

The Unconverted “Believer” (9): Faith unto the saving of the Soul

Today is the ninth Lord’s Day that we have devoted to this very important subject, the unconverted ‘believer.’ The Word of God tells us that at the final judgment of mankind there will be multitudes of people on whom the Lord Jesus will pronounce damnation, sentencing them to everlasting punishment. Sadly, there will be “many” among them who had wrongly thought that they were Christians, that they had salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, but they will also be damned in their sins on the Day of Judgment (see Matt. 7:21-23). It is our desire and intention, with the Lord’s help, that no one with whom we have contact and a measure of influence will be numbered among those “many.” Our desire is that of the Apostle Paul which he had toward those in the church at Thessalonica—may the Lord “establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints” (1 Thess. 3:13).

In addressing this matter we have attempted to state the reasons why so many are deceived with respect to their salvation, that they remain in an unconverted condition while thinking that they are true Christians. First, we have shown that there is a popular, but degraded view of salvation that is commonly published and embraced. Salvation is commonly reduced to that of only God’s forgiveness of sins. But biblical salvation is deliverance from all the effects of sin. God not only justifies but sanctifies the believer, for without holiness no one will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14). Second, we have also shown that too frequently a faulty view of saving faith is popularly held, that saving faith is present by simply believing who Jesus is and what He did through His life, death, and resurrection. But we have shown that saving faith is transformative in that it shows itself in the sinner repenting of all sin and submitting to Jesus Christ the Lord. Saving faith is in Jesus as Lord, not just as Savior. And then thirdly, we have shown that saving faith is often, but wrongly, assumed to be a one-time decision for Christ, rather than initial faith as the beginning of a life of obedience to Christ the Lord and fellowship with His people. Saving faith perseveres through life onto the full salvation of the soul at the Day of Judgment.

Today I would like us to consider a portion of Scripture that touches on all these matters, which if read and considered carefully, sets forth the way of salvation that we have been declaring. Let us turn to the book of Hebrews. We will begin with but one verse, Hebrews 10:39, which reads, ***“But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul”*** (Heb. 10:39). Take note that this verse sets forth saving faith as enduring through life unto the soul’s final salvation. We see that saving faith is not a one-time decision. Further, saving faith is persevering in nature in that it continues through all of life. And also we see that the “saving of the soul” is a future prospect, which the writer elsewhere sets forth to be at the second coming of Christ.¹ The writer of this epistle was speaking of himself and his readers; he speaks of “we.” In contrast to some who apostatize from faith in the Lord Jesus, which results in their damnation (perdition), he was confident that he and his readers would persevere in their faith unto the saving of their souls. This verse is somewhat of a concluding statement of the author’s argument that is reflected throughout the entire epistle.

We will attempt to do something rather different today. Normally a sermon will focus on one, several, or a number of verses within a limited context of a book or an epistle of the Bible. But it is our desire today to set forth the message of this entire epistle of Hebrews. And although this is somewhat unusual in its scope, it is not an unreasonable effort, for the epistles of the New Testament upon their reception were probably read in their entirety before the gathered congregations. Interestingly, regarding the book of Hebrews, although it ends like a letter, as do all other epistles of the New Testament, it begins in a form like the opening of a sermon. It is very likely that Hebrews was a written sermon that was first delivered to a

¹ As we have repeatedly shown, the Holy Scriptures set forth saving faith through which we were saved (past tense), that we are being saved (present tense), and that we will be saved (future tense). All aspects of saving faith must be understood and held in balance otherwise problems will result in what people understand about the way and nature of salvation.

Christian congregation perhaps in the 7th decade of the first century. The writer himself did not think that his epistle was very long. He refers to the entire epistle was written “in few words”, which he considered to be a “word of exhortation” (Heb. 13:22). We will attempt to set before us the message of this epistle is in a (relatively) few words this morning.

What, then, was the subject of this epistle, this word of exhortation? *The writer was urging his Jewish-Christian readers to persevere in their faith toward Jesus Christ unto the full and final salvation of their souls.* Some background information would be helpful at this point.

At this time in history the Christian faith was increasingly regarded by the Roman Empire as an illegal and illegitimate religion. The official religion of the empire was paganism, with its pantheon of gods and goddesses. However, Rome had long permitted freedom for the Jewish communities to practice their faith. There were Jewish synagogues in many of the cities throughout the Roman Empire. For the first decades of the Christian era, churches were comprised mostly of Jewish people, therefore Rome viewed Christianity as permissible as long as it was viewed as an extension or offshoot of Judaism. But as Christianity spread throughout the Roman world and it became dominated by gentile Christians, and as the Jewish leadership sought to distance Judaism from Christianity, Rome increasingly viewed Christianity as an illegal religion. Persecution of Christians and their churches increased as the decades passed. By the time of the writing of this epistle, the confiscation of property and the forfeiture of livelihood had already occurred (Heb. 10:34). The temptation was for Jewish Christians to abandon their claim to believe on Jesus as their Messiah and return to embrace fully and practice only the Jews’ religion. They thought that they could do so and continue in favor with God for they knew that God had created and sanctioned the Jews’ religion from ancient times. The writer of this epistle gave forth exhortation to his Christian readers that they must continue to believe in Jesus Christ. If they were to abandon their faith and to deny Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, they would forfeit any hope of salvation, of inheriting everlasting life. They must persevere in their faith in Jesus Christ, if they hoped to be saved.

As the argument of the writer unfolds, he showed forth the superiority of Jesus Christ and what He gives to believers that far outstrips anything that previous Jewish generations received or enjoyed from God. He showed that though God had originated and revealed all that had formerly been believed and practiced by the Jews, God Himself had been moving forward through history. God had arrived at His ages-long purpose to bring into reality the Christian faith of the New Testament. That which had existed before was preparatory for the present realization through Jesus Christ. There was fulfillment and finality in Jesus Christ who superseded all that had come before. Therefore, abandoning Jesus Christ and going back was not an option. One must continue in faith in Christ, overcoming all obstacles and enduring every trial that might prevent them from persevering in faith in Jesus Christ. Only those who persevere in their faith in Jesus Christ are true believers who will inherit all the promises that God has given through Him; that is, salvation and all that it encompasses.

Now let me say a word about this very important matter of perseverance. One of the five doctrines of the historic Protestant faith—the Reformed faith—is the fifth point, which is the perseverance of the saints. It is the biblical truth that the Lord will preserve His people by grace throughout life unto their final salvation. Here is a definition of the perseverance of true believers in Jesus Christ:

Those who are the elect of God, who are recipients of God’s effectual call, having been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, led to repent of sin and believe on Christ for salvation, shall never fall away so as to perish, but will be kept by the power of God unto the salvation which is reserved for them in heaven.

God guards and secures His people in that they are “kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet. 1:5). True Christians can never fall away. God will not permit that to occur. God has promised,

“I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts *so that they will not depart from Me*” (Jer. 32:40)

But there are actually two aspects to this doctrine of perseverance. One is God’s responsibility, in that God Himself has promised and is committed to enable His elect to persevere in faith throughout life. The

other is the believer's responsibility, in that he is to guard himself and keep himself in faith and obedience throughout life. Of course the perseverance on the part of believers can and will only occur because of the grace of God at work in them. The Lord will give grace to enable His people to persevere; nevertheless, it is their responsibility to cleave to Him in faith. And so, "the righteous will hold to his way, and he who has clean hands will be stronger and stronger (Job 17:9). God moves His people enabling them to embrace the promises of Scripture while they also heed the warnings of Scripture. Through these two means, the promises and warnings of God, His people continue in their faith unto their final and full salvation. The book of Hebrews contains both promises and warnings to which the Christian is to believe and embrace, and by which he is to live in persevering faith and thereby inherit all of the promises of God in Jesus Christ.

The epistle of Hebrews itself may be analyzed according to seven major sections. These include first, the finality of Christianity (1:1-2:18); second, the true home of the people of God (3:1-4:13); third, the high priesthood of Christ (4:14-6:20); fourth, the order of Melchizedek (7:1-28); fifth, the covenant, sanctuary, and sacrifices (8:1—10:18); sixth, the call to worship, faith, and perseverance (10:19-12:29); and seventh, concluding exhortation and prayer (13:1-25). In addition to these major subjects under these seven headings, there are four places in which the author pauses from addressing his subject and sets forth a direct admonition to his readers as to their responsibility. These are sharply worded warnings to persevere in faith in Jesus Christ unto salvation. These four warning passages include first, the gospel and the law (2:1-14); second, the rejection of Jesus more serious than the rejection of Moses (3:7-19); third, spiritual immaturity (5:11-14); and fourth, the willful sin of apostasy (10:26-31).² Let us work through this epistle and as we do we will give special attention to these four warning passages that God has given us in His holy Word.

I. The finality of Christianity (1:1-2:18)

The writer began his epistle by declaring that God has given to His people the full and final revelation of Himself and His purposes through Jesus Christ. In doing so, he declares the legitimacy of the truth of God contained in the Hebrew Scriptures—our Old Testament, but that through Jesus Christ, God has revealed Himself much more thoroughly and completely. God has brought forth the salvation that He had long promised, through the death, resurrection, and exaltation of His Son. Here is Hebrews 1:1-4:

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ²has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; ³who 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 at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

The writer acknowledged that God had revealed His word in the past. God had spoken to the Jewish patriarchs through His prophets. God had given His spokesmen the ability to communicate His will and ways to His people. But as true and valid as God's message through them, God's revelation of Himself through His Son Jesus Christ far surpassed what He had revealed through them. The quality and finality of God's revelation was far superior and complete that came through His Son Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is God's eternal Son, who was with Him in the beginning, through whom God had created the world, and to whom God promised that He would inherit all things. The writer shows both the superior quality and the finality of God's revelation of His Word through Jesus Christ. What is implied here, which will be stated overtly later, is that to reject Jesus Christ and to return to the Jews' religion as set forth in the Hebrew Scriptures is to reject the fulness and the fulfillment of all that God had promised to His people through the Hebrew Scriptures. The Old Testament pointed to and saw its realization in Jesus Christ the Son of God. To use the metaphor found later in this book, it would be turning from the substance of things in Jesus Christ to the shadows of those things in the Old Testament Scriptures.

² I have included a full outline of this epistle at the end of these notes.

The writer then set forth the glory of the person of the Lord Jesus as the eternal Son of God (1:5-14). He did so with particular emphasis on the superior nature and authority of the Son of God over the angels. Whereas the holy angels were ministers and messengers on behalf of God, God had exalted His Son to be King over His everlasting kingdom. He wrote beginning with verse 5:

⁵For to which of the angels did He ever say:

“You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You”?

And again:

“I will be to Him a Father,
And He shall be to Me a Son”? (Heb. 1:5)

⁶But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says:

“Let all the angels of God worship Him.”

⁷And of the angels He says:

“Who makes His angels spirits
And His ministers a flame of fire.”

⁸But to the Son He says:

“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever;
A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.
⁹You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness;
Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You
With the oil of gladness more than Your companions.” (Heb. 1:5-9)

The question needs to be answered: Why did the writer give so much emphasis to Jesus Christ to be far above the angels? It is because the Jews believed that much, if not most of the Mosaic Law had been delivered by God to them through the ministrations of angels. This was suggested by Stephen in his sermon recorded in Acts 7 (see Acts 7:52f). Jesus is shown to be vastly superior to the angels to prove that God's revelation of His word through Him is far greater than the law that had been delivered to the people by angels. If these Jewish Christians abandoned Jesus Christ and returned to believing and practicing the law as delivered through Moses, they would be returning to a system of faith and practice that, although legitimate and authoritatively given by God, was but preparatory and of less importance and relevance than the gospel of Jesus Christ that they would be abandoning.

After making his case, the writer inserted a warning, which is his *first word of admonition*, which is set forth in **Hebrews 2:1-4**. It is the implication and application of what he had set forth regarding the full revelation of God through Jesus Christ.

Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. ²For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, ³how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, ⁴God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?

The writer compares and contrasts the great accountability that the Jews had toward God's law with the great privilege that Christians have toward that which God has revealed through Jesus Christ. He cautioned his readers about departing from this truth and returning to pre-Christian Jewish faith and practice. God had progressed and passed beyond what He had formally revealed to His people. But now they had better be watchful and careful. Using the analogy of a boat unwittingly drifting past a safe harbor entrance, the writer warned his readers not to allow themselves to drift away from the safe mooring that is Jesus Christ. To do so would be far greater peril to their eternal well-being than even what apostates to the Mosaic Law had encountered. If the law of God required the execution of every one who defied and rebelled against Mosaic Law in the days of Israel, the punishment of God will be much more severe for those who neglect or turn away from Jesus Christ. This is especially true since God so amply testified to the legitimacy of His truth through Christ and His apostles by the miracles the Holy Spirit had enabled them to perform. God had stamped authenticity regarding them and their message and He will hold severely accountable those who turn from that which He had so graciously revealed to them.

The writer urged them to repent of their thoughts of defection. They could be assured that God would forgive them of their unbelief, if they repented and continued to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. God had exalted Him to reign upon His throne. The Lord Himself would be sympathetic with them in their weakness, for He underwent similar temptations in which He was threatened, faced great difficulty, and even suffered death. Therefore He is able to come to the aid of His people when they are tempted (2:5-18).

II. The true home of the people of God (3:1-4:13)

The next major section of the epistle compares and contrasts the Promised Land held forth before Israel in the Old Testament and heaven, which is the true home for the people of God. The writer first declares Jesus Christ worthy of far greater glory than even Moses, as great as he was. The comparative glory of each one may be assessed in the light of the house of God, that is, the household or family of God, to which each of them were associated. Moses was faithful in all of God's house; he was a faithful servant or steward as God had appointed him. But Jesus Christ is the builder and owner of the house of God. The implication is that devotion and commitment to Jesus Christ superseded obligation to Moses and the covenant which God had enacted with Israel through him. Here is Hebrews 3:1-6:

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, ²who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house. ³For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. ⁴For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God. ⁵And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, ⁶but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.

The writer then urged his readers not to reject following Jesus Christ, which was the unbelief in Him. If the first generation of Israelites who had rejected Moses due to unbelief suffered the forfeiture of entering the land that God had promised to them, how much greater a tragedy would be for those who forsake their faith in following Jesus who would lead them to a far greater homeland?

This brings us to the writer's directly stated *second word of admonition* in 3:7-19:

⁷Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says:

“Today, if you will hear His voice,

⁸Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,

In the day of trial in the wilderness,

⁹Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me,

And saw My works forty years.

¹⁰Therefore I was angry with that generation,

And said, ‘They always go astray in their heart,
And they have not known My ways.’
¹¹So I swore in My wrath,
They shall not enter My rest.’”

¹²Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; ¹³but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, ¹⁵while it is said:

“Today, if you will hear His voice,
Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”

¹⁶For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? ¹⁷Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? ¹⁹So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

Here we read of the absolute necessity to persevere in faith to Jesus Christ in order to have salvation. Again, verse 14 reads, “For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.”

With chapter 4 the writer continues his appeal. He reasons that the Old Testament Promised Land was the promised rest for the people of God after they had labored long and hard under Egyptian bondage. But the writer then argued that the land of Canaan was but a foreshadowing of the true land of rest that God had promised his people. The true rest for the people of God is heaven, in which they would dwell as God’s people in the presence of God. The Israelites had forfeited their entrance into the earthly Promised Land through unbelief, which was shown in their disobedience; professing Christians will forfeit their entrance into heaven, if they abandon Jesus Christ. Christians should take heed to persevere in their faith in following Jesus Christ or they will forfeit entering their heaven rest, just as the unbelieving Israelites of that first generation out of Egypt had failed to enter their earthly rest. Here is Hebrews 4:1-5.

Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. ²For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. ³For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said:

“So I swore in My wrath,
‘They shall not enter My rest,’”

And then after proving from the Old Testament Scriptures that Joshua had not brought God’s people into the true land of promise, their promised rest, the writer proved from Scripture that there was yet the true promised rest before professing Christians, to which the Lord Jesus would bring them if they continued to follow Him in faith (see 4:11-13).

This brings us to the third major section of the epistle, in which we read of...

III. The high priesthood of Christ (4:14-6:20)

Knowing the difficulty in continuing in faith in the face of what threatened them, the writer encouraged his readers that God’s grace was available to help them. It is at this point he introduces Jesus as the true high priest of God’s people. Here is Hebrews 4:14-16.

¹⁴Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with

our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Jesus was able to enable them to overcome whatever threatened their faith in Him because He was their High Priest who could secure God's grace to help them. But did Jesus qualify to be a high priest to God's people? The writer set forth his case that indeed He was well-suited. After the writer first gave the basic and essential qualifications for becoming a high priest (5:1-4), he showed that Jesus met these qualifications (5:5-10). He declared that God had called Jesus to be the high priest of His people. He had shown that this was in God's purpose by citing the prophecy of Psalm 110 respecting Him. The writer declared in 5:5-10,

So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him:

“You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You.”

⁶As He also says in another place:

“You are a priest forever
According to the order of Melchizedek”;

⁷who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, ⁸though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. ⁹And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, ¹⁰called by God as High Priest “according to the order of Melchizedek,” ¹¹of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

The writer here identified Jesus Christ as a high priest after the order of the Old Testament person of Melchizedek. He knew that this claim would be problematic for his Jewish readers to understand. He desired to explain more fully how this could be true, but he hesitated because of their spiritual immaturity. This subject, therefore, brought forth the *third word of admonition*, which is in Hebrews 5:12-14.

The writer rebuked his readers for their inability to understand spiritual truth. They were culpable in this, for they had been Christians for quite some time and should have been farther advanced in the faith and capable of understanding. Here are his words of rebuke:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. ¹⁴But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

This is one of the clearest verses of Scripture that sets forth what it is to be a mature Christian. Christian maturity is measured according the capability of being discerning. The writer rebuked his readers for being undiscerning Christians--they were mere babies when they should have been teachers. One cause for the deficiency of these Christians was that they were “not accustomed to the word of righteousness.” We should probably understand the phrase, the “word of righteousness” as a reference to the body of Christian teaching (doctrine); that is, the content of “the faith” of Christianity. This “word” was the standard by which they were to make judgments, however, they were “unaccustomed”, or unfamiliar with it, and as a result they were unable to distinguish “good from evil.” Due to their ignorance of the substance of their faith--Christian doctrine--and their failure to apply it--to distinguish “good from evil”--they were endangering themselves. They were immature, because they were ignorant of “the faith.” They did not understand Christian doctrine -the teaching of the Bible; consequently, they had no context or standard by which to assess matters. The

writer thought that they would have difficulty understanding his explanation of the high priesthood of Jesus Christ because they were ignorant of the faith. To apply it us, if are ignorant of sound biblically based theology, then we are unable to discern truth from error, right from wrong, and good from evil.

But even though he expressed his reservation concerning their ability to understand his teaching, he refused to coddle them in their ignorance. He would nevertheless set before them the teaching concerning Christ as high priest. He regarded it as pointless to go over the basics once again, giving forth his reasons in chapter 6, which we will need to pass over at this time.

IV. The order of Melchizedek (7:1-28)

But because he was addressing Jewish Christians, the writer knew that he had introduced a subject that would be difficult for his readers to accept. How could Jesus Christ be their high priest before God when the Law of Moses required that the high priest had to be from the tribe of Levi descended from Aaron, the first high priest? Jesus was from the tribe of Judah from which no legitimate high priest rose to serve in the temple. In chapter 7 he explained why Jesus was not only a legitimate high priest, being after the order of Melchizedec rather than the order of Aaron, but that He was a far better and greater high priest than had ever served in Israel. After he showed the imperfection of the Aaronic priesthood (7:11-14), he declared the superiority of the new priesthood of Jesus Christ (7:15-19). Jesus was a greater high priest because God had called Him by an oath, commissioning Him to be a high priest (7:20-22). But further, Jesus was a superior high priest because of the permanence of His service in that He lives forever in contrast to the sons of Aaron who always ended their ministry through their death (7:23-25). And lastly, the writer showed forth the superiority of Jesus as the high priest because of the superior nature of His holy character.

V. The Covenant, sanctuary, and sacrifices (8:1-10:18)

Having proven that Jesus Christ was the high priest appointed by God, the writer then set forth the superior ministry that Jesus Christ provided for God's people. In Hebrews 8:1-7 we read,

Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a high priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, ²a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.

³For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have something to offer. ⁴For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; ⁵who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." ⁶But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.

Jesus Christ is set forth as having established and inaugurated the long promised new covenant that the people of Israel looked for since the days of the prophets. Israel had broken its covenant with God, which was the Mosaic covenant that God made with Israel at Mount Sinai. The curse of God for having transgressed His covenant was upon the people. But God had promised that when the Messiah, the Son of David came, that God would remove their transgression (Isa. 53:4 and He would establish a new covenant by Him with His people. This was declared in **Isaiah 42:1-9**.

"Behold! My Servant whom I uphold,
My Elect One in whom My soul delights!
I have put My Spirit upon Him;
He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.
²He will not cry out, nor raise His voice,
Nor cause His voice to be heard in the street.
³A bruised reed He will not break,

And smoking flax He will not quench;
He will bring forth justice for truth.
⁴He will not fail nor be discouraged,
Till He has established justice in the earth;
And the coastlands shall wait for His law.”

⁵Thus says God the LORD,
Who created the heavens and stretched them out,
Who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it,
Who gives breath to the people on it,
And spirit to those who walk on it:
⁶“I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness,
And will hold Your hand;
I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people,
As a light to the Gentiles,
⁷To open blind eyes,
To bring out prisoners from the prison,
Those who sit in darkness from the prison house.
⁸I am the LORD, that is My name;
And My glory I will not give to another,
Nor My praise to carved images.
⁹Behold, the former things have come to pass,
And new things I declare;
Before they spring forth I tell you of them.”

The writer first declared that nature of the superior ministry that Jesus Christ, in which He served His people. He then quoted at length the new covenant promised in Jeremiah 31:31ff. Here is **Hebrews 8:6-13**.

⁶But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.

⁷For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second.

⁸Because finding fault with them, He says: “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— ⁹not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the LORD.

¹⁰For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ¹¹None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. ¹²For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins ^{1b}and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.”

¹³In that He says, “A new covenant,” He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

In chapter 9 the ministry of Jesus Christ as High Priest is set forth. He serves in a far better sanctuary than did the priests of the Old Testament. He serves in heaven itself before God His Father. The Old Testament ministry was only in a temporary tabernacle that was a type of the true sanctuary in heaven.

But not only is Jesus the perfect High Priest, but He offered a far better sacrifice for sin; He offered Himself when He died upon His cross. This is set forth in **verses 11 and 12**. In contrast to the Old Testament priests we read of Jesus:

But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. ¹²Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

By His sacrifice the Lord Jesus secured salvation from sin for all of His people. Those who continue to believe on Him will one day enter their eternal reward. Here is **Hebrews 9:24** through **28**:

For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; ²⁵not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another— ²⁶He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. ²⁷And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, ²⁸so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.

Here we read that the salvation that Jesus Christ obtained will be bestowed fully and freely upon all those “who eagerly wait for Him”, that is, at His second coming. Then He will come to bestow the fulness of all blessing upon them who believe on Him. Therefore, because of who Jesus Christ is, and for what Jesus Christ did for His people through His life and death, and due to His present ministry toward His people, this brings us to the sixth section of our epistle.

VI. The Call to worship, faith, and perseverance (10:19-12:29)

Everything that Jesus Christ is and all that He bestows freely upon His people, we should be motivated to renew our commitment to believe on Him—to follow Him, and to persevere in that faith through all that we might encounter. Here is **Hebrews 10:19-25**:

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, ²¹and having a High Priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, ²⁵not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

This brings us to the fourth and final *fourth word of admonition against the willful sin of apostasy*. Here is **Hebrews 10:26-31**.

For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. ²⁸Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. ²⁹Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? ³⁰For we know Him who said, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. And again, “The LORD will judge His people.” ³¹It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Here to “sin willfully” is to commit the sin of apostasy, the complete and intentional refusal to follow Jesus Christ in faith. The temporary believer does not have God’s promise of salvation, rather, he may be assured of his just condemnation, receiving the just, eternal wrath of God upon him for his sin.

This is one of the most troubling passages in all of Holy Scripture. So that none of us are troubled needlessly, we will cite the words of **F. F. Bruce** (1910-1990) from his commentary of Hebrews.

This passage was destined to have repercussions in Christian history beyond what our author could have foreseen. By “sinning willfully: he means something like that sinning “with a high hand”³ for which no pardon was provided by the Old Testament law of atonement. He has already emphasized that the despising of the saving message spoken by the Son of God must carry with it penalties even more severe than the sanction attached to the law of Moses, “the word spoken through angels” (Ch. 2:2); and he repeats the same argument here. The content suggests that something much more serious is in his mind than what Paul calls being “overtaken in any trespass”⁴—after all, he has pointed out more than once that in Jesus Christians have a high priest who can succor them when they are tempted, sympathize with them in their infirmities and bear gently with them when they stray from the path through ignorance. What he has in mind is rather that “falling away from the living God” of which he spoke in Ch. 3:12, that renunciation of Christianity against which he warned his readers in Ch. 6:4-8. To have received the knowledge of the truth and then reject it is to give up the only way of salvation. “There remaineth no more sacrifice for sins” which can avail for those who have deliberately abandoned reliance on the perfect sacrifice of Christ. That outright apostasy is intended here seems plain from the language of verse 29; the man who has committed this willful sin is described as having “spurned the Son of God, and profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace” (RSV).

Our author is not given to wild exaggeration, and when he uses language like this, he chooses his words with his customary care. To spurn the Son of God, to trample Him underfoot (as the word literally means), “denotes contempt of the most flagrant kind”; to treat the covenant-blood of Christ, by which alone His people are sanctified, cleansed and brought to God, as no better than the most common death, is to repudiate decisively both His sacrifice and all the blessings which flow from it; to outrage the Spirit of grace is, in the words of Jesus, to be “guilty of an eternal sin” (Mark 3:29). Anyone who was convicted, on adequate testimony, of a breach of Israel’s covenant law was liable to the death penalty, of a breach of Israel’s covenant law was liable to the death penalty: “thine eye shall not pity him”, so ran the inexorable sentence. But that was the penalty of *physical* death; the spiritual death which lies in store for the apostate under the new order is a “much sorer punishment.”⁵

In spite of the strongly worded admonitions that this writer set forth, he actually was quite hopeful for his readers that they would respond to his instruction, that they would resolve to continue in faith to Jesus Christ. We read these words of hopefulness that he had for his readers along with his own commitment to persevere in faith unto the end.

But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: ³³partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; ³⁴for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. ³⁵Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. ³⁶For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:

³⁷“For yet a little while,
And He who is coming will come and will not tarry.
³⁸Now the just shall live by faith;
But if anyone draws back,
My soul has no pleasure in him.”

³ Numbers 15:30

⁴ Galatians 6:1

⁵ F. F. Bruce, **The Epistle to the Hebrews; the English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes** (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964), pp. 258-260.

³⁹But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul. (Heb. 10:32-39)

We will not go into detail of the last several chapters of this epistle. But the same themes continue. The writer showed forth what true saving faith looks like from many persons whose lives of faith are recorded in the Old Testament (Heb. 11). When the readers of this epistle consider all who had gone before them, they, too, should be spurred onward, even as they considered the sufferings of their Savior.

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²⁶looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb. 12:1-3)

He exhorted his readers not to be discouraged due to the difficulty they are encountering and through which they must persevere in faith. They all are ordered and superintended by their heavenly Father who loved them and was training them. Moreover they were not experiencing anything that the Savior had not also encountered and overcome. He urged them onward, to assist one another in their pilgrimage of faith as they journeyed the rest of the way unto their heavenly Zion. But even as He did so, he added one more word of exhortation:

See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, ²⁶whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, “Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.” ²⁷Now this, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.

²⁸Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. ²⁹For our God is a consuming fire. (Heb. 12:25-29)

Conclusion:

We have before us in this New Testament epistle confirmation of what we have been declaring about certain false beliefs regarding the way of salvation that contribute to much nominal Christianity in churches. Hebrews sets forth saving faith as that which governs the way the believer lives in that he is a faithful follower of Jesus Christ the Lord. Salvation is much more than only God’s forgiveness of sins, as important as that is. God not only pardons the sinner, but He sanctifies the believer, for without holiness no one will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14). We have seen in this epistle that it is a faulty view of saving faith to think that it is merely believing who Jesus is and what He did through His life, death, and resurrection. The Scriptures set forth saving faith as transformative, which shows itself in the sinner repenting of all sin and submitting to Jesus Christ the Lord. And then we have seen in this epistle that saving faith is not just a one-time decision to “accept Christ”, whatever that means, rather saving faith is shown forth in a life of fellowship with Christ and His people, a life that continues to believe onto the final saving of the soul at the end of the life of faith. May the Lord affirm these important truths to us that He has set before us in His Word. May we all confess that ***“we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul”*** (Heb. 10:39).

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, ²¹make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Heb. 13:20f)

Analysis of the Epistle to the
Hebrews

By F. F. Bruce⁶

I. The finality of Christianity (1:1-2:18)

1. God's final revelation of His Son (1:1-4)
2. Christ better than Angels (1:5-14)
3. **First Admonition: The Gospel and the Law** (2:1-4)
4. The humiliation and glory of the Son of Man (2:5-9)
5. The Son of Man the Savior and High Priest of His people (2:10-18)

II. The true home of the people of God (3:1-4:13)

1. Jesus greater than Moses (3:1-6)
2. **Second admonition: the Rejection of Jesus more serious than the rejection of Moses** (3:7-19)
3. The true rest of God may be forfeited (4:1-10)
4. Exhortation to attain God's rest (4:11-13)

III. The high priesthood of Christ (4:14-6:20)

1. Christ's high priesthood an encouragement to His people (4:14-16)
2. Qualifications for high priesthood (5:1-4)
3. Christ's qualifications for high priesthood (5:5-10)
4. **Third admonition: spiritual immaturity** (5:11-14)
5. No second beginning possible (6:1-8)
6. Encouragement to persevere (6:9-12)
7. The steadfastness of God's promise (6:13-20)

IV. The order of Melchizedek (7:1-28)

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2. The greatness of Melchizedek (7:4-10)
3. Imperfection of the Aaronic priesthood (7:11-14)
4. Superiority of the new priesthood (7:15-19)
5. Superior of the divine oath (7:20-22)
6. Superior because of its permanence (7:23-25)
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V. The Covenant, sanctuary, and sacrifices (8:1-10:18)

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2. The old covenant superseded (8:8-13)
3. The sanctuary under the old covenant (9:1-5)
4. A temporary ritual (9:6-10)
5. Christ's eternal redemption (9:11-14)
6. The Mediator of the new covenant (9:15-22)
7. The perfect sacrifice (9:23-28)
8. The old order a shadow of the reality (10:1-4)
9. The new order the reality (10:5-10)
10. The enthroned High priest (10:11-18)

VI. The Call to worship, faith, and perseverance (10:19-12:29)

1. Access to God through the sacrifice of Christ (10:19-25)
2. **Fourth admonition: the willful sin of apostasy** (10:26-31)
3. Call to perseverance (10:32-39)
4. The faith of the Elders (11:1-40)

⁶ F. F. Bruce, **The Epistle to the Hebrews; the English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes** (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964), pp. lxiii, lxiv.

5. Jesus, the Pioneer and Perfecter of faith (12:1-3)
6. Discipline is for sons (12:4-11)
7. Let us then be up and doing (12:12-17)
8. The earthly Sinai and the heavenly Zion (12:18-24)
9. Pay heed to the voice of God! (12:25-29)

VII. Concluding exhortation and prayer (13:1-25).

1. Ethical injunctions (13:1-6)
2. Examples to follow (13:7, 8)
3. The true Christian sacrifices (13:9-16)
4. Submission to leaders (13:17)
5. Request for prayer (13:18-19)
6. Prayer and doxology (13:20, 21)

VIII. Postscript (13:22-25)

1. Personal notes (13:22, 23)
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