

I view the book of Hebrews as written to saved people. I think a great deal of what he says presumes their salvation. It was probably written to Hebrew Christians who are under considerable pressure from their contemporaries and who are being allured or invited back into Judaism.

Now, the danger, therefore, that the writer of Hebrews confronts, is a danger of apostasy on the part of genuine Christians. Now, I know that there are some theologies that hold that no true Christian can become an apostate in the sense that he abandons his faith. But my comment to that would be first of all, I don't believe that the Scriptures teach that a Christian cannot be an apostate in the sense that he gives his faith up. And I further think that the warnings of Hebrews are best understood as a warning against this, with the consequences he views as possible for it.

Now, in Hebrews he begins his book with a series of quotations about the Son, almost all of which are taken from OT contexts of kingship. And it is very interesting to trace all of these back. Of course, one obvious one is, "thy throne, O God, is forever and ever."

And then he speaks from one of the Psalms, "Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity. Therefore God has anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy metochoi, or companions."

Now in the concept of oriental kingship, it was sort of a part of this that when a king came to power, those who came to power with him were his friends and associates and so on, those who had probably grown up with him. In the OT, probably the classic example of this is Rehoboam, who finally followed the counsel of the young men who grew up with him. They now become his established counselors and he rejected the counsel of the older men. But in oriental kingship this was obviously quite common. And in all forms of kingship. In the Roman empire the friends of Caesar were those who had a special relationship with Caesar. It is almost inevitable in the nature of power that those who are closely associated with the man who comes to power share this power.

So, in the opening chapter we have those who are presented with the King. Also, through the OT scripture it is suggested that He has metochoi, companions, associates with Him in this kingship.

Now you remember in chapter 3 he says: "whose metochoi we are if we hold fast." In 3:6 the same thought is found. Verse 14 is really the strong one: He also, of course, in the opening part of this chapter has in mind the OT institution over which Moses presided. Moses was faithful in all his house, and Christ was faithful over His own house. Now this passage has sometimes been interpreted to mean that only if we endure to the end are we really part of the family of God. I think that is not to take the context into consideration. The OT house, as I understand the passage, was not the whole nation of Israel, but the levitical institution. This comes from the passage in Numbers (12:7) where Miriam and Aaron challenge Moses and God replies

"How come you weren't afraid to criticize him. Moses is faithful in all my house. Of this whole institution that I have set up, he is a responsible and reliable person. So, what I would define the house as in this particular context is 'the functioning priesthood.' (ie., the functioning institution). Now, Christ is a Son over this house. And, of course, this looks forward to his whole concept of the Melchizedek priesthood. And we are a part of this house. . . .

Q -- Is it almost like a stewardship? Yes, very much. We are a part of this house, as long as we are holding fast to our profession of faith. In other words, we function within the functioning priesthood, the priestly arrangement. We function within this as long as we hold on to our confession. We get outside of this, and we get outside of the priestly situation. Now this has nothing to say, in my judgment, about whether a man is saved or lost. But he refers to whether he is within the functioning apparatus of priesthood or outside of it. It is obvious that a man who is within the church is within this apparatus. And a man who leaves the church and apostasizes is outside of it. He gives the whole thing up.

Now, he also goes on to say in v. 14 that we become metochoi of Christ. This looks at both our present participation (note verse one -- we are partakers of the heavenly calling -- we are already, therefore, cooperating with Him) and a future sense as well.

And of course, to obtain the sabbatismos that he talks about here, which is the experience of having completed my works and sharing with God in the completion of His. . . . And he has considerable to say in chapt. 4 about the Israelites who failed to enter into rest and fell short because of unbelief. Even in Joshua's day they didn't quite finish the job. And there remains therefore a sabbatismos for the people of God. The point here I think is that if we hold on to our Christian profession faithfully to the end, we will finish the job God has given us to do just as God finished His creation in six days and rested on 7th. So we enter into the special joy of a life completed, a work well done. We look back over our life much as God looks back over creation and his work. This is for the one who holds fast.

The whole thrust of Hebrews is hold on to the end. That's the essence of it. And the author is spreading motives all over the place for doing this. He is warning that if we fall by unbelief, and don't hold on to the end, we are going to lose valuable things, among which is this sabbatismos or our capacity to function as metochoi of the Messiah and so on. . . .

Now with that in mind, coming to the problem passages, particularly in Heb. 6 and 10, it seems to me that what he is saying in these passages is: the person who has really been regenerated and then he turns his back on the whole thing, at this point there is no real hope that he will come back to his former position spiritually. It is impossible to renew them again to repentance. Apostasy, on the part of the Christian, is a final step. We can hardly expect that person to give up his apostasy as long as he is alive. I don't think this says anything about the eternal salvation of the person. It means that an apostate is

impossible to reach, and bring back. If he takes this step, he is stepping over a line and he can't reverse himself. Then he uses the figure of the earthenware . . . (6:7-8) The image here will help us to understand this. You have a field. Instead of producing good crops it's all overgrown with thorns and thistles. Well, people put a torch to it. This does not destroy the field, but it does burn off all the thorns and thistles. This is his way of saying, that what now links the apostate, who is producing thorns and thistles rather than producing food for the person who cultivated the land, his experience is now one of chastening which is designed to destroy the thorns and thistles.

This becomes a very prominent theme in the warning passages. There is a chastening from God, very severe, that awaits the Christian apostate. In chapter 10 this becomes even more plain. (10:26ff.)

Q -- Is this chastening something future or is it now?
I think it is now. There are things worse than death. And I think we all know that there are. I don't really think he is threatening them here with the sin unto death, so much as he is threatening them with punishments worse than the apostate and the rebel under the old covenant (10:28). There are ways of living, and wishing you were dead.

And then he goes on to say: the Lord will judge His people (10:30). . . . He uses hope and fear as his two motives in this book. On the one hand, there are all those rewards and promises to be obtained if we are followers of them who by faith and patience inherit the promises. Those who endure, get there, and find it infinitely rewarding. On the other hand, if we turn back, we face severe punishment from God. It is fearful to fall into the hands of the living God. The warnings against apostasy, a very serious form of unfaithfulness -- the seriousness of the warnings are measured out according to the seriousness of the sins.

INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS:

6:3 -- "if God permits" I'm still debating in my mind here as to whether he is talking about the actual experience of his reader or whether he is talking about his presentation of this. He has just finished talking about those who need milk and not meat -- you are not able to take meat yet. He would like, however, to leave fundamental things and go on to maturity, to the completeness of the truth. And if God permit this to be done he would do it. Now, as I said I haven't made up my mind yet, but either of these two ways would fit into my general conception of the book. But when I read this I often get the impression that he is talking about: "If we can, or if we get around to it." He has had to confront them with fundamentals, because they are in danger of throwing the fundamentals overboard. And he views this partly as an expression of their immaturity. The fact that they are wavering on the line between fidelity and apostasy is the result of not having gone on as well as they ought to have gone on. And they are in danger of collapsing under the pressure. So, I kind of think he may have this idea of, "I'd like to go on, to the fuller truths, the perfectness, and I'll do it if we can get around to it, if God allows us to reach that."

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But, it's conceivable that he means also: "Now, let's go on to a mature experience in Christ, under the hand of God and by His grace (something like that).

5:9 "eternal salvation"

I think in Hebrews that the term "salvation" refers to the full-orbed experience that is open to Christians. Similar to Romans, but w/o looking so much at the fine distinction between salvation and justification and w/o looking so much at "wrath".

One of the first occurrences of this is in chapter 2 -- how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation. This emerges completely out of chapter one where all the passages belong to a kingship context. Then, 2:5 -- "the world to come". That used to strike me as somewhat surprising. When has he spoken of the world to come? In what sense can he be talking about that? But he was talking about that in chapter one, because he is talking about the kingly prerogatives of the Son for whom God has spoken: He has made Him heir of all things, His throne is forever and ever, etc. From the very beginning of Hebrews, he is thinking of the kingdom in its future form. In other words, what we have been called to is an experience with the King. This is our soteriology. In chapter one, the king has metochoi. So my conclusion is, in Hebrews, "salvation" is the broadest possible conception of the experience into which God calls us. He is able to save to the uttermost or completely (7:25). I don't think he means by that that he will get you through to the end. Rather, he can give you the complete salvation that is available to you because he is your intercessor. In this book, the key to endurance is the knowledge that we have a great high priest over the house of God, and a throne of grace to which we can come and find grace and mercy to help in time of need. So, we are sustained in holding fast the confession of the faith clear unto the end, we are sustained in this course by the intercessory work of the priest after the order of Melchizedek. It is therefore disaster to throw away the new priestly order and our position in it in favor of the old priestly order which is only a shadow of the new one. ☆

So my understanding of "salvation" is that it is the full experience, and if we hold fast to the end through the undergirding of Christ as our intercessor we will be saved to the uttermost. In other words, we will have the full experience of our salvation.

The warning of chapter 2 is that if we neglect it, how are we going to escape. And this is already an intimation that there is going to be chastening for the man who is careless about so great an experience to which he has been called.

Q -- Is this the chastening that he refers to in the first verses of chapter 12? Is what is referred to there parallel to the judgment of God spoken of in chapter 10?

No, I don't. It seems to me the paidia in chapter 12 is the child-training experience which involves the sufferings that they are having to go through in the present times, those that are holding them back, the ones that they are bothered by and tempted to get out from under by going back into Judaism. So, there I think he is telling them, don't despise the chastening of the Lord because this is part of your Sonship experience.

Today, our word chastening mainly means or implies punishment for doing wrong. That's the sense in which I view the chastening in chapter 6 and 10. In those earlier chapters he is not thinking of the child-training experience so much, although there is a sense in which any kind of chastening that comes upon a Christian trains him, ultimately, but I think he is thinking of retribution for mis-conduct directly in the earlier chapters. In chapter 12 I don't think he is thinking of retribution for mis-conduct. He is thinking of something that is the normal part of Christian experience. Mistakes and failures may give rise to some of this, but that's not primarily what he has in mind. Christ, endured the shame, etc., so we are to look to him and his example as we go through suffering, and this suffering is paidia. Now, he scourges every son whom he receives. Again he is thinking primarily of the fact that God trains us, corrects us, and rears us. And I think that is to be put in a slightly different category than that which he has in mind in chapt. 6 and 10 where he thinks of those who have turned their backs on everything, so now God is going to deal with them in that light. That's a different kind of a proposition.

Q- In Peter talks about suffering for doing what is right and for doing what is wrong. Would it be that distinction he has in mind here?

Well, here we get into an area where the reality is not always as clear cut as the theology. Many times the sufferings that come to us, come to us for two reasons: first, they come to us because we are Christians, and somebody or something out there doesn't like us. But they also come to us because there are things in us that they will help to straighten out.

The classic example of this is Job. Basically if you read only the first chapters of Job, you would think that Job got all of his troubles simply because it was a test between God and Satan. On one level that is completely true. But when you come to the end of the book, Job says he abhors himself and he repents in dust and ashes. What emerges through the rest of the book is: Job was every bit the righteous man that God said he was, but he was also a bit self-righteous. He tended to justify himself even when he ought to have been justifying God. What then emerges in the experience of Job is that on one level Job does not deserve what happened to him. That is Satan. On the other level, Job needed it.

And I believe that with paidia, often the mixture of those two is true. And that's one of the things that makes it hard to take sometimes because sometimes we can see places where we went wrong and these helped to cause the trouble. We would like to think that the guy who opposes us opposes us because we are all righteous and he's all evil. But a lot of times in our heart of hearts we realize that we muffed it a little bit, yet he is in the wrong for opposing us. We may be preaching the gospel, and he is opposing it. But maybe I went at him tactlessly.

There is a real suffering for righteousness sake, but there is also this paidia which trains me not to make some mistake again. I think there is a lot of that in experience. Most people's experience conforms to that. So there is a level at which we may say: at one level I don't deserve this and this is something I am doing for Christ. On the other level it help me, and I am

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learning from it. And I'm not going to repeat certain mistakes that I've made.

It's a different thing for the man who has turned his back on God. He's not trying to serve God or acknowledge Christ. So God meets him as a devouring fire. The man is out of it with God, and he is coming to him precisely because he is out of it. This is the kind of experience we are talking about in 6 and 10.

The retribution that I am thinking of in chapters 6 and 10 is something that happens to us in this life before we die, some punishment that comes upon the apostate because he is an apostate.. There is such a thing as a Christian who never apostasizes while he still keeps his mouth shut which leads to the denial of honor in the presence of the Father and the angels. But in Hebrews I think we are talking about direct punishment in this life, severe in character because the sin is very serious in his desertion of the Christian cause.

So, in the book of Hebrews I would see the term "security" to be a better term than the term perseverance. I do believe in the perseverance of the saints, depending upon what is meant by the term perseverance. If we mean by that that all the saints persevere in holiness unto the end, I don't believe the Scriptures teach that. But if we mean by that that they persevere in the state of salvation to the end, I do believe the Scriptures teach that. But often what is implied by the perseverance of the saints is that they persevere in holiness and often they will come to passages in Hebrews to show that.