

Hebrews – Thursday Morning Group, part 4

We have suggested that we have a worldview problem that colors the way we read the text – we have an individualistic worldview, the New Testament authors had a collective worldview. As such we have been examining the warning passages and have seen that they can indeed be understood as warnings to the church as a whole rather than to individuals.

We have also looked at the key idea of “perfection” or “maturity”, words which translate the Greek *teleiow*, - related to the adjective *teleios* – describes something becoming finished, fulfilled, consummate, reaching it’s goal, fulfilling its purpose, becoming all that it can be. This concept is common throughout the New Testament – “perfection” is loving as God loves us, the pathway to “perfection” begins with faith, through hope to love. Important to note that perfection is not sanctification or sinlessness.

Last week – the first and last warnings, paying attention to God’s word and not being led astray by false teachings.

The starting point on the path to building mature churches is Faith (1:1-2:18), the end is with Hope (12:18-28) and Love (13:1-17).

This week we will look at the next steps in the chiastic argument of Hebrews, which encompasses the other warning passages and the love-hope-faith and faith-hope-love structures:

Warning 1 2:1-3 Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.
WARNING 2 3:12 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.
WARNING 3 (6:4-8) 6:10 Love, 6:11 Hope, 6:12 Faith
6:13 – 10:21 Central argument: The basis of our faith
10:22 Faith, 10:23 Hope, 10:24 Love WARNING 4 (10:26-31)
WARNING 5 12:15 See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;
WARNING 6 (13:9) Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings

The Word of God as the basis of our faith

1:1-4:13 as a whole focuses solely on the theme of God’s Word. 1:1- 3:6, hearing the word; 3:7-4:13, responding to the word

1. Jesus superior to the angels (1:4-14)
 2. Therefore we must pay closer attention (2:1-18)
 3. Jesus greater than Moses (3:1-6)
- } We have heard the Word of God

Next, Responding to the Word of God (3:7-4:13)

“Today if you hear his voice...” Those that heard the word and failed to believe.

Heb 3:7-4:13 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear his voice, (8) do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, (9) where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. (10) Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.’ (11) As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest.’”

The key text that we keep coming back to

(12) Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, **unbelieving** heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. (13) But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (14) For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

Exhort one another – the solution to the problem of the “one”

(15) As it is said, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.” (16) For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? (17) And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? (18) And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? (19) So we see that they were unable to enter because of **unbelief**.

The example of those who heard the word and did not believe. Note how often the word faith (believe) is used in these verses. Faith is the key issue.

(4:1) Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. (2) For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by **faith** with those who listened. (3) For we who have **believed** enter that rest, as he has said, “As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest,’” although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. (4) For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” (5) And again in this passage he said, “They shall not enter my rest.” (6) Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, (7) again he appoints a certain day, “Today,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” (8) For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. (9) So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, (10) for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. (11) Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

The *Gospel* came to us just as to them... How then do we respond?

What is the hope we have been called to? What is this “rest”?

(12) For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (13) And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

The final word on the “Word”

Jesus the Great High Priest (4:14-5:10)

Part one in establishing faith was the word of God, part two will be the priesthood of Christ. This theme, introduced fairly briefly here, will be the focus of the central section of the letter in 6:13-10:21.

Heb 4:14-5:10 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. (15) For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Tempted in every way?
A biblical pattern of temptation

(16) Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (5:1) For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. (2) He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. (3) Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. (4) And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was. (5) So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; (6) as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."

A new priesthood –
The order of
Melchizedek

(7) In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. (8) Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. (9) And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, (10) being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

The "perfecting" of
Christ – enduring
suffering

Calling the Christian Community to "perfection" (5:11-6:3)

Heb 5:11-6:3 About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. (12) For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, (13) for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. (14) But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. (6:1) Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, (2) and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. (3) And this we will do if God permits.

You ought to be
teachers! How do we
teach in the church?

1 Cor 3

Good from Evil – we
need wisdom!

Warning – 6:4-8

Encouragement towards maturity – Love (6:10) Hope (6:11) Faith (6:12).

Encouragement towards maturity – Faith (10:22) Hope (10:23) Love (10:24)

Warning – 10:25-31

Glimpses of Maturity in the Christian Community (10:32-39)

Heb 10:32-39 But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, (33) sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. (34) For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. (35) Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. (36) For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. (37) For, “Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; (38) but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.” (39) But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

Christ was made “perfect” through what he suffered, the Christian Community has shown glimpses of “maturity” in the midst of suffering

By faith... reaching “perfection” and entering into God’s rest (11:1-40)

Heb 11:1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Unseen?

Heb 11:8-10 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. (9) By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. (10) For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

The “rest” of God” – the city of God

Foundations – Eph 2:20, Rev 21:14

Heb 11:35-40 Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. (36) Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. (37) They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— (38) of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. (39) And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, (40) since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

Suffering -> Perfection

Maturity through Suffering (12:1-14)

Heb 12:1-14 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, (2) looking to **Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith**, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. (3) Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. (4) In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. (5) And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. (6) For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." (7) It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? (8) If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. (9) Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? (10) For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. (11) For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (12) Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, (13) and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. (14) Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

Heb 2:10 For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the **founder of their salvation perfect** through suffering.

Warning: 12:15-12:17 – Mutual responsibility

Heb 12:15-17 See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; (16) that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. (17) For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

More detail to the chiasmic structure of Hebrews

1. Jesus the **founder** of their salvation made **perfect** through suffering → **WARNING 2** (2:10-3:12)
2. Negative example: the faithless who failed to enter the rest (3:13-4:13)
3. Jesus made "mature" through what he suffered (5:7-10)
4. **WARNING 3** (6:4-8)
5. Love (6:10)
6. Hope (6:11)
7. Faith (6:12)

Main Argument (6:13-10:18)

7¹. Faith (10:22)

6¹. Hope (10:23)

5¹. Love (10:24)

4¹. **WARNING 4** (10:26-31)

3¹. The suffering of the Christian community (10:32-39)

2¹. Positive examples: the faithful who looked forward to “the city” (11:1-40)

1¹. Jesus, the *founder* and *perfecter* of our faith → **WARNING 5** (12:1-17)

Some things to think about

Faith and Suffering

Rom 5:1-5 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (2) Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (3) Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, (4) and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, (5) and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Teaching and Wisdom

Heb 5:14: distinguishing good from evil. – Gen 2&3 and the relationship between wisdom and faith

Pro 1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

1Jn 4:17-18 By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. (18) There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

Love and Good Works

Heb 6:10 For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do.

Heb 10:24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,

Eph 2:8-10 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, (9) not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (10) For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.