

Sunday September 18th 2011
The Letter to the Hebrews
Part Seventeen

1). Heb 5:12 *For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*

a). We had seen in our study from last week how some of the recipients of the letter written to the Hebrews had drifted away from the teaching concerning Christ and His coming Kingdom and that even though they had been thoroughly taught for a long time they had hardened their hearts, thereby not hearing His voice resulting in their reverting back to a place of spiritual immaturity. The extent of this regression is poignantly represented in the contrast that's given in the fact that 'by this time' they 'ought to be teachers', but in reality they needed someone again to teach them, and in the contrast that's made between their need for milk with other's diet of solid food and in the contrast between them being 'babes' and those who are of 'full age'.

b). They had not always been in this condition though and the somewhat disturbing thought here is that they were people, probably much like ourselves, who were eating the solid food of the word, who were hearing His voice and whose hearts once were not hardened; and yet this deplorable state, because of their choices, was now the condition they were in – a condition that was extremely dangerous.

c). Now we know the reason why they were now in this state as the first two warnings in our Book spell it out for us - Heb 2:1 ¶ *Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.*

d). Heb 3:12 *Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; 13 but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*

e). We know that the 'sin' that deceived them into hardening their hearts was that of unbelief, but we do not have the details of the actual events that brought this about. But what we can know for sure with regards to ourselves, is that even though we may be eating solid food and hearing His voice at present we are not immune from the possibility of hardening our hearts through the deceitfulness of

the sin of unbelief and therefore we must be constantly vigilant to keep our thoughts, decisions and actions in submission to the word – 2Ti 2:15 *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*

f). 2Pe 3:14 *Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless;*

g). It is then incumbent upon us to make sure that our progress in the area of spiritual maturity is always forward with our eyes focused and fixed on the hope that is set before us – 1Pe 5:8 ¶ *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 9 Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.*

h). God in His infinite wisdom, through the extending of His grace has provided all we need to be ‘steadfast in the faith’, a no small part of which is our participation in the ministry of the word through the Sunday message and the Bible Study that accompanies it – whether near or far we will neglect these things at our peril - Eph 4:11 *And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ-- 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*

2). And it is with a view to impending peril that our writer continues into Chapter Six, preparing the way for the third major warning - Heb 6:1 ¶ *Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. 3 And this we will do if God permits.*

a). It would seem from what is written here that the group who had regressed to the point of being able to handle nothing but milk still had the opportunity to turn this situation around and then go on to ‘perfection’. But in order to do this there was action that was required first – ‘Therefore leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ’.

b). The word translated ‘leaving’ has the idea of abandoning and therefore making a complete separation from – and so in order to go on to perfection there would need to be a complete separation from the elementary principles of Christ. And this is given as a command, not a suggestion.

c). Now we had seen in Chapter 5:12 as we began this morning a reference to the ‘first principles of the oracles of God’ and then in Chapter 6:1 ‘the elementary principles of Christ’ and we need to know that these two are not the same. The word translated ‘principles’ is a different Greek word in each location – In Chapter 5 they need someone to teach them these ‘principles’ again and in Chapter 6 the ‘principles’ are to be abandoned. This in itself would show us that we are dealing with different things.

d). As we consider the ‘first principles of the oracles of God’ in Chapter 5, I think we would have to see these as the foundational material concerning Christ and His Bride, the full scope of salvation and the 7th Day as set out in the opening Chapters of Genesis. And as such this would most definitely not be something to abandon. In fact this is the very stuff, taken in connection with the Psalms quoted in Hebrews Chapter 1, to which we are to give the more earnest heed.

e). When we move on to the ‘elementary principles of Christ’ in Chapter 6 we are given some clue as to these through those things we are told are not to be laid in foundation again - *not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.*

f). And if we keep these things in mind for a moment and then look in Chapter 9 we might be able to begin to pull this together - Heb 9:6 *Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services. 7 But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance; 8 ¶ the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. 9 It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience-- 10 concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation. 11 But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. 12 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.*

g). Now let’s remember that in the early years of the Church the majority of those who became Christians were by birth Jews, who were very familiar with the ritual and practice of the tabernacle and in v 9-10 in our scripture here we see that

these things – the tabernacle/temple rituals - were ‘symbolic for the present time’. And that which was symbolic could not ‘make him who performed the service perfect in regard to conscience’ and the reason for this is that these things were ‘concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation’. What is being spoken of here then is the performance of religious ritual for its own sake, that which we might call today, legalism – the following of certain religious practices with a view to their performance being accepted as righteousness. These of course are quite useless in that respect and therefore need to be abandoned in favor of acts of faith born of faithful obedience to the word; all things of course having been fulfilled in Christ Jesus our Lord - Heb 10:19 ¶ *Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.*

h). Within the context of the church at large today we would see this same idea in the practice of ‘foot washing’ at ‘Easter’, the man made regulations concerning what may and may not be worn, the prohibition against drinking wine or eating pork and in only attending ‘church’ on a Saturday, to name but a few. Again none of these is the slightest value of itself and should be left behind.

i). Col 2:16 ¶ *So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, 17 which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. 18 Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, 19 and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God. 20 Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations-- 21 "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," 22 which all concern things which perish with the using--according to the commandments and doctrines of men? 23 These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.*

j). And of course it is self-evident that those who would cling to ritual as a means of demonstrating righteousness would be those who are spiritually immature – those who partake only of milk.

k). And so the admonition is to leave, to abandon these practices, and such an abandonment is a prerequisite to what is to be done next – to ‘go on to

perfection'. It is not possible to go on, until that which is being clung to is left behind.

3). The verb 'to go on' is written in the original language in the passive voice and should therefore be understood in the sense of being carried along. This is something then that is done to the person experiencing it rather than the person doing it themselves, and this of course would be perfectly consistent with the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word bringing about that inward transformation as we would receive with meekness the implanted word - Ro 12:1 ¶ *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

a). It is then the work of the Spirit through the Word, transforming us by the renewing of our mind, that will carry us along to perfection. The word perfection of course speaking of completion rather than being made 'perfect' – It is the very idea that we have seen many times now in - 1Pe 1:9 *receiving the end of your faith-the salvation of your souls.*

a). The word 'end' and 'perfection' both come from the Greek word that the Lord uses on the cross when He says - Joh 19:30 *So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.*

b). We could therefore translate this verse as, 'leaving once and for all.....let us be carried along'.

4). V3 of Hebrews Chapter 6 then says to us - 3 *And this we will do if God permits.*

a). If God permits is a somewhat uncomfortable statement because it must carry with it the real possibility that God may not permit.

b). But, as with so many other instances, we must be careful here with regards to how we understand this.

c). In no sense should we ever see this as God playing favorites or operating a lottery – as the whole focus of scripture is the 7th Day and it is God's stated purpose that eternally saved Christians should enter into that Day as companions with His Son it would be ridiculous to think that God would prevent anyone from going on to the point of completion, because arriving at this point must result in the salvation of the soul, and that salvation is not deliberately withheld from any Christian who is willing to make the journey.

d). However, having said that we need to qualify it within the context in which the statement is made – so bear with me for a few minutes.

e). Our writer is addressing a group of Christians who at one time had been advancing towards spiritual maturity, who were able to eat the solid food of the word, but this group through the deceitfulness of the sin of unbelief had regressed to the point of being spiritually immature all over again and were not now capable of handling anything but milk. The writer then encourages them to turn away from their immaturity, to abandon ‘the elementary principles of Christ’ and make the journey again to spiritual maturity which would result in the salvation of their soul, receiving their inheritance and becoming part of the Bride of Christ. This is excellent advice and advice that could be embraced wholeheartedly by those who receive it. However, as we have just seen, this change can only be accomplished ‘if God permits’, and the reason He may not permit them to make that journey is the substance of our third warning. They may have reached a point of no return and therefore God would not permit them to do so.

f). Israel again provides us with an example – Look at what is said concerning the incident at Kadesh Barnea - De 9:23 *"Likewise, when the LORD sent you from Kadesh Barnea, saying, 'Go up and possess the land which I have given you,' then you rebelled against the commandment of the LORD your God, and you did not believe Him nor obey His voice.*

g). What do we see here but unbelief. A regression from that which they had once seen and believed to a point where it would seem they did not remember a word God had spoken to them.

h). The day following the nations refusal to go into the land we find this recorded in - Nu 14:39 *Then Moses told these words to all the children of Israel, and the people mourned greatly. 40 And they rose early in the morning and went up to the top of the mountain, saying, "Here we are, and we will go up to the place which the LORD has promised, for we have sinned!" 41 And Moses said, "Now why do you transgress the command of the LORD? For this will not succeed. 42 "Do not go up, lest you be defeated by your enemies, for the LORD is not among you.*

i). Having realized what they had done Israel repented and chose to move into the land to receive their inheritance, but God would not permit them to do so, ‘the Lord is not among you’. They could then have repented and gone on into the land but the Lord would not permit them to do so because they had crossed over a boundary from which there was no return.

j). What we would note then is that God’s lack of permission is in direct response to their choices and cannot in any sense be seen as arbitrary.

5). Heb 6:3 *And this we will do if God permits. 4 For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the*

powers of the age to come, 6 if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.

a). And here we can see it clearly with respect to the recipients of our letter here in Hebrews. They may be able to repent and go on to perfection, but God would only permit them to do so providing they had not crossed the line spelled out for us in v4-5.

b). V4 begins with the words ‘For it is impossible’ and the word ‘impossible’ is an excellent translation as it does mean exactly what it says. There is a shocking finality about it, the full force of which should not be lost on us.

c). And there is a remarkable parallel in what is recorded here with Israel at Kadesh Barnea once again – Nu 13:21 ¶ *So they went up and spied out the land from the Wilderness of Zin as far as Rehob, near the entrance of Hamath. 22 And they went up through the South and came to Hebron; Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, the descendants of Anak, were there. (Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) 23 Then they came to the Valley of Eshcol, and there cut down a branch with one cluster of grapes; they carried it between two of them on a pole. They also brought some of the pomegranates and figs. 24 The place was called the Valley of Eshcol, because of the cluster which the men of Israel cut down there. 25 And they returned from spying out the land after forty days.*

d). Not only had God promised Israel the land, but He also allowed them the privilege of seeing it and experiencing what would be found there, in a small way of course by comparison with the whole, but enough to know the absolute certainty of that which God had promised. And yet despite that which God had promised and despite that which they had seen of the land and what was to be found there, they turned away in unbelief.

e). Then what do we find in our verses from Hebrews? Those who are spoken of here ‘were once enlightened’, they have ‘tasted the heavenly gift’, ‘have become partakers of the Holy Spirit’ and ‘have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come’. God allowed them the privilege of experiencing what is to be found in the Heavenly land, the Kingdom which is to come, just as Israel had with respect to the earthly kingdom.

f). And then, if having arrived at this point of maturity they should ‘fall away’ it is impossible ‘to renew them again to repentance’. Now this is not that they couldn’t repent, just as Israel did, but rather that God would not accept their repentance and He Himself would not change His mind about His decision, again just as we saw with Israel.

g). The word translated ‘fall away’ means to fall aside, to deviate from the right path, to wander and is found nowhere else in the NT. The word can be found

in two places in the Greek translation of the OT in the Book of Ezekiel and on both occasions has to do with Israel falling away from the true worship of God.

h). And so for those who progress to a place of maturity, who have been allowed to touch and taste that which will be manifest in the Kingdom Age, if they should then deviate from the right path, thereby rejecting all that God has revealed to them then God will not let them back no matter how much they cry out to Him for it.

i). So why is this so serious from God's perspective? Well the end of v6 makes it very clear - *since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.*

j). How then should we understand this? Well very simply – having been given extraordinary mature knowledge and understanding of Christ and His coming Kingdom to then turn from that is the same as turning from and rejecting Christ Himself. In this sense agreement is made with those who were the crucifiers of Christ at His first advent, agreement that He has been tried and found not to be the true Messiah, but an imposter. The actions of those who fall away will put them on the same level as those who literally nailed Him to the tree.

k). Not only this, but they also 'put Him to an open shame', a phrase that is taken from a Greek word meaning exposing to ignominy or infamy, the kind of ignominy that came in less civilized times by exposing the quarters of the executed criminal or leaving him hanging in chains.

l). And this of course would be in the face of the principalities and powers in the heavens, placing the perpetrator firmly in their camp – this then is no small thing.

m). The warning for ourselves is self-evident – if we come to this place of spiritual maturity and then 'fall away', we will have crucified Christ for ourselves, and we will have put Him to an open shame and it will be impossible to renew us again to repentance. There is then a line in the sand, so to speak, that once crossed cannot be re-crossed. From that point on it's over and there is nothing to look forward to except death in the wilderness apart from an inheritance – *Heb 12:16 lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. 17 For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.*

6). What is taught here then is abundantly clear and it is no less shocking because of its clarity. But here is the thing if the root cause and the final outcome of drifting away and the hardening of the heart is unbelief, then anyone who finds themselves at this point of no return will probably not believe that either. Israel did not believe

that which God had said after their refusal to enter the land and I suspect Christians would be no different. Let's just remember that which our second warning told us Heb 3:12 *Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; 13 but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, 15 while it is said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."*

a). And let's be encouraged by Heb 6:9 ¶ *But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. 10 For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. 11 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, 12 that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*