Studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews - Lesson 7

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In the first ten verses of chapter five of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the inspired apostle began to unfold the teaching concerning the Great High Priestly work of Christ. But the very mention of the name of Melchizedek seemed to make him realize that the persons addressed were not able to understand the message—that the Lord Jesus Christ is “a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.” The Hebrew Christians were mere “babes in Christ.” They had just left Judaism and the Levitical priesthood; they were not ready for the deeper, spiritual truths concerning their Heavenly Priest, even Jesus, the Son of God. Other Hebrews living in the days of Paul were intellectually convinced that Christ was their Messiah, yet had not come out boldly for Him, had not been born again by faith in His shed blood. They preferred the ritualism of the temple worship to persecution, and were in grave danger of apostasy; that is, of turning their backs upon the Lord Jesus and His cross. Some had already become apostate. How could they understand the Melchizedek priesthood? They were not even saved.

Therefore, to urge the Hebrew Christians to “press on unto perfection,” to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (Heb. 6:1; II Peter 3:18), the inspired apostle paused for another of the long parentheses to be found throughout this epistle. He turned aside from the central theme, concerning the Great High Priestly work of Christ, to urge the Hebrew Christians to leave their spiritual babyhood for full and mature growth in the things of Christ. He paused also to warn the enlightened but unregenerate Hebrews of the awful danger of apostasy. And following this exhortation and this warning, he encouraged the young Christians with one of the strongest
passages on the eternal security of the believer in Christ that is to be found in all the Word of God.

That discussion of the assurance of eternal salvation brought the writer to the Hebrews back to the place where he left off in Heb. 5:10, the Melchizedek priesthood, a type of Christ in His Priestly work. Accordingly, we might link Heb. 5:11 with Heb. 7:1, and find no break in thought whatsoever. Yet how much we should have missed, if the Holy Spirit had not guided the pen of the apostle to write this long parenthesis, which is our lesson for today, recorded in 5:11-6:20!

Remembering that the original text was not divided into chapters and verses, let us read this passage as a unit, to get the message it bears in its entirety. Briefly, we might think of this parenthetical portion of the book under these four sub-divisions, which logically fall into these parts: (1) The appeal to leave Christian babyhood for mature growth, 5:11-14; (2) the exhortation to “press on” from the things of Judaism, from the types and shadows, to the “perfection” that is Christ Jesus Himself, the One of whom Judaism prophesied, 6:1-3; (3) the warning against the awful danger of apostasy, written concerning the enlightened, but unregenerate, 6:4-8; and (4) the encouragement to the true believer, because of his eternal security in Christ, 6:9-20.

This assurance, with its encouragement, is presented in view of the Hebrew Christians’ past spiritual experiences, and in view of their “sure and steadfast” hope in the eternal priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ. As if to reassure them of the certainty of their eternal salvation, the Holy Spirit used the illustration of God’s promise to Abraham, which He had confirmed by His oath—His promise concerning the Saviour who was to come. That promise was fulfilled in Christ. What further assurance could one ask?

Do you see, my friend, what a storehouse of treasures is revealed in these lines, which form our lesson for today? We have purposely outlined them briefly, in order to help you to get the message as a whole before we begin to analyze its parts. We did this for a very important reason: Many have taken Heb. 6:4-8 out of its context, and have perverted its true meaning, seeking to prove thereby that a believer in Christ can be eternally lost. The passage most assuredly teaches no such thing, as we shall prove in our further study today. The value of a repeated, prayerful reading of the whole parenthesis, therefore, can not be over-estimated, that the Holy Spirit who wrote it may teach us its true interpretation. As we read it, may the Spirit of God prepare our hearts better to understand what He meant when He said that our Lord Jesus is “a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek,” the message already presented in Heb. 5:1-10, and yet further developed in Heb. 7:1—10:18.

“BABES IN CHRIST”

The Holy Spirit, in 5:10, had just written those wonderful words which we considered in our last lesson, telling of how God, the Father, “saluted” our crucified, risen, and ascended Lord Jesus as “an high priest after the order of Melchizedek.” Then follow the words of appeal and exhortation which we want to read now, from 5:11-14, as they are translated in the Revised Version:

> "Of whom (that is, Christ, our Great High Priest) we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

In these searching words Paul was saying to the Hebrew Christians of his day that, because they could not understand the Melchizedek priesthood, as a type of the High Priestly work of Christ, they were mere “babes in Christ,” retarded in their spiritual growth. He made their understanding of God’s message concerning Melchizedek the test of their growth in “grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” They were little babies, as it were, needing milk, whereas they should have been mature men and women, able to feed their souls upon the deep things of God. He told them that they ought to be teachers of the Word, whereas they still required teaching in the “first principles of the oracles of God.” Now milk is predigested food;
it is just the right food for the baby, for no infant should be fed upon beefsteak. But what mother wants to see her infant remain in babyhood, never developing mentally, as well as physically?

Some years ago, when I was a pastor in the South, there lived close by our home a woman whose eyes were often red with weeping. I had been told that her husband was addicted to drink, and supposed that was the cause of her tears. Surely it was cause enough! But one day she said to me, "Mr. Talbot, I am going to show you one I seldom let others see."

And she took me into a room where her twenty-seven-year-old daughter sat, playing with rattles and dolls. The young woman had developed physically, but her mind was still that of a little baby.

Something like that must have been in the mind of Paul as he realized that the Hebrew Christians were still "babes in Christ." He said practically the same thing when he wrote to the Corinthians, Gentiles, similar words,

"And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal . . ." (I Cor. 3:1-3).

And today, if Paul were on earth and could speak in person to the average church member, he could not alter his rebuke. Christians who have attended services regularly for years go to the Lord's house without a Bible, and sit down to be entertained by illustrations and stories of wit and humor or of emotional appeal. Many do not want the deeper things of God. They say they cannot understand about Melchizedek, and they put forth no effort to understand. My friend, God has a father's heart; He wants us to "grow in grace." He does not want us to stay in a state of protracted babyhood, any more than that mother in Texas wanted her twenty-seven-year-old daughter to play with rattles and dolls. God means for us to feed our souls upon the Bread of Life, to know the meaning of the priesthood of our Lord. He wants us, when we enter a restaurant or ride the trains, to be able and eager to lead those we meet to the "throne of grace," to be able to introduce them to the One who is seated there at the right hand of the Father.

Because the average Christian today is still a "babe in Christ," literally dozens of cults and false religious systems have swept our country. Their adherents, zealously enough, spend their time ringing doorbells, putting their satanic literature into the hands of unsuspecting, untaught souls; and the sad thing is that the average Christian is unable to discern much of the error, unable to give a reason for the hope that is within him. These false systems deny the deity of Christ, His bodily resurrection. They tell men that they must observe the seventh-day Sabbath, in order to be saved. They tell the untaught that the Lord Jesus died as a martyr, that His death was like unto that of Stephen or of Paul or of David Livingstone. And how few church members, comparatively, are able to teach others "the first principles of the oracles of God"? They themselves need to be established in the fundamentals of the faith—that Christ died for our sins, and arose for our justification. They need to go to Calvary for the foundation truths of Christianity. And as for Melchizedek, how many even know that such a person ever lived?

Not long ago a member of our own church told me she was offended because I had not been to call on her. I wish I could call on every member often; but with the pressure of many duties in our full program at the Bible Institute and the Church of the Open Door, with the radio ministry and the time it requires, it is impossible for one pastor to spend much time making pastoral calls, much as he might like to do so. But the point is, that woman did not realize that, because she had been a Christian for twenty years, she should be spending her time teaching others, not waiting for pastoral calls. Perhaps an illustration will help us to understand what God means when He tells us to leave the state of babyhood, and grow into full Christian manhood and womanhood.

Before I left my home in Sydney, Australia, in 1911, to become a student in The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, I visited all my relatives, to bid them farewell. In the home of one of my aunts I saw a little baby; in fact, my aunt was rocking the cradle when I last saw her before taking
my boat. Some years passed. Then I returned to Sydney for a visit. I went to the home of my aunt; and there I saw the same cradle, with a little baby in it; but a little boy was rocking the cradle. I asked my aunt, “Is this the little boy I saw in the cradle before I went to America?” “Yes,” she replied; “he is the same little boy, but he has gotten out of the cradle, and is rocking his little brother.” That little boy scorned the thought of returning to the cradle, with the bottle of milk; he was growing up! In fact, he was holding the milk bottle for his little brother!

My Christian friend, God wants us to do something like that in spiritual things. He wants us to feed upon the “strong meat” of the Word; to meditate upon the Great High Priestly work of Christ, “called of God an high priest after the order of Melchizedek.” He wants us to know more and more of the meaning of His one sufficient sacrifice on Calvary; more and more of the access that is ours into the very throne-room of heaven because our Great High Priest is there to intercede for us, to deal gently with us in all our weakness and sin. He wants us to spend more and more time feeding our souls upon the wonders of His Person and the sufficiency of His work; then to go out and teach others the deep things of God. May He help us to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,” even as we lead never-dying souls to His cross.

“LET US PRESS ON” FROM JUDAISM UNTO CHRIST

Before we read Heb. 6:1-3, let us bear in mind that the exhortation of these verses was a call to those Hebrew Christians, who were mere “babes in Christ,” to leave the ceremonies and shadows of Judaism for the “perfection” which is in Christ Jesus, the Lord. It was not a call to leave their earlier Christian experiences for a deeper work of grace, as some hold. It was not an exhortation to cease being occupied with the elementary truths of Christianity, and go on to the deeper things of God. That is not what the inspired apostle had in mind. The great, underlying truth of Christianity has to do with the meaning of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ; and God never tells us to leave that! No matter how deep a truth may be, the cross is central! But the Apostle Paul, guided by the Spirit of God, did tell the Hebrew Christians, in these verses, to leave the temple worship with all its shadows and types for Christ Himself, who had come to fulfill all the prophecies of Judaism. Thus he wrote of the Law of Moses and all the prophets and all the Old Testament Scriptures as “the doctrine of the first principles of Christ” (6:1). “Leaving” these shadows for the reality, they would “grow in grace” from Christian babyhood to full maturity in their Christian experience; then they could understand the High Priestly work of Christ! With this truth in mind, let us read these three verses:

“Wherefore leaving the doctrine of the first principles of Christ (or ‘the word of the beginning of Christ’), let us press on unto perfection (or ‘full growth’); not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the teaching of baptisms (or ‘washings’), and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do, if God permit.”

Here we find six “principles” which the Old Testament had set forth, in preparing the godly in Israel for the coming of the Messiah; and every devout Hebrew believed in these six truths: (1) “Repentance from dead works”; (2) “faith toward God”; (3) “the teaching of baptisms,” or the ceremonial “washings” connected with the temple worship; (4) “laying on of hands” as the animal sacrifice was brought to the Jewish altar; (5) “resurrection of the dead”; and (6) “eternal judgment.” And now the Apostle Paul urged those Hebrew Christians, who lived while the temple was still standing, while the Christ-rejecting nation of Israel was still continuing the Jewish rituals, he urged those Hebrew Christians to leave behind those shadows and types for Christ Himself. Then he added, “And this we will do, if God permit.” It seems to us that Paul was saying, “God willing,” we shall “press on unto perfection.”

And now let us examine each of these six “principles” closely enough to be sure that our interpretation of their meaning is true:

1. “Repentance from Dead Works.” Throughout the Old Testament and in the ministry of John the Baptist God’s people were called to repent of their sins. This repentance...
was evidenced by their offering the animal sacrifices, which pointed on to Christ. Now that He had come; now that He had died and risen and ascended into heaven, the sinner was urged to repent of his sin, and put his faith in Christ's finished redemption.

2. "Faith toward God." Faith in the promised Redeemer was essential to salvation in the days of Adam and Abel and Abraham and David, as is our faith now in the Christ who has come. The Old Testament saints had faith "toward" God, even as Abraham looked down the centuries and saw the day of Christ "and was glad" (John 8:56). Now that Christ has come, we look back to Calvary, to the Saviour who has fulfilled the prophecies of His cross and of His empty tomb.

3. "The Teaching of Baptisms." The word here is plural, "baptisms," and refers to the ceremonial "washings" of Judaism. It can not refer to Christian baptism; moreover, God does not tell us to "leave" this Christian ordinance. He is telling Hebrew Christians of Paul's day to leave behind the ceremonial "washings" of the temple worship. The Greek word used here is never used of Christian baptism; it is used later in this epistle (Heb. 9:10) and translated "divers washings," referring again to the ceremonial cleansing of Judaism.

In our study of the Jewish tabernacle we saw that, before Aaron and his sons could minister before the Lord as priests, Moses had to wash them all over once, before the door of the sanctuary; and before they could enter the Holy Place for their daily ministry, they had to wash their hands and feet often at the brazen laver. The one washing all over was typical of their cleansing "once for all" in the shed blood of the Christ who was to come; the daily, often-repeated washing of hands and feet at the brazen laver represented the confession of the defilement of sin in their daily service and walk with the Lord. He is our Cleanser first from the penalty of sin "once for all"; then from the defilement of sin day by day, as we walk on our pilgrimage from His cross to heaven itself. Such "washings" as these were in the mind of God when He wrote this exhortation to the early Hebrew Christians, bidding them leave behind all such ceremonial cleansing, and "press on" with Christ, who had come to fulfill and to set aside all the shadows and types. To continue in those ceremonies of Judaism was an empty formalism; it was a denial of Christ's finished redemption; for in the precious blood of the Lord Jesus is the only cleansing from sin!

4. "Laying on of Hands." Here again the Holy Spirit referred to the sinner's bringing his animal sacrifice before the brazen altar in the outer court of the Jewish tabernacle, and later to that altar in the temple; to his laying his hands upon the head of the victim, even as he confessed his sin. Figuratively he was laying his sins upon the Lamb of God who was to come. Did not Isaiah explain this wonderful type of Christ when he wrote that marvelous prophecy of Isaiah 53:6?

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

That is the "laying on of hands" which the Holy Spirit had in mind in Heb. 6:2; not the laying on of hands as described in Acts 8:17, when Peter and John ministered to the Samaritans, and they received the Holy Spirit; and not the laying on of hands in the ordination service to the Christian ministry.

5. "Resurrection of the Dead." All the Old Testament saints believed in the resurrection of the dead. Abraham could offer Isaac upon the altar, because he believed that "God was able to raise him up, even from the dead" (Heb. 11:19). Elijah raised from the dead the son of the widow of Zarephath (I Kings 17:17-24). And Elisha raised from the dead the son of the Shunammite woman (II Kings 4:18-37). David wrote, in the sixteenth Psalm of the resurrection of the promised Redeemer; and both Peter and Paul quote that prophecy in the book of Acts, applying it to Christ's bodily resurrection. The Pharisees in the time of the Lord's earthly ministry held staunchly to the doctrine of the resurrection; whereas the Sadducees denied the existence of angels and all miracles, including the resurrection of the dead.

What the Old Testament saints did not have revealed to them, what John the Baptist did not live to see, concerns the resurrection of the members of the church, which is the bride of Christ, before the Antichrist is revealed and
the great tribulation runs its course. That is the "blessed hope" of the Christian—that he will share in the resurrection "out from among the dead" (Phil. 3:11); that is, the translation of the church in the first resurrection. This special revelation concerning the church was not made known to men until God revealed it to Paul (Eph. 3:1-12). Then through the apostles God taught the church that she is to be translated, caught up to be with Christ, before "the man of sin" is revealed, and before the great tribulation comes upon the world. Then Christ will come in glory with His church to establish His millennial kingdom, after which the wicked dead will be raised, judged, and cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11-15).

As Christians, we are to look forward to that "blessed hope," not merely to the "resurrection of the dead" as the Old Testament saints were taught. We have fuller light—now that Christ has come!

6. "Eternal Judgment." The closing verse of Ecclesiastes tells us that every godly Hebrew knew that there is to be "eternal judgment":

"For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Eccl. 12:14).

How grateful to our Lord every Christian should be, to know that his sins have been forever judged at the cross, and that he shall not come into judgment; but is "passed out of death into life" (John 5:24)!

In all six of these "first principles of Christ," these Old Testament foreshadowings of the Saviour who was to come, God had given Israel a measure of light, but not the full light that is revealed in Christ. Therefore, God said, in Heb. 6:1-3, leave behind the shadows; come out into the full revelation of Jesus, the Light of life. Leave Judaism for Christianity!

THE DANGER OF APOSTASY

Having urged the "babes in Christ" to leave Judaism completely for Christianity, in order that they might understand the High Priestly work of the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit then uttered one of the most searching warnings to be found in all the Word of God. It has to do with the "enlightened," but unregenerate souls who were convinced of the claims of Christ, yet who had not been born again; and it is recorded in Heb. 6:4-8. As we stated early in this lesson, Satan has used this passage to disturb more hearts than we can know; he has perverted its true meaning, and has convinced many of God's children that they can be saved, then lost. I say he has convinced many of "God's children" that they are not eternally secure in Christ; for I have known many born-again souls, who love the Lord Jesus and are trusting in His shed blood for salvation; yet who do not have assurance of salvation. Now we want to see what the Holy Spirit really says in this difficult passage; He does not contradict Himself; the whole body of Scripture proves the eternal security of the believer; and He who wrote the Scriptures is the only infallible Teacher.

Before we begin to analyze these verses, let us note two facts here which give us the key to the whole passage:

1. The Holy Spirit refers to the "enlightened," but unregenerate souls herein described as "those"; whereas in the preceding verses He has addressed the Hebrew Christians as "ye," or has included himself in their number, saying, "... let us," or "... we." Moreover, after He finishes this searching warning concerning "those" enlightened, but unregenerate souls, he turns again to the Hebrew Christians, addressing them in verse 9 as follows:

"But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation."

In other words, the Holy Spirit tells the saved ones that they are the "beloved" of God, that "better things"—"things that accompany salvation"—can be spoken of them than of "those" apostates described in verses 4-8. Apostates were never saved.

2. Those who hold that this passage teaches that a soul can be saved, then lost, are not logical in their reasoning; for they say a man can be saved, then lost, then "brought back into grace"; whereas the Holy Spirit says here that "it is impossible" for "those" described in these words to be renewed "unto repentance." Why? Because they are deliberate apostates. And who is an apostate? He is one who has had the light concerning Christ, but who deliberately turns
his back upon that light. He who finally rejects the Son of God can not be saved.

And now let us read verses 4-6, see what they really do say, then read the illustration of the truth they teach, as recorded in verses 7, 8:

“For as touching those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come, and then fell away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame” (R. V.).

Five special privileges of “those” “enlightened,” but apostate, souls are listed here; but not once does the Holy Spirit say that they were justified by faith, having received the new birth. They had every opportunity to accept Christ, but turned away from Him completely. Let us examine these five privileges which they had:

1. **They Were “Enlightened.”** We have just been trying to explain what the Holy Spirit means by this statement; we hardly need repeat just here. Suffice it to say that the Hebrews living in the days of Paul were convinced that Jesus of Nazareth was the One of whom the prophets had written; otherwise, they would have ignored His claims. Their very bitterness against Him indicted them. Knowing that He fulfilled the prophecies, yet they would not have Him to “rule over” them. They turned their backs upon the Lord of glory. They were “enlightened” by the preaching of John, of Christ Himself, and of the apostles; but their stubborn hearts would not yield to the love of Christ.

Throughout the Christian era men, Jew and Gentile, have had “the light of the glory of God” revealed unto them “in the face of Jesus Christ,” yet have turned away from the voice of apostle and evangelist unsaved! They have “loved darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil” (John 3:19).

2. **They Had “Tasted of the Heavenly Gift.”** The Heavenly Gift is the Lord Jesus Christ, the “Father’s love-gift to the world.” Those Hebrews living in the days of Paul were “enlightened” concerning the claims of Christ; they were not in pagan darkness. But they were not converted, born again; instead, they continued in Judaism, returning to the temple with their lambs and calves and goats and turtle-doves and young pigeons, to sacrifice them upon the brazen altar. They proved by this that they rejected the Lamb of God, who had fulfilled and set aside the Mosaic ritualism; they crucified “to themselves the Son of God afresh.” They had heard the earnest preaching of John the Baptist. They had witnessed the mighty miracles of the Lord Jesus; they had seen and heard what took place on the Day of Pentecost, and how the Holy Spirit worked through the apostles in miracles that could not be denied. They were “enlightened,” indeed; but they had only “tasted of the heavenly gift”; they had not received the crucified and risen Lord Jesus into their hearts.

Perhaps the meaning of this phrase will become a bit more clear, if we use a homely illustration. In the wholesale coffee houses, where the different varieties of coffee are blended, there are men called “coffee tasters.” In order to determine the best blending of the different varieties, these men taste samples from six or seven or possibly ten cups of coffee. They taste, but they do not drink the samples. Having tasted, they dispose of the liquid; not a drop do they swallow. One of these coffee tasters will spend a whole day at this task, yet not receive into his body one drop of coffee.

Likewise, in the days of Paul, as in every age since the fall of man, there were those who had “tasted of the heavenly gift,” yet who would not drink of “the water of life.” Possibly in an evangelistic service even today, such people are emotionally impressed, or intellectually convinced of the claims of Christ; yet they go away unconverted. Like Felix before Paul, they say,

“Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee” (Acts 24:25).

Or like King Agrippa before that great apostle, they say,

“Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” (Acts 26:28).

Yet they have only “tasted of the heavenly gift.” Such were
the apostate Hebrews, of whom Paul wrote in Heb. 6:4-8.

3. They "Were Made Partakers of the Holy Spirit." The literal Greek here means that they were "going along with" the Holy Spirit, "in company with" Him; it does not mean that they were baptized by and indwelt by the Spirit of God. On the Day of Pentecost, for example, many of the Hebrews were in the temple when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples. They heard the "sound as of a rushing mighty wind"; they saw the "cloven tongues like as of fire" descend upon the disciples; they heard those men who loved the Lord Jesus speak in languages, hitherto unknown to them. Yet what did the unregenerate Hebrews say of that mighty miracle of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the true believers? They said, "These men are full of new wine" (Acts 2:13). They said this mockingly, declaring that the Spirit-filled believers in Christ were drunken! Those wicked men were "enlightened"; they were "in company with" the Holy Spirit of God; but they would have none of Him! They turned their backs upon Him. They bitterly persecuted the disciples, who received into their hearts the Spirit of the living Christ.

4. They Had "Tasted the Good Word of God." To repeat, those apostate Hebrews had heard the preaching of John and Christ and the apostles. They knew the Old Testament prophecies which foretold the coming of a suffering, risen, ascended Messiah and Lord. But they had only "tasted" these precious truths; they had not "eaten," as it were, the "good word of God." Compare their "tasting" with the message of the Lord Himself, recorded in John 6:51-58; and you will see the difference between intellectual conviction and heart-acceptance:

"I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world . . . Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

Then, as if to make very clear His meaning, the Lord added, in John 6:63:

"The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."

And that is what Paul meant in Heb. 4:5.

5. They Had Witnessed "the Powers of the Age to Come." Here the Holy Spirit tells us that the miracles performed by the Lord and His disciples upon earth will be duplicated in His millennial kingdom; i.e., "in the age to come." The Jews saw those miracles in the days of our Lord's earthly ministry and in the days of Paul; yet not even those mighty miracles led them to the cross of Jesus. Their stubborn hearts turned away from their true Messiah. Following the sermon on the Bread of Life, from which we quoted just a moment ago, "many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him" (John 6:66). They preferred the high places in Judaism, the approval of the Christ-rejecting world, to the persecution and suffering that fell to the lot of the Lord's true disciples. They were apostates—enlightened, but not born again.

Thus it becomes clear that, in this passage from Hebrews, Paul was not writing of "backsliders" in the true church; he was not referring to the Christian who, in a moment of weakness, loses his temper or becomes drunken or does some sinful act to mar his testimony and lose the "joy" of his salvation. He was writing of "those" who had deliberately and finally turned away from the Christ of Calvary. And because there is no other Saviour, Paul added, "... it is impossible to renew them again to repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." These words could never be written of a born-again child of God!

On the contrary, in hundreds of ways, God reassures His saved ones that they are eternally secure in His hand. We need not quote again here the often-repeated passage from our Lord's own words, recorded in John 10:27-30. We know that this passage tells us how He said that no one is able to pluck us out of the Father's hand. Only by taking such a statement as that recorded in Heb. 6:4-8 out of its context, and only by perverting its true meaning, can one suppose for a moment that the redeemed child of God can be lost. Our Lord's many reassurances, to say nothing of
hundreds of similar statements by His apostles, settle once for all the question of the eternal security of the believer in Him. That security rests upon the Word of God; and our God tells the truth!

Three New Testament illustrations, familiar to every Bible reader, fit into this picture: (1) Judas Iscariot was certainly "enlightened," but he was eternally lost because he did not love the Lord. He saw the miracles of the Holy Spirit; but he was an apostate; he turned his back upon Christ and betrayed Him with a kiss. (2) Those of whom our Lord spoke, in Matt. 7:21-23, represent unregenerate church members today, as well as apostates in Paul's day; for He said of such as these:

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven . . . depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

(3) Those whose hearts the Lord likened to the stony ground in Matt. 13:5, 6 were certainly "enlightened." They heard, and apparently received the Word of God; but "they had no deepness of earth," as it were. Their profession of faith was not genuine; they were not born again.

These illustrations are like the parable in our lesson, recorded in Heb. 6:7, 8; let us read it now:

"For the land which hath drunk the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them for whose sake it is also tilled, receiveth blessing from God: but if it beareth thorns and thistles, it is rejected and nigh unto a curse; whose end is to be burned."

The same rain falls upon the fruitful ground that falls upon the unfruitful. But what a different crop! On the one hand good fruit and blessing; on the other, thorns and "the curse" that came when thorns first appeared, following the sin in the Garden of Eden. The one portion of the land drank "in" the rain; the other was like the stony ground of Christ's parable. Likewise, not everyone who hears the Gospel will "drink it in" and be saved. And "the wrath of God abideth" on all who reject His Son. (See John 3:36.)

Concerning the word "renew" in verse 6, "... it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance," Dr. H. A. Ironside writes:

"It is important to notice that the word 'renew' does not imply, as J. N. Darby has pointed out, a renewal or change, but to make what is entirely new. This could never be true again of those who had given up their Christian profession. It is not a definite statement that there is no possible hope for the recovery of such, but it is a declaration that they could never now come into all the blessing of Christianity as a new thing. They had already tried it out, they would tell you, and had deliberately given it up. Such must be left with God, whereas those who really valued the truth were urged to press on to fuller knowledge." Then Dr. Ironside adds, following the illustration of the man likened to the thorn-bearing ground: "He is not actually cursed as yet, for in the mercy of God he may eventually realize his fearful sin, but it is most unlikely. He has made his choice, and is therefore "nigh unto a curse." God alone knows the hardness of an apostate's heart; but rare is the apostate who will let the Lord into his stubborn soul. Like Pharaoh of old, he asks, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?" (Exod. 5:2).

**The Eternal Security of the Believer in Christ**

Already in this lesson we have called attention to the proof that Heb. 6:4-8 does not describe a Christian; for the contrast between that description of an apostate and the picture which follows is marked. Paul addresses the true children of God as "beloved," and says plainly that they are saved, clearly implying that apostates are lost. Let us read verses 10-12:

"But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak: for God is not unrighteous to forget your work and the love which ye showed toward his name, in that ye ministered unto the saints, and still do minister. And we desire that each one of you may show the same diligence unto the fullness (or 'full assurance') of hope even to the end: that ye be not sluggish, but imitators of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

1. **"Things That Accompany Salvation."** In these words
we have read of five "things that accompany salvation," descriptive of the Hebrew Christians: (1) A "work and labour of love"; (2) "the full assurance of hope"; (3) zeal for the things of Christ, not slothfulness or sluggishness; (4) "faith"; and (5) "patience." None of these could be written of "those" apostates described in verses 4-8. The contrast is striking.

Although the Hebrew Christians were still "babes in Christ," although they had not made as much progress in their Christian experience as they should have made; yet they had a testimony for the Lord Jesus. They had left the temple worship, even though that meant the bitterest of persecution. Later, in Heb. 10:32-34, Paul reminds them of how very much they had suffered for Christ. They had become a "gazingstock" for His name's sake. They had borne reproach for ministering to His saints, for having compassion upon Paul in his bonds. They had even taken "joyfully" the "spoiling" of their goods for Christ's sake, because they were looking forward to an eternal home in heaven. What a "work and labour of love" theirs must have been!

Little wonder Paul yearned for them to "hope even to the end" with the "same diligence unto full assurance"! Then he reminded them of their need for continued zeal—for their own joy, as well as for their testimony before a heathen world; and he reminded them also of their need to exercise the "faith" and "patience" of their forefathers. That reminder led him to speak of Abraham, one of Israel's strongest in his faith in the "promises" of God.

2. God's Word to Abraham Confirmed by His Oath.

The story from the life of Abraham, used by the Holy Spirit to reassure and encourage the persecuted Christians in the days of Paul, was familiar to every godly Jew. It was the story of what God said and did to Abraham, following the offering of Isaac upon Mount Moriah. For twenty-five years Abraham had prayed for this "son of promise," believing God's Word, that through him the Redeemer would come. Then, when Abraham was one-hundred years old and Sarah ninety, the child was born. He had grown to be a lad of some years, old enough to understand the need for a lamb as an offering unto the Lord, old enough to obey his father, doubtless trusting in the resurrection hope, as Abraham did. Abraham had obeyed God fully, in this hardest task he was ever called upon to perform. And because he obeyed and believed God, the Lord confirmed His promise by His oath. The words are recorded in Gen. 22:16-18, and quoted in part in Heb. 6:14:

"For when God made promise to Abraham, since he could swear by none greater, he sware by himself, saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee" (Heb. 6:13, 14).

"And thus, having patiently endured, he obtained the promise" (Heb. 6:15).

In Old Testament times, from the days of Moses, the Hebrews settled a thing in court by the word of two or three witnesses. Christ referred to this when He gave, not just two, but four witnesses besides His own to His eternal deity, in the fifth chapter of John. And here in Hebrews the Holy Spirit reminds the Jewish Christians that God gave two witnesses, as it were, to Abraham—His Word and His oath.

In our present day a man takes an oath that he is telling the truth, swearing by the Word of God. Why? Because God's Word is greater by far than any word of man; it is truth. But when the Lord wanted to confirm His promise to Abraham, because there is none greater than God, He swore by Himself. By these two "immutable" things; that is, by these two unchangeable witnesses—God's Word and God's oath—He established forever His promise to Abraham. Therefore, we read, in Heb. 6:16-18, some of the strongest words on the eternal security of the believer to be found in all the Scriptures; for here the Holy Spirit applies the message which God gave to Abraham to the suffering, persecuted Hebrew Christians in Paul's day:

"For men swear by the greater: and in every dispute of theirs the oath is final for confirmation. Wherein God, being minded to show more abundantly unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, interposed (i.e., 'mediated') with an oath; that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have a strong encouragement, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us."
Then the Holy Spirit leaves no uncertainty in the minds of His readers, but plainly states that their "hope" is Christ.

God's oath to Abraham was a confirmation of His promise that, through Isaac, He would send the Redeemer; and God's oath meant that His purpose would never, never change! What further assurance did Abraham need? What further assurance do we need, my Christian friend, that we "shall never perish," other than these "two immutable things"—God's Word confirmed by God's oath? Not to believe in the eternal security of our souls, is to doubt God's Word, to make Him a liar; and "it is impossible for God to lie," even as we have just read from this reassuring passage!

And who are "the heirs of promise," concerning whom God spoke to Abraham? We find the answer in Gal. 3:13, 14:

"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

It is important that we distinguish between God's "promise" to Abraham and His "covenant" with Abraham; for the Gentiles are "the heirs of the promise," together with the believing Israelites; whereas God's covenant with Abraham concerns only His ancient people, the Hebrew nation. And it is God's promise to Abraham concerning the coming of the Saviour of Jew and Gentile, to which the Holy Spirit refers in this sixth chapter of Hebrews.

Now the promise of God to the father of the nation of Israel gave assurance that, through Isaac, "the seed of woman" (Gen. 3:15) should come, even the virgin-born Son of God. Gal. 3:16 proves this fact beyond question:

"Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."

And only a moment ago we read the statement of Gal. 3:13, 14, telling us that Christ died, in order "that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." It was this promise concerning which God confirmed His Word to Abraham by His oath, the "two immutable things," in which it is "impossible for God to lie." The message is so clear and convincing that a little child can grasp it: Our Lord Jesus is the only Saviour of Jew or Gentile; and His promise of salvation is sure and certain to all who will accept His free gift. It is sure because God's promised Word was confirmed by His oath. To doubt the eternal security of the soul's salvation, is to doubt God's Word. And it would be blasphemy to say that God does not tell the truth!

It was some time after God made His "promise" to Abraham of the coming Saviour that He made a "covenant" with Abraham. And whereas the promise included all the world—Gentile, as well as Jew; yet the covenant was given to Abraham's nation concerning Abraham's land. For many long centuries the Gentiles have coveted and have trodden down the land of Palestine; but it will not always be so. The day will come when God's covenant with Abraham will be literally fulfilled, and Israel will fully possess the promised land. In that day Israel's King will sit upon the throne of David. His name is Jesus; and of His kingdom "there shall be no end!"

Israel's is an earthly possession; hers is an earthly land, with a covenanted King upon a throne. But to the church, composed of Jew and Gentile, though largely Gentile, God has promised the "Father's house," the "New Jerusalem." As members of Christ's bride, we are "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." That is the portion of the true church, which is His body. And we should be rejoicing in the assurance of eternal salvation even now—why? Simply because not to rejoice in this assurance is to doubt God's Word. If He had spoken only once, would that not be enough? Yet His promises are legion! As the Old Scotch woman said to the young theological student, who was putting her to the test on this subject: "If I should die and go to hell, after having put my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, God would lose more than I; for I should lose only my salvation, whereas God would lose His character. His Word and His oath tell me that I am saved; and God can not lie!"

3. "A Strong Encouragement"—A "Refuge"—"The Hope Set before Us"—"An Anchor of the Soul." In the
beginning of our study today we said that the words of Heb. 6:4-8 can not possibly teach that a saved soul can be lost, because the words of Heb. 6:9-20 present irrefutable proof that the believer in Christ is eternally secure; and the Holy Spirit does not contradict Himself! More than that, we have tried to show just what the Holy Spirit did say in Heb. 6:4-8 concerning apostates. Surely the argument is convincing; the verdict, final! God knows all things, "from the beginning of the ages"; and knowing that Satan would seek to rob Christians of the joy and peace that come through assurance of salvation, He has written the reassuring passage of Heb. 6:9-20. It is as though He were reiterating for emphasis and for our peace of heart the words set in array before us: "A strong encouragement," a "refuge," "an anchor of the soul," is Christ Jesus, the Lord, even our Hope!

To the "babes in Christ," Hebrew Christians who were being persecuted for their faith, God was saying, "Take courage; fear not!" He was comparing refuge in Christ Jesus to the six cities of refuge of Old Testament times, to which the Jew who accidentally killed another could flee for safety. He was comparing the Christian's security in the Lord Jesus to the ship that is safely anchored in the harbor, safe from every tempest and storm.

Every devout Hebrew knew what the Holy Spirit meant when He referred to the six cities of refuge; for Moses had written repeatedly of the safety of the manslayer who fled there. (See Num. 35:1—36:13.) The wonder of it is this: That manslayer was safe only if he stayed in one of those six cities of refuge until the high priest died; and every believer in Christ, our Refuge, is safe for all eternity because He shall never die! He "is alive for evermore" (Rev. 1:18).

The six cities of refuge were of easy access to every man in Canaan; for three were on the east of Jordan; three, on the west—in the north, central, and southern part of the land. Even so, we have "access" by faith into the very throne-room of heaven, because our Great High Priest is there to plead our cause. And He "ever liveth to make intercession" for us at the "throne of grace." Eternal security? We could not ask for greater assurance!

The figure of an anchor is also reassuring; and our hope in Christ is called "an anchor of the soul." The ship's anchor is cast without the vessel, even as our security depends not upon our own efforts, but upon what Christ has done for us. The word "forerunner," we are told, is a nautical term, and pictures a custom with which the early Hebrew Christians were familiar. The Greek harbors were often cut off from the sea by sandbars, over which the larger ships dared not pass till the full tide came in. Therefore, a lighter vessel, a "forerunner," took the anchor and dropped it in the harbor. From that moment the ship was safe from the storm, although it had to wait for the tide, before it could enter the harbor. Now the analogy is clearly explained in the two closing verses of chapter six. Christ is our "forerunner." Heaven is our harbor, into which He has gone, "within the veil," there to continue His Great High Priestly work for us, begun at Calvary. The Hebrew Christians understood what the "veil" meant; it referred to the veil of the temple in Jerusalem, which God rent in twain when Christ died, forever opening "the way into the holiest of all" by the shed blood of the only Saviour. Hitherto, only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies just one day in the year, not without the blood of the animal sacrifice. The Holy of Holies was a type of heaven, into which Christ Jesus, our "forerunner," has gone with His own precious blood as the full atonement for our souls.

Now the entrance of the small vessel into the harbor, the forerunner carrying the ship's anchor, was the pledge that the ship would safely enter the harbor when the tide was full. And because Christ, our "forerunner," has entered heaven itself, having torn asunder everything that separates the redeemed sinner from the very presence of God, He Himself is the Pledge that we, too, shall one day enter the harbor of our souls and the very presence of God, in the New Jerusalem. No wonder Paul wrote:

"We ... have a strong encouragement, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us: which we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope sure and steadfast and entering into that which is within the veil; whither as a forerunner Jesus entered for us, having become a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek."
Christ is our Anchor, out of our physical sight now, because He has gone on into the harbor before us. And even as the anchor links the ship with the place of safety, likewise our Lord has linked us with Himself; and our entrance into His presence depends upon His finished work alone not upon our feelings, not upon our poor, paltry works; but upon our faith in His redemption, accomplished on the cross for us.

It is the ministry of our Great High Priest which guarantees our entrance into heaven itself. And with the reference to the Melchizedek priesthood, the inspired apostle is brought back to his point of departure from his main theme, in Heb. 5:11. Our next lesson will be the study of chapter seven, continuing the message about Melchizedek, a type of Christ.

This has been a long parenthesis, recorded in Heb. 5:11—6:20; but what treasures are unfolded in these verses! May the Holy Spirit help us to learn well the lesson, addressed to us today, as well as the early Hebrew Christians—that we may “press on” from the condition of “babes in Christ” to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,” knowing that in Him we are eternally secure. This we shall do as we become occupied more and more with our Great High Priest Himself, seeking to warn men against the danger of deliberate apostasy, trusting our own eternal security to Him who is our Refuge, our Hope, our Anchor, our Forerunner. It is honoring to Him that we trust His Word of truth, confirmed by His oath, concerning the promised blessing that is offered to all who will believe that God the Father “so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).