

**Record of Sermons delivered during the month of**  
**August 2018**

(added progressively after each Sunday)

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(see following pages)

## **The Peril of Apostasy**

per S Olyott

This fortnight's Bible reading is Hebrews 3:1 to 4:1 and includes a serious look at the error and threat of apostasy.

So far in our study of Hebrews we have reached this passage which divides into 3: the first verse which is **exhortation** – here the Apostle is 'stirring us up' to do something; then verses 2-6 we have **teaching** – he is telling something that many of us may not realise; and the remainder of the passage from 3:7 to 4:1 is the most serious and stern, direct and personal **warning!**

Before we begin to examine this exhortation, teaching and warning, it is well that we are reminded of what has been noted so far:

- The Apostle is writing to Jews, who have become Christians, but
- now they have become Christians they are seriously thinking about giving up the Christian Faith and going back to their Judaism.
- He's warning, throughout the letter, that when we turn away from Christ, whoever we are and whatever the reason, we turn our back on the most glorious of all and go back to the shoddy.
- In fact if we turn our back on Christ, we are turning our back on the light of the glory of God and walking into 'outer darkness'.
- The whole message of the book is – to consider and fix our eyes afresh on Jesus Christ.

There are only two alternatives for those who profess to be Christians: They are – fix your eyes on Christ; or walk out and be lost. There's no in between ground. As we found out in an earlier section, we either have the choice of making the rope tighter – the rope of faith that binds us to Christ; or letting it slip which results in slipping away.

It is to this general theme that we return this morning.

He's already said to them, “Why turn from God's last Word as 'embodied' in the Person of Jesus Christ to the incompleteness of the Old Testament. Those revelations by God through the prophets were valuable, but God had more to say than that, and He has said it, now in these 'last days', by His Son.

Why turn back from Him, to that which is incomplete. The best that the Old Testament based Jew could boast of was that the Law came through the mediation of angels. But Christ is greater than the angels: both as God and even as 'man' and a suffering, crucified man at that.

So why turn your back on Christ? To go to the inferior, the shoddy and go into 'outer darkness'.

This fortnight's first section: exhortation. (verse 3:1)

“In the light of what I have said”, says the Apostle, “Consider Jesus Christ!” The word 'consider' is a very weighty word. Think .. ponder .. contemplate .. study .. meditate .. fix your thoughts on Jesus Christ. “After all”, he says, “You're holy!”

Those who are Christians are 'holy', they are set apart for God. Set apart from others. Set apart for Him. Is this you?

You're called 'brethren'. We were reminded of this last week: Jesus Christ is the older brother and all Christians are brothers (**adelphoi** – siblings in a family).

You are people who have received a calling. You received the Gospel and it was by means of the Gospel 'calling', that you were called out for God. Becoming members of the Divine Family. It was a heavenly calling. The *effectual* call – I'll explain presently – is a continuing miracle. There are men and women who will hear the Gospel and it 'goes in one ear and out the other'. It makes no impression. Yet other people hear the same Gospel, but they 'hear' more than what they hear with their ears. They 'hear' something in their heart. It come as a Word that arrests them: changes their personality and fixes them on a new road. So that they now walk a narrow road of loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what is meant by an 'effectual' call. It actually creates faith in the heart of a person. A faith that is also a free gift.

It's a miracle! A miracle. Praise God, that could be going on this morning! Somewhere in a 'pew' there may be an unconverted man or woman who thinks, “Just another sermon”. But the Holy Spirit is working through the words of the Scriptures, which are being explained by the preacher and that man or woman, boy or girl is actually changed. Brought to believe. Given Faith. Forgiveness of sins. Clothed in Christ's righteousness.<sup>1</sup> That person who can't see it – suddenly sees it. That person who has never wanted it – suddenly wants it. A person who cares nothing for Jesus Christ – casts himself on Christ. It goes on in an instant during that sermon.

It's a miracle!

That's why it's called a *heavenly calling*. This calling is a miracle.

“You're holy, brethren, you've received a heavenly calling, fix your eyes on Jesus Christ.”

You'll notice that in that first verse he used the words 'apostle' and 'high priest'. The Jews had a lot of time for two people: one was Moses.

Moses was sent by God to bring the Law to the people. He was sent as an apostle. Aaron was the first high priest and the ancestor of all the priests – the Levite tribe. So here were the two great figures amongst the Jews: Moses and Aaron. Apostle; high priest.

Now says the writer of Hebrews, that in the Christian Faith in the New Testament

<sup>1</sup> (The 'righteousness of God' that Martin Luther 'discovered' as he studied and taught the letter to the Galatians. God's righteousness bestowed by grace on the sinner. Not to be earned as Martin came to realise by his previous sincere and serious efforts, which being so clearly futile that he began to hate God!)

revelation, these two offices are not in two people, but in one Person. Christ is our apostle – sent by God. Christ is our high priest – he will explain this in great length as the letter goes on.

“Instead of going back and hankering after all the days past – of Moses and Aaron – and thinking of them as your great heroes, fix your eyes on – and consider, Jesus Christ. Who is the apostle and high priest of the Faith that we profess.” Of course immediately, some of the Jews would have asked this question: “Is Christ, as high priest, really greater than Aaron?” Well he will explain this through several chapters later.

But firstly have we heeded the **exhortation**? When did we last sit down and ponder Jesus Christ? When did you last create a quiet moment and contemplate Jesus Christ? When did you last drop every thing to fix your thoughts on Jesus Christ? In pausing, remembering that He is the Apostle sent by God. The High Priest who is Himself the sacrifice, but who is now interceding as the priest in Glory. In meditating on His Deity and His humanity. That God has made His final Word through Him. When did you last sit down and ponder Jesus Christ? The exhortation of verse 1 was not only to those Jewish Christians, 2000 years ago, but to me and to you right this minute, today! The writer, here is not just giving good advice. We will find as this passage continues that he is giving us a rule upon which our whole future faith depends.

“Is Christ as apostle really greater than Moses?”

That's the point he will tackle right away. At this point in the letter.

Now then, the **teaching** of verses 2-6.

What was it that everyone remembered about Moses? It's found in verse 2 and verse 5. It was his faithfulness. He was trustworthy. God entrusted him to do certain things and he did them.

Consider Moses for a moment: if Moses had failed, Pharaoh would never have heard God's word. If Moses had never done what God sent him to do, Israel would have compromised with Pharaoh's demands. If Moses hadn't done what God sent him to do, Israel would have come to a dead stop at the Red Sea. If Moses hadn't done what God sent him to do, once they had got over the Red Sea they would have turned back to Egypt a hundred times. If Moses hadn't done what God sent him to do, Israel never would have got to the brink of the Promised Land.

The great thing about Moses was that he was faithful. What God sent him to do, he did it. He could be relied upon to do it. A great man. He was faithful in all his house. In other words, Israel (that house) was the people of God, and Moses was faithful amongst them, in the things God sent him to do.

Verse 2 again: In the same way, Christ was faithful, Christ was faithful in all the work which God sent Him to do. Did God send Christ to live a perfect life? Yes. Did He ever capitulate to temptation? No. Did the Father send the Son to die? Yes. Did He

draw back and refuse to go to the Cross? No. Did God the Father send Christ to perfectly reveal the Father and to speak words such that had never before been heard? Yes. Did Christ go through life dumb? No. Moses was faithful, and Christ was perfectly faithful to every task the Father trusted into His hands. If He hadn't been so, it would be 'all up' with me and with you. There would be no salvation for sinners this morning.

Still with verse 2: The Lord Jesus Christ was faithful and in the same way Moses was faithful. That's the order in which the Apostle put it. Two faithful people. Which one should we honour the most? Christ.

Christ is entitled to far more honour than Moses. Why? He's entitled to far more honour than Moses, just as the architect is entitled to more respect than the building which he makes. (verse 3) You may admire a beautiful building, but the architect who designs it is entitled to far more honour. (verses 4 & 5) God has built everything – including the 'house' of Israel. Moses was only a servant in that household. Christ is the Son and the heir who rules over the household. Go back to the 'bad old days' (as some consider it). Here is a household: of family and servants. There is one servant who is particularly outstanding. But there is a son who is the heir and who's over all the household. Who is entitled to the most honour? It is the son!

Christ sustains the same relationship to His people as a son to a household. Whereas Moses was only a servant in the household.

You ask, "What is the household, please?"

He tells us in verse 6. Christ is a son over His own house. Whose house are we? <sup>6</sup> ... *if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope, firm to the end.*<sup>2</sup> There is a company of people in the world whose confidence and faith, never fails (*firm to the end*). There is a company of people in the world who never cease to 'joy' (or boast) in the hope which is in their hearts. There is a company of people in the world who believe – and who keep believing. That company of people is the household of Christ!

Look at verse 6 again! Whose house are we? IF we hold fast the confidence and our joy (or boast) in our hope – firm to the end.

That sentence in verse 6 would have greatly surprised the original readers. And perhaps it surprises some of you this morning. Especially since when I read it I emphasised the word 'if'. You're only Christ's if you keep on, in the Christian faith. You're not a Christian unless you keep on. Right to the end. That's what the Apostle is saying. It surprises many people when they hear that. You're not a member of God's household, of Christ's household. Unless you believe and keep on believing right to the end.

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<sup>2</sup> Footnote(3) of the ESV translation added.

That's obvious when you think about it. But sometimes, when people hear it, they think, "This can't be right." It doesn't seem to match up with other things that they have heard – at 'first sight'.

When you believed – truly believed. You didn't just receive a new record in heaven. When you believed. When you truly believed, you received the other blessing of the Gospel as well. Which is a new nature – while you are here on the earth. If you really do have a new nature – if you really do – you can never be the same as you were before. If you have a new record and a new nature, then once you begin to believe – which is the key 'mark', a continuing 'mark' of a 'new creature' – you will believe. Believe and continue believing. And so the proof that you really are a Christian will be that you maintain your faith and go on in your faith to the very end. But if somewhere along the line your faith peters out and proves to be a temporary thing. This will prove that there never really was a change in you. It will prove that you never were, really, 'born again'! It will display that you never really were 're-generated'.

The proof then that you are a Christian is that you continue to the very end.

The only guarantee that you have that you are in His house – that you are a Child of God – is that you go on consistently in the Christian faith till your very last breath is drawn.

So. We have had the **exhortation**: to consider Christ.

And the **teaching**: we must continue in the faith to the end.

Clearly then what follows is the warning of verses 3:7 to 4:1. For which we will need to gather our strength and resolve to encounter next week. In the meantime you can do nothing better, than to: Consider Christ.

[2338]

**May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.**

## **The Peril of Apostasy – Pt 2**

per S Olyott

Last week, in studying the first part of this passage, we have had the **exhortation**: to consider Christ. And the **teaching** that we must continue in the faith to the end.

Persevere!

Now we come to the severe **warning** of verses 3:7 to 4:1.

The writer is now going to tell the Hebrews (and us) that if you do not go on ... and on ... in the Christian faith you are not Christ's. He does this by referring to Psalm 95:7-11 – by coincidence in this chapter of Hebrews – verses 7-11.

This Psalm teaches that when the people came out of Egypt, their entrance, eventually, into the promise land, depended on their obedience. The fact that all of them who came out of Egypt, except two, perished in the wilderness, was not an accident. They did not go into the promised land! (Except Joshua and Caleb).

Why not?

Because in the wilderness, they rebelled against God. They didn't continue as they had begun. God was angry with them as verses 7 – 11 make plain. God swore that they would never *enter into His rest*.

Think about this! They had had a marvellous deliverance: blood was shed; of all those plagues – they were spared. Then the slaying of the 'first born' – but they put themselves under the blood on their doorposts. They were spared! They came miraculously through the Red Sea. They had their needs supplied – manna and quail and water bursting from the rock. They received a divine Law at Sinai. They were protected from their enemies. Shoes didn't wear out. Clothes didn't wear out. The Shechina<sup>3</sup> glory went in front of them. They had many experiences of God. Experiences of the Holy Spirit.

But they didn't enter into Canaan!

They could have said to themselves, "I'm on the way to Canaan!" But they didn't get there. They could have said, "A wonderful changes has taken place in my life!" And it had! But they didn't get there. They could have said, "God has acted for me – I've seen God work in my own life." But they didn't get there.

That's what Apostasy is.

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3 The Shekhina(h) (Biblical Hebrew: שכִּינָה šekīnah; also Romanized Shekina(h), Schechina(h), **Shechina**(h)) is the English transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning "dwelling" or "settling" and denotes the dwelling or settling of the divine presence of God.

Starting out: experiencing real experiences of God, but never arriving at God's Canaan. His promised rest.

<sup>12</sup> *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.* “Beware, beware,” says the Apostle, “lest the same thing happens to you. Beware lest you fall into the same neglect and disobedience.” He uses here the words: “unbelieving hearts”. The word in Greek that is translated *unbelieving*, doesn't just mean not to believe, it means obstinacy that springs from unbelief. It has in it the concept of rebellion.

That's what happened to them in the wilderness. They ceased to take God's Word seriously. Then they resisted God's Word. Then they actually rebelled against God's Word. God in His anger swore that they would never enter into His rest. “Beware,” he says, “lest that same evil heart takes hold of you.”

And this applies to professed Christians who depart from the the living God.

The way to avoid this happening is in verse 13: Daily exhortation by one another. Sin is deceitful. Sinful things can look attractive, when they are not. Sinful things can look better when they are not. Sinful things can look more glorious – more pleasurable, when they are not. Don't be caught out by the deceitfulness of sin. It's so easy to become hardhearted and to build up a resistance to God's Word. Don't fall into it but help each other. Tell each other to go on and on. <sup>13</sup> ... *exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today”, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*

Because he goes on to say, in verse 14, that we only benefit from what Christ has done as long as we continue. Only as long as we hold on. It's only as long as we make progress, that we benefit from what the Saviour did.

He's saying that they are to put their lives right. And in verse 15 he's not saying put your life right tomorrow. He doesn't say that there is a special celebration or conference or Lord's Supper, coming up soon so you might sort your life out when that comes. No! (Verse 15) the time to put your Christian life right and resolve that you're not going to go backwards, is 'today' and every 'today'.

Whenever apostasy begins it begins one day. God doesn't call you to live 'yesterday' or 'tomorrow' but 'today'. He hasn't even called you yet to live this afternoon. The time to make up your mind that you will not walk out on Christ. The time that you will make up your mind to fix your thoughts on Christ: is now. The whole secret of perseverance lies right here in the present. It's about what I do now. As long as it is called 'today', don't harden your heart as they did in the rebellion.

Verse 16: “How was it in ancient Israel? Some of them heard and they didn't like what they heard. There was murmuring. Then complaining. Then rebelling. They started seeking alternative leadership (last week's OT reading, for example). They started expressing dissatisfaction with God's Providence. They wanted to go back to where they were before. They started looking over their shoulder, to how the Egyptians were getting on. They started thinking less about Canaan than where they had been. They started getting fed up with the difficulties of the spiritual pilgrimage. Murmuring when things became hard and wishing they weren't hard. They kept thinking about the things they were missing. Which they used to have before. Eventually God slew them!

He was grieved with them 40 years. (Verse 17) It was the corpses of those people – who wanted to go back and thought of the things they had missed, caring very little now for obedience to God and the former glories of following the Shechinah leading of God – it was those people God was provoked by. It was their corpses which littered the wilderness. All the way from the Red sea ... past Sinai ... through Kadesh-Barnea right up to the very borders of the 'Promised land'. They buried then one by one until there was only the two left. It was this rebellious, disobedient people to whom He pledged (verse 19) they would never enter into the “Promised Land'. And they didn't. Their children did but they didn't!

They didn't get to the place they wanted to go. They didn't arrive at the place they had set their hearts on. Who would have thought when they set out – came through the Red Sea. Who would have thought that only two of that company would eventually arrive. Who would have thought that the very God who spared them, would have been infuriated by their love of themselves; the love of what they had left behind; their hardness of heart towards His Word; their rebellion, disobedience and complaints? Who would have thought that that same God would have slayed them? But He did!

“Therefore”, says the Apostle in Chapter 4 verse 1, “fear!”

There's a 'promised rest' awaiting believers. Held out to you is the Glory of heaven. The promise held out to believers is the celestial city. When we came to Christ we came afraid of hell and longing for heaven. When we came for cleansing in the blood, we came believing that when we were cleansed in His blood we would at last come to the dwelling place of God. Our thoughts on eternal issues. The desire to be acquitted at the judgement, and be embraced finally by the Lord and to enjoy Him even in this life. We longed for that eternal destination: “Therefore fear.” he says, “lest having set out on that journey, you don't make it and you fall short.” Because the peril of apostasy is not theoretical, but real.

Now as we close it's important that we define in our minds a few clear things about apostasy. It is not a popular subject. Perhaps too threatening to some. Yet there are many references to it in the New Testament. So not only is it a real threat, it is important to be aware of it.

This passage explains what it is, how it happens and how it can be prevented. Therefore we crystallise this teaching for our own souls' good.

- What is it? Verse 6. It is the failure of not holding fast to the end. Verse 14. Not holding the beginning of our confidence, steadfast, unto the end. That is: not continuing as you began.  
(More detail<sup>4</sup>)

Apostasy is ceasing to go forward. Going backward. And it starts in the heart and end up in Godlessness.

- But fortunately for us this passage and in fact the whole letter gives us a preventative to apostasy.

We should give the following points our careful attention;

- Recognise that there is no salvation without perseverance.

Verse 6 makes that plain. 6 ... *we are his house if ...*. Verse 14 <sup>14</sup> *For we have come to share in Christ, if ...*

You must continue in the Christian faith. If you were ever to stop then you will go back. There are only two ways you can't stay 'on the fence'. Those who stop are in God's reckoning already gone back. Unless they urgently repent now.

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4 Alternatively it is described in verse 12: falling away from the living God.

There are men and women who don't continue as they started. They stop: they slow down. They stop: they turn round and they seek the 'other way'. The result is (verses 6 & 14) they are not recognised as belonging to Christ. The result is (Chapter 4:1) that they don't enter into the 'promised rest'.

Note specially that apostasy only happens to people who appear, in the first instance, to be believers. The sad truth is that many may have seen close friends, apostatised. You may consider someone you thought of as a close Christian friend. They may have led others to Christ and been a great encouragement to many in the church. It appeared to happen suddenly to us that the person became less keen ... not keen ... then departed off the scene all together. Very often what they become is worse than they ever were before they claimed to be a Christian. An even lower standard than they had in the first place. Our hearts are shocked and saddened and we experience a sense of dread and fear. As we should, because apostasy is a reality.

- How does apostasy happen? Mercifully it doesn't happen to all, but it does happen. (verse 8) <sup>8</sup> *do not harden your hearts ...* and verse 10, <sup>10</sup> ... *'They always go astray in their heart; ...*. Verse 12: <sup>12</sup> *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, ...*. Verse 15: <sup>15</sup> ... *"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts ...*

Apostasy appears to happen suddenly, but it starts, well before, in the heart. It starts in the 'inner person'. Right down where none can see.

It starts with 'hardening'. That is a resistance that builds up against God's Word. The Word of God which formerly was received with gladness is no longer received this way. What God has said, which once came to the heart with keenness, is no longer keenly felt or welcomed. A resistance, that wasn't there before. Not the openness to the Word of God that had once existed. Sin starts to seem attractive as verse 13 tells us.

Things that God forbids start to look inviting.

Then comes provocation through rebellion (verse 8 & 16).

Having started to build up a resistance to God's Word the person, starts complaining about some of the things that God says in His Word. Resulting in expressions of dissatisfaction with the Christian life. Criticises the way God does things. Restless murmurings leading to 'pointing the finger' at God. Unbridled, deliberate sinning becomes habitual. (verse 17)

All this characterises 'unbelief' and disobedience. (verse 12 & 18)

The outcome is obstinate rebellion, such that what God has said no longer matters. What God commands is left undone. What God forbids is deliberately done. The dictates of the person's life are entirely what they want to do. What God says doesn't come into their reckoning. The person has closed his eyes to Jesus Christ and His magnificence. Shuts out all consideration of His Cross; resurrection; judgement and coming again. Tries to shut Christ out of his life and walks away. In doing so he walks to his damnation. The mercy of God has been discarded ... leaving only God's justified wrath.

- Understand that apostasy is a real threat. It's no good looking at others who fail and find reasons in their personality and temperament that explains their slipping away. It can happen to anyone. There are those who once said. "It could never happen to me!". It has happened to them. Some have been prominent Gospel ministers. Verse 12: <sup>2</sup> *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.* Verse 13: <sup>13</sup> *But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today", that none of you may be hardened ... .* Chapter 4 verse 1: ... *let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.*

The Apostle didn't say that there were certain classes of people who were exempt from this danger: it could happen to any one who claims to be a Christian.

Realise then that without perseverance you will be lost and it can happen to anyone. Therefore 'fear'! Holy fear – one who has faith trembles at God's Word. Of course there great consolations in the Gospel, which are so great they break our hearts with joy, but they must be married to a holy fear.

Paul had such a fear: “ ... having preached to others, I myself shall become a caste away”. (1Corinthians 9:27)<sup>5</sup> Even this Apostle didn't consider himself exempt.

So 'fear'. But not a fear of terror. But a fear that weighs up the realities and knows what the situation is. Taking the required action.

- Verse 13, makes it clear that apostasy is very much linked with not being connected with a fellowship. Continuing in the Christian life is very much linked with being joined in a fellowship with other Christians. It was never the intention of God that anyone should become a Christian and lead the Christian life on his own. It is a narrow road that leads to eternal life, but it is God's intention that we should lead it with others. Christians in the New Testament, joined churches and found their spiritual life – invigorated and strengthened and helped to continue – in the church.

Christians should join together in the church to be 'pastors' one of each other. Keep their eye on each other. So that as long as it's called 'today', we exhort one another to continue in the Christian life. Doing everything we can to strengthen one another.

Carry with you again verse 1:<sup>1</sup> *Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, ... .*

When people open the Word of God and see Christ. When they quietly meditate and pray until they catch a glimpse of Christ. They throw in their lot with a church, but only one where they see Christ. Where people pray together around the throne of Christ, living their Christian life with Christ filling their vision. Those are the people, and those alone, who continue in the faith.

God's not made it hard to persevere. He's given us a 'file-leader'.<sup>6</sup> If we walk the way

<sup>5</sup> But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

<sup>6</sup> See footnote 6 on page 5 of Sermon for 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2018

the 'file-leader' walks and we never let Him out of our sight, keeping close to Him, we find that the road He takes, is the road that takes us safely to heaven. But the moment we lag a little bit behind and He goes out of our sight or we turn away and look at something else, but not at Him: then all other pathways end in 'night'.

*<sup>12</sup> Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.*

[2219]

**May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.**

**Hebrews 4:1 -16**

**Unless You Go On – You Will Be Lost**

per S Olyott

Our studies today in Hebrews have advanced to Chapter 4.

The people initially receiving this letter were Hebrews – Jews by birth and religion had become Christians. They were Jews by nationality having come into the Christian faith, but having been so for a while, they were seriously thinking of giving it all up and going back to their earlier Judaism.

This letter then is especially for any of us who may be tempted of giving up the Christian Faith and going back to what we were before.

The Apostle has bluntly told the Hebrews that unless they go on ... and on ... and on ... in Christian growth and progress they will be lost. He's warned them of the Peril of Apostasy.

If you turn your back on the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, the only alternative is 'outer darkness'.

He's used the picture of Israel coming out of Egypt as an object study: they had a wonderful change in their lives; they'd seen God act on their behalf; they'd experienced a marvellous deliverance they'd experienced God protecting them and providing for them in the long years of their wilderness travelling. They even had the Law of God given to them! They had wonderful spiritual leaders. But with two exceptions, everyone who came out of Egypt, perished in the wilderness – although they were already on the way to Canaan. They set their hearts on Canaan – but didn't arrive.

The Apostle is saying, “Be careful if something similar happens to you.”

Last week we noted that initially, something happened in their hearts; they began to resist God's Word – they didn't accept it like they did before; then they became discontented with God's dealings with them; they began to grumble about God; eventually they began to rebel. Before long they were actually doing things deliberately which God forbade. Then their hearts were so obstinate that they wouldn't listen to God any more. Their hearts had walked out on Him completely and He slew them!

In verse one of our current Chapter (Chapter 4) the Apostle bluntly tells us, “Therefore let us fear, lest the promise to us of entering into His 'rest', sees us fall short of coming into it.”

A plain warning! It's no good saying that I have had a marvellous experience of Christ. That I had something happen to me years ago. No good saying that I've even seen God acting on my behalf. No good even rejoicing in the miracle – saying, “God has done a miracle in my life.” For God has given His Word to us in that there are many who set out for Canaan, but never arrive! So let us therefore 'fear'.

As soon as that teaching is given all sorts of questions come into people's minds. In Chapter 4 the Apostle answers the questions. He doesn't state the questions, but he answers them.

Perhaps similar questions come to your mind as you receive this teaching. Unspoken and unvoiced as they may be, but they are there.

- The first question (answered in verse 2) could be put like this: the Hebrews might say, “Isn't the reason the Israelites, back then, fell into Apostasy – the reason they walked out on God, was that they didn't have the advantages they we have in the Christian religion?”

“No!”, says the Apostle. In Greek it says, 'We have been Gossiped and so had they'. “In other words both us, as Christians, and they, the Old Testament people of God, we both have received messages from God. Messages of salvation; messages of Good news; messages of promise; messages of encouragement; messages about a future 'rest'.

They received messages from God, just as much as we have. The trouble with those Old Testament people,” says the Apostle, “Was not that they hadn't heard the Word. The problem with those Old Testament people was that after they heard the Word, the Word didn't do them any good.”

Why didn't the Word do them any good?

It happens every Sunday! The Gospel is preached. The Bible passage is explained, but for many people it doesn't do them any good. The answer is in verse 2: *<sup>2</sup>For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, (why not?) because they were not united by faith with those who listened. (or as the footnote states: ... it did not meet with faith in the hearers.)* The Word didn't do them any good, not because of the way it was preached, but because of the way it was received. “When the Word went into their ears, it wasn't mixed with faith in their hearts,” says the Apostle.

In other words they didn't receive the Word for what it is: the Word of God! You see that as you recognise how they saw the Scriptures – they revered the words of Moses, but not the Word of God from Moses. Because they didn't receive it for what it is, the Word of God, they began to trifle with it; disbelieve it; rebel against it. To grumble and murmur, to reject it: disobey it. Because they treated it as if it were the word of men, when it was, in fact, the Word of God. They didn't take it seriously. They didn't act upon it with 'holy' fear. They resisted it as we saw last week, because they treated it like one more message which came from the lips of Moses, when in fact it was the Word of God.

That is the difference between Apostasy and perseverance. The great difference between going back and going forward lies right here. The person who goes back is the person who hears the Word of God as much as anybody else, but he begins to trifle with it and not to take it seriously. Not to act on it with holy fear. Not to believe it nor be humbled by it, because he treats it as one more message – the word of men.

The one who makes progress is the one whose heart is humble, with holy awe because he knows that what is coming to him, although it is coming through human lips, and is thus mixed with imperfections – nonetheless – what comes to him is the Word of God.

That makes listening to sermons a very serious business. As you listen to this sermon this morning are you saying to yourself, “Huh, one more sermon, just one more in this series. We've done Chapters 1, 2 and 3 and now we're up to chapter 4. It's just one more.

Or have you come this morning with a prepared heart. Saying even before you left the house, “Master speak, your servant heareth.” waiting for your gracious Word. Now you're listening despite the imperfections of the sermon for the Word of God from His infallible Word.

When you pick up your bible and read it, do you say to yourself. “This is today's reading and I must get it out of the way as quickly as possible.”

Or do you say, “What I am handling here is breathed from heaven. God has spoken. The words that I read are true.” Then you ask God to speak through His Word to you.

The difference between an Apostate and the person who perseveres, ultimately – in the final analysis – is in the difference in the way the Word is received.

- In verses 3 to 11 he now answers a second question: Remember he gives the answers but not the questions. The question we can put like this: “When they failed to enter into the promised 'rest'.” Because that's what happened – we saw that in the previous chapter. “When they failed to enter into the promised 'rest', didn't the promises about 'rest' expire? When they failed to come into the promised 'rest', wasn't that the end of promises about rest?

Verse 3-11 are found by some to be some of the hardest verses in the New Testament. Especially in the authorised version: they find them confusing and hard to follow. But (especially in recent translations which benefit from further availability of manuscripts and careful research) the ideas are really quite straightforward.

Put simply it is like this: In the Bible there is a great deal of talk about God's 'rest'. That's something that God enjoys and it's something that He wants His

people to enjoy. It's mention often.

For instance. After six days of creation, God rested the seventh day. But that isn't all that is to be said about God's rest. For when God is speaking about Canaan and He promises that those who come out of Egypt shall enter into Canaan – if they continue on believing – He describes the entering into Canaan as a promised 'rest'. After all it will be a rest from pilgrimage. A rest from trouble and a rest from travel. A place where they can settle down and be free and enjoy God. But even that does not exhaust the meaning of God's 'rest'. That's not all that is to said about it.

“Because, says the Apostle, “Psalm 95 dates from the time of David and David lived a long time after Joshua had led the people into Canaan. But David in Psalm 95 continues, under the inspiration of God, to promise a rest (still to come) – 'today if you do not harden your hearts', and so on. This was said a long time after they had actually entered into Canaan.

“Now if Joshua had brought them into the final 'rest',” says the Apostle, “how could David in Psalm 95 continue to promise the future 'rest'.

Therefore there is a 'rest' that remains to be entered into. There is still a 'rest' for the people of God!

That in summary is the argument of the Apostle here in verse 3 – 11.<sup>7</sup>

If Joshua had got them into the Canaan 'rest' as a final and thus expired 'rest', then David (saying for God) couldn't have spoken about it many years later, as something still to come.

Alternatively, six days of creation, one day of rest. God used that 'picture' of what He said on the seventh day to describe what it would be like in Canaan, when they eventually got there, but even after that He continued to use the same word and said that those of you that don't harden your heart, you too can enter into God's rest. There is still (verse 9) a promised 'rest', which awaits the people of God. But in verse 9 He changes the Greek word. <sup>9</sup> *So then, there remains a 'Sabbath rest' for the people of God, ...* There's something for Christians to enter into. Where it's not striving; it's not labour; it's not warfare. It's a 'rest' like the seventh day of the world's history. A rest like the one promised originally for Canaan. It's a time to relax and do nothing except to enjoy God.

Of course the Apostle is speaking here of heaven.

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<sup>7</sup> Verse 8 in the Authorised version says, <sup>8</sup> For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. Now the New Testament was written in Greek, the Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew. There was a man in the Old Testament called Joshua, when you translate Joshua into Greek it becomes **Ἰησοῦς** (Iēsous, sounds like ee-ay-soos) and this is the same Greek sound when used to describe Jesus in the New Testament. The result is brought about because the letters in the Hebrew which are use for the name of Joshua, son of Nun, don't all have a corresponding equivalent in Greek and so are left out in subsequent translations making the names Joshua and Jesus, which are different in Hebrew, the same in Greek. So in verse 8, the word written as 'Jesus' is not the Lord Jesus Christ, but refers to Joshua – very important that this is recognised else you will go astray in the argument. Also in verse 8 the pronoun 'he' can be confusing. Does it refer (as the rules of English grammar would suggest) to the nearest proper noun? In which case it would mean Joshua which makes no sense (Greek grammar has different rules which can make it clearer which nouns are being referred to). In fact the principal proper noun in the context is God who is speaking through David. The ESV translation clarifies both these issues: <sup>8</sup> *For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on.*

The seventh day of the world's history. The first complete day Adam was in the world, remember, was a day when He didn't work. Didn't till the garden – he enjoyed God. His duty that day was to worship and enjoy God. Every Sabbath in the world ever since has been to remind us of what we lost when we 'fell' in Adam and what we can gain when we come to Christ. Every Sabbath reminds us of that. Every Sabbath is a pledge of heaven and a reminder of the 'fall'.

There remains then a Sabbath rest. A place where there is a perfect enjoying of God for all eternity, as the old catechism puts it. But we're not there yet!

So reads verse 11: *<sup>11</sup> Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.*

Canaan was just a 'picture' of heaven. The Old Testament 'promised land' is just an earthly 'picture' of the eternal promised land, for believers. Like those in the wilderness you're not in that promised land, yet. So give yourself to every Christian effort, lest like those who left Egypt, long ago, you like them, through unbelief fail to arrive in the ultimate Canaan.

When did you last think of heaven – that ultimate Canaan?

That heaven that you are yet to enter. You might say, "I've left Egypt. I'm on the way to heaven."

"But you're not there yet," says the Apostle. So therefore give yourself to Christian disciplines. So that at last you arrive. Alright, so you have left the 'city of destruction' – switching now to Bunyan's, 1678 Christian Allegory, *The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That World Which is to Come*<sup>8</sup> – you've come by the 'way of the Cross'. You catch glimpses, in the distance, of the 'celestial city' and if you keep walking; keep progressing. If you keep going you'll get there. Nothing will keep you out of the celestial city. If you keep going! Nothing will keep you out – unless unbelief. And unbelief, as we found last week, is resistance to God's Word.

The writer of Hebrews is bringing into their thinking a perspective which is lacking a great deal in modern Christianity. Often Gospel preaching seems to suggest, that all the blessing that we have from Christ, we have in this life. There is very little emphasis on heaven any more.<sup>9</sup> But it's very obviously there in the New Testament – throughout Scripture, but particularly in the New Testament. That the best things still await us: in the promised 'rest'. The chief thing of being there is that we are with our God and enjoying Him there.

Only unbelief will keep you out. That's why we must not treat any sin with sympathy. We must not listen to anything as well as we listen to God's word. There can be no compromising competition with the Word. We must give ourselves to being stronger, holier, better, wiser Christians. Making determined

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8 The entire book is presented as a dream sequence narrated by an omniscient narrator. The allegory's protagonist, Christian, is an everyman character, and the plot centres on his journey from his hometown, the "City of Destruction" ("this world"), to the "Celestial City" ("that which is to come": Heaven) atop Mount Zion.

9 If you want proof of that compare the words in the old hymnbooks with the new songs often used in Worship.

efforts to keep going and not let anything at all stop us in making Christian progress, because if we keep walking the way we are walking, we surely shall arrive and all the trumpets shall sound for us on the 'other side'.

[2411]

**May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.**

## **Unless You Go On – You Will Be Lost – Pt 2**

per S Olyott

We focus our attention firstly on verses 12 & 13;

Where the writer answers a third question.

- Once again he doesn't state the question, but gives the answer. However the question implied would be like this: "You've said a good deal about those who appear to be on the way, but fail to arrive, already in 3 ½ Chapters. How can I tell whether I am or am not such a person?"  
The answer is in verses 12 to 13. It is simply this: Expose yourself to the word of God! "How can I find out if I am a person who nurses false hopes or true hopes?" Expose yourself to the Word of God.

Look how he describes God's Word in verse 12:

*... the word of God is **living** and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, ...*  
This book is 'alive', it's not just dead print! It's alive and does something to the people who read it and expose themselves to it. Which is why he calls it powerful. There is life in the book and it does something in people's lives.

It's important to keep this in our minds. The Bible doesn't just inform us. It doesn't just give us information. The Bible actually does something to people. He describes it here like a sword. Those who are believers, know exactly what the Apostle is talking about: you lived as contentedly as you could; you were then exposed to the Word of God ; then it pricked you; some would say that it wounded you; some would say the Word of God, "Cut you to ribbons!"; some would even say that the Word of God, slew you. It acts like a sword. It's more effective than the most effective sword. Because the Bible gets right in – where nothing else can.

See how he describes that: *... piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.* It gets really in. Where nothing else can. Right into the inner most being. And. It reads your thoughts. Those who begin very rebellious against the Christian faith, know that they heard sermons and examined the Bible with the view of criticising it.

But as it was preached, or separately read, it was found that the Bible had an unexpected habit of searching and exposing the reader instead, of providing source for criticism. Showing how vain and foolish is the heart of man. The intents of the heart, the very springs of action which control the personality exposed to view by nothing else but the Bible. The final evidence which brings many sinners to Christ – through the divinity, the Godly origin, of the Book.

Such experience can show what sort of person you are: exposing yourself to Scripture.

But also – in verse 13 – we are shown that God Himself searches us. Our hearts are opened to God. The logic: straight from God's Word to God! Because God deals with men and women through His Word. The only way God deals with His creatures is His Word. As you study the Word and listen to it preached, you start to see yourself as God sees you. You realise there are no secrets from God. You can't hide anything from Him. You can't pretend to be one thing and in fact be another.

The Apostle is showing the absolute necessity of exposing yourself to Scripture.

There are men and women today, who sincerely believe that they are on the way to Canaan. The illusion persists: from childhood, adolescence to maturity believing that they are on the way to heaven. They really believe it! They gloat that they have never done anybody any harm; they are as good as the next person – they have parents who are believers. Everything is OK for them. Then one day they are exposed to the Word of God. The illusion is shattered! When they hear that it is not their works or anything that they are, which brings us into favour with God. When their illusions are shattered, one of two things happens: they either become furious – because their hopes have been destroyed; or their hearts are broken with repentance and they come to seek the Saviour.

They see themselves as God sees them, when they are exposed to His Word.

Others who hear preaching from the Bible, have great assurance. The more they are exposed to Scripture the more convinced they are, that they are a believer. But even so, for some reason they begin to let things slip. They read the Bible less; then hardly at all; hardly come to church – meaning that there is a period when they are not exposed to the Word of God. Then they find that the great assurance that they formerly had, begins to dwindle and disappear until they come to the point where they are not sure at all whether they are a Christian or not. Their previous great certainty is turned to uncertainty. Their former confidence has entirely faded away.

That's what the Word of God does, to a true believer. He sees himself in the Word and the Spirit works through the Word. As he sees the 'marks' of a Christian.<sup>10</sup> He says, "That's me!" But when he's not exposed to the Word, he begins to wonder.

The Apostle is showing here that there is no perseverance and indeed there's no genuine Christianity, except where people are constantly exposed to the Word.

- The Chapter concludes with verses 14 – 16. Here the Apostle answers a fourth question. Someone is saying in his heart: "With all my heart I do want to keep going. With all my soul I do want to arrive in the 'promised rest'. I don't ever want that my steps should falter or that I should grind to a halt; turn round; or walk out. I do

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<sup>10</sup> See the Apostle John's first letter.

want to keep going to the end and enter at last into glory! What must I do?"

The remainder of the Chapter tells you:<sup>11</sup>

"Oh," says the Apostle, "you want to go into the 'promised rest', then realise this: there is One who has already passed through death and He's passed through the heavens and He's now in the 'promised rest'. If your help in the Christian life is going to come from anywhere, it's got to come from Him! Because there is only one Man who has passed through the heavens in His own right, into the 'promised rest'. It's Jesus the Son of God."

So immediately the Apostle, says, "Stop looking at yourself and start looking at Him. Stop looking at all your problems, your weaknesses, your failings and your doubts. Stop being so introspective and self-analytical and start fixing your eyes on Christ." He's telling us again what he told us before: that the secret of going on in the Christian life is the contemplation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Don't think of this Christ as unfeeling. Here you are on earth with opposition, doubts – you do have them, don't you? We all have them! Temptation – often giving into it. All sorts of failings. Shortcomings. Things of which you are ashamed. Things you would never tell another. Yet they're in your life and they feel like great blots on your conscience. You feel that you will never ever arrive in heaven.

Then look to Christ. It must come from Him. Don't think of Him as unfeeling (verse 15). He's not a High Priest who can't be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. The very place where you've been – He's already been. Every temptation you've ever faced, He's already faced. But there is a difference. You gave in often. He never gave in, nor could He. That's why He's in a position to help.

(an answer to the difficulty of Christ's inability to sin.)<sup>12</sup>

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- 11 <sup>14</sup> Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. <sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup> Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.
- 12 Some people have difficulty with this. They say, "Well if Christ didn't sin. I can understand how He can help me. But you're telling me that Christ couldn't sin." This is the case! Unfortunately, certain branches of the Charismatic Movement, have a book which they greatly admire by Thomas Smail, called *Reflected Glory*. This book teaches that Christ could have sinned. That is heresy! It's a plain contradiction of the Bible. It's something to be very cautious about. Christ could not have sinned and did not sin. Yet it's because he couldn't sin and didn't sin that he can help sinners.

"I still can't understand it!", you might say.

Think of it like this: Think of the waves beating against basalt outcrops at the Bunbury 'Back Beach'. Those waves can never prevail against those outcrops. Certainly not in our lifetime. As a consequence those outcrops will experience a pounding, a beating like no other part of the shoreline. Consider the rest of the beach: it resists the pounding up to a point; but eventually gives way and the beach is eroded to be replaced, eventually by the next summer's currents.

Which knows the most about the severity of the sea? The ever resisting basalt outcrops or the seasonally fretted beach line? Which knows the most about the fierceness of the storm surges? The one that eventually slips away or the one that permanently resists? That couldn't give way!

Now our Lord Jesus Christ we read, in verse 16, is on a throne. It's a throne of Glory because He's the Son of God. But it's a throne of grace because He is Jesus, the Son of Man.

If you're to persevere in the Christian life it's not enough for you to just contemplate Christ, you've got to come to Him as this Great High Priest. With all your mess and failings. The sins that litter your past. You've got to come to Him for mercy. In all your weakness and the times when your strength seems to fail you, you've got to come with His strength to help you. Therefore every failing can be forgiven because He is a merciful High Priest. All the strength that you need, can be given, because He's a faithful High Priest, who has *grace to help in time of need*. He never did and He never will turn away the sinner.

The word translated, 'draw near', in the Greek language is in the present imperative. So it says: come and come again, and again ... Every time you fail – draw near, come, for mercy – to be forgiven. Every time that you can't make it. That you can't cope – come again *for grace to help in time of need*. Keep coming to this Christ, who is already in the 'promised rest'. That is the secret of perseverance.

There is a great tenderness in this Chapter. In Jesus Christ I have pardon; in Jesus Christ I have welcome – He knows all about my failings. In verses 12 & 13 it is made quite plain that He knows my heart completely and any sin that I tell Him about, is no surprise to Him. He knows about it already. But knowing about it, He still asks me to come boldly to His throne. However severe and wicked I've been, there's mercy in Christ for me. There's sympathy in Christ. There's help in Christ. Contemplate Him, by all means at your disposal, but above all, come to Him you must.

He knows that even when I pray my holiest thoughts will be tainted by sin, but He will accept me nonetheless. He knows that all my faith is mixed with unbelief, but He's still going to receive me. The offer remains open. The invitation to come boldly, stands. Mercy is always to be found. Grace is always available.

So we see from this Chapter that the secret of the Christian life is what Daniel found: He was a man who read his Bible and said his prayers. The secret of living the Christian life is not some marvellous experience. You may have marvellous experiences – but that's not the secret. Many had those in the wilderness and died there. The secret of the Christian life is by exposing ourselves to the Word and in humble prayer, keeping Jesus Christ the Great High Priest ever before our eyes and draw near, (come) to Him.

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The reason Christ can help you in your temptation, is because He's experienced it to a severity and to a degree that nobody else ever has. He did not sin and He could not sin. He was like a basalt beach rather than that of a sandy one. He experienced the poundings of evil violence like you and I have never, and will never, experience. Every experience of temptation that we have ever had, He can sympathise with it completely, because it's nothing to what He experienced.

That's why He is able to help. He's been through it already.

How do you 'line up' in this respect? How are you getting on? In public prayer. In private prayer. In prayer in families. How are you getting on in exposure to the Word of God. God hasn't made it hard to persevere! But it's the way it has to be. It's an 'old fashioned' path. It's an undramatic path. Nothing dramatic in the way the world would like it to be. It's a path that requires a certain discipline. It's the path of communion with Christ, by the Scriptures and by prayer – which is the road that leads to 'rest'.

[1933]

**May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.**