

12,29,22 Hebrews intro.

The Bible presents us with a world that is completely alien to this world. We are shown an alien culture, a way of living and thinking that are all foreign to us and that are antithetical to the world we are used to.

Partly for comfort's sake and partly because of pride, we have labored to find a way to make this alien world as much like ours as possible. This is unfortunate because the intent of our Lord in bringing us into this foreign culture is not for us to reshape it in our image but for it to reshape us into its image.

In the deepest part of who we are we have been 're-born' in a way that has naturalized us to this other world, so now when we fight against the changes needed in our thinking and behavior to live as citizens of our new home, we are actually fighting against who God has made us in Christ.

The best name for who we are as citizens of heaven would be the one that's given in the original language of New Testament scripture: Ekklesia. We translate this "church", but the word "church" has become almost irrelevant and even a misleading term because of its misuse over the last 2000 years. Once we discover what was originally meant by applying this term to us as citizens of heaven, we can see why it's the perfect word to use.

Ekklesia means "called out" or "the called-out ones".

The first and primary meaning of what a Christian has become is someone "called out" from one world, one kingdom, and then translated into another.

We're not just "not of this world" because we're more moral or religious or whatever, we are "not of this world" because something has happened inside us – we've had a spiritual metamorphosis deep within us that has made us literally, organically, "not of this world".

Our old flesh-based spiritual genetic code has been replaced by a whole new DNA sequence. "That which is born of flesh is flesh – but that which is born of spirit is spirit."

The distinction between citizens of earth and citizens of heaven is supposed to be a severe one and an obvious one.

Jesus's words and actions weren't confusing to this world and to His disciples because He was so much wiser than everyone – He was a mystery because He wasn't from here. He said, "I am from above, you are from beneath".

There was never meant to be a blurring or compromise in this. It is the alien nature of those who are in and from heaven that makes them distinct from the naturalized citizens of this world who, in many cases, are seeking a way out of a world that is destroying them.

Religion, or what has come to be known as “Christianity”, has nothing to do with what God has done in us. Much has changed for those in the kingdom of God, but becoming “religious” was never meant to be part of that change.

If we were able to see more clearly what God has accomplished in providing a way for humans from Earth to become citizens of His world, and what the true implications of that great transition are, we could avoid becoming part of this 21st. century “misrepresentation” of what the purpose of God really is.

Maybe that’s why the majority of Paul’s prayers for the early church seemed to be related to “having the eyes of our understanding opened. . . so we might see . . .”: As Christians, the first thing that has to happen to us is this – we need more than anything else to “see” who and what we have become.

And it doesn’t help having an enemy (Satan) who is tirelessly trying everything he can to keep us from “seeing” – to deceive, to blind, and to re-define everything about us. He knows that if he can perpetuate our identity crisis and our confusion, he can perpetuate our misrepresentation of the true meaning and expression of the Body of Christ.

So, here we are, in our generation - trying to understand what Christianity really is – trying to find out where we fit in – trying to discover how we can genuinely glorify God. And according to the Bible, step one is seeing this great gulf – this transition from one creation to another creation, that has taken all of us as believers out of one world and planted us firmly in an alien world.

If we can see who we are and what life is meant to be in the kingdom of God, we can begin to live according to God’s original intent for each of us. All I will do for now is introduce what I believe is the single most prevalent “misconception” that Christians are struggling with in our generation.

The simplicity of Christ has been destroyed by the legalism of religion.

Listen to the way this author puts it. His approach is a little different than most people, but I think he’s right on; he says,

“There are killers on the loose today. The problem is that you can’t tell by looking. They don’t wear little buttons that give away their identity, nor do they carry signs warning everybody to stay away. Most carry Bibles and appear to be clean-living, nice-looking, law-abiding, spiritual, worshipful citizens. Most of them spend a lot of time in churches, home groups, and conferences. Many are in leadership and are so respected that their neighbors would never guess they are living next door to killers.

They kill freedom, spontaneity, and creativity; they kill joy as well as productivity. They kill with their words and their pens and their looks. They kill with their attitudes far more often than with their behavior. The amazing thing is, they get away with it without being confronted or exposed! Strangely, the same ministries that would not tolerate heresy for 10 minutes will step aside and allow these killers all the space they need to maneuver and manipulate others in the most insidious manner imaginable.

“This day – this very moment – millions are living their lives in shame, fear, and intimidation who should be free, productive individuals. The tragedy is they think it is the way they should be. They have never known the truth that can set them free. They are victimized, existing as if living on death row instead of enjoying the beauty and fresh air of the life Christ made possible for all of us. Unfortunately, most don’t have a clue what they are missing.”

This is the Christianity I have seen rip apart the souls of God’s children – it’s the Christianity I want to do battle with.

I want us to be free and to know what freedom means. I want us to know what it means to live in and from another world. A world that despises religion and loves truth. A world that lives spontaneously, naturally, freely being who and what God has made its citizens to be - the world of Ekklesia – the ‘called out ones’ – the citizens of this alien world, the kingdom of God.

I want us to go there in experience, not just in theological discussions.

So, we will be doing a serious, in-depth study of this crucial subject; and we’ll do it by digging verse-by-verse into the one letter of the New Testament that was written specifically to deal with this problem of religious enslavement in the early church – the book of Hebrews.

In Isa. 43:19 the Lord says, “Behold, I do a new thing”. We’ll see more of what that means in terms of eternal implications, but to really understand the author’s intent

in writing Hebrews, we need to see why something completely new is needed, and how the Lord accomplished it.

In eternity past, all of creation was intended to be God's means of self-expression; just as when an artist or musician produces something that perfectly expresses who they are, so that when we see the painting or listen to the song, we get a sense of the personality as well as the creativity of the one who expressed himself in that painting or song.

So, creation is meant to be a self-expression of God and specifically, the second Person of the Trinity;

(Col. 1:15-18) "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, dominions, principalities, or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence."

And within that creation, man was designed to be the primary means through which the rest of creation would discover the nature and character of God. We're the only beings actually made in God's image. Angels, principalities, powers, and any other invisible beings that exist would be able to understand Who and What God is by virtue of those beings created in God's own image.

But in the fall of Adam, another "image" was introduced into creation – the image or nature of Lucifer. And for the past 6000 years, with the exception of those who belonged to God, humanity has painted or presented a picture of the character of Satan. This world became Satan's self-expression.

2000 years ago, God sent His Son into this world. He was the exact, expressed image of God in the flesh (which is the theme of Hebrews chapter 1). To see Him, hear Him and watch Him was to see, hear and watch the Father's self-expression in the Son of Man. Christ is the prototype Man – the "second Man"; those who come to Him are to be conformed to His image, so that the purpose of their creation might be restored and realized.

Now I'm going to tangent for a few minutes in an attempt to answer a question that a lot of Christians have wrestled with over the years, and then we'll get back on topic.

The question is this;

“Since God is sovereign and omniscient (all powerful and fully aware of how everything will play out) and as the scriptures tell us, He will do *all* His will, what possible advantage could there have been to His purpose in creation to set things up in a way that this last 6000 years have been filled with evil and suffering? How does evil, suffering, and sin contribute to God’s self-expression? Couldn’t He have found a better way to do this?”

Here's my feeble attempt to answer that. Only as a result of a fallen angelic realm, and consequent fallen humanity, could the ultimate purpose of creation, as that which reveals the *fullness* of Who God is and what He is like, be completed.

Man in innocence and the initial perfections of creation can reveal God’s power and creativity, and in His relationship with our first parents, His love. But without the fall and all that has happened since, neither humanity nor the angelic realms would know anything of God’s justice, mercy or willingness to sacrifice, seen in the judgment of His eternal Son, all for the objects of His love. If all of creation was both innocent and perfect, there would be no need for ‘unmerited favor’ – no need for grace. We would never know that God is gracious.

The Cross reveals characteristics of God that a billion-year history of unfallen man would never reveal. Without sin, without evil, there would be no understanding of God’s wisdom, justice, or mercy.

Some of God’s most amazing characteristics would remain forever concealed if not for the need for those characteristics to surface and bring glory and victory in overcoming the rebellion of the satanic host and the redemption of Man.

Without God designing creation in a way that allowed for a full revealing of all, not just part, of His perfections, His *complete* self-expression could never have happened. And He has done all of this without, at any point, violating the absolute free volition of any of His creatures. We can see how Paul responded to this insight of God’s eternal plan in (Romans 11:33-36);

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For
who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?
Or who has first given to Him, and it shall be repaid to him? For of Him and
through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever.”

The outcome of the Lord's eternal plan will be a creation of men and angels who understand God in a way that any other creative plan would never have revealed to them. It will move all of us who belong to the Lord as far above Adam in his innocence as heaven is above the earth.

Now, we can move back to the "new thing" I mentioned in the beginning. As applied to the Church, we see this disclosed in these passages;

(2 Cor. 5:17) "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old things (the fallen humanity in Adam) passed away; behold, new things have come."

(Eph. 2:15) ". . . so as to create in Himself one new man."

The Greek for "new" in this context is *kainos* and it means: "as related to substance, it is of a new kind, unprecedented, novel, unheard of."

It is not Adam's race improved or even perfected; it is the setting aside of one entire race of humanity and the bringing in of a completely new species of humanity that has never existed in any form before this. When Jesus, as the last Adam, went into the grave, the fallen race of Adam went with Him. When He was raised from the dead, He became the Second Man – the firstborn of a new species of humanity.

If you want to see what this new creation is like, you can see exactly what God has in mind by studying the life of Jesus of Nazareth, especially in His resurrection glory as shown in Revelation chapter 1. God's singular purpose for you and me is that we are conformed to His image; the image of the First Born of the new creation.

(Rom. 8:28-29) "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son."

Because of the fall, there is an entire race of humanity, beginning with Adam, that is under Lucifer's dominion and deception, and as we're going to see in Hebrews, the image Paul speaks of in Roman 8 is spiritual not soulical. "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh (soulical) . . ." (John 3:6 cp. 1 Cor. 2:14).

Our souls will take on the image of Christ *only* to extent that we are being conformed to His image. More than anything else; more than *any other activity* of Satan toward the body of Christ, he has hidden or confused this reality.

Satan's own self-expression is accomplished by replacing the indwelling Christ as the source of our Christian life with *us* as the source. The church as the corporate expression of Christ has now become a soul-based religion. Christ has been replaced by Christianity. As we saw in our study of Laodicea, Christ is 'outside'. The Laodicean church is oblivious to the fact that Christ is not the Head, but the Laodiceans are the *actual* head of *their* Christianity.

As we go through Hebrews, we will see this contrast as the enemy established it in the first century, we will also see what was lost because of this in terms of "inheritance".

This is one of the reasons Hebrews is so important. The forms of imitation Christianity may change over the centuries, but the solution is always the same, 'what place will Christ personally have in our churches?' The majority of Hebrews is showing the Lord's superiority to anything and everything that would seek to supplant Him.

There are amazing promises and provisions given to those who are in Christ that become illusive and confusing when we try to find them in the Christian religion – they become little more than psychological exercises or imitations of what God has provided for us.

Everything the Lord is doing in our lives now, as believers in search of Life as it's meant to be - all of these difficult and painful trials and tests are intended to remove our soul as being dominant (which in turn subdues the flesh in us) and raise our spirit in communion with God's Spirit as the predominate guide and teacher in our lives.

And all that the Lord asks of us is to trust Him – to have faith. Which is why there's an entire chapter devoted to both the definition of faith as well as numerous historical examples to show what faith looks like in real life.

I'll give one example of a definition or explanation of this now, but we'll do more when we get to those parts of Hebrews that address this; this is Andrew Murray;

"From the outset, until hard experience teaches him otherwise, the well-meaning believer thinks that since he has the will to obey God and to be what God intends for him, he should attempt to carry it out through personal consecrated effort with the Lord's help. He seeks to struggle forward via the love motive; i.e., 'He did for me, so I must do for Him.' A superficial acquaintance with God's plan leads to the view that while

justification is God's work, sanctification (spiritual growth) is our work, to be performed under the influence of the gratitude we feel for the deliverance we have experienced, and by the aid of the Holy Spirit. But the Christian soon finds how little gratitude can supply the power. When he thinks that more prayer will supply it, he finds that as indispensable as prayer is, it is not enough. Often the believer struggles hopelessly for years until he realizes the truth of Phil. 2:13 'God is both willing and ready to work in us to accomplish His will.' Christ is the Way, Truth and Life, not us."

In the context of what we've been looking at so far, this growth through consecrated effort with God's help is just a dedication of the flesh, the old humanity in us, to do God's will – which of course fails.

The ultimate effect that Hebrews will have on the believer who understand its message is that he or she will be inwardly at rest even if he's outwardly exhausted.

Here are the topics the author of Hebrews used to address in his letter to these first-century Jewish believers.

- 1) Who is Christ and how does He compare to Moses, the Law, Satan, Abraham and the Levitical Priesthood?
- 2) What is the "rest" God has provided for His people, how is it entered into, and how does the history of Israel illustrate this spiritual reality?
- 3) What are the dangers of turning back and failing to press on to maturity?
- 4) What is the difference between the Old and New Covenants?
- 5) And finally, what exactly is "faith"; what role does it play in our lives; and why does faith have such a supreme emphasis in the scriptures?

Over the next few months, we'll explore those in detail. But I need to briefly move into another area that forms a foundation for what Hebrews is all about.

To do this, we need to start with defining a term that is used in Hebrews, and other places, and make sure we understand what it means. The term is "adoption".

(Eph. 1:5) "He predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will."

(Heb. 2:11-13) "For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying: 'I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly, I will sing praise to You.' And again: 'I will put My trust in Him.' And again: 'Here am I and the children whom God has given Me.'"

There is an extremely important difference between what adoption means today and what it meant 2000 years ago.

In our culture adoption is when a child is brought into a family that isn't their family of origin. But that's not what adoption meant in the first century. The Greek word for adoption to sonship is a legal term referring to the full legal standing of an adopted male heir in Roman culture.

In other words, we aren't brought into someone else's family, we are regenerated and joined by nature to God's family by being placed in Christ as our elder brother.

We don't start our Christian lives in the full experience and responsibility of an adult heir. This is God's goal for us, but spiritual growth and development is needed to move us individually into the experience of adoption. Here's another explanation of this;

“In the Greek family the son never wore the toga until he came of age, and when he came of age, being given by his father the toga, that was the symbol of his having graduated to the place of responsibility to represent his father, and that day was the day of his adoption.”

How many of us, in looking back over our lives as Christians, would want someone like *us* held responsible to accurately and faithfully represent our heavenly Father to this world?

Remember when Jesus said, “If you have seen Me, you have seen my Father”? When you became a Christian, could you have said to those around you, “If you have seen me, you have seen my Father”?

I would have a very strong hesitation in saying that now, let alone then. I am well aware that faithfully representing the Lord is at best extremely rare.

Fortunately, getting to that place is something the Holy Spirit has committed Himself to do as long as we aren't grieving or quenching Him and preventing Him from completing what He's begun in us.

So, adoption is when a believer is placed in a position of responsibility. And to be able to do that with all of us is the Lord's desire and goal concerning His family.

I don't know if I mentioned it when we looked at the doctrine of predestination in our 1 Peter study, but predestination is never related to salvation in the New Testament, it is always related to the *purpose* of salvation. Salvation is included but it's only step one. The goal of salvation is adoption.

In quoting again from the author who explained the passing of the Toga from father to adult son, we see this;

“The Greek father, putting the toga upon his son in the day when he attains his status, brings him forth and presents him, no longer merely as a child, a member of his family, but as one who has come to honor; and so he is manifested in adoption. That is offered to the children of God. But there is now a progressive work going on that is intended to lead to that. That is the thing with which the New Testament is occupied.”

I hope all of that makes sense, because it’s a primary theme in Hebrews – and to see that realized in our lives, we have to be pursuing the same goal that God is pursuing on our behalf. Our goal for ourselves has to match the Lord’s goal for us.

If we define the purpose or goal of our lives as believers to be a list of Christian things to do or be, which is what most churches teach, then we will simply make plans to do those things. But if we move *only* according to God’s purpose for us, we *may* find ourselves doing some of those things along the way, but they will be the *result* of being focused on the goal, they won’t be our primary pursuit.

As we’ll see in Hebrews, our primary pursuit is a Person, not things (Christian or otherwise).

I found a brief statement by Sparks on this that aligns with what we’ve said so far;

“It is not the Lord's will that any one member of His family should always remain a child. It is the Lord's will that every member of the family should come to the adoption. There is nothing whatever in the New Testament to indicate that some are called to maturity and some to immaturity. Foreordination is to maturity, and to fail of that is to fail of God's full purpose. It will not do for anybody to say: ‘I just prefer to be a simple little child; all these advanced things are beyond me, I would simply rather not be concerned with them’. That is failing altogether to apprehend the mind of the Lord.”

I need to pause for a minute. Like much of what we have studied over the last couple of years in Revelation and in Peter’s letters, I’m pretty sure most believers haven’t had the opportunity to hear either the meaning or implications of adoption either.

We visited a church recently where the pastor told us that “discipleship” is what being a Christian is all about. Some churches focus on changing the culture to

match the morals of the Bible. Others say we are primarily here to reach the lost. Some say maturity comes through mastering certain doctrines and principles. As I've said before, Christianity has now become a smorgasbord of so-called Christian things to do for the Lord.

The reason there are so many denominations and confusion is because there is no unity of vision. (Prov. 29:18) "Where there is no vision the people cast of restraint"; and everyone ends up doing what's right in their own eyes – everyone has a specialty they latch on to.

In the book of Acts we see everyone in the early church moving in the same direction. So, yes, evangelism was there, and teaching and fellowship. But those things were the *fruit* of a unified vision.

In Acts, their purpose wasn't to focus on the fruit; their vision, their purpose was the spiritual health of the tree that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit would *produce* fruit in its time.

When that is the common pursuit of all the members of the body of Christ, fruit will be spontaneous, and there won't be any denominational attachments to one or more specific fruits to sidetrack us from a single, unified vision of why we are here.

If every Christian in the world joined arms to help each other move into what is meant by adoption or sonship - by spiritual maturity and responsibility, everything else that needs to happen would not only happen, it will happen organically in fullness instead of in splintered partialities.

As I've said numerous times in the past, the word "purpose" in the scriptures (like in Romans 8 for example) is always singular. God only has one purpose. We might have a thousand competing purposes, but the Lord will *only* commit Himself to the one eternal purpose He determined would govern all His actions with His people from before the foundation of the world.

But since most pastors won't teach what that purpose is, a splintered, smorgasbord Christianity is the best we can hope for.

But as we'll see in Hebrews, especially chapter 11, in every generation since Adam, God has had a remnant within the larger context of His people who both understand what God is after and have committed themselves to seeing His heart's desire realized. In the life to come, these are the people God will honor, because these are the ones who honored Him in their lives now.

One last quote by Sparks on this and then we'll move back to our introduction, and we'll wrap up our introduction;

“The Spirit is always striving, working, energizing, moving to bring about spiritual development, spiritual increase, with a view to spiritual responsibility. If we are seeking to live in and move in the Spirit, He will arrange that that which is available for our spiritual enrichment is made available to us, and we are brought into it. If we are genuinely reaching out to the Lord for all that is in His thought, He will work in all ways to bring us what we need.”

Here's the good news about all of this. The one character trait that Jesus said was the most important one for us to have is seen in these passages;

(Matt. 11:29) “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

(Isa. 50:4-5) “The Lord GOD . . . awakens Me morning by morning; He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple. The Lord GOD has opened My ears . . .”

The character trait that ensures all other traits will follow is *teachability* (ears opened to listen), which is also the one exhortation given to literally every generation in Church history as shown in the letters to the seven churches in Rev. 2 & 3 (“He who has ears to hear, let him hear”).

Another way to say “lowly in spirit” is what we see in Matt. 5:3;

““Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Something interesting in this verse that isn't in most English translations is the meaning in this context of the Greek word for “kingdom” (*basileia*).

All Christians, all believers, are allowed to enter the kingdom, but only the “poor in spirit”, the teachable, are allowed to possess what *basileia* means when it's made conditional on a specific character trait - which is this;

“Royal power, kingship, dominion, rule; not to be confused with an actual kingdom but rather the right or authority to rule over a kingdom, as of the royal power and dignity conferred on Christians in the Messiah's kingdom.”

Christians who are broken, teachable and who, because they are painfully aware of their own spiritual poverty (poor in spirit), are those whom God will move from childhood to adoption in time and then to a throne in eternity.

He's not asking that we be like Martha, but that we be like Mary.

(Luke 10:38-42) As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, 'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!' 'Martha, Martha', the Lord answered, 'you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed *only* one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.'