

Sunday November 4th 2012
The Letter to the Hebrews
Part Sixty Four

1). Heb 12:1 ¶ *Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. 4 ¶ You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.*

a). Hebrews Chapter 11 had set out for us a catalogue of OT saints, who are described here in Chapter 12 as ‘so great a cloud of witnesses’, a vast number who are witnesses to the fact that they have been successful in the race of the faith and will therefore be approved at the time of their Judgment and will have their part in the heavenly city.

b). These OT saints are given to us both as examples of how the race is to be run and to inspire us to continue to the end of our own race – Heb 6:11 *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.*

c). Now as we consider the example of these OT saints we must be careful to make sure that we view them correctly. It would be easy to think that because we are separated by so much time and geography that somehow the saints we see here are completely different from us. Well they certainly lived at a different time, the circumstances of their daily lives were different to ours and they lived in a different culture, but as individuals in pursuit of the heavenly Kingdom they would be absolutely the same as us – remember that the scripture says - 1Co 10:13 *No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*

d). And the scripture also tells us - Jas 5:17 *Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months.*

e). Let that sink in for a moment – ‘Elijah was a man with a nature like ours’ – Elijah had a nature, just like ours – and yet he would have to be included with ‘the prophets’ spoken of in - Heb 11:32 ¶ *And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets:*

f). As we consider this we might recall his actions in response to Jezebel’s threat - 1Ki 19:2 *Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time." 3 And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. 4 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, "It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!"*

g). So how is it that on one occasion this man, with a nature like ours, can pray earnestly and there is no rain in the land for three years and six months and then on another occasion he is running away in fear for his life?

h). The answer is very simple – he prayed ‘by faith’ and he ran away in unbelief.

i). And here in these two facets of Elijah’s experience is the very essence of our own sin nature, the same nature that he had – you see for the most part we think our sin nature is defined by the sins we commit. If I am a liar then I think this is my sin nature, but the reality is that my lying is just one of the symptoms of what my sin nature really is.

j). We find this recorded in Romans - Ro 14:23b...*for whatever is not from faith is sin.*

k). Our sin nature then can be defined very simply as the propensity we have for not believing that which God has said; our sin nature is a nature of unbelief. So if we go back to our previous example it is because I have not believed that which God has said about lying, because I have unbelief, that I allow myself to lie.

l). And the root of this can be traced all the way back to Genesis – Ge 3:1 ¶ *Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"*

m). And then according to Hebrews 12:1 it is ‘the sin [of unbelief] that so easily ensnares us’ that we must lay aside if we are to be successful in the race of the faith – as we saw last week we must ‘*lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance.....*’

n). And if we go back to our 'so great a cloud of witnesses' for a moment we will realize that they did lay aside every weight and they did lay aside the sin that so easily ensnares us and they did run with patient endurance the race set before them, even though they had a nature just like ours, and because they ran their race according to the rules, they have reached the goal of their faith – the salvation of their soul – and are assured of a place in the New Jerusalem.

o). And if we follow their example, by following the instructions at the beginning of Chapter 12, then we can also look forward to a position of rulership in the heavens with the same certainty – just as Paul did – *2Ti 4:7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.*

2). So, the question we left unanswered from last week is, 'How do we lay aside the sin of unbelief?'

a). The answer really is a self-evident one – unbelief is to be replaced by faith - it is however worth spending the time to go through how this happens though so that we are absolutely clear. And the key scripture for understanding this is - *Ro 10:17 So then faith comes by [out of] hearing, and hearing by [through] the word of God.*

b). Let's begin with what we can see as a companion scripture to the 'lay aside' in the first verse of Hebrews Chapter 12 - *Jas 1:21 Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.*

c). The Word of God is to pass through our ears into our redeemed spirit, but in order for the Word to do this effectively we find that we are to 'lay aside all filthiness' first and the word translated 'filthiness' comes from a root word that has to do with earwax. Within the metaphor of this verse then we are to remove any 'wax' from our ears that would prevent us from hearing correctly that which God has to say in His Word, anything that would dull or deaden our spiritual perception. And this could be anything from old religious mindsets, to the wisdom of the world – anything that could distort or corrupt the 'pure milk' of the Word.

d). Contextually we can see the 'all filthiness' in James and the 'every weight' in Hebrews as parallel thoughts as both have to do with the process towards the salvation of the soul.

e). Now we also see from our James scripture that all 'overflow of wickedness' is also to be laid aside. The word translated 'wickedness' is a general word that has to do anything opposed to purity. And so whatever impurity is in our life this also must be laid aside so that the Word can be properly received. And again, according to James, the Word is to be received with 'meekness'.

f). Once the Word has been received in this way then the indwelling Holy Spirit can effect a work within us. As all hindrances, 'all filthiness' and 'wickedness', all 'earwax' are set aside and the spiritual man is allowed to exert full control, the Holy Spirit, using the implanted word can then bring about spiritual growth in us. This is something that has to continue over time and will, if allowed to run its course, bring about a progression in us from spiritual immaturity to spiritual maturity, we will go from faith to faith, with the end result, the end of our faith, being the salvation of our soul – that which Hebrews refers to as 'so great a salvation' – the greatest thing imaginable that God could devise for His creation - 1Pe 1:9 *receiving the end of your faith--the salvation of your souls.*

3). 1Pe 2:1 ¶ *Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, 2 as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby [grow with respect to salvation], 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.*

a). When we studied the Book of 1 Peter we saw exactly the same thing as we have looked at in James and Hebrews. 'Laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy and all evil speaking' is the same as laying aside 'all filthiness and overflow of wickedness' and the same as laying aside 'every weight'.

b). Nothing must be allowed to interfere with our receiving the Word. It must be received as 'pure milk'; that which alone can produce the proper spiritual growth and we must grow because we are to grow with respect to salvation, with respect to the salvation of the soul.

c). Without this proper growth there can be no adoption as the child never grows up to be a son; there can be no transition from a servant in the Master's house to a joint heir with the Master's Son as the servant never grows up into that role.

4). 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). Here at the beginning of Romans Chapter 12 we find the same thing again – presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice and not being conformed to this world present exactly the same thought as the ‘laying aside’ we find in James, Peter and Hebrews.

b). Rather than conforming to this world, this age, we are to allow the Holy Spirit through the Word to bring about the transformation, literally the metamorphosis, in us.

c). Ephesians says it this way - Eph 4:22 *that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, 23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.*

d). Our mind is to be renewed through the Word of God so that we think in line with the Word of God, not the way we used to think, not the way the world thinks, but the way God has said we are to think - 1Co 2:16 *For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.*

e). The metamorphosis of Romans Chapter 12 is synonymous with the continuous process of growing with respect to salvation, which is the race of the faith, that extends throughout our pilgrim walk, and it is a process that must be allowed to take place if we will ever share in Christ’s glory – Col 3:9 *Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, 10 and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,*

f). Then we see this in - 2Ti 3:16 *All Scripture is God breathed, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

g). Eph 5:17 *Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be [continually] filled with the Spirit,*

h). Col 3:16 *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom,*

i). Just as in the natural from our birth we have life by breathing in the air around us so in the spiritual, having received the breath of life in our spirit at the moment of our eternal redemption so we must continue to receive spiritual life through that which is God’s breath, which is the Word, if we are to have life in the age to come. Being continually filled with the Spirit and

receiving with meekness the implanted word are synonymous ideas – and again it is this continually received word, received in the correct way, that the Holy Spirit uses to bring about the metamorphosis.

j). And to continue this analogy for a moment, breathing pure oxygen is a lot different to breathing the polluted air of a large city.

5). So then, laying aside ‘the sin that so easily ensnares us’ is accomplished through a work of the Holy Spirit in us as He brings about the metamorphosis as a result of our proper engagement with the Word. Again, the faith we are to have in order to overcome unbelief only comes out of hearing and our hearing only comes through the Word of God – undefiled, unpolluted and uncorrupted.

a). In the midst of this work of the Holy Spirit in us if we still struggle with sin in a particular area we still have Christ’s High Priestly Ministry in place for us - 1Jo 1:9 *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

b). And even though we can rejoice in the efficacy of Christ’s High Priestly ministry on our behalf, it is the root cause behind our sin, our unbelief, ‘has God indeed said’, that must be dealt with.

c). And because God has set us in this race of the faith in order to win, nothing has been left chance – there is no possible way we can fail in this race unless we choose to do so.

6). 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,*

a). The Lord has Himself given the ministry of the Word to His Church through individuals whom He has placed there for the very purpose of proclaiming that which those given into their care must receive in order to be successful in the race of the faith – that which Paul calls ‘the whole counsel of God’ – that which we would call the gospel of grace and the gospel of the glory of Christ.

b). He has laid out the foundation for everything that His word contains in Genesis and He has given explicit instructions as to how His Word is to be studied - Isa 28:10 *For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, Line upon line, line upon line, Here a little, there a little."*

c). And each eternally saved individual has been given the indwelling Holy Spirit to take His Word and guide that individual into all truth.

d). Then within our context here at Cornerstone, on a nuts and bolts level, we have our Bibles, we have the proclamation of the Word on a Sunday morning, the PDF version, the audio version and the DVD version of that which is proclaimed; we have a PDF study available on each individual message and 3 Bible studies in which to do that study.

e). We have the most phenomenal resources available so that we can do that seen in - Ac 2:42 ¶ *And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.*

f). But here is the thing – no amount of resources, no quantity of Bibles, no number of Bible studies are of any use whatsoever if we don't make the proper use them.

g). Faith does not come by osmosis, nor by wishful thinking, nor by good intentions but out of hearing and hearing through the Word of God. Therefore, the more we hear the Word of God after the fashion we have looked at this morning, the more we will grow with respect to salvation, the more our call and election will be made sure, the greater will our reward be in that Day.

h). And the corollary of this must also be true, the less we hear the Word the less opportunity we will have to grow with respect to salvation, the more weight we will try to run with, the more easily the sin of unbelief will ensnare us and ultimately, if this goes unchecked, we will lose our reward, just as we will see in the fifth and final warning.

i). Let's remember that which we saw in Hebrews Chapter 2 – Heb 2:1 ¶ *Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. 2 For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation,* When we stand at Christ's Judgment Seat we will each receive 'a just reward', we will get exactly what we deserve based upon that which we have done during our pilgrim journey, how we have chosen to run our race – and even amongst those who receive their reward there will not be an equality, but a level of rulership commensurate with our degree of faithfulness.

j). The old adage, the more you put in the more you get out would not be out of place here.

k). However, with respect to the heavenly realm of the Kingdom and what God has offered us there complacency, laziness and casualness are the unholy trinity that infest the Laodicean period in which we live, but these three are not the practice of those whose eyes have seen the coming of the

glory of the Lord; of those for whom the New Jerusalem is a greater reality than the city of Jacksonville; for those who will not be moved, who will not count their own lives dear to them that they may finish their race with joy; for those who would know Christ, know the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death in order to attain to the out-resurrection from the dead.

7). But let's be quite certain that nothing we have looked at today is a quick fix. Nothing here is microwavable – this is a process towards maturity that spans our whole Christian life, this is a race that must be run with patient endurance Heb 12:1 ¶ *Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,*

a). There are no short cuts.

b). As we participate in the process of laying aside every weight and the sin that so easily ensnares us through the maturing of our faith, the metamorphosis, the renewing of our mind, in response to the Word of God, as we have discussed this morning, so we are to run with patient endurance the race that is set before us.

c). The idea in this verse is that we are to patiently endure whatever may come our way through trials and testings as we run our race, keeping our eyes on the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

d). James speaks of this in - Jas 1:3 *knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience* [patient endurance]. 4 *But let patience* [patient endurance] *have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.*

e). We see then that we are to have 'patient endurance' during the trials and testing of our faith so that patient endurance can 'have its perfect work', that is to say that it will work in us to bring us to the end of our faith so that when we stand before our Lord we will 'be perfect and complete, lacking nothing'.

f). Remember - Ro 8:28 *And we know that all things* [trials, testings, patient endurance] *work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*

g). We have to endure patiently through trials and testings because it is impossible for us to see how our present circumstance is working towards the goal of our faith.

h). For example Joseph had the dreams which God had given him, but as he sat in a prison in Egypt it was not possible for him to see how that dream would be brought to reality – he just had to patiently endure during his time

of testing and trust God. In the same way Moses knew that he was to be the deliverer of his people, but he didn't know how that was going to work out, so he patiently endured through 40 years in the desert in Midian while he waited and trusted God.

i). 2Ti 2:11 *This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him. 12 If we [patiently] endure, We shall also reign with Him. If we deny [the work of patient endurance] **Him**, He also will deny us [with regards to a position of rulership].*

j). Patient endurance then during our race of faith is a prerequisite to rulership – if we patiently endure in the race of the faith we will be allowed to ascend the throne with Christ as, having patiently endured, we will have run the race after the correct fashion – according to the rules – and we will have finished our race in the proper manner - Jas 1:12 *Blessed is the man who endures [patiently endures] temptation [trials and testings]; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.*

k). So then as we receive the implanted Word of God into our saved human spirit so the Holy Spirit takes that living word and progressively brings about the metamorphosis in our lives, progressively moving us from immaturity to maturity, from faith to faith, so that we lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily ensnares us – then as we pass through this whole experience we will exercise patient endurance in the trials and testings of our faith – this will then ultimately result in our achieving the goal of our faith – the salvation of our soul.

8). And then we are instructed that during our race, as we patiently endure, we are to keep our eyes fixed upon Jesus - *2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith,*

a). But this will have to wait until next time – if the Lord is willing.