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EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS SIX

"An Age-Long Battleground"

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"I know how this passage has made the heart of many a good man tremble" are the words with which Dr. R. W. Dale begins his commentary on this scripture. He then continues, "It rises up in the New Testament with a gloomy grandeur, stern, portentous, awful, sublime, as Mount Sinai when the Lord descended upon it in fire, and threatening storm-clouds were around Him, and thunders and lightnings and unearthly voices told that He was there." These words convey some idea of the awe and hesitancy with which commentators have approached this scripture. Many have seemed afraid to express any opinion as to the meaning, application or interpretation of it, while among the ablest writers all down the years who have sought to give a faithful exegesis of this "Mount Sinai" of the New Testament, there is as wide a difference as between Calvinism and Arminianism. There is, in fact, a danger in approaching this Scripture, as many another, with a theological bias. Both Calvinist and Arminian have seemingly been convinced that this scripture sustains their peculiar belief.

A necessary postulate in all Bible exegesis is that *any interpretation is unscriptural if it conflicts with scripture*. There are three well known methods of interpretation of this scripture in Hebrews the sixth chapter, which the writer will first state. Following this, he will present his own interpretation of the passage for consideration. Each of these will receive due attention, but with a detailed analysis of

the words and context which will make clear what the author believes to be the true exegesis. The article will then be concluded by a statement as to the purpose of the epistle itself as it applies to the present exposition.

METHODS OF INTERPRETATION

First: That those spoken of were not "born again" but were mere professors who had received some enlightenment but had no saving faith. Matthew Henry states the case thus: "He" [the writer of the Hebrews] "shows how far persons may go in religion, and, after all, fall away, and perish for ever." He then recounts the experiences given in verses four and five, and concludes, "Those great things are spoken here of those who may fall away: yet it is not here said of them, that they were truly converted, or that they were justified." This interpretation is accepted by many able scholars who are sound in the faith.

Second: That they were true Christians, really believers in Christ, who fell away and were lost. Dr. R. W. Dale, in his book "The Jewish Temple and the Christian Church," says of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "I know not how he could have chosen expressions which more forcibly describe the possession of a real and genuine Christian life. Phrase is heaped upon phrase that there may be no misapprehension." Another writer, viz., R. Govett, enters into a close examination of the context and reaches the conclusion that the person spoken of was a believer, and that he was "once for all enlightened" but he "died spiritually." He says, "Then the scheme which supposes the 'mere professor' unpossessed of spiritual life, is here wrecked. The person described was '*once for all renewed in repentance.*' He was alive, but has died spiritually. Life will not *again* visit him" (see, "Christ Superior to Moses," p. 158). After quoting Mr. Darby, who says this supposed character "had never any spiritual life," Govett replies, "But while this escapes the difficulty of the perdition of a saint, it is widely

astray from the force, and the statements of the passage" (p. 165).

Quotations, demonstrating the divergence of opinion, could be multiplied, but these are sufficient for the purpose. There is a grave danger, let it be repeated, in being so desirous of safeguarding our doctrinal beliefs, that we interpret accordingly.

Third: That the scripture statement "For it is impossible . . . if they shall fall away" expresses the biggest "if" in the Bible. That God's Word presents a supposed falling away as actual, showing, if the *end* is to be avoided, so is the *way*. However, in the Scripture under consideration, viz., Hebrews 6:6, the word "if" does not appear at all. The reading is καὶ παραπεσόντας "and having fallen away." This being conclusive, we shall not refer again to this particular method of interpretation or application, though the writer is willing to concede that this would afford relief to many if this scripture could be so translated, and if this were where the particular emphasis lay.

Fourth: In presenting the following fourth method of interpretation, the writer begs leave to say that, in the presence of the foregoing conflicting interpretations, he felt perplexed as to the true meaning of this scripture. Being convinced that scripture is nowhere contradictory to itself, he felt there must be an interpretation which is in perfect harmony with the rest of scripture, and, realizing his utter incompetence to perceive the harmony apart from the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, he looked very definitely to the Lord for this guidance, and as a result, and after making a detailed study of the scripture in its whole setting, he presents this as a possible interpretation. Which interpretation, he suggests, is, *That the question is not one of salvation, but of rewards, relating, as the context shows, to 'the better things which accompany' or are connected with salvation, viz., fruitage, or good works which are the result of a vital Christian experience.* Note the relation between salvation by grace and good works following salvation "Not by works of

righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us . . . and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful (may take care) to maintain (to be forward in) good works" (see Titus 3:5 and 8).

Now let us examine the first and second of these interpretations before we present the fourth. Just a word before we do this. The writer is convinced "That no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation" (2 Peter 1:20), or, to put it in another way, no scripture is to be lifted out of its setting and interpreted according to the restrictions of that isolated word, or according to preconceived ideas, but it is to be left where the Holy Spirit put it and interpreted in the light of its context. Further, it takes all Scripture to present God's full-orbed message to mankind, and consequently, it takes all Scripture to interpret Scripture. Now let us proceed.

First Interpretation. That those spoken of were not "born again," but were mere professors who had received some enlightenment but had no saving faith. What saith the Scriptures? The most restricted context for the understanding of these verses, viz., Hebrews 6:4-6, is from Hebrews 5:11 to 6:12. The difficulty with this method of interpretation is that the whole passage seems to be against it. In commenting on this Scripture, R. W. Dale, M.A., D.D., L.L.D., says, "I know not how he could have chosen expressions which more forcibly describe the possession of a real and genuine Christian life. Phrase is heaped upon phrase that there may be no misapprehension."

In order to keep this paper within reasonable limitations, it will be necessary to make the comments as brief as possible and leave the reader to enlarge on the suggestions given. Now, to whom does this Scripture refer? Saved or unsaved?

(a) Hebrews 5:11, "since ye have become dull [slow, sluggish] in hearing." Here, deterioration is implied. Whereas, the unsaved are "dead" (Eph. 2:1).

(b) Verse 12, "ye ought to be teachers." This cannot be said of the "dead in trespasses and sins."

(c) Verse 12, "have need of milk." The unsaved need *life*.

(d) Verse 13, "a babe." The unsaved are not even born. "Ye must be born again."

(e) Hebrews 6:1, "Therefore leaving the word of the beginning of the Christ," that is, as Bruce remarks, "as a builder leaves his foundation in erecting his building," "let us be borne on unto completeness." The unsaved have not even begun.

(f) 6:1, "not laying again a foundation." The urge is to go on to maturity, not to remain at the beginning, not to remain in the doorway of the Christian life, but to go on with the building of the superstructure on the foundation already laid. The same word for "foundation" is used where we read "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation, etc." The true believer is saved because resting on this foundation which is Jesus Christ, whereas the unsaved are not on this foundation at all.

(g) 6:4, "those who were once for all enlightened." For the use of this word "once" (ἅπαξ), compare with Hebrews 9:26, 27 and 28. The meaning and force of the word "enlightened" is clearly given in Ephesians 1:18, where the same word is used, "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints." The unsaved are spoken of as being in "darkness." "What communion hath light with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14). Note how "the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light . . . should shine unto them" (2 Cor. 4:4).

(h) Chapter 6, verse 4, "tasted of the heavenly gift." Dr. Marvin R. Vincent's comment is, "The meaning is, *have consciously partaken of.*" The same word is used in Hebrews 2:9, where the meaning is unmistakable and cannot be

watered down, for it says "But we see Jesus, who was made for a little while lower than the angels, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man." This is further emphasized in these words "As new born babes . . . if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious" (1 Peter 2:1-3). There is no mistaking the sense in which the Lord Jesus *tasted* death for every man, nor the way in which "new born babes" "have tasted that the Lord is gracious," but what is the "Heavenly gift" of which they are said to have tasted? Surely this is clearly stated in many Scriptures. For example, "For God so loved the world, that he gave" . . . "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (John 3:16; Romans 6:23). How can this represent the experience of a mere professor?

(i) Chapter 6, verse 4, "became partakers of the Holy Spirit." The word here for "*became*," or "*made*" is the same as in John 1:12, "but as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the children of God." Note the word for "partakers," μετόχους. Drs. Liddell and Scott give the meaning as "sharing in, partaking of." The same word is translated "fellows" in Hebrews 1:9: "therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows," where the reference seems to be unmistakably to angelic beings (see Psalm 45:6, 7). In 2 Corinthians 5:5, the Holy Spirit is spoken of as God's "earnest" to believers. As "earnest money" is the pledge of full payment, and as the risen Christ is the "firstfruits," or guarantee, of the resurrection of the redeemed, so the Holy Spirit in the believer is God's "earnest" of the full work of grace being wrought in that heart, even as we are assured in Philippians 1:6, "He which hath begun a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ."

If these things be so, then how can this Scripture refer to one who is not a partaker of grace!

(j) Chapter 6, verse 5, "And have tasted the good word of God." Our Saviour declared, "the words that I speak unto

you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63), while the Holy Spirit, through Paul, says "That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word" (Ephesians 5:26).

"The powers of the world to come." This sentence is better translated, "the works of power of the age to come" (δυνάμεις-τε μέλλοντος αἰῶνος).

The question arises, What is the world, or age, to come? There seems no question but that this refers to the coming age of the Millennium, when the miraculous works of power which the Lord Jesus performed, and which had been witnessed and tasted by many of those to whom Paul was writing, will be witnessed again.

Lastly, in this connection, we note in chapter 6, verse 1, the urge is to "go on unto perfection," that is, to "full growth," or "completeness." Surely, such an exhortation would have been out of place were it not that these, to whom the Apostle was writing, were born-again ones and not mere professors!

The Second Interpretation. This is that these spoken of in this section of Scripture were true Christians, having been "born again" of God's Holy Spirit, but fell away and were lost. Dr. S. T. Bloomfield, in his Greek Testament, quotes Bishop Jeremy Taylor as commenting on the experience given in this Scripture, together with Hebrews 10:26-29, as "a falling away from the state of excellent things in which they had received all the present endearments of the Gospel, —a full conviction and pardon of sins, the earnest of the Spirit, the comfort of the promises, an antepast of heaven itself. . . . It must denote absolute apostacy either unto heathenism, or Judaism, or any other state of despising and hating Christ, as thus crucifying Him afresh."

That this Scripture does refer to those who had a real experience of God's saving grace seems clear from the study as presented in the foregoing section dealing with the first interpretation, but to say that they fell away into absolute apostacy is an entirely different thing. To explain this as

illustrating, or teaching, "falling from grace" is, in the opinion of the present writer, to immediately throw oneself into direct conflict with much Scripture. To accept and teach that a blood-bought child of God can fall from grace is to assault the very nature, character and sovereign purpose of God, as well as His justice and His love.

Such teaching is an assault on the nature of God in that the believer is declared to be a "partaker of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4); "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13); and indwelt by the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 17).

It is an assault on the character of God—His faithfulness and truthfulness, in that the life He imparts He gives His pledge to maintain. His promise is, "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall anyone pluck them out of my hand" (John 10:28-30) "and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed out of death into life" (John 5:24). How true is the blessed assurance,

"All Jehovah's 'shalls', and wills'
Are firm as the everlasting hills."

Further, the doctrine of "falling from grace" is an assault on the sovereign purpose of God as set forth in Romans 8:28-30, where the believer is seen in the purpose of God in *the eternity of the past*, in His foreknowledge and predestination, and in *the eternity of the future* sharing the very glory of Christ (John 17:22-26).

It is also an assault on the justice of God, in that God declares concerning the believer, "your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3), and that there is "no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus," and no separation "from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:1, 37-39). Thus, we can thank our Heavenly Father for His *justice*, for it is this which preserves the child of God from a second charge:

"Payment, God cannot twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
And then again at mine."

Lastly, it is an assault on the love of God, in that God declares His love "an everlasting love" from which nothing "shall be able to separate," for He is "able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy" (Jeremiah 31:3; Romans 8:39; Jude 24). The writer realizes that this aspect of truth merits a much deeper study than can be undertaken here. However, there are some good books available on this subject, and more is not needed for the present purpose.

Fourth Interpretation. (As noted before, the third interpretation is not further discussed). Does this scripture refer to Salvation or Rewards? From the foregoing, it will be clear to all that it is almost impossible to apply this scripture to the question of salvation without being in conflict with God's revealed plan of salvation. Consequently, while the writer has not come across any suggestion of it referring to the subject of rewards, and therefore it will be new to many, he, nevertheless, wishes to present this interpretation for the consideration of God's people.

That the subjects of salvation and rewards are distinct, the one from the other, even as the scriptures relating to them are distinct, is clear to all who have studied God's Word in this connection. Further, it is absolutely necessary that the scriptures relating to these distinct subjects shall not be confused. *Salvation* is the free gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord, whereas *rewards* are to be awarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ and are earned by faithful service and good works. Hence the admonition, "be careful to maintain good works" (Titus 3:8).

Now let us notice the emphasis which this scripture, viz. Hebrews 5:11 to 6:13, lays on *fruitage resulting from growth*.

(1) Here is a strong message to unfruitful Christians whose lives never show forth His praise, which is God's requirement (see 1 Peter 2:9).

(2) God tells us what this scripture does refer to, viz. the "better things connected with salvation" (τὰ κρείττονα καὶ ἐχόμενα σωτηρίας, Hebrews 6:9). Dr. Vincent says the word,

ἔχεσθαι, with a genitive is a common Greek idiom meaning *to hold one's self to* a person or thing; hence, to be closely joined to it. . . . He is persuaded that they will give heed to all things which attend the work of salvation and will enjoy all that attaches to a saved condition.

(3) Speaking of these persons, the writer to the Hebrews states, "ye ought to be teacher" that is, they ought to be producing fruit, and then

(4) he complains about them being "inexperienced in the word of righteousness" (5:13), that is, not putting it into practice, or, not studying to shew themselves approved unto God, workmen that need not be ashamed (2 Timothy 2:15).

(5) In chapter 6, verse 1, we read, "therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ," or "leaving the word of the beginning concerning Christ." Here, the urge is for believers not to make a stop-over at the commencement of the Christian experience, but to press on into a life of fruitfulness.

(6) This is further emphasized in the sentence which follows, "Let us be borne on to completion," and

(7) "not laying again a foundation" but to go on with the building of the superstructure.

That this passage refers to *works* and *rewards* seems clear from the contrast which is made between the "dead works" of a former experience (6:1) and the "faith toward God" which made it possible for the writer to say, "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to [served] the saints, and do minister [serve]" (Hebrews 6:10). This emphasis on service, which "God is not unrighteous to forget," is worthy of particular note in the study of rewards. This is further stressed in the words which follow, urging "that every one of you do shew the same diligence . . . that ye be not slothful." Neither "diligence" nor "sloth" can be associated with salvation, but they are certainly associated with service and rewards. This is seen in Second Peter, the first chapter, where the partaker of the divine nature re-

ceived this exhortation, "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, love. For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be idle (ἀργοὺς) nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

DOCTRINAL IMPORTANCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT'S
CHOICE OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

It is always important to note the application of the illustrations used by the Holy Spirit to enforce His message and teaching. Leading up to this section now under consideration is one illustration, while *in* this section is a second illustration. Knowing that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God" and that not any word is without purpose, we turn to study these even as Moses turned aside to see the bush that burned with fire and was not consumed and God spoke to him. So we look to the Lord to speak to us.

The First Illustration. This is in the fourth chapter, verse two, where we read "but the word of the report (ὁ λόγος τῆς ἀκοῆς) did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard." We observe that this account is taken from the record of the Children of Isreal as they came to the crisis in their Wilderness experience (Numbers 13). They were the subjects of redemption (Exodus 12). They had been brought out of the land of bondage and were now on their way to the land of promise, the land of fruitfulness. At Kadesh-barnea the Lord commanded Moses to send men "that they may search the land of Canaan." The spies went forth, and later "brought back word . . . and shewed them the fruit of the land" saying, "We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey: and this is the fruit of it," but the "word of the report did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard." In like manner, many Christians, though they are on redemption ground, they are standing at the Kadesh-barnea crisis of their experience, they are "dull of hearing" and still "babes."

and stand in constant need of the urge to diligence in Christian service and growth in grace; that is, to enter into the Promised Land where the riches of God's grace flow, and where fruitfulness to the glory of God will reward the true spiritual husbandry. As Israel suffered loss by not entering into the promised possessions through unbelief, so Christians are in danger of losing the crowns of reward through refusing to pay heed to God's command unto diligence to "inherit the promises" (Hebrews 6:13). Hence the need for the exhortation, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12, 13).

The Second Illustration. This the Holy Spirit uses in Hebrews 6:7, 8. Here, the application is quite apparent. The picture is that of a piece of ground with the rains descending upon it, but with two different results. It is the same soil which "drinketh in the rain which cometh oft upon it." Vincent's remark on this is, ". . . the contrast is between two classes of *Christians* under equally favorable conditions, out of which they develop opposite results." Note these opposite results relate to fruitage. On the one hand, there is that which "bringeth forth herbs" and "receiveth blessing from God." On the other hand, there is "that which beareth thorns and briars." Vincent renders verse 5, "*but if it (the ground that receives the rain) bear thorns and thistles, etc.*" Bloomfield gives a similar rendering.

In like manner there are Christians who have the same foundation and the same privileges in Christ, and yet on the one hand there is fruitfulness as the life is yielded to the Holy Spirit who produces the "fruit of the Spirit," while on the other hand there is barrenness. It is not the question of salvation which enters in here, but the question of works, the outgrowth of salvation, and rewards.

It is not worthy of note that the Holy Spirit associates this illustration with the scripture we are considering by the use of the conjunction "for." Thus the illustration is given by way of explanation of the preceding verses. Further, note

the unmistakable connection with the subjects of *rewards* by the use of another conjunction, "but"—"but, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you," and, take particular notice of these words, "and things that accompany salvation . . . for God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love."

EXPLANATION OF DIFFICULT WORDS AND SENTENCES.

First of all, what is the significance of the "falling away" referred to? If we can understand this and the other expressions used it will make it much easier to understand the whole message in this scripture. It does not say in the original, "If they shall fall away," it says, "and having fallen away" (παρὰπεσόντας). It is usually taken for granted that this means loss of eternal life. But we should never take anything for granted in the examination of scripture. Relying upon the Holy Spirit, the only safe teacher, we should be very careful in our examination before arriving at any conclusion. Now note, the word used here for "having fallen away" is παρὰπεσόντας from παραπίτω, which, according to Liddell and Scott, means "to fall aside," "to fall away from," "to mistake," "to err," "to fall in one's way," "to deviate." Surely it is clear that there is nothing here to demand the interpretation of a final falling away, or being eternally lost! If every Christian who deviates, or falls in the way is to be finally lost, then how many will be saved? When Peter turned aside, he certainly suffered loss, but he was not lost. If this scripture does refer to Christian growth and service and rewards, how can this word mean to be eternally lost? Is it not rather a case of backsliding and a fruitless life?

Notice further, παραπίτω is from παρα, *beside*, or *with*, and πίτω *to fall*, *fall down*. This latter word is found many times in the New Testament. It is used in relation to our Lord in Gethsemane, where we read "And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed" (Matthew 26:39), "he . . . fell on the ground" (Mark 14:35). Also it is used in connection with the sower sowing the seed, "some fell

upon a rock," "some fell among thorns," "others fell on good ground" (Luke 8:6-8). These uses but emphasize the thought that the word παραπίπτω cannot be limited to a final falling away. On the other hand, when the Holy Spirit desires to express the thought of the final falling away in the sense of separation from God, He used an entirely different word, ἀφίστημι, *to place off from, depart from*. For example, "Depart from me all ye workers of iniquity" (Luke 13:27); "and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away" (Luke 8:13); "In the latter times some shall depart from the faith" (1 Timothy 4:1).

In the second place, what is the meaning of the sentence "renew them again unto repentance"? (Hebrews 6:3). Some stress the words "For it is impossible," and seek to make them apply to the question of eternal life, whereas, in harmony with the rest of the passage, they refer to the subject in hand, viz., works and rewards. Repentance (μετάνοια) means "a change of mind," an "afterthought"; while the verb μετάνοεω means "to repent," "to change one's mind, or purpose." To "renew" unto repentance seems to suggest a former repentance, and this former repentance is referred to in verse one where it speaks of "repentance from dead works," e. g., ceremonial washings, sacrifices, ordinances, etc. If "repentance" in verse one refers to "works," as it so definitely states, why may not the renewal unto repentance in verse six also refer to works. There always has been need for the exhortation "Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance" as we find Paul preaching before Agrippa, and saying "Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but shewed . . . that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance" (Acts 26:19, 30).

In the third place, it is necessary to consider what is meant by the latter half of verse six, "seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." It is almost impossible for a Gentile Christian to understand what it meant for a Jew to become a Chris-

tian. It meant that he must forsake all that he once held most dear and sacred, viz., the sacrifices and ceremonies according to the Levitical law. He failed to realize that all the sacrifices were but types and shadows, of which Christ was the fulfillment and reality, which aspect of truth the writer to the Hebrews goes into very fully in the succeeding chapters of the epistle. As a consequence, many Christian Jews were seduced and persuaded to go back to the former life of "dead works," sacrifices, etc., thinking they could still be Christians while participating in the old Judaistic religion. They failed to grasp the truth that after Christ had come and finished the work of redemption, every sacrifice was a crucifying afresh of the Son of God. Hence the writer presents very clearly and forcibly the precious fact that the sacrifice of Jesus was "once for all . . . for by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Hebrews 10). However, in going back to the old sacrifices, they had fallen away from the only true foundation for Christian living, and as long as their minds were dominated by the traditions of the fathers, it was impossible to renew them unto repentance, or change of mind toward Christ and a life to "shew forth His praise," "for other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11).

Further, there is another aspect of this phase of the subject which is often lost sight of by Christians today. It is this. A Christian is either "growing in grace" or he is receding from a former spiritual standard of experience, that is, he is backsliding. A fruitless life is a life refusing to shew forth His praise, a denying to Christ His rightful place of *preëminence*. Consequently, such a life represents Christianity to the world as powerless, lifeless, and, as far as that testimony is concerned, Christ is not a living reality but a dead Christ. Fruitless living represents Christianity as lifeless and Christ ineffective and unreal, in the same way that "faith without works is dead" and cannot convince an unbelieving world. Our lives either *crown* or *crucify* Christ.

If Christ is not Lord of all, He is not Lord at all, and where He is not *preëminent*, there is contempt. There is no neutrality in this tremendous issue. Our Lord declared "He that is not with Me is against Me." We are either *with Christ* as a life of fruitfulness testifies to the reality of our salvation and shows forth His praise, or we are *against Christ* as a life of barrenness denies Him. To the extent that a Christian is unyielded to the Holy Spirit to produce in him the fruit, in life and deed, which will glorify God, to that extent he refuses to crown Christ as Lord and says "Away with Him, crucify Him." If "we are the only Bible a careless world will read," then the world will only see Christ as He is seen in us, and, is it not true, He is seen either as dead and ineffective, or living and powerful—crucified or crowned. A true Christian is not only a saved sinner but he is to be a laborer "together with God" (1 Cor. 3:9), "for we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

WHAT ARE THE MEANINGS OF "REJECTED,"
"CURSING," "BURNED"?

Verse 8 reads, "But that which beareth thorns and briars is rejected, and nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned." (1) The word "rejected" is ἀδόκιμος. The word δόκιμος means "approved" as in 2 Timothy 2:15, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God a workman that needeth not to be ashamed" (see also 1 Cor. 11:9; and 2 Cor. 13:7). The word is used in connection with *works* and *not salvation*. Since δόκιμος means *approved*, ἀδόκιμος means *disapproved*. It is used in a chapter where the apostle Paul is speaking of service and rewards, where it is unfortunately translated "castaway" (1 Corinthians 9:27). (2) "Nigh unto cursing." This emphasizes the thought of being disapproved as a fruitless, profitless life. Bloomfield, in his Greek Testament, gives the meaning as "is near being utterly rejected," and adds further, "land so hopelessly unproductive was popularly

called *cursed land*." (3) "Whose end is to be burned" (verse 8). Bloomfield's comment on this is, "we have here alluded to a process common in the East,—and found more or less everywhere—by which foul land is ameliorated by the thorns and thistles being pared off at the roots, and heaped and burned; which both cleans and manures the soil." There is a Scripture, however, which seems to throw all the light we need on this. It is the great chapter dealing with Christian service and the rewards, and that is 1 Corinthians 3. In this chapter Christians are spoken of as "God's fellow workers," "God's husbandry," who are to build upon the one foundation "Which is Jesus Christ." Then comes this significant revelation regarding the believer being tested at the Judgment Seat of Christ, not for or with regard to his salvation, but concerning his life's work: "Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." A clearer commentary on this subject could not be asked for than that which Scripture itself affords. The same thought is in view in John 15:6, where our Lord is dealing with fruit-bearing. He says, "If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." The whole context shows that our Lord was not dealing with the question of salvation, but with the believer in his capacity "as a branch," as to his fruit-bearing—"Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit."

THE TWO "ENDS" IN VIEW

(1) "Diligence unto the end"; and (2) "whose end is to be burned." The urge to "diligence unto the end" has certainly to do with service and rewards. *Diligence* neither secures nor aids our salvation. Salvation is all of grace

(Ephesians 2:8). *Diligence*, however, by the enabling of God, does turn idleness into zeal for God's glory, and barrenness into fruitfulness. If then, these two "ends" are before us by way of contrast, is it not clear that the other "end," viz., "Whose end is to be burned," has also to do with the question of service and rewards!

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WORD "IMITATORS"?

Hebrews 6, verse 12, reads "That ye be not slothful, but followers (*μιμηταί*, imitators) of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." In the light of salvation being by sovereign grace, it is simply impossible to make such a Scripture as this apply to the question of salvation, but it is as clear as day that it does refer to "Things that accompany salvation." Nowhere in the Word of God is anyone asked to imitate any man in order to be saved. Yet, in this Scripture, those who have overcome and gained the inheritance are held up to our view in order to exemplify what the grace of God makes possible "through faith and longsuffering." Thus the exhortation is made to every believer, "That ye be not sluggish, but imitators of them."

What then are our conclusions regarding the Epistle to the Hebrews and this section in particular? The epistle was undoubtedly written to Hebrew Christians who were still surrounded by all the attractions of the Temple worship. They were surrounded by influences which were calculated to seduce them to go back to the former life of "dead works"—the temple sacrifices and ceremonial—to sacrifices which would be crucifying the Son of God afresh. Hence we see the reason for the exhortation to steadfastness which runs through the epistle.

In Meyer's commentary,¹ we have this comment: "The Epistle to the Hebrews was occasioned by the danger to which the Christians in Palestine, particularly in Jerusalem, were exposed, of renouncing again their faith in Christ, and

¹*Critical and Exegetical Hand Book*, p. 380.

wholly falling back again into Judaism (comp. specially 6:4-6, 10:26ff). This danger had become a very pressing one, inasmuch as many had already as a matter of fact ceased to frequent the Christian assemblies (10:25). The epistle accordingly aims, by the unfolding on every side of the sublimity of the Christian revelation as the perfect and archetypal, above that of the old Testament as the merely preparatory and typical, as well as by setting forth the terrible consequences of an apostacy, to warn against such falling away, and to animate to a faithful perseverance in the Christian course."

To offset the danger in the temptation to return to the temple sacrifices, the writer of the epistle, by the Holy Spirit, reveals to them the glory of the New Testament with Jesus as the great High Priest: he seeks to lead them into the deep things of God to which the Old Covenant, with all its types, shadows and sacrifices, was ever leading; and so he urges them to advance beyond the food for babes for the meat of the Gospel, the fuller revelation, realizing that the fuller the knowledge of Christ, the less danger there would be of spiritual decline.

During the transition period from the dispensation of law to the dispensation of grace from Judaism to the Church, it was very difficult for believing Jews to accept teaching which linked Jew and Gentile in one body, in that it proclaimed "There is neither Jew nor Greek . . . for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28); "For He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition: having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances: for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross . . . for through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (Ephesians 2:14-18). It seemed a strange experience for these Christian Jews to be associated with Gentiles who had never been subject to the law of Moses, and at the same time to worship the Messiah of

Whom Moses and the Prophets spoke, but apart from the law of Moses.

The Hebrew Christians were suffering persecution at the hands of Ananias the high priest who regarded them as transgressors of the law. The comment by Jamieson, Fausset and Brown is to the point where they say "he [the writer to the Hebrews] warns them of the danger of apostacy, to which Jewish converts were tempted, when they saw Christians persecuted, whilst Judaism was tolerated by the Roman authorities." Some were stoned to death, others had their belongings confiscated while they themselves were banished from the holy places, being excluded from worshipping in the temple and treated as unclean. What sorer trial could there be for a Jew! He was banished from Messiah's people while seeking to be true to Christ the Messiah, and thus ranked among the "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel."

The writer enters into the heart-breaking situation and unfolds the greater glory of the New Covenant. He deals with the subject of their relationship to Israel, telling them that they are the true Israel, and that their God is the God of their fathers; and that, whereas they had Moses the faithful servant, now they have Christ, God's Anointed, as the Lord and Master of the house (Hebrews 3:1-6). They have, in fact, passed from the shadows to the reality for which all Israel had longed and waited. Jesus had been rejected by Israel, He had passed through humiliation and died the ignominious death of the cross and yet it was in His name that the early Church assembled. It is well nigh impossible for us to conceive just what it meant to a Jew to leave the pomp, the splendour, and the ancient ritual of his fathers to become associated with the followers of the despised Nazarene. Only as such a Jew believed in Jesus Christ gloriously risen from among the dead and exalted to the right hand of God, and that in Him the types and teaching of the Mosaic dispensation were abundantly fulfilled—only in this way could he be content to remain with the contemned believers in Jesus.

This was one of the leading purposes in the writing of this epistle. Frequent reference is made to the leaders of Israel, and to circumstances and experiences which no Hebrew could slight or question. Here they were reminded of Israel's bondage in Egypt. Here are seen, in all their meaningful associations, Abraham, Melchisedec, Moses, Joshua and David. Here, too, are seen the tabernacle with its sacred furniture, the Levitical priesthood, the order of Aaron and the daily sacrifices. And all this in order to show that the elaborate ceremonies and manifold sacrifices were but "a shadow of good things to come," and that "the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law . . . for the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope. . . . And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable [intransmissible] priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (see Hebrews 7). In this way the Hebrew Christian was led to see that *the Levitical sacrifices were not discredited but rather superseded*. "And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God. . . . For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Hebrew 10:10-14). And, rather than being *excluded* from the true worship, the wondering Hebrew believer was assured that *he could now enter into the very holy of holies*: "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (Hebrews 10:19-22).

It was to these same Hebrew Christians, and during the same period of transition, that the words in this section

(Hebrews 5:11 to 6:12), claiming our attention in this thesis, were addressed. And, as we have seen, the Scripture itself seems to conclusively prohibit their application either to believers falling away into a final apostacy, or to professors who received a great measure of enlightenment but were never regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Consequently, the only application possible seems to be that they were true Christians, born again, but "babes" in the faith, but on account of the proximity of the attractions of the temple worship, and also the generations of associations, they were strongly tempted to step aside from the revelation in Christ and go back to participate in the Judaistic sacrifices and ordinances instead of living in the enjoyment of "boldness to enter into the holiest," growing in grace and making progress in the "things that accompany salvation." Hence, the passage refers, not to the question of salvation, but rather to the question of service and rewards which are subsequent to salvation—to that life, following the experience of having passed from death unto life, wherein the believer is exhorted to "grow in grace" and to "be careful to maintain good works"—a "work and labour of love," showing "diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end" (Heb. 6:10).

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