

# The Excellency of Christ in the Book of Hebrews

## Chapter 1

### "Better By Far"

I trust that our look at the book of Hebrews will be a blessing to you as we study it together. It's when things get tough that we're tempted to give up following Jesus. Hebrews was written to believers who had been converted from the Jewish faith and had become Christians. Because of that they were being persecuted. Things were tough. On top of that the Romans were on the march with the intent of destroying and plundering Jerusalem. This happened in 70 A.D. Hebrews was written about 68 A.D. It was written because the new converts were beginning to falter. They wanted to avoid further unpleasant persecution from the Jews. They felt they should show their solidarity with their fellow Jews against the threat of Rome. So they were considering going back to the worship of God in the Temple and to the old sacrificial system of Judaism. They'd taken their eyes off the Lord Jesus and the glory of His person and work. Hebrews was written to encourage the believers to refocus on Jesus. The writer does this by showing the superiority of Jesus Christ over the people and practice of the old Jewish faith that they once followed. They were at the crossroads of decision. The answer was a fresh view of Jesus in all His glory and splendour as the incarnate Son of God and the only Saviour of sinners. Drifting away from God always begins when we forget who Jesus is and the marvellous things He has done for us. We must keep close to Christ. We will not drift from Him if we keep the truths of the book of Hebrews in our hearts and minds. Hebrews Ch. 12 v 2 summarises the purpose of the book, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith".

There's some debate about who wrote this letter to the Hebrews. Some say Paul wrote it, others that it was written by Barnabas or Apollos. We can't say for sure. Time will not allow us to look at the various arguments. But the message is more important than the messenger. One thing we can be sure of is that Hebrews is in the Bible because God inspired the writer. We have a revelation from God Himself about His Son Jesus Christ and how important He is. For my part I'm going for Paul as the writer.

In Hebrews Ch. 1 v 1 God tells us that He spoke "through the prophets at many times and in various ways". In verse two He says, "but in these last days He has spoken by His Son". Jesus is a very special person. He has more special than the prophets of the Old Testament because God has spoken only partially through them but finally and completely in Jesus. He has also more special because of who He is in relation to God the Father. A Puritan preacher called Thomas Brooks said, "Christ is the most sparkling diamond in the ring of glory". A diamond has many facets from which the light sparkles. Paul gives us six facts of the shining glory of Jesus Christ. Jesus is described at the end of verse two as, "the heir of all things". As God the Son everything belongs to Him by eternal right. We read in Philippians Ch. 2 v 8 that He was, "found in appearance as a man" and "He humbled Himself and became obedient to death - even death of the cross!". In verse nine we're told "God exalted Him to the highest place". So becoming the "heir of all things" belongs to His incarnation, humiliation, and exaltation as the incarnate God-Man and all that He purchased with His precious blood. God says this concerning His Son at the end of verse two, "and through whom He made the universe". Sometimes creation is attributed to God the Father. Genesis Ch. 1 v 1 says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth". Sometimes it's attributed to Jesus. We read in John Ch. 1 v 3, "Through Him all things were made" referring there to Jesus Christ. Who did the creating? Putting the three verses together, creation was the work of God the Father through the

instrumentality of His Son. No wonder we're to recognise the superiority of Christ over every person who's ever lived. He's the creator of all life. In verse three we read that Jesus is, "the radiance of God's glory". When God reveals Himself in all His attributes that is Him shining in His glory. All the attributes of God are clearly seen in Jesus Christ. For example, God is a God of grace and a God of truth. We read in John Ch. 1 v 14 about Jesus. "We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth". Again in verse three Jesus is described as, "the exact representation of His being". Do you want to know what God is like? Look at Jesus. Study Him in the Bible. All the perfection of God's character is seen in Him. Verse three goes on to say that Jesus is "sustaining all things by his powerful word". Someone once described Christ as "God's cosmic sustainer". Sometimes people ask what Jesus Christ is doing now. One answer is that He's upholding and preserving the universe. The word "sustain" is from the Greek work meaning "to bear and carry". It's used of a ship driven by the wind. Christ is the driving force behind the maintenance of all creation. He gives us our "daily bread". The end of verse three reminds us "He provided purification of our sins". The great creator became our Saviour. He shed His blood on the cross to reconcile believers to God. Have you been forgiven by God? Have you experienced cleansing from your sin? No other sacrifice for sin needs to be offered. Christ "sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven". The work of atoning for sin is done. Jesus cried on the cross in John Ch. 19 v 30, "It is finished".

The rest of Hebrews chapter one from verse 4 - 14 shows the superiority of Jesus Christ over the angels. Why didn't Paul begin by showing Jesus greatness over Moses or Aaron first? Because we don't go back far enough with Moses, nor do we go high enough. The angels are superior to Moses in order of existence and in power. Jesus Christ is superior to them. God says to Christ in verse 5, "You are my Son ". No angel was ever addressed like that by the Almighty. God commands in verse 6, "Let all God's angels worship Him" that is Jesus. The Son referred to by God the Father as creator in verse 10. He says there of Jesus, "In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth". Again God says to Jesus in verse 13, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for my feet". No angel was ever given that position of privilege.

So Hebrews get off to a marvellous start. We're left in no doubt that when we began to fix our eyes on Jesus we meet with more than a prophet, a good man, or a wise teacher. Christ was all of that. We meet with more. We meet with our Creator, our Sustainer and our Saviour God. Any view of Jesus less than that is not the Jesus Christ of the Bible.

## The Excellency of Christ in the Book of Hebrews

### Chapter 2

We turn our attention in chapter two of the book of Hebrews. The theme of this chapter is the same as chapter one. Jesus Christ is superior to the angels. The first four verses of chapter two apply the teaching of the previous chapter reminding us in verse three that we have, "such a great salvation". Hebrews was written to Jewish converts who were beginning to drift away from Christ back into Judaism. They'd forgotten the greatness of their salvation in Christ. Notice why this salvation was great. We have a great Founder. Verse three says, "This salvation which was first announced by the Lord". Our salvation is built on the person revealed in chapter one. Its built on our God and Saviour Jesus Christ the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. We have a great heritage. We read in verse three that our salvation "was confirmed to us by those who heard Him". The message of God's grace in Christ was accurately passed on by faithful eyewitnesses. Godly spiritual men have told us the truth about what they'd seen and heard. We have a great seal. Verse four says, "God also testified to it by signs and wonders, and various miracles". How can we be sure that the eyewitnesses are truthful? The words of the Apostles were accompanied by marvellous signs. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself appealed to this to confirm the truth of His message to men and women. He said in John Ch. 14 v 11, "Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or else believe me on the evidence of the miracles themselves".

Because we have such a great salvation there are implications for our lives. We must cultivate a right attitude. Verse one says, "We must pay careful attention therefore, to what we have heard". That's the only way any of us will avoid becoming negligent and drifting away from our love and devotion to Christ. We must listen very carefully to all that He has said to us in Him. This point is forcefully impressed upon us in verse two where we read, "For if the message spoken by angels is binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation". The 'message spoken by the angels' refers to the giving of the Ten Commandments. Stephen, the first martyr, said in Acts Ch. 7 v 53, "you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it". God punished those who didn't obey them. How much more serious is it to ignore the salvation which has been announced by the Lord. This will be punished with even greater severity. That's a solemn word of warning for anyone who has rejected Jesus Christ from their life. Don't turn your back on the one who said in John Ch. 14 v 6, "I am the way, the truth and the life". If you are a believer, then remember this, because God loves you He will chastise you when you begin to go astray. He does this so that you will not drift aimlessly.. He wants you to be brought even closer to Him and have a deeper experience of His love. Be attentive to His voice. Be alert to the perils of drifting because of neglect. Be aware that God punishes those who refuse Him and wander away. Its good to keep close to Jesus.

From verses 5 - 18 of chapter two we return to the theme of the superiority of Jesus Christ to the angels. Again we see the greatness of our salvation in Christ,. Christian friend, you have a bright future! We read in verse 5, "It is not to angels that He has subjected the world to come". This 'world to come' refers to what Peter speaks about in 2 Peter Ch. 3 verse 13, he says, "We are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness". This 'world to come' will be made subject to redeemed man. To prove the point in verses 6 to 8 Paul quotes from Psalm 8. He says concerning man in verse 7, "You made Him a little lower than the angels, you crowned Him with glory and honour, and put everything under His feet". Nothing will spoil the harmony of man and creation.

That isn't the case now. The world is marred by sin. Verse 8 says, "Yet at present we do not see everything subject to Him". How then can we be sure it will happen? The answer is given in verse 9, "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour". We see Jesus the glorified Son of Man; the representative Man; the exalted Man. For every believer what is true of the Lord Jesus now will be true of you in the future. He has entered into His inheritance. His inheritance is the believers as well. We read in Romans Ch. 8 v 17, "now if we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs of Christ". In Hebrews Ch. 2 v 13 Jesus says, "Here am I and the children God has given Me". He shared in our humanity and tasted death for us that every believer might be delivered from the power of sin and death. He did this for man and not for angels. We need to get a fresh sight of Jesus crowned with glory. I'm sure that if we really grasped what is ours in Christ both now and in the future we'd be keener to live for Him day by day. We'd serve Him with a greater love and earnestness.

Perhaps you're thinking, I can see what Jesus has accomplished for us, but will I personally make it to the end. The purpose behind Jesus being made a little lower than the angels is summarised in verse 17, "For this reason He had to be made like His brothers in every way, in order that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that He might make atonement for the sins of the people". Jesus shared in our humanity not only to taste death for us, and to destroy death and the Devil, who holds the power of death. He also shares our humanity that He might experience the trials and problems of life. He knows what we are going through. We read in verse 18, "Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted". The aim of that suffering is stated in verse 10, "Bringing many souls to glory". You'll get a glory because of God's grace and the daily intercessory ministry of your great high priest Jesus Christ. John Newton wrote the great hymn 'Amazing grace'. He said in verse 3, "Through many dangers toils and snares I have already come; 'Tis grace that brought me safe this far, and grace will lead me home". When you arrive there you'll see Christ in all His glory. You'll see the angels falling before Him in adoration and worship, and you'll do the same.

## The Excellency of Christ in the Book of Hebrews

### Chapter 3

We turn our attention today to Hebrews chapter three. We saw last time in chapters one and two that Jesus Christ is better than angels. The book of Hebrews was written to give reasons why the Jewish converts to Christ should remain faithful to Him and not to yield to the temptation to go back to Judaism. The writer continues his argument in chapter three by showing the superiority of Jesus Christ the Moses. No other Old Testament character was held in such high esteem as Moses. When we say that Jesus is superior to Moses we're not degrading Moses. Moses was a man of God. He was the chosen instrument of the Lord. Hebrews chapter three demonstrates why Jesus must be regarded as superior to Moses.

First, in verse one Jesus is referred to as 'the Apostle'. The word Apostle simply means 'one sent on a mission'. Moses was sent on a mission to deliver the Israelites from Egypt. He also brought God's word of command to Pharaoh. Jesus did a greater work, in that He came to deliver a lost world from sin and darkness. Jesus didn't simply bring the word from God. He was the very word of God incarnate. The difference is between the King sending an ambassador and him coming himself. Second, He's called the 'high priest' in verse one. Moses sometimes served as a priest. We read in Psalm 99 v 6, "Moses and Aaron were amongst His priests". Moses never served as the high priest. That title belonged to Aaron. In Hebrews Ch. 4 v 14 Jesus is called, "a great high priest". The high priest and sacrifice in one. Notice Paul says at the end of verse one that Jesus is the "high priest whom we confess". We confess Him now. How is that possible? Moses is dead but Jesus is alive and interceding for you and me in heaven. Third, Jesus is the builder of the house. The word 'house' refers to God's redeemed people. What has more honour, the house or the builder or the house? The builder of course. Moses was part of the building. Jesus brought the building into existence. Verse 3 says, "Jesus has been found worthy of greater honour than Moses, just as the builder of the house has greater honour than the house itself". In making that statement Paul unveils an important truth why Christ has to be seen as superior to Moses. We read in verse 4, "For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything". If God builds every thing then as the builder of the house Jesus must be God. Fourth, Jesus is referred to as the Son. In verse 5 we read, "Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house". We read in verse 6, "but Christ is faithful as a Son over God's house". Who is more important, the Son over the house or the servant in the house? Obviously, the answer is the Son. So Hebrews clearly proves the superiority of Jesus Christ over Moses.

This third chapter also encourages us to be faithful to the Lord. We see the example of faithfulness in both Jesus and Moses. Verse 2 says, "Jesus was faithful to the one who appointed Him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house". The Jews mustn't go back to Moses and the Law. They must go back to Moses and his example of faithfulness. In verses 7 - 19 this is applied to us as believers. We're taken back to the wilderness wanderings of the children of Israel. We discover in this passage the principles that both will hinder and will help faithfulness to Jesus Christ. Israel was renowned for her unfaithfulness and unbelief. What can we learn from Israel's behaviour? Hindrances to faithfulness include procrastination. Verse 7 says, "Today if you hear His voice". When God speaks you must listen and then apply what He's said. Don't put off the challenge of God's word to another day. There must be diligent hearing and immediate response. Verse 8 reveals another problem. It says, "do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion". When you fail to be sensitive to God's word and

ignore it then obedience becomes more difficult the next time. The root of hardening is rebellion. You fail to treat God's word with the proper respect and urgency it deserves. Unbelief hinders a faithful heart. Unbelief is damaging to spiritual growth. It makes the word unprofitable. It shuts us out from blessing. It hinders prayer. It leads us to false gods. Another hindrance is highlighted in verse 13. We read, "that none of you be hardened by sins deceitfulness". Sin looks pleasurable and appealing but in the end it stings like a poisonous snake. It's deceptive. It appears to offer everything you desire but leaves you empty and disappointed.

We also find some guidelines to help us to be faithful to the Lord. Verse one says, "fix your thoughts on Jesus". Consider His life of faithfulness and copy it. You can't do this in your own strength but you will as you draw your strength from the Lord. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew Ch. 11 v 29, "Learn from Me for I am gentle and humble in heart". Meditate upon Christ. Contemplate Him in all that He is and all that He's done. Study His life in the Gospels. See how He conducted Himself in all situations. Follow Him. We can help one another to be faithful. Verse 13 says, "encourage one another daily". We see the importance of meeting together. We can't encourage one another if we rarely see each other. Be sure to attend your church regularly. What do you talk about when you meet? Is your conversation mostly about trivial matters? There's much we can say to each other about how the Lord has blessed us. The word 'encouragement' in the original Greek means 'a strong word of encouragement' It's the word used of a commander building up the morale of his troops. He uses heartening stirring words. Let's do the same. The least help to faithfulness is in verse 18. We read, "to whom did God swear that they would never enter His rest if not those who disobeyed". Israel missed the blessing of entering into their rest because of disobedience. When we do as God asks we'll enter into all the blessings that He has for us in Christ. Verse 15 repeats verse 7, "Today if you hear His voice". It's one thing to hear. We must also obey. Jesus said in Matthew Ch. 7 v 21, "Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock". Your life will be marked by faithfulness as you put into practice all that God has said to you.

Moses was outstanding in faithfulness to the Lord. Verse 5 says, "Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house". No one amongst God's people was as faithful as Moses. You can be like him. Simply follow the principles for faithfulness we've looked at today and may the Lord bless you and use you as you do.

## The Excellency of Christ in the Book of Hebrews

### Chapter 4

As we've studied this letter together we've noticed in chapters one and two that Jesus Christ is superior to the angels. The angels surround the throne. Christ is seated on it! In chapter three we saw that Christ is greater than Moses. Moses was given a revelation from God. Christ is the embodiment of God's creation. We now turn to chapter four of the book of Hebrews. We're presented by the writer with the theme of 'rest'. We read in verse 1, "Therefore, since the promise of entering His rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it". We're challenged in this chapter to enter into that rest. We read in verse 11, "Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest". God promises a rest for His people. The Jews boasted of two rests., Some Hebrew Christians were tempted to return to their old Jewish faith because of the glory of the rests God had given them in Judaism. They had the seventh day rest. God said in Exodus Ch. 20 v 8, "remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy". God rested from His labour on the seventh day so must His people. They boasted of the rest of the land of promise. Hebrews chapter four refers back to this by referring to Joshua. We read in verse 8, "For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day". In the book of Exodus in the Old Testament we read of the wilderness wanderings of Israel. Then they actually crossed over the river Jordan and entered the promised land. Moses remained on the other side of the Jordan but Joshua led God's people into their inheritance in Canaan. The generation that entered Canaan was another generation of Israelites. They were the successors of those to whom the original promise was given. The first generation didn't enter in because of unbelief. Yet Canaan wasn't perfect rest. The writer to the Hebrews tells us there is a greater and better rest than could ever be found in Judaism. God has another rest for believers. It's more perfect rest; a far superior rest that excels the glory of the sabbath rest and the rest of Canaan. How do we know God has provided a better rest? In verse 7 Paul quotes from Psalm 95 v 7-8. The Psalmist speaks of another rest 450 years after Israel entered Canaan. Paul says in verse 7, "Therefore, God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later He spoke through David". The sabbath rest and the rest of the promised land are not the ultimate rest promised by God. What is this superior rest that is more excellent than both the sabbath rest and the rest of Canaan? It's the rest found in the Gospel. It's defined for us by Paul. We read in 1 Corinthians Ch. 15 v 3-4, "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died according to the scriptures". God's promised rest is the rest that may be found through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This rest is superior to the rests of Judaism because it reaches the depths of the soul. It meets the deepest needs of the heart of mankind. It's an eternal rest. It's perfect in every way. Christ is seen to be superior to Joshua another hero of the Old Testament. Joshua led the people of God into the rest of Canaan. Jesus Christ leads believers into the rest of peace with God. Listen to the wonderful words of Jesus in Matthew Ch. 11 v 28, "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest". Jesus Christ gives rest to the heart burdened by sin. He gives peace to the conscience weary with that heavy burden of the sense of guilt before God. Sin causes unrest in your heart and conscience. Only Jesus Christ can bring calm and peace to your soul. How foolish then for the Jews to want to return to the inferior rests of the old Jewish faith. This salvation and peace is available today for all who are sorry for their sin and ask God for forgiveness. How foolish for you to look anywhere else, or to anyone else, but Jesus Christ the Saviour of sinners.

How do we enter this Gospel rest? The sabbath rest of God shows us. We read in verse 10, "for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own works just as God did from His". There is no place for self-effort and works to enter into the rest of salvation. Paul said in Ephesians Ch. 2 v 8-9, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast". The way of salvation from sin is the rest of faith in the work of Christ. He died in your place, He bore your punishment. Christ has done all that needs to be done, and that can be done, to save you from your sin. You must believe the good news of the Gospel. Do not make the same mistake as Israel. We read in verse 2, "For we also have had the Gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard it did not combine it with faith". We read in Acts Ch. 16 v 31, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved".

Whereas the rest of God in creation typifies the rest of salvation found in the finished work of Christ, the rest of Canaan typifies the believer's inheritance in Christ. This is the rest of submission. This is entering into all that God has for you in Christ on a day to day basis. How can you fully enjoy the benefits and blessing of being a Christian? Verse 1 says, "let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it". Treat your salvation in Christ as you would treat your most precious possession. Handle with care! Don't be negligent. Be obedient. Disobedience will forfeit you God's blessing. We read in verse 6, "those who formerly had the Gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience". Be diligent. We're told in verse 11, "let us therefore, make every effort". Live your Christian life with determination to please the Lord. Be receptive to God's word as it searches your heart and exposes those things that displease Him. We read in verse 12, "The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow, it judges the thoughts and intents of the heart". Above all keep your eyes focused in Jesus. He knows the way is difficult. He will help you in the battle. We read in verse 15, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses". Jesus Christ will strengthen us and help us to avail ourselves of all that God has for us as we enter in. As verse 16 says, "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and grace to help in time of need". I trust that you have entered into the life of faith and trust. This is God's rest for believers.

## The Excellency of Christ in the Book of Hebrews

### Chapter 5

The purpose of the book of Hebrews is to show the superiority of Jesus Christ and the Christian faith over Judaism. The writer seeks to encourage Hebrew believers not to return to the old Jewish rites but to stand firm and follow the Lord Jesus. We've seen already that Jesus is superior to the angels, to Moses, to Joshua, and He offers a far better rest than the sabbath rest. Hebrews chapter five shows us that Jesus is superior to Aaron and the Aaronic priesthood. This section actually begins chapter 4 v 14 and takes us through to chapter 10 v 39. The great theme of these chapters is that we have in Jesus a better priest, a better sacrifice, and, a better covenant.

Jesus is described in verse 9 as, "the source of eternal salvation". He brought our salvation into being. To do this He needed to become a priest. The ministry of the priest was to deal with the problem of sin and its removal in the sight of a holy God. The Old Testament shows us the qualifications required for someone to enter the priesthood. Jesus met these requirements. Chapter 5 v 1 says, "Every priest is selected from among men". The priest had to be of the same nature as the people he represented before God. An angel could never be a priest because they're of a different created order. The Son of God became incarnate, John Ch. 1 v 14 says, "The word became flesh". Jesus took His place among the rank and file of humanity. The priest had to bring a sacrifice. We read in verse one that the priest "is appointed to represent men in matters related to God to offer gifts and sacrifices for sin". Christ offered up Himself as the sacrifice for sin. We read in Ephesians Ch. 5 v 2, "Christ loved us and gave Himself for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God". The priest had to be able to exercise sympathy. Hebrews Ch. 5 v 2 tells us, "He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray". The priest was human and experienced all the same temptations and weaknesses as his fellow man. Paul says in Philippians Ch. 2 v 8, concerning Jesus, "He made Himself nothing taking the very nature of a servant being found in human likeness". Like us He knew the attack of Satan. He felt the pressure of trial and temptation. Christ isn't out of touch with your needs. He knows how we feel. Go to Him in your difficulty and you will find real help in your time of need. The priest had to be called of God. Verse 4 says, "No one takes this honour upon himself, he must be called by God". God chose Aaron. We read in Exodus Ch. 28 v 1, "Have Aaron your brother brought to you - and his sons- so that they may serve Me as priests". God said of His Son Jesus in Matthew Ch. 3 v 17, "this is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased". God says to Jesus in verse 6, "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek". Christ is called and authorised by divine sanction to be the great high priest. The priest needed to be effective in intercession. Verse 7 tells us that Jesus, "offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears". Jesus interceded for you. In John Ch. 17 v 20, "I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their word, that they all may be one". He intercedes for you now in heaven. Chapter 7 v 25 says, "He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them".

There's much in common between Aaron as priest and Jesus as priest. There are some differences too. We can also see the superiority of Christ over Aaron. Jesus is a sinless priest. Verse 3 tells us that Aaron, "has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as the sins of the people". Peter says this about Jesus in 1 Peter Ch. 2 v 22, "He committed no sin and no deceit was found in His mouth". Jesus was a senior priest. Hebrews Ch. 5 v 10 says, "And was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek". This priesthood came before the priesthood of Aaron. Aaron and the tribe of Levi descended from Abraham. Abraham offered

tithes and offerings to Melchizedek. (Aaron and Levi offered them up in Abraham their ancestor) In doing that they actually offered them to Christ. He who receives the offering is greater than the person who offers it.

Verses 11 - 14 contain some challenging exhortations. The writer breaks from teaching doctrine to apply what he's taught so far. He challenges the Hebrew believers to go on to greater maturity in their understanding of the glory of Christ's person and work. We need a mature grasp of these marvellous spiritual truths. We'll never advance in the things of God unless we have a proper understanding of who Christ is and what He's achieved for us. We're not unlike the way Paul describes the Hebrews. He says in verse 11. "you are slow to learn". And in verse 13, "still and infant" What steps can we take to move from infancy to maturity as believers? We need to increase our knowledge by a disciplined study of the word of God. We need to be men and women of the Bible. When Paul says we are 'slow' he uses a Greek word that means 'lazy', an unwillingness to stir oneself, 'inertia'. The Hebrew believers hadn't spent time studying the Old Testament and how it is fulfilled in Christ. Due to a lack of biblical knowledge they had missed the wonder of what is there for them in this great salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 12 says, "by this time you ought to be teachers". It's likely some of the Hebrew believers were converted some thirty years ago on the day of Pentecost. Yet says verse 12, "you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again". It's possible to be well advanced in years as far as dating your conversion is concerned but to remain an infant in the things of God. It's possible to be a fairly new Christian yet to be rich in knowledge and experience in spiritual things. Mature in Christ. What makes the difference? How well you hear. How regularly and consistently you study scripture. Verse 14 says, "solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil". This will move you from being a spoon fed Christian to being a useful Christian. You will advance from infancy and milk to maturity and meat. You will be able to discern truth. You will be better acquainted with the teaching of the Bible on righteousness. The righteousness of God founded upon the priestly work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Be encouraged wherever you are. You have a great high priest eternal in the heavens. He died for you as the Lamb of God. He rose from the dead for you, to be your strength and support. He intercedes in heaven for you today. Be sure to get a mature understanding of all He is and all He wants to do for you. Study God's word constantly so that you are able to teach others the great things you have found in it.

## The Excellency of Christ in the Book of Hebrews

### Chapter 6

Hebrews is the book of better things. The Hebrew converts to Christianity needed to know that. Some of them were thinking seriously of returning to the Jewish faith, So Hebrews was written to show that the better way is the Christian way. We've seen that Christ is better than the angels, than Moses, and Joshua. Chapters 4 v 14 to chapter 10 v 39 show Christ as superior to Aaron and the Aaronic priesthood. We look today at chapter six. This chapter continues the theme of exhorting the believers to make progress in the faith. Since Jesus is our great high priest then we must respond to Him in a manner worthy of Him. If we see better things in Jesus He should see better things in us. The writer says to the faithful in verse 9, "we are confident of better things in your case". What are these better things? He says in the same verse, "things that accompany salvation". These things include progress, maturity and development. How can we make sure that we're moving on to better things in our walk with God?

First of all we need to make sure we are really a child of God and that we are not deceiving ourselves. The key sign to real conversion is growth in Christian maturity. Paul says in verse one, "Therefore, let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on the maturity". We will have advanced from the basics of the faith. Verse one says we should be moving on from, "the foundation of repentance - faith in God, baptisms, laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgement". When real progress isn't happening it's possible that we're deceiving ourselves and we don't really know the Lord Jesus as our Saviour.

Verses 4 - 8 are regarded by most Bible scholars as one of the most difficult passages in scripture. We read of those who appear to be falling away from their salvation. If this is possible then it contradicts the promises made by Jesus about the certainty of believers getting to heaven in the end. For example, Jesus said in John Ch. 10 v 28, "I give eternal life, and they shall never perish". That's an unconditional promise of security! If you're truly in Christ you'll never be out of Christ. You are not kept by your own efforts. Peter says in 1 Peter Ch. 1 v 5 that true believers, "are shielded by God's power until the coming salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time". It's one thing to taste God's word and another to digest it and make it yours. The Lord Jesus warns of the possibility of experience that falls short of real heart conversion. In Matthew 13 He tells the parable of the sower. He says in verses 20 and 21, "What was shown on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away". The man was 'enlightened' and emotionally moved but he was never really saved. Jesus says in Matthew Ch. 7 v 22 -23, "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name drive out demons and perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from Me, you evil doers!"

That being the case what is the sign of a real Christian? The answer is progress in spiritual maturity. Nothing more nothing less! How is this progress in maturity attained? Paul refers to a farmer. He says in verse 7, "Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop to those for whom it is farmed receives a blessing of God". The farmer cultivates his field. There needs to be the ploughing of the field of your life by the word of God. Study it and allow it to shape your thinking and living. That brings 'blessing from God'. Duncan Campbell experienced revival during his ministry in the Hebrides. A woman approached him and said, "I've read my Bible all the way through". Duncan

Campbell replied, "Good, but has the Bible been all the way through you?" Another factor that produces spiritual maturity is a loving commitment to God and His people. Verse 10 says, "God is not unjust, He will not forget your work and the love you have shown Him as you have helped His people". You will grow in the Lord as you love Him and serve Him. As you invest time in helping God's people you will find that you will enrich your own soul. Diligence as you live for the Lord is vital. Verse 11 says, "We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end". Many believers lack assurance of their salvation because of sluggishness and laziness in their approach to Christian living. Paul says in the same verse that the reason for this diligence is "in order to make your hope sure". Faith and patience are also needed. Verse 12 says that we're, "to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised". Sometimes God tests our faith and we have to wait for Him to fulfil His promises in our situation.

A well known preacher who lived many years ago called Andrew Murray once said, "Be assured that if God waits longer than you wish, it is only to make the blessing doubly precious". We must maintain a firm confidence in the promises of God at all times right to the very end of life's journey. The genuine believer will make progress here. Verse 18 says, "It is impossible for God to lie". Therefore, Paul concludes in the same verse, "We who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged". This hope is the divine promise of the certainty of heaven for true believers. Verse 19 says, "we have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters - behind the curtain". We may be greatly encouraged that we will reach heaven one day. We'll enter behind the curtain and see our Saviour face to face. So you see the genuine believer cannot fall from his salvation. It's anchored in heaven in the Lord Jesus who says in verse 20, "went before us". Our future hope is secure in the rock of ages.

The marks of a genuine Christian is spiritual progress in the things of God. When you are cultivating your Christian life, loving God and helping His people, living for the Lord diligently, and waiting for God with faith and patient endurance you can be assured that you are one of God's children.

## The Excellency of Christ in the Book of Hebrews

### Chapter 7

The book of Hebrews provides reasons why Hebrew converts to Christianity shouldn't return to the Jewish faith. Some were tempted to do so in order to stop the severe persecution from their fellow Jewish countrymen. They also felt they should stand with them against the threat of an imminent attack by the Romans. The writer of this book is showing them that a return to the old ways is a backward step. It's to go from the greater to the lesser. Christianity is superior to Judaism because Jesus Christ is better by far than the angels, Moses, Joshua and Aaron. Chapter seven, that we're looking at today, picks up the theme again of the superiority of Christ's priesthood to that of Aaron's. Paul ended chapter six by saying this about Jesus in verse 20, "He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek". In order to see the importance of this statement we need to see who Melchizedek was and why his priesthood was significant.

Melchizedek is first mentioned here and shows us how important Melchizedek is. Chapter 7 v 1 says, "This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God most high. He met Abraham returning from defeat of the Kings and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything". The name Melchizedek means 'King of righteous'. A person's name in Bible times wasn't simply a title. It actually revealed the person's character. Melchizedek lived a righteous life. He was a godly man. He lived Salem in Canaan. He was surrounded by Canaanite idolatry and ungodliness. He maintained a holy life in a decadent generation. He's our example in a godless society. We read in Philippians Ch. 2 v 15 that we, "may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe, as you hold out the word of life". Does that describe you? Melchizedek was the 'King of Salem' that means 'King of peace'. Righteousness and peace go together. As you live the righteous life you enjoy the peace of God. The world is full of turmoil and unrest. Why is that? There's no righteousness before God so there's no peace. Melchizedek met Abraham and blessed him. That must have been a great encouragement to Abraham after his battle with the kings. It's good to give encouragement, and a word of comfort, to those who are battling with the opposition of the world, the flesh, and the Devil. As 'King of Righteousness and peace' Melchizedek is a type of Christ. A 'Type' is a person or thing in the Old Testament that's a picture of the person and work of Jesus in some way. Jesus is the ultimate 'King of Righteousness'. He is the author of it. He perfects it. He rules in righteousness. Jesus is the 'King of Peace'. He gives peace of heart and mind to His subjects. Jesus said in John Ch. 14 v 27, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you". Real peace from a troubled conscience and a restless heart is found in Jesus Christ. Do you know Him as your Prince of Peace.

Melchizedek was "the priest of God most high". It's in this capacity that we see how he's like Jesus Christ, and why Jesus' priesthood is better than Aaron's. Paul explains why. First, Christ's priesthood is of a higher order than Aaron's. Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek. A 'tithe' is a tenth part of the whole. Verse 4 says, "Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder". Abraham was blessed by Melchizedek. Verse 6 says, "and he blesses him who had the promises". The Paul arrives at the logical implications. He says in verse 7, "and without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater". Indeed, Levi the priestly tribe of Aaron, were in effect Abraham their ancestor when he offered the tenth of the plunder. So Paul rightly says, "Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor. The one who receives the tithe is greater than the one who gives it. Second, Christ's priesthood is more effective than Aaron's. Verse 8

says, "The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless for the law made nothing perfect". When one priest died another took his place. The sacrifices they brought could never take sin away. There was an imperfection in the Aaronic priesthood. A more effective and glorious priesthood was required. Melchizedek was a perfect picture of Christ. We read in verse 3 that he was, "without beginning of days and end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever". Melchizedek did have a genealogy. There was simply no record of it in the book of Genesis. This becomes a picture of the eternal nature of Jesus Christ. Since He is eternal so is His priesthood. Verse 16 says that it's based on, "the power of an indestructible life". Jesus Christ also dealt with sin permanently. Verse 27 tells us, "Unlike the other high priests He does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for His own sins, and then for all the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when He offered Himself". The offering of Christ on the cross perfectly atoned for your sin. Christ's priesthood was more firmly established than Aaron's. Aaron's priesthood was based upon ancestry. Jesus' priesthood was established by an oath. Verse 21 says, "He became a priest with an oath when God said to him: 'The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind: you are a priest forever'".

The priesthood of Jesus Christ is superior to the Levitical or Aaronic priesthood because it's indestructible, eternal, perfect in both the person of the priest and in the perfection of the sacrifices. None of that could be said of Aaron's priesthood.

How should you respond to your great high priest Jesus Christ? If you are already a believer then follow the example of Abraham. He gave a tenth of the whole. How much more should we give ourselves to Christ because of all that He has done for us. In the fourth verse of his hymn, "When I survey the wondrous cross", Isaac Watts wrote, "Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small, Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all".

For anyone who as yet has not trusted Christ as Saviour we read in verse 26, "such a high priest meets our needs". You need a perfect priest and sacrifice that can deal with your sin. You need forgiveness for your sin. It can be found nowhere else but in the Lord Jesus Christ. Because of the perfection of who He is and what He has done verse 25 tells us, "Therefore, He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He ever lives to intercede for them". There is a living Saviour exalted above the heavens. He can meet your deepest need today. Trust Him to do so.

## The Excellency of Christ in the Book of Hebrews

### Chapter 8

There is only one way to get the best out of your Christian faith, you must keep your eyes on Jesus Christ. The Hebrew converts to Christianity had allowed their eyes to wander from Jesus and they were considering going back to their Jewish roots and beliefs. Doing this would be like going from the car to the bicycle! They were going from the superior to the inferior. Paul has already shown in chapter seven how Jesus Christ is better by far than the priesthood of Aaron. In this eighth chapter, that we're looking at today He shows how Christians belong to better covenant.

Paul begins where he left off in chapter seven. He refers to Jesus as the perfect high priest. He has already spoken of the glory of Christ's priesthood and how it perfectly meets the spiritual needs of men and women. He says in chapter 8 v 1, "We do have such a high priest who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven". This being the case, it's obvious that if the priest is superior then the covenant must of necessity be better. A famous pianist wouldn't play before a refined audience on an old, out of tune piano! The new covenant is better than the old because it's founded on the finished work of Jesus Christ. Remember, Christ is 'sat down'. There were no chairs in the Old Testament Tabernacle. That's because the priest never finished the work of atoning for sin. Jesus' priestly work dealt with sin fully, finally, and completely. In Hebrews Ch. 10 v 12 we read, "this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins He say down at the right hand of God". Not only did Jesus Christ sit down but He sat on a throne! He could do this as a priest after the order of Melchizedek who was both king and priest. More importantly Christ is the well beloved Son of the King of heaven

The new covenant in Christ is superior because of where it's ministered. Our great high priest is in heaven. He's active for us in a better place than the tabernacle that was on earth. How can we be sure that Jesus Christ is ministering in heaven? Some might argue that we cannot see Him so can we be certain? Since Christ is both alive and a priest then He must be somewhere. Verse three says, "Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer". Now, the priest would enter the sanctuary with his offering. Jesus' human ancestry would not allow Him to be a priest because it was necessary that the priest was from the tribe of Levi. As verse 4 says, "If He were on earth, He would not be a priest, for there are already men who offer the gifts prescribed by the law". We saw in chapter seven that the legitimacy of Christ's priesthood is that He belongs to the priesthood of Melchizedek. Christ is priest not on the grounds of ancestry like Aaron, but by the divine oath. God said in Psalm 110 v 4, "The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, you are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek". The sanctuary in which Aaron ministered is described for us in verse 5 where we read, "They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven". Later on in the verse Paul reminds us of what God said to Moses. We read, "This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the Tabernacle:

'See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you in the mountain". The true sanctuary has always been in heaven. Just as the sun shines in all its power and casts a shadow on the earth. Aaron's ministry was a copy of the true. The Old Testament sanctuary was an imitation of the true. Christ's priesthood and sanctuary are the original. Why then go back to the copies? Stay with the original. So Paul is saying, to return to the old ritual of

Judaism is to go back into dark shadows. To follow Jesus Christ is to live in the bright sunshine. Paul said in Colossians Ch. 2 v 17, "These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ". Are you looking for reality? You will not find it in outward form, ceremony, or ritual whether Jewish or Christian, Reality is found in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. You must come to Him in your need. As your great high priest He has atoned for your sin. Forgiveness is found in Christ. You must repent of your sin. Be sorry for your sin and ask God to forgive you. Jesus Christ died to reconcile you to God, and to bring in all the benefits of belonging to the better covenant.

A final reason is given why this new covenant is better than the old. We read in verse 6, "But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which He is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises". When God says that the new covenant is better than the old, He isn't suggesting that the old was a mistake. Paul contrasts the glory of the new over the old in 2 Corinthians chapter three. He does state that the old did have glory. We read in verse 7, "Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look in the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious?" In Hebrews chapter 8 God is simply saying that the old has fulfilled its purpose and is now redundant. We read in verse 7, "For if there had been nothing wrong with the first covenant, no place would have been sought for another". What was wrong with the old? It was weak and imperfect. The new covenant did what the old failed to do, it provides a full and perfect remedy for sin.

We are told that the new covenant is founded on better promises. The promises are based on grace. God says in verse 8, "The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel". The words 'I will' are found five times in verse 8 - 13. This is the 'I will' of divine initiative. God will work in matchless grace toward men and women. This new covenant was established by Jesus Christ. When Jesus instituted the Lord's supper, and after He took the cup, He said in Matthew Ch. 26 v 28, "This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins". We can always be assured of the certainty of God's promises. There is also the promise of an inward change. The old covenant could never reach into the hearts of men and women. It could demand but motivate the heart into action. God describes the glory of the impact of the new covenant in verse 10. This is a quotation from Jeremiah Ch. 31 v 31 -34 where He says, "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord, I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts". God puts within the believers heart the inner disposition toward spiritual things and the desire to please God. Paul said in Philippians Ch. 2 v 13, "For it is who works in you to will and to act according to His good pleasure". We work out what God has worked in. We fulfil the Law not out of a sense of fear or mere duty but out of delight, God has become real to us in Christ. Paul says in verse 11, again quoting from Jeremiah Ch. 31, "No longer will a man teach his neighbour or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord', because they will all know me from the least to the greatest". The joy of being a Christian is to know God personally. We also discover the promise of forgiveness. Verse 12 says, "I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more". The law couldn't give forgiveness. It exposed our sin but brought no healing for our sin. When God says that He will not remember our sins He isn't being forgetful. Forgetfulness is a human weakness. He means that He will not hold our sins against us anymore. He knows what we've done but treats us as though we've never done them. When Jesus dies on the cross for our sins God treated His Son as though He had done them. Before you can know God your sin must be removed from His sight. Only by trusting Jesus can that happen. The last promise is the promise of the eternal vitality of the new

covenant, In verse 3 the old covenant is described as, "obsolete and ageing" and that it "will soon disappear". This happened historically in 70 A.D. The Romans destroyed the Temple and there has been no Temple or priesthood since in Jerusalem. In contrast we read of the accomplishment of Jesus Christ as our great high priest. Hebrews Ch. 9 v 12 says, "He entered the most holy place once for all by His own blood having obtained eternal redemption".

I trust you are enjoying the blessing of the new covenant. I trust that you have seen the wonder of who Jesus is and what He has done for you. Have you been changed from within by the grace of God?

## The Excellency of Christ in the Book of Hebrews

### Chapter 9

Hebrews is the book of better things. Hebrews chapter nine helps us to see this by contrasting the Old Testament sanctuary with the new covenant one.

The sanctuary of the old covenant is inferior because it was earthly,. Verse 1 says, "The first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary". Being earthly it was subject to dilapidation and would need repair. It was also limited to one particular place geographically. To move it meant that it had to be dismantled and each section transported to the next place. It belonged only to Israel and not the world.

The old sanctuary was a pattern of something greater. It was divided into two main sections. The first section was the holy place. Verse 2 tells that there was, "the lamp stand, the table of the consecrated bread". The lamp stand was a reminder to the nation of Israel that they were to be a light to the surrounding nations. It especially pointed forward to Jesus Christ who would be the light of the world. The table of the consecrated bread taught God's people that it was the Lord who sustained them. This also pointed to Jesus Christ as the Bread of Life. We need Him to save us and keep us. His presence nourishes our souls. The second division of the sanctuary is the Holy of Holies. Paul says in verse 4 that in here were, "the golden altar of incense and the gold covered ark of the covenant". Strictly speaking the altar of incense was in the holy place just before the veil. Paul had not made a mistake. He's simply emphasising the intimate relation between the altar of incense and the mercy seat within the veil. On the Day of Atonement, celebrated once a year, the high priest would take coals from the altar to burn before the mercy seat within the veil. Beyond the veil was the ark of the covenant. It was a gold covered wooden chest 3 3/4 feet long, 2 1/4 feet wide, and 2 1/4 feet high. On top was the mercy seat made of gold with a cherub at each end. This was God's throne in the tabernacle. David said in Psalm 80 v 1, "Hear us, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock, you who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth". The priest sprinkled the mercy seat with the blood on the Day of Atonement. In the ark was the Ten Commandments. When the blood was sprinkled God didn't look at the broken law but at the blood and was merciful toward the Israelites. Jesus Christ is the believers' 'mercy seat'. His blood takes our sin away. The sanctuary was entered only by the priests. Verse 6 says, "when everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry". The tabernacle and its precincts were forbidden to the people generally. The Old Testament sanctuary was inferior because it was temporary. Verse 8 says, "The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the most holy place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing". The first tabernacle needed to be removed so that a superior one could take its place. The old system stopped men and women from entering the very presence of God. When Jesus died the veil blocking that entrance was torn in two. Matthew Ch. 27 v 51 says, "At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom". Access to God for all who believe has been opened up. We read in Hebrews Ch. 10 v 20, "We have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened up for us through the curtain, that is, His body". A further weakness of the old sanctuary is that it exercised an eternal ministry. It could never change the heart or calm the accusing conscience. Verse 10 says, "They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings - external regulations applying until the time of the new order".

The superiority of the new covenant sanctuary is presented in verses 11 - 28. The real sanctuary is heavenly. Verse 11 says about Jesus that, "He went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man made". The old sanctuary was made of materials from this passing earth. Verse 24 says, "Christ did not enter a man made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one"; He entered heaven itself". That being the case the new sanctuary is not subject to dilapidation. It's eternal. It never needs repair. No matter where believers live on this earth we can have access to God. We're not limited to a place. There's no need to dismantle it to move it on. It remains forever in the eternal holy place in glory where God dwells. We read in verse 11 of, "the good things that are already there". All that the old sanctuary prefigured has already arrived in Jesus Christ and His finished work and His ascension to the Father's right hand in heaven. We no longer need the type when we have the true!

The new sanctuary is better than the old because of the type of sacrifice offered for sin. The writer deals with this theme more extensively in chapter 10 where we see Christ the better sacrifice. Here he mentions that the atonement for our sin was made through the blood of Jesus Christ Himself. The Old Testament sacrifices consisted of the blood of goats and calves which could only cover sin. Notice the contrast in verse 12. We read, "He did not enter by the blood of goats and calves' but He entered the most holy place once and for all by His blood, having obtained eternal redemption". The benefit of this for all believers is that the cleansing work of Christ's blood is richer and deeper. Paul summarises it for us in verses 13 - 14. He says, "The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ ----- cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!". The old sacrifices had only an outward benefit. The sacrifice of Christ reaches into the heart and conscience. Have you been cleansed from your sin through the blood of Jesus Christ? Christ has secured an eternal redemption. Verse 15 says, "Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance". Our salvation is not a passing momentary thing. It has eternal implication. It will carry us through this life and into glory itself! This verse goes on to point out that sins committed under the old covenant were only covered by the blood of bull and goats. Sins could only be cleansed and taken away after the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. Paul says, "He has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant". Sufficient, efficient, and full deliverance from sin is found by all who trust Christ for their eternal salvation. Do you know the joy of forgiveness and the blessing of salvation in Jesus Christ?

The new sanctuary speaks of fulfilment. Verse 24 says, "For Christ did not enter a man made sanctuary that was only the copy of the true one; He entered heaven itself". Nor did He go in and out of heaven on an annual basis like the high priest on the Day of Atonement. Christ stayed within the heavenly sanctuary. He sacrificial blood was of such perfection and eternal value that no other sacrifice for sin could be offered or needed to be offered. His high priestly work was such that having once entered in He did not need to come out of the heavenly sanctuary. Everything that was necessary for our complete salvation was perfectly achieved. Mark Ch. 16 v 19 tells us that, "After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, e was taken into heaven and He sat at the right hand of God". The work was finished and complete. He was taken up into heaven and He sat at the right hand of God". The work was finished and complete. It lacked nothing. When you trust Christ as your Saviour He will save you to the uttermost. You will lack nothing in Christ.

The glory of the new covenant can be seen in the better sanctuary. In the old there were repeated sacrifices, in the new just one final and complete. In the old

there was the blood of goats and calves, in the new Christ's own precious blood. In the old sin was merely covered, in the new it is was put away out of sight. In the old the benefit of the sanctuary was for Israel only, in the new it was for sinners throughout the world. In the old the priest left the Holy of Holies, in the new Jesus entered heaven and stayed there. In the old the priest came out to bless the people, in the new Christ will come out in the way described in verse 28 where we read, "He will appear for a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him". Are you prepared and ready for His return?

## The Excellency of Christ in the Book of Hebrews

### Chapter 10

Today we look at the tenth chapter of Hebrews. Do you long to know God and meet with Him? Is God accessible? Many believe that God is distant and cannot be known. Some feel that God isn't interested in us. This tenth chapter shows that not only is God concerned about us but that He wants you to draw near to Him, and have intimate fellowship with Him. In verse 22 we find an exhortation, "Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith". That invitation from God to draw near still stands today. You can be assured that He wants you to do just that. How is this possible? Its through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. How close may we get to God when we approach Him? Verse 19 says, "therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the most holy place". Yes, you and I may go right into the most holy place. You will remember that only the high priest who served in the tabernacle was permitted to do this. In chapter 9 verse 7 we read, "only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood". We enter by the blood of Jesus. Not merely once a year but now in any place and at any time. Chapter 10 verse 19 says its, "a new and living way opened up for us through the curtain, that is, His body". In other words we may enter the most holy place on the grounds of the finished work of Christ. His body hung dying on the cross. He was giving His life a ransom for many. John the Baptist said in John Ch. 1 v 29, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world". Jesus is the superior Lamb. This is the theme of verses 1 - 18 of chapter ten. Jesus the Lamb of God is superior in value. The Old Testament was offered regularly. Verse 1 says that were offered, "endlessly year after year". If they could have provided perfect cleansing from the guilt of sin then surely they would have stopped being offered. Verse 2 says, "the worshippers would have been cleansed once for all". It wasn't God's purpose to deal with sin permanently through the blood of bulls and goats. Verse 1 tells us that, "the law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming - not the realities themselves". In verse 4 we read, "it is possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" They only pointed forward to the reality of the perfect and final superior sacrifice of Jesus Christ. His blood is of far more value than theirs. Paul quotes from Psalm 40 v 6 - 8. It speaks of the coming of the Messiah the Lord Jesus. Christ says in verses 6 - 7, "with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, "here am I -I have come to do your will, O God". God is more pleased with the precious blood of His son Jesus Christ. In the coming of Christ and the shedding of His blood on the cross the first covenant is replaced by the second. Its firmly established on the better blood of Jesus. Jesus the Lamb of God is superior in effect. We see this by contrasting the work of the priest of the old covenant and the work of Jesus. The work of the priest in the tabernacle was never finished. Verse 11 says, "Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties, again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins". How different is our Saviour Jesus Christ. Verse 12 says, "But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, He say down at the right hand of God". Such was the perfection of the blood of Christ that no more sacrifices needed to be offered or could be offered. There was no seat in the tabernacle. When Jesus entered the heavenly sanctuary He sat down. The work of salvation for men and women was full, final and complete. For any Jew to return to the old temple sacrificial system was a return to the inadequate and the futility of the old inferior sacrifices. The Lord Jesus said in John Ch. 14 v 6, "I am the way-----no one comes to the Father except through me". Your sins which are many need to be forgiven and cleansed . Verse 10 says of all who believe, "we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all". You cannot approach God while

you remain in the unholiness of your sin. When you come to Jesus Christ and seek His forgiveness and cleansing He will receive you. You may enter into the most holy place with confidence. Your sins are forgiven. Verse 17 says, "their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more". We are assured in verse 18, "where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin".

The last section of chapter 10, verses 19 - 39, contain an exhortation based on all that has been said about the superiority of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It calls for a worthy response. There's a call to faithfulness. Rather than be tempted to go back we must go on. Verse 23 says, "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess". We must keep our focus on the Saviour. There's the promise of the support of the Lord. The verse ends by reminding us, "for He who promised is faithful". He will forgive our sins. He will not bring them to mind. He will welcome all who come to Him in their need. You can count on the faithfulness of God. There's a call to fellowship. Believers must stick together. Rather than being distracted away from our hope, and falling out in our churches we read in verse 24, "Let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds". We can only do this well if we regularly meet to encourage each other. Verse 25 says, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the day approaching". Don't miss any opportunity for fellowship. We need one another in these evil days in which we live. The day that is approaching could be a reference to the coming of the Lord for His own. We need to be ready. It could refer to the imminent invasion of the Roman army. Just two years after writing this letter the temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed. If ever there was a time to keep together and be found fellowshiping with God in the true heavenly tabernacle it was now. The earthly would soon be gone. To go back to it would eventually leave them with nothing. The believer's security is in the invisible God, the heavenly tabernacle, and our eternal high priest. These will never be shaken or removed. There's a call to perseverance. Verse 37 says, "He who is coming will come and will not delay". Since this is true we're exhorted in verse 35, "do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised". As we persevere it will call for sacrifice and trials. Verse 33 tells us, "sometimes you are publicly exposed to insult and persecution". The true child of God will show the genuineness of his conversion by standing his ground. We read in verse 34 that the Hebrews, "joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions". The genuine believer has his eyes on heaven and the coming of the Lord. The loss of the things of this world means nothing for those who are looking for that city whose builder and maker is God. Pleasing God means more than passing possessions. For any who go back verse 29 says, "a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant". This is a terrible sin in God's sight. It brings God's severest judgement. Those who went back were clearly not saved. Paul makes this distinction in verse 39. He says, "But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved". The sign of a real follower of the Lord is the desire to do God's will.

Have you drawn near to God in repentance over your sin and placed your faith in the saving blood of Jesus Christ? Are you drawing near to God in Christ, through the veil, and enjoying rich fellowship with your Saviour? Hold on to Christ. Encourage your fellow believers.

## The Excellency of Christ in the Book of Hebrews

### Chapter 11

Do you want to please God? I'm sure you do. We live for the Lord with one main purpose that we might please Him in all we do. Paul prayed for the church at Colosse. He said in Colossians Ch. 1 v 10, "and we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way". What type of living pleases God? Hebrews Ch. 11 v 6 gives the answer. We read, "and without faith it is impossible to please God". Nothing pleases God more than living a life of faith. The Jewish converts to Christianity were thinking of going back to the outward ritual of Judaism. They didn't realise that this move would not be pleasing to God. We've noticed in the earlier chapters of Hebrews that Jesus Christ is the better priest of a better sanctuary and is Himself the better sacrifice. Faith that pleases God believes that and in the light of it. The old covenant has given way to the new. We read in Ch. 8 v 13, "by calling this covenant 'new' He has made the first one obsolete, and what is obsolete and ageing will soon disappear".

Hebrews chapter eleven shows us what faith really is. Master that and we will be sure to please the Lord. First of all we see faith defined. We read in verse 1, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see". Faith has been described as the believer's 'sixth sense'. By using my five senses of sight, smell, touch, hearing and taste I am certain of the material world around me and I can enjoy its benefits. Faith is the means by which I am sure of spiritual things and the unseen. Some things are unseen because they have not arrived yet. They are promised but not yet mine to hold. Faith is the certainty that it will be mine when it arrives. Some things are unseen because they are invisible. Faith confirms to our heart that God exists and that there's a spiritual dimension. We believe that because God tells us so in His word. Faith is believing what God has said. Faith brings assurance to the heart. It gives conviction to our hearts of what God has said and promised. (The well known Bible teacher A.W.Tozer one said, "The invisible world is more real than the one I can see".) Faith is the evidence. The man and woman of faith looks to the heavenly sanctuary, our heavenly great high priest Jesus Christ, and to God who in verse 6 says, "rewards those who earnestly seek Him". Faith doesn't go back. Faith moves forward in absolute confidence in the Lord. We read in chapter 10 v 39, "We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved".

Second we see faith displayed. The remaining verses of Hebrews chapter 11 from verse 7 - 4- list many of the great heroes of faith from Old Testament times. These verses have been called the 'gallery of faith'. We walk through this gallery and admire the faith of all who are found in it. We must not simply admire them; we must follow their example. The Hebrew believers who were tempted to go back to Judaism must see that their forefathers weren't men of ritual and ceremony but men of faith. They were men who believed God and obeyed Him. Faith and obedience are the two main things that bring God great pleasure. The people listed here illustrate faith. We see how faith really behaves. Faith is active. It's never static. We read in Ephesians Ch. 2 v 8 that, "it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God". Since faith is given by God it cannot be inactive and lifeless. God is living and active so anything that comes from Him has to be the same. Real faith speaks the language of the great missionary William Carey. He said, "expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God". Faith attempts. Faith expects. Faith is on the move. All the great believers in Hebrews 11 confirm their faith by their actions. Verse 4 says, "by faith Abel offered a better sacrifice";

verse 5 tells us, "Enoch - was commended as one who pleased God"; Noah believed God that the flood would come. Verse 7 says, "By faith Noah, when warned about things now seen, in holy fear, built an ark to save his family". Abraham obeyed when God asked him to leave his hometown. Verse 8 says, "by faith Abraham obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going"; Moses left Egypt. We read in verse 27, "he persevered because he saw Him who was invisible". The writer could go on. He says in verse 32, "and what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised, who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword, whose weakness was turned to strength". The one common factor in all of this is the bold activity flowing from real faith. Charles Wesley wrote in his hymn "O Thou who camest from above", "Ready for all Thy perfect will, my acts of faith and love repeat". Any claim to be a Christian without living the life of faith as detailed in this chapter is a spurious claim. I'm not saying you will build an ark or cross the Red Sea but your faith will show itself in deeds of some kind. Is there evidence in your life of genuine faith? Someone once said, "We live by faith or we do not live at all. Either we venture or we vegetate!". We read in James Ch. 2 v 26, "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead".

We also learn some practical lessons about in this chapter. Faith is tested. We read concerning Abraham in verse 17, "by faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice". The life of faith brings with it trials and testings. This was a severe test. Abraham was asked to offer up his son. Testing touches us where it hurts. It isn't pleasant. God tests faith to see whether we really do trust Him, and His wisdom. Faith is tested to show our shortcomings and to purify our lives. Tests of faith challenge us, wake us up and jolt us. Faith is confident. Abraham could not understand why he had been asked to offer his son. Especially when we read what God said in verse 18, "even though God had said to him, 'it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned'" How could Abraham have offspring from a dead son? Abraham was confident God would keep His promise by raising Isaac from the dead! Verse 20 tells us that God would accomplish His purpose in their lives. Verse 22 says about Joseph, "by faith Joseph-spoke about the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt". He was confident in God's promise and His integrity to keep His word. The life of faith is one of quiet assurance in the promises of God. Are you anxious? Are you uncertain about the future? We read in Proverbs Ch. 3 v 6, "In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight". We do not know what the future holds but we do know hold the future. Faith looks to the uncertain future with a calmness of soul resting in the promises of God.

Faith is undisturbed in the storm. When faith faces the Red Sea knows God will make a way through. Faith perseveres. Hebrews Ch. 11 v 35 tells of men and women of faith who, "were tortured-faced floggings-chained and put into prison-stoned-put to death by the sword". But faith kept them going. They believed God was in control. They knew the final victory belonged to God and His people. Faith sees the ultimate end. Faith is steadfast and unmoveable. We have built our lives on the firm foundation of the rock of Christ Jesus. The severest storm will not move us.

Doubt see the obstacles, faith see the way!

Doubt sees the darkest night, faith see the day!

Doubt dreads to take a step, faith soars on high!"

Doubt asks "who believes?", faith answers "I"!

## The Excellency of Christ in the Book of Hebrews

### Chapter 12

The Christian life is pictured in this twelfth chapter as a race. It is a good image to present to those Jews who were thinking of returning to the rites and rituals of the old covenant. A good athlete will run the whole race once he has started. He refuses to look back. His eye is on the finishing post. This chapter provides us with keys on how we can run the Christian race effectively. It teaches us how we can reach the finishing post.

The first thing we must do is get rid of anything that will slow us down and hinder us. Verse 1 says, "Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles". The verse begins with a reference to the men and women of faith listed in chapter eleven. We read, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a cloud witnesses". This doesn't mean that these people are in heaven watching us witnessing what we are doing. It means that each one in his life was a witness to what's involved in a wholehearted commitment to the Lord. They each put away from their lives anything that would slow them down in their determination to live for God. For example in chapter 11 and verse 26 we find the choice Moses made. We read, "He chose to be ill-treated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time". Our attitude must be the same. There may be a sin in your life and it's your particular weakness. It's that one sin that 'easily entangles' you. Keep a close watch on it and deal with it every time it demands to be satisfied. There are some things in your life that may not be sinful in themselves. They may be legitimate. It may be sport or a hobby you enjoy. There's nothing wrong with that. The problem is that it may begin to take up so much of your time that the things of God are more and more neglected. They might even become an idol. Remember, anything that takes the place of God in your affections is an idol. Be careful how you use your time.

The second thing we must do to finish the race is to follow the example of Jesus Christ. He persevered in the face of difficulty and pain. Verse 1 ends by saying, "Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us". Paul then shows us the very thing that will motivate us. He says in verse 2, "let us fix our eyes on Jesus". But not on Jesus in His glory here but Jesus as He faced the prospect of the cross. He says in verse 2, "for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame". They will be difficult crosses for you to bear as you serve the Lord. You may be tempted to give up. Again look at Christ. Verse 3 says, "Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart". Is the way tough for you at the moment? Do family and friends make things difficult for you because you are a Christian? Jesus knows how you feel. He experienced it Himself. He says this to you in Matthew Ch. 5 v 11 - 12, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven".

The third fact that will get you to the finishing line is to understand why you face hard times. This was a problem for the Hebrew believers. They had committed their lives to Jesus Christ and they had experienced a lot of difficulty as a result. Verse 7 tells us why it is that we face troubles. We read, "endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons". Tribulation and trials ought to be an encouragement to us because they are an evidence of our divine sonship. When we go through hard times it doesn't mean God has rejected you or has stopped loving you. In verses 5 and 6 Paul quotes from the book of Proverbs Ch. 3 v 11 - 12. He says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose

heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son". If we do not experience any hardship then it's time to get concerned. You need to ask the question, "Am I really a child of God?" We should not think it odd when we are disciplined. Our own earthly fathers discipline us when it was required. Paul says in verse 9, "we respected them for it". Our heavenly Father cares for us more than them. We read at the end of verse 9, "How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!" Verse 10 reveals the purpose God has in disciplining you. We read, "God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness". Hard times build our character. They have the effect of conforming us to the image of Jesus Christ. Rather than causing us to think about forsaking the Lord, troubles should cause us to praise Him because we know we will benefit from them in the end. Verse 11 says, "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful". We all know how true that is when we're going through difficult time. The verse ends with this encouragement, "Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it". So rather than allowing hard times to get us down, depressed, and despondent verse 12 says, "strengthen you feeble arms and weak knees" Make paths for your feet, so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed". Think of a runner on the last lap of the race. He's exhausted. He begins to falter. He wobbles and his legs look as though they're about to give way. He could give up. He gets a new burst of strength. He carries on to the end. If he had continued wobbling he could have dislocated his leg. That's the picture here. You are told to get new spiritual strength. If you continue limping along you may do some permanent spiritual damage. Trouble will bring one or two reactions from you. You'll say, "Why should I continue serving the Lord. It's brought nothing but aggravation". If you think like that you will become a disabled Christian, you will stop making progress. Or you will say, "My heavenly Father loves me and all that I face is for my ultimate benefit". That way of thinking will help you cope with the troubles that come your way. The spiritually minded believer will say what Joseph said to his brothers in Genesis Ch. 50 v 20, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good". Difficulties will spur you on to follow the Lord when you respond to them properly. Verse 14 says, "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy". This is God's great aim in the whole process of disciplining His children. We must seek God's blessing above everything else. Esau is presented as a warning to us in verse 16. He forfeited God's blessing for the sake of worldly pleasures. Verse 16 says, "See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son". Be sure not to miss all that is your in Christ for the sake of your own personal comfort.

The last truth that will help you to arrive at the finishing post in your Christian race is to appreciate who you are, and the wonder of what you belong to. The Hebrews who were tempted to go back into the Jewish religion thought they were returning to something far more glorious. Of course they weren't. It's the Christian who has the reality. The old way is the way of law and terror. Paul says in verses 18 and 19, "You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and is burning with fire-to such a voice speaking words, so that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken unto them". Verse 21 says, "The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear". That happened at Mount Sinai. The Christian way in Christ is the way of fellowship with God and joy. Verse 22 says, "But you have come to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God". Jerusalem was built on Mount Zion and it speaks of pilgrimage, welcome, joy, invitation. Jerusalem was God's dwelling place. In Christ we do not find terror and exclusion but acceptance and fellowship with the Lord. We have come into the 'city of the living God'. We see our privileged position as Christians in verse 23. We read we have come to, 'the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge

of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect'. When we really recognise the glory of our calling it will not be difficult to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. We will reach the finishing line. We will overcome every hindrance. Paul tells us how to respond in verse 28. We read, "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe". Are your eyes focused straight ahead? Follow the teaching of this chapter and they will be.

## The Excellency of Christ in the Book of Hebrews

### Chapter 13

This thirteenth chapter contains a number of concluding exhortations. We find the features that should be seen in all those who are determined to follow Jesus Christ. Verse 1 says, "Keep on loving each other as brothers". Your fellow believer is your brother. You are in the family of God. God is love so you must show real love to everyone in your church. Verse 2 says, "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it". It is possible to have many wonderful experiences as you open your home in Christian hospitality. Abraham gave hospitality to three strangers who turned out to be the Lord and two angels. God blesses hospitable believers in special ways. What act of kindness have you done recently for your brother or sister in Christ? What about believers we never meet? Verse 3 says, "Remember those in prison-and those who are ill-treated as if you yourselves were suffering". We have brothers and sisters in foreign lands who are persecuted for righteousness sake. True Christian love is practical. Try and find out what you can about them. What are their needs? Stand in their shoes and feel for them. If possible write and encourage them. Especially remember them in prayer.

Verses 4 - 6 remind us that we are not to be unholy and selfish. We read in verse 4, "Marriage should be honoured-God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral". Society in Paul's day was thoroughly depraved. The marriage bond was just a bit of paper. Our generation isn't any better. Society is rife with infidelity and immorality. The marriage bond must be honoured by believers. Is your marriage an example of a Christian marriage? Any illicit sexual relationships will face God's displeasure. He will judge it. Verse 5 says, "Keep your lives from the love of money". The answer to greed is contentment with what you have. Of course you need money to live. You must earn it honestly. When you have done all you can to provide for your family look to the Lord? He has promised to meet your needs. We can be content because we have His help. God says at the end of verse 5, "because God has said, 'never will I leave you, never will I forsake you'". Jesus says in Matthew Ch. 6 v 33, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given you as well". Do not be envious of the prosperity of the unsaved. Do not panic and be tempted to gamble or steal. Honour God and He will honour you and bless you with His provision for all your daily needs. The one who asks you to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread", will not withhold it from you.

To live the life of faith well we are exhorted to follow the example of present leaders in the church. Verse 7 says, "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their life and imitate their faith". Be grateful to God if you have a godly, biblical leadership in your fellowship. Follow their life style as they follow Christ. There may be a leader in your church full of wisdom and the Holy Spirit and you wonder what you will do when the Lord takes him home. Who gave you that leader? It was Jesus the head of the church. Ephesians Ch. 4 v 8 says, "Christ gave gifts to men". When Moses died Joshua was there to take his place. Hebrews Ch. 13 v 8 says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever". This verse has been used in all sorts of different ways. In the context it has to do with the provision of leaders in the local church. The great shepherd of the sheep will always make sure there is a provision of under shepherds to feed and guide His flock. He will never change in that objective. You need to be 'led and fed'! Especially as there are so many false teachings about. Verse 9 goes on to say, "Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings". Jesus provides sound bible teachers in the church to guide you into truth and help you to avoid error. The Hebrew Christians were

being told that they could not please God or grow in their faith unless they partook of certain ceremonial foods. Paul says in verse 9, "It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace". The Christian life is a life of grace from beginning to end. Any teaching that introduces legalistic requirements to please God is not biblical. Be careful of any teaching that externalises Christianity to mere outward performance of ceremony, ritual, and routine. The essence of the Christian life is stated in Philippians Ch. 2 v 12, "Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose". True Christianity is God working in our hearts by grace and us responding in loving, willing obedience. It is not rules and regulations. It is working out in daily practice what God has instilled in our hearts by His Holy Spirit. We see this in verse 20 and 21. Paul prays "May the God of peace---equip you with everything good for doing His will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ".

To serve Christ means that we will be ready to unashamedly identify ourselves with Him. Paul uses an Old Testament practice to make this point. He says in verse 11 concerning the burnt offering, "the bodies are burned outside the camp". So Jesus was crucified outside the city of Jerusalem in shame and disgrace. Yet in doing so He was doing God's will and bringing us salvation. Paul applies this to us in verse 13. He says, "Let us, then, go to Him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace He bore". Serving the crucified Christ is God's will for us, and when we do; we will be blessed and will win others to the Saviour. We cannot do what Jesus did and offer ourselves as a sacrifice for sin. Only the Son of God could do that. We do have a sacrifice to offer as we go to Him outside the camp. Verse 15 Says, "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God the sacrifice of praise-the fruit of lips that confess His name". Never be ashamed of the one who loved you and gave Himself for you. Speak for Him in this fallen world. You will be opposed and despised sometimes as Christ was at Golgotha. That's part of the cost of taking up your cross and following Him outside the camp. But it's worth it!

In verses 17 and 18 Paul deals with God's expectation of you toward Christian leaders. Verse 17 says, "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority". Our generation is one that objects authority and its influence can be felt in the church. Good leaders will not lord it over the flock of God. They will lead in a spirit of humility. Believers are called to submit to such leadership. Two reasons are given. First, we read, "they keep a watch over you as men who must give and account". Hopefully they will give a good account of a person who was humble enough to be led and not rebel. Second, we read, "so that their work will be a joy, not a burden". Christian leadership is a difficult work. The Pastor and Elders are at the forefront of the work and of the devils attack. Grumbling, complaining, nit-picking believers make the work twice as hard and are a real burden. They destroy the joy of the work for everyone, especially for leaders. What is the best way to encourage the work? Paul says as a leader in verse 18, "Pray for us". Instead of finding fault find time to pray. That will improve everything and give you a sweeter spirit in the work of God.

What will you do about all that this chapter asks of you? The Hebrew believers were left with a challenge. Verse 22 says, "Brothers, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation". We must indeed fix our eyes on Jesus and glorify Him. He is Lord above all. He excels all that Judaism offered. Be sure not to turn from Him. Follow Him at all times and in all circumstances. God will give you grace to help in time of need. So Paul concludes with a short benediction in verse 25.

"Grace be with you all".

