

Keys To Successful Living.

Part one-dated 25/01/15

Many of you received my New Year's Greeting, in which I talked about making deliberate Bible-inspired decisions that will cause us to experience a higher quality life. I also mentioned about making resolutions to bring in good changes in the new year. For Resolutions determine attitude, Attitude determines approach and Approach determines the outcome. I also gave you the 12 keys for 2015 from the book of Hebrews that can show us the way to successful outcome-no matter what the situation we are in. These "let us" sentences constitute 12 good resolutions and provide us a platform on which each one of us can stand and progressively build a new life.

Today and in months to come, I would like to expand on these keys as the Lord permits.

Key #1: Let Us Fear (God)-Hebrews 4:1.

As you can see, these words indicate resolution-individual as well as steps we take with our fellow believers. Before I go any further, let us look first at the background of the Hebrew believers to whom these encouragements were written. I believe this will provide us some lessons as Christians today. In many respects, we have inherited the special privileges that were enjoyed by the early Hebrew believers. But we have also inherited the special problems that go with those privileges.

Hebrews as the name indicate, had a different background from all other New Testament believers. All other epistles (perhaps with the exception of James & Peter) were addressed to believers who had come from non-Jewish backgrounds. But the epistle to the Hebrews was specifically and primarily addressed to believers from a Jewish background. That Jewish background gave them many advantages-many special privileges- that were not enjoyed by the gentiles or the pagans from other nations and backgrounds.

Three Advantages: (1) They had a thorough knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures-the special unique revelations God Gave through His Word in the Old Testament to the Jewish people.(2) They had been freed for many centuries from the awful iniquities of idolatry and false cults. The Law of Moses, by which they ordered their lives abounds with warnings against these two practices, which are both abominations in God's sight.

(3) Jews had familiarity with the Temple, its sacrifices, the form of worship and the beautiful liturgies.

These represented many advantages that could have strengthened & purified their faith BUT the sad truth is that many of these Jewish believers had not made proper use of these benefits. That is why the writer of the letter of Hebrew had to bring some sad and solemn words to them in Hebrews 5:11-14(NIV 1984).....**to be read.**

Is it not a tragic condition to be in? To be slow to learn when you have that special background? These people should have been mature grown-ups. Instead, they were still spiritual infants, not able to take more than milk.....I believe the same is true of many many professing Christians in our world today.

The Hebrews were in that condition because they had not trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. They had not applied themselves to the study of Scriptures. They had not given sufficient priority to spiritual pursuits in their lives. As a result of

these conditions, the epistle to the Hebrews contains more warnings of the danger of falling away than any other book in the New Testament—that in itself is a remarkable fact.

Warnings about Falling Away: Here are five(5) different passages in Hebrews that contain these warnings.

Hebrews 2:1-3.....The two dangers cited there are *drifting and ignoring*.

Hebrews 3:12.....The great danger here is *unbelief*

Hebrews 6:12.....The danger here is *laziness—spiritual laziness*.

Hebrews 10:35-36..The danger here is *failing to persevere—not holding on*.

Hebrews 12:25.....The danger here is *refusing to hear God when He speaks*.

It is important to note that people who had inherited spiritual privileges had to be warned of these terrible dangers.

Today's Christians

Through these verses, we see the condition of the Hebrew Christians—the Jewish believers at the beginning of the New Testament age more than 2000 years ago. Today, in some sense, the shoe is on the other foot. It is not primarily the Jewish believers who are in danger. But believers from non-Jewish backgrounds—people from so-called Christian Nations. These are people who have been “born” in the Christian church. They are people who automatically call themselves Christians without ever stopping to consider what that means. Look at the fact that many professing Christians today enjoy the same kind of privileges that the early Hebrew Christians enjoyed.

Like Hebrews, today's Christians also know the Scriptures— the Old & New testaments.

Like Hebrews, today's Christians have also been delivered from idolatry. They have no thought of deliberate idolatry. (though many are involved in indirect-idolatry).

Like Hebrew Christians, who were familiar with the services at Temple, many of today's Christians—in some measure— are familiar with church services, religious terminology, form of prayers and ceremonies. YET it is a sad fact that we fail to appreciate what is available to us AND this means that we need the same warnings the Hebrews received—*warnings against drifting, being negligent, being lazy, presuming on God's Grace and taking privileges for granted that are extremely precious and important*.

The description in Hebrews looks strikingly like multitudes of professing Christians. That is exactly why—in the epistle—we have the phrase “Let us” 12 times. These let us phrases address the spiritual condition that was the particular problem of the Hebrew Christians—which by inheritance, is also the particular problem of multitudes of professing Christians today, especially in the western world.

Now in the light of this background and understanding, Lets dig deep to find out why the first key is “ **Let us Fear(God)**”.

It is because of their false security, because of their laziness, because of their arrogant or disrespectful behaviour and because they did not avail all the blessings and privileges offered to them by God. The writer to the Hebrews also gives them a specific example of why they should fear. This example is taken from the past history of the people of Israel. It is based on the experience of the Israelites in their journey through the wilderness from Egypt to the Promised Land, and what God said to them during that journey. {Heb 3:7-10 with X ref Ps95:8}. What we read here is a remarkable fact. God brought the whole generation out of Egypt by many miraculous wonders; nevertheless, because of their

subsequent conduct, He was angry with them. Then the Scripture goes on—and this God speaking: “So I declared on oath in my anger, “they shall not enter my rest”(V11 NIV84). Immediately following that statement by the Lord, we see the application in the admonition given.....Verses 12-15 NIV 1984. {to be read}

The essence of this warning is: **DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS.**

Hearing God’s Voice. In what exactly did Israel’s generation fail? I think the above passage makes it clear. There³ was one basic failure—they did not hear God’s voice. They were content to get things secondhand through Moses.

Those Israelites, who so angered God, had only a form of religion. They had the Tabernacle, the ten Commandments, the priesthood, the sacrifices and the various laws of ceremonial cleanliness. **BUT** in all that, they missed the one essential. They were so satisfied with externals that they missed the one pursuit that could have saved them from disaster. The one factor, that could have carried them through God’s rest for them. What was that? They failed to hear God’s voice.

Today’s Christians are no exception. This injunction (order/strong warning) is not restricted to the Israelites in the wilderness.. The Israelites are merely put forward as an example and a warning to us—the present day Christians. The warning “Let us fear” also applies to us today. How do we accomplish this? We stay very much on our Guard and do not make the same mistake. Their mistake was to focus on externals and thus miss the real, inner, essential practice of hearing God’s voice.

The principle illustrated by this warning runs all through the Bible. The one basic essential for a right relationship with God is to hear His voice. Jesus says the same to us as His disciples in the New Testament. “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me”(John 10:27). This is perhaps the clearest and simplest description of **true Christians** found any where in the New Testament.

When Jesus says My sheep, He is speaking about those who truly believe in Him, those whom He acknowledges & accepts—being Himself the good shepherd. He makes 2 very simple statements about them. **First** “My sheep hear my voice” **second** “They follow Me”. Question Of-course is: **DO WE HEAR HIS VOICE????**

The pattern Jesus gives of the ancient shepherd and his sheep is clear: The sheep follow the shepherd because they hear His voice. If they **did not** hear his voice, they **could not** follow him. The essential element, then, is to hear the voice of Jesus and follow Him. Stating it another way, the danger is making the same mistake the Israelites made in the wilderness. What was the error? Becoming preoccupied with external- with religion, ceremonies and law **BUT missing the basic, inner and essential component:** hearing the voice of the Lord.

Hearing the voice of the Lord means having that intimate, personal relationship(Eph 5:32)with the Lord where He can speak to you directly and personally, whether through the Bible, in prayer, in fasting or some other way. Many people read the Bible without hearing the Lord’s voice-they miss the essential factor. Ask the Lord before starting to read the Bible. Say to Him to speak with you through His written Word and He will.

Let us fear making the mistake Israel made. Let us cultivate the practice of hearing the Lord’s voice. This practice will open the door to success in all that we’ll do in 2015.