

# CHAPTER 4

The apostle, having in the foregoing chapter set forth the sin and punishment of the ancient Jews, proceeds in this,

- I.** To declare that our privileges by Christ under the gospel exceed the privileges of the Jewish church under Moses, as a reason why we should make a right improvement of them (v. 1-4).
- II.** He assigns the cause why the ancient Hebrews did not profit by their religious privileges (v. 2). Then,
- III.** Confirms the privileges of those who believe, and the misery of those who continue in unbelief (v. 3-10).
- IV.** Concludes with proper and powerful arguments and motives to faith and obedience.

## ~~390~~ HEBREWS 4:1-10

### GOSPEL PRIVILEGES

Here,

**I.** The apostle declares that our privileges by Christ under the gospel are not only as great, but greater than those enjoyed under the Mosaic law. He specifies this, that we have a promise left us of entering into his rest; that is, of entering into a covenant-relation to Christ, and a state of communion with God through Christ, and of growing up therein, till we are made perfect in glory. We have discoveries of this rest, and proposals, and the best directions how we may attain unto it. This promise of spiritual rest is a promise left us by the Lord Jesus Christ in his last will and testament, as a precious legacy. Our business is to see to it that we be the legatees, that we lay our claim to that rest and freedom from the dominion of sin, Satan, and the flesh, by which the souls of men are kept in servitude and deprived of the true rest of the soul, and may be also set free from the yoke of the law and all the toilsome ceremonies and services of it, and may enjoy peace with God in his ordinances and providences, and in our own

consciences, and so have the prospect and earnest of perfect and everlasting rest in heaven.

**II.** He demonstrates the truth of his assertion, that we have as great advantages as they. For says he (v. 2), *To us was the gospel preached as well as unto them*; the same gospel for substance was preached under both Testaments, though not so clearly; not in so comfortable a manner under the Old as under the New. The best privileges the ancient Jews had were their gospel privileges; the sacrifices and ceremonies of the Old Testament were the gospel of that dispensation; and, whatever was excellent in it, was the respect it had to Christ. Now, if this was their highest privilege, we are not inferior to them; for we have the gospel as well as they, and in greater purity and perspicuity than they had.

**III.** He again assigns the reason why so few of the ancient Jews profited by that dispensation of the gospel which they enjoyed, and that was their want of faith: *The word preached did not profit them because it was not mixed with faith in those that heard him*, v. 2. Observe,

- 1.** The word is preached to us that we may profit by it, that we may gain spiritual riches by it; it is a price put into our hands to get wisdom, the rich endowment of the soul.
- 2.** There have been in all ages a great many unprofitable hearers; many who seem to deal much in sermons, in hearing the word of God, but gain nothing to their souls thereby; and those who are not gainers by hearing are great losers.
- 3.** That which is at the bottom of all our unprofitableness under the word is our unbelief. We do not mix faith with what we hear; it is faith in the hearer that is the life of the word. Though the preacher believes the gospel, and endeavours to mix faith with his preaching, and to speak as one who has believed and so spoken, yet, if the hearers have not faith in their souls to mix with the word, they will be never the better for it. This faith must mingle with every word, and be in act and exercise while we are hearing; and, when we have heard the word, assenting to the truth of it, approving of it, accepting the mercy offered, applying the word to ourselves with suitable affections, then we shall find great profit and gain by the word preached.

**IV.** On these considerations the apostle grounds his repeated and earnest caution and counsel that those who enjoy the gospel should maintain a holy fear and jealousy over themselves, lest latent unbelief should rob them of the benefit of the word, and of that spiritual rest which is discovered and tendered in the gospel: *Let us fear lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it,* v. 1. Observe,

- 1.** Grace and glory are attainable by all under the gospel: there is an offer, and a promise to those who shall accept the offer.
- 2.** Those who may attain them may also fall short. Those who may attain them may also fall short. Those who might have attained salvation by faith may fall short by unbelief.
- 3.** It is a dreadful thing so much as to seem to fall short of the gospel salvation, to seem so to themselves, to lose their comfortable hope; and to seem so to others, so losing the honour of their holy profession. But, if it be so dreadful to seem to fall short of this rest, it is much more dreadful really to fall short. Such a disappointment must be fatal.
- 4.** One good means to prevent either our real falling short or seeming to fall short is to maintain a holy and religious fear lest we should fall short. This will make us vigilant and diligent, sincere and serious; this fear will put us upon examining our faith and exercising it; whereas presumption is the high road to ruin.

**V.** The apostle confirms the happiness of all those who truly believe the gospel; and this he does,

- 1.** By asserting so positively the truth of it, from the experience of himself and others: "*We, who have believed, do enter into rest,* v. 3. We enter into a blessed union with Christ, and into a communion with God through Christ; in this state we actually enjoy many sweet communications of pardon of sin, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace and earnest of glory, resting from the servitude of sin, and reposing ourselves in God till we are prepared to rest with him in heaven."
- 2.** He illustrates and confirms it that those who believe are thus happy, and do enter into rest.

**(1.)** From God's finishing his work of creation, and so entering into his rest (v. 3, 4), appointing our first parents to rest the seventh day, to rest in God. Now as God finished his work, and then rested from it, and acquiesced in it, so he will cause those who believe to finish their work, and then to enjoy their rest.

**(2.)** From God's continuing the observance of the sabbath, after the fall, and the revelation of a Redeemer. They were to keep the seventh day a holy sabbath to the Lord, therein praising him who had raised them up out of nothing by creating power, and praying to him that he would create them anew by his Spirit of grace, and direct their faith to the promised Redeemer and restorer of all things, by which faith they find rest in their souls.

**(3.)** From God's proposing Canaan as a typical rest for the Jews who believed: and as those who did believe, Caleb and Joshua, did actually enter into Canaan; so those who now believe shall enter into rest.

**(4.)** From the certainty of another rest besides that seventh day of rest instituted and observed both before and after the fall, and besides that typical Canaan-rest which most of the Jews fell short of by unbelief; for the Psalmist has spoken of another day and another rest, whence it is evident that there is a more spiritual and excellent sabbath remaining for the people of God than that into which Joshua led the Jews (v. 6-9), and this rest remaining,

**[1.]** A rest of grace, and comfort, and holiness, in the gospel state. This is the rest wherewith the Lord Jesus, our Joshua, causes weary souls and awakened consciences to rest, and this is the refreshing.

**[2.]** A rest in glory, the everlasting sabbatism of heaven, which is the repose and perfection of nature and grace too, where the people of God shall enjoy the end of their faith and the object of all their desires.

**(5.)** This is further proved from the glorious forerunners who have actually taken possession of this rest — God and Christ. It is certain that God, after the creating of the world in six days, entered into his rest; and it is certain that Christ, when he had finished the work of our redemption, entered into his rest; and these were not only examples, but earnest, that believers shall enter into their rest: *He that hath entered into rest hath also ceased from his own works as God did from his*, v. 10. Every true believer hath

ceased from his own works of righteousness, and from the burdensome works of the law, as God and Christ have ceased from their works of creation and redemption.

**VI.** The apostle confirms the misery of those who do not believe; they shall never enter into this spiritual rest, either of grace here or glory hereafter. This is as certain as the word and oath of God can make it. As sure as God has entered into his rest, so sure it is that obstinate unbelievers shall be excluded. As sure as the unbelieving Jews fell in the wilderness, and never reached the promised land, so sure it is that unbelievers shall fall into destruction, and never reach heaven. As sure as Joshua, the great captain of the Jews, could not give them possession of Canaan because of their unbelief, notwithstanding his eminent valour and conduct, so sure it is that even Jesus himself, and captain of our salvation, notwithstanding all that fulness of grace and strength that dwells in him, will not, cannot, give to final unbelievers either spiritual or eternal rest: it remains only for the people of God; others by their sin abandon themselves to eternal restlessness.

## <3041> HEBREWS 4:11-16

### THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST

In this latter part of the chapter the apostle concludes, first, with a serious repeated exhortation, and then with proper and powerful motives.

**I.** Here we have a serious exhortation: *Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest*, v. 11. Observe,

**1.** The end proposed — rest spiritual and eternal, the rest of grace here and glory hereafter — in Christ on earth, with Christ in heaven.

**2.** The way to this end prescribed — labour, diligent labour; this is the only way to rest; those who will not work now shall not rest hereafter. After due and diligent labour, sweet and satisfying rest shall follow; and labour now will make that rest more pleasant when it comes. *The sleep of the labouring man is sweet*, <2152> Ecclesiastes 5:12. Let us therefore labour, let us all agree and be unanimous in this, and let us quicken one another, and call upon one another to this diligence. It is the truest act of friendship,

when we see our fellow-christians loiter, to call upon them to mind their business and labour at it in earnest. “Come, Sirs, let us all go to work; why do we sit still? Why do we loiter? Come, let us labour; now is our working time, our rest remains.” Thus should Christians call upon themselves and one another to be diligent in duty; and so much the more as we see the day approaching.

**II.** Here we have proper and powerful motives to make the advice effectual, which are drawn,

**1.** From the dreadful example of those who have already perished by unbelief: *Lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.* To have seen so many fall before us will be a great aggravation of our sin, if we will not take warning by them: their ruin calls loudly upon us; their lost and restless souls cry to us from their torments, that we do not, by sinning as they did, make ourselves miserable as they are.

**2.** From the great help and advantage we may have from the word of God to strengthen our faith, and excite our diligence, that we may obtain this rest: *The word of God is quick and powerful*, v. 12. By the word of God we may understand either the essential or the written word: the essential *Word*, that in *the beginning was with God, and was God* (**400** John 1:1), the Lord Jesus Christ, and indeed what is said in this verse is true concerning him; but most understand it of the written word, the holy scriptures, which are the word of God. Now of this word it is said,

**(1.)** That is *quick*; it is very lively and active, in all its efforts, in seizing the conscience of the sinner, in cutting him to the heart, and in comforting him and binding up the wounds of the soul. Those know not the word of God who call it a dead letter; it is quick, compared to the light, and nothing quicker than the light; it is not only quick, but quickening; it is a vital light; it is a living word, *zon*. Saints die, and sinners die; but the word of God lives. *All flesh is grass, and all the glory thereof as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away, but the word of the Lord endureth for ever*, **402** 1 Peter 1:24, 25. *Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live for ever? But my words, which I commanded the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers?* **305** Zechariah 1:5, 6.

**(2.)** It is *powerful*. When God sets it home by his Spirit, it convinces powerfully, converts powerfully, and comforts powerfully. It is so

powerful as to pull down strong holds (<sup><4704></sup>2 Corinthians 10:4, 5), to raise the dead, to make the deaf to hear, the blind to see, the dumb to speak, and the lame to walk. It is powerful to batter down Satan's kingdom, and to set up the kingdom of Christ upon the ruins thereof.

**(3.)** It is *sharper than any two-edged sword*; it cuts both ways; it is *the sword of the Spirit*, <sup><4117></sup>Ephesians 6:17. It is the two-edged sword that cometh out of the mouth of Christ, <sup><4116></sup>Revelation 1:16. It is sharper than any two-edged sword, for it will enter where no other sword can, and make a more critical dissection: it *pierces to the dividing asunder of the soul and the spirit*, the soul and its habitual prevailing temper; it makes a soul that has been a long time of a proud spirit to be humble, of a perverse spirit to be meek and obedient. Those sinful habits that have become as it were natural to the soul, and rooted deeply in it, and become in a manner one with it, are separated and cut off by this sword. It cuts off ignorance from the understanding, rebellion from the will, and enmity from the mind, which, when carnal, is enmity itself against God. This sword divides between *the joints and the marrow*, the most secret, close, and intimate parts of the body; this sword can cut off the lusts of the flesh as well as the lusts of the mind, and make men willing to undergo the sharpest operation for the mortifying of sin.

**(4.)** It is *a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart*, even the most secret and remote thoughts and designs. It will discover to men the variety of their thoughts and purposes, the vileness of them, the bad principles they are actuated by, the sinister and sinful ends they act to. The word will turn the inside of a sinner out, and let him see all that is in his heart. Now such a word as this must needs be a great help to our faith and obedience.

**3.** From the perfections of the Lord Jesus Christ, both of his person and office.

**(1.)** His person, particularly his omniscience: *Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight*, v. 13. This is agreeable to what Christ speaks of himself: *All the churches shall know that I am he that searches the reins and hearts*, <sup><4123></sup>Revelation 2:23. None of the creatures can be concealed from Christ; none of the creatures of God, for Christ is the Creator of them all; and there are none of the motions and workings of our heads and hearts (which may be called creatures of our own) but what are open and manifest to him with whom we have to do as the object of our worship, and the high priest of our profession. He, by his omniscience,

cuts up the sacrifice we bring to him, that it may be presented to the Father. Now as the high priest inspected the sacrificed beasts, cut them up to the back-bone to see whether they were sound at heart, so all things are thus dissected, and lie open to the piercing eye of our great high priest. An he who now tries our sacrifices will at length, as Judge, try our state. We shall have to do with him as one who will determine our everlasting state. Some read the words, *to whom with us there is an account or reckoning*. Christ has an exact account of us all. He has accounted for all who believe on him; and he will account with all: our accounts are before him. This omniscience of Christ, and the account we owe of ourselves to him, should engage us to persevere in faith and obedience till he has perfected all our affairs.

(2.) We have an account of the excellency and perfection of Christ, as to his office, and this particular office of our high priest. The apostle first instructs Christians in the knowledge of their high priest, what kind of high priest he is, and then puts them in mind of the duty they owe on this account.

[1.] What kind of high priest Christ is (v. 14): *Seeing we have such a high priest; that is, First, A great high priest, much greater than Aaron, or any of the priests of his order. The high priests under the law were accounted great and venerable person; but they were but faint types and shadows of Christ. The greatness of our high priest is set forth,*

1. By his having passed into the heavens. The high priest under the law, once a year, went out of the people's sight within the veil, into the holiest of all, where were the sacred signals of the presence of God; but Christ once for all has passed into the heavens, to take the government of all upon him, to send the Spirit to prepare a place for his people, and to make intercession for them. Christ executed one part of his priesthood on earth, in dying for us; the other he executes in heaven, by pleading the cause, and presenting the offerings, of his people.

2. The greatness of Christ is set forth by his name, *Jesus* — a physician and a Saviour, and one of a divine nature, the Son of God by eternal generation; and therefore having divine perfection, able to save to the uttermost all who come to God by him. *Secondly*, He is not only a great, but a gracious high priest, merciful, compassionate, and sympathizing with his people: *We have not a high priest who cannot*



*be touched with the feeling of our infirmities*, v. 15. Though he is so great, and so far above us, yet he is very kind, and tenderly concerned for us. He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities in such a manner as none else can be; for he was himself tried with all the afflictions and troubles that are incident to our nature in its fallen state: and this not only that he might be able to satisfy for us, but to sympathize with us. But then, *Thirdly*, He is a sinless high priest: *He was in all things tempted as we are, yet without sin*. He was tempted by Satan, but he came off without sin. We seldom meet with temptations but they give us some shock. We are apt to give back, though we do not yield; but our great high priest came off clear in his encounter with the devil, who could neither find any sin in him nor fix any stain upon him. He was tried severely by the Father. It pleased the Lord to bruise him; and yet he sinned not, either in thought, word, or deed. He had done no violence, neither was there any deceit in his mouth. He was holy, harmless, and undefiled; and such a high priest became us. Having thus told us what a one our high priest is, the apostle proceeds to show us,

**[2.]** How we should demean ourselves towards him. *First*, Let us hold fast our profession of faith in him, v. 14. Let us never deny him, never be ashamed of him before men. Let us hold fast the enlightening doctrines of Christianity in our heads, the enlivening principles of it in our hearts, the open profession of it in our lips, and our practical and universal subjection to it in our lives. Observe here,

- 1.** We ought to be possessed of the doctrines, principles, and practice, of the Christian life.
- 2.** When we are so, we may be in danger of losing our hold, from the corruption of our hearts, the temptations of Satan, and the allurements of this evil world.
- 3.** The excellency of the high priest of our profession would make our apostasy from him most heinous and inexcusable; it would be the greatest folly and the basest ingratitude.
- 4.** Christians must not only set our well, but they must hold out: those who endure to the end will be saved, and none but they.

*Secondly*, We should encourage ourselves, by the excellency of our high priest, to come boldly to the throne of grace, v. 16. Here observe,

**1.** There is a throne of grace set up, a way of worship instituted, in which God may with honour meet poor sinners, and treat with them, and they may with hope draw nigh to him, repenting and believing. God might have set up a tribunal of strict and inexorable justice, dispensing death, the wages of sin, to all who were convened before it; but he has chosen to set up a throne of grace. A throne speaks authority, and bespeaks awe and reverence. A throne of grace speaks great encouragement even to the chief of sinners. There grace reigns, and acts with sovereign freedom, power, and bounty.

**2.** It is our duty and interest to be often found before this throne of grace, waiting on the Lord in all the duties of his worship, private and public. It is good for us to be there.

**3.** Our business and errand at the throne of grace should be that we *may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need*. Mercy and grace are the things we want, mercy to pardon all our sins and grace to purify our souls.

**4.** Besides the daily dependence we have upon God for present supplies, there are some seasons in which we shall most sensibly need the mercy and grace of God, and we should lay up prayers against such seasons — times of temptation, either by adversity or prosperity, and especially a dying time: we should every day put up a petition for mercy in our last day. The Lord grant unto us that we may find mercy of the Lord at that day, <sup>18</sup>2 Timothy 1:18.

**5.** In all our approaches to this throne of grace for mercy, we should come with a humble freedom and boldness, with a liberty of spirit and a liberty of speech; we should ask in faith, nothing doubting; we should come with a Spirit of adoption, as children to a reconciled God and Father. We are indeed to come with reverence and godly fear, but not with terror and amazement; not as if we were dragged before the tribunal of justice, but kindly invited to the mercy-seat, where grace reigns, and loves to exert and exalt itself towards us.

**6.** The office of Christ, as being our high priest, and such a high priest, should be the ground of our confidence in all our approaches to the throne

of grace. Had we not a Mediator, we could have no boldness in coming to God; for we are guilty and polluted creatures. All we do is polluted; we cannot go into the presence of God alone; we must either go in the hand of a Mediator or our hearts and our hopes will fail us. We have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus. He is our Advocate, and, while he pleads for his people, he pleads with the price in his hand, by which he purchased all that our souls want or can desire.