

FALLING AWAY

We are going to turn this morning to the 6th chapter of the Book of Hebrews.

Last week, as I was closing, I made a very significant statement, I think . . . I do that every once in a while. I said that there are only two things that you need to know in order to be successful in your Christian life . . . only two things that you need to know in order for you to do all that God wants you to do and to be all that God wants you to be. And those two things are: first of all, you need to know who Jesus Christ is, and the second thing is to know who you are in Christ.

Now, if you know those two things, that's all you need to know to deal with whatever comes your way in life. You need to know that Jesus Christ is our Great High Priest. And you need to know that we as Christians are His Covenant People.

And, as I thought about that and the Book of Hebrews, I found that these are the only two subjects that are covered in the Book of Hebrews . . . those are the two points he is discussing in the Book. Christ as our High Priest . . . that's chapters 1-7, and the new covenant . . . chapters 8-10, and chapters 11-13 is the application of that.

Now, intermingled with those two subjects are other thoughts. In chapters 3 and 4, he tells us how Israel missed it. And in chapter 6, he points out the danger of a Christian missing it and failing as Israel did. **And his point is . . . we may fail to realize Jesus as our High Priest.** He's spending 7 chapters discussing that fact.

As our high priest, Jesus has opened the way to God and those that do not realize that they have access to God, through this priest . . . when we do not know and understand the significance of having access to the Throne of God, we cannot be partakers of the covenant and we cannot experience covenant life.

So before we can experience the life that He brought in the form of the New Covenant, we must, first of all, realize the significance of Christ being our High Priest because His priesthood opens the way to the throne of grace on our behalf.

Now, in the book of Hebrews, this Covenant life that we are talking about, first, is access to the throne (chapters 2 and 4). The emphasis is on the way has finally been opened where we can come directly, and even boldly, into the presence of God . . . that we are, in Paul's words, seated with Christ in heavenly places. The veil has been torn away, the restriction has been lifted, and God's people have been taken into the very presence of God . . . we have access to the throne of God and all that God has for us is available to us as we come into His presence.

Covenant life is described as intimate knowledge and understanding of God. In chapter 8, we have a new understanding of God . . . we can be intimate with God . . . we are His sons and daughters and He is dwelling in us . . . something Israel never really experienced.

Covenant life is realizing we have the forgiveness of our sins (chapters 8 and 10) . . . a significant thing . . . for Christian people to realize they don't have to go on making any kind of sacrifice or making any kind of offering for sin . . . that His death on the cross was sufficient for all sin for all time and we have complete and total forgiveness!

We don't have to go through life worrying about our sins and whether or not we are going to make it . . . and whether or not God is going to forgive us . . . or worrying about standing before the Judgment of God and being accountable for every little thing that we have ever done in our lives. Christ has already answered that for us. **We have complete and total forgiveness of sin.**

This forgiveness . . . Hebrews chapter 9, vs. 9 and 14, even reaches our conscious and it perfects our conscious. It "cleanses our conscious from dead works in order that we might serve the living God" (vs. 14). And I think that what is wrong with most peoples' service to God . . . the reason it is so inadequate and falls so short of the biblical standard is that **you cannot offer acceptable service to God until you have a cleansed conscious . . . that must come first.**

So, His blood is sufficient even to cleanse your conscious from dead works and to serve the living God. **He talks about the worshipers having a perfect conscious . . . we can't go around excusing ourselves because of sin. His blood is so powerful and so far reaching that it reaches into the inner most part of our being and cleanses our conscious . . . and that's what enables us to serve the living God.**

Covenant life is described as receiving an "eternal inheritance" (Heb 9:15), ". . . He is the mediator of a new covenant, in order that since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance." It is not an inheritance that passes away, it never runs out . . . it is an inheritance of which we are already partakers. Jesus speaks many times about people who will and who will not inherit the kingdom.

We like to transfer that off somewhere in the future, thinking in the terms that we might inherit the kingdom . . . **I think the inheritance is that which we experience here and now and continues to experience throughout eternity. But, if you don't begin to experience your inheritance now, you will not have any inheritance in eternity.** It is an eternal inheritance and we are partakers of that and that is part of covenant life.

Covenant life is described in this book as having no consciousness of sin. And that is a little bit foreign to us. Throughout the Old Testament, there was a continual . . . daily . . . hourly consciousness of sin. So it says in chapter 10, vs. 1, "For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very substance or the form of things, can never by the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near." It cannot perfect those who draw near, vs. 2, "Otherwise, (if it had for once and for all made them perfect they would have ceased to have be offered), would they not have ceased to be offered,

because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins?"

So, once you are cleansed of your sin, you don't go on having a consciousness of sin. He goes on down in vs. 12 and 14 and applies this to us. Vs. 12, "but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD" . . . vs. 14, "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified."

So God has accepted us, His covenant people, as being perfect before Him . . . once and for all and that is sufficient . . . But I don't feel perfect . . . I know I am not perfect (and that's us . . . a common-trying failing of Christians . . . well, nobody is perfect . . . or well, I'm not perfect so you don't expect me to do or to be all that you are teaching and preaching about) . . . **It is not how you feel or how you see it . . . or how you accept it . . . It's what God says in His Word.**

And when He says you are perfected in His sight, accept that as being true and live in it . . . that doesn't mean you don't sin, but it means that He takes care of you sin . . . the sacrifice of Christ is sufficient . . . and that which cleansed you in the beginning continues to cleanse you in your daily walk, and before Him, **if you are in Christ, you have been perfected for all times.**

You won't hear that preached in many Christian Churches around here, and you probably won't hear it in many Baptist Churches either, as far as that goes, but that's what the scriptures say. **It's not what we feel or what we think . . . it's what God declares us to be . . . It's what He accepts us as being . . . not really what we actually are because John says we all sin and we are not to say that we don't sin or that we haven't sinned . . . if we do, we make Him a liar . . . But He doesn't count that against us . . . He accepts us as being perfect in Christ.**

And therefore, another mark of covenant life is that we have confidence before God. Heb 10:18-22, "Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin. Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God (in other words, since we have all of this going for us), let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith . . ." (let us have confidence before God).

You see these concrete signs they put up along the highway saying "Prepare to Meet Your God," as if you are going to meet God out there somewhere . . . Prepare to Meet God -- Look, you don't prepare to meet God, you have already met Him . . . you have confidence to come boldly into His presence, through the veil, to the Throne of Grace . . . He is in us, living in us, dwelling in His people, not way off somewhere, but Here, Now, Present among us, all about us . . . we have confidence before God -- we are not afraid of Him . . . There is no dread, regardless of what our songs say, there is no dread of standing before God and meeting God because He is our Father and we are His sons and daughters . . . and look at what He has done for us.

And the last point of Covenant Life that I will mention, and these are only a few, is in Heb, chapter 12, vs. 28, is that we have received a kingdom which cannot be shaken . . . that is covenant life. We have already received this kingdom and this kingdom cannot be shaken . . . and all of these things that we have just mentioned here . . . all of these things are realized by availing ourselves fully of the high priesthood of Christ . . . and like we've mentioned previously, nobody preaches or teaches about the priesthood of Christ. But that is what Hebrews, chapter 6 is all about.

He has an important subject that he wants them to grasp . . . he says he has a lot of things to say about Christ and Melchizedek but you have become dull of hearing and its hard to understand, but that didn't stop him from telling them about it . . . and he took a side trail and gave them chapter 6 to try to get them back on track . . . his concern is that go onto maturity. He said solid food is for the mature and when he talks about Christ and Melchizedek, he is not talking about Vacation Bible School subjects . . . it is not Sunday School material he is discussing . . . **it is the meat of the Word and he said it is important that you understand it because it the very basis of your life before God and he wants them to come to the maturity to where they can understand it and to accept it . . . that is what he is after.**

Heb 6:1, "Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about Christ, let us press on to maturity . . ." (let's go onto maturity . . . yes, but preacher, you should preach so the little children can understand it . . . that sounds so spiritual, and we hear it everyday . . . feed the Sheep, not the Giraffe . . . well God created the Giraffe and He didn't create them to eat like the Sheep . . . He created them to eat off of the trees and gave them a long neck).

The little children are important, and let me tell you, these little children can grasp a lot more than you think they can. You don't have to tell them little bible stories . . . they are going to get a lot that you are going to miss . . . But the Hebrew Writer is not talking to little children. He is talking about adult people who have been Christians long enough to where they should have been teachers . . . **you talk at little children level all the time and people are going to remain little children . . . that's the level they are going to stay on.** It is alright to start there, but you have to go on. He says come on to maturity . . . get it together and press onto maturity.

And the maturity he is seeking is he wants them to come to is the measure of maturity so as to be able to recognize, to understand, to accept, and to apply the meaning of the high priesthood of Christ in our lives . . . that's the maturity he wants to bring them to . . . and he takes the entire chapter, chapter 6, to try to get them back on track because in chapter 5 he is talking about Melchizedek and Christ . . . then he comes right back to that subject in the last verse of chapter 6 and then continues it in chapter 7 . . . the maturity he wants them to come to is that they understand what it means to have Christ as your high priest, Christ after the Order of Melchizedek . . . **it is in the fulfillment of this that you experience covenant life . . . and those 8 things that we mentioned that are discussed here are a description of covenant life and there is more but those things stand out in this Book . . . you can never experience and**

know and live in those things and experience that kind of life until you understand Christ as your high priest . . . and that is why he is laying stress on it

Now, when we come down to Heb 6, and verses 4-6, you know we get into some dangerous territory here . . . I have wished many times that this writer, whoever he is, had not written these words. I wish he would have just said something else or left them out completely.

But he says if they have fallen away it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, because they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame. It is impossible to renew them again to repentance and that scares us to death whenever we read that and we ask the question . . . is he speaking of Christians in chapter 6? About 9 of 10 commentaries will say no he is not talking about people who are really Christians . . . well if that is true, why did he put it in a book that he is writing to Christians? If he wasn't speaking of Christian people here, he would not have put it in a book addressed and read by Christian people. He is writing to Christians, his exhortation is for them to correct their life, so there is no doubt in my mind that he is talking about Christians . . . if he isn't then why mention it at all. So these people that he is talking to in chapter 6 have to be Christians.

And the first thing he talks about are foundation truths . . . Heb 6:1, "Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about Christ, let us press onto maturity . . . and then he mentions these elementary teaching. Now these elementary teachings are the first things you learn in your Christian life. These are the very basics from which you need to graduate and go onto something more . . . vs. 1, "not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works (and I think dead works are the works we do -- and it is interesting to me that we talk about sinners repenting, and the bible talks about sinners repenting, but usually we apply repentance to sinners . . . there is nothing wrong with that . . . **but it is surprising to me that most of time that Jesus talks about repentance and most of the time that repentance is mentioned in scripture it is addressed to religious people. We are told to repent of our sins, but we are also told to repent of our dead works.**

Other elemental things are of faith toward God, of instructions on washings (this version says, the word is baptisms . . . instructions on baptisms), and the laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. These are elementary things in the Christian's life . . . elementary doctrine -- basic things.

Some of us, never get beyond repentance, faith, and baptism . . . those three . . . we spend all of our lives and our preachers and teachers spend all of their time on faith and repentance and baptism. They never talk about laying on hands, resurrection of the dead, or eternal judgment, and if they do they usually get it all muddled up in some tradition and get people confused about them. But they are elemental principles . . . even if we taught the laying of hands, resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment, these too are elemental principles. These are things we should learn he said and then get on with it. Those are the basics in life and he says you must have the

foundation right . . . we aren't saying against these things -- they are important . . . get the principle of repentance, and faith, and baptism, the laying of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment . . . get that in your life and then get on with it . . . that is Pabulum . . . that is baby food . . . be sure to get the foundation, but after you've got the foundation, go on.

Now why is it important to go on after laying the foundation . . . simply because of what it says in Heb 6, verses 6-8 . . . if they have fallen away it is impossible to renew them again to repentance since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame. If you don't go onto maturity, then that is exactly where you will end up.

Now, notice what they have done . . . and when he says have, it is the same word all the way through . . . "For in the case of those who have once been enlightened" . . . alright, they have been enlightened . . . "they have tasted the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come **and have fallen away** (having fallen away is the same as having tasted and having been made partakers and the other things . . . have is the same word . . . if they have done all of these things) then it is impossible to renew them again to repentance because they go on again crucifying to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame.

Falling Away here, and I'm not trying to get around the hard passage, as much I would like to, but this word falling away (they have fallen away) is not the same word used in scripture to apostatize . . . those are two different words. Paul used the "apostatize" and that is really the word for falling away . . . but this word is more of a stepping aside or a falling aside . . . it is not really a strong word.

We read it in here that means a person has fallen away and he has lost his salvation and there is no hope for him . . . my question is always . . . who is going to draw that line to say whether I have fallen away or whether I have not fallen away? God doesn't draw that line and God doesn't tell us. But that word . . . and I'm sorry the King James Version has always translated that in a strong way . . . but **that word is not as strong as it seems, but it is important.**

Now notice what he says, if they have fallen away it is impossible to again renew them to repentance . . . now get this in the context of what he is talking about . . . he is talking about building a foundation again . . . leaving the elementary teaching of Christ . . . not laying again the foundation of repentance and faith and baptism and these other things . . . he is talking about laying again a foundation and **he is saying don't go back and lay the foundation again . . . it is impossible to go back and build a new foundation . . . it is impossible to start as if they had never built a foundation . . . the foundation is there . . . I think he is saying God judges us at the point of where we are and we start building where we left off . . . we can't go back and start over again . . . we have to start where we have failed . . . the Hebrew Church had failed to grow.**

Now let's apply that . . . they cannot be enlightened again because they are already enlightened. They can't taste the heavenly gift again . . . they have already tasted it (they need to eat it up now) . . . you see, they can't go back to that tasting experience. They can't become partakers of the Holy Spirit again because they have already been made partakers . . . they can't get the Holy Spirit again because they have already got Him. Do we understand that?

He cannot introduce them again to the heavenly powers because they have already been introduced to it . . . you can't be introduced to a person twice . . . if you have already been introduced to them then you already know them . . . it is redundant to go up to that person and say I would like to you again meet so and so . . . why you met them years ago and you already know them . . . you cannot be introduced to that which you have already been introduced to.

If you could do all of this then you could renew them to repentance and **he is saying you cannot back and repent again and start over at the foundation again. This is not what they need . . . they don't need renewal, they don't need going back . . . they must pick-up where they left off at the foundation and go on from there . . . it is impossible to go back and renew them again to repentance.**

Israel could not go back to the Red Sea every time they sinned . . . they were judged where they were and then they went on from there . . . God didn't go back and create a new nation every time Israel sinned . . . He corrected them and went on from that point.

Now why is it impossible to renew them again to repentance? Well, it is impossible because they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.

Now the person who is continuously going back . . . continuously rebuilding the foundation . . . continuously trying to renew his repentance . . . trying to start over . . . he must go back to the Cross . . . he must go back to the sacrifice, to the crucifixion . . . and when you get back there, this is what you find . . . vs. 18, chapter 10, "Now where there is forgiveness for these things, there is no longer any offering for sin." When you get back to the Cross, you find it is empty . . . but you go back and you crucify Christ again and you apply the sacrifice of Christ once again and you never get passed the crucifixion . . . always going back to a dead Christ hanging on a Cross.

So he says, "they crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to an open shame" . . . to them . . . to those who are always going back . . . to those who never get on with it . . . to those who cannot get past the first principles . . . to those who don't come to maturity . . . they are always going back and crucifying Christ again TO THEM . . . not Him . . . TO THEM.

So to themselves, they are always crucifying Christ and that holds Him up to open shame . . . they never hold Him up to glory and exaltation . . . it is always the shame of the Cross.

Now that is not to say the Cross is not important . . . don't get me wrong . . . it is to say that the Cross is not everything. It is to say that the Cross was preparatory for something better . . . and when Jesus died on the Cross He, He arose from the dead, and ascended back to the Father, and He lives today.

He is not a dead Christ on a crucifix and the shame of the Cross was real, but it is over and it is done with . . . the sacrifice has been made . . . accept it and get on with it . . . and see the living and exalted Christ . . . as Lord and King of the Universe . . . that gives Him glory and honor, not looking at the Cross all of the time.

You see . . . in some people, the world never sees anything but the shame of the Cross . . . Christ is alive and there is no shame in that . . . nothing but glory.

And what the world needs to see is not so much the Cross, but the glory of the living Christ who was crucified.

Ok, in order to get on with it and to experience this covenant life, there are three things that must happen:

1. We have to see the need of making an effort to understand this spiritual truth . . . he didn't give us this passage to argue eternal security or whether or not a person can fall from grace . . . I don't think he even had that in mind when he wrote it . . . it has nothing to do with that anyway. But the first thing we have to do is to make an effort to try to understand what he says . . . he says a lot of people have become dull of hearing and a lot of people like to live in that atmosphere . . . Oh I can't understand the Bible . . . no wonder you can't understand it . . . he says it's by reason of use or the result of practice . . . he says they have their senses exercised "to discern good from evil by reason of use." **You'll never understand it until you start using it . . . until you start practicing it.**

And so the first thing is to understand it and start using it and to understand the high priesthood of Christ . . . that is so important . . . I cannot emphasize it too much.

Now, along that line, let me say that spiritual activity is not substitute for spiritual understanding . . . Heb 6:10-12, "For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered, and in still ministering to the saints. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

There was nothing wrong with their spiritual activity . . . I think they were very busy people . . . they were typical church people who busied themselves doing good and there is

nothing wrong with that . . . they should do that and people should do more. But spiritual activity is not substitute for spiritual understanding.

2. The means of doing this is not found within ourselves, but within God. Heb 6:13-"For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, 'I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply you" . . . I am going to do this . . . it took Abraham a long time to understand that. Vs. 15, "And thus, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. For men swear by someone greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement . . ."

In other words, if we ever enter into covenant life it will not be our own activity or by our own doing . . . God is going to have to work it in us, but we have to the point where God can work in us . . . because God is not going to come down and make us do it . . . we have access to the Throne and we have to let Him do it.

3. And the most vital factor in going on, not drawing back, and going onto this maturity is the hope that is set before us. Vs. 18, He gives us we may have strong encouragement, we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us. That is what we need to do is to lay hold of the hope that is set before us. Christians need to live in the light of their hope . . . their hope needs to guide their lives . . . and 90% of the Christians do not know what their hope is . . . that's the problem. Well I hope I am going to go to heaven . . . no wonder their lives are so muddled up if that is the only hope they have . . . Paul says plainly in the 8th chapter of Romans, vs. 23, that our hope is the redemption of this body along with the redemption of this world . . . we live in the hope of the resurrection and the hope of a new body . . . this hope, Hebrews says, we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil. We have to live in light of our hope and to realize what God is doing in our lives.

If we understand those three things, we are going to get on with it and we are going to come to the maturity that God wants us to come to . . . God wants us to understand it and we can only understand it if we understand the priesthood of Christ and realize that we can come boldly into the Throne of grace through Christ our high priest.