

# CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series: **STUDIES IN HEBREWS**

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Text: **Heb. 4:11-13**

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## CORAM DEO AND THE ADMONITION TO PERSEVERE (PART V)

We briefly alluded to this text last week in examining 4:14-16. Today we will study it in more detail. S. Lewis Johnson has properly remarked that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews uses what is called the *a fortiori* argument; that is, “A phrase signifying all the more; applied to something which must be admitted for a still stronger reason.”<sup>1</sup> It is easy to notice how constantly the writer uses this type of argument throughout the Epistle, but perhaps nowhere is the argument more intent or stressed than in ch. 4. Having stated the superiority of Christ to Moses (ch. 3) and having shown the tragic results that occurred when Moses’ revelation was ignored, he presses hard upon the Hebrews that to ignore the greater revelation of Christ is to suffer an even greater tragedy than that which fell upon the children of Israel under Moses.

### I. SOLEMN WARNING (v. 11)

Having warned them what to avoid (4:1), he now warns them again about what they *must* do. V. 11 – LET US THEREFORE BE DILIGENT (Gk. *SPOUDASOMEN*, to hasten (II Tim. 4:9) to eager and alert (I Thess, 2:17)).<sup>2</sup>

**NOTE:** The writer’s recurring emphasis on ANYONE (3:13; 4:1, 11). He is not sure about all of them.

The word ENTER (Gk. *EISELTHEIN*) highlights the thought of effort. It is similar to Paul’s exhortation in Phil. 2:12 – “continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” It is contrasted with the thought of *falling*. “As a pastor watching over his flock, the writer of Hebrews admonishes his readers to take care of one another spiritually. He stresses the responsibility of each believer toward the individual members of the church. No one in the Christian community should be neglected and thus, left to himself, be allowed to fall (see Heb. 3:12; 4:1).”<sup>3</sup>

### II. THE SEARCHING ADMONITION (vv. 12, 13)

The reason for giving diligence is now stated. If God has spoken, and He has, then what He has said is certain to come to pass. “The warning,” says Griffith-Thomas, “closes with a two-fold reminder. First about the WORD OF GOD (v. 12), and then about God Himself (v. 13).”<sup>4</sup>

#### A. THE TRUTH ABOUT THE WORD OF GOD

1. “When, then, THE WORD OF GOD is represented as SHARPER THAN A TWO-EDGED SWORD ... the idea intended to be conveyed is – “The threatening of God against unbelievers is a threatening which will assuredly be executed; and when executed, an intensity of suffering, a completeness and extent of destruction and misery will be the result!”<sup>5</sup>

2. It is stated that the WORD OF GOD is PIERCING (Gk. *DIK-NOUMENOUS*, to go through, here only in the New Testament) “He says,” comments Barclay, “That the word of God scrutinizes a man’s desires and intentions, *Desire* (thoughts, ESV Gk. *ENTHUMESIS*) is the emotional part of man, *intentions* (Gk. *ENNOIA*) is the intellectual part of man.”<sup>6</sup>

#### B. THE TRUTH ABOUT GOD HIMSELF

William Barclay has written a strikingly vivid description on this section, which I will quote in full. “Finally the writer to the Hebrews sums things up. He says that everything is *naked* to God and *compelled to meet his eyes*. He uses two interesting words. The word for naked (OPEN in

the N.A.S.B. and translated NAKED in the ESV) is the literal word (Gk. *GUMNOS*). What he is saying is that as far as men are concerned, we may be able to wear our outward trappings and disguises; but in the presence of God these things are stripped away and we have to meet him as we are. The other word is even more vivid (*LAI D BARE*, N.A.S.B.; *EXPOSED*, ESV) Gk. *TETRACHELISMENA*. This is not a common word and its meaning is not quite certain. It seems to have been used in three different ways.

- (1). It was a wrestler's word and was used for seizing an opponent by the throat in such a way that he could not move. We may escape God for long enough, but in the end he grips us in such a way that we cannot help meeting him face to face. God is one issue that no man can finally evade.
- (2). It was the word that was used for flaying animals. Animals were hung up and the hide was taken off them. Men may judge us by our outer conduct and appearance, but God sees into the inmost secrets of our hearts.
- (3). Sometimes when a criminal was being led to judgment or to execution, a dagger, with the point upwards, was so fixed below his chin that he could not bow his head in concealment but had to keep it up so that all could see his face and know his dishonour. When that was done, a man was said to be *TETRACHELISMENOS*. In the end we have to meet the eyes of God. We may avert our gaze from people we are ashamed to meet; but we are *compelled* to look God in the face.”<sup>7</sup>

**CONCLUSION:** The great Reformed Theologian B.B. Warfield once wrote “When we are asked why it is that there are so many persons who are indifferent to the claims of the Church, no doubt the safest answer to give is that it is for reasons best known to themselves. It seems, however, only a voluntary humility to profess to be ignorant of the fundamental basis of this indifference; an indifference, let it be well borne in mind, which is in no sense “modern,” but has characterized ever greater numbers as we go back in history of the Church to the very beginning. It lies in a weak sense of sin and the natural unconcern of men who do not feel themselves sinners with respect to salvation from sin. For Christianity addresses itself only to sinners. Its Founder himself declared that he did not come to call the righteous but sinners; and its chief expounder declared with energetic emphasis that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. There have always been men in sufficient abundance, both higher and lower, who have not bothered themselves about their sins. The open secret of the indifference of men of all classes in all ages to Christianity, so far as that indifference has existed, lies in the indifference of men to sin, and their consequent indifference to salvation from sin. Christianity makes no appeal to men who do not feel the burden of sin.”<sup>8</sup> The reason that Christianity has this emphatic emphasis upon the need for salvation from the burden of sin is precisely because of the Biblical doctrine of God that undergirds the Gospel message. Our text emphasizes as strongly as possible the impossibility of concealing anything from God. The scriptures declare that God is “the searcher of hearts” (cf. Jer. 17:10). But there is more – Not only does nothing escape God's scrutiny, but nothing will escape being held accountable before the Judge of all flesh.

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> D.D.Runes, *The Dictionary of Philosophy* (Philosophical Library, 1942) p. 7
  - <sup>2</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in The New Testament V* (Broadman, 1936) p. 362
  - <sup>3</sup> S. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Hebrews* (Baker, 1983) p. 113
  - <sup>4</sup> W.H. Griffith-Thomas *Exposition of The Epistle To The Hebrews* (Eerdmans, 1953) p. 50
  - <sup>5</sup> John Brown, *An Exposition of Hebrews* (rpt. The Banner of Truth Trust, 1961) p. 216
  - <sup>6</sup> William Barclay *Commentary on Hebrews* (Westminster Press, 1957) p. 40
  - <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p. 39
  - <sup>8</sup> *Selected shorter writings of Benjamin B. Warfield I* (P & R, 1970) p.46