

TOTAL CONVICTION – 4 THINGS GOD WANTS YOU TO BE FULLY CONVINCED ABOUT

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CHAPTER ONE: CONVINCED ABOUT THE INSPIRED WORD OF GOD

I'd like to explore with you, if I may, a single Greek word that's found four times in the New Testament. The word is plérophoria (pronounced play-rof-or-ee'-ah) and it means 'full assurance' or 'total conviction.' This means we're going to be talking about things most surely believed among us: in other words, things that belong to our core convictions. We hope to explore the four things the Holy Spirit has related this word to in the context of its occurrence each time in the New Testament. We start off with something I hope we can agree on, or at very least readily become convinced of ... and that's the Bible being **The Inspired Word of God.**

First, in 1 Thessalonians 1:5, we see the Holy Spirit connects this word for full assurance with the Scriptures, the Word of God itself. The Apostle Paul says: "*for our gospel did not come to you in word only but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with **full conviction**, just as you know what kind of man we prove to be among you for your sake.*" There's a verse that's related to that in the next chapter - verse 13 - where the Apostle adds that when he preached the word to them with that kind of conviction they, to their credit, received it not as the word of men, but as the Word of God, which it truly is. It's specifically the Gospel that the full conviction spoken of here is linked with, but the Gospel is, of course, Bible-based, and the Bible as a whole is its widest con-

text, for it was first preached in the third chapter of Genesis. And it's our conviction that the entire Bible is God's Word and that there's no book like it. It's God's one and only written communication to us, and in it he discloses himself and all that's his will for us.

It was the Scottish historian, playwright and poet Sir Walter Scott who, when he was lying dying in his office, said to his attendants, "Bring me the book!" They looked at the book-lined shelves in the room that he was lying in and they said to him, "Sire, which book?" He said to them, "There is only one book. Bring the Bible, of course. There's no other book like it." And, of course, we hold to that same conviction that there's no book like the Bible – it's the Word of God and it addresses itself with absolute authority on every topic that it covers.

The preacher Campbell Morgan, at an early stage in his preaching career, began to have doubts about his Bible - about it being the Word of God. He was saying to himself, "I wonder if this book really is everything my father (who was also a preacher) claims it to be - the inspired Word of God." This doubt led him to take away all his commentaries, all his Bible dictionaries, all his Bible study aids. He put them in a cupboard and locked the door. And he says later in his memoirs that he could still hear the click of the lock as he shut away all those books. He turned only to the Bible itself, and he prayed that the Lord would show him and convince him that this was uniquely God's Word in fullest inspiration, exactly as his father believed it to be. He said, "If what my father is saying is true this book in and of itself should convince me." Then he sat down with his open Bible and read through it, and was indeed convinced that this is the Word of

God. And he then devoted the rest of his life to becoming the preacher that he was.

2 Timothy 3:16 tells us that God's Word is inspired - that every scripture is inspired of God - it's 'God-breathed'. Some people tell us that this book contains the Word of God, but don't settle for that! This book does not simply *contain* the Word of God, but it *is* the Word of God! Everything that it contains is God's Word - his authoritative communication to us. The Bible is inspired on every topic that it addresses; and every word of Scripture comes within the scope of the Holy Spirit's supervision and superintendence as he caused precisely these words to be chosen by the human authors.

John Wesley had a prayer which said, "Lord, make me a man of one book" and that book, of course, was the book of Scripture - God's book. Not perhaps in his day, but certainly today, someone would be looked upon as an obscurantist if he or she took that view. "Why do you shun all the learning, all the helpful books, all the education of books that are in this world and just confine yourself to one book? Why narrow your horizons down to just one?"

The answer was that John Wesley knew there was no book like the Bible and he made himself a man of that one book - so much so that it's said that in his life he preached 40,000 sermons. John Wesley was a man who made himself a man of one book. We don't need to confine ourselves to only ever read the Bible, but it should have the first priority and the prime place in our lives and certainly bring with it the conviction that there's no book like it. It has no peers, because this is God's book.

I pass very frequently through the country of Belgium, heading to Antwerp, and I often think about someone that we are in tremendous debt to for our English Bible - and that's William Tyndale, of course. In 1536 he was martyred near to the Belgian border, and his last writing was to whomever was in charge of the squalid dungeon in which he found himself. And he wrote ever so graciously, asking the clemency of the one who had incarcerated him that he might speak to the commissary and ask for him to be granted a warm cap because, he said, he suffered with a terrific cold in the head in that dank cell. He said also, "Please send me a warmer jacket and please if I may have a piece of cloth with which to patch my leggings ... and may I have, most of all, my Hebrew Bible from among my belongings with my Hebrew grammar and my Hebrew dictionary ... oh and also a lamp, please, so that in these wearisome long, dark evenings I may study the Scriptures."

But, he said, that if any other sentence had been passed for him he would take it patiently and subject himself to the will of God and to the glory of the grace of his Lord Jesus Christ. He even asked that the Spirit would always direct his jailor's heart. Tyndale was granted the winter because he was arrested in the May of 1535, having completed his second translation of the New Testament in 1534 - and it was in the August of 1536 that Tyndale was led out, strangled, and burned at the stake - dying without marriage and without burial. He was a man who gave his life for the Scriptures he loved, having taken the Greek text of Erasmus and having given us the first translation from the Greek straight into English. He was a phenomenal scholar who had learned eight languages. Between his two translations

of the New Testament in an eight-year period he learned Hebrew so that he might give more accurate treatment to the nuances even of the Greek text. And 90% of the 'Authorized Version' text in the New Testament that we have today is William Tyndale's translation.

He did it because he knew with all his heart that this was God's Word, and he longed that we would have in our hands the Bible in our own mother tongue. People of whom this world is not worthy have given their lives, and therefore, surely, we have this conviction that this is God's Word - and we should study it as Tyndale longed to study it - but now with all the comparative comfort we have in our homes - still with the full conviction that it truly is God's Word.

It surely helps us to appreciate God's Word when we know we can be sure that the Bible we have is true to the original form in which it was communicated. It's well-known, and widely reported - so easy to check out - that from among all ancient literature nothing comes even remotely close to the Bible in passing the standard literary tests for a book being true to its original form.

What's more, by making painstaking comparisons between thousands of early language fragments, experts, working like detectives, are able to make a strong case for knowing pretty well exactly what the original text of the Bible said - and based on that knowledge, we can be confident that our English language Bibles are reliable.

The Bible is such a special book from God. He used about 40 human authors, but behind them all, he's its ultimate author, and

it's his revelation to us, affirmed by lots of its predictions having been fulfilled with exact precision. So, it's no doubt very special, but in the main we're meant to read it like any other book, taking its words to have their normal meanings. When we read it, we should read each verse in its context. Our first base, as it were, is to discover what it meant to those who first heard that verse. What it now means for us today must be consistent with that. The very last thing we should be doing is plucking a verse right out of its surrounding context and making it carry our own subjective and imagined meaning. We're to read meaning out from the text, not read our own into it.

The Bible isn't written much like a textbook: for much of the time God instructs us through narrating the life experiences of others. We begin to gain a clear sense of what God approves in their lives which we can then begin to apply in our own life. There's no situation in life for which we can't find guidance - at least in principle - from this vast store of human encounters with God. As we read its pages regularly, we'll find our attention is often drawn to certain statements it makes and we begin to sense their particular relevance to decisions we have pending, as well as to other of life's experiences. The greatest wonder of the Bible is that God speaks to us through its pages.

In summary, we're tracking one word that appears four times in the New Testament. Whether it's rendered full assurance or total conviction, you get the idea - these are the things that are to be surely believed among us and these are the things that will anchor us in our faith, because when you've seen these things - and when you appreciate the preciousness of these things - you won't be able to walk away. In its first application, we've seen that it re-

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lates to the Bible and us having the total conviction that it, and it alone, is the Word of God.

For discussion:

1. How convinced are you of the things the Bible has to say concerning itself, for example in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 and 2 Timothy 3:16?
2. What implication does a comparison of Exodus 9:16 and Romans 9:17 have for the issue of the authority of the Bible?
3. How does 2 Peter 1:21 help us to picture the interface between the 40 or so human authors and the one divine author behind them all?
4. What would you say to anyone who claims that a Bible text is capable of many different interpretations?

CHAPTER TWO: CONVINCED ABOUT THE INCOMPARABLE CHRIST OF GOD

We're looking at a single Greek word that's found four times in the New Testament. The word is plérophoria (play-rof-or-ee'-ah) and it means 'full assurance' or 'total conviction.' This means we're talking about things that are most surely believed among us: in other words, our core convictions. Americans often remind us that their country began with founding fathers who had great convictions. I've heard an Australian preacher say to his listeners that his country's founding fathers also had great 'convictions,' but of a different sort! Of course, Australia began as a penal settlement for convicts sent from England over 200 years ago. Now, as we said, the theme we're exploring is great Christian convictions. And we're coming to the second of four things with which the Holy Spirit has connected the word we're studying.

We find the second occurrence of the word in Colossians 2:2. Paul's saying to the church in Colossae that he wants them:

"... to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge

of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument ..." (Colossians 2:1-4).

Did you register the wording there that we're tracking? The key translated words were 'full assurance.' The context, as we've just seen, is all about having a full assurance of understanding about knowing Christ. The surrounding words emphasize the need for insight and true knowledge. Only a firm grasp of the truth about the person of Christ can help us defend against fine-sounding arguments. Persuasiveness and truth don't always go hand in hand, do they? If we've allowed ourselves to be persuaded by a high-pressure salesman, we might already be painfully aware of that. But in spiritual matters, I'm sure you've heard many forms of persuasive argument by people who've stumbled in their understanding over either the deity of Christ or else they've stumbled over his complete and full humanity. Jesus Christ is the god-man – that's our total conviction based on the Bible as the Word of God, declaring to us the full deity of the actual man Christ Jesus.

It was the so-called 'council of Nicaea,' a gathering of religious scholars, that affirmed the sixty-six books of the Bible as the Canon of Scripture as we have them today; and it also attested to the triune nature of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But it was left to a later council, the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD to affirm that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man.

Of course, the Scriptures alone teach us those things very clearly, and these historical events simply involved people groping in their Councils to do justice to the teaching of the Word of God.

Jesus Christ certainly is both fully God and fully man. Some years ago, when my son Michael was still quite young we had a camping holiday on the outskirts of Paris and went one day to see the tomb of Napoleon Bonaparte. It's a very impressive sight, but it did remind me of something much more impressive associated with Napoleon - some of the things that he said in the years after 1815, and after Waterloo. He was exiled on Elba and had time to think and reflect, and he spoke to some of the counts and generals who were with him and said, "What do you think, gentlemen, about Jesus Christ?" Now, their answer was somewhat non-committal, so Napoleon volunteered what he thought of Jesus Christ. He said 'Christ alone has succeeded in raising the spirit of man to such a point that it becomes insensible to time and space. Across a chasm of 1,800 years Jesus Christ asks something that is very difficult - he demands the human heart and forthwith it is granted. Wonderful, Napoleon said, that in defiance of time and space, the spirit of man with all his powers and faculty becomes an annexation of the Empire of Christ.'

Napoleon contrasted that with himself. He said, 'I know what it is to command the allegiance of an army and to have people who will swear unswerving devotion to me.' But he was no shrinking violet, he said, and 'in order to achieve that I had to stand before them with the electric influence of my looks and my words and my voice.' He could command the allegiance of other men by being present with them and standing before them. But, he said, it's altogether different with Jesus Christ - 'over a chasm of 1,800 years, he demands that which is most extraordinary: that unconditionally the human heart be granted to him and forthwith it is.'

He then concluded that this phenomenon is unaccountable other than if someone should believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ.

It's sometimes said that Jesus never claimed to be God. I want you to consider if that's an accurate assessment, based on how the second chapter of Mark's Gospel opens ...

"When He had come back to Capernaum ... He was speaking the word to them. And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic ... And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." But some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, "Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?" Immediately Jesus, aware in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves, said to them, "Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts? "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven'; or to say, 'Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk'? "But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" - He said to the paralytic, "I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home." And he got up and immediately picked up the pallet ..." (Mark 2:1-12).

Surely there could not have been a more emphatic way for Jesus to press his claim to be fully God as well as fully human. He affirmed only God can forgive sins – then proceeded to do so!

Added to this we have Titus 2:13 where we read of Jesus described as being both our "great God" and "our ... Savior." And

for the writer to the Hebrews, Jesus is addressed (by the application of Old Testament scripture) not only as 'Lord' (Hebrews 1:10) but actually as 'God' (Hebrews 1:8). But, equally, there's no New Testament writer who more emphatically underlines Jesus' humanity than the writer to the Hebrews – who tells us: "*Since ... the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death*" he might 'deliver' them (Hebrews 2:14). "*He had to be made like his brethren in every respect*" if he was to be their effective high priest, we read: "*it is not of angels that he takes hold; [but] he takes hold of the descendants of Abraham*" (Hebrews 2:16). He sympathizes with the weaknesses of his fellow-men and knows how best to help them, for "*he himself has suffered and been tempted*"—tempted indeed "*in every respect ... as we are, yet without sinning*" (Hebrews 2:18; Hebrews 4:15). There's everything warmly and appealingly human in the picture of one who poured out his soul in "*prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and 'learned obedience through what he suffered*" (Hebrews 5:7) - who blazed the trail of faith and persevered to the end, enduring the cross and despising the shame, putting up with sinners' hostility - so that his people, profiting by his example, need not "*grow weary or fainthearted*" (Hebrews 12:2).

The reality of Christ's humanity is on display here. And for good reason, another ancient misunderstanding was called Docetism, from a Greek word meaning 'to seem.' This early heresy questioned Jesus' humanity – saying he only seemed to be human. This is equally in error, but has tended to be more tolerated – as when some say that from conception to birth our Lord passed

through the body of his mother 'like water through a pipe', deriving no part of his humanity from her. To defend against such a view, how wonderfully precise the inspired writing of the Apostle Paul is when he says:

"For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh" (Romans 8:3).

Our Lord did not come in the mere likeness of flesh; far less in sinful flesh; but *in the likeness of sinful flesh* – fully human as we are (which, as our kinsman redeemer, was required of him), but without sin and indeed incapable of it.

Malcolm Muggeridge was someone who'd lived a very sensual life, but later in life, as far as I am aware, he was soundly converted to Christian faith. He said, 'In my lifetime I have seen my countrymen ruling over a quarter of the globe. I've seen a crazed, cracked Austrian proclaim a German Reich that would last a thousand years. I've seen an Italian clown claim that he would restart the clocks to coincide with his own assumption of power. I've heard that Georgian brigand in the Kremlin acclaimed by the world's intellectual elite as wiser than Solomon. All gone in a lifetime – all gone with the wind! Hitler and Mussolini dead and remembered only in infamy, and Stalin is a name that's forbidden in the country that he helped to found and dominate for three decades. But behind those sullen, self-styled supermen and imperial diplomatists there stands the gigantic figure because of whom, through whom, by whom and in whom

humanity may have hope - the figure of Jesus Christ, the only hope for this world.'

And truly there's no other hope but in God's son, Jesus Christ - the only one in whom we may have hope for now and for eternity - one who's fully God and fully man. Acts 4:12 says there's only one name given under heaven wherein we may be saved - the name of Jesus Christ. In 1 John 5:11-12, the apostle John tells us that eternal life with God is not found in religion or any system of thought, but it's found in a person. "*He who has the Son has the life, he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.*" Our full conviction is in Jesus Christ, God's son, who declared himself to be one in essence with the Father (John 1:30).

For discussion:

1. The Jews were so convinced Jesus was claiming equal honours with God the Father that they wanted to kill him (see John 5:17,18). We've reviewed Napoleon's reasons, but what convinces you personally of the deity of Christ?
2. What conclusion is it reasonable to draw from a comparison of John 9:38 and Revelation 19:10?
3. Why was it necessary that God the Son should become also human without ceasing to be God? (see e.g. Hebrews 2).

CHAPTER THREE: CONVINCED ABOUT THE CONDITIONAL HOUSE OF GOD

As we continue exploring a single Greek word (plérophoria meaning ‘full assurance’ or ‘total conviction’), you’re already aware we’re talking about things that are intended to become our core convictions. Our third example of its occurrence takes us to Hebrews chapter 6:11. It says, “*We desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end.*” But what hope was it that they were to be fully assured about? To answer that, we’ve got to understand the surrounding context of this verse, because when you take a text out of its context what you’re left with is a con! That means we have to read what goes before this to understand what its readers are being challenged with – and so to discover what it is that we also should be totally convicted about.

By the way, you’ll find some really good commentaries, by writers who’ve got a lot of worthwhile things to share with us, and they very often state that the people in these earlier verses in chapter 6 of Hebrews were mere professors of the Christian faith. In other words, they’re saying that they weren’t genuine born-again believers. But let’s look at those earlier verses and see if that stacks up. Chapter 6 verse 4-6:

“... in the case of those who have been once enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made

partakers of the Holy Spirit and have tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance.”

“You see?” they would say, “these people being described here weren’t genuine believers!” And they’d say that because they believe in eternal security and Hebrews 6:6 says these people fell away. “Ah well, if they fall away, given that *true* Christians are eternally secure, then these can’t have been true Christians in the first place. They must have only been people who professed head knowledge.”

Wait a minute! Let’s look again at those five descriptions - they were:

- (1) people who had been enlightened; they were
- (2) people who had tasted experience of the heavenly gift; they had
- (3) been made sharers or partakers of the Holy Spirit; they had
- (4) tasted the good Word of God; and
- (5) the powers of the age to come.

I put it to you, that it couldn't be plainer on the page of Scripture that these were people of genuine experience of Christ - genuine believers. But yet they fell away. We’re going to have to look for a different solution to this apparent problem. Again, we need to look at the context - the wider context of the whole letter to

the Hebrews – and when we do, we find it's not teaching about the Body of Christ, but it's teaching about something called God's house. Now, here's where we need to define our terms. The Church which is Christ's Body can be biblically defined as all true born-again believers of this present day of grace which began at the time of Acts chapter 2 with the coming of the Holy Spirit to permanently indwell believers for the first time in history. We never cease to be a member of Christ's Church (Matthew 16:18), referred to his Body, even when we die. And obviously, a great many of its members are now in heaven, having already died.

But God has a plan for living disciples, those who remain on earth at any one time. It's a design he established back in the days of the New Testament. Local gatherings of believers, known biblically as churches of God, are described as being interlinked in one overall New Testament fellowship of churches, variously spoken of as being God's people, God's house, his kingdom, the holy and royal priesthood, and God's holy nation.

Now, let's recap. The Bible teaches we have eternal security in Christ with regard to our salvation; but it also plainly talks about the possibility of 'falling away.' On the basis that we understand the Bible to be God's inspired Word, there can be no contradictions within its pages. No-one can both be eternally secure and fall away – **unless this security and falling away relate to two quite different things.** And it's here we have to distinguish between our salvation and our service for the Lord. If I can put it like this: as far as New Testament teaching is concerned, our salvation is to do with being forever in the Church which is Christ's Body; and our service has to do with being in a local church of

God while we're alive here on earth. It's therefore possible for someone, a believer, to fall away from serving God in a local church fellowship; while at the same time remaining eternally secure within Christ's Church, the universal Church, in terms of being forever saved from the penalty of sins. The theme of the letter to the Hebrews – and remember that's where we find this talk of falling away (Hebrews 4:11; 6:6; cf. Hebrews 10:29-31) – is focused on our service, and not our salvation.

In the Bible's teaching about salvation, our position in Christ was secured when we came to the Saviour and were born of the Spirit (John 3:6). The Lord Jesus took us and he baptized us in the Holy Spirit into the Body of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 12:12-13). That's our eternal incorporation into it - our membership of that body is a permanent membership. Christ's body can never be dismembered - who could do that? That means there's eternal security in the Body, and we praise God for that, something shared in common among all true fellow-believers. But we're also seeing that there is something that we can fall away from - or something that we can come short of - and it's this matter that the letter to the Hebrews majors on: which is about being in God's house, while serving him during our earthly life.

In Hebrews 3:6, the writer identifies himself with those to whom he's writing in the first century New Testament Churches of God (perhaps predominantly Jewish early Christians). He says to them, "... *whose house we are.*" He says that we are God's house "*if we hold fast our confidence and hope until the end.*" In its first century Jewish setting, the Hebrews' letter referred to the danger of early Jewish believers being drawn back into following the old ways of Judaism again. That's what's being referred to, for exam-

ple, in the falling away that's mentioned in Hebrews 6:6. In that first century setting at least, there could be no recovery back into church of God fellowship for anyone who renounced Jesus as Messiah and returned to the old ways of Judaism (such was the high-profile damage to the testimony that it was in effect a re-crucifying of Christ, see Hebrews 10:29-31). That would be a disastrous U-turn after they'd earlier had the courage to publicly recognize Jesus as the true Messiah.

The book of Hebrews is not at all discussing whether these wavering Jews maintained their salvation, but only whether they maintained their place of privilege among God's worshiping people. The writer says: we are God's house, if we hold fast. 'If,' notice: that implies a condition, something not guaranteed. This condition is something he's says a lot about in Hebrews. God's house – which Hebrews teaches is conditional – cannot be identified with the vast company of all those who've ever known salvation by God's grace through personal faith in Jesus Christ. It's also to be distinguished from the totality of all currently living believers – once again because of that stated condition. God's house at any time doesn't even include all true believers alive at that moment, for there is the condition applied: 'if we hold fast ...'

All of this shows us that the criterion for a place in God's house is not simply the possession of salvation. This is because Hebrews demonstrates we can fall away from God's house while still having salvation. There's no need whatsoever for us to hold fast (in the Body) to our salvation, for the Lord Jesus himself holds us fast, and assures us none can snatch us away from him (John 10:28,29). But, regarding what's called God's house, we evidently

do need to hold fast, just as they did, to whom the author of Hebrews wrote some two thousand years ago.

The Hebrews' letter was written as its name implies, to early Jewish Christians who'd left behind the ceremonial Law of Moses to embrace Jesus as the Messiah and follow the teaching of his apostles. By following the apostles' teaching they found themselves in the New Testament Churches of God. The Book of the Acts of the Apostles documents exactly how this came about. The existence of these churches spread outwards from Jerusalem particularly as a result of the various missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul. Those who turned to the Lord in each place were numbered and identified with its local church of God.

These were all linked by visits from the likes of Paul; they were addressed together in several of the Bible letters; they sent relief aid to one another as needs arose; and they were bound by a common adherence to the same understanding of the Lord's teaching – a point clearly demonstrated in the case of the Jerusalem Council of Acts chapter 15 (but see also 1 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Corinthians 7:17). In other words, they were an inter-linked community of disciples, maintained by the church elders in the different localities working in close fellowship with each other (1 Peter 1:1;5:1).

By the time the letter to the Hebrews came to be written, some had come to feel life would be easier outside of this Messianic community, just going along with the Law of Moses as did the majority of folks around them, at least in Israel. To these people, wavering on the brink of leaving the community of churches of God, the writer of the Hebrews' letter makes his appeal by the

Spirit of God: 'don't go back; don't fall away.' To quit their association with the practicing Christian community would not mean the loss of their salvation, but – and this is the main point of the letter – they'd miss out on all that was special in serving God in the biblical community of Churches of God: the very things the Old Testament had been pointing forward to! (See the next instalment). They'd lose their place in God's house where God lived by his Spirit, in a way that answered to earlier eras when the place where God lived on earth was known as Moses' Tabernacle or Solomon's Temple. **'Don't fall away'; but be totally convinced of where God wants you to serve him – that's the message.**

For discussion:

1. How might it be possible to both be eternally secure in Christ but also capable of falling away?
2. 'The Church the Body comprises all believers of the Church Age' – how would you support that from Scripture?
3. 'We are eternally secure in our salvation as believers in Christ's Body' – how would you support that from Scripture?
4. 'The House of God is something that - being conditional - can be fallen away from' - what Bible support can you find for that statement?
5. Try to accurately describe God's house by involving in your answer the local groupings of disciples in the New Testament known as churches of God.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONVINCED ABOUT THE SANCTUARY WORSHIP OF GOD

We now come to the final part of our four-part study of a single Greek word that's found four times in the New Testament (plérophoria, meaning total conviction). The last recorded instance of this word is found in Hebrews 10:22. But let's start reading from verse 19:

“... since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus by a new and living way which he inaugurated for us through the veil, that is his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith.”

The teaching of Hebrews is in relation to what's described in chapter 3:6 as God's house, where evidently, faithfulness, obedience and commitment are demanded on our part. Throughout a conditional note is struck – because overall the teaching doesn't apply to our salvation or our membership in the Body of Christ, but it applies to how we live out our faith in serving the Lord. The word that we're tracking is in verse 22 where it's *“full assurance of faith.”*

Those in Churches of God are to have full assurance about what it is they do when they gather together each Sunday morning. It can be discouraging if there's only a few, or maybe circumstances

are such that we don't feel, on the face of it, that it's been terribly uplifting. But I want us to understand how God sees it, which is how the Scriptures present it, so that in full assurance of faith we gather and participate. From verses such as Acts 20:6,7, it's quite clear that the earliest believers met on the first day of each week purposely to break the bread in remembrance of their risen Lord, just as he'd asked them to do shortly before he went out to die. This was designed to be the primary gathering of churches of God, the highlight with which each week's service began.

If that's the timing for public worship, then the setting is found in the verse we read earlier: *"Therefore brethren since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus."* Not everyone would be clear as to what that 'holy place' is, so let's check it out. Again, reading in context, you just scan back to see where this is mentioned previously, and you come to Hebrews 9:24 – *"for Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself now to appear in the presence of God for us."*

When our Lord rose on the third day, and later ascended into heaven, he entered into a holy place not made with hands, not of this creation, but a place that's in heaven. It's there he appears before the face of God for us as our great high priest. And that's the place, the very same holy place, that we're invited to enter into on the first day of every week (Hebrews 10:19). Hebrews 9:24 says it's not a mere copy of the true one. 'A mere copy'? - let's check we know what's being referred to. Back in the time of Moses - to which so much of the letter to the Hebrews refers - there was something called the Tabernacle (Exodus chapters 25-40) on earth and in it, and in particular in the tent of meet-

ing, there existed a copy of something in heaven. That's why God said very strictly to Moses, "*make sure that you make it according to the pattern that was shown you in the mountain*". It was because it was reflecting on earth (as a copy) a reality that existed originally in heaven.

We may recall from our knowledge of the Old Testament (Leviticus 16) that one day every year, one of the priests, the high priest, was instructed to enter into that inner sanctum of the tent of meeting in the Tabernacle. We know that the ordinary priests could officiate in the first section of the tent of meeting - that's the compartment that housed the lampstand, the table of shewbread and the golden altar - but they went no further. On what was called 'the Day of Atonement,' (Leviticus 16) one day every year (Yom Kippur), the high priest went straight through that first section and actually went beyond the dividing veil, and on into the second section of the Tabernacle - into 'the Holy of Holies'. It was only a replica of the true holy place in heaven, but it was sacred enough on earth that only one man, only once a year, (and not without blood) could enter there, into the immediate presence of God. Once inside, he sprinkled animal blood before, and on, the mercy-seat where the cherubim's wings overshadowed.

Now I'd ask you to come with me to earlier verses in Hebrews 9:7-9:

"... but into the second only the high priest enters once a year not without taking blood which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the

holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing which is a symbol for the [time then present (KJV)].”

This refers back to the ‘outer tabernacle,’ that’s the first section of the overall Tabernacle prior to the veil and the Holy of Holies. It says while that first section was still standing, it was a symbol for the time then present - not for today, but for the time *then* present. I think very often we read these verses and we’ve made an assumption that the whole of the Tabernacle is a parable for the whole of what we do now in the present time. But that’s not the sense here.

First of all, it’s not the whole tabernacle that’s being spoken about at the end of verse 8, but it’s the first section only - the outer tabernacle - and it’s a symbol or parable for the time then present when it was in operation. Let me explain why that’s true - because the way into the Holies, we’re told, was not then disclosed. It wasn’t revealed. Now there’s two senses to that - one is physical and visual, and the other is spiritual. Let’s just think about what was happening physically back then on the one day each year when the high priest entered the second or inner section of the Tabernacle. We’ve got this tent of meeting and it’s in two sections: the first section and the second section - the outer and the inner - and the second section or the inner tabernacle is where the Ark of the Covenant is. It’s the Holy of Holies and only the high priest goes in there on one day every year. On that one day, when the high priest was walking to the Holy of Holies, no human saw him because the way into the Holies was not disclosed.

Remember, the Old Testament tells us no priests were to be working in the first section of the Tabernacle when the high priest went straight through it into the second section to sprinkle the blood, and certainly no Israelite in the encampment of Israel could see what was going on – simply because blocking their view of the high priest walking through the tent of meeting were all those boards with curtains and animal skins draped over them, covering over his route.

Clearly, the progress of the high priest was not disclosed when he entered through the veil into the second section - no human eye saw that. 'And the Holy Spirit is saying' - now I want us to learn what that means, for there's a spiritual dimension to this as well. First, let's go to Hebrews 10:5-9 and words taken up by the Lord when he says:

“Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have not desired, nor have You taken pleasure in them” (which are offered according to the Law), then He said, “Behold, I have come to do Your will.” He takes away the first in order to establish the second.”

The wonder of the cross, combined with the incarnation of our Lord Jesus, is that he's totally transformed our worship experience - all the system of sacrifices of the Old Testament ended, of course, at the cross. The Lord took away 'the first' that he might establish 'the second' – the second being an entirely new way of approach to God. The teaching in Hebrews 9 by the Holy Spirit is that this first section of the Tabernacle represented that old 'economy' - it represented the totality of Israel's previous ap-

proach to God in worship under the Old Covenant. All the system of sacrifices and offerings - think of all that being associated with the first section of the tabernacle. And the Holy Spirit is saying: when that first section was still standing, the way into the holy place was not made manifest - it wasn't disclosed,

But the Lord came that he might take away what that first section represented, taking away all the system of offerings and sacrifices, being the whole old way of approaching God under the Mosaic Covenant. The Lord has taken it away through his cross-work. And if you then picture that first section of the tabernacle (representing that system of offerings and sacrifices), being removed physically - if that had been the case long ago, you would have plainly seen the high priest walking into the second section. Now that's what's happened spiritually. The way into the holy place has been disclosed to us and it's not merely a copy of the true, but it's the true holy place itself. It's the way into the Holies in heaven, into which Christ has already entered as a forerunner (Hebrews 6:19,20), that has been disclosed to us. And we're invited to draw near with boldness to enter into the holy place in heaven, not made with hands, and where Christ has already entered.

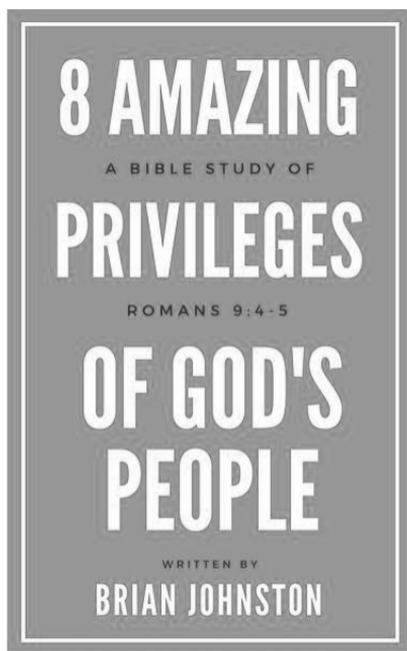
That's what's now disclosed to us by the Spirit through the Scriptures and we're invited to come in there! Do you see the picture? It's the way into the true Holies and it's the way we come every first day of the week when churches of God gather to break the bread, as commanded. What's more, we're encouraged to do so with full assurance of faith.

We may be few, we may stumble in our offerings, it may not be a physically impressive performance. People may come and observe, and if they didn't know this teaching of Scripture, they may well say: 'that wasn't very enthralling this morning' – 'there were a lot of silences and it was all very solemn' - but they're not seeing it in the full assurance of faith in the stupendous thing that's happening, which is the greatest spiritual experience this side of heaven, open to us week after week as we gather around the Lord's table and enter into the holy place above. Even the copy of what we enter wasn't disclosed long ago because of the physical hindrance, but even all that sacrificial system which it typified has now been taken out of the way by the Lord so that we have an entrance into the true Holies in heaven. That's to be our total conviction!

For discussion:

1. New Testament churches of God gathered on the first day of every week with their primary purpose being to 'break the bread' as commanded (Matthew 26:26; Acts 2:42; 20:6,7). We need look nowhere else for their public worship as a community of churches. Can you think of any other candidate for Hebrews 10:19-22 to apply to?
2. In their context extending down to v.25, explain why the entry being described in Hebrews 10:19 is not something future at the time of the Lord's return.
3. Draw a diagram of what is being depicted in Hebrews 9:7.
4. Using God's O.T. object lesson, try to express in your own words what the spiritual equivalent of Hebrews 9:7 is today when biblical churches of God engage in worship as a holy priesthood.

Did you love *Total Conviction - 4 Things God Wants You To Be Fully Convinced About*? Then you should read *8 Amazing Privileges of God's People: A Bible Study of Romans 9:4-5* by Brian Johnston!



The apostle Paul says in Romans 9:4-5: "who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God, Amen."

Perhaps you hadn't noticed this little gem tucked away in the middle of the letter, but it is a tremendous description of what it meant to be among God's people in the past. We are not so much interested in a history lesson, of course, but in seeing to what ex-

tent each of these eight great can find its answer today in our service for God.

Also by Brian Johnston

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Salt and the Sacrifice of Christ
The Glory of God
The Way: Being a New Testament Disciple
Power Outage - Christianity Unplugged
Windows to Faith: Insights for the Inquisitive



About the Author

Born and educated in Scotland, Brian worked as a government scientist until God called him into full-time Christian ministry on behalf of the Churches of God (www.churchesofgod.info). His voice has been heard on Search For Truth radio broadcasts for over 30 years (visit www.searchfortruth.podbean.com) during which time he has been an itinerant Bible teacher throughout the UK and Canada. His evangelical and missionary work outside the UK is primarily in Belgium and The Philippines. He is married to Rosemary, with a son and daughter.



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