:4. Though he and his son and grandsons could have returned to Mesopotamia had they so chosen, as Jacob did for a while, yet their faith in the promise of their own land not only kept them in Canaan, but also led them to understand that eventually they would live in that city of God which would come down from heaven. Because their faith grew to encompass eternal realities as well as earthly prospects, the writer declares that *God is not ashamed to be called their God*. Once again we see the deliberate link between the visible and the invisible. The land of Canaan was a picture of the heavenly country which would be theirs by faith, as 4:89 asserts. Since, as we have seen, "faith is being sure of what we hope for," this meant that they were already enjoying, in their inner lives, the intimate blessings that the resurrected body promised when the city of God came down from heaven (Rev 21:10). Such inner fulfillment

is the gift of faith to those who today are willing to look beyond death to God's day of perfect fulfillment. We cannot demand instant answers from God for all our earthly problems, but we can *welcome them from a distance*. We must not lose faith that God will satisfy every promise.

Having expanded our understanding of the faith of the patriarchs, our author returns to the severest test of Abraham's faith, and its most glorious triumph, the sacrifice of Isaac (vv. 17-19). Emphasis is laid on the fact that Abraham was asked to slay his son Isaac, even though he had received promises that Isaac would establish the guaranteed posterity. Ishmael was also a son of Abraham, but only Isaac was the son of promise. That is the meaning of *one and only son*. Some have criticized God for subjecting Abraham to such unbearable anguish, but it must be remembered that Abraham's faith in the loving character of God enabled him to solve this crisis. He reasoned that God was in full control of both death and life; he could restore as well as take. On that basis Abraham was able to carry through what was seen as a grisly task. Little of this is seen in the Genesis account (22:1-10), though Abraham did assure his servants that both he and the lad would return from the mountain. The substitution of a ram for the son was intended to portray that later scene at Golgotha when the Son of God would willingly lay down his life. It is, perhaps, this very scene that Paul has in mind when he writes, "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" The restoration of Isaac to his father's arms is called a parable (Gk: *parabole*) of resurrection by the writer. So Abraham's faith reached the highest pinnacle of faith: belief in a resurrection that would fulfill all the promises of God.

The Faith of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph (11:20-22)

The thought of a faith still trusting in the very face of death leads the writer to focus on Abraham's descendants--Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. They see their own deaths and yet look beyond in unwavering faith (vv. 20-22). The point about all three is that they clearly saw aspects of the future because they exercised faith in what was invisible at the present. Isaac, though not given to dramatic demonstrations of faith, could still foretell the subsequent character of his twin sons' lives, Jacob and Esau, because he understood, by faith, how each would relate to the program of God (Gen 27:27-29, 30-40). Jacob, in his earlier years, often found it difficult to trust God explicitly. But with Joseph in Egypt, he too saw the true relationship of Joseph's sons Manasseh and Ephraim in God's purposes. He dared, by faith, to transfer the birthright from Manasseh, the firstborn, to Ephraim, the younger (Gen 48). He did this, worshipping all the while the God who had foreordained this in wisdom. And Joseph, whose life was filled with dramatic examples of the power of faith, did not let his impending death alter his certainty that God would fulfill his promises concerning Israel. He gave instructions that when Israel would leave Egypt (over two centuries later), they should carry his bones with them and bury them in the land of promise. This Moses did (Ex 13:19), and Joseph's tomb is still visible at Shechem, as Joshua 24:32 records. These men were not dreamers or merely wishful thinkers; they "saw" invisible realities, and adapted their own lives and that of their descendants accordingly.

The Faith of Moses and the Israelites (11:23-29)

The spotlight of witness shifts again, this time to the towering figure of Moses, who stands next only to Abraham as the quintessential believer in the Old Testament. Verses 23-29 touch on five highlights from his life, beginning with the faith of his parents and ending with the Israelites' passage over the Red Sea. Two reasons are given for the faith of Moses' parents, shown in the hiding of their infant son among the reeds of the Nile. They saw he was *no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict*. The adjective *asteion* translated here as "no ordinary" child, is defined by Thayer as the opposite of *agroikos* which means "rustic" (Kistemaker 1984:344). It implies not merely a handsome or beautiful child, but a gifted and unusually promising one. Josephus, in his Antiquities, suggests that Moses' parents received a revelation from God concerning their son's destiny. This would explain why their action was by faith and strong enough that they were unafraid of the king's cruel command to kill all male Israelite babies. Since Jochebed, Moses' mother, was employed by Pharaoh's daughter to become Moses' nurse and help raise him to adulthood, the writer includes Moses' parents (Amram and Jochebed) as the molders of the faith of Moses himself.

So powerful was their influence on Moses that when he was forty years of age (Acts 7:23), having been trained in the culture of Egypt and even regarded as an heir to the throne itself, he renounced his earthly privileges. He went on to identify himself with the people of Israel and resolutely refused the royal title *son of*

Pharaoh's daughter (vv. 24-25). Stephen, in Acts 7:20-38, tells us that Moses "thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not." This suggests that Moses had a clear understanding of his calling from God, and his faith motivated his renunciation of Egypt. It was costly because *he gave up the treasures of Egypt to suffer disgrace for the sake of Christ*. Such disgrace (or "reproach") carried with it the promise of infinite reward (eternal life) which made the things he renounced appear paltry indeed. Such a renunciation is like the choices many Christians make today who choose to be faithful to moral principles, rather than to abandon them for the prospect of advancement or wealth.

The third mark of Moses' faith was that *he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger and he persevered because he saw him who is invisible* (v. 27). Admittedly, he fled to save his life, but as the writer of Hebrews points out, it was not because he feared the anger of the king. Rather, since he fled *by faith*, it was because he knew God would fulfill his promise to deliver Israel. Moses would await God's timing for that deliverance. So he *persevered* in Midian for forty years, with his faith continually being renewed because *he saw him who is invisible*. That long, discouraging wait was possible only because Moses saw the unseen; he reckoned upon invisible realities, and God surprised him one day with a remarkable experience with a bush that burned but was not consumed! [\(42\)](#)

Another biblical example of this kind of patient faith is David, who, knowing he had been anointed as king of Israel, nevertheless patiently waited for God to remove Saul from the throne. Such patience, for those who wait for recognition today, is rewarded by *him who is invisible*. God times such events, lifting up one and putting down another, according to his sovereign purposes. Peter exhorts us, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time" (1 Pet 5:6).

Our author leaps over the story of Moses' return to Egypt, his confrontations with the new Pharaoh and the shattering series of plagues which Pharaoh's intransigence brought upon Egypt. This brings us to the final, fateful night, when Moses and Israel kept the first Passover (v. 28). It was a crucial experience both for Israel and the church, as both look back to it as the paradigm of redemption. Central was the sprinkling of the blood of a lamb over the doorpost of each Israelite household. The angel of death would not enter where he saw the sprinkled blood. Paul refers to this incident in 1 Corinthians 6:7-8. Moses believed implicitly that this protection would work, and so it proved. Even Pharaoh's firstborn son lay dead the next morning with thousands of others throughout Egypt. In Israel, not one firstborn son perished, exactly as Moses had predicted. This act of faith broke the back of Pharaoh's resistance, and the Egyptians begged the Israelites to leave, even heaping upon them jewels and treasures to speed the process.

But in verse 29, the writer recounts the faith Moses and Israel had to exercise when the Egyptians changed their minds and pursued Israel with an army of chariots and soldiers. The waters of the Sea of Reeds (Hebrew text) flowed before Israel, and the army of Egypt was closing in behind. What could Israel do? God said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites to move on. Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water." By faith Moses obeyed, and by faith the waters were driven back all night by a powerful east wind (Ex 14). Israel's faith was shown when they passed between the walls of water and arrived safely on the far shore. When the Egyptians tried the same thing, Moses stretched out his staff, the waters returned, and all the Egyptian soldiers were drowned. Faith dares to obey despite apparent obstacles and difficulties. It pays no attention to impossibilities when God has spoken.

Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees
And looks to God alone.
Laughs at impossibilities,
And cries, "It shall be done."

Many Christians today face similar circumstances where it looks as if there is no way out. But God does not send believers out into a sea of trouble to drown; his promise is to see them through to the other side. As 1 Corinthians 10:13 promises, "He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

Faith Exhibited at Jericho (11:30-31)

No further examples of Israel's faith are described until forty years later, when Joshua leads them against the

city of Jericho, the first major obstacle to the conquest of the land of promise. This silence is the writer's way of recalling what he has already mentioned in chapters 3 and 4: the unbelief which the Israelites showed throughout their wilderness journeys. Not one Israelite who was twenty years or older when they left Egypt would enter Canaan, except Joshua and Caleb. But just as the faith of Moses had inspired some degree of faith in Israel while they were in Egypt, the faith of Joshua stirred the Israelites to act in faith before the walls of Jericho. The ancient city was actually a large fortress, 600 meters in circumference (Kistemaker 1984:347). It contained an armed garrison, filled with experienced warriors. These must be defeated before the valleys of Canaan could be occupied. Following the unique orders given him by the angelic Commander of the Army of the Lord, Joshua set the people marching around the fortress, once a day for six days, and seven times the seventh day. When they gave a great shout on the seventh day, the walls "came atumblin' dawn." By an earthquake, you may ask? Yes, perhaps so, but an earthquake that came in God's precise time and at God's precise place. The incident highlights God's ways of deliverance as being varied and often bizarre in the eyes of many. He is infinitely diverse in his solutions, and we make a great mistake in trying to predict his actions.

Along with the story of Jericho's overthrow, we read the remarkable account of Rahab the harlot (v. 31). She had heard of Israel's conquests at the Red Sea and in the wilderness and expected them to assault Jericho many years before. She knew that their victories came from their faith in God, and she "received the spies with peace" (literally) when Joshua sent them to spy out the city. Her motive was not merely to save her life and that of her family; she was convinced, as she said, that "the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below." That faith was honored when the walls of the city collapsed and all within were killed except Rahab and her family. That her faith was genuine is confirmed by Matthew when he lists her as one of the ancestors of Jesus. She went on to marry Salmon and became the mother of Boaz, and thus the great-grandmother of David. Faith overcame a sinful life, delivered her from a pagan religion. She was granted a place of honor among the heroes and heroines of faith. The incident also illustrates the fact that "in Christ there is neither male nor female." Rahab was a woman in a man's world, but faith accepts no such distinctions.

A Summary of the Faithful (11:32-38)

This survey of the faith of men and women in the past could have gone on to greater lengths, but the author feels that his epistle must not become burdensome to read. He refers to others in more general terms, mentioning only six more names. Their varied actions of faith are successful, whether in triumph or in suffering (vv. 32-38). The six names span the history of Israel from the days of the judges to the early monarchy. Included are Gideon, noted for his victory over Midian with a reduced army of only 300 men; Barak, who was encouraged by the prophetess Deborah and defeated the Canaanite army of Sisera; Samson, famous as the muscleman of Israel, fatally susceptible to the charms of young women, but nevertheless the instrument of God to deliver Israel from Philistine oppression; Jephthah, haunted by his rash vow concerning his daughter, but also conqueror of the Ammonites and punisher of the tribe of Ephraim; David, Israel's greatest king and the author of many psalms, "a man after God's own heart"; and, finally, Samuel, first of the prophets and last of the judges, who lived by faith from his boyhood to his final days. Others are simply listed as *the prophets*, which would surely include the great names of Elijah, Elisha, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel and others.

The faith these men possessed led them to three kinds of action (vv. 33-34). Faith helped some to govern---*conquered kingdoms* (David over the Philistines), *administered justice* (Solomon---1 Kings 21:9) and *gained what was promised* (Josh 21:43). Faith helped others to triumph over fearful odds---*shut the mouths of lions* (Dan 6), *quenched the fury of the flames* (Dan 3:17), and *escaped the edge of the sword* (2 Kings 6:11-18). Still others were enabled by faith to be mighty in battle---*whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies* (1 Sam 14:14). These were all actual historic incidents, familiar to the readers of this letter from the Old Testament accounts.

But faith was not confined to men only. Women of faith were also greatly benefited, receiving dead loved ones back to life. Notable in the Old Testament were the widow of Zarephath, whose son Elijah restored, even though she was not of Israel (1 Kings 17:24); and the woman of Shunem who called Elisha to raise her dead son because she knew him to be a man of God (2 Kings 4:8-37). The readers of Hebrews could also think of the widow of Nain, whose son Jesus raised, and of Lazarus whom Jesus restored to his sisters, Mary and Martha, and perhaps also of the widows in Joppa who rejoiced when Dorcas was restored to them by Peter.

These resuscitations were not mentioned to establish a norm, but to show what powers faith could release when God chose to act.

Nor was faith always a means to triumph and victory. Verses 35-38 record the other side of the picture. The incidents described here seem to be drawn mainly from the days of the Maccabean revolt and the cruelties of the Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes in the early second century B.C. The word for *tortured* reveals the type of torment used: a wheel or rack upon which the victim was stretched and then beaten to death. The *better resurrection* they looked for was not a return to this life, but the resurrection to eternal life, which was promised to all who were faithful unto death. The jeers, flogging, chains and prisons of verse 36 were experienced in many places and times, even by some recipients of this letter, as 10:32-34 declares. Jeremiah may have been the reference to some who were stoned, for tradition says he so died at the hands of the Jews in Egypt. Isaiah was thought to be sawed in half during the reign of Manasseh, the wicked son of King Hezekiah. Many were reduced to poverty and had to dress themselves in animal skins (Elijah, Elisha and John the Baptist, for example), and wandered about in deserts and mountains, living in caves because they were unacceptable to society. But the writer notes that the world was not worthy of them. God's heroes and heroines are often unrecognized while they are alive. Like Jesus himself, they are "despised and rejected of men." But what does that matter when the final triumph sees them honored and acclaimed before the whole universe? As another ardent Christian, Jim Elliot, put it: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose."

One cannot think on these verses today and not notice the contrast with the so-called health-and-wealth gospel. For the person of faith, material comforts mean less and spiritual values mean more. The question of Jesus comes to mind: "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" The people of God may often be poor and despised, but their faith opens to them riches of spirit which the world has never known.

Something Better for Us (11:39-40)

The closing verses (39-40) bring us back to the opening statement of the chapter, that faith *is what the ancients were commended for*. Though all those referred to by name or described by action in this chapter received commendation from God even in this life, yet they did not receive the promised city "with foundations" which Abraham sought (vv. 10 and 16). The reference to *foundations* indicates something material and earthly, rather than purely spiritual. They looked for more than their own personal satisfaction, but still longed to see God's purposes fulfilled on earth. The *something better for us* denotes the reality we have found already in Christ, which the men and women of faith in the Old Testament would attain only after their earthly life ended. We are already recipients of the blessings of the new covenant. They would not fully know them till the resurrection. The New Jerusalem, come down from heaven to earth, in which God will dwell among us and by which all the supernal vision of the prophets will be fulfilled, blends the two peoples of God together. The hope of being made perfect includes the hope of physical resurrection, as many Scriptures declare. In that "first resurrection" (Rev 20:6-7) believers of both old and new covenants will join. This is the way that *together with us would they be made perfect*. This is the mystery of God's will which Paul describes in Ephesians 1:9-10 "to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment---to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ."

What transcendent glory is described in those words, no one now really knows. John gives us the best description in Revelation 4-5. There the redeemed are gathered from all ages, amid millions of angels, to sing the praises of the One who redeemed them from the miseries and death which sin causes, and gave them an eternal ministry of glory and power beyond human description. The Redeemer will be forever the center of universal worship. It will be as Anne Cousin writes:

The bride eyes not her garment,
But her dear bridegroom's face;
I will not gaze at glory,
But on my King of grace:
Not at the crown He giveth,
But on his pierced hand;

The Lamb is all the glory Of Emmanuel's land.
("The Sands of Time Are Sinking")

Calvin caught the thrust of this chapter and said, "If those on whom the great light of grace had not yet shone showed such surpassing constancy in bearing their ills, what effect ought the full glory of the gospel to have on us? A tiny spark of light led them to heaven, but now that the Sun of righteousness shines on us what excuse shall we offer if we still cling to the earth?" Our motivation and inspiration is fuller than theirs, for we have Jesus himself to sustain us. It is to that powerful support that the author now turns his reader's attention.

12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. 2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. 4 In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 5 And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, 6 because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." 7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? 8 If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. 9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! 10 Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. 12 Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. 13 "Make level paths for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed. 14 Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. 15 See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. 16 See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. 17 Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears. 18 You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; 19 to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, 20 because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned." 21 The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear." 22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. 25 See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? 26 At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." 27 The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken --that is, created things --so that what cannot be shaken may remain. 28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our "God is a consuming fire."

Faith Trained and Tested (12:1-29)

Suddenly the scene shifts to a sports stadium where a distance marathon is being run. The runners are the readers of this epistle (including us), who need to run a grueling race. Encircling the track is a stadium filled with *a great cloud of witnesses*, among them many of the worthies of the past named in chapter 11. They are witnesses in the sense of bearing testimony that the race can be run successfully and that the rewards are great.

The Race of Life (12:1-3)

Their encouragement has two purposes: to *throw off everything that hinders* and to *put away the sin that so easily entangles*. As Moses laid aside the prerogatives of royalty for the sake of his God-given mission, so we must throw off whatever may hinder faith even though it may be right for others. Joseph properly ruled in Egypt, but for Moses it was a hindering weight. Other weights might well be ambition, anxieties, hobbies, wealth or fame. Each runner must honestly judge what hinders faith for him or her and resolutely lay it aside, even though others seem to be unhindered by the same thing. One cannot run well in an overcoat!

But the primary block to gaining the prize is *the sin that so easily entangles*. (43) Since the writer does not specify what this is, it may be taken for granted that it is the sin continually warned about in Hebrews---persistent unbelief Do not take God's Word lightly. Do not excuse any sin as all right for you, but forbidden to others. Do not feel you can evade God's discipline or judgment. Remember: "God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows". (Gal 6:7). Unbelief often looks trivial to us, but Moses was kept out of the Promised Land because he treated God's word lightly on one occasion (Deut 32:51-52; Ps 106:33). David apparently felt that his twin sins of adultery and murder could be overlooked because he was king, but God felt otherwise and sent Nathan the prophet to expose his wickedness and to announce his punishment.

The race, of course, is life itself. Since it is God who gives us life, it is also God who starts us in this race. We are all here for a purpose, and that purpose is to live our lives in fulfillment of God's intent for us. This requires not only faith in God's revelation, as we have seen, but also perseverance and endurance. Life is not a 100-yard dash, but a long and sometimes agonizing marathon. No one knows just how long it will be. It can suddenly be cut short, as we have often seen, but its very uncertainty requires that we run it as if it will last a long time, being prepared to keep going no matter what happens. The goal toward which we run is the end of life, whether it be death or the sudden transformation of living saints at the parousia of Jesus (1 Cor 15:51-52). Jesus says to the suffering saints of Smyrna, "Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev 2:10). (43)

Only one factor can make consistent endurance possible, and this the author states clearly in verse 2: *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus*. This is the central theme of Hebrews. He has stated it before ("But we see Jesus"
---2:9; "fix your thoughts on Jesus . . ."
---3:1; "since we have a great high priest . . . Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence"
---4:14, 16). He is saying, in effect, "Listen to the testimony of those who have gone before for they can help you know what to lay aside; but, above all else, fix your attention on Jesus, for he can do what no one else can---he can impart faith to you, and he can bring it to perfection at the end. He awaits you when you reach the goal, but he is also with you to strengthen your endeavor and guard your steps along the way. Look at other men and women of faith for inspiration and encouragement, but then look higher up to Jesus." This has been well expressed by a Christian poet:

The glory of the light is brightest,
When the glory of self is dim,
And they have most compelled me,
Who most have pointed to Him;
They have held me, stirred me, swayed me---
I have hung on their every word,
'Til I fain would rise and follow,
Not them, not them, but their Lord.

Why look away from human leaders to Jesus? Because he is *the author and perfecter of our faith*. He gives it and completes it. The word translated here "author" is *archegos*, which we saw in 2:10 has the thought of

pioneer or leader. Jesus has gone before us in this race to keep faith. He knows the need for it. He himself ran the race. He laid aside every weight, every tie of family and friends. He set his face against the popular sin of unbelief and daily lived in patient perseverance, trusting his Father to work everything out for him. He set the perfect example. As Bruce says, "It was sheer faith in God, unsupported by any visible evidence, that carried Him through the taunting, the scourging, the crucifying, and the more bitter agony of rejection, desertion and dereliction" (1964:352).

But there is more than example in him---there is also empowerment! Moment by moment, day by day, week by week year by year, as we look to him, we shall find strength imparted to us. He is not "out there" somewhere. As this epistle has made clear, he is within us, by faith. He has entered into the sanctuary, into the inner person, into the very place where we need strength and grace, and is available every moment to help us in time of need. Having himself lived by faith, he is able to impart that faith to others. He does this by means of the Spirit, as Paul reflects in his prayer of Ephesians 3:16: "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being." This power to awaken faith is what Jesus describes as the enabling of the Father ("no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him"---Jn 6:65). As the epistle to the Hebrews has repeatedly insisted, faith is essential to spiritual vitality. Jesus is our example of the kind of faith required, but his very life in us imparts the faith we need to run the race of life successfully. So we cry with Paul, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Phil 4:13).

This ministry of help for us is undoubtedly *the joy set before him* for which he endured the cross and scorned its shame! (44) It meant more to Jesus than his own well being, even more than the joy of returning to his Father and the glory of heaven. For the consummate joy of "bringing many sons to glory," he gave himself up to agony and death and counted it a small price to pay. It brought him, as verse 2 states, *to sit down at the right hand of the throne of God*. Redemption requires power, and now from the place of ultimate power he can "save completely those who come to God through him."

In Jesus, we have a model to follow which cannot be surpassed, for he, too, patiently endured the opposition of sinful men, even that of his own disciples. But he is also able to impart his own spirit of steadiness to those who trust him so they *will not grow weary and lose heart!* The author has exhorted us to keep our eyes on Jesus, to *consider him*. He represents faith, which has been tried to the utmost! He could take it because of the strength of his inner life. We, too, can take whatever life throws at us because we have him as our resource to draw upon. No truth in Hebrews is more strongly emphasized than this.

Psychologist Dr. Larry Crabb has described the mentality of many today who look for human help but ignore that offered by our great high priest, Jesus. He says:

Too often people take a word like *authenticity* and they secularize it to mean, "I'm going to let you know exactly what I feel," thinking that that is going to result in intimacy and a release of guilt.

What may in fact be happening is that you are demanding that the other person now deal with *your* feelings the way *you* want him or her to. If the other person doesn't do that, then you go into hiding convinced that nobody will ever deal with how you really feel; so why bother caring? The point is that you are not facing the real issue. Authenticity demands that you expose yourself not for the purpose of getting a person to respond to you in the way that *you* want, but exposing yourself so *you* can respond to what *God* wants. Only God can truly deal with your sin. Only God can truly forgive you. (Crabb 1989)

How God Trains Us (12:4-13)

The passage from verses 4-11 develops the true point of view Christians must have toward hardship and opposition. Verses 4-6 put it succinctly, saying, in effect: Remember, it isn't as bad as it could be! (*You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.*) Don't forget, behind the difficulties you must go through is a father's loving heart! (*You have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons.*) The quotation from Proverbs 3:11-12 is Solomon's words to his own son, helping him to handle the troubles and hardships which will come to him. The Septuagint version quoted here speaks of both rebuke and punishment

coming from the Lord. Rebuke is verbal correction; punishment (scourging) is designed to make the rebuke unforgettable. Scourging is severe punishment, symbolized by the Roman scourge, a leather whip with metal pieces embedded on the end.

An incident from the Old Testament illustrates this. David was rebuked by the Lord for numbering Israel and was given the choice of three punishments. He wisely let the Lord decide, and undoubtedly experienced the least hurtful of the three, but in the plague God sent, 70,000 Israelites died! (2 Sam 24). That was a lesson David never forgot! But it is important to note that our author insists that such discipline comes from God's love for those sons he is bringing to glory. Severe discipline only comes to those who have violated great responsibility or who are being trained for tough assignments. Many Christians today have testified that God got their attention only after some severe trial or circumstance came upon them!

The fact that the severe persecution these Hebrews had already undergone (10:32-33) had not yet involved the shedding of their blood is indication that their location was not Jerusalem or probably even Palestine. Acts records several instances of martyrdom among the early Christians there. But if we are called to follow Christ it may lead to actual bloodshed, as other centuries can bear ample witness, and not least our century! Persecution that stops short of death is something to be thankful for. But discomfort, hardship and deprivations, borne for the sake of Christ, are viewed as privileges and blessings, sent by a loving Father to prepare us to be worthy heirs of the incomparable glories yet to come. They are not a sign of his displeasure, but a sign that he regards us as genuine children.

So, in verses 7-8, the author reminds his readers that they are not illegitimate children for whom no future is being prepared, but legitimate children who require discipline to develop properly. Coach Tom Landry of the Dallas Cowboys is reputed to have said, "The job of a coach is to make men do what they don't want to do, in order to be what they've always wanted to be!" Our author would have welcomed that as an accurate statement of what God does with those he calls to be his children. They should "hang tough" because their trials are proof that they are beloved children and not bastards.

Verses 9-11 adduce a second reason for patient endurance: our earthly fathers disciplined us when we were children, even though they doubtless made mistakes. Yet we respected them for their efforts which we recognized were meant for our good. How much more should we accept the discipline of our God, who makes no mistakes and who aims at enabling us to share his own perfect character! The reference to God as *the Father of our spirits* is meant as a contrast to "human fathers" (Gk "fathers of our flesh") and reminds us that the fruit borne by suffering is spiritual in nature.

The trials, disappointments, hardships and even physical attacks which sometimes constitute God's discipline may be painful to bear. No one *enjoys* such experiences. As C. S. Lewis notes, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to arouse a deaf world" (1978:81). But the pain is not the whole story. There is always a *later on* which follows. There is a *harvest of righteousness and peace* which invariably will come *for those who have been trained by it* (the discipline).

Christian suffering is not simply sheer circumstantial misery or the result of blind chance. Paul declares, "We know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope" (Rom 5:34). James adds, "You know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (Jas 1:3-4). Peter concurs, "These [trials] have come so that your faith---of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire---may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1 Pet 1:7). How foolish then it is to complain and grouse about the difficulties we face. "If we are always rebelling against it and refusing to learn the lessons the Father is teaching us, we are shutting ourselves up to discontent and misunderstanding" (Morris 1983:123).

Our author well understands the tendency we all have to reject well-intentioned advice and concentrate on our misery. We derive a kind of perverse pleasure from so doing. So he urges, in verses 12-13, two specific actions:

1. *Strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.* That is, deal first with yourselves. Get your own hearts right

toward your troubles. He has already pointed out the way to do so: by each coming boldly to the throne of grace "so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (4:16). He has said the same in 12:2: "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith." It is only as we know his help ourselves that we are able to aid anyone else in finding it. The plural imperative (*strengthen*, Gk: "lift up") implies a joint effort by many. We can help each other draw upon the resources of Christ by offering encouraging words and mutual prayers, sharing our experiences and sometimes simply being with someone who is undergoing trial.

2. *Make level paths for your feet, so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.* That is, watch your influence on others! Take care that you are not a stumbling block to those who travel with you, whose faith may be much weaker than yours. *Disabled* carries the thought of having something thrown out of joint, as in a sprain or twist.

The two exhortations look back to Isaiah 35:4 where the prophet exhorts: "Say to those with fearful hearts, 'Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.'" This is not only an exhortation to wait patiently for the coming of Christ (10:37) but also to expect God to "come" in some sovereign action of deliverance in response to his people's prayers. Acts 12 records such a deliverance in the case of Peter whom Herod had put in prison. Any degree of persecution should be met by the Christian body gathering in mutual support so that no one is spiritually disabled. It is necessary to be strong for the sake of others as well as ourselves. The way we bear suffering has enormous impact on the whole Christian community, and the author stresses this point with this in view.

The Dangers to Watch For (12:14-17)

This concern for others leads to a more general exhortation to the whole community of faith in verses 14-24. Each member pursues two objectives: peace with all men and holiness before God. As Paul suggests in Romans 12:18, to live at peace with all is not always possible, but it must be pursued "as far as it depends on you!" The causing of strife should never begin with a believer! Here Paul's practical suggestions found in 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 are apropos. Disputes ought to be settled by arbitration rather than lawsuits. Seeking counsel is preferable to hurling charges, and forbearance is most fitting for those whom God has forgiven. How many disgraceful public displays of church disagreements could be prevented if this admonition of 12:14 were heeded.

But of even more importance is the pursuit of holiness, for without it *no one will see the Lord*. Whether this seeing of the Lord refers to the beatific vision of God (Bruce 1964:364), or to seeing Jesus at his Second Coming (Westcott 1889:406), it clearly precludes any who are not pursuing holiness from having a close and vital relationship with God. The need to *make every effort* suggests continuance and is perhaps better translated "pursue." As we have noted before, it is a mistake to take holiness as referring only to righteous behavior apart from seeing it also as a gift of God who imparts righteousness to the one who believes in Jesus. If we pursue righteous behavior only as a means to "seeing" the Lord, we will eventually find ourselves with the Pharisees. They were blindly ignorant of terrible failure but claimed a relationship that did not really exist. But if we truly practice a continual reckoning of ourselves as already righteous within by a gracious act of God on the basis of the death and resurrection of Jesus, we will find ourselves strongly motivated to live righteously and inwardly distressed at any failure to do so. This inward distress will bring us again and again to the throne of grace for forgiveness and recovery. We will progressively be "transformed into his (Christ's) likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:18). That is what is meant by the exhortation to "pursue holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."

A failure to do this is called, in verse 15, missing the grace of God. The writer has already warned of this in 3:12: "See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God." Such unbelief is a bitter root which will create strife and defile many. The root is unbelief which refuses to reckon on God's provision of righteousness because it feels confident it can produce an acceptable righteousness on its own. Strife and defilement are the bitter fruit which this root inevitably produces. It will reveal itself in two forms: sexual immorality or godlessness, like that of Esau. The first is defilement of the body; the second is defilement of the soul. Our author only touches on the first at this point but will bring it up again at 13:4. Yet this brief reference must not be missed for it equates sexual immorality in its effects with a

godless spirit.

The author uses Esau to illustrate the second form. The word for godlessness is *bebelos*, which is best translated "profane" or, as we would say, "secular." It is a mindset which takes little notice of anything beyond the material. This was Esau's outlook (Gen 27:30-40). He thought so little of the promises of God to Abraham and Isaac, to which he was the primary heir as the firstborn, that he sold those rights to his brother Jacob for a bowl of stew! So unimportant was this transaction in his eyes that later he assumed he could still receive the blessing which accompanied the right of firstborn. Though his brother Jacob had tricked their blind father into conferring the blessing upon himself, Esau still tried to change his father's words and gain the blessing he had sold. His father could not and would not change his mind, so Esau lost both the birthright and the blessing.

That is the secular mentality. It has little time for worship or service, but it is intent upon material gain and earthly advantage. Professing Christians who claim to be born again but who live no differently than non-Christians are repeating the godlessness of Esau. Like him they too will find a surprising rejection in the last day. Jesus has them in mind when he says, "Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Mt 7:23).

The Blessings Now Possible (12:18-24)

The author has, throughout the letter, been drawing a contrast between the old covenant of the law, which was given at Mount Sinai, and the new covenant of grace, which actually preceded the law. It was made fully manifest in the ministry and sacrifice of Jesus. Now, in verses 18-24, he repeats the contrast using striking symbols, drawing from Exodus and Deuteronomy the fearful scene at Mount Sinai when the Ten Commandments were given, and from the prophets various elements of the heavenly Jerusalem which are associated with the new covenant.

The point of his description of Mount Sinai and the giving of the law is that the old covenant aroused unbearable fear. The sight of the burning mountain and the ever-increasing blare of a trumpet, the darkness, storm and fearful threats directed even toward dumb beasts, created such fear in the people that they begged Moses to plead with God for relief. Even Moses said, "I am trembling with fear." That is the invariable end of efforts made to obey a law which requires perfection. Fear of God's just condemnation is overwhelming. Most people do not feel this fear because they do not take the law seriously, at least not until they reach the end of their lives and its fearful judgments lie immediately before them. All who seek earnestly to obey the law find themselves confronted with such personal failure that they soon despair of escaping God's fearful condemnation. Mount Sinai stands as the symbol of this despair and fear.

"For what the law was powerless to do . . . God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering" (Rom 8:3). That is the triumphant cry of the new covenant! Our author's description of it (vv. 22-24) is one of joyful celebration. It consists of six elements.

1. *You have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God.* That is the same city which Abraham and the patriarchs sought (11:10,16). It is what Paul called "Jerusalem that is above" (Gal 4:26), mother to all believers. Our author views it as already attained by those who have believed the new covenant and come to Jesus. In spirit they were residents of the city already, though in body they were yet pilgrims and strangers on earth. That there is yet to be an earthly manifestation of the city is clear from the later reference in 13:13 to "the city which is yet to come."

2. *You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly.* The myriads of angels are referred to several times in Scripture (Deut 33:2; Dan 7:10; Lk 2:13; Rev 5:11). All of these six elements here are governed by the verb translated, "you have come" (*proselelythate*). The perfect tense indicates a condition already existent with continuing effect. The thought of the author here is probably that of 1:14: "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" Angels minister, with joy, to believers in many hidden ways, helping them run the race of life with patient endurance. An example of this is found in Acts 27:23-24.

3. *You have come to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.* Bruce properly sees this

as a reference to the whole communion of saints who have come, not merely into the presence of the church, but into its membership by faith in Christ (1964:376-377). The writing of their names in heaven recalls Jesus' words to his disciples, "Rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Lk 10:20). They share with Jesus the title of firstborn (Col 1:18) because they are "heirs of God and coheirs with Christ" (Rom 8:17).

4. *You have come to God, the judge of all men.* The Greek text properly reads, "to a judge, who is God of all men." Without exception, all humans must stand before God to be judged. But the glory of the gospel is that believers may stand before him without fear, since Jesus himself assures each one that he "has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (Jn 5:24). This relief from the fear of judgment is an enormous blessing to those who know themselves to be sinners in word, thought and deed.

5. *You have come to the spirits of righteous men made perfect.* Commentators have differed over whether this describes "believers of preChristian days" (Bruce) or "New Testament believers" (Bengel). It likely looks back to 11:40 and the Old Testament saints who would be made perfect "together with us." Since it is their spirits which have been made perfect and not their bodies, it suggests that these saints, who lived before the Cross, are waiting with us for the resurrection to come. Jesus spoke to the Jews of "other sheep [Gentiles] that are not of this sheep pen." "They too," he added, "will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd" (Jn 10:16). As we have already noted, when the heavenly Jerusalem comes to earth, as John sees it in Revelation 21:2, these words will be fulfilled. Its gates are named for the twelve tribes of Israel, and its foundation stones bear the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

6. *You have come to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.* Moses was the mediator of the old covenant and under it, the Aaronic priests sprinkled blood upon the mercy seat to cover over the sins of Israel. This made the continued presence of God among them possible. As our author has ably shown, all this was but a shadow of the new covenant where Jesus would be an eternal mediator, sprinkling his own blood which does not merely cover over sins but take them entirely away. The *better word* of which his blood speaks is forgiveness, whole and complete. This is in contrast to the blood of Abel, which, as we saw earlier, could only call for vindication but could not offer forgiveness. Let us never forget that we are redeemed, not with perishable things such as silver or gold "but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect" (1 Pet 1:19).

To summarize, the advantages of being in Christ consist of (1) living already, in spirit, in the new Jerusalem which Abraham and Old Testament believers longed to see; (2) joining already in praise around the throne of God with myriads of the heavenly host; (3) belonging to a body of believers who are members with each other and who share a heavenly citizenship; (4) having no fear of God's judgment even though standing spiritually before his august throne; (5) sharing with Old Testament believers the certain hope of the resurrection of the body; and (6) possessing Jesus in a new and intimate relationship ("you in me and I in you"), which involves a complete and final solution of the problem of human sin.

The Fifth and Final Warning (12:25-29)

Since believers in Christ now possess such enormous resources for living as those just described, it is of the utmost importance to act in accordance with them. Truth simply understood is never acceptable in and of itself; it is truth done that counts! So, for the fifth time in this epistle, the author warns against turning back from the truth they have learned as professing Christians to a more comfortable and less demanding life in Judaism or to an accommodation to the unbelieving lifestyles around them.

Verses 25-27 take us back to the first warning of 2:1-3. There the Hebrews were in danger of drifting away from that which they had heard; here they also stand in peril of refusing *him who speaks*. There they were reminded that violations of the law received immediate punishment; here they are also told that those who refused the One who gave commandments from the mountain *did not escape*. There the question confronted them: "How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?" Here the question is *How much less will we [escape], if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven?* There the message was one "spoken by angels," in contrast to the salvation "first announced by the Lord." Here the contrast is also between the message spoken *on earth* from the mountain, and the word which has come to them from him who speaks *from heaven* (which almost certainly refers to 1:1-2: "God . . . has spoken to us by his Son").

It is clear that the warning passages envision the same peril--that apathy toward spiritual matters and complacency with a religious lifestyle falls far short of what God requires and has made full provision for. But such complacency cannot go unjudged forever. It actually constitutes a refusal of God's grace, a turning of one's back on truth and deliverance. This is where some, if not many, of the recipients of this letter now stand. The last three warnings particularly (6:4-6;10:26-31 and here) envision a deliberate and final rejection of the new covenant as the greatest danger. The shaking of Mount Sinai was designed to arouse serious consideration of the demands of the law on the Israelites. Since such "earthly" shaking was not sufficient to gain their full attention a greater shaking is yet to come; a shaking not merely of earth but of earth and heaven together.

We have already noted that heaven is the realm of invisible realities, of forces and principles which actually govern human life. The word translated "created things" (*pepoiemenon*) means "things made," but 11:2 reminds us that behind the visible things are invisible forces. This shaking of heaven and earth is both of the visible and of the invisible. Isaiah also declares: "Therefore I will make the heavens tremble; and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the LORD Almighty, in the day of his burning anger" (Is 13:13). It is this greater shaking from which there is no escape. That shaking began with the preaching of Jesus (Hag 2:6) has been continuing through the Christian centuries, and will culminate in the great judgments described in Daniel and Revelation. The earth and heaven will flee away and be replaced by the new heavens and the new earth.

There is something chilling about the thought of a shaking of heaven and earth. The twentieth century has watched the crumbling of much which we once thought to be stable. Faith in human government has been widely shaken; confidence in science as the savior of the race has waned as the problems of pollution, urban decay, biological warfare and existential despair increase. Long-accepted moral standards have disappeared under the onslaught of divorce, unmarriages, sexual explicitness, homosexuality and abortion.

But there are some things which cannot be shaken and which will remain forever. That which is shaken and removed is so done in order that what cannot be shaken may stand revealed. Such an unshakable thing is the kingdom of God into which those who trust in Jesus have entered. It is present wherever the King is honored, loved and obeyed. The present active participle ("are receiving") indicates a continuing process. We enter the kingdom at conversion, but we abide in it daily as we reckon upon the resources which come to us from our invisible but present King. Such unbroken supply should arouse a continuing sense of gratitude within us and lead to acceptable worship of God. What renders such worship acceptable is the sense of God as incredibly powerful and majestic in person, and yet loving and compassionate of heart. An old hymn puts it well:

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible, hid from our eyes.
How blessed, how glorious, the Ancient of Days
Almighty, Victorious, thy great name we praise!

The proper attitude of Christians must be one of awe that a Being of such majesty and glory could find a way to dwell eternally with such sin-controlled and sin-injured creatures as us. Since *our God is a consuming fire*, "we must cry with Isaiah, "Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who of us can dwell with everlasting burning?" (Is 33:14). God's love is just such a fire, it destroys what it cannot purify, but purifies what it cannot destroy. In Jesus we have a relationship that cannot be destroyed (Rom 8:38-39). Our great king is leading us through trials and difficulties in order that we may at last cry with Job, "He knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10 KJV).

13:1 Keep on loving each other as brothers. 2 Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. 3 Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering. 4 Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. 5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." 6 So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be

afraid. What can man do to me?" 7 Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. 8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. 9 Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them. 10 We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat. 11 The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. 12 And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. 13 Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. 14 For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. 15 Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise --the fruit of lips that confess his name. 16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. 17 Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you. 18 Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way. 19 I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon. 20 May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, 21 equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. 22 Brothers, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written you only a short letter. 23 I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you. 24 Greet all your leaders and all God's people. Those from Italy send you their greetings. 25 Grace be with you all.

Faith at Work (13:1-25)

If you like to get letters from close, loving friends you will enjoy this last chapter of Hebrews for it affects us as much as it did its original readers. The great pastoral heart of the writer comes to the fore in his closing words. Far from being an unrelated addendum, written perhaps by another hand or at another time as some commentators have claimed, the chapter is a natural close for one who has finished his teaching and warnings and now gives some final words of loving application. One by one, he touches on the kinds of behavior by Christians which will impress a secularized society with the value and power of Christian truth. The general acceptance of religious pluralism in America has made standard methods of Christian witness less and less effective. Christians are now being judged, not on their teachings, but on their lives. What qualities of life will favorably influence the Buddhist family down the street, or the Vietnamese who moved into the neighborhood, or the young unmarried couple who live together in the apartment downstairs, who are turned off by church and know next to nothing about the Bible? This first-century author confronts the same kind of pluralistic world with urgencies that work in any age.

Keep Love and Purity Central (13:1-6)

First, and above all else, is brotherly love (v. 1). Jesus himself said this would be the mark by which his true disciples would be known (Jn 13:35). It is not a love based on personal liking, but one based on a shared relationship. All Christians are "members one of another" because they share the life of Christ. They value and care for each other because they are brothers and sisters, whether they naturally like each other or not. In 12:12-17, the author has already shown his concern that his readers guard their influence on other believers and strive to live at peace, avoiding immorality and a materialistic spirit. Here he indicates the more positive side of actively showing love. There is a practical quality to this love, as 1 John 3:17 indicates: "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?" Church members then checked up on those in need and saw to it that their basic needs for food, shelter and clothing were met.

Second, they were to be hospitable and generous, even with total strangers or any who showed need of their ministrations. Job could say, "No stranger had to spend the night in the street, for my door was always open to the traveler" (Job 31:32). Certain Old Testament saints, because of their hospitable ways, had enjoyed

extraordinary experiences with angelic visitors. Noteworthy among them would be Abraham (Gen 18), Gideon (Judg 6) and Manoah (Judg 13). Hospitality to strangers is a peculiarly significant mark of Christian ministry since it reflects the undeserving mercy which the Christian has received from God already. Jesus said, "Freely you have received, freely give" (Mt 10:8), and warm hospitality reflects such an attitude. Such hospitality is not manifest in the modern practice of repaying entertainment by one's friends, though that is not wrong in itself. It is simply not reaching out to strangers as Jesus commanded (Lk 14:13-14). Fear, lest one be taken advantage of, keeps many from this practice, but first-century believers found a way to minimize that. An early Christian commentary, the *Didache*, limited visits to only one day, or two if necessary. If a Christian stayed three days, he was regarded as a false prophet (Bruce 1964:390). (45)

A third display of true Christian concern is to become aware of the needs of prisoners and others suffering difficult circumstances. Empathy is called for, not merely help. We must feel with the prisoner or the mistreated, the shame, hurt and hopelessness they often experience, and minister to them out of an awareness that we too could have been where they are, had our circumstances been the same as theirs. Even those imprisoned justly merit Christian help, since Jesus ministered to the guilty and the condemned simply because they were human beings, who were victims of self-deceit or ignorance. Churches in the twentieth century have too easily shifted concern for the poor and homeless to the shoulders of government. That help should be welcomed, but it must be remembered that it will often be rather impersonal and short-lived. Christians can add dimensions of love and continuance that non-Christians are not capable of showing. Each Christian should frequently review his or her efforts in this direction, for these exhortations are still valid today.

As a fourth indication of Christian reality, marriage must be preserved as God-given and honorable, with no sexual infidelity tolerated. This second reference to the danger of sexual immorality indicates the concern on this point in early Christian teaching. They saw clearly that marriage cannot exist where sexual infidelity is tolerated. But even failure in this area would not call for cold condemnation. Counsel, understanding, and a willingness to forgive and restore upon repentance are needed.

The family is the basic unit of society, and any breakdown soon begins to affect all. We are witnessing the truth of this widely today. Laxity among Christians is probably responsible for the attitude of many young people who regard marriage as "just a scrap of paper" and feel free to live together without benefit of marriage vows. The point to remember is that God views infidelity as serious and will allow the natural consequences of pain, hurt and guilt to take their terrible toll, and no way can be found to escape it. It is in this way that he judges *the adulterer and all the sexual immoral*. The knowledge of such inevitable consequences should induce couples to work hard at solving marriage rifts and to seek spiritual help in fleeing from temptations to sexual sin. Christian leaders must see that such help is available and that it is not superficial or inaccurate. The moral climate of society may regard biblical sexual standards as quaint and old-fashioned, but the church especially ought to hold to such standards in a time of declension.

The fifth sign of genuine Christian life is a contented, greed-free attitude (vv. 5-6). The basis for such contentment is God's promise and ability to supply the necessities of life (Mt 6:25-34). Loving money must particularly be avoided as it becomes a substitute for faith in God's loving care and induces a false trust in an unreliable supply. God has said he will never leave us nor forsake us. This should evoke, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (46) The two quotations, one from Deuteronomy 31:6 and the other from Psalm 118:6-7, reveal that the answer to any kind of fear, including the fear of poverty, is found in the commitment of God to ever be with us. There are many warnings in Scripture against loving money. Jesus said it was impossible to serve both God and money, and Paul had written young Timothy: "People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction" (1 Tim 6:9).

Though credit cards were unknown in the first century, they often constitute a trap today that results in financial ruin and destruction. The point of danger is the love of money which cancels out the sense of God's love and promised supply, and launches the believer into worldly schemes for financial security that belie all trust in God. This is not to set aside the recognition that God can and often does supply methods of financial support using banks, insurance, securities and other means. But all these must be seen as coming from his hand. It is always spiritually dangerous to grow financially discontent. Remember Paul's words: "Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs" (1 Tim

6:10).

Life In the Church (13:7-19)

The five manifestations listed above are normal expressions of the new life in Christ. They are open to all true believers and, when consistently exhibited, are designed to impress nonChristians with the advantages of faith. In the next section, from verses 7-19, the author focuses more on the marks of faith at work within the life of the church. Prominent among these is respect for and compliance with godly leaders (mentioned three times in this chapter---vv. 7,17, 24). Here, the aorist *elalesan* ("spoke") indicates leaders who were no longer with them, who probably had died, and yet the impress of their lives is still on those who remain.

It is particularly their faith that must be emulated, since it was fixed on Jesus who is unchangeable and always available. Almost every Christian has some mentor who has shaped his or her faith by godly example, and their memory is a continual encouragement to draw strength from the unchanging Lord. The memorial marker to John Wesley in Westminster Abbey bears the inscription: "God buries his workmen, but he carries on his work." Memories of godly lives help best when they turn us to the One who never needs to be replaced and who is permanently available to his people. This great statement that Jesus is unchanged and unchangeable builds upon 1:10-12 where all creation may pass away but Jesus the Creator remains forever the same. Here, at the end of Hebrews, Jesus' role as mediator of the new covenant and pioneer of faith who is always available to his people is even more the focal point of the author's declaration.

The section of verses 9-12 is directed against the tendency of many Christians then and now to seek approval or status from God by eating, or refraining from eating, certain special foods. The once-held Catholic practice of eating fish on Friday would be a case in point. Many appeals are made today for vegetarianism, special diets, and even the use of marijuana, peyote or other hallucinogenic drugs, which are designed to enhance spiritual vitality. The author calls such practices *all kinds of strange teachings* and warns against becoming involved with such beliefs. They turn attention from the strengthening by grace which trust in the living Christ can bring to the troubled heart. For, in any case, the ascetic practices of some have done them no good, for the author asserts they are *of no value to those who eat them*. It brings to mind Paul's word to the Colossians: "Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence" (Col 2:23). Churches should frequently alert their people against involvement in such useless practices.

In the words *we have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat* the author is still seeking to direct faith to the person of Jesus, instead of some empty ritual. This is made clear in verse 11, where he refers to the sin offering of the Day of Atonement. He thinks of Christ's sacrifice as the antitype of that sin offering, and it is that antitype which constitutes the altar we Christians have. It is, of course, the Cross. The priests of Israel could not eat the flesh of any animal whose blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat, though they partook freely of the flesh of other sacrificed animals. The bodies of the sin offerings were burnt *outside the camp* where Jesus was also taken when he was crucified (Jn 19:20 "near the city"). Though the priests had no right to eat of the bodies of the sin offerings, we do have the right to nourish ourselves on the life of our great Sin Offering, Jesus. We are "eating Christ" when we trust him and obey him. This may be an oblique reference to the words of Jesus in John 6:53-54 ("Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day"), though this cannot be certain. But to draw grace and strength from Jesus is to be made holy daily. This is on the basis of the once-for-all shedding of Jesus' blood. It was for this very purpose that Jesus suffered outside the city gate. (47)

So the appeal comes again: *Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore* (v. 13). The word for *disgrace* is the same word used of Moses in 11:26, who chose to bear reproach for the sake of Christ. The camp is the religious establishment, whether of Judaism or of a distorted Christianity. Going outside that camp does not necessarily mean a physical withdrawal. It refers more to the inner attitude which sees no value in religious ritual and dietary restrictions. It looks directly to the promises of the new covenant for personal strength to live by. There is a recognition here that visible religious practices are often highly regarded by society at large, and those who live by faith, without the need for impressive buildings, rituals, altars, vestments and the like, are often scorned as having nothing beautiful about their faith to commend it.

The scorners have forgotten, of course, the admonition of Scripture: "Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness" (Ps 29:2). God has never made anything more beautiful than a genuinely holy person whose inner commitment and fellowship with Christ is visibly evidenced by a loving spirit, a humble attitude, a forgiving heart and a moral walk.

This lack of need for materially expressed religion is underscored by the author in verse 14: *For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.* Like Abraham of old, believers are pilgrims and strangers in the world, looking forward, as he did, to "the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (11:10). This is not intended to sentence believers of every age to penury---for Abraham was rich---or to prohibit involvement with politics or business---for Abraham was involved in both. But it frees us from lusting after material benefits, and especially from seeking to gain influence by religious display. We have already attained to that "city that is to come" in our spirits (12:22); we shall enter it in body at the resurrection when Jesus returns (Rev 21:2-4). We are in no need now of ornate buildings, special ceremonies and elaborate ritual.

How is true faith then to be manifested? Verses 15-16 answer with the sacrifices of genuine praise, and compassionate sharing and help. Worship and service: these are the fruits produced by genuine life from God. They are to be done *through Jesus, and continually* (Gk: *dia pantos*, through everything), because it is with such sacrifices (not by empty rituals) that God is pleased (Is 58:6-9 and Hos 6:6). James agrees with this, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (Jas 1:27). The worship of Christians together and their practical deeds of compassion and help are the "sacrifices" with which God is pleased. A Christian poet expresses this perfectly:

'Tis in the daily toil and stress
we best can preach his loveliness,
It's Mrs. Johnston's shining face proclaims
that she is saved by grace,
While Mrs. Smith by kindly deeds
shows how from sin her soul is freed
And in the busy common round
reveals the Saviour she has found.
And Ann by polishing the floors
tells forth the Master she adores.
"Oh, Lord," I pray on bended knee,
"make me like these, thy children, please."

In 13:7, the author recalled to his reader's minds the influence for good left by mentors who were now gone. In verse 17, he urges respect for and compliance with the godly leaders they now have. This verse, along with 1 Thessalonians 5:12, has been widely misunderstood because of the faulty translation of the KJV, NIV and other versions. The words *obey* (twice here) and *submit* and the phrase from 1 Thessalonians 5:12 "are over you in the Lord" have often fueled a harmful authoritarianism that has turned pastors into autocrats and congregations into personal domains. Such a twisted view of authority ignores entirely Jesus' words to the disciples: "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. *But it shall not be so among you:* but whoever would be great among you must be your servant" (Mk 10:42-43 RSV).

Perhaps those words, "it shall not be so among you," have been among the most ignored sayings of Jesus within the churches. Wherever leadership views itself as having God-given authority to impose rules or limitations on individual Christians or a congregation without their willing consent, these words of Jesus are being violated. Warnings against "lording it over the brethren" are given in 2 Corinthians 1:24 by Paul, in 1 Peter 5:3 by Peter, and in 3 John 9-10 by John. (48)

The author's basis for urging his readers to give willing response to their leaders is that the leaders are godly men who feel deeply their responsibility to lead wisely and lovingly *as men who must give an account.* This account must be given, not to the congregation, but to the Lord (1 Pet 5:2-4). Henri J. M. Nouwen has said,

"The task of future Christian leaders is not to make a little contribution to the solution of the pains and tribulations of their time, but to identify and announce the ways in which Jesus is leading God's people out of slavery, through the desert to a new land of freedom. Christian leaders have the arduous task of responding to personal struggles, family conflicts, national calamities, and international tensions with an articulate faith in God's real presence." If individuals yield voluntary submission to such responsible leadership, it will make the leader's work a joy and of great advantage to all. Note that the responsibility for making the operations of a church a joy, and not a burden, is placed on the congregation, not on their leaders. Even the Declaration of Independence recognizes that legitimate government derives its just powers from the consent of the governed!

The closing section of the epistle takes a more personal turn. Still thinking of leaders and their need of support from those they lead, the writer asks his readers to pray for him (vv. 18-19) and bestows on them a benediction of unusual power and beauty (vv. 20-21). His prayer request concerns his own desire to live in good conscience and to be able soon to come for a personal visit. There may be a veiled awareness here of some possible resentment in his readers for the blunt things he had to say to them or for his long absence from them. But he does not feel that he did anything wrong in speaking bluntly (*we are sure that we have a clear conscience*), and he enlists their prayerful concern that he may visit them again soon. Any resentment on their part would surely be dispelled by the warmth of his closing benediction.

A Gathered-Together Prayer (13:20-21)

Verses 20-21 must rank among the most powerfully worded blessings found in the Scripture. They gather up the passionate concern of the writer for his readers' spiritual growth and stress the major factors that make such growth possible: the God of peace, the blood of the eternal covenant, the resurrection of Jesus, his Shepherd care for his sheep, the indwelling life of God himself, the equipping of the Spirit, the aim to please God, and the eternal glory and lordship of Jesus. It is all there in one glorious outpouring of good wishes and confident certainty.

Bruce sees it as a kind of collect (a gathered-together prayer) which later became popular in the Latin churches. These are the themes of Hebrews, brilliantly restated and forming an appropriate conclusion to the letter. *The God of peace* is surely a reference to the peace given to all who are justified by faith (Rom 5:1); *the blood of the eternal covenant* recalls all the writer has said in chapters 8-10 about the opening of a new and living way to God; *brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus*, though the only direct reference to the resurrection in the epistle, implies the new beginning and the new power which is now shared with all who believe; *that great Shepherd of the sheep* pictures the high priestly ministry of Jesus under a different figure; *equip you with everything good* speaks of the spiritual gifts imparted by the Spirit, mentioned in 2:4; *working in us what is pleasing to him* looks back to 13:15-16, the worship and service of God's people; and *through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever* concludes with the pre-eminent theme of the entire letter: the superiority of Jesus to anything and everything else that men worship or honor.

With such marvelous resources as these, who can excuse any failure to become the man or woman God intends you to be? We may well adopt for our own the words of J. I. Packer: "My task is not to dizzy myself by introspecting or speculating to find (if I can) what lies at the outer reaches of consciousness, nor to pursue endless, exquisite stimulation in the hope of new exotic ecstasies. It is, rather, to know and keep my place in God's cosmic hierarchy, and in that place to spend my strength in serving God and men" (1986:67-68).

Closing Words (13:22-25)

The final verses (vv. 22-25) continue the note of affection in the address brothers and in the plea to take his word of exhortation in a well-meant sense. It is relatively short compared with what he could have said had he fully developed his themes (compare 5:11 and 9:5). Certainly *all* commentaries on Hebrews are much longer than the letter itself! The writer's own view of his message is that he is simply fulfilling the same ministry he urges upon his readers in 3:13, "But encourage [same Gk word as *exhort*] one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." This passionate concern for their spiritual welfare has been expressed throughout the letter.

He announces to his friends that Timothy has now been released, presumably from prison, and may be able to

join him on his proposed visit to their locality. Nothing further is known of Timothy's imprisonment, though it suggests that Paul's warning to him in 2 Timothy 4:15 to be on his guard against Alexander the metalworker was not without substance. It may well be that Alexander obtained Timothy's incarceration, and if so, it would probably have been at Ephesus. Timothy would have had many friends throughout the province of Asia, and it is likely that the recipients of this letter live somewhere in that area, or in a neighboring province such as Phrygia or Galatia. The greetings extended from those from Italy do not mean that Hebrews was written from Italy, for then the writer would have said "those in (or of) Italy." The phrase designates a group of Italians now living wherever the writer is when he writes.

He asks his readers to greet their leaders for him, indicating that the letter was not addressed to the leaders themselves but to the church at large, including possibly some home churches (*all God's people*). This is the third mention of leaders within this chapter, showing the author's respect for their position and value. The closing Grace be with you all is another indication of his close association with Paul, for this is identical with the ending of the letter to Titus (3:15), and the conferring of grace is Paul's habitual way of closing his letters (2 Thess 3:17).

This letter was written at a time when the winds of change were blowing strongly throughout the Roman Empire, and most strongly within Judaism. At such times humans tend to cling to familiar patterns and resist change simply because it is unfamiliar and therefore threatening. But their real need is for recognition of the things which cannot change and receptivity toward the things which must be changed. Bruce well states the case: "Every fresh movement of the Spirit of God tends to become stereotyped in the next generation, and what we have heard with our ears, what our fathers have told us, becomes a tenacious tradition encroaching on the allegiance which ought to be accorded only to the living and active word of God" (1964:416).

The epistle to the Hebrews magnificently links the things which cannot be shaken with the fresh sweep of the Spirit in carrying forward the purposes of God as history moves toward its predicted consummation. It is a document greatly needed as the world lurches toward judgment and a new creation, based on the new covenant, gradually emerges from the crashing chaos of human events. Let us be grateful for its wise and careful teaching and obedient to its passionate concern for a constantly maturing faith.

NOTES, Chapters 10-13.

(32). 10:5-7. The major difference between the Septuagint and Hebrew versions lies in the term "a body you prepared for me," found in the Septuagint, and the words "but my ears you have pierced" in the Hebrew text. The Hebrew may be read as "my ears you have digged," that is "hollowed out," which would describe the creation of that part of the body. Thus the body prepared by God is symbolized by the creating of the ears, and is given back to him in obedient service (Bruce 1964:232). If we relate this latter phrase to the words of the Suffering Messiah found in Isaiah 50:5, "The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back," we see that the same concept presented: the willingness of the Messiah to undergo the pain and suffering of the Cross. The ideas may be harmonized thus: "A body you have prepared for me which involves ears opened to your voice to do your will."

(33). The thought of Jesus' body as a curtain or veil brings to mind the words of Charles Wesley, "Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see, Hail th' incarnate Deity," and the statement of John 1:14, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling [tabernacled] among us." It was the human body of Jesus which made it difficult for his disciples to believe that he was also God. It was like the curtain before the Holy of Holies that hid God from the presence of the priests in the Holy Place. But now that curtain/body no longer hides God from our eyes. The reference in Hebrews 10:20 undoubtedly recalls the statement in 6:19 that the Christian's hope of full acceptance before God is like an anchor for the soul, "it enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf."

(34). *Of The Day* Hughes properly says: "When spoken of in this absolute manner, 'the Day' can mean only the last day, that ultimate eschatological day, which is the day of reckoning and judgment, known as the Day of the Lord" (1977:416). This, however, does not envision a 24 hour period, but a longer, indefinite time,

when all the events foretold by the prophets will be fulfilled. It would begin with the Second Coming of Jesus (9:28) and would extend through the judgments at the beginning and end of the millennium (Rev 20), to the creation of the new heavens and earth.

(35). 10:26. Bruce remarks, "We shall not properly understand the anxiety [in the early church] which this problem caused unless we realize that the kind of sin which in practice aroused greatest concern was sexual irregularity. It was precisely here that the ordinary canons of everyday behavior differed most as between Christians and pagans. We may think today that equal attention ought to be paid to the other six deadly sins; the fact remains that this was the one which involved the greatest heart-searching in the Christian community" (1964:260). A refusal to follow Christian standards of morality may well mark the beginnings of the kind of apostasy brought before us in 10:26-31.

(36). 10:37-31. The Hebrew of the Habakkuk quotation reads:

For the revelation awaits an appointed time;
it speaks of the end and will not prove false.
Though it linger, wait for it;
it will certainly come and will not delay.
See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright--
but the righteous will live by his faith. (Hab 2:3-4)

The Septuagint text reads:

Because the vision is yet for an appointed time,
and it will appear at length and not in vain;
if he is late, wait for him;
because he will surely come, he will not delay.
If he draws back my soul has no pleasure in him,
but my righteous one will live by faith [faithfulness].

It is clear that the writer of Hebrews feels free to rearrange the order of the sentences here and to put a somewhat different emphasis on the words. The revelation (or vision) which is to come, seen in the Hebrew text, is viewed by the writer as a reference to Christ. He denotes him as "the Coming One," which is the title given to the Messiah by John the Baptist (Mt 11:3). When the Hebrew text says, "Behold his soul is puffed up . . . but the righteous shall live by faith," it is a test to distinguish the coming prophet from one who is false. The LXX says instead, "If he draws back . . ." which seems to be the result that follows one whose "desires are not right." The writer of Hebrews adopts that wording but refers it to the apostate who turns away from truth. By placing the phrase "my righteous one" before this, he makes it the subject of both parts of the verse. His thought is, if the righteous one endures by faith, he will gain the promised reward; if he draws back, he will show himself apostate. This freedom to rearrange an Old Testament text without destroying its basic meaning is characteristic of the New Testament writers who knew themselves to be the spokespersons of the Holy Spirit.

(37). 11:1. Scholars debate the exact meaning of the words *hypostasis* ("assurance" or "substance") and *elenkos* ("certainty" or "evidence"). The NIV and RSV follow the first set of meanings ("assurance" and "certainty") the KJV, the latter. Westcott points out that the KJV text reflects the unanimous usage of the Greek and Latin fathers, and, I believe, is more in line with the argument of Hebrews to this point. To say, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for" is to see faith as being able to enjoy *in the present* something largely intended for the future. This is surely the sense intended in 6:5, "tasted. . . the powers of the coming age." Thus the invisible entities such as love, peace, joy, courage, are made evident in the lives of those who walk by faith. Hence my title for this chapter---"Faith Made Visible."

(38). 11:4. The LXX says Cain's offering was not "divided rightly" though it offers no explanation as to what that meant. Philo described Abel's offering as "living" in contrast to Cain's which was "lifeless." Josephus suggested that God is more pleased with things which grow spontaneously than with that which is "forcibly produced by the ingenuity of covetous man," by which he apparently meant that Cain had to work harder than

Abel! The Puritan scholar John Owen, followed by many today, linked the offerings with Hebrews 9:22, "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" and insisted that Cain's bloodless offering was the reason for his rejection. But neither offering is ever said to be a sin offering. The offering of firstfruits was included later under the law as acceptable worship of God. Scripture attaches no blame to Cain for the offering he brought; it was the condition of his heart in bringing it that caused its rejection.

(39). 11:25. Bruce (1964:286-289) gives excerpts from intertestamental wisdom literature which show how widely Enoch was accepted as the earliest of the prophets.

(40). 11:10. *A city which has foundations* . . . Nowhere in the Old Testament is there any mention of such a city. However, the concept of a city is prominent in the Old Testament from the beginning. Cain built a city in the land of Nod, naming it after his son Enoch (Gen 4:17), and after the flood men built the city of Babel, which they saw as an instrument to achieve fame and security (Gen 11:4). Abraham is called to leave the city of Ur of the Chaldees, a highly developed commercial center with schools and a library, and it should not be surprising that he would expect a city to be built ultimately in the land of Canaan to which he was called. This would be what Paul calls "the present city of Jerusalem" which pictures the "Jerusalem that is above" which he says is "our mother" (Gal 4:26). Just as the land of Canaan itself was a picture of a heavenly rest, so other earthly cities could only faintly shadow the city with foundations which God would plan and build. It would be this heavenly city which Abraham's faith envisaged that would enable him to wait patiently through a lifetime of nomadic existence.

(41). 11:11. Many commentators are troubled by the phrase which the NIV translates *was enabled to become a father*, especially since in the Greek "Sarah herself" is in the nominative case which would make her the subject of the sentence. The Greek is *dynamin eis katabolen spermatos elahen*, literally, "received power unto the laying-down of seed." It is generally agreed that this refers to the depositing of semen by the male, rather than the presenting of an ovum by the female. Thus Abraham must be the subject here. Two alternatives have been proposed for understanding the phrase *aute Sarra steira* ("Sarah herself barren"). One is that taken by the NIV here; namely, that the phrase is a Hebraic circumstantial clause---"and Sarah herself was barren." The other possibility is that the phrase is a dative of accompaniment (with the iota subscripts absent in the uncial script). Thus we should translate: "By faith he [Abraham] also, together with Sarah, received power to beget a child . . ." (Bruce 1964:302---see the discussion 299-302.) In either case, the explicit mention of Sarah should be seen as a commendation of her faith as well.

(42). 11:26. It is difficult to know what aspects of Christ Moses saw that so powerfully turned him from the transient treasures and pleasures of Egypt. The Hebrew word for Christ ("Anointed One") did not have the associations with the life of Jesus that the word Christ has for us today. Yet there was an unmistakable Presence which Moses and other Old Testament characters sensed, which they associated with God, and which they valued in a personal and intimate way (Ex 33:14-15). Paul could say of the Israelites in the wilderness, "they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ" (I Cor 10:3).

(43). 12:1. Another possible translation for the sin that so easily entangles is "the sin which is in good standing" that is, popular or admired by many. Westcott says of this, "The form of the word is favourable to this sense" (1889:393). This meaning would apply equally well to the sin of unbelief, since this is widely approved by a world which easily ignores the word of God, and even by many Christians who take the exhortations of Scripture lightly.

(43). 12:2. Bruce sees the joy set before him as his exaltation at the right hand of the throne of God. However, he adds, "His exaltation there, with all that it means for His people's well being and for the triumph of God's purpose, . . . is 'the joy that was set before him' " (1964:353). Thus he too sees the ministry of Jesus to his people as part of the joy he desired so greatly that he scorned the agony and shame of the Cross.

(45). 13:2. Perhaps a caution should be added in this violent age against a mechanical or legalistic practice of this exhortation. Due care should be exercised with strangers to guard against admitting those with criminal intent to a home or those who habitually prey upon ingenuous people. There should be clear evidence of the need of hospitality, and wisdom exercised in perhaps including other trusted persons.

(46). 13:5-6 The Greek phrases for "Never will I leave you never will I forsake you" constitute the strongest expression of assurance possible. They may be interpreted: "Never, under any circumstances ever. will I leave you!" God promises to supply, as Paul stoutly avers (Phil 4:19), but believers must allow him to do so in his own way and time, without specifying either.

(47). 13:10. Is the altar mentioned here a reference to the Lord's Supper, commonly called the Eucharist? Many have thought so through the centuries. Though it is natural to tie this to the Lord's words in John 6:53-54 ("Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life"), it cannot be demonstrated that the writer of Hebrews has this in mind To take it as a direct reference to the Eucharist has given strength to the concept of the Mass, which views the bread and wine as transformed into the body and blood of Christ. But the early church Fathers did not view this as the Eucharist, for it is not till Cyprian, in the third century, "that it [the altar] begins to be used as a synonym for the Lord's table" (Hughes 1977:578). Even Thomas Aquinas states: "This altar is either the cross of Christ, on which Christ was sacrificed for us, or Christ himself, in whom and through whom we offer our prayers" (Hughes 1977:578). Though the Lord's Supper presents a magnificent occasion to inwardly feed upon the value of Christ's sacrifice for us, it is probably not what was in the mind of the author of Hebrews.

(48). 13:17. Several things should he noted about Hebrews 13:17 and I Thessalonians 5:12. The word "obey" comes from the Greek *peitho* , "to persuade." The present imperative middle form, used here, means "permit oneself to be persuaded, "yield to persuasion." It definitely does not mean to blindly follow orders. The phrase those who are over you in the Lord should simply be "your leaders in the Lord." There is no thought of being "over" anyone, or others being "under" a leader. The authority of a Christian leader is not command authority, but servant leadership. A servant has authority, as Jesus said he had, because he awakens by his loving service a desire to comply. Or he is persuasive because of his logic or knowledge.

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