

**HEBREWS 11-13 CHRIST AS THE AUTHOR AND FINISHER OF OUR FAITH**

We continue with Heb. 11, called "the Faith Chapter," where Paul names six more examples of faith (plus the prophets), after the Israelites conquered the land. He says, "And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of *Gideon* and *Barak* and *Samson* and *Jephthah*, also of *David* and *Samuel* and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again" (Heb. 11:32-35). These six had something in common--they faced enormous odds and yet prevailed by trusting in God.

Paul now includes those who remained faithful even unto death, saying, "Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain *a better resurrection*. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth" (Heb. 11:35-38). So people of faith were loyal to God unto death because they wanted to be part of a "better" resurrection. This group is called in chap. 12:23 "the Church of the Firstborn," being firstfruits, and are named "blessed" in Rev. 20:6 since they will be part of the "first" resurrection.

Paul concludes, "And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, *did not* receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us" (Heb. 11:39-40). This clearly shows those faithful who died are *not* in heaven, enjoying their reward, but instead are unconscious, *awaiting* that "better" resurrection, along with the faithful who are still alive, which *only* occurs *at* Christ's return.

Since they won this long-distance spiritual race, similar to a marathon or to a relay race where a torch was passed on to the next runner, he adds, "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set

before us, looking unto Jesus, the author [pioneer] and finisher [perfecter] of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:1-2).

So not only do we have these winning examples to encourage us, but we have Jesus Christ, the ultimate winner of the race of faith, *now helping us with our race*. He had a much more difficult race to run than anyone else, for He "endured the cross" for the joy of "bringing many children to glory" (Heb. 2:10). Paul says to be successful, we must overcome "the sin that so easily ensnares us" or the particular weakness that still harasses us.

He continues, "For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: 'My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son who He receives.' If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Heb. 12:3-11).

He reminds them, just as in a long-distance race, there is going to be pain and suffering along the way. So God uses trials in life to fortify our character and build up our faith. Sometimes He also has to discipline us to teach us lessons or to correct us when we go astray. His ultimate goal is so we can be partakers of His holiness, that divine nature which is God's very character (2 P. 1:4).

So he again warns them of coming up short in this race: “Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed. Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears” (Heb. 12:12-17).

It seems some Hebrew brethren were becoming discouraged and disgruntled in the new faith because of persecutions and trials, and Paul urges them not to give up nor become sour, but rather have peaceful relationships. For, if they don’t, they are in danger of letting a root of bitterness arise and this wrong attitude can spread to other brethren. It can also happen if a member becomes worldly or promiscuous and then lose out on the great reward, just as Esau missed out on his inheritance by not valuing spiritual things.

He urges them, “For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. (For they could not endure what was commanded: ‘And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow.’ And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, ‘I am exceedingly afraid and trembling’)” (Heb. 12:18-21).

He stresses their spiritual responsibility is much greater, having God’s spirit, and these wonderful truths, “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of

sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel” (Heb. 12:22-24).

Here we have a clear description of heaven—consisting of God the Father, Jesus Christ, the multitude of righteous angels, and where the spirits of “the righteous made perfect” are kept (Heb. 12:22, ESV). Notice the faithful who have died only have *their names* “registered in heaven” and are not alive. It is their “spirits” which have gone to God, as Eccl. 12:7 tells us, where the dead “know nothing” (Eccl. 9:5). Also note here there is *no* Holy Spirit as a person mentioned in heaven—which would be a great insult if it were so!

Paul then admonishes, “See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, ‘Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.’ Now this, ‘Yet once more,’ indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:25-29).

Again, he urges the Hebrew brethren to remain firm and not waver, for their ultimate goal is entering that “unshakeable” kingdom of God that is coming while the kingdoms of this world will be abolished. Besides, they would not want to face God as apostates and end up being given a death sentence and then cast into the lake of fire.

After all these admonitions, Paul ends the epistle encouraging them to practice basic Christian principles. He says, “Let brotherly love continue. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels. Remember the prisoners as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also” (Heb. 13:1-3).

He exhorts them to continue brotherly love (*philadelphia* in Gk.) which is indicative they needed to heed this. As F. F. Bruce brings out, “If a weakening of faith and resolution among the recipients of this epistle led to a weakening of the

bonds that united them to their fellow Christians, this would add urgency to the plea that brotherly love should *continue* among them. Some specific forms of brotherly love are enjoined in the following verses. Strangers, and especially strangers belonging to the Christian brotherhood, must be shown hospitality...Inns throughout the Roman Empire were places of doubtful repute" (pp. 389-390). Abraham and Lot, for instance, entertained angels not knowing who they were.

Paul continues, "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge. Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we may boldly say: 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?'" (Heb. 13:4-6). Here the 7th and 10th Commandments are upheld, and then he encourages them to trust God and be content.

Paul then says, "Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb. 13:7-8). Here he backs the Church leaders and asks brethren to support them as they serve and give a good example. He reminds them, though, to *ultimately look* to Christ.

Paul adds, "Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them. We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek *the one to come*. Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (He. 13:9-16).

These "strange doctrines" regarding foods are similar to what he said in 1 Tim. 4:3 and Col. 2:21.

The term "strange" (Gk. *xenos*) means here doctrines "foreign" or outside the Bible. F. F. Bruce identifies them as "syncretistic Gnosis, perhaps with Essene or quasi-Essene affinities...dealing with *sacrificial* meals" (p. 398). Instead, we have an "altar" in heaven with Christ as our High Priest and where His sacrifice atones for our sins. So our "sacrifices" should now consist of praising Him and obeying His laws to do what is right.

As Paul says, "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably. But I especially urge you to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner" (Heb. 13:17-19). Due to the dissent, he repeats they need to respect the authority of their Christian leaders, for they have the spiritual responsibility to give account of them before God.

Paul ends, "Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words. Know that our brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly. Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you. Grace be with you all. Amen" (Heb. 13:20-25).

He reminds them God is a God *of peace* and they should promote it, for they are *being* perfected by Jesus Christ. He exhorts them to accept this "word of exhortation," another term for a sermon or a homily, and it is not too long, for it can be read in an hour. Also mentioned is Timothy, one of Paul's closest companions, who had been set free from jail and Paul hopes they both can soon visit these Hebrew brethren. He then again focuses on their Church leaders and sends them greetings from the Church in Italy, probably in Rome, where he was staying. He ends the epistle in a positive way wishing God's grace be with all of them.