

Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews

Chapter 4: The True Sabbath Rest, the Word, and our New High Priest

(also available on-line at ichthys.com)

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Introduction: Chapter four may be divided into three parts: 1) Paul's explanation of the true Sabbath rest for the Church Age and his encouragement for us to enter into it as the exodus generation did not (vv.1-10); 2) the power of the Word of God in its uncovering of all hypocrisy and false motivation (vv.11-13); 3) the encouragement we believers have in our new High Priest who advocates for us in spite of our failures in this life (vv.14-16).

The Sabbath: The fourth commandment is set forth in the Pentateuch as follows:

(8) "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. (9) Six days you shall labor and do all your work, (10) but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. (11) For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it."

Exodus 20:8-11 NKJV

(12) "Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. (13) Six days you shall labor and do all your work, (14) but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. (15) And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

Deuteronomy 5:12-15 NKJV

While all of the other ten commandments are easily applied to believer-behavior at all times and at any time, as these full quotations of the passages dealing with the fourth commandment make clear, it is impossible to understand this particular commandment without reference to the Law of Moses (e.g., we do not have slaves who need rest; we were not brought out of Egypt – only those of Israel were). Or, put another [crucial] way, now that the Law is defunct, it is impossible – and

wrong – to honor this commandment in the same way in which it was to be kept under the Law.

As is often noted, the fourth commandment is the only one of the ten not repeated anywhere in the New Testament as necessary to be literally fulfilled. In fact, much of the opposition our Lord received from the religious powers-that-be during His ministry was precisely on account of His "breaking the Sabbath" . . . as they wrongly understood it in their legalistic interpretation (Matt.12:1-8; Mk.2:22-28; 3:1-6; Lk.6:1-11; 13:10-17; 14:1-6; Jn.5:1-15; 7:21-24).

(9) Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, (10) and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to bring charges against Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" (11) He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? (12) How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." (13) Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. (14) But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.
Matthew 12:9-14 NIV

(16) So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. (17) In his defense Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working." (18) For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.
John 15:16-18 NIV

The true purpose of the Sabbath was *not* ritualistic legalism. Instead, this day was meant to provide rest and, very importantly, time and opportunity in that day and age to assemble and hear the Word of God spoken and taught.

They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach.
Mark 1:21 NIV

When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed.
Mark 6:2 NIV

So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read [the scriptures].
Luke 4:16 NKJV

Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath he taught the people.
Luke 4:31 NKJV

Now it happened on another Sabbath, also, that He entered the synagogue and taught.
Luke 6:6 NKJV

Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures.
Acts 17:2 NKJV

But the gift of the Holy Spirit changed everything. No longer was the dispensation of the Word confined to one special people; now, the entire Body of Christ, gentiles as well as Jews, was to be specially gifted and given individual roles for the dissemination of the truth. No longer was the scripture an adjunct to the rites and practices of the Law of Moses; now there was a New Testament in the process of being formed (and nearly entirely available in Jerusalem by this point) wherein all of the mysteries of the Old were revealed, all of the shadows illuminated in the brilliant light of the incarnate Son of God. And no longer were spirituality and sanctification bound up in the practices of the Law (to the extent that they ever really were); spiritual realities had now replaced ritual shadows, so that going back to the shadows was a none too subtle rejection of the now revealed truth these shadows merely hinted at – because only in the coming of Jesus Christ could there ever be any full revelation of those mysteries.

It is of this [Church] that I, [Paul], have become a minister according to God's mandate given to me for dispensing [the truth] to you, in order to bring completeness to God's plan (lit., "word", Gk. *logos*), that is, [to make known] the **mystery hidden** from ages and from generations [past], but **now revealed** to His holy ones (i.e., believers). To all such God desired to make known what wealth there is in this glorious **mystery** regarding the gentiles, for it is that Christ – your hope of glory – is in you.
Colossians 1:25-27

The Old Testament is still of the greatest value (e.g., Rom.15:4; 1Tim.1:8), but that value lies in the spiritual truths it contains which can now be explained and expounded by the New in ways concerning which even those given to write it could only guess at the time (1Pet.1:10-12).

(9) So [then] there **does** remain a "Sabbath day's rest" for the people of God. (10) For he who has entered into [God's] rest has himself ceased from his works just as God did from His own. (11) Let us therefore be eager to enter into that [continual and spiritual] rest, lest anyone fall [from grace] following the same pattern of disobedience [exhibited by the exodus generation].
Hebrews 4:9-11

With the cross, the fourth commandment likewise passed from the realm of shadows into the brilliant light of the Son of God come in the flesh and revealed to the world. No longer would a literal seventh day regimen be necessary – or even useful or helpful. The entire gentile world was about to be evangelized for the great expansion of the Church which is the purpose of this present age. Requiring literal refraining from physical labor on Saturdays could not be realistically accomplished without the adoption of the Law in general, and that would be anathema to spiritual growth (as may be seen from all later experience where some have wrongly

attempted to apply these strictures). Instead of one day a week, believers in Jesus Christ would now be called upon to refrain from their own fleshly works *at all times* . . . by resting in, by trusting in, by relying on the Lord, and not on themselves.

For he who has entered into [God's] rest has himself ceased from his works just as God did from His own.

Hebrews 4:10

Believers today trust God to "do it", whatever "it" may be, not being lazy or slack in any way, but recognizing who it is who is in control of all things, and continually being at peace with His working on our behalf, rather than striving to do things for Him in the energy of the flesh . . . like trying to keep the Law.

So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?

Galatians 3:5 NIV

This peace, this rest in God was always at the heart of genuine Sabbath observance. And now that the dispensation of the letter has been replaced by the dispensation of the Spirit, that peace and rest are available to all believers at all times in a dynamic, spiritual way – not merely in a ritualistic, physical way, one day a week. It is into that spiritual rest we have been called to enter.

Let us therefore be eager to enter into that [continual and spiritual] rest, lest anyone fall [from grace] following the same pattern of disobedience [exhibited by the exodus generation].

Hebrews 4:11

This statement of Paul's was no doubt the most potentially controversial he had made so far in the epistle to the Hebrews, coming as it does in the near context of explaining that he is deliberately contrasting the seventh day worship of the Law with this "faith rest" which believers are to strive to enter and abide in at all times. It is controversial because it implies in no small measure, for those paying close attention and perceiving the logical conclusion of these statements, that to enter into a full-time spiritual rest in fulfillment of the fourth commandment is mutually exclusive to literal Saturday Sabbath observance – and yet that set of rituals was considered to be part of the bedrock of the Law (e.g., Neh.9:14; 10:31; 13:15-22).¹ Paul does not

¹ The sensitive nature of delivering this proposition – i.e., of not only a need for a moment by moment Sabbath but also of renouncing special days – can be easily appreciated by all, inasmuch as this sort of legalistic thinking has fairly infected the entire church visible from the beginning and such thinking continues in our own day with most lukewarm believers imagining that observing Sunday (or Saturday) is somehow important. But this was not a positive point for the broad acceptance of the gospel by gentiles in the days of the apostles: under Rome, there were as yet no "weeks", only months. Divisions of months did occur based on "market days", but these differed by localities. No doubt pagan holidays would have provided the best opportunities for believers to gather. The only way for gentiles to have even known about the seven day week

draw out that inevitable conclusion here just yet. In his eagerness to retain the hearing of those listening, he instead seeks to accumulate an abundance of evidence such as this to predispose them to eventual acceptance of the replacement of the Old Covenant by the New, and he does so one step at a time.

(9) But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? (10) *You observe days* and months and seasons and years. (11) I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.

Galatians 4:9-11 NKJV

We are told at Genesis 2:3 that God "blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because on it He ceased (*shabath* > Sabbath) from all His work". God does not need to rest, obviously, but we human beings do. As readers of this ministry should know, the seven days of Genesis provide a schematic for the organizational plan of God's construction of the ages, with each millennium representing approximately 1,000 years (cf. Ps.90:4; 2Pet.3:8; Rev.20:2-8). The seventh day, the day of rest, corresponds to the Millennium, the thousand year reign of the Messiah wherein earth will be blessed as never before, and human life will be free from toil to the maximum extent possible for sinful creatures. The Sabbath of the Law likewise represented this coming time of blessing and peace, looking forward to that day of eternity where God will be "all in all" (1Cor.15:28). It is to embrace that context of meaning, the truly powerful rest of peace in God and coming from God, not the literal seventh day observance under the Law, that the New Covenant calls us.

(16) So don't let anyone judge you in regard to food or drink, or in the category of festival observances, be it of new moons or *Sabbaths*. (17) All these things are *shadows* of what was to come, but *the reality* has to do with *Christ*.

Colossians 2:16-17

The Power of the Word: This second section of chapter four, verses eleven through thirteen, is often quoted in support of the might and wonder of the Word of God – and rightly so. In the context, however, it is important to understand that Paul is appealing to the Word of God as a godly rebuke to His listeners. The context is all about the Word acting in concert with our consciences and the ministry of the Holy Spirit to convict us whenever we are guilty of straying from the strait and narrow way. Inevitably, believers who are straying – or turning back to the past as so many of the Jerusalem church were doing – have first become sloppy about taking in the truth of the Word. And that was the case here. Most believers have some experience with the phenomenon of growing spiritually under some consistent regimen, then, for whatever reason, backing off on their commitment. At first, things may seem to go well enough, but after a time, the natural erosion of their spiritual sharpness will begin to tell. As Jascha Heifetz

and which day was Saturday / the Sabbath was through the Law and its administration by the priests and Levites in Jerusalem, disseminated through Jewish synagogues. The "week" as a basic pillar of temporal organization came with the establishment of Christianity as a state religion in the fourth century.

famously remarked, "If I don't practice one day, I know it; two days, the critics know it; three days, the public knows it." Similarly, while we don't lose what we have learned and believed, certainly not quite this quickly, eventually we will begin to regress if we fail to progress. It is difficult if not impossible to stand still in the Christian walk – which is, after all, a walk forward, following Jesus Christ.

(32) Remember the days gone by, when you first saw the light, when you persevered through that terrible trial of abuse. (33) For you were publicly exposed to humiliation and persecution, and shared the lot of others who experienced the same. (34) You suffered from my chains, and accepted the confiscation of your belongings with joy, because you knew that you possessed a more valuable estate, and a more lasting one. (35) So do not throw away this conviction of yours – it leads to a great reward. (36) You need to keep persevering so that you may carry off in victory what has been promised – after you have accomplished God's will. (37) For yet a little while, how short, how short [the wait], and He who is coming shall come, nor will He delay. (38) "Then shall my one [made] righteous by his faith live because of his faith, but if he shrinks back, My heart takes no pleasure in him (Hab.2:3-4)." (39) Now we are not possessed of cowardly apostasy which leads to destruction, but we have faith which leads to [eternal] life.
Hebrews 10:32-39

As we see from the quote above, Paul was well aware that the Jerusalem congregation had suffered immensely in the past. They had borne their personal tribulation nobly, growing in the Word and proving fundamental in the initial expansion of the truth "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8 NIV). The Jerusalem believers were shunned and subjected to economic isolation and persecution (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35; 11:28-30; 24:17; Rom.15:25-28; 1Cor.16:1-4; Gal.2:10). Their leaders were beaten (Acts 5:41-42), imprisoned (Acts 12:1ff.), stoned (Acts 7:57-60), and otherwise executed (Acts 12:2-3). The believers themselves were later grievously persecuted, driven from Jerusalem, dragged from their homes, imprisoned and executed (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1; 9:13). The faith of many of them was severely challenged by these events (Jas.1:2-7; cf. Gal.3:4; 1Thes.2:14). Everyone of us, if we do not take pains to avoid it, is subject to "combat fatigue", and that seems to have been the case with many in Jerusalem by the time of their receipt of this letter. Having "done their bit", now that the focus of the expansion of the Church had moved eastward, compromising for the sake of some respite was a natural temptation, leading inevitably to also backing off from their previous dedication to the Word of truth (since rejecting many of its basic tenets was part and parcel of their return to the Law). This was, however, a seriously dangerous course (Ezek.18:1-32).

(24) And let us give careful attention to one another[']s ministries] as motivation for [our own] love and good works, (25) ***not abandoning your mutual assembling*** as some have made it their practice to do [and which makes this impossible], but rather encouraging each other [to persevere in this work of the Lord], and doing so to an ever greater degree to the extent that you see the day [of the Lord] drawing [ever] closer.
Hebrews 10:24-25

We see a similar phenomenon at play today in Laodicea. Commitment to genuine spiritual

growth often results in being shamed by the lukewarm who are "nodding to God" by attending church on Sunday . . . and growing not a whit. Ironically – and usually overlooked by those who quote this passage to shame believers who are not content with the token Christianity practiced by today's church-visible – the true backsliders in Jerusalem were the ones "going to church", i.e., the temple, to partake in pointless ritual instead of assembling with other believers who were desirous of learning the truth of the Word: with rare exceptions, "church-goers" today are akin to those who "refuse to assemble" along with Paul's contemporaries who were returning to the temple rites and abandoning their spiritual duty, while those who are taking pains to grow spiritually are the ones who are "truly assembling" for the mutual encouragement which can only be built upon a solid foundation of the truth of the Word of God – *not* the other way around.

But in one important respect our own situation is different: we are not experiencing the level of persecution the Jerusalem believers had (not in this country, anyway), a continuing measure of significant personal tribulation which had contributed to the dampening of their spiritual ardor and had led far too many to compromise for the sake of peace with the world – when peace with God should be our true desire. The weakening of their faith which had inevitably resulted would make them vulnerable to failing completely once God's terminal cycle of divine discipline hit Judea and Jerusalem not many years hence. And we today who live on the threshold of the Tribulation face a similar challenge: the pressures of the Tribulation will be like none other in history (Matt.24:21; Mk.13:19). Facing them from a lukewarm posture is a recipe for apostasy into which one third of believers who enter those seven years are prophesied to fall (Dan.8:10; 2Thes.2:3; Rev.12:4).

The Word [Jesus Christ] existed at the very beginning, and there was reciprocity (i.e., co-divinity) between the Word and God [the Father]. And the Word was God.
John 1:1

What we have seen from the beginning, what we have heard and seen with our eyes, what we have observed and touched with our hands – this is about the Word of life, [Jesus Christ].
1st John 1:1 (cf. Jn.1:1-4; 1:14)

And He was clothed in a cloak splattered with blood, and His Name stands [forever]:
"The Word of God".
Revelation 19:13

Jesus Christ *is* the Word of God. By their failure to give proper attention to the Bible and its teaching, these believers, like all believers before or since who have done so, were neglecting their Savior. This is the essence of Paul's point in bringing in the penetrating power of the Word of God directly after his discussion of the exodus generation and the need to enter into God's true rest, not a Sabbath of the Law but a daily, moment by moment walk with Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit: giving attention to the Word will reveal to them in their heart of hearts that they have been unfaithful in this most important of all Christian endeavors, spiritual growth.

(22) Be doers of the Word and not merely hearers, deceiving yourselves. (23) Because if

anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, such a one is like a man who recognizes his natural face in a mirror – (24) for in this case, though he recognized himself, he straightway went about his business, soon forgetting what he looked like. (25) But he who sets his gaze upon the perfect law of freedom (i.e., scripture – the perfect mirror of the heart) and sticks with it, and is not a [mere] forgetful hearer [of the Word], but a doer of deeds [inspired by the Word], that man will be blessed in his "doing".
James 1:22-25

"Doing" in their case would mean resuming assembly – assembly with other growing believers not with unbelievers and the lukewarm at the temple – for the sake of listening to the truth being taught, believing that truth and then acting upon it, as had been their good pattern in the past. But by failing to pursue spiritual growth, these believers had, in effect, "abandoned their first love" (Rev.2:4), and had instead fallen into a pattern of resisting the Holy Spirit's remonstrance with their consciences, hardening their hearts to the truth instead of allowing the truth to correct them, prune them, refine them, and lead them forward in the brilliant light of the truth. In short, they had left the high road leading to life and had allowed themselves to slip backward into that reverse, dangerous pattern which leads to destruction (cf. Ezek.18:1-32).

(17) So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do with their minds emptied [of the truth]. (18) They are darkened in their thinking, separated from the life of God because of this [willful] ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts [against the truth], (19) who, when once they have lost all sensitivity [for what is right], have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. (20) This is not how you learned to follow Christ.
Ephesians 4:17-20

So while these verses (i.e., Heb.4:11-13), are beautiful and positive validations of the glory of scripture in their own right, Paul's purpose here is one of rebuke.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for **reproof**, for **correction**, for **instruction** in righteousness.
2nd Timothy 3:16 KJV

Proclaim the Word! Keep at it, whether circumstances are favorable or not! **Reprove**, **rebuke**, [and] encourage with all patience [in your] teaching!
2nd Timothy 4:2

This saying is true. Therefore **rebuke** them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith
Titus 1:13 NIV

These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and **rebuke** with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.
Titus 2:15 NIV

Without a change of heart, nothing good was coming to the Jerusalem believers. Instead, their failure to "recognize the time" would remove the only protection of blessing by association their city and their nation still possessed, as the salt lost its savor:

(41) Now as [Jesus] drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, (42) saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. (43) For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, (44) and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, ***because you did not know the time of your visitation.***"

Luke 19:41-44 NIV

There is an application for us today too. As with the believers in Jerusalem, the time of our visitation is swiftly coming on as well. We cannot change the future as God has ordained it, any more than they could. But there is a great difference between how our Lord comports Himself toward those who are striving to do what He desires and towards those who are not.

(2) "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, to you, O Baruch: (3) 'You said, "Woe is me now! For the Lord has added grief to my sorrow. I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest." ' (4) "Thus you shall say to him, 'Thus says the Lord: "Behold, what I have built I will break down, and what I have planted I will pluck up, that is, this whole land. (5) "And do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them; for behold, I will bring adversity on all flesh," says the Lord. "But I will give your life to you as a prize in all places, wherever you go." ' ' "

Jeremiah 45:2-5 NKJV

"Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."

Luke 21:36 NIV

Our High Priest: Once Paul had connected the Jerusalem church's regressing to the Law with the exodus generation's refusal to enter into God's continual rest of faith (in contrast to the ritual rest of the Sabbath), and, further, had appealed to their consciences through the Word they were neglecting, then, in his third paragraph, reminding them of their true High Priest in heaven was a logical next step, meant to leave them in no further doubt about the replacement of the Law, the Old Covenant replaced by the New in our present dispensation of the Spirit.

(16) "No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and the tear is made worse. (17) Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put ***new wine into new wineskins***, and both are preserved."

Matthew 9:16-17 NKJV

For this is My blood of the ***new covenant***, which is shed for many for the remission of

sins.

Matthew 26:28 NKJV

For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are *not under law* but under *grace*.

Romans 6:14 NKJV

For Christ is the *end of the law* for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Romans 10:4 NKJV

[God] who also made us sufficient as ministers of the *new covenant*, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

2nd Corinthians 3:6 NKJV

Now, instead of having Moses to follow, a mere steward over the house – we have the Son of God Himself.

(1) So, brothers, [being now] sanctified and partakers of the call [come] from heaven, set your hearts on Him whom we profess as the One sent [to save us] and the High Priest [of that salvation], [even] Jesus, (2) who was faithful to the One who appointed Him, just as also Moses was in all of his "household" (i.e., area of responsibility). (3) This One [Jesus Christ] is worthy of greater glory than Moses inasmuch as the One who builds the house has greater honor than the house itself. (4) For every house is built by someone, but God is the One who has built all things (i.e., creation). (5) And while Moses was faithful as a servant in all of his household as a witness to the [truths] that would be spoken [in the future], (6) Christ [was faithful] as a Son over His household – whose household we are, if indeed we hold fast to the hope [in which we] boast, firmly until the end.

Hebrews 3:1-6

Now, instead of the literal blood of animal sacrifices, we have the very blood of Christ, that is, His spiritual death in the darkness whereby He once and for all paid the price for all of our sins.

(18) . . . knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, (19) but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

1st Peter 1:18-19 NKJV

Now, instead of a temple built of earthly materials, Jesus Christ is our temple, and we as His Body are being built up into a spiritual temple to worship and glorify Him.

(19) Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." (20) But He was speaking of the temple of His body.

John 2:19-20 NKJV

(4) Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, (5) you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy

priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.
1st Peter 2:4-5 NKJV

Now, instead of festivals with sacrificial meals, for us, these shadows have been replaced with the reality of Jesus Christ, whose sacrifice for us on the cross we celebrate whenever we take communion.

(23) For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, (24) and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." (25) In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink [it], in remembrance of me." (26) For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.
1st Corinthians 11:23-26 NIV

(16) So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, (17) which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.
Colossians 2:16-17 NKJV

Now, instead of a one-day-a-week ritual worship, we have a moment-by-moment Sabbath rest of walking with our Lord in peace in the power of the Holy Spirit.

(9) So [then] there *does* remain a "Sabbath day's rest" for the people of God. (10) For he who has entered into [God's] rest has himself ceased from his works just as God did from His own.
Hebrews 4:9-10

Now, instead of a mortal human being to act as a priest on our behalf, we have Jesus Christ Himself as our perfect and eternal High Priest.

Since we have, therefore, a Great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, [even] Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our profession [of faith in Him].
Hebrews 4:14

And if there has been a change of priesthood – and there most definitely has – then why were these believers reverting to the merely ritualistic priesthood of the Law? To be a believer in Christ is to rely on *His* intercession on our behalf in dying for our sins. Going back to the Law is proclaiming His sacrifice null and void, in effect, when in fact it is the Law that has become obsolete.

In that He says, "*A new covenant*," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.
Hebrews 6:8 NKJV

The other side of the coin here is that, in addition to waking the Jerusalem believers up to the

new reality of a High Priest in heaven who has replaced the ones on earth along with the Law, having that High Priest to advocate and intercede for us is a blessing far beyond any benefit the Aaronic priesthood ever provided. Jesus our heavenly High Priest had provided **actual** forgiveness for our sins, including the ones the Jerusalem church was committing in turning their backs on Him (Rom.3:25-26; Eph.5:2; Heb.2:17; 9:5-7; 9:11-12; 9:23-24; 1Jn.2:2; 4:9-10).

Unlike the [human] high priests, [Jesus] has no need of making sacrifice day by day, first on behalf of His own sins, and then for the sins of the people. For this [latter] He did once and for all when He **offered Himself** [as a sacrifice].
Hebrews 7:27

Jesus our heavenly High Priest is presently **advocating** on our behalf to the Father whenever we do commit sins, including the ones the Jerusalem church was committing in turning their backs on Him (Rom.8:34; 1Jn.2:1; cf. Job 16:19; Jn.14:13-14; 1Tim.2:5).

(23) Now the others who have become priests are [of necessity] many since they are prevented from remaining [in office] because of their mortality. (24) But He, [Jesus Christ], because He abides forever, possesses the priesthood irrevocably. (25) For this reason He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, since He lives forever **making intercession** for them.
Hebrews 7:23-25

And since Jesus is our heavenly High Priest, He stands ready to hear our prayers and forgive us whatever sin and evil we may be involved in whenever we repent and confess, including what the Jerusalem church was involved in through turning their backs on Him.

"You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."
John 14:14 NIV

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.
1st John 1:9 NIV

This is a critical point for anyone who proclaims the Word of God to remember: along with rebuke and reproof, we must also never forgo teaching the solution, ever reminding those to whom we minister of the great mercies of our God.

(3) If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? (4) But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.
Psalm 130:3-4 NIV

(21) This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. (22) It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. (23) They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.
Lamentations 3:21-23 NKJV

Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are convinced of better things in your case – the things that have to do with salvation.

Hebrews 6:9 NIV

II. Translation

(1) So let us beware lest any of you should seem to fall short of entering into His rest by casting aside [God's] promise [in a manner similar to the exodus generation]. (2) For we have had the gospel proclaimed to us just as they did. But the Word they heard did not profit them, for, though they heard it, they did not mix it with faith. (3) For it is we who **have believed** who enter into this rest [not those without faith], just as He has said, "So I swore in my anger, 'They shall not enter into My rest.' "

(4) Now [God] has spoken somewhere about the seventh day in this way: "And God **rested** on the seventh day from all of His works" (Gen.2:2). (5) Yet to quote our context again, [He said] "They shall **not** enter into My rest" (Ps.95:11). (6) Since it follows [from comparing these two passages] that some [of His people] **will** enter into this rest of His, although that previous [generation] did **not** do so on account of their lack of faith (unbelief) – even though they had [also] had the good news [of salvation] proclaimed to them – (7) [God] has designated another day, namely, "Today". Speaking through David so many years after [the passing of the exodus generation], [God] has proclaimed the following: "**Today** if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts . . .". (8) Now if Joshua had given [the exodus generation and their children this] rest, [God] would not be speaking about any other "day" [of rest, so long] after those [earlier] events.

(9) So [then] there **does** remain a "Sabbath day's rest" for the people of God. (10) For he who has entered into [God's] rest has himself ceased from his works just as God did from His own. (11) Let us therefore be eager to enter into that [continual and spiritual] rest, lest anyone fall [from grace] following the same pattern of disobedience [exhibited by the exodus generation].

(12) For the Word of God is living and powerful; it is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even to the point of being able to divide the spirit from its earthly life and the marrow from its bones; [for] it (i.e., the Word when resident in our conscience) acts as a judge of our heart's thoughts and deliberations. (13) For there is no created thing [which can remain] invisible before Him. Everything is naked and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

(14) Since we have, therefore, a Great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, [even] Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our profession [of faith in Him]. (15) For we do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, since He too was put to the test in all things just as [we are], [only] without sin. (16) So let us approach the throne of grace [of the Father] with the confidence to speak freely, that we might receive [His] mercy and gain [His] favor to help us in our time of need.

Hebrews 4:1-16

III. Summary and Paraphrase

Jesus is the Initiator of the true Sabbath (as opposed to the Sabbath of the Law). He is the living

Word of God, and as the true High Priest, He is the One who has fulfilled all the ritual meaning of the Sabbath (and of all the festivals).

To continue with what we have been saying, since the exodus generation failed to enter into "rest", not trusting the Lord and therefore not being allowed to enter into the land of promises which symbolizes that rest of faith, you should take pains not to make the same mistake: the fact that in our passage, Psalm 95, the psalmist says that "Today" is the day of entrance into that rest, and warns against hardening the heart so as not to enter it, means that this promise of faith-rest is available for you right now – and you should be very careful about refusing to enter it, remembering that God's true rest is entered by faith, not by the works of the Law you seem to prefer and to which you have turned back just as the exodus generation turned back to Egypt in their hearts. They had the good news of salvation proclaimed to them just as you have, but in their case it did them no good because they refused to believe it as we know full well from their faithless behavior. Only those who believe enter into the rest of faith. After all, it says in our psalm that the Lord swore to them that they would *not* enter His rest. And He said that even though of course the original Sabbath of the seventh day of re-creation happened a very long time before those words were spoken or written (Gen.2:2). And since the exodus generation refused to enter the rest of faith, God set out another day, the "Today" of Psalm 95 written long after that rebellious generation had passed. They did not enter because of their lack of trust in the Lord and lack of faithfulness to Him, and not even their children fulfilled this "rest", because if Psalm 95 were talking about the entrance of that second generation into the land of promise, the psalmist, who wrote many centuries later, would not have said that "Today" was the day of entrance into rest. So there is a true "Sabbath rest" for God's people, a spiritual one which fulfills the symbolism of the ritual observance. Anyone who has entered into that true rest of faith has ceased trying to work for salvation (as in wrongly looking to the Law as the means thereof or engaging in so called "Gnostic combat"), just as God too ceased from His own works of reconstructing the world on the very first Sabbath. Let us therefore make every effort to enter into that true faith-rest, the rest of trusting the Lord and not of turning back to the works of the Law which cannot save, so that we do not fall into the same trap of disobedient lack of faith.

The Lord knows what is in all of our hearts. Rebellion cannot be hidden from Him who is the very Word of God. And we also have the written Word which, if we are honest and listen to the Spirit's voice in making it clear to us, will pierce through all lies and convict all false doctrines we may have believed, refute all lies we have been told and given ear to, right to the depths of our heart. Instead of turning back to the rituals of the Law (or Gnostic perversions of them), therefore, let us remember that we have been saved by putting our faith in the true High Priest, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Since He came into this world as a true human being in order to sacrifice Himself for our sins, He knows full well and experientially what it means to be human. And as one who drank to the full the cup of bitterness which is human life, Jesus is able to be sympathetic to the pressures you are under and to the ostracism you are suffering – all of the temptations that lie at the heart of your present rebellion. For He suffered all of the same pressures and temptations – only without ever succumbing to them as you are doing. So instead of giving in

through lack of faith, let us take our petitions directly to Him, confident that we will indeed receive mercy, grace and timely help from Him who is seated on the throne of grace on high if we do so.

IV. Verse by Verse Commentary

Verse One

So let us beware lest any of you should seem to fall short of entering into His rest by casting aside [God's] promise [in a manner similar to the exodus generation].
Hebrews 4:1

So: The Greek conjunction *oun* indicates a conclusion here based upon what preceded in chapter three: "For this reason, that is, on account of the negative example of the exodus generation who were unable to enter the land of promise because they were unfaithful and disbelieving . . . ". The appeal Paul gives the Jerusalem believers in this verse is based directly upon what he had just said. This is important for modern readers to note since we all probably have a tendency to think of chapters in the Bible as self-contained units, whereas in fact, of course, chapter divisions in both testaments are relatively recent inventions. The New Testament chapter and verse divisions with which we are all familiar were devised respectively by Stephen Langton in the thirteenth century and Robert Estienne in the sixteenth century. These are very helpful markers for us all, but it is a mistake to think that there is anything inspired about them.² We all need to be aware that sometimes such divisions can impair our sense of the flow of the argument (in any Bible passage where the sense continues after a chapter break), if we pause, e.g., between reading chapters. This passage is a good example, because the division here between chapters three and four is particularly unfortunate. Everything Paul says here in chapter four is predicated upon the argument he has just made in chapter three, and he would have counted on his readers *not* pausing at this badly chosen and arbitrary break-point.

Let Us: Paul uses the first person plural cohortative which includes himself, "let *us*", to soften the command here and to introduce it more as an encouragement rather than as a direct rebuke. Paul was aware that there was much in this epistle that would be hard for this church to take. He wants his readers to respond and not to become discouraged, comporting himself towards them like a loving father who wants his children's conduct to be corrected but does not wish to embitter them unnecessarily.

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.
Ephesians 6:4 NIV

Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.
Colossians 3:21 NIV

² For example, some of the ancient biblical manuscripts such as Aleph (Sinaiticus) had paragraph divisions which do not coincide with our present system whatsoever.

Seem to Fall Short: Paul is being indirect here (i.e., by saying "*let us* beware lest any *seem* to fall short", rather than saying "*Don't* fall short, you all!") for two reasons. First, as mentioned above, he hoped that this way of putting things would make the bitter pill of being compared to the exodus generation go down a bit easier. Second, it is also true that since we are often not entirely sure about ourselves when it comes to evaluating spiritual matters (1Cor.4:3-5; cf. 1Cor.10:12; 2Cor.9:3; Gal.2:2; Phil.3:11), how much less then can we be confident about ascertaining the spiritual state of other believers? To be sure, we can see what they do and say, and Paul's conviction that many if not most in the Jerusalem church were in fact in grave spiritual danger was founded upon good evidence, no doubt reported to him by many visitors and correspondents (cf. 1Cor.1:11).

Paul is certain enough that he himself, at any rate, is not on the road to apostasy or the sin unto death (for he says, "lest any of *you*"), but in terms of individual believers at Jerusalem, he obviously will not have had the complete picture of every single one. And it is also true that there is sometimes a disconnect between our words and actions on the one hand, and what is really going on in our hearts on the other. The former are seldom independent of the latter, however, and every believer needs to remember that we are being watched at all times, not only by the Lord and the elect angels, but by our fellow believers and unbelievers alike. Keeping our witness above reproach is important not only for reasons of avoiding hypocrisy but also to further the kingdom of God. Paul was no doubt hoping, based upon the previous wonderful witness given by this church in years past, that this dangerous behavior of many in going back to the Law and of some in delving into Gnosticism was merely an aberration and a correctable mistake. His qualification here is meant for those who have not fully joined in these serious errors – and for those who have who will yet be willing to respond to His Spirit-filled words, accepting the rebuke and reforming their behavior.

(32) Remember the days gone by, when you first saw the light, when you persevered through that terrible trial of abuse. (33) For you were publicly exposed to humiliation and persecution, and shared the lot of others who experienced the same. (34) You suffered from my chains, and accepted the confiscation of your belongings with joy, because you knew that you possessed a more valuable estate, and a more lasting one. (35) So do not throw away this conviction of yours – it leads to a great reward.

Hebrews 10:32-35

Casting Aside God's Promise: What does it mean to "to fall short of entering into His rest" and to "cast aside the promises of God"? In the Greek text the latter is the predicate for the former. That is to say, overlooking and neglecting God's promises *leads* to failure in faith-rest. Properly motivated believers move forward. We are motivated by the rewards to come on the other side of this life: the resurrection, the reunion of the entire Bride of Christ, the eternal crowns and other rewards we will receive for our stalwart service to the Lord in this life, the offices we will occupy in the Lord's millennial kingdom, and our place and life eternal in New Jerusalem. God has promised us all these things, *if* we but remain faithful to the One who has done everything for us in Jesus Christ.

Now *without faith*, it is impossible to please [God]. For whoever wishes to draw nearer

to God must believe that He exists, and that He will reward those who earnestly seek Him.

Hebrews 11:6

(8) **By faith**, Abraham, when He was called [by God], obeyed and went forth into the place he was destined to receive as an inheritance. He went forth, moreover, in ignorance of where [exactly] he was heading. (9) **By faith**, he sojourned as an alien in the land he had been promised, dwelling in tents with Jacob and Isaac, coheirs of [this same] promise. (10) For he was waiting for the foundation of that city (i.e., the New Jerusalem) whose architect and builder is God.

Hebrews 11:8-10

(24) **By faith**, Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, (25) and chose instead to suffer maltreatment with the people of God rather than to enjoy the transitory pleasures of sin, (26) because he considered the reproach [suffered on behalf] of Christ greater riches than [all the] treasure vaults of Egypt. For he was looking to his reward.

Hebrews 11:24-26

Whenever we lose sight of this eternal perspective, whenever we "lose focus" in the Christian life, we tend to drift rather than maintain our spiritual momentum, and drifting eventually, if not necessarily immediately, generally results in moving sideways and then moving backwards. When that happens, not only has the person so affected forgotten to keep God's promises firmly in mind, but he/she has come to regard them as of little import compared to the things of this life and this world. Then, for the sake of "pursuing happiness" in a secular way on the one hand, or "avoiding trouble" because of our faith on the other, said individual may actually come to the point of "casting aside" these most valuable promises, thinking and speaking and acting as if they were meaningless. When this happens, said individual will find him/herself testing God and grieving the Lord in the very same manner as the exodus generation did, failing to enter the day-by-day rest we are offered which provides the necessary peace to make it through this world in a godly way, seeking substitutes in this world instead. This was precisely the status of some large number of the Jerusalem church in returning to the Law (for security) or embracing Gnosticism (for worldly pleasure).

(20 "But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; (21) yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For **when tribulation or persecution arises** because of the word, immediately he stumbles.

Matthew 13:20-21 NKJV

(16) "These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; (17) and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, **when tribulation or persecution arises** for the word's sake, immediately they stumble."

Mark 4:16-17 NKJV

"But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and *in time of temptation* fall away."
Luke 8:13 NKJV

In days soon to come, there will definitely be much "tribulation or persecution . . . because of the word". Just as the exodus generation offered a very useful cautionary tale for the believers of Jerusalem of that later day, so both groups should stand as warnings for us "upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1Cor.11:11 NKJV).

Verse Two

For we have had the gospel proclaimed to us just as they did. But the Word they heard did not profit them, for, though they heard it, they did not mix it with faith.
Hebrews 4:2

The Gospel: [index]

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me will live, even if he dies. And everyone who lives and believes in Me will surely not die forevermore."
John 11:25-26

The word "gospel" is a direct Old English translation of the Greek word *euangelion* meaning, literally, "good news" or "blessed proclamation".³ Truly, there is no better news for sinful human beings facing death, judgment, and condemnation than that Jesus Christ has died for us and that we may have eternal life by simply putting our faith in Him (2Tim.1:9-10). Ever since our Lord's first advent, ever since the cross and the resurrection, this message has been proclaimed with crystal clarity in the direct light of the truth with no shadows obscuring it whatsoever.

"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved!"
Acts 16:31

Before our Lord came into this world, before He died for us and rose on the third day, the message was the same – trust in God for deliverance from sin and death – but it was presented symbolically. Nevertheless, from the coats of skin that the Lord made for Adam and Eve to cover their nakedness (sinfulness symbolically removed by the death and blood of another), to the elaborate and extensive rituals of the Mosaic Law, God has never left Himself without a witness to the truth on this earth (Ps.19:1-6; Acts 14:17; 17:24-31). Anyone at any time in human history who truly desired to be saved was given the necessary information to be so saved, the gospel, presented "at many times and in many ways" (Heb.1:1a), and resulting in salvation for all who embraced the truth even before the cross, after which "in these last days [the Father] has communicated to us [*directly*] in a Son" (Heb.1:1b). So it is wrong to assume that the exodus

³ See BB 4B: Soteriology, section II.5, "The Gospel".

generation was in any way disadvantaged on account of not having had the gospel given to them in the same direct way as we have received it, the same way in which Paul's contemporaries had received it. After all, the father of the Jewish race, Abraham, "*trusted* in the Lord, and [the Lord] considered him righteous because of it" (Gen.15:6).

(18) But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did: "Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world." (19) Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says, "I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding." (20) And Isaiah boldly says, "I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me." (21) But concerning Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people."

Romans 10:18-21 NIV

Salvation, therefore, is not a matter of information. Rather, it is a matter of willingness on the part of those who receive the gospel – and God never refuses it for those who are desirous of it (Jn.3:16; 1Tim.2:4; cf. Ezek.18:23; Matt.18:14; Jn.12:47; 2Pet.3:9).⁴ And while some might think to advance the false excuse of "never having heard", surely the exodus generation, the generation led by Moses and Aaron and first given the Law, having heard from the Lord Himself (Deut.5:23-29), and having been given so many miraculous signs (e.g., the ten plagues on Egypt, the great victory at the Red sea, the pillar of cloud and fire guiding them by day and night, the manna supplied to them daily), had no excuse whatsoever – how much less so Paul's readers, many of whom had seen the Lord personally.

Not Mixed with Faith:

Thus Israel saw the great work which the Lord had done in Egypt; so the people feared the Lord and *believed* the Lord and His servant Moses.

Exodus 14:31 NKJV

By faith they (i.e., the exodus generation) crossed the Red Sea as if it were dry land – though when the Egyptians tried this they were drowned.

Hebrews 11:29

Did they never believe? The verses above indicates that initially they did believe, at least for a time, after their outburst against Moses on the banks of the Red Sea (Ex.14:10-14), long enough at any rate to have enough faith to cross the miraculously divided sea. How then did they lose faith? Paul, writing in the Spirit, says in our context verse, "though they heard [the good news], they did not mix it with faith".

⁴ Salvation is also not a matter of perception, since the Holy Spirit is the One who makes the issue of the gospel clear to everyone who is given to hear it; thus there is no "epistemological problem". See BB 5: Pneumatology: the Study of the Holy Spirit, section II.B.1.d.2, "Gospel Epistemology".

"Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. **They believe for a while**, but in the time of testing **they fall away**." Luke 8:13 NIV (cf. Matt.18:20-21; Mk.4:15-16)

The above verse seems to fit the majority of the exodus generation to a tee. While they may have had a small amount of faith early on, after their miraculous deliverance from the hordes of Pharaoh and their joyous praise of the Lord on the other side of the Red Sea (Ex.15:1-21), beyond all argument the exodus generation failed test after test thereafter, precisely by **not** trusting the Lord to bring them through whatever adversity it was they were facing. Instead, their immediate default was to complain and blame, first Moses, then God Himself. Such is not the stuff of strong faith or even the indication of any faith at all. Only God knows what is going on in the heart of any given person. The rest of us are often not capable of distinguishing between stone-cold unbelievers and extremely marginal believers. Indeed, in terms of what they say and do, sadly there often is no difference whatsoever between the two. But the exodus generation did keep the Passover as commanded (otherwise their firstborn would likewise have been killed); they did follow Moses and the Lord out of Egypt and into the desert; and, as the passage quoted above, Hebrews 11:29 affirms, they did cross the Red Sea "by faith", and they did **at that time** "believe" in the Lord and His servant Moses (Ex.14:31). Whether or not this modicum of faith completely evaporated during their frequent rebellions against God and His spokesmen, only God knows. We can say with surety, however, that their behavior is not to be emulated by us today, but that it was, as the epistle to the Hebrews bears witness, being emulated to some distressing degree by many of the Jerusalem believers to whom Paul was appealing.

(7) Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "Today if you hear His voice, (8) **do not harden your hearts** as in the rebellion during the time of trial in the desert (9) where your fathers tried Me and put Me to the test, although they saw my works [on their behalf] (10) for forty years.
Hebrews 3:7-10a

The heart is, in biblical terms, the inner-person, the place where the physical mind and the human spirit interact, the place where we think and feel and emote and decide.⁵ The heart is made by God to respond to the truth, but when the truth is rejected, something else always takes its place, namely, some lie or system of lies invented by the evil one (Jn.8:44).⁶

(17) So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do with their minds emptied [of the truth]. (18) They are darkened in their thinking, separated from the life of God because of this [willful] ignorance that is in them due to **the hardening of their hearts** [against the truth], (19) who, when once they have

⁵ This inner person is also called the "soul" in the Bible, often confused in secular appreciations of the Bible but in scripture meaning the same thing as "the heart". See BB 3A: Anthropology, section II.4, "The Dichotomy of Man".

⁶ For a detailed case study of the process, see the series "Exodus 14: Hardening Pharaoh's Heart". For an analysis of the devil's system of lies, see SR 4: Satan's World System.

lost all sensitivity [for what is right], have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.
Ephesians 4:17-19

Make sure, brothers, that none of you develop an evil heart of unbelief [lack of faith] by turning away (lit., "apostatizing") from the living God. Rather keep encouraging each other every day as long as we still call it "today" (i.e., we remain in this world), lest any of you *be hardened* [in heart] by the deception of sin.
Hebrews 3:12-13

When believers receive and accept the glorious light of the gospel, our hearts are illuminated by the truth and we are delivered from all previous hardening (Ezek.11:18-21; 18:31; 36:26; 2Cor.5:17; Gal.6:15).⁷ But over the course of our lives, if we fail to respond to the truth, if instead we begin to turn back to the world, such decisions dim the light that is in us. Our hearts which were once tender to the Word and to the Lord become hardened against them. Sin plays a role in this process because sin is lawlessness, rebellion against God (1Jn.3:4). That is why believers need to take pains to repent and confess our sins quickly when we do err.

The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart,
And saves such as have a contrite spirit.
Psalm 34:18 NKJV

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit,
A broken and a contrite heart—
These, O God, You will not despise.
Psalm 51:17 NKJV

And while we all stumble, and are all promised forgiveness if we seek it (Ps.32:5; 1Jn.1:9), any believer who refuses to repent of sinful behavior pushes the Lord away, so to speak, becoming estranged from Him rather than drawing closer to Him as we all should be making every effort to do daily. The consequence of turning our backs on Him who is the light is the darkening of our inner person back towards the darkness that ruled absolutely when we were unbelievers. Our faith in Jesus Christ shattered our previous hardness of heart, but subsequent rebellion against the Lord, lack of faith, lack of trust, complaining against Him, turning away from Him and back to the world, all of these negative behaviors and attitudes only serve to clog our spiritual circulatory system and blind our spiritual eyesight.

(22) "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. (23) But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"
Matthew 6:22-23 NKJV

Failing to believe the Lord, failing to trust Him when we are under the pressure of some testing,

⁷ See BB 4B: Soteriology, section II.7, "Spiritual Rebirth".

is, therefore, not only a matter of failing to "mix the Word with faith" as in our context verse. The *fact* of such failure has consequences. When we trust God, we grow; when we doubt God, we regress. The more we trust Him, the more absolutely we trust Him when the chips are down, the more solid our faith becomes; the more we doubt Him, complain about our lot, fail to have confidence in His deliverance, the quicker will be our spiritual decline. And if we persist in this reverse course long enough, eventually our hearts will harden – even to the point of snuffing out our previous faith entirely. Before that happens, God is gracious, loving Father that He is, to send us sufficient divine discipline to motivate us to turn around. When He does, it is very important for those who have taken a bad turn such as this to respond to His loving correction appropriately, not losing heart, but actually turning around in repentance, the very thing divine discipline is designed to accomplish (Heb.12:3-13).⁸ The exodus generation was notorious for failing all their tests and rebuffing all such divine correction. They did this deliberately – because as creatures possessed of the image of God, free will, of course we decide how we are going to act and react: even if we do so out of a fit of emotional excess, we are still responsible for giving in to it. Paul is entreating the Jerusalem believer not to take a page from that tragic book, but instead to turn around and respond appropriately to the Father's disciplining of them, trusting Him and doing what He wills in returning to Jesus Christ with all their hearts, not continuing to harden those hearts instead.

Verse Three

For it is we who *have believed* who enter into this rest [not those without faith], just as He has said, "So I swore in my anger, 'They shall not enter into My rest.' "
Hebrews 4:3

Entering into God's Rest: As this verse demonstrates, faith (or lack thereof) is the critical element in entering into God's rest . . . or not.⁹ We enter into the peace, the rest of God in the first place when we believe in Jesus Christ, when we believe the truth of the good news about Him; we abide in that peace, that rest, we move forward in it and deeper into it as we grow in grace through learning, believing and applying all of the truth of the Bible. The exodus generation seems to have believed at first, but later, with some rare exceptions, to have fallen away (Lk.8:13). They did cross the Red Sea "by faith" (Heb.11:29; cf. Ex.14:31), but when they had a chance to enter into the land at last, they rebelled against the Lord's direct, spoken will, accepting the bad report of the ten spies and ignoring the good report of Caleb and Joshua (Num.13:1-33; Deut.1:19-33). This was "the last straw", so to speak, whereby, after much mercy and forgiveness and longsuffering and after failing repeated previous tests (Ex.14:10-12; 15:22-24; 16:1-3; 16:19-20; 16:27-30; 17:1-4; 32:1-5; Num.11:1-3; 11:4-34; 14:3), the Lord's patience with them finally came to an end.

(22) "Not one of those who saw my glory and the signs I performed in Egypt and in the

⁸ See BB 3B: Hamartiology, section IV.5, "Principles of Divine Discipline".

⁹ For that reason, calling this state of trust in the Lord "Faith Rest" is appropriate. See *The Faith-Rest Life*, by Col. R.B. Thieme jr. (Berachah 1961).

wilderness but who disobeyed me and *tested me ten times* (23) not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their ancestors. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it."

Numbers 14:22-23 NIV

Having refused to enter His rest by trusting Him in all of the prior ten tests and having now placed the capstone on their rebellious disobedience, the exodus generation was prevented from entering the land of promise – and it is from just this sort of final crossing of the line into unbelief (from having consistently refused to trust the Lord) that Paul is attempting to spare the Jerusalem believers.

(23) Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror (24) and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. (25) But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it – *not forgetting* what they have heard, but *doing* it – they will be blessed in what they do.

James 1:23-25 NIV

Being a "doer of the Word" is first and foremost *believing* the truth after hearing it (cf. Jn.6:29 NKJV: "This is *the work* of God, *that you believe* in Him whom He sent"). Then also, as the passage above explains, it is also "continuing in [the truth]", that is, living according to the truth we have believed. Believers believe. And since we believe, we ought to think and speak and act according to that belief. Otherwise, our reputed faith is no faith at all, merely knowledge which has no value apart from believing it: as in the case of the exodus generation, knowledge which is not mixed with genuine trust in the Lord so as to respond to that truth as the Lord would have us to do is worthless.

(14) What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? (15) Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. (16) If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? (17) In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. (18) But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. (19) You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder. (20) You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? (21) Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? (22) You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. (23) And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. (24) You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone. (25) In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? (26) As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

James 2:14-26 NIV

This is *not* salvation by works and in no way counter to the salvation by grace proclaimed by e.g. Paul elsewhere (Rom.3:27; 4:2; 4:6; 9:11; 9:32; 11:6; Gal.2:16; 3:10; Eph.2:8-9). Anyone can say that they have faith; the faith of genuine believers is validated by what we think, say and do. The doing proves the believing for without the believing there would be no doing. Both Abraham and Rahab were "justified" by trusting the Lord: that is the sort of "good work" which our Savior desires from us, not the legalistic works of the flesh to which Paul's contemporaries had returned.

They profess to know God, but *in works* they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every *good work*.

Titus 1:16 NKJV

True believers, therefore, are the ones embracing God's faith-rest. That is the "work" to which we have been called, the "work" of trusting God to "do it" and following through on whatever He has told us to do in confirmation of that belief. It is "we who *have believed* who enter into this rest"; but to those who have rebelled against the Lord and who have continually and repeatedly failed to trust Him when the pressure was on, He says, "So I swore in my anger, 'They shall not enter into My rest.' " If the exodus generation had truly believed, they would have done what the Lord commanded and entered into the land of promise instead of refusing to do so. If we truly believe we will demonstrate our faith by entering into the Lord's "Sabbath rest of faith", waiting on Him to answer us and deliver us, faithfully doing whatever He asks of us in the meantime.

On this account take up that full armor of God so that you may be able to resist in the day of trouble and, when you have completely done everything [necessary (in spiritual preparation); i.e., whatever He has called you to do], to stand your ground (waiting on Him and resting in Him in faith).

Ephesians 6:13

Verses Four through Five

(4) Now [God] has spoken somewhere about the seventh day in this way: "And God *rested* on the seventh day from all of His works" (Gen.2:2). (5) Yet to quote our context again, [He said] "They shall *not* enter into My rest" (Ps.95:11).

Hebrews 4:4-5

The Seventh Day: As mentioned and covered in some detail in the introduction, the original seventh day was the final day of the Lord's reconstruction of the world to make it fit for human habitation in order for the human race to provide God's solution to the devil's rebellion.¹⁰ Just as He had created the original universe, time and space, in the blink of an eye long before the seven days (Jn.1:3; 1Cor.8:6; Col.1:16; Heb.1:2), so our Lord could have refitted the world as habitable for the human beings He was going to create in an instant with no effort whatsoever. The purpose of the seven days was to give the angels, elect and fallen, and us as well, an outline for

¹⁰ These matters are covered in detail in the Satanic Rebellion series, specifically Part 1: Satan's Rebellion and Fall from Grace; Part 2: The Genesis Gap; and Part 3: The Purpose, Creation, and Fall of Man.

our God's great plan of redemption (accomplished through judgment, restoration, and replacement), resulting in everlasting peace and rest in the new heavens and new earth where only righteousness dwells (2Pet.3:13).

Thus the seventh day of our Lord's restoration of the heavens and the earth (following the judgment of the Genesis gap and setting the stage for the replacement of the fallen angels with the Bride of Christ) is symbolic of the successful completion of the overall plan of God, with the seven days in toto also providing us with a template of the outline of human history, the seventh day representing the last phase of that history, the time of great peace and rest, the Millennium.¹¹ Peace and rest, wholeness and completeness, blessing and light and truth with no darkness or division or trouble or sorrow has always been God's will for the world. Only the intervention of sin – in the form of Satan's rebellion and the subsequent fall of humanity in the persons of Adam and Eve – could ever have disrupted that peace. And only the divine intervention of God Himself in the very person of Jesus Christ come into this world as an atoning sacrifice for all human sin could restore it. We do not yet see that peace entirely restored (as Paul says earlier in this epistle: Heb.2:8), but we who believe in Jesus Christ have been given the blessed opportunity to have and to manifest here in the devil's kingdom that peace which comes from entering into God's rest – in spite of the opposition we all presently face as those who belong to Jesus Christ.¹²

Peace I leave for you; ***peace*** I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you."
John 14:27

"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have ***peace***."
John 16:33a NKJV

So now that we have been justified by faith, let us take hold of the ***peace*** [we have] with God [the Father] through our Lord Jesus Christ.
Romans 5:1

And let the ***peace*** of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.
Colossians 3:15 NKJV

And the ***peace*** of God which surpasses every thought will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
Philippians 4:7

Now may the Lord of ***peace*** himself give you ***peace*** at all times and in every way. The

¹¹ See the Satanic Rebellion, Part 5: Judgment, Restoration, and Replacement, where the plan of God and the seven millennial days are discussed.

¹² See the Satanic Rebellion, Part 4: Satan's World System, wherein the devil's present kingdom and tactics used against believers are detailed.

Lord be with all of you.
2nd Thessalonians 3:16 NIV

Entering into this rest, this peace, this *Shalom* of completeness, and maintaining it amid the troubles that come all believers' way is a life-long challenge, but one that must be taken up by any Christian who wishes to advance spiritually and progress in following and serving our Lord Jesus Christ to His glory.

(12) Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; (13) but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

1st Peter 4:12-13 NKJV

(8) Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. (9) Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. (10) But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.

1st Peter 5:8-10 NKJV

They Shall not Enter: The Jerusalem believers, the majority it seems, were doing the opposite. Instead of striving to enter the rest and peace of God which can only be appropriated through spiritual growth and trusting in the Lord in spite of trouble and persecution, they were instead taking what seemed to human eyes the path of least resistance, accommodating and compromising with the unbelievers in going through the motions of the rituals of the now replaced Old Covenant. This process was, as we have seen, made even more tempting because it constituted a return to familiar practices. To apply this to our day, how much easier for any believer who grows tired of their commitment to access good Bible teaching daily, striving to grow and progress and to serve through the ministry opportunities the Lord provides, to slip back instead into the "nod to God" tradition of going to some lukewarm church once or twice a week. Initially, not only is this easier but the pressure also comes off – since the devil is not nearly as interested in harassing those who have taken themselves out of the fight of their own free will. But the end of this process is spiritual decline. This would have been even more rapid in the case of the Jerusalem believers inasmuch as what they were returning to by its very nature denied the validity of Jesus Christ's work on the cross (analogous in our own day to anyone going back to Roman Catholic or Mormon roots, e.g.). By refusing to do the hard "good works" of spiritual growth and by returning to the Law instead, these believers and all ever after who follow that bad example were instead substituting their own fleshly works for the truly good works of God the Holy Spirit. Lack of trust in the Lord inevitably results in pursuing futile human ends instead, no matter how proud a person may be of their ostensible accomplishments.

Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by *the law of faith*.

Romans 3:27 NKJV

For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, ***but not before God.***

Romans 4:2 NKJV

Just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness ***apart from works.***

Romans 4:6 NKJV

For the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, ***not of works*** but of Him who calls.

Romans 9:11 NKJV

Why? Because they ***did not seek it by faith,*** but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone.

Romans 9:32 NKJV

And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, ***grace would no longer be grace.***

Romans 11:6 NIV

. . . knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; ***for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.***
Galatians 2:16 NKJV

For as many as are of the works of the law ***are under the curse;*** for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them."

Galatians 3:10 NKJV

(8) For you have been saved by [God's] grace through faith [in Christ]; and this did not come from you – it is God's gift. (9) Nor did it come from what you have done, ***lest anyone should boast.***

Ephesians 2:8-9

Verses Six through Seven

(6) Since it follows [from comparing these two passages (i.e., Gen.2:2 with Ps.95:11)] that some [of His people] ***will*** enter into this rest of His, although that previous [generation] did ***not*** do so on account of their lack of faith (unbelief) – even though they had [also] had the good news [of salvation] proclaimed to them – (7) [God] has designated another day, namely, "Today". Speaking through David so many years after [the passing of the exodus generation], [God] has proclaimed the following: "***Today*** if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts . . .".

Hebrews 4:6-7

The faithlessness of the exodus generation did not result in the revocation of the promises of God to Abraham – of which promises all believers today have a part as offspring of Abraham *by faith* (Rom.4:16; Gal.3:7-9; 3:14; 3:16-29; 4:28). The rebelliousness and unbelief of the exodus generation did not put an end to the plan of God. There were then and there are now – and there were in Paul's day – those among both the Jewish and gentile populations of the world who were willing to come to God the Father through faith in Jesus Christ, entering into His rest in our walk through this life.

(3) For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? (4) Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: "That You may be justified in Your words, And may overcome when You are judged."

Romans 3:3-4 NKJV

The unbelief, unfaithfulness and rebelliousness of the exodus generation hurt no one but themselves – and the same thing was true of those who in Paul's day were likewise alienating themselves from God the Father and His promises to their forefathers by turning away from His Son . . . which returning to the Law necessarily entailed. Therefore the "rest" promised to the exodus generation and to all believers since has always been available to anyone willing to cease from their own works which could never produce salvation and turn instead to the work of Jesus Christ, His death for us on the cross. This Paul's contemporaries had done, but they were falling away from grace and substituting the works of the Law in its place, preferring the shadows which spoke of the Messiah yet to come to the actual Messiah who had died in their place. Only by continuing in the truth of the Word of God can His rest be entered into and abided in. Reverting to works of any kind, trusting in self instead of in the Lord, neglecting truth and returning to the world and a worldly viewpoint, results in spiritual decline, and, left unchecked, the evaporation of faith.

(1) "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. (2) Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. (3) You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. (4) Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. (5) I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. (6) If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned."

John 15:1-6 NKJV

As with all bad and dangerous conduct, all lax and negligent behavior, the time to repent, turn around and move back to the right path is right now, *today* . . . while there is still time to turn around and before worse damage is done.

(12) Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, (13) and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

Hebrews 12:12-13 NKJV

Verses Eight through Ten

(8) Now if Joshua had given [the exodus generation and their children this] rest, [God] would not be speaking about any other "day" [of rest, so long] after those [earlier] events. (9) So [then] there *does* remain a "Sabbath day's rest" for the people of God. (10) For he who has entered into [God's] rest has himself ceased from his works just as God did from His own. (11) Let us therefore be eager to enter into that [continual and spiritual] rest, lest anyone fall [from grace] following the same pattern of disobedience [exhibited by the exodus generation].

Hebrews 4:8-10

Joshua: In Hebrew and in Greek both, the name "Joshua" is indistinguishable from the name "Jesus". Whatever English transliteration or version of the name is used, in the original Hebrew it means "the Lord saves". Since our Lord Jesus Christ is our Savior, the name needs no explanation in His case.

(20) But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. (21) And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name *Jesus*, for *He will save His people from their sins.*"

Matthew 1:20-21 NKJV

Joshua is also well-named and brought up in this context by Paul for that very reason. Joshua was "a type" of Christ.¹³ That is to say, along with certain other Old Testament believers (David in particular), some aspects of Joshua's life and career are meant to parallel our Lord's in certain respects, most notably in this context, leading the people of Israel into the land of promise as a parallel to the Messiah's victorious regathering of the Jewish people from the four corners of the globe to the land of Israel after the victory of Armageddon.¹⁴ In both cases, we see Jesus (and Joshua) giving the people of God rest, physical rest, in the promised land.

(43) So the Lord gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. (44) *The Lord gave them rest all around*, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; the Lord delivered all their enemies into their hand. (45) Not a word failed of any good thing which the Lord had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass.

Joshua 21:43-45 NKJV

¹³ See BB 4A: Christology, section I.5.c, "Old Testament Typology".

¹⁴ See Coming Tribulation I, sections 4.1.b, "The "Day of the Lord" Paradigm", and 4.1.d, "Typology and Sequence in Old Testament Prophecy".

(1) For the Lord will cherish Jacob, and will again choose Israel, and place them in their own land. Foreigners will join with them and will attach themselves to the house of Jacob. (2) Nations will take them and bring them to their [rightful] place. Then the house of Israel will receive them by lot in the land of the Lord [for use] as servants and maidservants. For they will take their captors captive, and rule over those who oppressed them. (3) And it will come to pass on the day (i.e., during the Millennium) when the Lord *gives you rest* from your pain, and from your turmoil, and from the hard labor which was levied upon you, (4) that you will take up this taunt concerning the king of Babylon (i.e., antichrist), and you will say, "How the oppressor (i.e., antichrist) has come to an end! How the golden [city] (i.e., mystery Babylon) has ceased to be!"
Isaiah 14:1-4

But while Joshua in his capacity as a type of Christ gave the children of the exodus generation physical rest in the promised land (as a parallel to the Millennium when the Messiah, Jesus Christ, will do so in a complete and unequalled way for the entire Jewish people), this is not the rest Paul has in mind in our context. Rather, that physical rest is a temporal analogy for the more important spiritual rest into which all believers are called to enter. The children of the exodus generation did enter into the land in peace and rest after the Lord had defeated their enemies, and the same is prophesied to happen for the Jewish population of the world following the second advent. However, the spiritual rest we believers here in the world in the meantime are promised is better than any physical blessing imaginable. For whatever we may have in this world, whether now, or during the Tribulation, or even during the Millennium (in the case of unbelievers blessed to enter therein, those who survive the Tribulation without taking the beast's mark), all such blessings are temporary. This world will not endure – it has a definite end as does our brief sojourn in it. But the spiritual rest into which we have the right to enter as believers in Jesus Christ will last forever, and the rewards which attend to the growth, progress and production which produce, attend on, and follow that entrance in our Lord's spiritual rest likewise will endure for all eternity.

The New Sabbath: As explained in the introduction, believers of the Church Age, the dispensation of the Spirit, are not required to obey the Saturday Sabbath of the Mosaic Law. Rather, we are required to adopt, honor and enter into a moment-by-moment "Sabbath rest" which honors our Lord Jesus Christ by relying on Him and His grace rather than on our own works. Since this is what we are now commanded to do, we should be eager to do so. Failing to do so is in fact to join in with the previous bad example of the exodus generation in refusing to trust the Lord. Failing to do so was exactly what the contemporary Jerusalem believers were guilty of.

The word in our context translated "Sabbath day's rest" is the Greek *sabbatismos*, a rather uncommon noun most likely coined by Paul himself (it is found nowhere else save later occurrences referencing this very passage, mainly in the church fathers).¹⁵ Paul deliberately used

¹⁵ It is possible that the word may also occur in the Greek biographer, Plutarch (*De superstitione*: 164e-171f), but this is probably a Monastic textual error for a correct *baptismous*. Even if correct, it would still be later than the book of Hebrews and possibly derivative in that

a new word which is unmistakably related to the word "Sabbath", but slightly different in order to make crystal clear the distinction between the previous day-observance of the Law and the new at-all-times "Sabbath rest" which believers in the dispensation of the Spirit are now required to observe. The former is ritualistic and physical; the latter is dynamic and spiritual. And now that the Law of the Old Covenant has been replaced by the promise of the Spirit under the New Covenant, observing the former in a literal way is detrimental in the extreme to observing the fourth commandment in the new way of "entering into His rest" at all times. That is because legalism, seeking to gain God's favor by our own works, is inimical to grace. Works by definition is not rest; rest by definition is relying on grace, not one's own works. The latter approach is how we were saved, and that is also how we are supposed to live as Christians after salvation.

(8) For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, (9) not of works, lest anyone should boast.
Ephesians 2:8-9 NKJV

The difference is often a matter of attitude, how we are thinking about things in our heart of hearts. Only God can tell if when we do something, study for a test, for example, we are relying entirely on our own efforts for success and taking pride therein and expecting God's approbation as a result, or instead are relying on Him to give us success and being diligent so as to honor Him even as we trust Him rather than ourselves. And if we think to "do something" for God of our own fleshly efforts, seeking to "work" so as to truly deserve something because of what "we have done" (cf. Roman Catholic "works of supererogation"), that is the very opposite of being saved through faith by the grace of God. Abraham *believed* in the Lord and that *faith* was "credited to him for righteousness" (Rom.4:3; 4:5). He was considered righteous by God not on account of his doing anything such as the "works of the Law" the Pharisees engaged in but because He *trusted* God to provide His salvation (Gal.2:16).

(2) If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about – but not before God. (3) What does Scripture say? "Abraham *believed* God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." (4) Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. (5) However, to the one who *does not work* but *trusts* God who justifies the ungodly, their *faith* is credited as righteousness.
Romans 4:2-5 NIV

Thus, since grace is opposed to works in the passages quoted above and elsewhere in scripture, the point is often made that God gives grace/favor to the humble (Jas.4:6; 1Pet.5:5), that is, to those who approach Him in the correct way, seeking His mercy *through faith*, not to those who arrogantly assume that they are "doing something for Him" and therefore "deserve" something from Him (e.g., Lk.18:9-14). So in the Bible, grace (God's favor freely given on the basis of Christ's sacrifice) and [human] works (arrogantly assuming God needs us and our effort) are mutually exclusive:

instance as well.

And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

Romans 11:6 NIV

That is why Paul is so insistent in impressing upon his readers that their present course of action in returning to the dead works of the Law (or doing "Gnostic combat" ostensibly for His benefit) is not just compromising at the margins. Rather, it is undermining everything they have believed in, and has the capacity as a result, if carried to its logical conclusion, to destroy their faith entirely.

You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.

Galatians 5:4 NIV

Verse Eleven

Let us therefore be eager to enter into that [continual and spiritual] rest, lest anyone fall [from grace] following the same pattern of disobedience [exhibited by the exodus generation].

Hebrews 4:11

Anyone who has entered into the true rest of faith has ceased trying to work for salvation, whether through wrongly looking to the Law as the means thereof or engaging in so called "Gnostic combat" to "help God" or through any other fleshly means. Paul therefore appeals to his readers to be eager to make every effort to enter into that true faith-rest, the rest of trusting the Lord and not of turning back to the works of the Law or any other system of legalism or religion which cannot save. To do otherwise is to fall into the same trap of faith-destroying disobedience into which the exodus generation fell. In contrast to their and to the contemporary Jerusalem believers giving way to fear so as to compromise, we believers in Jesus Christ are called to live in confident peace and hope of all that is soon to come. That is the rest our Lord promises us, but it can only be entered into *by faith*.

(4) Rejoice in the Lord all the time! I will say it again, rejoice! (5) Let your reasonableness be known to all men – the Lord is near. (6) Don't worry about anything, but in everything let your requests be made known to God in prayer and in petition with thanksgiving, (7) and [then] the *peace* of God which surpasses every thought will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (8) So as you go forward, brothers, [keep meditating on] all the many [wonderful things you have learned], things that are true, godly, righteous, holy, pleasing [to God], reverent – if you have [developed] any virtues [in your Christian walk] and if you have [any hope of] praise [from God at the judgment] – these are the things you should be thinking about. (9) [All these same things] which you have learned, and have received [into your hearts by believing them], and have heard about and observed me [doing in my walk], go do likewise (i.e., grow, progress, produce). Then the God of *peace* will be with you.

Philippians 4:4-9

(16) For men are accustomed to take oaths on the authority of something greater than they are, and there is absolutely no doubt about the fact that an oath is taken for the purpose of confirmation. (17) Just so God, out of a desire to make it abundantly clear to us, the heirs of His promise [after the pattern of Abraham's faith], that His will in this matter [of salvation and its resultant blessings] is unchangeable, guaranteed it with an oath (Gen.22:16-17), (18) so that through two unchangeable matters wherein it is impossible for God to prove false (i.e., His Word and His oath), we who have escaped [the wrath to come] and taken hold of this *hope* (i.e., of life eternal, resurrection and eternal reward) offered to us might have a strong basis for encouragement. (19) And this *hope* [truly] is what "anchors" our lives, so to speak: it is certain; it is solid; it penetrates beyond the [heavenly] veil into the [holy of holies], (20) where our vanguard, Jesus, has entered on our behalf, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. Hebrews 6:16-20

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love.
2nd John 1:3 NIV

Being at peace in the midst of the noise and churn of this world, keeping ourselves focused on the hope of all the wonderful things to come, is exactly how we enter into and abide in the faith-rest which has replaced the fourth commandment for Church Age believers. Thus, this "rest" does not mean laziness or lack of effort on our part. Far from it. All believers are called to grow spiritually, to progress in our walk with Jesus Christ (which includes passing tests which are definitely described in scripture as "works": Jas.2:14-26), and to produce a crop for our Lord through the proper functioning of the spiritual gifts we have been given. The difference is whether the "works" are fleshly and originate with us or instead are godly and originate with the Spirit being empowered by Him in furtherance of the plan of God (cf. Matt.5:16; Gal.6:9; 2Thes.3:13; Tit.2:14; Heb.10:24; 1Pet.2:12).

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for [the purpose of accomplishing] *good works*, which [very works] *God has prepared* ahead of time for us, that we might walk in them (i.e., live our Christian lives in the accomplishment of them).
Ephesians 2:10

So there is all the difference in the world between fleshly human works ostensibly "for God" which unbelievers do in wanting to work their way into heaven on the one hand, and genuine, godly good works which are given believers to do in the power of the Holy Spirit on the other. The former is works; the latter is grace. When we are operating in the rest of God, trusting Him to guide and empower us, what we do is genuinely "good". On the other hand, involving ourselves in legalism of any sort, operating in the energy of the flesh instead of in the power of the Holy Spirit, doing things that are clearly *not* what Jesus Christ wants from us, then we are not only not adding anything to our heavenly treasury; instead we are endangering the very faith upon which receiving any reward at all absolutely depends.

(8) Watch out for yourselves, lest you lose what you have worked so hard for, but may

instead receive a full reward. (9) No one who goes wandering off, that is, anyone who does not keep to the teachings about Jesus Christ, has [even] a share in God.
2nd John 1:8-9

The only way to lose anything we have legitimately earned by way of eternal reward is by losing our eternal lives. And engaging in any system of legalistic behavior, such as returning to the now defunct Law (as the Jerusalem believers were doing), or allowing ourselves to compromise with religion for whatever reason today (as some who have returned to Roman Catholicism or other legalistic movements are doing), or making the horrific mistake of allowing ourselves to be co-opted by the beast's no doubt extremely attractive Gnostic-like religion of the near future (as one third of the believers who enter the Tribulation are prophesied to do), is to gamble with our eternal future for the sake of a mess of pottage.

And make sure that there isn't any immoral or irreverent person like Esau, who sold his birthright in exchange for a single meal.
Hebrews 12:16 CSB

Verses Twelve through Thirteen

(12) For the Word of God is living and powerful; it is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even to the point of being able to divide the spirit from its earthly life and the marrow from its bones; [for] it (i.e., the Word when resident in our conscience) acts as a judge of our heart's thoughts and deliberations. (13) For there is no created thing [which can remain] invisible before Him. Everything is naked and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.
Hebrews 4:12-13

This paragraph, coming as it does directly after Paul's appeal to enter into "the rest of faith", to cease from our own fleshly works and instead respond to the Spirit and the truth, is meant to remind Paul's readers to whom it is they belong. The Lord knows perfectly what is in all of our hearts. Sin and rebellion cannot be covered up so as to be hidden from Him who is Himself the very Word of God. The Jerusalem believers had forgotten much – in terms of truth in their hearts of which their consciences were attempting to remind them. They had suppressed these proddings of the Holy Spirit and returned instead to a false interpretation of the Law (or a fantastic mythologizing of it in Gnosticism). But if God's word is not just writing to us, if it is believed and stored in our hearts through that faith and invigorated by the Spirit, it is a powerful sword capable of piercing through all lies and convicting all false doctrines (Eph.6:17). The very fact that these quondam believers are not having this experience is a sign of how far they have fallen.

The Word of God: This passage is often rightly quoted in appreciation of the Word of God. What could be more wonderful, more magnificent than the Word of God by means of which Word alone we have come to know our dear Savior, through which Word alone we grow closer to Him day by day? But we would be remiss not to note that in this context it is the awesome nature of that Word and of Him who speaks it – and the terror which should befall anyone who

rejects it and Him – that is primarily meant to be understood here.

In the beginning, there was *the Word*.

John 1:1a

And *the Word* became flesh and tented among us. And we beheld His glory, a glory like that of a one and only Son from [the] Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14

What we have seen from the beginning, what we have heard and seen with our eyes, what we have observed and touched with our hands – this is about *the Word of life*, [Jesus Christ].

1st John 1:1

(11) And I saw the sky above opened up, and, behold, a white horse, and the One seated on it is called "Faithful and True", and in righteousness He renders judgment and makes war. (12) And His eyes were a flame of fire, and on His head were many [kingly] crowns, with names written [on them] which no one knows except He Himself. (13) And He is dressed in a robe splattered all about with blood, and His Name has [always] been called, "*The Word of God*".

Revelation 19:11-13

The Word is the Father's will, the Father's plan (Col.1:19-20). The Word is Jesus Christ.

He is the shining forth of [the Father's] glory, the precise image of His essence, the One who sustains the universe by His mighty Word.

Hebrews 1:3a

Jesus Christ is the living Word of God, and He Himself is *the* message, the written and spoken Word of God. One cannot read the words of truth in the Bible and not see Jesus Christ, not, that is, if the Spirit is empowering that reading. For all of the scriptures speak of Him.

"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me."

John 5:39 NKJV

Fighting against the scriptures is to fight against the truth, and fighting against the truth is to fight against Jesus Christ.

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, *the truth*, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

John 14:6 NKJV (cf. Jn.18:37)

Jesus is the Word of God, and as such He is "alive". As He lives forever, as He has eternal life in Himself (Jn.1:4; 5:17), so the Word of Him who is the Word is the key to life eternal for all who

embrace the truth of that Word witnessed to by the Holy Spirit (Jn.3:15-16; 1Jn.5:13). Jesus is the Word of God, and as such He is "powerful". As God He is omnipotent, as the Savior of the world He is the One with the power over life and death (Matt.28:18; Rev.1:18), so that all who obey the truth of the Word of Him who is Himself the very plan of God, the *logos*, the Word of God incarnate, shall not perish but have eternal life (Jn.3:16).

(11) Here is a trustworthy saying:

If we died with Him, we will also live with Him;

(12) If we persevere, we will also reign with Him.

If we disown Him, He will also disown us;

(13) If we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself.

2nd Timothy 2:11-13

As believers, Jesus Christ is our life in every way. Through His death, we have life. We have committed ourselves to following Him, believing in the good news about Him and following Him thereafter through attention to the truth which truth He is. As believers, the truth is what this life and what we are all about (2Pet.3:18). But if we turn aside from that truth, if we revert to the lies of the past out of a search for pleasure in this life (as the Gnostics were doing) or out of completely misplaced search for worldly security (as those going back to the temple rites were doing), we risk losing connection with the Word, the Head of the Body to whom we belong (Col.2:18-19). And the end of such backsliding, such reversion, if carried to its ultimate end, is death in place of the life we had once embraced in Him who is life, the living Word of God.

(14) But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. (15) Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

James 1:14-15 NKJV

Sharper than any Two-Edged Sword: The sword in context here is the *machaira*, the double-edged short sword or "Spanish sword" used by the Roman legions. While the Greek phalanx relied on masses of infantry in closed ranks to push through the enemy line with spears leveled, the legion was far more flexible. Especially on uneven ground, a phalanx might develop gaps when moving to contact, but the legion was designed to be more elastic, adapting to the contours of the ground and to the ebb and flow of battle. Legionaries in groups of five organized as a quincunx (a shape like the pips on the five on dice) could adjust to sudden changes and exploit all such gaps however small – and create them too when a solid line ran into a legion's front. In addition to drill and discipline, the equipment of the legionary was also critical to accomplishing this task. The *scutum* or door-like shield protected the body against spear thrusts, while the two-edged sword could be employed in short, sharp thrusting motions against any and all targets of opportunity when shield met shield. As such, the *machaira* relied not on the momentum of a huge wind-up (as is the case with the broadsword) but upon the sharpness of its point and sides.

And [in this spiritual warfare] put on the helmet of salvation and gird on the sword (*machaira*) of the Spirit – which is the Word of truth.

Ephesians 6:17

In the analogy, the Word of God empowered by the Holy Spirit is unbeatable, refuting all lies and capturing all enemy strongholds (2Cor.10:4). The truth of scripture is the believer's main offensive weapon in the spiritual warfare in which we are engaged in this Christian life we are living – and we would be defenseless without it. In our context, however, the believers being addressed were not making use of this sword. They were not counter-attacking lies or battling their way through enemy attacks. Instead of making use of the sword of truth to defend themselves and their fellows from the twin threat they faced to their spiritual growth and even salvation, the compromise of legalism and the temptation stemming from Gnosticism, they were leaving this weapon in its sheath and going over to the enemy.

(12) So I turned around to see [the source of] the voice that was speaking to me, and when I had turned around, I saw seven golden lampstands. (13) And in the middle of the lampstands was what looked like a man, dressed in a long robe with a golden belt tied around His waist. (14) And His head and his hair were as white as wool or as snow, and His eyes were like a fiery flame, (15) and His feet were like white-hot bronze when super-heated in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. (16) And He held seven stars in His right hand, ***and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword.*** And His face shone like the sun in its glory.

Revelation 1:12-16

As Paul will affirm later in this book, it is "a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb.10:31 NIV). Our Lord Jesus Christ is awesome beyond imagination. We have the right to wield the sword of the Word because our Lord who is the Word has given it to us. But if instead of fighting in His ranks as He would have us to do, we straggle, mangle, or desert the colors, then we need to take care lest this very sword be used ***against us.***

Yet He too is wise and can bring disaster; He does not take back his words.

Isaiah 31:2a NIV

"So repent. And if you do not, I am going to come to you quickly and make war on them with the sword from My mouth."

Revelation 2:16

Dividing Soul from Spirit and Marrow from Bones: That the point of this comparison is to express the unique penetrating qualities of the Word of God is obvious. Precisely how it does so, however, requires some explanation. Paul gives us two cases in order to express this point, a spiritual one and a physical one, with the latter being added to explain the former. That is to say, without some serious background information on biblical anthropology and psychology, it is more than likely that an immature believer might not understand the first case in the analogy without adding the second to explain it – and the Jerusalem believers had regressed seriously (Heb.5:12 NKJV: "you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food"). For that reason Paul provides a parallel physical analogy which anyone might be able to grasp.

Bones contain marrow. However, separating the one from the other entirely is not an easy task

since they are vitally interconnected by divine design, and, especially with the ancient world's medical technology, death would be the result of trying to do so. Similarly, the soul and the spirit are also two different things but even more difficult – actually impossible – for anyone even to distinguish, let alone to separate. Anyone, that is, except for God. And indeed they are only ever separated when He removes the human spirit from the body at physical death.

And the Lord God formed the man (i.e., Adam's body) from the dust of the ground, then blew into his nostrils the life-giving breath (i.e., his human spirit), and [thus] the man became a living *person* (Heb. *nephesh* [Gr. *psyche*], "soul").
Genesis 2:7

As we have noted in the past, God made man dichotomous.¹⁶ That is to say, as in the case of original creation of Adam in the verse above, all human beings have a physical body and a human spirit. The breathing in of the latter at birth, i.e., "the breath of life", is what gives us physical life (*not* procreation in the womb: Zech.12:1b; cf. Num.16:22; Is.57:16; Acts 17:25; 1Tim.6:13a; Heb.12:9). When God creates the human spirit within our bodies at birth, we become complete persons, "souls". That is what the word "soul" means in the Bible. Not a separate entity apart from the body and the spirit but the entire living person as a whole which now exists on account of the divine combination of these two. When the spirit leaves the body, death results and only the body is left – no longer a person but the shell which once contained the spirit.

And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.' " Having said this, He breathed His last.
Luke 23:46 NKJV

As any attempt to separate bone from marrow would result in death (especially in the ancient world), so also the only way to separate the human spirit from the earthly life of any person ("soul") is, as in the example above of our Lord, the Last Adam (1Cor.15:45), through physical death. The living, powerful Word of God is capable of making just such divisions, and the implied threat hanging over this description is not accidental. More than one believer in the history of the plan of God has begun well enough but ended poorly, sometimes catastrophically so (e.g., the entire exodus generation whose failures are explored immediately prior to our present paragraph). It is from precisely such a fate that Paul is endeavoring to rescue his readers.

(13) Saul died because he was unfaithful to the Lord; he did not keep *the word* of the Lord and even consulted a medium for guidance, (14) and did not inquire of the Lord. So the Lord put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse.
1st Chronicles 10:13-14 NIV

Despite being specially chosen by the Lord, Saul rebelled against His Word, and instead of attending to the truth, went elsewhere for guidance . . . precisely as the majority of the Jerusalem congregation were guilty of doing in returning to legalism or straying into Gnosticism. There is

¹⁶ See BB 3A: Anthropology, section II.2, "The Creation of Adam".

no neutrality in the spiritual fight in which we who belong to Jesus Christ are involved. Either we are following Him as we should, or we are turning aside to one degree or another, the end of which reversion carried to its final end is death (i.e., either the sin unto death as in the case of Saul or the spiritual death of apostasy wherein faith dies completely).¹⁷

The Judge of our Hearts' Thoughts and Intentions:

As a man thinks in his soul (i.e., his "heart"; cf. KJV), so he is.
Proverbs 23:7

In the Bible, the "heart" and the "soul" are synonyms and often used interchangeably, with either one often being employed where the inner thoughts of the individual are emphasized. This is essentially the literary figure of synecdoche, the whole being substituted for the part when we mean the whole person, as in "you are such a good heart!" or "he was a merry old soul" (e.g., Deut.6:5). That focus on the inner person (or "heart") is what we have here in our context verse with Paul's use of the word "soul".¹⁸

Any person (i.e., "soul", *nephesh*) who sins unintentionally . . .
Leviticus 4:2

Since the fall of Adam and Eve, all human beings are born with a sin nature – with one very important exception, our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus had to be perfect and remain so in order to be a suitable sacrifice for our sins. As we shall see in the next paragraph, this constituted a heavy part of the load He had to bear during the first advent, even before His ministry began, before the gauntlet He had to run to get to the cross, before dying for our sins in Calvary's darkness. For the rest of us, opposition from the sin nature which infests our mortal bodies is constant, influencing in a negative way all our deeds and words, all of which emanate originally from what we think and decide in our hearts.

(9) "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it?
(10) I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings."
Jeremiah 7:9-10 NKJV

Our human spirit is "who we are" in essence; but we must express that identity, that image of God, that free will, through the body which houses our spirit (Job 32:8; Prov.20:27; Matt.26:41; Mk.2:8; Jn.4:24; Acts 19:21a; 1Cor.2:11a; 5:4-5; 14:14-15; 2Cor.7:13; Rom.1:9; 8:16; Eph.4:22-24; Phil.4:23). And because this body of ours is at present under the influence of the sin nature, every good decision we make in our "hearts", the place where our spirits and bodies interface, will be challenged.

¹⁷ See BB 3B: Hamartiology, section IV.6, "Apostasy and the Sin unto Death".

¹⁸ See BB 3A: Anthropology, section II.4, "The Dichotomy of Man".

The point is that the "dividing of the soul and the spirit" in our verse is meant to be integrally connected by the reader directly with these "thoughts and intents of the heart": it is the sharp sword of the Word of God which is capable of splitting the indivisible first pair (soul and spirit) and of judging with absolute precision the second pair (thoughts and intents). That is to say, the Word can discern what is truly the will of any individual absent the pressures of the sin nature (for, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak": Matt.26:41; Mk.14:38), and can perfectly differentiate mere thoughts from actual decisions, thoughts from intents.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by this *renewal of your thinking* (lit., "mind"), so that you may discern what God's will for you is, namely what it is good, well-pleasing, and correct [for you to do].

Romans 12:2

The purpose of the reconstruction of our thinking commanded above, changing it from the pre-salvation worldly approach to the proper, godly viewpoint after we believe (accomplished through spiritual growth) is to actually *do* the will of God once we know what it is.

(21) [For you have learned the truth] – if, at any rate, you have truly heard Him (i.e., Jesus) and have been instructed in Him according to what is [definitely] true in Jesus – (22) that in respect to your previous behavior you have put off the old Man (i.e., the previously dominant influence of the sin nature), the one that is being destroyed by deceptive lusts, (23) and that instead you are being re-made in *the spirit of your mind*, (24) and that you have put on the new Man, the one created in righteousness and sanctity of the truth according to God's standards.

Ephesians 4:21-24

For all believers, life is filled with subtle tests where discernment between "good and evil" is not so easy. Every human being has a general appreciation of the difference between absolute good and gross evil, an essential informing of the conscience which is the legacy of the fall of Adam and Eve (Gen.2:9; 2:17; 3:5).

Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us, to know good and evil."

Genesis 3:22a NKJV

But when it comes to areas of application of which the Christian life is full, prayer and careful consideration may be necessary to discern what God's will is for us in particular situations which are not specifically spelled out in the Bible or covered by the basic human understanding of right and wrong (Rom.13:5).

(14) For whenever the gentiles who do not have the Law do *by nature* the things [written in] the Law, these who have no Law are a Law for themselves. (15) For they demonstrate that the essence of the Law has been written in their hearts when *their conscience* testifies against them, and their [mental] deliberations [based on conscience] alternatively either condemn them or acquit them.

Romans 2:14-15

Everyone knows perfectly well and by nature without reading the Bible that murder is wrong; the specific answer to the particular question of whether we should we marry this person or that person . . . or not marry at all, is, along with many other such things, not so easily discerned.

Conscience is the name we give to that faculty of mind whereby we assess right and wrong. But while as a result of our heritage as fallen human beings we all possess a rudimentary conscience at birth which is calibrated by our upbringing (or should be) to basic civility and lawful behavior, fine tuning this faculty to biblical standards in all things is, for the believer, a life-long process which proceeds in tandem with our spiritual growth.

The spirit of Man is the Lord's lamp, searching out the inner chambers of his heart.
Proverbs 20:27

Therefore it is necessary to be subject [to authority] not only because of this severity, but also *for conscience' sake* (i.e., everyone's conscience teaches them "by [observation of] nature" to obey legitimate authority).

Romans 13:5

Judge for yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with an uncovered head? *Does not even nature itself teach you* that a man suffers dishonor if he prays with long hair, but that long hair (i.e., God's "head covering") is her glory? For her long hair has been given to her in the place of a veil.

1st Corinthians 11:13-14

(5) The objective of this command [to refrain from false teaching and cleave to the truth] is love from a pure heart, *a clean conscience*, and an un-hypocritical faith – (6) it is by rejecting these things that some have missed the mark and turned aside to pointless false teaching.

1st Timothy 1:5-6 [index]

As we learn the truth through the Spirit, our consciences become more and more attuned to what is right (and what is wrong) in ever greater detail.

Solid [spiritual] food is for the [spiritually] mature, those who by [diligent] practice have trained their [moral] perceptive faculties (i.e., consciences) to [properly] distinguish between good and evil.

Hebrews 5:14

Thus, believers in Jesus Christ have the Holy Spirit to aid us in this fight of fights: the battle to control our thoughts and emotions and choose the right way while eschewing the wrong is the essence of the spiritual warfare in which we are engaged. While He is God and omnipotent, the Spirit *does not* overrule our free will. Indeed, we are placed here in this world precisely so that

we *may* choose what is really of most importance to us.¹⁹ While the majority of the human race has chosen to reject God and the salvation the Father offers in the ineffable gift of His Son, we believers have placed our faith, our "free-will faith", in our Savior for eternal life. But that is not where the story ends as we all know very well. Having been saved, we are still here in this world with the privilege – and the necessity – of choosing what we value every day, every step of the way until kingdom come.

(16) But I tell you, walk in the Spirit and you will not carry out what the flesh lusts for. (17) For what the flesh lusts for is contrary to the Spirit's will, and the Spirit is opposed to what the flesh lusts for. Since these are diametrically opposed to each other in this way, what you are doing is not what you yourself choose. (18) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. (19) The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; (20) idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; (21) drunkenness, orgies – and whatever is similar to all these things. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. (22) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, uprightness, faith, (23) humility, self-control. Against such things, there is no Law. (24) Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its weaknesses and its lusts. (25) If we live because of the Spirit, let us also walk by means of the Spirit.
Galatians 5:16-25

Turning away from the faith, from the truth, from the Spirit's guidance, failing to "walk by means of the Spirit" and turning back to the flesh instead, reverses the process, tuning out the Spirit's "still, small voice" (1Ki.19:12), and weakens the conscience we had previously taken pains to strengthen.

(1) Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will *depart from the faith*, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, (2) speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own *conscience seared* with a hot iron.
1st Timothy 4:1-2 NKJV

Omniscience and the Fear of God: God knows everything. It seems trite to say. But what can any believer be thinking when we sin? Sin *is* lawlessness (1Jn.3:4), and sinning is essentially rebellion against God, following in the footsteps of the devil (1Jn.3:8). Knowing that God is omniscient, that nothing could even happen in the first place without His ordaining it, that He is watching us – and is in fact in us (Jn.14:23; Rom.8:9), how could we ever possibly even entertain the idea of sin?

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding.
Psalm 111:10 NKJV

¹⁹ See BB 5: Pneumatology, section II.B.3.b.3, "Walking in the Spirit"; and BB 6A: Peripateology, section I.2.C, "Spiritual Discernment".

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Proverbs 1:7 NIV

We who are walking with Jesus Christ in the Spirit and who have attained spiritual maturity through learning His truth and applying it to our lives through the process of spiritual growth do have, by definition, "good understanding"; likewise, we are not "fools" since we have chosen the better part in this life (Lk.10:42).

For there is no man on earth who is [so] righteous that he [always] does what is good and [never] sins.

Ecclesiastes 7:20

For all sin and fall short of God's glory.

Romans 3:23

For we all stumble (i.e., sin) in many ways.

James 3:2a

Good as we try to be, we are still presently residing in bodies infested with the sin nature, so that, from time to time, we all do sin (1Ki.8:46a; 2Chron.6:36a; Job 15:14; Ps.130:3; 143:2; Rom.3:9; 5:12; 7:14; 7:23; Gal.3:23)– and anyone who claims differently is making God out to be a liar (1Jn.1:10).

"And forgive us what we owe you just as we also forgive those who owe us."

Matthew 6:12

"And forgive us our sins just as we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us."

Luke 11:4

Our Lord would not have included confession with a request for our sins to be forgiven as something we should pray in our daily prayer, the "Lord's prayer", if it were unnecessary. Sin is a wide and deep subject. Not only can overt actions which are clearly reprehensible be sinful, but what we say – and what we think – can be sinful as well. Beyond all argument, we all sin much more than we have any idea, and therefore we all need to walk humbly before the Lord in this regard, doing our best to pursue holiness, sanctification, in everything we think and say and do, but recognizing also that we are imperfect in our present human nature, and that sins of ignorance as well as sins of cognizance are always "crouching at the door" (Gen.4:7).

(8) If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (9) If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1st John 1:8-9 NKJV

Being humble about our imperfection, confessing our sins early and often, and of course doing

our best to avoid sin of any sort, as we grow closer to Jesus Christ and do a better job daily of listening to our consciences as the Holy Spirit empowers them and directs them, is the only safe course for a believer in this dangerous world. But what is beyond dangerous is adopting the insane attitude that God can be deceived or ignored or that we can somehow hide from His perfect superintendence of our lives (cf. Rev.6:15-17).

(8) And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife *hid themselves* from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. (9) Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?" (10) So he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself."

Genesis 3:8-10 NKJV

While the above may seem comical to us today, at least Adam and Eve had the excuse of having no prior experience of fearing God and at least are seen here to be displaying some measure of respect (albeit after the fact). But for believers who willfully sin in spite of knowing about God's omniscience, in spite of knowing about His foreordaining of all things, in spite of knowing that the Lord is with us and in us (Col.1:27), how is this anything but utter madness?

For he who lacks these things (i.e., not walking according to the Christian virtues of 2Pet.1:5-8) is *shortsighted*, even to *blindness*, and has *forgotten* that he was cleansed from his old sins.

2nd Peter 1:9

When we believers give ourselves over to the sin nature, ignoring the Holy Spirit's gentle reminders, we embrace – temporarily – blindness to and ignorance of the truth we have been so carefully learning and treasuring in our hearts by faith. Mind you, this happens to us all on a regular (daily) basis to one degree or another. As we grow, we get better at fighting this fight, but we will always be vulnerable to even serious lapses as long as we inhabit these bodies of sin (as, e.g., David's impulsiveness in regard to Bathsheba and Uriah amply demonstrates). But what we can *not* do, what we absolutely must avoid *at all costs* is falling into a pattern of sinful behavior, especially gross, willful, overt rebellion from the Lord and His will for our lives. Such patterns often start small but can grow up subtly into massive failure – just as alcoholism or heroin addiction may start with a single drink or a single dose. Before one knows it, all the good standards placed into our consciences by the Spirit as we learned the Word of truth and believed it are seared away, all the truth which guided us has been forgotten while spiritual blindness has taken its place. At such a point, it often takes intervention for us to change, divine intervention in the form of serious divine discipline (as Paul will explain in chapter twelve) and often also the intervention of other believers who love us and who are attempting to save us from ourselves (as Paul is attempting on behalf of the Jerusalem church).

(19) Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, (20) let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

James 5:19-20 NKJV

(22) Have compassion on those who are struggling [with their consciences] (i.e., wavering in their faith in regard to sinful behavior). (23) Rescue those you can by snatching them from the fire [of temptation and its consequences]; but exercise [such] compassion in [godly] fear, hating even the smallest part of sin's contamination (i.e., stay clear of, lit., "even the garment tainted by the flesh").

Jude 1:22-23

The above would be unnecessary if we would take Paul's words to heart here: "For there is no created thing [which can remain] invisible before Him. Everything is naked and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Heb.4:13). After all, how would we behave if Jesus Christ were standing right here with His hand on our shoulder? Doubtless we would take pains not to *do* anything amiss and would also be very careful with our words – although, human that we are, it would still be difficult not to err in what we are *thinking*. Indeed, Jesus Christ *is* right here right now! But we cannot see Him with our fleshly eyes, and that is the rub. As believers, it is our responsibility to see Him even though He is invisible, and walk with Him both in confidence of His faithfulness to us and also in godly fear of the consequences of displeasing Him.

For [Moses] grew strong by seeing the One who cannot be seen (i.e., by keeping his mind's eye on the invisible Jesus Christ).

Hebrews 11:27

Though you have never laid eyes on Him, yet you love Him. And though you cannot see Him at this present time, yet you have faith in Him. For this reason you rejoice with an inexpressible joy that bespeaks the glorious future to come.

1st Peter 1:8

Continually calling to mind that our Lord sees everything and that nothing is invisible to Him (our context: Heb.4:13), is thus a very important and valuable thing for believers to be doing at all times. Life is distracting and it is admittedly difficult to be always in control of the "high ground" of our hearts, keeping the focus of our inner person on the One who died for us, the One we love beyond all else. No one is perfect in this fight, but this is a fight all believers must commit to engaging in continually. Slacking off in our walk with the Lord leads to slacking off in our taking in of His Word, which in turn leads to slacking off in our application of the truth to our lives, which then makes sinful behavior more likely and confession, repentance and turning back to Him less likely. Instead of a virtuous circle of growth leading us closer to the Lord, it is all too easy, when we once turn ourselves in the wrong direction, to begin the vicious circle of reversion to the world which feeds ever more aggressively on itself if nothing is done to correct it. Since this life is all about the choices we make, since free will is the issue in the conflict begun by the devil's rebellion, the Spirit does not force us and God gives us great leeway in our thinking and in our behavior. Eventually, as we have seen, divine discipline will accelerate, and in extreme situations believers who refuse to repent and turn back to the one Way of following our Savior in the Spirit will be left with the choice of the sin unto death or apostasy.²⁰ Knowing

²⁰ See BB 3B: Hamartiology, section IV.6, "Apostasy and the Sin unto Death".

this, keeping the horrors of the wrong way firmly in mind, is absolutely salutary for all believers. This is what godly reverence is all about: we fear God for good reason, knowing that the things which legitimately terrify us exist entirely for our benefit – to keep us from ever even considering heading down that dark and dangerous road.

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.

1st John 4:18 NKJV

As this often misunderstood verse affirms, believers are *not* terrified of the Lord. Rather, we *love* the Lord more than our lives as we are meant to do (Matt.22:36-38). God is good in every way. Our heavenly Father is love itself and only desires our first best good in all things and is working everything out for that good . . . for all who *love* Him (Rom.8:28). Just as we loved our earthly fathers (or at least understand that principle), yet respected them on account of the discipline they might inflict on us if we erred in some egregious way, all the more so we ought to both love our heavenly Father and His Son – because of what God has done for us in delivering us from the lake of fire through the Father's judging of the Son He loved so much in our place – and also fear Him with a good, godly, reverent fear (as in that of the Messiah: "and he will *delight* in the fear of the Lord": Is.11:3 NIV), *not* with mindless terror as if unjust punishment were to be forthcoming, but with a godly appreciation of the just, kindly and loving discipline that the perfect Father will inevitably bring our way should we prove rebellious to Him instead of following Him and His Son our dear Lord as we should.

"I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works."

Revelation 2:23 NKJV

The above are the words of Jesus Christ spoken to a similarly rebellious faction. Not even in our minds and hearts can we conceal rebellion against Him. No sin however small has ever escaped His notice – for He died for them all. How much more will overt disrespect in word and deed not bring about a terrifying response from the awesome Savior of the world? Failing to appreciate this point led the majority of the Jerusalem church to test our Lord in this matter. How foolish to "cross swords" with Him from whose mouth precedes the sword of the Word of God (Rev.1:16; 2:12; 2:16; 19:15)!

(8) You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. (9) All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan. (10) Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away. (11) If only we knew the power of your anger! Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your due. (12) Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.
Psalm 90:8-12 NIV

(1) The word of the Lord came to me: (2) "Son of man, this is what the Sovereign Lord

says to the land of Israel: 'The end! The end has come upon the four corners of the land! (3) The end is now upon you, and I will unleash my anger against you. I will judge you according to your conduct and repay you for all your detestable practices. (4) I will not look on you with pity; I will not spare you. I will surely repay you for your conduct and for the detestable practices among you. Then you will know that I am the Lord.' "

Ezekiel 7:1-4 NIV

The rest were killed with *the sword* coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

Revelation 19:21 NIV

Indeed, "there is no created thing [which can remain] invisible before Him. Everything is naked and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Heb.4:13; cf. Job 31:4; 34:21; Ps.33:13-15; 44:21; 139:3; Prov.5:21; 15:3; Jer.16:17; 23:24; 32:19; Dan.2:22; Matt.10:26; Mk.4:22; Lk.8:17; 12:2). In the end, every thought and motivation will be revealed (Eccl.12:14; Lk.2:35; Rom.2:16; 1Cor.3:13; 4:5; Jude 1:15); in the end, everyone will be judged (Dan.12:2; Jn.5:27-29; Rev.20:11-15); in the end, everything which is of this temporary world will be destroyed (2Pet.3:10; Heb.12:25-29). Knowing all this, what sort of people ought we believers to be (2Pet.3:11)? Instead of tempting and testing the Lord, instead of blinding ourselves to the reality of His presence, instead of ignoring our consciences and the testimony of the Holy Spirit, should we not rather be zealous to be "working out our salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil.2:12)? Should we not rather take the negative example of the exodus generation to heart, mindful of what befell them as a direct result of testing the Lord's great patience to end? That the answer is the most emphatic "Yes!" imaginable is obvious. But to give that answer requires an exercise of our free-will faith, not just perfunctorily and initially, but with consistency and determination until we see our Lord face to face.

But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.

Hebrews 10:39 NIV

Verse Fourteen

Since we have, therefore, a Great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, [even] Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our profession [of faith in Him].

Hebrews 4:14

Having brought the Jerusalem believers up short through his extensive comparison of their behavior to that of the failed exodus generation and doubtless having given his readers a bit of a scare thereby and with his reminder of the awesome power of Him who is the truth (those with any remaining humility who were paying close attention, at any rate), Paul now reassures them by reminding them that we have the Lord Jesus Christ to help us "in our time of need" (Heb.4:16). God forgives our sins. That is so important to remember that our Lord included a request for forgiveness in the prayer he gave us, the "Lord's prayer" (Matt.6:12; Lk.11:4). When we are spiritually out of sorts, whether on account of a failure to respond to some pressure or

trouble in the appropriate way with faith by resting in God, or through some momentary lapse, or even (or especially) if we should be guilty of slipping into an inertia of no forward progress in our spiritual lives or even of reverting backwards, we cannot, we *must* not allow anything to prevent us from seeking our Lord's forgiveness. Jesus Christ died for *all* of our sins. *All* of our sins have already been paid for by His blood, His suffering for each and every one of them in the darkness on the cross. It is the height of arrogance – and the most dangerous folly – to allow anything to prevent us from seeking His mercy whenever we may need it. And we do need it, every day. Failing to appreciate this fact and foolishly allowing ourselves to drift away from the truth a little or a lot, does seem to make it more difficult for believers who have strayed to break off that bad pattern of behavior and come back to the Lord with all their hearts. Confession of sin should, therefore, be daily – at least – and engaged in on every occasion when we become aware that anything we have done, or said . . . or thought . . . requires it. And there is no harm in giving our situation "the benefit of the negative doubt" that we might need it. After all, it is for good reason that our Lord tells us – without any qualification to the effect that perhaps we might not need it – to ask for forgiveness daily.

"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."
Matthew 6:12 NKJV

"And forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us."
Luke 11:4a NKJV

It is true that confession cannot be merely perfunctory. That is to say, we cannot confess out of mere rote or with the mental reservation of not really intending to change our ways; on the other hand, we also cannot let inordinate and misplaced feeling of guilt ever stop us from confessing.²¹ Clearly, some sins are more subtle and difficult to master than others. Some inveterate bad behavior is addictive and it can take a long fight for us to be able to gain control over it. But confession is necessary if we are to be restored to fellowship with the Lord and resume our spiritual advance.

But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we do have fellowship one with one another (i.e., we with the Father and the Son as well as with other believers; cf. v.3), and the blood of Jesus His Son is cleansing us from all sin.
1st John 1:7

The Jerusalem believers were returning to the sacrifices of the Law wherein literal animal blood was shed at the brazen altar to represent the coming sacrifice of Jesus Christ. But in truth it is that latter "blood", the "blood of Christ", that is, the suffering endured for our sins by our Lord in the three hours of darkness on the cross, that "cleanses us from all sin", *not* literal blood, not His, and certainly not that of any animal. The latter was symbolic of the true work of redemption our Lord wrought for us on the cross, called "the blood of Christ" because the violent death of sacrificial victims was the best way to give us some small idea of what our Lord was going to accomplish – and now blessedly *has* accomplished for us in His sacrificial death on our behalf.

²¹ See in BB 3B: Hamartiology, section V.1, "Repentance, Confession, and Forgiveness".

Under the Law, priests offer animals to represent forgiveness. To fulfill the divine purpose which the Law merely symbolized, Christ offered Himself on our behalf – and there is nothing more awesome or wonderful in the history of the world, rightly understood.

(13) For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of the heifer sprinkled upon the unclean render a person holy in respect to bodily cleansing, (14) how much more will the blood of Christ, who offered Himself (i.e., His body; cf. 1Pet.3:18) without defect to God through the eternal Spirit, cleanse our conscience from dead works so that we may serve the living God?
Hebrews 9:14

The benefits we believers enjoy in having Jesus Christ as our new High Priest are marvelous and manifold. First, our sins have actually been forgiven rather than merely being symbolically washed away by the literal blood of animal sacrifice. The latter was a promise to believe in at the time, but now the promise has been completely fulfilled. There "no longer exists" any animal sacrifice sufficient to produce forgiveness "on credit" (Heb.10:26), because the "bill" has been completely paid for by the actual blood of Christ (i.e., His spiritual death wherein He paid for all sin²²), the Lamb of God "without spot or blemish" (1Pet.1:19; cf. Jn.1:29; 1:36). Failing to appreciate this critical fact – and failing to honor it and Him who has provided our so great salvation – is the exact opposite of the command to "hold fast to our profession of faith" given in our context verse.

Since Jesus Christ is our High Priest (1Tim.2:5; Heb.7:24-25; cf. Job 16:20-21; Is.53:12b; Heb.4:14; 6:19-20; 9:11-12; 9:24), the One who has gained us access to the Father's throne of grace (Eph.2:18; 3:12; Heb.4:16), we have no further need of any human priest to mediate between us and God the Father (as the Levitical priests did for the people of Israel). Indeed, since we belong to our Lord Jesus flesh and bone as His Bride, we believers are ourselves part of the new priesthood which our High Priest has now established (1Pet.2:5; 2:9; Rev.1:6; 20:6).

(9) And they sang a new song, saying, "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain and have purchased with your blood for our God [men] from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, (10) and have made them into *a kingdom and priests* to our God, and they will rule upon the earth!"
Revelation 5:9-10

We have no need of any now obsolete, ritualistic priesthood (Heb.8:13; cf. Heb.7:12). We ourselves have the right to petition the Father directly (Jn.14:13; 15:16; 16:23; 16:26), as well as our dear Lord Himself . . .

"If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it."
John 14:14 ESV

. . . just as our High Priest, Jesus Christ Himself presents petitions before the Father on our

²² See BB 4A: Christology, section II.4, "The Blood of Christ".

behalf, advocating for us in a way no human priest could ever hope to do (Rom.8:34; Heb.7:25; cf. Job 16:19; Jn.14:13-14; 1Tim.2:5).

My children, I am writing these things to you so that you won't sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate to [approach] the Father [on our behalf], Jesus Christ the righteous.

1st John 2:1

Disregarding these wonderful benefits that accrue to us as believers who belong to the great High Priest who stands before God the Father in heaven itself and returning instead to the weak and insufficient human priesthood of the Law was the worst possible bargain imaginable – especially since the Levitical Priesthood could do these believers no further good whatsoever, since it had and has been disestablished by the sacrifice of sacrifices, the victory of our Lord on Calvary's cross. Failing to honor Jesus Christ as their new High Priest and returning to that which, in addition to being improperly conducted by unbelievers, had now been invalidated by God the Father was beyond pointless – it was also extremely dangerous.

(26) For if we continue to sin willfully (i.e., arrogantly) after having received full knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains any sacrifice applicable to [such] sins (i.e., the Levitical sacrifices being no longer considered valid by the Father), (27) but [only] the terrifying expectation of judgment and fiery retribution waiting to devour those who oppose [the Lord].

Hebrews 10:26-27

Verse Fifteen

For we do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, since He too was put to the test in all things just as [we are], [only] without sin.

Hebrews 4:15

Instead of turning back to the rituals of the Law (or Gnostic perversions of them), Paul's readers should have remembered that they had been saved by putting their faith in Jesus Christ, not through the works of the Law.

(30) What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; (31) but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness.(32) Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, **but** as it were, **by the works of the law**. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone.

Romans 9:32 NKJV

. . . knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; **for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified**.

Galatians 2:16 NKJV

For as many as are *of the works of the law are under the curse*; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them."

Galatians 3:10 NKJV

And yet these Jerusalem believers were falling into the same trap which had ensnared their unbelieving countrymen, abandoning their true High Priest, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in preference for a defunct human priesthood which could not save or forgive or benefit them in the least.

(9) But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. (10) For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

Hebrews 6:9-10 NKJV

To justify this confidence of Paul's in their return to the right path, the only way forward, embracing again their true High Priest who is the only "way" of salvation (Jn.14:6), would require turning away from the now outmoded rituals which Jesus Christ had already fulfilled. Paul reminds his readers of their previous sacrifices on behalf of Christ and His Church, and will later also recall the suffering which they had endured in the past in order to perform these ministries mentioned in the quotation and to stay true to the Lord (Heb.10:32-39). What these believers were experiencing was nothing unprecedented. It is common for those who have won great spiritual victories in the past, who have endured much without faltering, to either become complacent when the pressure lets up on the one hand, or to lose heart when a new wave of pressure breaks over them on the other. Only by staying close to Jesus Christ can we hope to avoid falling into such traps, seeking relief either through worldly security (in accommodating with unbelievers, returning to the Law and legalism in the case of these individuals), or in the distraction of worldly pleasures (embodied in Gnosticism, in the case of Paul's contemporaries).

I have kept the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be moved.

Psalms 16:8

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Philippians 1:21

For [Moses] grew strong by seeing the One who cannot be seen (i.e., by keeping his mind's eye on the invisible Jesus Christ).

Hebrews 11:27

(1) Since then we too [like the believers of chapter 11] have such a large audience of witnesses surrounding us [both men and angels], let us put off every hindrance - especially whatever sins habitually affect us - and run with endurance the race set before us, (2) turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith, who, for the

joy set before Him, endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despite, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:1-2

Instead lift up Christ as Lord in your hearts [above all else].

1st Peter 3:15a

And our Lord will help us in this struggle! He knows what we are suffering. Clearly, God is omniscient. Clearly, everything that happens in this world has been foreknown and foreordained by God in His divine decree. There are no mistakes. There are no accidents. There are no surprises. There are no hypotheticals. But even more than this – more, that is, for the encouragement of us mere mortals who are experiencing life one day at a time under the pressures of this life amid the shot and the shell of the invisible conflict now raging around us – our Lord Jesus Christ actually experienced exactly what we are having to go through . . . only to a degree we cannot really imagine this side of heaven-home and without sin. Meaning that as a genuine human being, He had it much worse than we do, and yet out of His great love for us He endured it all without ever faltering, flagging or failing in order that we might be saved and have eternal life.

Jesus Christ came into this world as a true human being in order to sacrifice Himself for our sins. That was the only way in which we could be saved from the lake of fire and eternal condemnation. He took on true humanity, being, after the virgin birth, a genuine human being in every way that we are, save only that He was born without a sin nature – an absolute necessity for us to be saved since He had to be the perfect sacrifice, "a lamb without spot or blemish" (1Pet.1:19; cf. Jn.1:29; 1:36), to be acceptable as our sin-bearer. None of us could go a day without sinning, at least in our hearts; Jesus had to live His entire life without ever sinning a single time – or we were doomed and damned. Therefore He not only knows what it means to be a human being, since He is one; He knows far better than we what it takes to negotiate this life and push through opposition and hardships without giving in or giving up, because He did so perfectly.

(3) He was despised and rejected by men, ***a man of sorrows and acquainted with suffering***. Like a person people hide their faces from, He was despised, and we did not hold Him of any account. (4) For He bore our sicknesses and He carried our weaknesses. And yet we considered Him as [the One who had been] punished, smitten and afflicted by God. (5) But [in fact] He was made subject to torment on account of our transgressions, and He was crushed because of our collective guilt (lit., "guilts"). The punishment [required] for making peace [with God] on our behalf [fell] upon Him. Because of His wounding, we have been healed.

Isaiah 53:3-5

(9) But now we do see Jesus crowned with glory and honor on account of the death He suffered, even Him who became "a little lower than the angels" [for a brief span] so that by the grace of God He might taste death on behalf of us all. (10) For it was fitting for [the Father] to make complete ***through sufferings*** Him on whose account all things exist

and through whom all things exist, namely, the Captain of their salvation, even Him who has led many sons to glory, [our Lord Jesus Christ].

Hebrews 2:9-10

For *because He has suffered*, He is able to help those who are being tested, since He Himself was [also] put to the test.

Hebrews 2:18

(7) [Jesus our High Priest] who in the days of His flesh[ly life] (i.e., while He was on earth prior to the resurrection), having offered up prayers and petitions with powerful shouting and with tears to the One who was able to save Him from death, and having been hearkened to on account of His devoutness, (8) although being [God's one and only], nevertheless *came to understand [firsthand] from what He suffered* [what] obedience to God [truly is] (i.e., what it takes for a human being to be obedient to God), (9) and, once He was perfected (i.e., perfectly completed His course), became the source of eternal salvation for all who are obedient to Him (i.e., believers).

Hebrews 5:7-9

(21) For it is to this [sharing in the sufferings of Christ] that you have been called, for Christ also died on your behalf, leaving you an example so that you might follow in His footsteps: (22) *He committed no sin*, nor was any guile found in His mouth. (23) He did not return slander when He was slandered, did not threaten *when He suffered*, but entrusted Himself to the One who judges righteously.

1st Peter 2:21-23

And as one who drank to the full the cup of bitterness which is human life, our Lord Jesus Christ is able like no one else to be sympathetic to the pressures we believers are under and to whatever persecution or ostracism we may be suffering. He knows by His own genuine human experience all of the pressures and temptations that lie at the heart of every spiritual failure. For He felt all of these Himself – only without ever succumbing to any of them. Nor was the mandate our Lord had to fulfill in His humanity only one of resistance to sin. He was not absolved of any of the necessary responsibilities which fall to the lot of all human beings. Our Lord was a son, a sibling, a citizen, and He had to be perfect in all of these respects, fulfilling with exactness the duties pertaining thereto – while at the same time preparing spiritually for the ministry of ministries, the gauntlet of gauntlets, and the crucible of the cross thereafter. Our Lord was virgin born, born without a sin nature, it is true. But this did not diminish the burden placed upon His shoulders as our context affirms: "He too was put to the test *in all things* just as [we are], [only] without sin" (Heb.4:15b). So in addition to the sins we commit daily, while we also often failed in many ways in our secular responsibilities as children growing and also thereafter when we went out into the world, our Lord had no such luxury on either score. He had to be perfect in everything He thought and said and did, not only in refraining from sin but also in perfectly carrying out whatever responsibilities and needful tasks it was incumbent upon Him to do as the genuine human being He was, and all at the same time as He was also charged to grow up and prepare spiritually in a perfect way and to a perfect degree.

And the child grew up and was being strengthened [by being] filled up with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him.

Luke 2:40

We have discussed this subject in detail before (and readers are highly encouraged to review it).²³ Suffice it to say here that instead of having things somewhat easier because He was and is the Son of God, as the Son of Man, the One sent into this world to die to save mankind from our sins, no one ever had it tougher than Jesus Christ. There is in fact no true comparison because no one else in the history of the world had to be perfect in all things (1Pet.1:19), and no one else ever faced the level of satanic opposition our Savior faced (e.g., Matt.4:1-11; Mk.1:12-13; Lk.4:1-13). If anyone can appreciate what it is like to face suffering and pressure in this world, it is our Lord Jesus Christ.

(1) Who has believed our report? And to whom has the Arm of the Lord (i.e., the Messiah) been revealed? (2) For He grew up before Him like a suckling plant, like a root [springing up] from dry ground. He had no [particular] handsomeness that we should take note of Him, no [obvious] charisma that we should be taken with Him. (3) [On the contrary,] He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with suffering. Like a person people hide their faces from, He was despised, and we did not hold Him of any account.

Isaiah 53:1-3

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

2nd Corinthians 8:9 NIV

Although He was born Savior of the world, Son of God, King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Lk.2:10-11), Jesus came into this world in a humble way and lived a humble life without the glory that was due Him by virtue of who He was. He was born a king (Jn.18:37), but He lived as a servant.

(13) "You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. (14) If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. (15) For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. (16) Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him."

John 13:13-16 NKJV

Our Lord knows what it is to live in this world. And He knows what it takes to live a godly life, to push through the resistance thrown at us by the evil one, his minions seen and unseen, and his evil world system. Jesus knows because He did it Himself, facing opposition beyond anything we could ever take, beyond anything we could ever even imagine. He did this for us, in order to be our perfect sacrifice and take away all of our sins by dying for them in the darkness on the

²³ See BB 4A: Christology, section I.5.g, "Early Life and Preparation for Ministry".

cross. That was the only way we could be saved. If we ever have any question about the great love of God for us, all we need do is think on the cross (Jn.15:13; Eph.2:4-10; 1Jn.3:1). For our Lord suffered all that He suffered throughout His life and to the end of it not merely to endure but to *save us*.

Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher 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.

Hebrews 12:2 NKJV

Having given up everything for us, and knowing from personal experience through His absolutely unique sufferings just what it is we are going through in this world, how would our Lord Jesus not be capable of the deepest and most perfect sympathy for us who are His "joy"? We who belong to Him have a right, a duty and a responsibility to keep this important principle in mind, especially if we ever find ourselves feeling sorry for ourselves, remembering what our Lord endured for us and why, in complete confidence, trust and faith that whatever we are suffering He feels our pain and is working it all out for our absolute good in the end.

(1) "Do not let your heart be troubled. You believe in God [the Father] – believe also in Me. (2) There are many rooms in my Father's house. If there were not, I would have told you. For I am going in order to prepare a place for you. (3) And if I go and prepare a place for you, I shall come again and take you to Myself, so that where I am, you may be also."

John 14:1-3

And we know that, for those who love God, He works everything together for good – [that is to say,] for those who have been called according to His plan.

Romans 8:28

(38) For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, neither angelic nor human authorities, neither things present nor things to come, neither heavenly powers, (39) be they the highest [of the elect] or the lowest [of the fallen], nor any other created thing [on this earth] will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:38-39

Without Sin:

(1) *The Word* [Jesus Christ] *existed at the very beginning*, and there was reciprocity between the Word and God [the Father]. And the Word was God. (2) This One both existed and enjoyed reciprocity with God from the very beginning. (3) Everything came into being through Him, and without Him, nothing has come into being which has in fact come into being. (4) In Him was life, and this life was the light of men.

John 1:1-4

Jesus Christ is God (e.g., Is.40:3; Rom.1:4; Matt.22:41-46; 28:19; Lk.1:35; 5:20-21; Jn.1:1-18;

5:18; 2Cor.13:14; Col.1:15-20; 2:9; Heb.1:3).²⁴ He has always been and will always be God. He could never possibly be otherwise. But uniquely Jesus Christ is, since His virgin birth, also a genuine human being.²⁵

And *the Word became flesh* and tented among us. And we beheld His glory, a glory like that of a one and only Son from [the] Father, full of grace and truth.
John 1:14

Jesus had to be virgin-conceived and born because the sin nature, acquired by Adam and Eve at the fall, is passed down through the male line (Rom.5:12).²⁶ Since His birth, our Lord Jesus Christ was and is fully human, a genuine man as well as God. In His humanity, He was born without sin – the only human being so born – and maintained His sinlessness to the end. He had to. Otherwise none of us could be saved, because Jesus had to be the perfect sinless sacrifice in order to be qualified to take away our sins through His spiritual death on our behalf (Jn.1:26; 1:39; 1Pet.1:19). Jesus never sinned. Nor was He aided in resisting sin (or in doing all of the positive things He had to do in His human life for us to be saved) by any direct help from His deity. To be our perfect sacrifice our Lord had to fight this fight the same we way do: through obedience to the truth and through the help of the Holy Spirit.

(5) You too should have this attitude which Christ Jesus had. (6) Since He already existed in the very form of God, equality with God was [certainly] not something He thought He had to grasp for. (7) Yet in spite of this [co-equal divinity He already possessed], He deprived Himself of His status and took on the form of a slave, [and was] born in the likeness of men. (8) He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even [His] death on [the] cross [for us all].
Philippians 2:5-8

Our Lord's foregoing of any accessing of His deity by His humanity during the first advent (so as to be qualified to be our sin-bearer) is called in theology the doctrine of *kenosis*.²⁷ Jesus Christ is the unique Person of the universe, possessing a human as well as a divine nature, being both God and man since the birth of His humanity. So He had to be, if we were to be saved, and so He had to become, if creatures given free will were to be blessed with eternal life.²⁸ It is not too much to say that initiating creation necessitated the cross, so that the cross has always been the foundation

²⁴ See BB 4A: Christology, section I.1, "Jesus Christ is truly Divine".

²⁵ See BB 4A: Christology, section I.2, "Jesus Christ is truly Human".

²⁶ BB 4A: Christology, section I.5.f.3, "The Necessity of the Virgin Birth".

²⁷ See BB 4A: Christology, section I.5.e, "The Hypostatic Union and *Kenosis*".

²⁸ These issues are discussed in the Satanic Rebellion series.

of all that God has done and made.²⁹ Since that is the case, we need not belabor the theological argument of whether or not Christ "could have sinned", because as our context verse assures us, in spite of being tempted "in all points . . . like as we are" (Heb.4:15 KJV), He **did not** sin.³⁰ Our Lord is a genuine human being just as the rest of us are, save without sin, and as such possessed the same free will that we all do. But instead of using His free will to follow His own desires (as every other human being has done at least to some degree from the beginning until the end of history), uniquely our Lord was perfect in His response to the Father's will from His first breath to His last.³¹

"I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me."

John 5:30 NKJV

"For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."

John 6:38 NKJV

"I have given you an example that you may do as I have done."

John 13:15 (cf. Jn.14:15; 14:23-24)

We are never going to be perfect this side of the resurrection, but we have a right to be grateful to our dear Lord that He was – for otherwise we would be lost. His sinlessness does not mean that He cannot properly understand what we are going through. To the contrary. It means that He understands by personal experience much better than we will ever do.

"Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

Matthew 11:29 NKJV

(2) Turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith, who, for the joy set before Him, endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despite, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God. (3) Keep in mind all the terrible opposition He endured against Himself at the hands of sinful men, ***so as not to grow sick at heart and give up.***

Hebrews 12:2-3

²⁹ See BB 4B: Soteriology, section I, "God's Plan to Save You".

³⁰ I.e., *non posse peccare, posse non peccare*, "not able to sin; able not to sin". This argument does much to explain the problems with traditional theology which has a penchant for debating hypotheticals which are impossible in the actual plan of God and often missing the greater truths of scripture as a result. Jesus did not sin. If He had there would be no plan of God and none of this would exist. Q.E.D.

³¹ See BB 4A: Christology, section I, "The Life of Christ".

[index "Prayer"]

Verse Sixteen

So let us approach the throne of grace [of the Father] with the confidence to speak freely, that we might receive [His] mercy and gain [His] favor to help us in our time of need.
Hebrews 4:16

At present, our heavenly Father is seated on His royal throne in the third heaven, separated from this impure world, directing the progress of the plan through which the present conflict with the devil and his forces is being resolved through Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

(2) Immediately I came to be in the Spirit, and, behold, a throne had been placed in the [third] heaven, and [some] One was sitting [upon it]. (3) And the One sitting [on the throne was] similar in appearance to a gemstone of jasper or sardius.
Revelation 4:2-3

As we have seen before, the original temple, palace, headquarters of God was not in the third heaven but here on earth – before, that is, the universe was devastated in judgment as a consequence of Satan's rebellion.

I kept looking until thrones were set down and the Ancient of Days (i.e., the Father) took His seat. His attire was white as snow, as was the hair of His head, [white] like the purest wool. His throne was aflame with fire, and its wheels were a blazing fire.
Daniel 7:9

As may be inferred from the passage above (and from many other places in scripture as well³²), the Father's throne has wheels because it is an instrument of warfare, a chariot conveyed into battle by the four cherubim (Ezek.1:4-26; 10:6-17; cf. Is.6:1-6; Rev.4:6; 4:8; 4:9; 5:6; 5:8; 5:11; 5:14; 6:1; 6:6; 7:11; 14:3; 15:7; 19:4).³³ Readers are encouraged to review these important matters where they are treated elsewhere.³⁴ Apropos of our present study is the critical point that prayer on the part of believers in Christ, the subject of our current context verse, *cannot* be properly understood apart from the conflict in which we are all presently engaged. Prayer is a weapon or, to put things into modern military context, a request for "fire support". Anyone with a modicum of conversance with the American experience of warfare in the last hundred years or so will understand the importance of the role of supporting arms, tanks, artillery, naval gunfire, aircraft and the like, to all of this country's military endeavors. In victory (and even in defeat), such support has for many decades now been a if not the critical factor in preserving the lives of

³² See in CT 2B: The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation, under "The Throne".

³³ See BB 2A: Angelology, section II.9.3.1, "The Cherubim". The cover of the ark of the covenant (which represents this chariot symbolically) is adorned with golden cherubs.

³⁴ I.e., in part 1 of the Satanic Rebellion series, part 2B of the Coming Tribulation series, and part 2A of the Bible Basics series.

infantry in contact with the enemy.

(1) And when He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. (2) And I saw the seven angels who stood before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. (3) And another angel with a golden censer came and stood by the altar, and much incense was given to him so that he might offer it *for the prayers of the saints* on the golden altar in front of the throne. (4) And smoke from the incense went up from the hand of the angel before God *for the prayers of the saints*. (5) Then the angel took the incense holder and filled it *with fire* from the altar and threw it to the earth. And there occurred thunderous voices and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

Revelation 8:1-5

Analogously to the casting down of fire upon the earth in response to prayer in the passage above referencing the onset of the Tribulation, we believers have the great right and privilege to call down divine help at any time in our support in whatever trouble we may find ourselves. When facing threats to our very lives, as in the passage above, it is not unprecedented for God's response to our requests to be literally "fiery" and dramatic (e.g., Ps.18:6-17), as will be the case oftentimes during the Tribulation, especially at its end.

(5) [These tribulations which you are enduring] are evidence of the righteous judgment of God in His [judging] you to be worthy of His kingdom on behalf of which you are also suffering. (6) Since indeed it is just for God to repay with tribulation those who are subjecting you to tribulation, (7) and to give you who are being distressed relief along with us at the revelation of our Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful angels, (8) wreaking vengeance *in a flame of fire* upon those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

2nd Thessalonians 1:5-8

But while military firepower can often be a blunt instrument – and even with all too much frequency fall upon friendly forces by mistake – prayer is far more surgical and has the added benefit of being directed by the perfect "support liaison": God knows what we need far better than we do.

(7) "And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. (8) Do not be like them, *for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*"

Matthew 6:7-8 NIV

God's answering of our prayers is always perfect, never harming us, even on those occasions when what we ask for specifically out of at least partial ignorance would really be the last thing we need.

(7) "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. (8) For *everyone who asks receives*, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. (9) Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for

bread, will give him a stone? (10) Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent?
(11) If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give *good things* to those *who ask Him!*"
Matthew 7:7-11 NKJV

"Everyone who asks receives" is a principle from our Lord Jesus Christ Himself which we should never allow to fall from our hearts but should strive always to rely on *in faith*. For while the Word of God is the believers' sharp sword for engaging in this conflict in which we presently find ourselves (Eph.6:17; Heb.4:12), and while prayer is a weapon of unequalled divine firepower (which is why the two are connected in scripture; e.g., Eph.6:17-18; Heb.4:12-16), the *key* to employing both the Word and prayer is the believer's *faith*. The Word has to be believed to be useful to the Spirit; and we have to believe that our prayers are heard in order for them to be fulfilled:

(21) So Jesus answered and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done. (22) And whatever things you ask in prayer, *believing*, you will receive."
Matthew 21:21-22 NKJV

Even if the response we request is not immediate, we should *never* lose heart or become discouraged about continuing to place our requests before the Lord in prayer – *in faith* that He does hear us and will answer us if we but persevere.

(1) Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray *and not give up*. (2) He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. (3) And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' (4) "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, (5) yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!' " (6) And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. (7) And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?" (8) I tell you, *he will see that they get justice, and quickly*. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find *faith* on the earth?"
Luke 18:1-8 NIV

In addition to the need to ask "believing" when we pray, it certainly is also true that we need to ask with the right motives, as soldiers of Jesus Christ who are here in this temporary world attempting to fight the fight He has given us to fight rather than merely indulging ourselves as friends of this satanic world (Jas.4:4; 1Jn.2:15-17). We cannot expect to ask with the wrong motives and be heard (Jas.4:2-3). We cannot harbor sin in our hearts and expect the Lord to listen to us (Ps.66:18). None of us is perfect in our motivations or in our daily walk (and we all need to also always be availing ourselves of the prayer of confession to stay in fellowship with our Lord in this fight: 1Jn.1:9; cf. Ps.32:5). And it is also true that the more we have advanced

spiritually, the greater response we can expect.

(16b) The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. (17) Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. (18) And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

James 5:16b-18 NKJV

Part of the reason why great believers have such success in prayer is because they pray in the correct way, while in fellowship with the Lord, while filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph.6:18; Jude 1:20-21; cf. Rom.8:26-27; Phil.1:19; Eph.2:18); and part of the reason is because the closer one is to the Lord, the more likely it is that what one prays for will actually be God's will for us.

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything *according to His will*, He hears us.

1st John 5:14 NKJV

While we have all no doubt experienced the wonderful blessing of asking God for something and having that prayer answered in the just the way we asked and almost immediately (cf. Gen.24:12-15; Acts 12:1-17), that is not always (nor even most commonly) the Christian experience (cf. Dan.10:12-14).

(8) But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. (9) The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

2nd Peter 3:8-9 NKJV (cf. Ps.90:4)

The passage above is counseling patience in regard to the Lord's return, it is true, but the principle surely applies to prayer as well. Sodom was destroyed even though Abraham asked the Lord to spare it – but what he really desired was for his nephew to be spared, and God did grant him his heart's desire which lay behind that request (Gen.18:23ff.). Abraham's most heartfelt prayer was for an heir. And he did receive Isaac in answer to his many petitions – but he had to wait until he was a hundred years old for this particular request to be fulfilled. Waiting on the Lord for His answer and the necessity of doing so in faith that He will answer us in the perfect way at the perfect time is a common test we believers often have to face in this fight. To trust the Lord to answer our prayers, even when we have to wait much longer than we would prefer or accept an answer which is not precisely what we asked for (but actually better if we stop and consider things), is part of the faith and faithfulness that glorifies Him.

(5) Then [the Lord] brought [Abraham] outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." (6) And [Abraham] believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

Genesis 15:5-6 NKJV

So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived.
Genesis 19:29 NIV

Therefore we have confidence in prayer, confidence in the Lord and in His perfect faithfulness. He has promised to answer us – many times – and in His perfect integrity we know and believe with all our hearts that He will do what He has promised to do. So even if our prayers have not yet been answered, we know by faith that they will be – at the right time and in exactly the right way, even if we end up being surprised by the timing and the manner of their fulfillment. Everything that God does for us is for our good in every way (Rom.8:28), and that includes His fulfillment of all of our prayer requests. If this were not so, why then would scripture be filled to overflowing with encouragement for us to pray and with assurances that God hears and answers our prayers? The Lord "longs to be gracious" to us (Is.30:18 NIV). Our job as those who profess faith in Him is to demonstrate that we do in fact trust Him completely – no matter what – never forgetting the many times He has faithfully answered us in the past.

The Lord is near to all who call upon Him,
To all who call upon Him in truth.
Psalm 145:18 NKJV

"It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; And while they are still speaking, I will hear."
Isaiah 65:24 NKJV

"Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you."
Jeremiah 29:12 NKJV

"Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them."
Mark 11:24 NKJV

"And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."
John 14:13 NKJV

"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you."
John 15:7 NKJV

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you."
John 15:16 NKJV

"And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask

the Father in My name He will give you."
John 16:23 NKJV

Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving.
Colossians 4:2 NKJV

And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.
1st John 5:15 NKJV

As sons and daughters of the living God, as members of the Body and Bride of Christ, we have the right to ask the Father and Son for anything legitimate, and we should always have confidence that our prayers are heard – and will be answered. Therefore prayer is a large part of the Christian life not only in terms of our own needs, but also in our efforts to minister to our brothers and sisters in Christ. And while prayer is a ministry which may fall to certain believers uniquely (as a major part of what they have been gifted and called to do in their service to the Lord), it is a daily right, privilege and obligation in which all believers should consistently participate.

"Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven."
Matthew 18:19 NKJV

". . . but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."
Acts 6:4 NKJV

. . . you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many.
2nd Corinthians 1:11 NKJV

And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.
Colossians 4:3 NIV

Brothers and sisters, pray for us also.
1st Thessalonians 5:25 CSB

So whenever we feel that our prayers are being shut out or not heard or answered (Lam.3:44), if we have taken stock and are not at fault, we need to remember not to do as Job did, a great man of God with legendary patience who nonetheless gave up at the last second, losing that patience just before the answer came. Instead, we need to have faith in God's deliverance even before we see it with our own eyes, knowing that God is and will answer us, regardless of what the world says.

(27) Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach

your hand here, and put it into My side. ***Do not be unbelieving, but believing.***" (28) And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" (29) Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."
John 20:27-29 NKJV

The throne of God the Father, to which we now have the direct right of access and petition as those who belong to Jesus Christ (Eph.2:18; 3:12), is called in our context "the throne of ***grace***". Grace, as we have seen in our studies is God's favor³⁵, His goodwill and beneficent actions toward us in spite of the fact that we have not and could never deserve that favor in any way (Rom.4:1-4). We receive God's grace, we have the right to come before the throne of grace, because of the cross of Jesus Christ. The cross is the great victory of the conflict in which we are engaged, the foundation of every blessing we receive, just as our Savior who won that victory is the Rock and cornerstone upon which the entire plan of God is founded. Grace ***is*** the cross. And it is because we are believers in the One who has conquered sin and death that we have been given the great honor of entering into the pursuit which follows His victory of victories. We are here in the devil's realm winning spiritual battles which glorify Jesus Christ and which will redound to our eternal blessing in the rewards He will bestow upon us at the judgment seat of Christ (Rom.14:10-12; 2Cor.5:10).³⁶ Prayer is a critical weapon in this fight, and believers should never hesitate to employ it at every opportunity.

For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers.
Romans 1:9 NKJV

(18) And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. (19) Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel.
Ephesians 6:18-19 NIV

We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you.
Colossians 1:3 NKJV

Pray without ceasing.
1st Thessalonians 5:17 NKJV

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men.
1st Timothy 2:1 NKJV

³⁵ See Hebrews chapter 2, verse nine; also Peter #12.

³⁶ See CT 6: Last Things, section I.7, "The Judgment and Reward of the Church".

I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day.
2nd Timothy 1:3 NKJV

Having so many positive assurances of God's answering of our prayers and encouragements to pray, in scripture and also in our own Christian experience, how can we even think to leave such an important weapon in our arsenal gathering dust? After all, in our context verse we are directly encouraged to be seeking God's help through prayer: "So **let us approach** the throne of grace [of the Father] **with** the **confidence** to speak freely, **that we might receive** [His] **mercy** and gain [His] **favor** [grace] **to help** us in our **time of need**" (Heb.4:12). And in that context, in the verse directly preceding, we have been told that Jesus Christ is capable of sympathizing with us in the trials and tribulations we are going through. He gave us the example of One who prayed continually (Heb.5:7; cf. Matt.14:23; Mk.6:46; Lk.6:12; 9:28). And He is our Advocate, supporting our every petition before the Father's throne of grace (Rom.8:34; 1Jn.2:1; Heb.7:25; cf. Job 16:19; Jn.14:13-14; 1Tim.2:5). Let us therefore never hesitate to "go boldly" to the Father in prayer, placing our petitions also directly into the hands of the One who died for us, the One whose standard we are following in this present fight.

"If you ask **Me** anything in my name, I will do it."
John 14:14 [index]

Finally, let us also always be thankful, remembering that whatever happens, the Lord is working everything out for the good of us who love Him (Rom.8:28).

Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.
Ephesians 5:20 NKJV

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with **thanksgiving**, let your requests be made known to God.
Philippians 4:6 NKJV

In everything **give thanks**; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.
1st Thessalonians 5:18 NKJV