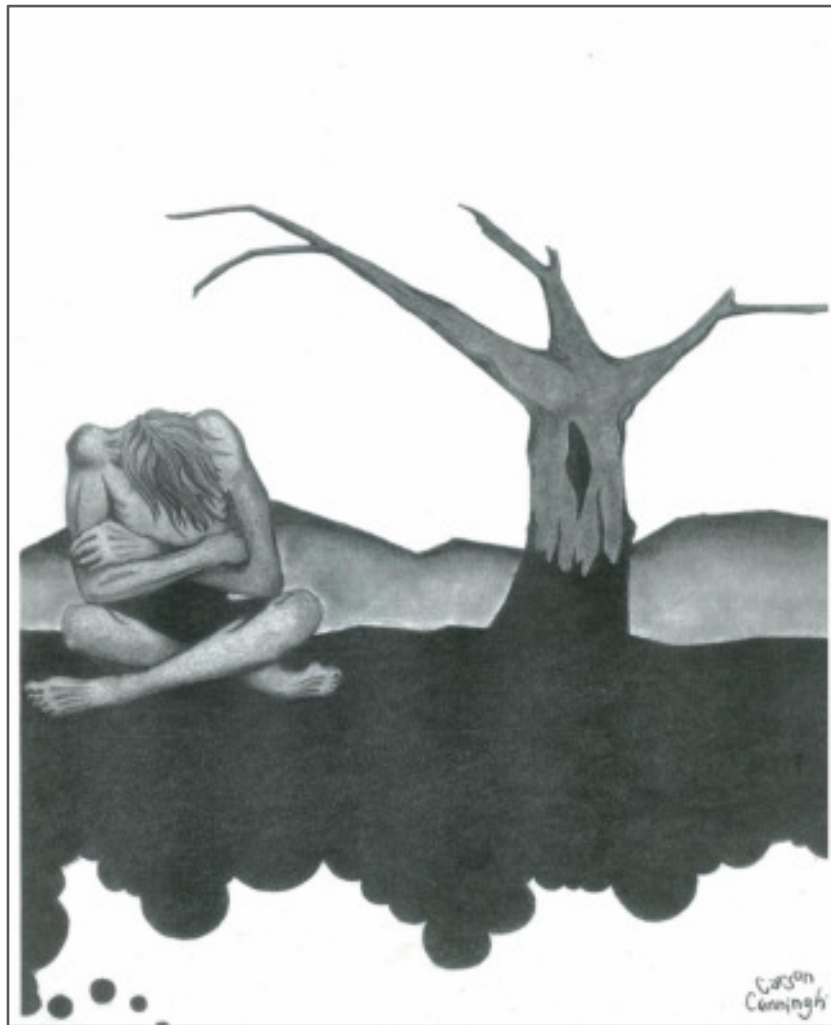


Words of Warning to an Apostate Generation

Red River Cowboy Church
Sherman, Texas
April 1-3, 2022



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Introduction

This letter, like those of James, 1 & 2 Peter, and Jude, are often referred to as the Jewish epistles. They were written to Jewish Christians about questions and problems they faced early in the history of the church. The following notes of introduction have been adapted from the writings of Dr. Warren Wiersbe and Dr. J. Vernon McGee.

The Author

The question of authorship has plagued this epistle throughout church history. However, it is a debate in search of a cause. The epistle was accepted into the canon on the basis of Paul's authorship. Many like to quote the statement by Origen, "who wrote the Epistle is known only to God." However, they leave out the important part of his quote.

"The thoughts are Paul's, but the phraseology and composition are by someone else. **Not without reason have the ancient men handed down the Epistle as Paul's**, but who wrote the Epistle is known only to God."

This puts the quote in an entirely different light. Clement of Alexandria (150-215AD) said that Paul wrote the epistle in Hebrew, and that Luke translated it into Greek. Actually, the argument for Paul's authorship is stronger than for some of his other epistles, in spite of the lack of his name in the epistle.

Following is a list, far from complete, of thoughts and phrases in Hebrews used by Paul in other epistles, but never by other authors. Compare the following...

1. Heb.1:1, 3 with 2Co.4:4; Col.1:15-16.
2. Heb.1:4, 2:9 with Phi.2:8-9.
3. Heb.2:14 with 1Co.15:54, 57.
4. Heb.7:16, 18-19 with Rom.2:29; Gal.3:3, 24.
5. Heb.7:26 with Eph.4:10.
6. Heb.8:5; 10:1; with Col.2:17.
7. Heb.10:12-13 with 1Co.15:25.

Some claim that Heb.2:3 excludes Paul as the author, since he says in Gal.1:11-12 that he received the Gospel not from men but from God. But in Heb.2:3 he identifies himself with other early Christians, using “we” to separate them from the early disciples.

Two reasons may explain why Paul did not sign his name to the book. First, he did not begin with “Paul, an apostle...” because he intended to present the Lord Jesus Christ as the ultimate apostle from God (Heb.3:1). Second, we know that the Jews hated Paul, and the addition of his name would only hinder the acceptance of the truth contained in it. Consider seven things the author reveals about himself that would fit the apostle Paul.

1. He was a Jew acquainted with the details of Mosaic ritualism (Heb. Ch.7-10; 13:13).
2. He was highly acquainted with Greek philosophy.
3. He had been in prison and was supported by the recipients (Heb.10:34).
4. At the time of writing he was a prisoner in Italy (Heb.13:19, 24).
5. Timothy had been imprisoned with him, but now was free (Heb.13:23, compare Phi.2:19).
6. The author hoped to be liberated soon (Heb.13:19, compare Phi. v.22).
7. The scholar Lightfoot wrote in favor of Paul’s authorship, saying, “The very style of it may argue the scholar of Gamaliel” (see Act.22:1-3).

The final argument, and to me quite convincing, for Paul’s authorship, comes from the apostle Peter. We know that Peter wrote to believing Jews who had been scattered by persecution (compare Act.8:1-4 with 1Pe.1:1). In 2Pe.3:15-16 Peter speaks of an epistle written to these same Jewish believers by the apostle Paul. He specifically separated this epistle from Paul’s other epistles, “*as also in all his epistles*” (2Pe.3:16). Peter identifies this epistle of Paul, sent to Jews, as Scripture. If Hebrews is not that epistle, then we have a portion of the inspired word of God missing!

The Recipients

This reference by Peter also helps us know specifically where the letter was sent. It would have been “*to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus,*

Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia..." (1Pe.1:1). This letter, then, is a counterpart to the Epistle to the Galatians. Where Galatians deals with the Gentile side of the problem of law versus grace, Hebrews deals with the question from a Jewish perspective. No doubt it was also to be carried to Jews especially in Jerusalem and Judea, where the judgment of God was soon to fall in the coming of Titus and the Roman legions, and the fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the nation of Israel. The recipients are called "*holy brethren*" (Heb.3:1), and "*brethren*" (2:11, 12, 17; 3:12; 10:19; 13:22). In addition to this, in every exhortation in the epistle, the author includes himself with them, using the words "*we*" and "*us*" (Heb.2:1-3; 4:1-3, 11, 14; 6:1-3; 8:1; 10:19-24; 12:28).

The Theme

The theme of Hebrews is twofold: first doctrinal and then practical. The main theme is that we have a perfect high priest who has offered a perfect and final sacrifice for sins (Heb.8:1-6). This is the main focus of chapters 7 through 10. Then the subtheme is that we ought to carefully and diligently "*consider Jesus*" (Heb.3:1; 12:3) so that we might go on to maturity (Heb.6:1). Paul's point here is that although the Lord Jesus is God's final word to man, our comprehension of that message will never be final. Throughout all eternity we will be learning what the coming of Christ and His sacrifice for us has accomplished (Eph.2:7).

The Outline

The outline of the Epistle is quite simple, but the concepts contained in these sections can be difficult to comprehend, especially for Gentile readers.

1. The Superior Person of Christ – Chapters 1- 4:13 (Doctrinal).
The Superiority of the Lord Jesus Christ is seen in seven ways.
 - A. Christ is superior to the prophets (Heb.1:1-3).
 - B. Christ is superior to Angels (Heb.1:4-2:18).
 - C. Christ is superior to Moses (Heb.3:1-19).
 - D. Christ is superior to Joshua (Heb.4:1-13).

2. The Superior Priesthood of Christ – Chapters 4:14- Ch.10 (Dispensational).
 - A. Christ is superior to Melchizedek (Heb.7:1-28).
 - B. Christ serves in a superior, heavenly sanctuary, ministers a superior covenant, based on a superior sacrifice (Ch.8-10).

3. The Superior Promises of Christ – Chapters 11-13 (Practical).
These fall into a familiar category of three.
 - A. The blessings of Faith (Heb.11:1-40).
 - B. The blessings of Hope (Heb.12:1-29).
 - C. The blessings of Love (Heb.13:1-25).

Along with this outline, there are five warning sections embedded within the book.

1. The danger of drifting from God's word (Heb.2:1-4).
2. The danger of doubting God's word (Heb.3:7-4:16).
3. The danger of dullness toward God's word (Heb.5:11-6:8).
4. The danger of disobeying God's word (Heb.10:26-39).
5. The danger of despising God's word (Heb.12:12-29).

Key Words

The main idea of the book is expressed in the repetition of key words like "*perfect*" (Heb.2:10; 5:9, 14; 6:1; 7:11, 19, 28; 9:9, 11; 10:1, 14; 11:40; 12:2, 23), and "*better*" (Heb.1:4; 6:9; 7:7, 19, 22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40; 12:24). The word "*better*" suggests infinite superiority of Christ and His work, and the word "*perfect*" speaks of that which is whole, complete, without lack. We also find the words "*heavenly*" and "*eternal*" often.

The Date

It is clear that this epistle was written prior to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, probably around 68AD, before Paul was martyred. He speaks of the temple still standing, and of priests who continue to serve there (Heb.8:4-5; 9:9-10; 10:1-3, 11). The torn veil on the day of Christ's crucifixion (Mat.27:51) showed that God had rejected the nation, and put an end to the Levitical system of worship. The book of Hebrews serves as a warning of the coming day of fiery judgment (Heb.10:25, 27; 12:28) that would fall on Israel. See Peter's warning in Act.2:40. This was the result of the nations rejection of her Messiah, the unforgivable sin of Mat.12:24, 31-32, which resulted in the kingdom being taken from Israel, for a time (Rom.11:24-25), and given to the Gentiles (Mat.21:40-44). This judgment Paul compares to the failure of Israel to enter Canaan due to their unbelief (Num.13-14; Heb.3:1-19). Hebrews may actually have been Paul's last epistle.

The Infinite Superiority of Jesus Christ

This is the theme of the book of Hebrews. It is most interesting that in Col.1:15-19 Paul presents seven unique superiorities of Christ. Here in Hebrews, there are several sets of seven superiorities.

1. The seven superiorities of the book: Jesus is superior...
 - A. To prophets (Heb.1:1-3).
 - B. To angels (Heb.1:4-14).
 - C. To Moses (Heb.3:1-19).
 - D. To Joshua (Heb.4:1-13).
 - E. To Melchizedek (Heb.4:13-7:28).
 - F. To the Old Covenant (Heb.8:1-10:39).
 - G. To all other heroes of the faith, as He is the Author and Finisher of faith (Heb.11:1-13:25).
2. His seven superiorities over the prophets (Heb.1:1-3).
3. His seven superiorities over the angels (Heb.1:4-14).

I am sure we could “impose” our system of “seven superiorities” in every category in the book. However, it is evident that Paul is here in the first chapter, and throughout the book, following the formula he used in Colossians 1:15-19.

I. First Warning: The Danger of Drifting (2:1-4)

1. The necessity, v.1a. The “*therefore*” ties this warning to the truths presented in chapter one. Since Jesus Christ is superior in every way, it is essential that we heed what He has said. As the Father said to the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration, “*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!*” (Mat.17:5). The phrase “more earnest heed” comes from two words that were used for the extreme care necessary to bring a ship into safe harbor. “*Things we have heard*” refers to Jesus’ teachings (v.3).
2. The peril, v.1b. Failure to be attentive to the word of God results in a gradual drifting away spiritually. The word pictures a ship that has slipped its moorings and is drifting away with the tide. Only the Lord Jesus Christ, through His word and by His Spirit, is able to keep us anchored in the protective will of God (Heb.6:19).
3. The accountability, v.2. If God’s word communicated by angels was sure, and every disobedience brought just judgment, how

much greater is the word spoken through Jesus Christ, who is infinitely greater than angels?

4. The impossibility, v.3a. The phrase *“how shall we escape”* indicates the impossibility of escaping Divine retribution for spiritual apathy. This is the impossibility mentioned again in Heb.6:4. The reason it is impossible to escape temporal judgment, if we are apathetic/disobedient to Gods word, is found in three other “impossibilities” in the book.
 - A. Because it is impossible for God to lie (Heb.6:18). Both His promises of blessing for obedience, and His warnings of judgment for disobedience, will be fulfilled.
 - B. Because it is impossible for animal sacrifices to accomplish what only the cross of Christ could achieve (Heb.10:4-10). To turn away from the provisions of the new covenant (Heb.2:1-4), which were purchased at the cost of the cross, and to return to the rituals of Judaism, is to reject the reality for the shadow (Heb.9:11-15; 10:1-10).
 - C. Because without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb.11:6). It is an axiom of Scripture that *“The just shall live by faith”* (Hab.2:4; Rom.1:17; Heb.10:38). Failure to do so results in God’s displeasure and judgment (Heb.10:26-31, 38, 11:6; 12:25-29).

The phrase *“so great a salvation”* has the same qualifying *“so”* as in Joh.3:16, which suggests infinite quality. The use of *“salvation”* in Hebrews looks at Divine deliverance in all three stages: past redemption, present deliverance, future glorification. Thus it includes deliverance from the soon coming destruction of Jerusalem, which is *“the day”* referred to in Heb.10:25. Believers who drifted away from sound doctrine in the first century would find it “impossible” to escape the horrors of 70A.D.

5. The authority, v.3b-4. All that is written in the epistles is but the exposition of the words of Jesus Christ we read in the gospels. This is especially true of the teaching of Jesus in the upper room (Joh.13:17) which contains the seed-thoughts of all Church age truth. In the Jewish world, every truth must be attested by two or three witnesses (Deu.17:6; 19:5; Mat.18:16; Joh.5:31-40;

2Co.13:1; 1Ti.5:17). Here, we have 1) the witness of Jesus Himself, 2) the witness of those who heard Him, 3) the witness of signs, wonders and miracles from God, 4) the gifts given by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

Five works of the Holy Spirit in relation to Scripture

1. Revelation – This is the work by which the word of God is made known to the prophets and apostles (1Co.2:10; 1Pe.1:10-12).
2. Inspiration – This is the work of directing and guiding the writing down of that which has been revealed (2Ti.3:16; 2Pe.1:19-21).
3. Preservation – This work assures us that no Scripture can ever be destroyed (Isa.40:6-8; 1Pe.1:24-25; Mat.24:35).
4. Illumination – This work opens the eyes of understanding to the student who studies God’s word in faith (Psa.19:8; Eph.1:17-20; Heb.6:4).
5. Application – Here the Spirit enables the believer to apply God’s word to daily life (1Co.2:4-5; Eph.3:16-20; 1Th.1:5-6).

Summary

These five warning sections (see page 4) in Hebrews progress from bad to worse. They show the progressive spiritual decline of the believer who is apathetic and indifferent to God’s word, who drifts to his or her own spiritual destruction. This warning is resumed in Heb.3:7-19.

II. Second Warning: The Danger of Doubting God’s Word (Heb.3:7-4:13)

Again, this section is critical to rightly interpret the entire book. The Exodus generation is used as the historical example of those who were redeemed out of slavery, but who failed to enter into the full blessings intended by God for them. While their redemption out of slavery required only faith in the blood of the lamb (Exo.12), entrance into the promised land required both believing in the promise of God, but also in claiming the land through victorious conquest.

In the very same way, the Lord Jesus offers to all who come to Him two kinds of rest (Mat.11:28-30). The first is the rest of salvation (v.28), which is freely given to all who come to Him in faith. However, the second rest (v.29-30) is discovered only by those believers who will take up the “yoke” of discipleship, who study and grow in His word, and

become fellow-laborers with Him in obedient service (Rom.12:1-2). We do not want to follow the negative example of the Exodus generation of doubt, unbelief, and failure!

The quote from Psa.95:7-11 takes us back to the story in Numbers 13 and 14. Moses sent the twelve spies into the land of Canaan to prepare for the Israelite invasion. When the spies returned, ten of them declared that it was a suicide mission to go into the land (Num.13:17-33). Only Joshua and Caleb remained faithful to the plan of God to give the land to Israel (Num.13:1-2).

Because Israel believed the ten unfaithful spies and rejected the two who were faithful (Num.14:1-10), God declared that He would destroy the nation, and build a new nation from Moses. Moses interceded on behalf of Israel, and God forgave them (Num.14:11-21). However, God declared that as discipline for their unbelief, none of the adults of that generation would enter the land, except Joshua and Caleb (Num.14:22-38).

When this message was relayed to the people, they wanted to “repent”, and sought to go in and claim the land, but were defeated (Num.14:39-45). From this story we can conclude several doctrinal points.

1. The issue here is not salvation. These people had all believed in the Lord (Exo.4:31; 14:31) and had been redeemed by the blood of the Passover lamb (Exo. 12). It is worth noting that Moses also was not allowed to enter the land, and this was also due to his unbelief (Num.20:7-12; Deu.1:37; Deu.3:23-27).
2. The land of Canaan represented victory through faith, along with all its blessings. By their refusal to continue in faith, the Exodus generation forfeited the victorious life and the resulting blessings.
3. Israel’s failure resulted from turning away from the promise of God, and believing instead in what they saw and heard concerning their circumstances. They followed appearances instead of faith.
4. The author of Hebrews is warning these first century Jewish believers that they, like their ancestors, were in danger of failing to enter into a life of victory and blessing, by rejecting the word of God and instead living in fear of their enemies’ persecution.

5. In Heb.2:3 the question, “*How shall we escape?*”, leads us, by the example of the Exodus generation, to the conclusion that, “*It is impossible...to renew them again to repentance*” (Heb.6:4-6).
6. There are times in history, and indeed in the Christian life, where failure to heed God’s word and be guided by His Spirit will result in blessings, and eternal rewards, that will be lost forever (Heb.12:15-17; 25-29). Some opportunities once lost cannot be reclaimed. These first century Jewish believers were facing one of the greatest historical upheavals of the ancient world, the destruction of the temple in 70A.D., and the destruction of the nation of Israel.
7. Again, the issue throughout Hebrews is not a question of whether the recipients of this letter were saved. That is beyond doubt (Heb.3:1). The question is whether they will continue to grow up to spiritual maturity (Heb.5:11-6:3) and trust in the faithful promises of God (Heb.6:13-20).

In this quote from Psalm 95 should be read in the context of the whole Psalm. In the first seven verses we see the joy, thanksgiving, and worship of those who chose to live by faith and claim victory through obedience to God.

Then in v.7b-11 comes the warning to those who have hardened their hearts to God’s word and promises at Kadesh Barnea (Num.13). It is worthwhile to identify the conditions that led to their spiritual failure.

1. First, they hardened their hearts to the word of God (Psa.95:8; Heb.3:8).
2. Second, they wanted to test God, instead of trusting Him (Psa.95:9a; Heb.3:9a).
3. Third, while they had seen the mighty works of God, they had not learned His ways (Psa.95:9b, 10b; Psa.103:7; Heb.3:9b, 10b). Note that in Psa.95:9-10 and 103:7 God distinguishes between seeing His works and knowing His ways.
4. Fourth, they “*went astray in their hearts*” (Psa.95:10; Heb.3:10).
5. Finally, as a result of their spiritual retreat and decline, they were not allowed to enter into His rest, the land of Canaan (Num.14:39-45; Psa.95:11; Heb.3:11).

6. These stages are similar to the same warnings Paul gives to believers in Gal.3:1-5; 5:1-9; Eph.4:17-24, and those of John in Rev.2:4-7; 14-16; 20-24; 3:1-3; 16-19.

The Meaning of Rest

In this context, the word “rest” refers to victory and blessing in the land of Canaan. However, within the wider context including chapter four, the word is used in several different ways, that are all closely related.

1. It is used of God’s rest after creation (Gen.2:1-2; Heb.4:4).
2. It is used of Canaan, the promised land, whose rich blessings had to be claimed by victory through faith (Deu.6:10-11; Jos.24:13; Psa.95:11; Jos.1:13-15; Heb.3:11).
3. It is used of spiritual rest for our souls by receiving eternal salvation (Mat.11:28; Heb.4:3).
4. It is used of the victorious life of faith (Mat.11:29-30; Heb.4:9-11).
5. Finally, it is used of our eternal rest of inheritance/reward in Christ’s kingdom (Rev.14:13).

The main burden of the book of Hebrews is to bring those who have entered into salvation rest all the way to the rest of spirituality, maturity and victorious living by faith.

The Warning Applied (Heb.3:12-19)

These believing “*brethren*” (Heb.3:1) are identified as the first century equivalent of those mentioned in Heb.2:11, 12, 17. That is, they are members of the family of God, which includes both Old and New Testament saints.

They are warned to “*beware*”, or “watch out”, lest they fail as the saints of the Exodus generation did. Paul makes this very same argument in 1Co.10:1-13. It is important to take note of the seven exhortations which show the sure path of escaping spiritual defeat.

1. “Consider”, 3:1. We must keep our eyes on Jesus Christ.
2. “Hear His voice”, 3:7. We must be attentive to His word.
3. “Do not harden your hearts”, 3:8. We must recognize the danger.
4. “Beware”, 3:12. We must examine ourselves daily.
5. “Exhort one another”, 3:13. We must care for one another.
6. “Hold fast”, 3:14. We must get a grip on our faith, and never quit.
7. “Let us fear”, 4:1. We must recognize Satan’s strategy.

Speaking of the very same Exodus generation in 1Co.10, Paul says,

“Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were recorded for our admonition, upon the ends of the ages have come.”
1Co.10:11.

This spiritual defeat is attributed to *“an evil heart of unbelief”*. Those who think that “evil” and “unbelief” cannot refer to true believers I would recommend comparing Scripture with Scripture (Luk.11:13; 1Co.5:13; Jam.2:4). Jesus often rebuked the original apostles for their hardness of heart and unbelief (Mar.6:52; 8:17; 16:11, 13, 14). There is a five-fold progression here.

1. First comes the evil of unbelief in the heart, v.12a.
2. This results in a spiritual departure from the living God, v.12b.
3. This begins a process of hardening in the heart, v.13, 15.
4. Then life becomes a series of divine discipline, v.16-17.
5. The sad end is failure to enter and enjoy the rest of God, v.17-19.

When we get in the habit of failing to trust God, in each and every situation, we end up *“departing from the living God”*. This refers to loss of fellowship, fruitfulness, and service, not the loss of salvation. In Gal.5:4 Paul calls it being *“estranged from Christ”*. To avoid this ever present danger, we are to exhort one another daily, and hold fast to the local church (Heb.10:24-25). It is certain that if we unaware of the danger of drifting (Heb.2:1), and fail to “hold fast” to the word of God, we will fall prey to the deceitfulness of sin and become hardened of heart.

Over my 50 years of ministry, I can count many who, when faced with a great test of faith (illness, loss of a loved one, death of a child, etc.) have followed this very pattern! All of us are in peril of following this path, if we do not “hold fast” to God’s word “today”.

God has a plan for every believer. That plan includes spiritual gifts and ministry (Rom.12:1-8; Rom.11:29; 1Co.12:7). We are called to a life of fellowship and joint-participation with the Lord in His plan (2Co.5:14-21). However, we can only remain active partners in this plan if we *“hold fast the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.”* This is

essentially a repetition of the truth stated in v.6. To be in fellowship and partnership with God is the sure path to victory and blessing.

In v.15 he repeats the warning from v.7 to emphasize the word *“Today”*. Because our enemy the devil, never sleeps, he keeps stressing the need for daily vigilance and spiritual progress (v.13). To live *“today”* in the fellowship and power of the Holy Spirit is what it means to *“redeem the time”* (Eph.5:16; Col.4:5). We have no time to waste in fulfilling the plan of God for our lives. How can we *“redeem”* each day, moment-by-moment? These five things we do every day for our bodies. Let us also do them for our souls.

1. Wash (1Jo.1:9; 1Co.11:28, 31).
We need to daily examine our lives and confess our sins.
2. Eat (Mat.4:4; 5:6; Joh.6:27; 35; 1Pe.2:1-3).
Every day we need to feed on the word of God.
3. Walk (2Co.5:7; Gal.5:16; Eph.4:1; 5:2, 8).
We need to walk in fellowship and communion with our Lord.
4. Work (Gal.5:6; Eph.2:10; Phi.2:12-13; 1Th.1:3; Tit.2:14; Jam.2:22).
God has gifted and empowered each of us for His special work.
5. Rest (Mat.11:28-30; Heb.4:1, 11).
By faith we rest in His faithfulness and promises, even in trials.

Verses 16-19 are especially valuable for they stress that these were believers who rebelled and ended up dying in the wilderness (1Co.10:1-13). The three *“Who”* questions emphasize that the Exodus generation had been blessed with great and mighty signs and wonders (As had these first century believers) and yet they still failed. Read Psalm 78 in its entirety. The other sins of Israel, including their complaining (Exo.15;24; 16:2; Num.14:2), their idolatry (Exo.32; 1Co.10:7), and their sexual immorality (Num.25:1-9; 1Co.10:8), all these sins are traced back to the same cause, *“They could not enter in because of unbelief”* (v.19).

Jesus made it clear that all the sins that men commit originate in the heart (Mar.7:21-23). Solomon warns us to *“Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life”* (Pro.4:23). Two things determine the condition of the heart: first, the presence or absence of faith. Second, consistent spiritual growth, or the lack of it (Heb.5:11-14).

As an example of believers failing to *“hold fast...to the end”* (v.6), and of *“departing from the living God”* (v.12), consider the sad account of Demas. In Phi. v.24 he is named by Paul among his fellow laborers. In Col.4:14 he is serving with Paul and Luke. Then, in 2Tim.4:10 we read, *“for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world...”*. This is not loss of salvation, but of fruitfulness, blessing, and eternal reward.

Exhortation to enter into rest (4:1-16)

The author mixes warning with positive exhortations to avoid the dangers presented. This section is dominated by four positive commands in the form of an exhortation. The author includes himself in the pursuit of these goals.

1. Let us fear (4:1-9)

Because of the negative example of the Exodus generation, and the fact that we also can fail, we ought to fear failing to enter into the life of faith-rest victory. During His earthly ministry Jesus offered two kinds of rest (Mat.11:28-30). The first is the rest of eternal life, and this is a gift. This we receive at the moment of trusting in Jesus Christ. The second rest is that of discipleship, the faith-rest life. We find or discover this rest as we take up the yoke of discipleship and service and follow the plan of God for our lives (Luk.19:23). Eternal life is free, but discipleship is costly.

God rested the seventh day because His work was finished (v.3-4). The Exodus generation could have enjoyed rest in Canaan had they been willing to trust God and claim the land. Their “rest” would have followed the finished “work” of conquest. However, they did not trust God (Num. 13&14), and failed to enter the Canaan rest (v.6). Five hundred years later David declared that spiritual rest was still available (v.7-10; Psa.95:7-8). This is the “Sabbath-rest” in the soul, which we can enjoy day-by-day as we walk by faith and finish the work God has for us to do.

2. Let us be diligent (4:11-13)

The word for diligence is the same one found in 2Tim.2:15 and 2Pe.1:5&10 and 3:14. It refers to a strong inner drive and motivation to reach a set goal or objective. It is the attitude Paul expresses in Phi.3:13-14. The absence of diligence in our spiritual lives will guarantee that we fail just as the Exodus generation did.

Our victory comes by humbling ourselves under the authority of the word of God (v.12-13). It alone has the power to discern our thoughts and motives, and to bring everything of our inner life into conformity with the will of God. One day we will give an account of our life before the Lord (1Co.3:11-15; 2Co.5:10). That accounting will be far more joyful and worthy of reward if we let God's word work in us for *"reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness..."* (2Ti.3:16) here and now.

3. Let us hold fast (4:14-15)

We proclaim to the world that Jesus Christ has been crucified, buried, and raised again, and is now seated at the right hand of God in power and authority (1Co.15:3-4; Psa.110:1; Heb.1:13). To falter in our faith in times of trial and affliction is to the world a denial of our claim.

Our victory depends, not on our ability, but on the faithfulness of our High Priest. Jesus not only is able to have compassion on our weakness and frailty. He intercedes for us daily to the Father (Rom.8:34). He alone is a *"merciful and faithful High priest"* (Heb.2:17). Because of His victory on our behalf, *"He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them."* (Heb.7:25).

4. Let us come boldly (4:16)

Our victory is won when we take advantage of our High Priest through effective prayer. It is the prayer of faith that delivers us (Jam.5:13-18). Jesus Christ not only delivered us in the past, at salvation. He continues to be the only hope of deliverance in the present and for the future (Rom.7:24-25; 2Co.1:9-10). Like Joshua, we need to learn to be *"strong and courageous"* (Jos.1:6-7), not because we are able, but because God is faithful to keep His promises. Like David we need to learn that *"the battle is the Lord's"* (1Sam.17:47), and that only as we rest in faith will He win life's battles for us. Let us come boldly to the throne of grace!

Summary

Spiritual growth, like physical growth, requires daily nourishment, exercise, and rest. If we are daily learning more and more of the word of God, and by faith applying it in our lives, and trusting in the promises and the plan of God, we will naturally grow up to maturity in our faith.

Peter gives us a very good picture of the stages of spiritual growth, as well as the blessings and eternal benefits we will receive by growing to maturity in our faith (2Pe.1:5-11). Five steps can summarize the plan of God for every believer.

1. Salvation by faith in Jesus Christ (Joh.3:16, 36; 6:29, 40; 10:27-29).
2. Growing to maturity by the Spirit and the word (Tit.2:11-14; 2Pe.2:5-7).
3. Service in effective prayer to God (priesthood – 1Pe.2:5-9), witness to the lost (ambassadorship – 2Co.5:14-21), and ministry to fellow believers (exercise of spiritual gifts – Rom.12:3-8; 1Pe.4:10-11). Every believer has this three-fold calling on their life (1Th.1:2-10; Heb.10:19-25).
4. Increasing conformity to the character of the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom.8:29; 12:1-2; 1Co.11:1; 2Co.3:18).
5. Holding fast the faith to the end (Col.1:23; 2Ti.4:7-8; Heb.3:6, 14).

III. Third Warning: Growth or Retreat the only options (5:12-6:12)

In these warning sections it is important to remember that the author is moving through a series of stages in the experience of believers who stray from the Word and the plan of God. These include drifting from God's word (2:1-3), doubting God's word (3:12-19), dull (sluggish) of hearing God's word (5:11-14), disobeying God's word (10:26-39), and finally, of despising God's word (12:12-29). This process is often referred to as the backsliding or reversion of a Christian.

The warning against spiritual dullness (5:11-14)

This section is a rebuke to all who fail to grow in grace and truth (2Pe.3:18) to the point of spiritual maturity. The path of stunted growth in Christians is always the same. Those who drift from God's word (Heb.2:1) will inevitably come to doubt God's word (Ch.3), because they do not mix the word with faith (Heb.4:2). As a result, Bible study does not benefit them, since their faith has no practical application or exercise (Heb.5:14; Jam.2:17, 26). They start out as hearers of the word, but they never become "*doers of the word*" (Jam.1:22-23).

In v.12 we see that the recipients of this letter had been believers for long enough that they should have now been able to instruct others in the faith. The work of making disciples (Mat.28:19) belongs to every

believer. How tragic, then, to have those who, after years of instruction, “need someone to teach...again the first principles of the oracles of God.” They could not “endure sound doctrine” (2Ti.4:3), but love to have their ears tickled and their egos gratified.

Basic Biblical instruction is likened to milk (v.13). Milk is good for those who are babes in Christ (1Pe.2:2). However, spiritual growth demands a willingness to “go on to perfection (maturity)” (Heb.6:1), and to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2Pe.3:18). While the gift of eternal salvation is free to all who will believe, the life of discipleship and service is costly indeed (Luk.9:23-26; 14:26-33).

Verse 14 sets before each and every believer the goal for every child of God. The “solid food” speaks of “the deep things of God” (1Co.2:10), what we might call advanced doctrinal instruction. Those who are growing into ever greater maturity are faithful to get their spiritual workout in learning and applying the word of God to life. As a result, their spiritual senses are “exercised” in daily life to distinguish between good and evil. The word used for exercise in Greek is the basis for our word “gymnasium”. It refers to the place we go for training, and this is what every local church should be.

It is worth ending this section with the reminder that we will all one day stand before the Lord Jesus to give an account of our lives (Rom.14:10-11; 1Co.3:11-15; 2Co.5:9-10). It was this knowledge that drove the apostle Paul, both in his personal life, and in his ministry (1Co.9:24-27; Phi.3:7-14; 2Co.5:11; Col.1:28-29). It is God’s will, expressed often in His word, that we live lives worthy of eternal reward, which will be our expression of our gratitude for all that Jesus Christ has done for us (2Ti.4:6-8; Rev.3:11; 22:12).

The goal of the faith-rest life is spiritual maturity (Heb.6:1-3)

In keeping with the negative example of the Exodus generation in chapter 3, and the exhortations in chapter 4 to enter into the life of faith and rest, the author now challenges his readers to “go on to perfection”. A more literal translation would be “Let us be borne/carried on to maturity”. He is urging them to rest in faith and submit to the working of the power of God by the indwelling Holy Spirit. It is important to note that, like all the exhortations in Hebrews, the author includes himself

with the readers in saying, “*Let us... .*” We are never beyond the need for spiritual exhortation. Even Paul, the great Apostle, toward the end of his earthly life, was focused on “pressing on” to higher spiritual ground (Phi.3:14).

To achieve this goal they need to leave behind what we might call “the basics” of elementary teaching. The ABC’s of the faith, or the “milk” he mentioned in 5:12. Milk is fine for babies, but “solid food”, or advanced doctrinal instruction was essential for the mature (5:14).

Six basic doctrines are mentioned to define “*elementary principles*”. While many commentators see in these the basic elements of Judaism and the Mosaic law, I cannot agree. The reason is that the “*dead works*” they had repented of were all of the Jewish rituals and rites that pointed to Jesus Christ (Heb.9:14). With the rending of the veil at the death of Christ (Mat.27:50-51), all temple rituals were made invalid. What they foretold in shadow form; Christ had now fulfilled (Heb.10:1-4). Thus they had all become “*dead works*”.

The message of the Apostles to the Jewish people was their need to repent from the sin of unbelief. By restoring the veil and continuing to engage in the sacrificial system, they proved their rejection of the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Act.2:36-39; 3:17-21). They needed to repent from the dead works of the law, which could never save them (Heb.9:14). This repentance would result in a true faith in God, through Jesus Christ.

The various baptisms would specifically recognize the difference between the baptism of John, which was a sign of repentance (Mat.3:11; Mar.1:4), the baptism of Jesus, which revealed Him as the Messiah (Joh.1:25-34), and Christian baptism, which is a public profession of faith in Jesus Christ (Mat.28:19-20; Act.8:35-38; 16:31-33).

The laying on of hands was a sign of fellowship and commitment to service (Act.13:1-3). The doctrine of the resurrection from the dead speaks of the resurrection of believers, and the doctrine of eternal judgment relates to all who reject Jesus Christ as Savior (Joh.5:19-30).

The goal of attaining spiritual maturity was stated as a possibility.

“This we will do if God permits” (v.3). To grow to maturity takes time, and as this letter was written around 67A.D., the author knew that time was short. Already, the shadow of the destruction of the Temple and the dispersion of the nation of Israel was at hand. The time was short, and there was no time to waste.

When repentance is no longer possible (Heb.6:4-8)

This passage has troubled many believers through the ages. Many good Bible expositors do not even attempt to deal with it. As we approach this text we must remember the most crucial law of Biblical interpretation: the context determines interpretation. Let us review a few points of the preceding context.

1. The negative example is the Exodus generation (Ch.3), who failed to enter into the blessings of the Promised Land due to their lack of trust in the promises of God.
2. The authors’ challenge to his readers to be diligent to enter, not into the land of Canaan, but to enter into a life of faith leading to victory and spiritual rest (Ch.4).
3. The problem of the readers is not lack of salvation, but a failure to grow up into spiritual maturity (Ch.5:12-14).
4. The challenge in Ch.6 then, is to become mature and fruitful. Failure to do so would result in Divine discipline in life and loss of reward in eternity.

Before we deal with the phrase *“For it is impossible...to renew them to repentance”* (v.4, 6), let’s confirm that these readers are truly saved men and women. There are five qualifications listed as to their spiritual condition (v.4-5). These show that they were indeed believers.

1. They *“were once enlightened”*. The word used means “once for all”. It is the same word translated in Heb.10:10 *“once for all”*. The word *“enlightened”* is the same one translated *“illuminated”* in Heb.10:32 (NKJV). This word refers to the moment of salvation.
2. They had *“tasted the heavenly gift”*. The word *“tasted”* is the same one used for Jesus’ substitutionary death on our behalf (Heb.2:9). The gift refers to the gift of eternal life, which they are in full possession of.
3. They became *“partakers of the Holy Spirit”*. The word used here is also translated *“partakers”* in Heb.3:1 and 14, which speak of union with Christ.

4. They had “*tasted the good word of God*”, the idea being to taste to the full. Just as Jesus had “*tasted*” death for all mankind (Heb.2:9).
5. And with the word of God they had also tasted “*the powers of the age to come*”. The signs that Jesus and the apostles had performed in the presence of these people were a preview of the Kingdom age, when Christ will rule on the earth.

There is no way that the five things listed above could be experienced by any unbeliever. These are truly saved individuals, who are in danger of committing an offense even greater than that of the Exodus generation recorded in Numbers 13-14.

There is no “if” in the original of v.6. Literally it reads, “having fallen away”. The idea is to fall by the wayside. Now we can bring in the statement, “*It is impossible...to renew them again to repentance*”. He is not talking about salvation, but repentance and restoration. Why would it be impossible for a Christian who falls away to repent and be restored? There are two good answers to this question, one is textual, the other is historical.

Let’s take the historical first. Remember the Old Testament incident that the author is building his arguments on? Those in Hebrews 3 and Numbers 13-14 who failed to enter the promised land. Go back and read Numbers 14 again, Pay close attention to v.39-45. Do you see that they tried to “repent” and go into the land, but were defeated? Once the opportunity to trust and obey passed, it was too late to “repent”.

Remember that the recipients of the book of Hebrews were on the brink of a far greater calamity. In 70 A.D. the Roman legions would destroy the city of Jerusalem and the temple. By 73 A.D. the nation of Israel had ceased to exist. The window of opportunity for these first century Jewish believers to grow to maturity and fruitfulness was fast closing. Once closed, it would be “impossible” for them to reclaim the opportunity.

The textual explanation helps here as well. The phrase “*since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame*”, uses two present participles, and should be translated, “while they are crucifying...while they are putting to shame”. In other words,

repentance is not impossible should they cease these actions. However, the act of denouncing the effective work of Christ, and going back into Judaism, so as to escape persecution, would likely harden the heart beyond the point of no return. Again, the issue is not eternal salvation, but growth to maturity, fruitfulness, and eternal rewards.

At a time of great historical crisis, and intense persecution of believers, to publicly deny Christ, and to identify with those who cried out for His crucifixion, would likely exhaust what little time remained, and make restoration and growth to maturity impossible.

The examples in v.7-8 verify that the issue is fruit-bearing and blessing, and not eternal life. The “earth” represents the believer. To each and every child of God is given the “rain” of God’s word and Spirit. The provisions of grace are available to all. One believer drinks in the rain and bears fruit, resulting in blessing to others, as well as blessing to that believer. His or her life is fruitful, beneficial, and “*receives blessing from God*”. This blessing in time is a foretaste of eternal reward at the judgment seat of Christ (1Co.3:11-15; 2Co.5:9-10). Like a fruitful field, this land is blessed (Psa.65:9-13).

Another believer is represented in v.8, as an unfruitful field. On it the same rain falls, but it bears thorns and briars. Remember that these are emblems of the curse that came through Adam’s disobedience (Gen.3:17-19). This “fruit” is “*rejected and near to being cursed*”. The word “rejected” is the same one used by Paul in 1Cor.9:27, translated either “castaway” or “disqualified”. It speaks of that which is rejected by God for usefulness in time and from eternal reward. Note that it is the crop of thorns and briars that are burned. This could refer to Divine discipline in this life (Heb.12:3-11) and fits perfectly with Paul’s depiction of the judgment seat of Christ (1Co.3:11-15). The issue here for these believers is loss of blessing in time and reward in eternity, should they turn back to Judaism. Interestingly, Jesus used this very contrast between fruitful and unfruitful branches (Joh.15:1-8). Fruitful branches, believers who abide in Christ, are blessed with increasing fruit. Branches that bear no fruit are burned. This could refer to ultimate Divine discipline which the apostle John calls “*the sin leading to death*” (1Jo.5:16).

An assurance and a challenge (Heb.6:9-12)

The author follows the severe warning with a word of comfort. He is *confident of better things...things that accompany salvation.* That he calls them *“beloved”* again assures us that they are children of God by faith in Christ. The issue is not salvation, but the fruits that ought to accompany a healthy and strong spiritual life.

That they had engaged in faithful ministry in the past was certain (v.10, 10:32-34). They needed the encouragement of v.10, that God is faithful, and will never forget our *“work and labor of love”* (1Th.1:3-10). When we minister to the needs of fellow believers, we are in fact ministering to Jesus Christ (Mat.25:31-40).

The option of every believer each and every day is to be either diligent, or sluggish (v.11-12). The word translated *“sluggish”* is the same one translated *“dull”* of hearing in Heb.5:11. Those who choose the path of diligence (Heb.4:11) will hold fast in the assurance of God’s word and the blessed hope that is before us (Tit.2:13), to the very end. Such faith and endurance will *“imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises”*. That is, like the great one’s of the faith that have gone before us (Heb.11), we will ultimately receive eternal rewards in abundance (2Pe.1:10-11).

IV. Fourth Warning: No More Sacrifice for Sins – Heb.10:19-39

Here the author builds on the three former warnings, each one becoming a bit more stern. The exhortations in v.19-25 are the means we have of escaping the *“fearful expectation of judgment”* in v.26-31.

It is important to emphasize here that both the positive exhortations of v.19-25, and the warnings that follow v.26 are based on the finished work of Christ on the cross (v.5-18). The tenth chapter of Hebrews shows us that the cross of Christ provides for those who trust in Him both the eternal security of our salvation, as well as severe judgment for those believers who live in disobedience to His word.

The three exhortations to escape judgment, v.19-25.

The phrase *“Therefore, brethren”* speaks to believers in light of the cross of Christ. Jesus Christ offered the one and only sacrifice that could bring complete forgiveness and eternal life (v.12). Those who believe are

“perfected forever” positionally in Christ, though in practice we are *“being sanctified”* (v.14) day by day.

In v.19-21 we see three present possessions of every believer. We have boldness to enter into the presence of God (v.19; 4:14-16), we have a new and living access beyond the veil (v.20), and there we have a High Priest, who is faithful and merciful (v.21; 2:17-18; 7:26-28). In light of these great spiritual possessions, we are given three exhortations, which clarify the three ministries, which every believer is to engage in.

1. Let us draw near, v.22. (Priesthood)

This is the ministry of our priesthood (1Pe.2:4-10). We perform this ministry when we intercede on behalf of others, in the power of the Holy Spirit (Eph.6:18; 1Th.5:17-19; Heb.13:15). In order to be effective in our prayer life, we need to cleanse ourselves daily through self examination and confessions of sins (1Co.11:27-31; 1Jo.1:9).

2. Let us hold fast, v.23. (Ambassadorship)

Every believer is called to be an ambassador for Christ (2Co.5:14-21). Our witness to the world is that by faith in Jesus Christ we have the hope (absolute confidence) of eternal life. Our confidence is not based on our performance, but on the fact that *“He who promised is faithful”*. No one who doubts the eternal security of the believer is capable of holding this confession *“without wavering”*. Our assurance and security are based on the perfect and finished work of Jesus Christ our Savior.

3. Let us consider one another, v.24-25. (Ministry)

Each and every child of God is spiritually gifted by the Holy Spirit (Rom.12:3-8; 1Co.12:7; Eph.4:7; 1Pe.4:10-11). These gifts are given for the building up of the body of Christ. We are all members of His body, dependent on the other members for our full spiritual development. We are to edify one another in love and good deeds (1Th.5:11-22). The arena in which these activities are to take place is the local church. To forsake our gathering together is to fail our 3-fold ministry.

The warning against willful disobedience, v.26-31

The willful sin in this context is the forsaking of the local church. The word *“forsaking”* implies a desertion by which others are left in peril.

The use of the present participle indicates a habitual absence from the local gathering of believers.

It should be remembered that under the O.T. law, sacrifices were made for sins of ignorance, sins of omission, and sins of defilement (Lev.4-5). Willful and deliberate sins were not covered, but instead were dealt with by judgment (consider Achan, Joshua 7; and Exo.21:14; Deu.17:2-6;). While we know that confession of sins brings forgiveness and cleansing (1Jo.1:9), continual sin, without confession and correction, will result in increasing levels of Divine discipline (Heb.12:3-11).

For these first century Jewish believers, forsaking the church to go back into Judaism, would result in them sharing the fate of the “*adversaries*” (v.27), who would die in the fiery judgment of the fall of Jerusalem. By their defection they would be guilty of the three offenses listed in v.29. What could be worse than to die without mercy (v.28)? The apostle John warns us about the “*sin unto death*” (1Jo.5:16). This refers to unconfessed and persistent sin continued in until death. This could play out in several ways.

1. Immediate and unavoidable death (Act.5:1-11).
2. Prolonged illness until death (Rom.8:13; 1Co.11:29-32).
3. Becoming a “*castaway*”, rejected for further service (1Co.9:26-27), and denied eternal reward (1Co.3:11-15).

It is evident from v.30 that the author is dealing with discipline on God’s people, not on unbelievers. It would be better to die without mercy than to live without grace! That this warning is to true believers is made clear in the passage in the following ways.

1. The author addresses the readers as “*brethren*” (v.19). They are the same ones called “*holy brethren*” (Heb.3:1).
2. The three exhortations include the author with them, “*Let us...*” (v.22-24).
3. The author includes himself in the warning about willful sin, v.26.
4. It is to “*His people*” that these warnings are addressed, v.30.

We must never forget that God is faithful to judge His own people (1Pe.4:15-17), but He always does so in love (Heb.12:5-7). These stern warnings are now followed with words of encouragement.

A call to endurance, v.32-39.

The author reminds these believers of their early Christian experience. They had left their *"first love"*, and the only remedy was to *"Remember...from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works"* (Rev.3:5). That they were genuine believers is shown by the fact that they *"were illuminated"* (v.32), a term used in Heb.6:4 for the moment of entering eternal life.

They had previously suffered for their faith, and had supported Paul in his chains. They had endured persecution and privation because of the sure conviction that they possessed eternal treasure (Mat.6:20).

His challenge is *"Do not cast away your confidence"*, and the reason is that *"If we hold fast the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end"* (Heb.3:14), it will result in *"great reward"* (v.35). It is only by endurance in our faith that we can receive this promise (v36). Our lives ought to be lived out in the light of the Bema seat of Christ (Rom.8:17; 1Co.3:11-15; 2Co.5:10).

If we live life in light of the return of Jesus Christ (v.37-38), the issue will be whether we will face Him in confidence or in shame (1Jo.2:28-3:3). We are to live by faith, and not by sight (2Co.5:7). Those who fail to hold fast their confidence, and draw back in fear, cannot please God (Num.14:20-24, 29-32; 1Co.10:1-12).

The author concludes by saying *"But we are not of those who draw back to perdition (destruction), but of those who believe to the saving of the soul"* (v.39). There are those who hear the gospel message, and who then draw back in unbelief, unto eternal destruction in hell. We are not of this group. The danger he is dealing with is to those who hear and believe the gospel, and then draw back in continued disobedience. For them the five warning passages of Hebrews are written.

The phrase *"believe to the saving of the soul"* should literally be translated *"to the possession of the soul"*. It is the same sense, though using different words, that Jesus spoke of in Luke 21:19, *"In your patience possess your souls"*.

V. Final Warning: We Are Receiving a Kingdom, 12:12-29

This section must be seen in the light of the teaching on divine discipline in v.3-11. For the sake of review here is a brief summary.

1. Only by keeping our eyes fixed on Christ can we endure, v.3-4.
2. We should neither despise nor be discouraged by His discipline, v.5. God disciplines in love those who are His own children. This discipline is evidence of our salvation!
3. God's discipline increases, the longer we resist, along three lines; rebuke, chastening, and scourging, v.5-6.
4. No believer escapes discipline, for none are perfect, v.7-9.
5. The goal of divine discipline is always purification and blessing, v.10-11. Correction brings blessings in time and reward in eternity. The word "*trained*" in v.11 is the same word used in Heb.5:14 translated "*exercised*". We get "gymnasium" from it.

Do not fail like Esau, 12:12-17

The discouraged and downcast believer is pictured as a runner whose hands are hanging down, with feeble knees and stumbling feet (v.12-13). But strength is available, and it comes from God's word, received in the local church (Heb.10:25). The goal is not to be a dislocated limb (a believer out of fellowship), but rather to find spiritual healing through grace and truth. This requires a continual focus on the Lord Jesus Christ as the source of our hope (v.2-3).

Our lives are to be a continual pursuit of peace and holiness, or sanctification, "*without which no one will see the Lord*". Those who believe have been sanctified forever in our **position** in Christ (1Co.6; Heb.10:10). Now our lives are to be a process of **practical** sanctification. In other words, we are "*being sanctified*" (Heb.10:14). As we keep our eyes on Christ, and continue to grow in grace, we are purified even as He is pure (1Jo.3:3). Those who reject the offer of eternal life in Christ are devoid of all sanctification, or holiness, and will never see Him as we will. The basis of our holiness is the imputed righteousness of Christ (Rom.4:3, 22-25; 2Co.5:21).

Esau is an example of one who was in line for blessing and inheritance, but who chose physical gratification over lasting spiritual rewards. He sold his birthright and inheritance for one meal. It is important to notice that his "*afterward*" (v.11) is just the opposite of the "*afterward*" in v.11.

Wise decisions bring blessed consequences. Foolish decisions only result in loss of blessings. Believers who only live for the here and now, who ignore their spiritual responsibilities, will one day stand before the Lord and “*suffer loss*” (1Co.3:15) in terms of eternal reward they could have gained (Rev.3:11).

When it was too late, Esau sought to repent, even with tears, but the opportunity was past. At that point it was “*impossible*” for him to repent. This verse is poorly translated, leaving a wrong impression of what it actually says. It should read:

“For you know that afterward when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, though he sought it (the blessing) earnestly with tears, for he found no place for repentance.”

The difference here shows that Esau was seeking the blessing, not repentance. He could not receive the blessing because the opportunity for repentance was past. Both the Exodus generation in Ch.3, and Esau here in Ch.12, illustrate the meaning of “impossible” in Ch.6:4.

This is a good picture of the believer who stands before the Lord at the Bema, and watches his life go up in smoke, and sees the reward he could have gained, had he been faithful (1Co.3:11-15). There will be tears of regret, but it will be too late to repent and claim the rewards that have been forfeited through self-indulgence. It is worth noticing that in Jesus’ message to the seven churches (Rev.2-3), the call to repent is repeated seven times!

We are under grace and not law, 12:18-24

The covenant of the law is here contrasted with the new covenant. One declared that access to God was impossible. The other extends a welcome mat for each and every believer to draw near to God. One so emphasized death, that even Moses was terrified. The other holds out the promise of welcome in our eternal union with Christ Jesus. One engendered only fear of God, the other of love, fellowship, and obedience. The first covenant showed that access to God was barred. The new covenant declares that the way into the Holy of Holies is open to us at all times (Joh.4:23-24; Heb.4:14-16; 10:19-22).

This same contrast is made by Paul in 2Co.3:4-18, another of the many parallels with his other epistles. The glory of the Old Covenant was intended to fade away, as illustrated by the fading glory on Moses face. But the glory of the New Covenant is permanent and eternal.

I like to think of the welcome described in v.22-24 as depicting what happens when a believer dies. Out from the gates of the New Jerusalem comes first a welcoming crowd of angels, singing as they come. Then comes *“the general assembly”*, the saints of the Old Testament, mentioned in Heb.11, the heroes of the faith, who welcome us. Then we are met by *“the church of the firstborn”*, which can only refer to church age believers. Then, we meet the Father, the judge who declares all those justified by faith as *“men made perfect”*. From God as judge we have nothing to fear, because of the work of Christ. Then, finally, we are led by the Father through the gates of the city, where none other than *“Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant”* meets us, to welcome us to our eternal home which He has prepared for us (Joh.14:2-3). What a glorious picture!

Warning against despising God’s word, 12:25-29

He whose voice shook the earth at Sinai will once again speak, so that *“the things which cannot be shaken may remain”*. This will include all our works done in faith and obedience to the leading of the Spirit of God.

Knowing that we are bound for an unshakeable kingdom, we ought to be motivated to so utilize the grace of God that we might serve Him now in reverence and godly fear. If we live our lives now, in the light of eternity, what a difference it will make on that day, when we stand in His presence.

The fact that *“Our God is a consuming fire”* should hold no fear for those who know that that fire can only consume the things of this world and of this life. That fire can only refine and purify all that is done by faith (1Co.3:12-14; 1Pe.1:3-9). Therefore, let us live each day for our King, and for the glory of His kingdom. It will all be worth it in the end.

Summary

The book of Hebrews is as relevant today as in the first century. We live in an apostate generation. We have sown the wind, and we are about to

reap the whirlwind. There are consequences for the decisions we make, and the longer we make bad decisions, the greater weight of consequences we will have to face. Judgment is coming to America, and judgment begins at the house of God.

Yet, for those who heed the lessons of the book of Hebrews, there is still the promise of power and purpose; the call to be a hero of faith in a lost generation. Therefore, *“Let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach”* (Heb.13:13).