

Hebrews - A Letter Addressed to Modern-Day Christians

Part 17

Hebrews 10:32 – 12:3

Hebrews 10:32:37 [NIV] *“Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathised with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So 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. For in just a very little while, “He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.” But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved. Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.”*

Enlightenment leads to testing.

Because Satan does not like our being shown the reason we have been created as human beings and how we can, through faith in Jesus Christ, receive the gift of eternal life.

Acts 14:22 *“... we must go through many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God.”*

It is a fact of life that in many ways it is easier to endure adversity than it is to experience prosperity.

An easy life ruins far more people morally than trouble ever will.

We can meet with honour the greatest hour of testing and of trial, it is the routine of every day seeking to be our best which saps our strength and may weaken our faith.

2 Corinthians 4:16 [NIV] *“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.”*

To avoid this weakening of our faith we need to renew our mind and heart every day through prayer and study of God’s Word, the Christian Bible.

The writer of Hebrews encourages believers to persevere in their Christian faith and conduct when faced with persecution and pressure.

We don’t usually consider suffering is good for us, but it can build our character and our patience.

This is true because in times of stress and suffering we feel God’s presence more clearly, by being drawn to Him for strength and encouragement.

Romans 5:3-5 [NIV] *“Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”*

The Greek preposition translated “into” is “en” which indicates that this love is received from God but will then flow out from us to others, by the action of the Holy Spirit working in and through us.

John 7:38-39 [NIV] *“Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.”*

When this happens we can be greatly encouraged as we see the effect our Spirit filled life can have on other people’s lives.

Hebrews 10:35-39 [NIV] *“So 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. For in just a very little while, “He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.” But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.”*

The Greek word translated “confidence” is “*parrhēsia*” meaning to speak out with boldness and assurance, a freedom of speech.

Mark 13:11 [NIV] *“Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.”*

This is how we can have this confidence.

We are not to be defensive or fearful about our faith in Jesus Christ for the Holy Spirit will speak through us.

As an active, witnessing Christian, fulfilling our Saviour’s commission we need certain things that are mentioned in this passage of scripture.

1 **We need to keep our hope before us constantly**, the hope that involves the many promises that Jesus Christ has made to those who trust their lives to Him and remain faithful to the commission He has entrusted to us.

Matthew 28:19-20 [NIV] *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

To fulfil this commission we must submit to a disciplined life, of study and prayer **not** allowing our life to be governed by the routine things that can cause us to sink into a policy of drifting away from God’s presence.

2 **We need fortitude** – perseverance is one of the great unromantic virtues. Most people can start well, almost everyone can be fine in spasms, on their good days having great moments.

In a moment of great effort everyone can “*run and not be weary*”, but the greatest gift is to “*walk and not to faint*.”

The Christian life is a marathon, not a series of short sprints.

3 **We need a clear vision of the end of life’s race.**

The return of Jesus Christ to sort out the mess that humanity has got itself into when God is **not** included in the decisions that are made.

The prophet Habakkuk, that the writer of Hebrews is quoting, tells the people of his day to hold fast to their loyalty to God.

God will see us through and victory will come if we just hold on to the promises that God has made.

Romans 8:36-39 [NIV] *“As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Whatever trials and troubles we may face this is a promise we can hold onto.

We all as Christians have two alternatives that will affect the end goal of our lives.

1 Shrink back because of fear, or unbelief, the end result will be joining all unrepentant sinners in their fateful end.

Revelation 21:8 [NIV] *“But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practise magic arts, the idolaters and all liars, their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death.”*

2 Perseverance motivated by faith.

Revelation 21:7 [NIV] *“He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.”*

The *“all this”* refers to the new world that Jesus Christ will prepare for all who are faithful to Him.

Revelation 21:1-5 [NIV] *“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”*

This is the reward of all who receive salvation through the work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

There are no “grey” areas, it is one or the other.

Hebrews 11:1-2 [NIV] *“Now faith is being **sure** of what we hope for and **certain** of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.”*

The previous chapter closed with a solemn lesson.

There is no safety or strength for the Christian, but to be strong in faith.

There is no way to please God or abiding in His presence and favour but by faith.

Faith is the spiritual faculty which deals with the spiritual realities of the future and the unseen spirit world.

Just as we have our physical senses, through which we communicate with the physical world, so faith is the spiritual sense through which the human spirit within us is affected by the spirit world, [Proverbs 20:27].

Just as the sense of seeing is a dormant power until light strikes it, or just as hearing is a dormant power until sound strikes, so faith is a sense with **no** power beyond the capacity of receiving the impressions of the eternal spirit world in which God lives.

Faith is like an empty vessel which wants to be filled with its unseen contents.

It is only when eternal spiritual realities draw near and exercise their power that faith becomes and is the substance of things hoped for.

Faith then becomes the foundation on which we can build our Christian life.

The writer of Hebrews uses two words to describe faith, sure and certain.

These two qualities need a secure beginning and ending point.

The beginning point of faith is believing in God's character, that He is what He says He is.

The end point of faith is believing God's promises, that He will do what He has promised.

When we believe that God will fulfil His promises even though we don't see those promises materialising as yet, we demonstrate true faith.

John 20:24-31 [NIV] *“Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.” A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!” Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; **blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.**” Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”*

The key phrase is *“blessed are those who have **not** seen and yet have believed.”*

Faith therefore is much more than trust in another person's word.

Such trust is an important starting place, but the words must lead us to the living person from whom they come.

To deal exclusively with the word as a foundation for faith will lead to a faith that is more intellectual than spiritual.

Such a faith rests more in the wisdom of men, in the power of reason, than the power of God.

Faith is not only dealing with certain promises, but an unceasing spiritual intercourse with the unseen spiritual world around us.

Faith in our life must be as natural and unceasing as our breathing and seeing are when we are going about our day-to-day work.

The people whose lives are recorded in God's Word and are listed in this chapter of Hebrews had the above natural and unceasing faith.

This is why God has recorded their lives in His Word.

Hebrews 11:3 [NIV] *“By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.”*

A bold statement by God that this whole universe came into being out of nothing, by the Word and Power of the Eternal God.

Everything in this physical universe is governed by space and time, both of which are physical in themselves.

God lives outside of time and space, He has no beginning and no end.

God is spirit, He is **not** complex or made up of parts, without a bodily presence and therefore not visible to our body senses.

John 1:18 [NIV] *“No-one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.”*

No physical human being has ever seen God, except Jesus the Word who is God and became human in order to reveal God’s character and will.

God is a personal spirit, rational, self-conscious, and self-determining, and intelligent moral agent.

God is supreme in mind and the source of all rationality and intellect in all His creatures.

God is infinite spirit, without bounds or limits to His being or to any of His attributes, every aspect and element of His nature is infinite.

His infinitude in relation to time is spoken of as eternity, in relation to space it is omnipresence.

In relation to the universe God is transcending, that is an independent, self-existing being.

God is not shut in by nature, as we are, but infinitely exalted above it.

God is the Sovereign Creator and judge of the world and universe.

God is immanence, that is His all pervading presence and power within His creation.

God does **not** stand apart from His creation, a mere spectator of the work of His hands.

God pervades everything organic and inorganic, acting from within outwards, from the centre of every atom and from the innermost springs of thought, life and feeling.

Psalms 139:1-16 [NIV] *“O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. **Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD.** You hem me in, behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,” even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. **All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”***

David in this psalm gives us a glimpse of the power of the Creator God and His relationship with us.

Our finite minds cannot conceive the greatness, power and omnipresence of the God whose presence we seek and who loves us as His created children.

When we meditate on the greatness of the Creator God, faith in Him as the Creator of this universe out of nothing becomes very logical.

When we accept that God made this whole universe out of nothing, we realise that it is God's personal property and we are but stewards of a very small fragment of this world and then for only a few brief years.

Such knowledge should cause us to use God's world in such a way that it will please Him as its Owner.

Also we should remember that God is in total control of His property, even when at times it does not look as if He is.

Accepting what we have just meditated on helps us to have faith in God even when we cannot understand His lack of intervention in circumstances that are bringing pain and suffering to human beings He has created and is sustaining.

Hebrews 11:4 [NIV] *“By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.”*

We have already examined the history of Cain and Abel, the writer of Hebrews then gives us a long list of people who had great faith in God, all have their lives expanded in the Old Testament record of Israel's history.

The key to why these people are mentioned is found in:-

Hebrews 11:39-40 [NIV] *“These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.”*

Their lives were recorded as example of faith for us to study.

Hebrews 12:1-3 [NIV] *“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”*

Don't overlook the word “*therefore*.”

May I suggest before we progress any further in our study of Hebrews we read the accounts of all these people of faith who are recorded in the Old Testament.