

The Third Warning (Hebrews 5:11--6:20)

By G. H. Lang

Again the flow of teaching is stayed, by a blockage in the understanding of the readers. This leads to another serious exhortation. Observe:

1. *The Persons warned.* They have spiritual life, for they have spiritual hearing, and spiritual appetite for milk. They are distinctly compared to infants; they have capacity for growth, and they can walk, for they are exhorted to press on. Evidently they are not dead persons, for to such none of these activities is possible.

Moreover, the Writer will shortly term them “beloved,” will commend their work, and the love which they showed toward God’s Name, in that they ministered unto the saints and still minister (6:10), and later he will speak of how they had endured joyfully a “great conflict of suffering,” with “the spoiling of their possessions”; assured, as they were, of a better and abiding possession (10:32—36). It was steadfastness that they now needed. But no one exhorts the dead to be steadfast. These addressed, therefore, had spiritual life, were Christians.

2. *The Need for Warning.* Their hearing was less acute than it had been: “ye have become (*gegonate*) dull of hearing” (5:11). They had been believers long enough to have become teachers of the faith to others; but from not growing and from not teaching they were losing ground. We must teach, or we shall forget what we know.

Ceasing to give, we cease to have;
Such is the law of love. (Trench.)

As their appetite failed the power of digestion weakened. They could not now master advanced lessons or assimilate solid food. Milk was all they could endure, and even this light diet they could not find for themselves but had to be spoon-fed by others. In consequence they were weak in understanding; they found it difficult to distinguish between good and bad food, and were in danger of arrested development, instead of being on the way to become full-grown men. Using less and less their spiritual senses (*aistheteria*, the aesthetic sensibilities) their sensitiveness in things heavenly became impaired. Such torpid natures can take unwholesome food, or even poison, and not know it; they can sustain injuries and be unaware of it. There are to-day believers enough of this type. Their dangers are many and serious; hence the warnings given, the exhortations pressed home.

3. *The Exhortation:* “let us press on.” He has mentioned the rudiments of the beginning of the oracles of God” (5:12); He further speaks of “the word of the beginning of Christ (6:1).

It is obvious that the oracles of God and the word or message concerning Christ had their “beginning” in the Old Testament.¹ Therefore he who would become versed in the oracles of God and their message concerning their chief topic, the Messiah (*tou Christou*), must begin with and sufficiently understand the Old Testament. Failure in this is an initial reason for the infantile condition of so many Christians and indeed, so many preachers and teachers.

On the other hand, to learn only the A.B.C., the multiplication table, or but the rudiments of any subject, is to remain a child in understanding. It is for us to press on unto full growth, to attain to years and stature, to become *men* of God. ‘1 Ins was one of Paul’s last exhortations (2 Tim. 3:14-17). Observe the progress from a *babe* to a *man* of God. It is the message of Gal. 3:15-4:11; children are to grow up and become sons, in the full sense of sonship, grown-up sons, able to understand and to co-operate with their Father; and the danger with these Galatian believers, as these hdre, lay in turning back to the rudimentary things and being contented with them (Gal. 4:9). Thus were the Ephesians also urged to “grow up in all things into Him Who is the head, even Christ” (Eph. 4:11-i6), and so to be no longer children.

The growth of a child does not just happen. It requires at first the diligent care of mother or nurse, feeding, washing, clothing, training it. And when that first stage has been passed, then must the growing child, youth, man himself diligently render to himself these same services, or growth will cease, health fail, decline set in.

The Old Testament oracles give the foundation of knowledge of God and of God-fearing living. The foundation is indispensable and permanent, but its use is that upon it a superstructure can be built, and without the latter it is of small value, is incomplete. The Old Testament foundation is formed of six elements, which form three pairs:

- (1) Repentance from dead works, and
- (2) Faith toward God:
- (3) The teaching concerning washings, and

¹ After the above was written I was glad to find the following in Nairne (*The Epistle of Priesthood*, 334/5), the only one of a dozen commentators read who confirms the application to the Old Testament:

In the last paragraph [5:12) “the rudiments of the beginnings of God’s oracles” would most naturally mean the simplest and most obvious instruction that could be drawn from the Old Testament. Here [6:1] “the argument of the beginning, or first doctrine of the Christ” would be that doctrine of Christ in tile Old Testament which even to a Jew meant much, though a Christian learnt at once to fill it with a new significance. The doctrine of washings, of imposition of hands, of resurrection and of eternal judgment, could all be found in those books of the Old Testament in Greek which the author habitually used.

- (4) Laying on of hands:
- (5) Resurrection of the dead, and
- (6) Eternal judgment.

(1, 2.) The Old Testament entire may be summarized as a continuous call to men to repent of sin and set their trust in God. Of this repentance and faith the offering of a sacrificial victim was an expression, being an acknowledgment by the sinner that he deserved to die, yet trusted in the mercy of God.

(3, 4.) But God sought, yea demanded, that to this judicial transaction there be added actual visible purity, together with a renewal of the nature and its powers by the imparting of gifts from Himself. The former was symbolized by the frequent washings ordained under the law, the latter accompanied the laying on of the hands of the priest.

It is clear that the distinctively Christian baptism cannot be here meant by the plural “washings,” nor the laying on of hands as in New Testament times; for these are later than the Old Testament. Yet do these teach the same lessons as those older ordinances, namely, personal purity and enduement from on high.

They who lay too heavy a stress on these God-appointed externals, should observe that not the washings and the laying on of hands themselves were part of the foundation. The passage says that it was *the teaching* connected with these that was of the foundation. This did not warrant non-observance of the external rites, nor to-day of the Christian rites; but it does forbid attaching virtue to the mere outward observance without the spiritual conditions they taught being personally realized.

(5, 6.) The Old Testament did not speak much of the resurrection or eternal judgment. Yet must it not be inferred that these solemn prospects were little known in early times. It would be of interest and profit if some competent scholar would gather together the ancient pagan myths which embody these expectations, however confused and corrupted be their form. It would show that the primary revelation by God included this knowledge and placed the race under responsibility to walk as those who knew that death does not end all, but is followed by resurrection and judgment. And the Old Testament sufficiently emphasizes this.

A few centuries after the Flood Abraham is found expecting confidently the raising of Isaac to life “accounting that God is able to raise up even from the dead” (Heb. 11:17-19; Gen. 22:5, “we [himself *and* Isaac] will come again to you”). And later men of faith anticipated the like outcome of life, so that at the close of that Old Testament period and the commencement of the new age Martha could express the general belief as to the dead: “I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection in the last day” (John 11:24). A little later a learned Jew could declare in public that the hope of attaining to resurrection was an inspiration to all pious Israelites (Acts 26:6-8); and in 11:35 our Writer will mention that some of old were expecting a better resurrection than a speedy resuscitation after the death of the body.

These truths were therefore the foundation of true religion, and Paul could assert that his preaching had as its basis that men “should repent and turn to God doing works worthy of repentance,” which covers points (1-4) above; and then he adds that thus his teaching was that of the law and the prophets, fulfilled in Christ as the Victim offered in the suffering of death and as the personal proof of resurrection and judgment, which is points (5) and (6) above (Acts 26:20, 22, 23).

This, then, is the foundation, and on it all godly living in all ages has been built, and must still be built; *yet it is only the foundation*. It is the foundation of Christianity, *but it is not Christianity*, even as the foundation is not the superstructure. What the Lord and the apostles built hereupon will be opened out by the Writer later; for the present he presses the necessity of a mind, a purpose, a resolute effort to move onward from knowing the beginning of what God taught concerning Christ to ever fuller understanding of the complete Divine message concerning Him. To hinder a sinner from getting on to the foundation is a first endeavour of Satan; but failing in this, then he studies to make the believer *satisfied with the foundation*, and here souls innumerable are deceived and dwarfed and despoiled. The perils of this are great; and to warn, to exhort, to encourage, to foster growth and advance, is the immediate object of the Writer.

To be limited to the truths that form the foundation is like one who should repeatedly lay a foundation of a house but not build thereon. This is what too many are doing. It marks largely the great organized Churches; it is the basic reason why they perpetuate the ritual of the Old Testament, and it explains why even true but simple believers in such communities are commonly infantile in knowledge of the purposes of God and in spiritual experience.

Therefore “let us press on. . . . And this will we do, if [*eanper*, if at least] God permit.” IF GOD PERMIT I Is there then some possibility that God will *not* permit a Christian to press on? Or is this merely a pious compliment to the Almighty, an ancient form corresponding to (D.V.)? The context will show that the remark is made with solemn intention, that it is sadly possible for a Christian to reach a state of soul when God in equal love and righteousness will no more allow him to press on.

4. *The Warning* (vers. 4-7). The line of teaching along which the Writer was led by the Spirit was that of constant reference to the Old Testament. In these five chapters preceding he has quoted fourteen passages, and has drawn his lessons and warnings from the ancient histories and institutions. It is therefore somewhat surprising that expositors have not used this feature as the key to open this present passage. For want of it the warning has been found difficult to explain and apply. Is it addressed to mere professors? Or can it apply to the regenerate? If the latter, how does it agree with the teaching of other passages that the life of the regenerate is *eternal* life and that therefore their security from eternal death is assured?

The great second warning was drawn from the failure of Israel at Kadesh Barnea. Is this still in his mind? Is it the needed key?

i. *Enlightenment.* When God was commissioning Moses to return from the desert to Egypt and set Israel free Moses answered that, when he should inform the Israelites that the God of their fathers had appeared to him and was intending to deliver them, they would reply, "What is His Name?" (Exod. 3:13). This implies that they had lost the knowledge of the God of their fathers and of His covenant with them and their descendants. Fifty years later Joshua threw light on this by reminding their children that their fathers, the generation to which he himself belonged, had served the gods of Egypt (Joshua 24:14). Nine centuries later God, through Ezekiel (20:6-8), confirmed this, reminding Israel that their fathers did not forsake the idols of Egypt, for they quickly made a golden calf and worshipped it, which was a chief form of Egyptian idolatry.

Israel had succumbed to their surroundings and had adopted the religion of their oppressors, quite possibly in the hope that the oppression might thus be lightened. In consequence they were in the dark as to their true God and His purposes concerning them. But through Moses they were, as our Writer puts it, "*once for all enlightened.*"

ii. *The Heavenly Gift.* As soon as Israel had commenced their walk with God in the desert the question of food became urgent. The desert yielded no bread. Nine hundred years afterward, in the days of their deepest apostasy, their God told them that His heart had been touched by that venture of faith: "I remember concerning thee the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals; how thou wentest .after Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown" (Jer. 2:2). Though their love was but as the morning dew and passed early away (Hos. 6: 4), yet it was sincere at the time, and thus they are a type of such to-day who feel some true if imitative love to the God Who has first loved them.

In response to their trust and cry God gave them manna: "I will rain bread from heaven for you" (Exod. 16:4). Thus they "*tasted of the heavenly gift,*" that gift which was the type of the true Bread from heaven, even Jesus the Son of God, the gift of His Father to hungry men (John 6:32ff).

Two considerations are vital:

(1) That the English verb "*tasted*" is here used in its less usual sense of *to experience fully, to appreciate* the quality of a thing. The Writer has already so used it at 2:9 "that he should taste of death," meaning that deep and thorough experience of death which the Redeemer endured. On our present verse (6:4) Alford says: "*have tasted* (personally and consciously partaken of)"; Grimm (*Lexicon*) says: "to feel, make trial of, experience"; and Westcott writes: "*Geusasthai* expresses a real and conscious enjoyment of the blessing apprehended in its true character"; and so Cremer "practically and in fact to experience anything." It is not, therefore, here a mere mental or aesthetic appreciation of Christ that is in view, as when a sceptic or social reformer acknowledges

His moral worth; it is a true heart enjoyment such as only the regenerate can know

(2) And this is made certain by the apostle's assertion (I Cor. 10:3, 4) concerning even Israel in the desert that "they did all eat the same *spiritual* food; and did all drink the same *spiritual* drink; for they drank of a *spiritual* rock that followed them [went about with them]; and the rock was Christ." It is thus evident that, though so carnal, they were at least spiritual enough to know that they partook, for their inward man, of spiritual counterparts to the material food and drink for the body. It follows that they cannot be types of persons still really dead to things heavenly, whatever their profession, but only of such as have some true, conscious enjoyment of the heavenly Bread.

iii. *Living Water*. Directly after the giving of the manna came the smiting of the rock and the supply of living water. From the statement just quoted from I Cor. 10:4 it is plain that in some real degree they were made "*partakers of holy spirit*," that they experienced some measure of the Spirit's grace. Referring to that period Isaiah, seven centuries later, said: "Where is He that put his holy Spirit in the midst of them? . . . the Spirit of Jehovah caused them to rest" (Isa. 63:11, 14).

That the manna and the spiritual rock accompanied them all the journey teaches that Bread and Water are the only provision that God makes for His children in the desert. To demand more than these is disastrous. Israel did so: "Give us flesh..., there is nothing at all save this manna to look to" (Num. 11:4-6); upon which history the Divine comment is: "He gave them their request, But sent leanness into their soul" (Ps. 106:15).

Here, as wherever water is a type, is meant the blessed Spirit of God (John 7:38, 39). First manna, then water; first Christ the Bread of heaven (John 6), then the Spirit, the Water of life (John 7). First Calvary, then Pentecost; and only one who has availed himself of the blood receives the water. That the Writer had in mind a definite, known reception of the Spirit is shown by the use of the *aorist* participle (*genethentas*), "they became partakers" at a distinct point, and experimentally.

iv. *The Word of God*. Israel reached the desert of Sin on the fifteenth day of the second month after they left Egypt (Exod. 16:1). The next fortnight was momentous. In it were given the manna and the living water; there followed the fight with Amalek, and Moses judging the people; and on the first day of the next month they came to mount Sinai (Exod. 19: 1). There God appeared in glory and the people heard His veritable voice speaking unto them, commanding them, statutes and ordinances "which if a man do, he shall live in them" (Ezek. 20:11, 13, 21). For this "commandment was unto life," this "law is holy, righteous, good," and "spiritual" (Rom. 7:10, 12, 14); of which Israel had ample experience, in so far as they obeyed it. They "*tasted the Word of God that it is good*." The above force of *to taste* applies here also: "those spoken of had not merely tasted, but recognized, the goodness of the word of God" (G. Mulligan, D.D., *The New Testament Documents*, 68).

Thus Israel exemplified the course of all spiritual life, today as then: redemption from wrath by blood; deliverance from bondage by power; Christ the food to strengthen; the Spirit to refresh and vitalize; and now God's words to instruct and regulate. It is to be noted that the law at Sinai was not given to effect salvation from wrath (the angel of destruction) and from Satan (Pharaoh); but to guide and rule men already redeemed and free. The guilty it could not justify, nor grant life to the dead; but it could bless the living, if they would be obedient; and this it can do to-day, if the Christian will render loving obedience. The saint of old could say: "Oh how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day" (Ps. 119: 97): the saint to-day can say: "I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom. 7: 22). Both they of old and we "*taste the word of God that it is good.*"

v. *The Coming Age.* But there was another privilege of that age and this. They experienced "*the powers of a coming age,*" and so it has been in this age of the gospel. Under law and under grace mighty works have been seen which are a foretaste of the coming age, the Millennial.

The cloud of glory, which did not scatter in the fierce winds of the desert, was a picture of that canopy of glory, which is compared to the cloud by day and the fire by night in the desert, and which shall abide over mount Zion in that coming day when Jerusalem shall have been purged (Isa. 4:2-6).

God's personal and visible presence, His daily guidance and protection, constant supplies of food and drink, victory over enemies; healing of disease, preservation of health; these and similar displays of heavenly powers will be known yet more fully in the age of glory yet to come. In measure they have been known in this age, both in spiritual blessings and external advantages. This last was especially the case at the commencement of Israel's national career and at the commencement of the church of God; but all through both ages those powers have worked which will be more largely known in the next age in the full subservience of nature to the good of man, in bodily health, and other ways.

But not only in acts of grace were those powers displayed, but also in chastisement upon the unfaithful in Israel; and so it is to-day, and so it will be during the Millennium. For in I Cor. 10 the correspondence between Israel and ourselves covers both privileges and warnings. Did they, as we, partake of Christ, so are we most solemnly warned lest their judgments also overtake us; for "these things happened unto them by way of example; and they were written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the ages are come" (vers. 6-13). Both aspects, blessings and judgments, are foretold of the Millennial age in one sentence (Isa. 65:20), as elsewhere.

vi. *Falling away.* What then is the lesson for us? They "*fell away*" (*parapipto*); "let him who thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall (*pipto*)" (I Cor. 10:12). "The idea [in *parapiptein*] is that of falling aside from the right path, as the idea of *amartanein* (sin) is that of missing the right mark" (Westcott).

When did Israel thus turn from the right path? At Kadesh Barnea (Num. 13 and 14). The right path lay straight ahead; but it led uphill, with giant defenders, monsters by descent, size, vice, and ferocity. Faith failed, courage fled, so they turned aside and resolutely refused to go up.

Thus at Kadesh Barnea they “*fell away*,” and God saw and declared that “it was impossible to renew them to a change of mind,” that is, to make them thereafter dutiful and trustful. What was their cry “Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt” (Num. 14:2) but a hasty regret that they had accepted redemption at all? What was their resolve “Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt” but an impulse to reverse the salvation effected by the blood of the lamb slain and a putting Moses to open shame as, in their view, an unsafe leader? In this they were a type of those to-day who so openly turn from Christ and return to a worldly life as to “crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and to put Him to an open shame.”

Such cases we have known. In an eastern land it was our joy to lead to Christ a cultured Englishman of good family. From the first he gave a fine public witness and maintained it for several years. Then he lapsed into the darkness of theosophy and occultism where he had wandered before his conversion, and openly repudiated the Son of God and His atonement. Now had he died before his lapse no one could have questioned the reality of his conversion. But as all those earlier years the evidence was adequate, some other explanation of his fall must be found than the suggestion that he was never born of God, for the facts prove the contrary. And he is but one of many cases.

Those who so readily offer this too easy explanation should reflect that some to whom it would apply have returned to faith after many years, thus showing the reality of the early faith. It was so with the person mentioned and the celebrated Professor F. W. Newman is another instance. In early manhood he was an earnest, devoted disciple, a companion of Groves, Darby and the first Brethren. Then, for perhaps thirty or forty years, he was a leading sceptic; but at the close of his long life he returned to the faith of his youth, and it was stated over his grave, by his own request, that he had died trusting to the precious blood of Christ for salvation.

No one therefore is justified in saying that any particular person is beyond the possibility of repenting; nevertheless there are such who die in this apostate state, and it is these who are in question in Heb. 6. Their unchangeable condition is known to God in their lifetime, though not to us.

Of the men of war, Caleb and Joshua were like the land that gives due response to the heaven-sent blessings and “bringeth forth herbs meet for them for whose sake also it is tilled”; the many were as the plot that bore only the thorns and the thistles of faithlessness and rebellion. These latter were “rejected” by God: “they shall not see the land which I swore unto their fathers” (Num. 14:23); for they had rejected God’s special

gift. And how “nigh unto a curse” they were these awful words of their God tell: “I will smite them with pestilence, and disinherit them” (ver. 12). And just as the present end of weed-producing land is that it be “burned,” so it was said to them “your carcasses [shall] be *consumed* in the wilderness” (ver. 33), a word which is used once again of Israel when later on God was rejecting them nationally: “The bellows blow fiercely; the lead is *consumed* of the fire; in vain do they go on refining; for the wicked are not plucked away. Refuse silver shall men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them” (Jer. 6:29, 30).

5. It will be still asked, Can such apostasy be possible in a real child of God? Are we not in this place at least driven to suppose that here (Heb. 6) it is only professors making a fair show in the flesh, but not knowing the reality of divine grace, who are described? Let us notice:

(1) These were *born heirs* to the land, being children of the covenant, and they were those who had been actually redeemed and emancipated.

(2) The partaking in the benefits implies the truly regenerate person.

(3) Though they were “nigh to a curse” they were not actually cursed. Their noble leader interceded for them, and God said, “I have pardoned according to thy word; but in very deed, as I live” these rebels shall not see the land. Our great Priest delivers His own perpetually from the wrath to come (see I Thess. 1:10: “delivereth”), but He cannot, and would not, hinder the severest chastisement and loss where such are due.

(4) God saw to it that they never did get back to Egypt. They perished in the wilderness, as a backslider may die in his apostate state; but to the place which pictured unalleviated separation from God they were not permitted to get back.

(5) Even though they had forfeited the fullest of the proffered blessings yet did God in most wondrous grace still deal with them as His people, and not as foes. “In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them: in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bare them and carried them all the days of old” (Isa. 63:9). “For about the time of forty years suffered He their manners in the wilderness” (Acts 13:18), feeding, clothing, guiding, and protecting them, and in fact doing for them all that He could do short of restoring to them the prospect of entering the land that they had rejected. It was thus, as we have already noticed, that Reuben and Esau were dealt with by their fathers.

(6) That in *Hebrews* the Writer regarded those he addressed as genuine saints is abundantly clear in the next verses (9-12). He was “persuaded better things” of them, though he thus warned them: it was not of salvation itself but of “things that *accompany* salvation” that he was writing, not of escaping judgment and slavery, in Egypt, but of the benefits and prospects which accompanied that deliverance. Unlike the salvation, these

latter were not yet secured and might be missed.

It is to be conceded that here is a picture of the extremest kind of rebellion possible, and not of what we may term ordinary failure. Lot's conduct in deliberately consorting with the sinners of Sodom was a very different offence to Abraham's failure of faith and of courage when he saw, as he thought, his wife in danger in Egypt, and it was very differently dealt with by God. For Abraham, though humbled, was helped, and was restored to the hill-top communion with God, whilst Lot was left barely to escape, and finally to close his days in shame, conscious that his course had desperately corrupted his own daughters, and involved himself in lasting dishonour. Let us remember the teaching in Gal. 5:21, as to the *practising* of gross moral or physical sin resulting in a disinheriting from the kingdom.

As in Esau's case so with these men of war, it was a deliberate turning from high advantages offered, and indeed desired in measure, and a choice of the lower state because it seemed easier and more immediate. And have there not been instances of disciples facing God's call and leading towards high and noble living and full concentration upon heavenly things, but who, alas, have feared to cut loose from the things that bound to the world? Do none ever set the heart on the things that are on the earth though pleaded with by the Spirit to set the mind on the things that are above? The full record of this aspect of powerful spiritual meetings, of holiness conventions, and of private labours of men who walk with God, has yet to be made known. A sad chapter it will prove to be as its tale is told of how alluring business or professional prospects, or worldly or fashionable marriage offers, or social and political ambitions, yea, and even sheer carnality, not to speak of a hesitant timidity that grieves and insults our faithful God, have caused some of His own people to turn back from the heights of conflict and of glory to the low level of being saved from perdition, as is believed, and then "making the best of both worlds," as is the hideously deceptive phrase, whereas it is in reality a making the worst of both.

Workers of long experience in the gospel have known ungodly persons who seemed utterly callous to external solemnities and impervious to heavenly appeals, whilst yet admitting theoretically the truth of all that the Bible teaches. And not so infrequently as might be thought it is learned that once or oftener such had been brought by the Spirit to a crisis, when a decision for or against Christ had to be made, and that it was by deliberate rejection that the state of apathy was reached which seems, and often proves to be, unalterable. And let those who have long and adequate experience in seeking to serve the people of God reflect upon cases of such as gave a clear account of a good conversion and of walking with God for a time, but who seem immovable as regards aspiring to elevated present experience and future and heavenly prospects. These admit the desirability of such a life and future, but present no sign of any determination to attain thereto. Most certainly it is not for us to pronounce upon any individual case, but rather to exercise the love that "hopeth all things"; but it is impossible at times not to inquire in one's own mind whether certain have not passed the limit of forbearance and been turned back to spend their days in the wilderness:

“we shall press on, *if God permit.*”

As the Spirit ceases to strive with the ungodly remarked upon, so is it written of Israel as the people of God: “He said, Surely they are my people, children that will not deal falsely; so He was their saviour. In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them: in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old.” (Isa. 63:8-9). They were His people, His sons, whose afflictions He shared, giving them divine love and pity. Himself was their Redeemer, and those whom He redeemed He bare and carried as a father his child. “*But they*”—they “rebelled and grieved His holy Spirit: therefore He was turned to be their enemy—Himself fought against them” (Isa. 63: 10). And similarly we Christians are warned that it is possible, not merely to grieve, but to *quench* the Spirit. Do we reflect sufficiently upon the inevitable consequences, present and future, that must surely attend so grave sin?

Thus is given, and given expressly for *our* admonition, the supreme example of how individuals may lose their place in the body corporate and their share in the fullest blessings open to attainment. Of course, God will perform His covenants, however long be the delay occasioned by His people’s waywardness. In the fourth generation Abraham’s posterity duly returned to Canaan; but *not all did so who might have*. Thus, too, God will have in His glory. His church, and Christ will have His bride, and the universe will have its executive government. But let us each give heed that we obtain a full reward, and let us in love “exhort one another day by day, as long as it is called To-day”—that is, so long as the opportunity for attainment remains open.

It surely ought not to be needful to add that the words, whose end is to be burned,” do not import the endless perdition of those so treated. If it means that the thorns and thistles are to be burned, that would benefit and not finally ruin the land, and this would be a picture of the finally sanctifying effect upon the believer of even the severest chastisement. But taking the meaning that it is the land that is to be burned, it still remains a picture of temporary affliction, for in any case the land abides. And though burning it is a last resource of the farmer, yet the ultimate design and issue is beneficial. “*Our God is a consuming fire*”; but the same fire which destroys the alloy cleanses the gold, though the process is drastic and may need to be prolonged. The destruction of the flesh contributes, in the case of a child of God, to the salvation of the spirit, not from eternal wrath—that is secured by the cross of Christ—but as regards what must be faced “in the day of the Lord Jesus” (I Cor. 5:5).

Interpreted thus by Israel’s history this passage in chapter 6 of *Hebrews* enforces the same lesson as the Second Warning in chapters 3 and 4, as follows:

That for them of old as for Christians now:

i. Rebellion, definite and persistent, can induce a state of heart of which there will be no reversal in this life. The limit of time arises from the example of Israel as

narrated in God's histories. These do not introduce the question of the *eternal* prospects of those in question, which question therefore does not arise in the application the Writer makes to Christians.

ii. The penalty of such rebellion may include (a) the wasting of this present life in a desert experience, as to which more will be said; (see pp. 192—196); (b) the death of the body under summary judgment—see again I Cor. 10:8-10; Acts 5:1-11; I Cor. 11:27-32; Jas. 5:20; I John 5:16, 17, etc.; (c) the loss of Canaan, that is, the Millennial age, which carries also the forfeiture of sovereignty for ever, since it is only those who rise in the first resurrection who form the bride, the wife of the Lamb, and are said to reign for ever and ever (Rev. 20:4-6; 21: 9; 22:5).

iii. That these possible penalties, though indeed severe, do not involve the *eternal* destruction of regenerate persons. The type forbids. Not one Israelite was able to return to Egypt, from which they had all been separated by blood and water. Not one reached again the former standing as condemned and liable to die without mercy. So also no regenerate person can ever return to the lost condition of the unregenerate. God will not suffer it: He has too much respect to the blood of His Son, even though a believer may repudiate its value. It is never to be assumed that the bodily death of a person under the judgment of God necessarily implies his eternal death; nor is it to be assumed that "fire" or "burning" must mean *eternal* fire, the lake of fire. Such terms are used much more often of the temporal judgments of God. See p. 179.

6. *Consolation and Exhortation* (ver. 9—12).

As remarked above the Writer has a genuine affection in the Lord for those addressed. He would not have them think him stern and callous, nay, they are "beloved." It is wise to set before them the full possible outcome of declension; "faithful are the wounds of a friend"; nevertheless he is assured that they have not reached that state, but are evidencing in some real measure their salvation by displaying the things that accompany salvation. What could he say to make plainer that he writes to them as really "saved" persons? No unreal professor can produce things that belong to salvation, seeing that he is not saved.

For this assurance he finds reason in their love to the Name they had professed, shown by serving His saints, a love, which God, its Object, would not forget. Ponder the thought that God's *righteousness* determines His conduct towards His people and their works. It is at once encouraging and warning. This is one of many passages the force of which lies in the very real peril of liberty, and even life, incurred in periods of persecution by espousing the cause of the persecuted. Consider in the same light I Cor. 12:3; 1 John 3:13, 14.

But the spiritual life is like riding a bicycle: one cannot stand still, but must go on or go off. Therefore he expresses the most urgent concern and appeal that the former diligence be maintained, so that their hope may be retained to the reaching its full end.

It is their *hope*, their expectation of things future that is in danger of dying. Thus Paul reminds the Colossians that, being already reconciled to God by the death of His Son, their prospect was the highest of all honours, the being “presented” before God in glory, as one is “presented at court”: comp. Eph. 1:4; 5:27; Jude 24. But that, unlike the reconciliation which results entirely from the death of Christ on the cross, this final honour is contingent upon their *continuance* in the *faith* and their not being moved away from the *hope* of the gospel (Col. 1:22, 23).

Christians may easily become “sluggish” as to this hope and goal, as these already were as to keenness of hearing. The word is the same as in 5:11. The alternative is that they constantly bestir themselves to be “imitators of those who through faith and long patience inherit” what God has promised. For the promises of God are not absolute, in disregard of the moral state of His people, but are expressly made dependent upon the response of faith and the exercise of long patience. This strong exhortation to extended patience (*makrothumia*) is inharmonious with the unfounded notion that the early Christians were taught that the return of Christ was to be expected by them at any time. On the contrary, they knew from Christ Himself that it would be only “after a long time” that He would return (Matt. 25:19), and that throughout that lengthy period they must be steadfast in hope.

7. *An Encouraging Example (13—20).*

Of this extended patience Abraham, the father of all the faithful, is a shining example. From the beginning the utterances of God to mankind include two major elements, warning and promise: warning—“in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die”: promise—the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head (Gen. 2: 17; 3:15). Our Writer has warned; now he would encourage to long patience. Such steadfast endurance was amply rewarded in Abraham’s case, whose children we are in faith and hope and need to be in patient waiting.

God promised to Abraham that his posterity should be numerous, saying, “multiplying I will multiply thee” (Gen. 22:17). This was an amplifying of the first promise, “I will make of thee a great nation” (Gen. 12:2), a promise given when he was childless. He then waited no less than twenty-five years for the son to be born through whom the promise should be fulfilled (coin. Gen. 12:4 with 21:5); and later, as this son of promise was a ripening lad, the hope centred in him was seemingly dashed to the ground by the command to slay him (Gen. 22). But Abraham’s faith prospered on the test because he kept on “looking unto the promise of God’s; so that faith grew, and he became “fully assured that what God had promised He was able also to perform” (Rom. 4:20, 21).

Now a promise from GOD is warrant enough for assurance of hope; but God in great grace was “minded to show more abundantly unto the heirs of the promise the unchangeable-ness of His counsel,” to which end He confirmed it by an oath, and an oath based upon His own existence and character; so that these shall cease should His promise fail of fulfilment, which is impossible. Now men regard the oath of a fellow

mortal as confirming a matter beyond further dispute; how much more ought a Divine oath to dismiss all doubt!

Thus by two unchangeable things, the promise and the oath of God, He has given us adequate ground for strong encouragement and steadfast endurance. For as Abraham was given a great future as the object of his hope, so we have a great hope set before us, only one of far greater dmgnty and glory. Abraham's hope attached him firstly to a glorious future connected with his national descendants on earth; our hope connects us with a future to be realized in the heavens.

8. This hope is

i. A refuge. Hope saves from despair. By looking forward we are kept from looking back, as did Lot's wife; and also "by hope we are saved" as regards present difficulties daunting the spirit: as a poor youth, struggling with present poverty, is saved from giving up the battle, by reason of a hope that one day he will secute an inheritance left to him, but situate in a distant land, and for the enjoyment of which he must wait till he come of age.

ii. Hope is an anchor, enabling the ship to ride out the gale. The security of an anchor depends firstly upon the firmness of the unseen ground which it grips. Our hope attaches our hearts to the realm "within the veil," the region which is eternally stable, the kingdom and presence of God. The storms which rock the surface of the sea do not disturb its rock-bottom, so neither do the tempests of earth disturb the tranquillity of heaven, where our hope is fixed.

iii. The figure is changed. Into that high and holy place Jesus has entered, and is for ever beyond and above the storms of time. He braved their fiercest blusterings and passed through into the haven of eternal peace. But even as His passage through this tempestuous world was for our benefit, so has He entered within the veil for our good. It is as a forerunner of all who will follow His steps that He has gone into the immediate presence of God, having become High Priest for ever.

What, then, must be our response? We are urged (i) to flee to the refuge, and to abide there. (2) To lay fast hold of the hope and never to relax our grip. (3) We must cast our anchor within the veil, nor ever slip the cable of faith that links us to it. (4) We must follow after our Forerunner, nor turn from His path, for only so can we arrive at the place whither He has gone in advance of us.

Let us therefore run with patience the race that lies before us, looking off unto Jesus, and thus finding Him to be both author and perfecter of faith (12:1). "Wherefore girding up the loins of your mind, be sober, and set your hope perfectly [=undividedly] upon the favour that is being brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (I Pet. 1:13).

This strenuous and ceaseless advance each must make for himself. It is no use waiting for others, “for” (ver. 4) as touching those who have been described they cannot and will not go forward, so it is useless to wait for them, even though they be dear to our hearts in the Lord or by ties of nature. “He that loveth father or mother more than Me, he is not worthy of Me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me, is not worthy of Me. And he that doth not take his cross and follow after Me, is not worthy of Me. He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it” (Matt. 10:37-39).

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