

A Feast Message From Hebrews

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Revelation 11:1-2 And there was given me a reed like unto a rod; and the angel stood, saying, "Rise, and measure the temple of God and the altar, and them that worship therein. But the court which is outside the temple, leave out, and measure it not, for it is given unto the Gentiles; and the Holy City shall they tread under foot for forty and two months.

It is my speculation that we are in a period of time in which God is judging the church, not completely and totally. Our eternal salvation is not necessarily on the line here, but we have been separated pretty much from the world. We are under the gun, as it were, to see whether or not we are applying the things that we have learned in the past, whether our knowledge is increasing right now in the present, and we have set our course for the future.

God is the source of all power. He not only creates and rules but He is the source of everybody else's power as well. In His purpose and plan He calls. He grants repentance. He forgives us. He justifies us. He provides us with the His spirit of power; He sanctifies us, gives us gifts and then sends us on our way to make choices in the theater of life.

This seems like such a neatly tied package. Everything seems to be secure, steady, uneventful, and ready for the pilgrimage to the Kingdom of God. It leads people who have not the understanding and the belief, to adopt such false notions as the eternal security doctrine. Once saved always saved, and if those doctrines are true then answer this question, why are there so many warnings in the Bible, to make your course right on target.

There is an interesting warning in Luke 9: 23-26 and with that you ought to know it is coming from Christ.

Luke 9:23-26 And He said to them all, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever will lose his life for My sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged if he gain the whole world, and lose himself and be cast away? [It does not sound like once saved always saved, does it?] For whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed when He shall come in His own glory and in His Father's and in the holy angels'.

This is a typical warning. There are many, many more. The warnings begin early in the book of

Genesis, when Adam and Eve are booted out of the Garden. Warnings continue all the way through the Old Testament with God's almost constant displeasure with Israel's conduct. Then Jesus warns us to make sure that we count the cost. The apostles make many appeals for us to get with it because time is closing in on us.

In the church experiences of virtually every one of us adults in this room are memories of family and friends who were once part of the Worldwide Church of God. We witnessed the rapid growth of that organization in membership as people made professions of faith in the doctrines. They became part of the body of Christ, but who have since, at least spiritually, left for other pastures, even protestant and catholic ones. Some people have simply dropped out of sight.

The recording of Israel's journey through the wilderness provides a sobering witness of the kinds of trials that threaten the Christian's journey. Are you aware that the Bible provides us with a fairly clear pattern of how it is that people fall away? People fall away despite God's awesome power (that can be drawn upon by anyone of us), despite the fact that God's patience and mercy seem to be fairly inexhaustible and He sincerely urgently wants all of us to make it. There is, just like the song in the "Phantom of the Opera," there is a point of no return. The Bible actually gives a very clear picture of how this drifting away occurs.

Luke 9:57-62 [First a little background] And it came to pass that, as they went along the way, a certain man said unto Him, "Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest." [Is that not what we tied ourselves to when we were baptized?] And Jesus said unto him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath nowhere to lay His head." [Are we willing to follow Him under a circumstance like that?] And He said unto another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father." Jesus said unto him, "Let the dead bury their dead, but go thou and preach the Kingdom of God." And another also said, "Lord, I will follow Thee, but let me first go bid those farewell who are at home at my house." [These three individuals never left the starting block. We have gone a great deal farther than that, but the principles that are used there to illustrate that there is the opportunity to turn back, are quite clear. Verse 62 is the one I am aiming for.] And Jesus said unto him, "No man, having put his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God."

Here is step number one on a program of how people leave the church. There are clear stages that are shown in the Bible and if you happen to be in any one of them, your eternal life is more or less in danger depending upon which stage it is you happen to be in.

Here in stage one: Example is Lot's wife looking back. When she looked back toward Sodom, she did so with some degree of longing for what she had just left. The loss of her life was literally on the line! God was going to destroy that place and her life was literally on the line. Here she was giving higher priority to life's lesser matters than the great matter of preserving her life.

That ought to lead us to understand that the matter of preserving our life is always going to be in the future and the present at exactly the same time. It is in the present that we are going to make decisions, but it is in the future that is going to show the trajectory of how resolved we were whenever we made a decision. When she looked back, she revealed that her heart was still there in Sodom, in the world, and this action gives indications of regret. There is the key, "I wonder if I really did the right thing in what I did." There is a tinge of sorrow, "I was having such a good time there. Everything just seemed to be just honky dory and now here I am running, my life is on the line. Things are getting a little bit desperate," but she nonetheless looked back.

Success in God's way requires following an awesome vision to the glory ahead. Abraham is a primary example. He looked for a city whose builder and maker was God. God's calling becomes our vocation and it requires concentrated attention going forward. A vocation is ones regular occupation. In other words, we have become involved in something that touches on our life every day. It is not something here and there. It is all the time. This is why David describes the Christian as being one in which all his thoughts are filtered through God.

Is there anytime when you are not thinking? We think an awful lot. Maybe this can be illustrated in this way: it is somewhat similar to a person talking on the cell phone while driving their car. They are frequently (if you have watched them) all over the road, swerving this way and that. Their attention is at least split between conflicting priorities. "Oh, the phone is so immediate and I have got to get this out of me or have got to hear this." In the mean time they are making adjustments all over the place. That person you see in the automobile is setting himself up for trouble and all too frequently an accident occurs.

A person cannot make a Beeline for the Kingdom of God with attention diverted elsewhere. We are not to be almost, but altogether, followers of Jesus Christ the Son of God. The stakes are that high because the fulfilling of the promises to Abraham is so great, nothing can compare to it.

Something as dramatic as happened to Lot's wife will not happen often. So a person slides or drifts from the look back into the second step with hardly a ripple, if he is not careful. Now remember point number one was "the person looks back."

Hebrews 10:38 Now the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him."

You see the longing is followed by a gradually growing belief that God's requirements are too exactly and difficult. You can be pretty sure that Lot's wife was thinking, "Here I am out here, maybe in my bare feet or maybe in my high heels, and I have to run for my life. That is too much to ask for me." You see God's standards are too high. We can never reach that. Maybe we might not ever reach the pinnacle of God's standards. That is not the issue—the issue is to grow toward those standards.

But if we think even as we are beginning, that they are too exacting and difficult, we will begin to draw back. And so what happens? Now the person is not only looking back but also drawing back, with that there are feelings of self-pity and self-justification rising within him. It is true

that we must be prepared to put God first in all things. There are going to be times when it will be exceedingly difficult if the giving up of something involves someone or something deeply loved or highly valued. It can happen, but again, it is not very often that something like that does happen.

How many times did even the great Abraham have to sacrifice his son? You see, one time over a period of how many years that God was working with him was something of that degree of intensity put on him. You know very well that God did not put that on him until He was sure—absolutely sure, that Abraham could pass it. So occasions where it is very difficult are very rare.

It has been said, "He who is unwilling to sacrifice everything for the cause of God is really unwilling to sacrifice nothing." Drawing back happens despite God's promise that every trial is measured to the specifications needed by the individual Christian. The word picture in this verse, Hebrews 10:38, is of a person shrinking back from following through on the demands of faith. It pictures a person who is looking, shrinking back and looking around for an easy way out of something distasteful that he wishes not to face.

The appeal of the world seems to be the broad and easier way. It probably is for a while. That apparently easier way draws the person ever further from salvation. He grows steadily weaker as he gradually loses contact with God. The apostatizer thus permits himself to be drawn back.

Step three is that the person actually turns away. He looks back. He begins to be drawn back and now he actually is turning, taking the first really solid steps away from Christ. Now in John, interesting verse number here, chapter 6, verse 66. Sometimes I wonder if God does that.

John 6:66-68 From that time many of His disciples went back and walked no more with Him. [They went, they turned and left.] Then Jesus said unto the twelve, "Will ye also go away?" Then Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

This is a poignant scene as Jesus watches people who may have been friends leave His group. They left because they could not comprehend what it was He was teaching. Now there is no doubt that He was speaking of things of an order far higher than they were accustomed to hearing. Have there not been times in your life, whether it was in school, on the job, in a relationship when you just could not get it? You could not understand, you could not grasp what was going on but because you patiently stuck it out, you eventually did get it.

There are going to be times in your Christian life when you hear a sermon that goes over your head. Or you will hear something or maybe the minister did make a mistake; what are you going to do? I have had people leave the Church of the Great God over one thing that I said in a message. I have pretty sound reason to believe that they probably are not converted anyway, but it happens. People will turn because they do not understand something about Christian life, something about a group, something about a doctrine.

Well, these people here rather than face up to the issues as Peter did and come up with a bit of

truth that would buck him up; their faith could not stand the strain. Their loyalty was shattered and they apparently gave up, looking for something else that would satisfy them at least momentarily.

Even though a person has turned away like this, it is still not too late, but the appeal of the world has by this time become almost overpowering and the spiritual decline has reached the tipping point. The person is in very serious trouble. It can still be repaired, but it would be much more difficult than it would have been when they just looked back. It is a little more difficult when they began to be drawn back, now it is exceedingly difficult for them to turn around.

Now the fourth step is reached; and back in the Old Testament in Isaiah and we will begin in 28: 9. It would be good to look at this in its entire context of what was going on here, but this will be enough to show you that the point of no return has been reached.

Isaiah 28:9-13 "Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine? [Teaching] Them that are weaned from the milk and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, [here is where patience comes in] precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little and there a little." [Our understanding our grasping of things is slowly built if we have enough patience and endurance to hang in there.] For with stammering lips and another tongue will He speak to this people, to whom He said, "This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest," and, "This is the refreshing" —yet they would not hear. But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little and there a little, that they might go, backward and be broken and snared and taken.

You can see that in the third step God was appealing to them, reiterating things that they should have known and understood. In the larger context here, this is addressed to Judah, to the entire nation and especially to the leadership. So God taught them again as it were, "Line up on line, precept upon precept." Finally they would not hear, even though He was chastening them, appealing to them. This was like it was the straw that broke the camel's back and they went into captivity. The apostate here has reached the point of no return. For us in this day and age, in the church era, they have earned for themselves the lake of fire.

I hope that none of us have regressed this far. We all have periods of decline during which we need a plan of attack that is going to get us going again. God has one, but I warn you that it requires a great deal of humble effort and energy being expended. Most of us have a verse, a chapter or even an entire book that somehow resonates with particular strength with us. It inspires us; it provides us with understanding to a high degree, a higher degree than other parts of the Bible. For me it is the book of Hebrews, I do not understand why, but for some reason it keeps drawing me back to it. Especially at times that I need to be bucked up it motivates me, it uplifts me. I begin to realize, "Hey, I'm wrong, I need to get back on the stick once again."

I know that its pages and what it says on those pages that I am not alone. I have even read in protestant commentaries that many of the authors of those commentaries believe that it is on the very highest level in the entire Bible in terms of the things that are written within it. The concepts that are there are so valuable to Christian life. A few even go so far as to say, that if taken only on its merits of the quality of its literary level, it is among the five greatest writings in the entire history of mankind.

I am not fit to judge such things, but I do appreciate its instruction as to what we have been called to. The book of Hebrews assesses to the most vivid and grandest way, the value, the importance of what we have been given, and it makes clear in broad powerful strokes what we must do about it.

The theme in the book of Hebrews is actually quite simple. It presents to its readers, the superiority of Jesus Christ and the message that He brought to mankind. It presents the gospel of the Kingdom of God containing the New Covenant to anything, any message, any person, and any way of life ever given to mankind, even greater than what was given in the Old Testament. Nothing else compares. That is its message.

The outline is actually quite simple, too. Just a brief overview: the first two chapters are mostly introductory but even the language here is soaring and majestic in what it proposes. It sets the stage by showing Christ, as God's Son superior to angels and Old Testament prophets. It shows He is seated at the right hand of God and He upholds everything in the universe by the Word of His power.

The second chapter touches on our glory to some extent, where they quote David, "what is man that you are mindful of him" We begin to see a bit of what we have been called to, that we are called to be greater than angels, that we are going to be directly under God in the Kingdom of God.

In chapter three, Jesus Christ is declared superior to the great figure Moses. Yet in that chapter by way of contrast, Paul urges us to remember the unfaithfulness of Israel that occurred while the great Moses was their leader.

In chapter four, Christ is superior to Joshua, the leader who brought Israel into the Promised Land; but despite Joshua's personal greatness, Israel failed to attain to the rest of God. We are shown here that each man in one sense bears his own load. That load is shared with Christ, as we later find out. Each person has to bear his own load, walk his own path along with everybody else who is a part of the church.

Chapter five begins the single largest block of chapters devoted to one subject. It shows why the high priesthood of Jesus Christ is superior to the Aaronic and Levitical administrations. This subject is of such importance to us that it occupies almost six chapters and continues up to Hebrews 10:18. Hebrews 10:19 begins the book's second longest section.

Hebrews arguably contains the most powerful and urgent exhortations in the Bible. Why? It is because so much is on the line for Christians! There is so much that can be lost if one is unwilling to pay the price.

Hebrews presents these things through careful, thoughtful reasoning. It contains threats but

also contains with it the concept that help is available. The book is devoted to the practical applications of this tremendously compact bundle of historical comparisons—Israel and us. It contains very pointed doctrinal instruction and inspiration. It is beginning in chapter 10 that we are going to spend the remaining time.

The time setting of the book appears to be somewhere close to sixty-three to sixty-five A.D. and thus it is just five or so years from the Roman invasion of Jerusalem under Titus, and the destruction of the temple. That destruction pretty much brought to an end the Jewish nation and way of life in Palestine.

Think about this, the Jewish people began as a separate nation, apart from Israel during the reign of Rehoboam, Solomon's son. Solomon reigned somewhere around one thousand B.C. to about nine hundred-sixty or so B.C. then came Rehoboam's reign. Roughly from nine hundred B.C. to sixty-three or sixty-five A.D., a period of over nine hundred years was coming to an end. Israel had already gone into captivity. With Israel and Judah together, we are talking about fifteen hundred years of history was coming to an end about five years after this book was written. This was serious stuff. These people were facing at a time of the end! Very similar to what we are facing, whether we are five years or ten years away, I do not know. The book is here and it is intended, it is aimed at people who are facing a time of an end, an end of an age.

The first permanent colony in what is now the United States of America did not even happen until 1607 at Jamestown, Virginia. For four hundred years the Anglo Saxon people have mainly been in this homeland of ours. This period of time was almost four times longer than that. These people had a great deal of history behind them. Here was the apostle telling them, warning them that "time is running out and you better get with it," because that is what this book is about—time is running out, you had better get with it.

The form of writing is doctrinal, frequently interspersed with some brief and vivid exhortations. Now this form of writing was prompted by the fact that the Hebrew people written to had drifted into a lackadaisical way of life. They had grown weary from resisting the constant pressures of the deteriorating world around them. Their perseverance was breaking down and they were deteriorating spiritually right along with the world.

This is my concern, because it is very easy to drift along with the attitudes and the ways of the world. Like the Hebrews in Paul's day, we too have the responsibility to choose which way we shall go. Are we going to look back now that times are getting tougher? Are we going to shrink back from living by faith? Are we going to turn back? Are we going to fall back?

Well, we will determine what we will do. It will be a day-to-day process. That is what life is; it goes from day to day to day to day to day. As I said at the beginning, God gives us all of these things and then He sets us on the path and says, "Hey I want you to make choices about what you are going to do with your life. I have given you the power. I gave you life in the first place. I keep you breathing. I give you water and I provide food for you. I have called you into my church. I give you spiritual knowledge. I am giving you gifts that you can use. I give you understanding. I give you wisdom and I give you power to overcome."

We are not without resources, but we still have to make the choices. The person who is living in the day, handling things as they come to them (always with his eye on the future), has the

greatest chance of making the right choice.

This epistle is organized like almost all of Paul's other epistles, with the exception in most cases of the Pastoral Epistles. The first part of his books laid a doctrinal foundation with illustrations almost invariably drawn from the Old Testament. Then after he gets done with the doctrinal part of it, he gives other practical doctrine. He gives practical examples of how to apply the teaching that was in the first part of the book. It compares favorably with the book of Romans. The first eleven chapters of Romans are doctrinal teaching, much of it very basic teaching. Then beginning in chapter 12:1, when he tell us we have to be living sacrifices, from there to the end of the book when he starts saying, "Say hello to this person, say hello to that person." It is practical application in one verse after the other.

The same is true with the book of Ephesians. The first three chapters are doctrinal teachings and then chapters four through six contain practical doctrinal teaching. "This is how you put into practice what I gave you in the first three chapters," Paul is saying.

For those of us living now, in one sense we are at a disadvantage with some of the material that is in the book of Hebrews. We lack a familiarity with and a reverential feeling for the temple and the tabernacle that the Israelites had. We have an advantage over them though and that is that we can understand to a greater degree the spiritual truths contained within those buildings' symbolism. Now for our purposes today, we are going to begin in Hebrews 9:1-9, just to lay a little bit of a foundation.

Hebrews 9:1-9 Then verily, the first covenant also had ordinances of divine service and a worldly sanctuary. For there was a tabernacle made, the first, wherein was the candlestick and the table and the showbread, which is called the sanctuary. And after the second veil was the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, which had the golden censer, and the Ark of the Covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; and over it were the cherubim's of glory shadowing the mercy seat, of which we cannot now speak particularly. Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service to God. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the errors of the people; the Holy Spirit by this signifying that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest, so long as the first tabernacle was yet standing. It was a figure [a shadow] for the time then present in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, which could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience.

Hebrews 10:1 For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come and not the very image of those things, can never, with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually, make those who come unto it perfect.

For our purposes it might be helpful to understand that both the tabernacle and temple, though they were places of worship, are also used in the sense of being a house. It was a special house because it was held to be God's house as well as the very highest place of worship. It had two rooms separated by a heavy veil or a drape. Each room contained furniture, important to Israel's proper understanding, and therefore proper worship. Every aspect of these two buildings is a pattern, a model for our understanding and proper worship of God under the new covenant.

Each day the officiating priests were permitted to perform their duties on its exterior and in the first room but only the high priest was permitted in to the second room called the Holy of Holies. The high priest was permitted into that second room, only one time a year on the Day of Atonement. That room symbolized God's personal room and the place from which He judged mankind. It was not only a personal room; it was also a courtroom as well. The drape separating the first room from the second room, the Holy of Holies is important.

In chapter 10, Paul in one way signals that he is coming to a transition in his writing because he states a significant doctrinal reality regarding a Christians spiritual standing he had only once briefly mentioned before in the entire epistle. In fact he mentions this standing twice within six verses and three times in chapter 10 alone.

Hebrews 10:9-18 Then said He, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God," He taketh away the first, that He may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering time and again the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from henceforth expecting until His enemies be made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever them that are sanctified. Of this the Holy Spirit also is a witness to us; for after he had said before, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.

What did Christ do there that is of exceeding importance to us? He reminded them and us twice, once in verse 10, "by the which will," meaning the New Testament—the new covenant—we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all!

Do you see that? Sanctification is only given once! In verse 14, "for by one offering He has perfected forever them that are sanctified." The only other place that this was ever mentioned was in chapter 2 where we are called again "the sanctified." It is for those who are sanctified that this book is written—and that is us. He reinforces these declarations here in chapter 10: 10, 14 by reminding them and us in verse 16. The purpose for the sanctification is that we can have

our hearts inscribed with God's laws!

That statement contains a great number of other truths that are not mentioned right here, but they are mentioned in other parts of the Bible. I will give you eight of them that are encapsulated, covered up by this single word of being sanctified. We are sanctified so that the legal righteousness of Christ that is given us through justification can become practical righteousness in daily life. What good is head knowledge if it is not used? What good is it to be freed of guilt, to be forgiven if we do not put that to use? It is no good at all. Sanctification is given to us so that legal righteousness comes through Christ's blood. We are justified so that righteousness of Christ can become ours, literally, practically in our conduct and daily life!

The second reason is tied right to that. Without this we will never become conformed to the image of Christ. To become conformed to the image of Christ takes time! It is not something that happens immediately. It takes that whole period of sanctification, which might be, as in the case of somebody like Abraham. God was working with that man as a sanctified man for probably a hundred and twenty-five to a hundred and fifty years!

A third reason: our witness for God takes place during sanctification. Therefore, a third reason is so we can witness for God.

A fourth reason is so that we have the opportunity to fulfill our role in the church, learning to love the brethren is the fourth reason.

The fifth reason: sanctification requires cooperation with God. It is during sanctification that our cooperation and loyalty to God is measured.

The sixth reason: sanctification is that process during which we are living sacrifices.

The seventh reason: it is through sanctification that Christian works come to the fore and we glorify God by our lives.

I probably get as many spears thrown at me and arrows shot at me over this one issue than all the others put together. They think we are trying to earn salvation by cooperating with God in doing the works that He requires. They think we are trying to earn salvation. Far from that!

The eighth reason: it is during sanctification we truly become holy. At justification we become holy to a very limited degree, it is only legal. Holiness is a practical position or operation.

Just in case you have forgotten how important holiness is:

Hebrews 12:14 Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

You want to be in the Kingdom of God? We need to be sanctified and it needs to be practical, day-to-day living.

As Paul is reaching the conclusion of this epistle of Hebrews, he has reminded us how important sanctification is. Once that very important reminder in chapter 10:10, 14 is given, he makes the transition to the next section. In this section the temple and tabernacle patterns become important to our spiritual understanding and practical holiness. Verses 9-18 bridge the gap.

They are the transition from the doctrinal sections to the practical sections. Verses 19-39 contain some of the most powerful exhortations to get up and get going.

If this group that Paul was writing to is not Laodicean as a whole, it is very close to it. Overall he is saying, "Do you not realize the danger you are in? You are justified, you are sanctified. Hey! Wake up and smell the coffee! Do you not realize the game is on? There the players are on the field and there you are sitting here staring off into space distracted by something of minor significance by comparison." He is saying to them in these exhortations, "You have all of this powerful help available through Christ and here you are drifting away. Do you not realize what you are giving up by your slow but steady drift into apostasy?" He had already laid a little foundation all the way back in chapter 2 as to what their problem was. I want you to go back there. I want you to see how early he begins giving them a trigger to their mind as to what is going on and why he has written this letter.

Hebrews 2:1-3 Therefore we [Christians] ought to give even more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. [That is exactly what is happening.] For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord and was confirmed unto us by those who heard Him.

Please understand, these people to whom Paul was writing were not enemies of God. They were not unconverted Israelites that God railed at, you might say, in the Old Covenant. They were not enemies but they were their own worst enemies through their neglect of their responsibilities. Life was just drifting by. They get up in the morning. They did their work. They came home. They went to bed. They got up the next morning. In a sense Paul was saying, "Where is God in your life? Where is your calling in your life? You are just drifting. You are neglectful!"

Do you know what a Laodicean is? This is just one illustration among many. A Laodicean is a person who has his right foot in the church, his left foot is in the world and he is trying to walk both directions at the same time. They are not single minded. It is not that they hate God. They just will not pay attention and they are drifting. They cannot seem to stir up the energy to go in the direction that God wants them to go.

If you got anything out of those four steps that I gave you, I think that you ought to see this and understand how subtle it is and how quietly it takes place. Think about the Israelites leaving Egypt and going to the Promised Land. How did they get there? One step at a time, step by step by step. God brought us to a converted state—to repentance by giving us a calling. We came to that calling and to conversion step by step by step. But the walk does not end there. It keeps on going through sanctification, step by step by step.

People leave the church exactly the same way! It is one inch at a time, losing a little ground. It is almost imperceptible—slide, slide, slide. Instead of taking three steps forward and sliding back

one step, they take one step forward and slide back three. It is so subtle that they are almost unaware. That is why the exhortations in here are so powerful. This is not written to the people who had already left the church. This is written to the people who remained in congregations in which people had already left. The message that was delivered to the apostle Paul was, "Yeah, the congregations are holding together, BUT an awful lot of them seem to have their mind elsewhere. They are sliding away through neglect." Not really being overwhelmed—it is just little by little the frog in the water thing.

In Hebrews 10:19-39, I hope that you get a feel for the strength of the exhortation that is here.

Hebrews 10:19-39 Having therefore boldness, brethren, to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living Way, which He hath consecrated for us through the veil (that is to say, His flesh), and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast to the profession of our faith without wavering (for He is faithful who promised), and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as ye see the Day approaching. [70 A.D. was only five to eight years away.] For if we sin willfully after having received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, [Do you see that? No more forgiveness! The point of no return had been reached.] But a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation, [I said earlier when the person goes backwards they have earned the lake of fire, that is where I got this, fiery indignation.] which shall devour the adversaries. [They have become enemies of God.] He that despised Moses' law died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath accounted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified [there is that word again], an unholy thing, and hath despised the Spirit of grace? [Do you get what the unpardonable sin is? It is to treat the sacrifice of Jesus Christ with scornful disdain. It does not matter what the sin is. What matters is what they are doing to Christ, and God will not put up with that!]

For we know Him that hath said, "Vengeance belongeth unto Me; I will recompense," saith the Lord. And again, "The Lord shall judge His people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But call to remembrance the former days in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions, partly while ye were being made a gazing stock by reproaches and afflictions, and partly while ye became companions of those who were so used. For ye had

compassion on me in my bonds and took joyfully the despoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in Heaven a better and an enduring substance. [Do you know what he is saying there? "How far you have fallen from what you were!"] Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. "For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him." But we are not of those who draw back unto perdition, but of those who believe, to the saving of the soul.

Let us go back to verse 19; because Paul is beginning right here (encapsulated in five or six verses) part of God's solution to this problem. The first part has been to emphasize to the people what Christ was, what He has done and what He now is.

But where does that leave us? Suggestion number one from Paul: (now that you understand what Christ was, what He is right now, what He has done for us) he said, "I want you to be very bold to enter right into God's house. God is not going to meet you at the door. He is not going to meet you at the first room. You are invited to go right into the Holy of Holies. There is nothing hindering your way to have direct access to all the power that exists in the universe. He is kind, He is generous, He is good, He will listen, and He will instruct. He may punish, but you will be forgiven again."

I wonder how many of us are neglectful of following through with that a couple of times a day—at least in the morning and in the evening—as shown by the morning sacrifice and the evening sacrifice that was made at the temple and the tabernacle. How many of us are neglectful to go before God and to spend time with Him, imbibing some of His spiritual power, some of His spirituality. He says, "there is nothing to hinder you from going there because, 'a new and living Way,' [verse 20] which He hath consecrated for us through the veil (that is to say, His flesh)."

You know historically that the veil was rent from top to the bottom. When Christ died, immediately the veil was rent so that access into the temple and tabernacle was available and we are invited in. Now it says, "The veil (that is to say, His flesh)." Paul is reflecting back, that what split it was done while Christ was a man. It happened when He died, but it was the giving up of His life in the flesh that brought about the tearing of the veil, and opened the doorway right on in.

Then in verse 21 he says, "and having a High Priest over the house of God." The implication is that this One who died is now in the house with the Father, as it were. He is there as your advocate, as your representative. He is your lawyer, there to appeal your case before the Father. He can make a far better presentation than we can, by far. We can be received by not just one great God but also two, and one of them is our High Priest.

Verse 22, "let us draw near." Not shrink away, but draw near. "With a true heart in full

assurance of faith." Paul is saying, "Do not be afraid, go there!" "Having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." In reference to the water, just in case you did not know or you forgot, every time the priest went in to that first room, he had to wash his hands and his feet in the laver that was sitting outside.

Paul was saying to you and me, "Look, do not just go to God. Begin working on yourself. Start working on your problems. Start overcoming your sins and faults. Show God that you are putting your sins behind you, your lackadaisicalness. Start by cleaning up your act and going before Him, knowing that He is not going to refuse you!" Then he said, "Let us hold fast to the profession of our faith without wavering (for He is faithful who promised)." This is kind of interesting. Five times before this in the book of Hebrews, Paul said almost exactly the same thing. "Hold fast," he said. "You are sliding away. Hold fast to the things that you believed at the beginning and made your profession of faith. When you were baptized all these things are kind of contained within this."

Verse 24, "Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works." He is talking about relationships within the congregation. He is telling those people, "You need to begin to fellowship with those people in a right heart and a right spirit and be someone who sets an example and lifts others up."

Between verse 22, 23 and 24, Paul used faith, hope and love. He is saying, "Put them to work." Do you understand that because God has given us His spirit, those things are already in us? Those qualities are already there. It is God who gives us faith, God gives us the hope, and God gives us His love by His spirit. They are already there. Paul says, "You have no excuse not to do those things because the powers have already been given to us by God by means of His spirit." The only thing that will keep us from not using them is neglect. Fear might cause neglect as well.

Verse 25, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some is." This is a key to how far the people who had already left the church had gone. Paul is now using them as an example of what not to do. He says, "Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together as a manner of those who had already left." The word "forsaking, forsake" is the key.

Do you remember when Jesus said, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" What was the picture there? Where was God? He was not there. Jesus uttered a truth. God had forsaken Him. Jesus had to face that trial without God strengthening Him, at that time. God had forsaken Him. Now these people here had forsaken the Sabbath. That does not mean that they were missing an occasional Sabbath service. They had turned their back on it and were no longer keeping it. They had forsaken it!

We will carry this one step further. He says, "For if we sin willfully after that having received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins." I have always accepted the explanation that was given to us in the Worldwide Church of God, that a willful sin is a deliberate sin. You know that is true, but I found out that there are a number of protestant commentaries that they said this verse is mistranslated. There is one word that is wrong there and it is the word, "willful." They said it should be translated "willingly." They give some impressive proof of that. But you have to understand the context to understand why these men are saying that.

Paul is showing how far gone these people who had forsaken the Sabbath really were. This is their reasoning. They say that every sin that we do we do willfully, even though there might be ignorance, there might be deception, and there might be weakness involved in it. We determine we are going to sin to any one of those things. It is a willful sin; but a willing sin has this involved within it.

I looked this up in the American Heritage College Dictionary and it helped me to understand that these men are probably right about this. To do something willfully, according to the American Heritage College Dictionary, is to do it purposely and deliberately.

To do something willingly is to be disposed, inclined, or prepared to do it. It means to do something readily, eagerly, compliantly, ungrudgingly, voluntarily, and volitionally. I wonder if you get the point. Those people who had forsaken the Sabbath were so far gone. They did not care!

There was no sense of sin left in them! Their conscience was completely defiled, no sense of guilt! They were so disposed to sin they just did it like they were trained to do it, and they did it eagerly, readily, willingly!

I think you know people who have left the Worldwide Church of God. They might live on your street corner. You see them out there and they do not give any indication that they give a hoot whatsoever. That is pretty far gone.

So if you ever run into somebody who left Worldwide Church of God, you ought to be able to tell whether they are completely gone or not by the attitude that they have toward sin, toward Christ. If somebody tramples underfoot, the son of man, their Savior, they do not care, caring is gone, and they are once again enemies of God. Romans 8: 7 clicked in.

You see this is Paul's concern in writing this epistle, because he knew that people were drifting in that direction and he wanted to give them picturesque illustrations so that they could understand what they needed to do. They needed to make the effort to draw near to God, by drawing upon their understanding of how important Christ is to their life, to be impressed by it and to begin showing their love for Him.

Let me finish with a very familiar set of scriptures in II Peter 1: 5.

II Peter 1:5-10 And besides this, using all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.

Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble

JWR/sf/vls