

Economy, Dispensing, Organic Union, and Corporate Expression in the Epistle to the Hebrews

by John Pester

When the content of the truth in God's economy is revealed and received by the believers through the divine dispensing, the believers' organic union with God grows and matures into the corporate expression of God. *Economy, dispensing, organic union, and corporate expression* sum up the essence of the divine revelation in the holy Scriptures. These four great matters are woven, implicitly, if not explicitly, throughout the New Testament, unveiling the fulfillment of the economy of the mystery, which in other times was hidden in God (Eph. 3:9). The most explicit presentation of these four points occurs in the Epistle to the Ephesians, which unveils the divine economy (1:10) and the experience of the divine dispensing in the believers' regenerated human spirit, which is organically joined to the Triune God (1:17; 3:16; 2:18) to produce a corporate expression of God (1:22-23).¹ In the Epistle to the Ephesians these four great matters are seen from the eternal perspective of the Triune God, and the certainty of their realization in time is affirmed without condition because the economical operation of the Triune God will head up all things in Christ and will result in a multifarious display of the wisdom of God through the church, thus fulfilling God's eternal desire for an enlarged corporate expression of Christ and in Christ (1:10; 3:10-11).

Although less explicit than Ephesians, these four great matters are equally present in the Epistle to the Hebrews. In Hebrews these four great matters are seen from the heavenly perspective of Christ as our Minister and High Priest (8:2; 4:14; 7:26), and the certainty of their accomplishment in time also is affirmed without condition because the economical operation of Christ, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, will consummate in the believers' becoming the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (12:2, 22). There is, however, an aspect of conditionality in the accomplishment of these four great matters that is not present in Ephesians. This conditionality is

not related to the efficacy of the divine economy that is revealed, for there is an element of superiority in every aspect of Christ that is revealed. Neither is it related to the certainty of our organic union with Christ through faith nor to our ultimate participation in the corporate expression of God as the heavenly New Jerusalem, for our union is with the One who righteously regards repentance as an eternal foundation upon which an unshakable kingdom is being built (2:11; 9:12; 6:1; 12:28). What is conditional, however, is our participation in this economy in this age and our enjoyment of the reward for this participation in the coming age, the age of the millennial kingdom.

Ephesians speaks of God, who is able to do superabundantly above all that we ask or think (3:20), whereas Hebrews speaks of believers who neglect God's great salvation (2:3), who come short of God's promised rest (4:1), who lack maturity (6:1), who fail to come forward and shrink back to ruin (10:22, 39), and who falter in the race and fall away from the grace of God (12:1, 15), all of which imperil their participation in the corporate expression of God in this age and in the coming millennial kingdom. Consequently, when the economical content related to the superiority of Christ is revealed in Hebrews, it is accompanied with sober warnings related to our need to experience the divine dispensing that imparts this content into our being, particularly our soul. This dispensing is based on our organic union with God in our spirit. The development of this organic union in our soul will determine the degree of our participation in the corporate expression of God in this age and in our enjoyment of God's expressive rest in the millennial kingdom.

The Epistle to the Hebrews unveils the truth of the superiority of Christ in the economy of God in four sections from 1:4 through 10:39, and in the fifth section,² comprising chapters 11 and 12, the unique way of faith

in God's economy is presented. In the first four sections the scope of Christ's superiority in the economy of God is revealed in relation to His person and work. In His person Christ is superior to angels, Moses, and Aaron, and in His work the new covenant is superior to the old covenant. In the fifth section faith is revealed as the unique way to receive and apply the content of Christ's person and work. Given the superior content of God's economy, which is presented in each section, each section subsequently contains a warning related to our need to experience the divine dispensing that imparts this content. In this dispensing God's indestructible life is supplied to us as grace, empowering us to heed the warnings in each section and to reap the heavenly blessings inherent in God's economy. This dispensing is made practical and possible through our organic union with the heavenly Christ, which serves as the basis for our experience and enjoyment of His life. In an implicit recognition of the importance of this organic union, there are experiential references to it in each section which reassure the believers that a reward in glory, rather than a just recompense, is available to all who are joined to the

God's eternal purpose through His word and His speaking, and that our participation in the fulfillment of this purpose involves hearing His speaking (Matt. 17:5). When God speaks in the Son, it is imperative that we give more abundant heed to the things we have heard (Heb. 2:1), not harden our hearts when we hear His voice (3:7-8, 15; 4:7), allow the word that we have heard to profit us (4:2), not become dull of hearing (5:11), focus on the chief point that is being spoken (8:1), and not refuse Him who speaks (12:25).

Economy, Dispensing, Organic Union, and Corporate Expression in 1:4—2:18

God's speaking in the first section in Hebrews is a revelation of the superiority of Christ to angels in the economy of God (1:4—2:18), and it contains a concise but complete summary of the content of God's economy. Among the Hebrew believers there was a misplaced appreciation for angels, in part, because the law was given through the mediation of angels (Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19). In contrast to the situational service of angels as ministering spirits (Heb. 1:14), the vast superiority of the person and work of Christ in the economy of God is unveiled in this section. His work involves more than mere deliverance from circumstantial danger (Psa. 34:7; Acts 12:7-11); it involves the application of His redemption, which was made possible through His death (Heb. 2:14-18), His life, which was made possible through His resurrection (vv. 10-11; 1:5), and His ruling and reigning, which were made possible through His ascension (v. 8, 13-14; 2:8), to believers who have been held in slavery through the fear of death and who are suffering the temptations inherent in the sin-corrupted creation (vv. 15-18).

All the warnings in this Epistle ultimately speak of the consequences of not receiving the benefits of the Son's accomplished salvation through a neglect of the divine dispensing.

Author of their salvation. Being thus joined to Christ and under the divine dispensing according to the divine economy, the believers will be rewarded with a glorious participation in the corporate expression of God in this age and in the coming millennial kingdom. With such an end in view, each section also contains references to the corporate expression of God. The references in the Epistle to the Hebrews to these four great matters in the Bible—the economy of God, the divine dispensing, the organic union between Christ and redeemed believers, and the corporate expression of God through Christ and the transformed and glorified believers—underscore our capacity to live a life on earth that bears the testimony of having crossed over from religion with its laws and rituals to the realm of God's New Testament economy as genuine believers who are inheriting the full scope of God's promised salvation.³

Before Paul⁴ begins to speak of the superiority of Christ in God's New Testament economy, he draws attention to God's speaking in the Son, who is the focus of God's economy, reinforcing the point that the Son carries out

Christ is also superior to angels in His work because He is superior in His person as the Son of God and as the Son of Man. In the introduction to Hebrews, the Son's standing as God in the eternal Godhead is confirmed by the acknowledgment that He is the effulgence of God's glory and the impress of His substance (v. 3).⁵ This truth is a reflection of His eternal and unique designation as the only begotten Son (John 1:18; 3:16, 18). In the first section of Hebrews, however, Christ is also revealed to be God based on His status as the firstborn Son of God (1:6), who will come again to rule and reign in the kingdom with the scepter of uprightness (v. 8). On the day of His resurrection (v. 5), Christ was begotten as the firstborn Son of God in His humanity, and He inherited a more distinguished name than the angels by virtue of being designated the Son of God in His humanity out of the resurrection of the dead (v. 4; Rom. 1:4). In His incarnation as a genuine man, the only begotten Son of

God was made a little lower than angels (Psa. 8:4-5; Phil. 2:6-7; Heb. 2:6-7), but in His resurrection as the first-born Son of God, He was crowned in His humanity with the glory and honor of God, making Him perpetually superior to angels as the firstborn Son of God as God.

Christ also is superior to angels in relation to His ability to impart the content of His person and work into many brothers (v. 11), the many sons of God, through His heavenly ministry in resurrection. As the Son of Man, He tasted death on behalf of everything (vv. 6, 9), destroyed the devil who has the might of death (v. 14), and made propitiation for the sins of the people (v. 17) so that the salvation which He authored in His humanity could be applied to humanity, to those who are inheriting salvation, in order to lead many sons into glory (v. 10). Hebrews chapter 1

gives us an account of Christ from eternity past to eternity future. He was the very God in eternity past (v. 8); He was the Creator of the earth and the heavens (vv. 10, 2); He is the Upholder of all things and the One who bears all things (v. 3); He is the Heir of all things (v. 2); He was incarnated to accomplish redemption by being crucified (v. 3); He was begotten as the Son of God in resurrection for the imparting of life to the many sons of God (v. 5); He is the firstborn Son of God who will come again (v. 6); He will be the King on the throne with the scepter in the kingdom (vv. 8-9); and He will remain forever and ever in eternity future (vv. 11-12). (Recovery Version, Heb. 1:5, note 1)

The unveiling of Christ as the Son of God and as Son of Man in the first section is an unveiling of the scope of God's economy and a description of the content in the economy of God. It is what we believe, and it is the source of our belief. We have the Son, who is the eternal creating God, the inheriting God, the incarnated God, the crucified God, the resurrected God, the imparted God, the God who is coming again, the reigning God, and the ever-eternal God.

As the creating God, the Son initiated the execution of the Triune God's deep desire for an enlarged expression of His life, nature, and person by creating the universe and then by preparing human vessels in His image and likeness (v. 2; 11:3; Gen. 1:26). As such, His expression involves much more than a display of His eternal power and divine characteristics through the things made (Rom. 1:20). As the inheriting God, the Son passed through a process in time to gain and transform His chosen vessels, who were corrupted by sin through the fall, so that He could inherit them as an acquired possession (Eph. 1:14). As the incarnated and crucified God, the Son satisfied God's righteousness by shedding His blood to obtain an eternal redemption (Heb. 9:12). As the resurrected and

imparted God, the Son, as the life-giving Spirit, enlivens the deadened spirits of God's chosen vessels (1 Cor. 15:45; John 20:22; 1 John 5:12; Eph. 2:5). As the God who is coming again, the Son will return to purge every element of sin and death from creation, possess the totality of His redeemed possessions, and express His enlargement in glory through the church, represented by the overcomers in the millennial kingdom and all the believers as the New Jerusalem. As the reigning and ever eternal God, the Son will abolish all rule and all authority and power, and all enemies will be put under His feet in the coming millennial kingdom (1 Cor. 15:24-25; Heb. 2:8).

All the elements in the superior work of Christ are now included in the superior person of Christ. What He has accomplished in His work cannot be separated from what He is in His person. His all-inclusive work, which is unveiled in the first section, has been compounded into His all-inclusive person so that when we receive Him, we also receive His work. His person and work are the essence of the salvation that is so great in the first section (2:3). Salvation refers to

God's full salvation, from the forgiveness of sins to the sharing of the coming kingdom with glory. It refers not only to what Christ has done and will do for us but also to Himself, the One who is able to save us to the uttermost (7:25). As the Son of God—as God—and as the Son of Man—as man—He is our salvation. His wonderful person plus His splendid work constitute so great a salvation, a salvation that none of us should neglect. Our negligence will cause us to miss this great salvation's (1) most precious part—the enjoying of Christ as our saving life and rest in this age; and (2) most glorious part—the inheriting of Christ's kingdom with glory in the coming age. (Recovery Version, Heb. 2:3, note 2)

Salvation in Hebrews involves more than the forgiveness of sins based on faith, that is, more than initial salvation,⁶ and it is more than just a future event.⁷ In the Epistle to the Hebrews, salvation involves the ongoing impartation of the person and work of the Son to our entire being in general and to our soul in particular in this age. This impartation involves the dispensing of the divine life, which has been compounded with all the effective elements of Christ's person and work. The great salvation that the Son has accomplished is applied to us in our experience through the divine dispensing. Consequently, the first warning in the first section of Hebrews is actually a warning to not neglect the receiving of the divine elements of the person and work of Christ through the divine dispensing in this age. In fact, all the warnings in this Epistle ultimately speak of the consequences of not receiving the benefits of the Son's accomplished salvation through a neglect of the divine dispensing. Without an

ongoing experience of the divine dispensing, which imparts the person and work of Christ into our being, we will drift away from the things we have heard, and this neglect will result in a just recompense at the time of the coming judgment (v. 2). This recompense will be just, primarily because the sanctifying elements of Christ's person and work will not be present in our constitution. Instead, there will be an unsanctified source of shame in our being that is worthy of judgment. If, however, we do not neglect the divine dispensing, there will be a progressive sanctification in the life of the One who is holy and fully separated from every residue of the world, sin, death, and the flesh. This progressive sanctification will serve as the means for our escape from judgment. The warning to not neglect so great a salvation (v. 3) in its simplest derivation is a warning to not drift away from the experience of the divine dispensing that imparts the person and work of Christ into our being (v. 1).

The relationship between the economy of God and the divine dispensing in the first section can be seen in verses 3 and 4. According to verse 3, this great salvation

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“had its beginning in being spoken by the Lord” and was “confirmed to us by those who heard.” Then in verse 4 Paul speaks of God bearing witness by signs, wonders, various works of power, and distributions of the Holy Spirit. This great salvation begins with the truth of God's economy, which was spoken by the Lord and confirmed by those who heard. This truth has been borne witness of both outwardly and inwardly. Outwardly, God has borne witness of the truth in His economy “by signs and wonders and by various works of power,” but more importantly, He witnesses inwardly “by distributions of the Holy Spirit.” These distributions of the Holy Spirit are the Spirit's impartation of the true contents of God's economy through the divine dispensing.⁸ The footnote to the word *distributions* in the Recovery Version says, “Distributions of the Holy Spirit, which include the Holy Spirit Himself, are the things that the Holy Spirit distributes to those who receive salvation by believing” (Note 1). The Holy Spirit distributes Himself, making it possible for us to be partakers of the Holy Spirit in order to become holy brothers (6:4; 3:1), and He distributes the things of Christ's person and work, which are

received by believing. This distribution is a dispensing, but this dispensing is based upon the true things spoken of by the Lord and confirmed by those who heard. Verses 3 and 4 of Hebrews 2 speak of a progression from the revelation of the truth in God's economy to the impartation of the content of the truth in God's economy. This progression can be clearly seen in relation to three of the crucial items in God's economy that are revealed in the first section: the Son's making purification of sins (1:3), the Son's being begotten in resurrection (v. 5), and the Son's bearing the scepter of the kingdom (v. 8).

The truth of these three matters had their beginning in being spoken by the Lord. In Matthew 26:28 the Lord spoke of the purification of sins through the blood of the new covenant, which He would pour out for the forgiveness of sins, and in Luke 24:46-47 He assured His disciples that the forgiveness of sins could be proclaimed in His name following His death and resurrection. In John 12:24 the Lord also spoke of the begetting power of His resurrection when He compared Himself to a grain of wheat bearing much fruit in resurrection, after falling into the ground and dying, and in John 16:21 when He compared Himself to a little child being born into the world, bringing forth joy in His resurrection following the sorrow of His death. In Matthew 12:28 the Lord spoke of His preeminence in the kingdom, and in Luke 22:29 of His appointment to a kingdom by the Father.

These items in God's economy, which were spoken by the Lord and confirmed by the Gospel accounts of those who heard His speaking, have been imparted to the believers by distributions of the Holy Spirit. According to Acts 10:43 everyone who believes into Jesus will receive the forgiveness of sins because the redemptive power of His shed blood has been made available through the Holy Spirit. According to 1 John 1:9, His forgiveness and cleansing can also be continually applied to our sins through confession. According to 1 Peter 1:3, the believers were regenerated unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, because the enlivening power of His divine life has been imparted by the Spirit, who gives life to all those who believe (John 6:63; 1 John 5:12-13). According to Romans 14:17, the righteousness, peace, and joy that are in the Holy Spirit and imparted by the Spirit are the reality of the kingdom, and according to 2 Peter 1:11, an entrance into the coming eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is being richly and bountifully supplied to us today.

All the items of Christ's person and work in His great salvation in God's economy can be bountifully supplied by the Spirit of Jesus Christ through the divine

dispensing because the believers have been organically joined to the Lord (Phil. 1:19; 1 Cor. 6:17). The connection between the divine dispensing and the organic union is highlighted by Paul in the first section of Hebrews as an item of the truth, prior to the first warning, and as a matter of experience, following the warning. In 1:9 Paul declares that the believers have become the partners of Christ, who has been anointed by God with the oil of exultant joy. As partners, we share in His anointing because the anointing on the Head extends to the Body (Psa. 133:2; 1 John 2:27). Our partnership with Christ depends upon this anointing, and this anointing is possible only because God has firmly attached us to Christ (2 Cor. 1:21). Without attachment, without being organically joined to Christ, there would be no basis for our participation in His anointing. Nothing in ourselves is worthy of anointing, but in our organic union with Christ, we have a righteous basis to receive and share in His anointing. The anointing of God in Hebrews 1:9 is based upon Christ's love for righteousness and hatred of lawlessness and on the truth of His righteous position in the kingdom (v. 8).

After speaking of the truth of our organic union and then warning us to not neglect this item in God's great salvation, Paul refers to the organic union in our experience in 2:11-12. In verse 11 Paul declares that we are being sanctified by the sanctifying Christ because both we and Christ are all out of One.

He who sanctifies is Christ as the firstborn Son of God, and those who are being sanctified are the believers of Christ as the many sons of God. Both the firstborn Son and the many sons of God are born of the same Father God in resurrection (Acts 13:33; 1 Pet. 1:3) and have the same divine life and nature. Hence, He is not ashamed to call them brothers. (Recovery Version, Heb. 2:11, note 1)

Both the Sanctifier and those who are being sanctified, being out of One, share the life and nature of the Father and are organically joined in this life and nature. He is in the Father, we are in Him, and He is in us (John 14:20), and the Father is in Him, He is in the Father, and we are in the Father and the Son (17:21). Since we are out of One, our oneness is the oneness of the Triune God, a oneness with distinction but not separation, based on a union in life and nature. "In Hebrews 2:11 the great announcement is made that Christ and they that are sanctified are all of one! They *share His life* Who died and rose!" (Newell 53). One high experience and enjoyment of this organic union in life involves the firstborn Son singing hymns of praise to the Father in the midst of the church.

This is the firstborn Son's praising of the Father within the Father's many sons in the church meetings. When we, the many sons of God, meet as the church and praise the Father, the firstborn Son praises the Father in our praising.

It is not that He praises the Father apart from us and alone; rather, He praises within us and with us through our praising. In our singing He sings hymns of praise to the Father. If then we do not sing, how can He sing? The more we sing to the Father, the more we enjoy His presence, His moving, His anointing, and His life-imparting within us. (Recovery Version, Heb. 2:12, note 3)

In the midst of the church does not refer merely to the midst of a meeting of the church, although such singing certainly occurs in a meeting of the church, especially the Lord's table meeting. Rather, it refers especially to the church as the corporate expression of God, and from the midst of this corporate expression, involving the Firstborn who is organically joined to His many brothers, praise to the Father is released through the singing of hymns.

The superiority of Christ to angels in the economy of God is imparted through the divine dispensing that is made possible through our organic union with the Triune God, which, in turn, produces a glorious expression in the church that is corporate in nature. This corporate expression is the church, and the church is composed of both Christ as the Firstborn and the believers as the many sons and many brothers who are being led into glory (v. 10).

The last step of God's great salvation is to bring His many sons into glory. Romans 8 tells us that God's work of grace upon us began with His foreknowing, passed through His predestination, calling, and justification, and will end with His glorification (Rom. 8:29-30). Also, Rom. 8 tells us that the whole creation eagerly awaits the revelation (glorification) of the sons of God, in hope that the creation itself will enter into the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Rom. 8:19-21). This will be accomplished by the Lord's coming back (Phil. 3:21), at which time we will be manifested with Him in glory (Col. 3:4); this is our hope (Col. 1:27). This glorification of the sons of God, as the goal of God's salvation, will last through the millennial kingdom and will be manifested in full in the New Jerusalem for eternity (Rev. 21:11, 23). (Recovery Version, Heb. 2:10, note 3)

The expression of God is always an expression of glory. In the first section of Hebrews the expression of glory that was present in eternity past in the only begotten as the effulgence of God's glory has become enlarged in the church as the corporate expression of God's glory. In resurrection the firstborn Son was glorified in His humanity with the glory that He had with the Father in His divinity as the only Begotten Son (John 17:5). And in resurrection the glory of the firstborn Son was given to the church through our organic union with Him. This union produces the church as a corporate expression of God in oneness through the divine dispensing of all that Christ is and has done in God's economy. While this organic

union ultimately will produce a glorious corporate expression in the New Jerusalem, there is a need to not neglect this great salvation in this age. Daily we need to receive the contents of God's economy through the divine dispensing in order to participate in the corporate expression of God in the coming millennial kingdom.

Economy, Dispensing, Organic Union, and Corporate Expression in 3:1—4:13

These four great matters in relation to our participation in the coming millennial kingdom continue to be developed in the second section of Hebrews, which speaks of Christ's superiority to Moses in the economy of God's salvation and of our need to not come short of God's promised rest of the millennial kingdom by falling away from the living God (3:12; 4:11). The central focus in the second section is on the superiority of Christ to Moses as the builder of God's house (3:3, 6). In this section the experiential reference to the church as God's corporate expression in 2:12 is developed and accorded greater significance through the revelation that the building of the

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church with the constituted life of the God-man Jesus is the goal of the Son's being sent as an Apostle greater than Moses. As our Apostle, Christ is building God's house through the divine dispensing that occurs when our heart is soft and open to hearing His word which, in turn, strengthens the organic union by dividing soul and spirit so that God's corporate expression can be built up as His house and enjoyed as His rest (3:7-8, 15; 4:7, 12). The church, as the house of God and the rest of God, is the goal of God in His economy, and it is this truth that is developed in the comparison between Christ and Moses.

To the Jews and to the Hebrew Christians, Moses was held in high esteem because of the customs he delivered to them from God (Acts 6:14), the most notable being the law, yet the law is not even mentioned in this section of Hebrews. By focusing on Moses' role as one who was "faithful in all His House as a servant, for a testimony of the things to be spoken later" (3:5) and then comparing this with Christ's role as the One who "built the house" (v. 3), Paul underscores the significance of the house of God. God's eternal economy is focused on His

desire to obtain a house, a place of rest, within humanity (Isa. 66:1), not on our observation of the law. By avoiding any mention of the law, Paul confirms that God's desire for a corporate expression is of paramount importance. It is as if Moses' contribution in relation to the giving of the law is not even worthy of being included in a comparison related to Christ's accomplishment in the building of God's house. For the sake of drawing a comparison that is at least equivalent in type, Paul instead focuses on the function of Moses as an apostle so that Paul can emphasize the importance of God's house and stress the superiority of Christ as an Apostle who was sent to build the house of God.

Moses was God's sent one, the apostle who was to take Israel out of Egypt and lead them through the wilderness for the purpose that they might be constituted as God's house and to be formed into a habitation of God on earth. This habitation of God was symbolized by the tabernacle made by the children of Israel in the wilderness. That tabernacle was only a symbol; it was not the real habitation of God. At that time, God's real habitation on earth was the children of Israel themselves. The children of Israel were formed and constituted into a house of God by Moses, God's apostle. (Lee, *Life-study* 164)

In comparison to Moses, Christ is spoken of as being "faithful to Him who constituted Him, as also Moses was in all His house" (Heb. 3:2), but Christ is further spoken as the One who built the house (v. 3). Thus, while there is a similarity between Christ and Moses in the matter of constitution, there is a superiority in capacity with Christ because He is both the building God (v. 4) and the faithful Son (v. 6). *Constitution* involves God's operation of perfection upon human nature (2:10; 5:8-9).⁹ Both Moses in His human nature and Christ in His human nature, which was obtained through incarnation, were constituted by God to be builders and were sent by God as apostles to build God's house. The building that came out of Moses' constitution, however, was a house only in type as a testimony of things to be spoken of later. The building that came out of Christ's constitution was the fulfillment of Moses' testimony, which is the church. "Moses had the human nature, which is fit for God's building, but he did not have the divine nature, which is suitable for being the builder" (Recovery Version, Heb. 3:3, note 2). Without divinity Moses could only provide material for God's house but not actually build God's house. With His constituted humanity as the firstborn Son, Christ became the material for God's house, and with His divinity as the only begotten Son, He could also build the church as God's house for God's rest.

Christ builds with Himself as the material because He is

the foundation stone (Isa. 28:16), the cornerstone (Matt. 21:42; Acts 4:11), the topstone (Zech. 4:7), and the living stone (1 Pet. 2:4-5). And Christ builds by dispensing Himself into redeemed humanity, to those who are poor and contrite in spirit rather than to those who are hardened in their heart through unbelief, which is the result of falling away from the living God and forsaking their organic partnership with Christ (Isa. 66:2; Heb. 3:8, 12, 14). Just as in the first section, the warning in the second section¹⁰ is focused on the importance of receiving the person and work of Christ through the divine dispensing. In this instance, however, the warning related to receiving the divine dispensing is focused on the critical relationship between the divine dispensing and the building up of the house of God as the rest of God.

The divine dispensing is imparted through speaking the word of God, and it is received by hearing the word of God.¹¹ As such, the relationship between speaking the word of God, hearing the voice of the Lord, and entering into God's promised rest is at the center of this warning related to the consequences of not receiving the divine dispensing. The warning in this section is focused on the believers' responsibility to receive the divine dispensing by the hearing the word of God which, being living and operative, divides soul from spirit and strengthens the hearing believers' organic partnership with Christ, bringing them into God's rest in this age and qualifying them to enter into God's rest in the coming age of the kingdom. Three times in this section, the believers are warned to not harden their heart when they hear the voice of the Lord (3:7-8, 15; 4:7). This voice is contained in the constant word of the Scriptures, as testified by the repeated quotation of verses from Psalm 95 (Heb. 3:7-11, 15; 4:3, 5, 7). It is contained in the instant speaking of the Spirit (3:7), it is contained in the exhorting words of the brothers (v. 13), and it is contained in the apostles' announcement of the good news (4:2). To hear the word is to receive the divine dispensing, and to receive the divine dispensing is the proper exercise of diligence to enter into God's rest.

There are many views related to the significance of *rest* in Hebrews 3 and 4. To some this term refers to a present spiritual condition, to others it refers to the commonly understood notion of heaven, and still to others it speaks of the coming millennial kingdom in the future.¹² But just as *salvation* in the first section refers to our experience of Christ's person and work in His accomplishments from eternity to eternity, *rest* in the second section refers to our experience of Christ's person and work in His accomplishment of God's desire to obtain an eternal dwelling place within humanity. The Sabbath rest is more than a condition, a place, or an event; it is Christ who has been constituted in His humanity to be an eternal abode, an eternal place of rest, for the Triune God and who is

being constituted into redeemed humanity to build the believers up as an enlarged dwelling place of rest for the Triune God.

This Sabbath rest is Christ as our rest, typified by the good land of Canaan (Deut. 12:9; Heb. 4:8). Christ is rest to the saints in three stages: (1) in the church age, as the heavenly Christ, the One who rests from His work and sits on the right hand of God in the heavens, He is the rest to us in our spirit (Matt. 11:28-29); (2) in the millennial kingdom, after Satan is removed from this earth (Rev. 20:1-3), Christ with the kingdom will be the rest in a fuller way to the overcoming saints, who will be His co-kings (Rev. 20:4, 6), sharing and enjoying His rest; (3) in the new heaven and new earth, after all the enemies, including death, the last enemy, have been made subject to Him (1 Cor. 15:24-27), Christ, as the all-conquering One, will be the rest in the fullest way to all God's redeemed for eternity. But the Sabbath rest mentioned here and typified by the rest of the good land of Canaan covers only the first two stages of Christ's being our rest; it does not include the third stage. The rest in the first two stages is a prize to His diligent seekers, who not only are redeemed but also have enjoyed Him in a full way, thus becoming the overcomers; whereas the rest in the third stage is not a prize but the full portion allotted to all the redeemed ones. Therefore, in the first two stages, and especially in the second, Christ as our rest is the Sabbath rest mentioned here, the rest that remains for us to seek after and enter into diligently. It is in the second stage of His being our rest that Christ will take possession of the whole earth as His inheritance (Psa. 2:8; Heb. 2:5-6), making it His kingdom for a thousand years (Rev. 11:15). All His overcoming followers who seek and enjoy Him as their rest in the first stage will participate in His reign in the millennium (Rev. 20:4, 6; 2 Tim. 2:12). (Recovery Version, Heb. 4:9, note 1)

According to the warning in the second section, the believers who fall away from the living God by hardening their heart to the speaking of the dispensing God will fall short of entering into His rest in this age (3:12; 4:11). Without the faith that comes from hearing the word of God, these believers will bear no testimony of constitution and maturity in the divine life in this age. As a consequence, the true condition of their status as the church, the *if* in 3:6, will be "laid bare to the eyes of Him to whom we are to give our account" (4:13), and He will be able to justly declare, "They shall not enter into My rest!" (3:11; 4:5), which is the day He has designated for His millennial kingdom (v. 7).

Where there is a soft and open heart, however, the word of God will be living and operative even to the dividing of soul and spirit (4:12). This living operation is the actualization of the divine dispensing within the believers, and

the dividing of soul and spirit is the experiential issue of this divine dispensing. There is a need for such a division because the heart, which is composed of the mind, emotion, and will as the faculties of our soul and the conscience as a faculty of our human spirit, has been so affected by the fall that its unchecked tendency is toward unbelief, deceit, and disobedience (3:12-13; 4:6, 11), all of which masquerade as acceptable thoughts and intentions but which in reality are the source of an intrinsic resistance to our entrance into His rest. There is no place for God to rest in a heart that has not become the home of Christ, and only the living and operative word can divide soul from spirit, thereby discerning and judging the thoughts and intentions of the heart. The experience of the children of Israel in their coming short of entering into the rest of the good land provides the context for understanding the emphasis on the living and operative word of God in verse 12.

With them there were three places: (1) Egypt, from which they were delivered; (2) the wilderness, in which they wandered; and (3) Canaan, into which they entered.

To show the superiority of Christ to Moses, Paul speaks of Christ as an Apostle sent to bring God into humanity. To show the superiority of Christ to Aaron, he speaks of Christ as a High Priest who is qualified to bring humanity into God.

Their history in these three places signifies the three stages of their participation in God's full salvation. This is a type of us, the New Testament believers, in our participation in the full salvation of God. In the first stage we receive Christ and are redeemed and delivered from the world. In the second stage we become wanderers in following the Lord; our wandering always takes place in our soul. In the third stage we partake of and enjoy Christ in a full way; this is experienced in our spirit. When we pursue the pleasures of material and sinful things, we are in the world, typified by Egypt. When we wander in our soul, we are in the wilderness. When we enjoy Christ in our spirit, we are in Canaan. When the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, they were always murmuring, reasoning, and chiding. This surely took place in their soul, not in their spirit. But Caleb and Joshua believed in the word of God, obeyed the Lord, and pressed toward the goal. This surely took place not in their soul but in their spirit. At that time the receivers of this book, the Hebrew believers, were wondering what they should do with their old Hebrew religion. This wondering in their mind was a wandering in their soul, not an experience of

Christ in their spirit. So the writer of this book said that the word of God, i.e., what was quoted from the Old Testament, could pierce into their wondering like a sharp two-edged sword and divide their soul from their spirit...

Our soul is our very self (Matt. 16:25; cf. Luke 9:25). In following the Lord we must deny our soul, our very self (Matt. 16:24; Luke 9:23). Our spirit is the deepest part of our being, a spiritual organ with which we contact God (John 4:24; Rom. 1:9). It is in our spirit that we are regenerated (John 3:6). It is in our spirit that the Holy Spirit dwells and works (Rom. 8:16). It is in our spirit that we enjoy Christ and His grace (2 Tim. 4:22; Gal. 6:18). Hence, the writer of this book advised the Hebrew believers not to stagger in the wandering of their soul, which soul they had to deny, but to press on into their spirit to partake of and enjoy the heavenly Christ that they might participate in the kingdom rest of His reign in the millennium. If they staggered in the wandering of their soul, they would miss God's goal and suffer the loss of the full enjoyment of Christ and the kingdom rest. (Recovery Version, Heb. 4:12, note 2)

When the living and operative word is received, the divine dispensing exposes every thought and intention that is rooted in the self, dividing them from the spirit. The divine dispensing also strengthens the organic union in our mingled spirit through faith, thereby enabling the believers to be profited by the word so that they can be diligent to enter into God's rest and even become the place of His rest, the dwelling place of God (vv. 2, 11; Eph. 2:22).

In the second section concerning Christ as the Apostle who was sent to build the church as the house of God and the rest of God, the organic union between Christ and the believers is also stressed. This organic union is a union in life based on the regeneration of the believers' human spirit by the divine Spirit. The second section stresses this organic union when it speaks of the identification of the believers with Christ as His partners (3:14), unveiling this union in the context of speaking and hearing the voice of the Lord in verses 13 through 15, which say,

But exhort one another each day, as long as it is called "today," lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin—for we have become partners of Christ, if indeed we hold fast the beginning of the assurance firm to the end—while it is said, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the provocation."

There are several layers of speaking involving the word of God in these verses. There is the speaking of the believers, who are speaking the word of God to one to another

as words of exhortation. There is the speaking of the word of God as the constant, *logos* word through the quotation of Psalm 95:7-8. And there is the speaking of the word of God as the instant, *rhema* word by the Holy Spirit. This instant word is imparted as the voice of the Lord through the speaking of the believers one to another. In this layered speaking, the believers and the Lord are speaking as one in an organic partnership: The instant speaking of the Spirit in the believers' speaking of the word of the Scriptures is the voice of the Lord. In this age, an age in which the believers need to be diligent to enter into God's rest, each day is a "today" in which the exhortation of the believers is the speaking of the Lord, not just a repetition of the Lord's word. Such a speaking can only come out of the believers' organic partnership with Christ.

The word for *partners* in Hebrews 3:14 is the same Greek word as *partakers* in 3:1. In his commentary on verse 14 in *The Holiest of All*, Andrew Murray speaks of the intrinsic organic aspect of our partnership with Christ

They are become partakers of Christ. There is often danger, as we listen to the teaching of Scripture about Christ as our High Priest, of regarding Him as an outward person, and His work as something that is done outwardly for us in heaven. This precious word reminds us that our salvation consists in the possession of Himself, in the being one life with Him, in having Himself as our own. Christ can do nothing for us but as an inward Saviour. Himself being our life, personally dwelling and working in us. As truly and fully as Christ, when He became partaker of flesh and blood, was entirely and eternally identified with man and His nature, so that He and it were inseparably united in one life, so surely, when we become partakers of Christ, do we become indissolubly identified with Him. (136)

By being inseparably united to Christ in one life, the believers have become partakers of Christ and are indissolubly identified with Him. In this organic identification, the exhorting word of the brothers to one another is the speaking of the Lord, and the word of the Lord is heard through the brothers' exhortations. In this one speaking of the brothers and the Lord, there is also a singular call to be diligent to enter into the corporate expression of God as the house of God and the Sabbath rest.

In the days of His flesh, Christ was the unique tabernacle of God and the unique rest for both God and humanity (John 1:14; Matt. 11:28-29). Through the constitution of His humanity, Christ became God-approved material that could be imparted into redeemed humanity to enlarge not only the household of God but also the rest of God. The enlargement of God's household in the church involves many sons being brought into glory, and the enlargement of God's rest in the church involves the

people of God being diligent to allow the living word to operate in their being to remove every element of unbelief, deceit, and disobedience so that God can find rest in holy brothers who match Him as the holy God by partaking of His holiness (Heb. 3:1; 12:10). The church is the enlargement of the corporate expression of God as the house of God, and the church is also the enlargement of the corporate expression of God as the Sabbath rest.

As an Apostle sent to build the house of God and to enlarge the resting place of God by bringing God into man, Christ is superior to Moses in the economy of God. Christ brings God into humanity, initiating an organic union between God and humanity through the word of God that dispenses His person and work into redeemed humanity. This union, in turn, produces a corporate expression of God, which is progressively manifested as God's house and God's rest.

Economy, Dispensing, Organic Union, and Corporate Expression in 4:14—7:28

This progressive manifestation, however, requires not only an Apostle to bring God into humanity, but also a High Priest to bring humanity into God. The central focus in the third section of Hebrews is on the superiority of Christ to Aaron as a great High Priest who is dispensing Himself into the believers for their growth and maturity in the divine life and who is saving the believers to the uttermost by bringing them into the organic union in their regenerated human spirit, which is the reality of the dwelling place of God, for the corporate expression of Himself through the believers as the heirs of God's promise. In order to show the superiority of Christ to Moses, Paul speaks of Christ as an Apostle who was sent to bring God into humanity, but in order to show the superiority of Christ to Aaron, he speaks of Christ as a High Priest who is qualified to bring humanity into God. Both Moses and Aaron were needed to accomplish God's eternal purpose in type by building a house for God and then bringing God's people into this house. Toward this end Moses was constituted to build the house of God so that Aaron could bring the children of Israel into this house through his priestly service. Consequently, the Hebrew believers had a deep appreciation for the priestly provision instituted by God which made it possible for God to meet with them and to dwell in their midst (Exo. 29:43-46). In their appreciation, they likened their good and pleasant standing before Him to the fine anointing oil upon the head of Aaron, that ran down upon his beard to the hem of his priestly garments (Psa. 133). Aaron's priestly service enabled them to come forward as a corporate people through the veil to meet with God based on Aaron's offering of sacrifices for his own sins and for the sins of the people (Heb. 7:27).

The honor that was bestowed upon Aaron by the children

of Israel was not misdirected because his calling was from God; it was not something with which he glorified himself (5:4). Consequently, it was necessary for Paul to present a superior comparison, originating from a superior calling, in order to convince the Hebrew believers that a superior transfer of the priesthood from Aaron to Christ had occurred in God's economy (7:12). In the third section of this Epistle, therefore, Paul unveils the superior service of Christ as a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek (5:6; 7:10, 17), focusing on the superior aspects of His person which produced a superior work in His heavenly ministry to bring redeemed humanity not just to God but into God.

In order to carry out His heavenly, eternal service as High Priest, Christ was begotten in His humanity as the Son of God in resurrection. In the day of His resurrection, the day of His "becoming a High Priest," God declared, "You are My Son; this day have I begotten You" (5:5).

For Christ to be our High Priest, He had to partake of our humanity, as mentioned in 2:14-18, and enter with this

The warning in the third section establishes a general principle that the believers can be brought on to maturity only by hearing the higher truths in God's economy and by receiving and partaking of these truths as food.

humanity into resurrection. In His humanity He can be touched with the feeling of our weaknesses and be merciful to us (4:15; 2:17). In resurrection, in His divinity He can do everything for us and be faithful to us (7:24-25; 2:17). (Recovery Version, 5:5, note 2)

Following His designating and qualifying resurrection, the Son, who had learned obedience from the things which He had suffered, also was declared to be "a Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" in His ascension (v. 6). Verse 6 is a quotation from Psalm 110:4, which references the priesthood of Melchizedek in the context of the Son's ruling from the heavenly Zion (vv. 1-2), indicating that in His ascension and enthronement, Christ is qualified to minister His heavenly life into believers who are encompassed with weakness and in need of mercy and grace for timely help (Heb. 4:16; 5:2). In His ascension as High Priest, Christ also became the Forerunner who entered within the veil of the heavens in order to bring the believers into God (6:19-20).

While the work of Christ in His earthly ministry qualified

Him to serve as a great High Priest, the primary point in Paul's comparison between Christ and Aaron involves Christ's superior and continuing work in His heavenly ministry.

According to the work and ministry of Christ, this book has a turn at this verse [7:1], a turn from earth to heaven. To the end of ch. 6, what is revealed is mainly Christ's work on earth, typified by the priesthood of Aaron. That section is the word of foundation. From this verse, Christ's ministry in heaven according to the order of Melchizedek is unveiled. This section is the word of perfection, which shows us how the heavenly Christ ministers in the heavenly tabernacle. His purifying of sins is typified by the work of Aaron, while His sitting down on the right hand of the Majesty on high (1:3) is according to the order of Melchizedek (Psa. 110:1, 4). His work on the cross on earth, typified by the work of Aaron, affords us forgiveness of sins. His ministry on the throne in heaven ministers to us the overcoming of sin. His cross delivered us out of Egypt; His throne brings us into Canaan. The Hebrew believers participated in His work on the cross. Now they had to press on to enter into the enjoyment of His ministry on the throne. (Recovery Version, Heb. 7:1, note 1)

In His heavenly service Christ is ministering Himself as mercy and grace into the believers, whose human life is encompassed with weakness and beset with sin through temptation (5:2; 4:15). In His heavenly ministry, He is continually coming forward to God, enabling the believers to also come forward to God through Him (7:25), and He is ever living to intercede for the believers so that they may experience the salvation that flows from the power of His indestructible life (vv. 25, 16). As the Son who is perfected forever, His work as the great High Priest is focused on ministering His perfected humanity and His divinity into the believers so that by His sanctifying life they also will be perfected forever (vv. 28; 10:14). This involves much more than the forgiveness of sins, which was the primary focus of Aaron's earthly ministry. The heavenly ministry of Christ as High Priest is superior in its content, containing all the heavenly elements of Christ's person and work in resurrection and ascension. It is also superior in its scope, being an eternal salvation that has no need for the believers to daily renew themselves unto repentance which would only insult the Spirit of grace and bring open shame to the Son's redemptive sacrifice (7:27; 10:29; 6:6).

Instead, this salvation only needs to be received and enjoyed daily by those who hold fast the confession of the faith. In the economy of God the priestly service of Christ is far superior to Aaron's in its ability to bring believers who are weak and suffering from the temptations and

entanglements of sin into the house of God and, therefore, into God. There is no limitation in His service because He is always living to intercede and His priesthood is eternal and unalterable (7:24-25). Based on His superior service as a great High Priest, the reality of Christ's person and work on earth and in the heavens is available to be received by the believers through the divine dispensing. Receiving this content involves tasting and partaking, which, in turn, fosters growth in the divine life unto the maturity of God's expression. Thus, while there is no limitation upon the divine economy, there is the possibility that believers will not cooperate with Christ in His priestly service by not receiving the contents of God's economy which are available through the divine dispensing. In order to encourage the believers to not fall away from receiving the intrinsic elements of the faith, becoming sluggish in their pursuit (6:6, 12), the third section also contains a warning related the believers' need to receive the divine dispensing.

The warning in the third section begins in 5:11 and continues through 6:20. In the verse immediately prior to 5:11, Paul focuses on the truth of Christ being addressed by God as a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek (v. 10). In the verse immediately following 6:20, Paul begins a more detailed explanation of the economical significance of Melchizedek in relation to Christ (7:1). The warning in 5:11 through 6:20 is related to the believers' failure to appreciate the higher truth in God's economy related to Christ as a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek and, consequently, to their lack of growth in the divine life from not having the reality of this higher truth dispensed into their being (v. 1). This can be seen from the fact that Paul begins the warning in 5:11 by indicating that he had much to say concerning Melchizedek but that the Hebrew believers had become dull of hearing, and he concludes his warning in 6:20 by showing that when the truth of Christ as a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek is received and applied through the divine dispensing, Christ becomes the Forerunner who is entering the veil for them and in them in order to meet in God.

The warning in 5:11 through 6:20 is based on Paul's recognition that the Hebrew believers had not moved beyond the rudiments of the beginning of the oracles of God to the deeper truth concerning Christ as a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek (5:12), a teaching he characterizes as the word of righteousness and as solid food (vv. 13-14). Consequently, this warning establishes a general principle that the believers can be brought on to maturity only by hearing the higher truths in God's economy and by receiving and partaking of these promised truths as food (6:4-5). In principle, partaking should follow teaching, and teaching should issue in partaking, which is a matter of the divine dispensing.

In order to be brought on to maturity, it is necessary to leave the word of the beginning of Christ by not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith in God, by not focusing on the teaching of baptisms and of the laying on of hands, and by not just stressing the coming resurrection of the dead believers and eternal judgment (6:1-2).¹³ Every believer should be able to teach these rudimentary truths and also to know the higher truths in God's economy in order to be mature and full-grown in the divine life. Maturity and growth are the issue of the divine dispensing, just as the growth of vegetation is the issue of the dispensing of rain: "The earth, which drinks the rain which often comes upon it and produces vegetation suitable to those for whose sake also it is cultivated, partakes of blessing from God" (v. 7). "*Produces vegetation* is an illustration of being brought on to perfection, to maturity (v. 1). The believers, as the earth, are tilled for God's sake that they may bring forth Christ, as the vegetation, to perfection, to maturity" (Recovery Version, v. 7, note 2).

Since truth is the means for conveying the divine dispensing, it is possible for truth to produce vegetation when it is received as the good word of God, but it is also possible for truth to bring forth thorns and thistles if it is received as the letter, as was the case with the Hebrew believers (v. 8). "Strictly, the thorns and thistles here refer to the traditional things of the Hebrew believers' old religion" (Recovery Version, v. 8, note 1). Like vegetation, maturity is the expression of life. It is not something that is produced from the teaching of the dead letter.¹⁴

Being brought on to maturity involves receiving the divine contents of God's economy through the divine dispensing, and receiving is a matter of the believers' cooperation with God's dispensing operation. Therefore, Paul begins the warning in this section by pointing to the believer's responsibility to participate in God's economy, saying, "Let us be brought on to maturity" (v. 1).

In the experience of our spiritual life, there is always the Lord's doing, on the one side, and our pursuing in cooperation with Him, on the other side. The Lord wants to bring us on to maturity, but we still need to cooperate with Him by being brought on to perfection, to maturity.

The Lord wants to bring us on, but we must let Him do it. This is our willing cooperation with His gracious work. In order to be brought on to perfection, to maturity, we need to share with Christ in His attainments (1:9; 3:14), to be diligent to enter into the remaining Sabbath rest (4:9, 11), to come forward to the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace (4:16), and to feed on the solid food to enjoy Christ as our High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek (5:9-10, 14). (Recovery Version, Heb. 6:1, note 3)

Part of the responsibility of cooperating with God involves the believers' not attempting to renew themselves again unto repentance, crucifying again for themselves the Son of God even when they have fallen away (v. 6). There is considerable misunderstanding surrounding verses 4 through 6,¹⁵ but in its simplest explanation, these verses are an assurance that there is no need to return to the rudiments of the faith when a falling away occurs because such a return will only delay the process of maturing in the divine life. Such delays will only hinder a believer from receiving the deeper content of God's economy in His dispensing which enable him to grow in life and thereby to overcome the aspects of his living that contributed to his falling away. Christ's one sacrifice is sufficient to deal with the sins that a believer committed prior to his initial salvation and is sufficient to deal with any sins committed after his initial salvation. If a believer regards Christ's one sacrifice as being insufficient to cover sins that occur in a falling away, this is to deny the eternal efficacy of Christ's redemptive work. There is no need for repetitive renewals by a believer in response to repetitive "altar calls," prompted by feelings

righteousness. This word was spoken to help the believers partake of the solid nourishment contained in the word of righteousness so that their growth and maturity would become a reality through the divine dispensing. It takes maturity to pick up from failure. It takes maturity to go on rather than to seek some misplaced sense of solace by returning to the rudiments of the faith, and it takes maturity to have faith in the unchangeable nature of God's counsel and Christ's accomplishments (v. 17), not allowing the details of one's falling away to deter him from being brought on to maturity.

Verses 1 through 12 in chapter 6 generally speak of advancing from tasting and partaking of the divine supply contained in the rudiments of the faith to tasting and partaking of the divine supply in the better things which belong to salvation and which are part of the full inheritance of the promises (vv. 9, 12). This tasting and partaking is made possible because there is an organic union between Christ and the believers. While the matter of the organic union is not explicitly mentioned in this section, it is the intrinsic reason why it is impossible for a fallen believer to renew himself again unto repentance. Having believed into the Son, a believer is joined to the Lord and becomes one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6:17). Consequently, a self-applied renewal unto repentance is not needed and not even possible. Having been born again of the divine life through faith in Christ, there is no need to be reborn again of the divine life, nor is it even possible. Just as Nicodemus's inquiry related to being born again, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his moth-

When our organic union is manifested in maturity, there will be a corporate expression of God through the many sons who have inherited the reality of the promise of being Abraham's multiplication in the divine life through faith.

of inadequate growth (5:12), coupled with a lack of experience in discriminating between both good and evil (vv. 13-14).

Those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come have already laid the foundation, at the time they believed. If they fall away and turn back, there is no need for them to lay the foundation again (v. 1); there is only the need to go on, to be brought on to perfection, to maturity. There is no need for them to repeat repentance, for it is impossible for them to renew themselves unto repentance. Verse 1 indicates that it is not needed; v. 4 says that it is not possible; and vv. 7-8 show that it is not right. (Recovery Version, Heb. 6:4, note 1)

The word concerning the impossibility of believers' renewing themselves again unto repentance, having fallen away, in verses 4 through 6 is not a word intended to condemn but rather to encourage; it is actually a word of

er's womb and be born, can he?" (John 3:3-4), was uninformed in regard to the initiation of God's salvation, any thought that a believer somehow loses his organic union with Christ when there is a falling away is equally uninformed about the fulfillment of God's salvation. The organic union is stressed in this section precisely by speaking of the impossibility of believers' renewing themselves again unto repentance and crucifying again for themselves the Son of God, having been enlightened, having tasted the good word, and having become partakers of the Holy Spirit.

When the certainty of our organic union is manifested in maturity, there will be a corporate expression of God through the many sons of God who have inherited the reality of the promise of being Abraham's multiplication in the divine life through faith. The promise that God made to Abraham was a promise of seed, of organic multiplication, based on an organic union between God and man. The seed of Abraham is Christ (Gal. 3:16), and by virtue of the believers' organic union with Christ, the seed of Abraham is also a corporate seed (v. 29). As those who

are inheriting the promise (Heb. 6:12), the many sons are the many heirs of God and also God's glorious inheritance (Rom. 8:17; Eph. 1:18). The many sons are fellow heirs, and the fellow heirs are also fellow members of the organic body of Christ (3:6). Since glory is related to God's expression, Paul's speaking concerning the inheritance of the many sons is a reference to the corporate expression of God. This corporate expression will be manifested in those who have been brought on to maturity and who have become heirs through the dispensing operation of Christ as a great High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, who was appointed not according to law of a fleshy commandment but according to the power of an indestructible life (7:16). The power of this life is conveyed through the divine dispensing, which imparts the contents of God's economy into the believers.

Economy, Dispensing, Organic Union, and Corporate Expression in 8:1—10:39

After speaking of the superiority of Christ as High Priest, Paul makes a final comparison in the fourth section to show that the offerings of Christ as a great High Priest in the new covenant are also superior to the sacrifices of Aaron in the old covenant. According to typology, a believer's entrance into the house of God, the true tabernacle, to enjoy God and to meet in God depends not only upon the service of a High Priest, but also on the sacrifices offered by the High Priest. In the first section Christ is unveiled as being superior to angels in God's economy, which stretches from eternity to eternity. In the second section Christ is unveiled as being superior to Moses in the building of God's house, which is the goal of God's economy. In the third section Christ is unveiled as being superior to Aaron as the High Priest to bring redeemed humanity into God's house, which is the advancement of God's economy. And in the fourth section the new covenant of Christ is unveiled as being superior to the old, being a better covenant of better promises with a more excellent ministry and having better sacrifices and better blood with the greater and more perfect tabernacle, in its qualification for bringing redeemed humanity into the house of God. It is this superior covenant that initiates, enacts, and accomplishes God's economy within humanity in time by fully qualifying believers to come forward to the Holy of Holies and to receive the divine dispensing in our regenerated human spirit (10:22). With our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our conduct and walk cleansed by the living word, there is an assembling of believers that is a corporate expression of the house of God as His house (vv. 21, 25), which is the true tabernacle (8:2).

In the economy of God unveiled in the second and third sections, the chief point is that we have Christ as our High Priest in the heavens, who is a Minister of the

holy places, even of the true tabernacle that the Lord built as an Apostle sent by God (8:1-2). There is a need for a High Priest in God's economy because there is a need for sacrifices that satisfy God's righteousness in order for humanity to participate in His new covenant. Sacrifices are needed, but these sacrifices for sin cannot be offered by sinful humanity (2:17; 5:1; 7:27; 9:7). Thus, there is a need for a qualified High Priest, who is without sin (4:15), and there is the need for a sacrifice that can be eternally efficacious so that God will by no means remember the sins of redeemed humanity anymore (8:12). In the economy of God, Christ is both the Mediator of the new covenant as the High Priest and the sacrifice that mediates by making propitiation for the sins of the people (9:15; 2:17). The new covenant that Christ mediates thus is a better covenant in the economy of God (8:6).

This better covenant not only was enacted upon better promises of a better law, the inner law of life (vv. 10-12), but also was consummated with Christ's better sacrifices (9:23), which accomplished for us an eternal redemption (9:12), and the better blood of Christ, which purifies our conscience (9:14). Even more, the High Priest of this better covenant, the eternal Son of the living God, ministers with a more excellent ministry (v. 6) and in the greater and more perfect tabernacle (9:11). (Recovery Version, Heb. 8:6, note 3)

The better covenant makes our entrance into the true tabernacle possible because of the better sacrifice of Christ's redeeming blood.

In the old covenant the blood of goats and calves only made expiation for people's sins (Lev. 16:15-18); it never accomplished redemption for their sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (10:4). In Hebrew the root of the word for *expiation* means *to cover*. Thus, to make expiation means to cover sins; it does not mean to take away sins. Since Christ as the Lamb of God took away the sin of the world (John 1:29) by offering Himself once for all on the cross as the sacrifice for sins (v. 14; 10:12), His blood, which He sprinkled in the heavenly tabernacle (12:24), has accomplished an eternal redemption for us, even the redemption of the transgressions under the first (old) covenant (v. 15), transgressions that were only covered by animal blood. Thus, we have been redeemed with the precious blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:18-19). (Recovery Version, Heb. 9:12, note 2)

Hebrews 10:10 declares that "we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." This verse speaks of sanctification as an accomplished fact, and it reflects the believers' status in the economy of God from God's eternal perspective. It

speaks of the certainty of the fulfillment of God's promises contained in the new covenant, which are promises to impart His living laws into our mind and to inscribe them on our hearts to make Him a living God to us and us a living people to Him, enabling us to know Him inwardly and subjectively (8:10-11; 10:16-17; 9:12). Just as God views us as having already been called, justified, and glorified (Rom. 8:30), He also views us as having been sanctified, because glorification follows sanctification. When God views our status under the new covenant, He sees only Christ, who is the source of sanctification. In Him our sanctification is an accomplished fact. However, in Hebrews 10:14, the experience of the believers' "being sanctified" is mentioned in addition to the certainty of the believers' sanctification.

The experience of being sanctified is a matter of receiving the divine dispensing. Consequently, Paul includes a fourth warning in 10:19 through 39, after speaking of the believers' need to experience sanctification in verse 14. This warning is related to receiving the divine dispensing by coming forward to the Holy of Holies, which is our

of its law to perfect those who draw near (10:1), and with the inadequacy of its sacrifices to remove sins (vv. 4, 11). Without the effectual sacrifice of Christ and His blood, which sprinkles our hearts from an evil conscience and gives us the boldness to come forward in the full assurance of faith (v. 22), the operation of the divine dispensing is practically nullified in our experience. Such a shrinking back tramples underfoot the person and work of the Son of God, insults the Spirit of grace who dwells and works in us, and contributes to our abandonment of the assembling of ourselves together as the church for the corporate contact and expression of God (vv. 29, 25). It also is an invitation to a certain judgment from God who no longer finds delight in sons who have shrunk back to ruin and who are in need of both discipline in this age and perhaps punishment in the next (vv. 27, 38).¹⁶ By not experiencing the divine dispensing according to the new and living way of the new covenant, there will be ample justification for judgment from the living God when the Lord returns (vv. 27, 30-31, 37). No Christian should take comfort in the thought that these verses do not apply to him because he has not returned to the outward

practices of Judaism, either in mind or deed. The true test of whether or not we are living under the new covenant is the extent to which we are experiencing the divine dispensing of the divine life, which is made possible by our organic union with the great High Priest who is over the house of God (v. 21).

In the fourth section the organic union is unveiled first as the fulfillment of the promise of a new covenant and second as an experiential reality in the new covenant. In regard to

the promise, the organic union is the issue of the laws of God being imparted into the mind and inscribed on the heart: "This is the covenant which I will covenant with the house of Israel...I will impart My laws into their mind, and on their hearts I will inscribe them; and I will be God to them, and they will be a people to Me" (8:10; see also 10:15-16).

In Jer. 31:33, the source of this quotation, the word used is *law* (singular), whereas in this verse it is *laws* (plural). This proves that it is one law that spreads to become a number of laws. This one law is the law of life (see *the law of the Spirit of life*—Rom. 8:2). Every life has a law. The higher the life, the higher is its law. The divine life that we receive of God is the highest life; therefore, it has the highest law, the law referred to here. By imparting His divine life into us, God puts this highest law into our spirit, whence it spreads into our inward parts, such as our mind, emotion, and will, and becomes several laws. (Recovery Version, Heb. 8:10, note 1)

For God to put His highest law into our spirit means that

The warning in the fourth section is related to receiving the divine dispensing by coming forward to the Holy of Holies, which is our regenerated human spirit. Christ is both in the heavens and in our regenerated human spirit.

regenerated human spirit. The Holy of Holies in the new covenant is where Christ is, and He is both in the heavens and in our regenerated human spirit. "The very Christ who is in heaven is now also in our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22)...Hence, whenever we turn to our spirit, we enter into the Holy of Holies. There we meet with God, who is on the throne of grace" (Recovery Version, Heb. 10:19, note 1). At the throne of grace in our spirit, it is possible to receive grace through the divine dispensing. Therefore, the call to come forward to the Holy of Holies is a call to receive the divine dispensing of grace at the throne of grace in our spirit. The way into the Holy of Holies, which has been made possible by the priestly mediation of Christ and the perfect sacrifice of Christ, has opened a new and living way to receive the life of God as the grace of God (v. 20).

In addition to the believers' need to come forward to the Holy of Holies, Paul also warns the believers to not shrink back to ruin (v. 39). Shrinking back means to return to elements of the old covenant with its sanctuary made with hands in this world (9:1, 24), with the inability

He puts the Spirit into our spirit. When the Spirit as the law of the Spirit of life is imparted into a believer through faith in the better sacrifice of Christ with His better blood, God's covenanted promise is fulfilled through the formation of an organic union between God and the redeemed believer. This organic union involves a union of life through the union of the divine Spirit and the human spirit, making his regenerated human spirit the reality of the Holy of Holies.

This organic union is also unveiled in the speaking concerning a believer's experiential entrance into Holy of Holies. In the old covenant the Holy of Holies was only an example and a shadow of the heavenly things (8:5), being part of the earthly tabernacle made with hands (9:24), but in the new covenant the Holy of Holies has become an enterable inner chamber of the true tabernacle that the Lord, not man, has pitched (8:2). In this true tabernacle the Holy of Holies in the heavens and the Holy of Holies on earth, the regenerated and mingled human spirit, are joined in an organic union in the divine life and connected through the divine dispensing of this life.

The Holy of Holies today is in heaven, where the Lord Jesus is (9:12, 24). How, then, can we enter the Holy of Holies while we are still on earth? The secret is our spirit, referred to in 4:12. The very Christ who is in heaven is now also in our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22). As the heavenly ladder (Gen. 28:12; John 1:51), He joins our spirit to heaven and brings heaven into our spirit. Hence, whenever we turn to our spirit, we enter into the Holy of Holies. There we meet with God, who is on the throne of grace. (Recovery Version, Heb. 10:19, note 1)

The organic union that is unveiled in the fourth section, however, is not revealed primarily for the purpose of presenting a doctrinal fact but for the purpose of encouraging the believers to enter into the experiences that issue forth from this union, specifically service to God that is expressed through love and good works unto the building up of God's corporate expression (9:14; 10:24-25). It is important to note that the experiential reference to the organic union is contained in the warning related to coming forward to the Holy of Holies. The warning in verses 19 through 39 is a call to enter into the divine dispensing that has been made available to the believers in the new covenant because of its better promises, better sacrifices, and better blood; subsequently, the organic union, the reality of the Holy of Holies, is unveiled as being the dynamic source of the divine dispensing. To enter into the Holy of Holies, to touch the throne of grace, is to activate the operation of the organic union in service to God and in service to His house.

When the blood of Christ purifies our conscience and when our hearts are sprinkled from an evil conscience

(9:14; 10:22), it is possible to come forward to the Holy of Holies and contact the One who is on the throne of grace and to serve God in our spirit out of our organic union with Him (Rom. 1:9). This service in spirit is a subjective service in His house that is for His house; it is not some outward activity that presumes to be for God. The organic union issues in service that is directed toward the growth, building up, and expression of God's house because immediately after speaking of coming forward to the Holy of Holies in Hebrews 10:22, Paul begins to speak of the believers' relationship to one another as the house of God in verses 24 and 25: "Let us *consider one another* so as to *incite one another* to love and good works, *not abandoning our own assembling together*, as the custom with some is, but *exhorting one another*" (emphasis added). It is through the dynamic operation of the organic union that the corporate expression of God is made possible and becomes a reality in time.

Entering into and serving in the corporate expression of God is the implicit context of the fourth section. From the building of the house by Christ in the second section to the mediation of Christ as a High Priest for the house of God in the third section to the effectual sacrifice of Christ in the new covenant for entering into the house of God in the fourth section, there is a progression of revelation that increasingly illuminates the importance of God's desire to gain an enlarged, corporate expression of Himself.

The main thought in vv. 1-18 is that Christ has removed sins, accomplishing what all the Levitical sacrifices were unable to do. Having put away sin once for all, Christ has now imparted Himself into us as the divine life so that through the working of this divine life we may become the corporate reproduction of Himself. (Recovery Version, Heb. 10:10, note 1)

Thus, the fourth section begins with a clear reference to the corporate expression of God when it speaks of Christ as a "Minister of the holy places, even of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man" (8:2). In the age of the old covenant, there was a tabernacle that was pitched by man, but this tabernacle was only an example, a copy, a representation of the true tabernacle (v. 5). The true tabernacle first appeared on the earth with the incarnation of Christ, who lived in humanity and among humanity as the tabernacling God (John 1:14). In resurrection the only begotten Son of God became the Firstborn, as revealed in Hebrews 1:5-6, and the true tabernacle was enlarged by the regeneration of many sons through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Pet. 1:3).

The true tabernacle in Hebrews 8:2 is also the house of God in 10:21, over which and in which Christ is ministering

as the great High Priest. As the High Priest, Christ is bringing the believers into the Holy of Holies so that, in turn, they can serve God and express God through their assembling together (v. 25). The believers' participation in this corporate expression is not a small matter, because the willful sin referenced in verse 26 is the abandoning of the assembling together of the believers.

To sin willfully here means to abandon one's own assembling together with the church. The Hebrew believers had been instructed to abandon Judaism and remain under the new covenant. If they had still returned to Judaism, they would have abandoned their own assembling with the church. This would have constituted a willful sin in the eyes of God, in that it would have been committed after they had received the knowledge of the truth, after they had come to know that God had abandoned Judaism, which was formed according to the old covenant, and had initiated the new and living way of contacting God according to the new covenant. (Recovery Version, v. 26, note 1)

When the contents in God's economy are imparted and received, there is a substantiation of these contents through the divine dispensing. The issue of this dispensing is an organic union, which is the conviction and proof of faith.

This willful sin cannot be propitiated by the blood of bulls and goats because the blood of bulls and goats is no longer effectual to cover sins much less remove them (v. 26). In such a circumstance the only expectation that is reasonable is a fearful expectation of judgment (v. 27). In such an instance, judgment is reasonable because all that does not express God, all that falls short of the glory of God, is worthy of being judged. But when one willfully sins by abandoning the new covenant means for expressing God corporately, after receiving the knowledge of God's desire for a corporate expression, the knowledge of God's building of His house as His corporate expression, and the knowledge of God's provision for our entrance into His corporate expression, the Lord has a strong basis for meting out justice and judging His people (v. 30). To whom much is given, much is required (Luke 12:48), and it is reasonable to assume that the failure to meet His requirements will result in His judgment.

In contrast to His judgment, however, there is His great reward for those who do not cast away their boldness to participate in God's corporate expression (Heb. 10:35).

Such boldness enables the believers to endure a great conflict of sufferings, to partake with those who are made a spectacle both in reproaches and in afflictions, and even to accept with joy the plundering of possessions (vv. 32-34). The great reward, which will be given for not shrinking back to ruin and for having faith to the gaining of the soul, involves enjoying Christ and reigning with Christ in the coming millennial kingdom, the coming Sabbath rest (v. 39; 4:9). This reward will not be based on eternal salvation which was received through faith but on the works that issued forth from the organic union in our spirit (10:24), and it will be determined at the judgment seat of Christ when He comes as the Coming One (v. 37).

Economy, Dispensing, Organic Union, and Corporate Expression in 11:1—12:29

Whether or not we lose our soul in this age in order to gain it in the next is a matter related to faith, and faith is related to God's economy, the divine dispensing, the organic union, and the corporate expression of God. Therefore, in the fifth section, Paul speaks of faith as the unique way for God's seekers to receive His promised reward by coming forward to Him (11:6). Paul's speaking on faith in the fifth section is not a departure from his focus on the superiority of Christ in God's economy; it is not a softening of his warnings to receive the contents of God's economy through the divine dispensing; it is not a diminishment of his emphasis on the organic union; and it is not a glossing over of his call to participate in God's corporate expression. Rather, Paul's word on faith subsumes all of these four great matters;¹⁷ it is a peroration, a reiteration of these four great matters with even greater emphasis and earnestness: When the contents of the faith in God's economy are imparted as the word of God and received through the hearing of faith, there is a substantiation of these contents through the divine dispensing. The issue of this dispensing is an organic union, which is the conviction and proof of faith, and upon this organic union, a foundation of faith for the building up of God's corporate expression is laid by Him. With such a promise and having such faith, we can run with endurance the race which is set before us (12:1).

Running the race is in contrast to shrinking back to ruin, and faith is essential in this race. At the end of the fourth section, Paul, in faith, declares, "We are not of those who shrink back to ruin but of them who have faith to the gaining of the soul" (10:39). In God's economy the gaining of our soul is equal to the salvation of our soul, which is the end of our faith (1 Pet. 1:9). If the proving of our faith, reflected in the condition of our soul, elicits praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus

Christ (v. 7), we will gain the enjoyment of our soul in the coming kingdom, entering into the joy of our Master (Matt. 25:21, 23). Having faith for the gaining of the soul, therefore, is a critical factor in the Lord's determination of our reward or our punishment at His judgment seat (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10).

For some there will be a great reward at the judgment seat of Christ because the superior contents of God's economy in the Epistle to the Hebrews have been dispensed into their being, and the growth of the organic union produced by this dispensing has flourished through their participation in and identification with the corporate expression of God in this age. This reward will go to those who have come forward to the Holy of Holies with a true heart in the full assurance of faith and who are of those who have faith (Heb. 10:22, 39).¹⁸ For others, there will only be ruin, disapproval, and a punishment that is near a curse (6:8). The punishment meted out by the Lord will be a form of discipline in the coming age, a just recompense for not living in the position of sons and for not receiving perfecting discipline in this age from the Father of spirits, which brings His sons into life for the gaining of their soul (2:2; 12:9).

Paul ends his speaking in the fourth section with a reference to having faith "to the gaining of the soul" in 10:39, and he begins the fifth section by defining faith and then by presenting a

brief history of faith—from God's creation, through all the generations of God's chosen people, to the New Testament believers (v. 40)—to prove that faith is the unique pathway by which God's seekers receive His promise and take His way. (Recovery Version, 11:3, note 1)

Following this history, there is a final warning and an encouragement to look away unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith in order to run the race that can bring us into God's corporate expression, first to Mount Zion, as overcomers for a reward,¹⁹ and then to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, as believers who have a righteous stand as the church of the firstborn to receive the promised portion that is common to all (12:1, 22-23). Thus, faith and its role in fulfillment of the economy of God are the intrinsic context of this section.

In perhaps one of the most elusive passages in the Bible because it is not a doctrinal statement but a divine and mystical description, Paul begins to speak of faith by providing a spiritual definition of faith: "Now faith is the substantiation of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (11:1). The elusive nature of this definition is compounded by the fact that the terms *substantiation* and *conviction* seemingly also call out for the need of definition. The key to understanding these two terms, however,

is contained in the even more nebulous word *things* which is used in the phrases *the substantiation of things* and *the conviction of things*. Faith is clearly related to things, and it is important to understand the nature of these things in order to understand faith. In the context of Hebrews there is an ongoing contrast between earthly and heavenly things and between the inferior things of Judaism as a religion and superior things of Christ in His person and work. Given these contrasts, it is reasonable to assume that the things that faith substantiates and proves are not earthly and material things but rather the divine and heavenly content of God's economy as revealed throughout Hebrews.²⁰ Paul goes to great length in this Epistle to show the superiority of the divine and heavenly things in God's economy, including the person of Christ as God, as man, as an Apostle, and as a High Priest, and the work of Christ in incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension, especially in His ongoing heavenly ministry of mediation and intercession. These are the things that faith substantiates and proves.

If the things that faith substantiates and proves are the things of God's economy, the first of the four great matters in the Bible, it is reasonable to assume that the substantiation and proving of faith are also intrinsically related to the other great matters in the Bible, particularly the divine dispensing and the organic union. "The word *substantiate* is *substance* in verb form; to substantiate is to give substance to the reality of the substance not seen. This is the action of faith. Therefore, it says here that faith is the substantiation of things hoped for" (Recovery Version, 11:1, note 2). Substantiation is a process, an action, that imparts the reality of the unseen but true contents of God's economy. For example, when the eternal efficacy of Christ's redemptive blood is imparted to sinners through faith, the propitious nature of His blood is applied to our sins and sprinkles our conscience so that we can and do truly come forward to God, whereas before the substantiation of His blood through faith, there was only a foreboding sense in us of darkness, gloom, and whirlwind (12:18). As an imparting process, substantiation is the receiving of the things in God's economy through the divine dispensing. Faith, according to Paul's definition, is the divine dispensing in action.

The Greek word for *conviction* can also be translated as "evidence" or "proof," so faith is the evidence and proof of things not seen. In the divine and mystical realm of faith, the convicting action of faith, the proving of the things of God, comes out of the organic union that is initiated through the substantiation of the things of God's economy in our believing response to His word. The organic union, which is produced by faith, is the proof of faith. Through faith we have been joined to the Lord as one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17), and our spirit is now a spirit of faith (2 Cor. 4:13). It is a spirit of faith because we have

been joined to the faithful One who can never deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:13). We, who have been joined to the Lord and sealed by the Spirit through faith in response to hearing the word of the truth of the gospel (Eph. 1:13), may think, at some point in time after our regeneration, that we no longer believe in the Lord, either because of confusion in the mind or failures in the flesh. But even if we are outwardly faithless, the Lord within, by virtue of the organic union, cannot deny Himself. The inability of the Lord to deny Himself continually testifies to us of His reality within us. Faith is the proving of the things that are not seen by virtue of our organic identification with these things in our organic union with Christ.

By faith an environment for building the corporate expression of God among humanity on earth has been prepared, and the humanity needed for building the house of God is being gathered and constituted. By faith the universe was framed by the word of God, creating an environment for the corporate expression of God (Heb. 11:3). The heavens were stretched forth, the foundation of the earth was laid, and the spirit of man was formed within

By faith an environment for building the corporate expression of God among humanity on earth has been prepared, and the humanity needed for building the house of God is being gathered and constituted.

him so that God could have a dwelling place on earth in humanity (Zech. 12:1). The history of the gathering of the material for this building, which began in the Old Testament age, is a history of faith (Heb. 11:4-39). In response to God's word and by faith in His promise, a corporate cloud of witnesses has gathered over time, including Noah, who was divinely instructed (v. 7); Abraham, who was called and heard the promise of seed (vv. 8, 17-18); Sarah, who considered the promises of Him who was faithful (v. 11); Isaac and Jacob, who blessed their sons according to the things they had heard (vv. 20-21); Joseph, who mentioned the things he had heard concerning the exodus (v. 22); and Moses, who instituted the Passover according to the word of God (v. 28). None of these obtained the promise (vv. 9, 13, 17, 39), which was a promise of a city whose Architect and Builder is God (vv. 10, 16), a city which is the enlarged, corporate expression of God. This corporate cloud is waiting for perfection in order to be part of the consummate testimony of God's enlarged expression. Their perfection, however, is contingent upon the faithful running of the New Testament believers who have obtained the reality of the promise

through faith (vv. 39-40), and who are positioned to receive the better things that God has prepared, the things of His economy, which, when received through the divine dispensing and nurtured on the foundation of our organic union with Him, will produce the city that He desires.

Their perfection is contingent upon the willingness of some of the New Testament believers to run the race with endurance (12:1). And since the encumbrances of sin so easily entangle, there is a need for a final warning to receive the divine dispensing from the Author and Perfecter of faith (v. 2), a dispensing that often is accompanied with discipline from the Father of spirits (v. 9). As a father disciplines his son for his perfection out of love, so the Father disciplines His sons for their perfection out of love (vv. 6-8). The goal of His discipline is for His sons to partake of His holiness in the pursuit of peace and sanctification, forsaking the defilement that can spring up from the inner being of bitter and profane persons (vv. 10, 14-16). Being in subjection to the faithful operation of the divine dispensing brings these runners to Mount Zion as the corporate expression of God in the millennial kingdom and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem as the corporate expression of God in eternity (v. 22). In contrast, refusing Him who is speaking is to unwisely reject the warning of the One who shakes the earth to remove all that can be shaken so that His corporate expression as an unshakable kingdom can be established and manifested (vv. 25-28).

Conclusion

In the fifth section faith and hope are emphasized because the contents of the economy of God, the unseen things that are substantiated by the divine dispensing and proven by the organic union, are the things that will remain when the One who warns and the One who shakes is finished with His fiery consumption (vv. 25-27, 29). Faith and hope will abide because the economy of God is eternal, the divine dispensing is continuous, the organic union in life is indestructible, and the corporate expression is on eternal display. There is, however, a final abiding item according to 1 Corinthians 13:13 which is love,²¹ and in Hebrews 13 Paul begins to conclude the Epistle to the Hebrews with simple words: "Let brotherly love continue" (v. 1). The entire Epistle is a demonstration of faith, hope, and love; there are faith and hope, which subsume the four great matters in the Bible: the economy of God, the divine dispensing, the organic union, and the corporate expression of God; and there is a deep sense of divine love that pervades throughout. There is the love which is shown toward His name in the ministering to the saints (6:10); there is the love in the consideration of the saints that, in turn, incites the saints to love and participate in the good works of God's

economy (10:24); there is the love that motivates Paul to include righteous warnings, knowing that there will be no escape from an accounting with the Firstborn, who loves righteousness, when He comes again into the inhabited world (1:6); there is love in the exhortations to one another to heed the warnings given in love (3:13; 10:25); and there is the love of the disciplining Father whose only desire is that His many sons would be led into glory in this age so that He can reward their diligent seeking and find His delight in them in the coming age. LFC

Notes

¹This, admittedly, is an abbreviated summary of the Epistle, but these four matters are quite explicit throughout the Epistle to the Ephesians. Chapter 1 begins by unveiling the divine economy of the Triune God to dispense His divine life into humanity through the Father's selection and predestination, the Son's redemption, and the Spirit's sealing and pledging (vv. 3-14). This dispensing begins in a regenerated human spirit that is joined organically to the Triune God, spreads into the heart (3:17), and ultimately redeems the body (1:14). Each chapter of this Epistle, consequently, speaks of the human spirit (1:17; 2:22; 3:5; 4:23; 5:18; 6:18), the locus of the organic union, and each chapter contains references to the corporate expression of God that comes out of this organic union (1:22-23; 2:15-16, 22; 3:10, 21; 4:4, 12-13, 15-16; 5:25-27; 6:11-13).

²The division of the Epistle to the Hebrews into sections in this article is drawn from Witness Lee's outline in the Recovery Version of the Bible.

³Hebrews was written to genuine believers of Hebrew descent and unless this point is acknowledged, it is nearly impossible to see the applicability of these four great matters in this Epistle. Most commentators readily acknowledge that Hebrews was written to genuine believers who had a background in Judaism and, as such, also applies to all believers. William R. Newell, for example, in discussing the great salvation in 2:3, declares, "Hebrews, we repeat, is addressed to professing Christian believers" (40); that is, to "Hebrew believers" (34, 474). When other commentators, who agree with Newell on this basic point, however, come to some of the passages that are considered quite troublesome to genuine Christians, such as 6:4-6 and 10:26-29, they argue that these exhortations are directed toward unbelievers. This change often results from the need to uphold one side of a deeply entrenched theological position. The tendency to change the focus back and forth from believers to unbelievers in this Epistle is addressed in some detail in this issue of *Affirmation & Critique* in the article titled "The Warnings in the Book of Hebrews," pages 74-90.

⁴In contrast to much of the scholarship that is reluctant or refuses to ascribe authorship of this Epistle to the apostle Paul, I am willing to accept it without any sense of consternation. The lack of a claim of authorship is fully in keeping with Paul's emphasis that this Epistle comes through the speaking of God in the Son. Any claim of authorship, therefore, would have

undermined the attention that Paul seeks to focus on Christ, the Son. In reviewing the capacity of all the known New Testament writers, Paul alone stands out as having the necessary understanding of the contents of the old covenant, being once a Pharisee, even a son of Pharisees (Acts 23:6), or as having the constitution of spiritual experiences under the new covenant. "The mentioning of Timothy in such an intimate way" in 13:23 is also "a strong proof that this book was written by the apostle Paul" (Recovery Version, Heb. 13:23, note 1).

⁵The Son, being consubstantial with the Father and Spirit in eternity, is God.

⁶There is considerable variation in commentaries on Hebrews as to the meaning of the term *salvation*. In commentaries that view *salvation* as being synonymous with a believer's initial justification based on faith, the call to not neglect this great salvation is often seen as a warning to unbelievers. This is the focus of R. C. H. Lenski's *The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James*:

But here is "so great salvation," this wondrous gospel content with only the obedience of receptive faith needed to make it our own. The expression is not: "on rejecting so great salvation" it is: "on neglecting," *sich nicht bekümmern*, just letting it lie, remaining indifferent to salvation, the one supreme thing that every sinner needs. (66)

Lenski's narrow understanding of salvation, however, places his explication of 2:3 in direct conflict with his view that the Epistle was written "exclusively to Jewish Christians" as a warning against apostasy from the faith (14), forcing him, at least in this instance, to abandon his position that the Epistle was written to believers. But it is much easier for him to abandon this position than it is to acknowledge that the warning applies to believers, because that acknowledgment would open the door to the possibility that there is a more comprehensive understanding of salvation that needs to be considered, a possibility that he seems not prepared to consider, even though elsewhere the Scriptures speak of salvation involving much more than just reconciliation and justification (Rom. 5:10).

Even when commentators acknowledge that *salvation* pertains to the ongoing experience of a believer, as William R. Newell does in *Hebrews: Verse-by-Verse*, there often is little or no link between *salvation* and the contents of the economy of God that Paul speaks of prior to his use of the term in 1:14 and 2:3. The word *therefore* at the beginning of verse 1, however, clearly links the superior aspects of Christ's person and work with the salvation that the believers will inherit and should not neglect. Failing to see this link, Newell is forced to explicate the meaning of neglecting salvation with religious, but still natural, concepts of spirituality. He states,

"Neglect," among many phases, would include:
1. Ceasing to give attention and earnestness to the things of God and of salvation that once we gave; a growing distaste for Bible reading; willingness to be absent from the assemblies of the saints of God (Heb. 10:25).

2. Absorption in earthly, selfish interests. 3. Increasing deadness of heart toward Christ, His sacrifice, and to the love of God, Who gave Him. 4. Occupation with the affairs and news of this world, rather than of the world to come, and our coming Lord. 5. Loss of God-consciousness. 6. Putting away of the thought of a “judgment to come.” 7. Finally, living like the “beasts that perish,” so far as eternity is concerned. (40)

All the items above certainly speak of a heart that is cold toward God, but Newell’s focus upon them implies that a believer’s attendance to these matters is equivalent to participating in the salvation that God intended in His economy. It is possible, however, to read the Bible, pursue spiritual works, acknowledge God, and live in a proper fear of judgment, but not receive any of the divine content in God’s economy through the divine dispensing. The failure to see the connection between the content of God’s economy and the experience of this content as the salvation that should not be neglected also produces overspiritualized definitions that can minimize the severity of the warnings in Hebrews by absolving believers of their responsibility to heed them. In *The Christology of the Epistle to the*

deliverance in the first resurrection. That is ‘the prize of our calling,’ which Paul bent all his energies to obtain” (33). In *If They Shall Fall Away*, R. E. Neighbour states, “The great salvation of verse 3, is the salvation which lies in the future” (28). In *The Epistle to Hebrews: A Practical Treatise for Plain and Serious Readers*, G. H. Lang points to the future when he correctly associates an aspect of salvation with the kingdom reward.

Thus the point in our passage is that the future salvation in view is something as wholly unexampled...It is not that “common salvation” in which all the saved must share, or they would not be saved in any sense, but it is that highest height and splendour of glory to which the God of all grace is in this age calling us in Christ, even “unto His eternal glory” (1 Pet. 5:10); yea, “into *His own* kingdom and glory” (1 Thess. 2:12). (47-48)

At its most basic level, the extent of our salvation through the gaining of our soul will be manifested in the future (Heb. 10:39), and it will have a great bearing on our position in the millennial kingdom. But even if it is accurate to speak of salvation as a future event, it is the present possibility of neglecting this salvation that is central to the warning in the first section of Hebrews. If it is possible to neglect God’s salvation in this age, then salvation involves more than a future event because only a present possibility can be neglected. And if salvation is not a present experience, it would be unrighteous for God to impose a recompense upon His sons for neglecting something that will occur only in the future. But since His recompense is always just because He is just, salvation must surely be an experience for believers in this age.

⁸Andrew Murray makes an interesting observation about our participation in the divine dispensing associated with the “so great a salvation.” He asks, “Wherein does the greatness of this salvation consist?” and then answers, “In this that it comes to us from and through THE TRIUNE GOD; the Holy Trinity is revealed as combining to work out this salvation for us” (69). The divine dispensing is a dispensing that comes out of the Triune God and through the operation of the Triune God, that is, through the word spoken by the Lord, the witnessing of the Father, and the distributions of the Spirit. In God’s economy the Divine Trinity is always the source, the means, and the content of the divine dispensing. Murray affirms this reality in his short commentary on verses 3 and 4 of chapter 2.

⁹Constitution involves perfection in relation to humanity so that humanity can be qualified to participate in God’s economy. This can be seen with regard to Moses, whose humanity needed to be perfected before he could be sent to deliver the children of Israel from Egypt into the good land, and with regard to Christ, who was perfected in His humanity in order to redeem and deliver sinful humanity from the authority of darkness to the kingdom of the Son. In relation to His divinity Christ had no need for constitution, but in relation to His humanity, we are

The divine dispensing is a dispensing that comes out of the Triune God and through the operation of the Triune God, that is, through the word spoken by the Lord, the witnessing of the Father, and the distributions of the Spirit.

Hebrews, for example, Harris Lachlan MacNeill states,

By the term “salvation,” the writer denotes all the benefits received under the inspiration or by the help of Jesus, which benefits are necessary to the realization of the new covenant relation, viz., entrance into and full enjoyment of the presence of God. (375)

This sounds quite good, but it removes the responsibility for pursuing God’s great salvation from the believer and places it upon Jesus, without whose inspiration and help there would be neglect on the part of the believer. This spiritualized understanding of salvation actually promotes a neglect that will result in a recompense that is just because it would reflect God’s righteous evaluation of a believer’s irresponsibility in regard to experiencing His economical operation by failing to receive what He has already accomplished and made available.

⁷When commentators rightly understand salvation as referring to more than a believer’s initial justification by faith, it is often relegated to the future when the believers are resurrected at the time of the Lord’s return. In *Govett on Hebrews*, Robert Govett states, “‘Salvation’ in this Epistle is spoken of the full

clearly told that He was made perfect through sufferings (2:10). Having been perfected, He has been fully qualified to be the source of God's eternal salvation in His economy (5:9). Perfection, as an aspect of human constitution, is explained well in the footnote to verse 2:10 in the Recovery Version of the Bible.

To make Jesus perfect was to make Him perfect in terms of qualification. It does not imply that there was any imperfection of virtue or attribute in Jesus, but only that the completing of His experience of human sufferings was needed to make Him fit to become the Author, the Leader, of His followers' salvation.

As the self-existing and ever-existing God, the Lord Jesus is complete from eternity to eternity. But He needed to be perfected through the processes of incarnation, the partaking of human nature, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, that He might be qualified to be God's Christ and our Savior. (Note 5)

¹⁰The second section in Hebrews contains thirty-two verses. The first six verses in this section are devoted to the truth of Christ's person and work as an Apostle in the economy of God, whereas the remaining twenty-six verses are devoted to Paul's warning to not come short of the building up of God's house as His promised rest. The length of the warning in the second section is striking in comparison to the warning in the first section, which occupies only four out of twenty-nine verses. The extensive emphasis on the warning in this section, I think, reflects the importance of the truth revealed in the first six verses. It is God's intention to gain not only a dwelling place to manifest His glory in eternity; He also desires to gain a dwelling place in this age. Thus, a lengthy warning is warranted.

¹¹The divine dispensing produces faith and imparts the Spirit. Faith, which is a gift of God, is received by hearing the word of Christ, and the Spirit, who is the consummated reality of the Triune God, is received through the hearing of faith (Eph. 2:8; Rom. 10:17; Gal. 3:2).

¹²Most commentators, taking note of the unmistakable references to the journey of the children of Israel from Egypt to Canaan in chapters 3 and 4, accurately associate *rest* with the type of the good land. However, because there is considerable variation in the interpretation of this type, there is considerable variation in the understanding of the significance of the term *rest*. Those who view the good land merely as one of God's promised blessings for His chosen people tend to speak of *rest* as a spiritual condition in this age. In *The Letter to the Hebrews*, William Barclay illustrates this tendency, regarding rest as one of many blessings available to those who entered into the good land. He says,

To wanderers in the desert the Promised Land was the place of rest, and it was often called *the rest* (cp. *Deuteronomy* 12:9). The point is that the disobedience and the distrust of Israel debarred them from the blessings of God that they might have enjoyed. (33)

When rest is viewed only from the standpoint of being a blessing, commentators can associate rest with a multiplicity of spiritual conditions, including having fellowship with God, entering into the presence of God, and being at peace with God. In *The Gospel in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, R. V. G. Tasker equates rest with fellowship, saying, "To have fellowship with God means to 'enter into His rest'" (18). In *Encounter with God in Hebrews*, Joy Tetley conveys a similar thought, saying, "We should therefore make full use of the privilege opened up to us by our great high priest, that of continually and boldly drawing near to the presence of God. Here, and whenever we choose, we can enter into God's 'rest'" (65). In *Hebrews: Verse-by-Verse*, William R. Newell associates rest with peace: "So many professing Christians today, though a promise is left them of entering into His rest, fail of it:—of that spiritual 'rest' which belongs to all who hear and believe that Christ has borne their sin; that He made peace by the blood of His Cross" (115).

Other commentators, who regard the good land as a type of heaven, equate rest with the believers' enjoyment of the blessings of God in heaven. For example, R. C. H. Lenski says, "The rest from which the Jews of the Exodus were excluded, into which we are entering, is God's rest,...the timeless, heavenly state that has been established and intended for men in their glorious union with God" (132). As to the extent and type of blessings purportedly awaiting the believers, Lenski can only say, "It is useless to speculate, for who can make plain what heaven is like?" (138). This understanding of rest in relation to the good land is clearly influenced more by tradition than truth. The rest that Paul speaks of is a present reality, a rest which "we who have believed enter into" (Heb. 4:3). We are exhorted to be diligent to enter into this rest today when we hear His voice; we are not exhorted to be diligent to wait to enter into this rest following our passage from this life. If heaven is the certain destination of a believer following his death, then the scriptural call to be diligent to enter into this rest is superfluous; this fact alone refutes the teaching that resting in the good land is equivalent to going to heaven.

Although the notion that the good land is a type of heaven is quite pervasive, there are many commentators who reject this understanding. In *The Holiest of All*, Andrew Murray notably says,

Some think that the rest of Canaan is the type of heaven. This cannot be, because the great mark of the Canaan life was that the land had to be conquered and that God gave such glorious victory over enemies. The rest of Canaan was for victory and through victory. And so it is in the life of faith, when a soul learns to trust God for victory over sin, and yields itself entirely, as to its circumstances and duties, to live just where and how He wills, that it enters the rest. (144)

In *If They Shall Fall Away*, R. E. Neighbour points out the fallacy of assuming that the good land represents heaven because there is a component of fear associated with falling short of God's promised rest:

The Spirit did not tell saints to fear lest they fall short of Heaven, for the simple reason that eternal life, everlasting life, is promised unconditionally to all who believe on Christ. What then meaneth this, "Fear lest?" Heaven is not in the picture at all, neither is eternal life. (55)

In *Govett on Hebrews*, Robert Govett reiterates Neighbour's point that the presence of a godly fear in a believer is a proof that rest should not be understood to be heaven. He also correctly associates the coming millennial kingdom as being one aspect of the Sabbath rest.

"Let us *fear*." How should there be room for fear, if we are, as believers, certain of that rest? God is not to be mocked. We believers have to do with a real peril, as Israel's example proves. Here is a just admonition against the teaching of some, who, seeing only eternal life, and the certainty of it to God's elect, assert that no Christian ought to fear. Now, in regard of eternal life as the *gift* of God, that is true. But when the question relates to the *prize* of the millennial glory, and the *reward* to be rendered to the believer's work, fear ought to come in. (94)

Neighbour's and Govett's view that the Sabbath rest is solely a future event associated with the coming of the kingdom is shared by many respected commentators. In *The Epistle to Hebrews*, G. H Lang states, "It is vital to recognize that this rest is future to our present age" (76), and Robert Govett says, "There shall be a life and a reign with Christ, during the Sabbath-rest of a thousand years" (100). The only question for Govett is

Who shall rest with Him? For multitudes of believers shall be saved eternally in the new heaven and earth, who will fail of *reward* in the transition-period of the thousand years. For they do not work and rest with God, nor can God feel complacency in them. (103)

Although the coming kingdom reward in the future involves an aspect of rest, it is wrong to exclusively regard the Sabbath rest as an event in the future because it is possible to enter into this rest today by hearing the voice of the Lord.

Because Neighbour considers the promised rest in the coming millennial kingdom to be an event that will occur in the future, he allows the time element in his understanding of rest to influence his understanding of salvation, which he also regards as a future event. Thus, for him both *salvation* and *rest* are synonymous terms for the same future event.

The "salvation" of Hebrews 2:3, to which we must give more earnest heed, and which we are warned not to neglect, is the same thing as the "rest" in chapters 3 and 4. That "salvation" is to be brought to saints, when Christ appears the second time (Heb. 9:28), and so also is the "rest that remaineth" to be brought when He comes again. (52)

While it is correct to include the coming millennial kingdom as

part of the promised Sabbath rest, it is the experience of salvation in this present age that qualifies the faithful believers to participate in this aspect of God's rest. By not neglecting the salvation that is available to the believers in God's economy, some will gain entrance into God's rest through their diligent pursuit of the divine dispensing of the divine life in this age and in the next.

The terms *salvation* and *rest*, while not being synonymous, actually encapsulate the speaking related to the economy of God, the divine dispensing, the organic union, and the corporate expression of God in the Epistle to the Hebrews. *Salvation* involves the gaining of our soul through the divine dispensing according to the economy of God, which produces a mature corporate expression that is organically one with the Triune God. *Rest* involves the enjoyment of our soul as a righteous reward in the coming kingdom, a reward that is based on the degree to which the soul has been gained through the experience of the divine dispensing and its participation in God's corporate expression in this age.

¹³It is quite revealing to realize that these six items—repentance from dead works, faith in God, baptism, the laying on of hands, the coming resurrection of the believers, and the eternal judgment of an unbeliever—constitute, in most instances, the full range of teaching in today's Christianity, including fundamental, evangelical, and charismatic expressions. Since only the rudiments, therefore, are being taught, Paul's warning is applicable to most Christians, and in recognition that Paul's warning is an accurate reflection of the state of Christianity, we should be more willing to acknowledge that there is yet more light and truth to break forth from His Word in our experience.

¹⁴In his comments on Hebrews 6:1, Robert Govett illustrates the tendency of many to regard maturity merely as a matter of knowledge, understanding, and interpretation of doctrinal matters of truth. He says,

"Let us go on to perfection," then, is a word which embraces a call (1) both to *teachers*, to go into more profound truths; and (2) to the *taught*, to accept and carry them out. Paul has complained,—not that he had to teach them over again these elements of Christian truth; but that they had not known, or not believed, the first principles concerning the interpretation of God's Word, which if they had used, they would have been led on to further views of the Christ and His glories. (146)

¹⁵There is considerable controversy over the interpretation of verses 4 through 6, which say,

For it is impossible for those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and yet have fallen away, to renew themselves again unto repentance, crucifying again for themselves the Son of God and putting Him to open shame.

Since these verses appear in the warning contained in the third

section and seemingly point to a believer's absolute inability to return to a condition of being accepted by God in the aftermath of falling away from the faith, they are a source of great consternation to many believers. In part, this is because there are many interpretations of what it means to fall away. To those who are overly subjective and sensitive, *fallen away* can be interpreted to refer to every small imperfection in their being and conduct. To those who, despite believing into the Lord, do not have the full assurance of the faith (10:22), *fallen away* can be interpreted to refer to not being fully persuaded in regard to the items of the faith related to the One in whom they have believed (2 Tim. 1:12). Given the fact that the consequences spoken of in these verses are associated in the minds of many believers with both occasional sins and long-standing doubts about the items of the faith, they provoke serious considerations about the meaning of being impossible to renew.

These considerations are also especially difficult for those who believe in the eternal efficacy of Christ's redemption in relation to one's salvation. The commentators who approach these verses from the perspective that once a person is saved, he is eternally saved, often are forced to argue that this condition is the result of a complete and utter rejection of the faith. Robert Govett says,

After receiving all the main truths of Christ, and the Holy Spirit's indwelling in grace and power, and then renouncing them all, there is no further sacrifice for sin, no further pardon, no greater system, coming with superior evidence to work upon the soul of the sinner. The refusal of Christ and of the Spirit of God are absolute perdition. *Man cannot* renew such: *God will* not! (159)

In the above quotation Govett holds out the possibility of a believer suffering "absolute perdition," and in the following quotation, Lenski speaks of a believer being "doomed."

His statement constitutes a warning: those once converted may fall so that it becomes "impossible to renew them to repentance." The readers are to apply that fact to themselves. One may go so far that even God's grace can no longer reach him; the judgment must then take him in hand and send him to his doom (10:26-31). What is said is not written in order that we may judge others as to their fall and pronounce it irreparable, but so that each of us may check himself lest he fall and be doomed. (180)

Both of these statements imply that eternal perdition in the lake of fire are not beyond the realm of possibility for a fallen believer. Both statements, however, are inaccurate because they fail to understand the larger context of the verses in relation to the inseparable organic union that the believers enjoy with the Lord. They also ignore the clear word in this section that those who return to the rudiments of the faith in an effort to renew themselves, are only near a curse (v. 8), rather than being absolutely cursed and abandoned by God.

In their support of the view that eternal perdition is still possible despite the Lord's salvation being eternal, these same

commentators often associate verses 4 through 6 with the unpardonable sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit

In a study of what is said here and in 10:26-31 regarding the sin against the Holy Ghost we should begin with the passages found in the Gospels, namely Matt. 12:31, 32; Mark 3:28, 29; Luke 12:10, where Jesus warns the blasphemous Pharisees against committing this sin...Both those who were never converted and those who have been converted may fall into a state in which they make repentance impossible. (Lenski 180)

These verses pose little difficulty for those who do not hold to the truth of the eternal security of one's salvation. In fact, they are quoted quite enthusiastically in support of their view that one's salvation is not eternally secure but conditional, based on the conduct of a believer following his initial belief in the Lord.

¹⁶The extended emphasis in Hebrews 12:5-11 on the discipline of fathers and sons and the discipline of the Father of spirits and His sons in the divine life in the fifth warning is not accidental or misplaced. Rather, it extends the thought in the fourth warning of the consequences of shrinking back to ruin by not running the race. Rather than shrinking back, we should run forward in God's economy, inciting one another to love and good works, exhorting one another, and pursuing peace with all men and sanctification (10:24-25; 12:14).

¹⁷In a footnote to 1 Timothy 1:1, Witness Lee writes concisely concerning the relationship between faith and these four great matters.

The faith equals the contents of the economy, the household administration, the dispensation, of God. The truth is the contents, the reality, of the faith according to God's economy. Healthy teaching, healthy words, and healthy speech are the ministry of the truth, ministering to people the reality of the divine truths. Eternal life is the means and power to carry out the divine realities of the faith. Godliness is a living that expresses the divine reality, an expression of God in all His riches. Faith (subjective) is the response to the truth of the faith (objective); such faith receives and participates in the divine realities. The conscience is a test and a check to preserve us in the faith. (Note 1)

The objective faith, as the contents of God's economy, becomes subjective faith when the true contents of God's economy are dispensed through healthy teaching, healthy words and healthy speech. Eternal life, which is the means and power to carry out the divine realities of the faith, is sourced in the organic union that is the issue of the divine dispensing, and the expression of these realities is godliness, the corporate expression of God (3:16).

¹⁸*Of those* (v. 39) points to a relationship between receiving the reward and participation in God's corporate expression. The reward at the judgment seat will be a corporate reward with a corporate enjoyment because, as Paul indicates, apart from us the overcomers in the Old Testament would not be made perfect (11:40). Verse 40 indicates that the pursuit of the saints in

the New Testament has an impact on the perfection of the saints in the Old Testament. Witness Lee writes,

Both the participation in the kingdom for one thousand years (Rev. 20:4, 6) and the sharing in the New Jerusalem for eternity (Rev. 21:2-3; 22:1-5) are corporate matters. The kingdom feast will be for the overcomers of both the Old and New Testaments (Matt. 8:11). The blessed New Jerusalem will be composed of both the Old Testament saints and the New Testament believers (Rev. 21:12-14). Hence, apart from the New Testament believers, the Old Testament believers cannot obtain what God promised. To obtain and enjoy the good things of God's promise, they need the New Testament believers to perfect them. Now they are waiting for us to go on that they may be made perfect. (Recovery Version, Heb. 11:40, note 3)

If we are "of them," the overcomers, by being in God's corporate expression in this age, a corporate expression of our reward awaits us. Consequently, the pursuit of an overcomer is also a corporate pursuit which is evidenced as a longing for others to be perfected so that we can be perfected and a recognition that our perfection in the corporate expression of God involves many functions that can only be manifested through the assembling of ourselves together. Such a corporate pursuit involves "exhorting one another; and so much the more as you see the day drawing near" (10:25).

¹⁹Mount Zion in Revelation 14:1 is associated with the rapture of the one hundred forty-four thousand overcomers: "I saw, and behold, the Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him a hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads." Consequently, Mount Zion in Hebrews 12:22 is associated with the kingdom reward that is given to overcomers, and the progression from Mount Zion to the heavenly Jerusalem accurately reflects the progression in God's economy from the age of the millennial kingdom to the age of the new heaven and new earth for eternity with the New Jerusalem as the central point of focus, being the city of the living God, whose content is God, whose living is the dispensing God on the throne, and whose expression is the ultimate consummation of the organic union between the processed Triune God and called, justified, and glorified humanity.

²⁰There is no basis for regarding the things in Hebrews 11:1 as being common things, especially earthly and material things, which many long for as "blessings" from God. This should be evident from the fact that the plundering of our physical possessions by others for the sake of gaining the better spiritual possession is considered to be an occasion for joy (10:34) and that having a way of life without the love of money is considered to be a virtue for the church life (13:5). It is regrettable that faith has become so intertwined with notions of material prosperity in the minds of many Christians today that it has been reduced to a speech act for the claiming of physical and monetary blessings from the Lord. It somehow escapes the

mind of the promoters of these teachings that faith involves things hoped for and things not seen. Material things that can be seen are not related to faith and hope, because things that can be seen are not really in the realm of the divine hope (Rom. 8:24); hope for such things is really lust.

²¹"Now there abide faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13). While many Christians cherish this verse, not many, I think, realize the depths of this verse as it relates to the four great matters in the Bible. Witness Lee, while not intentionally focusing on this relationship, nevertheless, highlights it in his footnote to this verse.

Faith receives the divine things (John 1:12) and substantiates the spiritual and unseen things (Heb. 11:1). Hope reaps and partakes of the things substantiated by faith (Rom. 8:24-25). Love enjoys the things received and substantiated by faith and partaken of by hope, for nourishing ourselves, building up others (8:1), and expressing God. (Recovery Version, note 1)

Faith receives the divine things of God's economy and substantiates them through the divine dispensing. Hope reaps and partakes of these divine things through the organic union, and love nourishes and builds up the expression of God.

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