

THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

Being partaker of Christ A few notes on Chapters 3 ¹

“God having provided something better for us..” Hebrews

11:40 INTRODUCTION

Overall theme

For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end Hebrews 3:14 (NKJV)

Context from Chapter 2

We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. Hebrews 2:1 (NIV)

Do not drift away: this is so easy to do, being entrapped into the backwash of the world, a boat without an oar. The solution is to remain in Him – “continue in My word”

The nature of the discourse

In Chapter 3 the author is showing the superiority of Christ by comparison with Moses whom the Jews hold to be the greatest.

He is leading the readers, who are Jews, down a path of realization that there is a new law (the Law of Christ) which is based on a heavenly calling: this requires a heart of belief in Christ Jesus.

Noting Chapter 2:17 *He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest*. This the author carries forward into chapter 3.

Overall, the author has dealt with the glory of the person of Christ, now this chapter begins a new division setting out the attributes of His services as our Great High Priest under the following headings.

1. The House of God
2. The necessity of the High priest in the wilderness journey
3. The rest to which the wilderness journey leads.

¹ Forms notes for two sermons

4. The grace of God that preserves us in the wilderness

The chapter warns and exhorts us: verse 12: *Beware [take care], brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart.* The chapter is full of contrasts, pitting the real against the shallow.

(1) Heavenly calling versus the earthly nature of the Jewish calling – a new departure.

(2) Moses who was faithful over a house versus God who builds and owns the house.

(3 &4) House of Israel versus the House of the saints of God.

(5) Faithfulness versus unbelief (also v12).

(5) Servant versus the Son of God.

(6) Rejoicing in the hope versus no hope of those in the wilderness (death) (also v11).

(8) Rebellion versus obedience which is faithfulness (also v15)

(11) Rest versus no rest.

Divisions

1. Consider the heavenly calling of Christ.

2. Compare Moses, with Christ (there are 7 comparisons)²

- a. Moses an apostle vs Christ the Apostle
- b. Moses a member of a house, God the Builder
- c. Moses, of one house, Jesus the creator (builder) of all things
- d. Moses a man, Jesus is God
- e. Moses a Servant, Christ, the Son
- f. Moses, a testimony of things to come, Jesus, the fulfilment of and substance of those things
- g. Moses a servant in the house of Jehovah, Christ, the Son over his own Home

3. Moses was faithful.

4. Membership of the house of God is evidenced by holding fast the confidence of Christ

² AW Pink *An exposition of Hebrews*, Baker Book House.

PART 1

By Verse³

(1) "Therefore": connects to the previous - see 2:17

Note the use of the term "holy brethren" which is defined as being those who are partakers of the heavenly calling.

The word "calling" is used by Paul only, save Peter in 2 Peter 1:10.

The epistle uses "heavenly" a number of times e.g. 6:4, 8:5, 9:23, 11:16, 12:22.

"Consider" can be taken from 11 Greek words. The same is used by Jesus in "*Consider the ravens, consider the lilies*" (Luke 12:24 & 27). It means to "behold" and is rendered this way in some translations.

- We are to consider the superiority of Christ over Moses.

We need to consider, ponder, take in, behold – which means take time to ponder the position of Christ Jesus as our Apostle and High Priest. Note that he is "the" Apostle.

- Both appointed (Note verse 2 – *Him who appointed Him*)
- He being sent by the Father: "*As My Father has sent Me, so send I you*" John 20:21.
- Both are representative officers, acting on behalf of some other.
- He was the first apostle, the other 12 were appointed by Him.
- Apostolic appointment refers to the prophetic office of Christ.

(Noting Moses was never called an apostle or high priest, yet acted in this role).

"Our confession": Jesus whom we profess.

Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 1 Timothy 6:12 (NKJV)

Christians have a wonderful confession to make – and need to make given our life in Christ Jesus.

³ See Also D Guthrie, *Hebrews*, Intervarsity Press, or H Smith *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The Publisher, Edinburgh.

(2) Consider

“Consider” is to direct the mind carefully toward him – can be rendered “behold”. This is the same word (compound verb) Jesus uses:

And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? (Matthew 7:11).

Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls? (Luke 12:24)

(2) Now the contrast:

“who was faithful”

The chapter focuses in on the difference between faithfulness and un-faithfulness and its root cause – a hardened heart (v 8) causing unbelief. This is taken up again in Chapter 11, where it is emphatically stated that it is impossible to please God without faith.

Just as Moses was faithful to the house of Israel – and all Jews would agree with this – so Christ was faithful to the one who appointed Him (God).

(3,4,5) Two houses

The idea here points to the people of God that form the house of God, put together by God.

The owner of a house has the title-deed and is in full assurance of its possession, whilst the servant can never be in this position.

The idea of the title-deed is brought out by showing the contrast between Moses and God in terms of who built the house. The builder (Jesus), is also the owner, has more honour (v. 3). Moses was merely a member of Israel not the founder, thus a tenant. Moses did not make men children of God, Christ does this.

Note the He in (v. 3) is God shown in (v. 4).

(5. 6) Servant and Son

Moses, whilst faithful to the house was not the builder: he was the servant, although in this case as *therapōn*, a word rarely used, meaning personal services freely rendered (compared with *doulos* which implies the servitude attribute of the position).

But Christ was the Son, which is superior to a mere servant. Further it was “His own house”.

(6) Leadership

Moses actually failed to lead the children of Israel into the promised land, which will be highlighted next. But in Christ we can have the confidence that there is a “firm end”. That is, we

have confidence that at the end of our life we will see the promised land – heaven, making Christ the Apostle and High Priest superior in leadership qualities.

The passages show the glory and honour the Son has, epitomised in:

*“Blessing and honour and glory and power
Be to Him who sits on the throne,
And to the Lamb, forever and ever!” (Revelation 5:13)*

(6) House

The house we are in is not of an earthly nature. A relationship by natural birth does not place us into this house, it is only by the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit: are we reborn into the the house of God.

(6) Evidence of being of the house of Christ

Now the bottom line is spelt out. The author writes to “holy brethren:” meaning they are of the house whom Christ is over, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.

The hope here is made known by the Gospel:

if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister. Colossians 1:23 (NKJV)

And is of course laid up for the saint in heaven (Col 1:5).

We need to hold fast and not let go (image of a boat tied to a warf), else we will drift away, be ensnared by the world or false doctrine. We need to hear God’s voice and hearken unto it.

“Now therefore, listen to me, my children, For blessed are those who keep my ways. Proverbs 8:32 (NKJV)

Application

1. Christ is counted more worthy of glory than any man that ever lived, including Moses.
2. The passage begs the question: which house are we: one that will withstand or one that will tumble. The house that will enter the eternal rest, or one which will be cast into outer darkness.
3. Do we hold fast (v. 6) for if we don’t we will drift.
4. Do we hold fast (v. 6) for if we don’t doubt will come, unbelief and a hardened heart.
5. The proof of belonging to the house of Christ is that we remain steadfast to Him

For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end Hebrews 3:14 (NKJV)

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. John 8:31 (NKJV)

PART 2

By Verse

(7) The failure of the house of Israel, its reason and its consequence.

The author turns to the consequence of Moses leading the people of Israel. Their failure is spelt out in Psalm 95 which is quoted here.

The failure was not reaching their place of rest, the Promised Land, but the need to spend 40 years in the wilderness so that all had died who rebelled – see Numbers 13 and 14, the consequence of sin.

(8) Hardened heart in the rebellion

The word “harden” or “hardened” is used 48 times in Scripture, first used in Exodus referring to Pharaoh’s heart.

Happy is the man who is always reverent [fearth – KJV], But he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity. Proverbs 28:14 (NKJV)

In this case it refers to the rebellion of the Children of Israel that led them to spend 40 years in the wilderness (Num 14:11, 22, 23; Deut 9:22-24)

It is the hardened heart in rebellion that sends us diametrically to God. The one who is hardened:

- Is blind to the ways of the Lord – see Exodus 4-14).
- Follows the ways of the wicked (Proverbs 21:29)
- Will fall into mischief (Proverbs 28:14)
- Will be suddenly destroyed (Proverbs 29:1) – this fits into Hebrews 3:6, for the man of God is waiting for the end – he knows not when it will come, but it will not descend like a thief in the night – a Christian watches and waits (See Micah 7:7).

Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. Proverbs 8:34 (KJV)

- Is full of pride (Daniel 5:20)

- Is blind to the miracle of Christ (Mark 6:52) – the gospel is of no effect to a heartened heart – the Holy Spirit needs to work on it.
- Is not compassionate, loving or kind-hearted (Deuteronomy 15:7)

We find that the deceitfulness of sin causes the hardening of the heart – Hebrews 3:13.

In Genesis we see that it was doubt, sowed by a question – where doubt is a lack of faith in God – and which led Eve to submit to Satan’s temptation.

(10) The issue of hardening arises in the heart, as Jeremiah 17:9 states

“The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?”

The hardening of the heart is the principal cause of our rebellion. If our drifting away, which is warned against in Chapter 2, is due to our lack of reliance in Scripture – our life manual – it is our hardened heart that prevents us partaking in the precious words of Scripture and its resulting blessedness.

We can all read, but do we actually apply the words to our life.

The hardening of our hearts is a deliberate, meditated action: We have a choice – hardening of our hearts and be blind to the gospel or open our hearts – as David writes (Hebrews 4:7) *To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.*

(11) Unbelief

The consequence of unbelief is that you will not enter in the God’s rest, but will be cast into eternal darkness.

The message of unbelief if carried throughout this epistle – and in Chapter 11 emphatically linked to pleasing God – “it is impossible to please God without faith”.

(11) Rest

Rest is an absence of toil – caused by the curse of the garden. It is not a rest from sin but rest from labour because the work is complete.

The position of rest is raised here and 10 other times in Hebrews, with chapter 4 clearly defining what this means.

We indeed participate in the Lord’s Supper in joyous anticipation knowing Christ is coming again to take us into His rest.

The Children of Israel had no rest in the wilderness – sin prevents resting – but there is an eternal rest which sin will not mar.

Canaan was an earthly rest, in some senses, and only depicts the heavenly rest, promised to believers as a shadow in poor light.

For the people of God there remains a rest (Hebrews 4:9) and on the other hand hell gives no rest:

And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name." Revelation 14:11 (NKJV)

(12) Beware – take heed

We have a warning. Scripture is full of warnings of the consequence of not “holding fast”, to fall into unbelief, to doubt. We are to take heed, lest the evil heart of unbelief turn us away from the living God. If we fall away we bear no fruit and become useless for God' work

We need abide in Him: we need to be regularly reminded of these warnings. Therefore, read the Bible daily, commune with the one that is an everlasting fount of truth.

In turning away from God we once again put our trust and hope in dead forms: our selves, or worldly philosophies.

(13) Exhort

To ensure we, the household of God, do not fall into the trap of the unbelieving heart we are to exhort each other

(14-19) Companions of Christ

Believers are companions of Christ. We profess Christ, we therefore are ambassadors of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Our assurance (of the rest) is not based on what we can do, or have done, but on the confidence we have in Christ. We are exhorted to hold fast to the efficacy of His work. Ours can but die in the wilderness.

(16-19) Five searching questions (Note the methodology – it is highly instructive in the form of exegesis)

The second and fourth questions answer the rhetorical first and third.

1. *For who, having heard, rebelled?* – All of the children of Israel save Caleb and Joshua, giving the extent to which the rebellion was. Only a remnant will enter the final rest.

Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? A rhetorical question: the revolt was total.

2. *Now with whom was He angry forty years?* Those that rebelled – highlights again the extent of the rebellion – it was not a transient event.

Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness?

This is the final result of sinners – death.

And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? Those that rebelled – that is, those that rebelled are but sinners – hence it was disobedience that leads to death.

Application

1. To prevent a Christian from hardening his or her heart he or she must be in constant communion with God. The things of this world – its values and its deceitfulness can so easily entrap the unwary.
2. There will be difficulties, hurdles, objects that look insurmountable, situations that we would prefer not to enter, yet, unless we go will not grow – only wither away. Resistance builds strength.
3. A mark of a Christian is Godliness – which is epitomised by obedience towards God.

But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. 1 Timothy 6:11 (NKJV)

4. A mark of a Christian is his or her faith.

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Hebrews 11:6 (NKJV)

5. A mark of a Christian is obedience to the Word of God.

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. John 8:31 (NKJV).

6. A Christian looks forward to the coming rest for there is a rest for the people of God, something worthwhile to be joyous about. We need to patiently watch and wait for His return.

“There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.”- 2 Timothy 4:8

