

Read Text: Hebrews 4

“We must indeed confess, that then only is our life rightly formed when it becomes subject to God. But through inbred corruption this is never the case, until we rest from our own works; nay, such is the opposition between God’s government and our corrupt affections, that he cannot work in us until we rest. But though the completion of this rest cannot be attained in this life, yet we ought ever to strive for it. Thus believers enter it but on this condition, — that by running they may continually go forward.” —John Calvin

The book of Hebrews is a tightly argued, theologically reasoned epistle, that speaks to us of the better and more complete things than were revealed to Moses. Moses was only privileged to see the hinder parts of God, and was not permitted to see the glory of God directly. Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, gives us a much fuller revelation of the glory of God, for He beholds His Father face to face. Faith in Christ also removes the veil from our hearts so that we can see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ as we read the New Testament, as Paul declares in 2Corinthians.

Chapter Four does not begin a new subject. It is the continuation of the Second Great Warning that began in 3:7, which calls us to hear the voice of Jesus Christ and do not harden our hearts against His voice.

Let me reset the context of the argument of the writer of Hebrews. He has demonstrated that Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, is greater than the angels—therefore his message, the message of the Gospel is greater than the message of Moses--as true and powerful as the message of Moses was--Christ’s message is better, and therefore there will be greater punishment for those who despised Christ’s message than for those who ignored the message of Moses. This is the First Great Warning and is found in 2:1-4. The reason for the warning is this: God did not put the world to come, the glories of the heavenly kingdom, under the authority of angels, but under the authority of man, in the person of the Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ draws all His people to Himself and represents them before the throne of the Majesty on high, after being made a complete and mature man by the things that He suffered, for he carried our griefs and sorrows, the guilt of our sin, and the awful wrath of God in order to take us to Himself in the peace of God in the Heavenly Kingdom. The temple of the Lord Jesus is a greater temple than that built by Moses, and we are the temple of the Lord Jesus – His house, if we hold fast the faith and the hope that He has given to us, His church.

Therefore, Jesus calls us to Himself and promises us His Sabbath, his rest: 28 Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. – Matthew 11.

This theme runs throughout the Bible from the Garden of Eden, which itself is a figure of the peaceful kingdom of God and man’s eternal rest. In chapter four of the book of Hebrews, the author hits the highlights of this theme, in order to demonstrate that Israel as a nation did not know the peace and rest of God in reality, but only in figures and ceremonies which pointed to the true peace and rest of God.

Let us look at Chapter Four in this light: Three things: First, the warning and the text [vs. 1-3a]; Second, Illustration and Examples of what was not the eternal rest [vs. 3b-8]; Third, The Promise and Warning restated. [vs. 9-16]

- I. The Warning and the Text: vs. 1-3a; Psalm 95:6-11, which he had introduced at the beginning of this warning back in chapter 3. [turn and read].
 - A. Those who came out of Egypt [the adults] did not enter the land of Canaan, and their carcasses fell in the wilderness.
 - B. The Jewish Christians were to take heed of this; those who despised Moses died in the wilderness; shall we escape if we despise the words of the Lord Jesus.

- C. Their sin was unbelief and hardening of the heart. They could not enter in because of unbelief; and if we do not enter into the rest of God, it will also be because of unbelief.
- D. The Gospel was preached to them, in the promises; but they did not heed them, but murmured and complained and griped and fussed because God didn't live up to their expectations; the fault was not in God, but in their expectations, for they thought only in terms of earthly things.
- E. Those who believe enter into the rest of God. It is by faith that we obtain the inheritance.
- II. Illustrations and Examples of what was NOT the ETERNAL rest. Vs. 3b-8
- A. Understand first, that Psalm 95 was written during the time of David, many years after the conquest and settling of the land by Joshua—hundreds of years afterward.
1. Hence, it was not the seventh day Sabbath. God's works had been finished from the foundation of the world. Vs. 3b-4 This warning “Today, if you will hear his voice,” was given to them who were already living in Canaan and had the Ten Commandments and the law of the Sabbath Day which was from the beginning. There is an eternal Sabbath in the kingdom of God that the weekly Sabbath promises us in a figure.
 2. Neither was the rest the land of Canaan: vs. 8. Israel found no rest in Canaan because of unbelief. They did not even conquer and pacify the land, but made peace with the inhabitants, many of whom became their conquerors and slave masters. Not even David and Solomon, in all their glory, knew the rest of God, but knew sin and misery and distress. Read the Psalms to find the agony and unrest that filled the mind of David and the people so many times. Israel has still not found peace, and will not until they return to Jehovah and His Son the Lord Jesus Christ.
 3. There remained a promised rest for the people of God that Israel did not know because of unbelief, future from the time prophesied by Psalm 95. This is the doctrine set forth by the writer of Hebrews.
- B. There was an inheritance that was yet future for the people of God, of which the Sabbath Day and the Land of Canaan were but examples. They were great blessings for the Lord's people, but were not the final blessing, but as it were, the hinder parts of God; God having something better for us, to whom the ends of the world are come.
- III. The Promise and Warning Restated. Vs. 9-16
- A. The rest of God comes when a man ceases from his own works.
1. The law of the Sabbath forbade all work to be done, and the death penalty was affixed. But this only partly figured it: for oxen had to be gotten out of ditches, the priests had to labor; the rest was never complete; but what a great blessing compared to the rest of the world. Debtors were freed, the land was rested every seventh year, etc., but people still knew debt and man wasted their inheritance, families knew strife and misery, and men neglected the worship of God. The Sabbath day was not the final rest for the people of God, but was intended as a figure and illustration. But even as imperfect as it was, it was far, far better than anything the rest of the world knew.
 2. The rest of God comes when all of our enemies are destroyed and our warfare is over. That did not come in Canaan for Israel. The book of Judges recounts the sufferings and slavery of Israel because of unbelief. They had only intervals of peace, but there were also times of famine and distress. Naomi and her husband even left the land of Judah to go to Moab because of a famine. The land was often invaded and Israel knew perpetual war.
- B. The nature of the word of God and the promises of God: they go to the heart, not only to the body.
1. Because Israel had no faith, they did not understand the nature of the word of God. They saw the promises as external, only.
 2. To them faith meant resting the body; and conquering the armies of their enemies.
 3. The word of God is sent with a far greater mission than ease and comfort for the body. It goes to the soul, to the inner man, to the hidden man of the heart. Vs. 12,13
 4. No creature can escape this responsibility to God. Our first business is in the heart and it is with God. Always, always, always.
- C. Our problem, therefore, is always unbelief and the sin that comes from unbelief.

1. Our business is with our High Priest. If we do our work there, then we enter into the rest that God has promised.
2. Our important and primary peace is with God: Romans 5:1-5.
 - a. Justified by faith, we have peace with God.
 - b. Tribulations do not disturb this peace, for we have learned the reason for them: patience.
 - c. Our hope is in God and in the world to come: we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.
3. Our inheritance is in the world to come.
 - a. It is there that we will rest from our labors.
 - b. It is there that we are freed from the slavery of sin and its misery.
 - c. It is there that we behold the overthrow of all that wars against us: sin, death, and hell are destroyed and we enjoy the everlasting peace of God forever and ever.

Application: Question 103 of the HC

Q103: What does God require in the fourth Commandment?

A103: In the first place, God wills that the ministry of the Gospel and schools be maintained,[1] and that I, especially on the day of rest, diligently attend church [2] to learn the Word of God,[3] to use the holy sacraments,[4] to call publicly upon the Lord,[5] and to give Christian alms.[6] In the second place, that all the days of my life I rest from my evil works, allow the Lord to work in me by His Spirit, and thus begin in this life the everlasting sabbath.[7]

1. Titus. 1:5; I Tim. 3:14-15; 4:13-14; 5:17; I Cor. 9:11, 13-14
 2. II Tim. 2:2, 15; Psa. 40:10-11; 68:26; Acts 2:42, 46
 3. I Cor. 14:19, 29, 31
 4. I Cor. 11:33
 5. I Tim. 2:1-2, 8-10; I Cor. 14:16
 6. I Cor. 16:2
 7. Isa. 66:23; Gal. 6:6; Acts 20:7; Heb. 4:9-10
1. The gospel of justification and peace with God must be preached to all the world; the church is an instrument of the proclamation of the peace and mercy of God.
 2. I rest from my works every day of my life, so that God can work in me and use me for the glory of God. Thus I begin my rest in this world, and enter the Canaan of eternal rest in the World to Come as He has promised, when my earthly labor for the Lord Jesus is finished. No Christian is to work for himself, but for the Lord Jesus, who loved us and gave Himself for us. We are not our own. Our only comfort in life and in death is that I belong to Jesus Christ, and have nothing of my own.

May God bless you. Amen and Amen.