

Dear Friends,

I started my serious study of Scripture in my fourteenth year. About six months later I experienced my first venture into the New Testament Book of Hebrews. Paul's repeated explanation of one Old Testament lesson after another, always finding Jesus in those passages, excited me beyond words. By the time I reached the eighth chapter, the unfolding reality of Jesus became so overflowing that I literally felt the need to take a brief break to absorb and grow to appreciate all I had read. Hebrews has never diminished or disappointed me since that early beginning.

Has life dished out painful difficult trials for you? Study Hebrews. Have you heard others put Jesus down or dishonor Him? Study Hebrews. Are you struggling with discouragement? Study Hebrews! Only after Paul builds the rock-solid foundation of "Jesus is better" through the first ten chapters does he take us into the gold mine of faith in Chapter 11. Early in my faith journey a wise man reminded me,

and many others, to take great care in choosing the object of our faith. In his words, "Some folks believe in their belief. Some folks trust their trust. Others have faith in their faith. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only right object of a godly faith." Biblical always takes us to Jesus, the "...author and finisher of our faith," fully showing us who He is and how He has faithfully accomplished our eternal salvation, as well as giving us the one worthy example of a godly faith-way to live our lives in a hostile world. If you trust your trust, sooner or later you will come face to face with your distrust. If you believe in your belief, you shall eventually realize your unbelief. (Mark 9:24 KJV) And if you have faith in your faith, the day shall come when you shall hear Jesus' piercing words, "Oh ye of little faith." But, if you faithfully anchor your faith in Jesus, you shall never be disappointed or abandoned.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the famous English poet, was an admirer of the Christian poet/hymn writer, William Cowper. When Cowper died, Browning wrote a touching poem and tribute to Cowper. One of my favorite lines from this poem

reminds us. In His darkest hour on the cross, Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46 KJV) Browning insightfully observed; Jesus voluntarily submitted to the Father by putting Himself in this position of forsakenness. Yes, for a brief moment, even the Father forsook our Lord. (Isaiah 54:7 KJV) However, she reminds us. Jesus, the only worthy object of our faith, truly was forsaken so that you and I can never--ever--even for a brief moment, truly say that we are forsaken. That is the glorious truth that makes Jesus the only right and Biblical object of true faith. Hebrews powerfully reminded some first century Christians of this truth, and it equally reminds us.

O worship the King, all glorious above,
O gratefully sing His pow'r and His love;
Our Shield and Defender, the Ancient of Days,
Pavilioned in splendor and girded with praise.
(Robert Grant, 1779-1833)

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

Hebrews

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. (Hebrews 1:1-4 KJV)

Although the human author of Hebrews doesn't name himself, the prevailing historical view attributes the book to Paul. We can't doubt that the first recipients of the letter knew and respected the writer. Based on Hebrews 10:32-37, we may conclude that the letter was written

to Jewish believers who were discouraged because of intense persecution, so much so that they were thinking of abandoning their faith and returning to their old way of worship. Several objectives, all affirmed and more in the letter, were vital for the Hebrew believers to stay their course and keep their faith.

1. ***Their faith in Jesus is valid.*** He is God in human flesh. Everything they learned about Him in the gospel is true.

2. ***Because of Jesus, the old way of worship under the law is no longer valid.*** God instituted that way as a bridge from Moses to the coming of Jesus at which coming the law way of worship ended. (Galatians 3:19 KJV; Carefully notice the two punctuating points in the verse. "...it was ***added...till.***")

3. ***Romans 11 affirms that Paul and the other apostles had some understanding of the impending judgment that would soon fall on the temple.*** If the Hebrew believers went back to that way, they were

facing greater problems than their present persecution.

The first nine chapters are focused on the central doctrinal truths of Jesus as God in human flesh, including the opening verses quoted above. Since these believers were familiar with the Mosaic way of worship, those first nine chapters repeatedly show how Jesus fulfilled all that law in His coming and work, including the central truth that He is—has ever been—God’s one and only true High Priest. Chapter 10 transitions from this doctrinal foundation to the practical lifestyle that grows out of the truth of Jesus and the resurrection. Repeatedly in this chapter, Paul builds a strong logical link between what Jesus did, so therefore “**Let us...**” build our lives on Him and His glorious Person and work.

The “Since Jesus has...let us...” of Chapter 10 takes us directly to Chapter 11 and the bedrock truth that the faith (Or faithfulness) of Jesus becomes our example for godliness in all things in our life. (Hebrews 12:1-2 KJV) For Paul in this chapter, as throughout Scripture, “Faith” is not about a feeling we have or a belief

not founded on Scripture, but about the example of Jesus and the clear teachings of Scripture. “I have faith...” doesn’t whitewash all our private opinions and sanctify them as good. It always—no exception—takes us by the hand and shows us the Jesus-way and teaching, as revealed in Scripture.

God...hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son. Jesus’ coming was in fact God speaking to His people no less than His voice shook Mt. Sinai when He spoke to Moses. It is not a philosophical or mystical reason that Jesus is called the “Word” or the “Word of God” in the New Testament.

*And the **Word was made flesh**, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory **as of the only begotten of the Father**,) full of grace and truth. (John 1:14 KJV 1900; emphasis added)*

God has ever revealed Himself to His people and communicated with them according to His will and way, but He never more fully “Spoke” to them, to us, than in the Person and

life of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is this truth that the Hebrew Christians forgot, and that they so needed to hear again. The Son of God (Son in the Biblical sense of possessing the same nature, status, or characteristics as the Father, not in the sense of His having a beginning or being a “Second generation” God), Jesus, is the “Word of God.”

*But when the fulness of the time was come, **God sent forth his Son**, made of a woman, made under the law. (Galatians 4:4 KJV 1900; emphasis added)*

I added emphasis to the major point in this verse, “**God sent forth his Son.**” The Father didn’t send the Word who then became the Son. **He sent His Son, who was the Word.** Grammatically, according to this verse, He was already the “Son” when the Father sent Him. Whoever the Father sent was the “Son.” These points are the foundation for the whole Hebrew letter and the opening emphasis we see in our study passage. God has spoken to us in His Son. As the Father spoke to the three disciples on the

Mount of Transfiguration, “***This is my beloved Son...hear ye him,***” (Matthew 17:5 KJV), even so He spoke to the Hebrew Christians—and to us—in Jesus, in His coming, His work, in His whole Person in the Incarnation. Paul’s opening words to the Hebrews serves as both emphasis to this central truth of Jesus and the gospel, as well as a reminder, “Are you listening to what (To Whom) God says?” How does He speak to us? You occasionally hear a sincere believer say, “The Lord revealed to me that....” However, the content of their supposed “Revelation” contradicts the teachings of Scripture. How did Paul proceed to teach the Hebrew believers in this letter? He faithfully appealed with each point to the writings of Scripture, showing that the right interpretation and meaning of all those Scriptures is to be found in Jesus and His work. If the Lord were to “Speak” to us today apart from Scripture, everything He “Spoke” would harmonize with what He “Spoke” in the pages of His Book. The Lord’s primary “Revelation” to His people is in the words of Scripture, not in a private opinion or idea. When someone claims a “Revelation” that fails to harmonize with Biblical

teaching, their “Revelation” did not come from God.

Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. Pause and study these words long and fully. This is the Holy Spirit’s authentic revelation of Jesus, of God “Incarnate,” of God in human flesh. He is God’s “Son” in the sense of being in every way equal with, and in harmony with the Father. Human language could not more fully teach this truth than this passage. In John 1:1, we see this truth affirmed.

*...the Word was **with** God, and the Word **was** God.* (John 1:1b KJV; emphasis added)

In *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, A. T. Robertson makes two essential points from this verse. First, “was” appears three times in this verse. Each time the same Greek word, according to Robertson, emphasizes “Continuous existence,” not a beginning to exist.

Second, Robertson observes that the Greek word translated “with” above means “Face to face” as equals. The Word is eternally God. He had no beginning.

After this foundation, Paul’s first point in Hebrews is that Jesus, Word-Son of God, is not a created being, not an angel. Rather He is superior to all angels. Paul’s emphasis takes us to the virgin birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

*And again, when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, And let **all the angels of God worship him**. (Hebrews 1:6 KJV; emphasis added)*

Likely beginning with Arianism, errant teachers advocate that Jesus, and even the “Word” of God (As in John 1;1-2 KJV), was not God, but rather the chief angel. This one verse refutes this idea. “All the angels of God” are directed to worship Him who was born in Bethlehem. If He were an angel, the command could not be worded as it is. Although we do not find these precise words in our King James Old Testament, they do appear in the LXX or

Septuagint translation of the Old Testament, the Old Testament commonly read by Greek speaking and reading people in the first century.

Rejoice, ye heavens, with him, and let all the angels of God worship him; rejoice ye Gentiles, with his people, and let all the sons of God strengthen themselves in him; for he will avenge the blood of his sons, and he will render vengeance, and recompense justice to his enemies, and will reward them that hate him; and the Lord shall purge the land of his people.
(Deuteronomy 32:43 LXX, Brenton English translation)

These leading verses from Hebrews 1, along with the first 18 verses of John's gospel, take us from the "Word" of God who was God and who eternally existed "Face to face" (As equal) with God to the Incarnation when He who was God eternally as the Word or Son (Proverbs 30:4 KJV) became flesh.

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory

as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. (John 1:14 KJV)

Why such strong emphasis on the deity of Jesus in the beginning of Hebrews? This is the bedrock truth that the Hebrews must reject if they abandoned their faith and returned to their old way of worship. The Spirit directed Paul to write of this truth so clearly that it could not be questioned by any who approach God and His worship by the path of God-given faith.

A simple sentence can summarize the first ten chapters of Hebrews, “Jesus is better!” He is better than angels, He is better than Moses, He is better than Levi and the priests in Levi’s succession, He is better than any of the sacrifices offered under the Levitical priesthood. Paul punctuated this truth in the tenth chapter with the refrain, “Because we have...let us....” Hebrews 10 is to children of God today no less than to those early Hebrew Christians. Everything Paul enumerates to them, that they had in and because of Jesus, we also have. So the “...let us” teachings equally are to us as to them. The ethical demands of godly faith that

anchors its hope in Jesus, His Person and His work, continues to the end of the book. Because of who Jesus is and what He has done for us, how should we live? This was the central question that Paul used to confront the discouraged believers who first received this letter. It is the same question for us today. Because of who Jesus is and what He has done for us, how then should we live our lives? A godly, faith-guided Christian life builds on the motive of love and gratitude to Jesus for what He has done for us, not on what we might earn for ourselves.

Elder Joe Holder