

Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews

Chapter 6

(also available on-line at ichthys.com)

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Introduction:

Chapter six may be divided into five parts. The first paragraph (vv.1-3) contains Paul's synopsis of basic Bible doctrines which all believers should be taught thoroughly, immediately after salvation (but of which many in the Jerusalem church had become forgetful due to the re-hardening of their hearts). The second paragraph (vv.4-8) consists of a direct rebuke of that congregation through a very blunt description of their problematic behavior in returning to the Law. Paul lays bare the essence of the sin in which many believers in Jerusalem were involving themselves: they were in effect "crucifying the Son of God afresh" by continuing to sacrifice. In the third paragraph (vv.9-12), in order not to completely demoralize his readers, Paul provides some guarded encouragement, calling into remembrance their better application of the truth in the past. In paragraph number four (vv.13-18), Paul also now "sets the table", so to speak, for their resumption of spiritual advance by assuring them of the absolute and unchangeable nature of the Christian hope for those who stay faithful. Lastly, in the final paragraph (vv.19-20), Paul expands on the true nature of our Christian hope, leading his readers to shift focus from the here and now to the glorious eternity which awaits us with our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

II. Translation

(1) Let us then move on from the elementary teachings about Christ and press on to maturity rather than continually [needing to be] reconstructing the same foundation over and over again [consisting of the following doctrines]: [1] [instruction about] repentance from dead works and faith in God; (2) [2] instruction about the [various types] of baptisms and the laying on of hands; [3] [instruction about] the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. (3) And this [switch of emphasis] we shall accomplish – if God allows it (i.e., if you respond).

(4) For, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, and who have experienced the heavenly gift and become partakers of the Holy Spirit, (5) and who have experienced that the Word of God is good, and [who have experienced] miracles foreshadowing the age to come, (6) it is impossible to restore them to [true] repentance after having fallen away [into sin] as long as they keep crucifying the Son of God afresh and exposing Him to open shame. (7) For land that drinks the rain coming frequently upon it and as a result produces plants beneficial to those by whom it is farmed receives its share of God's blessing. (8) But if it brings forth thistles and

thorns, it is found wanting and is close to receiving a curse, the end of which is burning.

(9) But we stand convinced of better things concerning you, beloved, things with a hold on salvation, even though we speak in this manner. (10) For God is not unjust so as to forget the labor and the love you demonstrated towards His Name in having rendered service to [your] holy [brethren] and in continuing to do so. (11) But we desire each of you to keep demonstrating this same enthusiasm for the full consummation of your hope, all the way to the end, (12) so that instead of lapsing into laziness you may become imitators of those who through faith and patience inherited the promises.

(13) Now when God made His promise to Abraham, since He had no one else greater to swear by, He swore by Himself, (14) saying, "In blessing you I will surely bless you, and in multiplying you I will surely multiply you!" (15) And it was in this way [that Abraham] came into full possession of the promise, having waited patiently [for its fulfillment]. (16) For men are accustomed to taking oaths on the authority of something greater than they are, and there is absolutely no doubt about the fact that an oath is taken for the purpose of confirmation. (17) Just so God, out of a desire to make it abundantly clear to us, the heirs of His promise [after the pattern of Abraham's faith], that His will in this matter [of salvation and its resultant blessings] is unchangeable, guaranteed it with an oath, (18) so that through two unchangeable matters wherein it is impossible for God to prove false, we who have escaped [the wrath to come] and taken hold of this hope set before us might have a strong basis for encouragement.

(19) And this hope is what [truly] "anchors" our lives, so to speak: it is certain; it is solid; it penetrates beyond the [heavenly] veil into the [holy of holies], (20) where our vanguard, Jesus, has entered on our behalf, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 6:1-20

III. Summary and Paraphrase

By your conduct, you believers in Jerusalem seem to have forgotten the most fundamental doctrines. Continuing this way leads only to apostasy, and that is not where you want to be. Remember that God's promises to you are safe and secure, confirmed by an oath from Him – if only you hang onto your faith firmly until the end.

It is time to move on from basic teachings and press on to spiritual maturity. Don't you remember the teaching of repentance? But you have turned back to your prior behavior. Don't you remember the teaching of faith unto salvation? But you are acting just as faithlessly as the exodus generation. Don't you remember the teaching of baptisms, how that Spirit baptism is the baptism of the Church? But you are reverting to the ritual baptisms of the Law. Don't you remember the teaching of the resurrection of believers and the last judgment of unbelievers? But you are acting as those who are determined to be part of the latter rather than the former.

It is not possible for you who have stumbled – you who were once led to the light of the truth and given the Holy Spirit, enlightened by the truth and given to see exceptional miracles – to be restored to your previous status of spirituality while you are right in the middle of putting Jesus Christ to open shame by participating again now in the rituals of

the Law – which amounts to crucifying Him all over again. If we bless land that produces a good crop but set on fire land which is producing thorns, consider how dangerous this crop of brambles and briars is which you are presently producing.

You have forced me to put things this way, but I do have confidence that you will turn around and be saved in the end. God will not forget the good things you have done in the past for Christ and your fellow believers in service which continues up until the present time – as long as you don't fall away entirely. You need to rekindle that confidence in your eternal reward and hold onto it firmly until the end, not becoming lazy in your approach but rather imitating the great believers of the past who through faith, patience and perseverance came into the full inheritance of the things God has promised to those who belong to Him. If we are walking with Christ, we have every right to be confident about that inheritance. Didn't God Himself make that promise of eternal inheritance to our forefather Abraham? And God also swore by Himself as He could swear by no other to make it so. And Abraham received the pledge of that promise by believing it, waiting patiently for it, and following through in faith. God swore this to him in addition to His promise to him so that there would be no doubt about the matter. That is why men swear, after all, and there is no greater oath of confirmation than one invoked by God Himself by Himself. That oath-confirmed promise of salvation and reward for proving faithful in this life is our heavenly anchor, given to us by God Himself who has always told us nothing but the truth. It securely and solidly binds us who have taken refuge in that future hope of the wonderful things to come just like an anchor in this life reaching into heaven, right into the true holy of holies where Father and Son reside. That is the very place into which Jesus has led the way for us, pioneering it, so to speak. As our true, unique High Priest – priest and king, just like Melchizedek – Jesus is the One who has passed behind the veil to open up the way into heaven on our behalf.

IV. Verse by Verse Commentary

Verses One through Three

(1) Let us then move on from the elementary teachings about Christ and press on to maturity rather than continually [needing to be] reconstructing the same foundation over and over again [consisting of the following doctrines]: [1] [instruction about] repentance from dead works and faith in God; (2) [2] instruction about the [various types] of baptisms and the laying on of hands; [3] [instruction about] the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. (3) And this [switch of emphasis] we shall accomplish – if God allows it (i.e., if you respond).

Hebrews 6:1-3

The Catalog of Basic Doctrines: The basic teachings Paul lists here are the true "fundamentals", basic principles of truth in regard to which every believer should receive instruction as soon as possible after being saved. And, indeed, all new believers should (and generally universally do) wish to know these important truths.

Perhaps the greatest shortcoming of modern-day evangelism is its failure to share this critical information with new converts immediately after they profess faith in Christ. Common practice is for evangelical missions and events to partner with local churches and hand the new believers over to such organizations . . . as if this fulfilled the need. As we are all well aware, however, in our Laodicean era, few Christian churches today are teaching even these very basic principles of truth, and that accounts in no small measure for the fact that many if not the majority of Christians today are ignorant of or hold incorrect opinions about these few simple doctrines which Paul deems "elementary", and from which he is eager to "move on" to more substantive teaching. And while Paul is dealing with a congregation in deep spiritual trouble, he actually *does* feel justified in moving on from these "basics" without explanation, assuming, even though this group of believers contains many in dangerous reversion, that nevertheless many if not most of them at least still understood and accepted *these* elementary doctrinal points, so that at least on *these* teachings they might all agree without needing further discussion, so as to be able to proceed onward and upward from there. What this shows us (or will, once we examine these three pairs of principles below), is that for all its troubles, at least in terms of essential biblical knowledge, the Jerusalem church was far better off than the average Christian church and average believer in Laodicea today.

The first thing to note is that with his mentioning of "(1) repentance from dead works and faith in God, (2) instruction about baptisms and the laying on of hands, [and] (3) the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment" in verses one and two, Paul is organizing the essentials of Bible doctrine into three fundamental categories: 1) doctrines pertaining to salvation; 2) doctrines pertaining to living life as a Christian; and 3) doctrines pertaining to the prophetic future.

The first category deals with things past: we are already saved, but we do need to know certain basic truths about our so-great salvation. The second category deals with things present: we are still here in the devil's world after being saved, and there are certain basic principles of truth which are essential to know right from the beginning of the Christian life so as not to be led astray on the one hand, but to understand the true source of our spiritual power on the other. The third category deals with things future, eschatology: to keep the correct, godly perspective in this world and in this life all Christians need to be focused on our eternal future and our Lord's evaluation of us rather than becoming fixated with this world in which we are only temporarily residing.

Needless to say, although these are "elementary principles", they do entail a great many doctrinal points on the one hand (so that explaining them to new converts is not an overnight task), and on the other hand there are always deeper levels of understanding, with the result that there is always more to be learned about all biblical subjects, even for very advanced, mature believers (so that we will never stop learning this side of heaven – or at least we shouldn't). And of course "learning" anything important in this life generally takes repetition and reinforcement, so that we should all be reviewing even the basic things we "know", because when it comes to the truth, we can't know them too well (*n.b.*, the "Basics" series at Ichthys is composed of eleven parts and is more than 1,800 pages long, single-spaced: few believers are capable of "learning it" on one reading).

Part 1: Dead Works and Faith in God:

(14) After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. (15) "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Mark 1:14-15 NIV

Although much ink has been spilled on the subject, being saved is neither complicated nor difficult – for us. Jesus Christ has died for the sins of the entire world. To be saved, a person needs only turn *away* from the world ("Repent!") and *towards* God in Jesus Christ, trusting in Him ("believe the good news!"). That is the gospel, the "good news" which is better than any other news any human being has ever received in the history of the world. Deliverance from death is the ultimate good and can only be achieved one way: through faith in Jesus Christ. We have to turn away from dead works, the notion that anything we can do will be honored by God (as paganism and religion preach), and turn instead to the only Savior, Jesus Christ, honoring Him and His work on the cross for us by trusting in Him alone for deliverance from death and condemnation.

"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved!

Acts 16:31

As this short discussion already should make clear, there are many facets to our "so great salvation" (Heb.2:3), most of which are not necessary for an unbeliever to understand in order to be saved, thus becoming a believer. The Holy Spirit knows the hearts of all (cf. Ps.33:15). He knows who is willing to be saved. And He assures that every such person receives the basic understanding of the gospel necessary to be saved.¹ After salvation, however, it is essential for everyone belonging to Jesus Christ to move forward in his/her knowledge of the truth, believing what is taught, reinforcing that believed knowledge, converted thereby into *epignosis* by the Spirit, through consistent access to solid teaching and applying said truth to one's life. That is, as we have affirmed many times, the essential process of spiritual growth without which no believer will ever attain maturity or fulfill God's purpose for our individual lives, the forsaking of which process has potentially dire spiritual consequences (as the Jerusalem believers were experiencing).

In terms of "dead works", while this does indeed encompass the realization that we are sinners and therefore unworthy to live in the presence of holy God without some intervention on His part, merely recognizing that physical death is inevitable absent "rescue" by Him is often sufficient motivation to turn *away* from the world and *towards* the truth being presented in the gospel. Significantly, however, "dead works" also and preeminently includes things ostensibly done *for* God. No one can be saved who thinks that salvation is based on works done by themselves, for that attitude is the essence of the devil's world system of religion designed to turn mankind away from the truth. Salvation is based entirely on the work of Jesus Christ for us, *not* anything turned wrong-side round so as to assume that God's approval can be won by whatever

¹ See BB 5: Pneumatology, section II.B.1.d.2, "Gospel Epistemology".

we might think to do – and all such efforts are actually offensive to God (as Cain's sacrifice was; Eph.2:8-9).

A person does not need to be able to articulate the above in order to turn viscerally away from the world and such satanic thinking so as to be saved, but after salvation these are essential truths, "elementary teachings", which need to be taught, understood, believed and applied. This is, of course, just the beginning. Learning what the Bible has to say about the purpose, creation and fall of mankind and God's plan of redemption (BB 3A: Anthropology), and about the sin nature, about the nature of sin, about sinning in particular and how believers need to address it through repentance, and confession, leading to forgiveness (BB 3B: Hamartiology), requires much intermediate level study. What is sad to say is that many if not most believers today do not even know or accept the basic principles expressed here, let alone have any inclination for such further study. For example, legalism is rife in the church-visible, a return to the very "dead works" whose rejection originally led to our salvation. The Jerusalem believers may have forgotten much; most Laodicean believers seem never to have bothered to learn these important teachings in the first place.

In terms of "faith in God", while this phrase does indicate the need to trust and believe in the One who can save us from death, a Substitute who will rescue us from the grave and our deepest fear, Paul does not even mention Jesus Christ here, and it is fair to say that many if not most people at the moment of their salvation have a very limited understanding of who Jesus is and what He has done for us. Believing in Christ as sent from God to save us and God as the One who sent His Son as a sacrifice on our behalf is, on a very basic level, the same thing (with all the glorious and important distinctions seldom understood at the point of being saved).

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life."

John 5:24 NKJV (cf. Jn.14:1-3)

Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son.

1st John 5:10 NIV

As these verses make clear, believing in Jesus truly is believing in the Father and truly believing in the Father necessitates also believing in His Son, Jesus Christ. True faith cannot be separated out one from the other. Only later in the Christian life do believers begin to see the depths of these and many related truths as they are instructed in the Word through those who led them to Christ in the first place . . . one would at least hope. It is not necessary to be able to give a detailed account of the Trinity to be saved, for example. After salvation, every aspect of the three persons of God and their chosen roles in the plan of God need to be fleshed out (BB 1: Theology), especially the uniqueness of the God-man Jesus Christ (for all doctrine is at its base about Christ and all good Bible teaching needs to be directly related to Him), His human and divine natures, His human life, and His saving work for us on the cross, His substitutionary death

for us, the unlimited atonement of His sacrifice, the true meaning of "the blood of Christ", His spiritual death whereby we are delivered from our sin, and the propitiation, redemption, justification and reconciliation which are ours as a result (BB 4A: Christology). After salvation, we need to learn all about God's plan to save us, the mechanics of our salvation, His foreknowledge and divine decrees, our predestination, calling, election and coming glorification as those who belong to Jesus Christ, and all the wonderful things we enjoy now as those who are in union with Jesus Christ, born again, born from above, and sealed with the Holy Spirit against that future day (BB 4B: Soteriology). What is sad to say is that many if not most believers today do not even know or accept the basic principles expressed here, let alone have any inclination for such further study. For example, groups professing simple faith without artifice or addition are a rare commodity in the church-visible today, with many often adding works such as water-baptism which if relied upon initially would never have led to salvation in the first place. The Jerusalem believers may have forgotten much; most Laodicean believers seem never to have bothered to learn these important teachings in the first place.

Part 2: Baptisms and Laying on of Hands: After nearly two millennia, it is a sad commentary on the state of the church-visible that water-baptism continues to be the source of so much controversy. As readers of this ministry should know quite well, and as any Christian could easily confirm, no two groups who advocate or engage in that biblically unauthorized practice agree on the means or the method or the meaning of it – a fact that in and of itself ought to make anyone suspicious of it and ask for biblical passages supporting it (of which there are none). Yes, there is water-baptism in the gospels, but there is also animal sacrifice and all manner of things which pertained to Israel under the Law but which are not meant for the Church Age now that the Old Covenant has been replaced by the New, the very issue with which Paul was struggling in regard to the Jerusalem church.

"Now I am baptizing you with water for the purpose of [your] repentance. But the One coming after me is more powerful than me and I am not worthy to carry His sandals. It is He who is the One who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."
Matthew 3:11 (cf. Mk.1:8; Lk.3:16; Jn.1:33)

Therefore even John, whose baptism this water-baptism really is, was looking forward to the reality of the Messiah who would replace the symbolic baptism done with water with the real, powerful, dynamic baptism in and by the Holy Spirit.

[There is only] one Lord, one faith, *one baptism*.
Ephesians 4:5 NKJV

For Paul, the doctrines centering around the symbolic practice of water-baptism and the Spirit baptism which is the hallmark of the Church Age were "basic". Not only that. He includes these issues along with the "laying on of hands", the practice of imparting the Spirit to believers during the period of transition from Law to grace (when there was a complement of those who had believed before Pentecost and had thus not received the Spirit at the point of faith), in his list of "essential teachings" which he expects even these wayward Jerusalem believers to understand and accept. It is a mark of the spiritual torpor of our own day that these doctrines listed by Paul

as representative of fundamental truths necessary for living the Christian life should be so universally misunderstood by so many in our present day church-visible.

Simply put, water-baptism was *symbolic* of the coming of the Messiah *to Israel* and the need for His people to prepare themselves for His arrival (Lk.1:17). Spirit baptism is the *actual* means of empowering *the entire Church* to grow and produce for Jesus Christ in a way impossible in the past. Paul says "baptisms" here (plural), to make clear the point that the former has now no place in the Church while the latter is the power which energizes the Church.

"Laying on of hands" describes the temporary means by which the apostles imparted the Spirit to believers in the early days of the Church Age (Acts 8:17), providing them also thereby with the spiritual gifts which all believers now possess – not true of the Age of Israel, and *not* capable of being imparted through water (obviously). Through the Spirit, believers in this age are empowered to walk with the Lord, to follow, imitate and serve Him as was never the case in the past. This is all very basic information of which all Christians need to be informed immediately after salvation. We cannot be expected to learn and understand overnight the whole realm of the Spirit's activities and ministries (e.g., the details of the Spirit's baptism, indwelling, placing us into union with Christ, His bestowing upon us of spiritual gifts, His guidance of the believer through the truth, His ministry in making truth understandable, etc.; i.e., BB 5: Pneumatology), but it is sad that, while it was Paul's expectation that even these backsliding Jerusalem believers at least accepted and understood these basic things, most believers in Laodicea do not.

Charismatics are in complete rebellion against the truth when it comes to the proper role and function of true spiritual gifts actually being given today, and most other groups have very little concept of the Holy Spirit's critical ministry to us at all. Without the filling of the Spirit, without His ministry of turning mere knowledge into usable *epignosis*, "full knowledge", it is not really possible to live the Christian life to the full in the way our Lord expects us to do. How we apply the truth we have learned in the Spirit and submit to His guidance are intricate subjects that no believer can be expected to learn over night (i.e., BB 6A: Peripateology), but it is sad that while the recipients of this letter were expected to still understand and accept the gist of these teachings, in our own day they are matters of great ignorance, confusion and dissension.

Part 3: Resurrection of the Dead and Eternal Judgment: The two quintessential points of truth that every Christian needs to know immediately after being saved are that we *will* be resurrected – that is the hope *with which* we are saved, after all (Rom.8:23-24); and that as believers in Jesus Christ we *will not* be subject to the "last judgment" after which all unbelievers are cast into the lake of fire, but will instead receive a life-evaluation from our Savior for the purpose of reward. In other words, life eternal is what believers have in store; unbelievers have only the second death to look forward to.

"Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt."

Daniel 12:2 NIV

This third set of basic doctrines is in some respect the most important, at least from the

standpoint of orienting us – and in the case of the Jerusalem believers *re*-orienting them – to the essential purpose for our being here and thus encouraging us to persevere in following our Lord, faithfully to the end. We are confident in our salvation and understand the basis of it as having been paid for by our Savior Jesus Christ (set #1); we are aware of the benefits of now being one with Him and of being empowered by the Spirit to now walk with Him through this world as He would have us do (set #2); and we are looking forward not to any security or happiness in this life (whatever we do have here comes from Him), but to our resurrection and a good reward from having served Him well in the time given to us (set #3).

There are, as briefly referenced above, many aspects to the first two sets of essential truths which every believer should commit to learning and internalizing as soon as possible after being saved, and the same is true of this third set. Every believer needs to know something about the background of mankind's creation and the reason for it (matters covered in the Satanic Rebellion series); about the crowns of eternal reward, the means of earning them, the judgment seat of Christ where we will be evaluated, the time and the nature of the resurrection, the interim state of departed believers in the meantime, the nature of the conflict in which we are presently involved and the spiritual warfare in which we are engaged, the role of Christ's Church individually and collectively in God's plan (BB 6B: Ecclesiology), and the source of all truth related to all of these principles, namely, the Bible (BB 7: Bibliology); also, specifically, what the Bible prophesies about the end times: the Tribulation, the Second Advent, Armageddon, the resurrection of the Church, the Millennium, the last judgment, and New Jerusalem (matters covered in BB 2A: Angelology; BB 2B: Eschatology; and in the Coming Tribulation series).

There is much to learn about all of these important doctrinal topics, but the "essential teachings" Paul gives by way of outline are the true "fundamentals" upon which every Christian life needs to be founded. As mentioned, Paul felt that with at least these three sets of truths he was on solid ground even with many of the wayward believers in the Jerusalem church. It is thus beyond sad in regard to this third set of truths as well, the very basis of our Christian hope which is supposed to anchor us to heaven home (Heb.6:19), that even here we find a distressing lack of understanding in the Laodicean church-visible.

How many Christians today really understand that we will be resurrected at Christ's return? For all too many evangelicals, the false notion of some pre-Tribulation deliverance has become their hope – a completely false one. How many Christians today have any clear idea of the resurrection at all, that it will be bodily and powerful, spiritual yet material, truths readily evident in scripture (and forming part of any worthy teaching ministry)? How many Christians today understand that if it should be in God's plan for us to be taken home before His return, that our spirits will not "sleep in the dust", only our bodies will, and that we will be face to face with the Lord in an intermediary status that far outshines our present experience until we reach the resurrection (which is the best of the best)? How many Christians today have a solid understanding of the warfare we are engaged in, not against flesh and blood opponents, but against the forces of evil, or any clear idea how to go about fighting it in a godly way (Eph.6:12)? How many Christians today understand that the Tribulation and the events described in the Bible as occurring therein are literal, close at hand, and likely to be experienced personally by many of us, that the biblical descriptions of the Millennial kingdom and New Jerusalem on the other side

of our Lord's thousand year reign are literally true as well and destined to happen as part of the unchangeable plan of God? It is true that for many of these subjects there is much more that we should wish to know than is included in scripture, but that is surely not an excuse for knowing little or nothing about the great wealth of material the Bible does share with us about all that lies ahead for us. Should it not rather provide a stimulus for learning all that we can about the glories to come, the glories to which we aspire and which we eagerly await? Again, as sorry as the shape in which the Jerusalem church found itself upon the receipt of Paul's letter, in many respects it was not nearly as sorry as the situation of the present-day church-visible.

If God Allows: While expressing guarded confidence about the response of the Jerusalem church to his letter here and a little later on (i.e., Heb.6:9-10; cf. Heb.10:32-39), Paul has to admit that this matter is not in his hands. He can pray (and he is praying no doubt); he can attempt to persuade his listeners to turn away from their self-destructive course (that is the entire point of this epistle); in the end, however, the future was in their hands, not his. God without doubt was willing and certainly able to effect a change of course in these believers. What was also necessary to bring it about was a genuine change of *heart* on their part.

And it is shocking that these Jerusalem believers have gotten to the point of needing to be reminded of the very basic doctrines of Christianity, but that is reminiscent of believers today in many denominations who have drifted away from basic truths of which they may have once had some inkling, and who now find themselves in this sorry state even though they may go to church on Sunday (and possibly especially if they go to church on Sunday). In one respect, present day believers are generally better off than those in the Jerusalem church whose conduct Paul has and will seriously upbraid: it is fair to say that the majority of believers in Laodicea are not presently charging headlong to apostasy by violently reversing course in their Christian lives and pursuing what amounts to a satanic agenda instead (which is what returning to a false application of the Law that denied the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice certainly was). But before allowing ourselves any relief on that point, it is good to consider that while it is worse to be swiftly headed in the wrong direction than merely moving too slowly forward or being stagnant or even drifting backwards slowly (which conditions sum up the Laodicean church generally), when the Tribulation arrives, all lukewarm believers will find themselves in potentially even worse trouble than the reverting believers in Jerusalem: during the Tribulation, one third of such will indeed fall away completely, taken in by the deceptions of antichrist (Matt.24:10-13; 2Thes.2:3).² No good ever comes in this life for believers who are not denying themselves, picking up their crosses, and following Jesus Christ "daily" (Lk.9:23).

Verses Four through Eight

(4) For, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, and who have experienced the heavenly gift and become partakers of the Holy Spirit, (5) and who have experienced that the Word of God is good, and [who have experienced] miracles foreshadowing the age to come, (6) it is impossible to restore them to [true] repentance after having fallen away [into sin] as long as they keep crucifying the Son of God afresh and exposing Him

² See CT 3A: The Tribulation Begins, section II, "The Great Apostasy".

to open shame. (7) For land that drinks the rain coming frequently upon it and as a result produces plants beneficial to those by whom it is farmed receives its share of God's blessing. (8) But if it brings forth thistles and thorns, it is found wanting and is close to receiving a curse, the end of which is burning.

Hebrews 6:4-8

Once Having Been Enlightened:

But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings.

Hebrews 10:32 ESV

In verses four and five, Paul relates some familiar characteristics which are common to the experience of all believers, and to which we can all relate. The first of these is enlightenment, expressed in the exact same way by Paul in the verse above as we have in our present context of Hebrews 6:4 as, literally, "having been illuminated" (the aorist passive participle in both cases of the verb *photizo*, coming from the noun *phos/photos*, from which we derive all English "photo-" words, with "photograph" meaning, etymologically, "light-writing").

And this is the message which we have heard from Him and report to you: that God is **light** and there is no darkness in Him.

1st John 1:5

Since God *is* light, and since this world is the domain of darkness (Eph.6:12; Col.1:13), it is no wonder that believers often express this experience of enlightenment with the words, "I've seen the light!" With such expressions we do not mean seeing the actual glory of God (in the manner of Paul on the road to Damascus: Acts 9:3; 22:6-11; 26:13). We mean rather that we received a moment of complete clarity in our hearts provided by the Holy Spirit when hearing the **truth** of the gospel, a moment at which suddenly everything became clear, when the darkness obscuring our purpose in this world with the death shadow was pierced by the brilliant light of the truth: yes, there *is* hope, hope of life eternal through the person and work of Jesus Christ! Bringing this message to the gentiles was, after all, the very mandate with which our Lord charged Paul upon his conversion.

(15) Then I said, "Who are you, Lord?", and the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. (16) But stand up on your feet. For I have appeared to you for this [very] reason, [namely] to appoint you a minister and a witness, both of what you have [now] seen, and of [other things] in regard to which I shall appear to you [later]. (17) [For] I am going to rescue you from this people (i.e., Jewish opponents) and from the gentiles to whom I am sending you (18) to **open their eyes** that they may turn from **darkness** to [the] **light**, even from the power of Satan unto God, in order that they may receive the forgiveness of [their] sins and a share among those who have been sanctified **by faith** in Me."

Acts 26:15-18 NIV

Our eyes are opened when we respond to the gospel, turning from the devil's darkness to the brilliant shining forth of the light of God in Jesus Christ, the radiant "shining forth of the Father's glory" (Heb.1:3), through believing in Him. That is what enlightenment means, namely, the illuminating of our previously darkened hearts through the truth by the agency of the Holy Spirit. God is truth. God is light. God's truth is light, putting the lie to the darkness fostered by the evil one, making all things suddenly clear to us when we first believed and, ideally, leading us from light to light as we draw closer to the Lord through faith in the truth (Ps.36:9; Rom.1:17; 2Cor.3:18).

But the path of the righteous is like the first light of dawn, shining ever brighter until the full light of day has come.

Proverbs 4:18 [index]

Believers who persevere in the truth, who are walking in the Spirit, rather than complaining about "feeling dry", frequently have the experience of "seeing things" in the Word, of having that wonderful feeling of being close to the Lord through seeing Him through His words of truth. This is, in fact, meant to be the normal Christian experience. But it is sadly the case for many if not most believers in our day and age, that the memorable enlightenment felt at salvation and in the days following while still eager for the truth has been allowed to fade, precisely because the truth which is the essential element in enlightening us has been neglected.

Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

John 8:12 NKJV

If we are following the Lord, we have light – but not if we are not. And how *do* we follow Him if not by giving attention to His words of truth? He is *the* Word of truth (Jn.1:1; Rev.19:13); He is *the* light of the world (Jn.8:12; 9:5), that light which has illuminated all who receive His words at salvation and thereafter.

(5) Those who are oriented to the flesh think about the things of the flesh, but those who are orientated to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. (6) For the thought-pattern of the flesh results in death, but the thought-pattern of the Spirit results in life and peace. (7) Now the thought-pattern of the flesh is [one of] enmity towards God, for it does not obey God's law, nor is it [even] able [to do so]. (8) And [so] those who are under the control of the flesh (i.e., unbelievers enslaved to the sin nature) are not able to please God. (9) But you are not under the control of the flesh, but under the control of the Spirit – if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, that person does not belong to Him.

Romans 8:5-9

Now indwelt by the Holy Spirit, liberated from the fear of death (Heb.2:15), and having set our hearts on the resurrection, eternal life and the things above (Rom.8:24; Tit.1:2; Col.3:1-2), we

believers are now, as in the passage above, "reoriented".³ That is to say, our entire life-direction has been turned around, away from the darkness and towards the light (Col.1:13). In short, we now see things differently than we did before. Before we were blind, but now we see (Jn.9:25). Before being saved, we sat in darkness (Lk.1:79), but now we walk forward in the light of the truth our of dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Jn.8:12; 12:46).

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.
2nd Corinthians 4:6 NIV

(8) For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light. (9) Now the fruit light produces accords with all goodness, righteousness and truth. (10) So [in all things] you should [always] be calculating what it is that pleases the Lord. (11) And do not participate in dark deeds which bear no fruit. But rather expose them as such. (12) For the things done in darkness by those [who reject the truth] are shameful even to mention. (13) But all things become visible [for what they really are] when they are illuminated by the light, (14) because everything which has been made visible [through such illumination] is light. That is why it says, "Arise, sleeper! Awake from the dead, and Christ will shine [His light of truth] upon you!"
Ephesians 5:8-14

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.
1st Peter 2:9 NIV

(5) This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. (6) If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. (7) But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.
1st John 1:5-7 NIV

As all of the passages above affirm, while the "fresh start for the heart" we receive when we are saved is wonderful and memorable (as Paul is counting on in attempting to reach these believers), this illumination, this "seeing" things all of a sudden in a crystal clear way, no longer blinded by the deceit of the devil and his dark world-kingdom, will not continue unless we continue in the light. If we fail to continue to follow Jesus Christ through loving and embracing the light of the truth of the Word of God, this clarity of spiritual vision will fade and the darkness that once enveloped us will gradually return – as had evidently happened to many in the Jerusalem church.

The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness,

³ See BB 4B: Soteriology, section II.7.c, "Our New Orientation as Reborn Believers".

and let us put on the armor of light.
Romans 13:12 NKJV (cf. 1Thes.5:4-6)

Having Experienced the Heavenly Gift:

You welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.
1st Thessalonians 1:6b NIV 1985

While Jesus Christ is the ultimate Gift of God to us (2Co 9:15), and the salvation we have in Him the concomitant gift upon which all others depend (Eph.2:8-9), Paul is referring here in particular to the joy we receive when we believe poured out by the Holy Spirit. "Having experienced" is, literally, in the Greek, "tasted", a natural expression since taste is a quintessential human experience (cf. Matt.16:28; Heb.2:9).

Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good;
Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!
Psalm 34:8 NKJV

The second thing, therefore, that Paul calls upon these Jerusalem believers to remember is the great joy they experienced in this reception of the Holy Spirit at salvation. While some may have been present at the first Pentecost of the Church Age where the Spirit distributed gifts visibly as "tongues of fire" to the assembled believers (Acts 2:1-4), the vast majority will have received the Spirit later, not at all necessarily accompanied by miraculous demonstrations of the sort we find at the so-called gentile Pentecost (Acts 10:44-45).

This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?
Galatians 3:2 NKJV

Even though we have no indication of any visibly miraculous, ecstatic speaking in tongues or prophesying in the case of the Galatian churches when they first came to Christ (Acts 13-14), Paul nevertheless here too expects his readers to find the gift of the Spirit when first they believed to be a memorable experience.

And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.
Acts 13:52 NIV

The "joy given by the Spirit" is, for a new believer who experiences it for the first time, unforgettable. Or at least it should be. But if we fail to remember aright the great benefit that the Spirit was to us right from the start of our Christian lives – and has continued to be ever since (at least as long as we have actually been listening to Him and following Him as we are supposed to be doing) – then losing our grip on all that is important in the Christian life is a much easier trap to fall into. Paul thus seeks to remind these wayward believers of the salad days of their early salvation experience, hoping to rekindle in them a spirit of longing for better spiritual times,

jogging their memories that they may realize how much better things actually were when they were doing what was right before God, and the joy of the Spirit – which at present in their lack of fellowship with the Lord they were doubtless *not* experiencing – is one such indescribably wonderful benefit which, on remembrance of it, they ought to dearly want to recover.

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.
Romans 14:17 NIV

(18) And don't get drunk with wine – which is dissipating – but instead keep on being full-filled (i.e., making progress in spiritual growth) by means of the Holy Spirit (i.e., the means to edification in contrast to dissipation). (19) [Be] speaking [encouragement] to your own selves through psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and vocalizing psalms in your heart to the Lord.
Ephesians 5:18-19

Having Become Partakers of the Holy Spirit: The third memorial to which Paul appeals to shake the Jerusalem believers out of their spiritual torpor is the gift of the Spirit Himself and the gifts He has given us. Paul distinguishes here the initial joy of salvation, a genuine fruit of the Spirit indeed, from His indwelling presence, an even greater blessing of which all believers are partakers.

"Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you."
John 16:7 NIV

From our Lord's own lips, we have assurance that the indwelling of the Spirit all believers possess (Acts 5:32; Rom.8:9; 1Cor.12:13) is more advantageous than were He Himself here with us prior to His glorification. That is an amazing thing to consider. Note that our Lord does *not* say "preferable from your point of view", but an actual "advantage" . . . when it comes to carrying out the Father's plan for our lives. Of course, we would prefer to be with the Lord Jesus Christ above all else (Phil.1:23). But in terms of carrying out the will of God, the ministry of the Spirit is absolutely needful (Phil.1:24).

(21) Now the One who has given us security in regard to Christ together with you and who has anointed us (i.e., with the Spirit) is God – (22) [Yes, He] has also sealed us and given us His pledge of the Spirit in our hearts.
2nd Corinthians 1:21-22

And it is God [the Father] who has fashioned us for this very purpose [of resurrection and eternal life], and it is He who has given us the pledge of the Spirit [to guarantee that eternal future].
2nd Corinthians 5:5

(13) In [Christ] you also when you heard the Word of truth, the good news of your

salvation, in whom [I say], when you believed, you were sealed by the Spirit of promise, the Holy [Spirit], (14) who is a pledge of our inheritance for redeeming its preservation (i.e., safeguarding our resurrection and reward in every way), for the purpose of the praise of His glory (in eternity).

Ephesians 1:13-14

The benefits of having the Holy Spirit in us are manifold and marvelous. Knowing without doubt that we are saved, sealed by God Himself for the salvation ready to be revealed in the last days (1Pet.1:5), gives us great confidence and peace. Being empowered by Him in our daily walk (Gal.5:16; Eph.5:18), being gifted by Him to accomplish the ministries Jesus has for us (1Cor.12:1-11), and being one with Jesus Christ through His baptism of us into our dear Lord and Savior along with all our brothers and sisters to form His perfect Bride (Matt.9:15; Matt.25:1-13; Mk.2:19; Lk.5:34; Jn.3:29; 2Cor.11:2-3; Eph.1:22-23; 5:22-33; Rev.19:7-14; 21:2-4; 21:9ff.; 22:17) are just some of the wonderful benefits that are to our great "advantage" in being "partakers of the Holy Spirit" (we have devoted an entire section of the Basics series to this subject: BB 5: Pneumatology).

Taken together, we can say that being baptized with the Spirit gives us an empowerment which is difficult to describe but one which all believers experience to one degree or another depending on the one hand on our present spiritual state and progress (i.e., to what degree are we acceding to the Spirit's guidance: Rom.8:14; Gal.5:16-25), and on the other hand on our remembrance of how different things were for us prior to salvation (i.e., not nearly as good). If we are, like the Jerusalem believers, falling back into previous carnal patterns and failing to move forward spiritually, it can be especially easy to take this wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit for granted and forget all of the wonderful benefits that came our way when we first believed.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of (the [Father]) God, and the fellowship of (i.e., coming from) the Holy Spirit be with you all.

2nd Corinthians 13:14

(1) If [you have] any comfort in Christ, if [you have] any encouragement from [God's] love, if [you have] any fellowship of (i.e., coming from) the Spirit . . .

Philippians 2:1a

Having Experienced the Word's Goodness:

In the beginning, there was the Word.

John 1:1a

(1) God, from antiquity communicated to our fathers in the prophets at many times and in many ways, (2) [but now] in these last days He has communicated to us in a Son.

Hebrews 1:1-2a

Jesus Christ *is* the Message, the Plan, the Word of God. After believing in the Living Word, every believer has had the experience of the joy and the power that comes from heeding and

reading the written word, the Bible, which is all about Jesus Christ. While for unbelievers the scriptures are mere words (cf. Is.29:10-13), for us who believe, the Bible contains the very words of God, the entire and complete testimony about our Savior Jesus Christ. Paul's appeal to this fourth memorial of prior experience would have been a particular cause of chagrin for any and all who were paying attention to his message, a message which itself was and is a part of God's Word. For while it is certainly true that the genuine strictures of the Law to which these wayward believers had returned are written in the book, they were never meant to be abused or misapplied, neither through Gnostic fantasy nor legalistic contortion. The Law foreshadowed Jesus Christ, so that of necessity it had to mean something different before He came than it did after He had fulfilled it.

"For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law *till all is fulfilled.*"

Matthew 5:18 NKJV

Turning back to a Law fulfilled and employing it as if this were not the case would require turning one's back upon everything written in the New Testament thus far. Paul is given the duty and the privilege in the Spirit to write an epistle which leaves no doubt about the issue. The Old Testament is the Word of God too, and very valuable for spiritual growth (Rom.15:4), *if* it is used correctly (1Tim.1:8), the very opposite of how these believers in Jerusalem were treating it. Turning towards what is false necessitates turning one's back on what is true, so the likelihood of those Jerusalem believers who had reverted having experienced "the Word's goodness" lately was remote. Reminding them of the joy and the power of the Word of truth experienced in the past should have been a bracing reminder of what they had sacrificed and of how far they had fallen.

"So remember where you have fallen from, and repent, and do the works you did at first. And if you do not, I am going to come to you and move your lampstand out of its place, if you do not repent."

Revelation 2:5

Having Experienced Miracles Foreshadowing the Coming Age: One might think the blessings of the Word of God and the encouragement given to all believers who read it would have been the ultimate appeal for Paul to make use of, and that supposition is not far from the mark. The glories of the Bible are difficult to enumerate and impossible to explain to unbelievers, for it is a book that no human being would write if he could nor could write if he would (to paraphrase Dr. L.S. Chafer, founder and former president of Dallas Theological Seminary). We have devoted an entire chapter of the Basics series to exploring and explaining the greatness of that unparalleled and inspired book which contains God's own words for us (BB 7: Bibliology), and just as that section of Bible Basics forms the concluding capstone to the entire series, in many ways it would have been fitting for Paul also to have ended his series of appeals to the Jerusalem believers with the Bible: if nothing else were capable of reminding them of the wondrous spiritual heights from which they had fallen, surely recalling the joy and the encouragement they had received from scripture in the past ought to have been able to do so. And for us believers today, that would have been the likely approach. Instead, Paul made use of a special opportunity for admonishing these reverting countrymen of his, one that does not apply

to us today at all.

(14) Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. (15) These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! (16) No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: (17) 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. (18) Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. (19) I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. (20) The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. (21) And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' "

Acts 2:14-21 NIV

Not all who received Paul's letter had been present at the first Pentecost of the Church Age so as to have personally experienced these miraculous outpourings of the Holy Spirit firsthand, but some certainly had been and everyone else would doubtless have heard about it. Nor was that the end to the miracles (lit., "powers" in our context, Gk. *dynamis*, often referring to miracles: e.g., Acts 2:22; 8:13; 19:11; 1Cor.2:4; 12:10; 12:28-29; 2Cor.12:12; Gal.3:5) which the Spirit had wrought in Jerusalem and its environs in the early days of this age.

(3b) . . . Which [salvation], having received its initial expression from the Lord by those who had heard [Him personally] (i.e., the previous generation in the early days of the Church, ca. mid to late 30's A.D.) has now been confirmed to us [in our day] (i.e., the present day generation of the Church, ca. mid to late 50's A.D.), (4) through God [the Father Himself] bearing witness to it through signs and wonders and various [other miraculous] demonstrations of His power, and with distributions of the Holy Spirit (i.e., spiritual gifts) according to His will.

Hebrews 2:3b-4

These miracles are harbingers "of the age to come", because, as the passage quoted by Peter on Pentecost, Joel 2:28-32, makes clear, the miracles done by our Lord and those done by His apostles (and other believers) after the gift of the Spirit are signs of "the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord" (Acts 2:20 NKJV; cf. Joel 2:31). So if nothing else, the Jerusalem believers should have been able to recall all the amazing miracles, wonders and signs that had been accomplished in their midst not many years prior to receiving this letter. These signs were "demonstrations of the power of the Holy Spirit" (Heb.2:4), the gift of whom to each and every one of us who believe is the fundamental factor which makes our age, the Church Age, Christ's mystery age, different from everything that came before. The *true* power of the Holy Spirit, however, is seen most explicitly in His inspiration and imparting of the truth of the Word of God.

(11) Then He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an

earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; (12) and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire *a still small voice*.

1st Kings 19:11-12 NKJV

"This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, *but by My Spirit*,' Says the Lord of hosts.

Zechariah 4:6b NKJV

We saw earlier in this epistle how that the present generation of believers in Jerusalem was in danger of reverting back to the pattern of "this generation", that is, the hard-hearted, stiff-necked unbelievers of our Lord's day, the very ones who ignored His words of truth and refused to be convinced by all of the miracles He accomplished. For them, no "sign" was ever enough.

The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven. (12) He sighed deeply and said, "Why does *this generation* ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it."

Mark 8:11-12 NIV

The believers in Jerusalem had received more miraculous signs from our Lord, from His apostles, and from other believers endowed with special interim gifts than any other place on earth and than at any other time in human history. Yet, just as had also been the case with the exodus generation, experiencing these wonders had not been sufficient to keep them following the Lord closely. That is an important principle to remember for us all: experiences come and go, but our entire spiritual life is built upon *faith*, and *not* upon what we may have been given to see.

[Let us] not [be] having [any] regard for what can be seen, but [instead] for what cannot be seen. For the things which can be seen are ephemeral. But the things which cannot be seen are eternal.

2nd Corinthians 4:18

For we walk by faith, not by sight.

2nd Corinthians 5:7 NKJV

It is faith [in the Living and written Word], moreover, that substantiates what we hope for. [Faith] provides proof of things unseen.

Hebrews 11:1

Every believer has been given sufficient memorials from the Lord to validate this faith of ours, times and experiences where we know of a certainty that God helped us in our hour of need. We who live on the cusp of the end times (1Cor.10:11) may not have been given to see the astounding works of the apostles, raising the dead, healing the sick by touch, speaking in tongues, mediating the Holy Spirit, etc., but our faith in Jesus Christ is solid nonetheless, and we make it a point to thank the Lord and remember daily the memorials to His faithfulness which He has given us (or at least we should do so). How ironic and how sad that the very people who had

been blessed to see and experience more than any other group of believers in history (with the possible exception of the exodus generation) were now forgetting what they should have remembered and turning back to what they should have left behind.

Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."
John 20:29 NKJV

Crucifying the Son of God Afresh:

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"
John 1:29 NKJV (cf. Jn.1:36)

Needless to say, Jesus Christ is not a literal lamb. He is called by John, in the Spirit, the "Lamb of God" because His sacrifice on Calvary's cross provided for remission of all sin, "the sin of the world". And just as Jesus is not a literal lamb, so the lambs and other sacrificial animals offered under the Law were always meant to symbolize the great sacrifice He would make for us "once for all" (Rom.6:10; Heb.7:27; 9:12; 10:10). The "blood of Christ" is thus, as we have affirmed many times in the past, not literal blood (indeed, our Lord's blood was still in His body after He had completed eternal salvation and had given up His spirit: Jn.19:34-35), but a powerful symbol of the spiritual death He died in paying for all of our sins.⁴ What better way to demonstrate the cost of our salvation than through the slaughter of innocent animals whose blood poured out along with their lives merely represents our Lord pouring out His life unto death in being judged for the sins of the world (Ps.22:14; Is.53:12; Matt.26:28; Mk.14:24; Lk.22:20)?

"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."
Matthew 26:28 NIV

Returning to the sacrifices of the superseded Law whose symbolism had now been entirely fulfilled as these Jerusalem believers were doing, however, completely reversed that original symbolism upon which all its sacrifices were predicated. The entire purpose of the Law was to foreshadow the cross. Continuing to participate in animal sacrifices which proclaimed a Savior not yet come and salvation not yet provided for was to say, in effect, that the death of Jesus Christ had been ineffectual.

(19) "What things [were you discussing]?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. (20) The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; (21a) but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel."
Luke 24:19-21a NIV

⁴ See especially BB 4A: Christology, section II.4, "The Blood of Christ".

These believers who encountered our Lord on the road to Emmaus just after the resurrection (and who were miraculously prevented from recognizing Him) may have had an excuse for not yet understanding that Jesus had, on the cross, now accomplished eternal redemption for us all through His death on our behalf: the Spirit had not yet been given and thus the many wonderful truths about our so great salvation had not yet been explained to nor understood by even the apostles. Nevertheless, our Lord castigates these men for their failure to realize that the greatest event of all creature history had now taken place.

(25) He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! (26) Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" (27) And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.
Luke 24:25-27 NIV

Nearly *forty years later*, these Jerusalem believers, dwelling at the center of Christendom and having received teaching directly from the apostles of Jesus Christ themselves (of whom of course Paul was the most notable of all), had absolutely *no* excuse. As Paul had similarly remonstrated with them, by this time "they ought to be [capable of] teaching" others, rather than needing "someone to teach" them "the basic principles of God's truth are all over again" (Heb.5:12).

But this relapse into following the Law which had now been fulfilled and which was being completely misapplied by unbelievers was not just foolish or misguided – it was horribly sinful. It is impossible to imagine a worse witness to the Lord who bought us with His blood, His actual spiritual death in the darkness whereby He suffered the penalty for our sins, than to publicly proclaim that what He had done was in fact worthless. And while no doubt these individuals who had reverted to the Law did not put things into words in that way, this was the unmistakable message their cowardly actions were sending.

. . . it is impossible to restore them to [true] repentance after having fallen away⁵ [into sin] *as long as* they keep crucifying the Son of God afresh and exposing Him to open shame.
Hebrews 6:6

This translation differs considerably from that of many versions, but it is very close to being a direct, word for word rendering of what the Greek actually contains.⁶ As readers of Ichthys are

⁵ The verb *parapipto*, to "fall by the wayside", refers, as the expanded translation explains, to spiritual lapsing, falling "into sin", and does not mean "loss of faith" or apostasy. We see an close parallel usage in Matthew 6:14-15, where "trespasses" (*paraptomata*) are, literally and etymologically, "fallings by the wayside", a verbal noun derived from the same compound verb used here.

⁶ The two major "non-literal" features are 1) the words "it is impossible" renders the Greek *adynaton* which actually occurs at the beginning of verse four but does in fact apply here after the lengthy Pauline parenthesis which explains the five bases for his conclusion of what he

probably aware, misunderstanding this verse has been at the heart of many believers wrongly assuming that they have irrevocably lost their salvation.⁷ While it ought to be *prima facie* evident that Paul is saying nothing of the kind – why then would he bother writing to people who are lost and can no longer be saved? – some of the unfortunate renderings of this verse have wrongly lent credence to that absolutely incorrect interpretation. Instead, Paul is saying in no uncertain terms that there could be no restoration to fellowship with the Lord on the part of those who have "fallen into" this disgraceful behavior without first acknowledging their guilt to God (by repenting of it and confessing it to Him), and **certainly not** while they were in the very process of continuing to engage in it. This ought to be obvious to all. We are promised, as believers, that the Lord forgives all of our sins when we confess them to Him (Ps.32:5; 1Jn.1:9), but should we expect this forgiveness to come to us while we are in the very act of sinning? That would be absurd. How can we imagine that our change of heart is legitimate (for that is what biblical repentance is⁸) if we are still in the act of doing what it is that we wish to confess? Surely on some level these believers understood that what they were doing in sacrificing animals under the Law and participating in its other activities, all of which were meant to look forward to Christ's coming, was wrong. But for them to be restored to fellowship, absolutely essential for spiritual safety, recovery, and for renewal of spiritual growth, they first had to **stop** doing it.

How wrong was this return to the Law? Paul is blunt. What they were doing was "crucifying the Son of God afresh" and "exposing Him to open shame". Christ died for us once (Rom.6:10; Heb.7:27; 9:12; 10:10). But these believers were, in effect, putting Him to death all over again – symbolically. Christ endured the shame of the cross for us (Heb.12:2), and in so doing brought us eternal salvation. But these believers, instead of gladly embracing that disgrace in emulation of Him and joining Him in suffering disgrace on His behalf as we ought to do (Heb.13:13), were instead, in effect, submitting Him to public disgrace all over again by their public participation in the activities of the Law meant only to be engaged in **until** the Messiah had fulfilled the

says next, namely, the five important memorials these believers have received which make their return to the Law all the more indefensible (this placement was chosen for readability in English); and 2) the placing of "to restore them to [true] repentance" before "after having fallen away" in order to make the temporal sequence clearer. Changing the order of these words in an English translation does not change the meaning, but does make the actual meaning more difficult to understand. Greek word order is significantly different from English word order and it is a rare occurrence where an English translation which orders words precisely as they are found in the Greek will seem anything more than gibberish.

⁷ At the heart of the errors in translating this verse is the incorrect rendering of the present participle here, *anastaurontes*, meaning, literally, "crucifying". This is a present tense participle which in Greek syntax occurs simultaneously with the main verb, hence the rendering here "as long as they keep crucifying". Translating this participle as causal, i.e., "because they . . .", while not impossible, obscures the fact that the impossibility is a factor of their continued action and **not** to be understood as meaning restoration is impossible (the Greek clearly does not support that idea here), but rather that it is incompatible with continuing wrong-doing.

⁸ See BB 3B: Hamartiology, section V.1, "Repentance, Confession, and Forgiveness".

symbolism they contained.

"For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law *till all is fulfilled*."

Matthew 5:18 NKJV

For Christ is *the end of the Law* for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Romans 10:4 NASB20

The Good Land and the Bad: In the time of writing of scripture from Genesis to Revelation, people were much closer to the soil than is generally the case today. According to the census of 1790, some ninety percent of Americans lived on farms. Today, of course that number is much smaller, somewhere around two percent. But even if we have never had the opportunity (or, better put, faced the challenge) of living and working on a farm or ranch, we can still appreciate agricultural analogies in the Bible in general as well as the point Paul makes here in contrasting productive versus unproductive land.

For we (i.e., Paul and Apollos) are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field . . .

1st Corinthians 3:9 NIV

As in the passage above, Paul compares the Jerusalem believers to a field, but leaves it to them to decide which type they are and which result they would prefer. In the analogy, the quality of the ground is determined by the type of crop it produces. The seed sown is good in either case, and both receive bountiful rains – the water of the Word (Eph.5:26). One field produces a crop which is in keeping with the effort expended upon it by those who farm it and thus receives God's blessing, but if instead it should repay that effort by producing thistles and thorns, then cursing instead of blessing is the likely result, "the end of which is burning" (Heb.6:7-8). In terms of an actual field, burning off the thorns and thistles would be an understandable and needful action to take, but of course the "burning" in the analogy is potentially eternal for these believers who are flirting with apostasy, or a least marking a very bad end of life, the sin unto death, for those who refuse to repent of their sinful actions yet manage to hold onto their faith. Either way, it is not exactly a subtle analogy.

(22) Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.

(23) But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

Matthew 13:22-23 NIV

"Worthless" land, land that is "found wanting" in our context is, in the Greek, *adokimos*, a prospector's term meaning, "having been put to the test and having failed that test" (as in ore being found to be not genuine gold when assayed).

(6) In anticipation of this ultimate deliverance, your joy overflows, though at present it

may be your lot to suffer for a time through various trials (7) to the end that your faith may be shown to be genuine. This validation of your faith is far more valuable than gold, for gold, though it too is assayed by fire, ultimately perishes. But your faith, when proven genuine in the crucible of life, will result in praise, glory and honor for you at the glorious return of Jesus Christ.

1st Peter 1:6-7

The Lord is testing us all every day (*dokimazo*) to see what is really in our hearts (Jas.1:2-3; cf. 2Chron.32:31), to see if we are genuine in our faith (*dokimos*). Those who completely fail after the manner of the exodus generation (*adokimos*), analogous to the land which proves itself worthless (*adokimos*), will suffer the consequences.

(5) Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves (*dokimazo*). Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you – unless, of course, you fail the test (*adokimos*)? (6) And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test (*adokimos*). (7) Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong—not so that people will see that we have stood the test (*dokimos*) but so that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed (*adokimos*).

1st Corinthians 13:5-7 NIV

Verses Nine through Twelve

(9) But we stand convinced of better things concerning you, beloved, things with a hold on salvation, even though we speak in this manner. (10) For God is not unjust so as to forget the labor and the love you demonstrated towards His Name in having rendered service to [your] holy [brethren] and in continuing to do so. (11) But we desire each of you to keep demonstrating this same enthusiasm for the full consummation of your hope, all the way to the end, (12) so that instead of lapsing into laziness you may become imitators of those who through faith and patience inherited the promises.

Hebrews 6:9-12

We Stand Convinced: Paul uses the perfect tense of the verb *peitho*, meaning "to persuade" in the active voice, but, when used in the middle voice as it is here, it means "to be persuaded of something", therefore to be convinced of it. With this somewhat unusual use of the perfect tense, Paul tells his readers that not only *is* he convinced of "better things" in their regard, but that he has strong conviction of it. We should not take this to mean that Paul's confidence extends to every single member of the Jerusalem church, the majority of whom he had no doubt never even met. Rather this is very typical of what we find in all of his epistles addressed to an entire church where the encouragements and rebukes are given on an "if the shoe fits" basis. Which is to say, it would be unusual and indeed highly unlikely for every single believer in any church to be in precisely the same place spiritually at any given time. So just as when Paul reproaches the Corinthians for communion abuses (1Cor.11:17ff.), while in the same chapter he had just finished praising them for "holding onto my teachings just as I passed them on to you" (1Cor.11:2), we see this same method at work in Hebrews: the recipients are to apply to themselves what fits their behavior. If any given reproof does indeed strike their conscience,

then they should correct that behavior; if any given words of encouragement are fitting for where they are at spiritually, then they should draw encouragement from them and endeavor to do so "more and more" (1Thes.4:9-10).

In this respect, the experience of the Jerusalem congregation in hearing Paul's letter read for the first time is exactly parallel to what ours should be whenever we read scripture. It is important for us on the one hand to maintain a tender conscience and listen to scripture and to the Bible teaching with open ears, "taking the lesson" when we are convicted of being deficient in any respect, but on the other hand it is also critically important not to over-react in such cases wherein the reproaches do not in fact apply to us at present (even if they may have in the past). Avoiding emotional overreaction is crucial for all believers in order to maintain objectivity in regard to learning the truth and growing spiritually. Subjectivity in this regard, thinking, that is, that some teaching is directed personally at oneself, is highly detrimental to growth and good application of principles of truth. One of the worst things is for believers who are doing what is right to feel that some reproof, whether from scripture directly or from the Bible teaching they are exposing themselves to, is aimed directly and personally at them, and it is even worse for those for whom such reproaches do in fact apply to fail to see that in their case the shoe does indeed fit (and then take appropriate corrective action).

Better Things: The "better things" Paul desires and hopes for in the case of his recipients all have "a hold on salvation", meaning that these believers do have to persevere in their faith in order to receive them. These believers had suffered much in the past, and the Jerusalem church had, all things considered, done much good in prior days for the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ. So Paul puts this desire and concern of his in the best possible light here in order not to discourage his listeners but instead so as to try to encourage them to respond positively to his reproofs (cf. Col.3:21).

This was a delicate balancing act, and one that every pastor-teacher always has to engage in. Not all of his listeners are in the same place spiritually. Not all are needing to be rebuked; not all are worthy of comforting assurance. Paul's job – every pastor's job – was to teach the necessary truth without either alienating those who were following him closely enough so as to need only minor correction, or, on the other hand, giving false assurance to those who were on the brink of falling away. And this he was responsible to do without compromising the truth in any way. Yes, he hoped for better things for them, "even though he spoke in this matter". Yes, he was confident of them (some of them, at any rate), responding sufficiently so as not to fall away, "even though" he "spoke in this matter". But for his hope to be fulfilled required their perseverance, "holding on" to their salvation, a prospect which returning to the now defunct and wrongly applied Law and false teachings about it was making ever more dubious. And that was why Paul was forced to "speak in this manner" throughout the book of Hebrews, even though it clearly grieved him to do so, causing pain no doubt for all who heard the letter read, and unnecessarily so it would seem in the case of at least a few of those to whom these remonstrances did not directly apply, at least not with full force.

Even those who had not fallen into full-blown reversion really did need to hear these things as well, however, both as a validation of their good approach and as a palliative against giving in to

the poor approach the majority of the Jerusalem congregation had adopted. The correct approach of the minority in holding fast to grace was "good"; had they been working towards correcting the majority who were on the brink of falling away would have been even "better", especially if a positive response had been elicited. And that, after all was the purpose of the letter: striving for what is "better" is one of Paul's major themes in Hebrews, moving on from the past to the better future God has planned for us all:

[And at His session (v.3), Jesus] became [manifestly] *superior* to the angels to the degree that He received as [a part of] His inheritance a Name so *much more glorious* than theirs.
Hebrews 1:4

Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are convinced of *better* things in your case – the things that have to do with salvation.
Hebrews 6:9 NIV

. . . (for the law made nothing perfect), and a *better* hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.
Hebrews 7:19 NIV

Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantor of a *better* covenant.
Hebrews 7:22 NIV

But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on *better* promises.
Hebrews 8:6 NIV

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.
Hebrews 9:23 NIV

You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had *better* and lasting possessions.
Hebrews 10:34 NIV

By faith Abel brought God a *better* offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead.
Hebrews 11:4 NIV

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.
Hebrews 11:16 NIV

Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were

tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even *better* resurrection.
Hebrews 11:35 NIV

. . . since God had planned something *better* for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.
Hebrews 11:40 NIV

. . . to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a *better* word than the blood of Abel.
Hebrews 12:24 NIV

Previous Labor and Love:

(12) [It is] not that I have already gotten [what I am striving for], nor that I have already completed [my course]. Rather, I am continuing to pursue [the prize] in hopes of fully acquiring it – [this prize for whose acquisition] I was myself acquired by Christ Jesus. (13) Brethren, I do not consider that I have already acquired it. This one thing only [do I keep in mind]. Forgetting what lies behind me [on the course] and straining towards the [course] ahead, (14) I continue to drive straight for the tape, towards the prize to which God has called us from the beginning [of our race] in Christ Jesus.
Philippians 3:12-14

(1) Since then we too [just like the believers of chapter 11] have such a large audience of witnesses surrounding us [men and angels], let us put off every hindrance – especially whatever sins habitually affect us – and run with endurance the race set before us.
Hebrews 12:1

In this Christian race we are running, without doubt, the best thing is to start early and strong, stay strong, and finish strong. Few of us can lay claim to such a track record, however. Paul himself, though one of (if not the) greatest believers of all time came late to the race, following a long period of opposing Jesus Christ and requiring a personal intervention from our Savior Himself to turn him around. Nor did he run a perfect race thereafter (albeit one of the best ever run). Many of us took our time after salvation before picking up the pace for our Lord, and few of us have not been tripped up or stumbled once or twice along the way. All such infelicities can at least be mitigated by putting a strong finish to the race. But of all the possibilities in this contest in which we are all engaged, the sorriest and the saddest is to start strong and finish weak . . . or, worst of all, not finish at all.⁹

"But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? All the

⁹ There are notable biblical examples of this unhappy phenomenon such as in the case of various kings of Israel: Asa (1Ki.5:23-24; 2Chron.14-16); Joash (2Ki.11:21-12:16; 2Chron.24); and Amaziah (2Ki.14; 2Chron.25). For a discussion of the dangerous false doctrine of "absolute eternal security", sadly much in vogue in our day, see Peter #27: "Three False Doctrines".

righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die."
Ezekiel 18:24 NKJV

The sin unto death, as we have explained many times, is God's terminal divine discipline leveled against believers who turn away from the truth entirely and begin to behave in a manner so damaging to the Name of Jesus Christ that they are taken out of this life prematurely. Apostasy, on the other hand, occurs when believers in decline also turn away from their faith, abandoning entirely it and reverting to being unbelievers. In the former case, the individual remains saved, having held onto his or her faith in spite of dishonoring the Lord. In the latter case, the person becomes no further concern to the Lord as one who no longer belongs to Him – from their own free will choice. Thus, the former circumstance, the sin unto death, may well give the appearance in this life of being worse than the latter, but the latter is certainly worse in the end than the former: regardless of how uncomfortable it may be for any believer standing before the Lord's judgment seat when we, His Church, receive our final evaluation, that eventuality is infinitely better than being cast into the lake of fire at the last judgment.

Since both prospects, resulting either from a poor finish or a lack of finishing the Christian race, are dismal, Paul's statement about God being just "so as not to forget the labor and the love you demonstrated towards His Name in having rendered service to [your] holy [brethren] and in continuing to do so" must be taken to mean "at least as long as you do not apostatize". We are assured by our Lord that everything we do or have done for His Church will not fail to receive its due reward (Matt.10:42). The *only* way we can entirely lose what has been deposited in our heavenly thesaurus (Matt.6:19-21; 1Tim.6:20; 2Tim.1:14), is through abandoning that faith upon which everything depends (2Tim.2:12-13).

(8) Watch out for yourselves, lest you lose what you have worked so hard for, but may instead receive a full reward. (9) No one who goes wandering off (i.e., from the faith), that is, anyone who does not keep to the teachings about Jesus Christ, has [even] a share in God (i.e., because of apostasy).
2nd John 1:8-9

"I am coming quickly. Hold on to what you have so that no one takes your crown [away]."
Revelation 3:11

Certainly, Paul is counting on those believers who are only partially involved in compromise to renounce it entirely, and hoping for those who have stopped running the race completely to recall what they had suffered in the past along with the genuine good they had done for the Church of Jesus Christ, so as to repent in order not to lose everything they previously worked so hard for. For all who eventually did heed Paul's rebukes and respond to his encouragement, we say with surety that God will indeed honor His promises to reward their prior godly efforts done for Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

(10) According to the grace of God given to me like a wise architect I have laid down a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each one take care how he builds upon

it. (11) For no one can lay another foundation except the One that has been laid down: Jesus Christ. (12) And if someone builds upon his foundation with gold, silver, and precious stones, [or] with wood, hay, and stubble, (13) [in either case] his work will be made manifest [as to its true quality], for the Day [of judgment] will make it clear [for what it truly is], because it will be revealed (lit., uncovered) with fire. And the fire will evaluate (lit., "assay") the work of each person as to what its [true] quality is. (14) If anyone's work which he has built [on his foundation of faith in Christ] remains (i.e., is not burnt away by the fiery evaluation), he will receive a reward [for it]. (15) If anyone's work is burnt up, he will suffer the loss [of any potential reward for it], but he himself will be saved – but in this way [just described] as through fire [which evaluated his false works as worthless and burnt them up].

1st Corinthians 3:10-15

The Jerusalem church had been instrumental in the first expansion of the gospel beyond its environs (Acts 8:1-4; 8:14; 11:19), exactly as the Lord had commissioned His apostles to do (Lk.24:47; Acts 1:8; cf. Matt.28:19-29; Jn.15:27). And in those earlier days, the believers there had gladly parted with their worldly possessions for the sake of the Church of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:32-37).

(32) Remember the days gone by, when you first saw the light, when you persevered through that terrible trial of abuse. (33) For you were publicly exposed to humiliation and persecution, and shared the lot of others who experienced the same. (34) You suffered from my chains, and accepted the confiscation of your belongings with joy, because you knew that you possessed a more valuable estate, and a more lasting one. (35) So do not throw away this conviction of yours – it leads to a great reward. (36) You need to keep persevering so that you may carry off in victory what has been promised – after you have accomplished God's will. (37) For yet a little while, how short, how short [the wait], and He who is coming shall come, nor will He delay. (38) "Then shall my righteous one by faith live because of his faith, but if he shrinks back, My heart takes no pleasure in him (Hab.2:3-4)."

Hebrews 10:32-38

As the quote above shows, our context is not the last time when Paul will appeal in this letter to the Jerusalem church's previous spiritual victories . . . in hopes of bringing them back to their spiritual senses. They had already made very large deposits into their heavenly accounts in the past. What was needful now was to not "shrink back", but instead to persevere so as to "carry off in victory" what they had duly earned, keeping that heavenly reward in mind so as to cease descending down the dark road of compromise on behalf of worldly security, trading everything they had worked for previously for a mere mess of pottage.

(19) "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. (20) But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. (21) For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Matthew 6:19-21 NIV

Enthusiasm for the Consummation of Your Hope: Paul's diagnosis of the problem in Jerusalem is stated here with some delicacy yet also with crystal clarity. Desiring the believers there to demonstrate the same zeal for the Lord and His truth they had displayed before means without question that they are certainly *not* demonstrating it at the moment. Furthermore, Paul also includes here the rationale for this desire of his for the Jerusalem church to rekindle their enthusiasm for fighting the Christian fight, namely, "for the consummation of your *hope*".

(24) For it is in this *hope* [of the resurrection of our bodies] that we have been saved. Now a hope that is visible is not [really] a hope. For why should someone wait expectantly for what his eyes can see? (25) But we have set our *hope* on what cannot be seen, and so are patiently awaiting its fulfillment.

Romans 8:24-25

Hope in the New Testament is not longing for a distant possibility but instead is absolute confidence in a future reality.

Not only this, but let us also boast in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation develops endurance, and endurance results in proven reliability, and that such reliability brings with it *hope* (i.e., unshakeable confidence) [of eternal reward].

Romans 5:3-4

Looking for that blessed *hope*, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Titus 2:13 KJV

Let us hold on without turning [to the right or to the left] to the *hope* we have professed – for the One who has promised us [eternal life] is faithful.

Hebrews 10:23

(1) It is faith [in the Living and written Word], moreover, that substantiates what we *hope* for. [Faith] provides proof of things unseen. (2) For it is by this [very faith] (i.e., in what was hoped for) that believers of old received their divine approval.

Hebrews 11:1-2

As Paul will affirm at the end of this chapter, it is just such hope which "anchors" us in this life to the eternity we know is coming (Heb.6:19). But in order for our hope, our anticipation in complete confidence of the resurrection and the reward we are striving for, to be fully "consummated", we absolutely need to hold onto our faith in and faithfulness to Jesus Christ "firmly to the end" (Heb.3:6; 3:14; 6:11; 1Pet.1:7).

(11) This is a faithful saying:

For if we died with Him,
We shall also live with Him.

(12) If we endure,
We shall also reign with Him.
If we deny Him,

He also will deny us.
(13) If we are faithless,
He remains faithful;
He cannot deny Himself.
2nd Timothy 2:11-13 NKJV

In other words, in order to win this race, we absolutely need to *finish* this race.

You were running well! Who knocked you off your stride so as not to believe the truth?
Galatians 5:7 (cf. Gal.2:2; Phil.2:16)

I press on to reach the end of the race (i.e., the finish line) and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.
Philippians 3:14 NLT

As discussed earlier, "God is not unjust" so as to take away from these believers the rewards they have already earned. But on the one hand, if they abandon their faith, they will forfeit everything they have worked for, not just their rewards but their eternal lives. And on the other hand, the very best way to make sure that we finish this race is to commit ourselves to finishing just as strongly as we possibly can. That will never be more true than during the Tribulation, a time and circumstance which, as we have seen, has many parallels to the situation of the Jerusalem church in Paul's day: re-engaging with the sacrifices of the Law, "crucifying the Son of God afresh" and "trampling Him underfoot", seems in many respects very close to the fatal compromise of taking the mark of the beast (Heb.6:4-6; 10:25-31).

(9) Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, (10) he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. (11) "And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name." (12) Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.
Revelation 14:9-12 NKJV

Imitators of the Faithful:

Therefore I urge you, imitate me.
1st Corinthians 4:16 NKJV

(6) You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. (7) And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.
1st Thessalonians 1:6-7 NIV

For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in

Christ Jesus.
1st Thessalonians 2:14 NIV

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.
Hebrews 13:7 NIV

Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good.
3rd John 1:11

Paul will famously return to this theme of emulating worthy models in chapter eleven, where he provides us with a stirring catalog of so many great witnesses whose lives lived for the Lord we would all do well to imitate. In our context, however, the participle which refers to these individuals (*kleronomounton*) is in the present tense, meaning that these particular individuals are still alive. While some of these believers worthy of emulation were no doubt part of the Jerusalem church (cf. Heb.13:17), Paul clearly also has in mind *gentile* and Jewish believers alike in many of the *other* churches now established and growing throughout the Mediterranean world through his efforts and those of the other apostles. Paul puts this point very indirectly in order to give as little offense as possible to these Jewish believers (intimating an unfavorable comparison with gentile believers who are running a good race in contrast with the "lapse into laziness" which at that moment characterized the majority of the Jerusalem church), and in so doing teaches us an important lesson too: not every point need be driven home with force when subtlety will do, especially if unnecessary umbrage can be avoided (which might otherwise undermine everything we are trying to accomplish).

(19) Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. (20) To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. (21) To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. (22) To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. (23) I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.
1st Corinthians 9:19-23 NIV

Inheriting the Promise:

Not one of all the Lord's good promises to Israel failed; every one was fulfilled.
Joshua 21:45 NIV

This experience of God's promises fulfilled was true then in Joshua's time, it is true now, and it will be true in the glorious future for all believers in the Church of Jesus Christ who have a part and a share in Him who is the King of Israel, our Savior and Messiah to us who are all the true

"Israel of God" (Gal6:16).¹⁰ For every promise God has given us, everything we hope for in eternity to come, is based upon our relationship with Him who has empowered and fulfilled all promises on the cross, our dear Lord Jesus Christ.

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.
2nd Corinthians 1:20 NIV

The people of Joshua's day looked forward to coming into the promised land and receiving the inheritance in that land for which they had longed and waited forty years in the desert. All the promises related to that earthly inheritance were fulfilled. Not one of them failed. But however wonderful and marvelous it was to enter into that land flowing with milk and honey, receiving their inheritance in Canaan according to God's promises, coming into the possession of "houses filled with all kinds of good things, wells already dug, vineyards, olive groves and fruit trees in abundance" (Neh.9:25), that set of blessings was only symbolic of the indescribably wonderful *eternal* inheritance God has promised to those who have put their faith in His Son Jesus Christ.

But as it is written:
"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,
Nor have entered into the heart of man
The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."
1st Corinthians 2:9 KJV

Time and space do not permit a complete rehearsal here of what the Bible has to say about the glories to come. And indeed, even though scripture has much to say, as the verse above affirms we really can have no detailed idea before the fact of the wonders we will experience in New Jerusalem, enjoying fellowship with our Lord and with each other in perfect, resurrection bodies forever.¹¹ What we can say here is that Paul opposes the reception of that eternal inheritance based upon God's infallible promises to the spiritual sluggishness and laziness of those who have turned their backs on spiritual growth.

(39) These [great believers of the past] were all commended for their faith, yet none of them [has yet] received what had been promised, (40) since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect (i.e., resurrected and given their rewards).
Hebrews 11:39-40 NIV

In order for us to receive our promised inheritance along with all of the famous believers of scripture, we need to persevere in our faith. That was the issue confronting the Jerusalem church, just as it did the generation of the exodus.

¹⁰ See in SR 5: The Seven Millennial Days, in section II.8.c., "Israel is God's Perfect Standard".

¹¹ See CT 6: Last Things, section I.7, "The Judgment and Reward of the Church".

Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully.

2nd John 1:8 NIV

In many ways, the experience of the exodus generation is paradigmatic of all of Jewish history on several levels: God delivers His people; God promises them rest in the midst of tribulation and on the other side of tribulation; but many refuse to enter that rest, failing to hold fast to His promises, resulting in the sifting out of those whose faith did not prove genuine when put to the test.

(9) He replied, "Go your way, Daniel, because the words are rolled up and sealed until the time of the end. (10) Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand."

Daniel 12:9-10 NIV

As during the exodus, so during this time of pressure in Jerusalem with the end of that city soon to come, and so also today, with the Tribulation not many years hence, all of us who belong to Jesus Christ will need to hold fast to God's promises in order to be able to persevere through the terrible testing to come. To persevere to the end, we like they will need to be "looking to our reward" (Heb.11:26), the inimitable inheritance in comparison to which all we see here in this life is merely a mess of pottage. With only a few exceptions, the exodus generation failed in this most important task of putting heavenly treasure ahead of earthly substitutes. We are not told and have no way of knowing how many of the Jerusalem believers responded to Paul's immense labor of love in this epistle so as to come back to the truth. But we can say that in our own case, a great many will fail the coming test – but even more will pass it, whether through martyrdom or "enduring to the end" (Matt.24:13), and thus come in to all the promises of God in full when our Lord returns to rescue us and bestow upon us our blessed eternal inheritance.¹²

"I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

Luke 18:8 NIV

Verses Thirteen through Eighteen

(13) Now when God made His promise to Abraham, since He had no one else greater to swear by, He swore by Himself, (14) saying, "In blessing you I will surely bless you, and in multiplying you I will surely multiply you!" (15) And it was in this way [that Abraham] came into full possession of the promise, having waited patiently [for its fulfillment].

(16) For men are accustomed to take oaths on the authority of something greater than they are, and there is absolutely no doubt about the fact that an oath is taken for the purpose of confirmation. (17) Just so God, out of a desire to make it abundantly clear to us, the heirs

¹² For the former, see CT 3A, section II, "The Great Apostasy"; for the latter, CT 4, section VII, "The Great Persecution".

of His promise [after the pattern of Abraham's faith], that His will in this matter [of salvation and its resultant blessings] is unchangeable, guaranteed it with an oath, (18) so that through two unchangeable matters wherein it is impossible for God to prove false, we who have escaped [the wrath to come] and taken hold of this hope set before us might have a strong basis for encouragement.

Hebrews 6:13-18

His Promise to Abraham:

And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

Ephesians 6:4 NKJV

Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

Colossians 3:21 NKJV

A wise father, one who loves his children and wishes to guide them successfully rather than discipline them retributively, will be careful to temper correction and admonition with love and encouragement. So Paul, who loved all of his charges deeply (1Thes.2:8; 3:8), and who had a special place in his heart for his countrymen (Rom.9:1-5), adds this paragraph to help restore the courage and confidence of his listeners (who he may have felt were by this time possibly despairing from the criticisms leveled against them, assuming they had taken them seriously), as well as the joy of their salvation. What better way to do so than to remind them of God's promises and of the inviolability and unshakable nature of those promises?

(28) As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, (29) for God's gifts and his call are *irrevocable*.

Romans 11:28-29 NIV

But while irrevocable, God's promises to us as individuals are yet conditional as well, based upon our continued allegiance to Him. God's promises are for *believers* only, not for unbelievers.

". . . and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones."

Matthew 3:9 NKJV (Lk.3:8; cf. Jn.8:31-59)

"He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

John 3:18 NKJV

Abraham's Full Possession of the Promise: When it comes to believing God's promises, Abraham is our role model. He waited patiently for what the Lord had promised, the heir he longed for, and he received that promise in full, justified by his faith. The promises made to Abraham applied to Paul's readers as descendants of Abraham, and also to us today, even we gentiles, who are "children of Abraham" and "heirs of the promise" by following Abraham's

pattern, His *faith* in the Lord.

Now [Abraham] had believed in the Lord, and [the Lord] considered him righteous because of it.

Genesis 15:6 [index]

(6) . . . just as Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."

(7) Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.

Galatians 3:6-7 NKJV (cf. Rom.4:1; Heb.2:16)

And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Galatians 3:29 NKJV

Of course, Abraham did not receive the heir he was longing for immediately. He had to wait many years – until he was a hundred years old – before the birth of Isaac (Gen.21:5). Not only that. It would take many generations before Abraham's offspring became as numerous as the stars in the sky (Gen.15:5). And not only that. The ultimate fulfillment of the Lord's promise to Abraham will not be accomplished until the entire Church has been incorporated into Israel in New Jerusalem. That is the point at which we will all finally and fully enjoy the many blessings the Father has for us (1Cor.2:9), including our individual rewards (Jn.14:2). That delay has been necessary so that all of us members of Christ's assembly, His Bride, His Body, His Church, might likewise come into the full reward which the Lord has for each and every one of us.

(39) And through their faith, all of [these great believers on the Hebrews honor role], though they became witnesses [to the world] (lit., "were martyred"), yet they did not receive the promise (i.e., resurrection and reward), (40) since God was looking forward for our sakes to something better, so that they might not be made perfect (i.e., resurrected and rewarded) without us.

Hebrews 11:32-40

Abraham indeed "obtained the promise", having received at last the heir who was the pledge of all of the other promises to come, and will come into the final fulfillment of every aspect of the Lord's promises to Him in the end. And so will we, all who have believed in the manner of Abraham, staying faithful to the end as he did, passing the tests that come our way just as he passed them (Heb.11:17-19; Jas.2:21-23), becoming heirs of God Himself as Abraham did, setting our hope on what is to come, not on what our eyes presently see.

Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Romans 8:17 NIV

If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Galatians 3:29 NIV

This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 3:6 NIV

The Oath of Guarantee: If God says something, it is so. If God promises us something, He will bring it to pass. It is impossible for God, in His perfection, in His absolute and immutable integrity, to ever prove false in anything He says or does. The problem is not with God. The problem is with us. God is absolutely, perfectly and unchangeably faithful. Human beings, however, often lack faith.

(25) Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. (26) When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. (27) But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." (28) "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." (29) "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. (30) But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" (31) Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

Matthew 14:25-41 NIV

Faith, as we have seen many times, is the quintessential expression of the image of God which we have been given, the free will which makes us and the angels unique among all of God's creatures. Possessing this image of "free-will faith" is a wonderful blessing indeed, for those who use it properly. We are made by God for God (Rom.11:36; Col.1:16). We are made to respond to Him. We are made to believe Him and to be faithful to Him once we have put our trust in Him. Without God, we would not exist. Without a living faith relationship with Him, we will never be truly fulfilled. But we have a choice. And under the pressures of life, even those of us who have turned away from the lies of this world to the only One who has "the words of eternal life" (Jn.6:68) are still a work in progress, so to speak, when it comes to applying complete and absolute faith and faithfulness.

It is not too much to say that spiritual growth is in its essence growing in our ability to trust God, regardless of all distractions, regardless of what we feel or hear or see. He is worthy of such absolute faith, since He is absolutely faithful. But, flesh that we are, we fall short – often very far short – of that perfect standard of response. Growing spiritually is fundamentally learning to trust God beyond all else.

(5) The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" (6) He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you."

Luke 17:5-6 NIV

The Law provided regulations for swearing oaths (e.g., Num.30:1-7; Deut.23:21-23), no doubt because human beings are by nature fickle, so that a mechanism of assurance that what we say we will do we will in fact do was desirable (cf. Gen.24:3; 24:37). But we believers in Jesus Christ are people of faith by definition, no longer under the Law and commanded *not* to make vows (Matt.5:33-37; Jas.5:12), because we are to trust in God's grace and not in our own fleshly works.

(33) "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' (34) But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; (35) nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. (36) Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. (37) But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one."
Matthew 5:33-37 NKJV

But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes " be "Yes," and your "No " "No," lest you fall into judgment.
James 5:12 NKJV

To help us in this most important fight of faith, God has given us not only a promise which is unbreakable, but an oath, one sworn by Himself and which is thus "unchangeable", "so that through two unchangeable matters wherein it is impossible for God to prove false, we who have escaped [the wrath to come] and taken hold of this hope set before us might have a strong basis for encouragement" (Heb.6:18). It only remains now for us upon whom the ends of the ages has come to embrace the promise and fully accept the oath so as to be "not unbelieving, but believing" (Jn.20:27) – as was also the challenge for the Jerusalem church.

Strong Basis for Encouragement:

(17) Just so God, out of a desire to make it abundantly clear to us, the heirs of His promise [after the pattern of Abraham's faith], that His will in this matter [of salvation and its resultant blessings] is unchangeable, guaranteed it with an oath, (18) so that through two unchangeable matters wherein it is impossible for God to prove false, we who have escaped [the wrath to come] and taken hold of this hope set before us might have *a strong basis for encouragement*.
Hebrews 6:17-18

Through the grace of God, purchased by the blood of Christ, we believers have "escaped" the wrath of God which is destined to fall upon the entire unbelieving world (Rom.5:9; 1Thes.1:10; 5:9). Although we were once "by nature children of wrath, just as the others" (Eph.2:3 NKJV; cf. Matt.3:7; Lk.3:7; 2Pet.2:18; 2:20), we have been rescued from that wrath which is the inheritance of all who reject Jesus Christ (Jn.3:36), saved by God the Father "who rescued us from the power of darkness and delivered us into the Kingdom of His beloved Son" (Col.1:13). This, after all, is what salvation is: deliverance from death of every sort, the spiritual death which is the heritage of all born of Adam's line, the physical death which awaits everyone as a result, and the second death, eternal death, condemnation in the lake of fire which is the lot of all who reject the one way of being rescued, the deliverance from death which is to be found in Jesus Christ alone (Jn.14:6). That is the blessing of all blessings, the promise of all promises: eternal life, without which everything else is meaningless.

[It is] through these [divine blessings] that the great and honorable promises have been granted to us, so that through them we might become partakers of the divine nature (i.e., perfect in resurrection in contrast with our earthly sinful nature), having [through

salvation] escaped earthly corruption and its lust.
2nd Peter 1:4

We who belong to Jesus Christ, saved by grace through faith (Eph.2:8-9), have so many wonderful things to look forward to! Having absolute confidence in being saved from perdition, however, is essential to our spiritual growth and progress. Spiritual growth is all about faith, and we believers have both a right and an obligation to strongly and emphatically "take hold" of this "hope set before us". God has made this hope evident, setting it "right before us", so to speak, by giving us the double means of assurance Paul reminds us of in this passage, namely, not only His promise to us of eternal life in Jesus Christ, but also His swearing to us on oath as heirs of Abraham that His beneficent purpose to us in His beloved Son will never change. God never changes (Mal.3:5; Jas.1:17). His promises are unbreakable as is His oath. It is incumbent upon us to respond to these firm assurances with commensurate *faith*.

(8) But God commends His love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (9) So how much more is it not true now, after we have been rendered righteous [through faith] in His blood, that we shall be saved from the [coming] wrath through Him? (10) For if when we were His enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, how much more is it not true [now], since we have been reconciled [to Him through Jesus' death], that we will be saved by His life? (11) And not only that, but we even exult in [our new relationship] with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained this reconciliation.

Romans 5:8-11

Verses Nineteen through Twenty

(19) And this hope is what [truly] "anchors" our lives, so to speak: it is certain; it is solid; it penetrates beyond the [heavenly] veil into the [holy of holies], (20) where our vanguard, Jesus, has entered on our behalf, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 6:19-20

This Hope that Anchors Us: As this passage in particular teaches, hope, in the Bible, is not a whimsical wish or a merely sought after possibility. Rather it is a certain expectation based upon the unbreakable promises of God Himself. As faith places confidence and trust in the person and character of God and His Son Jesus Christ, so hope takes that trust and focuses it on eternity, on the marvelous promises of the life to come. Hope cuts through the veil of earthly sorrow like a laser, zeroing in on the inexpressible joy of being in the presence of our Lord forever in a perfect body and in company with all the saints. Hope is that part of our "faith eyesight" which penetrates eternity and affirms the reality of these unseen wonders (Rom.8:23-25; Heb.11:1). Our hope is not an empty dream, but a reality unseen whereby we yearn to leave this world behind and put on the new body of eternal life which will be ours forever in the presence of the Lord (2Cor.5:1-9; Phil.1:21-23), looking not to the transient treasures of this life, but, like Moses, setting our gaze on the reward which God will give us, keeping the eyes of our heart set on the One our physical eyes cannot yet see (Heb.11:26-27). This hope of ours, our confidence that God will fulfill all these marvelous promises, anchors our thoughts to heaven (Phil.4:8; Col.3:1-2),

where our Lord Jesus Christ has already gone before us to prepare all things, our Forerunner, our Vanguard, our Pioneer who has opened up the path into heaven-home for us through His victory on the cross (Heb.6:18-20; 10:20).

Not only this, but let us also boast in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation develops endurance, and endurance results in proven reliability, and that such reliability brings with it **hope** [of eternal reward].

Romans 5:3-4

Looking for that blessed **hope**, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Titus 2:13 KJV

Let us hold on without turning [to the right or to the left] to the **hope** we have professed – for the One who has promised us [eternal life] is faithful.

Hebrews 10:23

(1) Beloved, we are already the children of God, but what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when He, [our Lord Jesus Christ,] is revealed [to us at the resurrection], we will be [exactly] like Him, and so will see Him exactly like He is (i.e., at the resurrection, we will have new bodies exactly like our Lord's and know Him as we are known by Him: cf. 1Cor.13:12). (3) And everyone who has this **hope** within himself is sanctifying himself (i.e., pursuing holiness) just as He Himself is holy (i.e., sanctified).

1st John 3:2-3 [index]

The world at large hopes for the things of this world, but we who have committed ourselves to Jesus Christ are hoping for – confidently expecting (for that is the meaning of hope in the Bible) – things presently invisible to fleshly eyes, things eternal, glorious, refulgent with light that never dims once the darkness of this present cosmos has been forever eradicated (Jn.1:4-5; 1:7-9; 8:12; 9:5; 1Jn.1:5; Rev.21:5; 22:5). Our hope is what anchors us to all that is to come. It is solid beyond shaking, even if "the earth gives way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea" (Ps.46:2). It penetrates into the very throne room of God the Father Himself where our Lord Jesus Christ has been seated in glory at His right hand, for that is where our heart presently resides, and that is where all of our departed fellow believers now behold Him in all of His splendor. These truths anchor us, and so they should have anchored the Jerusalem congregation which ought to have been looking forward to heavenly Jerusalem and not to any sort of solution or resolution of their troubles in the earthly one, turning back to this world and to the old covenant now fulfilled and replaced by the New Covenant bought for us by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Our capability comes from God, who has made us capable ministers of a **new covenant** – not the one of the letter (i.e., the Law), but **one of the Spirit**. That is because the letter (i.e., the Law) puts us to death, but the Spirit brings us to [eternal] life.

2nd Corinthians 3:6 (cf. Rom 2:29; 8:10; Gal.4:29)

But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which

he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the *new covenant* is established on *better promises*.

Hebrews 8:6 NIV

(22) But you have come [not to Mount Sinai which stands for the present Jerusalem (Gal.4:21-31), but] to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, [that is, you have come to] the Heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of [elect] angels in assembly [before God], (23) and to the Church of the firstborn enrolled [as its citizens] in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of justified [believers] [who have now] completed [their tasks], (24) and to Jesus, the Mediator of a *better covenant*, and to sprinkled blood (i.e., the work of Christ in bearing our sins) which speaks [far] more powerfully than that of Abel[’s sacrifice].

Hebrews 12:22-24 [index]

The national anthem of the present secular state of Israel is *Hatikva*, "the hope", by which they mean the hope of returning to the land and to earthly Jerusalem. As Jews throughout the centuries have said to each other with every passing year, "Next year in Jerusalem!" We who believe in Jesus Christ fully understand that there is no escape from death through changing one's geography or through any other fleshly efforts. Returning to the physical land by human means has not brought in the Millennial or summoned the Messiah. He will return and bring that glorious 1,000 year period to fruition, "not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit", says the Lord of Hosts" (Zech.14:6). Things done for and by the flesh are meaningless and mere emptiness (Eccl.1:2; 1:14; 2:1; 2:11; 2:15; 2:17; 2:19; 2:21; 2:23; 2:26; 3:19; 4:4; 4:7-8; 4:16; 5:7 etc.); only things done through the Spirit for the Lord are meaningful and eternal. Therefore it is through the Spirit that we grab hold of the hope that anchors us to heaven and to eternity, for He is the surety of all the wonders to come, the seal and the pledge to us from God that His promises will all prove true on that great day of days.

(21) Now the One who has given us security in regard to Christ together with you and who has anointed us (i.e., with the Spirit) is God – (22) [Yes, He] has also sealed us and given us His *pledge* of the Spirit in our hearts [of eternal life].

2nd Corinthians 1:21-22 [index]

And it is God [the Father] who has fashioned us for this very purpose [of resurrection and eternal life], and it is He who has given us the *pledge* of the Spirit [to guarantee that eternal future].

2nd Corinthians 5:5

(13) In [Christ] you also when you heard the Word of truth, the good news of your salvation, in whom [I say], when you believed, you were sealed by the Spirit of promise, the Holy [Spirit], (14) who is a *pledge* of our inheritance for redeeming its preservation (i.e., safeguarding our resurrection and reward in every way), for the purpose of the praise of His glory (in eternity).

Ephesians 1:13-14

In the citations above, Paul compares the Holy Spirit to a "pledge" (Greek: *arrabon*, ἀρραβων, from the Hebrew וְקִרְבָּנָה), namely, the "down payment" which every believer receives at salvation, the "bond", so to speak, which is a surety of the resurrection and eternal life which all who belong to Jesus Christ will receive at His return. It is the possession of the Spirit which guarantees this blessed hope which anchors us to heaven home.

(1) "Do not let your heart be troubled. You believe in God [the Father] – believe also in Me. (2) There are many rooms in my Father's house. If there were not, I would have told you. For I am going in order to prepare a place for you. (3) And if I go and prepare a place for you, I shall come again and take you to Myself, so that where I am, you may be also."

John 14:1-3

We who believe have many reasons for the hope which is in us, fully sufficient to be able to "give a defense" of it to anyone who may ask us about the hope which defines our lives (1Pet.3:15). For this hope entails the bodily resurrection and our eternal rewards, and it anchors us to the very throne room of God Almighty Himself in anticipation of all the glorious wonders to come. Reminding the Jerusalem congregation of the absolute solidity of their eternal hope in the way in which he did so was calculated on Paul's part. The heavenly throne room of God the Father, the One who has made the promise and sworn the oath of assurance to Abraham their forefather in the flesh and ours in the Spirit, is where that hope is anchored. And that heavenly throne room is the *actual* residence of God which the tabernacle/temple merely represented.

These [earthly Levitical priests] minister in [what is a] *copy* and a *shadow* of the [actual] heavenly [tabernacle], just as command was given to Moses as he was about to complete the tabernacle. For He says, "See to it that you make everything according to the *pattern* shown to you on the mountain (i.e., Sinai)."

Hebrews 8:5 (cf. Heb.10:1).

For Christ did not enter into a man-made sanctuary that was only a *copy* of the true one. Rather, He entered *into heaven itself*, so as to present Himself before God [the Father] on our behalf.

Hebrews 9:24

These backsliding believers were worshiping at the earthly copy of the true heavenly realities, and in so doing were, in effect, turning their backs on what was genuine for the sake of rituals and replicas whose godly purpose had now been completely fulfilled – which behavior was anything *but* godly.

"For all the prophets and the Law prophesied *until* John [the baptist]."

Matthew 11:13

(17) "Do not assume that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets: I did not come to abolish [it] but *to fulfill* [it]. (18) Until heaven and earth pass away, not one iota or one serif will pass away from the Law – that is, *until* everything has come to pass (i.e., until

the shadows of the Law are fulfilled on the cross)."
Matthew 5:17-18

For Christ is the *fulfillment* (lit., "end") of the Law, resulting in righteousness for everyone who believes [in Him].
Romans 10:4

(1) God, from antiquity having communicated to our fathers in the prophets at many times and in many ways, (2) [*but now*] has in these last days communicated to us in a Son, [the One] whom He has appointed heir of all things, [the One] through whom He created the universe.
Hebrews 1:1-2

For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law.
Hebrews 7:12 NKJV/

(13) In mentioning a "New [Covenant]", He has rendered the Old one obsolete. And that which is obsolete and antiquated is close to disappearing.
Hebrews 8:13

For us who are operating under God's grace, His favor towards us who belong to Jesus Christ (and who thus need no intermediary priesthood or symbolic rituals signifying the realities which have now taken place), the hope of the Messiah has been realized, along with the validation of the promises dependent upon the person and the work of Him who was and is the promised One. This is the hope which anchors us: the confident expectation of being with our dear Lord and Savior as part of His Bride in resurrection forever. For us who are His, all things have indeed "become new" (Rev.21:5).

(16) "No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and the tear is made worse. (17) Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."
Matthew 9:16-17 NKJV

For this is My blood of *the new covenant*, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.
Matthew 26:28 NKJV

As so we believers have a right, a duty, an obligation to worship God in the new way of the Spirit, not in the old way of the Law (Rom.7:6), for that would be dishonoring to our Lord whose death for us has fulfilled and abolished it, replacing the Old Covenant with the New one.

(14) For He Himself is our peace, for He has made both [Jews and gentiles] one, and has broken down the middle wall of partition, that is, the enmity between us, (15) *by discharging the Law of the commandments and its requirements in His [own] flesh*, so that He might re-create the two into one new Man by making [this] peace, (16) and might

reconcile both in one Body to God through His cross, having by means of it abolished the enmity [between God and mankind].

Ephesians 2:14-16

Our Savior has won the victory of victories at the cross, dying for our sins and rising on the third day, ascending to the third heaven to be gloried by the Father and seated at His right hand. We who belong to Him have had our hope empowered thereby, because we are one with Him through the Spirit who has baptized us into Him, making us part of His Church forever. Heaven is where we believers in Jesus are anchored – because that is where our Lord presently resides, having entered the true holy of holies as our Vanguard, our Forerunner, our Pioneer (Heb.6:20), the One who split the veil of separation, the barrier of sin separating us from the Father, by His victory on the cross (Matt.27:51), and opened up the way for us to heaven home (Heb.10:19-22). Our hope in being with Him forever does not depend on any earthly temple; it reaches directly into the true throne room of God the Father with absolute and unchangeable certainty, guaranteed by the promise and oath of the Father in the person of Jesus Christ to whom we belong forever.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus [who is] *our hope*.

1st Timothy 1:1 NIV

Only the high priest could enter the holy of holies behind the veil in the tabernacle temple (Heb.9:7), the place where God had said "There I will meet with you" (Ex.25:22; 30:6; 30:36). In this he only represented our Lord Jesus Christ in His capacity of the true and eternal High Priest, not a temporary one who served a merely symbolic purpose, but the One who would offer the sacrifice of His own life to save us from our sins, the only sacrifice which the Father could ever find acceptable to redeem us all from death and damnation. Through what He did for us on Calvary's cross, Jesus has become our "high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek", opening the way for us to eternal life and glory, granting us access to the Father and to the true holy of holies in heaven itself (Eph.2:18; 3:12; Heb.4:16), "through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen" (Heb.13:21).

(50) Then Jesus shouted out again in a loud voice and sent forth His spirit. (51a) And, behold, *the veil* [shielding the holy of holies] of the temple *was split* from top to bottom. Matthew 27:50-51a