

LIVING WATER NEWSLETTER

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NEW COVENANT LIFE AND THE DANGER OF FALLING AWAY

In the last two issues of *Living Waters Newsletter* we wrote about *Jesus Our High Priest* and *The Present Ministry of Christ*. This month we again turn to the book of Hebrews and consider New Covenant life and the danger of falling away as we consider the sixth chapter of the book. In the book of Hebrews there are basically only two subjects covered: Christ our High Priest (chapters 1-7) and The New Covenant (Chapters 8-10). Chapters 11-13 is the application of these two subjects. As High Priest, Jesus has opened the way to God and those who do not realize they have access to God through the High Priest; when they do not know and understand the significance of having access to the throne of God, they cannot be partakers of the New Covenant and cannot experience New Covenant life. Before we can experience New Covenant life, we must first realize the significance of Christ being our High Priest because his priesthood opens the way to the throne of grace on our behalf.

It is the book of Hebrews that describes just what Covenant life is. It is access to the throne of God (chapters 2 and 4). The emphasis is on the fact that the way has finally been opened where we can come directly, and even boldly, into the presence of God. The believer is, in Paul's words "seated with Christ in heavenly places." The veil has been torn away, the restriction has been lifted, and God's people have been taken into the very presence of God. New Covenant life is described as intimate knowledge and understanding of God. In chapter 8 we have a new understanding of God, we can be intimate with God, we are His sons and daughters and He is dwelling in us...something Israel never really experienced. New Covenant life is realizing we have forgiveness of our sins (chapters 8 and 10). It is a significant thing for Christians to realize they do not have to go on making any kind of sacrifice or making any kind of offering for sin. His death on the cross was sufficient for all sin for all time and we have complete and total forgiveness. This forgiveness (9:9-14) even reaches and purifies our conscience. It "cleansed our conscience from dead works in order that we might serve the living God" (ver. 14). He talks about the worshipers having a "perfect" conscience. We can't go about excusing ourselves because of sin. His blood is so powerful and so far reaching that it reaches into the inner most part of our being and cleanses our conscience...and that is what enables us to serve the living God. Covenant life is described as receiving an "eternal inheritance" (9:15): "...He is the mediator of the new covenant, in order that since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance." Many transfer this to somewhere in the future, thinking that we might inherit the kingdom. However, this inheritance is that which we experience here and now and continue to experience throughout eternity. But if we do not begin to experience inheritance now, we will not have any inheritance in eternity. It is an eternal inheritance and we are partakers of it now because it is a part of covenant life. New Covenant life is having no consciousness of sin (chapter 10:1-14). This is a little foreign to most religious people. Throughout

the Old Testament there was a continual, daily and hourly consciousness of sin. "For the law, since it was only a shadow of good things to come and not the very substance or the form of things, can never by the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near, otherwise would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins" (10:1, 2). That this applies to us is seen in verses 12 and 14: "but he, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, for by one offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified." When he says you are perfected in His sight, accept that as being true and live in it. This doesn't mean you don't sin, but it means that he takes care of your sin. The sacrifice of Christ is sufficient, and that which cleanses you in the beginning continues to cleanse you in your daily walk. If you are in Christ, you have been perfected for all time in God's site. It is not what we feel or think, it's what God declares us to be. It's what He accepts us as being, not really what we actually are because John says we all sin and we are not to say we don't sin or that we haven't sinned. But God doesn't count that against us. He accepts us as being perfect in Christ. Another mark of covenant life is that we have confidence before God (Chapter 10:18-22): "Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin. Since, therefore, we have confidence to enter the holy place (Heaven itself 9:24) by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God since we have all this going for us) let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith..." (Let us have confidence before God). We are not afraid of God. There is no dread, regardless of what our songs say, there is no dread of standing before God and meeting Him because He is our Father and we are His sons and daughters.

The last point of covenant Life we will mention, and these are only a few, is that we have received a kingdom which cannot be shaken (chapter 12:28). We have already received the kingdom and the kingdom cannot be shaken. All these things we have mentioned are realized by availing ourselves fully of the high priesthood of Christ. These things are seldom taught or even mentioned in preaching today, but this is what Hebrews chapter 6 is all about.

The writer has an important subject that he wants them to grasp. He says he has a lot of things to say about Christ and Melchizedek but they have become dull of hearing and it is hard to understand, but that didn't stop him from dealing with it. He took a side trail and gave them chapter 6 to try to get them back on track. His concern is that they go on to maturity. Chapter 6:1: "Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about Christ, let us press on to maturity..." And the maturity he wants them to come to is the measure of maturity so as to be able to recognize, to understand, to accept, and to apply the meaning of the high priesthood of Christ in their lives. It is in the fulfillment of this that we experience covenant life. One cannot experience this life until you understand the high priesthood of Christ.

Chapter 6:1-6: “Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and faith toward God, or instructions about baptisms, and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits. For in the case of those once enlightened and have tasted the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come and then have fallen away it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the son of God and put him to an open shame.” Is the writer speaking to Christians in these verses? The majority of commentaries will say no he is not talking about people who are Christians. If that is true why did he put it in a book written to Christians? He is writing to get them to correct their lives. These are elementary (basic) teachings we should learn, the writer says, and then get on with it. These are basic things in the Christian life and are only the foundation, he says we must have the foundation right then go on to maturity.

Why is it important to go on after laying a foundation? Simply because of what he says in verse 6: If they “have fallen away it is impossible to renew them again to repentance since they again crucify to themselves the son of God and put him to an open shame.” The word “fallen away” is not the same word used in scripture to apostatize. It is a different word. Paul used the word “apostatize” in II Thessalonians 3:2 this is not the word used here. It is a word meaning more of a stepping aside and is not as strong a word as apostatize. Following is *Thayer’s Greek-English of the New Testament* definition of the two words: 1. *Apostasia* (II Thess. 3:2) “a falling away, defection from the true religion.” The word used here: 2. *Parapipto* (Heb. 6:6) “to slip aside, hence to deviate from the right path, turn aside, wonder” Both words are translated “fallen away” in our English Bibles.

When he says “when they have fallen away it is impossible to again renew them to repentance,” get this in context of what he is talking about. He is talking about building a foundation again, leaving the elementary teaching of Christ and not laying a foundation of repentance and faith and baptism and these other things. It is impossible to go back and build a new foundation. The foundation is there. He is saying God judges us at the point where we are and start building where we left off. We can’t go back and start over again at the beginning. We have to start where we have failed. The Hebrew Church had failed to grow.

Now apply the fact that...they cannot be enlightened again because they are already enlightened. They can’t taste the heavenly gift again; they have already tasted it (they need to eat it up now). They can’t become partakers of the Holy Spirit again because they have already been made partakers. They can’t get the Holy Spirit again because they already have It. He cannot introduce them to the heavenly powers again because they have already been introduced. If you could do all this, you could renew them again to repentance. He is saying one cannot go back and build another foundation and start over again. This is not what they need. They don’t need renewal, they don’t need to go back, they must pick up where they left off at the foundation and go on from there. Israel could not go back to the Red Sea every time they sinned. They were judged where they were and went on from there. God did not create a new nation every time

they sinned. He corrected them and they went on from that point.

Why is it impossible to renew them again to repentance? It is impossible because they again crucify *to themselves* the son of God, and put him to an open shame. This is the person who is continuously going back, continuously rebuilding the foundation, continuously trying to renew their repentance, trying to start over again, always going back to the cross, back to the sacrifice, to crucifixion. When they get back there what do they find? They find it empty. Yet they go back and crucify Christ again and apply the sacrifice of Christ again and never get pass the crucifixion, always going back to a dead Christ hanging on the cross. It is *to themselves* they are always crucifying Christ and that holds him up to open shame. They never hold him up to glory and exaltation it is always the shame of the cross. Chapter 10:18: “Now where there is forgiveness for these things there is no longer any offering for sin.” This is not to say the cross is of no importance, but it is to say the cross is not everything. The cross is preparatory for something better. It is important so see and understand that when Jesus died on the cross he arose from the dead and ascended to the Father and this gives us access to the Holy of Holies, that is the very presence of God. He is not a dead Christ on a crucifix. The shame of the cross was real but it is over and done with. The sacrifice has been made. We need to accept it and get on to the maturity the cross has made possible. The world needs to see the living and exalted Christ, the King and Lord of the universe. This will give him glory and honor, not looking at the cross all the time.

In order to experience Covenant Life there are three things that must happen: 1. We have to see the need of making an effort to understand this spiritual truth. The Hebrew Christians had “become dull of hearing and they had need for someone to teach them the elementary principles of the oracles of God...” (Heb. 5:11, 12). Further: “For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, having ministered and still ministering to the saints” (6:10). There was nothing wrong with their spiritual activity, they were very busy people. They were typical church people who busied themselves doing good, and there is nothing wrong with that. But spiritual activity is not a substitute for spiritual understanding. 2. The ability to do this isn’t found within ourselves, but in God. To ever enter covenant life, it will not be on our own effort. God is going to have to work it in us but we have to get to the point where God can do this. God is in no way going to make us do it because we have access to the Throne and we are to let Him do it. 3. The most vital factor in going on, not drawing back and coming to maturity is the hope that is set before us, a “hope we have as anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us having become a high priest after the order of Melchizedek” (6:19, 20). Christians need to live in the light of their hope, which is not a hope that they will go to heaven, but according to Paul in Romans 8:23 our hope is the redemption of our bodies along with the redemption of the earth.

If we understand these three things, we are going to come to the maturity God sets before. We can only understand maturity if we understand the priesthood of Christ and realize we can come boldly into the throne of Grace through our great High Priest. This is covenant life. Don’t be in danger of falling away.