

CHAPTER 6

INTRODUCTION TO HEBREWS 6

In this chapter the apostle exhorts the believing Hebrews not to rest in the rudiments of the Christian religion they had learned; and much less to lay them again in the foundation after the Jewish manner, of which he instances in six particulars; but to seek after a perfect knowledge of evangelic truths, which, under a divine permission, was his determination to do, (~~scribble~~ Hebrews 6:1-3) which was the best method to prevent apostasy, he dissuades from; by giving the characters of apostates, showing how far they may go in the knowledge of divine things, and yet fall away; by asserting the impossibility of their repentance and recovery, with the reason of it, taken from the blackness of their crimes, (~~scribble~~ Hebrews 6:4-6) and the difference between them, and true believers, he illustrates by two sorts of earth, the one takes in the rain that comes down from heaven, and brings forth herbs for the use of its dresser, and is blessed of God: such are true believers in Christ, (~~scribble~~ Hebrews 6:7) the other bears thorns and briers, and is rejected and cursed, and in the issue burned; and to such earth the above apostates may be compared, (~~scribble~~ Hebrews 6:8) but lest the believing Hebrews, such as were truly gracious among them, should conclude that this was their case, and that it was desperate; and lest they should think the apostle had an ill opinion of them, he declares he was otherwise persuaded of them, and hoped and believed they were interested in the things of salvation, (~~scribble~~ Hebrews 6:9) the reasons of which persuasion are taken from the work of grace, which was wrought in them; from their laborious love they showed to the name of God, and to his people, and which they continued to show: and from the righteousness of God in not forgetting all this, (~~scribble~~ Hebrews 6:10). And then he proceeds to exhort them to diligence in the exercise of grace, and discharge of duty, that so they might arrive to a full assurance of hope, (~~scribble~~ Hebrews 6:11) and not to indulge slothfulness, but to be followers of the saints that were gone before them; whose character is, that through faith, and patience, they had inherited the promises, things the apostle would have those believers imitate them in, (~~scribble~~ Hebrews 6:12) and particularly instances in Abraham, the father of this people, and of all believers; who having a promise from God, to which an

oath was annexed, patiently waited for it, and obtained it, (³⁰⁶³Hebrews 6:13-15) and having made mention of an oath, the apostle takes notice of the nature and use of one among men, (³⁰⁶⁶Hebrews 6:16) and of the design of God in making use of one himself, which was to confirm his promise, and show its immutability to the heirs of it; and that by observing these two immutable things, which could never fail, they might have solid and abiding comfort: even all such, who, under a sense of danger, flee to Christ for refuge, who is the ground of hope proposed to them in the Gospel, to lay hold upon, (³⁰⁶⁷Hebrews 6:17,18) and because of the firmness of the grace of hope, as it is conversant with Christ, and is cast on him, the good ground of it, it is compared to an anchor; and is said to be sure and steadfast, and to enter within the veil, where Christ is gone as a forerunner; and which is an encouragement to that grace to enter in after him; who is further described by his name Jesus, by his office as an high priest, and by the order of which he is, that of Melchizedek, (³⁰⁶⁹Hebrews 6:19,20) which is mentioned, to lead on to what the apostle had to say concerning him, in the next chapter.

Ver. 1. *Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, etc..]* The Gospel is the doctrine of Christ, and is so called, because Christ, as God, is the author of it; as Mediator, he received it from his Father; as man, he was the preacher of it; and he is also the sum and substance of it: the principles of this doctrine are either the easier parts of the Gospel, called milk in the latter part of the preceding chapter; which are not to be left with dislike and contempt, nor so as to be forgotten, nor so as not to be recurred to at proper times; but so as not to abide in and stick here, without going further: or rather the ceremonies of the law, which were the elements of the Jews' religion, and the beginning, as the word may be here rendered, of the doctrine of Christ; which were shadowy and typical of Christ, and taught the Jews the truths of the Gospel concerning Christ: in these the believing Jews were very desirous of sticking, and of abiding by them, and of continuing them in the Gospel church; whereas they were to be left, since they had had their use, and had answered what they were designed for, and were now abolished by Christ.

Let us go on to perfection: in a comparative sense, to a more perfect knowledge of things, which the clear revelation and ministry of the Gospel lead unto; and which the rites and ceremonies, types and figures of the law, never could:

not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works; the Syriac version reads this by way of interrogation, “do ye lay again, etc..” and makes the third verse to be an answer to it: the phrase, “not laying again the foundation”, is to be read in connection, not only with this article of repentance, but with each of the other five articles, the foundation of which is no more to be laid again than this: and not laying it again, either means not teaching it, and so refers to the apostle, and other ministers of the word, who should not insist upon the following things, at least not stick there, but go on to deliver things more sublime and grand; or not hearing it, and so refers to the Hebrews, who should seek after a more perfect knowledge of evangelic truths than the following articles exhibited to them: and the several parts of this foundation, which; are not to be laid again ministerially, by preachers, or attended to by hearers, design either the first things, with which the Gospel dispensation was ushered in; or rather, and which I take to be the true sense, the general principles and practices of the Jews under the former dispensation; for these are not the six principles of the Christian religion, as they are commonly called, but so many articles of the Jewish creed; some of which were peculiar to the Jews, and others common to them, with us Christians: thus,

repentance from dead works, does not intend evangelical repentance, the doctrine of which is to be ministerially laid, and the grace itself to be exercised over and over again; but a repentance which arose from, and was signified by the sacrifices of slain beasts; for by them the Jews were taught the doctrine of repentance, as well as remission of sin; and in and over them did they confess their iniquities; yea, every beast that was slain for sacrifice carried in it a conviction of sin, an acknowledgment of guilt; and it was tacitly owning, that they, for whom the creature was slain, deserved to be treated as that was, and die as that did. So the Jews ^{f77} say,

“when a man sacrifices a beast, he thinks in his own heart, I am rather a beast than this; for I am he that hath sinned, and for the sin which I have committed I bring this; and it is more fitting that the man should be sacrificed rather than the beast; and so it appears that, *j rj y awh wnbrq ydy l* [, “by the means of his offering he repents”.”

But now, under the Gospel dispensation, believing Jews, as these were to whom the apostle writes, were not to learn the doctrine of repentance from slain beasts, or to signify it in this way; since repentance and remission of

sins were preached most clearly to them in the name of Christ: nor were they to lay again another part of this foundation, or a second article of the Jewish creed,

and of faith towards God; which article is expressed in language agreeable to the Jewish dispensation; whereas evangelical faith is usually called the faith of Christ, or faith in Christ, or towards our Lord Jesus Christ; but this respects faith in God, as the God of Israel: hence says our Lord to his disciples, who were all Jews, “ye believe in God”: ye have been taught, and used to believe in God, as the God of Israel; “believe also in me”, as his Son and the Messiah, and the Mediator between God and man, (~~840~~ John 14:1), so that now they were not only to have faith towards God, as the God of Israel, and to teach and receive that doctrine; but to have faith in Christ as the Saviour of lost sinners, without the intermediate use of sacrifices.

Ver. 2. *Of the doctrine of baptisms*, etc..] Some read this divisively, “baptism and doctrine”, as the Ethiopic version; as if the one respected the ordinance of baptism, and the other the ministry of the word; but it is best to read them conjunctively: and by which most understand the Gospel ordinance of water baptism, so called by a change of number, the plural for the singular, as the Syriac and Ethiopic versions, who render it baptisms; or because of the different persons baptized, and times of baptizing, as some; or because of the trine immersion, as others; or because of the threefold baptism of spirit, blood, and water, which have some agreement with each other; or because of the baptism of John, and Christ, though they are one and the same; or because of the inward and outward baptism, the one fitting and qualifying for the other; and so the doctrine of it is thought to respect the necessity, use, and end of it; but since there is but one baptism, and the above reasons for the plural expression are not solid, and sufficiently satisfying, it is best to interpret this of the divers baptisms among the Jews, spoken of in (~~890~~ Hebrews 9:10) which had a doctrine in them, to that people; teaching them the cleansing virtue of the blood of Christ, and leading them to it, to wash in for sin, and for uncleanness; but now, since this blood was shed, they were no more to teach nor learn the doctrine of cleansing by the blood of Christ this way; nor any more to be led unto it through these divers baptisms, ablutions, and purifications.

And of laying on of hands; the foundation of this was to be no more laid, nor the doctrine of it to be any longer taught and learned in the way it had

been; for not the rite, but the doctrine of laying on of hands is here intended; and it has no reference to the right of laying on of hands by the apostles, either in private persons, or officers of churches; for what was the doctrine of such a rite, is not easy to say; but to the rite of laying on of hands of the priests, and of the people, upon the head of sacrifices; which had a doctrine in it, even the doctrine of the imputation of sin to Christ, the great sacrifice. It was usual with the Jews^{f78} to call the imposition of hands upon the sacrifice, simply, *hkym*s, “laying on of hands”; and they understood by it the transferring of sin from the persons that laid on hands, to the sacrifice, on which they were laid; and that hereby, as they express it, sins were separated from them, and, as it were, put upon the sacrifice^{f79}; but now believers were no longer to be taught and learn the great doctrine of the imputation of sin, by this rite and ceremony, since Christ has been made sin for them, and has had sins imputed to him, and has bore them in his own body on the tree:

and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment: articles of faith, which distinguished the Jews from the Gentiles, who were greatly strangers to a future state, the resurrection of the dead, and judgment to come: these are doctrines of pure revelation, and were taught under the Old Testament, and were believed by the generality of the Jews, and are articles which they hold in common with us Christians; yet the believing Hebrews were not to rest in the knowledge of these things, and in the smaller degrees of light they had in them, under the former dispensation; but were to go on to perfection, and bear forward towards a greater share of knowledge of these, and other more sublime doctrines of grace; since life and immortality are more clearly brought to light by Christ through the Gospel.

Ver. 3. *And this will we do, if God permit.*] That is, leave the rites and ceremonies of the law, which were the rudiments, or first principles of the Gospel, and go on to a more perfect knowledge of Gospel truths; and, not lay again as the foundation of the ministry, or insist upon them as if they were the main things, even the above articles of the Jewish creed, especially in the, way and manner in which they had been taught and learnt: the sense is, that the apostle and his brethren, in the ministry were determined to insist upon the more solid and substantial parts of the Gospel, and which tended to bring on their hearers to perfection; and that it became the believing Hebrews to seek after a greater degree of knowledge under the ministry of the word. It is, or at least should be, the determination of a Gospel minister, to preach Christ, and the great truths

of the Gospel; and wheresoever God has called him to it, though there may be many adversaries, and though he may be reproached, calumniated, and deserted: resolution in preaching the Gospel, and adhering to it, is very commendable in a minister; and it is very laudable in hearers to attend to it, stand by it, and search further into it; and which both should determine upon with a regard to the will of God, “if God permit”: God’s permission is much to be observed in the ministry of the word, in giving gifts to men, in placing them out here and there, where they shall exercise them, in directing them to subjects, and in making their ministry useful and successful: and it may be observed in general, that nothing can be done, or come to pass, good or bad, but what God permits or wills to be done; no good things, no actions, civil, natural, moral, or spiritual; no evil things, the evil of punishment, afflictions, the persecutions of wicked men, the temptations of Satan, heresies, and even immoralities.

Ver. 4. *For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened*, etc..] The Syriac and Ethiopic versions render it, “baptized”; and the word is thought to be so used in (~~scrib~~ Hebrews 10:32). And indeed baptism was called very early “illumination” by the ancients, as by Justin Martyr^{f80}, and Clemens Alexandrinus^{f81}, because only enlightened persons were the proper subjects of it; and the word once here used seems to confirm this sense, since baptism, when rightly administered, was not repeated; but then this sense depends upon an use of a word, which it is not certain did as yet obtain; nor does the apostle take notice of baptism in a parallel place, (~~scrib~~ Hebrews 10:26,27). This gave rise to, and seems to favour the error of Novatus, that those who fall into sin after baptism are to be cut off from the communion of the church, and never more to be restored unto it; contrary to the promises of God to returning backsliders, and contrary to facts, as well as to the directions of Christ, and his apostles, to receive and restore such persons; and such a notion tends to set aside the intercession of Christ for fallen believers, and to plunge them into despair: it is better therefore to retain the word “enlightened”, in its proper sense, and to understand it of persons enlightened with Gospel knowledge; there are some who are savingly enlightened by the Spirit of God, to see the impurity of their hearts and actions, and their impotency to perform that which is good, the imperfection of their own righteousness to justify them, their lost state and condition by nature, and to see Christ and salvation by him, and their interest in it; and these being “once” enlightened, never become darkness, or ever so fall as to perish; for if God had a mind to destroy

them, he would never have shown them these things, and therefore cannot be the persons designed here; unless we render the words, as the Syriac version does, “it is impossible” — — *ˆwj j y bwt d*, “that they should sin again”; so as to die spiritually, lose the grace of God, and stand in need of a new work upon them, which would be impossible to be done: but rather such are meant, who are so enlightened as to see the evil effects of sin, but not the evil that is in sin; to see the good things which come by Christ, but not the goodness that is in Christ; so as to reform externally, but not to be sanctified internally; to have knowledge of the Gospel doctrinally, but not experimentally; yea, to have such light into it, as to be able to preach it to others, and yet be destitute of the grace of God:

and have tasted of the heavenly gift; either faith, or a justifying righteousness, or the pardon of sin, or eternal life; which are all spiritual and heavenly gifts of grace, and which true believers have real tastes of; and hypocrites please themselves with, having some speculative notions about them, and some desires after them, arising from a natural principle of self-love. Some think the Holy Ghost is intended; but rather Christ himself, the unspeakable gift of God's love, given from heaven, as the bread of life. Now there are some who have a saving spiritual taste of this gift; for though God's people, while unregenerate, have no such taste; their taste is vitiated by sin, and it is not changed; sin is the food they live upon, in which they take an imaginary pleasure, and disrelish every thing else; but when regenerated, their taste is changed, sin is rendered loathsome to them; and they have a real gust of spiritual things, and especially of Christ, and find a real delight and pleasure in feeding by faith upon him; whereby they live upon him, and are nourished up unto eternal life, and therefore cannot be the persons here spoken of: but there are others who taste, but dislike what they taste; have no true love to Christ, and faith in him; or have only a carnal taste of him, know him only after the flesh, or externally, not inwardly and experimentally; or they have only a superficial taste, such as is opposed to eating the flesh, and drinking the blood of Christ, by faith, which is proper to true believers; the gust they have is but temporary, and arises from selfish principles.

And were made partakers of the Holy Ghost; not his person, nor his special grace; there are some who so partake of him, as to be united to him, in whom he becomes the principle of spiritual life, and motion: such have the fruits of the Spirit, and communion with him; they enjoy his personal presence and inhabitation in them; they have received him as a spirit of

illumination and conviction, of regeneration and sanctification, as the spirit of faith, and as a comforter; and as a spirit of adoption, and the earnest and seal of future glory; but then such can never so fall away as to perish: a believer indeed may be without the sensible presence of the Spirit; the graces of the Spirit may be very low, as to their exercise; and they may not enjoy his comforts, gracious influences, and divine assistance; but the Spirit of God never is, in the above sense, in a castaway; where he takes up his dwelling, he never quits it; if such could perish, not only his own glory, but the glory of the Father, and of the Son, would be lost likewise: but by the Holy Ghost is sometimes meant the gifts of the Spirit, ordinary or extraordinary, (^{<4612>}1 Corinthians 12:4-11) and so here; and men may be said to be partakers of the Holy Ghost, to whom he gives wisdom and prudence in things natural and civil; the knowledge of things divine and evangelical, in an external way; the power of working miracles, of prophesying, of speaking with tongues, and of the interpretation of tongues; for the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost seem chiefly designed, which some, in the first times of the Gospel, were partakers of, who had no share in special grace, (^{<4172>}Matthew 7:22,23 ^{<4613>}1 Corinthians 13:2,3).

Ver. 5. *And have tasted the good word of God*, etc..] Not the Lord Jesus Christ, the essential Word of God, who seems to be intended before by the heavenly gift; but rather, either the Scriptures of truth in general, which are the word of God, ended by him, and contain his mind and will; which he makes use of for conviction, conversion, instruction, and comfort; and which are preserved by him: and these are a good word; they come from him who is good; they are a revelation of good things; they make known things true, pleasant, and profitable: or else the Gospel in particular, of which God is the author; and in which is a wonderful display of his wisdom and grace; and which he owns and blesses for his own glory, and the good of others: and this is a “good word”, the same with **bwj rbd**, “good matter”, or “word”, in (^{<4961>}Psalm 45:1) **ybwj μgtp**, “my good word”, or “the word of my goodness”, in the Targum on (^{<2851>}Isaiah 55:11) for it is the word of righteousness, reconciliation, peace, pardon, life, and salvation. And there is a special and spiritual taste of this good, word, which is delightful, relishing, and nourishing; and such who have it can never totally and finally fall away; because they who taste it, so as to eat and digest it, and be nourished by it, to them it becomes the ingrafted word, which is able to save them: but there is such a taste of this word as is

disrelishing, as in profane sinners, and open opposers and persecutors of the word, or as in hypocrites and formal professors; which is only an assent to the Scriptures, as the revelation of God, or a superficial knowledge of the doctrines of the Gospel without the experience of them, and a temporal faith in them, and a natural affection for them, and pleasure with them for a time; as the Jews, and Herod with John's ministry, and the stony ground hearers.

And the powers of the world to come; meaning either the state of the church, and the glorious things relating to it, after the first resurrection, which they might have some notional apprehensions of; or the ultimate state of glory and happiness, the powers of which are the immortality, incorruption, and glory of the body, the perfect holiness and knowledge of the soul, entire freedom from all evils of every kind, full communion with Father, Son, and Spirit, and a complete enjoyment of all happiness for ever; which hypocrites may have a notional knowledge of, a natural desire after, and delight in the contemplation and hope of, as Balaam had; or rather the **δυναμεις**, miracles and mighty works in the former part of the Gospel dispensation, or times of the Messiah, the Jews' world to come, (see Gill on “³⁰¹⁵Hebrews 2:5”), are intended; which many, as Judas and others, were able to perform, who were not sincere Christians, or true believers.

Ver. 6. *If they shall fall away*, etc..] This is not supposed of true believers, as appears from (³⁰¹⁶Hebrews 6:9) nor is it to be supposed of them that they may fall totally and finally; they may indeed fall, not only into afflictions and temptations, but into sin; and from a lively and comfortable exercise of grace, and from a degree of steadfastness in the Gospel; but not irrecoverably: for they are held and secured by a threefold cord, which can never be broken; by God the Father, who has loved them with an everlasting love, has chosen them in Christ, secured them in the covenant of grace, keeps them by his power, has given them grace, and will give them glory; and by the Son, who has undertook for them, redeemed and purchased them, prays and makes preparations in heaven for them, they are built on him, united to him, and are his jewels, whom he will preserve; and by the Holy Ghost, whose grace is incorruptible, whose personal indwelling is for ever, who himself is the earnest and seal of the heavenly inheritance, and who having begun, will finish the good work of grace: but falling away, so as to perish, may be supposed, and is true of many professors of religion; who may fall from the profession of the Gospel they have made, and from the truth of it, and into an open denial of it; yea, into

an hatred and persecution of what they once received the external knowledge of; and so shall fall short of heaven, and into condemnation: for,

to renew them again unto repentance, is a thing impossible: by “repentance” is meant, not baptism of repentance; nor admission to a solemn form of public repentance in the church; nor a legal repentance, but an evangelical one: and so to be “renewed” unto it is not to be baptized again, or to be restored anew to the church by repentance, and absolution; but must be understood either of renovation of the soul, in order to repentance; or of the reforming of the outward conversation, as an evidence of it; or of a renewing of the exercise of the grace of repentance and to be renewed “again” to repentance does not suppose that persons may have true repentance and lose it; for though truly penitent persons may lose the exercise of this grace for a time, yet the grace itself can never be lost: moreover, these apostates before described had only a show of repentance, a counterfeit one; such as Cain, Pharaoh, and Judas had; and consequently, the renewing of them again to repentance, is to that which they only seemed to have, and to make pretensions unto; now to renew them to a true repentance, which they once made a profession of, the apostle says is a thing “impossible”: the meaning of which is not only that it is difficult; or that it is rare and unusual; or that it is unsuitable and improper; but it is absolutely impossible: it is impossible to these men to renew themselves to repentance; renovation is the work of the Holy Ghost, and not of man; and repentance is God’s gift, and not in man’s power; and it is impossible for ministers to renew them, to restore and bring them back, by true repentance; yea, it is impossible to God himself, not through any impotence in him, but from the nature of the sin these men are guilty of; for by the high, though outward attainments they arrive unto, according to the description of them, their sin is the sin against the Holy Ghost, for which no sacrifice can be offered up, and of which there is no remission, and so no repentance; for these two go together, and for which prayer is not to be made; (see ^{<4123>}Matthew 12:32 ^{<5816>}Hebrews 10:26,27 ^{<6046>}1 John 4:16) and chiefly because to renew such persons to repentance, is repugnant to the determined will of God, who cannot go against his own purposes and resolutions; and so the Jews ^{f82} speak of repentance being withheld by God from Pharaoh, and, from the people of Israel; of which they understand (^{<1196>}Exodus 9:16 ^{<2360>}Isaiah 6:10 ^{<4366>}2 Chronicles 36:16) and say, that when the holy blessed God withholds repentance from a

sinner, *bwçl l wky wnya*, “he cannot repent”; but must die in his wickedness which he first committed of his own will; and they further observe^{f83}, that he that profanes the name of God has it not in his power to depend on repentance, nor can his iniquity be expiated on the day of atonement, or be removed by chastisement:

seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh; who is truly and properly God, begotten of the Father, and of the same nature with him, in whom he greatly delights; this is Christ's highest name and title; and it was for asserting himself to be the Son of God that he was crucified; and his being so puts an infinite virtue in his sufferings and death; and it heightens the sin of the Jews, and of these apostates, in crucifying him. He was once crucified, and it is both impossible and unnecessary that he should be, properly speaking, “crucified afresh”, or “again”; it is impossible, because he is risen from the dead, and will never die more; it is unnecessary, because he has finished and completed what he suffered the death of the cross for; but men may be said to crucify him again, when, by denying him to be the Son of God, they justify the crucifixion of him on that account; and when they lessen and vilify the virtue of his blood and sacrifice; and when both by errors and immoralities they cause him to be blasphemed, and evil spoken of; and when they persecute him in his members: and this may be said to be done “to themselves afresh”; not that Christ was crucified for them before, but that they now crucify him again, as much as in them lies; or “with themselves”, in their own breasts and minds, and to their own destruction. Now this being the case, it makes their renewal to repentance impossible; because, as before observed, the sin they commit is unpardonable; it is a denial of Christ, who gives repentance; and such who sin it must arrive to such hardness of heart as to admit of no repentance; and it is just with God to give up such to a final impenitence, as those, who knowingly and out of malice and envy crucified Christ, had neither pardon nor repentance; and besides, this sin of denying Christ to be the Son of God, and Saviour of men, after so much light and knowledge, precludes the way of salvation, unless Christ was to be crucified again, which is impossible; for so the Syriac version connects this clause with the word “impossible”, as well as a foregoing one, rendering it, “it is impossible to crucify the Son of God again, and to put him to shame”; and so the Arabic version. Christ was put to open shame at the time of his apprehension, prosecution, and crucifixion; and so he is by such apostates, who, was he on earth, would treat him in the same manner the Jews did; and who do

traduce him as an impostor and a deceiver, and give the lie to his doctrines, and expose him by their lives, and persecute him in his saints.

Ver. 7. *For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it,* etc..] Here the apostle illustrates what he had before been speaking of, by a simile taken from the earth, to which men in general answer, who are of the earth; earthy and unregenerate men and carnal professors are of earthly minds; they are like the earth when it was rude and without form, and cursed by God; and are as insensible as the earth: but the earth is particularly distinguished into that which is fruitful, and which is unfruitful; and the former is spoken of in this verse, to which true believers in Christ agree; who are the good ground, into which the seed of God's word is received, and brings forth fruit; these are God's tillage or husbandry: and the "rain" that comes upon them may signify either the grace of Christ, which, like rain, is an instance of his sovereignty, and what he alone can give, and not the vanities of the Gentiles; and which he gives to persons undeserving of it; and which refreshes, revives, and makes fruitful: or else Christ himself, (~~Gen~~ Psalm 72:6 ~~Gen~~ Hosea 6:3) whose first coming was like rain much desired, and long expected; and so is his spiritual coming very desirable, delightful, refreshing, and fructifying: or rather his Gospel, (~~Gen~~ Deuteronomy 32:2 ~~Gen~~ Isaiah 55:9) which comes from above, and is the means of softening hard hearts, of reviving distressed and disconsolate minds, and of making barren souls fruitful; which is done by coming "oft" upon them, at first conversion, and afterwards, alluding to the former and latter rain; and may refer to the receiving of more grace, even grace for grace, out of Christ's fulness, through the ministration of the word, which is drank in by faith, under the influence of the Spirit of God:

and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed; God the Father, who is the husbandman, and ministers of the Gospel, who are labourers under him; and where the Gospel comes in power, it brings forth the fruits of the Spirit, the fruits of righteousness, the fruits meet for repentance; and which are to the glory of God the Father, and are answerable to the means he makes use of, the ministry of the word and ordinances; and no man can bring forth fruit without Christ, his Spirit, and grace: and such earth, or those signified by it,

receiveth blessing from God; both antecedent to all this, and which is the cause of fruitfulness; and as consequent upon it, for such receive more grace, even all the blessings of grace, and at last the blessing of glory; and

all this being in a way of receiving, shows it to be of gift, and of pure grace.

Ver. 8. *But that which beareth thorns and briers*, etc..] To which wicked men answer; who are unfruitful and unprofitable, and are hurtful, pricking and grieving, by their wicked lives and conversations, by their bitter and reproachful words, and by their violent and cruel persecutions; and particularly carnal professors, and especially apostates, such as before described; for to such earth, professors of religion may be compared, who are worldly, slothful, defrauding and overreaching, carnal and wanton; as also heretical men, and such as turn from the faith, deny it, and persecute the saints: and the things or actions produced by them are aptly expressed by “thorns and briers”; such as errors, heresies, and evil works of all kinds; and which show that the seed of the word was never sown in their hearts, and that that which they bear, or throw out, is natural to them: and such earth is

rejected; as such men are, both by the church, and by God himself; or “reprobate”, as they are concerning the faith, and to every good work; and are given up by God to a reprobate mind: and is “nigh unto cursing”; and such men are cursed already by the law, being under its sentence of curse and condemnation; and are nigh to the execution of it; referring either to the destruction of Jerusalem, which was near at hand; or to the final judgment, when they shall hear, Go, ye cursed:

whose end is to be burned; with everlasting and unquenchable fire, in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone.

Ver. 9. *But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you*, etc..] The apostle addresses the believing Hebrews, as “beloved”; being beloved by the Lord, not as the descendants of Abraham, but as the elect of God, and so as loved with an everlasting love; and which might be known to themselves, by its being shed abroad in their hearts, and by their being called by grace, and by their love to him, and to his people: and from hence they might conclude they should not fall away, as the apostates before spoken of; since, in consequence of being beloved by God, they were chosen in Christ unto salvation; Christ was given to die for them; they had the Spirit sent down into their hearts; they were justified, pardoned, and adopted; nor could they be separated from the love of God: and the apostle also so calls them, because they were beloved by him, not merely as being his countrymen, but as saints: and this he says to testify his affection to

them; to show that what he said was not from hatred of them, or prejudice to them; and that his exhortations, cautions, and reproofs, might be better taken; and particularly that they might credit what he here says, that he was “persuaded better things” of them, than what he had said of others in (³⁰⁶⁴Hebrews 6:4-6) even such as are expressed in (³⁰⁶⁰Hebrews 6:10) he was persuaded they had the true grace of God; whereas the above mentioned persons had only gifts, when in the height of their profession; and the least degree of grace is better than the greatest gifts men can be possessed of: grace makes a man a good man, not gifts; a man may have great gifts and not be a good man; grace is useful to a man's self, gifts are chiefly useful to others; grace makes men fruitful, when gifts leave them barren in the knowledge of Christ; grace is lasting, when gifts fail, and cease and vanish away; grace will abide the fire of persecution, when gifts will not; grace is saving, gifts are not:

and things that accompany salvation; which enter into salvation; are ingredients in it, and parts of it, and with which salvation is connected; such as faith, love, etc.. or which mutually touch or follow one another in the chain of salvation; as to be predestinated, justified, called, adopted, sanctified, and, at last, glorified:

though we thus speak; concerning others, as in the preceding verses: the hard things spoken by him of some, were consistent with such persuasions in general; for there might be some among them to whom the aforesaid characters belonged; and saying such things might be a means to make others watchful and careful.


Ver. 10. *For God is not unrighteous*, etc..] He is just and true, righteous in all his ways and works; there is no unrighteousness nor unfaithfulness in him; and this the apostle makes a reason of his strong persuasion of better things concerning the believing Hebrews; because he was well satisfied of the good work upon them, and he was assured that God was not unrighteous and unfaithful:

to forget your work: which is not to be understood of any good work done by them, for these are generally expressed in the plural number; and besides, these, if at all, are designed in the next clause; moreover, external good works, or such as appear to men to be so, are performed by hypocrites; nor can they be said to be better things, at least, not such as men are saved by: men may fall from these; and supposing them intended, the merit of works cannot be established, as is attempted from hence by the

Papists; for the apostle could only consider them as fruits, not as causes of salvation; they are imperfect, and cannot justify, and therefore cannot save; they do not go before to procure salvation, but follow after, and, at most, but accompany; and though God does remember and not forget them, this is owing to his grace, and not to their merit; God's righteousness in remembering them regards not a debt of justice, but a point of faithfulness: but this is to be understood of the work of God upon them, called in Scripture a good work, and the work of faith; and is elsewhere joined, as here, with the labour of love; (see ~~ROM~~ 1 Thessalonians 1:3) and this might be called their work, not because wrought by them, but because it was wrought in them; and the grace that came along with it was exercised by them: now from hence the apostle might be persuaded of better things of them, even such as accompany salvation; since this work is a fruit of everlasting and unchangeable love, and is itself immortal, and the beginning of eternal life; and particularly faith is the effect of electing grace; shall never fail; is the means of the saints' preservation; and is connected with everlasting salvation: it follows,

and labour of love, which ye have showed toward his name; the word "labour" is omitted in the Alexandrian copy, Vulgate Latin, Syriac, and Ethiopic versions: this may be understood either of love to God, the name of God being put for himself; who is to be loved for his own sake, on account of the perfections of his nature, as well as for the works of his hands; and which is to be showed for the sake of glorifying him: and this love is laborious; it sets a man to work for God; nor are any works to be regarded but what spring from love to God, and to his name; and from hence the apostle might entertain a good hope of these persons, since their love to God was an effect of God's love to them, is a part of the work of grace, and cannot be lost; all things work together for good to such as love God; and these have a crown of life promised unto them: or else it may be understood of love to the saints, as follows,

in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister; in seeking both their temporal and spiritual good; and though all men in general are to be loved, yet especially the saints, who are set apart by God, whose sins are expiated by Christ, and who are sanctified by the Spirit; and love to them being laborious, and appearing in many instances, and this shown for the Lord's sake, for his name's sake, might lead the apostle more strongly to conclude better things of them, even things of a saving nature; since charity or love to the saints is better than gifts, and is the evidence of grace, of

passing from death to life, and of being the disciples of Christ; (see 1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

Ver. 11. *And we desire that everyone of you do show the same diligence,* etc..] In the constant exercise of the graces of faith and love, and in ministering to the necessities of the saints: there is a spiritual labour, diligence, and industry to be used by the saints; and former diligence is a motive to future; and is a means of attaining to full assurance, as appears by what follows; and this is to be shown for the glory of God, for the evidence of the above graces, and for an example and encouragement to other saints: and the persons addressed being “everyone”, this shows the apostle's impartiality in his exhortations, and served to remove all groundless suspicions in particular persons; and the manner of his addressing them shows his hearty concern for their welfare, his mildness and gentleness towards them, and his design to encourage them to go forward; and that his exhortation might have the greater weight, he uses the plural “we”; and this exhortation, put in this form, moreover shows that what he had said before had no tendency in some things to encourage despair, or in others carelessness and indolence: and what he had in view in the whole was, that they might arrive

to the full assurance of hope unto the end; not only that they might keep up an hope, but attain to the full assurance of it; as to interest in the love and grace of God; in the covenant of grace, its blessings and promises; in God, as a covenant God and Father; in Christ, as a Saviour and Redeemer; and as to the truth of the work of grace upon their souls, and their right and meetness for the possession of eternal glory and happiness: the phrase, “unto the end”, may either respect the continuance of the grace of assurance; or refer to the showing forth of their diligence and industry in ministering to the saints, as they had done, to the end of their lives.

Ver. 12. *That ye be not slothful,* etc..] With respect to hearing the word, and attendance on every ordinance; with respect to the use of means for the increase of knowledge, faith, and hope; and with respect to ministering to the saints; but on the contrary, should take every opportunity of improvement and doing good:

but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises; or things promised; not the land of Canaan, nor the coming of the Messiah; but either grace and salvation by Christ; or eternal Life, which is expressed by a promise, to show that it is not by any works, or merits of men; that it

is wholly of grace, and shall certainly be enjoyed: and it is expressed in the plural number, “promises”, because it is the grand promise, which is inclusive of all others; and because it has been given out at various times, and in different manners: and the possession of it being signified by “inheriting”, it shows that this is their Father's gift and legacy, which they have as children; and which comes to them through the death of Christ, and of which the Spirit is the seal; and comes not by works of righteousness done by them: and the means through which saints that are gone before are come to the enjoyment of this happiness, are “faith and patience”; not that “faith” is the cause of, or what gives right to the inheritance, but it designs a course and walk of believing, at the end of which, saints come to glory; and faith is connected with salvation, and salvation with that; and through faith believers are preserved unto it: and “patience” is joined with faith, as a fruit and evidence of it; and supposes troubles which are patiently endured before men come to the possession of the inheritance: now the apostle exhorts these Hebrews to be followers and imitators of such, in diligence, faith, and patience, when they need not doubt of inheriting the same promised blessedness they do.

Ver. 13. *For when God made promise to Abraham*, etc..] The apostle proposes Abraham as a pattern, because he was the father of these Hebrews, and of all believers; and because they were interested in the promise made to him, and had a right to the same blessing with him; and because he was remarkable for his faith and patience: the promise made to him is not that in (⁰¹²³Genesis 12:1-3) nor that in (⁰¹⁵⁰Genesis 15:1,4,5,13,14) but that in (⁰²²⁶Genesis 22:16,17) for that only had an oath annexed to it: and this was made by Jesus Christ, there called the Angel of the Lord, and here God; and who is truly and properly so; and than whom there is none greater; and who elsewhere, as here, is said to swear by himself, (²³⁵²³Isaiah 45:23) as follows:

because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself; swearing is ascribed to a divine person after the manner of men, and in condescension to them; and who is never introduced swearing, but in matters of moment and of great importance; the note of Philo the Jew ^{f84} on the passage in (⁰²²⁶Genesis 22:16) from whence the following words are cited, is worthy of observation, being very near the apostle's words;

“well does he (God) confirm the promise with an oath, and with an oath that becomes God; for you see that God does not swear by

another, for nothing is better than himself, but by himself, who is the best of all; but some have suggested as if it was inconvenient to swear, for an oath is taken for the sake of faith; but God alone is faithful, etc..”

Ver. 14. *Saying, surely blessing I will bless thee*, etc..] Which is expressive of the certainty of the blessings; the reality and substantiality of them; the abundance of them, and the continuance of the same: and of this nature are all spiritual blessings; as to be chosen of God; to have God to be a covenant God and Father; to be justified, pardoned, adopted, and sanctified, and so have a right and title to eternal happiness:

and multiplying I will multiply thee; meaning both in his natural and spiritual seed, which has had its accomplishment.

Ver. 15. *And so, after he had patiently endured*, etc..] He waited long for a son, from whom the Messiah was to spring, after he had had the promise of one; and he endured many afflictions with patience, in his journeys from place to place, throughout his life to the end:

he obtained the promise; he was greatly blessed in temporal things; he lived to see the son of the promise, and his sons; he saw the day of Christ by faith, and now inherits the heavenly glory, which is the thing chiefly designed.

Ver. 16. *For men verily swear by the greater*, etc..] These words contain a reason why God swore by himself, and why his promises, having an oath annexed to them, ought to be believed. Men when they swear, they swear by the greater; not by themselves, as God does, because there is one greater than they; not by any of the creatures on earth, nor by the angels in heaven, but by God; because he is the God of truth, the searcher of hearts, and who can take vengeance on perjurers: and an oath may lawfully be taken, when it is truth that is sworn to, and is just and good; and in cases of weight and moment; and in what is possible and right to perform; and when it is done with deliberation, in the fear of God, with a view to his glory, and the good of men: for an oath is of a moral nature, what God has commanded, and he himself has taken; it has been used by Christ, and by the saints of the Old and New Testament; and is prophesied of the New Testament saints, as what they should practise; and is a part of religious worship:

and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife; it is used to confirm things that are doubtful, and in dispute; and to put an end to strife and contention; so Philo^{f85} the Jew says,

“by an oath things doubtful are determined, and things uncertain are confirmed, and what were not believed receive credit.”

The manner in which an oath was taken among the Jews, to which, the apostle writing to such, must be thought to have respect, was this;

“he that swore took the book of the law in his hand, and he stood and swore by the name (of God), or by his surnames; and the judges did not suffer anyone to swear but in the holy tongue; and thus he said, behold I swear by the God of Israel, by him whose name is merciful and gracious, that I do not owe this man anything^{f86}”

The Hebrew word **h[bc]**, used for an oath, is of the root **[bc]**, which signifies to “fill, satiate, satisfy”: for an oath being taken about matters in controversy, not clear but doubtful give content unto and satisfy the minds of men; and the same word also signifies “seven”, a number of fulness and perfection; an oath being for the perfecting and finishing an affair in debate; agreeably, when covenants were made by oaths, seven witnesses were used, (^{f87}Genesis 21:28-30) and Herodotus says^{f88} as Cocceius^{f88} observes, that the Arabians, when they swore at making covenants, anointed the stones with blood.

Ver. 17. *Wherein God, willing*, etc..] Or “wherefore”, as the Syriac and Ethiopic versions render it; that is, whereas an oath is used among men to confirm anything that might be doubted; therefore God, in condescension to the weakness of men, made use of one; being very desirous and determined,

more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel; by which is meant, not the Gospel nor the ordinances of it, though these are sometimes called the counsel of God; but the decree of God, concerning the salvation of his people by Jesus Christ, which is immutable; as appears from the unchangeableness of his nature, the sovereignty of his will, the unsearchableness of his wisdom, the omnipotence of his arm, and the unconditionality of the thing decreed, and from that and the purpose of it being in Christ: and the immutability of this, God was willing to show

“more abundantly” than in other purposes, though all God's purposes are unchangeable; or than had been shown to the Old Testament saints; and more than was necessary, had it not been for man's weakness: even to “the heirs of promise”; not any earthly temporal promise, but the promise of grace and glory; the promise of eternal life; the heirs of which are not only Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or God's elect among the Jews, but all that are Christ's; who are justified by his righteousness, believe in him, and are the children of God; for as many as are such are heirs of eternal glory, and of the promise of it: and that the unchangeableness of God's purpose in saving them by Christ might be manifest to them, and be out of all doubt, he “confirmed it by an oath”; his counsel and purpose; he not only determined in his mind that he would save them, and promised it in his covenant; but he also, to confirm it the more to the persons concerned in it, if possible, annexed his oath to it; or “he interposed or acted the part of a Mediator by an oath”; which some refer to Christ's mediation between God and Abraham, when he swore unto him, as before observed; but rather it expresses the interposition of the oath between God's purpose and promise, and man's weakness: God did as it were bind himself by his oath, or lay himself under obligation, or become a surety, for the fulfilment of his purpose and promise; which shows the super-abounding grace of God, the weakness of man, and what reason the heirs of promise have to believe.

Ver. 18. *That by two immutable things*, etc..] God's counsel and oath, which never change and alter, and from which he never varies:

in which it was impossible for God to lie; fail or deceive, nor, indeed, in anything else, besides his counsels, promises, and oath, (see ^{SCOP}Titus 1:2)

we might have a strong consolation; the saints often stand in need of consolation, by reason of sin, Satan, and the world; and it is the will of God that they should be comforted; and he would have them have

strong consolation; that which is solid and an abundance of it; and this much depends on the immutability of God's counsel and oath: *who have fled for refuge*; either in allusion to mariners, as some think; who make all the haste they can to their port and haven, and are glad when they arrive there, and there cast anchor; of which mention is made in the next verse: or to runners in a race, who make up to the mark, in order to lay hold on the prize; hence Christ is afterwards spoken of as a forerunner: or rather to such as fled to the cities of refuge, which were a type of Christ; the names of these cities were, Kedesh, Shechem, Hebron, Bezer, Romath, and

Golan; (~~(16117)~~ Joshua 20:7,8) and the situation of them, according to the Jews ^{f89}, was like two rows in a vineyard. Hebron in Judah was over against Bezer in the wilderness; Shechem in Mount Ephraim was over against Ramoth in Gilead; Kedesh in Mount Naphtali was over against Golan in Bashan: the names of these several cities agree with Christ; Kedesh signifies “holy”, as Christ is, both as God and man, and is made sanctification to his people; Shechem is “the shoulder”, and Christ has not only bore the sins of his people in his own body, on the tree, but he bears and carries their persons, and has the government of them on his shoulders, where they are safe and secure; Hebron may be interpreted “fellowship”, and the saints have not only fellowship with Christ; but with the Father through him; Bezer may be rendered a “fortified place”; Christ is a stronghold, a tower, a place of defence, whither the righteous run, and are safe; Ramoth signifies “exaltations”; and may fitly be applied to Christ, who is exalted at God's right hand, and who will exalt those that trust in him in due time: Golan may be translated “manifested”; Christ the Son of God has been manifest in the flesh, to destroy the works of the devil; and he will be revealed from heaven in a glorious manner at the last day: these cities were known to be such; and they were open to all Israelites and proselytes, that killed any person at unawares; and they were open at all times; and the way to them was made plain and large; every year care was taken to make the way good, to remove every hillock, or anything that hindered; if there was a river in the way, to make a bridge over it; and where more ways met, to set up pillars with a hand to them, and these words written on it, **j l qm j l qm**, “refuge, refuge”; nor was the road to be less in breadth than thirty two cubits ^{f90}; and there was always room in these cities; and whoever fled there was safe; but those that were found without died: thus Christ is known to be a refuge for distressed sinners; and he is open to all that come unto him, and at all times; the way of life and salvation by him is plainly pointed out in the Gospel, and by the ministers of it; who are appointed to direct unto him, and to remove all impediments and discouragements from such who are seeking to him; and though so many have been received and saved by him, still there is room for more; and whoever betake themselves to him are safe, but those that are without him die and perish: so Philo the Jew ^{f91} makes the divine Word, or Logos, to be the chief and most profitable refuge to fly unto, of all the six which he takes notice of; and the Jews have a notion that in the time to come, in the days of the Messiah, three other cities of refuge will be added ^{f92}. There is in some things a difference between Christ and these cities of

refuge; there were six of these, but there is no other than Christ; the cities of refuge were only for such who shed blood ignorantly, but Christ is a refuge for all sorts of sinners; they were in a kind of exile who fled to them, but in Christ is complete liberty; it was possible that such might die in them, but those that are in Christ never die the second death; and at best those who fled thither were only saved from a temporal death, whereas those who betake themselves to Christ are saved with an everlasting salvation. Now “fleeing” to Christ, implies danger in the persons that flee, as such are in danger, in themselves, of the curse and condemnation of the law, of the wrath of God, and eternal death; it supposes a sense of this danger, which when right comes from the Spirit of God; it shows guilt of conscience, and a consciousness of the insufficiency of other refuges, and a knowledge of Christ; as a suitable one; and is expressive of haste and hearty desire to be there:

to lay hold on the hope set before us; by which is meant, not the grace of hope, but either heaven hoped for, or rather Christ the object of hope; who is not only set down at God's right hand, but is set forth in the Gospel and in the ordinances, both by the Spirit of God, and by the ministers of the word; that men may look and go to him, and trust and believe in him, to the saving of their souls; where he is in sight, near at hand, accessible to; the way to him is straightforward; and here he abides: and he is set before us to be laid hold upon, which intends an act of faith; which grace lays hold on the person, blood, and righteousness of Christ; and is done in a view of fulness and safety in him, and under a sense of danger otherwise; it supposes grace, and that in exercise and somewhat strong; and some degree of resolution and courage of faith, and the steadfastness and continuance of it; the soul determining, if it perishes it will perish here; and it shows that Christ and his grace are to be touched and laid hold upon by faith.

Ver. 19. *Which [hope] we have as an anchor of the soul*, etc..] This world is as a sea; the church in it, and so every believer, is as a ship; the port that is bound unto is heaven; Christ is the pilot, and hope is the anchor: an anchor is cast on a bottom, out of sight; and when the ship is in a calm, or in danger of a rock, or near the shore; but is of no service without a cable: and when cast aright, keeps the ship steady: so hope is cast on Christ; whence he is often called hope itself, because he is the ground and foundation of it, and who is at present unseen to bodily eyes; and the anchor of hope without the cable of faith is of little service; but being cast

aright on Christ, keeps the soul steady and immovable: in some things there is a difference between hope and an anchor; an anchor is not of so much use in tempests as in a calm, but hope is; the cable may be cut or broke, and so the anchor be useless, but so it cannot be with faith and hope; when the ship is at anchor, it does not move forward, but it is not so with the soul, when hope is in exercise; the anchor of hope is not cast on anything below, but above; and here it is called the anchor of the soul, to distinguish it from any other, and to show the peculiar benefit of it to the soul. Pythagoras makes use of the same metaphor^{f93};

“riches (he says) are a weak anchor, glory: is yet weaker; the body likewise; principalities, honours, all these are weak and without strength; what then are strong anchors? prudence, magnanimity, fortitude; these no tempest shakes.”

But these philosophical moral virtues are not to be compared with the Christian's grace of hope, which is

both sure and steadfast; it is in itself a grace firm and stable; it is permanent and can never be lost: and it is still more sure and steadfast, by virtue of what it is fixed upon, the person, blood, and righteousness of Christ; and by the immutability, faithfulness, and power of God it is concerned with; and through the aboundings and discoveries of divine love, grace, and mercy; and from the instances of grace to the vilest of sinners:

and which entereth into that within the vail; the holy of holies, heaven itself; in allusion to the vail which divided between the holy and the holy of holies: the things within the vail, or in heaven, which hope entering into fixes upon, are the person of Christ, who is entered there, and appears in the presence of God for his people; his blood which he has carried along with him, and by which he is entered there; his justifying righteousness, by which the law is fulfilled, the two tables of stone in the ark of the testimony; the sweet incense of his mediation, which is continually offered up by him; the mercy seat, or throne of grace, on which Jehovah sits as the God of grace; and all the glories of heaven; all which hope is concerned with, and receives strength and rigour from: and their being within the vail, is expressive of their hiddenness and invisibility at present, and of their safety and security, as well as of their sacredness; and this shows a difference between the hope of believers and others, whose hope fixes upon things short of these; and likewise the great privilege of a believer, who being made a priest unto God, has liberty and boldness to enter into

the holiest of all. The Jews ^{f94} speak of a vail in the world to come, which some are worthy to enter into.

Ver. 20. *Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus,* etc..] Christ was a runner; he had a race to run, which lay in going about to heal diseases, in preaching the Gospel, in obeying the law, and in suffering death for his people; which race was run by him with great swiftness, strength, and courage, with patience, cheerfulness, and joy, and is now ended; as appears from the accomplishment of salvation, from his entrance into heaven, and session at the right hand of God; from the glorification of his human nature, and its everlasting freedom from the dominion of death: and this race is run out, as a “forerunner”; Christ is the most excellent runner; there is none like him; there is none that can come up to him; he has out ran and exceeded all others; he has performed in the best manner; he has run out his race first, and has entered into heaven first by his own blood; and he has cleared the way thither, and opened the gates of heaven for his people; and is a guide and pattern for them to follow: and he is the forerunner for them, as well as entered for them; for he was born, and he lived, and died for them, for their good and service; and he is entered into heaven for them, as man and Mediator, and as their high priest; where he represents their persons, appears and intercedes for them, takes care of their affairs, and presents their services; prepares mansions of glory for them, and takes possession of heaven in their name, and opens the way for them to follow him thither; all which gives great encouragement to hope to enter now, where Jesus is: who is

made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec; (see ^{<3816>}Hebrews 5:6,10). This is repeated here, to lead on to what the apostle had to say concerning Melchizedek in the following chapter.