

**NOTE:** *This study is a transcript of the E-dialog that Monty held with others concerning the book of Hebrews through the E-link ministry.*

### **Reviewing the Warnings on the Way**

Hello, my friend. Well, it's quite a stretch of time since we began our study of this great letter to the Hebrews (began in June 5, 2001) and I thank the Lord for the privilege of having dug into the Book together with you. I want to especially thank those of you who have responded from time to time and whose encouragement has spurred this old teacher on to continue on the journey of seeking God together with you. I know that for many of you, it has not been possible to keep up regularly but just to have your name on the list of E-LINKERS and to be able to pray for you individually from time to time has been a huge privilege for me and I thank you from my heart for the fellowship.

As we come to this last E-LINK in our Hebrews study, I found it useful to check out the warning "road-signs" on life's road. We have commented on them all before but it is valuable to remind ourselves of where we can become sidetracked on the journey.

1. **NEGLECT (2:1-4)** "We must pay more careful attention to what we have heard so that we do not drift away." Neglect can be as devastating as direct refusal to respond to the Word, since it is so subtle, so seemingly benign, yet so insidious.
2. **UNBELIEF (3:7-19)** "So we see they were unable to enter, because of their unbelief." This is a hugely valuable passage of Scripture because, as we saw in E-LINK #8 belief is always accompanied by action; to believe is to obey. So important.
3. **DISOBEDIENCE (4:11-13)** "Let us make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience" And how do we do that? As we see, by dwelling in the Word and at the Throne (verses 12-16)
4. **IMMATURITY (5:11-6:20)** I suppose my greatest disappointment is to see students who come with obvious gifts but as life progresses never mature them to great usefulness. "When by the time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's Word all over again." What we share we keep, what we neglect we forever will lose!
5. **WILLFUL SIN (10:26-31)** What a solemn section of Scripture, reminding us that other than Christ's atonement there is no other sacrifice for sin. And continued sinning is an outrage to God's gift of Grace. "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."
6. **APOSTASY (12:14-17)** To become accustomed to Christian behavior, without deep inward holiness is to be "filled with a bitter root that grows up to cause trouble and to defile many." Fellowship with Christ brings peace and joy. To fail to live the truth of His Word brings guilt, pain and grief. As He is so are we in the world.

7. REFUSAL TO LISTEN (12:25-29) "Do not refuse Him who speaks." It's joy to be able to hear God's Word. What a tragedy to hear it and yet refuse to allow it to dwell in us richly (Col.3:16-17). Let's be a world fellowship, dear E-LINKER, of pilgrims who have become sources of living water to a world in tragic need. (John 17:38).

I thank God on every thought of you, my friend!

Cheerio. Monty.

Reviewing the 'Lettuce' Patch

To all our nearby Village Schools Friends, may I remind you of our 20th Anniversary Celebration Banquet on Friday, April 26th. The details are in our school paper, the Philogian, which you have recently received and on our Web site, [www.vsb.net](http://www.vsb.net). It would be a great encouragement to have you along at our birthday party. If you can come, phone the Village Office, 952-540-9460, as soon as possible to reserve your seats. Tickets are \$25 each.

Hello, my friend. It has been encouraging to hear from various E-LINKERS how this rather long look at this letter to the Hebrews has been stimulating and enabling. It is inevitable that one is strengthened as you focus on any Scripture with eager intention and I, too, have thoroughly enjoyed digging into the Book this way. We continue to ask ourselves who was the author, and I continue to be inclined to think it was the Apostle Paul. However, there are features about this letter which differ in a way from his other letters and one of them is the way the author uses the phrase "LET US..." so frequently. It is both an invitation involving and linking both the writer and the reader, as well as a reminder of things which are of particular importance. I thought I would just list some of the more prominent such phrases, allowing the Holy Spirit to apply them to our hearts as He sees fit.

Heb.4:1, "Let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it."

Heb.4:11, "Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest..."

Heb.4:14, "Let us hold firmly to the faith we profess."

Heb.4:16, "Let us then approach the throne of Grace with confidence"

Heb.6:1 "Let us leave the elementary teaching about Christ and go on to maturity..."

Heb.10:22 "Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith.."

Heb.10:23, "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful."

Heb.10:24, "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds."

Heb.10:25, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing."

Heb.10:25, "Let us encourage one another, and all the more as you see the Day



Hello, my friend. We come today to the end of this study of Hebrews and we find one of the greatest Benedictions in all of Scripture. There are other books, of course, which end with a Blessing, such as that with which Paul closes nearly all of his letters, "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you." He extends this in 2 Corinthians 13:14 by saying, "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

But here in Hebrews we have a final greeting that is remarkable in its content. He bases his greeting on the emphatic assurance of the resurrection of Christ. It is more than just a farewell thought, it is a huge reassurance that all that we have in faith, hope and love is based on the resurrection of Christ. Paul asserted this, for example, when he shouts his life-goal, "That I may know him and the power of His resurrection, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead." (Philippians 3:11). He defines what is the heart of the Christian's life, knowing Christ, His resurrection, sharing in His death.

So here in this Hebrews benediction the writer reminds us of God's Grace, Christ's blood and His resurrection, which alone can bring us peace, the peace that comes when we share the Psalmist's joy as he writes, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." Or as the little boy, quoting the verse at a Sunday School program said, "The Lord's my Shepherd, what more do I want." Indeed, He is not only our Shepherd, He is our enabler. Our verse continues so assuringly, "May He equip you with everything good for doing His will, may He work in us what is pleasing to Him through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."

Oh, my friend, this is much more than just a pleasant platitude. I have reminded myself so often during our study together of the fact that God created us, He formed us, He redeemed us, He summoned us by name "because you are Mine!" (Isaiah 43:1) We have been created for the pleasure of a sovereign, sufficient and satisfying God (Phil.2:13, 1 Thessalonians 2:13). And the wonder of it is that He in no way expects us to bring Him pleasure on our own. He finds His greatest pleasure in bringing us both blessings and a future. I love that verse in Psalm 107 where, describing people who "were hungry and thirsty, their lives ebbed away and they cried out to the Lord in their trouble and He delivered them from their distress." Then the Psalmist shouts, "Let them give thanks to the Lord for His unfailing love and His wonderful deeds for men, for He satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things." (Psalm 107:5-9). God finds pleasure in blessing us, His unworthy children. And our Hebrews verse reminds us that He equips us with everything good for doing His will. It is better to give than to receive!

As we read in Hebrews 12:2, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and fulfiller of our faith...." "He who has begun a good work in us will carry it on to completion..." (Phil.1:6) What greater promises do we need. God is at work in us, He is equipping us, He longs to use us to bring Him Glory. What greater prospects could anyone want. "Oh, thank you, Lord, for the joy of pondering your Word and

praising your Name. We long to bring you Glory forever and ever. Bless my faithful fellow-pilgrim, and we'll soon be Home together, to praise you as we ought."

Cheerio, my friend. Monty

Hebrews 13:17-19  
Obedience in Prayer

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. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. What a privilege, year after year, to be reminded of the heart of the Christian message: CHRIST IS ALIVE AND WE ARE ALIVE IN HIM. Here at the Village Schools, we want to wish you a very blessed Easter celebration, reminding us of that great verse in 2 Corinthians 5:15: He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and rose again! Hallelujah!!!

We are now about to jump into the month of April and it's springtime in many parts of America. And with springtime comes preparing and planting and sensing great expectations of the fruit of our labor. And one of the things that characterizes any garden or farm is that the owner "keeps watch over it." That phrase is filled with a sense of both accountability as well as anticipation.

We find that very phrase in our reading for today. We are told in vs. 17 to "obey your leaders.. submit to their authority. They keep watch over you!" And this may strike one as being an unusual command. To submit to the authority of someone else is a strong commitment and it implies two things. First of all, my desire to be led into new fields of growth and of service, in walking in the Light, as Christ is in the Light (I John 1:7). And that verse promises that in doing that we will have "fellowship with each other."

That is in a sense what discipling is all about. It is not a casual truth that the last command our Lord gave was "going into all the world, make disciples." (Matt. 28:19). So secondly, instructing me to submit to my leaders can logically raise the question, "Why should I do this?" And the answer is in vs. 17 where it says leaders "must keep watch over you as men who must give an account." This is a perfect description of an elder, a person who is responsible for members of the Body, to keep watch over them. And they will have to give an account to the Lord for the way they did this. And they can do this only insofar as I "obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to me." (vs.17). Isn't that small verse filled with great instruction? I am instructed to obey my leaders because they are keeping watch over me, and will have to give an account

for the way they do this. What a blessing to be cared for!!!

Then the writer, in verses 18 and 19, pleads that the believers would pray for him. He makes a moving statement by saying, "We are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to live honorably in every way." What a tremendous evidence of an awareness of complete forgiveness, which brings about a clear conscience. Past failures, sins, denials have been forgiven, and we are cleansed from all unrighteousness (I John 1:9). Not merely forgiven but cleansed, with a new heart, a new slate, a new walk, a new vision of God and His Glory. Ponder this truth, and rejoice in its implications.

We need to remind ourselves, my friend, of this basic truth which underlies the meaning of GRACE: His mercies are new every morning, and as I walk in the light I can enjoy constant fellowship with Him. All barriers are down, all failures forgiven and forgotten, all guilt removed and all burdens borne by the Lord who loves and keeps and satisfies. Because of Grace we can obey the command, "Cast all your anxieties on Him because He cares for you" (I Peter 5:7, 10). "And the God of all Grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To Him be the power for ever and ever. Amen" And so the writer reminds us that prayer is the key to fellowship, and prayer is the key to restoration (13:19). What a measureless provision of God's Grace is ours in Christ.

"Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you are both the giver of Grace and the provision of all our needs. We praise you with all our being." I trust you have entered into this great resurrection truth, my friend. Grateful for your prayerful fellowship in Christ.

Cheerio. Monty

Hebrews 13:9-16  
Danger of Deception

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. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. Good to be with you again, as we come near to the end of our

journey together in Hebrews. It has been so reassuring to hear from some of you that your deep look into the Book has been a strengthening. Some have even said that they have used these Hebrews Musings in their small-group studies. I praise God when anything I have shared becomes a stimulus for someone else to share, as well. Because, as you have heard, what we share we keep, forever!! VERY SINCERE THANKS to you who have responded to our query on the future of the E-LINKS, sent Feb.28th. Your response was an encouragement. There is still time to answer the questions we sent you and it would be a blessing to hear from you if you haven't already responded. You are real partners on the journey and I am so grateful for you!

There has been quite a lot of discussion among writers regarding the meaning of "being carried away by all kinds of strange teachings." The writer says that our hearts are not made strong by eating certain kinds of ceremonial foods. He says "they never did any good to those who took that line of conduct." We have an altar, on which was shed Jesus' blood and there is nothing we can possibly achieve, physically, which can replace our faith in Christ's death and resurrection.

I was interested in Barclay's comment on this. "There may have been a little group in this Church who, either at the sacrament or at some common meal where they consecrated their food to Jesus, claimed that they were in fact eating the body of Christ. They may have persuaded themselves that because they had consecrated their food to Christ, His body had entered into it. The writer to the Hebrews believed with all the intensity of his being that no food, nothing eaten, can bring Christ into man and that Christ can enter into him only by Grace."

What about Christ being sacrificed "outside the city-gate... outside the camp"? This is surely a suggestion that, even as Christ put up with misunderstanding and abuse and persecution from those who never understood Who He is, so can we remember that meekness is "the ability to take praise without conceit and blame without resentment. This is the curriculum of Grace, Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart (Matt.11:29)" as Ray Stedman says. And we do this, not grudgingly, nor of obligation, but as a "sacrifice of praise--the fruit of lips that confess His name. (vs.15).

And we declare that it is true praise by living Godly lives and sharing with others. God so loved the world that He gave... and we show that we so love God that we give to others in need. As a dear friend of mine in South Africa just wrote, "You can give without loving, but you can't love without giving." I find it striking that this passage says that with such generosity God is pleased. Stedman says, again, 'The word is "communicate" or "to hold all things in common." That is not communism. Communism says, "What's yours is mine." But Christianity says, "What's mine is God's; therefore it's yours." This reminds me of that strong verse in Romans 12:4, "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body and each member belongs to all the others." This immensely important truth simply says that

the key to Christian unity is not organizational but operational. This truth helps me see how important you and other fellow-believers are to me and I to you. We share with others, sacrificially, for "with such sacrifices God is pleased." What a great truth to ponder. What pleases Him should be a main principle of life. "Thank you, Lord, for the very privilege of being able to please use. Imprint your Word on our hearts." Thank you, dear fellow-pilgrim, for sharing your loving prayers.

Cheerio. Monty

Hebrews 13:7,8

"Follow the Leader"

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. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. I will never forget that day, back in September 1943, when I was looking for a room in Wheaton, Illinois. I had been accepted as a student at the College, on the condition that I found my own place to stay. All the residences were full, since I was applying so late. I had only two days to find a place. The town was strange to me, I knew no one there, and just wondered where to go. I decided to tackle one of the nearby streets and knock on doors. My first hours of searching were depressing, since either there was no place available or the homes had already rented out their rooms to students. But I persisted, and will never forget the moment a cheerful man opened the door.

He said he was the Pastor of the Wheaton Bible Church. His name was J.C. Macaulay. He said that, unfortunately, he and his wife had no rooms available. But I liked him from the first moment and I pled, "I'd be happy to sleep in your attic and would even buy my own mattress." And he responded with his gentle Scottish accent, "Well, you've certainly asked for help, and you've been seeking all morning, and you've come knocking at our door. And Matthew 7:8 says 'to him who knocks, the door will be opened.' Who are we to refuse your knocking."

That began a four-year friendship with one of the great leaders in my life. I moved into the attic and stayed there throughout the first semester, when a room became available in the men's dormitory. Our friendship flourished. Eventually I was asked to come onto the staff as Director of Music and Youth ministries. I consider the rich blessing of knowing Pastor Macaulay as my leader/mentor a key to any spiritual growth I've known.

I'm sure you could pause and recall people who in your life have been significant leaders. The writer to the Hebrews says we should "remember your leaders" (13:7), we should "obey our leaders and submit to their authority" (vs.17)



quote: 'There was a young poet in Japan whose poetry no one could scan. When told it was so, he replied, 'Yes, I know, but I try to get as many words in the last line as I can.'" In this last chapter the writer has tried to squeeze in every bit he can in the way of practical applications.

We find that in these first six verses he declares, as J.C. Macaulay says, "Charity in the church; chastity in the home; contentment everywhere." These suggestions are summarized in the single word, "Genuine love." The first is love for the Body of believers; the second has to do with love for the marriage bond; the third has to do with love for the Lord who has promised, regardless of our unworthiness, never to leave or forsake us.

How can we exercise love in the church? First of all, we read that we should love each other as we do our own physical families. This means that we should have an intimate sense of caring for each other in the various realms of life. The early church was marked by the way the members of the Body were familiar with each other member. Acts 2:42 says they devoted themselves to "the breaking of bread", or as vs. 45 elaborates, they broke bread in each others homes. This is mistakenly thought to mean the communion service, but the context makes clear it is simply that believers got to know other believers 'where life's action really is', in each others homes. And we are also exhorted to welcome strangers into our homes, because we may be entertaining angels without knowing it. The word "angel" really means "servant, or minister." And one of the joys of Christian hospitality is inviting people who are really strangers to us, only to discover they are servants of God to us in special ways. And vs. 3 says we are to care for people who are imprisoned in whatever kind of bondage, seeking to reflect the love of Christ in the midst of their suffering.

And how can we reflect love in our homes? First of all, by honoring marriage, this great gift of God to the Body, the union of two lives into one flame of blessing, the conjoining of two bodies from which can come children, God's great gift to mankind. So precious is this gift that we read of a very severe warning, "God will judge all the sexually immoral." This is God's affirmation of the solemn significance of the sexual life, His special gift.

And how can we reflect love everywhere? By resisting the insidious pressures of a secular culture which is inclined to measure all worth in terms of money. "Keep your lives free from the love of money." What a valuable command. What freedom comes when we, by Grace, have been freed from the bondage of envy, of greed, of this inordinate hunger for things. Money is a necessity, of course, but the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil (I Timothy 6:10). And the antidote for this ravishing hunger? It is to rejoice in the wonder of vs.5 and 6, "God has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you' so we can say, with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid.'" Freedom from self, freedom from fear, freedom from the sin of struggling on in my own foolish pride. "Thank you, dear Lord, forgiving us your instructions regarding these common details of life. Help us to be committed

to loving you wherever we are." We praise God together, my friend, for the stretching wisdom, learned on the Journey.

Cheerio.  
Monty.

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Hebrews 12:25-29  
Don't refuse Him who speaks...

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." (NIV)

Hello, my friend. One of the most remarkable things we can treasure in our lives is that God speaks to us. He speaks, first of all, of course, through the written Word, which is our greatest possession. He speaks through circumstances, when the Word is applied and bears fruit. He speaks through friends, whose lives reflect His presence and whose wisdom confirms His Word. He speaks through heartache, when we can hear His assurance of His Presence more clearly than ever before. He speaks through moments of joy, when we can turn to no one else to fully and truly express our thanks. God speaks, and our word for today is simply be careful when He speaks and immediately respond by obedience, adoration, thanksgiving and praise.

I love that old hymn that makes clear my response to His speaking to me. "Lord, speak to me that I may speak in living echoes of Your tone; As You have sought, so let me seek Your erring children lost, and lone. O teach me, Lord, that I may teach the precious things You do impart; and wing my words, that they may reach the hidden depths of many a heart. O fill me with Your fullness, Lord, until my very heart o'er-flow in kindling thought and glowing word Your love to tell, Your praise to show. O use me, Lord, use even me, just as You will and when and where; until Your blessed face I see, Your rest, Your joy, Your glory share."

Our today's Scripture continues the solemnity of what we read in our previous E-LINK. Sometimes because of our easy access to the Throne of Grace, because of

our self-indulgence in our worship-focus, because of the almost flippant way we enter our place of worship, we forget the awesomeness of the Purpose of our coming. And we read, "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?" Moses was God's voice on earth, and that Word brought stern judgment and condemnation. Now as Hebrews has continued to emphasize "in these last days, God has spoken to us by His Son, Whom He appointed heir of all things and through whom He made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word" (Heb.1:2-3). To neglect the Word is to reject the Lord Himself.

A few days ago, a good friend of mine phoned to say that he and his Bible study group had been stirred on reading from Monty's Musings on Chambers, My Utmost for His Highest. Some of you may remember that we studied this remarkable book a couple of years ago. Rich said they had been studying My Utmost for February 12, and were stirred as they read my musings. I am going to do an unusual thing by quoting that page, since it is so appropriate for our thought here in Hebrews:

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Let's look at our reading for today. Exodus 20:19, "They said to Moses, 'You speak with us and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.'" Chambers handles this so strongly, so powerfully, by saying, "We don't consciously and deliberately disobey God, we simply don't listen to Him. God has given His commands to us, but we pay no attention to them--not because of willful disobedience, but because we do not really love and respect Him." The Lord says, "If you love Me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

There are many reasons why we should be serious students of the Book.... we are commanded to be, we are permitted to be, we are expected to be because it is the nourishment of the soul, the only way we can really hear God speaking with us. So Satan, in an ingenious way, keeps us busy going to meetings, even leading groups, but sometimes our very busyness keeps us from listening to God speaking to us individually. We love to listen to great preachers and to be along when a clever Bible teacher is going strong...but we show how little love we have for God by preferring to listen to His servants rather than to Him. We love to listen to exciting, personal testimonies but we don't want God so to speak to us, personally, which He will do when we thoughtfully, intentionally, and consistently study His Word.

We really humiliate God every single day we live without listening to Him speak to us. We humiliate and grieve our loved ones when we are too busy to listen to them share their thoughts, longings, griefs and joys. And so with God. And as Chambers says, "Once I finally hear him, the humiliation I have heaped on Him returns to me." Just last evening a student said, "Mont, I am ashamed of all the years I've wasted since becoming a Christian, simply because I never really seriously studied the Scriptures. I never really seriously was seeking God. What a

joy I'm experiencing, now that I am listening to Him myself."

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"Dear Lord, deliver us from the superficial reading of these powerful Scriptures so that we may truly be people who worship you in spirit and in truth. Forgive us, enable us, use us, Lord." I thank God for you fellow-pilgrims, for your loving prayers.

Cheerio. Monty

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Hebrews 12:18-24  
"You have come to God."

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. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. One can see truth more vividly by considering contrasts. We understand the wonder of light when we have known deep darkness. We can truly experience comfort when we have been plunged into distress. We can appreciate provision when we have been ravaged by deep need. And so it is in our today's reading. The writer tells us that we can begin to fully appreciate the wonder of coming to God by comparing it to what the old covenant demanded.

He refers to Deuteronomy 4:11 which says how the Lord spoke to the people out of the fire. And even more dramatically he refers to Exodus 19:12 which emphasized the holiness of God and said, "Take heed you do not go up the mountain...whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death...he shall not live. When the trumpet sounds a long blast they shall come up to the mountain." And Deuteronomy 5:23-27 describes how afraid the people were when they heard the voice of God, "If we hear the voice of the Lord our God any more, we shall die." At least three things are emphasized: 1) God was inaccessible because of His holiness; 2) God's nature declared His authority which condemned man's approach; 3) Every thought of Him brought fear to the seeking heart.

How different the picture is now that Christ has come as the perfect mediator between us and God. 1) We have the assurance that God is preparing a place for us, a city which has lasting foundations (cf. John 14:1-2); 2) We will participate in a vast assembly of angels and the spirits of righteous men with joyful praise; 3) We can be assured of our arrival because our names are written in the Lamb's book of life. I love that great passage in Revelation 21:22-27, "I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life."

Few passages in all of Scripture describe more effectively the place which Christ is preparing for those who love Him. Through this Revelation passage we see that the significance of the whole place called heaven is that the Lord is the temple, the Lord is the Light, so there will be no night there. And our Hebrews passage for today reflects this singular central significance of the Lord Jesus. When we worship, we come to God, the judge of all men...to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant and to the sprinkled blood.

This look at the significance of "coming to God" stirs within each of our hearts both the solemn significance of such a moment in life as well as the awesome responsibility which is ours if we come carelessly, thoughtlessly, without intention or self-examination. Every time on this earthly journey, when we come near God in prayer, praise or worship we come for the purpose of listening to what He has to say. Our verse for our next E-LINK begins with, "Do not refuse Him who speaks." As we worship, we wait for His Word, for His instructions. "O Lord, let it be." We worship Him together.

Cheerio.  
Monty

Heb.12:12-17  
Beware of Bitterness

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. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. We are approaching the final section of this remarkable book and are finding the writer expressing a whole cluster of injunctions. Some of them are related and others are single instructions, but all of them are pungent with significance. Our passage for today is a challenge to us to "make every effort." In other words, what follows is not something of casual importance but something of great value. Paul often used the phrase "devote yourself to..." In other words, take seriously what is being taught. And to what should we "make every effort"?

First of all, we are to "make every effort to live in peace with all men and be holy; without holiness no man will see the Lord." It is a rather convoluted suggestion, to struggle to live at peace. Does it take struggling to be at peace? He is just saying that it is so important that we don't allow anything to destroy our relationships with other people. Paul says the same thing in Romans 14:19, "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. So not to destroy the work of God for the sake of food." In other words don't be confrontational over some matter of secondary importance, thereby robbing myself of the opportunity of having an open door into another person's thoughts and needs. It is interesting that here in Hebrews, the writer links keeping peace with being holy. And he says we should make every effort to be holy.

One must be careful to understand what he is actually saying. With all the effort in the world I cannot make myself holy. Holiness is an attribute of God, which He alone can confer. And He does this upon my new birth, as we have read there in Hebrews 10:10, "we have been made holy once for all through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ." In other words, we are holy, but the writer here is simply saying, "BE WHO YOU ARE." We find the same thing being said by David to Solomon, back there in 1 Kings 2:2, "I am going the way of all the earth," he said, "so be strong, show yourself a man and observe what the Lord your God requires." Solomon was obviously a man; now David is saying, "Show yourself a man." Just as we read in Hebrews 10:10, we have been made holy, so we read here in 12:14, "You are holy, now be holy." What an encouragement for us to be Who We Are, the living representatives of Christ in a darkening world.

Then we read that we must see to it that no one "misses the Grace of God that no root of bitterness grows up to cause trouble and defile many." Moses instructs the people (Deut.29:18), "Make sure that there is no person among you today whose heart turns away from the Lord our God to go and worship the gods of those nations, make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison." Peter, speaking to Simon, the sorcerer, in Acts 8:23, "I see you are full of bitterness and captive to sin." In other words, bitterness is an insidious sin in that it poisons everything around it. And it is here called a root. In other words it is not easily apparent, hidden away, but always producing evil thoughts and souring everything around it. And the writer warns against all sexual immorality, or godlessness like Esau, who for a moment's pleasure threw away his birthright. And having done so,

even when he regretted it, there was no reversal possible. So it is with us, dear friend. Once an opportunity to be holy in even a bitter situation is wasted, there is no further opportunity to do so. We must eagerly seize the moment, and live for the Lord day by day, in the light of His Light and Life, for the night is coming! "Thank you, blessed Lord, for this strong, wise counsel, this promise of Grace, this Word of Life. I rejoice." And I know we praise the Lord together.

Cheerio. Monty

Hebrews 12:5-1

The Discipline of Love

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. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. We have been looking at the problem of suffering. It may be physical suffering, it may be emotional, it may be social, it may be financial, it may be one of any number of ways. But suffering is often with us, as we saw in our last E-LINK and we may often ask the question "Why?" So the writer to the Hebrews gives us some great answers to this "Why?"

He begins by reminding them that they had forgotten what they had long since read in Proverbs 3:11-12, "My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent His rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, as a father the son he delights in." The writer powerfully reminds us that Scripture is a "word of encouragement that addresses us as sons," (vs.5) as children of a Heavenly Father. And he forthrightly tells us to "Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons!" He here again uses this word, endure, as it is used in vs. 3, regarding Christ who endured such suffering for us.

Donald Guthrie in his commentary on Hebrews says, "Chastisement that springs from love cannot be vindictive but must always be beneficial. The Proverbs passage is setting out a profound view of love, a love which does not hesitate to correct. A father who neglects to discipline a son is deficient in his capacity as father, and a son who escapes all discipline is losing out on his sonship. This is a principle which has generally ceased to be a part of sonship. The authority of

parents has been so eroded that discipline rarely if ever comes into play. It is small wonder that those brought up in such an atmosphere find genuine difficulty in understanding the discipline of God."

One may ask, "Does God, in fact, devise difficulties so that I may benefit from discipline?" Sometimes circumstances are so severe that it is hard to think that God constructed them for my good. It is important to remember that God is never the creator of sin (James 1:13) but God is at work in everything for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28). And He can make situations of His planning which are difficult but which will produce a settled, strong faith. Moreover, He can take situations which are not of His making but in which He can make us aware of great truths never before understood. The big thing is that we must never miss the privilege of our problems. Since God is at work in them, then all that He permits can only be used by Him for my growth and His Glory.

I love verse 10 which reminds me that "God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness." It is amazing how God is always at work for our good, even though, as vs. 11 says, "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." This is not a trifling suggestion, it is a powerful promise which changes ones entire perspective, facing the pain and pressure of the Father's discipline. God is our Divine Coach, and so often what a coach demands is painful to the sportsman. And in all of life's circumstances God is training us to be strong people of His making, able to stand the torrents of life's difficulties because He is always at work in and with us.

"Thank you, Lord, for giving us this great encouragement from Scripture. Help us to cooperate with You, with joy and not reluctantly, with thankfulness and not despair. We love you more and more." Thanks for your fellowship, dear friend.

Cheerio.  
Monty

Hebrews 12:3-4  
"Consider Him."

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. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. It is a serious moment when, in the face of difficulties and pressures, we become so discouraged that we want to give up, to throw in the towel, to say that we've had enough and the demands of faith are too great to pay. Have you ever felt like that? I'm sure many of you have not, but I know that some of you have been stretched to that breaking point, in certain testings of your lives, and one can just shake ones head in disbelief.

Apparently there are two words in verse 3 that have a particular meaning. These two words, translated growing weary and losing heart, are words which Aristotle uses of an athlete who collapses after he has run past the final winning post in the race. Hebrews is really saying, "Never collapse before you've finished the race." The writer in this passage reminds his discouraged readers that "it's always too soon to quit; it's never too late to begin." And he reminds them of all the heroes listed in chapter 11 went through, some to death. Yet here they are, still alive and where there is life there is hope. Some of the readers were, as Philip Hughes remarks, "feeling the allurements of withdrawing from the world and its antipathy and of a more 'respectable' judaizing theology which would ease the pressure of hardship suffered for Christ's sake."

Then the writer urges them to consider Christ, the Prince of Glory, the Father's Beloved Son, the Creator of all the galaxies of the universe, the designer of all things beautiful and the conceiver of all things good. He says, "Consider Him...who steadfastly endured such opposition at the hands of sinners, compare your lives with His." In other words, let His promises that He would never forsake you, nor that He would ever forget you, sustain you and enable you to press on in the face of life's greatest temptation, which is just to give up! Consider Him who promised to be with you, even to the end of the age. Consider Him, who said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and heavily burdened, and I will give you rest...take my yoke on you" (Matthew 11:28). Consider Him, who endured such hostility from those very men whom He had created, with great plans and gifts, who now were violently seeking to destroy Him. Consider Him, whose loving nature attracted little children, whose compassion forgave the woman caught in the act of adultery. Consider Him, who hung steadfast, nailed to the Tree, a tree which He had created, nailed there by the men whom He had created, abandoned by the multitudes whom He had healed, had fed in miraculous ways, had blessed beyond measure.

Consider Him, who groaned on the Cross, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt.27:46), so that we need never know the abandonment He knew. Consider Him, who though He had no sin, became sin for you and me, that we might become the righteousness of God, in Him (2 Cor.5:21). Consider Him, and you will not grow weary, you will not lose heart. "Love so amazing, so divine, shall have my heart, my soul, my all." "Thank you, Lord Jesus, for knowing your Presence, whatever our lot may be. Thank you for becoming what we are, so that, in You, we might become what we otherwise never could be. You took what was ours and gave us what was Yours. We worship you, King of Glory. And Lord, haste the day when faith shall be sight, the clouds be rolled back as a scroll, the trumpet shall resound and the Lord shall descend; even so it is well with my soul. Love so amazing, so Divine...." May you know God's special blessings today, my partner in the Way.

Cheerio.  
Monty

Hebrews 12:1,2

Let's get rid of the rubbish!

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. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. Well, chapter 11 was a remarkable display of many different people. Some were reputable, some were dishonorable. Some were of commendable background, some came up from nothing. But they are for us a wonderful source of both challenge and encouragement. They are, in fact, that 'great cloud of witnesses' which surrounds us and brings both conviction and tremendous incentive to live a winning life.

Ray Stedman has written a very thoughtful book, *What More Can God Say*, a fresh look at Hebrews. He makes a useful comment on our verses for today. "We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. Now that does not refer to people who have died and gone to heaven and who are looking down on us from above. I know that is a favorite interpretation of this figure here, but I do not think that is what it means. It means that these people named in chapter 11 are saying something to us, they are testifying to us, they are witnesses in that sense. Their lives are saying that we ought to lay aside every weight, i.e., everything that hinders faith. You never say yes to Christ without saying no to something else. And the sin which clings so closely--what is that? That is unbelief, the refusal to take Scripture seriously, the sin which is mentioned all through Hebrews."

This is so helpful. I thought for many years that vs. 1 suggests we are down here in some kind of stadium, struggling in the battle, with all these OT saints watching us. And this often gave me shivers, when I was failing, or a kind of encouragement, when I prevailed. But that is so incorrect. These witnesses are not looking at us, they are giving testimony as to what it means to fix their eyes on Jesus, their enabler and source of victory. I also often used to think that "the sin which so easily entangles" was some particular area of weakness from which I suffered. Again, wrong. That entangling sin, that thing which hinders is simply unbelief, failing to take God at His Word. It is refusing to allow the Lord to be rightful Owner of all my life. Even "good" things are evil, if they hinder my walk with God. And how do we walk pleasing to Him?

The writer in chapter 3:2, reminded us to "fix our thoughts on Jesus." Proverbs 4:23 says, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." The heart is the core of my thoughts, my ambitions, my longings. And 12:2 says we then must "fix our eyes on Jesus." My heart is the source of desire; my eyes, fixed on Jesus, see opportunities of letting the world know that He is indeed Lord. Christ,

as we read here, is the author and the perfecter or maturer of our faith. And true faith is reflected in obedient belief, with our thoughts fixed on Jesus and our eyes open to Jesus' will for our lives. He opens the doors, He leads us together into vast fields of opportunity and service.

Christ, "for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, scorning its shame." And what was that joy set before Him? I think you and I are His joy, together with the multitude of other people of faith. He is at work in us, both to act and to do of His enjoyment (Phil.2:13). We could never measure the cost of our redemption, revealed in both His Cross and His shame. But He is now seated at the right hand of the Throne of God, forever praying for you and me (Heb.7:25). After "the sufferings of His soul, He will see the Light of life and be satisfied" (Isa.53:11). Oh, may He enjoy us fully today, as we let Him live in and through us. "Thank you, Lord Jesus, for the privilege of it all." And thank you, friend, for the fellowship on the journey.

Cheerio.  
Monty

Hebrews 11:35-40  
By faith, weakness becomes strength

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. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. (This is just a preliminary note to thank you for your prayers and your encouragement. I treasure these notes which E-LINKERS have sent, expressing their partnership in prayer and deep fellowship. Although I still am very weary from the effect of the cancer-medication I am able to get to the office, now and then, for a few hours, for which I am thankful. God is good, and I've been enjoying reviewing His Grace, as a special provision of blessing. Indeed, God takes stumbling-blocks and turns them into stepping-stones. That's what Grace is all about, God's measureless provision reaching us at the point of immeasurable need. God is able! (2 Cor.9:8) Thank you for your very special fellowship, dear E-LINKER.)

One of the many important things we discover in this great document to the

Hebrews is how God takes stumbling-blocks and turns them into stepping-stones. He often chooses the most unlikely and makes them most effective. As we saw in 11:34, they were people "whose weakness was turned into strength and they became mighty in battle."

An old teacher of mine back there sixty years ago said, "So often, a man's greatest gifts can become his greatest handicap because they are considered a source of adequacy instead of a cry for Grace." I have pondered this, when I meet a person with so many natural abilities, being aware that it is only in the face of need that I can possibly find real growth. When we ponder our verses for today, we are stunned by what seems to be an ironic twist, in the light of the promise in Matthew 11:18, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest." Rest? Is what we read in verses 35-40 rest? "Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, others were chained and put in prison, stoned, sawed in two, put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated, wandering in deserts and mountains and in caves and holes in the ground."

**BROTHERS!! SISTERS!!** We can so easily gloss over verses like these because of glib familiarity but we need to read and reread them, to fully understand the astonishing extent of this meaning of real "REST"! Real rest is not absence of anguish, it is provision **IN** anguish. It is not freedom from difficulties, it is freedom **IN** difficulties. Few paragraphs in all of Scripture stir me more deeply than this clutch of verses. They make me feel utterly ashamed at my pathetic complaining in difficulty. There they were, homeless, seemingly without protection from vicious circumstances, pilgrims wandering in the world, indeed "longing for a better country--a heavenly one" (11:16).

And yet we read so compellingly, "God is not ashamed to be called their God..." (11:16). And we read "they were all commended for their faith...." Indeed, that is the ultimate badge of honor, to be commended by an unashamed God for our faith, for beholding the invisible, for touching the intangible, for hearing the inaudible, for "pressing on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me" (Phil.3:12-14). Are we truly seeking an indestructible City, which has true foundations? Or are we becoming mesmerized by the glow and the glamour of the lure around us, the appeal of the senses, of carnal appetites, of the world's measure of success? Are we really seeking the commendation of a great God, **WHO GAVE HIMSELF FOR US**, the Key of our faith, the Foundation of an indestructible future, the Beginning and the Goal of real living. Indeed, He is enough!!

And finally we read that, in spite of all we have read, "none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect (or be fulfilled)." And what was that better thing? It is referred to so powerfully in chapter 1:1-4, which gloriously points

us to God's Son, superior in every way to all the world can offer! Indeed, let us press on! "Thank you, blessed Holy Spirit for this powerful, inspired Word. We long to serve you well." Thank you, my dear friend, for sharing the journey.

Cheerio. Monty.

Hebrews 11:32-34

By faith, a line of heroes

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. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. We are nearing the end of this list of heroes in this Hall of Fame, or should I say this Hall of the Faithful. In the review of the astonishing evidence which reflected the faith of those named, we are gripped by one truth: FAITH IS LINKED TO ACTION. Ephesians 2:8 wisely reminds us that "it is by Grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship ('masterpiece') created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." So faith, in itself, is a gift of God. As the hymn-writer says, "Nothing in my hand I bring; only to the Cross I cling." So I cannot say my faith saves me, for faith itself is a gift of God. But I must say that, once having been saved by God's gift of faith, "what good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead (or false.)" (James 2:14-17).

FAITH IS LINKED TO ACTION. And what remarkable descriptions accompany this list of the faithful, recorded in our reading for today. The writer lists the names of people whose amazing lives have challenged, stirred, encouraged us since we were small children: Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets. Some of them seem appropriately included, while others seem hardly worthy of mentioning, Barak, the commanding officer of the prophetess, Deborah, seemed like a weakling. When she commanded him to attack the enemy hosts, he said, "If you go with me, I will go, but if you don't go with me, I won't go" (Joshua 4:8). She agreed to accompany him and the battle with Sisera was a great victory. But here his name is listed, and hers isn't. Perhaps he, in his fearful sense of inadequacy, is an even greater example of faith than she.

And of all people, we find Samson listed, this man whose life is rife with acts of disobedience, especially since he was given back to God before his birth as a Nazarite (Judges 13:7). His life is filled with dramatic evidences of his powerful personality, his huge strength, his power over people and places. But it is only

when he comes to the end of the journey that he acknowledges God as Lord of his life. It is never too late to acknowledge our failures, our sins, our disobedience. We are sometimes outraged by Samson's arrogance, but we must all be humbled by the fact that he is listed among the great worthies of Grace.

We read that these heroes of faith "conquered kingdoms, administered justice, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames and escaped the edge of the sword, routing enemies, becoming powerful in battle." What a challenge for you and me, living in times like these. Instead of cowering in fear before the insidious attacks of our enemies, we should leap forward into the fray by faith in the God who still can do what He did then, He turns our weakness into strength (11:34). This is a great evidence of faith. Paul glorified in it, when he says there in 2 Cor. 12:9, "But God said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.'"

"Got any rivers you think are uncrossable? Got any mountains you can't tunnel through? God specializes in things thought impossible, and He can do what no other one can do." Let's seize the moment and let the world know how great is our God.

Cheerio. Monty

Hebrews 11:23-29

By faith he looked ahead

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. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. I'm so glad to hear from E-LINKERS from time to time, to know how things are going in your part of the world. Sometimes the news is very good and one is encouraged. At other times, the news is desolating and one is driven to ponder and pray. A while ago I received a letter from Craig Woods in Cape Town, the son of one of two most special friends in South Africa. His wife is from Zimbabwe, a country which once was considered the garden-spot of Africa. But in recent years it has been taken over by a ruthless dictator, Robert Mugabe, and the

situation is unbelievably alarming. In that land, there are 13 million people who will be facing starvation in the coming months, inflicted on them because the government will not allow the farmers to grow food. And the reason they will not allow this is because Mugabe says the white farmers are working land which was taken from the blacks decades ago and which should be rightly returned to them. So the farms are being confiscated, the food shortage is critical, the land seems without hope.

But Craig wrote and said that we should all pray BIG that Mugabe would be saved, that his eyes will be opened. When I read this, I was startled by my own reaction. Mugabe? Saved? Is that possible? You see how we even fashion our praying after our own expectations. We forget, as I have previously said, that God delights in displaying his power in things thought impossible. Amazingly, these ancients reviewed here in Hebrews had that same unshakable, invincible faith and hope that, in all things, God was at work.

And why was this? Because in everything they were "looking ahead." We know little about Moses' parents but somehow they must have been remarkable people. We see this by that startling verse 24 where we learn that "by faith, Moses when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time." In other words, with a little shifting of convictions here and there, he could have become eventually a Pharaoh of a powerful nation. But he refused, even though he knew he could have been enjoying the pleasure of sin for a short time. Why was this? Because he was always looking ahead. It's the end of the journey that defines its significance.

And I love that next verse 26, startling because it says Moses "regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward." For the sake of Christ? Yet Christ would not be coming into the world as Savior, for centuries to come. He had learned through the words of the Holy Spirit to and through him of the wonder of the Savior of the world yet hidden in the shadows of future history. But I am even more struck when I read in vs. 28: "By faith he left Egypt...he persevered because he saw Him who is invisible." Isn't that stirring? Way back there, before the full revelation of God had been given, before the presence of the Holy Spirit could lift dull eyes to see the Glory of God, Moses "saw Him who is invisible." What a challenge, what an encouragement to us to 'look ahead.' "Though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and even though you do not see him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:8-9). "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Cor.4:18). "We praise you Lord, for the wonder of it all, for what Hope in you can achieve. We believe, forgive our unbelief." His richest blessings be yours, friend.

Cheerio.  
Monty

Hebrews 11:20-22  
By faith, blessings shared!

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. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. I want to thank you for your prayers during this recent cancer flare-up and to praise the Lord for the assurance of His presence. Would you also especially pray for the Village Schools? Support has declined, as is true for so many nonprofit ministries. We invite you to partner with us in this special way at this special time if the Lord leads you, by contacting us at VSBMain@aol.com.

Dr. T. J. Bach was a great hero of mine when I was a young man. He was an early leader of the Evangelical Alliance Mission (TEAM) and made a huge impact on many people, with his vision and insight for world mission. I treasure the memory of the times I heard him speak and particularly remember his saying, "WHEN MY LIFE IS OVER, HOW GLAD I SHALL BE THAT THE LIGHT OF MY LIFE HAS BEEN SHINING FOR THEE. IT WILL NOT THEN MATTER HOW MUCH THAT I GAVE OF TIME, TREASURE TALENTS SOME LOST SOULS TO SAVE. For it is, after all, the end of the journey that will define its significance.

Our brief reading for today makes reference to three ancient heroes of faith, who have one thing in common: for each one reference is made to the faith of a person for whom death was very near. Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future. Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, as he leaned on the top of his staff. And by faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus from Egypt, and about his burial. It is also significant that none of these three ever saw the fulfillment of God's assuring them of a Promised Land. Barclay describes this: "Isaac was still a nomad, Jacob was an exile in Egypt, Joseph had attained to greatness but it was the greatness of a stranger in a strange land; and yet they never doubted that the promise would come true. They died not in despair but in hope. Their faith defeated death."

I'm sure Joseph knew that suffering awaited the people in the land of Egypt. After all God had predicted it to Abraham more than 200 years before Joseph's death, "Your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and they will be enslaved and mistreated for four hundred years" (Genesis 15:13a). But Joseph also knew that the Lord had told Abraham, "I will punish the nation they serve as slaves and afterward they will come out with great possessions." Joseph had faith in what seemed then to be an impossibility, but he trusted a God who delights in

things thought impossible (vs.13b).

We are perhaps puzzled by the curious instruction regarding his bones being carried into the promised land. In due course we know his instructions were carried out by Moses, who "took the bones of Joseph with him" as the Israelites turned their backs on Egypt and marched toward the promised land (Ex.13:19). And this promise was completed by Joshua who, following Moses' death, led them into Canaan: "The bones of Joseph which the people of Israel brought up from Egypt, were buried at Shechem, in the portion of ground which Jacob bought from Joseph" (Josh.24:32). Why all this strange interest in an old man's bones? They would not have carried them through successive generations if they had not been convinced that, in spite of their constant difficulties, God would finally fulfill His promise to lead them into the Promised Land.

Is our faith that strong, my friend? Do we exhibit the same kind of committed faith, regardless of circumstances, of severe testing, of the passing of time, when it seems God is not only not answering our prayers but seems absent when we pray? Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees and clings to God alone. Laughs at impossibilities and shouts, "It shall be done." "Oh, Lord Jesus, let us be that kind of steadfast people of faith that trust you not 'so that' but 'because of'. You declared it, we believed it, that settles it. Thank you, Lord." It's such a privilege to continue to dig into the Book, friend.

Cheerio.  
Monty

Hebrews 11:17-19  
By faith, a supreme Sacrifice

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. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. This is just a little note to tell you that Doris and I probably won't be going to Arizona until after Christmas due to health problems. Your e-mails are always an encouragement. Thank you for keeping in touch.

One of the surest evidences that I am in the process of spiritual growth is to continually face testings. Why should this surprise us? One registers in a good University, pays out enormous fees for the privilege of being a student there, attends lectures and ponders many books, all for the ultimate purpose of being tested. If there were a University which consisted only of lectures, discussions, reading books, etc., no one would attend. We go to a center of learning to be properly instructed and then to be examined and tested to know we are getting

somewhere in the process.

All through Scripture we find evidences of the wisdom of this attitude. "Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep His commands." (Deut.8:2). "We rejoice in our sufferings (testings), because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character, and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit." (Romans 5:3). "When all kinds of trials and testings crowd into you lives, my brothers, don't resent them as intruders, but welcome them as friends. Realize that they come to test your faith and to produce in you the quality of steadfastness. Let the process go on until that steadfastness is fully developed and you will find you have become men of mature character, with the right kind of independence" (James 1:2-4, J.B.Phillips translation).

So in our reading for today we are reminded of Abraham's supreme sacrifice, recorded so vividly in Genesis 22:1-18, a story which is often skipped over and in some religion classes is ignored altogether. It is felt by some that this gives us a wrong picture of God. Why would God promise a man that through his son would all the nations of the earth be blessed, and then suddenly ask him to sacrifice his nearest and dearest, the child through whom God's very promises would be fulfilled.

In other words, God may ask me to trust Him in circumstances which seem alien to God's presence. He leads me into deep waters where there is no bottom, and yet God has promised to be with me in them (Isaiah 43:2. Even with such promises, I may easily evade the terror of the unknown by praying a little familiar prayer, where there is no pain. Abraham had gone through many testings. In fact, one Jewish legend said he had been subject to ten testings, of which this one with Isaac was the most severe. We so often forget that sacrifice is not denying of ourselves something bad, it is joyously giving up something that is good for something infinitely better. Giving up something bad is just self-denial; giving up something precious for the Lord is pure worship. "God so loved the world, He gave up His only Son..."

We need to ponder the great truths hidden in this story of Abraham's quick answer to the Lord's question, "'Abraham?'" (Gen.22:1). 'Here I am,' he replied. And God said, 'Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering...' Early in the morning, Abraham got up...the two of them went on together..." "Teach us the true meaning of testing, Lord, so in all circumstances we may be quick to say, 'Here I am, Lord.' Thank you, Lord, for the privilege of such fellowship with you. Help us remember that in testing we can know you best of all." Thank you, friend, for your fellowship on the journey.

Cheerio.  
Monty

Hebrews 11:13-16

By faith, pilgrims on a journey

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. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. This is just a brief note to inform you E-LINKERS that Doris and I will be away from the Village Center for several weeks, spending time away from the snow and blizzards of Minnesota during the winter. We will be in Tucson, Arizona. Will you please hold back any e-mails until we can notify you by a subsequent E-LINK of our correct address down there.

During our absence we will be sending only one E-LINK a week, on Wednesdays. Always grateful for you all. A difficult thing about moving to a strange country, as Doris and I have done several times, is settling down in fact. It is one thing to unpack boxes and suitcases, to hook up and turn on the electricity but another thing to 'feel at home.' In fact, culture shock is essentially just that, feeling deeply strange to the new surroundings we have been thrust into. Some people feel culture shock is meeting people who eat their food without utensils, only with fingers. Or it may be being shocked by their nakedness and their existing on muddy water. But culture shock is what happens internally, intrinsically, when we are in an alien situation, without roots and without strong references for daily life.

And our Scriptures for today suggest that the Christian lives, in a sense, in a state of culture shock, because he is now only a stranger and alien on the earth (vs. 13). In other words, the true Christian no longer feels completely at home in this world anymore. This doesn't in anyway mean he lives miserably, or morbidly, or in a depressed state. But he, with these ancients of old in our today's passage, admits that he is a pilgrim on a journey. Peter refers to this in I Peter 2:10,11, "Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us."

Three things characterize an Ambassador. He is forever an alien in a foreign land, where he never becomes unduly involved in the country and never becomes unnecessarily an investor in its affairs. Secondly, he represents the country where

he belongs, he wants the people in 'this strange land' to think well of his king, his president, his people. Thirdly, his happiest moment is when his term of foreign-office is over and he is able to go Home, where he belongs. So with the Christian. We are told we are 'Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.' (2 Cor.5:20). Furthermore, we are acting 'on Christ's behalf', or in the shoes of Christ, whom we represent.

And in our today's passage we read that though the fulfillment of these ancient's hopes were never realized, they were always looking forward to "a country of their own", they were "longing for a better country--a heavenly one." I love this thought. You and I are often misunderstood, and our lives and motives are questioned. And we do our best to adapt to the thoughts and needs of people around us. But we are always reminded that a true pilgrim travels light, the less baggage the better. For this earth is not our home, and we are told, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven...for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19-21). It's easy to read these words, but it is infinitely wise to ponder and to heed them. We are encouraged in Hebrews 12:1 to "throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus..." remembering that "in this world, we are like Him" I John 4:17. Lord, we are awed by this privilege and need constantly to keep the world from squeezing us into its mold. Keep us true, Lord Jesus." And thank you, fellow-pilgrim for your fellowship on the journey Home. Even so come, Lord Jesus.

Cheerio.  
Monty

Hebrews 11:11-12  
By faith he believed the incredible...

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. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. As life spins on its way, it is valuable to review these characteristics of FAITH, so remarkably displayed in Abraham's life. Recent weeks and months have reminded us again of the very transient nature of the things that surround us. We have been reminded in Hebrew 11:6 that God is the reward of those who diligently, eagerly seek Him. In other words, the primary goal in life is to be aware of the fact that in Christ we are new creatures (2 Cor.5:17). Old things are changed, everything has become new. And essentially that means that we now are able to see the invisible, to hear the inaudible, to touch the intangible and to claim the impossible.

This is what our brief reading for today tells us about Abraham and Sarah. Let's read a parallel passage about this great event from Romans 4:18-21 "Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, 'So shall your offspring be (Gen.15:5).' Without weakening in his FAITH, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead--since he was about a hundred years old--and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his FAITH as he gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised."

I'm afraid that we often limit God's ability to display His power and amazing Grace because we remain comfortable and safe within the walls of our manageable lives. We never dare great things for God, preferring to perform routine religious acts in which He, in fact, may be absent. We say God is great, but do we dare exercise the kind of FAITH that demonstrates what we glibly declare. I think of that old chorus we used to sing as kids, "Got any rivers you think are uncrossable? Got any mountains you can't tunnel through? God specializes in things thought impossible and He can do what no other friend can do."

We must, of course, always defer to God's will in any matter. I sometimes hear people misquoting Ephesians 3:20 by saying "Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine..." That little word 'can' is not in the verse. We are in fact strongly encouraged in that great passage where Paul prays "that out of His glorious riches God may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your heart through faith. I pray that you...may have power to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

Then Paul continues, "Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine." In other words, He can do more than all we do ask, not can ask. There is a difference. There are things even God cannot do. He cannot make a surgeon out of a man with no arms, or a pole-vaulter of a man with no legs. But the verse reminds me that you and I may be filled with all the fullness of God. That is the greatest miracle of all. When that occurs, then I am able to believe the incredible. to enjoy the invisible, to achieve the impossible, because God is at work in us, as He was in Abraham and Sarah. Let's let God be God, in all our thinking, walking, planning and living. He is indeed Great.

"Thank you, Lord, for giving us this wonderful evidence of what you can do with a man totally yielded to your fullness. We rejoice." Hallelujah, my friend.

Cheerio. Monty

## "Give Thanks in all Circumstances..." I Thess.5:18

Hello, my friend. Since this Thursday is officially Thanksgiving Day in America, I thought I would interrupt our study in Hebrews to recognize this in a special E-LINK. Having just received from my oncologist a rather solemn report on the present state of my cancer condition, with his prescribing some rather strong treatment, I find it so appropriate that I look, with you, at this command in I Thessalonians, "Give thanks!"

I remember back in the forties when I was in a really difficult situation. I was a student in the Multnomah School of the Bible, having some serious financial problems. I had a job as an orderly at the Lutheran Hospital and was working under an individual who seemed bent on making my life miserable. I had not been able to complete an assignment in one of my classes in the time set, and had just felt the sting of a rather strong but appropriate rebuke from my teacher there. In retrospect, it doesn't seem that any of these were critical (except perhaps the financial dilemma), but at the time I was in a state of near-despair. I read I Thessalonians chapter 5 that morning and I remember scratching out verses 16 and 18. I could fulfill the command in verse 17, "Pray continually..." but felt it impossible to obey verse 16, "Be joyful always..." and verse 18, "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

So let's take a moment, at Thanksgiving time, to especially ponder verse 18. What are some lessons and encouragements to be learned from this promise.

1) First of all, it doesn't say to give thanks FOR all circumstances, but IN all circumstances. Most of us encounter difficulties on this journey and some may be more or less severe. But we are never expected to be thankful for them, except insofar as we have learned that every problem is an invitation to grow in faith and exercise thankfulness, which is evidence of true faith in our lives. We are invited to be thankful in difficulties, assured that it is when we pass through deep waters, when we walk through the fire God says "I will be with you..." (Isaiah 43:1-2).

2) Secondly, we are startled to read that to refuse to rejoice, to pray, to give thanks will put out the Spirit's fire (vs.19). In other words, the Spirit is able to use difficulties in our lives as fuel which can produce a shining sense of His presence in our witnessing. It is easy to rejoice when things are going well, when circumstances are easy and when life is free from trouble. But expressing true rejoicing and thanksgiving when we are confronted with darkness and difficulties is a marvelous proof that we are new creatures, that we "no longer regard things from a worldly point of view...the old has gone, the new has come...all this is from God.." (2 Corinthians 5:16-18).

3. Thirdly, we know that in all circumstances "God Himself, the God of peace, will sanctify us through and through...(I Thess. 5:23-24). Oh, how ones heart is lifted up to be forever reminded of the WITNESS of God, known even more clearly in testing times. He enables us to look around and be thankful for the very breath we breathe, dear ones loving us, the fellowship of the Body, the joy beyond

description, the peace that passes understanding. . This is all God's provision and we can lift holy hands in praise that God "gives us richly all things to enjoy" (I Tim. 6:17). What He permits we can thankfully accept, and what we can accept as a gift of His Grace, He can richly use.

"Thank you, Lord, for this miracle of Grace, to rejoice and be thankful in all circumstances. We marvel at the wonder of it all." So thankful you're along on the journey, dear friend. The Lord is near (Phil.4:5).

Cheerio. Monty

Hebrews 11:7

By faith, he built an ark

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. (NIV)

Hello, my friend... The comments about this remarkable man, Noah, are brief in our Hebrews account. It is a terse, invaluable statement, "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." He was warned, and first of all he took God at His word. He believed the message God had sent him, even though it might look foolish at the moment. As Barclay puts it, "Noah's life was one continued and concentrated preparation for what God had said would come."

Secondly, he ignored the skepticism and even the mockery of those around him. How uniquely did he stand out among the corruption of the world. We read in Genesis 6:6,7: "The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth and his heart was filled with pain. So the Lord said, 'I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth...with all animals, creatures and birds..I am grieved that I have made them.'" What a remarkable declaration from the Lord of creation. But we then read v. 8: "BUT NOAH FOUND FAVOR IN THE EYES OF THE LORD." And this man's faith, we can conclude, deflected God's destructive judgment on all mankind. You and I can never know how our faith can bring a shield of blessing to those around us, even to those who may seem cynical of our belief in a living God.

Thirdly, Noah's faith in itself brought ultimate judgment on those around him . Again I quote Barclay, "In one sense it is dangerous to be a Christian. It is not that the Christian is self-righteous or censorious or that he goes about finding fault with other people. It often happens that by being himself the Christian passes judgment on other people. Alcibiades, that brilliant but wild young man of Athens used to say to Socrates: 'Socrates, I hate you, for every time I meet you, you show me what I am.'" Christ calls you and me the Light of the World (Matthew 5:14), and he also

says, "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed." This is a most important truth. We often would shield the light, lest it disturbs our friends who are walking in darkness. We don't want to offend them, or alienate them, and so we conveniently turn down the light, lest it condemns them.

Not so with Noah. And why did he have such courage? Three things are important. We read in Genesis that "he was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time and he walked with God." (Genesis 6:8:9). He was inwardly sharing God's nature, and outwardly was fulfilling God's will. For we read thirdly that "Noah did everything just as God commanded him"(vs.22). It is interesting to note that he is the first man in the Bible to be called dikaios, righteous. He emphatically showed by his obedient walk with God a great contrast with a world that disregarded the Lord and was sinking into a vast sea of iniquity.

And so we, too, in a world that is in incredible conflict with God can shine like lights in the darkness. Never before was there a greater need in our world for this than today. "Give us, Lord Jesus, both the courage and consistency to be the source of the Light you have placed within us, to shine near and far so that others can walk with you as well. We are grateful for the privilege." Thank you, partner on the journey.

Cheerio,  
Monty

Hebrews 11:5-6  
Walking with God!

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. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. Welcome along our journey in this Biblical Hall of Fame. It is a fascinating review of the lives of the ancients and emphasizes the things about them that made them people of historic significance. We have just seen that Abel was a man of total obedience, whose death continues to speak to us, millennia later. Today we look at Enoch. He is the first man in Scripture of whom it is written that he "walked with God." He stands therefore as the prototype of the walk of faith. Our Scripture for today refers first to the issue of Enoch's walk of faith and ends with an analysis of the faith that brought him to that great relationship with the Lord.

Hebrews 11:6 says, simply, that "without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He is and that He rewards

those who earnestly seek Him." In other words, walking with God is more than just a rather aimless ramble, although it certainly can contain moments which are just restful fellowship. But there is a quality of focus and deep desire in the walking that reflects its purpose. Our walk with God is first of all, intentional. It is marked by one who earnestly seeks God. And this seeking means that, as Raymond Lull, missionary to India, said, "I have but one Passion, it is He." He is not one of our goals, He is not one of our references, He is our constant ambition and preeminent desire. And we note that this great, generous God cannot be outgiven by our puny intentions. We read that He, in fact, rewards those who earnestly seek him.

The Genesis record of Enoch is terse and triumphant. It is summed up in one sentence, "And Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away" (Genesis 5:24). I love to relate that with Genesis 15:1, "...Do not be afraid, I am your shield and your very great reward." Because he walked with God when other men were walking away from Him, he daily came nearer to him and the last step took him into the very presence of that God with whom he had always walked. In other words, Enoch learned that God does not reward us merely with good things, like joy, peace, rest, forgiveness, purpose, etc., although He does this. But His very great reward is Himself... So our verse in Hebrews 11:6 says clearly that HE is the reward for those who earnestly seek Him. The Psalms are full of great encouragement to "seek the Lord." "Those who seek the Lord lack no good thing (34:10); "Let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. Look to the Lord and His strength; seek His face always" (105:3,4). So walking with God is earnestly enjoying our companion in the walk.

In Africa, while living in the villages, I enjoyed the custom at the end of a good day to walk along the jungle path with an African friend, to his home. I treasure the memory of those walks, some of which became long experiences of fellowship. We walked and talked and prayed and loved each other. And more than once, when we arrived at his home he would say, "It's far now to your place. Just stay the night here." And I did. And one day, as Enoch was walking with God, the Lord said, "My friend, it's far to your house, come stay with me." And he did. That's the reward of walking with God. At any moment of the journey, the Lord says, "Come to my heavenly Home." And that is His greatest reward, when we will be forever with the Lord!

"Thank you, Lord, for the privilege of earnestly seeking you as we walk and grow in our love for You. We are truly hugely blessed." Thanks, friend.

Cheerio,  
Monty

Hebrews 11:1-3  
"By Faith!" What is Faith?

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. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. Now we come to this great chapter which defines and describes the meaning of faith. The importance of this chapter is recognized in the 6th verse, which categorically declares that without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He is and that He rewards those who earnestly seek him. Two unalterable prerequisites are asserted in this single verse. Faith is belief that God is, it is belief that He rewards those who diligently seek Him. God is the foundation of faith and the fabric of faith. And vs.3 says that faith is the key to understanding that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

A mother once asked her six-year old son what he had learned in Sunday School. He said the teacher had talked about 'faith.' "And what is faith?" the mother asked. And her son responded, "I think it's believing in what you know ain't so." Vs. 1, casually read and superficially pondered can give one that impression. "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." The Authorized Version puts it like this, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." The Greek word translated 'substance' is used five times in the New Testament, a kind of legal term, used of the documents by which one might substantiate his claim to property. It is a condition of absolute certainty, or 'being sure of what we hope for.' Here is that intriguing little word 'hope' again, to which I have made frequent reference. The original is the word 'elpis', which can best be translated "confident expectation." In our current vocabulary the word 'hope' may include a measure of uncertainty, e.g.: "I hope I'll be home in time for supper," "I hope I have enough money to buy gas." Not so in Scripture. Paul concludes that magnum opus, his letter to the Romans, with the statement, (15:13), "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

No vague uncertainty here. This is being confidently sure!! As someone facetiously reworded the hymn phrase, "On Christ the solid rock I stand! All other rock is sham-rock!!" For faith is Christ! Peter powerfully explains this in his first letter, chapter 1:7-9: "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. Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls." Reread this passage again, my friend. It is the key to Hebrews. As I shared in my extra-E-LINK, "Not all faith pleases God." But faith is simply having been born anew, one has been given the life of God. Romans 1:16,17 so importantly declares, "In the Gospel the righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last,

just as it is written: "He who by faith is righteous shall live."

So the writer has devoted an entire chapter describing the activity of faith for which the ancients were commended (vs.2). We plunge into this marvelous tapestry of faith with great eagerness and thankfulness. "Thank you, blessed Holy Spirit, for being alongside us, for being within us, to give us a strong foundation on which our eternity will be built. We rejoice!" Thanks, dear friend, for being along.

Cheerio.  
Monty

Hebrews 10:32-39  
The Danger of Drifting

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. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. Our study today is a valuable review of the things in our lives which may cause us to "shrink back", as the writer warns in vs. 39. It is important that we do not become too introspective in examining our faith, because that can lead us to a kind of ego-focus that can be very discouraging. However, it is also important to review, from time to time, the things that may cause us to drift in our faith.

This study is the last of this section which is a strong warning against putting up with a spurious 'faith', if there is such a thing. Our next E-LINK will begin an exciting look at the Heroes of Faith, in chapter 11, and what made them that way. So our study today is a good preparation for launching into one of Scriptures' most important definitions of genuine faith. I just had a phone-call last evening from one of my students and very dear friend, Norb Winter. He asked me to help him have a clear understanding of what it means to truly 'believe in Christ'. We so easily get swept up in the organizational program of our church meetings, forgetting that Hebrews 11:6 says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God." We need to be absolutely clear in our understanding of transforming faith, so we can be freed from the danger of drifting.

What are some of the things that may cause us to "shrink back"?

1. Vs 32, choosing a life of 'ease' rather than "standing our ground in any great contest in the face of suffering." There is certainly nothing virtuous about suffering, if it is not for some great reason. We sometimes suffer because of our own foolishness and selfishness. But if we suffer for Christ and the Kingdom, blessed are we.

2. Vs.33, preferring to be praised and receive the accolades of people, rather than being "publicly exposed to insult and persecution." We all need encouragement, but it is so easy to compromise convictions and moral principles because we may be attacked by people who vigorously confront us. Christ said, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:10).

3. Vs.34, preferring to protect our possessions, at any cost, rather than " joyfully accept the confiscation of our property, because we know that we ourselves have better and lasting possessions." I am sure that few, if any, of us will ever suffering this kind of persecution. We are protected by our Bill of Rights, and many other legal structures. But this is a strong reminder that we should let our possessions "hang loose." We are after all "aliens and strangers on the earth" (Heb.11:13) and pilgrims travel light. Only what's done for Christ will last.

4. Vs.36-38, preferring to 'live for today' rather than 'with eternity's values in view.' The writer reminds us that we "need to persevere so that when we have done the will of God;, we will receive what He has promised. For in just a little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay." If we shrink back, God will not be pleased with us. We live with one passion, to please Him. "Thank you, Lord Jesus for the strong encouragement you give me and my friend. Help us to persevere in the face of daily testings."

Thanks, partner.

Cheerio.  
Monty

Hebrews 10:26-31  
The Danger of Pretense

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. 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. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. If you have studied this book of Hebrews at all, you will remember that many commentaries include reference to the various warnings contained throughout the book. So far, I have not specifically defined them, except in my general comments. I have wanted to focus on the incomparable glories of Christ, so powerful and uniquely described in this precious letter. But our reading for today gives us a very strong warning and I thought it might be useful for us to review those that have been previously mentioned.

1. The first warning: NEGLECT, 2:1-4. As I mentioned in that study, neglect is insidious because it seems so benign. One neglects to change the oil in ones car, only to destroy the motor. One neglects a decay in ones tooth only to have to remove it. Neglect is at times more dangerous than outright admission of need, since it seems at times so tolerable. This passage states that neglect can produce a kind of drift that eventually brings the vessel on the rocks. It is a most serious warning.

2. The second warning: UNBELIEF, 3:7-19. This passage warns against the subtle corrosive effect unbelief can have on ones soul. The writer so strongly warns against the hardening of heart that unbelief can bring, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as you did in the rebellion." And as I have pointed out, it is not sin that hardens but the deceitfulness of sin, of unbelief, that destroys, thinking that somehow I can sin and it won't matter. It does matter. Harboring unbelief prepares one for tragedy.

3. The third warning: DISOBEDIENCE, 4:1, 11-13. This remarkable passage tells us that there is a promised rest for those who "make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience." We may think that rest is some kind of removal from testing, from pressure, from difficulties, when it is really the assurance of the partnership and provision of the Lord in difficulties. The promise of rest, in Matthew 11:28 is coupled with a command, "...I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me...." The promise rests on the premise of our obedience.

4. The fourth warning: IMMATURITY, 5:11-6:20. The writer warns of remaining in the friendly delusion of spiritual infant-hood, and warns us to "leave the elementary teaching about Christ and go on to maturity." We become content with our pleasant, perhaps pious programs, but this may be no more than spectatorship and the results are nothing more than sterile stagnation.

5. The fifth warning: WILLFUL SIN, 10:26-31. In one of the most scathing warnings in the book, we are told, "If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left...It is a dreadful thing

to fall into the hands of the living God."

This is a jolting focus on the peril of careless indifference to the consequences of repeated sin. It is, in effect, a mockery of the purpose of God's Grace, which is to lead us to holiness. It is perilously easy to be familiar with evangelical lingo, and even 'acceptable' behavior, all the while we may be 'trampling the Son of God underfoot'. May God speak strongly to all of us, lest we fall into the trap of meaningless familiarity, which can lead to contempt.

"Lord Jesus, we bow before You, to whom all things are uncovered, and by whom all things will be judged. We are silent in the presence of your stern Grace." We quietly, earnestly ponder together, my friend.

Cheerio!  
Monty

Hebrews 10:19-25  
Let us, let us, let us!!!

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. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. Someone has called today's reading the Hebrews Lettuce-Patch. As you have read it, you have noticed that there are five instances where the writer invites us to join him in taking various initiatives of faith. He continues to say "Let us".. again and again and each of these invitations has strong significance.

1. LET US DRAW NEAR TO GOD, 10:22 He undergirds this imperative by reminding us that we can have confidence to enter the Holiest of Holies because of Christ's death and resurrection. It is stirring to read that we have a new and living way through an opened curtain, that is Christ's body, broken on the cross for us. I'm sure you remember the astonishing moment recorded in the synoptic Gospels when "the sun stopped shining and the curtain of the temple was torn in two, and Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' When He had said this, he breathed his last" (Luke 23:45,46). Now you and I have immediate access into the Presence of God Himself, no longer needing priest or prophet to open the way.

2. LET US HOLD FAST TO THE HOPE WE POSSESS, 10:23. God is faithful, who has promised to hold us in the shelter of His loving hands, but we must also heed the words in Jude 21, "Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life." He knows, He loves, He cares, nothing this truth can dim. He gives the very best to those who leave the choice with Him. We cling closely to this assuring hope that nothing, other than our rejection, can separate us from the love of Christ. He is always there. But we must draw near and hold fast to this powerful hope.

3. LET US CONSIDER HOW TO SPUR ONE ANOTHER ON, 10:24. One of the challenges in Paul's writings is to be sure we build each other up in our faith. "Make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you...we urge you to do this more and more" (I Thess.4:2). How powerful is the encouragement from another believer, to uplift, to strengthen and to rouse to further growth in faith, hope and love.

4. LET US NOT GIVE UP MEETING TOGETHER, 10:25. The Lord assured the early believers that where they were gathered together, there He was in the midst (Matt.18:20). Often, it is so much easier just to stay home, even when believers are gathering for worship, for study, for fellowship in Christ. Sometimes, alas, this may be because some gatherings are not, in fact, focused on building up the body and one leaves still hungry, even unfed. But if this is the case, our meeting with others should be for the purpose of sharing and not so much as receiving. If I go for the purpose of being a source of blessing, and not only being blessed, I will be nourished in the giving.

5. LET US ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER, 10:25. Here we are reminded of a strong purpose of meeting with others, to be a source of encouragement. This may be accomplished by bringing a word from the Word, or from bearing another's burdens, or from simply being available as an instrument of Grace. We cry with the Prophet, "Here am I, Lord, send me!" (Isaiah 6:8) and God blesses the giver, even more than the receiver, for it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). What a privilege! "Thank you, Lord Jesus, for calling us into this divine partnership. We joyfully respond!" It's a blessing, partner, to be encouraging each other this way.

Cheerio.  
Monty

#### PREFACE TO E-LINK H31

Hello, my friend. A dear E-LINKER from South Africa wrote me, bringing reassurance from Psalms 27 and 37. We are always so grateful to hear from members of the E-LINK family, bringing encouragement and real fellowship in Christ.

Thank you all for praying for us at this time. We are truly heading into a new era

of world history. Yesterday's TV newscasts were full of descriptions of the imminent danger of chemical warfare. One said that an amount of 1,000th of an ounce of anthrax could kill a person. A spoonful of it introduced into an air conditioning system could kill all the occupants of an office building. We are involved with a bestial, faceless enemy in a new kind of terrible war. It is a fact that, indeed, today could be our last day on this earthly journey.

It is a call-up from the Lord to vigilance and true commitment. As you may have read, prayer meetings are being held in every village, town and city in the USA, a thing undreamed of a month ago. In fact, a fortnight ago no schoolteacher could lead the class in prayer. Now, in some schools every class is begun with prayer. THANK YOU FOR PRAYING ALONG WITH US. AND THANK YOU FOR YOUR NOTES OF ENCOURAGEMENT. We stand on praying ground, as our today's study in Hebrews 10:11-18 reminds us. Now let's share what we have learned to a waiting, wondering, wandering world. God is able!

+++++

Hebrews 10:11-18,  
He remembers our sins no more!

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. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. It is such an encouragement to receive a letter from an E-LINKER, expressing how these studies are being used both personally and in small-groups. It is when one shares something that you begin to possess it. As the writer to the Hebrews has already told us, "By the time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food." And why is that? Simply because when I don't share what I've received, I will forget what I've heard. What you share you keep forever; what you don't share you soon will lose! Thank you, my friends, for bringing this old man huge encouragement by sharing!!!

From time to time we read promises in Scripture that seem just too good to be true. There are many such in Hebrews. We read just a few days ago that

tremendous verse in Hebrews 7:25, "Christ is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them. Such a high priest meets our need." I am awed to read that Christ, by whom and for whom were all things created, lives to pray for me!! And in today's reading we find another equally stupendous promise.

We read that the Holy Spirit testifies to us about this. First he says, "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." What a glorious promise is this verse, from Jeremiah 31:33. "They will all know me, from the least to the greatest." When Christ moves into our lives, we begin in a real, consistent and growing way TO KNOW THE LORD, whom to know is life eternal (John 17:3). But then the passage in Jeremiah 33:34 is quoted here in Hebrews 10:17, "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more." Of all the promises in Scripture this must surely rank amongst the most astonishing and enabling of them all. The Holy Spirit affirms what the prophet so joyously said, "Their sins and iniquities I will never remember again." Did you get that, my friend? As the old chorus used to go, "Gone, gone, gone, gone, yes my sins are gone. Now my soul is free and in my heart's a song! Buried in the deepest sea, yes that's good enough for me. I will live eternally, praise God my sins are gone!" David shouted (Psalm 103:12), "As far as the east is from the west, so far as He removed our transgressions from us." Micah rejoices when he says (7:19), "You will hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea!" Isaiah declares (44:22), "I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist"...they're gone, gone, gone. John reassures us (1 John 1:9), "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and will purify us from all unrighteousness." He wipes them from the record, for good, forever.

Do you get the full impact of these huge promises? Our sins are not only forgiven, they are forgotten, and we have no right to continue to bring them up again in confession and regret. To do so is to question God's amazing forgiving Grace. Receive it, my friend, believe it forever. God is able to make Grace overflow (2 Cor.9:8). "We are flooded with thankfulness, Lord Jesus, that we stand before you

just as if we'd never sinned. How sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I'm found. Was blind, but now I see!" Praise God, my friend, that God doesn't patch us up, He cleans us up and we are His new creation forever.

Cheerio. Monty.

Hebrews 10:1-10,  
One sacrifice, once for all, forever

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. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. I was startled once, in South Africa, when an acquaintance of mine said the most important thing in the life of the Christian is to take communion, since that meant renewing Christ's sacrifice for us, again and again. He said he often missed going to church because of other interests, but he never missed going when he knew there would be communion. And my mind went to our reading for yesterday and today, where we read that Christ "entered the Most Holy Place once for all by His own blood" (9:12), and again "Christ has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (9:27) and "Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people" (9:28). And in our today's reading, "By that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (10:10).

You see, the moment we focus on the sacrifice of Christ as the main theme of the Gospel we have missed the point. He died for our sins, once for all, and He rose from the dead to give us new life and we continue to live and walk in the Spirit forever (Gal.5:25). To focus on his death, and to repeat this sacrifice on a man-made altar is to reduce the Christian faith to a repetitious religious ritual. And religion is simply my attempts to please God by observing certain obligations, whereas true faith is God welcoming me into His presence by the death and resurrection of His son.

The writer to the Hebrews refers to this so clearly in our reading for today. He says that the Old Testament sacrifices were but a shadow of the good things to come. "For this reason, it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. 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. But those sacrifices are a regular reminder of sins, since it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (10:1-4).

Sorry for repeating what you already have read in your reading for today, but it is so important to understand that a routine repetition of some religious act could

never be pleasing to God, now that Christ has come to bring us to Himself.. The Christian life is not merely a routine ceremony; it is fulfilling that strong statement written by the Apostle John in I John 4:17, "...in this world we are like Him." So we too must be able to declare what Christ said "I have come to do your will, O God" (Heb.10:7,9).

Note carefully that strong warning in vs.8, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offering you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" even though the law required them. But they were shadows of the reality which was to come. So if our emphasis is on eucharists, ceremonies, holy consultations, we fall into the indictment so powerfully stated in Isaiah 1:12ff, "When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations--I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. Even if you offer many prayers I will not listen." It is not that assemblies and prayers and offerings are bad, but they are not acceptable to the Lord if they do not represent the total giving of ones life to God.

"Thank you, Lord Jesus, for reminding us of the real meaning of worshipping you in Spirit and in truth." We press on, together, fellow-pilgrim.

Cheerio!  
Monty

SPECIAL MESSAGE to all in the Family,

Hello, my friend. This has been a week of historic tragedy and catastrophe. I'm sure you have all been made aware through your own news media of this terrible terrorist attack on our nation. We have always felt December 7th, Pearl Harbor day, was a day of special infamy, but in fact this Trade Center destruction is in many ways a more terrible day. The incident which brought the USA into the 2nd World War was a tragedy, involving the thousands of sailors aboard the USS Arizona. But this week involves perhaps up to the 10,000 people who were not in the military at all, simple, ordinary citizens with families and homes and jobs, many of whom have lost their lives. And this doesn't include the hundreds who have died or been injured in other ways, with other hijacked planes, etc. So I am just prefacing today's study with a call for your prayers. Pray for President Bush and his advisors, that he will hear clearly from the Lord as to the proper words to say and the effective way to lead a stunned nation. Pray for wisdom among local leaders. With all the airports closed off on Tuesday, there was a widespread impact on many families, especially those who have to use planes for their work. Pray for the thousands of families who are grieving at this time, who need to be loved in a special way. Pray for the church in America to rise up in earnest prayer, as reflected in 2 Chronicles 7:14. These are challenging days for believers to share their faith and to be great encouragers to people who are especially effected by this terrible event. Let this be a call to repentance and an open door to bring a strong

witness in the places where we live and work. When we read that "in everything God is at work with those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose" we know that He is able to bring a powerful move in our land, to trust Him all the more and to prayerfully share His Word as we've never done before.

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### Hebrews 9:23-28 Christ's three appearances

23) It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. 24) For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. 25) Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. 26) Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. 27) Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, 28) so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. If you have ever participated in a courtroom trial, you know that the accused is represented by a lawyer, who stands in his place. At times the accused is never even called on to testify, his case being handled by the one in his place. This brings to mind I John 2:1, "If any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (RSV). It is thrilling to note here in chapter 9 three references how Christ has appeared on our behalf. (Ref. J.C.Macaulay's Epistle to the Hebrews.)

1. Christ appeared in the flesh in His incarnation in Bethlehem for sacrifice, 9:26, "Now He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of Himself...Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people." We think of Christmas as a time of jolly jingles and frothy festivities, when it should always be remembered that Christ was born to die. All the way through His earthly journey there was this shadow of the Cross. Speaking of a corn of wheat falling into the ground to die, Christ said, "Now my heart is troubled and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" And he said "'When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself' He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die." (John 12:27-32).

2. Christ now appears for us in God's presence, for intercession, 9:24. We read another rather astonishing statement here: "Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to

appear for US in God's presence." As I referred to above, we have such an advocate standing in heaven on our behalf. And we read that not only is He there as our defender, He is there as one who continually prays for us. We were encouraged to read that recently, in Hebrews 7:24, 25, "Jesus live forever...therefore He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them." This is one of those enormously remarkable statements in Scripture which we should read every day. He always lives to intercede for me, therefore it is the least thing I can do to always live to fellowship with Him in prayer. A very special fellow-student of mine, Widdy Bird, wrote, "I was listening to R.C.Sproul while driving to my fathers last week. Sproul said, 'If I am ever thrown in prison and allowed to have only one book of the Bible I would choose Hebrews since it is a summation of both the Old and New Testament.' He confessed that he had already memorized the book of Romans so that didn't count.

3. Christ will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him. vs.28. In other words, He will appear here on earth the second time, in His coming back again. This verse follows that solemn statement that "... man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (vs.27). What a promise in the face of a moment of review, as Paul stated, in 2 Cor.5:10, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him, for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." And the wonder of it all is that the judge is our advocate, standing before the Throne of God on our behalf. Thus He will bring salvation to those who trust Him. This is an assurance that brings peace and joy forever.

"Thank you, Lord, that you have chosen us to be the objects of your love. How little do we understand of this but how thankful we are to embrace it. We praise you forever." Thank you, dear fellow-pilgrim, for your faithful prayers.

Cheerio. Monty

Hebrews 9:15-22

Without blood, no forgiveness

15) For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance-- now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. 16) In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, 17) because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living. 18) This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood. 19) When Moses had proclaimed every commandment of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll and all the people. 20) He said, "This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep." 21) In the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and

everything used in its ceremonies. 22) In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. We continue on with the Hebrews focus on the significance of the new covenant, which Christ established by His death and resurrection. Notice in particular that significant verse 16, in today's reading. "In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living. This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood." And the writer continues to make reference to Moses' taking the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop, sprinkling the scroll and all the people. For "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (vs.22).

Ray Stedman wrote a very useful and fresh commentary on Hebrews, What More Can God Say? In it he reflects on the significance of the necessity of the death of one who writes a will. A group of directors of a Christian Conference Center had been examining a deed which had been executed by the owner of a property and was to be paid an annuity until her death, on her death the property becoming the property of the Center. Someone raised his hand and facetiously he asked, "How healthy is she?" The question was not in good taste but it illustrates the point. Wills are of no value to the beneficiaries until the death of the testator, the will maker.

And Stedman continues, "If we fight this sentence of death, for the rest of our Christian lives we shall be troubled with a guilty conscience. We will never rest in any final acceptance before God. We shall always be wrestling with the problem of whether we have done enough and have been pleasing to God by our activity. But if we accept this, the effect is to render service pure delight." If we continue to want to be in a place of leadership, exercising power in our ministry, to be useful to God in the use of all our gifts and talents, we will be overwhelmed with a sense of frustration and defeat. We will experience this over and over simply because we will not accept the fact that is proclaimed here in Hebrews: God has ruled us out, because there are no talents we have that we can employ in any service, any worthwhile service acceptable to God. As long as we are still struggling to use our abilities to do something for God, instead of with God we will never be acceptable. (Stedman, page 142).

It is so crucial to grasp the truth of that verse in Luke 9:23, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself". This doesn't mean denying myself of certain things, or places or position, it simply means I must deny myself. When Christ died, I died with Him, as Galatians 2:20 and Romans 6:5 so emphatically declare. Therefore, we have the right to claim this new covenant promise, "Now 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, 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. (Hebrews 13:20,21). The risen Lord is

working in you and me and enjoying us. Hallelujah!

"Thank you, Lord Jesus, for all you have done for us, for all you have done for me, in your death in my place and your risen life in each one who belongs to you. Help yourself, Lord." It's good to be letting the Word grip us, together, friend.

Cheerio. Monty

Hebrews 9:11-14

He offered His own blood...

11) When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. 12) He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. 13) The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. 14) How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! (NIV)

Hello, my friend. I had the privilege, many years ago in South Africa, to teach Biblical Studies in a state University. I did this for more than ten years and it was a new experience for me to teach Scripture to a very diverse group of students. Back in those days, when the government was largely of the Dutch Reformed faith, it was required that every teacher be able to teach Scripture, whether in primary or high school. And it was our responsibility as lecturers in the Education Department to prepare them to do so.

There they were, a mixture of Protestants, Roman Catholics, atheists, outspoken agnostics, New Agers and other genial unbelievers. I found this to be an exhilarating experience, first because it required a new teaching method, not assuming that any were Christians. Secondly, it enabled me to get to understand the reasons for their skepticisms or for their belief-systems. What a privilege those years were.

I will never forget when one outspoken student came into my office one day with a forthright statement that "I'm finding that the Bible teaches a bloody religion, which I find repugnant. If God is a God of love," he asked, "what is all this, especially in Hebrews, about blood." He had just read Hebrews chapters 9 and 10, which says, "only the high-priest entered the inner room...and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed..." (9:7) and Christ "entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption" (10:12).

He was an alert, Jewish student, not insincere in his search, and his question

opened up the door to a long, enriching conversation about Christ's death and resurrection for us. I turned to Leviticus 17:22, "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life." And to Ezekiel 18:4, "The soul who sins is the one who will die." And then to Romans 6:23, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord." I think he gained insight into the purpose of it all.

As we have already seen, these Old Testament types or pictures are an ancient presentation of God's holiness and His judgment on sin, as well as His presence with His people. And all these 'shadows' we are seeing, are fulfilled in the Lord Jesus. As far as 'blood' is concerned, we see that blood means life. Blood shed means life poured out. Sacrificial blood is life poured out, yielded up, for redemptive purposes. We did not think of blood banks during the war in terms of ugliness, horror and the slaughterhouse; we thought of them in terms of life--life poured out to give life. And if blood-plasma, gathered from the veins of multitudes of the nation, carried high potency for life into the veins of our men wounded in battle, surely the sacrifice of the Son of God, His life poured out even to the blood-shedding on Calvary, will carry high life-potency, in the spiritual realm, to people sick unto death with the wounds and poisons of sin. As the old hymn goes, "Precious, precious blood of Jesus, shed on Calvary, shed for rebels, shed for sinners, shed for me. Precious blood that has redeemed us! All the price is paid; perfect pardon now is offered, peace is made." "We acknowledge Lord Jesus that there was no other good enough to pay the price of sin. You only could unlock the gates of heav'n and let us in. We rejoice, in awe and renewed commitment." Thank you, dear fellow-seeker, for your fellowship in the precious Word.

Cheerio, Monty

Hebrews 9:6-10

The purpose of Nearing God

6) When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. 7) But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. 8) The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing. 9) This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. 10) They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings-- external regulations applying until the time of the new order. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. Are you listening? We have about 250 E-LINKERS on our address list and we praise God for each one of you. Furthermore, I want to emphasize how encouraged we are when someone responds to the study for the

day. Sometimes we go for more than a week without a single comment from out there in cyberspace. Fellowship is a bilateral experience and I want to express my hope that you have blessings to share with this old teacher. This is not a complaint, but a loving reminder.

Our reading for today is a concentrated description of the Old Testament tabernacle, with emphasis on the fact that the way into the Most Holy Place, with its gold-covered ark of the covenant was standing, was closed to everyone but the High Priest. Furthermore, he entered it only once a year (vs.7) and always with blood. And on the hem of his priestly garment were hung bells in the shape of pomegranates (Exodus 28:34). "The sound of the bells will be heard when he enters the Holy Place before the Lord and when he comes out, so that he will not (or has not) die." In other words, access to this most Holy Place was such a solemn, even frightening occasion, that every precaution was taken so that the High Priest could enter in safety. If you read through Exodus 28 you will be startled again by all the preparation that was necessary for this access into the Presence of God.

In spite of all this, our reading for today says bluntly, "the gifts and sacrifices offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. They were only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings--external regulations applying until the time of the new order." We will see in our next E-LINK how Christ alone has fulfilled all that was required to enter in and dwell in the Most Holy Place, as the the veil was torn from top to bottom to allow all God's children entrance into His Presence.

It is interesting how Paul frequently refers to the precious gift of a cleared conscience. On one occasion, Ananias, the high priest and his lawyer, Tertullus came before the Roman governor, Felix, accusing Paul of being "a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world, a ringleader of the Nazarene sect, even trying to desecrate the temple; so we seized him." (Acts 24:5,6) Among many other thoughts in his defense, Paul said to Felix, "I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man" (vs.16). In the previous chapter, standing before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish tribunal, Paul, looking straight at them, said, "My bothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day" (23:1). Paul

writes, (I Tim.1:5), "The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." And in vs. 19, he writes, "Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith." A cleared conscience is a great weapon for spiritual warfare.

One of God's most precious redemptive gifts is that of forgiveness and cleansing from sins, past and present. "What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood

of Jesus." And with that washing comes the cleansing of conscience, which Christ does for us as He has entered into the Presence of God on our behalf. Indeed, amazing Grace! "Thank you, Lord Jesus, for the wonder of it all. We rejoice in our constant access into Your presence, moment by moment. Bless my friend who is alongside in fellowship." I praise God for you, fellow-pilgrim. Looking forward to hearing from you.

Cheerio.  
Monty

Hebrews Extra #1  
Not all Faith pleases God

Hello, my friend. From time to time, as we press on in the study of Hebrews, I want to insert a relevant article which seems to comment appropriately on our study. This is the first Extra I am sending you, and I grieve that I don't know the author's name. It came to me in copy-form and if anyone would recognize it, your information would be gratefully appreciated. The writer to the Hebrews comments in the next chapters on the necessity of Faith, in contrast to sterile religious tradition. But this article today is a useful caution again concluding that all 'faith' is valid.

#### NOT ALL FAITH PLEASES GOD

Without faith it is impossible to please God, but not all faith pleases God.

I do not recall another period when faith was as popular as it is today. After the first World War the man of faith was considered weak and frightfully behind the intellectual parade. But since the close of World War II the pendulum has swung far in the other direction. Faith has come back into favor with almost everybody. The scientist, the cab driver, the philosopher, the actress, the politician, the prize fighter, the housewife--all are ready to recommend faith as the panacea for all our ills, moral, spiritual and economic.

If we only believe hard enough we'll make it somehow. So goes the popular chant. What you believe is not so important. Only believe. Jew, Catholic, naturemystic, deist, occultist, swami, Mormon, Sufi, moonstruck poet without religious convictions, political dreamer or aspirant for a cottage on Uranus or Mars--just keep on believing, and peace, it will be wonderful. Soon a disease-free, warless world will emerge from the mists inhabited by a colorless, creedless, classless race where men will brothers be for all that and all that.

Back of this is the nebulous idea that faith is an almighty power flowing through the universe which anyone may plug into at will. It is conceived vaguely as a

subrational creative pulsation streaming down from somewhere Up There, ready at any time to enter our hearts and change our whole mental and moral constitution as well as our total outlook on man, God and the cosmos. When it comes in, out go pessimism, fear, defeat and failure; in come optimism, confidence, personal mastery, and unflinching success in war, love, sports, business and politics.

All of this, of course, is a gossamer of self-deception woven of the insubstantial threads of fancy spun out of minds of tenderhearted persons who want to believe it. It is a kind of poor man's transcendentalism, which in the form we have with us today, came down from the more literary and respectable transcendentalism of the New England of a century ago.

Transcendentalism is a sort of creedless religion, growing out of the will to believe and an unwillingness to believe the Holy Scriptures. To discover the tenets of transcendentalism is extremely difficult, if indeed any such tenets actually exist; but Emerson gave us a hint when he said, "Belief consists in accepting the affirmations of the soul; unbelief, in denying them." I think this may be taken as a fair summary of Emerson's religious belief, and certainly it is an accurate description of the humanistic faith of the quasi-Christian masses today

What is overlooked in all this is that faith is good only when it engages truth; when it is made to rest upon falsehood it can and often does lead to eternal tragedy. For it is not enough that we believe; we must believe the right thing about the right One. To believe in God is more than to believe that He exists. Ahab and Judas believed that. To a right faith knowledge is necessary. We must know at least something of what God is like and what His will is for His human creatures. To know less than this is to be thrown back upon the necessity of accepting the affirmations of the soul and substituting "Thus says my soul" for the Biblical "Thus says the Lord.."

True faith requires that we believe everything God has said about Himself, but also that we believe everything He has said about us. Until we believe we are as bad as God says we are, we can never believe that He will do for us what He says He will do. Right here is where popular religion breaks down. It never quite accepts the severity of God or the depravity of man. It stresses the goodness of God and man's misfortune. Sin is a pardonable frailty and God is not too much concerned about it. He merely wants us to trust in His goodness.

To believe this is to ground faith upon falsehood and build our eternal hope upon sand. No man has any right to pick and choose among revealed truths. God has spoken. We are all under solemn obligation to hear the affirmations of the Holy Ghost.

To manipulate the Scriptures so as to make them excuse us, compliment us and console us is to do despite to the written Word and to reject the living Word. To believe savingly in Jesus Christ is to believe all He has said about Himself and all

that the prophets and apostles have said about Him. Let us beware that the Jesus we "accept" is not one we have created out of the dust of our imagination and formed after our own likeness.

True faith commits us to obedience. "We have received grace and apostleship to call people from all the nations to the obedience that comes from faith" (Rom.1:5). That dreamy, sentimental faith which ignores the judgments of God against us and listens to the affirmations of the soul is as deadly as cyanide. That faith which passively accepts all the pleasant texts of the Scripture while it overlooks or rejects the stern warnings and commandments of those same Scriptures is not the faith of which Christ and His apostles spoke.

Faith in faith is faith astray. To hope for heaven by means of such faith is to drive in the dark across a deep chasm on a bridge that doesn't quite reach the other side. "On Christ the solid rock we stand; all other ground is sinking sand."

Hebrews 8:7-13

No longer just religion

7) For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. 8) But God found fault with the people and said: "The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. 9) It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. 10) This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. 11) No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. 12) For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." 13) By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. Dr. Johnny Jonsson, a friend of ours from years ago in Africa, once wrote, "David Wilkes has painted a picture entitled, 'the reading of the will.' A lawyer with spectacles on the tip of his nose, with an open document before him, has gathered round him a group of people, including an old man with an ear trumpet. A will is being read and each one is eagerly waiting to hear the mention of his or her name. Each one is anxious to know what claim they have on the last Will and Testament of a loved one."

And Dr. Jonsson continued, "This is how we should be reading our Bibles, for it represents the Will and Testament of God. Although the Bible is divided into what we call the Old and New Testaments, we are not thereby to think there are two testaments. God has one last Will and Testament in which there is promise and

fulfillment. It is the very fulfillment of the promise which gives the Testament its new quality. It is in this sense that we are to understand the covenant (or Testament) as in Hebrews 8:10-13. God is not canceling out the Old, He is rather bringing it to its intended fulfillment."

In the days of the Covenanters, a Scottish lassie was stopped by a group of English soldiers, while she was on her way to a Christian gathering one Sunday morning. "Where are you going?" they demanded. She knew the consequences of telling them where she was going. But she gave them a reply which really expressed the real reason for her attending worship. "A very dear Friend of mine has died," she uttered, "and I am on my way to hear the reading of the Will."

This is the way we approach our reading for today. The writer declares that Christ is so much superior to the Old Testament's shadows and copies because He has come to fulfill them. They were a type of the coming Messiah and he stresses that it is time to accept the completeness that Christ was bringing to the Law. He quotes verbally from Jeremiah 31:31-34 and his declaration here includes some wonderful truths and promises:

1. HIS WORD WILL BE PLACED IN OUR MINDS, WRITTEN IN OUR HEARTS. This in no way dismisses the written Word of God, but through the coming of the Holy Spirit it promises that the Living Word will dwell within our hearts, and will take residence in our minds. As Paul so joyfully states, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, as you sing...with gratitude in your hearts to God." (Col.3:16)

2. WE NO LONGER NEED SOMEONE ELSE TO MEDIATE BETWEEN US AND THE LORD, TELLING US TO "KNOW THE LORD." We all have direct access to His Word by the Holy Spirit, and the purpose is that we KNOW THE LORD and not only know about Him, dependent only on the teaching of others.

3. HE WILL FORGIVE OUR INIQUITIES AND REMEMBER OUR SINS NO MORE. What a breath-taking promise, our sins have not only been forgiven, they have been forgotten. "Oh, Lord, I praise you that 'gone, gone, gone, gone, yes my sins are gone. Now my soul is free and in my heart's a song. Buried in the deepest sea (Micah 7:19), yes that's good enough for me. I will sing eternally, Praise God, my sins are gone, gone, gone, gone!" as the old chorus goes. What a wonderful Savior, is Jesus our Lord." Thank you, friend, for sharing.

We press on to know the Lord.  
Cheerio. Monty.

Hebrews 8:1-6  
Christ sat down!

1) The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat

down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, 2) and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man. 3) Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer. 4) If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already men who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. 5) They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." 6) But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. We are often surprised when welcoming new students into the Village School by the fact that a strong grasp of the Old Testament is a rarity among many. A verse we refer to frequently here in the VSB is 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." In other words, a person with a weak understanding of the Old Testament would not be very thoroughly equipped for serving the Lord. And we remember that this verse, at the time of its writing, referred ONLY to the Old Testament. The New Testament hadn't been compiled yet into a recognized volume of Scripture.

Some people feel that the Old Testament is for the Jews, who were under the Law, and the New Testament is for Christians, who are under Grace. Others feel it is so complicated and who needs to make the Gospel that difficult to understand. And others simply say they're so busy, it's a miracle they can find something in the New Testament easy enough to understand, within their free-time frame. In fact, we should be living under the command of 2 Timothy 2:15 every day of our lives, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the Word of Truth." This deserves serious intention and strong desire.

With reference to our reading today, I want to stress that it is an intricate chapter, and can easily be brushed over. But there are three things emphasized in these six verses.

1. WE HAVE A HIGH-PRIEST who has sat down in the heavenlies. This was something the OT high-priests could never do. First, they always stood as they served at the altar. There was actually nowhere for them to sit. They were there representing a priesthood that by its very nature was temporary. On the edge of their robes were a series of bells which kept ringing as they served, token that they were still alive and the offering was being accepted (Ex.28:35) Hebrew tradition says they had a rope tied to their ankle so their bodies could be removed, in case the offering was inadequate. What fragile priestly representatives they were. Their priestly service was never complete.

2. THEIR SANCTUARY WAS BUT A SHADOW OF WHAT IS IN HEAVEN. We are often puzzled by the intricacies of the details given Moses for the structure of the Tabernacle. But as we soon continue into chapter 9 and 10, we will see how marvelously the intricacies of the Old Testament Tabernacle are pictures or 'shadows' of what would be fulfilled in Christ, as recorded in the New Testament. As someone has said, "The NT is in the OT concealed, the OT is in the NT revealed." How diligently we need to study both.

3. MOSES WAS WARNED, AS ARE WE TO OBEY EVERY DETAIL. Jesus said to His disciples, "You are my friends if you do what I command...you do not belong to the world...I have chosen you out of the world." (John 15:14,19). It is freedom to allow the Holy Spirit to convict us of sin and righteousness (John 16:8). We need to diligently seek the Lord in the smallest details of the Word and of our lives. He deserves our best!

"Thank you, Lord, for honoring us with your Word, with your Life." Great to be with you, my friend. Press on! Thanks for your prayers and fellowship.

Cheerio! Monty

8/23/01

Hebrews 8:1-6,  
Christ sat down!

1) The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, 2) and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man. 3) Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer. 4) If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already men who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. 5) They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." 6) But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises.

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"Thank you, Lord, for honoring us with your Word, with your Life." Great to be with you, my friend. Press on!

Thanks for your prayers and fellowship.  
Cheerio! Monty

8/21/01

Hebrews 7:26-28

Christ meets our need.

26) Such a high priest meets our need-- one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. 27) Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. 28) For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. This book continues contrasting the Lord Jesus with various people, places and procedures. As you know, this section is dealing with the huge difference between Christ and other High Priests. The moment one gives some ecclesiastical person the authority to forgive sins, we diminish the unique place Christ has in God's plan of redemption. In vs. 26 we are told that Christ 'meets our need.' We have someone before the throne of God who, Himself, is free from condemnation. HE IS ABLE!!

It is interesting to note that on the Day of Atonement, a very High and Holy Day, the High Priest officiated. And the first thing that was done in the ritual of the day was a sacrifice for the sins of the High Priest himself. "He washed his hands and his feet; he put off his gorgeous robes; he clothed himself in spotless white linen. There was brought to him a bullock which he had purchased with his own money. He laid both hands on the bullock's head to transfer his sin to it; and thus he made confession: 'Ah, Lord God, I have committed iniquity. I have transgressed; I have sinned. I and my house. O Lord, I beseech Thee, cover over the sins and transgressions which I have committed, transgressed and sinned before Thee. I and my house.'" (The Daily Study Bible, Wm. Barclay, p.84).

And vs. 27 reminds us that such high-priests "need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for their own sins and then for the sins of the people." But Christ "sacrificed for our sins once for all WHEN HE OFFERED HIMSELF." We need to remind ourselves again and again that forgiveness of our sins does not come because of our frequent prayers or even because of the prayers of our pastor or discipler or Bible-teacher. Christ Himself lives forever to pray for us, because He has offered Himself for you and me. I need to remind myself of this great truth regularly. CHRIST ALONE IS ENOUGH!!

It is not the ritual that cleanses but the righteousness of God revealed in Christ alone that sets me free. And when we read that Christ meets our needs...our minds are flooded with many other verses which say the same thing. "If you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the NEEDS of the oppressed, then

your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The Lord will guide you always; He will satisfy your NEEDS in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail" (Isaiah 48:10,11). Don't you love that passage? As we allow God to meet others needs through our involvement and love, He meets our own needs through His compassion and Grace. We become channels of His blessings. What a wonderful encouragement!

Philippians 4:19 stresses the same truth. "And my God will meet all our NEEDS, according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus." We remind ourselves of that great verse we've looked at (Heb.4:16), "Let us then approach the throne of Grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find Grace to help us in our time of NEED." Oh, how important it is to acknowledge our needs, whatever they are, and sing with the old hymn-writer, "I need Thee every hour in joy or pain; come quickly and abide or life is vain. I need Thee every hour, most Holy One; O make me Thine indeed, Thou blessed Son."

"Thank you, Lord Jesus, for this great truth that You meet our needs. We rejoice that you alone are awesome."

Praise God for you, my friend.  
Cheerio. Monty

8/16/01  
Hebrews 7:21-25  
Christ lives to pray for us!

21) but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever.'" 22) Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant. 23) Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; 24) but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. 25) Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. One of my many peculiarities is that, when answering someone on the phone, I often ask, "What are you doing?" Friends will affirm this, since they sometimes answer, "None of your business!!" But I still find it useful, when speaking with someone from a distance, to try to relate to what they are doing at that moment. It makes the conversation that more personal, envisaging the setting in which the other friend is found.

Have you ever asked yourself what is God doing at this very moment? It is really impossible to imagine what He is doing, since He lives in a realm none of us can

possibly conceive. In fact, one is startled to read that none of us will ever see God. Paul in I Timothy 6:4 gloriously describes Him as "God, the blessed and only Ruler.. who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see..". But "we see Jesus, now crowned with glory and honor because He suffered death, so that by the Grace of God He might taste death for everyone" (Heb.2:9). In other words there is a Man in the Glory, our representative and our advocate (I John 2:1). And I ask, "What is Jesus doing?" Well, first of all we know He is building His church and the gates of Hell will not overcome it (Matthew 16:18). We often get absorbed in our planning and scheming without remembering that Christ is both Architect and Builder of the Church, which He is doing at this moment. We know that He is also preparing a place for His children when they arrive Home. He said, "In my Father's house are many rooms...I am going there to prepare a place for you...so that you may also be where I am" (John 14:2,3). He took six days to prepare this glorious world in which we live, but He has been preparing a Heavenly place for us which has taken more than 2,000 years. What a wonder it will be to see Him there face to face.

But I think the most amazing and significant thing Christ is doing is emphasized in our reading for today, here in Hebrews 7:21-25. In contrast to those ancient high-priests who ministered briefly and were then replaced by others who themselves had needs, we have a High Priest who lives FOREVER! He is the source and the substance of our faith, He is the Lord of our lives, and shows His authority and love by praying for us NOW! As I mentioned a few E-LINKS ago, one of the most significant verses in all Scripture is Hebrew 7:25, HE IS ABLE TO SAVE COMPLETELY THOSE WHO COME TO GOD THROUGH HIM, BECAUSE HE ALWAYS LIVES TO MAKE INTERCESSION FOR THEM. Isn't that a powerful promise to which we can cling in moments of loneliness, of being swept by the dust of difficulties and discouragement, of knowing the swirl of doubts and guilt, He, the young Son of Glory, ever lives to pray for you and me.

We find that elsewhere in Scripture. That great jewel of the book of Romans, chapter 8, verse 34, says, "Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died-- more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us." And we read in Romans 8:27, the same reassuring truth about the Holy Spirit: "He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will." With God the Son and God the Spirit interceding for us in the Glory, we can stand strong with authority and blessing all the journey through.

"We praise you, Lord Jesus, for the preciousness of all we are learning and thank you forever for the joy of it all."

Praise God for you, friend.  
Cheerio. Monty

8/14/01

Hebrews 7:11-20  
The New King and High-Priest

11) If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come-- one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? 12) For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law. 13) He of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar. 14) For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. 15) And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, 16) one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. 17) For it is declared: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." 18) The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless 19) (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God. 20) And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any oath, (NIV)

Hello, my friend. I am always greatly excited when someone writes in and shares an insight into the study of Hebrews. We are in this searching together and your thoughts are as valuable as mine, and perhaps even more so. A dear friend in Illinois wrote with reference to our E-LINK H10, commenting on my thoughts on the meaning of obedience. I had written, if you remember that "obedience is more than just doing what we are told to do, it is opening up our ability to do more than what we thought we could do. Obedience is not simply saying 'Yes' to a command, it is enlarging my capacity to say 'Yes'. And as the capacity grows, so do the opportunities. Obedience is a large part of spiritual growth, and it introduces an endless series of steps to high achievement."

Lydia, my friend, wrote, "Obedience is one of the outward signs of the inward change of salvation. It certainly is one of the keys to a fruitful walk with the Lord. Most importantly, our obedience is not coerced, as if without it we might not go to heaven, but is willingly given out of love and gratitude for that which our Savior has done for us."

So what, you ask, does this have to do with our reading today on Melchizedek, and the inadequacy of the Kingly-priesthood which he represented. Our today's paragraph in Hebrews points out that the priesthood, according to the Law, had to come through Aaron and yet here in Melchizedek there was another order. He came through a tribe which had never served at the altar, for through the tribe of Judah there is nothing said about priests. But vs.14 is important, "What we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life."

Wow, that is quite a complicated statement and I hope you have hung on until

now. What the writer is emphasizing is two things: first, the priesthood is a most important part of the life of a believer, for without a High Priest we would have no permanent bridge to the Father. Melchizedek was a picture or symbol of a high-priest to come, but as the writer says, "the former regulation was weak and useless (for the Law made nothing perfect) and a better hope is introduced by which we draw near to God." Secondly, we need a High Priest who lives forever, one who is like us but free from sin, one who is able to fully represent us in the presence of God. There is a Man in the Glory on my behalf. And we remember that astonishing verse we recently studied in Hebrews 4:8, "Although He was a son, He learned obedience from what He suffered and once made perfect He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him and was designated by God to be High priest in the order of Melchizedek. This, of course, is the Lord Jesus.

We may wonder why the writer continues to labor this point. It is simply because unless we are represented in the presence of God by one who stands in our place, we have no right to claim Heaven as our eternal Home. As the old hymn goes, "There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin. He only could unlock the gates of Heav'n and let me in." Hallelujah, what a Savior!

"How can we thank you enough, Lord Jesus, for being there in our place, waiting to welcome us Home. We glorify You." I praise God for you, friend, as we journey Home together, thankful beggars telling hungry beggars where to find Bread.

Cheerio! Monty.

8/09/01

Hebrews 7:4-10

Melchizedek, Priest and King

4) Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder! 5) Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people-- that is, their brothers-- even though their brothers are descended from Abraham. 6) This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. 7) And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater. 8) In the one case, the tenth is collected by men who die; but in the other case, by him who is declared to be living. 9) One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, 10) because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. I am sure that, when you read our passage for today, you probably said, "What is this all about?" Few passages in all the Scriptures are as difficult to understand as is our reading for today, simply because the description regarding Melchizedek seems almost like a description of the Lord Jesus. Doesn't

this sound like a commentary on the Lord Jesus? (vs.3) "without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God, he remains a priest forever."

I think we see a key to this section in that little phrase, "like the Son of God...". I don't want to get technical but that word 'like' is the Greek word *aphomoiomenos*, which occurs only this once in the New Testament. Donald Guthrie in his Commentary says, "This is a suggestive word, used as 'a facsimile copy or model' or 'being made similar to'. It is because Jesus Christ is of the order of Melchizedek that the representative of the order is seen to be a model of the true. In other words, it is Christ's priesthood that is the standard, not that of Melchizedek. The passage comes close to being allegorical."

Are you still with me? We ask ourselves, why does the writer spend so much time on Melchizedek? Because he is using this ancient King as a model of the real King who was to come. And if you've read the passage you have seen how it focuses on the great qualities of one who is a priest forever. Guthrie comments so helpfully on this. As we have already seen, the high-priest, the one who stands between God and people, had to be "like his brethren" (2:17), he had to be "merciful and faithful" (2:17), he had to make atonement for the sins of the people (2:17); above all he had to be able to sympathize with the people he represented (4:15). In the first more extensive passage in 5:1ff, the main qualification stressed is that of being appointed by God.

And the Holy Spirit, who inspires all of Scripture, used this ancient King so people could see these qualities fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was "better" than all, even this King for whom the Jewish readers had great respect. And "Melchizedek comes into his own only when the anti-type (Christ) is seen. In other words Melchizedek gains his significance through Christ, not vice versa. Indeed, Melchizedek himself is said to be made like the Son of God."

You will see how the writer powerfully uses Old Testament situations to be perfectly fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. In chapter 8 we will ponder the wonder of a High-Priest who is without ancestry and who lives forever for us in the heavens. We often give little consideration to this amazing truth, this eternal presence of the Lord Jesus in the heavenly places on our behalf. Heb.7:24 is a huge anchor to the soul..." Because Jesus lives forever, He has a permanent priesthood. Therefore He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them." Do you get this? Even this remarkable King of ancient times, who was also a priest, could never "save completely those who come to God through him." But we have such a one "who speaks to the Father in our defense" (1 John 2:1).

Who more do we need? Hallelujah!

"We marvel as we ponder Your word, Lord Jesus, at the wonder of Who You are, and grieve for our careless neglect of Your Word, our indifference to

acknowledging the greatness of your love for us.. We worship in awe and adoration!"

Thank you, dear partner, for being along on the journey.  
Cheerio. Monty

Hebrews 7:1-3,  
"Righteousness and Peace Kiss Each Other"

1) This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, 2) and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means "king of righteousness"; then also, "king of Salem" means "king of peace." 3) Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. I am sure you are wondering how I got the title for today's study from the passage in Hebrews we are looking at. In fact, I didn't get it from the Hebrews verses but from a wonderful Psalm 85, where in vs.10 we read, "Love and faithfulness meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other." And of course in today's reading we discover that this Melchizedek's name means "King of Righteousness" as well as "King of Salem (shalom)" which means "King of Peace" (vs.2). We get a clue, then, about the importance of this ancient king, whose greatness is emphasized in this 7th chapter of Hebrews. Who exactly was he?

Barclay states "In the old Genesis story (14:18-20) he is a strange, almost eerie figure. He arrives out of the blue; there is nothing about his life, his birth, his death or his descent. He simply arrives for a couple of verses. He gives Abraham bread and wine...he blesses Abraham. And then he vanishes from the stage of history with the same unexplained suddenness as he arrives. There is little wonder that in the mystery of this story the writer to the Hebrews found a symbol of Christ" (The Daily Study Bible, p.72).

I want to emphasize the fact that, if he is a prophetic symbol of Christ (which I believe he is) then in none other could righteousness and peace meet and mingle. He was the King of Righteousness and the King of Peace. As Barclay says, "Note that the order is at once significant and inevitable. Righteousness must always come before peace. Without righteousness there can be no such thing as peace." Paul emphasizes this in Romans 5:1: "Therefore since we have been justified by faith (or declared righteous), we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.." We read the same thing in Romans 14:17: "The kingdom of God is...righteousness, peace and joy." The order must always be the same--first righteousness and then peace.

Some people think the theme of the Bible is man and his needs. In fact, the theme of the Bible is God and His righteousness. Paul says, in Romans 1:16-17, "I am not ashamed of the gospel...for in the gospel the righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "He who by faith is righteous shall live" (RSV). And astonishingly we read in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "God made Him (Christ) to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."

That's what it means, when one is born anew. We receive God's nature, even as a human child receives his nature from his parents. And whereas I was previously controlled by my carnal nature, I have been born into a new life, I am a new creation, and the result of all this change is that I have peace with God, the first of the remarkable changes that come to a child of God. "Being made righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. We rejoice in the confident expectation of the glory of God" (Rom.5:1, 2). So when you begin to think of this ancient King Melchizedek, I hope you'll remember first of all that through our King of Righteousness we have Peace with God, forever.

"Thank you, blessed Holy Spirit, for enabling us to probe and ponder this precious Book, so that we can fully be who we are, living evidences of your Life in action."

Thank you, fellow-servant of the Lord, for your love and prayers.

Cheerio. Monty

8/02/01

Hebrews 6:4-8,

Crucifying Christ Again

4) It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5) who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, 6) if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace. 7) Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. 8) But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. This passage has been called a 'thorny' one by one commentator, a passage bristling with difficulties and over which there have been endless disputes. Some have sought to solve the problem of this heavy declaration by confining its application to the Jews of the first century, wanting to return to the ancient faith of their fathers. Others have concluded that the sin of apostasy is

here put into a class by itself, as different from backsliding and alone capable of annulling ones salvation. And yet others look at the passage as referring to those who had been blessed with the hearing of the Gospel, had pondered its implications and seemingly had agreed. They had been 'converted', intellectually, but had never been truly born again.

I am inclined to agree with this latter point of view. I think it is so clear in Scripture that when one has been born anew, he can hardly be 'unborn.' The new birth gives eternal life, and one can hardly rationalize that 'eternal' means anything but 'eternal.' However, one can participate in a Christian culture and give what seem to be conversion evidences, yet without truly being born anew.

Let's take a look at the statement that "it is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, have tasted the heavenly gift, have shared in the Holy Spirit, have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the power of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance...they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace." I think it is possible to be enlightened, without being born anew. One can ponder the truth about Christ, the Light of the World, and can be wise about salvation without being truly born anew. One can even 'taste' of the heavenly Gift, without indeed eating and partaking of the Gift itself. To 'taste' something is different from ingesting it. One can experience the convictions of the Holy Spirit over sins past and present, and even grieve over them, without responding in faith to the redemptive cleansing of the blood of Christ. One can hear the Word of God, can be moved by its authority and message, can even taste of the treasures it contains without accepting the Savior the Scriptures proclaim and being born anew. One can even be stirred by what Scriptures present about the power of future things, without allowing Christ to become ones life, both now and throughout all the future. The new birth is more than agreeing with doctrine, it will bring hunger for the Lord and an eagerness to grow in Grace.

I realize that thoughts like these can be solemn and challenge one to examine ones own faith. Is it truly life-changing or is it simply a life one lives because he is in a Christian culture. Those verses in 2 Corinthians 13:4 and 5 are so valuable: "He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in Him, yet by God's power we will live with Him to serve you. Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves." I am not writing this to make us doubt our faith, but that we examine whether or not our lives are reflecting the power of God dwelling in our weakness. Unless one is born again, as the passage reads, it is impossible to be brought back to repentance. And to neglect this crucial commitment to Christ can produce an attitude of indifference that can bring eternal loss.

"Give us wisdom, Lord Jesus, to examine our lives, so we can be confident that we have truly been born anew." Thank you, friend, for your fellowship. 'These are written that we may know...that He lives in us' (1 John 3:23,24).

I thank God for you.  
Cheerio. Monty

7/31/01  
Hebrews 6:1-3,  
Marks of Immaturity

1) Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, 2) instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. 3) And God permitting, we will do so. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. "The greatest weakness in Christianity today is its failure to teach. Biblical education amongst Protestants is in a shambles. In fact, some Christians have little more than a kindergarten concept of their faith. The general situation is a kind of Biblical illiteracy and a virtual blank about theology." So spoke George Cornell, the religious editor of the Associated Press at the 24th Annual Convention of the Evangelical Press Association. How his cry reflects the anguish of the writer to the Hebrews, expressed in our reading for the previous E-LINK. "In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's Word all over again" (Hebrews 5:12).

And the argument is continued here in chapter 6, when the writer says, "Therefore, let us leave the elementary teaching about Christ and go on to maturity" (6:1). He is simply stating that if I refuse to teach what I have received I will continue to be preoccupied with elementary teachings. These teachings are not in themselves wrong, since they are foundational, but to be preoccupied with them is a devastating mark of immaturity. What are these "elementary teachings?" Read carefully. There are three, in particular:

1) Being focused on repentance for the sins I continue to commit, and continually reaffirming my faith in God. One may ask, are these things wrong? Of course not, repentance and faith are foundation stones of the Christian life. Peter preached to onlookers, "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord" (Acts 3:19). But many Christians are living such an immature spiritual life that they are constantly repenting of their sins and failures, and are affirming their faith in God. In other words, GROW UP! STOP SINNING! LIVE A LIFE OF FRUITFUL FAITH AND ENJOY GOD'S FELLOWSHIP.

2) Being focused on religious activity, such as arguing about baptisms, the laying on of hands, etc. Here the writer warns us about getting sidetracked into focusing on these doctrines dealing with initial experiences. Some say there is one baptism (Eph.4:5; I Cor.12:13), others say there are multiple baptisms, and this difference has produced a great division in the Body of Christ. The baptism of the

new birth is an essential aspect of our faith; the laying on of hands is a practice marking the anointing of an individual for service, for healing, for ministry. But it is an initial experience, not something repeated again and again. Heresy is not denying truth; it is emphasizing one aspect of truth to the neglect of the rest of the Word of God.

3) Being preoccupied with eschatology, or future things, such as the resurrection of the dead, and the judgments to come. Is it wrong to ponder these things? Of course not, but to make future things, Christ's coming, etc., a primary interest is to make such a study almost a hobby. Focus on future speculation is wrong if it dims my focus on the present command, which is to go NOW, into all the world to share Christ with all whom I meet!!

Why read series of books about the Future, if I neglect the only Book that really matters! Let us fix our thoughts on Jesus, living His Life, loving His partnership in ministry, and leaning on His Word for guidance, preparation, fulfillment, power and joy.

"Lord, let it be; keep us from getting sidetracked into infantile speculation, when the world needs You, most of all." Thank you, my friend, for your prayers and fellowship.

Cheerio. Monty

7/19/01

Hebrews 5:11-14,

The danger of remaining a baby!

11) We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. 12) In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! 13) Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14) But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. If you are reading Hebrews along with the rest of us, you will notice that today's study begins with a kind of abrupt interruption. The writer suddenly opens his heart to his listeners, as if he is concerned about their inability to pursue this study. He is concerned about the danger of people studying the Scriptures without really hearing what they say. In vs. 11 he almost sarcastically says, "We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn (NIV)". Or as the RSV puts it, "...you have become dull of hearing." What a graphic warning! It makes one think of the danger of ignoring the ringing of ones alarm clock. The first time it rings, we jump out of bed, but soon we become

indifferent to the ringing, until finally we don't hear it at all.

You see, disobedience engenders a greater neglect, until before long the word of challenge which should stir us to obedience is hardly heard at all. And the writer is suddenly concerned lest all that he has been saying is falling on deaf-ears. He continues by reminding them: "In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's Word all over again." What a shattering indictment. What an almost scathing comment, as he continues by saying, "You need milk, not solid food. And anyone who lives on milk, being still a baby, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness" or teaching about God!

Are we getting the message? The writer here echoes Paul's statement to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2, "The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others." In other words, every Christian is a 'teacher'. This may not be in the sense of standing up in front of a class, but it certainly means that every Christian should be involved in teaching someone else, be that one person or a hundred. In fact, the Great Commission (Matt.28:19,20), given to us all, says that every believer must go into his world to make disciples... teaching them to obey everything the Word of God commands. Are you listening, friend? In other words, the great commission is given as much for the good and the growth of the disciple as for the encouragement and blessing of the disciple. Neglecting to teach is self-defeating!

You've heard us here in the Village Schools say again and again, "What you keep for yourself, you soon will forget. But what you share with another, you will keep forever." All the way through Scripture this principle is emphasized. Ezra, great Old Testament saint, "devoted himself to the study of the Scriptures, to obeying them, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel" (Ezra 7:10). Paul made teaching Scripture a mark of a mature believer when he writes to the Romans, saying "I myself am convinced, by brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness (or God), complete (mature) in knowledge, and competent to instruct one another" (Romans 15:14).

You see, as our passage in today's reading says, to refuse or neglect to share what we have learned makes us slow to learn and ignorant of really knowing God; because "solid food is for the mature, who by constant use (or faithful teaching) have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil" (vss.14). As we said in our previous E-LINK, to fail to pray is human arrogance at its worst, and to fail to teach is human selfishness at its worst. We are entrusted with God's Word, and before Him we will someday have to give account as to how we have shared it.

"Speak strongly to us, Lord, so that we will eagerly and obediently listen to your Word." Thank you, my friend, for being a teacher of God's Word. Praise God.

Cheerio. Monty

7/17/01

Hebrews 5:1-10,  
Learning Obedience

1) Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. 2) He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. 3) This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people. 4) No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was. 5) So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father." 6) And he says in another place, "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." 7) During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. 8) Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered 9) and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him 10) and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. Someone suggested that chapter 5 should have begun with 4:14, for there is a continuing flow of thought. In E-LINK H12, we read, "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence." P.T. Forsyth used to insist that prayerlessness is the root of all sin. Raymond Brown in his book on Hebrews says, "When we do not give time each day to earnest and believing prayer, we are saying that we can cope with life without divine aid. It is human arrogance at its worst. Jesus knew that He had to pray (Mt. 14:23) and did so, gladly, necessarily and effectively. To be prayerless is to be guilty of the worst form of practical atheism. We are saying that we believe in God but we can do without Him. This letter urges us to come into the presence of a God who welcomes us and a Christ who understands us. To neglect the place of prayer is to rob ourselves of immense and timely resources. For the Christian, the throne of Grace is the place of help." Such a powerful statement, don't you think. And 4:16 continues strongly into chapter 5.

This chapter opens with a discussion of Christ as a high priest (in Latin, Pontifex Maximus, or literally: the Chief Bridge). And I love how the writer in verses 1-3 describes an earthly High Priest, one representing people in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. It says such a person is "able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people."

Then he speaks of Christ who, as God, was not subject to any weakness, nor did He have to offer sacrifices for His own sins. Even so, we see how dramatically

Christ's humanity is described, in that "he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save Him from death. He was heard, because of his reverent submission." Was He heard? He prayed, "If you are willing take this Cup (his death) from me" (Lk.22:42). And did the Father remove the Cup? We know He did not, but nevertheless Christ's prayer was heard, we read here, because of his reverent submission.

We are startled to read that He, Christ, "learned obedience from what He suffered and, once made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him." What does it mean, "He learned obedience..."? As Brown says, "This does not mean that Christ learned obedience as one who had no previous knowledge or experience." It means simply that He, too, experienced fully the crisis and cost of obedience and was made "perfect", or demonstrated the completeness of His preparation to be my High Priest, representing me in the heavens. It doesn't mean there was a time when He was not complete, but in His submission He demonstrated that in every way He was "perfect" or completely able to bear away the sins of the world. The tension between Christ's deity and His humanity is here referred to, and is one of the miracles of His incarnation. Why should God need to learn anything, since He is the source and circumference of all things. But Christ revealed He was completely a Man in every way and I can trust Him fully.

"Thank you, Lord Jesus, for the wonder of this intimate relationship, Your becoming what You were not, that we might become what we otherwise never could be, the very children of God. We adore You, and find immeasurable comfort in your Love." Thank you, my fellow-pilgrim, for your loving prayers.

Cheerio. Monty

7/12/01

Hebrews 4:12-16,

How to revel in God's rest

12) For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. 13) Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. 14) Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15) For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-- yet was without sin. 16) Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. It is gratifying to hear from some E-LINKERS who are pondering the greatness of the Lord Jesus. Thank you for writing us and sharing

with us encouragement as we study the Word together. He is indeed above all, by whom and for whom all things were created. And in our previous E-LINK we have read that nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. That word 'nothing' is remarkable in that it is inclusive in its scope. It simply means that, nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight.

We read that 'everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.' This is a frightening statement to those who would deny or hide their sins, for it states that a day will come when we will all have to give account. 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." This is a moment of elation for the faithful and of regret for the disobedient. I don't think it refers to sins which have been confessed and forgiven but to the way we have lived our lives, either for ourselves or for the Lord Jesus, in every way.

The word 'laid-bare' is a big Greek word, *tetrachelismena*, a colorful word which occurs only here in the New Testament, meaning 'to bend back the neck' as in wrestling, or to be completely exposed, nothing hidden. We read this and our hearts tremble because we know how easy it is to wander and to become accustomed to a life of partial obedience. Our hearts cry out to the Lord, "Help us know, Lord, how to live such a transparent life." And as always, the Lord answers completely: live in the Book, as it completely defines the meaning and purpose of life (vss.12-13), and live at the Throne, maintaining a heavenly perspective on running the race set before us (vss.14-16).

The Word of God, living and written, is given us to reveal the Mind of God in perfection. It pierces into the heart of man, revealing both need and failure. It gives a foundation for the life of man, revealing both the true and false bases for living. No wonder the Psalmist shouts, "Blessed is the man...whose delight is in the Law of the Lord, in Whose Law he meditates day and night." (Psalm 1:1,3).

The Throne of God, living and written, is given us so that, having shared the Mind of God we can be enabled to fulfill the Will of God completely. We see here that both the Word and the Throne are not in any way mere religious repetitions; they are focused on the living Christ, who has gone before us and who, astonishingly, is the One who has been tested in every way just as we are--yet was without sin (4:15). We may stumble at this great verse, wondering how could Christ know the depth, the anguish of my temptation if he was without sin. But we forget that being tempted is not in itself sin. James 1:14-15 reminds us that we are tempted by our own evil desire, are "dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, full-grown, gives birth to death." But it is hugely encouraging to know that Christ, our elder Brother, has known the deceitful hold of the temptation, and remained without sin. Indeed, salvation doesn't mean that I cannot sin, it means that I need not sin, for Christ is faithful who will not let us be tempted beyond what we can bear; when we are tempted He will also provide a

way out so that we can stand up under it (I Cor.10:13). He provides His Word and His Throne of Grace, given to help us in time of need. What a great God we serve.

"Thank you, Lord, for this wonderful teaching. We adore you." Thanks, friend.  
Cheerio. Monty

7/10/01  
Hebrews 4:8-13,

Naked in God's sight

8) For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. 9) There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; 10) for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. 11) Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience. 12) For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. 13) Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. One of the remarkable things about studying Scripture is that it whets appetite, challenges strong thinking and enlarges ones capacity to explore it, more and more. I love the way obedience works. As I have said, it is more than just doing what we are told to do, it is opening up our ability to do more than what we thought we could do. Obedience is not simply saying 'yes' to a command, it is enlarging my capacity to say 'yes.' And as the capacity grows, so do the opportunities. This is a fact, and I am sure you have discovered the significance of it. Obedience is a large part of spiritual growth, and it introduces an endless series of steps to high achievement.

So in verses 8-11, the writer invites us to "make every effort to enter that REST so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience." We can see here clearly that entering God's rest isn't something that just happens when I placidly agree with Him. The entire Christian life is marked by struggle, by action, by warfare, by facing huge difficulties. We see this in the analogies Paul uses with Timothy: "Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 2:3). And he continues by using the picture of an athlete who faces the struggle of competition, the long distance runner who faces the struggle of fatigue, and the farmer who faces the struggle of a possible crop-failure. So it is important to note

that God's REST doesn't mean we are separated from tension and trial, but it means we are greatly enabled by dwelling in His REST at the heart of the storm. Even as God rested on the seventh day, when His work of creation was complete, so we REST in His finished work on the cross, when the work of redemption was complete. It says we 'rest from our own work.' In other words, we dismiss our failing efforts to seek to be deserving of God's mercies through all sorts of spiritual devices, such as fasting, praying, self-denial, etc. I cannot work my soul to save, for that my Lord has done. But I will work like any slave for love of God's dear son.

In other words, it is not 'so that I can work enough' but 'because of Christ's finished work on the Cross for me'. And every effort to merit God's grace denies the possibility of my receiving and enjoying it. Then how do we enter in? Well, our passage today reminds us of one of the two ways, diligently allowing the Word of God to dwell in us richly (Col.3:16). In our next E-LINK we look at the other way, by dwelling at the Throne of Grace, in confidence. The WORD and the THRONE are the keys to REST.

Here in this crucially important passage we discover certain things about God's Word:

1. It is LIVING and ACTIVE, it works in all those who believe (I Thess.2:13)
2. It is like a two-edged SWORD penetrating to the innermost part of us (Eph. 6:17).
3. It is ABLE TO JUDGE the thoughts, intents and motives of the heart.
4. It EXPOSES everything before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

Notice the dramatic description here of the power of the Word. Vs. 13 says, in the original, that everything is naked before His eyes. The word for 'naked' is *gumnos*, from which we get the word 'gymnasium.' The ancient Olympians ran nude for the first few years of that Greek celebration. And we are told that nothing can be hidden from the eyes of the Lord, as He works in us through His Word. Nothing, NOTHING in all creation is hidden from God's sight. What a warning! And what a blessing, to know that "God knows, He loves, He cares. Nothing this truth can dim. He gives the very best to those who leave the choice to Him."

"Thank you, Lord Jesus, for opening up the way to perfect REST in you. Bless my friends who share in this joy." Thanks, my friends. Press on!

Cheerio. Monty

Hebrews 4:1-7  
Falling short of real REST

1) Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. 2) For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. 3) Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, "So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'" and yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world. 4) For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: "And on the seventh day God rested from all his work." 5) And again in the passage above he says, "They shall never enter my rest." 6) It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. 7) Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." (NIV)

Hello, my friend. A warm welcome to those of you who are receiving E-LINKS for the first time. As you may know, there are nearly 250 people in the E-LINK family, people whose names we know and for whom we pray, as the Lord leads. If you know of anyone who would like to join this E-LINK family, just notify me at HolySholy1@aol.com or our Village Schools office, vsbmain@aol.com. Yesterday, we reviewed some of the things that keep us from enjoying God's REST. If you haven't carefully read E-LINK H8, would you do so. In that study we saw that one of the God's promises to us, if we come to Him, weary and burdened, is that He will give us REST (Matt. 11:28). Today in our reading we examine the meaning of that REST which God has promised.

The warning is clear: it is possible to clearly know the doctrine of salvation, to be familiar with all the teaching of the creeds, and to even be busy with Christian activity, and never enter into God's REST. So REST is not freedom from responsibility, it is a partnership with the God of salvation. Many people have totally misunderstood that promise of REST. They have made a decision, have been baptized, have had their names inscribed in a church-registry, and have yet fallen short of God's rest (see 4:1). And the writer says we must be careful about this possibility. He says that those wanderers in the wilderness "had the gospel preached to them, just as we have." (vs.2.)

But he says "THE MESSAGE THEY HEARD WAS OF NO VALUE TO THEM because those who heard did not combine it with faith." THIS IS SO IMPORTANT. It is easy to fulfill religious expectations implicit in the culture in which we are living. We go through the motions, and may even participate in the activity. But I repeat an invaluable definition of true faith; IT IS BELIEF IN REVEALED TRUTH AND TRUST IN A REVEALED GOD. Belief is an objective, intellectual assent to truth, but one can do this without being truly born-again. Trust is moving completely into a relationship with God where He becomes the center and the circumference of life, the beginning and the end of life, the source and substance of life. "Apart from Him we can do nothing" (John 15:5). The writer uses an interesting creation-analogy by

saying that "on the seventh day God rested from all His work." In other words, creation was complete, with nothing to add. And when Christ shouted on the Cross, "It is finished," He declared that there was now nothing left to be done to bring us, in redemption grace, back to the Father's house.

The writer emphatically repeats in vs. 6 what was referred to in vs. 2: "Those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience." But in vs. 2 we read they didn't enter in "because they did not have faith." Do you get it? Faith and obedience are implicitly and explicitly declared to be synonyms and assumptions. We have read this so often, but we can never ponder it enough. Obedience does more than get the job done, it is the open door to REST. REST from guilt, REST from loneliness, REST from uselessness, REST from fear, REST from religious struggles, REST from the bondage of my own tortured ego. Ephesians 2:14 says, "He, Christ, is our peace" ... or our REST. He doesn't only provide it, He IS our Rest. Without Him, we can do nothing but we can do all things through Him who strengthens us (Phil. 4:13).

"Thank you, Lord Jesus, for these eternal, glorious truths. Helps us act on their power and provision." Thank you, partner, for your encouragement and prayers.

Cheerio. Monty

8/07/01

Hebrews 3:7-19

The danger of heart-hardening

7) So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice, 8)do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, 9) where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did. 10)That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, 'Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.' 11) So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'" 12) See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. 13) But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. 14) We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first. 15) As has just been said: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion." 16) Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? 17) And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? 18) And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? 19) So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. It's so encouraging to be welcoming new friends into the E-LINK family. There is an eagerness among many people for strong, systematic teaching of the Scriptures and your joining us only enlarges the circle of prayer and commitment to the Lord of the Book. Our passage for today is crucial, especially as it is linked up with chapter 4 which deals with "the promise of entering God's rest still standing." This idea of enjoying God's rest is one of the high spots of these early chapters in Hebrews.

We will be looking at chapter four in our next E-LINK but I want in our study today to point out some of the things in our lives that keep us from enjoying the rest that God can give a child of God. After all, Christ said so powerfully in Matthew 11:28, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest." And then he attaches a significant prerequisite to entering into Christ's rest: taking His yoke upon us and learning from Him. In other words, rest is not withdrawal from responsibility but participating in the privilege of being yoked with Christ. And a yoke signifies a union between oxen, for the purpose of laboring together in the fields of God. To enjoy God's rest, then, means that I am intimately, constantly and joyfully linked with Christ for Royal Service. A yoke implies two participants, mutually indispensable. And Christ in that great verse simply reminds me that I am an indispensable partner in serving God in a world in need.

In our passage for today we find some of the things that keep us from enjoying God's rest. We are reminded that there is a danger of hardening our hearts, which plunges us into that terrible statement in vs.11, "So I declared in My anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'" And this statement defines seven things that keep us from enjoying God's rest.

1. A sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God (vs.12)
2. Failing to encourage one another daily (vs.13).
3. Failing to daily keep short accounts with God (vs.13).
4. Becoming hardened by sin's deceitfulness (vs.13).
5. Causing God to become angry because of our rebellion (vs.15-17).
6. Who would never enter His rest? Those who disobeyed (vs.18)
7. They could not enter in, because of unbelief (vs.19).

What, in fact, is a sinful, unbelieving heart? It is a heart that lives for self, rather than God, for its definition of the meaning and purpose of life. It is a heart that may agree with all the creeds and doctrines but continues to resist God's total control. As I have often said, Sin is a synonym for Self in defiance of God's control of life. And the great thing about the cross is that sin was crossed out, allowing me to enjoy and love Christ.

One sees the emphasis on the fact that enjoying God's rest is a daily experience. Neglecting any of the above instructions, even for one day, can destroy the reality of rest. And we see so clearly that sin doesn't harden my heart, it is sin's deceitfulness that does. It is feeling that somehow I can sin and get away with it. It is neglecting to daily reckon myself dead to sin and alive to God. And the result is

to remain weary and heavily-laden, trying foolishly to live a Christian life without allowing Christ to be my life. "Thank you, Lord Jesus, for allowing us to ponder these great truths, all focused upon you as Owner of all. Bless all the E-LINKERS as we press on to know and serve you well." Thank you, my friend, for your prayers and your fellowship.

Cheerio! Monty

6/29/01

Hebrews 3:1-6,

Greater than the Greatest

1) Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess. 2) He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house. 3) Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. 4) For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. 5) Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future. 6) But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. One of the stirring incidents in the life of Jacob was when, on his way to Haran, he paused at Bethel for a nap. "When he awoke from his sleep, he thought, 'Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it'" (Gen.28:16). He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, this is the gate of heaven." And why was he so startled? Because as you perhaps remember, he had in his dream seen "a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven and the angels of God ascending and descending on it. Above it stood the Lord" (Gen.28:13).

We see that picture again in John's Gospel, 1:51. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." What does this mean? It is a picture reflected in our reading for today where we are told to "FIX YOUR THOUGHTS ON JESUS, THE APOSTLE AND THE HIGH PRIEST, WHOM WE CONFESS." So early in the book, the writer urges us to FIX OUR THOUGHTS ON JESUS. In other words, this takes both intention and action. It is not enough to scatter a few thoughts God's way in the morning in a vague prayer and a casual look at the Book. This word is "katanoiēn", which implies concentration, careful focus. It means to be as strong in our desire as a scientist is when peering into a microscope for some lurking problem, or some lifesaving provision.

And we fix our thoughts on Jesus in what way? The picture referred to above is demonstrated in two words, "JESUS, the APOSTLE and the HIGH PRIEST." An apostle is one who has been sent to proclaim the truth. In other words, the angels descending to declare and share the Word of God by declaring its truth. This is what the APOSTLE does. On the other hand, we also read Christ is the HIGH PRIEST, which in Latin is described as the PONTIFEX MAXIMUS, which means the Supreme Bridge, or High Priest. For Christ is Greater than the Greatest. He ascends to pray for us.

A priest is not primarily someone who brings truth down from heaven to meet man's needs but one who brings man's needs up to the throne of Grace. Both the preacher and the priest are integral partners in the work of the Gospel, one comes before people with the Word of God, the other comes before God with the Needs of the People.

And we read in our fascinating passage for today that the Lord Jesus is both. I love how the writer states that Christ is worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. The Hebrew readers revered Abraham as the father of the people, and Moses, as the one who delivered them from bondage. They revered Aaron, the first high-priest; and Joshua who led them into the promised land. And the center of their lives was of course the tabernacle, where God's glory shone. But here we read that surpassing them all is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, as God, is the builder of everything. But note carefully: We are His house (literally 'His Home') where He dwells today. And as He is, so are we in the world today (I John 4:17), chosen to declare God's Word before people, and to enter into the most Holy Place as priests, to receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Heb.4:16).

"We praise you, Lord Jesus, for bringing God's Word to us and for bringing us, in return, back to the Father's Throne. We rejoice in the wonder of it all."

And thank you, friend, for your prayers for me, as I seek to share His Word with blessing.

Cheerio. Monty

6/27/01

Hebrews 2:14-18,

Christ helps me in temptation.

14) Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death-- that is, the devil-- 15) and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. 16) For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. 17) For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might

become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. 18) Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. One of the joys of this new relationship I have in the Village Schools organization is the privilege of spending time each day with interested people. Some of them are past-students, and some are new friends I am meeting on the journey in the classes. I was privileged this morning to spend an hour with a remarkably gifted young man who is preparing to enter Dental school at the University. It is always a great joy to see these young people filled with eagerness for the Lord and a great hunger to know Him and share Him in their future professions. Jack mentioned that he had a friend in his apartment who was in his early twenties but was "afraid of death."

When one is 81 years old, it is obvious that journey's end cannot be that far off, and after eight decades experiencing the constant glory of God's Grace, we can share the Apostle's thoughts when he says, "I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far" (Philippians 1:23). In another place he says, "Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened...we wish to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life" (2 Corinthians 5:3-4). However, when a lad in his twenties thinks of life he feels afraid of death, and this may not be an uncommon fear, even among those who are older.

So our verses in Hebrews for today are powerfully encouraging. Christ has shared our humanity so that by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil--and FREE ALL THOSE WHO ALL THEIR LIVES WERE HELD IN SLAVERY BY THEIR FEAR OF DEATH. This is a hugely significant statement. Not only does it say that freedom from this fear is possible, but that we must enter into this freedom, else we will continue to be held by a slavery that can shackle all our service for the Lord Jesus.

Hallelujah, Christ has, in His death and resurrection, destroyed the devil who held the power of death, and we can enter every day with joy, knowing that if it is our last, so much the better. And if it is not, even so we are one day nearer home than we've ever been before. It is important to see how the writer links the bondage of the fear of death with the temptations which beset us day by day. And we have all experienced how giving in to temptation does bring a kind of death to joy, to authority, to anticipation, to praise and power. But here we read, amazingly, that Christ, who "was made like His brethren in every way" (vs.17), suffered "temptations in every way, just as we are" (4:15), IS ABLE TO HELP THOSE WHO ARE BEING TEMPTED. How better can one say it?

That great hymn by George Matheson gives us the key to freedom "Make me a captive, Lord, and then I shall be free; force me to render up my sword, and I shall

conqueror be. My will is not my own, till Thou has made it Thine; if it would reach a monarch's throne, it must its crown resign. I sink in life's alarms when by myself I stand; imprison me within Thine arms, and strong shall be my hand."

"Oh, thank you, Lord Jesus, for the privilege of pondering your Word like this and to sense a freedom that comes in just brooding over its great encouragement. Thank you for the joy of sharing these blessings together. Thank you for freeing us from the fear of death and the bondage of temptation."

I praise God for you, friend.  
Cheerio. Monty

6/21/01

Hebrews 2:10-13,  
Christ is not ashamed of you and me!

10In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. 11Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. 12He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises." 13And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again he says, "Here am I, and the children God has given me." (NIV)

Hello, my friend. Frequently in our study of this letter to the Hebrews we are going to face the challenge of trying to explore a mountain in the few moments a day's E-LINK permits. Today's reading is truly worth pondering for a month of E-LINKS because it continues that great theme of chapter 1, the superiority of Christ.

We were awed by the exaltation of the Lord Jesus described there in chapter 1. One of my past-students, Chris Conger, now a Pastor here in Minnesota, sent me an e-mail note in which he says, "Wow, we have a superior Lord, greater than the prophets, greater than angels, greater than Moses, greater than Aaron, greater than Joshua, greater than the priests!! I had to stay up pretty late last night because I was so stirred by the study." In the face of that glory, we are stunned to read in today's passage that "it was appropriate that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering."

The word 'perfect' is an important word which needs explanation. We find it frequently used in the Bible and it sometimes brings confusion, seeming to suggest that there is imperfection. Some writers claim that God brought his Son to a perfection he did not previously have. Donald Guthrie comments: "When applied to Christ, the meaning is rather 'to bring to completion', in the sense that suffering was necessary before Jesus could be the complete pioneer of salvation, if others

were to be saved." Or as William Barclay says, "The basic meaning of the adjective teleios is always that the thing or person so described fully carries out the purpose for which designed." In other words, it implies a fullness of maturity, a completeness of preparation. Through Christ's sufferings, then, he was really identified with men, can sympathize with men, and can fully help them.

You will find this intimate identification referred to frequently in this letter to the Hebrews and I emphasize it today. You see it here in vs.11, "Both the One who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. SO CHRIST IS NOT ASHAMED TO CALL THEM BROTHERS." This thought of Christ not being ashamed is referred to again in Hebrews 11:16, "God is not ashamed to be called their God...", those patriarchs who died in faith. This, of course, is in contrast to Mark 8:38, where we read "If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels." We have read here that God created us a little lower than Himself, and has crowned us with glory and honor. In contrast, we see there is no greater contrast between the destiny of believers and unbelievers. Shame and glory are mutually exclusive.

And it is a great and amazing encouragement to read in this passage that Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers. He says, "Here am I and the children God has given me." We can rest in this triumphant declaration. We are joined to Christ in the family of God and we need never fear since we have "one who has been tested in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin" (4:15). Ponder this truth, friend, revel in it and be strong!

"Thank you, Lord Jesus, for reminding us of these basic truths of our new life in You. Help us to grow up into maturity, bearing precious fruit."

With love,  
cheerio. Monty!

6/19/01  
Hebrews 2:5-9,  
An Ode to Man

5It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. 6But there is a place where someone has testified: "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? 7You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor 8and put everything under his feet." In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. 9But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor

because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. Someone told me once that a burden shared is a burden halved, and a blessing shared is a blessing doubled. Rarely, but sometimes I receive a word from an E-LINKER that a particular study had been a particular blessing. Just telling me that doubles the blessing for them and for me. I am so encouraged when someone drops me a note, sharing a blessing they have received from the Word. Paul spoke of his eagerness to hear from his friends "that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith." Thank you for sharing. I am always privileged to pray with you for God's richest blessing on your life in Him and His life through you to others.

Our reading today brings an astonishing quote from that great Psalm 8:4-6, a startling statement in Scripture regarding the significance of being created in the image of God. But let me go back to that Psalm a bit and review the glorious setting in which our verse for today is found. The Psalm begins by glorifying God, "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens... When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him...". And I think we would surely agree. As we gaze into a clear, evening sky and see the multitude of stars, many millions of miles away, all shining in perfection, we say that God is indeed majestic. When we drive through a mountain range and are awestruck with its beauty, with the forests, the flowers, the fauna we say that indeed God is majestic. And when we think of the way man so easily distorts God's creation, often making glorious things sordid by neglect and indifference, we also say, "What is man that You are mindful of him?"

But notice that phrase in vs. 5... "You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings...". Here we are confronted with a most unfortunate mistranslation. You will see in your margin an alternate reading.... "YOU HAVE MADE HIM A LITTLE LOWER THAN GOD." And I notice that in our reading here in Hebrews 2:7 the same misquote is made. Authorities tell us that Psalm 8:5 does indeed say... "a little lower than God" ... and not lower than angels. I have often stressed, with joy, that that great verse in Ephesians 2:10 says that we "are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." I was so thrilled years ago when a great Greek scholar told me that the original of 'workmanship' is the little Greek word *poema*, used only this once in the New Testament in this context. And *poema* means MASTERPIECE. And in Greek classical life and thought, an artist had only one MASTERPIECE, the finest work he could create.

Here we read that you and I are God's greatest MASTERPIECE. We are all conscious of God's majestic power in the wonder of creation but apparently all His creation takes second-place to the wonder of His creating us. In our wonderful passage today, we are reminded that when God could do nothing greater He

created you and me, His masterpiece, in His image, and has left nothing that is not subject to us (vs.8). Although indeed that has not yet been accomplished, yet WE SEE JESUS, who tasted death for everyone that God's glory might be revealed in us, redeemed and restored by God's Grace to shine like lights in a dark world. Oh, what a huge encouragement this is. "We glory in the truth of these verses, Lord Jesus, and rejoice in the wonder of who we are, created in Your image. Let us so live that the world may see You in us." I praise God, with you, my friend, as we together let the Light shine.

Cheerio. Monty

6/14/01

Hebrews 2:1-4,

The danger of drifting away...

1We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. 2For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, 3how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. 4God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. (NIV)

Hello, my friend. Someone has said that a Christian's greatest danger is not committing some grievous, defiling sin, nor even committing milder sins, like cheating in an exam or misusing the petty-cash fund. A Christian's greatest danger is simply neglecting to respond to the voice of God, when it comes to us so clearly in and through His Word. Verse 3 is both solemn and severe in its implications: "how shall we escape if we ignore (or neglect) such a great salvation. And how vividly is this related to vs. 1, which so strongly says, "We must pay more careful attention to what we have heard so that we do not DRIFT away."

Scholars say that these verses have a nautical background. The King James version says, "...lest at any time we should slip away from them." When one ties up a boat to the mooring, it is crucial to see that the rope is tight and the knot is firm. To neglect this is to allow the vessel, during the night, to silently slip away from the harbor and perhaps to crash against the rocks.

What are the causes of neglect?

1. Failing to be convinced of the importance of the message, spoken by angels, which was at first spoken by the Lord (vs.3) and was confirmed by those who heard Him. This is such a hugely important verse, affirming the fact that God's Word has

complete authority and has been given us to be believed and obeyed.

2. Feeling that somehow I can postpone obedience, that procrastination can't be all that bad. After all, I'm not rejecting the Word of God, just delaying acting on what it instructs me to do. I agree with all the Scriptures teach, but I'm just not ready at the moment to act upon them with commitment and intention.

3. Not being convinced of the tragedy that follows neglect. Neglecting to change oil in my automobile can destroy the motor. Neglecting to have a decayed tooth repaired can cause its total destruction. Neglecting to weed a garden can cause it to become a wasteland. And neglecting to nourish my spiritual life, be it ever so slightly, can cause my life to be a wasteland, when I should be bearing fruit for God.

Notice how carefully the writer emphasizes the importance of heeding God's instructions. He gathers together a host of arguments as to why we should obey Scripture promptly and completely. He reminds us that what we have heard from Scripture is binding and to neglect it is to invite punishment. He says salvation was first declared by the Lord and was confirmed by those who lived with Him. He says it was affirmed by signs, wonders, various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed by the Lord "as He willed."

Seldom, elsewhere in Scripture, do we read an argument more compelling than these four verses regarding instant and total obedience. There are seven warnings in this letter to the Hebrews and this, the first one, is important because it declares that the other six are related to the tragedy of neglecting to act upon what we have learned. We will take careful note of these warnings as we continue on in the journey. So great to have you along. I trust you, too, are committed to instant and complete response to what you hear.

"Grip us, Lord Jesus, by this precious reminder of responding to Your invitation to walk with You and work with You, faithfully, day by day."

Thanks, partner.

Cheerio! Monty

6/12/01

Hebrews 1:4-14,

Who needs to be 'touched by an Angel!'

4So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. 5For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father"? Or again, "I will be his Father, and he will be my Son"? 6And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." 7In speaking of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire." 8But about the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. 9You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore

God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy." 10He also says, "In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. 11They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. 12You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end." 13To which of the angels did God ever say, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"? 14Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? (NIV)

Hello, my friend. It is amazing how this letter here deals so strongly, even lengthily with the topic of angels. Apparently this had become a strong attraction in the minds of these early Hebrew believers, even as today it is becoming such a popular alternative to simply trusting in Christ for salvation. The popular TV program, "Touched by an Angel" ranks high in the weekly ratings. A recent poll says a whopping 69 percent of American adults confirmed that they believed in the existence of angels. A full 46 percent acknowledge that they believed they had their own guardian angel. Among teenagers, their belief in angels has steadily increased to 76%, which means that three out of every four young Americans believe in angels today.

Now, the Scriptures plainly teach that not only do angels exist but that they are active servants of the Lord in the world. For example, Rev. 5:11-12 says, "I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering ten thousand times ten thousand. In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise." 'Ten thousand times ten thousand' is a lot of angels, calculating to 100,000,000 angels surrounding Christ on the throne. I could give you many more illustrations from Scripture about how angels are among us to serve the Lord. (IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN MY SPECIAL STUDY ON ANGELS, SEND \$15 FOR A THREE-TAPE ALBUM AND THE ATTACHED NOTES.) Why are they so attractive today?

Please note carefully 2 Cor.11:14, "No wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness." It is clear, then, that Satan will use the medium of angels as a powerful alternative to trusting in Christ alone for salvation and declaring that Christ ALONE is Worthy to receive honor glory and praise. You will notice in the TV program, Christ's name is NEVER mentioned, and everyone is told that God loves them and will care for them, with His angels. He does this, indeed, for those who belong to Him by redemptive faith, but His wrath rests on those who do not trust Christ as Lord (John 3:36).

Why this astonishing rise in interest in angels? 1) They allegedly offer humankind a form of spirituality that does not involve commitment to God or His Word. Time magazine says, "for those who choke too easily on God and His rules...angels are the handy compromise, all fluff and meringue, kind, nonjudgmental, available to everyone, like aspirin"; 2) they allegedly are a means

of attaining God's help without having to deal directly with God; 3) they are a reaction against the materialism and secularism of Western society; 4) they "can bring meaning and purpose into lives". In fact, this teaching is a deadly alternative to faith in Christ. As Ron Rhodes says, "What is being taught today would seem to have more to do with fallen angels (demons) than God's holy angels, impostors who seek to foster a spirituality without Christ, without the true God".

"Help us, Lord Jesus, to be aware of the subtle yet destructive way Satan will deceive us by counterfeiting your Word with wicked alternatives. Give us courage to resist Him. Thank you, my partner on the journey, for your attention and, I trust, your intention to allow the Lord to use you today in a world bewildered and bereft of life, without Christ. I am thankful and encouraged by our fellowship together in the Lord.

Cheerio! Monty