

Hebrews: Striving to Enter (Hebrews 4:11–16).

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (11/20/2016)

Introduction

1. “Striving” must not be construed as the effort of flesh to win rest in God’s Canaan land.
 - a. God has provided the rest—His rest, a Sabbath rest in which we cease from our works as He did from His (vv. 9, 10).
 - b. Indeed, the striving has more to do with resisting the flesh, the failure of which cost the generation that God delivered from Egypt.
2. It is believing God that earns one entrance to rest (v. 3).
3. God has provided for us two things to enable us to “strive”: The living Word and a great High Priest.

I. What *Striving* Means

1. The Greek word translated “strive” or “labor” (KJV) is used 11 times in the Greek NT.
 - a. It is variously rendered “eager,” “do your best,” “strive,” “make every effort” and “be diligent.”
 - b. The term encourages one’s focus and dedication toward a desired goal.
 - c. One must recognize the importance of something not yet attained and respond with resolve and determination to attain it.
 - d. Grace awakens the mind to the reality of Christ’s rest, and grace provides the power and ability to believe the promise and claim it through regeneration.
 - e. The means that grace uses to awaken the sinner is the knowledge of Christ and an irresistible call to act on that knowledge.
 - f. A truly regenerated heart will choose to act and obey the Spirit in pursuing that rest.
2. Paul provides us a living example of this spirit of desperation and diligence (Phil. 3:7–16).
 - a. The goal of Paul’s new life was *Christ* (the One described in 2:5–8), for whom he sacrificed that in which he formerly hoped (vv. 7–9a).
 - 1) The worth of Christ cost him *everything*.
 - 2) Whatever did not help him in his pursuit of Christ was now counted as *refuse*.
 - b. All he wanted was the *righteousness* (the way one lives life in the world before God) found in Christ (vv. 9b–11).
 - 1) This way of life comes from God by *faith*, not law-keeping.
 - 2) It is lived in the continual pursuit of *knowing* Christ, *sharing* in His sufferings, and *conforming* to His death (which is obedience to the will of God).
 - 3) The *hope* Paul had in this pursuit was *attaining* the *resurrection*—the eternal life that Jesus promised to His own that He earned for them in His resurrection (v. 21; John 6:44).

c. Paul understood that he must “press on” to realize this life.

- 1) The verb translated “press” pictures one desperate for something upon which his very life depends (vv. 12–16).
- 2) The *assurance* one needs in this process is addressed in verses 15 and 16.
- 3) The example is held out (v. 17) and contrasted with the end of those who will not walk by this rule (vv. 18, 19).

In Hebrews Paul encourages the reader with what God has provided to ensure that His people will be successful in their pursuit of rest in Christ—the living Word (on earth) and the intercession of Christ, our High Priest (before the throne of grace in heaven).

II. The Work of the Word

1. The Word is described as “living and active” (v. 12).
 - a. Contrasting the Old Covenant with the New, Paul demonstrates its power to transform (2 Cor. 3:12–18).
 - b. Scripture is the scalpel in the hand of the Spirit to perform the spiritual surgery needed to heal the believer from the disease of the flesh that holds him back from believing and obeying Christ.
 - c. The soulish person neither desires nor understands the spiritual until the Word corrects his heart (1 Cor. 2:14).
2. The Word is also able to reveal accurately the true condition of every heart.
 - a. We are often guilty of self-deception; thus, the Lord uses the Word to discern our real thoughts and motives.
 - b. The assurance of this power resides in the fact that the Word comes from the One from whom nothing can be hidden.

II. The Work of the Priest

1. We are encouraged to “hold fast” (to hang on for dear life) to our confession because our Priest before the God to whom we must give account is fully qualified to represent us (v. 14).
 - a. He has already passed through the heavens—fulfilled every requirement for our salvation so that He is now seated at the Father’s right hand (Phil. 2:9–11).
 - b. This ascension also demonstrates the success of His purpose to bring many sons unto glory (Heb. 2:10).
2. We are encouraged to draw near with “confidence” to the throne of grace (vv. 15, 16).
 - a. Jesus, because of His experience, is able to sympathize fully with us in our weakness.
 - b. There is no veil or prohibition, only free access to the throne, because it is there for us to receive mercy and to find grace to help us in our need.

Hallelujah!