

Week of October 22 - 28

The Christian in The End Times (1 Peter 4)

Peter encourages Christians to be prepared to suffer and be persecuted, as Christ was persecuted, and to live by God's will rather than our own. He says, "Since Christ suffered and underwent pain, you must have the same attitude He did, being ready to suffer, too. When your body suffers, sin loses its power, and you won't be chasing after evil desires but will be anxious to do the will of God. You've had enough of the evil things the godless enjoy – sex, sin, lust, getting drunk, wild parties, drinking bouts, worshipping idols, and other terrible sins. Your former friends will be surprised when you don't join them anymore in the wicked things they do. They'll laugh at you. But they must face the Judge of all and will be punished for the evil way they lived.

"The end of the world is coming soon. Be earnest, thoughtful men of prayer and continue to show deep love for each other, for love makes up for many of your faults. Share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay for the night.

God has given each of you some special abilities (or gifts). Use them to help each other. Are you called to preach? Then preach as though God were speaking through you. Are you called to help others? Do it with all the strength God gives you so He'll be glorified through Jesus Christ.

"Don't be surprised when you go through fiery trials. These trials will make you partners with Christ in His suffering. Then you will have the joy of sharing His glory on that coming day. Be happy if you are cursed and insulted for being a Christian, for when that happens, the Spirit of God will come upon you with great glory.

"I don't want to hear of your suffering for murdering or stealing or making trouble or being a busybody and prying into other people's affairs. But it's no shame to suffer for being a Christian. The time has come for judgment, and if we Christians must be judged, what horror awaits those who have never believed in the Lord? If the righteous are barely saved, what chance will the godless have? If you are suffering according to God's will, keep doing what's right and trust the God who made you, for He will never fail you.

Christian Life with God (1 Peter 5)

Peter ends his first letter by talking to the elders, telling them how to oversee the church. He says, "Feed the flock of God, care for it willingly, not grudgingly, not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve the Lord. Don't be tyrants, but lead them by your good example, and when the chief Shepherd comes, your reward will be a never-ending share in His glory and honor.

"Younger men, follow the leadership of those who are older. All of you should serve each other with humble spirits. God blesses those who are humble but sets himself against those who are proud. If you humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, in His good time, He will exalt you.

"Let Him have all your worries and cares. He is always thinking about you and watching everything that concerns you.

"Be careful and watch out for attacks from Satan. He prowls around like a hungry, roaring lion, looking for some victim to tear apart. Stand firm when He attacks. Trust the Lord and remember that other Christians around the world are going through these sufferings too.

"After you've suffered a while, God will give you His eternal glory. He will come and pick you up and set you firmly in place and make you stronger than ever.

Lastly, Peter says, "I am sending this letter to you through the courtesy of Silvanus, who is a faithful brother. What I have told you here should help you to stand firmly in His love. The church here in Rome sends you her greetings. So does my son Mark. Give each other the handshake of Christian love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

Hebrews Overview

Hebrews is the least studied and least understood book in the New Testament. We don't know who wrote it, when it was written, to whom it was written, or why it was written. But it talks about Christ, sin, sacrifice, salvation, perseverance, priesthood, revelation, faith, and love. Its vocabulary is unlike any other in the Bible. Only God knows who wrote it.

Commentators suggest it was written between 70 AD after Jerusalem fell and 95 AD. Clement of Rome quoted from it. It is a pep talk to a group of Christians who seem to have lost their initial enthusiasm for the Christian faith. They were discouraged and questioning their faith. The author says the better choice is Christ, even if it has trials and tribulations, rather than renouncing what is true.

The theme is Christ's superiority: He is the perfect priest and the perfect sacrifice. The author says Christ is greater than prophets, angels, Moses, Joshua, and Aaron.

Christ Is Superior to Angels (Hebrews 1)

The author explains, "Long ago God spoke in different ways to our fathers (Adam, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David) through prophets in visions, dreams, and even face to face, telling them little by little about His plans. But now He has spoken to us through His Son to Whom He has given everything, and through Whom He made the world and everything. In fragments, God lifted the veil fold-by-fold as humanity was able to receive it.

"God's Son shines with God's glory, and all that God's Son is and does marks Him as God. He regulates the universe by the power of His command and died to cleanse us and clear our record of sin, and then sat down beside the great God of Heaven.

"Therefore, He became far greater than angels, as proved by the fact that His name 'Son of God' is far greater than the angels' names and titles. God never said to an angel, 'You are my Son, and today I have given you the honor that goes with that name.' But God said it about Jesus. Another time He said, 'I am His Father, and He is my Son.'" And still another time when His firstborn Son came to earth, God said, "Let all the angels of God worship Him."

Peter adds, "God describes angels as messengers swift as the wind and as servants made of flaming fire, but of His Son, He says, 'Your Kingdom, O God, will last forever and ever. Its commands are always just and right. You love right and hate wrong. So God has poured out more gladness upon You than on anyone else.

"God also called Him "Lord" when He said, "Lord, in the beginning, you made the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will disappear into nothingness, but You will remain forever. You will never change, and your years will never end.

"Did God ever say to an angel, as He does to His Son, 'Sit here beside me in honor until I crush all Your enemies beneath Your feet'? No, for the angels are only spirit messengers sent out to help and care for those who are to receive His salvation."

Christ Is Superior to Angels (Hebrews 2)

The author continues comparing Jesus to angels, explaining, "Listen carefully to the truths we have heard, or we may drift away. Since angels' messages have always proved true and people have always been punished for disobeying them, why do you think we can escape if we are indifferent to the salvation announced by Jesus and passed on to us by those who heard Him speak?"

"God always has shown us that these messages are true by signs and wonders and miracles and by giving particular special abilities from the Holy Spirit to those who believe. And the future world we are talking about won't be controlled by angels. David said to God, "What is a mere man that you are so concerned about him? And Who is this Son of Man you honor so highly? For though you made Him lower than the angels for a little while, now you have crowned Him with glory and honor. You have put Him in complete charge of everything there is. Nothing is left out."

"We haven't yet seen all of this take place, but we do see Jesus crowned now by God with glory and honor because He suffered death for us. It was right that God should allow Jesus to suffer, for in doing so, He was bringing multitudes of God's people to Heaven. We have been made holy by Jesus and have the same Father. That's why Jesus isn't ashamed to call us His brothers."

"Since we are human beings made of flesh and blood, He became flesh and blood by being born in human form. Only as a human being could He die and break the devil's power who had the power of death."

"We all know He didn't come as an angel, but as a human being, as a Jew. Jesus needed to be like us, so He could be our merciful and faithful High Priest before God, a Priest who would be merciful to us and faithful to God in dealing with people's sins. Since He has now been through suffering and temptation, He knows what it is like when we suffer and are tempted."

Christ Is Superior to Moses (Hebrews 3)

Moses was a prophet, patriot, warrior, and lawgiver, who was a hero to the Jews and is today. He was the lawgiver; Jesus is our Redeemer.

"Therefore," the author explains, "I want you who are chosen for salvation to think about Jesus, who is God's Messenger and the High Priest of our faith. Jesus was faithful to God, who appointed Him High Priest, just as Moses also faithfully served in God's house. But Jesus has far more glory than Moses, just as a man who builds a fine house gets more praise than His house does. Many people can build houses, but only God made everything."

"Moses did a great job working in God's house, but He was just a servant, and his work was to illustrate and suggest things that would happen later. But Christ is in complete charge of God's house. And we Christians are God's house. He lives in us if we keep up our courage firm to the end and our joy and trust in the Lord."

"The Holy Spirit warns us to listen to Him, to be careful to hear His voice, and not let our hearts become set against him, as the people of Israel did. They hardened themselves against His love"

and complained in the desert while He was testing them. But God was patient with them for forty years, though they tried His patience. He kept doing His mighty miracles for them to see. But their hearts were always looking somewhere else instead of up to Me, and they never found the paths I wanted them to follow. Then God, full of this anger against them, bound himself with an oath that He would never let them come to His place of rest.

"Beware then of your hearts so as not to you find that they are evil and unbelieving and are leading you away from the living God. Never forget the warning, 'Today if you hear God's voice speaking to you, do not harden your hearts against him, as the people of Israel did when they rebelled against Him in the desert.'

"And who were those people who heard God's voice speaking to them but rebelled against him? They were the ones who came out of Egypt with Moses. Who was it who made God angry for those forty years? These same people who sinned and, as a result, died in the wilderness. To whom was God speaking when He swore with an oath they could never go into the land He had promised His people? He was speaking to all those who disobeyed him. And why couldn't they go in? Because they didn't trust him.