

The Five Warnings of Hebrews

The main theme of the letter to Jewish Christians is the revelation of Jesus as our High Priest and the key to our inheritance, rest and perfection.

Within this main theme we also find five distinct warnings that if ignored will cause us to fail in our part in attaining the inheritance, rest and perfection that God desires to produce in us.

I see these five warnings as a slippery slope and if we neglect what has been offered to us by God through Jesus Christ we will end up failing to receive our inheritance and rest.

Each warning is an acceleration on the downward path to extinction.

Warning Number One: Neglect

Ignoring or neglecting the message God has sent to us through Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 2:1-4 [NIV] *“We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.”*

Note “drift away”.

This is something that happens gradually.

This is a change that gradually takes place most likely by what we do not do in our day-to-day life.

The Greek word translated “drift away” is “*pararrhēō*” referring to something that is flowing or slipping past.

It is regularly used of something which has carelessly or thoughtlessly been allowed to slip away or become lost.

There are few who deliberately and in a moment of anger or disappointment turn their backs on God, but there are many who day by day drift further and further away from fellowship with Him.

There are far more of us who commit the sin of neglect than the more obvious sins of disastrous action.

The sin of neglect creeps into our lives almost imperceptibly, little by little we involve ourselves in activities or situations that eat up our time; time which should have been spent in fellowship with our Creator through prayer and study of His Word.

Such a lifestyle leaves us wide open to the temptations and to commit violation of God’s way of life through disobedience.

The understanding of the use of the Greek word again helps us to comprehend how we can find ourselves in this situation of beginning to slip into eternal oblivion.

“Violation” the Greek word “*parabasis*” literally means to “*step across a line*”.

This line is one drawn by previous knowledge and by our conscience.

To step across that line is to sin, anything we do that we feel may be wrong is sinful because our conscience has been compromised and weakened.

“Disobedience” the Greek word *“parakōō”*. The use of this word is progressive in nature.

It begins by meaning imperfect hearing, for instance the hearing of a man who is partially deaf.

The word then goes on to mean careless hearing which is the result of inattention that results in misunderstanding or failing to hear all that was spoken.

The word finally refers to unwillingness to hear and therefore disobedience to the Word of God.

A deliberate shutting of our ears to the commands, warnings, advice and invitations of God.

Neglect and a careless attitude lead us directly to actual disobedience.

To avoid *“drifting away”* anyone who understands boats and boating knows that we need an anchor.

Hebrews 6:17-20 [NIV] *“Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. **We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.** It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”*

Our hope for the future is based on what Jesus Christ has done for us and is willing to do for us now as our High Priest.

Hebrews 2:2-3 [NIV] *“For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, **how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.**”*

The main point of this warning is against ignoring or neglecting the importance of this message from God through Jesus Christ.

This warning is not directly against being openly wicked or rebellious but being lukewarm towards the importance of the message, not paying sufficient attention to what God is saying through Jesus Christ.

Revelation 3:14-17 [NIV] *“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, **because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’** But you do not realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.”*

We have described in this passage of scripture a group of people who had become blinded to their condition through neglect.

They were careless about what God’s Word explains about our desperate need for mercy from our Creator God.

They saw in their vanity no daily need for the atoning Blood of Christ.

The more important the message the greater the guilt of ignoring it.

The importance of the message is dependent on the greatness of the messenger.

We may have ignored the message brought to our forefathers under the Old Covenant, in fact we may never have heard the message preached.

The message was brought by angels.

Acts 7:53 [Living Bible] *“Yes you have deliberately destroyed God’s Laws though you received them from the hands of angels.”*

Deuteronomy 33:2 [Living Bible] *“The Lord came to us at Mount Sinai ... surrounded by ten thousands of Holy Angels ...”*

The message we have been given has come directly from the Son of God.

Galatians 3:29 [NIV] *“If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”*

The message brought by Jesus was of a New Covenant [agreement] that was offering far greater rewards.

The rewards of the Old Covenant given at Sinai was limited to physical rewards in this life. The New Covenant is offering eternal rewards.

There are three reasons why this last message from God is unique and so much more important than anything that man had received before.

Hebrews 2:3-4 [NIV] *“...how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.”*

(a) The origin of this message came direct from Jesus Himself.

The Word, the very voice of the Son of God, not from a messenger of God [an angel] or some human being [a prophet of God].

(b) This message was unique in its transmission.

Coming directly to the people to whom it was first to be received, the Jews, who heard it directly with their own ears from the lips of God.

(c) This message was unique in its effectiveness.

Testified by signs, wonders, miracles and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

If we then reject this final and more important message how much greater will be our just recompense for our neglect [our punishment]?

Justice or just reward in God’s Word is two-sided.

It includes rewards for those who do well but also rewards for those who do evil, God’s wrath!

Both rewards are appropriate in God’s Eyes.

Warning Number Two: Unbelief

Hebrews 3:7-8 [Living Bible] “... *the Holy Spirit warns us to listen to Him, to be careful to hear His voice today and **not let our hearts become set against Him**, as the people of Israel did. They steeled themselves against His love and complained against Him in the desert while He was testing them.*”

This warning is based on and is a direct quote from **Psalm 95:7-11** and is mainly a warning against unbelief.

Matthew 22:31-32 [NIV] “*But about the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what God said to you, **‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’?** He is not the God of the dead but of the living.*”

The reference that Christ made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was very relevant, for it was to these men that God made the promises of reconciliation and eternal life.

Jesus Christ came and was sacrificed so that these promises could be fulfilled.

By redeeming us from the slavery of sin and to be the propitiation [the gift offered] to God to remove the justified wrath of God against all sinners.

Without this perfect gift of Jesus Christ, God could not extend mercy to us and still remain sovereign holy and just.

By quoting from the Old Covenant here and on many other occasions confirms it as still the valid Word of God.

2 Timothy 3:16 [NIV] “*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,*”

The only scripture at that time was the Old Testament.

The Good News [gospel] that Jesus Christ brought was all foretold in the writings of the Old Testament.

“*God breathed*” directly refers to the Holy Spirit, He was the Author of the Old Testament.

John 16:12-13 [NIV] “*I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But **when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.** He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.*”

Christ spoke only as the Father directed and it was the Holy Spirit who pronounced the Father’s Words and He will continue to lead us into all truth.

Hebrews 3:7-11 [NIV] “*So, as the Holy Spirit says: **‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did. That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, ‘Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.’ So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’**”*

All of these five listed mistakes that Israel made were against the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 4:30 [NIV] “*And **do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God**, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*”

We are warned not to grieve the Holy Spirit as Israel did in the wilderness.

The five mistakes that Israel made that caused them to lose out on their inheritance, [rest].

a) Did not hear God's Voice

The way we hear God's Voice is through His Word, The Bible, but also the prompting of the Holy Spirit as He leads us into all truth, as the "*Spirit of Truth*".

The Greek word used for "*hear*" is "*akōuō*" meaning to listen silently, to give audience signifies an answer to a knock on the door.

This word includes understanding with the intention of obedient responding action.

Revelation 3:20 [Amplified Bible] "*Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears, listens to and heeds My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will eat with him, and he shall eat with Me.*"

John 10:27 [NIV] "*My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.*"

We are to hear and follow The Shepherd, Jesus Christ, as He leads us through the Holy Spirit.

Romans 10:17 [NIV] "*Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.*"

Faith is acquired and maintained by hearing God's Word and acting on that word to make it living faith.

James 2:20 [RAV] "*But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?*"

Hebrews 11:6 [NIV] "*And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*"

The Israelites did not please God [the Holy Spirit] because they did not believe Him, had no faith in what He said He would do for them, did not believe the promises He made.

b) Hardened their hearts

As a result of not hearing and responding to God's Word their attitude towards God hardened.

The Greek word is "*sklērunō*" which refers to an attitude that is stubborn, callous or unfeeling.

This is a very accurate description of a society that has ignored the Word of God and turned their back on Him.

c) Tested and tried God

Hebrews 3:9 [Amplified Bible] "... *your fathers tried my patience and tested my forbearance...*"

The two Greek words used express our natural response when we do not accept or believe what we have been told.

We challenge what God tells us in His Word wanting personal experience.

Humanity has been influenced by Satan to have this attitude towards our Creator from the very beginning of our existence.

Genesis 3:1 [Amplified Bible] “... and he [Satan] said to the woman, **can it really be that God has said, you shall not eat of every tree of the garden?**”

Satan succeeds **implanting doubt** in the mind of Eve and she then disbelieving God personally experienced tasting of the forbidden fruit.

Matthew 27:42 [NIV] “**He saved others,**” they said, “**but he can’t save himself! He’s the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him.**”

Another example of Satan inspired provocation of God.

John 4:48 [NIV] “**Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders,**” Jesus told him, “you will never believe.”

So often we seek signs or miracles, but these will not produce enduring faith or trust in God.

God desires us to trust Him through having a close fellowship with Him that will enable us to know who He is rather than just seeing what He does.

When we know God we can then trust His Word without understanding why He commands what He does, for we know that all He commands is for our welfare.

When we follow the promptings of Satan and insist on proof by personal experience the results are most likely to be drastic, even ending in death.

Examples of such experiments for personal proof of God’s Word are indulging in drugs, sex outside of marriage, etc.

Such lack of trust in God’s Word always ends up in rebellion against God as we can see in the history of Ancient Israel.

d) Going astray in their hearts

Hebrews 3:10 [Amplified Bible] “*And so I [God] was provoked, displeased and sorely grieved with that generation, and said, they always **err and are led astray in their hearts,** and they have not perceived or recognised My ways...*”

The Greek word translated “err” is “*planaō*” meaning to roam, be seduced and wander away from safety or truth.

God and God’s Word do not feature in the daily thoughts of the vast majority of mankind today.

The concerns for personal comfort and sensual pleasure blind society to the truth.

2 Corinthians 4:4 [NIV] “*The god of this age **has blinded the minds of unbelievers,** so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*”

The God that this world worships without realising it, is Satan, and he blinds people to the wonderful truth of the gospel message and the great joy and peace of mind it can bring to us.

Revelation 12:9 [NIV] “*The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or **Satan, who leads the whole world astray.** He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.*”

Satan is the one who has lead people astray right from the day they were created.

e) Not knowing God's ways

Psalm 103:7 [NIV] *“He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel:”*

There is a difference between knowing God's ways and seeing His acts of wonder.

Moses and God had a close relationship, they conversed with each other.

It was through this intimate relationship that Moses gradually understood the way God thought and acted.

The rest of Israel were distant from God by choice.

Exodus 20:18 [NIV] *“When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance.”*

There is an innate fear of God in every person.

When we bring God or His viewpoint into a conversation most people will quickly change the direction the conversation takes to avoid the subject of God.

James 2:19 [NIV] *“You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that, and shudder.”*

The demons know there is a God, they see His acts, but will not believe His ways are the direction their lives should take.

This statement is in the context of faith.

A person with living faith, that is active faith, believes what God says and directs their lives in the way He commands.

In many religions, people may experience what they feel are *“Acts of God”* but by themselves these *“acts”* will not reveal God's way of life.

Only through believing God's Word, His Promises, and living by this revelation of God do we have living faith.

Knowledge of God can only come through Jesus Christ, God's living word, and The Christian Bible, God's written word as we are prompted by the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 3:12-15 [NIV] *“See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first. As has just been said: **“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion.”***

In effect what we are being told is while there is yet all the time we need to believe what God tells us if we act on it now.

While we have the chance, while this physical life lasts, give to God the trust, that comes out of belief in His Word, and the submission to Him as our God and Creator.

Give the trust and submission to God before our day closes, before our *“to-day”* is gone forever.

Three facts we need to take to heart:

(a) **God is making us an offer** as He did ancient Israel, an offer we can embrace or reject.

(b) **The acceptance** of the wonderful offer **entails two conditions.**

Trust in God is necessary.

We must believe that what God says is true.

We must believe that God promises He is able to perform.

We must be willing to stake our future life on the fact that God's Promises are sure.

Obedience is necessary.

The doctor will say, *"I can cure your disease if you follow my instructions implicitly."*

The teacher will say, *"I can make you a scholar if you diligently follow my curriculum."*

The athletics trainer will say, *"I can make you a champion if you never deviate from the disciplines I insist you follow."*

In any realm of life success depends on obedience to the word of the expert.

God is the expert on life. He created it, and His Word is The Christian Bible, the Handbook For Life.

(c) **There is a time limit** to what God offers.

Luke 12:16-20 [NIV] *"And he told them this parable: 'The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' 'Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.' ' **"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?"***

What prompted this parable was the request made to Jesus to settle the dispute between two people over a physical inheritance.

Christ pointed us towards a far more valuable spiritual inheritance.

James 4:13-17 [NIV] *"Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, **'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.'**" As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins."*

The time limit is our present lifespan.

It is easy to speak about "to-morrow" but for any of us "tomorrow" may never come.

God's offer must be accepted today, trust and obedience must be given today, for we never know if for us to-morrow will ever come.

Hebrews 3:12 [NIV] *"See to it, brothers, that none of you has **a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.**"*

Unbelief is a sin in God's eyes.

Not a weakness to be excused, but a sin to be repented of.

We tend to condone our unbelief, we say, “*Well, I find it difficult to accept and believe all that I read in God’s Word, but I feel God will understand and it is no great problem!*”

Don’t be deceived!

The Greek word translated “*sinful*” associated with unbelief in this scripture is “*pōnērōs*” meaning full of mischief, evil intent, worthless grievous harm, malignant wickedness.

This same word is used to describe the nature of Satan in many scriptures!!

How do we avoid this un-belief ?

Hebrews 3:12-14 [NIV] “*See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.*”

Double protection against unbelief is mentioned.

(a) “*See to it*”. This is what we should do on an individual basis, we must **not** be half-hearted, but positive and emphatic.

(b) “*Encourage one another*” and “*share in Christ*”.

Malachi 3:16 [NIV] “*Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honoured his name.*”

Meeting in fellowship is essential for us to encourage one another.

One of the most encouraging things when in a trial or when ill is to know that others are praying for us.

1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 27 [NIV] “*The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free, and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.*” ... “*Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*”

Just as our physical body needs each part to work as a whole effectively, so each member of a church needs the support of the other members.

Warning Number Three: Falling Away

Hebrews 6:4-5 [NIV] “*It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age,*”

This warning is **not** to spiritually young Christians, but to people who have had five spiritual experiences over what may have been many years since their initial conversion.

a) Been enlightened

Hebrews 10:32-35 [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.***”

It is a true saying that in many ways it is easier to stand in adversity than it is to stand in prosperity.

A life of ease has ruined more people than trouble ever did.

All of us can remember the ridicule and hostility we experienced from our friends and relatives when we first became a Christian.

We may have had to give up our job because of our new outlook on life.

We must never lose that enthusiasm and dedication we then had for God’s way of life, and the enlightenment into the real purpose of life.

b) Tasted the heavenly gift

Romans 6:23 [NIV] *“For the wages of sin is death, but **the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**”*

Having accepted the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ as atonement for our sins we have received the gift of eternal life.

Romans 6:4-5 [NIV] *“We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also **be united with him in his resurrection.**”*

Just as the man Jesus Christ rose from the dead and lives eternally as our High Priest at God’s heavenly throne so we have joined Him in eternal life.

Romans 4:18-25 [NIV] *“Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead, since he was about a hundred years old, and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why “it was **credited to him as righteousness.**” The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness, for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.”*

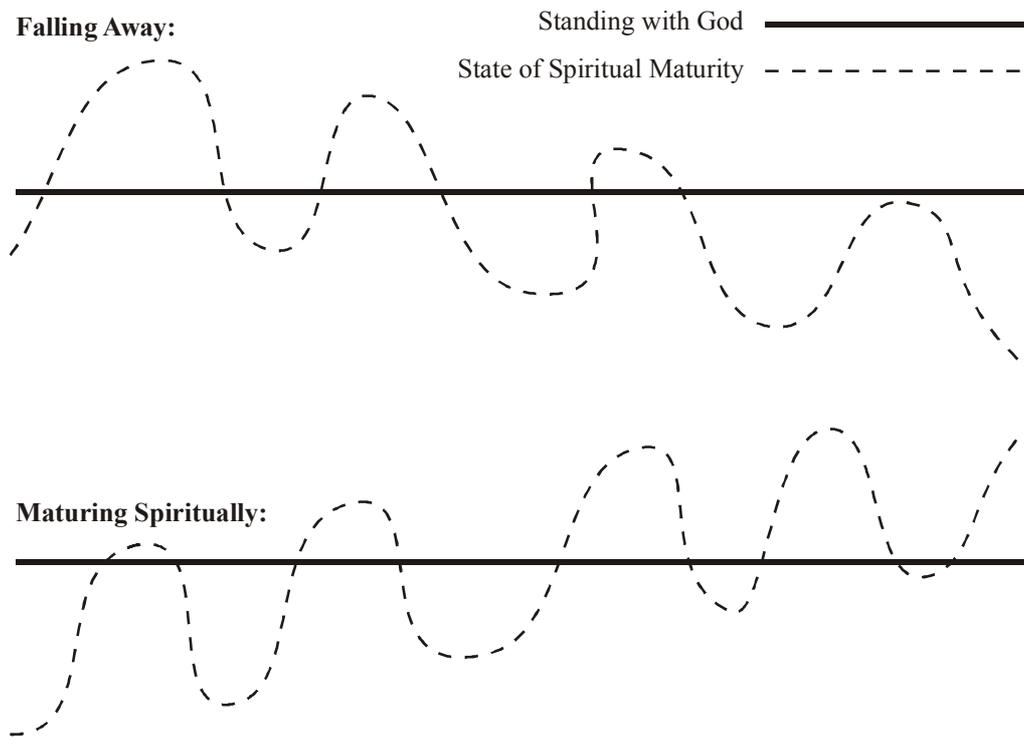
Our faith in what God has done for us in Jesus Christ is credited to us as righteousness, an undeserved gift from God of the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

From the moment we accept this gift our standing in God’s sight does not change, when God looks at us He sees only the righteousness of His Son.

What does fluctuate in our lives is our spiritual state of maturity, this can change on a day to day basis according to the closeness of our walk with God and whether we have grieved the Holy Spirit.

Hopefully, if we are not falling away the peaks of our spiritual maturity will be ever increasing.

See charts overleaf:-



c) Become partakers of Holy Spirit

Acts 2:38 [NIV] *“Peter replied, **“Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”**”*

Upon repentance and baptism, the outward sign of accepting Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Lord, we receive the gift of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Acts 5:32 [NIV] *“We are witnesses of these things, and so is the **Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.**”*

The gift of Holy Spirit comes with conditions, obedience, He will only come into our lives as Director of our lives for He is Sovereign Lord.

John 14:15-17 [NIV] *“If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever, the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for **he lives with you and will be in you.**”*

This scripture indicates that the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is at two levels “with us” or “in us”.

I understand that it is dependant on our relationship with the Holy Spirit as to what level He works with us!

d) Tasted the goodness of the Word of God

1 Thessalonians 2:13 [NIV] *“And we also thank God continually because, **when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.**”*

The emphasis is on what the church was receiving was the Word of God **not** the puny logic of man.

The trouble of many in the church is so often they cling to a man-made religion instead of a God given faith.

The indication is that in the Thessalonian church an active faith was being shown in the changed lives of those who had heard and accepted the Word of God.

Head knowledge of God's Word and His Nature is of no use until it became what is in our heart.

The heart is referring what drives our lives, if our heart stops life ends on a physical level.

On the spiritual level if the heart as well as the head **not** involved then we are spiritually dead.

It has been said that the longest journey a Christian has to take is from the head to the heart, from understanding the truth of scripture in our mind to the place where that knowledge becomes the driving force of our life.

When this happens we truly have tasted the goodness of God's Word.

Hebrews 4:12-13 [NIV] “For 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 attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

It is by using the Word of God that we can distinguish what parts of life, our thoughts and attitudes are driven by our bodily passions, or our intellectual mind or by the union of our spirit and the Holy Spirit.

We can with God's Word bring under judgement our thoughts and ideas to see if they originated from our built-in human passions [body], or from our own mind or will [soul] or from the Will of God in our lives [spirit/Spirit union].

e) Tasted the powers of the age to come

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 [Living Bible] “It is God who has made you and me into faithful Christians and commissioned us apostles to preach the Good News. He has put His brand upon us, His mark of ownership, and given us His Holy Spirit in our hearts as guarantee that we belong to Him, and as the first instalment of all that He is going to give us.”

Ephesians 1:13-14 [Amplified Bible] “In Him you also who heard the Word of Truth, the glad tidings of your salvation, and have believed in and have adhered to and relied on Him, were stamped with the seal of the long promised Holy Spirit. That Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance, the first fruit, the pledge of foretaste, the down-payment on our heritage, in anticipation of its full redemption and our acquiring complete possession of it, to the praise of His Glory.”

As we experience the Work of the Holy Spirit in our lives we are tasting the power of the age to come.

Philippians 3:10-11 [NIV] “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

Paul was desiring “resurrection power” now.

Resurrection power is experiencing the presence of the resurrected Christ as real as the disciples did who walked with Him on earth.

We will not see Jesus on a natural level but we can experience His presence on a supernatural level.

Hebrews 6:6 [NIV] *“if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.”*

If we have had all these experiences, and all Christians have in different measure, and we then deliberately turn away from Christ, we lose our ability to repent.

Our conduct is equivalent to crucifying Christ once more.

Hebrews 6:7-8 [NIV] *“Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.”*

This analogy of the soil which receives the free gift of God’s rain and cultivation yet does not produce useful fruit but thorns and thistles is enlarged in parables given by Jesus Christ.

Matthew 13:3-9 [NIV] *“Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. **Some fell on rocky places**, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. **Other seed fell among thorns**, which grew up and choked the plants. Still **other seed fell on good soil**, where it produced a crop – a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear.”*

We see in this parable three ways in which we can reject what God has sown and nourished in our lives.

a) To shut our mind to what we are hearing

We as a result of pride have an unteachable mind, our vain mind considers we don’t need new truth. Or what we hear may condemn the things we enjoy doing so we refuse to listen.

b) We fail to think things through

We have a shallow mind that is governed by every new craze or fashion which we take up and just as quickly drop.

We then treat God’s truth in the same way, we react emotionally but without conviction.

Christianity has its demands that have to be faced and accepted.

Christianity offers not only great privileges but also responsibilities.

Sudden emotional enthusiasm can soon become a dying fire.

c) We have a life too full to give needed space for God’s Word to mature and be fruitful

Modern life style can be constantly in the “*fast lane*” increasingly crowded with the preoccupation of our physical needs and desires.

We become too busy to have the daily “*quiet time*” with our Creator in prayer and study so that our spiritual life may mature.

We may not deliberately neglect prayer and study but we become so involved with work, committees, charitable service and good works that each day that we are too tired to think of anything else.

How then can we avoid falling away?

Hebrews 6:9-12 [Living Bible] *“Dear friends, even though I am talking like this I really don’t believe that what I am saying applies to you. I am confident you are producing the good fruit that comes along with your salvation. For God is not unfair. How can He ever forget your hard work for Him, or forget the way you used **to show your love for Him, and still do, by helping His children?** And we are anxious that **you keep right on loving others as long as life lasts**, so that you will get your full reward. Then knowing what lies ahead for you, you won’t become bored with being a Christian, nor become spiritually dull and indifferent, but you will be anxious to follow the example of those who receive all that God has promised them because of their strong faith and patience.*

We can never earn salvation, it is a gift from God, but our future reward will depend on how we use what God has blessed us with, to love and serve others.

Ephesians 2:8 [Living Bible] *“Because of His kindness you have been saved through trusting in Christ. And even trusting is not of yourselves; it too is a gift from God. Salvation is **not** a reward for the good we have done, so none of us can take any credit for it. It is **God Himself** who has made us what we are and has given us new lives from Jesus Christ; and long ages ago He **planned that we should spend these lives in helping others.**”*

The Christian mind, the Christian attitude to life is that of a servant, and it is because of that attitude to life we will never, never fall away.

The faithful servant doesn’t look for reward to motivate his life, they are grateful to have the privilege of being a servant to so loving a Master.

The faithful servant is always there at His Master’s side ready to go or do whatever is His Master’s desire.

The bond slave, the true rendering of the Greek word that the apostles applied to themselves in their relationship with Christ, is a servant for life with no personal rights only responsibilities.

Galatians 6:17 [Living Bible] *“From now on please don’t argue with me about these things, for I carry on my body the scars of the whipping and wounds from Jesus’ enemies that mark me **as His slave.**”*

Nothing was going to stop Paul continuing to be a slave of Christ who served his Master by serving his fellow Christians and being willing to lay down his life for them.

Galatians 6:14-15 [Living Bible] *“As for me, God forbid that I should boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. **Because of that cross my interest in all the attractive things of the world was killed long ago,** and the world’s interest in me is also long dead ... what counts is whether we really have been changed into new and different people.”*

Paul’s total commitment was now towards being a faithful servant of Christ, willingly he had lost interest in the status symbols of the society around him, and the friends of his previous lifestyle had long left him.

What was important to him now was helping his Master Jesus Christ bring about the conversion of others.

Warning Number Four: Wilfully Continuing To Sin

Hebrews 10:26-27 [NIV] *“If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, **no sacrifice for sins is left,** but only a fearful expectation of judgement and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.”*

The Greek word translated sinning is not isolated acts of sin but a lifestyle of sin.

This is not referring to a sin committed in error or in ignorance but deliberate sin against the Holy Spirit.

Knowledge of the truth makes us doubly accountable.

If we reject the mercy we have received through Christ, no other ground for mercy is left for us.

The writer of Hebrews has this horror of sin for two reasons, both of which are still true today.

(a) The greatest peril in the Church was the evil living or apostasy of its members.

Such people are bad advertisements for the Christian faith, and a great handicap to the work of the church.

The members of the church must be loyal or not members at all.

The unsatisfactory Christian was and is the person who undermines the very foundation of the church.

(b) The greater knowledge that comes with the New Covenant makes sin now a greater offence to our Creator.

Matthew 12:30 [NIV] *“He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.”*

There are only two choices we can make; if we are not with Christ then we are automatically because of our human Adamic nature, His enemies.

If we are not working with Christ then we are in effect hindering His Work.

Neutrality is impossible; if our presence does not strengthen the Church then we are weakening it, refusing to support Christ and His Work means we are giving support to His adversary, Satan!

Matthew 11:12 [King James] *“And from the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence and the **violent** take it by force.”*

The Greek words used for violence and violent have the same root “*bia*” denoting force indicating that the Kingdom of God is not for the well-meaning but for the desperate.

No-one will ever drift into the kingdom, the doors into the kingdom will only be opened by those who are prepared to do whatever it takes to get into it, inspite of any violent opposition they may face.

If we turn our backs on Christ and what God has done for us through Him we have chosen our future, the wrath of God that will consume all His adversaries by fire.

Hebrews 10:28 [NIV] *“Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.”*

Paul points us back to the Old Covenant where those who violated the Covenant and worshipped other gods were stoned to death.

Deuteronomy 17:2-6 [NIV] *“If a man or woman living among you in one of the towns the LORD gives you is found doing evil in the eyes of the LORD your God **in violation of his covenant**, and contrary to my command has worshipped other gods, bowing down to them or to the sun or the moon or the stars of the sky, and this has been brought to your attention, then you must investigate it thoroughly. If it is true and it has been proved that this detestable thing has been done in Israel, **take the man or woman** who has done this evil deed to your city gate **and stone that person to death.** On*

the testimony of two or three witnesses a man shall be put to death, but no one shall be put to death on the testimony of only one witness.”

Death was the end result of rejecting the Old Covenant that had for only lifetime lasting physical rewards for obedience.

Hebrews 10:29 [NIV] *“How much more severely do you think 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 that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?”*

How much greater is our sin of rejection of the New Covenant with its eternal rewards for obedience.

In three ways our sin is greater than Ancient Israel:

a) Trample Christ under foot

Sin under the New Covenant is taking the “love gift” from God of Jesus Christ and trampling it under foot.

Matthew 7:6 [Amplified Bible] *“Do not give that which is Holy, the sacred thing, to the dogs, and do not throw your pearls before hogs, lest that trample upon them with their feet...”*

If we treat the love of God in this way, the pearl of great price [**Matthew 13:44-45**] that we should be seeking with all our life, then we are no better than ignorant beasts.

Once Christ our Saviour had come the awfulness of sin lay not in its breaking of the law but it lay in the fact we were treating the love of Christ for us with total contempt.

b) Failure to see the sacredness of sacred things

If we look on Christ as just a good man who died for a good cause we treat what is sacred as if it were common or not holy.

If we reject the deity of Christ we blaspheme God just as much as if we claimed we were God, and so deserve to die.

Sin is failing to see the sacredness of the sacrifice of Christ [the anointed of God] upon the cross.

c) Sin is to insult the Holy Spirit

John 16:8 [Living Bible] *“And when He [the Holy Spirit] has come He will **convince the world of its sin...**”*

It is the Holy Spirit that brings us to repentance.

John 16:13 [NIV] *“But when he, **the Spirit of truth**, comes, he will **guide you into all truth**. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.”*

The Holy Spirit leads us into all truth.

Romans 8:9 [NIV] *“You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the **Spirit**, if the **Spirit of God** lives in you. And if anyone does not have the **Spirit of Christ**, he does not belong to Christ.”*

The Holy Spirit is the spirit of Christ.

If we reject Christ we reject the only way we can receive salvation, being saved from the consequences of our sinful lifestyle.

Hence there is no way back to our former relationship with our Creator and our only future is rejection by our Creator God and eternal extinction even the memory of our existence will fade away completely.

Matthew 10:32-33 [NIV] *“Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.”*

The word in Greek translated “disowns” points to final disapproval and rejection with no turning back.

This is **not** the word used of Peter when he denied Christ, this word only indicated a separation that was **not** final.

Matthew 25:12 [NIV] *“But he replied, ‘I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.’”*

The rejection of the foolish virgins indicated that Christ was not aware of their existence, for they lacked oil [the Holy Spirit] in their lamps, what guided their lives.

Matthew 7:21-23 [NIV] *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 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 evildoers!’”*

In spite of all the religious acts these people had performed in the name of Christ, Christ tells them He had never been aware of their existence.

Rejection of the Holy Spirit rejects our means of fellowship with Christ through which He comes to know us even as we are led to know Him more as our Saviour, High Priest and Master.

How then do we respond to this warning?

Hebrews 10:30-31 [NIV] *“For we know him who said, ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ and again, ‘The Lord will judge his people.’ It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”*

Be sure we truly know God and fear His judgement.

Hebrews 10:32-34 [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.”*

Remember all we endured when first we acknowledged Christ as our Saviour and Master, and our loyalty to Him.

Hebrews 10:35-36 [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.”*

Remember what we were at our very best and seek never to sink below our best.

We will accomplish this only in one way and the Greek word translated “*confidence*” shows us how.

“*Parrhēsia*” is the combination of two words denoting “*all*” and “*flow out*” with emphasis on speech.

This is talking about our testimony, both verbal and visible, by example.

Trust in what God has done for us and is accomplishing now in us allows us to speak out boldly concerning our faith.

The parallel Greek word “*pepoithēsis*” is translated “*trust*” in several scriptures.

Hebrews 10:39 [NIV] “*But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.*”

The only two alternatives:

a) Shrink back to eternal destruction

Motivated by cowardice and unbelief.

Revelation 21:8 [Living Bible] “*But cowards who turn back from following me [Christ] and those who are unfaithful [unbelievers] ... their doom is in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur. This is the second death.*”

(b) Perseverance to final salvation

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

The Greek word translated overcomes is “*nikaō*” is a term for victory, to conquer and prevail.

Revelation 12:11 [NIV] “*They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.*”

Satan, depicting all evil, is vanquished by Christ’s blood, that is victory over death, which was Satan’s ultimate weapon, and the confident testimony of faithful Christians.

There are no grey areas, these are the only two paths we choose in life, if we try to avoid the choice we end up choosing death, the second death.

Warning Number Five: Falling Short of the Grace of God

Hebrews 12:15 [RAV] “*Looking diligently lest anyone should fall short of the Grace of God.*”

Falling short of the Grace of God is to claim to belong to God’s people without meeting the conditions.

Hebrews 12:15-17 [Amplified Bible] “*Exercise foresight and be on the watch to look after one another, to see that no-one falls back from and fails to secure God’s Grace, His unmerited favour and spiritual blessing. In order that no root of resentment, rancour, bitterness or hatred, shoot forth and cause trouble and bitter torment, and the many become contaminated and defiled by it. That no-one may be guilty of sexual vice, or become profane, godless and sacrilegious, person as Esau did, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. For you understand that later on, when he wanted to*

regain title to his inheritance of the blessing he was rejected, disqualified and set aside, for he could find no opportunity to repair by repentance what he had done, that is no chance to recall the choice he had made, although he sought for it carefully with bitter tears.”

The sad real life story of one who did **not** value what God had done for them and what they could have in the future from their Creator.

Rejecting a God-promised inheritance for some trifling material gain.

Still worse, Esau’s example shows that once a God-given inheritance has been deliberately rejected, there can be no further opportunity of regaining it.

A person who acts in this way stands permanently condemned.

In this passage of scripture the writer of Hebrews faces the problems of everyday Christian living.

The hardest task we face is living the life of a Christian day by day every day.

2 Timothy 3:1-5 [NIV] *“But mark this: There will be terrible times in the **last days**. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—**having a form of godliness but denying its power**. Have nothing to do with them.”*

In the context of the last days, remember the “*last days*” is **not** confined to the short period before Christ returns.

- a) The “*last days*” began at Christ’s resurrection.
- b) The “*last days*” for us are the days before our death, and that can encompass all our life, for we do not know the day of our death!

We live in a world that is totally opposed to God’s way of life, being influenced by Satan, the god of this world.

Satan, god of this world’s society:-

a) **Revelation 12:9** [NIV] *“The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or **Satan, who leads the whole world astray**. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.”*

Satan leads the world away from God’s way of life.

b) **Revelation 12:10** [NIV] *“Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. **For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.**”*

Satan knows the faults and weaknesses of every Christian and uses them to try to put doubts in God’s mind as to our faithfulness to God, and His way of life.

c) **2 Corinthians 4:4** [NIV] *“**The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.**”*

Satan makes his way of life glitter so brightly, look so good, that the true light of our need for salvation is hidden from most people.

d) **2 Corinthians 11:13-15** [NIV] *“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for **Satan himself masquerades as an angel of***

light. *It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.*”

Satan has his own ministers who masquerade as ministers of God and it is only the fruit of their lifestyle that exposes them for who they are.

Not only society as a whole but all Christians can fall under the spell of Satan’s deception.

1 John 4:1-3 [NIV] *“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognise the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.”*

We as Christians need to be able to recognise what is from God and the Holy Spirit, and what is from other spirits that are anti-christ.

1 John 4:4-6 [NIV] *“You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.”*

It is only by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that we can recognise the truth and live out an active Christian life on a day-to-day basis.

We cannot win this battle against Satan and his world alone.

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.”*

Notice the “let us” in this passage of scripture; there are twelve passages of scripture that indicate that corporate action is needed in the Church in many situations, working under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 6:1-2 [Living Bible] *“Dear brothers, if a Christian is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help them back onto the right path, remembering that next time it might be one of you who is in the wrong. Share each other’s troubles, and problems and so obey our Lord’s Command.”*

As Christians we have a duty to support one another and to be a right example to one another; we do this in two major ways.

Hebrews 12:14 [NIV] *“Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.”*

a) Aim to seek peace

In the Hebrew language and thought peace is not just the lack of hostility it is intensely positive not just a freedom from trouble.

We actively seek peace between ourselves and God.

Proverbs 3:1-3 [RAV] *“My son, do not forget my law but let your heart keep my commands, for length of days and long life and peace will they add to you.”*

Peace between us and God is the end product of obedience to His way of life.

We then seek peace between ourselves and other people, first though is our peace with God.

Only when we are at peace with our Creator can we learn how to make peace with each other.

b) **We also have to seek holiness**

The Greek word for “holiness” is “*hagiasmōs*”.

The root meaning of this word is “*difference*” or “*separation*”.

Although we live in this society a person who is “*hagios*” [holy] must always in one sense be different from and separated from the world.

The Christian standards are not the same as the world’s standards and their conduct is not following the conduct of the world.

God’s Word is the standard by which a Christian seeking holiness “*hagiasmōs*” judges his lifestyle, seeking holiness is the preparation to our standing in the presence of God.

The life of a Christian must be dominated and directed by the aim to be equipped to enter the presence of the Holy God, his Creator.

Hebrews 12:28-29 [NIV] *“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our “God is a consuming fire.”*

Our eternal future depends on our taking these warnings from God seriously for God is a just God and rewards all people according to their response to the invitation to be a part of His Kingdom, His created family.